

Upholding Faith

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Upholding Faith and Religious Freedom: An Analysis of Qur'anic Story on the Experiences of The Young Cave Dwellers as Religious Minorities

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Abstract

The study of religious freedom for minorities involves various perspectives, such as legal, human rights, sociological, cultural, and religious aspects. Unfortunately, efforts to find solutions to protect religious freedom for minority groups have not made adequate use of religious perspectives, particularly Islam. This paper aims to fill the gap by analyzing the active efforts of young cave dwellers as a minority group described in the Qur'an. This research used a qualitative-descriptive approach by utilizing the method of thematic interpretation of the Qur'an. This article was based on the story of the young cave dwellers in Qur'an al-Kahf/18:9-26. The story was analyzed in terms of the narrative context, storyline, similarities with similar stories, and crucial aspects in the attempt for religious freedom. This paper found that young cave-dwellers actively fought for religious freedom by combining firmness in faith and positive adaptation in interacting with society. The stories of the cave dwellers teach us that religious freedom depends not only on the willingness of the majority group and the state to provide guarantees but also on the proactive efforts of minority groups in behaving and acting on the diversity of religious views that surround them. For this reason, this paper contributes to providing conceptual solutions to the struggle of minority groups to fight for religious freedom amid religious diversity and views of life.

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Keywords: Qur'an, religious minority, religious freedom, freedom of expression, human rights

1. Introduction

Religious freedom is the most fundamental human right. It is the freedom to express one's religion or belief to protect other fundamental human rights.¹ Recognition of religious freedom can promote social integrity in a pluralistic society. It is a tool for peace, friendship, equality, justice, and tackling hostility and discrimination. Therefore, the campaign for religious freedom has a significant meaning.²

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¹ Avdylkader Mucaj and Florent Muqaj, "Human Rights and Religious Freedoms During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Kosovo," *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics* 14, no. 2 (December 1, 2021): 5, <https://doi.org/10.2478/bjlp-2021-0010>.

² Ali Akbar, "Freedom of Religion: The Contribution of Contemporary Iranian Reformist Scholars," *Religions* 12, no. 6 (2021): 7, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060384>.

In modern democracies, religious freedom is becoming a political policy. It is a fundamental legal right under the laws of many countries. ² The European Convention on Human Rights, for example, stipulates that everyone has the right to the freedom of religion.³ In Western Europe and Australia, religious freedom encompasses two main things: freedoms of conscience and practice. Despite the limited scope of the concept in India and Indonesia, this concept has become part of the country's constitution.⁴

Religious freedom is an essential ingredient in the teachings of religions, including Islam.⁵ In Islam, this concept is asserted in al-Baqarah/2:256, "There is no compulsion in religion." It is a fundamental principle of Islam taught in the verses that came down in Mecca and became the basis for the verses that came down in the following period. In addition, the prohibition against religious intolerance is also affirmed in al-Kāfirūn/109:6.⁶ In Islam, freedom of religion means that every human has the right to choose their beliefs and faith.

Religious freedom is an important idea promoted by human rights activists at national and international levels. These organizations play a significant role in striving to protect human rights. Many human rights organizations advocate and monitor the activities of states and social institutions in support of and implement specific human rights.⁷ In one situation, human rights organizations are positioned as supporters of state policies in upholding human rights. However, in other conditions, they are considered as opposition against oppressive state

Commented [MT3]: Surah names, numbers, and verse numbers have been added to the entire text.

³ Frane Staničić, "Does Religious Freedom Warrant Protection as a Fundamental Human Right?," *Drustvena Istrazivanja* 28, 22 (2019): 3, <https://doi.org/10.5559/di.28.2.01>.

⁴ Neha Tripathi and Anubhav Kumar, "The Constitutional Struggle for Religious Freedom: A Comparative Study of India and Indonesia," *Constitutional Review* 8, no. 1 (2022): 10, <https://doi.org/10.31078/consrev811>; Vikas K. Choudhary, "The Idea of Religious Minorities and Social Cohesion in India's Constitution: Reflections on the Indian Experience," *Religions* 12, no. 11 (November 1, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12110910>.

⁵ M Mehfooz, "Religious Freedom in Pakistan: A Case Study of Religious Minorities," *Religions* 12, no. 1 (2021): 12, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12010051>.

⁶ Yohanan Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511497568>; Jane Dammen, *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Collections (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521831601>; Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (Oxford University Press, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195139914.001.0001>.

