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MANAGING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY: AN *IHSAN* APPROACH

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Abstract

This study begins with the notion that some religious groups engage in intolerance and violence directed at members of their religious community and at people of other religions. This shatters interfaith relationships. In addition, religion is being accused to be the reason for intolerance and a source of conflict and chaos. Conversely, Islamic teachings can be used as approaches in managing religious communities and social interaction. An example is the concept of *ihsan*. The purpose of this study is to explain the concept of *ihsan* as an approach to fostering the interreligious relationship. This qualitative research used library research for data collection from books, journal articles, and documents related to the management of religious diversity and the concept of *ihsan*. The collected data were processed using descriptive analytics. With both methods, the researcher reports and presents the collected data to be analyzed and concluded. This research finally found that the concept of *ihsan* which contains 'witnessing' and 'supervision' is appropriate for use by Muslims as an approach to managing the plurality of religious communities. This is because Muslim, while always remaining steadfast in their faith, can

still establish positive relationships with those who practice other religions using the *ihsan* approach.

Keywords: Religious diversity; Islam; approach; *ihsan.*

Khulasah

Kajian ini bermula dengan tanggapan bahawa sesetengah kumpulan agama terlibat dengan sikap tidak bertolak ansur dan keganasan yang ditujukan kepada ahli komuniti agama mereka dan kepada penganut agama lain. Ini menghancurkan hubungan antara agama. Selain itu, agama juga dituduh sebagai punca sikap tidak bertolak ansur, konflik dan huru-hara. Sebaliknya, ajaran Islam boleh dijadikan pendekatan dalam mengurus masyarakat beragama dan interaksi sosial dan sebagai contohnya ialah konsep ihsan. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menjelaskan konsep ihsan sebagai pendekatan untuk memupuk hubungan antara agama. Kajian kualitatif ini menggunakan kajian perpustakaan untuk pengumpulan data daripada buku, artikel jurnal, dan dokumen berkaitan pengurusan kepelbagaian agama dan konsep ihsan. Data yang dikumpul diproses menggunakan analisis deskriptif. Dengan kedua-dua kaedah, penyelidik melaporkan dan membentangkan data yang dikumpul untuk dianalisis dan disimpulkan. Penyelidikan ini mendapati konsep ihsan yang mengandungi 'penyaksian' dan 'pengawasan' sesuai digunakan oleh umat Islam sebagai pendekatan mengurus kemajmukan masyarakat beragama. Ini kerana dengan pendekatan ihsan, seseorang Muslim masih boleh menjalinkan hubungan baik dengan penganut agama lain walaupun dia sentiasa berpegang teguh kepada akidah yang dianuti.

Kata kunci: Kepelbagaian agama; Islam; pendekatan; ihsan.

Introduction

Religion is accused to be responsible for the violence and intolerance because it is most often committed by religious people. Religion is to blame as a source of conflict and chaos on earth. Some people believe this, including Charles Kimball who wrote a book entitled *When Religion Becomes Evil*. He said that religion is the obvious root of all global conflicts. He claims that the majority of people today agree that religion is indeed the cause of the problem. The cause is that numerous religiously fervent leaders or communities frequently engage in violence and terror in the name of their religion.[1]

Kimball's work criticizes a variety of religions, but oddly it seems like he is particularly focused on criticizing Islam. In the preface of the revised edition released in 2008, Kimball specifically names Islam as an example of a religion where groups or individuals claim divine inspiration or a command from God for cruelty.[2] Kimball's dislike of Islam became even more evident when he always associated Islam with the 9/11 World Trade Center (WTC) tragedy. In one of the sub-chapters he wrote, "Beginning with September 11, 2001, and continuing through sectarian violence in Iraq and terorrist attacks in Great Britain, Spain, Indonesia, and elsewhere, violent extremists have provided daily headlines throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century."[3] The extremists he calls are none other than Muslims.

Besides Kimball, there is A.N. Wilson, the famous biographer, novelist, and former Christian apologist, who wrote very clearly his hatred of religion, "It is said in the Bible that the love of money is the root of all evil. It might

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[1] Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil* (United Kingdom: HarperCollins e-Book, 2008), 26.

[2] *Ibid*., v.

[3] *Ibid*., 27.

be truer to say that the love of God is the root of all evil. Religion is the tragedy of mankind."[4]

Along with these two, numerous other authors published works that were tendentious towards religion. Sam Harris, an atheist, wrote *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*[5] and *Letter to a Christian Nation.*[6] Richard Dawkins wrote *The God Delution.* Christopher Hitchens wrote *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything.*[8] They agree that religion is the source of the problem.

However, some Western writers reject religion as a source of problems. Billy Joe Daugherty wrote *God is Not Your Problem* to criticize those who said that God was the source of the problem. Douglas Wilson wrote *Letter from a Christian Citizen*[10] and Joshua D. Vajda wrote an article entitled *Letter to Sam Harris: An Assessment of Responses to Harris Letter to a Christian Nation*[11] to answer Sam Harris' *Letter to a Christian Nation*.

Their viewpoint appears to be shaped by Western society's sordid past. They decided to reject the idea of exclusivism and religious truth claims. This is expected given that they reside in a Christian context where there

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[4] A. N. Wilson, *Against Religion: Why We Should Try to Live Without It* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1991), 1.

[5] Sam Harris, *The End of Faith* (New York: Norton & Company, Inc., 2005).

[6] Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (London: Vintage, 2008).

[7] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delution* (London: Bantam Press, 2006).

[8] Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Toronto: McClelland & Steward Ltd., 2007).

[9] Billy Joe Daugherty, *God is Not Your Problem* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2006), 7–9.

