

## **Negative Media Effects and Islamic Remedies**

### **Penyelesaian Kepada Kesan Negatif Media Menurut Perspektif Islam**

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#### ***Abstract***

Generally speaking, media is extensively used as the means to disseminate news and information pertaining to business, social, political and religious concerns. A portion of the time and space of media has now become an important device to generate economic and social activities that include advertising, marketing, recreation and entertainment. The Government regards them as an essential form of relaying news and information to its citizens and at the same time utilizes them as a powerful public relations' mechanism. The effects of media are many and diverse, which can either be short or long term depending on the news and information. The effects of media can be found on various fronts, ranging from the political, economic and social, to even religious spheres. Some of the negative effects arising from the media are cultural and social influences, crimes and violence, sexual obscenities and pornography as well as liberalistic and extreme ideologies. This paper sheds light on these issues and draws principles from Islam to overcome them. Islam as revealed to humanity contains the necessary guidelines to nurture and mould the personality of individuals and shape them into good servants.

**Key Words:** Media, Negative Effects, Means, Islam and Principles.

#### ***Abstrak***

Secara umum, media secara meluas digunakan sebagai sarana untuk menyebarkan berita dan maklumat yang berkaitan dengan perniagaan, kemasyarakatan, pertimbangan politik dan agama. Sebahagian dari ruang dan masa media kini telah menjadi peranti penting untuk menghasilkan kegiatan ekonomi dan sosial yang meliputi pengiklanan, pemasaran, rekreasi dan hiburan. Kerajaan menganggap sarana-sarana ini sebagai wadah penting untuk menyampaikan berita dan maklumat kepada warganya dan pada masa yang sama juga menggunakannya sebagai mekanisme perhubungan awam yang berpengaruh. Pengaruh media sangat banyak dan pelbagai, samada berbentuk jangka pendek atau panjang bergantung kepada berita dan maklumat yang brekenaan. Kesan dari media boleh didapati mempengaruhi pelbagai aspek, bermula dari bidang politik, ekonomi, sosial bahkan juga agama. Beberapa kesan negatif yang timbul dari media ialah pengaruhnya terhadap budaya dan sosial, jenayah dan keganasan, kelucahan seksual dan pornografi serta ideologi yang liberal dan ekstrim. Kertas ini menyoroti isu-isu ini dan cuba mengambil prinsip-prinsip dari ajaran Islam untuk mengatasinya. Tujuan Islam itu sendiri diturunkan kepada umat manusia ialah untuk menjadi pedoman yang diperlukan untuk membina dan membentuk keperibadian individu dan menjadikan manusia hamba yang taat kepada Tuhannya.

**Kata Kunci:** Media, Kesan Negatif, Cara-cara, Islam dan Prinsip-prinsip.

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### **1. Introduction**

The term “mass media” connotes the means of a variety of forms of media that are specifically designed to reach a very large audience. Media is effective for the dissemination of news and information to a large audience for a variety of reasons. Undoubtedly, media is very important and has become a part of routine and life. The news and information of the media affect many facets of our lives.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, our total behaviour is instantly dictated by the news and information disseminated by the media. Despite its great importance, however, the media also generates a number of negative implications. This essay attempts to highlight issues that constitute the negative effects of the media and suggests possible remedies from an Islamic perspective.

### **2. Negative Media Effects**

#### **a. Cultural and Social Influences**

Most television channels (government and non-government-owned) give more broadcasting time to entertainment. The topics of television programs on entertainment cover talent shows, talent quests, popular drama series, music, travel programs and reality shows. The broadcasts feature a combination of live and taped content in an effort to demonstrate that the station is capable of producing high quality narrative programming with excellent production values, as well as an adequate control of all the variables needed to produce a live show or news feed.<sup>2</sup> Most often—in view of its entertainment value and appeal—these programs generate large audiences of viewers.

The influences of television’s entertainment programs are social and cultural in nature. Layers of personal, social and cultural contexts determine the shape, scope and degree of the contribution that television is likely to make. While, a viewer’s gender, age or class can make a difference in perspective, television viewing itself can make a similar and interacting difference. Viewing can help define what it means, for example, to be an adolescent female member of a specific social class.<sup>3</sup> Thus, viewers acquire distinctive identities through their exposure to the ongoing flow of messages from television.

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<sup>1</sup>Maxwell McCombs, “News Influence on our pictures of the world,” *Media Effects Advances in Theory and Research* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Mark Hobart, “Entertaining Illusions: How Indonesian Elites Imagine Reality TV Affects the Masses,” *Entertainment Media in Indonesia* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>George Gerbner and Larry Gross, “Growing up with Television: The Cultivation Perspective,” *Media Effects Advances in Theory and Research*, p. 23.

Due to its large content in entertainment value and appeal, television programs from America and Western European countries come into our living rooms with ease. Their supposedly modern and contemporary social and cultural values will eventually drive out our traditional values and practices. The term “cultural imperialism” is a tendency that will destroy local cultures and traditions.<sup>4</sup> This was particularly true in the case of the popular television program, *Dallas*, broadcasted in ninety different countries and extensively studied by many scholars.<sup>5</sup> Herta Herzog Massing wrote in an article entitled “Decoding Dallas” in *Society*:

Critics of popular culture and of all things American in particular, have concerned themselves with the question of whether the worldwide diffusion of programs such as ‘Dallas’ made possible by the growth of new media technologies may eventually result in the worldwide cultural assimilation at the expense of indigenous diversity.<sup>6</sup>

For the proponents of the cultural imperialism thesis, the content of the entertainment reality show from the West is recognizable as ‘Western’ culture. The idea of an *Idol* as a global brand borrowed from the reality show, *American Idol*, leads to questions of cultural and media imperialism.<sup>7</sup> In Indonesia, the idea of cultural influence is not new, and in the case of *Indonesian Idol*, the Indonesian press has criticised it for valuing the style of cultural performance that can be distinctively seen as deriving from Western pop tradition.<sup>8</sup> This is an example of the influence and preferment of Western cultural performances as opposed to the uniquely ‘Indonesian’ forms of *dangdut* and traditional Indonesian music.

