

## INTERFAITH MARRIAGE CONTROVERSIES IN SEMARANG: AN ANALYSIS OF QUR'ANIC LEGAL EXEGESIS

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## ABSTRACT

Interfaith marriage in Semarang has become a controversial issue, challenging established religious, cultural, and legal norms. The study aims to address two key questions on how Indonesian society responds to interfaith marriage and what role does the Qur'an play in the interfaith marriage controversy in Semarang. Through this study, we seek to gain an in-depth understanding of the interaction between religious teachings and social responses, with the broader aim of enhancing insights into the influence of Qur'anic exegesis on interfaith marriage dynamics. Th study adopts a qualitative approach, utilising document analysis and in-depth interviews. Primary participants include interfaith couples and Indonesian netizens. Data collection is conducted through interviews, field observations, and document analysis, including Qur'anic exegesis, religious decrees, fatwas, and public commentary. Thematic analysis is applied to identify evolving patterns in Islamic legal understanding and its impact on social harmony. In Semarang, interfaith marriage has proved to be a contentious affair for both social and legal researchers owing to some of the intricate issues it entails. Interfaith couples often experience disapproval not only from their families but society as a whole. A considerable part of society shows contempt, as per the religious views such marriages can endanger the family's spirituality. Nevertheless, there are some who advocate for Indonesian multiculturalism and the values of respect and social harmony thus viewing interfaith marriages as legitimate. This dispute includes discussions of Qur'anic interpretation and Islamic law as they assert different viewpoints regarding the legitimacy of marriage of Muslims with *Ahl al-Kitab*. What aggravates the situation along with the ambiguous national legislation is the fatwa that was promulgated by Majelis Ulama Indonesia about interfaith marriages. This paper responds to the identified problems by offering some recommendations for communication, better understanding around the differences as well as the *maqasid al-shari'ah* objectives of protecting religion and *nashab*.

## Introduction

Interfaith marriage has emerged as a contentious issue globally, particularly in Indonesia, home to the biggest Muslim population worldwide. This tendency is widespread in Semarang owing to the city's significant religious variety (Ibrahim, 2023). The debate of interfaith marriage encompasses both legal considerations and religious doctrines, especially within Islam. Qur'anic texts, notably Surah Al-Baqarah verse 221, are essential in discussions regarding the Islamic perspective on interfaith marriage. This passage underscores the restriction for Muslims to wed polytheists, commonly regarded as a ban on marrying non-Muslims. Nevertheless, interpretations of this poem and its application in contemporary circumstances frequently differ. This study examines the debate surrounding interfaith marriage in Semarang by evaluating diverse legal interpretations derived from the Qur'an. This topic is pertinent as it impacts the social and religious dynamics of the populace in Semarang and elucidates the influence of religious interpretations on legal and social behaviours.

The debate regarding interfaith marriage in Indonesia is fundamentally anchored in the nation's legal, religious, and social structures. The Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974 stipulates that a marriage is valid only if conducted in accordance with the laws of the relevant religions and beliefs. However, it does not explicitly address interfaith marriages, resulting in diverse interpretations and legal ambiguities. The legal ambiguity has led to varied practices, including couples supplying inaccurate information regarding their religious status or opting to marry abroad to bypass local restrictions (Anon, 2023b). The impact of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is considerable, particularly in predominantly Muslim nations, where numerous religious scholars and organisations reject interfaith marriages, deeming them invalid and inconsistent with religious doctrine. Interfaith marriages persist despite challenges, motivated by couples' intent to uphold their distinct beliefs while formalising their partnership. The pursuit of legal recognition frequently entails obtaining court decisions that require civil registrars to document these marriages, utilising existing legal loopholes. Interfaith couples experience marginalisation, confronting intricate challenges in reconciling love, religion, and state law, frequently feeling constrained by the inflexible legal framework. The controversy is exacerbated by varying interpretations within the community, with some proponents of liberal views emphasising individual freedom over religious conformity. Activists in online media and interfaith marriage counselling contribute to this discourse by emphasising the social and legal challenges faced by interfaith couples (Hastuti et al., 2022; Indrayanti et al., 2017). Comparative studies with other countries indicate that Indonesia's approach is comparatively stringent, leading to calls for legislative reform to establish clearer guidelines and mitigate inequality. The controversy surrounding interfaith marriage in Indonesia illustrates the intricate interactions among legal, religious, and social factors that perpetuate debate and necessitate nuanced solutions.

Concepts of marriage in the Qur'an include: marriage as a legal contract, as an advocate and as a social bond, which encompasses traditional as well as modern conceptions. It has been observed that traditional scholars and thinkers place additional focus primarily on legal and patriarchal concepts, for example the restrictions on Muslim women against marrying outside their religious community whereas Muslim men marrying a woman of the book is allowed under certain conditions (Fatah & Shofaussamawati, 2022; Heriawanto, 2019; Ibrahim, 2023). In contrast, a growing number of scholars and exegetes reject them as well, and articulate a more even distribution of gender relations and a reading anchored in the contemporary context. Other contemporary ideas for example, some oppose inter-faith marriage by arguing reciprocity and integration of modern and scholarly wisdom of modern interpreters who endorse marriage between Muslim women and people of the Book would be more helpful. Amalgamation of ethical features such as respect for each other as well as equity also emerges from the religious ethos of marital scholars that particularly repudiate the unilateralism of the Islamic patriarchy and unequally powerful institutions. Modern interpretations of Islamic texts seek gender equality by addressing marital rape, coercion of spouses, control of sexual relations and other aspects of marriage to eliminate derogative concepts of a woman. In more modern understanding, polygamy is being revisited; violence does not confer rights, gender inequality remains an exploding paradigm but it is not the only one, nowadays suppression and injustices are more subject to debate. Across all interpretive practices, marriage in Islam is emphasized as a means of achieving peace and happiness (*sakinah*) as well as a focus on social dealings. The linguistic understanding of the Qur'an also highlights the need to fulfil marriage contracts as well as the ethical considerations of divorce. This serves the greater purpose of justice and obligation in all relations.