[10] Douglas Wilson, *Letter from a Christian Citizen* (Georgia: American Vision, 2007).

[11] Joshua D. Vajda, "Letters to Sam Harris: An Assessment of Responses to Harris Letter to A Christian Nation," 2013.

has been a tragedy involving religious relations.[12] While in Islam, a Muslim's relationship to their religion is their most important value. No exception in managing people's diversity and social interaction. Numerous Islamic teachings can be used as guidelines in this situation.[13] The idea of *ihsan*, which will be covered in this article, serves as an outline.

Approaches to Religious Diversity

Religious diversity is an undeniable fact and has become the most dominant issue of all time.[14] It refers to the existence of major differences in religious belief and practice.[15] This religious diversity will later give rise to a diversity of absolute truth claims between religions that contradict each other. Every religion claims to be true and others are false. From here, the doctrine of salvation arises, which states that salvation and heaven are only the rights of certain religious followers, while followers of other religions will go to hell. As Kamar Oniah said it is a

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Many religious people also see religion as the problem. By religion, they invariably mean other people's false religion. A substantial number of Christians, for example, embrace some form of exclusivism that says, "My understanding and experience of Jesus is the only way to God. Any other form of human understanding or behavior is nothing more than a vain attempt by a sinful people on a fast track to hell." See, Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, 33.

[13] Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali, Nur Hidayah Mohd Paudzi & Abdul Nasser Sultan Mohsen Sallam, "Islamic Perspective on the Concept of Interaction," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 23(2) (2021), 249–274; See also, Khadijah Mohd Khambali @ Hambali, "Kepelbagaian & Kesatuan dalam Konteks Fiqh al-Ta'ayush," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 22(1) (2020), 73–102.

[14] Anis Malik Thoha, *Tren Pluralisme Agama: Tinjauan Kritis* (Jakarta: Perspektif, 2005), 1.

[15] Dale Tuggy, "Theories of Religious Diversity," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed March 23, 2023, https://iep.utm.edu/reli-div/#:~:text=Religious%20diversity%20is%20the%20fact,smallest%20and%20most%20isolated%20communities.

fundamental fact about religion that each religion defines and understands itself in its own special way, often quite differently than other religions' definitions and understandings. As a result, each religion and religious group will have their own worldviews and value systems, as well as their own sensitivities and sentiments, priorities and preferences. Therefore, each religious community perceives and relates to their religion in very different ways than other communities, and is thus religious in its own unique manner.[16]

In a country's development, the religious diversity can be both a strength and a weakness. It can be both a barrier to progress and a destabilizing force. A well-managed plurality will foster mutual understanding, coexistence, and collaboration. As a result, people will start building helpful relationships to assist and cooperate. However, if religious diversity is not properly managed, it will result in a range of prejudices, speculations, hostility, conflicts, and fractions.[17] For this reason, it is necessary to manage religious diversity with a good and appropriate approach.

Islamic scholars conceptualize the strategies for managing this plurality.[18] Religious pluralism is one approach that has emerged and departs from the denial of claims to absolute truth in one religion. This is because exclusivism, with its truth claims, not only encourages a mindset of closing oneself off to the truth of other religions but also has significant effects on conflicts in the

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[16] Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, *Early Muslim Scholarship in Religionscwissenschaft* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC IIUM, 2003), 27–28.

[17] Roni Ismail, "Resolusi Konflik Keagamaan Integratif: Studi Atas Resolusi Konflik Sosial Keagamaan Ambon," *Living Islam: Journal of Islamic Discourses* 3(2) (2020), doi: https://doi.org/10.14421/lijid.v3i2.2458.

[18] Khadijah et al., "Islamic Perspective on the Concept of Interaction," 249.

name of religion and God. [19] Therefore, according to exclusivism, the more a person learns his religion and the higher his piety, the more intolerance they have in seeing and treating 'others'. This poses a threat to other people's lives, as well as to plurality itself, and should be avoided. Thus, leaving exclusive religious diversity is a must for diversity, which is the will of God (*sunnatullah*).[20]

In basing their arguments, pluralists also use verses from the Qur'an. However, their way of interpretation is different. Pluralists use a hermeneutic method whose philosophical foundation is doubt. Thus, their interpretation is different from the interpretation of the previous Salaf scholars. One of the verses commonly used to justify their ideas is the al-Baqarah verse 62 and al-Ma'idah verse 69. This verse serves as evidence for pluralists that all religions will endure in the afterlife provided, they believe in God, the Last Day, and carry out good deeds,[21] including those who are not religious.[22] That is, even without adhering to a particular religion, doing good is the only requirement for salvation in the hereafter.

In contrast to that, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 604AH) argues that the four groups mentioned in the al-Baqarah verse 62: "whoever believes in Allah, they shall have their reward with their Lord. Faith in Allah also means having to believe in what He has required, namely believing in

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[19] Sukidi, *Teologi Inklusif Cak Nur* (Jakarta: Kompas, 2001), xxxiii. See also, Harda Armayanto, "Meninjau Ulang Upaya Merukunkan Umat Dengan Pluralisme Agama," in *Pluralisme Agama: Dari Pandangan Hidup ke Praktik Kehidupan*, ed. Harda Armayanto (Ponorogo: Centre for Islamic and Occidental Studies (CIOS), 2022), 95-129.

[20] Mun'im Sirry, "Keragaman Agama Itu Sunnatullah," *GEOTIMES*, August 2, 2023, https://geotimes.id/kolom/agama/keragaman-agama-itu-sunnatullah/.

[21] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1994), 166.

[22] Ahmad Syafii Maarif, "Hamka Tentang Ayat 62 al-Baqarah dan Ayat 69 al-Ma'idah," *Republika*, November 21, 2006.

