

| Freedom of Religion in Qur'anic Exegesis | |
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| Author | Omaima Abou-Bakr - BA in English (Cairo University), MA in English (North Carolina State University), PhD in English & Arabic literature (University of California, Berkeley) |
| Qur'an 2:256 | <p>"There is no coercion in religion. Sound judgment has become clear from error. So whosoever disavows false deities and believes in God has grasped the most unfailing handhold, which never breaks. And God is Hearing, Knowing"</p> |
| Works on the development of the <i>tafsīr</i> genre | <p>Al-Dhahabi's <i>al-Tafsīr wa-al-Mufassirūn</i> Ibn 'Ashur's <i>al-Tafsīr wa-Rijālūh</i></p> |
| Al-Ṭabarī's analysis | <p>Context of the revelation - revealed in reference to some people who had children whom they had converted to Judaism or Christianity; when God revealed Islam, they wanted to enforce it on them, but God prohibited them from doing this</p> <p>نزلت هذه الآية في قوم أو في رجل كان لهم أولاد قد هودوا أو نصرؤهم، فلما جاء الله بالإسلام أرادوا إكراهم عليه، فنهى الله عن ذلك</p> <p>This verse is specified and not unconditional, since the Prophet fought the idolaters and did not accept from them a tax as an alternative to entering Islam</p> <p>كان المسلمون جمِيعاً قد نقلوا عن نبيهم ﷺ أنه أكره على الإسلام قوماً فأبى أن يقبل منهم إلا الإسلام، وحكم بقتلهم إن امتنعوا منه، وذلك كعبدة الأوثان من مشركي العرب، وكالمرتد عن دينه دين الحق إلى الكفر ومن أشبئهم</p> <p>There should be no coercion of the People of the Book to convert to Islam</p> <p>وأنه ﷺ ترك إكراه الآخرين على الإسلام بقبوله الجزية منه وإقراره على دينه الباطل، وذلك كأهل الكتاب ومن أشبئهم</p> |
| Zamakhsharī's analysis | <p>Connects the verse with another verse to strengthen the argument against compulsion: "And had thy Lord willed, all those who are on the earth would have believed all together. Wouldst thou compel men till they become believers?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Had He wanted, He would have forced them to belief, but He did not do this and rather based the matter on choice (<i>ikhtiyār</i>) <p>ونحوه قوله تعالى وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَمَّاَنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلُّهُمْ جَمِيعاً أَفَلَمْ تَكُنْ أَنْتَ هُنَّا كَوْنُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ أَيْ لَوْ شَاءَ لَفَسَرْهُمْ عَلَى الإِيمَانِ وَلَكِنَّهُ لَمْ يَفْعُلْ، وَبِنِي الْأَمْرُ عَلَى الْاخْتِيَارِ</p> |
| Al-Rāzī's analysis | <p>Since this world is a place of trial and affliction (<i>ibtilā'</i>) for humankind, any forceful imposition or oppression for the sake of faith annuls the meaning of this divine test</p> <p>في الشَّهْرِ وَالْإِكْرَاهِ عَلَى الدِّينِ بُطْلَانٌ مَعْنَى الْابْتِلَاءِ وَالْامْتِنَانِ</p> <p>Connects this verse with another verse: "So whosoever will, let him</p> |