The current research stems from the interreligious marriage controversies witnessed in Indonesia, particularly in Semarang, which takes into broad comprehension the grievances of the people and the function of religion in society. The problem under study is limited to two main questions: first, how does Indonesian society view intermarriages, with sentiments holding to tradition on one side and with modernisation on the other; and second, how do Surah al-Baqarah verse 221 and Surah al-Maidah verse 5 inform Islamic views on interfaith marriage in Semarang (Basid, 2018). It is also hoped that through this research a systematic portrayal of how society views interreligious marriage could be achieved, with emphasis being given to attempts to understand the reasons for and attitudes towards such practices and how Qur'anic exegetical works may provide a local viewpoint. The aim of this study is to elaborate how religion and popular views on interfaith marriage coexist. In particular, this research contributes to the understanding of how the interpretation of the Qur'an impacts the dynamics of inter-faith marriages and how such relations can be validated through the concept of *maqasid al-shari'ah*, which seeks to protect faith and lineage (Basid, 2023). Hence, this study intends to assist in policy formulation or social strategies that are more compassionate in consideration of religious factors and additionally the existing context within Semarang society.

This research includes a number of primary beliefs which it seeks to validate. The first argument or hypothesis is that a clear understanding of interfaith marriage in Islam is provided by the interpretation of Surah al-Baqarah verse 221, Surah al-Maidah verse 5 and its *asbab al-nuzul*. It has also been sought to understand whether Semarang society still employs classical and modern approaches in interpreting these verses. The second hypothesis asserts that *maqasid al-shari'ah*, for instance, which seeks to protect religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, justifies both for and against interfaith marriage. This also describes how scholars and the public cite the principles of *maqasid al-shari'ah* to support their arguments for or against interfaith marriage in Semarang. The third hypothesis proposes that transcripts and netizen comments, especially on YouTube will be scanned against the variables of interest to see what influences or is influenced by public views and Islamic legal positions regarding interfaith marriage. The final hypothesis intends that netizen opinions would inform us about people's voices, concerns, understandings, and attitudes which are common among Semarang Muslims. Last but not least this research aims at elucidating the role of the Qur'an in interfaith marriage controversies in Semarang. This hypothesis states that the local perception and policies regarding interfaith marriage are created through the understanding of the Qur'an as an important document. This research can provide tentative answers to how Islamic sacred texts are interpreted and applied in the social and cultural contexts of Semarang.

## Literature Review

Some scholars have attempted to analyse interfaith marriage more closely from the Islamic perspective. For example, Munir and Rachmawati (2020) argue in their paper "Islamic Legal Review on Interfaith Marriage in the Book of Tafsir Al-Ahkam by Sheikh Aly Al-Shabuny" that the goal of interfaith marriage of embedding tranquillity, love and mercy is elusive. This paper elaborates on interfaith marriage issues in the context of developing a peaceful family. Further, in their paper Enghariano and Asra (2017), "Legal Verses On Interfaith Marriage", as the title reads, they bear out their intercultural relationship with Rasyid Ridha and al-Maraghi. These scholars examine the works of Rasyid Ridha and al-Maraghi and their position on interfaith marriage in the light of Qur'anic verses. They stress the socio-historical contexts of these verses concerning pluralistic societies. As Turnip (2021) states in "Interfaith Marriage: A Tale of Tafsir Scholars' Opinion, MUI Fatwas and Indonesian Islamic Family Law", Nahdlatul Ulama' (NU) scholars and the Majelis Tarjih Muhammadiyah Central Leader have strong opinions that interfaith marriage is prohibited in Indonesia. This study highlights the disagreements among scholars in interpreting the laws of interfaith marriage. Jarudin (2021) compares the views of three prominent scholars on interfaith marriage. This study examines the differences in scholarly interpretations of the law on interfaith marriage. Previous research has shown limitations, including a lack of focus on the local context of Semarang and insufficient analysis of public opinion and the social impact of interfaith marriages. This current study thus, addresses these gaps by providing an in-depth contextual analysis of the interpretation and application of Surah Al-Baqarah verse 221 in the context of interfaith marriages in Semarang.

## Methodology

This research focuses on the controversy surrounding interfaith marriage in Semarang, particularly regarding the contribution of Qur'anic legal exegesis to local community perspectives. The research questions posed include: 1) What are the societal responses towards interfaith marriage in Indonesia? and 2) What is the Qur'an's role in the controversy over interfaith marriage in Semarang? The study aims to comprehend, analyse, and examine concepts within *maqasid al-shari'ah* concerning interfaith marriage, assessing the relevance of Islamic law in Semarang's diverse social and cultural context (Ambrose et al., 2005; Denzin & Ryan, 2007). The knowledge gap that this study addresses is the limited public understanding of Qur'anic interpretation and the principles of *maqasid al-shari'ah* as they apply to interfaith marriage and the extent to which Islamic law provides either flexibility or strictness in such cases. In terms of research methodology, the study focuses on the application of *maqasid al-shari'ah* principles in interfaith marriages. The research design is qualitative, employing document analysis and in-depth interviews. Primary participants or sources of information include local Islamic scholars, interfaith couples, and the public in Semarang, who hold varied views on this issue. Data collection was conducted through interviews, field observations, and document analysis, including interpretations of the Qur'an, religious decrees, and public commentary. The collected data was thematically analysed with an emphasis on identifying evolving patterns of Islamic legal understanding within the community and the impact of its application on social harmony. This research is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Islamic perspectives on interfaith marriage in Indonesia, as well as the contributions of the Qur'an and *maqasid al-shari'ah* in mediating religious differences within a plural society (Shihab, 2013).

## Results and Findings

### *Maqasid al-Shari'ah and Interfaith Marriage*

*Maqasid al-shari'ah*, also known as the objectives of *Shari'ah*, are principles that form the backbone of Islamic jurisprudence, and their outcomes are aimed at safeguarding five core values in human life, which include religion, life, reason, progeny, and property. In regard to interracial marriage however, especially from an Islamic standpoint, *maqasid al-shari'ah* provides a useful tool that would help assess the relevance as well as the legal implications of the marriage. In Islam, a marriage is not a simple contract or legal bond between two parties; it is a tool to promote virtues and order, goals that are connected to *maqasid al-shari'ah*. The focus is to protect religion and promote relationships that are faith-based. There are rules that govern an Islamic marriage in which prudence is taken to ensure that the faith and family lineage are carried on Islamically. As stated in the above principle of *usul al-fiqh*, “ما لا يتم الواجب إلا به فهو واجب” “What is necessary to fulfil an obligation becomes obligatory itself”, inter-religious marriages are notable because of the value and belief incompatibilities that can exist and affect the family environment or the upbringing of children. The Islam-centric approach of *maqasid al-shari'ah* on marriage seeks to maintain religion (حفظ الدين) as its primary objective since it is believed that marriage will provide for a faith strong enough to ensure children are born Islamically educated. It may be difficult to uphold Islamic principles when marrying a person of a different religion, especially when it comes to worship, child-rearing, and way of life (Rohma et al., 2021; Solikin & Wasik, 2023). For this reason, laws related to marriage under the *Shari'ah* discourage individuals from marrying outside their religion due to possible issues which may arise from dissimilar religious practices and beliefs. In this sense, *maqasid al-shari'ah* seeks to protect the integrity of the family which is the core foundation of Islamic society. Likewise, the maxim “درء المفسد مقدم على جلب المصالح” “The prevention of harm comes before the obtaining of benefit”, is a further emphasis on non-violent and political issues that dwell within a family that could alter the family's stable condition of faith (Alias et al., 2024).