⁷ J Fox and R Finke, "Ensuring Individual Rights through Institutional Freedoms: The Role of Religious Institutions in Securing Religious Rights," *Religions* 12, no. 4 (2021): 9, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12040273>.

policies. Luckily, international human rights organizations now effectively mobilize the international community to pressure countries that commit human rights abuses, especially religious freedom, to change their policies.

Although this issue has received global attention, the religious freedom of minority groups is impaired both by weak law enforcement and the majority group's dominance of public space. Several US human rights watchdogs report that there has been religious persecution in much of the world perpetrated individually and in groups by secular, religious, terrorist, and state actors.⁸ In Sri Lanka, for example, violence against religion has been promoted by many groups to perpetuate the ethno-religious hegemony of the majority.⁹ Even in developed countries like the UK, religious minorities face discriminatory treatment from politicians.¹⁰ Various violations and discrimination against religious minorities occur intertwined with differences in culture, ethnic origin, gender, and language.

As the weak laws and the domination of the majority in the public sphere, minority groups succumb to the repression of authoritarian power and thus follow the religion of the ruler. To give an example, religious minorities in Japan are considered another group and cannot be a whole part of Japanese nationalism due to the country's official affiliation to the majority religion.¹¹

In many societies, religious minorities do not actively and openly convey their beliefs and religion to the majority group through the available communication media. In fact, poor communication generates misunderstandings about differences in beliefs, worship procedures,

⁸ Lee Marsden, "International Religious Freedom Promotion and Us Foreign Policy," *Religions* 11, no. 5 (2020): 1110, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11050260>.

⁹ Matthias Basedau and Johanna Schaefer-Kehnert, "Religious Discrimination and Religious Armed Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Obvious Relationship?," *Religion, State and Society* 47, no. 1 (2019): 30–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2018.1531617>.

¹⁰ Lee Crawford and Ukasha Ramli, "Discrimination by Politicians against Religious Minorities: Experimental Evidence from the UK," *Party Politics* 28, no. 5 (2022): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688211021053>.

¹¹ Ernils Larsson, "Covenantal Pluralism in 'Homogenous' Japan: Finding a Space for Religious Pluralism," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 20, no. 1 (2022): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2022.2031056>.

morality, and socio-cultural views. These misunderstandings have the potential to create mutual suspicion from each side.¹² Mutual mistrust, in turn, breeds social conflicts. With this atmosphere, it is difficult to expect the groups to cooperate in improving economic welfare, health, environment, and education.

The social conflicts within society resulting from limitations in following people's beliefs and expressing their religious symbols have been reported in several countries. For instance, ethnic minorities in Vietnam were treated as sub-citizens whose religion was not officially recognized by the state. Consequently, religious activities performed by minority groups were considered in opposition to Vietnamese culture.¹³ In Sri Lanka, there was an anti-halal and anti-slaughter campaign backed by nationalist Buddhist forces. This campaign aimed at disrupting the Muslim economy.¹⁴ In Norway, Muslim men were reported to experience discrimination in the labor market because of their religious identity.¹⁵

Although plenty of research has been done to investigate religious freedom among minority groups, no study uses the Qur'an as a framework to analyze this issue. In fact, some stories in the Qur'an discuss religious minorities, which can be used as an example of actively fighting for religious freedom. Indeed, the Qur'an has long been known to tell stories about people in the past. For instance, one study explored stories directed at uncovering the principles of moral education for children.¹⁶ Another study discussed sibling violence in two stories,

¹² see Zoua M. Vang, Feng Hou, and Katharine Elder, "Perceived Religious Discrimination, Religiosity, and Life Satisfaction," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 20, no. 6 (2019): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-018-0032-x>; Basedau and Schaefer-Kehnert, "Religious Discrimination and Religious Armed Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Obvious Relationship?"; Ramy Bassioni and Kimberly Langrehr, "Effects of Religious Discrimination and Fear for Safety on Life Satisfaction for Muslim Americans," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 15, no. 1 (2021): 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.3998/jmmh.133>.

¹³ Edyta Roszko, "Controlled Religious Plurality: Possibilities for Covenantal Pluralism in Vietnam," *Review of Foreign and International Affairs* 19, no. 3 (2021): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2021.1954421>.

¹⁴ Mohammad Agus Yusoff and Athambawa Sarjoon, "Anti-Halal and Anti-Animal Slaughtering Campaigns and Their Impact in Post-War Sri Lanka," *Religions* 8, no. 4 (2017): 2, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8040046>.