Culture here, is understood as a widely distributed system of symbols through which people make sense of the world in order to orient themselves, construct identities, and communicate with others.<sup>9</sup> Media producers in the local entertainment industry draw on the same symbolic systems present in *American Idol* in order to equate the same representations of Western performances among local talents and to generate the same kind of entertainment value and appeal.

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<sup>4</sup>Arthur Asa Berger, “Texts in the Contexts: Analyzing Media and Popular Culture from a Cross-Culture Perspective,” *Mass Media Effects across Cross Culture* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications Inc., 1992), p. 14.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>6</sup>Herta Herzog Massing, “Decoding Dallas,” *Society* (Nov.-Dec, 1986), p. 74.

<sup>7</sup>Penelope Cutas, “Fame, Fortune, Fantasi: Indonesian Idol and the New Fantasy,” *Entertainment Media in Indonesia*, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. pp. 28-29.

<sup>9</sup>Mark Allen Peterson, *Anthropology and Mass Communication: Media and Myth in the New Millennium* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), p. 25.

Another significant negative effect of the media influence is the creation of an unhealthy habit of consumerism for high-end products or overt connections to extravagant materialistic consumptions. Viewers tend to visualise another life style that encompasses the important aspects of luxury, comfort and superiority. This new life style phenomenon, which focuses on the enjoyment of life, is simply another form of hedonism; lifestyle where – the sole aim of life becomes living and behaving in ways that bring pleasure. The belief holds that we can pursue only pleasure, that is, pleasure is what we ought to pursue.<sup>10</sup> This new and imaginary feeling of superiority complex inevitably discards the usual aspects of modesty and humility in local people. Slowly, local people will strive for a materialistic approach in life rather than the usual moderation advocated in Islam.

#### ***b. Crimes and Violence***

The growth of television as a popular medium of mass entertainment and information saw similar concerns about potential harms, especially in connection with young audiences.<sup>11</sup> Violence on television may have behavioural and emotional effects. Behavioural effects may lead to aggression and the encouragement of people to take steps to protect themselves, while emotional effects produce shock, disgust or excitement.<sup>12</sup> The issue that dominates concerns about violence on television is the ease of access that children have to the medium. Among the effects of media, which pose a great concern, are the serious negative consequences for children in both the short and long terms.<sup>13</sup>

Findings from research done in Pakistan on children's exposure to television violence claim that behaviours ranging from aggressive play to aggressive and violent interpersonal behaviour are clearly linked to viewing violence. These findings show the children's inability to distinguish fantasy from reality as can be seen in their serious imitations of even fantasy cartoon depictions. The findings were justified on the basis of children's inability to distinguish between justified and unjustified violence.<sup>14</sup> Researchers on Media effects have also found that male children are more prone to the effects

<sup>10</sup>Edward Craig, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1988), Vol. 4, p. 257.

<sup>11</sup>Barrie Gunter, "The Question of Media Violence," *Media Effect Advances in Theory and Research*, p. 164.

<sup>12</sup>David Buckingham, "Electronic Child Abuse, Rethinking the Media's Effect on Children," *Ill Effects: The Media/Violence Debate* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 39.

<sup>13</sup>Cynthia Carter and C. Kay Weaver, *Violence and the Media* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), p. 77.

<sup>14</sup>Alay Ahmad, *Effects of Television Program on Children* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, 1978), pp. 165-166.

of viewing violence than female children are. This is due to males' viewing violence in male characters as socially desirable. For males, there was an articulate relationship between finding pleasure in the images of violence and assertions of masculinity.<sup>15</sup>

Up to the age of nineteen, children and teens exposed to violence in the media are more likely to view violence as a normal behaviour and therefore, potentially become criminals themselves. For youth, movies and television present an entirely imaginary rendering of a society in which killing for pleasure is a common occurrence. Teens are the best market segment for Hollywood, while the board's pro-violence stance gives studios an incentive to present more death and mayhem, to ensure profitability.<sup>16</sup> In September 1996, the American Medical Association (AMA) concluded that the "link between media violence and real life violence has been proven by science time and time again." Where media is concerned, music seems to have an even more powerful influence for young people than television. Heavy metal, gangster rap, and other forms of music with the destructive themes of homicide, suicide and Satanism are becoming an increasingly dominant part of teen culture.<sup>17</sup>

A recent study conducted by Stanford University in January 2001 appeared in the journal of *Archives of Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* shows a significant connection between heavy television viewing and aggression.<sup>18</sup> This is due to the brains of the children being structured in languages and cultural patterns being displayed on televisions that are antagonistic to the values and goals of formal education.<sup>19</sup> Jerry Mander, a western writer, went so far as to suggest that television should be eliminated altogether due to the powers of television not acting out of deep moral or political enlightenment; but rather, their following the inexorable dictates of the medium itself.<sup>20</sup>

Adult television programs most often promote a particular understanding of violence and encourage viewers to adopt certain ideological positions in relationship to violence; conceiving certain forms as 'legitimate'

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid. p. 197.

<sup>16</sup>Gregg Easterbrook, "Movie and Television Violent Makes Children Violent," *Violence in the Media* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press Inc.), pp. 65-58.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas L. Jipping, "Popular Music Contributes to Teenage Violence," *Violence in the Media*, pp. 62-65.

<sup>18</sup>Marie Winn, *The Plug-in Drug*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2002), p. 50.

<sup>19</sup>Jane M. Healy, *Endangered Minds* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), p. 86.

