

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE CONCEPT OF RELIGIOUS LITERACY

#### A. Literacy Concept

Etymologically, literacy can be interpreted in three meanings, namely: (1) the ability to read and write; (2) knowledge or skills in a particular field or activity; or (3) a person's ability to process information and knowledge to survive skillfully.<sup>84</sup> More simply, literacy can also be interpreted as the quality or state of being literate, where literacy itself means being educated, cultured, and able to read and write.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, literacy according to UNESCO's definition is the ability to distinguish, understand, interpret, create and communicate various texts or objects.<sup>86</sup>

In its development, literacy cannot be separated from the role of libraries as a source of knowledge that is a marker of a civilization. An example is the 18th century, known as the Age of Enlightenment. The century was characterized by the progress of libraries and literacy, which is related to people's habit of acquiring knowledge through reading and writing. In both the Western and Islamic worlds, literacy is a milestone in the rise of civilization. In the Islamic world, for example, the iqra' command found in Q.S Al 'Alaq shows how important knowledge is. This command is linked to the emergence of Islamic civilization through the revelation given to Prophet Muhammad. In addition, the Middle Ages - namely the VII to XIII centuries - are remembered as the golden age of Islamic civilization. At that time,

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<sup>84</sup> "Literasi," in *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Jakarta: Badan Bahasa Kemdikbud RI, 2016).

<sup>85</sup> "Literacy," in *Merriam-Webster.Com*, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/literacy>; "Literate," in *Merriam-Webster.Com*, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/literate>.

<sup>86</sup> Yusuf, *Literasi Keagamaan*, 5.

Baghdad and Spain became centers of knowledge marked by the existence of Baitul Hikmah institutions, libraries and study centers that represented the wealth of knowledge. Cordova at that time was also a metropolitan city in Andalusia that had a public library with a collection of more than four hundred thousand books. In fact, the mosques in this city also functioned as educational centers, besides of course being a place of worship. The spirit of the *iqra'* command in Q.S. Al 'Alaq has moved people to live life based on the word of God written in the Quran rather than following myths and superstitions that are part of oral culture.<sup>87</sup>

The practice of reading and understanding religious texts is an important component in the development of civilizations of major religions around the world. In the 19th century, in the tradition of the Church, the Bible became the main activity in Sunday School. At that time, there was a distinction between reading activities and writing activities. This difference was due to the difference in the way of generating thoughts. Writing activity is the activity of reconstructing one's thoughts. Therefore, writing activity is a profane activity, while reading activity is considered as an activity to internalize religious values through reading God's revelation. Reading is identified with obedience, therefore reading is considered more sacred than writing activities. In contrast, writing is usually done outside of religious fields, such as politics, commerce, and office administration. This secularization between reading and writing activities marks the existence of church-sponsored literacy programs. Eventually, this literacy program was replicated en masse in school learning programs. This was due to the fact that the goal of formal education at the time was

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<sup>87</sup> Sofie Dewayani, *Suara Dari Marjin: Literasi Sebagai Praktik Sosial*, Cetakan pertama (Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2017), 2–3.

to produce religious and obedient youth. Formal education was only meant to improve the ability to write well, master grammar and rewrite the thoughts of others. At that time, schools did not facilitate writing activities that involved critical and creative thinking.<sup>88</sup>

Generally, two conflicting models - the ideological model and the autonomy model - are used to define literacy. Jack Goody introduced his literacy thesis in 1972 by referring to the autonomy model for the first time. This model places literacy as an independent variable that affects a person's cognitive and social capacities. According to this autonomy model, writing and reading are neutral and context-free processes that aim to achieve literacy status in society. In this sense, literacy is taught as a skill of composing and dissecting (mainly printed) texts. In this context, it is the fields of education and psychology that often use the autonomy model, and see literacy as a cognitive process. An example of this cognitive process is when this model teaches students certain mechanistic techniques so that they can understand texts and communicate their opinions articulately. Basically, it argues that these comprehension strategies will benefit students from different social, cultural and age backgrounds. Today, this autonomy model has dominated language arts teaching in the country, as it has also done for literacy educators in developed countries.<sup>89</sup>

Considered to obscure the ideological and social components that shape literacy practices, the autonomy model, which tends to ignore student subjectivity, has been criticized. From there, a second model emerged, a model of literacy that is seen as a social practice and the result of ideologies that develop in society. This

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<sup>88</sup> Dewayani, *Suara Dari Marjin*, 4.

