Qur'anic Prescriptions Seemingly Contradictory to Normative Religious Pluralism

Having explored exegetically the Qur'anic conception of normative religious pluralism in terms of its ethical foundations, structural elements and main objectives, it is important next to analyse another factor. This is certain Qur'anic prescriptions, or concepts, which seemingly contradict the concept of religious pluralism as elaborated. The verses concerning these prescriptions can be grouped into two categories: those related to the issue of warfare and fighting; and those imperatives related to alliance with non-Muslims.

It is important to examine the verses in question because alongside their supposed contradiction of religious pluralism, they are also historically underpinned by scholarly opinions not in favor of the peacebuilding process – a stance which needless to say affects negatively interfaith relations. Moreover, historically grasped as contradictory to normative religious pluralism, these groups of verses are often quoted as evidence to support an exclusivist view of interfaith relations. There is also the issue of Islamic concepts of warfare and alliance. These present a difficult area in terms of being accurately understood by non-

Muslims in the Western context, thus leading to speculation, misleading statements and conclusions often being made in regard to these two notions. For instance, in his work *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, David Marshall attempts to make the case that it is instinctive to the sincere worshipper of God to seek to emulate, in attitude and in action, the divine mind, which in the case of Islam, according to Marshall, declares war on unbelievers. The author's perception of Muslims as God's weapon for punishing unbelievers, thus leads him to draw the conclusion that for Muslims their relationship with non-Muslims is always based on war.[1] This conclusion is likely if, like the author, one ignores essential rules and conditions regulating the hermeneutical process of Qur'anic exegesis.

Given problematic areas such as these, this chapter analyses and elucidates the meaning as well as root cause of the Qur'anic prescriptions to fight and those which prohibit taking non-Muslims as allies. In doing so, it aims to advance a progressive understanding of these ideas in the light of normative religious pluralism. In fact, the chapter seeks to answer the question of whether Qur'anic normative teachings, from this particular angle related to the issues of warfare and alliance, contradict religious pluralism.

[1]

An Analysis of the Qur'anic View on Warfare Contextualised to Normative Religious Pluralism

The issue of warfare in the Qur'an will be studied within the context of normative religious pluralism. This means it will only be analysed in terms of whether the Qur'an's prescription to fight contradicts the principles of religious pluralism. The key to understanding this lies in establishing the root cause for Muslims to fight (*qitāl)* in the Qur'an. *Qitāl* and its derivatives (from the linguistic root *q-t-l*) are specifically used in the Qur'an for military fighting and war. Note the term jihad falls beyond the scope of this study and will not be examined. Its meaning is far more

general and also concerns inner struggle as well as human effort to the utmost of one's ability in the way of God, and in every aspect of life.

Analysis will focus on three main aspects: the historical background of warfare at the time of the Qur'anic revelation; a morphological analysis of *q-t-l*, and some of its derivatives; a textual and contextual study of some Qur'anic verses containing the command to fight.

Historical Background of Warfare
At the Time of the Qur'anic Revelation

Methodologically speaking, historical context is important for the hermeneutical interpretation of Qur'anic verses, in other words the latter should not be detached from their historical context. Accordingly, to viably understand the Qur'an's concept of warfare, we need to create a virtual historic climate similar to that in which the verses referring to war were revealed.

To begin with the essential thing to note is that the Qur'an was first revealed in a harsh and intolerant nomadic environment which failed to recognise peaceful co-existence among difference. The Revelation began in Makkah, which was a part of *Arabia Ferox*, or Wild Arabia in which ʿAdnānī Arabs lived. Ibn Khaldūn describes their nature as: "The Arabs are a savage nation, fully accustomed to savagery and the things that cause it. Savagery has become their character and nature."[2] Tribal despotism, oppression, and injustice were features of their society, and their life was far removed from any democratic values. Ibn Khaldūn states: "Under the rule of Bedouins, their subjects live as in a state of anarchy, without law. Anarchy destroys mankind and ruins civilisation."[3] ʿAdnānī Arabs lived in an environment, where "blood relationship alone traces the orbit of their lives."[4] Raised in these conditions their way of thinking was "purely egotistic,"[5] intolerant, and violent. For this reason, in the centuries preceding the Qur'an as well as during the Revelation, much warfare too place between the Arabs. These wars are

known as *Ayyām al-ʿArab*, literally Days of the Arabs, wherein day refers to battles. These early Arabian epics chronicled the wars among and within the tribes. According to Ḥājjī Khalīfah, there have been two compilations of *Ayyām al-ʿArab*. The first, known to have been written by Abū ʿUbaydah Muʿammar ibn al-Muthannā, mentions 1200 Days, or battles, The second, attributed to Abū al-Faraj al-Aṣbahānī, mentions 1700 battles.[6] Some of these battles lasted decades. For example, the war of Basūs between Taghlib and Bakr, two ʿAdnānī tribes, lasted for 40 years (495-535), and all because (such was his despotic nature) Kulayb, the leader of Taghlib, could not bear to hear his wife Jalīlah, originally from Bakr, claim her brother Jassās to be the greatest man ever.[7]

Therefore, the environment in which the Qur'anic revelation began was inherently marked by severe war and entrenched in violence. Pre-Islamic Arabia was not therefore an environment that was prepared to co-exist with Qur'anic teachings, since "the gulf between the moral views of the Arabs [Makkans] and the prophet's ethical teachings [was] deep and unbridgeable."[8] This gulf generated widespread tension, which later turned into all out war against Muslims on three fronts. As a result, Muslims in Madinah were facing attack on three fronts and had to somehow face this multi-level onslaught:

> The first [front] was against the polytheists of Mecca who initially oppressed [Muslims] and expelled them out of their homes. The second front was against the Jews in Medina who were hostile to the Prophet and sided with the Meccan polytheists, in spite of all the Prophet's efforts to remind them of the monotheistic and Abrahamic bonds that related them to the Muslims and to secure their rights in his document following his immigration to Medina. The third front was against the Bedouins, possibly the worst of all enemies since they were scattered across Arabia, were known to be mercurial and opportunistic, and were open to being used by the enemies of Islam in Mecca and the Jews in Medina against Muslims.[9]

Under these circumstances and threat, Muslims were permitted to defend themselves:

> To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged; – and verily, Allah is Most Powerful for their aid; – (They are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, – (for no cause) except that they say, "our Lord is Allah". Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those who aid his (cause); – for verily Allah is full of Strength, Exalted in Might, (able to enforce His Will). (Qur'an *al-Ḥajj* 22:39-40)

Generally speaking, the verses define oppression and especially the restriction of religious freedom, as the main reasons for the permission to physical self-defence. The verses also point out that a lack of self-defence against oppression inescapably leads to overwhelming corruption destroying religions.[10] More particularly, the verb given in the passive voice *yuqātalūn*, "those against whom war is made", indicates that the real reason for the permission to fight was oppression and religious persecution, and not due to any belief system different to Islam. For this reason, al-Sharawi states that the verses are related to the issue of oppression at every time and every place.[11]

In sum historical examination reveals warfare to have been an inherent feature and historical characteristic of pre-Islamic society. And it was in this toxic climate that the Qur'an was revealed. It naturally followed that the newly revealed divine message would be fought oppressively without reason. Given these circumstances and resultant persecution, that is against an oppressively initiated war against Muslims, the Qur'an legitimised the right to fight in self-defence. Therefore, the root cause of the Qur'anic imperative to fight lay not historically in the different belief system of the other, but in the oppression and persecution of Muslims leading to war being waged against them.

A Morphological Analysis of the Root *q-t-l*

The triliteral linguistic root *q-t-l* means to cause somebody humiliation and fatality,[12] or the removal of the soul from the body.[13] In this respect, the literal meaning of *q-t-l* is to kill. However, its range of meaning also includes to fight because fighting is associated with causing humiliation and death. Thus, a cause-and-effect relationship exists between the meaning of *q-t-l* and that of to fight.

The root *q-t-l* and its derivatives in the Qur'an exist mostly in the form of descriptive text conveying information on historical events related to the meaning of *q-t-l*. And events are mentioned for moral lessons to be drawn, in this instance from human experience associated with issues relating to *q-t-l*. Nevertheless, *q-t-l* and its derivatives do exist in the Qur'an in the imperative (or command) form, in other words prescribing Muslims to fight. Note however, this imperative form of *q-t-l* constitutes less than one percent of the entire Qur'anic content, which fact is essential to grasp in terms of the peaceful nature of its message. For it should be borne in mind that the Qur'an was revealed in a climate of intense violence and constant warfare, in which its verses and message of peace, invoking human dignity, stood out all the more starkly against a backdrop of fierce tribal aggression and hostile mindsets. Note also that the Qur'an contains imperatives to peace (i.e. *al-Baqarah*, 224).

The *q-t-l* linguistic root and its derivatives occur in the Qur'an mainly in forms I and III of the Arabic morphological forms. Forms II and VIII also exist, but as they are very restricted and do not play any role in deriving principles of warfare, they will not be analysed.

The first morphological form is *qatala* which equates to the basic form, or verb pattern, of *faʿala*. The source noun, *al-maṣdar*, of *qatala* is *qatl*. This morphological form shows that the action of killing or fighting is initiated from one side without a tendency of the other side to retaliate. For this reason, lexicographers explain the meaning of the first form of *q-t-l* by the

Arabic word *imātah*, which means to cause initially death.[14] Because of this, Baalbaki in his *Mawrid* translates the first morphological form *qatala* as "to kill, slay, murder, assassinate."[15]

The third morphological form of *q-t-l*, is *qātala* which equates to the standard form of *fāʿala*. The source noun, *al-maṣdar*, of *qātala* is either *qitāl* or *muqātalah*. The third morphological form indicates a consequence of an action and thus adds to the first form an associated meaning.[16] In other words, the act in the third form is conducted in response to another act. In that case, *qātala*, *qitāl*, or *muqātalah* means that the act of killing or fighting is done in response to another initially started act of killing or fighting. Accordingly, Baalbaki translates the third morphological form *qātala* as "to fight, combat, battle (against),"[17] but not as to kill, slay, murder, assassinate, though these occur within the process of fighting.

The difference in the meaning then between the first and the third morphological forms of *q-t-l* is that the first form *qatala*, *qatl*, is associated with oppressive as well as aggressive initiation of war on others without reasonable reasons for such an action, whereas the third form *qātala*, *qitāl*, or *muqātalah*, is associated with the right to self-defence against unjustly initiated war.