*Maqasid al-shari'ah* also addresses the preservation of *nasab* (حفظ النسل), which is the prevention of descendents from being raised in a society that stifles the practice of Islamic virtues. This may ultimately hinder their development as children of interfaith marriages may be exposed to a variety of beliefs that are likely to trouble them. In this regard, the tenets of *maqasid al-shari'ah* highlight the necessity for periodic emphasis on religion in children, enabling them to establish a robust religious foundation in their youth. Concerning interfaith marriages, *maqasid al-shari'ah* encourages the preservation of faith and family structures. However, if children are raised with two religions, there is a possibility that they may

receive religion with confusion, which would not align with *maqasid al-shari'ah* — which aims at the preservation of religion and descent. *Maqasid al-shari'ah* also adopts a broader definition of safeguarding intellect (حفظ العقل) in relation to interfaith marriages. For instance, within the family, one spouse may follow one religion while the other follows a different one, which creates emotional strain for the couple or for their children. When two individuals in marriage have differing religious beliefs, there is a tendency for divergence to occur in daily practices such as normal decision making, ethical understanding, as well as how each individual perceives the existence of God (Muthalib et al., 2021; Pelu et al., 2022). However, the principle of *maqasid al-shari'ah* emphasises the protection of intellect, as well as the importance of emotional and mental well-being in a household, thus conflicts rooted in religious differences can undermine the goal. The principle does state that “الأصل في الأشياء الإباحة” (In principle, all things are permissible), or in simpler terms, the principle allows all kinds of practices, but if such practices give rise to conflicts that contradict the principles of *maqasid al shari'ah*, the aforementioned would not be permissible.

*Maqasid al-shari'ah* gives a detailed analysis in looking into whether interreligious marriages are permissible in Islam. Its tenets seek to make marriage only an institution that facilitates religious and moral goals within Islam. However, Islamic law does permit something with some degree of liberty, like a Muslim man marrying a woman of the People of the Book who are considered to possess a scripture. However, this concession is tempered with a warning on the effects of religion which may affect and even shake the faith of the family. Hence, *maqasid al-shari'ah* in interfaith marriage reflects the desire to preserve faith integrity, psychological stability, and the continuity of Islamic values in future generations (Hanapi & Hasballah, 2022; Nur Mahmudah et al., 2022). From a *shari'ah* perspective, marriage between a Muslim and a non-Muslim is subject to specific limitations intended to preserve Islamic values within the household and lineage. The Qur'an addresses this in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 221, which states:

Translation: Do not marry polytheistic women until they believe; a believing slave woman is better than a polytheist, even though she may please you.

(Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:221)

In hadith, although interfaith marriage is not explicitly discussed in most narrations, certain interpretations are derived from the Prophet's stance on marriage with *Ahl al-Kitab* (Jews and Christians). In a hadith reported by Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim, Muslim women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslim men. One commonly cited basis for this is a hadith narrated from Jabir bin Abdullah:

Translation: The Prophet prohibited Muslim women from marrying disbelievers.

(Al-Bukhari, 1993, Hadith 4816)

Nonetheless, for Muslim men, there is a divergence of opinion on marrying women of *Ahl al-Kitab*. Scholars generally agree that Muslim men may marry women from *Ahl al-Kitab* based on Surah Al-Ma'idah, verse 5, which mentions, “And (lawful to marry are) chaste women among those who were given the Scripture before you”. However, scholars still emphasise that such marriages should be approached with caution, considering that religious differences can impact children's education and family harmony (Az-Zuhaili, 2013; Ibn Kathir, 1996). Another related hadith, though not directly on interfaith marriage, is the Prophet's saying reported by Al-Bukhari:

Translation: A woman is married for four things: her wealth, her lineage, her beauty, and her religion; so, choose the religious one, and you will succeed.

(Al-Bukhari, 1993, Hadith 5090)

This hadith does not explicitly prohibit or command interfaith marriage but highlights the importance of religion as a key factor in choosing a life partner. In this context, marrying someone of a different faith may present significant challenges in establishing a harmonious family life aligned with Islamic teachings. Classical scholars such as Imam Shafi'i, Imam Malik, and Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal opine that a Muslim should not marry a polytheistic woman or a woman from a religion outside *Ahl al-Kitab*. They base their views on interpretations of Qur'anic verses and hadith and consider the social and educational impacts of

interfaith marriages. Meanwhile, Imam Hanafī tends to allow Muslim men to marry women from *Ahl al-Kitab*, albeit with certain conditions that must be observed. As an additional note, the following is relevant hadith on marriage:

Translation: A woman is married for four things: for her wealth, for her lineage, for her beauty or for her piety. Select the pious, may you be blessed!.

(Al-Bukhari, n.d., Hadith 5090)

The *takhrij* for this hadith is *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, No. 5090. This hadith highlights the importance of choosing a life partner with good faith as a priority, which, in the context of interfaith marriage, implies the need for shared beliefs to foster an Islamic household (Al-Syaukani, 1983; Maghnīyah, 2008; Syaukânī, 2000).

### ***Prohibitions and Social Context of Interfaith Marriage***

Interfaith marriage is prohibited based on religious, legal, and social considerations. From a religious perspective, Islamic teachings emphasise the importance of building a family that embodies *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* (tranquillity, love, and compassion) (Hidayatullah & Moechthar, 2023; Hidayatullah et al., 2023), which is believed to be achievable only when both partners share the same faith. Interfaith marriage is seen as detrimental to one's faith and contrary to the objectives of marriage in Islam, leading to prohibitions by religious authorities such as the Indonesian Ulama Council and Majelis Central Leader of *Muhammadiyah*. From a legal perspective, Indonesia's national law, particularly Law No. 1 of 1974, requires marriage between individuals of the same religion, reflecting the state's commitment to religious harmony and freedom of religion, which includes adhering to religious laws that often prohibit interfaith marriage (Elmali-Karakaya, 2022; Jawad & Elmali-Karakaya, 2020; Sion, 2023). Socially, interfaith marriage is considered to create challenges, including potential conflicts and difficulties in maintaining marital harmony, as religious differences can lead to misunderstandings and disputes. Moreover, it is pertinent to mention that the scholarly consensus, both classical and modern, regarding Muslim women marks another restricting factor and combines with cultural and historical context, namely that it is not permitted for Muslim women to marry men of other religions because this may affect their practice of Islam and their family life. Also, the state intervenes in such marriages in order to maintain compliance with civil and religious standards, thus ensuring the social and religious order. The interfaith marriage ban is a complex of religious, legal, and socio-cultural determinants intended to enhance both religious and social stability.