His messengers and believing in the Last Day." [23] Believing in Allah's prophets' means believing in them as a whole, not believing in some and denying others. If so (believing in some and denying others), then they are among the disbelievers. [24]

According to Ibn Kathir (d. 774AH) based on the opinion of Ibn 'Abbas that after al-Baqarah verse 62 came down, Allah sent down Ali 'Imran verse 85, [25] the point of which is that the followers of the prophets in their own time are in guidance, truth, and salvation. The Jews as followers of Moses are in righteousness if they enforce the law. When Isa was sent, they had to follow and believe in him. Therefore, they became followers of Prophet Isa who were called Nasrani. Then when Muhammad (PBUH) was sent, they were obliged to believe in his message and obey his orders. [26] That is, adherents of previous religions are safe if they believe in the prophet Muhammad and convert to Islam.

In addition to al-Baqarah verse 62 and al-Ma'idah verse 69, other verses are commonly used in the diversity approach as well as justifying religious pluralism. They are al-Baqarah verse 256 (no compulsion in religion), Ali 'Imran verse 19 (concept of *din* and Islam), or Ali 'Imran verse 64 (concept of *sawa'*). [27] This study is not to explain these concepts, but rather to define the idea of *ihsan* as an approach to managing religious diversity.

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[23] Fakh al-Din al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb* 6 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981), 113.

[24] *Ibid*., 6:94.

[25] Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* 1 (Giza: Mu'assasah Qardaba, 2000), 431.

[26] *Ibid*., 1: 431-32.

[27] Harda Armayanto & Adib Fattah Suntoro, "Konsep *Kalimat Sawa'* dalam Hubungan Antaragama: Analisis Komparatif Pandangan Hamka dan Nurcholish Madjid," *Al-Misykah: Jurnal Kajian Al-Quran dan Tafsir* 3(2) (2022): 199–223.

Ihsan as an Approach to Religious Diversity

a. Definition

Lexically, the word *ihsan* comes from the Arabic word *ihsanan* which means to improve or do good.[28] This word also means *itqan* (mastery, command, skill, perfection), *ikram* (glorification, respect), and *ijmal* (leveling, generalization). The antonym is *isa'ah* (doing evil). [29] This word is the *masdar* (noun of a verb) form of the verb *ahsana-yuhsinu-ihsanan,* which is transitive (*muta'addi*) independently (*bi nafsih*) or involves other elements (*bi ghayrih*). To be understood, the word *ihsan* in Arabic requires an object.[30] Zarkasyi summarized these objects into 22 kinds based on the Qur'an and Hadith, including parents, relatives, orphans, and even the natural environment.[31]

In Islam, the concept of *ihsan* does not stand alone. It is part of the trilogy of *islam*, *iman*, and *ihsan*. This refers to the Hadith of (The angel) Gabriel narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslims. [32] In that Hadith, the Prophet Muhammad explained that faith is: 1) testifying that no deity has the right to be worshiped except Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; 2) establishing the salah prayers; 3) paying zakat; 4) fasting in Ramadan; and 5) making the pilgrimage to the Baytullah if able. While six pillars of faith (*iman*) are believing in the existence of Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Day of Judgement, and believing in *Qada'* and *Qadr* (Doom and

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[28] Ahmad Warson Munawwir, *Kamus al-Munawwir Arab-Indonesia Terlengkap* (Surabaya: Pustaka Progressif, 2007), 265.

[29] Shawqi Dayf, *Mu'jam Alfaz al-Qur'an al-Karim* 1 (Cairo: Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah, 1988), 291.

[30] Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dar al-Sadir, 1979), 115.

[31] Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, *Minhaj: Berislam, Dari Ritual Hingga Intelektual* (Jakarta: INSISTS, 2020), 172–88.

[32] Muhammad bin Ismail al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih* 1 (Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir, 1987), 27. Muslim Ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim* 1 (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi, n.d.), 36.

Divine Decree). *Ihsan* is to worship Allah as if you see
Him. Even if you do not see Him, Allah actually sees you.

Regarding the definition of *ihsan* conveyed by the
Prophet in the Hadith, al-Nawawi explained that in the
context of worship, *ihsan* means to present submission
and solemnity to the maximum extent possible in
worshiping God. [33] Abdurrahim Faraj al-Jindy, in
Mukhtasar al-Nawawiyyah, divides *ihsan* into two levels,
namely high level (*'ulya*) and low level (*dunya*). *Ihsan* at a
high level entails a state as if someone sees Allah while
worshiping at the peak of solemnity. Meanwhile, low-
level *ihsan* is being aware that Allah's knowledge covers
His servants, and this makes him devoted to worshiping to
pursue His pleasure. According to al-Jindy, people who
worship without presenting an *ihsan*, both high and low
levels, then their worship only serve to cancel obligations,
and such worship is susceptible to degenerating into an
attitude of insincerity or joy.[34]

In the trilogy of *islam*, *iman*, and *ihsan*, the degree of
ihsan is at the highest level. Ibn Taymiyah explained that
ihsan is broader than *iman*, and people who reach the
degree of *ihsan* are more specific than the degree of faith.
Meanwhile, the level of *iman* is broader than *islam*, and
people who reach the degree of faith are also more
specific than the degree of *islam*. That is, *ihsan* is the
highest level of worship. People who have reached the
degree of *ihsan* must have reached the degree of faith and
islam. Thus, the *Muhsin* is higher in rank than *Mu'min*,
and the *Mu'min* is higher than the *Muslim*.[35] If arranged
hierarchically, *ihsan* is at the highest level, below it is the
iman and at the lowest position is *islam*. The arrangement

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[33] Muhy al-Din al-Nawawi, *Sahih Muslim fi Sharh al-Nawawi*
(Lebanon: Bayt al-Afkar al-Dawliyyah, 2003), 222.