For this reason, when the Qur'an applies the first morphological form of *q-t-l* and not in a textual context of the third form *qātala*, *qitāl*, or *muqātalah*, it always refers to aggression and oppressive fighting and killing of innocent people. For example, the Qur'an uses the first morphological form *qatala*, *qatl*, with reference to Pharaoh's killing of Bani Israel's baby boys, the killing of prophets by some of the People of the Book, the plot hatched by the sons of prophet Jacob to kill Joseph, the pre-Islamic tradition of some Arabs to kill their daughters, the killing of one of Adam's sons by the other. All these actions of killing were committed oppressively against innocent people reluctant to fight or kill. Accordingly, the Qur'an refers to all these cases, none of which exists in the textual context of self-defence, by using the first morphological form of *qatala*, *qatl*.

As far as the third morphological form *qātala* or *qitāl*[18] is

concerned, the Qur'an always uses this in the context of the right to self-defence against unjustly initiated war. In other words to resist aggression and thus restore peace and justice.

So, an accurate understanding of the Qur'anic verses relating to the issue of fighting requires distinguishing verb forms in order to understand correctly the message being conveyed. We must not project our own meaning simplistic fashion, but elucidate the meaning being conveyed to us. And we must not take verses out of context to suit our own interpretations.

Keeping this in mind it is important to note that in the following verse in which Muslims are commanded to fight, God's prescription to fight is expressed in the third morphological form (*qitāl*):

> Fighting is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knoweth, and ye know not. (Qur'an *al-Baqarah* 2:216)

So *qitāl*, not *qatl*, is used in the verse to express the word translated as "fighting". This is a point of huge significance for being in the third morphological form it indicates the right to self-defence against aggressive oppression. In fact in the entire Qur'an nowhere does the word *qatala*, *qatl* appear in Form I, that is the first morphological form, with reference to the People of the Book.[19] What does exist in this regard is only the imperative of the third morphological form *qātala*, *qitāl*, indicating that fighting People of the Book is prescribed only in the case of their unjustly waging war on Muslims, and not due to their beliefs or way of thinking.

Now, the imperative to fight using the verb *qatala* in its first morphological form occurs in four verses of the Qur'an only, and in all four occurrences it is with reference to the polytheists as well as hypocrites, who are people of war against Muslims. With regard to polytheists, the direct imperative occurs in verse 2:191 (surah *al-Baqarah*) and verse 9:5 (surah *al-Tawbah*) whereas with regard to the hypocrites, it occurs in verses 89 and

91 of surah *al-Nisā'* (4:89-91). Note, all four verses exist in the textual context of the third morphological form, that is *qātala*, *qitāl*. In other words, the order given to Muslims to kill in these four verses, is related to those polytheists and hypocrites who are people of war against Muslims. The context of war in the four verses is expressed by the contextual indications (morphological and thematic) showing that the Form I imperative to fight (*qatala*) was prescribed within the context of a war initially waged on Muslims.

In sum, analysis of the linguistic root *q-t-l* (to fight/kill), reveals that the Qur'anic concept of warfare related to the issue of fighting is expressed using the third morphological form of Arabic verb morphology, that is *qātala*, *qitāl*, or in its textual context. And because Form III is used this signifies that the act of killing or fighting is done in response to another initially started act of killing or fighting, and thus associated with the right to self-defence. This proves morphologically, that the root cause of the Qur'an's imperative to fight is in response to the initiation of oppression expressed by war on Muslims, and is not based on any different belief system.

Textual and Contextual Study of Some Qur'anic Verses Connected to the Imperative of Fighting Against Others

In this section, two key Qur'anic verses are examined with reference to the issue of warfare. Both occur in surah *al-Tawbah*: verse 9:5 (which prescribes fighting against the polytheists) and verse 9:29 (which concerns the issue of warfare in relation to the People of the Book). The rationale behind the selection of these two particular verses is rooted in the hugely significant controversy surrounding their understanding. Note, since both verses were revealed in the one of the latest revealed surahs and address groups religiously different to the Muslims, it is likely that their exploration will satisfactorily answer the question of whether the Qur'anic prescription to fight contradicts the conception of normative religious pluralism.

*An Analysis of the Imperative to Fight and Slay
the Polytheists in Verse 9:5*

The Qur'an stipulates the following:

> But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans
> wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for
> them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular
> prayers and practise regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah
> is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. (Qur'an *al-Tawbah* 9:5)

Critics of Islam often cite this verse quoting it out of context
to promote the idea of Islam being a religion of violence. There
are two main problematic areas which need examination: first,
the claim of abrogation, and second the root cause for the imper-
ative to fight and slay the polytheists.

Claim of Abrogation: The first thing to note is that the verse is
known as "the verse of the sword,"[20] which many exegetes
define as a verse abrogating all virtues and ethics towards non-
Muslims. To examine this serious claim we need to trace its
origins and analyse the argument.

In this respect, no evidence from the time of the Prophet and
his Companions exists to support abrogation. The earliest
exegetical work in which abrogation is mentioned, seems to be
Ibn Abū Ḥatim al-Rāzī's *Al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* written at the
end of the ninth and beginning of the tenth centuries. Ibn Abū
Ḥatim writes in the work:

> We were told by my father, [who said]: We were told by al-Suḥayn ibn 'Īsā
> ibn Maysarah, [who said]: We were told by Muḥammad ibn al-Muʿallā al-
> Iāmī, [who said]: We were told by Juwaybir who narrated from al-Ḍaḥḥāk
> that: "Every verse in the book of Allah which refers to any obligations or
> covenant between the Prophet – peace be upon him – and any one of the
> pagans was abrogated by surah *al-Tawbah* "and seize them, beleaguer
> them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war)"[9:5].[21]

This narration from Ibn Abī Ḥātim has also been transmitted

by al-Suyūṭī in his *Al-Dur al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*.[22] The narration clearly states verse 9:5 to have abrogated every other verse in the Qur'an prescribing certain obligations towards polytheists. From here, it came to be understood that any good moral behavior, as well as ethics such as forgiveness, compassion, mercy, etc. towards non-Muslims, were no longer to be considered valid. So much so that Ibn ʿAṭiyyah asserts, without any evidence, that "this verse [9:5] did abrogate every obligation and covenants contained reportedly in 114 Qur'anic verses."[23] Hence, it was through this channel that the view came to be widely disseminated that Muslim moral obligation towards others was abrogated with the verse of the sword.

However, this huge and sweeping statement cannot be accepted simply on the basis of al-Ḍaḥḥāk's narration. Firstly, it is attributed neither to the Prophet nor to any of the Companions. Secondly, the hadith is not authentic at all due to the weakness and unreliability of Juwaybir ibn Saʿīd al-Azdī (one of the transmitters in its chain).[24] All scholars of Hadith unanimously agree on Juwaybir being a weak and unreliable transmitter. For instance, according to Ibn Ḥibbān, Juwaybir narrated from al-Ḍaḥḥāk things upside down,[25] whilst Ibn Ḥajar in his *Taqrīb* concludes Juwaybir to be a very weak transmitter, "*ḍaʿīf jiddan.*"[26] Therefore, Juwaybir's narration attributed to al-Ḍaḥḥāk corroborates nothing, is unauthentic and thus cannot be accepted as evidence to establish verse 9:5 as having abrogated every obligation in respect of non-Muslims.

Examining the arguments of those scholars who nevertheless maintain the validity of abrogation we note that their views are unreliable in themselves and that they advance no credible evidence to support their theory. For example, al-Samarqandī claims without mentioning any supporting evidence that: "*it is said*[27] that this verse [9:5] abrogated 70 Qur'anic verses related to obligations and covenants"[28] (italics mine). Similarly, al-Bagawī claims, without providing any chain of transmission, that al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Faḍl[29] stated: "This verse [9:5] abrogated

every Qur'anic verse referring to forgiveness and patience towards the offences of enemies."³⁰ Equally, al-Qurṭubī transmits the same narration attributed to al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Faḍl ʿAbbās without any chain of transmission.³¹ Similarly, Ibn Kathīr provides three narrations in support of the abrogation claim,³² without any of them being authentic. The first narration is that of al-Ḍaḥḥāk, as already analysed. The second is ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās through al-ʿAwfī's chain of transmission, about which Ahmad Shakir concludes that: "This chain of transmission consists of weak and not trustworthy transmitters coming from one family. This chain is known among exegetes as *tafsīr al-ʿawfī* because the transmitter narrating from Ibn ʿAbbās is called ʿAṭiyyah al-ʿAwfī."³³ The third narration provided by Ibn Kathīr in favor of abrogation is attributed again to Ibn ʿAbbās, but this time through ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah's chain of transmission. Yet, "Alī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah's *tafsīr* is not reliable due to the break in the chain between him and Ibn ʿAbbās."³⁴/³⁵

Therefore, it is unquestionably clear from the analysis that the widely spread claim of the so called "verse of the sword" as abrogating all moral obligations towards others, is not supported by the Prophet or any of his Companions, and neither is it supported by any authentic hadith or plausible argument.

Moreover, what cannot be ignored is that this supposed abrogation of 9:5 contradicts basic fundamental principles of the Qur'an. These include: the inviolability of human life, freedom of belief, human brotherhood etc. For this reason, in one of the earliest and most reliable sources of abrogative and abrogated verses in the Qur'an, *Kitāb al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh* written by Abū Jaʿfar al-Nuḥās, verse 9:5 is not defined as an abrogative to any other verses.³⁶ In the same way, exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, al-Bayḍāwī and others do not mention anything with regard to verse 9:5 being abrogative to the moral obligations of Muslims towards non-Muslims.

As for the second problematic area with regard to verse 9:5 this concerns the root cause for the imperative to fight and slay polytheists. In general, there has been disagreement among

exegetes over the root cause. Some exegetes such as al-Rāzī and Ibn Ashur infer the imperative to have general meaning, thus concerning all polytheists until they embrace Islam. Thus, al-Rāzī asserts the imperative "slay the Pagans" to be a general command, going on to surmise that the blood of unbelievers is permitted until they realise three conditions, these being to repent from unbelief, establish prayer, and give in charity.[37] Similarly according to Ibn Ashur "in verse 9:5 there is legality and permission for jihad [against pagans], and an indication that nothing else can be accepted from them except Islam."[38] In a more restricted interpretation, al-Sharawi confines the slaying of polytheists geographically to the Arabian Peninsula, claiming that "the punishment of the pagan is murder, ʿiqāb al-mushrik huwa al-qatl. Why? Because in this place [the Arabian Peninsula] two religions cannot exist."[39] To support this claim al-Sharawi presents the argument that the Arab polytheists were fully aware of the Prophet's honesty, as they were also aware of the authenticity of the Qur'anic Revelation due to their knowledge of the Arabic language. Hence, because of these two facts, they could not be excused from accepting Islam, in other words the obligation to embrace Islam in their case was binding.[40]

Another group of exegetes point to the constant warmongering of the polytheists against the Muslims, together with their transgression of covenants, as the reason for the imperative to slay them. In favor of this opinion are exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, Abū Zahrah and others. Their main argument concerns the overall Qur'anic context, and more importantly the textual context in which verse 9:5 exists.