In Indonesia, the laws surrounding inter-religious marriage are quite fragile. The legal implications are intricate and stem from the fact that there are different courts that possess different jurisdictions. There exists a legal gap for people who practise different faiths from getting married and this restriction encroaches upon the right to family, and the freedom of religion in Indonesia as stated in the Penal Code of 1945. Supreme Court Decision No. Ester J. Ranum 1400K/Pdt/1986 suggests there is a possible path available for people who wish to marry under different religions as it provides that they can apply to court and seek a decree for marriage registration, however this does not allow for similar marriage registration (Pelu et al., 2022; Salam et al., 2024; Thahir, 2024). In the case of the constitutional court, which has been rated the highest in handling issues which touch on the Constitutional Review, upheld the law on the prohibition of inter-religious marriage during the case of Manhajussunni and Anis Hidayah Vs Islamic Faith Society decision No, 68/PUU-XII/2014, the reason given was that it was against religious and moral principles and also against the provisions of Islamic law. Such a decision confirms the notion of *lex superior derogat legi inferiori* from the fact that the decrees of the constitutional court are stronger due to the fact that it articulates intent to legislate, rather than lower-level regulations. Because of this view, conflicting interpretations of the same principle and different decisions have resulted in legal ambiguity when the same principle would have been applied to couples of a different faith. The prohibition of interfaith marriages poses constraints for several facets of family law including the illegitimacy of children born from such marriages in Islamic law, inheritance rights, property rights, maintenance, and joint property. Interfaith marriages continue to happen and are a warning of changing trends in society, but the country does not budge from enhancing religious interest and the first principle of Pancasila

(Husain et al., 2024; Iskandar, 2024; Qohar et al., 2022). The law on population administration engages in the registration of such marriages but based on a court ruling; as such, it is limited to resolving the legal issues such couples go through in Indonesia with a consideration of socio-cultural dynamics (Al-Thabari, 2009).

Interfaith marriages present a unique situation for people. They can lead to heightened internal and external tensions, impact personal and relational goals, and ultimately alter someone's level of life satisfaction. Furthermore, the psychological effects extend beyond individuals and can reverberate through families. For instance, disputes regarding the religion that children should be brought up in can cause strain in families and give birth to lifelong psychological disorders (Candra et al., 2022). On a greater scale, interfaith marriages cause more social rifts and hinder integration into multicultural societies. And as a byproduct, these rifts and divisions further increase social tension and decrease societal unity. A lot of these strains and societal tensions arise due to the psychological turmoil people go through, be it a strain from wanting to marry a partner but being objectively unable to due to religious differences or feeling ostracised from the community. In addition, in a lot of societies, interfaith couples face immense social pressure to conform to one religious view which ultimately exacerbates their anxiety. Research shows that the ongoing struggle of mental health perspective against religion will always be a contentious issue which will make the application of providing mental health care to patients contested (Indrayanti et al., 2024). Indeed, certain people may encounter the problem of identity crisis by adopting different religious practices while going against their will, leading to internal conflicts and emotional trauma. Therefore, the psychological impact of interfaith marriage is profound, affecting not only the individuals directly involved but also their families and the wider community.

#### ***Exegesis of Surah Al-Baqarah Verse 221 and Surah Al-Maidah Verse 5 on Interfaith Marriage***

The prohibition of interfaith marriage based on the Qur'anic verse "ولا تتكحوا المشركات حتى يؤمنَّ" indicates that initially, this verse generally forbade Muslim men from marrying polytheist women, which included idol worshippers, Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and others. However, an exception was later introduced in the Qur'an, allowing marriage with women of *Ahl al-Kitab*, as stated in the verse "والمحصنات من الذين "أوتوا الكتاب من قبلكم إذا اتبتموهن أجورهنَّ". According to Al-Thabari and other exegetes, the origin of this prohibition was aimed at avoiding the influence of polytheistic beliefs in Muslim life. However, it was later exempted for women of *Ahl al-Kitab* because they possessed holy scriptures and acknowledged monotheism, albeit in a different context from Islam (Al-Thabari, 2000). Therefore, although the basis of the prohibition remains, tolerance for marriage with women of *Ahl al-Kitab* was introduced under certain conditions. Subsequent discussions among scholars and exegetes, including the explanations of Ibn Abbas, show differences in understanding and application of this verse, illustrating how interpretations can evolve and adapt to changing social and legal contexts. Al-Qurtubi also explains that this decision should be viewed in a broader context to avoid division and promote unity among Muslims while acknowledging clear boundaries that must not be crossed concerning marriage with non-People of the Book (Al-Qurthubî, 1993).

Ibn Kathir regards marrying polytheist women as idol worshippers, bans them and explains to us that this was an instruction from Allah directly to Muslims. It is discussed further by elaborating that a Muslim should not wed a polytheist until she converts to Islam. In any case, such women who are of the People of the Book and continue being chaste can be married without the condition of first converting to Islam (Qutub, 1961). According to Ibn Kathir, Allah prohibited attachment in any form with polytheists initially, but later *Mut'a* was specifically permitted for women in the case of the People of the Book. It is understood that these women practice monotheism outside the Church in reality, although there are significant differences between them. Various other narratives and traditions have further strengthened this understanding, such as in the case of Talhah, Hudhayfah and other companions of the Prophet who claimed marrying women of the People of the Book to have been true. This is in defiance of Umar bin Khattab and other figures who expressed concern about a decreased inclination to marry Muslim women, especially if the principle of permissibility for marrying the Women of the Book is acknowledged to have been established. Additionally, there is a need to complement Al-Baghawi and Al-Mas'ud (1989) in this regard; Ibn Kathir explains that when looking for a partner for life, the best criterion to be selected is their commitment to Islam and not their beauty, wealth or social class. Such material or physical attractions may be enticing but do not ensure contentment or moral and spiritual relevance in family structure.