<sup>20</sup>Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1978), p. 338.

and others as 'illegitimate'.<sup>21</sup> In this regard, television viewing is not only a form of entertainment, but also a mode of dissemination of messages. Failing to draw a line of demarcation between the two has had tremendous negative impacts on society.

Following former President Suharto's resignation in 1998, the emergence of local broadcasting with regional and community televisions, due to the flourishing of innumerable radio stations, made it seem that Indonesians enjoy a rich television viewing life. By 2004, every commercial channel had an average, one to two hours a day of violent crime. For the more celebrated crimes, several channels would vie with each other for coverage, each offering rival reconstructions, analyses, and interviews with witnesses.<sup>22</sup>

Crimes and violence in Malaysia, though, have not reached such a critical situation but are growing at a faster rate. Crimes and violence among the youth of Malaysia are seen in the spread of gangsters, snatch thefts, stealing, burglary, rape and murder. A new phenomenon that has become rampant among Malay teenagers is '*rempit*' (illegal motor racing). The media's influence has helped to create this new culture of Malaysian youth. Hollywood movies such as '*The Fast and the Furious*' have become a model for the emulation of their feats and stunts on the highway. However, Hollywood movies alone cannot be responsible for the negative influences. The local producers share similar responsibility for producing movies such as '*Ramp-it*,' '*Impak Maxima*,' '*Bohsia: Jangan Pilih Jalan Hitam*' and many others.

### *c. Sexual obscenity and Pornography*

Advertising is frequently neglected in the discussion of media and violence. Quiet recently however, media critics and theorists have come to see the significant role advertising plays in the media's normalization of violence; especially violence against women.<sup>23</sup> Commercial media normally aims to 'sell audiences to advertisers.' In the case of commercial television, this means that broadcasters need to schedule programs to attract specific types of viewers in sufficiently large numbers so that advertisers will want to purchase advertising 'spots' in the programs. Violence is portrayed as a competitive tool in both entertainment and news shows to attract audiences. Television broadcasters use violent program content in this way because they

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<sup>21</sup>Cynthia Carter and C. Kay Weaver, *Violence and the Media*, pp. 81-84.

<sup>22</sup>Hobart, "Entertaining Illusions: How Indonesian Elites Imagine Reality TV Affects the Masses," *Entertainment Media in Indonesia*, pp. 44-46.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid. p. 116.

believe it increases the sensational and dramatic appeal of programs and the level of excitement that it produces for the viewers.<sup>24</sup>

The media also constantly portrays women as objects for the advertisement of products and services. The objectification of women involves their representation as objects of men's desires and fantasies, rather than subjects of their own individual desires and fantasies.<sup>25</sup> Women are made to wear sexy clothes, which often expose some parts of the body, sometimes even to the point of nudity, in order to advertise products and services.

A straightforward effect of sex in media is sexual arousal, the drive that energizes or intensifies sexual behaviour. Sexually oriented movies and media, especially magazines and videos, tend to arouse people sexually. The less explicit sitcoms, showing teenagers considering being sexually active also contradict and consequently weaken family-taught values against premarital sex.<sup>26</sup>

Links between sex and aggression have long been the subject of speculation, particularly in the sense of sexual arousal facilitating violent behaviour. One of the main concerns regarding the behavioural effects of viewing explicit materials is a possible link between it and sex crimes such as rape and child molestation. Another likely possibility is the creation of a trend of having sex between consenting partners among teenagers, that is, premarital sex.<sup>27</sup>

Unlike Singapore and Malaysia, Indonesia has no restrictions on satellite dish ownership. In addition to its being able to pick up the state and privately owned stations, Indonesia's satellites can also access many regional and international broadcasters throughout most of the country.<sup>28</sup> This "open skies" policy allows the Indonesia access to uncensored programs that are outside the jurisdiction of the state Film Censorship Institution.

The apparently clear linkage between sex and aggression is found in pornography. Purchasing of pornographic materials such as magazines and videos is convenient. The situation is now becoming much more alarming with increased accessibility to websites in the internet that display and promote pornography. If such a situation persists, sex crimes will continue to

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid. p. 117.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid. pp. 121-122.

<sup>26</sup>Richard Jackson Harris, "The Impact of Sexually Explicit Media," *Media Effects Advances in Theory and Research*, pp. 251-252.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. pp. 258-262.

<sup>28</sup>Mohd. Yusof Hussain and Abderrahmane 'Azzī, *The Media in the Muslim World: Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sudan, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 1998), p. 10.

occur frequently and at the same time put family values and religious beliefs into jeopardy.

*d. Liberal and Extreme Ideologies in the Muslim World*

The last and most disturbing issue with respect to media's negative effects are liberal and extreme ideologies. Both ideologies are threats to the state of belief of Muslims. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the West coined both terms. Similar terms often associated with Islam include radicalism, fundamentalism and terrorism. Leonard Binder uses the term Islamic Liberalism as depicted in the following excerpt:

Rational discourse in Islam seeks to bring practice into accord with some norm of revelation, of history, of reason, or of exegesis, whereas the liberal notion of rational discourse aims primarily at agreement based on good will. Western liberal thought does not predict that rational discourse will always lead to agreement on the same set of institutions—the ideal democratic state—but rather, has held that political-cultural continuities of Western civilisation are due to the continuous effort to apply rational discourse, despite the heterogeneity of historical experience.<sup>29</sup>

Charles Kurzman uses the term liberal Islam to describe radical interpretations of Islam. Liberal Islam, according to Kurzman, employs three modes of interpretations, as described in the following excerpt:

The first mode takes liberal positions as being explicitly sanctioned by the *Sharī'ah*; the second mode argues that Muslims are free to adopt liberal positions on subjects that the *Sharī'ah* leaves open to human ingenuity; the third mode suggests that the *Sharī'ah*, while divinely inspired, is subject to multiple human interpretations.<sup>30</sup>

In his book, *Liberal Islam*, Kurzman mentions several prominent writers on Islam such as Amina Wadud Muhsin, Chandra Muzaffar and Nurcholish Madjid, among others. In Indonesia, the spread of Liberal Islam is conspicuous. In fact, an organization known as the LibForAll Foundation was set-up. Beside Gus Dur, the co-founder and former President of Indonesia, other liberalists who sit on the board of advisors are Azumardi Azra (Rector of UIN), Abdul Munir Mulkan and Amin Abdullah.