Examining al-Rāzī, Ibn Ashur, and al-Sharawi's reasoning it is clear that the central point of their argument is the question of belief. In other words the polytheists' belief system is the root cause for the imperative to slay them. For all three scholars therefore acceptance of Islam is the only avenue for the cessation of fighting and slaying. For instance, al-Rāzī bases his opinion on the literal meaning of "but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practise regular charity, then open the way for

them" (9:5). Note, for al-Sharawi the Qur'anic principle of freedom of belief does not apply to the pagans of the Arabian Peninsula.

So, according to al-Rāzī every polytheist must be killed until he/she repents, establishes regular prayer, and practises charity. However, this argument clearly contradicts the textual context in which the imperative to slay polytheists appears:

> (But the treaties are) not dissolved with those Pagans with whom ye have entered into alliance and who have not subsequently failed you in aught, nor aided any one against you. So fulfil your engagements with them to the end of their term: for Allah loveth the righteous. (Qur'an *al-Tawbah* 9:4)

Al-Ṭabarī employs this verse as a contextual argument to maintain that it is only people of war to whom the imperative of slaying in 9:5 refers. He remarks that the imperative to fight and slay the polytheists applied only to those who had transgressed the covenant and involved themselves in enmity and war against the Prophet. For those who remained loyal to the covenant and did not wage war against the Prophet, God ordered the Prophet to remain loyal to them.[41] More explicitly, al-Ṭabarī also argues against perceiving the imperative in its general sense, because the verse following the imperative does not allow for such a general perception:

> How can there be a league, before Allah and His Messenger, with the Pagans, except those with whom ye made a treaty near the sacred Mosque? As long as these stand true to you, stand ye true to them: for Allah doth love the righteous. (Qur'an *al-Tawbah* 9:7)[42]

Al-Ṭabarī states that this verse: "Supports our argument, and goes against the statement that it is permitted to kill every pagan after the forbidden months are past, for God commanded His Prophet and the believers to stand true to those pagans who stand true to them."[43]

Following al-Ṭabarī's approach of employing textual context[44] as counter-argument to challenge the view of belief motivating the imperative to slay polytheists, we have other clear-cut evidence, in terms of textual context, which points to the root cause as being polytheist aggression, transgression of oaths, and declaration of war against the Prophet and his followers, necessitating a response:

> But if they violate their oaths after their covenant, and taunt you for your Faith – fight ye the chiefs of Unfaith: for their oaths are nothing to them: that thus they may be restrained.
>
> Will ye not fight people who violated their oaths, plotted to expel the Messenger, and took the aggressive by being the first (to assault) you? Do ye fear them? Nay, it is Allah Whom ye should more justly fear, if ye believe! (Qur'an *al-Tawbah* 9:12-13)

As is clear from the verses, it is not the belief system of others that is defined as a necessary condition for fighting, but their aggression, transgression, and initiation of war. This meaning is supported by an authentic interpretation of 9:5 by Qatādah. Al-Ṭabarī transmits:

> We were told by Bishr ibn Muʿādh, who said: We were told by Yazīd, who said: We were told by Saʿīd, who narrated from Qatādah a narration related to the words of God: "But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them," to the end of the verse 9:5. In this regard, Qatādah used to say: "Open the way for those who God commanded you to open their way. People are three groups: Muslims obliged to give regular charity, zakah; people associating partners with God, this kind of people are obliged to pay tax, *jizyah*; and people of war, who if they pay one tenth of their capital, their safety as well as the safety of their trade with Muslims is guaranteed."[45/46]

So, Qatādah's *tafsīr* of verse 9:5 clearly shows that it is not a choice of embrace Islam or death that is offered to polytheists, but rather, there is an option to fulfill obligations and co-exist peacefully.

Ibn Taymiyyah also supports the position that it is not the polytheist's belief system that underlies the imperative to fight and kill them, but rather their persecution of Muslims. He dedicated a whole work entitled *Qāʿidah Mukhtaṣarah fī Qitāl al-Kuffār wa Muhādanatihim wa Tahrīm Qatlihim li Mujarrad Kufrihim* to the issue of warfare. In this work, he concludes that it is not permissible for a Muslim to kill a person because of his/her beliefs whatever they might be. He attributes his conclusion to the opinion of the majority of Islamic scholars. As for his comment on verse 9:5, he states that: "It is not permissible to kill a pagan given that he/she is subject to an agreed covenant or asylum, or providing that he/she does not belong to the people of war."[47] In other words, Ibn Taymiyyah's words imply that it is only those polytheists who are people of war who can be fought against.

Another modern response to an exclusive view of 9:5 is Asad's interpretation of the verse. He points out that:

> Now the enemy's conversion to Islam – expressed in the words, "if they repent, and take to prayer [lit., "establish prayer"] and render the purifying dues (zakah)" – is no more than one, and by no means the only, way of their "desisting from hostility"; and the reference to it in verses 5 and 11 of this surah certainly does not imply an alternative of "conversion or death…"[48]

Therefore, the "conversion or death" attitude adopted by al-Rāzī and Ibn Ashur contradicts the textual context of verse 9:5 as well as many scholarly opinions in this regard. Moreover, this attitude also contradicts the Qur'an's universal principle of freedom of belief as expressed in the verse "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (2:256), which clearly states that conversion to Islam by force is not permissible.[49]

Turning to al-Sharawi, regardless of freedom of belief being a universal principle, it seems that he would qualify "universal" to exclude Arab pagans from it. As mentioned earlier, in his opinion pagan Arabs can only be offered two options: "Islam or death." And he supports this argument with two observations:

that Arab pagans were well aware of the honesty of the Prophet, and also aware of the authenticity of the Qur'an given their strength in the Arabic language. Putting these two facts together, he concludes freedom of belief as being inapplicable to the Arab polytheists.[50]

Yet if this is the case then how should the verse following 9:5 be understood:

> If one amongst the Pagans asks thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of Allah; and then escort him to where he can be secure. That is because they are men without knowledge. (Qur'an *al-Tawbah* 9:6)

This verse seems to directly contradict al-Sharawi because it includes the exact group of people he chooses to exclude from the right to freedom of belief. In contrast, the verse proves freedom of belief and dignity to be inclusive values encompassing Arab pagans too. In this respect, attention is captured syntactically from the very beginning of the verse by way of a conditional sentence introduced by the Arabic conditional particle *in*, translated into English as "if." The function of the conditional particle *in* indicates unlikeness, meaning that the condition introduced in the sentence by *in* (if) is unlikely to happen.[51/52] Thus in this instance the conditional particle *in* is used in the verse to indicate that it is very unlikely that anyone from among the pagans would come and ask the Prophet for asylum, but should they happen to do so then to "grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of Allah; and then escort him to where he can be secure" (9:6). This syntactic point shows that despite the pagans' reluctance and unwillingness to interact peacefully with Muslims, the Qur'an orders Muslims to guarantee asylum and safety to them if they ask for this.

Another important syntactic point to emphasize in verse 9:6 is the existence of inversion. According to the Arabic syntactic structure of the conditional sentence, the verb should follow the conditional particle *in*.[53] However, in verse 9:6 it is followed by a noun (*aḥadun*, anyone) which refers to any pagans, while the

verb *istajāra* (ask) is postponed in the sentence. This linguistic approach is referred to as inversion.⁵⁴ The function of the inversion in 9:6 is to place particular emphasis on the person asking for asylum, and not so much on the asylum itself. Thus, the aim of the inversion is directed towards preserving human dignity from any possible violation.

Furthermore, the conditional sentence presented in verse 9:6 prescribes two actions in response to anyone from the pagans asking for asylum. The first action requires Muslims to grant asylum to the pagan, where he/she can hear the Qur'an, whereas the second pertains to the issue of escorting the pagan, when the asylum is over, to a place where he/she can be secure. Reflecting on these two actions it becomes clear that polytheists in general and Arab polytheists particularly have been inclusively considered to enjoy the right to freedom of belief.

Al-Sharawi's statement also contradicts the teachings of the Prophet, who forbade Muslims during war to kill children, women, worshippers, and elderly people. This negates al-Sharawi's "Islam or death" option, for if it were valid then the Prophet would not have forbidden Muslims to kill this group of people. In addition, there is no single authentic evidence proving that the Prophet killed or ordered to be killed any person because of his/her belief.

Finally, al-Sharawi deprives Arab polytheists of the right to freedom of belief with the justification that knowing the profound honesty of the Prophet, and the authenticity of the Qur'an based on knowledge of the Arabic language, they should have accepted his message. However, this argument could just as well be applied to humanity today. For there are those who study the biography of the Prophet and so are well aware of his honesty, and who study the Arabic language and have great linguistic knowledge of it. Are we to infer that as a result of this they are to be deprived of the right to freedom of belief and consequently killed if rejecting Islam? Logically, this line of reasoning is unacceptable for belief is determined by a host of other factors.

As this brief analysis has shown verse 9:5 does not therefore abrogate any moral obligation towards non-Muslims. To repeat this is because the verb used in the imperative to "fight and slay the Pagans" is in the third morphological form *qitāl*, which indicates the right to self-defence against a previously waged war. As such, the object of the imperative ("Pagans") must be given a literal not a metaphorical meaning and understood as a synecdoche, *majāz mursal*. A synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a term for a part of something refers to the whole of something, or vice-versa. In other words, the word "Pagans" in the verse pertains to only to people of war and hence relates the root cause of the imperative to the pagans' aggression, and not their belief system.

This being the case (that the verse does not abrogate moral obligation towards non-Muslims, and was not motivated by the belief system of others), it is apparent that verse 9:5 and its imperative to fight and slay the polytheists does not contradict the process of normative religious pluralism.

An Analysis of Verse 9:29's Imperative to Fight the People of the Book

This section focuses on one of the most central Qur'anic verses concerning the issue of warfare in respect of the People of the Book:

> Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, from among the People of the Book, until they pay the *jizyah* with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued. (Qur'an *al-Tawbah* 9:29)

From the outset, it is worth mentioning that no authentic comments or explanations directly relating to this verse exist either from the Prophet or his Companions. However, much discussion and controversy surrounding the verse can be found in

the succeeding generations. Some of the issues debated have concerned the motive for the imperative to fight as well as its scope.