According to Al-Qurtubi, the prohibition on marrying polytheist women in Islam is very strict and based on Qur'anic verses. Al-Qurtubi discusses that Muslims are not allowed to marry polytheist women until they believe. He explains that a believing Muslim woman is better than a polytheist woman, even if the latter possesses physical attractiveness or other appealing attributes (Al-Qurtubi, 2007). Al-Qurtubi also explains that initially, all non-Muslim women were included in this prohibition. Still, later, a specific exception was made for women of the People of the Book, i.e., Jews and Christians. This discussion also highlights that there is debate among scholars about the interpretation of this verse, particularly whether the verse in Surah Al-Baqarah that prohibits marriage with polytheist women was abrogated by the verse in Surah Al-Ma'idah that permits marriage with women of the People of the Book. Al-Qurtubi states that according to some scholars, including Ibn Abbas and Malik bin Anas, initially, marriage with polytheist women was prohibited but later changed except for women of the People of the Book. Another opinion, held by Qatadah and Said bin Jubayr, considers that the prohibition was general for all non-believer women. Still, the verse in Surah Al-Ma'idah specifically clarifies and excludes women of *Ahl al-Kitab* (Abū Dāwud, 2009; Ibn Anas, 1991). Al-Qurtubi also mentions that although marriage with women of *Ahl al-Kitab* is allowed, some scholars, including himself, view it as not recommended or less favourable from a social and religious perspective. Al-Qurtubi concludes by explaining that it is important for a Muslim to choose a believing partner to maintain lineage and the integrity of faith within the family.

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, in his exegesis, addresses the issue of the prohibition on marrying polytheist women and the guidance that a believing woman is better than a polytheist woman. Al-Razi elaborates that marrying a polytheist woman might bring worldly benefits while marrying a believing woman brings benefits in the hereafter. Although both types of benefits are valuable, the benefits of the hereafter are of greater importance. Therefore, he understands that even though there is potential permission to marry a polytheist woman, greater wisdom and goodness lie in choosing a believing woman. Furthermore, al-Razi explains that a believing woman should not marry a non-believing man in any form. Regarding children born from interfaith marriages, al-Razi discusses concerns that the child might be influenced by disbelief, indirectly leading to hell, a view referring to the broader implications of marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims. He also notes that love and intimacy in marriage can cause one party — Muslim or non-Muslim — to be influenced to adopt the other's religion. However, if a non-Muslim converts to Islam due to such influence, it is considered a spiritual goal for the Muslim partner. To call towards hell, al-Razi explains that this means they (non-Muslims) bring habits and beliefs that lead to hell. He asserts that close interactions, such as in marriage, increase the risk of undesirable influences that might pull Muslims away from their faith. Al-Razi's view is very cautious about interfaith marriages, prioritising spiritual caution and religious virtue in choosing a life partner, with an emphasis on the afterlife over worldly goals.

The issue of a Muslim marrying a woman from among *Ahl al-Kitab* has been the subject of extensive study among scholars, with differing views and various interpretations based on the texts of the Qur'an and hadith. Al-Qurtubi explains that the verse in Surah Al-Maidah that mentions 'women who guard their honour against among those who were given the book before you' indicates the permissibility of marrying chaste-free women from among the people of the book (Al-Qurtubi, 2007; Basid, 2022). He also notes that most scholars agree that the women in question are those who are not in a state of war (*harbiyah*), with the permissibility of this marriage being specific to women who guard themselves against adultery. Mujahid is of the opinion that this permissibility extends to any free woman, whether a believer or a woman of the Book. At the same time, female slaves of *Ahl al-Kitab* are not included in this rule, as stated in Sura An-Nisa verse 25.

Al-Baghawi quoted Ibn Abbas as saying that the women of *Ahl al-Kitab* who are permissible to marry are those who are under covenant (*dhimmi*) and not in a state of hostility, which is supported by the view of other scholars that the context of this marriage is safer in the area of *dhimmis*. For Al-Baghawi, the meaning of 'women who guard their honour' refers to women who guard themselves against sin and adultery, as explained by Ash-Sha'bi (Al-Baghawi, 1997). In addition, this verse also warns those who do not believe so that their deeds will not be in vain. Abu Al-Haytham added that this verse confirms that anyone who denies faith will lose the value of his deeds.



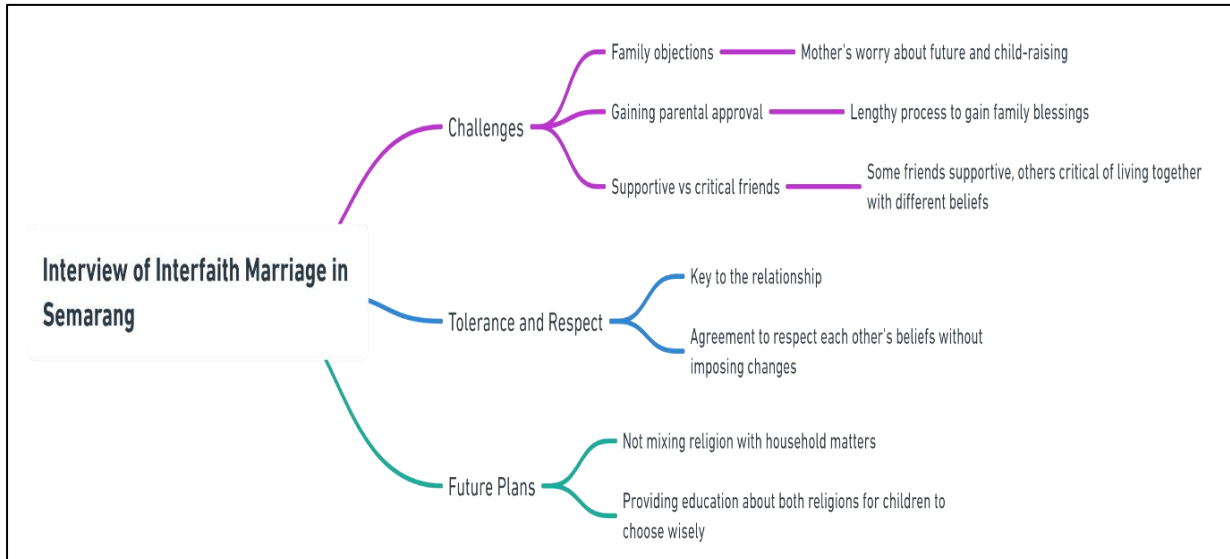
Imam Al-Shafi'i, along with other scholars such as Ibn Mundhir and Ibn Abd al-Barr, supported this view of the permissibility of marriage based on scholarly consensus (*ijma'*). They were of the view that a Muslim may marry a Christian woman who is free and not hostile to Islam, but a Christian may not marry a Muslim woman (Maghnīyah, 2008). The narrations of the Companions also support this view, such as Umar ibn Khattab, who stated that it is permissible for a Muslim to marry a woman of the Book who maintains her honour. Even Uthman bin Affan once married the daughter of *Al-Farafishah Al-Kalbiyah*, who was originally a Christian but eventually converted to Islam.