Another non-governmental organisation that is connected to liberal Islam is *Jaringan Islam Liberal* (JIL). JIL propagates its messages through a website and mailing lists. It also collaborates with print publication and radio stations. Apart from books, the liberalist spread their ideology via internet website, such as: [www.libforall.org](http://www.libforall.org), [www.islamlib.com](http://www.islamlib.com) and

<sup>29</sup>Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 5.

<sup>30</sup>Charles Kurzman, *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 14.

www.islamliberal@yahoogroups.com. Articles published on the JIL's websites are mostly cited in quality print media or media for elites such as *Jakarta Post*, *Kompas* and *Tempo*.<sup>31</sup>

The most worrisome aspect of the ideology of liberal Islam is the portrayal of Islam that places emphasis on the human rational mind and allows for the freedom of thought to the interpretations of the principles of Islam. Some critiques even equate liberal Islam to Western liberalism, that is, the importance of human judgment according to Western standards.

Another term coined by the West in regards to Islam is Islamic extremism. The term gained currency in part due to the popular thesis developed by Samuel Huntington regarding the impending clash of civilizations between Islam and the West. Following September 11th, the people who were already predisposed to viewing Islam with suspicion jumped on this bandwagon and through a number of primarily right wing outlets have been successful in the creation of a climate of extreme prejudice, suspicion and fear against Muslims.<sup>32</sup> This is an example of the negative portrayal of Islam by the media controlled by the West.

The aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup> found America under President George W. Bush who adopted the unilateral policy of invading a nation suspected of breeding terrorists. The invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq soon precipitated the feelings of anti-American. Therefore, anti-Americanism is to a certain extent, a result of American foreign policy.

Anti-Americanism as well as Islamophobia,<sup>33</sup> a term used to refer to unfounded fear of hostility towards Islam, both share a common denominator. Both are strategic weapons in the war of ideas, particularly among people who stand on radical sides of the political/ideological spectrum. Both are present in Muslim societies and in the United States. Both ideologies stem from misrepresentations, ignorance, lies, and half-truths disseminated by the media and bent on delivering the message to defame Islam and marginalise Muslims.<sup>34</sup>

### ***3. Islamic Remedies to Negative Media Effects***

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<sup>31</sup>Merlyna Lim, *Islamic Radicalism and Anti-Americanism in Indonesia: The Role of the Internet* (Washington: East-West Center Washington, 2005), p. 41.

<sup>32</sup>Parvez Ahmed, "Prejudice is Real and Exacts a Heavy Toll," *Islamophobia and Anti-Americanism: Causes and Remedies* (Beltsville: Amana Publications, 2007), p. 15.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Louay Safi, "Truth and Vanity Shape Anti-Americanism and Islamophobia," *Islamophobia and Anti-Americanism: Causes and Remedies*, p. 21.

The first aim of Islam is to establish a righteous man, who is competent in his worship of Allah on earth. Man was created by Allah in the best of forms and was given everything between the heavens and earth. This is the man in whom the qualities of humanity are placed and is raised above the savagery of imbecile animality or ferocity. Such a man is the foundation of the good home, society and nation.<sup>35</sup> In order to fulfill the essential requirements for man to achieve the virtue of righteousness, there exists an urgent need to look to the sources of Islam for effective guidance and direction.

As revealed by Allah to His Messenger, the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* both contain all the necessary information that an individual would need in order to become a good servant. These two important sources of Islam must become the foundations of guidance and direction for man. The idea of guidance and direction concerns the preventive measures through the punitive mechanism which is derived from the sources of Islamic law. The preventive measures or remedies from Islamic perspective encompass the roles of the government, Islamic education, parents, and society.

#### ***a. The Role of the Government***

The government has the potential to make a new start in terms of socio-political Islamic programs in order to resurrect society from the ashes of decay. It can stop the present drift of Muslim society towards Western concepts and institutions.<sup>36</sup> In fact, this authority alone has the needed power to eradicate the social ills of the society.

The government also has a duty to provide free and compulsory education to its citizenry. It is the citizen's right and the government's duty to have a system of education that makes knowledge freely accessible to every man and woman of the state. This system of education must not only focus on skill and physical knowledge, but also on religious education and morality. This is important because it would allow citizens to acquire the necessary skill and expertise to earn a living, while becoming good law abiding citizens. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "He who sets foot on a path in the quest of knowledge, Allah facilitates for him the path to Paradise."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup>Yusuf al-Qaradāwī, *Introduction to Islam* (Cairo: Islamic Publishing and Distribution Inc, 1995), p. 177.

<sup>36</sup>Muhammad Assad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1980), p. 16.

<sup>37</sup>Tirmidhī, *ʿAṣṣat al-ʿAḥwādī bisharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Tirmidhī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1997), *Ḥadīth* No: 2646, p. 83; and Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2005), *Ḥadīth* No: 223, p. 125.