[34] 'Abd al-Rahim Faraj al-Jindi, *Mukhtasar al-Nawawi 'ala al-Arba'in
al-Nawawiyyah* (al-Rawdah: Markaz al-Rasikhun, 2018), 26.

[35] Fawzan Ibn Fawzan, *Kitab al-Tawhid* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Malik
Fahd al-Wataniyyah, 1421), 63.

is in accordance with the editorial of the Hadith mentioned before.

Although the definition provided above emphasizes the meaning of *ihsan* in the context of worship, its actual meaning is much broader. The author of the book *Ta'ammulat fi al-Ihsan*, Muhammad bin 'Ali al-Arfaj, divides *ihsan* into two categories. First, *ihsan* is the right of Allah related to worshiping Him. Second, *ihsan* is the right of the creatures. That is, giving benefits to them and preventing the bad that befalls them. *Ihsan* to Allah includes four aspects: 1) *tawhid*; 2) surrender; 3) following the goodness of the previous people; and 4) *taqwa* and *sabr*. *Ihsan* to fellow creatures includes seven aspects: 1) to parents; 2) to relatives, orphans, poor people, and neighbors; 3) to wives 4) to fellow humans; 5) to bad people; 6) in the *jihad* for Allah; and 7) when performing *diyat*.[36]

Ihsan does not only do good to fellow Muslims, but also to all people of all faiths. However, *ihsan* to humans is based on *ihsan* to Allah. Therefore, doing good to humans should not be outside the Sharia prescribed by Allah. *Ihsan* is a good deed whose basis is order and is general in nature. That is, all of God's creatures, both human and non-human, are included in the good deeds that are performed, rather than just close friends, family, and acquaintances. This good deed is an expression of love and respect that grows over time and generates more goodness. In other words, *ihsan* includes a commitment to continue to perfect goodness in addition to just doing good.

b. The Concept of *Ihsan* in the Qur'an and Hadith

Muhammad Fu'ad 'Abd al-Baqi in *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfaz al-Qur'an al-Karim* mentions that in the

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[36] Muhammad bin 'Ali al-Arfaj, *Ta'ammulat fi al-Ihsan min Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman fi Tafsir Kalam al-Manan* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Malik Fahd al-Wataniyyah, 2011), 25–68.

Qur'an, the word *ihsan* is mentioned 211 times in various pronunciation derivations and meaning variants. Among them are in the form of the word *ihsanan* which means 'do good' five times, and once in al-Nisa' verse 62 meaning 'conciliation'. It emerged in the form of *ihsanin* twice, in al-Baqarah verses 178 and 229, meaning 'with grace'. The pronunciation of *ahsan* emerged 32 times with various meanings, namely better, more useful, best, good way, best more beautiful, best, and good deeds. While in the form of *hasuna* and *hasunat*, which means 'the best' was mentioned four times. In the form of *muhsin* which means 'people who do good,' it is mentioned 36 times. There are many other forms of words that are cognate with the *ihsan* pronunciation mentioned in the Qur'an, such as *al-husna, hisan, ahsin, husn, tuhsinu* and so on.[3] A large number of repetitions of words in the Qur'an implies the importance of the term.

For example, the command of *ihsan* in al-Baqarah verse 195, "…And do good, for Allah certainly loves the good-doers." Al-Sa'di says that *ihsan* in this verse includes all good deeds, such as doing good with wealth, calling to goodness, forbidding evil, teaching useful knowledge, easing one's needs, eliminating difficulties, visiting and caring for the sick, burying the dead, showing the way for the lost, and helping those who are working and have not been good in their work.[38] In short, *ihsan* benefits those around you with wealth, limbs, and knowledge. This *ihsan* charity even includes benevolence to animals.[39]

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[3] Muhammad Fu'ad 'Abd al-Baqi, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfaz al-Qur'an al-Karim* (Beirut: Dar al-Hadith, 1998), 202.

[38] 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sa'di, *Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman fi Tafsir Kalam al-Mannan*, ed. 'Abd al-Rahman bin Mu'alla al-Luwayhiq 1 (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 2000), 90.

[39] *Ibid*., 147; Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an* 10 (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyyah, 1964), 166.

In al-Nahl verse 90, the command of *ihsan* is juxtaposed with the command to do justice: "Indeed, Allah commands justice, grace, as well as courtesy." Wahbah al-Zuhayli explained that justice is being proportional (*al-insaf*),[40] while *ihsan* is maximizing good deeds (*al-itqan fi a'mal*).[41] In the statement of Imam al-Baydawi, this justice includes faith and morals. While *ihsan* is to maximize the deeds of obedience, both in quantity and quality, by worshiping as if seeing Allah or feeling seen by Allah.[42] Therefore, the degree of *ihsan* is above justice. If justice is like giving and taking according to one's share, then *ihsan* is giving more to others and taking less from his own share. Therefore, Allah loves the *muhsinin* (those who apply *ihsan*).[43]

In another verse, Allah explains the objects of *ihsan*. In al-Nisa' verse 36, it is stated to be kind to 1) parents; 2) relatives; 3) orphans; 4) the poor; 5) near neighbors; 6) distant neighbors; 7) close friends; 8) travellers; and 9) the needy/ slaves. According to *ulama'* such as Imam al-Qurtubi, al-Baghawi, and al-Nafasi, the mention of the command to be kind to the nine groups of people after the command to worship only Allah (*tawhid*), shows the importance of maintaining a balance of religion at the social and transcendental level.[44] This verse is also a proof of the correlation between *iman* and *ihsan*.