¹⁵ Valentina Di Stasio et al., "Muslim by Default or Religious Discrimination? Results from a Cross-National Field Experiment on Hiring Discrimination," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47, no. 6 (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1622826>.

¹⁶ Mohammad Jaber Thalgi, "Principles in the Moral Education of Children in the Light of Qur'anic Stories," *Darulfunun Ilahiyat* 30, no. 1 (2019): 205-30, <https://doi.org/10.26650/di.2019.30.1.0049>.

Habil-Qabil and Prophet Yūsuf.¹⁷ In addition, there was a study of the story of the 25 Prophets viewed from the perspective of existential theory. A comparative study was also conducted to identify the process of transgression, including temptation, transgression, and tragedy, in the story of Eve in the Jewish and Islamic traditions.¹⁸ However, up to the present, no study uses the story in the Qur'an, while it might offer practical usefulness for solving the problems among minorities.

Commented [MT4]: Added literatures review

This paper is significant to encourage religious minorities to uphold faith and religious freedom actively. It also provides lessons for Muslim countries that struggle with protecting religious minorities. Therefore, this paper aims to reveal the meaning of the story of Young cave dwellers in the Qur'an, which is relevant to efforts to maintain religious freedom for minority groups. This paper argues that protecting religious minorities is not only an obligation of the state and society but also an obligation of religious minorities to obtain active security and protection.

2. Method

Commented [MT5]: Explanations of data collection techniques, sources, and analysis techniques have been added.

This paper employed descriptive-qualitative research with a thematic interpretation approach (*mawḍū'ī*). The thematic interpretation approach was used to reveal the Qur'anic view of the story of young cave dwellers (Aṣḥab al-Kahf) from the text dimension and its context.¹⁹ Data in the research were collected in the form of verses about the story of Aṣḥab al-Kahf mentioned in al-Kahf/18: 9-26. The data were reinforced by other verses that explained the prophets' stories that have similar plotting stories. Verses about the stories of the Prophets

¹⁷ İbrahim YILDIZ, "Kur'an'da Kardeş Şiddeti: Hâbil-Kâbil ve Hz. Yūsuf Kıssalarında Psikolojik Bir Bakış," *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 24, no. 1 (June 15, 2020): 4, <https://doi.org/10.18505/cuid.690585>.

¹⁸ Khaoula Träd, "Eva y La Triple T En Las Tradiciones Judia e Islámica," *Ilu* 22 (2017): 8, <https://doi.org/10.5209/ILUR.57425>.

¹⁹ see Fazlur Rahman, *Islam & Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/L/bo41314165.html>; Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 1 (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), <https://www.routledge.com/Interpreting-the-Quran-Towards-a-Contemporary-Approach/Saeed/p/book/9780415365383>.

were collected through manual and digital indexes of the Qur'ān. The manual indexes were ²³ *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* by Muḥammad Fuād 'Ābd al-Bāqī.²⁰

Meanwhile, verses were translated from *Saheeh International* from the Ayat app.²¹ The Qur'anic commentaries used as sources of analysis were the works of M. Quraish Shihab, a modern Indonesian interpreter, namely *Tafsir al-Mishbah*²² and *Tafsir Al-Lubab*.²³ The verses were analyzed descriptively, comparatively, and critically. The verses about young cave dwellers were descriptively analyzed to identify their narrative context and the storyline. Furthermore, the story of young cave dwellers was compared with the stories of the prophets with similar storylines. In the next stage, the story of young cave dwellers was critically analyzed as a religious minority group actively fighting for religious freedom.

3. The Story of Young Cave Dwellers in The Qur'ān ¹⁴

3.1 The Historical Context of The Revelation

The story of Aṣḥāb al-Kahf appeared in the context of the theological interaction between Muhammad, the Meccan pagans, and the People of the Book in Medina. Meccan pagans doubted Muhammad's prophetic claims. For this reason, they looked for ways to prove the fallacy of these prophetic claims. One of them was to test the conformity of Muhammad's prophetic claims with the content of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. They believed that Muhammad's prophetic claims would collapse if he could not explain the essential issues written in the old books. One of the controversial issues among the People of the Book was the