Furthermore, the government is entrusted with law enforcement as its duty; preferably in the application of the *Sharī'ah* in its jurisdiction areas. Ibn Khaldūn (723-809 AH) contends that *Siyāsah Dīnīyyah* (government-based on *Sharī'ah*) is the ideal Islamic government in which the institution of *imāmate* is part of the religious law because it serves the public. Its real meaning is the supervision of interests of the Muslim community, both in religious and temporal affairs. It succeeded the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) in the guardianship of the religion and the government of the people. The Prophet (ﷺ) was entrusted with the duties imposed by religious law and the task of ensuring that people acted in accordance with them and with their interest in the world, these duties also belong to the *imāmate*.<sup>38</sup> According to Ibn Khaldūn, the essence of the *Sharī'ah* is that Allah has laid down the laws of the state which were followed by the Prophet and also created a religious obligation for followers to emulate. The government must also ensure that legislative and enforcement agencies perform their respective tasks in order to fight the social ills spreading in society. Governmental failure would be a serious misdeed to the people. Allah says: “Let the people of the Gospel judge by what Allah hath revealed therein. If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) those who rebel” (Sūrat al-Mā'idah: 47).

The government of the day is required to uphold the principle of consultation, particularly on matters of public interest. In regards to the negative effects of the media, there are segments of society that are not comfortable with the ample time and space allotted to various television channels for programs related to entertainment and amusement, while limited airtime is given to religious and educational programs. The innermost purpose of a government by consent and council is to provide a political and social framework based on unity and cooperation. The aim of such an effort is to build a community of people who work for the creation and maintenance of social conditions that enhance their physical and moral well-being. This is in line with the Qur'ānic verse: “...and who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation” (Sūrat al-Shū'arā': 38).

Moreover, the government has moral obligations to eradicate corruption and malpractice. This is a very important aspect of good governance because corruption and malpractice are the root of malaise in society. The government must appoint officials and employees who are not only qualified, but also morally fit for various positions in its institutions. These people should

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<sup>38</sup>Abd al-Raḥman bin Khaldūn, *Al-Muqaddimah* (Beirut: Maṭba'ah 'Adābiyyah, n.d.), p. 193.

discharge their duties without fear or favour. Their appointments are neither made for the benefit of any political gain or business interest, nor due to their self-canvassing for appointment, but rather, based on personal merits. The Prophet (ﷺ) said: “Do not solicit an office of authority, for if it is given to you for the asking, you will be left therein to your own resources, while, if it is given to you without asking, you will be aided by Allah therein.”<sup>39</sup>

Finally, the government is obligated to provide economic security to its citizenry and nation. To justify its claim to citizens’ loyalty, the government must assume the responsibility for the welfare of the citizens.<sup>40</sup> The government must also provide prospects for employment and business opportunities in order for its citizens to earn a living. This is especially important because it allows citizenry to avoid seeking income from illegal ways or immoral means. Nothing could illustrate this principle better than the saying of the Prophet (ﷺ): “You will recognize the faithful by their mutual compassion, love and empathy. They are like one body; if one of its parts is ill, the whole body suffers from sleeplessness and fever.”<sup>41</sup>

#### ***b. The Role of Islamic Education***

Modern knowledge is crucial for well-being and success in this world, yet it cannot singularly overcome the challenges of contemporary life. The negative effects of the media are a detrimental menace to society and as a result, the demand for an increasingly holistic and comprehensive approach of Islamic education becomes more urgent.

Primarily speaking, the chief aim of Islamic education is to instil belief and faith in Allah. Children in school should be taught that there is only One God, Allah, and to worship none but Him. This is in accordance with the covenant that man agreed upon with Allah: “Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes! We testify” (Sūrat al-ʿAʿrāf: 172). The covenant calls for the complete submission to Allah and to follow and adhere to the teachings of the Qurʾān. The philosophy of belief and faith liberates men from the worship of others, (i.e. objects, nature or Satan) and allows them to remain steadfastly obedient to Allah. Belief and faith rely on the fear of violating the terms of *Shahādah*; which is akin to punishment, whereas a strict compliance to it would ensure the rewards of Allah in the Hereafter. This is in line with the verse: “So, whoever does good equal to the weight of an atom, We shall see it. And whoever does evil equal to the weight of an atom We shall see it” (Sūrat al-

<sup>39</sup>Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2003), *Ḥadīth* No: 1652, p. 174.

<sup>40</sup>Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam*, p. 87.

<sup>41</sup>Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2004), *Ḥadīth* No: 6011, p. 537.

Zalzalah: 7-8). Children should also be taught the importance of following the *Sunnah*. The second part of the *Shahādah*, means obedience to the teachings of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), and holds similar consequences in the case of violation. Allah says, “Say: “Obey Allah and His Messenger”: But if they turn back, Allah loveth not those who reject Faith” (Sūrat ‘al-‘Imrān: 32).

The second aim of Islamic education is the performance of worship to Allah. Children should learn that the most important aspect in the creation of man is to worship Allah. Allah says: “And I created not the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me (Alone)” (Sūrat al-Dhāriyāt: 56). Apart from their study and obligations, children should also learn that the essential forms of religious duties such as praying, *Zakāh*, *Ṣawm* and *Ḥajj* are all important in bringing the believer nearer to Allah while keeping him away from evil. Such acts of worships give birth to peace and tranquility, as can be seen in the verse: “Those who are the believers and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Surely, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest” (Sūrat al-Ra‘d: 28).

Another important aim of Islamic education is to focus on character and virtue. Children should also be taught that a good Muslim is not only one of faith and belief but also one of character and virtue; one in whom purity attests to their character in every sense of the word. Allah sent Prophet Muḥammad as a role model for Muslims to follow, due to his being “on the high scale of character.” The Qur’ān says, “Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the Praise of Allah” (Sūrat al-Aḥzāb: 21).