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[40] It also means fairness. Read more in Santhad Borna, Mohd Fauzi Hamat & Ali Ali Gobaili Saged, "Fairness in Dealing with Opponents According to Salaf," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 21(2) (2019): 217–256.

[41] Wahbah al-Zuhayli, *al-Tafsir al-Munir fi al-'Aqidah wa al-Shari'ah wa al-Manhaj* 14 (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr al-Mu'asir, 1997), 212.

[42] Nasir al-Din al-Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil* 3 (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath, n.d.), 238.

[43] Al-Raghib al-Asfahani, *al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Qalam / al-Dar al-Shamiyah, 1412), 119.

[44] Al-Qurtubi, *al-Jāmi'* 5, 180; al-Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil* 2, 73–74. 'Abd Allah bin Ahmad al-Nasafi, *Madarik al-Tanzīl wa Haqa'iq al-Ta'wil* 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kalim al-Tayyib, 1998), 357.

This verse shows that Islam teaches its adherents to do good (*ihsan*) to anyone regardless of race, ethnicity, and even religion. This is as stated in al-Mumtahanah verse 8, which translates, "Allah does not forbid you from dealing kindly and fairly with those who have neither fought nor driven you out of your homes ..." Ibn Kathir explained this verse that Allah does not forbid Muslims to do good to non-Muslims who do not fight Muslims, in fact, Allah recommends Muslims to do good and fair to everyone because Allah loves fair people.[45] This means that as long as non-Muslims are not fighting Muslims, they must be treated fairly in society.

The idea of *ihsan* in the Qur'an is therefore based on a standard rule, according to which Muslims are commanded to show kindness to all beings, starting with their closest neighbors, parents, and other family members before moving on to others, but with restrictions to ensure that they do not violate any laws. The faith of a Muslim is pawned by these good deeds. This rule has been mentioned in Luqman verse 15 which reads, "But if they endeavor to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them but accompany them in [this] world with appropriate kindness ..." Wahbah al-Zuhayli, an expert on contemporary interpretation, explained that there are no guidelines to obey creatures in terms of disobedience to the Creator, so if parents force a child to commit *shirk*, it does not need to be obeyed. But in other matters, a child must still be devoted to his parents.[46]

In addition, the Qur'an also mentions the opposite of *ihsan*, namely *isa'ah* (doing evil). This is mentioned in al-Isra' verse 7:

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[45] Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* 8 (Beirut: Dar al-Tayyibah, 1999), 90.

[46] Wahbah al-Zuhayli, *al-Tafsir al-Munir fi al-'Aqidah wa al-Shari'ah wa al-Manhaj* 21 (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr al-Mu'asir, 1997), 148.

"If you do good, you do good for yourselves; and if you do evil, [you do it] to yourselves." Then when the final promise came, [We sent your enemies] to sadden your faces and to enter the temple in Jerusalem, as they entered it the first time, and to destroy what they had taken over with [total] destruction."

In *Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman fi Tafsir Kalam al-Mannan*, al-Sa'di interprets the verse that if someone does good (meaning) he does good for himself. Because, both in this world and in the afterlife, good deeds essentially come back to the doer. But on the other hand, if someone does evil, then (the evil loss) will return to him as well, both in this world and in the hereafter.[47] In *Marah Labid,* Nawawi al-Bantani gives a similar interpretation, that if someone does a good deed in the form of obedience, then, in fact, he has done good to himself because the obedience will make Allah open the door of goodness for him. However, if someone engages in immoral behavior, for example, they have harmed themselves because Allah may punish them for it.[48] Similarly, not much different interpretations are offered by other scholars.[49] Allah promises a reward for every deed, if the deed is good (*ihsan*) then the reward is good, but if the deed is bad (*isa'ah*) then the recompense will be bad.

The above-described succinct explanation makes it clear that the Qur'an mention of the pronunciation of *ihsan* in various places indicates the significance of

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[47] Al-Sa'di, *Taysir al-Karim*, 1:453.

[48] Nawawi al-Bantani, *Marah Labid li Kashf Ma'na al-Qur'an al-Majid* 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1417H), 614.

[49] See: Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil ay al-Qur'an*, ed. Ahmad Muhammad al-Shakir 17 (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 2000), 371; al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami'*, 10:217; al-Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil* 3, 248; Ibn Mas'ud al-Baghawi, *Ma'alim al-Tanzil* 5 (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath, n.d.), 79; Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an* 8, 439.

understanding the meaning of *ihsan*. If analyzed, all pronunciations that are cognate with the word *ihsan* always contain the meaning of goodness, such as *ihsan* which means doing good, *ahsan* means better, *hasuna* means the best, and *muhsin* which means do good, and so on. In addition, the Qur'an has specified to whom one should apply *ihsan*, which includes parents, relatives, neighbors, orphans, and others. The Qur'an also explains that doing *ihsan* is higher in degree than doing justice because *ihsan* is at the peak level of one's religiosity. In addition, the Qur'an also explains the opposite of *ihsan*, which is *isa'ah* (doing evil), which must be avoided. The guidelines for applying *ihsan*, as prescribed by the Qur'an, do not only apply to religious barriers, as Muslims are also required to extend *ihsan* to non-Muslims as long as they do not engage in hostilities with Muslims or encourage them to reject Islam.