Al-Zuhayli also emphasised the importance of this permissibility with certain conditions, especially ensuring that the woman of the book one marries is free and maintains chastity (al-Zuhaili, 1997; Al-Zuhayli, 2000; Zuhaili, 2010). However, he and many other scholars advise that Muslim women should be favoured as partners. This is because marriage to a Muslim woman is considered safer for the religion, helps the continuation of good offspring, and preserves the honour of Muslim women. If a Muslim marries a woman of the Book, Al-Zuhayli advises the father to ensure the religious education of his children so that they remain in the faith. If they cannot be enrolled in an Islamic school, then learning at home through a teacher is also recommended to keep them firm in their faith. Hence, although marriage to a woman of the book is permissible, scholars agree that marrying a Muslim woman is preferable to preserve religion and generations (Az-Zuhaili, 2013).

## Discussion

### *Response of Interfaith Marriage in Semarang*

Interfaith marriage remains a challenging topic in Indonesia, especially for couples in Semarang. In this interview, Budi and Ratna (pseudonyms), a married couple of different faiths, share their experiences in navigating differences, seeking family approval, and maintaining harmony in their household (Budi, 2024), “When I decided to marry my partner of a different faith, many challenges arose, both from our families and the surrounding environment”, said Budi (a pseudonym), a man from Semarang who married his partner from a different religion. He added, “Initially, our families objected. My mother was worried about our future and how we would raise our children”. Budi explained that one of the biggest challenges was gaining parental approval. “It took a long time to convince our families, especially our parents, that our love is genuine and can withstand religious differences”, he said. He also mentioned that they had to go through a lengthy process before finally receiving family blessings. “Except for our families, some of our friends were really nice and supported us while others were critical. They said: “Will you two be able to live together while holding on to a completely different set of beliefs?”. So, we think that tolerance is a fundamental part of this relationship. So, we said that we would respect each other’s beliefs but would not be able to alter them. In comparison, his spouse, Ratna (a pseudonym), had the same viewpoints. “I’m positive that as long as there’s love and respect between us, the religious differences should not matter”, she said. They spoke of concrete agreements, for instance, not combining religion and family life which would allow their children to select their own faith as they grew older. “We will be teaching them both religions so that they can make an informed decision”.



**Figure 1.** Shows Interview of Interfaith Marriage in Semarang

Realities reveal that interfaith marriages in Semarang are faced with many challenges owing to the experiences of the couples involved. Such couples are likely to face rejection and worries, especially from their families, particularly parents, due to their concern about their welfare and even the welfare of their future children. In most cases, obtaining family approval takes a long time and requires breaking much verbal assurance that the couple's love can overcome the religious differences. In addition to family pressures, there are also friends whose opinions diverge from the views of the couple resulting from the nature of their interfaith marriage. Some friends are supportive while others are critical.

This is why, as they try to survive, couples emphasise tolerance and respect for each other. For instance, they do not seek to change each other's religious affiliations and do their best to create a balanced atmosphere at home. For instance, one couple suggested allowing their children to choose which faith to follow but agreed to inform the children about both faiths and some of the principal tenets of each (Budi, 2024). Such couples have been able to maintain their relationships with each other in Semarang despite being pressured by society due to their interfaith marriages by being committed, communicative, and respectful of each other.

In Indonesia, a strikingly multicultural country, interfaith marriage is a prominent topic of controversy, and the video *Interfaith Marriage in Semarang* is one of the divisive issues. The YouTube video contained early references to comments made by Semarang netizens. Content analyses of the video and comments made by the netizens will provide data regarding society's views on interfaith marriage in Semarang.

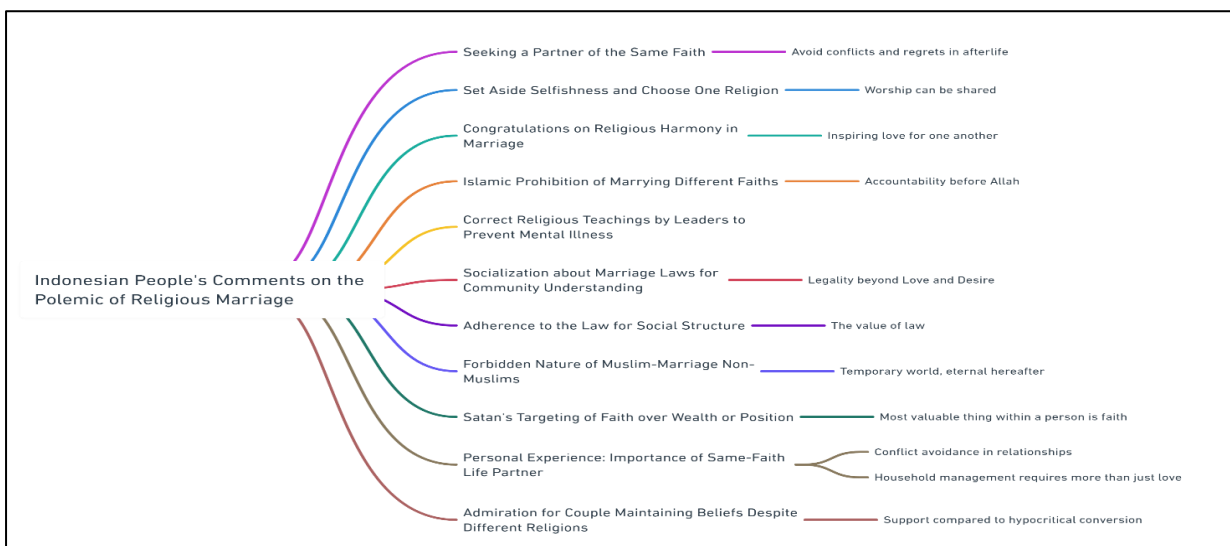
The video contains close-up takes of an interfaith wedding which has gained a lot of attention on social media. In the 13-second clip, shared on TikTok, it shows the bride wearing a hijab and a Muslim wedding dress, while the groom is dressed in a black suit. Something that stands out in the video is the church where the ceremony took place; there are two people inside the room, a pastor and a man in a *peci*.