Some sources of Qur'anic exegesis have linked the root cause for the command to fight (*qātilū*) to the four characteristics mentioned in the verse: unbelief in God, unbelief in the hereafter, lack of prohibiting what God and His Messenger have prohibited, and lack of acknowledging the religion of truth. Yet, the larger part of the disagreement has related to the command's scope which for some exegetes has been left vague. For example, al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī briefly outline the general meaning of the verse without clear focus either on its scope or underlying cause for the command to fight.[55] Al-Rāzī on the other hand, states explicitly that all People of the Book come within its purview, most of them because of their unbelief, but even if some Jews still remain true to the Oneness of God, they are also to be fought unless they pay the *jizyah* (tax).[56] Thus, for al-Rāzī the root cause underlying the command to fight People of the Book lies either in their unbelief or refusal to pay the *jizyah*. Rida however, argues that all four characteristics are necessary conditions to initiate fighting against the People of the Book. Accordingly, those of them who believe in God and the hereafter, and prohibit what God and their prophets had prohibited, and acknowledge truly their religion, should not be fought.[57] However, for Ibn Ashur even if the People of the Book believe in God and the hereafter and prohibit what God has prohibited in their scriptures, they still nevertheless should be fought for failure to acknowledge the true faith of Islam.[58]

What is clear from these opinions is that although they disagree as to the scope of the command, they are in consensus as to its motivation which is belief. Furthermore, note all these scholars base their argument, in different ways, on the four characteristics existing in the relative pronoun.

However, the implications of these views, and initiation of aggression against the People of the Book in the light of universal human values, not only historically but also, and even more sharply, in today's global world, is unacceptable. Even Rida's

opinion, which seems to be the most liberal, cannot be accepted since the classification "People of the Book" today is a largely cultural construct with most people defining themselves as agnostics. Indeed, today's global context only serves to highlight more starkly the failure of these opinions to diagnose the real cause of the command to fight. However, this aside, the main reason for rejecting opinions such as these is their contradiction of central Qur'anic principles including freedom of belief, human free will, human dignity etc.

In contrast are scholarly opinions which state that the command to fight is to be applied only to those who initiate hostilities against Muslims, that is, Muslims are to fight those who wage war on them. This is self-defence. Thus, the scope of the command falls on those of the Book who are people of war. As for the four characteristics following the imperative to fight, they should be understood not as conditions which permit the declaration of war, but as informative descriptions characterizing those who stoke oppressively the fires of war against peaceful people. To support this view, we examine next the historical, textual, and intertextual contexts of verse 9:29.

As mentioned earlier, it is important to examine as much as possible the historical context of the verse being interpreted. In terms of the historical context of verse 9:29 we know that it exists in surah *al-Tawbah* which contains information about the battle of *Tabūk* in 630 C.E./9 AH – it can be estimated that the verse was revealed around this year. Generally, the years preceding 630 C.E./9 AH witnessed a deterioration in interfaith relations, especially between the Muslims and the Jews, mainly due to the latter's constant transgression of the mutually signed pact of Madinah.[59] More particularly, in 628 C.E./7 AH one of the Prophet's emissaries (carefully selected people sent to rulers of the surrounding kingdoms to invite them to Islam) was aggressively killed. In this respect al-Wāqidī narrates:

> I was told by Rabīʿah ibn ʿUthmān, who transmitted from ʿUmar ibn al-Ḥakam, who said: The Prophet – peace be upon him – sent al-Ḥārith ibn

ʿUmayr al-Azdī with a message to the governor of Bostra, *Buṣrā*. When the Prophet's messenger arrived at Mu'tah,[60] he was stopped by Shuraḥbīl ibn ʿAmrū al-Ghassānī, [a Christian, one of the representatives of the Byzantine emperor], who asked him: "Where are you heading towards?" He responded: "Towards Sham." [Shuraḥbīl ibn ʿAmrū al-Ghassānī] said: "You might be one of Muhammad's messengers?" [Al-Ḥārith ibn ʿUmayr al-Azdī] answered: "Yes, I am a messenger of the messenger of God." Then, [Shuraḥbīl ibn ʿAmrū al-Ghassānī] ordered his men to capture and bind him. Then, he approached al-Ḥārith ibn ʿUmayr al-Azdī and slew him without any resistance from al-Ḥārith's side. This was the only case when a messenger sent by the Prophet was killed.[61]

Evaluating the narration's chain of transmission we note its source as ʿUmar ibn al-Ḥakam ibn Thawbān al-Madanī (657 C.E./37 AH–735 C.E./117 AH), who lived most of his life in the first century of Muslim history. He is classified as an authentic transmitter,[62] along with the second transmitter Rabīʿah ibn ʿUthmān al-Hudayr al-Tīmī al-Madanī also classified as an authentic transmitter.[63] With regard to the author of *al-Maghāzī*, Muḥammad al-Wāqidī, al-Baghdādī confirms his having heard the narration from Rabīʿah ibn ʿUthmān.[64] However, there has been controversy regarding his reliability as a transmitter of hadith. Some scholars have praised him, but most of them have criticised him. Thus, according to one of the rules of the *Jarḥ wa Taʿdīl* discipline (a systematic approach to critiquing a narrator's position as a narrator) the critics of a narrator are to be considered over praises for him,[65] meaning that Muḥammad al-Wāqidī should be considered a weak transmitter. In fact, this is Ibn Ḥajar's conclusion with regards to al-Wāqidī's status as a transmitter of hadith. Ibn Ḥajar states: "Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Wāqidī was abandoned, *matrūk*, despite his immense capacity of knowledge."[66]

However, it seems that the reasons for accepting the narration outweigh those for its rejection. First of all, it should be underlined that the methodology of evaluating the narrations related to Muslim history cannot be equated with the methodology of evaluating the Prophetic Hadith, since the latter pertains directly

to Islamic law, whereas the former is mostly informative. If the same rules and conditions of evaluating Prophetic hadith are applied to Muslim history, this will lead to loss of a great deal of the Muslim historical heritage. The point being that there is a necessity to differentiate between Hadith methodology and the historical methodology of evaluating the reliability of events. In this respect, it is important to note that after examining *al-Maghāzī*, al-Salūmī concludes that al-Wāqidī had a specific methodology in narrating historical events, different from the methodology of the scholars of Hadith. For example, it was acceptable for al-Wāqidī to narrate from a person a certain historical event which had occurred in his tribe or in his close circle of family members without examining his trustworthiness or memorising capability, as is the case among scholars of Hadith. Thus, it is al-Wāqidī's different methodology which seems to have been the reason for Hadith scholars to classify him as a weak transmitter.[67]

The second reason for accepting the narration is the fact that it is inherently not related to issues of the Islamic belief system or any aspect of Islamic legislation. The narration simply suggests that a Muslim was killed unfairly by a Christian in a Christian land. Now, it needs to be stressed that the information narrated corresponds exactly to al-Wāqidī's area of interest and expertise. Al-Baghdādī and Ibn ʿAsākir write that al-Wāqidī informed about himself the following:

> Whoever I managed to trace from the children of the Companions of the Prophet, the children of the martyrs, or their servants, I asked them: "Have you heard any of your relatives telling you about cases and places of killed people?" When they informed me about any case of killing and its place, I went to identify that place. I did go to the area of *Al-Muraysī*,[68] where I stayed until I identified the exact place of the battle.[69]

There is much other evidence witnessing that al-Wāqidī was a distinguished expert in the field of *al-maghāzī*, identifying the battles. For this reason, al-Salūmī remarks that there is a unanimous consensus among biographers on al-Wāqidī being one of

the most important sources of the historical aspect of Muslim battles.[70]

The third reason for accepting al-Wāqidī's account of the information relayed to him by Rabī'ah ibn 'Uthmān with regards to the aggressive killing of al-Ḥārith ibn 'Umayr al-Azdī by Shuraḥbīl ibn 'Amrū al-Ghassānī, is the fact that prominent scholars of Hadith have transmitted as well as relied on this narration. For example, Ibn Sa'd transmits the narration in his *Al-Ṭabqāt al-Kubrā*.[71] In the same way, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr transmits it in *Al-Istī'āb fī Ma'rifah al-Aṣḥāb*[72], and Ibn al-Athīr in *'Usud al-Ghābah fī Ma'rifah al-Ṣaḥābah*.[73] More importantly, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī who is unanimously regarded as the most reliable source of knowledge in the field of Hadith, transmits al-Wāqidī's narration in his *Al-Iṣābah fī Tamyīz al- Ṣaḥābah*,[74] and also mentions it in *Fatḥ al-Bārī* to explain the reason for the battle of Mu'tah.[75]

The fourth reason for relying on al-Wāqidī's narration is Ḥārith ibn 'Umayr al-Azdī's tomb existing in the small village of Liwa' Busayra in southern Jordan. This is clear archaeological evidence witnessing to the authenticity of Ḥārith ibn 'Umayr al-Azdī's death in southern Jordan, far from his homeland.

In sum, all four reasons form compelling evidence to prove that in 628 C.E./7 AH an aggressive killing of a Muslim by a Christian took place.

As far as the content of the narration is concerned, it conveys three important points. First that the Muslim killed was no mere Muslim, but the messenger of the Prophet no less. Second that the Christian who killed him was not just any Christian, but the governor of Bostra (today Busra), and representative of the Byzantine Emperor at the time. Third that the act was not an accident but a premeditated crime which failed to recognise freedom of expression, and without any justification violated the right to life of an unresisting person. In fact, these three points sent a clear message to the Muslims, that the Northern Arab Christians announced war on the Prophet and his followers. Consequently, it triggered the first brutal war – known as the

battle of Mu'tah – which took place between the Christians and Muslims in the year 629 C.E./8 A.H.[76] This time, the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius supported the Northern Arab Christians and sent his army to fight alongside Shuraḥbīl ibn ʿAmrū al-Ghassānī against the Muslims.[77] Thus, both Byzantine and Northern Arab Christians allied themselves against the Muslims.