While in the Hadith, the meaning of *ihsan* is definitively in the Hadith of Gabriel; "It is that you worship Allah as if you see Him. And even though you do not see Him, [you know] He sees you." *Ihsan* is acting righteously in this sense while being fully aware of Allah's presence and guidance. *Ihsan* in this sense is included in the term's general sense, claims Zarkasyi. *Ihsan* is being kind to humans (*mu'amalah ma'a al-nas*) in various forms such as saying good, forbidding evil deeds, forbidding enmity, forgiving humans, restraining anger, repaying bad deeds with kindness, etc. *Ihsan* in the specific sense must be based on *ihsan* in the general sense. That is, doing good to humans must be in accordance with the provisions and laws of Allah. This is because, in Islam, good deeds are seen, controlled, and supervised by Allah.[50]

In addition, there is also *ihsan* to the natural environment. The Prophet said, "Verily, Allah has

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[50] Zarkasyi, *Minhaj*, 172–178.

enjoined kindness upon all things; so, when you kill, kill well; and when you slaughter, slaughter well. Let one of you sharpen his blade and spare suffering to the animal he slaughters." [51] Even in one of his Hadiths, the Prophet warned that there was a woman went to hell because of a cat which she kept locked up until it died. [52]

Thus, the concept of *ihsan* is a part of the ethical teachings (*akhlaq*) in Islam, and has been a subject of focus by *tasawwuf* (sufism) experts throughout history. For example, al-Ghazali positioned *ihsan* behavior as higher than merely being just (*'adl*). For al-Ghazali, being just is a necessity, while showing *ihsan* is a virtue. [53] Therefore, he stated, "It is not appropriate for a religious person (*mutadayyin*) to feel satisfied with being just and avoiding injustice by leaving acts of *ihsan*." [54] This means that a sufi in his effort to attain *ma'rifah* (spiritual knowledge) of Allah should not only focus on practices that are self-oriented but should also be beneficial to others, which is known as *ihsan*.

In line with this, Raghib al-Asfahani explained in his interpretation of al-Nahl 16:90, that being just is an obligation (*al-fard*) that will be rewarded if done, and will be considered a sin if left undone. Meanwhile, showing *ihsan* is a recommended practice (*al-nadb*) that will earn rewards if done, but will not be considered a sin if left undone. [55] Similarly, al-Shawkani explained that *ihsan* is similar to *tatawwu'* (voluntary charity), which is a practice not mandated by Allah in worship or other activities, but

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[51] Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, 1:1548.
[52] Muhammad bin Isma'il al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih* 1 (Beirut: Dar Tuq al-Najah, 1422H), 112.
[53] Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1982), 79.
[54] *Ibid.*, 2:79.
[55] Al-Raghib al-Asfahani, *Tafsil al-Nash'atayn wa Tasil al-Sa'adatayn* (Beirut: Dar Maktabah al-Hayah, 1983), 87.

will be rewarded if done.[56] According to 'Izz al-Din bin
'Abd al-Salam, *ihsan* is applied in three forms, namely:
(1) *ihsan fi al-'ibadah* (*ihsan* in worship), which is to
worship as if seeing God or to worship with the awareness
that God sees him; (2) *ihsan ila al-khala'iq* (*ihsan* towards
all creatures), which is to do good to all creatures by
providing the widest possible benefit and preventing the
smallest harm; and (3) *ihsan al-mar'i ila nafsih* (*ihsan*
towards oneself), which is to benefit oneself by doing
what Allah has commanded and preventing harm to
oneself by avoiding anything that Allah has forbidden.[57]
Therefore, the application of *ihsan* in all aspects of life
can cultivate noble character (*akhlaq al-karimah*), as a
muhsin (one who did *ihsan*) does not do good deeds out of
formality, but with spiritual foundation.

c. Religious Diversity with *Ihsan*

Islam has coexisted with numerous pre-Islamic religions
ever since its inception. That is why the discussion of
coexistence is considered essential in Islamic teachings. It
is written in al-Hujurat: 13 as follows:

> "O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a
> male and a female, and made you into peoples
> and tribes so that you may get to know one
> another. Surely the most noble of you in the
> sight of Allah is the most righteous among
> you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware."

The concept of *ta'aruf* mentioned above has a
relationship with *ma'ruf* which means good deeds that is
known by many people. The deed was definitely
considered good so no one would think it was bad. Its
opponent is *munkar*, that is, an act that enjoins

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[56] Muhammad bin 'Ali bin Muhammad al-Shawkani, *Fath al-Qadir* 3
(Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 188.
[57] 'Izz al-Din 'Abd al-Salam, *al-Qawa'id al-Kubra* (Damascus: Dar al-
Fikr, 1416H), 34.

disobedience. That is, the activity of 'knowing each other' must be with 'good deeds'.[58] If *ma'ruf* is a preferred deed, then *munkar* is the opposite. *Munkar* is disliked and hated by the soul, since its evil is known religiously and intellectually. Therefore, instead of prioritizing differences in skin color, race, ethnicity, nation, or religion, *ta'aruf* requires the similarities as humans who were born from Adam and Eve. As for *taqwa* which is mentioned at the end of the verse, it is not a barrier to getting to know each other. *Taqwa* is an indicator of the goodness and character of a Muslim, and eliminates feelings of pride by considering oneself better than others because of heredity, wealth, rank, or others. Therefore, *taqwa* becomes an indicator of the noble character of Muslims in the sight of Allah.[59]

To get to know each other and foster human relations in Islam, therefore, the standard is goodness, not bad or evil acts. As a result, LGBTQ+, free sex, or other immoral acts considered to violate Islamic rules are not tolerated, agreed upon, allowed, or even legalized, just for the sake of good, harmonious, and peaceful human relations. To summarize, tolerance, unity, and peace in Islam must be founded on faith and obedience to Allah, not disobedience.