Subsequent to the video's dissemination, *tribunjateng.com* reached out to Ahmad Nurkholis, a counsellor who had been assisting the couple. Ahmad confirmed that the viral marriage occurred the previous Saturday and revealed that the couple had undergone two years of intensive counselling with him before their marriage. Notably, this couple was the 1,425th interfaith pair he had assisted. Ahmad explained that the legal requirements for interfaith marriages are identical to those for regular marriages.

He noted that many couples hesitate to marry due to fears stemming from religious differences. According to Ahmad, while some individuals accept the possibility of interfaith marriages, others strongly oppose them, reflecting broader societal debates. Ultimately, he emphasised that the decision rests on the personal beliefs and discretion of the individuals involved.

**Table 1.** Indonesian People's Comments on the Polemic of Interfaith Marriage

No.	Commentator	Commentary
1.	Informant 1 (Netizen 1)	Therefore, if you are seeking a partner, find someone of the same faith, Muslim with Muslim, Christian with Christian, <i>etc.</i> , to avoid conflicts and regrets later on, especially regrets in the afterlife.
2.	Informant 2 (Netizen 2)	Set aside selfishness... and choose one religion so that worship can still be shared.
3.	Informant 3 (Netizen 3)	Congratulations to both of you; may your union last until you are old and always healthy. This exemplifies Indonesia's religious harmony and is inspiring, encouraging us to love one another.
4.	Informant 4 (Netizen 4)	<i>Astaghfirullah...</i> seek a partner of the same faith, as everyone will be held accountable before Allah.
5.	Informant 5 (Netizen 5)	Although this may seem trivial, it is strictly prohibited in Islam. May Allah always bless us... <i>Ameen</i> .
6.	Informant 6 (Netizen 6)	Islamic religious leaders must provide correct religious teachings... so that their community does not suffer from mental illness.
7.	Informant 7 (Netizen 7)	<i>Astaghfirullah. nauzubillah</i> , may this not happen in my family or my descendants. <u>Because in Islam, marrying someone of a different faith is akin to committing adultery.</u>
8.	Informant 8 (Netizen 8)	Awareness needs to be spread about marriage laws so that the community better understands the legality of marriage, which is not just a matter of love, as the line between love and desire is very thin.
9.	Informant 9 (Netizen 9)	The law remains the law; do not play with the law. Without it, where would our social structure be led?
10.	Informant 10 (Netizen 10)	It is forbidden for Muslims to marry non-Muslims, however unfortunate it may be. For the sake of love, some are willing to abandon their faith, <i>na'uzubillah</i> . Remember, this world is temporary, but the hereafter is eternal.
11.	Informant 11 (Netizen 11)	Satan will never steal a person's wealth or position, but Satan always targets one's faith because Satan knows that the most valuable thing within a person is their faith.
12.	Informant 12 (Netizen 12)	I remember when I had a boyfriend; I was Muslim, and he was non-Muslim. Initially, everything was calm between us, but after a few months, we often argued about religion, and every meeting ended in discord due to our differing beliefs. Eventually, our relationship became incompatible, and we parted ways. That experience made me realize I want a husband of the same faith... look for a life partner who shares your path and art because if you are not aligned, there will be conflicts, from minor to major ones. <u>After all, running a household requires more than just love.</u>
13.	Informant 13 (Netizen 13)	Although this is highly discouraged in Islam, I admire this couple for maintaining their beliefs and continuing their relationship despite their different religions. I support them more than I would if one of them hypocritically converted just to get married. I hope their union remains strong and enduring.



**Figure 2.** Comments by Indonesians on the Polemic of Interfaith Marriage

From the data on comments by the Indonesian society regarding interfaith marriage, the majority shows a lack of support for the concept. This opinion is generally based on strong religious beliefs, with some commentators stating that interfaith marriage can have negative consequences not only in this world but also in the hereafter. They emphasise the importance of finding a partner of the same faith to avoid conflict and maintain spiritual harmony in the household. These comments reveal the most common view which prevails in this society, namely, that religion is of the utmost importance when selecting a life partner and when entering into marriage. In contrast, there are supporters of interfaith marriage, who accept and admire interfaith couples for their ability to sustain marriages. Such comments underscore the virtues of peace and tolerance that many differences echo as part of Indonesia's sociological pluralism and multi-religiousness. A few comments however are worried about the prevailing ignorance of policy and religious matters in the society and proposed structures for interfaith marriages that would require a proper communication campaign and education of the first assets of the church. Overall, this analysis of comments presents a combination of commitment to religious norms and social tolerance values in relation to interfaith marriage that nurture the developments and complexities of interspersed Indonesian society.

### *The Qur'anic Contribution to the Controversy of Interfaith Marriage in Semarang*

In Semarang, interfaith marriage presents a more intricate and difficult situation. Such unions usually confront problems in the aspects of family approval and the greater social setting. For example, it is narrated that Budi and Ratna (pseudonyms) had difficulties in getting their parents' approval to marry. Budi's parents first opposed the marriage on the grounds of potential future scenarios or even as to how the children would be raised. Yet they kept on trying to explain to their family members why religion should not serve as a hindrance to their happiness. In due course, they were finally rewarded with an approval after a long struggle. While some friends provided assistance, other parts of them began to wonder how stable the family would be because of their differing beliefs. Yet, the couple chose to prioritise tolerance and mutual respect without attempting to alter each other's beliefs. Indonesian society's views on interfaith marriage are quite varied (Budi, 2024). The majority of public commentary reflects disapproval, grounded in a strong religious belief that interfaith marriage can negatively impact family spirituality. Conversely, some voices advocate for values of harmony and mutual respect, showing tolerance towards interfaith couples as part of Indonesia's multi-cultural social reality.

The interpretation and application of the Qur'an and Islamic jurisprudence significantly influence the controversy of interfaith marriage in Semarang. The Qur'an permits marriage between Muslim men and women of the People of the Book, but this has become a debated issue in Indonesia due to concerns about Christianization and the preservation of Islamic identity. The *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI) issued a religious edict (*fatwa*) in 1980 explicitly prohibiting interfaith marriage, citing the principle of preventing harm overachieving benefit (*maslahah*). While this fatwa satisfactorily attends to the provisions of Islamic law theory as above, it equally captures aspects of social change with a view to curbing adverse effects on the Muslim society. Nevertheless, Indonesia's legal system, such as Law No. 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage, does not prohibit the practice, and with such omission there are fewer legal conundrums, and the system requires us to seek the courts of law for the issuance of marriage permits and registration of these marriages. (Dārimiy, 2015; Nuryanti & Ahmad, 2022; Tirmīziy, 1996). The *Baḥsul Masa'il Nahdlatul Ulama* (BMNU) also endorses a position that bans inter-religious marriage, further consolidating the stance that such marriages are wrong and unacceptable. Such geopolitical and socio-legal circumstances together give rise to complex situations and environments, where people or societies that are interfaith require marriage and face a lot of challenges, both socially and in a legal and institutional setting. Furthermore, social customs related to marriage in Semarang, such as *walimah* (wedding feasts), serve as a lens through which the locals understand the significance of religious affiliation in a marriage and Islam's conservatism. Therefore, the Qur'an's impact is apparent in terms of the social and legal aspects of marriage in Semarang; thus, the society's attitude towards intermarriage is well regulated in accordance with Sharia principles and values.