Tension and conflict between the Christians in the North and Muslims continued to increase, and such was the extent that Muslims in Madinah lived under constant fear of imminent invasion from Ghassānī Christians. In this respect, al-Bukhārī narrates that ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said:

> ...At that time I had a friend from the Anṣār who used to bring news (from the Prophet, peace be upon him) in case of my absence, and I used to bring him the news if he was absent. In those days we were afraid of one of the kings of Ghassān tribe. We heard that he intended to move and attack us, so fear filled our hearts because of that. (One day) my Anṣārī friend unexpectedly knocked at my door, and said, "Open, Open!" I said, "Has the king of Ghassān come?" He said, "No, but something worse; Allah's Apostle (peace be upon him) has isolated himself from his wives."[78]

In another place in his Ṣaḥīḥ, al-Bukhārī transmits that ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: "In those days it was rumoured[79] that Ghassān (a tribe living in Sham) were getting their horses ready to invade us."[80]

At the same time, certain leaders of the Byzantine Christians refused to tolerate those of their people who had embraced Islam on the basis of religious conviction, persecuting and killing them. Ibn Taymiyyah reports that "when a number of Christians, in the region of Maan,[81] embraced Islam, their Christian leaders in Sham went to kill those of them who were prominent."[82] More particularly, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī transmits from Ibn Isḥāq that when Farwah ibn ʿAmrū al-Jadhdhāmī – a Christian working for the Byzantine Emperor in Maan – embraced Islam, the Byzantines on learning of this, tracked him down and killed him.[83]

Tension and conflict between the Northern Christians and Muslims peaked when the former learned of Islam's victory in the Arabian Peninsula. For Northern Christians the polytheist Arabs' embrace of Islam following the battles of Makkah and Ḥunayn, was perceived as a direct threat to their power and identity.[84] Accordingly, they gathered their troops and stationed them along the borders between Sham and Hijaz[85] with the purpose of obstructing the expansion of Islam into their lands.[86] This aggressive warlike stance was witnessed by traders travelling between Sham and Hijaz, and relayed to the Prophet and Muslims in Madinah. In fact, it was for this reason, and to prevent a surprise attack, that the Prophet mobilised the Muslims in 630 C.E./9 AH, and went north as a response to the military challenge.[87] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī also relied upon this reason to explain what triggered the battle of Tabūk, or what is known as the great expedition to Tabūk.[88]

It was under these particular circumstances outlining the clear historical context of war, that verse 9:29 was revealed. In this respect, al-Ṭabarī transmits the following:

> I was told by Muḥammad ibn ʿAmrū, who said: We were told by Abū ʿĀṣim, who said: We were told by ʿĪsā, who narrated from Ibn Abī Najīḥ, who narrated from Mujāhid that the verse, "Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, from among the People of the Book, until they pay the *Jizya* with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued" (Qur'an *al-Tawbah* 9:29), was revealed when the Prophet and his Companions were ordered to face the battle of *Tabūk*.[89]

The chain of transmission is authentic because Muḥammad ibn ʿAmrū ibn al-ʿAbbās, known as Abū Bakr al-Bāhilī al-Baṣrī, "was a reliable transmitter."[90] Equally, "Abū ʿĀṣim al-Nabīl al-Baṣrī, the name of whom is al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Makhlad, was also a firm reliable transmitter, *thiqah thabat*."[91] Likewise "ʿĪsā ibn Maymūn al-Jurashī, known as Ibn Dāyah, was a reliable transmitter,"[92] along with "Ibn Abī Najīḥ, whose name is

ʿAbdullah."[93] As for Mujāhid, he is the well known successor, "the Imam of Qur'anic exegesis and knowledge, and a reliable transmitter."[94]

However, there has been a claim that Ibn Abī Najīḥ did not hear any *tafsīr* directly from Mujāhid, but that the former narrated Mujāhid's *tafsīr* from the Book of al-Qāsim ibn Abī Bazzah.[95] Although, Ibn Ḥibbān attributes this claim to Yaḥyā al-Quṭṭān, it seems that the originator of the claim is actually his teacher, Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah, as is narrated by al-ʿAlāʾī in his *Jāmiʿ al-Taḥṣīl fī Aḥkām al-Marāsīl*.[96] Thus, it is likely Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah's claim could be true, since he was born in al-Kūfah in 725 C.E./107 AH, but then moved to Makkah in 737 C.E.C/120 AH[97] and lived there until his death in 813 C.E./198 AH,[98] while Ibn Abī Najīḥ died in 749 C.E./132 AH in Makkah, too.[99] Moreover, it appears that Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah knew ʿAbdullah ibn Abī Najīḥ well, since the former transmitted directly *aḥādīth* from the latter, and informs that ʿAbdullah ibn Abī Najīḥ was appointed as a mufti of Makkah after the death of ʿAmrū ibn Dīnār.[100]

Yet, the existence of counter-arguments against Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah 's claim makes the investigation more complex. In this regard, al-Bukhārī reports that "ʿAbdullah ibn Abī Najīḥ al-Makkī did hear [*tafsīr*] from Ṭāwūs, ʿAṭāʾ, and *Mujāhid*[101] ...."[102] Similarly, al-Dhahabī states the following: "Some people say that Ibn Abī Najīḥ did not hear the whole *tafsīr* from Mujāhid. I say: He [Ibn Abī Najīḥ] was one of the most special people of Mujāhid."[103]

It seems very difficult to conclude with explicit certainty that Ibn Abī Najīḥ did or did not hear directly *tafsīr* from Mujāhid. For this reason, when Ibrāhīm ibn al-Junayd asked Yaḥyah ibn Maʿīn – an expert, and one of the founders of the discipline of *Jarḥ wa Taʿdīl* – whether it was true that Ibn Abī Najīḥ did not hear *tafsīr* from Mujāhid. He [Ibn Maʿīn] said: "I do not know whether or not it is true."[104] The real difficulty for determining whether or not Ibn Abī Najīḥ did hear *tafsīr* from Mujāhid emerges from the fact that no chronicle records have been made

of Ibn Abī Najīḥ's date of birth. Thus, even though it is logically sound to assume that Ibn Abī Najīḥ received his knowledge of *tafsīr* directly from Mujāhid, since both were in Makkah and participated in the same area of knowledge, this could not be the case because Ibn Abī Najīḥ might have started seeking knowledge after the death of Mujāhid.

Nevertheless, all those scholars of the opinion that Ibn Abī Najīḥ did not hear *tafsīr* directly from Mujāhid, unanimously agree that Ibn Abī Najīḥ did transmit Mujāhid's *tafsīr* directly from al-Qāsim ibn Abī Bazzah.[105] In this case, knowing that the intermediary between ʿAbdullah ibn Abī Najīḥ and Mujāhid is al-Qāsim ibn Abī Bazzah, and knowing that al-Qāsim ibn Abī Bazzah himself is a reliable transmitter, *thiqah*,[106] we have adequate proof of the authenticity of Mujāhid's *tafsīr*, when received through the chain of transmission analysed.

To summarise, it appears that the Jewish-Muslim conflicts of Madinah triggered off a wave of conflicts between the Northern Christians and Muslims. The first occurred in 628 C.E./7 AH when an envoy of the Prophet was aggressively killed by a Christian governor, causing the first fierce war between the Christians and Muslims to take place in 629 C.E./8 AH known as the Battle of Mu'tah. Then, as a result of this battle, and also due to the Muslim's rapid expansion and victory over the idolatrous Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula, the Northern Christians mobilised troops against them, stationing them in the region of *Tabūk* in 630 C.E./9 A.H. to obstruct the expansion of Islam into their lands. It is in this historical context of war, Mujāhid (who had read the entire Qur'an 30 times in front of Ibn ʿAbbās, and who had also revised the explanation of the whole Qur'an 3 times with him)[107] informs us that verse 9:29 was revealed.[108] Thus as analysis of the historical context of verse 9:29 reveals, the command to fight in the verse relates to the aggression of the People of the Book (as expressed in their challenge to war) and not their belief system. In light of this, it is clear that the scope of the prescription to fight is based exclusively on those of the People of the Book committed to agrestic and warfare, and not those who wish to live in peace.

Turning next to the textual context of verse 9:29, we note the Arabic morphological form used for the imperative to fight which first draws our attention. Form III of the root *q-t-l* is used giving us *qātala*, which indicates that the act of fighting must be performed in response to another initially started act of killing or fighting. In this respect, the prescription to fight is related to the right to self-defence against an unjustly initiated war, not to the belief system of those who are the object of the imperative. Note, for the command to be related to the People of the Book's belief system it would have to appear in the verse as Form I, that is *uqtulū* (slay or kill them).[109] For example, see verse 40:25 wherein Pharaoh commands all Israelite male children to be killed using Form I of the root *q-t-l*:

> Now, when he [Moses] came to them in Truth, from Us, they said, "Slay the sons of those who believe with him, and keep alive their females," but the plots of Unbelievers (end) in nothing but errors (and delusions)!...(Qur'an *Ghāfir* 40:25)

As is clear, the first morphological form of *q-t-l* is applied, since the command is not related to the right to self-defence, but Pharaoh's act of killing unjustly innocent children.

Another textual indication is the word *ḥattā*, until: "fight... until they pay the *Jizyah*" (9:29). Sources of Arabic grammar define mainly three functions for *ḥattā*: "the end of a purpose, motivation, and exception."[110] The first function, "end of a purpose" (*intihā' al-ghāyah*), means that what is after *ḥattā*, represents the point where the action of what is before *ḥattā*, must end. For example, if a person says: "I will walk until I reach the library", it means that the action of the intended walk will end when the person reaches the library, because the library is the purpose of the person's walking, but not its motivation. In fact, a person's motivation for walking to the library is to gain knowledge. The second function of *ḥattā* is known as motivation. Unlike the previous function, the second shows that what is after *ḥattā* serves as a motivation for the action before *ḥattā*. At this

point, it should be noted that in respect of the second function, it is more accurate to translate *ḥattā* into English as "in order to." For example, in terms of the second function of *ḥattā*, it is more accurate to say in English: "I will read the newspaper in order to know what happened in Egypt yesterday"; instead of saying: "I will read the newspaper until I know what did happen in Egypt yesterday." For this reason, Sībawayh points out that with regard to the second function of *ḥattā*, it appears as a synonym of the Arabic word *kai*,[111] which equates to "in order to" in English. Thus, as can be seen in this second example, the information provided after the word *ḥattā*, "in order to," serves as a motivation for the action mentioned before *ḥattā*, "in order to." In other words, the motivation for reading the newspaper is to learn about recent events in Egypt. As for the third function of *ḥattā*, this is defined as an exception, meaning that the action before *ḥattā*, is done as an exception to what is after *ḥattā*. For example, if a person addresses another person by saying: "I will not enter the room until you enter it first," this means that the action of entering the room by the first person is refused, but exception is made only if the second person enters the room first. It is obvious, that in this case *ḥattā*, works as a condition.

Now, what is the function of *ḥattā*, in verse 9:29?

> Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, from among the People of the Book, **until**[112] they pay the *Jizyah* with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued. (Qur'an *al-Tawbah* 9:29)

Taking all three functions of *ḥattā* into consideration (reverse order) we come up with the following:

1) *Exception*: This appears unlikely given the context. Largely because *ḥattā* as exception would mean to fight the People of the Book as a permanent and inclusive act up to the point at which (or except in the circumstance that) they pay the *jizyah*. However, this view contradicts many other Qur'anic

texts which exclude from the scope of war and do not permit to be attacked children, women, the elderly, priests, those embracing Islam, and peaceful people in general.