¹⁸ Muḥammad Fuād 'Abd Al-Bāqī, *Al-Mu'jam Al-Mufahras Li Alfāz Al-Qur'ān Al-Karīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2007), <https://ia902702.us.archive.org/27/items/WAQ140507/140507.pdf>.
²¹ ETC King Saud University, "Ayat KSU - Electronic Moshaf Project" (Arab Saudi: King Saud University, 2015), <http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/ayat/?f=en>.
²² M. Quraish Shihab, "Tafsir Al-Mishbah Volume 7," in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an [Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Message, Effect, and Compatibility of the Qur'an]* (Tangerang: PT Lentera Hati, 2016).
²³ M. Quraish Shihab, *Al-Lubab: Makna, Tujuan, Dan Pelajaran Dari Surah-Surah Al-Qur'an Volume 2 [Al-Lubab: Meaning, Purpose, and Lessons from the Surahs of the Qur'an]* (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2012), https://mizanstore.com/TAFSIR_AL-LUBAB_MAKNA_TUJUAN_DAN_PELAJARAN_DARI_SURAH_SURAH_AL_56306.

story of the cave dwellers. In this context, the Qur'ān put forward the story of young cave dwellers as an answer to the Meccan pagans who challenged the Prophet to prove the truth of his prophetic claims.

Surah al-Kahf is connected with the Quraysh tribe, who sent al-Najjār bin Hārith and Uqbah bin Abi Mu'ait to the Jewish priests in Medina. The two men asked the priests about Muhammad, his qualities, and the content of his da'wah. Upon arrival in Medina, the two asked the Jewish leaders how to know the truth of Muhammad's prophethood. The Jewish leaders suggested that the two asked Muhammad about three things: the young cave dwellers, the wandering men in the east and west, and the soul. If Muhammad could answer these three questions, he was right. On the other hand, if Muhammad could not answer, he was a liar.

Al-Najjār and 'Uqbah then returned to Mecca. When meeting with the Quraysh, both reported they could ask three questions to know the truth of Muhammad's prophethood. Then, they went to Muhammad and asked them these three questions. Having asked about the three questions, Muhammad promised to answer them the next day. Muhammad delivered the promise without accompanying it with the saying, "If God wills." After one day had passed, Muhammad did not answer because he had not received a revelation from God. Muhammad waited for fifteen days for God's revelation to come upon him. During this waiting period, Muhammad was saddened by the ridicule of the people around him. Then God's revelation came down to Muhammad, explaining the story of the young cavemen and admonishing him that when he promised, he should accompany his promise with the words, "If God wills."²⁴

3.2 The Narration of The Story

²⁴ Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia, *Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsirnya (Edisi Yang Disempurnakan) Jilid 5* (Jakarta: Widya Cahaya, 2011), 576–77, <https://pustakalajnah.kemenag.go.id/koleksi?kategori=tafsir-tahlil>.

The story is narrated in al-Kahf/18: 9-26. The surah comprises 110 verses and belongs to the Makkiyya group of surahs. This surah is named al-Kahf, which means cave, while Aşşhāb al-Kahf means cave dwellers. These names are taken from the story of young men hiding in a cave and sleeping in it for 309 years.²⁵ The Qur’ān narrates this story globally and does not elaborate on it in chronological and detailed storylines. The Qur’ān only explains a few important things about the setting of the story’s revelation, the story, the setting of the story within the story, the narration of the main events, the duration of the time when they occurred, and the story’s purpose. The setting related to the context of the story’s revelation to Muhammad appears at the end, while the story’s narration seems at the beginning (see Figure 1).

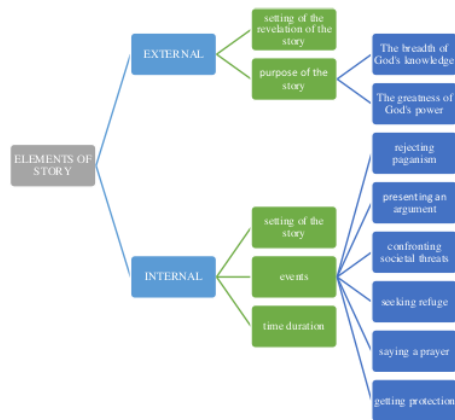


Figure 1: Elements of the story

The story of the Young cave dwellers appears in the Qur’ān in the context of Muhammad’s dialogue with the pagans of Mecca and the People of the Book of Medina. As

²⁵ Indonesia, 575.

mentioned earlier, Muhammad received questions about the cave dwellers and spontaneously agreed to give answers the next day. Against Muhammad's spontaneity, the Qur'ān rebuked him, "And never say of anything, 'Indeed, I will do that tomorrow,' except [when adding], 'If Allah wills.'" (al-Kahf/18: 23). Only after 15 days did verses of the Qur'ān come down to Muhammad and respond to some of the views circulating among the public. In verse 9, the perception that the young cave dwellers were the only extraordinary event was answered by affirming that its greatness parallels other events in the universe.