In this field, the media, particularly television, holds a tremendous influence and thus becomes an important channel for disseminating Islam to the public. The term ‘broadcasting Islam’ connotes the effort of television in conveying the message of Islam on television. In the early 1990s, Television Malaysia’s performance came under open criticism for not doing enough in broadcasting Islamic programs. In 1997, the Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) established a department known as the Electronic Media and Broadcasting Department (MEP) with the main function of producing Islamic-oriented programs broadcasting Islam through radio and television, and to coordinate and censor non-Islamic materials for television and radio.<sup>42</sup> Since then, Television Malaysia allocated six hours (360 minutes) a week of its total airtime for Islamic-oriented programs, excluding dramas

<sup>42</sup>Che Mahzan Ahmad, “Broadcasting Islam on Malaysian Televisions,” *Communication in Muslim Nations* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2008), pp. 189-191.

with Islamic themes. Examples of such programs are *Bicara Mufti* (Mufti's Lecture), *Forum on Islamic Affairs*, *Friday Prayer*, *Khutbah*, etc. Other television channels also provide some airtime for Islamic programs. TV3 provides airtimes for programs, such as *Al-Hidāyah*, *Jejak Rasūl*, *Al-Kulliyah*, *Laman Nurānī*; TV9 provides airtimes for *Halaqah*, *Sīrah Anbiyā'* and *Mari Mengaji* (learning how to read Al-Qur'ān).<sup>43</sup> Despite their efforts, the allocations seem to be inadequate. The television channels have a moral obligation to do the work of *da'wah* and to educate the society with good morals, at the same time, without overzealously airing programs that lead to the destruction of human values.

Islamic education also aims at inculcating the aspect of *al-tawāzun* (moderation or balance) in life. The essential aspect of this teaching is the emphasis placed on needed attention without exaggeration or deficiency. It calls for society to practice moderation in order to avoid the ideologies of liberalism or extremism. Allah says: "We have made you an *ummah*, justly balanced, that you be witnesses over mankind and that the Messenger be a witness over you" (Sūrat al-Baqarah: 143). The ideologies of liberalism or extremism are sicknesses that seem to plague us both individually and collectively in our relationship with one another. We express liberalism or extremism in our interpersonal behaviour, interpretation of religion, political ideals and even our style of life and habits by spending extravagantly or not spending at all.

In the aforementioned Qur'ānic verse, Allah offers us a clear direction in our life; to be justly balanced. In his monumental work of *Tafsīr*, Ibn Kathīr describes the holders of the term *wasat* as the 'best and most just nation'. He goes on to assert that through the application of this term, we can justly balance everything we do, and that only then can we truly be witnesses over the nations.<sup>44</sup> Parties often argue with each other due to the clash between liberal or extreme views and a refusal to compromise and accommodate each other's views. It is only through a third party or a just outsider they can be brought back to reason and realize their mistakes.

We often suffer untold miseries as a result of unhealthy practices. We constantly blame the market forces to justify our spending or lack thereof. We often land ourselves into an imprudent financial situation due to our overzealous spending or lack of it. The secret of success in any effort is our ability to keep a "just balance" between the extremes. Islam calls for

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 196-199.

<sup>44</sup>Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Riyadh: Dār- al-Salām Publishers & Distributors, 2000), Vol. 1, p. 422.

moderation in the manner we conduct our life, which can be seen in accordance with Allah's words: "And those who, when they spend are neither extravagant nor niggardly, but hold a medium (way) between those extremes" (Sūrat al-Furqān: 67). In explaining this verse, Ibn Kathīr says that there is a need to keep a just balance between the extremes of extravagance and stinginess. He contends that they are not extravagant, spending more than they need, nor are they miserly towards their families, not spending enough on their needs. Rather, they follow the best and fairer way. The best matters are those which are moderate; none of them is extreme.<sup>45</sup>

### c. *The Role of Parents*

We live in an environment dominated by non-Islamic values and behaviours. Parents should understand that Islam makes it clear that children are a blessing, a trust, and a test from Allah.<sup>46</sup> Allah says, "And know that your possessions and your children are but a trial and surely with Allah is the mighty reward" (Sūrat al-Anfāl: 28).

Similarly, Allah reminds us with a similar message of trust and trial in another verse: "Your wealth and your children are only a trial, whereas Allah, with Him is a great reward (Paradise)" (Sūrat al-Taghābun: 15).

Ibn Kathīr explains the significance of the term *fitnah* (test and trial) in both verses. He argues that Allah grants wealth and children as a test and trial so that He may know those who obey Him and those who do not. Children may cause one to sever his or her connection with Allah or disobey Him, as the individual in question may become busied with their demands rather than performing good deeds.<sup>47</sup> Ibn Kathīr reiterates this line of argument by quoting the verse, "O you who believe! Let not your properties or your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. And whoever does that then they are the losers" (Sūrat al-Munāfiqūn: 9).

This shows that parents have the religious duty to nurture and guide their children to the path of Allah as they are indeed born in the state of *fiṭrah*. Islam teaches that the human being's original *fiṭrah* or nature is pure and uncorrupted. Consequently, each newborn baby comes into the world in a pure state, untainted by any sin. Like other creatures of Allah, children are born as Muslims, in the sense that in their original nature they submit to the Creator.<sup>48</sup> This is affirmed in the saying of the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ): "A

<sup>45</sup>Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, Vol. 7, p. 198.

<sup>46</sup>Norma Tarazi, *The Child in Islam: A Muslim's Parent Handbook* (Burr Ridge: American Trust Publications), p. 48.

<sup>47</sup>Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, Vol. 10, pp. 27-28.