2) *Motivation*: If applied to the verse this would mean fighting People of the Book in order to obtain *jizyah* from them. In other words the root cause of fighting would be payment (of *jizyah*). This assumption is false and contradicts teachings of the Qur'an, the historical context of the verse as analysed, and does not correspond to the morphological form of the imperative *qātilū*. Furthermore, interpreting *ḥattā* as motivation, would imply killing all non-Muslims living in Islamic countries today, if they refuse to pay their taxes. Of course everyone suffers a penalty of some sort for tax evasion, across the world, but they are not put to death for this.

3) *End of a purpose* (*intihā' al-ghāyah*): If applied to the verse, this interpretation would mean fighting must end at the point at which non-Muslims agree to pay the *jizyah*. In other words, the action of fighting here, which is not motivated by *jizyah* but by the right to self defence against an initially initiated war declared on Muslims, ends at the point in which agreement is reached by the People of the Book agreeing to pay the *jizyah*. This agreement signifies that they agree to observe the general system of the state as well as the social order. In fact, the psychological condition of the latter whilst accepting the *jizyah*-based agreement is described as "subdued" (*ṣāghirūn*) where once it had been rebellious bent on war. However, some Muslim scholars have erroneously drawn the conclusion from this that humiliation is a requirement from the People of the Book (necessary condition) when accepting to pay the *jizyah*.[113] This view is implausible because "the payment of *Jizyah* cannot be considered a penalty, for Islamic law does not punish any non-Muslim for his/her faith."[114] In this regard, Thomas Arnold remarks:

> This tax [*Jizyah*] was not imposed on the Christians, as some would have us think, as a penalty for their refusal to accept the Muslim faith, but was paid by them in common with the other dhimmīs or non-Muslim subjects of the

state whose religion precluded them from serving in the army, in return for the protection secured for them by the arms of the Muslims. When the people of Ḥīrah contributed the sum agreed upon, they expressly mentioned that they paid this jizyah on condition that "the Muslims and their leader protect us from those who would oppress us, whether they be Muslims or others."[115]

So this third function of *ḥattā* (the end of a purpose) is the correct interpretation for it corresponds to the historical context of the verse, linguistic rules, and the main objectives of the Qur'an. In other words *ḥattā* as used in the verse denotes the end of the action of fighting. This provides clear evidence that the root cause of the command to fight is not the belief system of the People of the Book for were it so then fighting would not cease with the payment of the *jizyah*, rather it could only end when Islam had been accepted and the beliefs changed.

As far as the intertextual context of verse 9:29 is concerned, in the first place it should be stressed that the overall Qur'anic context rejects the claim that the root cause of the imperative to fight lies in the People of the Book's beliefs. This denies and contradicts the universal Qur'anic principles of freedom of belief, human dignity, and diversity, which emerge as a natural result of mankind's creation as creatures of free will.

Secondly and more particularly, the theme of surah *al-Tawbah*, as well as its preceding surah *al-Anfāl*, is entirely geared to the context of war as a result of (provoked by) aggression and oppression. It is methodologically unacceptable therefore to selectively take out of their proper context certain prescriptions mentioned in these surahs, and then graft onto them a generalised interpretation to sanction a policy announcing war on those of different faiths, contradicting the Qur'an and Islamic teaching! For instance, Watt would appear to be doing just this in his *Muhammad at Medina*, wherein he makes the following comment on verses 9:29-32:

> The passage as a whole marks the transition to a policy of hostility to the Christians. This policy found its expression in the great expedition to

Tabūk in 630/9, and was continued not merely for the rest of Muḥammad's lifetime but also afterwards, at least until Syria had been completely subjugated. In so far as the passage prescribes hostility to the Byzantine Empire and to Christians in general, it long continued to influence the Muslim attitude to the Christian church.[116]

Watt's statement is generalisation based on a selective disregard of the historical, textual, and intertextual context of the Qur'an's verses. Whilst pointing to verses 9:29-32 as evidence for the Qur'an's hostile attitude towards Christians in general, Watt suggests the root cause of this supposed hostility as being the Christian belief system. This is false association. In reality, the block of verses referred to by Watt is not in favor of this generalised claim, because the verses (9:29-34) themselves go beyond the scope of differing belief and explain metaphorically that a circle of priests among the People of the Book had waged war on God Himself, hindered/turned people away from the path of/worshipping God, and devoured unjustly the wealth and possessions of mankind hoarding up gold and silver and not spending it in the way of God. In other words the verses speak for themselves and intrinsically do not support any attempt at generalisation. What we are being told in no uncertain terms is that aggression and oppression is to be challenged. It is this which is being addressed necessitating response in the interests of justice and peace, not people's belief systems.

Finally, God's rhetorical question in a verse preceding 9:29 provides explicit intertextual evidence of the Qur'anic root cause for the prescription to fight being not people's beliefs and religions, but their aggression:

Would you, perchance, fail to fight against people who have broken their solemn pledges, and have done all that they could to drive the Apostle away, and have been first to attack you? Do you hold them in awe? Nay, it is God alone of whom you ought to stand in awe, if you are [truly] believers! (Qur'an 9:13)

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Obviously, the violation of covenants, the hatching of plots to assassinate or expel the Prophet, the initiating of oppressive wars on others, all these actions contradict any belief system, not to mention the belief systems of what is referred to as the monotheistic religions.

Therefore, examination of the historical, textual, and intertextual context of verse 9:29, has shown that the root cause for the Qur'an's command to fight the People of the Book is their aggression expressed in the act of waging of war against the Muslims. Accordingly, the scope of the command to fight falls only on those People of the Book who are people of war. As for the four characteristics succeeding the imperative to fight, they should be understood not as conditions permitting the declaration of war, but as informative descriptions of those who oppressively kindle the fires of war against peaceful people.

In summary, analysis reveals that Qur'anic exegesis sources do not systematically present the Qur'an's concept of warfare contextualised to interfaith relations. Misinterpretation and confusion characterise understanding of the prescription to fight as reflected in the inconsistency of statements and conclusions scattered throughout the sources. This in turn affects detrimentally, and needlessly, elucidation of the meaning and root cause of the command to fight as well as its scope, opening the doors vastly to speculation and misleading conclusions.

In actual fact, there is no real complexity in the verses in question. In the Arabic at least the position is clear if one were to look a little closely. Although various reasons can perhaps be cited for the inconsistency, it would seem that in addition to the specific historical circumstances of the exegetes interpreting the verses, a major role has been played via the employment of an atomistic methodology to Qur'anic exegesis. This approach prevents crystallisation of the thematic coherence of the topic in question. Versus the atomistic approach is the more superior thematic, holistic one. Applying the latter, that is systematically examining the historical, linguistic, and contextual aspects of, in this case the prescription to fight, we discover no contradiction to exist

between the Qur'anic conception of normative religious plural-
ism and the command to fight. This is because the root cause for
this command is not the belief system of others, but their initia-
tion of war on peaceful people. Thus, the scope of the Qur'anic
imperative to fight refers only to people of war.

[2]
An Analysis of the Prescription to Not Take Jews
and Christians as *Awliyā'*, Patrons: A Case
Study of Qur'anic Verse 5:51

This final section of the chapter analyses the Qur'anic prescrip-
tion to not take Jews and Christians as *awliyā'* or patrons. This is
one of the most controversial Qur'anic verses with regards to
normative religious pluralism:

> O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your allies and
> protectors;[117] they are but allies and protectors to each other. And he
> amongst you that turns to them [for protection] is of them. Verily Allah
> guideth not a people unjust. (Qur'an *al-Mā'idah* 5:51)

This command not to take the Jews and Christians as
allies/protectors and generally friends has caused much contro-
versy and speculation. Aside from the issue of translation, this
has largely been due to the fact that the textual implication of the
prescription is speculative, *ẓannī*, and not definitive, *qaṭʿī*,
respectively. Furthermore and in particular, inaccurate transla-
tion of the word *awliyā'* has triggered and exacerbated contro-
versy surrounding the verse. *Awliyā'* has a very complex mean-
ing as well as sense and connotation. To simply translate it as
friends is to do it a disservice.

Because of this exegetes such as al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī
misconstrue *awliyā'* to derive an understanding requiring Mus-
lims to isolate themselves from religiously different people and
ignore them, making of this a normative obligation.[118] In fact
most exegetes interpret *awliyā'* and the command this way,

concluding that Muslims are not permitted to show any affection towards religiously different people.[119] As a result, this perception has led to double standards developing amongst certain Muslims with regards to how they behave towards the religious other.

It is extremely unfortunate, yet not surprising, that all these interpretations of verse 5:51 have been noted in the West and construed as a hostile attitude on the part of Muslims towards Jews and Christians. As mentioned earlier this has been nurtured and exacerbated by most western translations of the Qur'an rendering the term *awliyā'* as friends, allies etc. Consequently, the verse has been employed as evidence to support the view that the Qur'an does not leave enough room for accommodating normative religious pluralism.

To derive a correct understanding of the issue this section examines verse 5:51 in the light of three major aspects: a semantic analysis of the term *awliyā'*, the historical context of the revelation of the verse, and a textual and intertextual study of the verse. In fact, by examining the verse from these three particular angles, we reach a coherent understanding of what is being in reality commanded, enabling us to answer the question of whether the prescription forbidding taking Jews and Christians as *awliyā'* contradicts the conception of normative religious pluralism.

A Semantic Analysis of the Word *Awliyā'*

As mentioned *awliyā'* is a complex and ambiguous term. The word appears in the verse as an accusative masculine plural noun in an indefinite grammatical form, and this latter not being limited to any indicative description, increases its complexity and ambiguity. To establish its sense and implications as well as precise and accurate meaning, we need to examine *awliyā'* semantically.