<sup>89</sup> Dewayani, *Suara Dari Marjin*, 6–8.

second model became known as the ideological model. This second model emerged based on the results of Brian Street's anthropological research in Iran in 1995 which concluded that the position of individuals in society in the process of reading and writing is based on power relations.<sup>90</sup> Referring to that second model, Barton and Hamilton<sup>91</sup> give us some important ideas about literacy as a social act. Firstly, literacy can be defined as a set of social practices derived from events involving written texts; Secondly, different types of literacy emerge in different aspects of life; Thirdly, social institutions and power relations shape literacy practices, where certain literacies are considered more dominant and influential than others; Fourthly, social goals and cultural practices are closely related to literacy practices; Fifthly, literacy takes place in the past; and Sixthly, literacy practices are constantly evolving, and informal processes of learning and meaning-making often enable the acceptance of new types of literacy. By looking at literacy as a social practice, we can see how literacy activities can influence social situations. For example, certain social groups may see literacy as power or a threat.<sup>92</sup>

On the other hand, literacy, both as a skill and a social practice, can bring a person to a better social level in life. One example of cultural capital that can be used to improvise habits is literacy, according to Bourdieu's French sociological theory. Cultural capital can be considered a means to obtain a certain socio-cultural status. Habitus, on the other hand, can be defined as any kind of rules, norms, and values that have been attached to a person's life so that they have an automatic ability to

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<sup>90</sup> Dewayani, *Suara Dari Marjin*, 6–8.

<sup>91</sup> David Barton, Mary Hamilton, and Roz Ivanič, eds., *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*, Literacies (London ; New York: Routledge, 2000), 8.

<sup>92</sup> Dewayani, *Suara Dari Marjin*, 12.

make decisions. For example, if a person considers his social habits as second-class citizens, he will unconsciously behave like a second-class person. Cultural capital has the status of a cultural artifact that facilitates the improvisation of the habitus.<sup>93</sup>

## B. Religion Concept

Religion is a teaching and system that regulates human belief and devotion as a servant to God the Creator, along with norms relating to human life and their environment.<sup>94</sup> Religion can also be defined as: (1) a personal set or system of institutionalized religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices; (2) service and worship to God or the supernatural; (3) commitment or devotion to religious beliefs or observances; and (4) a cause, principle, or belief system held with passion and faith.<sup>95</sup> Meanwhile, religion, in Geertz's view, is:

*(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.*<sup>96</sup>

The concept of religion did not originally refer to a social genus or cultural type. The word was adapted from the Latin term *religio*, a term roughly equivalent to "rigor". *Religio* also comes close to meaning "rigor," "devotion," or "perceived obligation," since *religio* is the effect of a taboo, promise, curse, or transgression, even when it is not related to a deity. In ancient times in the West, and most likely in many or most cultures, there was recognition that some people worshipped different

<sup>93</sup> Dewayani, *Suara Dari Marjin*, 144.

<sup>94</sup> "Agama," in *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Jakarta: Badan Bahasa Kemdikbud RI, 2016), <https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entri/agama>.

<sup>95</sup> "Religion," in *Merriam-Webster.Com*, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religion>.

<sup>96</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 1966), 90.

gods with incompatible commitments to each other and that these people constituted social groups that could be rivals. In such contexts, we sometimes see the use of *nobis religio*, meaning "the way we worship.". However, *religio* has such a wide range of meanings that Augustine could have considered but rejected it as an appropriate abstract term for "the way one worships God" because the Latin term (like the Latin terms for "cult" and "service") is used for the observance of obligations in divine and human relationships.<sup>97</sup>

The most significant shift in the history of this concept was when people began to use *religio* as a genus, of which Christian and non-Christian groups were species. The concept of *religio*, understood as a social genus, was increasingly used by European Christians as they sought to categorize the various cultures they encountered as their empires moved into the Americas, South Asia, East Asia, Africa, and Oceania. In this context, with reports from missionaries and colonial administrators, the extension of the generic concept was expanded. The most influential example is that of anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917), who had a scientific interest in pre-Columbian Mexico. Like Herbert, Tylor sought to identify what all religions had in common, what he called the "minimal definition" of religion, and he proposed that its main characteristic was "belief in a spiritual being."<sup>98</sup>

Since the beginning of the 20th century, scholars of the history of religion have seen a third and final growth spurt in the expansion of the concept. The concept

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<sup>97</sup> Augustine and R. W. Dyson, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 251–53.

<sup>98</sup> Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 8.

of religion was expanded to include not only practices that connect people with one or more spirits, but also to include practices that connect people with “powers” or even with “forces” that lack mind, will and personality. We can see this shift in the work of William James, for example, when he wrote,

*Were one asked to characterize the life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto.*<sup>99</sup>

In short, we can think of the growth of the social genus version of the concept of religion as an analogy of three concentric circles—from theistic to polytheistic and then to cosmic criteria.<sup>100</sup>

In the 20th century, scholars of religion also saw the emergence of a very different approach. Religion was no longer defined in terms of the substantive elements to which it had previously been so strongly attached. A new concept of religion emerged in terms of its particular role in shaping people's lives, namely a “functional” definition. This functional approach can be seen in the thoughts of Emile Durkheim,<sup>101</sup> who defined religion as any system of practices that unites a number of people into a single moral community (whether or not the practices involve belief in an unusual reality). Durkheim's definition emphasizes the social function of creating solidarity. We can also look at Paul Tillich's functional approach,<sup>102</sup> which defines religion as anything of primary concern that serves to

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<sup>99</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, The Works of William James (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985), 43.