For this reason, the Qur'ān affirms that Allah will correctly tell their message to Muhammad (al-Kahf/18:13). Furthermore, the people of Mecca and Medina debated the number of cave dwellers and the length of their stay. These two issues were not considered essential to the Qur'ān, so Muhammad was asked to affirm that Allah knew better their numbers and the length of their stay. Muhammad was forbidden to argue with and ask the People of the Book for views on both matters (al-Kahf/18:22 and 26). In addition to the setting of the revelation of the story of young cave dwellers, the Qur'ān also presents the location of the life of young cave dwellers.

What is interesting about the young cave dwellers is the fact that they lived at a time when political authorities curbed religious freedom. The political ruler imposed certain religious beliefs on all citizens of society (al-Kahf/18:20). Verse 15 confirms the views of the people of the time: "These, our people, have taken besides Him deities. Why do they not bring a clear authority for [worship of] them?" In addition, the Qur'ān also explains the cave's position that allows its inhabitants to survive. The cave's situation is such that at sunrise, the rays lean to the right from the mouth of the cave, and when they set, the rays move away to the left. Its inhabitants are also in a prominent place within it (al-Kahf/18:17). However, for people who approach the cave, the state of the cave and its inhabitants is so scary that they will move

away out of fear. Qur'an al-Kahf/18:18 describes the horror of the cave: "If you had looked at them, you would have turned from them in flight and been filled by them with terror."

Chronologically, the story of the young cave dwellers began with their refusal to follow the pagan religion adopted by the king and society. They emphatically called for: "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Never will we invoke besides Him any deity. We would have certainly spoken, then, an excessive transgression." (al-Kahf/18:14). In making their appeal, they also argued about the religious error of their people, that neglected logical evidence for belief in many gods (al-Kahf/18:15).

Their calls resulted in death threats to their souls from the king and a forced return to pagan religion (al-Kahf/18:20). To avoid the danger, they decided to exile themselves to a cave in the belief that their Lord would provide help and guide them to the straight path (al-Kahf/18:16). To strengthen their hearts, they prayed, "Our Lord, grant us from Yourself mercy and prepare for us from our affair right guidance." (al-Kahf/18:10)

The Qur'an further describes how Allah fulfilled their prayers. "God closed their ears for years" (verse 11). They had faith in their Lord, and God gave them instructions (al-Kahf/18:13). Next, they slept, and God turned them right and left while their dog spread its front legs in front of the cave door" (al-Kahf/18:18). Then, God woke them up. After waking up, they discussed and agreed to send one of them to buy food. When buying food, he was advised to be gentle with outsiders and to hide his identity (al-Kahf/18:19). If their identity was exposed, society would arrest and force them to return to pagan religions. If so, they would never be lucky forever (al-Kahf/18:20). It was when their messenger came out that God revealed their identity to his people. Nevertheless, their people remained at odds (doubtful) about the actual state of the cave dwellers. The rulers of this people then built a mosque over the cave (al-Kahf/18:21).

Although other aspects are not mentioned in details, the Qur'ān provides information the duration of their stay in the cave: "And they remained in their cave for three hundred years and exceeded by nine." (al-Kahf/18:25). This verse explains that they were in the cave asleep for 300 years according to the calculation of the solar calendar used by the Jews, plus nine years according to the estimate of the lunar calendar used by the Meccans.²⁶ However, when others gave different information, Muhammad was asked to assert that Allah knew best about the duration of their stay in the cave because of His visual and hearing acuity (al-Kahf/18:26).

Furthermore, the primary purpose of the story of young cave dwellers is to show the breadth of knowledge and God's power over His creatures. Qur'ān al-Kahf/18:12 explains that God awakened them from their long sleep to show themselves who had the correct count of their sleep length. In Qur'ān al-Kahf/18:19, it is explained that people in Mecca and Medina had a dispute about the length of time. The affirmation that God knows the duration of time is stated again in al-Kahf/18:26: "Allah is most knowing of how long they remained."