One of the earliest semantic accounts of the root morpheme *wāw-lām-yā'*, from which the word *awliyā'* is derived, is given

by Ibn Fāris, who explains that this linguistic root, in itself and in respect of all its derivatives, signifies "closeness."[120] However, with direct connection to the word *awliyā'*, Ibn Fāris states that "a person in charge of other person/s is referred to as his/her or their *walī*,"[121] the singular of *awliyā'*. Of course, Ibn Fāris' definition "a person in charge of other person/s" means a person who is in charge of managing other person/s' life affairs. In this respect, the English translation of *awliyā'* would be more accurate if rendered as "guardians." At this point, it is important to note that Ibn Fāris mentions another derivative of the root *wāw-lām-yā'*, which is *mawlā*, and states that it conveys the following meanings: a slave who was set free, a person who freed a slave, a friend, an ally, a cousin, protector, and neighbor.[122]

After Ibn Fāris, another scholar in the field of semantics, al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, explains the meaning of *walā'*, the source noun of *wāw-lām-yā'*, as follows: "Two or more subjects united together, in a way that there is nothing between them that is not part of them."[123] It seems that al-Aṣfahānī's definition of *walā'* is more akin to the notion of fusion than to Ibn Fāris' "closeness." More importantly, al-Aṣfahānī distinguishes different areas to which the notion of *walā'* is related, such as: a place, affiliation, religion, friendship, protection, and belief.[124]

Two centuries after al-Aṣfahānī, Ibn Manẓūr transmitted many different meanings of the root *wāw-lām-yā'*. In addition to Ibn Fāris' observations on the meanings of *mawlā*, Ibn Manẓūr remarks that *mawlā* also means: a lord, a possessor, a master.[125] With regard to ally, *ḥalīf*, as one possible meaning derived from the root *wāw-lām-yā'*, Ibn Manẓūr states that this is a person or group of people with whom another person or group of people is/are united, and the latter draw their comfort and dignity from the former, and fulfil their orders too.[126] Moreover, Ibn Manẓūr attributes to Ibn Isḥāq the statement that one of the meanings of the expression "God is their *walī*" is that God supports them against their enemies, and He also supports them in making their religion prevail over the religion of others.[127]

Chronologically succeeding Ibn Manẓūr, Sharīf al-Jurjānī had a greater opportunity to acquaint himself with written works in the field of semantics prior to his time, and thus managed to compile his famous compilation *Al-Taʿrīfāt*. In this work, al-Jurjānī adopts a laconic style that is defining terms and notions related to Islamic knowledge concisely. In this respect, he provides a concise, but meaning-saturated definition of *walī*. Al-Jurjānī writes: "*Walī* is whoever you take as a subject to unconditional obedience."[128] Al-Jurjāni's definition of *walī* in itself, seen from the religious aspect, provides a firm ground for grasping the essential meaning of the command in verse 5:51.

As opposed to the terse, succinct style of al-Jurjānī it seems that contemporary semantic discourse on the concept of *walī, awliyā'* and its definition is more complicated and verbose. For example, Baalbaki applies more than 35 different English words to explain the meaning of *walī*.[129] However, all those words can be accommodated into the classical, semantic framework of *walī* mentioned previously.

Therefore, semantic analysis reveals the complex nature of the concept of *awliyā'*. In this respect al-Aṣfahānī provides a crucial key for understanding this concept when he remarks that the notion of *awliyā'* pertains to different spheres of socio-cultural life. Al-Aṣfahānī's remark suggests that the concept of *awliyā'* in the case of verse 5:51 should be observed from a particular angle related to the religious belief system, since this is the context of the verse. Consequently, the definition of *awliyā'* given by al-Jurjānī would appear to be the most suitable in explaining the meaning of the command. He writes: "*Walī* is whoever you take as a subject to unconditional obedience."[130] Adding to al-Jurjānī's definition those semantic meanings of *awliyā'* which are closely related to the belief system, the scope of the prohibition in 5:51 can be limited to the following semantic illustration in respect of Jews and Christians: religious guidance→unconditional obedience→fusion and religious melting. This semantic illustration leads, in turn, to the conclusion that the root cause for the prohibition in 5:51 is related to the idea of preserving

religious particularities, which in fact constitute an essential element of the structure of religious pluralism. At this point, it should be mentioned, therefore, that the English translation and definition of *awliyā'* as "friends" in the context of 5:51 raises much concern about the methodology applied to draw such a conclusion.[131] Indeed, if we were to determine a single English word to express all these meanings of *awliyā'*, then that word would seem to be "patron" which conveys most suitably the meaning of that Arabic word considered in the particular context of 5:51. This is because, in addition to the meaning of a protector, the word "patron" etymologically means lord, master, father, and patron saint.[132]

The Historical Context of Verse 5:51

The historical context of verse 5:51 is determined by the occasion of its revelation. In this respect, Ibn Abī Ḥātim reports the following:

> We were told by my father, who said: We were told by Abū al-Aṣbagh al-Ḥarrānī, who said: We were told by Muḥammad ibn Salamah, who narrated from Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq, who said: I was told by my father Isḥāq ibn Yasār, who narrated from ʿUbādah ibn al-Walīd, who narrated from ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit that: It was not until the Jewish tribe of Banū Qaynuqāʿ waged war [on the Prophet and Muslims in Madinah], when ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit went to the Prophet and announced that he did disown the tribe of Banū Qaynuqāʿ, whereas ʿAbdullāh ibn Ubay ibn Salūl insisted on sticking by his alliance with Banū Qaynuqāʿ. ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit was one of Banū ʿAwf ibn al-Khazraj [Arab tribe allied with Banū Qaynuqāʿ, and the chief of which was ʿAbdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salūl], but when Banū Qaynuqāʿ turned against the Prophet, ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit terminated his alliance with them, and said: I take Allah, the Prophet, and the believers as my *awliyā'*. This event was the occasion of revelation of the verse 5:51 "O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your allies and protectors; they are but allies and protectors to each other."[133]

The content of this narration is also transmitted by al-Wāḥidī

as well as al-Ṭabarī, but both exegetes narrate it from ʿAṭiyyah al-ʿAwfī, who, in addition to his controversial status as a transmitter, had not met ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit¹³⁴ nor had he mentioned the mediator between him and ʿUbādah. Therefore, the narration presented by Ibn Abī Ḥātim in his *Tafsīr*, appears as the only authentic one in terms of its content, which comes in accordance to the Qur'anic textual context of the verse. In addition its chain of transmission consists of purely reliable transmitters and thus is defined as authentic.¹³⁵

However, two objections might be raised with regard to it. The first is related to the chain of transmission, where one can claim that ʿUbādah ibn al-Walīd ibn ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit did not hear hadith from ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit. At this point, it should be noted that ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit was the grandfather of ʿUbādah ibn al-Walīd, and thus it is very likely that the latter did hear hadith from the former. Furthermore, in *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah states that ʿUbādah ibn al-Walīd did hear his grandfather ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit. But then, commenting on Sufyān's statement, Ibn Ḥanbal states: "Another time Sufyān said: *from*¹³⁶ his grandfather ʿUbādah,"¹³⁷ meaning that ʿUbādah ibn al-Walīd was narrating from his grandfather through a mediator between them. The mediator in this case is known. This is al-Walīd ibn ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit, the father of the young ʿUbādah, and the son of the old ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit. This relation in terms of transmission is confirmed by Ibn Abī Ḥātim in his *al-Jarḥ wa al-Taʿdīl*, where he declares that ʿUbādah ibn al-Walīd was transmitting hadith from his father al-Walīd ibn ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit.¹³⁸ Therefore, any objection as to the chain of transmission seems untenable.

With regard to the second possible objection, this pertains to the content of the narration. How can the narration refer to a historical event which occurred between the Jews of Banū Qaynuqāʿ and the Muslims in around the year 623-624 C.E./2-3 AH in Madinah, as being the occasion for revelation of the verse which note occurs in surah *al-Māʾidah* known as the last Qur'anic surah to have been revealed?

In order to dispel this objection, it should be emphasized that the revelation of some Madinan surahs lasted for several years, including surah *al-Mā'idah* which took a long period of time. Evidence to support this statement can be found in al-Bukhārī in which he transmits a narration from the Prophet's wife ʿĀ'ishah who asserts explicitly that verse 6 of *al-Mā'idah* was revealed when she lost her necklace in the region of al-Baydā' near Madinah.[139] Historically, according to Ibn Ḥajar, this incident happened in 626 C.E./5 AH during the event known as the battle of *Banū Muṣṭalaq* which occurred in the region of the springs of al-Muraysīʿ.[140] This evidence witnesses that certain verses of *al-Mā'idah* were revealed during the early Madinan period. Therefore, it seems that the opening of *al-Mā'idah* commenced at the end of the second and beginning of the third Hijri year, as indicated by the occasion of the revelation of 5:51, and continued until the end of the Qur'anic revelation, when the largest part of *al-Mā'idah* was revealed.

Now, after proving the occasion of the revelation of 5:51 as sound, it becomes clear that the imperative prohibiting Muslims from taking the Jews and Christians as their patrons (*awliyā'*) has been based on a specific historical event, which plays a paramount role in understanding the cause and the scope of this imperative. The prohibition therefore emerged from the historical context of the first religious conflict which took place between the Muslims and Jews following the Muslim victory over the Makkan polytheists at the battle of Badr. At this stage, as the oldest monotheists in the region, the Jews of Madinah were expected to show support for Islam. However, instead of supporting the Muslims, the Jews of Banū Qainuqāʿ chose to transgress their covenants, threaten the Prophet, make a mockery of the Muslims, and violate the dignity of a Muslim woman.[141] Consequently, all these provocations led to a war between the Muslims and Jews of Banū Qaynuqāʿ. But, since the axis of that war was religious, with allies and enemies grouped along religious lines, the Muslims were forbidden to team up with the Jews of Banū Qaynuqāʿ against the Prophet and his

followers. In other words the verse is telling Muslims not to trust and take as protectors those who were their enemies. Therefore, the different attitudes each of ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit and ʿAbdullah ibn Ubay ibn Salūl, in the context of religious conflict, served as an occasion to prohibit all Muslims in all times to take Jews and Christians as religious patrons, or to team up with them against Muslims.

In summary, as historical analysis shows the reason for the prohibition in verse 5:51 was to caution Muslims at a time of religious conflict which aimed to involve the Islamic faith in religious turmoil and also to exterminate it. Accordingly, the scope of the prohibition pertains only to those among the Jews and Christians attempting to religiously fuse Muslims or engage them in a religious conflict against the followers of Islam. These reasons aside, it has also been historically proven that the Prophet himself, both before and after the conflict with the Jews of Banū Qaynuqāʿ, engaged with the Jews and Christians in mutual understanding, mutual co-operation in all that is good, and mutual support against all that is evil.

Textual and Intertextual Study of Verse 5:51

An inseparable and integral part of Qur'anic exegesis is (methodologically speaking) the examination of both the textual and intertextual contexts of content. Failure to do so makes determining the precise meaning of any verse impossible. For this reason, a selective approach, which disregards the different contexts of Qur'anic verses, tends to distort the true meanings of those verses. Thus, in accordance with this stipulation, and to complete our analysis, we next examine verse 5:51 in terms of textual and intertextual context.