It must be distinguished between deed and doer. Islam hates evil deeds, not the perpetrators. The perpetrators of evil must be treated well and respected as human beings. However, his behavior must be said to be wrong if it really violates Allah's law. That is *ihsan*, which is a model of approach studied in this article. *Ihsan* simply means 'doing good', and cannot be separated from *ihsan* in the sense of 'worshipping God'. It is implied in the meaning of *ihsan* in the Hadith related to worshiping Allah. "*Ihsan* is that you worship Allah as though you see

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[58] Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab* 11, 36–39.
[59] Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar* 8 (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2015), 430-431.

Him, for though you see Him not, He certainly sees you." That is, doing good in Islam is a command of Allah. There is either *mushahadah* (witness) and *muraqabah* (supervision) where when a Muslim does good he should see Allah, and Allah oversees all the actions of His creatures.

If the Hadith of Gabriel is examined more deeply, *ihsan* is inseparable from *islam* and *iman*. The *islam-iman-ihsan* trilogy is interconnected and inseparable. Therefore, Zarkasyi said that there are three levels of religion in Islam; 1) Islam in the Sharia; 2) in faith; and 3) Islam with *akhlaq*. The first level means carrying out Islamic law with its five pillars of Islam. Many people believe that Islam is sufficient if they follow the five pillars of Islam: fasting, prayer, *zakat*, and performing the *'umrah* and *hajj*. However, they overlook the fact that Islamic law must be strengthened and founded on true faith. In fact, lower than that, some only take the *shahadah*, and profess Islam, but never pray or fast. Those who fast without faith will also have their fast rejected. People who pray casually or without sincerity are not able to change their bad habits, so their prayers are useless. Islam should ideally uphold all of its requirements and tenets while also exhibiting a strong sense of faith and steadfast behavior. All the tenets of *islam* will operate, have an effect, and improve individual and communal life if this is put into practice.[60]

Meanwhile, *iman* (faith) in Islam is not as simple as summarized in the six pillars of *iman*. *Iman* is an oral statement that is strengthened by belief in the heart and implemented in actions. In the Hadith of the Prophet narrated by Muslim from Abu Hurayrah, it is said that, "Faith has sixty to seventy branches, the best of which is to declare there is no God but Allah, the least of which is to remove something harmful from the road, and modesty

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[60] Zarkasyi, *Minhaj*, 42.

is a branch of faith".[61] This means that the six pillars of
faith are the basis of all deeds such as devoting to parents,
supporting orphans, giving charity, respecting guests,
helping fellow human beings, seeking knowledge and
teaching it, all of which are part of faith. Therefore, faith
must be manifested in the form of charity at the level of
family and society. A believer must be kind to his parents,
relatives, and other family members. He is also concerned
about Muslims' interests at the same time.

A Muslim's strength comes from the depth of his
faith, not from his Islam. Muslims won't be ruled over and
colonized by non-Muslims if their faith is strong. This is
under the words of Allah in al-Nisa' verse 141, "… And
Allah will never grant the disbelievers a way over the
believers." Some say they believe but do not. Their level
is not faith, but only that of Islam. This is as stated in al-
Hujurat verse 14: "Some of the nomadic Arabs say, "We
believe." Say, O Prophet, "You have not believed. But
say, 'We have submitted,' for faith has not yet entered
your hearts." Therefore, to prove the degree of faith, faith
must be realized in good deeds.[62]

The highest level of "The 'I' Trilogy" is *ihsan*. At
this level, good deeds (*ihsan*) are performed out of love
for Allah and His Messenger rather than for reward or
sin.[63] Then, as a result of the good deeds, the perpetrators
become fully aware that they appear to be in Allah's
presence and that their actions do not at any point stem
from a desire to worship Him.[64] *Ihsan* is performed out of
love, and Allah sees and controls the manifestation of that
love.

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[61] Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih* 1, 11; Muslim, *Sahih Muslim* 1, 63.
[62] Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Orang Beriman Pasti Lemah Lembut Pada
Keluarganya," *Gontortv*, February 25, 2021,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_lLPgic0hU.
[63] Zarkasyi, *Minhaj*, 166.
[64] *Ibid.*, 166.

Zarkasyi emphasized that not all noble deeds qualify as *ihsan*. This is so that people understand how closely *islam* and *iman* are related to other factors, specifically good deeds. If *islam* and *iman* are not good and strong, people will not attain *ihsan*. *Islam*, *iman*, and *ihsan* are three interconnected Islamic teachings. *Islam* is imperfect without *iman*, but the reverse is also true: *iman* is imperfect without *islam*. Likewise, *ihsan* is impossible to achieve without *islam* and *iman*. From this, Zarkasyi concludes that a disbeliever who does good cannot be called *ihsan* (*muhsin*), because he left *islam* and *iman* as a condition for attaining the degree of *ihsan*.[65]

For Muslims, *ihsan* is an appropriate approach in the context of religious diversity. This is so because Muslims have a duty to foster and maintain good relationships with all religious people, which is directly correlated with fostering and maintaining faith in Allah. *Ihsan* is based on love - both love for the Creator, who oversees this type of love, and love for the creatures who serve as the world's social objects. *Ihsan* is not just tolerance. Currently, tolerance is defined as how the interacting parties take advantage and benefit. Tolerance is how to be friendly and sympathetic to achieve a common goal.[66] While *ihsan* is more than that. *Ihsan* is to establish good relations because of love and it aimed at others are not to expect a return. *Ihsan* is merely a reflection of selfless noble character.