In Qur'ān al-Kahf/18:21, this story is presented to show God's power regarding the truth of His promises and the occurrence of the Day of Judgment. God's promise was filled with their prayers answered to find a way out of the threat of religious coercion (al-Kahf/18:10). Similarly, the Lord's promise was fulfilled by giving them additional instruction because of their sincere prayer and effort (al-Kahf/18:13).

3.3 Young Cave Dwellers' Participation in Upholding Religious Freedom

The story of young cave dwellers shows the active participation of religious minorities in demonstrating their existence and defending themselves from socio-political threats from outside their group. Active participation are manifested in at least four forms: open declarations

²⁶ Shihab, *Al-Lubab: Makna, Tujuan, Dan Pelajaran Dari Surah-Surah Al-Qur'an Volume 2 [Al-Lubab: Meaning, Purpose, and Lessons from the Surahs of the Qur'ān]*, 291.

of beliefs, affirmation of arguments against beliefs, seeking protection from threats, and gentleness to society. These forms are presented in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Active participation of young cave dwellers

The declaration of faith of young cave dwellers based on their freedom of conscience amid an oppressive regime is affirmed in al-Kahf/18:14. This verse confirms that they appeared bravely and openly before the ruler or the public to declare their beliefs. They also practiced these beliefs perfectly, attentively, and sincerely.²⁷ Their sincerity received God's acceptance by steadying their hearts on the faith, "*wa rabaṭnā 'alā qulūbihim*" (al-Kahf/18:14). To bind (*rabaṭa*) means to confirm their faith because faith has its place in the heart, so if the heart is attached, it becomes steady and does not waver.²⁸ Not only does God bind hearts, but He also instructs them (al-Kahf/18:13).

Young cave dwellers affirmed their belief arguments by questioning the ideas of another faith they considered false, i.e., belief in multiple gods (al-Kahf/18:15). Their question to the pagans was a consequence of the declaration that their God was the Lord of heaven and earth (al-Kahf/18:14). In another passage, al-Kahf/18:26 affirmed the characteristics of a true God, that is, a God who knows all that is invisible in heaven and on earth, who does not need

²⁷ Shihab, "Tafsir Al-Mishbah Volume 7," 253.

²⁸ Shihab, 254.

a protector, and who determines the decision over all things. For this reason, other things, such as humans, animals, or other items, are not worthy of godhood. Consequently, those who worship something that lacks divine attributes have gone completely astray.

Young cave dwellers have been threatened by their people because they declared faith and arguments. Faced with the threat, they agreed to exile themselves to a cave. When they went to the cave, they offered hope to God, "Our Lord, grant us from Yourself mercy and prepare for us from our affair right guidance." (al-Kahf/18:10). Their hope was accompanied by confidence that God would give them the best way (al-Kahf/18:16). In addition, they hid so that their people could not trace their whereabouts and identity. For this reason, when they woke up from sleep and felt hungry, they sent one of them to find food in secret. They told the messenger sent to find food: "...and let him be cautious. And let no one be aware of you" (al-Kahf/18: 19). They did this action because they feared that if the people recognized the messenger, the people could threaten their safety. They might be allegedly killed or forced to return to their religion (al-Kahf/18: 20).

The condition of young cave dwellers as a minority vis-à-vis a tyrannical ruler follows the state of Muhammad and his followers as a minority vis-à-vis the majority of Meccan pagans. For this reason, this story, in addition to providing answers to pagan challenges, also offers lessons to Muhammad and his followers on how to take attitudes as a minority group. The story of the cave dwellers provides an example of militancy and, at the same time, a strategy for avoiding majority pressure. Militancy is reflected in resilience and steadfastness in holding personal beliefs even if they contradict the views of the majority of society. Meanwhile, avoiding majority pressure takes the form of actions to isolate themselves and hide in a safe place.

The actions of young cave dwellers became a pattern of activity that the apostles of the Lord also carried out in delivering the mission of his treatise. Such action patterns can be found

in their stories set forth by the Qur'ān. One example is the pattern of actions Muhammad took when he began his apostolic da'wah in Mecca. At first, Muhammad received orders to preach but without the obligation to do so openly. Muhammad said, "O you who covers himself [with a garment], arise and warn! (al-Muddaththir/74:1-2). Then it turned into the blatant proselytizing command, "Then declare what you are commanded and turn away from the polytheists" (al-Ḥijr/15:94).