With regard to the textual aspect, it should be noted that the verse's linguistic structure consists of an imperative addressed to all believers applicable for all times: "O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your patrons" (5:51). Grammatically the subject, that is the addressees, of the imperative cannot be limited to a certain historical period, as Osman seems to

suggest,[142] since the particularity of the occasion of the revelation does not restrict the general sense of the Qur'anic words. However, what is subject to limitation is the grammatical object of the imperative, namely "the Jews and the Christians as *awliyā'*." Just as not all meanings of the term *awliyā'* can be accommodated to serve as the object of the imperative in this particular context, so neither can all Jews and Christians be considered as the object of this imperative. This is largely clear from Qur'anic principles which call for universal moral values, as well as from the example of the Prophet concerning interfaith relations.

Now, it is worth quoting al-Ṭabarī's conclusion on this verse, wherein he states: "God has forbidden all believers to take the Jews and the Christians as supporters and allies against those who have belief in God and His Messenger."[143] It is obvious from this that al-Ṭabarī limits the meaning of *awliyā'* to "supporters" and "allies" *against* the followers of Islam. Moreover, al-Ṭabarī refers to this meaning of *awliyā'* as forming partisanship, that is favoring the Jews and the Christians against the Muslims, *taḥazzub*.[144] Hence, according to al-Ṭabarī's understanding of the verse, the prohibition concerns only that kind of support and alliance with the Jews and Christians which is directed against God, His Messenger, and the believers. He goes further however to regard this, what is in effect betrayal if you like, as apostasy. For this reason, he literally interprets the statement "And he amongst you that turns to them [for protection] is of them" (5:51).[145] Hence, grammatically the object of the imperative "Take not" (in the 2nd person masculine plural (form VIII) imperfect verb, jussive mood) is limited in al-Ṭabarī's interpretation to partisanship with the Jews and the Christians against Islam and thus to the realm of religious apostasy.

Two centuries after al-Ṭabarī's relevantly liberal conclusion, al-Zamakhsharī chose to expand the focus of the prohibition to such a degree that he derives a "legal norm" from the verse of "obligation to avoid religiously different others and to isolate them."[146] Of course, this generalisation underpinned by the

legal term obligation conflicts not only with the normative teachings of Islam towards others, but also with the history of interfaith relations and any constructive reasoning. And it is this, al-Zamakhsharī's conclusion, which may have provided good reason (if not ammunition) for certain parties to understand the term *awliyā'* as meaning "friends," thus allowing them to promote the view that Islam is an intolerant religion which does not make any room for religious pluralism.

Whilst citing al-Zamakhsharī's avoiding the religiously other as an obligation assumption, al-Rāzī also adds that the prohibition means neither to seek the protection of Jews or Christians or to show them affection.[147] We are left with a generalised statement which does not qualify the circumstances, if any, under which this action is to take place, opening the door wide to adverse speculation and misleading conclusion. Note for example in contrast that the Prophet himself sought the protection of the Christians in Abyssinia against Makkan oppression and persecution.

Modern sources of Qur'anic exegesis differ little, echoing much the same interpretation of the prohibition. In fact, barely a significant difference exists. For instance, Ibn Ashur states that the meaning of *awliyā'* in 5:51 pertains to notions of affection and protection.[148] In his opinion the reason for the prohibition of taking Jews and Christians as *awliyā'* can be understood in the light of the verses preceding 5:51, wherein God describes some of the People of the Book as having corrupted their holy scripture, corrupted the moral example of their prophets, and attempted to religiously misguide Muslims.[149] In fact, even though Ibn Ashur does not state so explicitly, his explanation of the cause of the prohibition implies that the scope of the imperative does not inclusively cover all People of the Book, as the descriptions provided by him are not applicable to all of them.

Another modern exegete, al-Tabataba'i, argues strongly that the meaning of *awliyā'* in 5:51 is related mainly to love and affection. He asserts that though the prohibition is specific to historical context, and has a meaning linked to alliance, this neverthe-

less cannot restrict application of *awliyā's* general sense which conveys a meaning of love and affection. To defend his statement, al-Tabatabai applies both textual and intertextual approaches to interpreting verse 5:51.[150] Yet, the issue once again remains of qualifying a statement, that is al-Tabatabai does not provide a clear distinction between those Jews and Christians who are not to be treated on the basis of love and affection, and those who can be. Moreover, al-Tabatabai does not seem to distinguish between different reasons for showing love and affection to People of the Book. Consequently, generalisation, deprived of accurate distinction between different notions and conceptions, tends to lead to a conclusion that claims prohibition for all Muslims to show any kind of love and affection to any Jews and Christians. If this were so, it would not explain how the Qur'an could permit a Muslim man to lawfully marry a Jewish or a Christian woman yet simultaneously prohibit him from showing any love or affection to her. It has to be emphasised, such contradictions are not becoming of any scripture, and are certainly not characteristic of the Qur'an considered by Muslims as divine revelation.

In sum, as analysis reveals, the object of the prohibition in verse 5:51 has been differently defined, fluctuating between absolute generalisation and excessive restriction. In this case, it is methodologically necessary to use a thematic approach to examine the textual as well as intertextual context of verse 5:51 in order to reconcile the different definitions.

Analyzing the content of the whole of surah *al-Mā'idah*, it becomes obvious from the very beginning that the surah encourages cooperation and thus mutual engagement with the other: "Help ye one another in righteousness and piety" (5:2). Moreover, to facilitate implementation of this, the same surah stipulates that the food and women of the People of the Book are made lawful for Muslims (5:5). Similarly, surah *al-Mā'idah* also promotes mutual contribution in the context of religious diversity through competing with the other in good works (5:48). Note however the textual context of *al-Mā'idah* also commands

Muslims to "take not for friends and protectors (*awliyā'*) those who take your religion for a mockery or sport" from among the People of the Book and disbelievers (5:57). At this point, it should be borne in mind that both verses 5:51 and 5:57 occur in the context of discussion on the issue of apostasy, which is a clear sign that the prohibition in 5:51 cannot be reduced to the issue of friendship and affection.

Moving on to the intertextual context as thematically related to verse 5:51, it is apparent that, in addition to the broad Qur'anic sphere of human brotherhood, the Qur'an fosters the objective of mutual understanding through the human initiative of knowing each other (49:13). This culminates in the Qur'an's emphasis on the need for mutual support between religions with the aim of protecting religious freedom and repelling oppression (22:40).

Additionally, another thematic circle can be traced in the Qur'an, which clearly identifies different categorisations of the People of the Book. This thematic circle seems to start from the statement that "not all of them [the People of the Book] are alike" (3:113), and ends at two different positions. The first position pertains to those among the People of the Book who when "hearing what has been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of what they have recognised of the truth" (5:83), whereas the second corresponds to the following Qur'anic statement: "and that which has been revealed to you from your Lord will increase many of them [the People of the Book] in transgression and disbelief" (5:68). Of course, between these two positions, the Qur'an discusses other attitudes adopted by the People of the Book towards Muslims. However, what is essential to stress here is that the object of the prohibition in 5:51 certainly should be limited to those among the Jews and the Christians who represent the second position.

Another intertextual thematic reading explicitly shows that only those who are enemies of God, the Prophet, and Muslims are not to be taken as *awliyā'* as well as not to be treated on the basis of love and affection by Muslims. The Qur'an says: "O you

who believe! Take not My enemies and yours as *awliyā'* – offering them (your) love" (60:1). The reason for this prohibition is explained in the same verse; it is because those enemies have "driven out the Prophet and yourselves (from your homes), (simply) because you believe in Allah your Lord!" (60:1). However, in the same surah it is advised that "Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for your faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them" (60:8). The Arabic word for "dealing kindly and justly with them" is *tabarrūhum*, which carries the meaning of honest treatment on the basis of love and compassion.

Therefore, all these foregoing elements[151] thematically related to verse 5:51 construct necessary limitations to our understanding of the grammatical object of the command. In other words, a thematic reading of the Qur'an does not allow for generalisation of the prohibition stipulated in 5:51 to include reference to all People of the Book, claiming that any kind of friendship, alliance, mutual support, and protection in respect of the Jews and Christians is not allowed for Muslims.

Overall, based on semantic, historical, and textual study, analysis of verse 5:51 reveals that the Qur'an's command to not take the Jews and Christians as *awliyā'* is limited to two aspects. The first is purely theological, wherein the prohibition is related to Muslims' reliance on the Jews and Christians as a source of religious guidance aiming at religious fusion, and thus leading to apostasy. The root cause of the prohibition in this aspect is related to the idea of preserving religious particularities, which, in fact, constitute an essential element of the structure of religious pluralism. The second aspect pertains to any involvement in partisanship with the Jews and the Christians against Islam. The reason behind the prohibition in this respect is enmity and transgression. Consequently, the scope of the prohibition in this second aspect is limited to those among the Jews and the Christians who are people of transgression, aggression, and enmity towards the Muslims. Apart from these two aspects, any kind of friendship with Jews and Christian based on love and

affection, and any kind of alliance with them seeking to spread all that is good and fight all that is evil, is not subject to prohibition in the case of verse 5:51.

[3]
Conclusion

In summary, analysis reveals that Qur'anic exegesis sources do not systematically present the Qur'an's concept of fighting against, or alliance with, non-Muslims contextualised to interfaith relations. Misinterpretation and confusion characterise understanding of the prohibitions stipulated, primarily their root cause, scope and objective, as reflected in the inconsistency of statements and conclusions scattered throughout the sources. This in turn creates a vast area for speculation and misleading conclusions. By employing a holistic-thematic approach to systematically examine the historical, linguistic, and contextual aspects of, in this case, the command to fight non-Muslims and not take them as *awliyā'*, we discover no contradiction to exist between the Qur'anic conception of normative religious pluralism and the command to fight. This is because the root cause for this command is not the belief system of others, but their initiation of war on peaceful people. Thus, the scope of the Qur'anic imperative to fight refers only to people of war.

Similarly analysis of verse 5:51 and the prohibition against taking the Jews and Christians as *awliyā'* reveals that it is limited to two aspects. The first is purely theological, whereby Muslims are forbidden to rely on Jews and Christians as a source of religious guidance aiming at religious fusion, and thus leading to apostasy. The second pertains to any involvement in partisanship with the Jews and Christians against Islam. The reason for the prohibition in this respect is enmity and transgression. Consequently, the scope of the prohibition here is limited to those among the Jews and Christians who are hostile to Muslims and their faith, in other words people of transgression, aggression, and enmity towards Muslims. Putting these two aspects

aside, and keeping commitment to their faith, in relation to verse 5:51 Muslims are not barred from any kind of friendship with the Jews and Christian based on love and affection, and any kind of alliance with them seeking to spread all that is good and fight all that is evil.

It is clear Qur'anic prescriptions play an important role in preventing the process of the normative religious pluralism from corruption, and remain as relevant today in our fractured times as when first revealed, since these prescriptions are related to issues such as aggression and transgression, but not to the belief systems of non-Muslims and not to people of peace.