<sup>48</sup>Tarazi, *The Child in Islam*, p. 11.

child is born in a state of *fiṭrah*, as the animal gives birth to a perfect offspring. Do you find it mutilated? Then his parents make him a Jew, Christian and Magian.”<sup>49</sup>

The most important aspect of *fiṭrah* is that through an Allah-given nature, a child is born as a believer. Therefore, it is the duty of parents to ensure that their child grows up and remains a believer. Until children reach the age of reason—as seen in the signs of physical maturity—they are not responsible for their bad deeds. According to the Prophet (ﷺ), “There are three kinds of people whose actions are not recorded: a sleeper until he awakens, a boy/girl until he reaches puberty, and a lunatic (mentally defective) until he comes to reason.”<sup>50</sup>

Thus, parents have a religious duty to provide education and guidance alongside Islamic principles. The essential aspects of the lawful and unlawful must be taught to children at a very early age, while teaching them to read the Qur’ān and perform daily prayers. In addition, the negative impacts media has on children should never be underestimated. Television has a powerful impact on children. Violence in cartoons and video games, as well as indecent exposure, excessive entertainment and amusement can easily turn them away from *fiṭrah*.

Parents have a moral and religious duty to ensure that the link to Allah remains intact. Linking the child to Allah is a very important and continuous process for Muslims and it starts at birth. The Prophet (ﷺ) has instructed believers to say the *Ādhān* (the call for prayer) in a newborn’s right ear and the *Iqāmah* (the second call for prayer) to the newborn’s left ear following birth. Thus, the first words the child hears are the calls to prayer.<sup>51</sup>

Parents should also create situations in which children can witness Islamic values by taking them to the mosque for prayer and participation in mosque activities. Parents should also deal with each other and with their children in a way that reflects Allah’s mercy. “And by the Mercy of Allah, you deal with them gently. And had you been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have broken away” (Sūrat Āl-‘Imrān: 159). This does not mean negligence in parenting, as parents need to be firm with children when the situations warrant. Parents themselves should provide a good example by not watching television programs that show indecency, violence or even

<sup>49</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2003), *Ḥadīth* No: 1385, p. 256.

<sup>50</sup> Abū Dawūd, *Sunan ‘Abū Dawūd* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1997), *Ḥadīth* No: 4399, p. 363.

<sup>51</sup> Ekram and Moḥammed Riḍā Beshir, *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West: An Islamic Perspective* (Beltsville: Amana Publications, 1998), pp. 22-23.

excessive entertainment and amusement. Some protection is necessary to help children avoid harmful influences. The message of the Prophet (ﷺ) is very clear and affirmative as can be seen in what follows, “Obscenity is a part of the hardness of heart and the hardness of heart is in Hell; but modesty is part of faith and faith is in Paradise.”<sup>52</sup>

When the situation warrants it, physical punishment becomes necessary and should be carried out with restraint to avoid injury and physical harm. Such punishments should hold the intention of teaching a lesson due to not performing good deeds or for doing something bad. The Prophet (ﷺ) said: “Order your children to pray when they become seven, and spank them for it when they become ten years old.”<sup>53</sup>

Parents also need to raise children in a proper environment and offer them education with Islamic values. A proper Islamic environment and education are a must. The environment must be conducive to the promotion of positive values and at the same time, avoid negative influences. Children need to be reminded of the importance of utilizing time to study and do household works. They should also avoid spending too much time on entertainment or other unnecessary activities. The importance of the utilization of time is reported in the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (ﷺ): “Everyone will be asked about four things on the Day of Judgment: his life, how he spent it; his youth, how he used his time; his wealth, how he earned and on what it was spent; and his knowledge, how he used it.”<sup>54</sup>

The provision of knowledge for children is something Islam never compromises. Parents should make every effort to ensure that children have the opportunity for a proper education. There should not be any form of discrimination between sons and daughters in respect to education; as both are entitled to the best forms of education. The Prophet (ﷺ) says, “Seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim.”<sup>55</sup>

When children attain the age of maturity, it becomes incumbent for parents to encourage them to marry. This is to steer them away from entering into friendship with the opposite sex that have no prospect of marriage or leading to the committing of adultery. This is in line with the teaching of the Qur’ān: “And among His signs is that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you

<sup>52</sup>Tirmidhī, *Ilal al-Tirmidhī al-Kabīr* (Ammam: Maktabat al-’Aqṣā, 1986), *Ḥadīth* No: 345, p. 803.

<sup>53</sup>Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abū Dawūd*, *Ḥadīth* No: 494, p. 237.

<sup>54</sup>Al-Bayhaqī, *Shu’ab al-’Imān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyyah, 2000), *Ḥadīth* No: 1785, p. 286.

<sup>55</sup>Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyyah, 1998), *Ḥadīth* No: 224, p136.

affection and mercy. Surely, in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect” (Sūrat al-Rūm: 21).

#### *d. The Role of Society*

The Qur’ānic view of human society and history is one of harmony. Human societies should be aware of their common destiny. Therefore, the central aim of the Qur’ān is to establish a viable social order on earth that is justly and ethically based.<sup>56</sup>

The society has the collective responsibility of promoting goodness and avoiding evil. This means that everyone in society—the individuals, society, private and public citizens or business community—all carry the same responsibility to uphold the concept of *al-‘amr bil-ma’rūf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar*. Islam lays down the principle of mutual responsibility in all aspects of human life. In it, we find the responsibilities, which exist between a man and his own self, his immediate family, individuals, and community. Islam promotes this striking phenomenon in such a way that these elements are inextricably linked together. No individual, then, should be exempted from caring for the general interest. Rather, everyone must have a constant care for the community.<sup>57</sup> Thus, everybody should seek to promote equality and moral uprightness or goodness and avoid evil or indecency. The Qur’ān says, “Let you be a community calling others to the good, enjoining *al-ma’rūf* (goodness or decency) and forbidding *al-munkar* (evil or indecency): and it is they who are successful” (Sūrat: al-‘Imrān: 104).