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| | believe, and whosoever will, let him disbelieve” |
| Author's criticism of the aforementioned analyses | They seem to perceive no disconnect between the basic ethical import of the verse that forced faith is no faith and that it is a matter between God and every individual's heart, and the issues of jizyah or fighting the kuffār |
| Al-Qurtubī's analysis | Mentions a report that Caliph 'Umar once called on an old Christian woman to enter Islam, and when she insisted on refusing, he recited “There is no compulsion in religion” and said, “God be my witness” سمعت عمر بن الخطاب يقول لعجوز نصرانية : أسلمي أيتها العجوز تسلمي ، إن الله بعث محمدا بالحق، قالت: أنا عجوز كبيرة والموت إلى قريب، فقال عمر : اللهم اشهد ، وتلا لا إكراه في الدين |
| Bayḍāwī's analysis | This injunction is either a general commandment abrogated by “O Prophet! Struggle against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be firm with them,” or a specific one that concerns only People of the Book وهو إما عام منسوخ بقوله جاحد الكفار والمُنَافِقِينَ واغلظ عليهم، أو خاص بأهل الكتاب |
| Ibn Kathīr's analysis | All peoples and communities should be called upon to enter Islam, and those who refuse or do not pay the jizyah will be fought <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quotes 3 verses intended to strengthen the argument for fighting and almost to reverse the verse's direct meaning of prohibiting compulsion <p>وقال آخرون: بل هي منسوخة بآية القتال وأنه يجب أن يدعى جميع الأمم إلى الدخول في دين الإسلام ، فإن أبي أحد منهم الدخول فيه ولم ينفعه أو يبدل الجزية ، قرتل حتى يقتل ، وهذا معنى الإكراه ، قال الله تعالى: سَنُذْعُنَّ إِلَى قَوْمٍ أُولَئِكَ شَدِيدُ تَقَاتُلُهُمْ أَوْ يُسْلِمُونَ ، وقال تعالى : يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ جَاهِدُ الْكُفَّارَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ واغلظ عليهم، وقال تعالى: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قاتلُوا الَّذِينَ يُؤْنَكُمْ مِنَ الْكُفَّارِ وَلَا يَجِدُوا فِيكُمْ عِظَةً</p> |
| Author's criticism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each of these verses belongs to a specific textual and historical context which Ibn Kathīr ignores |
| Al-Ālūsī's analysis | The grammatical form is that of ikhbār but it carries the meaning of nahy It is either a generalized rule abrogated by the injunction to strive against disbelievers and hypocrites, or specific to the People of the Book who accepted paying the tax إما عام منسوخ بقوله تعالى: جاحد الكفار والمُنَافِقِينَ، أو مخصوص بأهل الكتاب الذين قبِلُوا الجزية Mentions the point raised by Zamakhshari and Razi about the test of faith being invalidated by coercion ومن الناس من قال: بل مبني الأمر على التكفين والاختيار ولو لا ذلك لما حصل الابتلاء ولبطل الامتحان فالآية نظير قوله تعالى: فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلِيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلِيَكُفُرْ |
| Muhammad 'Abduh's analysis | Argues against the accusation that Islam was founded and spread by the sword <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Verse was revealed in Madinah at the height of Islam's dominance <p>هذه الآية نزلت في غرة هذا الاعتزاز فإن غزوة بنى النضير كانت من السنة الرابعة ولم يأذن لمن</p> |

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| Author's words | <p>استأنفه من أصحابه بآدبه أو لادهم المتهودين على الإسلام</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prophets were sent as simply messengers, either bringing good news of future reward or delivering a warning إن الرسل لم يبعثوا جبارين ولا مسيطرين وإنما يُعثرون بُشرين ومُذرين - Motive behind the verses commanding fighting was to safeguard the religion and avert the harm of the disbelievers شرع القتال لتأمين الدعوة ولকف شر الكافرين عن المؤمنين - Quotes: "And fight them until there is no strife (fitnah), and religion is for God. But if they desist, then there is no enmity save against the wrongdoers" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The interpretation of 'fitnah' determines the legitimate causes for fighting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many considered fitnah to mean idolatry, and so ending fitna is overcoming idolatry - Desist could mean they stop being idolaters and become Muslims - Or what they should desist from is aggression and hostility - This is supported by the plain sense of the verse - Jihad is not an objective of the religion but a protective measure; it is not something required for its own sake فالجهاد من الدين ليس من جوهره ومقاصده وإنما هو سياج له وجنة |
| Shaltūt's analysis | Permission to fight was governed by the historical context of the early Muslims defending themselves |
| Quṭb's analysis | The clear distinction of sound judgment from error is proof that choice is left to human beings |
| Ibn 'Āshūr's analysis | <p>This verse apparently was revealed after the conquest of Makkah and the triumph of Islam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Once the truthfulness of Islam was made clear to all with no impediments and a community of believers was formed, God abolished fighting to enforce the religion and upheld fighting for the expansion of its sovereignty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hence, verse 2:256 abrogates the previous verses of warfare, not vice-versa <p>لما تم مراد الله من إنقاذ العرب من الشرك والرجوع بهم إلى ملة إبراهيم، وتبين هدى الإسلام، وحقق الله سلامه بلاد العرب من الشرك، لما تم ذلك كله أبطل الله القتال على الدين وأبقى القتال على توسيع سلطانه وعلى هذا تكون الآية ناسخة لما نقم من آيات القتال مثل قوله قبلها: يا أيها النبي جاحد الكفار والمُنَافِقُينَ واغْلُظْ عَلَيْهِم</p> |
| Khaled Abou El Fadl | <p>The poll tax is not a fixed theological principle to subordinate or coerce the nonbeliever, but was only endorsed as a common historical practice and as a response to a specific set of circumstances</p> <p>The Islamic law of apostasy, which punishes conversions out of the</p> |

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| | faith by death, is a major failure and even a betrayal of the Qur'anic teachings |
| Abdul Aziz Sachedina | <p>The Qur'an treats the diversity of religions as a divinely ordained system, and the unification of all humanity under one confessional tradition as beyond any human power</p> <p>وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَا يَرَأُ الْوَلُوْنَ مُخْلَقِينَ</p> |

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