The principles of respect and brotherhood, which are both unconstrained by the beliefs they hold, are born from *ihsan*, which contains love. Respecting these two tenets, however, does not entail endorsing or approving non-Islamic religious customs. The idea of respect is to treat those who follow other religions with dignity and respect, recognizing that everyone has the right to their own

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[65] *Ibid*., 168.
[66] M. Quraish Shihab, *Toleransi: Ketuhanan, Kemanusiaan, dan Keberagaman* (Tangerang Selatan: Lentera Hati, 2022), 33–35.

beliefs and to practice them, as well as the right to coexist peacefully with those who hold different opinions.[67]

Throughout Islamic history, the concept of respect has been applied to everyone, including non-Muslims, living people, and even those who have passed away. Sahih Hadith on this subject narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim: "A funeral passed by the Messenger of Allah, peace, and blessings be upon him, and he stood up. It was said to him, "It is a Jew." The Prophet said, "Was he not a soul?" [68] In another Hadith narrated by Ahmad, someone asked the Messenger of Allah whether to stand in funeral. The Prophet replied "Verily, you stand to glorify Allah, who is the receiver of souls."[69] These two Hadiths are not to be contradicted, but to complement each other, that respect and good deeds done by a Muslim, will undoubtedly remain under the supervision of Allah. That is the concept of *ihsan*. There is supervision (*muraqabah*), that doing good has its rules, and there are still teachings. It cannot be separated from the All-Seeing, All-Judging. In the framework of *ihsan*, good deeds are accomplished through obedience rather than disobedience. Therefore, if an action is good but goes against Allah's provisions and laws, it is not true.

Correspondingly, in al-Nisa' verse 36 translate into: "Worship Allah 'alone' and associate none with Him. And be kind to parents, relatives, orphans, the poor, near and distant neighbors, close friends, 'needy' travelers, and those 'bondspeople' in your possession". Regardless of the religion that their parents, neighbors, coworkers, and others practice, this verse teaches that good deeds are done to everyone. Al-Tabari later clarified that kinship is essentially based on love rather than religion. Therefore,

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[67] *Ibid.*, 18.
[68] Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih* 1, 441. Muslim, *Sahih Muslim* 2, 661.
[69] Ahmad Muhammad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal* 6, ed. Ahmad Muhammad Shakir (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1990), 145.

doing well defies religious affiliation and is open to everyone, regardless of personal beliefs. This verse's commandment is to do that.[70]

Caliph Umar r.a. once saw a blind Jew begging. He then took him to the Bayt al-Mal and ordered the Companions to provide for his needs. This is a sign of respect for followers of other religions. It must be emphasized once more that showing respect does not imply accepting the veracity of religious teachings. Islam defines respect as a way of thinking and treating those of other faiths well without blending their practices. Since faith is the foundational element of every religion, it is inappropriate to use it as a space for tolerance in the sense of combining and uniting different people.[71]

While the brotherhood principle stresses that Muslims and other people are brothers because they share a common ancestry with Adam and Eve, as stated in the al-Nisa verse 1, al-Suddiy described that this verse, in addition to containing the command to fear Allah, also tells the obligation to maintain relationship.[72] Given that all people are descended from Adam and Eve, they must protect each other's rights, love each other, support one another, and refrain from oppressing one another.[73]

In horizontal relationships between people, the brotherhood principle teaches that everyone is equal in the eyes of Allah in Islam; no one feels superior to another, regardless of individual, class, race, ethnicity, or skin color. This principle completely erodes the fanaticism of groups, so that all members of society can work together even though they have different beliefs. In terms of the vertical relationship with God, the idea of brotherhood is

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[70] al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan,* 8:7-8.
[71] Departemen Agama RI, *Tafsir al-Qur'an Tematik: Hubungan Antar Agama* 1 (Jakarta: Departemen Agama RI, 2008), 40.
[72] 'Abd al-Rahman al-Suddi, *Tafsir al-Suddi al-Kabir* (Al-Mansurah: Dar al-Wafa', 1993), 195.
[73] Al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan* 6, 339.

presented as a path leading to the Almighty. One person from another is distinguished by their level of piety. This is what the Prophet said. In the Hadith that Ahmad narrated:

> "O people, your Lord is one and your father Adam is one. There is no favor of an Arab over a foreigner, nor a foreigner over an Arab, and neither white skin over black skin nor black skin over white skin, except by righteousness. Have I not delivered the message?" They said, "The Messenger of Allah has delivered the message."[74]

With these two guiding principles, Muslims are encouraged to cooperate with non-Muslims in social contexts such as business, trade, and other social activities while adhering to Islamic teachings. That is, as long as the relationship is not intended to cause one to disobey Allah, the *ihsan* approach does not restrict the interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. Then, using this strategy, Muslims can develop and promote religious diversity without compromising their faith.

Conclusion

The obligation to uphold moral principles in Islam extends to all people, regardless of their religion. To establish and keep up that positive relationship, a range of approaches are employed. The concept of *ihsan* is used as an approach from a variety of already existing approaches. According to the *ihsan* approach, Muslims who adhere to the exclusivity of their religion can build positive relationships with people of other religions and grant them the freedom to practice their religion. *Ihsan*, which means 'love', fosters respect and a sense of brotherhood among people, despite their differing religious beliefs. Respect and brotherhood in the frame of *ihsan* are under the

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[74] Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* 38, 474.

witnessing (*mushahadah*) that Muslims see Allah, and Allah supervises them (*muraqabah*).

As a result, good deeds continue to be governed by rules and principles and are performed in the context of obedience rather than disobedience. In light of this, *ihsan* is a suitable approach for Muslims in the context of managing religious diversity and to foster tolerance and harmony. *Ihsan* holds that respect and brotherhood can still exist despite differences and diversity; maintaining these values does not, however, entail supporting other people's right to practice their faith. *Ihsan* teaches that fostering good relations with people of other religions is an obligation of Muslims that is in line with the obligation to believe in Allah, which is consistent with the duty to uphold faith in Allah.

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