Society in Islam maintains unity within its ranks. As one person alone cannot handle the task of combating evil-doing, Islam insists on the essential aspects of cooperation and caring for others.<sup>58</sup> The Islamic term for such a noble endeavour is *ta’āwun*, the partaking in any approved kind of activity that is designed to benefit society or individual members in the community. The root causes of corruption and destruction of moral values result from man’s inability to observe the limits imposed by Allah. Therefore, *ta’āwun* is a code of social responsibility that serves the protection of society’s wellbeing with regards to the safety of man’s life, property and dignity, as well as the environment.<sup>59</sup> Regardless of the costs, the pursuit for the elimination of social ills should take the utmost priority. The society must

<sup>56</sup>Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’ān* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1999), p. 37.

<sup>57</sup>Sayyid Quṭb, *Al-‘Adālah al-‘Ijtimā‘iyyah fī al-‘Islām* (*Social Justice in Islam*, trans. Hamid Algar), (New York: Islamic Publications International, 2000), p. 86.

<sup>58</sup>Sohirin M. Solihin, *Islamic Da’wah: Theory and Practice* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2008), p. 166.

<sup>59</sup>Sayed Sikandar Shah Haneef, *Ethics and Fiqh for Daily Life: An Islamic Outline* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2005), pp. 80-81.

unite against social ills such as violence and indecency as well as Western ideologies and cultures that threaten to upset the harmony of the society. The theme of unity is emphasized in the Qur'ān in the following verses: "Surely, Allah loves those who fight in His Cause in rows (ranks) as if they were a solid structure" (Sūrat al-Şāff: 4), and "Help one another in righteousness and piety but do not help one another in sin and transgression" (Sūrat al-Mā'idah: 2).

Another important matter in regards to society is the supreme welfare of the society itself. Individuals should not allow themselves to be carried to their extreme by way of passion, appetite or pleasure; yet their freedom should not conflict with that of others. Islam granted individual freedom in the most perfect form, and human equality in its most exact sense while maintaining it and keeping it controlled. As a result, society has its interests; humans have their claims; and value is attached to religion.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, a society must not be built upon oppression or coercion but should rather be based on a just balance of rights and privileges. The goal is to correct error and to establish justice in society. Society must stand firm on matters that are detrimental to it even if there exists a slight element of personal or interpersonal interests. Allah says:

O ye who believe! stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest ye swerve, and if ye distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do (Sūrat al-Nisā': 135).

The principle of just balance or moderation is another important commandment in Islam. The Islamic approach to developing human beings, both morally and physically, is based on the principles and laws of balance, equilibrium and moderation. It neither leans towards asceticism nor towards greedy materialism, but to the fulfillment of both.<sup>61</sup> Society must realize that there should not be any form of laxity in attitude that leads to either excessiveness or deficiency in all aspects of life. This may manifest itself in the form of public expenditures, consumptions, preferences, entertainment and amusement. The essential limits within each parameter must be strictly observed to ensure that it will not reach the extreme of excessiveness or the extreme of deficiency. Allah says:

<sup>60</sup> Quṭb, *Al-'Adālah al-'Ijtimā'iyah fī al-'Islam*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>61</sup> Haneef, *Ethics and Fiqh for Daily Life*, p. 72.

Thus, have We made of you an *ummah* justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves; and We appointed the *Qiblah* to which thou wast used, only to test those who followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels (From the Faith). Indeed it was (a change) momentous, except to those guided by Allah. And never would Allah Make your faith of no effect. For Allah is to all people Most surely full of kindness, Most Merciful (Sūrat al-Baqarah: 143).

It is also the duty of society to regard the fight against evil as *Jihād*. This aspect of *Jihād* is a war against any ills that may crop up within the society, examples of which include but are not limited to *rempit* (illegal motor racing), snatch thefts, violence and pornography. Such evils pose a major threat to the harmony of the society.<sup>62</sup> Every individual in a society is responsible to put an end to the evildoing that he or she sees. Failing to do so results in disunity, and as a result, society is eventually harmed through such evildoing. Thus, society will bear the consequences if it passively permits evildoing. There is no justice in this, for there is an immoral element in which evildoing flourishes unchecked, in which the society slowly becomes powerless to confront it and in the end, inevitably leads itself to self-destruction.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the use of the term *Jihād* is justified, in both theory and practice, as attested to by the words of the Prophet (ﷺ): “If any of you sees something evil, he should set it right by his hand; if he is unable to do so, then by his tongue; and if he is unable to do even with that, then within his heart, but that is the weakest form of faith.”<sup>64</sup>

### 7. Conclusion

The media, especially television can provide both relaxation and entertainment and thus has proven its ability to influence people. It can also affect the attitudes and behaviours of its viewers. The adverse effects of the media on the lives of such a number of people have become the subjects of serious debates.

Concerns regarding negative effects of the media are not something new. Public outcries against the rise of violence and immoral activities are increasing due to the media and its negative influences. An individual or an organization cannot shoulder the responsibility of overcoming this malaise in society. Rather, responsibility falls on the society and state. Therefore, individuals have their role to play, whether they be a person, a parent, an individual in society or a leader of the state.

<sup>62</sup>Sadruddīn Iṣlāhī, *Islam at a Glance* (Delhi: Markazi Maktabah Publishers, 1998), p. 204.

<sup>63</sup>Quṭb, *Al-‘Adālah al-‘Ijtima‘iyyah*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>64</sup>Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 2004), Ḥadīth No: 170, p. 211.

The remedies suggested in the essay follow principles prescribed by the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. We may draw strength from them and promote their intrinsic teachings and values, as Islam offers humanity perfectly comprehensive guidelines. As Muslims, it is incumbent for us to follow them. This is the fundamental teaching of Islam that every Muslim must live up to. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, “You shall not enter Paradise until you have faith; and you cannot attain faith until you love one another.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid. p. 224.