A small part of Mecca's population accepted Muhammad's proselytizing, but most refused. Qur'ān Yāsīn/36:7-10 describes their rejection quite highly. They so vehemently rejected Muhammad's proselytizing that the existence or absence of an invitation to *da'wah* made no difference. Furthermore, they not only resisted but harassed and tortured those who followed Muhammad.²⁹ Qur'ān al-Burūj/85:8 states that the torture of Muhammad's followers was solely because of their faith in God, "And they resented them not except because they believed in Allah, the Exalted in Might, the Praiseworthy." In turn, the rejection and torture saddened Muhammad and even caused his body to ache. For this reason, to strengthen Muhammad's heart, Allah explained that Muhammad was only tasked with delivering da'wah, while humans had the freedom to accept or reject it (al-Kahf/18:29).

To defend his preaching, Muhammad sought a way out of the rejection and torture of his followers through migration out of Mecca. Before eventually emigrating to Medina in 622 C.E., Muhammad ordered his followers to hijrah to Habashah in 615 and to Thaif in 619 CE. This migration aimed to gain freedom in the practice of religion and a virtue praised theologically. Such actions receive great rewards from God in the Hereafter (see Ālu 'Imrān/3:195; al-Anfāl/8:72, 74). On the other hand, those who allow themselves to be oppressed so that they cannot practice their religion freely, while having the ability to migrate

²⁹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Al-Lubab: Makna, Tujuan, Dan Pelajaran Dari Surah-Surah Al-Qur'an Volume 4 [Al-Lubab: Meaning, Purpose, and Lessons from the Surahs of the Qur'ān]*, 1st ed. (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2012), 318, https://mizanstore.com/TAFSIR_AL-LUBAB_MAKNA_TUJUAN_DAN_PELAJARAN_DARI_SURAH_SURAH_AL_56306.

to safer places, are considered persecuting themselves (see al-Nisā'/4:97). Thus, migrating for religious freedom is a religious obligation that minority groups cannot abandon.

3.4 Toward Active Participation of Religious Minority

As provided in Figure 2, one form of active participation by religious minorities is declaring their beliefs openly. This open declaration is also a manifestation of implementing the principle of freedom of expression. Freedom of expression is a fundamental right guaranteed by the constitutions of democratic countries for every individual.³⁰ It is protected through regulations at the national and international levels. Nevertheless, in reality, the implementation of this concept is greatly influenced by particular societal values. In some Asian countries, for instance, freedom of expression adapts to the community's interests.³¹ For this reason, this concept goes hand in hand with the community's interests. Meanwhile, in modern political culture, freedom of expression needs to be regulated through the rule of law so as not to be threatened by the manipulation techniques of politicians in democratic regimes.

The next form of active participation is presenting logical arguments for their beliefs, as described in Figure 2. Belief arguments are put forward openly to become part of public reasoning. Public reasoning serves to explore and get the agreement of a community about public good. In obtaining consensus on the public interest, the public reasoning process is based on the principles of inclusive and non-coercive.³² Public reasoning is the reasoning of equal citizens in imposing rules on each other under the protection of state power. In a pluralistic

³⁰ Justyna Miklaszewska, "Freedom of Speech in Modern Political Culture," *AVANT. The Journal of the Philosophical-Interdisciplinary Vanguard* 10, no. 6 1 (April 30, 2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.26913/avant.2019.01.06>; Olha S. Bondarenko, Maryna S. Utkina, and Mariia V. Kolesnikova, "Role of Mass Media in Preventing Corruption," *Law, State and Telecommunications Review* 13, no. 1 (May 26, 2021): 70-93, <https://doi.org/10.26512/istr.v13i1.35433>.

³¹ Ivan Ng Yan Chao, "'Asian Values' in Different Forms: A Comparative Examination of How Singapore, Indonesia and Myanmar Address Insults to Religion," *Religion & Human Rights* 15, no. 3 (January 12, 2021): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18710328-BJA10013>.

³² *Islam Ramah Lingkungan* (Iain Antasari Press, 2015), <http://idr.uin-antasari.ac.id/5183/>.

society, ¹ public reasoning allows the realization of the desire for equitable social cooperation among community citizens.³³

As shown in Figure 2, religious minorities can also actively seek allies as an active participation to protect religious freedom socially and politically. Security cooperation agreements with other parties need to be pursued by religious minorities. This cooperation includes the protection of life, property, and, in particular, faith and worship based on those beliefs. However, it is still crucial for religious minorities to safeguard the existence of others and not disturb their security. Religious minorities also play an active role in realizing the common good in the new place's economic, social, political, and cultural aspects.