Interfaith marriages and their legal aspects are handled differently in different regions. For instance, in Indonesia, one can argue that interfaith marriage means obtaining consent from the authorities, but that does lead to legal loopholes under Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974. With regards to article 2(1) of the marriage law, interfaith marriage is somewhat a blurred situation: it is deemed lawful to marry as long as done according to one's faith. In Indonesia, to an extent, one can apply for an interfaith marriage but only with court approval. However, in no way does this deem an interfaith marriage lawful, for it only acts as a measure which permits registration of interfaith marriage. Hence, in compliance with the general legal point of view, this act does not violate the Marriage Law. Moreover, the interfaith marriage ruling is still debated, and considering Indonesia's standpoint on pluralism, I think it is relevant for you to look at my case where the interfaith marriage ruling was rejected by the Constitutional Court in decision No 68/PUU-XII/2014. The idea emphasises the overarching concern with preserving individual freedom while defining the boundaries of marriage in modern Indonesia. Surabaya District Court Decision No 905/Pdt.p/2022/PN.sby is another verdict that clearly states that all interfaith marriages should be seen in light of religious laws. Additionally, Article 66 of the Marriage Law provides that interfaith marriages can be registered by court order, thus providing both parties with legal certainty and protection. In contrast, there are countries like Canada, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands which have a more liberal approach towards intermarriage and may serve as a guide for the rest of Indonesia's lawmakers since it is a vast area of research. Legal issues include the right to bequeath property in addition to the motherhood of the children from such marriages. India faces similar obstacles, as evidenced by the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Act of 2020, which, like other laws, bans marriage conversion and interfaith marriage mainly to deter unlawful men and women. There are definite indications within the legal framework of Indonesia for dealing with interfaith marriage; for instance, statutory enactments and decisions of the courts of law have been made, but the subject is yet to be resolved completely and the provisions detailing it are either too restrictive or too vague (Hastuti et al., 2022; Zin et al., 2019).

Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:5 and Surah Al-Baqarah 2:221 shed a little light on the Islamic view concerning interfaith marriage, with respect to gender. The Quran first prohibits Muslim men from marrying women who practice polytheism, such as idol worshippers or even followers of other religions like Judaism, Christianity or Zoroastrianism. However, it later allows marriage with Muslim women from the people of the book, teaching in prescribed conditions. Some scholars like Al-Thabari (Jarir, 1992) explain this view by saying that Muslims within Judaism and Christianity are to some extent monotheistic. Contrarily, prohibition exists for marriage with polytheists in order to curtail any social and religious discord that may manifest due to the differences in faith and approaches. Ibn Kathir (Ibn Kathir, 1978) and Al-Qurtubi are some of the notable scholars who provide insights on this guidance by stating that marriage to *Ahl al-Kitab* was permitted so long as the woman is able to abide by her faith and does not act immorally. They, however, stress that such marriages ought to be avoided for the same reason as above, that Islam reigns supreme and the family remains intact. This debate illustrates the manner in which Islamic law changes with society while still upholding the fundamental objective of ensuring that there is religious fidelity in marriage.

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and other scholars reiterate the necessity of interfaith marriage, arguing that the selection of a partner from among believers would promote the stability of both spiritual and psychological health (Jasas, n.d.). Razi explains that there is no prohibition on marriage with *Ahl al-Kitab* women; however, there is greater merit in marrying a Muslim woman so that the religion is not jeopardised by going into disarray. Razi and Al-Qurtubi point out that children of such marriages ought to be provided with Islamic education at a very young age so as to avoid the problems a diversified religious affiliation would otherwise create. Al-Baghawi (2003) and Al-Zuhayli (2000) make observations on other aspects of interfaith marriages, particularly the need to remain a virgin and the vows taken. Also, *Ahl al-Kitab* non-Muslim women are not recommended as they may weaken the faith of future generations and all the issues that are associated with it. Thus, whereas some verses do allow selective measures, these scholars recommend taking a Muslim partner in order to avoid losing the maqasid al-shari'ah of the preservation of religion and offspring.

## Conclusion

This study attempts to analyse the complications and social issues arising out of interreligious marriage in Semarang, while incorporating the Muslim perspective as a parameter in the controversy. The general Indonesian societal perception of interreligious marriage is principally affected by underlying religious, legal, and cultural contexts which tend to view such marriages as disruptive to family and religious cohesion. In this perspective, basic doctrines of Islamic law on inter-religious marriage which hold the maintenance of religion (حفظ الدين) and offspring (حفظ النسل) to be among ten important doctrines of *maqasid al-shari'ah* are integral. These tenets confirm that marriage is not only a legal matter, but it is primarily to guard religious values in families and to pass on the faith by propagating proper education in those families. The Qur'an for its part allows some latitude in the case of Muslim men wishing to marry women of the Book under certain provisos, but with much emphasis on bearing the consequences as they relate to the balance of family customary faith. This research aims at reasserting the application of *maqasid al-shari'ah* in interreligious marriage context such as Indonesia whereby this paper specifically pinpoints the contradictions present in Qur'anic interpretations and the practices of these interpretations in legal and social spheres. Such knowledge gap has been brought into existence by the previously created inconsistencies and underlying facts and this gap is addressed in the following research by investigating how *maqasid al-shari'ah* can be applied to emerging issues and disputes posed in an interfaith marriage context. Through a Qur'anic exegesis approach, this study demonstrates that the principles of *maqasid al-shari'ah* underscore the importance of maintaining religious unity within families, regarded as the fundamental units in Islamic society. In conclusion, the Qur'an's contribution to the interfaith marriage controversy in Semarang extends beyond the normative level, offering a framework for society to navigate religious differences while safeguarding religious stability and family welfare in line with *maqasid al-shari'ah* principles.

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