Finally, as an immigrant, religious minorities must behave politely and avoid being arrogant so that others accept and associate peacefully with them (see Figure 2). Peaceful social association requires a high level of social tolerance. Social tolerance is an attitude of acceptance of the existence of various social groups.³⁴ High social tolerance allows learning interactions between social groups that create close relationships. Formed by an intimate social environment due to intensive associations, it can foster creativity, innovation, and productivity.³⁵ In addition, it enables active social participation.

Religious minorities need active social participation to be accepted as part of society. It is vital to enhance behavioral adaptation and social norms.³⁶ Furthermore, it creates social collaboration that begins with intensive interaction with nearby community members. Social collaboration comes from individuals who have a good knowledge of the region in which they

³³ Blain Neufeld, "Shared Intentions, Public Reason, and Political Autonomy," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 49, no. 6 (2019): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1448046>.

³⁴ Olga Aimaganbetova et al., "Youth's Disposition of Radicalism in a Poly-Ethnic and Poly-Confessional Society from the Perspective of Tolerance/Intolerance," *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 10, no. 1 (2023): 7, <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/1155>.

³⁵ Osama Alhendi et al., "Tolerance, Cultural Diversity and Economic Growth: Evidence from Dynamic Panel Data Analysis," *Economies* 9, no. 1 (2021): 9, <https://doi.org/10.3390/economies9010020>.

³⁶ Julianna M. Nemeth et al., "A Social-Contextual Investigation of Smoking among Rural Women: Multi-Level Factors Associated with Smoking Status and Considerations for Cessation," *Rural and Remote Health* 18, no. 1 (February 1, 2018): 11, <https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH4338>.

live and their needs. When this collaboration has been achieved, it can serve as a reinforcing factor that enhances social cohesion. In this case, social collaboration carried out by individuals can occur quickly in societies that have strong identity ties.³⁷

5. Conclusion

The story of Aşhāb al-Kahf illustrates that religious freedom for minority groups does not only depend on external parties who guarantee religious liberty but also depends on the active efforts of religious minorities themselves in fighting for it seriously. These diligent efforts include open declarations of beliefs, affirmation of arguments for views, seeking protection from threats, and adaptive attitudes to society. This active effort effectively allows religious minorities to maintain their existence and contribute to the common good with other groups. Finally, with such diligent efforts, peace and productive social cooperation can be achieved.³⁸

The story of young cave dwellers also provides lessons about the necessity of majority groups to build multicultural competence, especially for religious minorities. Multicultural competence is essential in today's era of globalization.³⁹ With multicultural competence, the majority group does not have a sense of threat from the minority group and provides strong support for the rights of the minority group. For this reason, the majority group is expected to develop multicultural competence to form a harmonious and peaceful social life. Multicultural competence can grow if religious minorities open up and are not exclusive and closed. The

³⁷ Mitchell Goist and Florian G. Kem, "Traditional Institutions and Social Cooperation: Experimental Evidence from the Buganda Kingdom," *Research and Politics* 5, no. 1 (2018): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168017753925>.

³⁸ *Islam Ramah Lingkungan*.

³⁹ Sojung Park et al., "Traditional Korean Art Materials as Therapeutic Media: Multicultural Expansion Through Materials in Art Therapy," *Art Therapy* 38, no. 2 (April 3, 2021): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2020.1729077>.

openness of religious minorities contributes to the disclosure of sufficient information and the loss of suspicion of other groups.

Furthermore, this study contributes to developing new interpretive approaches to uncover ¹⁴ the purpose of the Qur'anic stories that are relevant to the problems of Muslims in modern times,⁴⁰ such as social relations between majority groups and religious minorities. For this reason, the story in the Qur'an can be elaborated operationally to solve the tensions that occur in the social life of Muslims.

This study can also open up space for further study of Qur'an stories that can offer solutions to contemporary humanitarian problems. Among them are conflict problems, both due to differences in political, religious, and economic views. The stories of Dhū al-Qarnayn, Dāwūd, Sulaymān, and Tālūt can be critically examined using a thematic interpretation approach. The study provides input to Muslims in solving problems arising from political and economic developments.

Commented [MT6]: Added recommendation

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⁴⁰ see M. Ainur Rifqi and A. Halil Thahir, "Maqasidi Interpretation; Building Interpretation Paradigm Based on Mashlahah." *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 18, no. 2 (2019): 3, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol18.iss2.art7>.

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