<sup>100</sup> “The Concept of Religion,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (blog), March 28, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concept-religion/>.

<sup>101</sup> Émile Durkheim, Carol Cosman, and Mark Sydney Cladis, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>102</sup> Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).

organize one's values (whether or not such concern involves belief in an unusual reality). Tillich's definition emphasizes the axiological function of providing orientation for one's life.<sup>103</sup>

It is sometimes assumed that defining religion as a social genus means treating it as universal, as something that appears in every human culture. It is true that some scholars have treated religion as pan-humanism. An example is when a scholar defines religion functionally, i.e. as beliefs and practices that produce social cohesion or as something that provides orientation in life, then religion mentions an inevitable feature of the human condition rather than an effect of religion's very existence. The universality of religion that is then discovered is not an invention, but a product of one's own definition. Nevertheless, as a social genus, religion can be present in more than one culture without being present in all of them, so one can define religion, both substantively and functionally, in ways that are not universal. Just as belief in disembodied spirits or cosmological order has existed in human history, for example, there are many people in the past and present who do not have an explicit view of the afterlife, supernatural beings, or metaphysics.<sup>104</sup>

Recently, some scholars have come up with quite reflective discourses related to religion. An example is Jonathan Z. Smith, who argues, "There is no data for religion." According to the man who popularized the term "locative religion," religion is merely a creation of scholars. It is created for the analytical purposes of the scholar through his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion

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<sup>103</sup> "The Concept of Religion."

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has no independent existence apart from the academy.<sup>105</sup> Next, there is Talal Asad, who adopts Michel Foucault's "genealogical" approach.<sup>106</sup> He sought to show that the concept of religion operating in contemporary anthropology has been shaped by assumptions that are both Christian (insofar as one regards belief as a mental state characteristic of all religions) and modern (insofar as one treats religion as essentially distinct from politics). Asad's Foucauldian point is that while people may have a wide range of religious beliefs, experiences, moods, or motivations, the mechanisms that instill them are the disciplinary techniques of an authoritative power, and for this reason, one cannot treat religion as a mere mental state.<sup>107</sup>

It is a common understanding that every religion emerges and comes complete with truth claims. It's just that religious adherents differ in how they see the truth.<sup>108</sup> By saying that one religion is the only true one, one will assume that the religion one adheres to is the only true one and that other religions are heretical and must be eradicated or converted because God condemns those who are heretical.<sup>109</sup> This claim of exclusivism and absolutism of truth is then supported by the juridical notion of "salvation," where each religion claims to be the only "soteriological space" where humans can find salvation, freedom, or enlightenment. With the doctrine of the "chosen people," for example, Judaism only accepts righteousness,

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<sup>105</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi.

<sup>106</sup> Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

<sup>107</sup> Talal Asad, "Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith's 'The Meaning and End of Religion,'" *History of Religions* 40, no. 3 (February 2001): 217, <https://doi.org/10.1086/463633>.

<sup>108</sup> Ahmad Zamakhsari, "Teologi Agama-Agama Tipologi Tripolar, Eksklusivisme, Inklusivisme Dan Kajian Pluralisme," *Tsaqofah* 18, no. 1 (June 28, 2020): 37, <https://doi.org/10.32678/tsaqofah.v18i1.3180>.

<sup>109</sup> "Tipologi Sikap Beragama," *Uinsgd.Ac.Id* (blog), July 2, 2012, <https://uinsgd.ac.id/tipologi-sikap-beragama/>.

piety, and salvation on the basis of a very limited ethnicity, namely the Jewish nation alone. Protestants, on the other hand, believe that only by faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as a ransom for inherited sin can one determine the status of godliness and salvation. Islam with the statement in QS. Ali Imran [3]:85, which means that Allah only accepts Islam and rejects other religions. Departing from the phenomenon of the struggle for truth and salvation claims, inclusivism emerges as a mediator between exclusivism and religious pluralism.<sup>110</sup> In contrast to Alan Race, who raises three typologies of religiousness, Komarudin Hidayat states that there are five types of religious attitudes: exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, eclecticism, and universalism. These types are more accurately considered prominent tendencies because they are not really separate from each other. This is because any religion or religious attitude can produce any of these five types.<sup>111</sup>

The first view, exclusivism, asserts that the truest teachings are only those of one's own religion and that other religions are heretical and must be eradicated or converted because God has cursed them and their adherents. This attitude is intrinsically flawed because it presupposes an ostensibly purely logical conception of truth and an uncritical attitude of epistemological naivety. Moreover, it carries the real danger of intolerance, arrogance, and contempt for others. Whereas according to the second perspective known as inclusivism, truth also exists outside of one's religion, even though it may not be as perfect as one's religion. There is also theological and faith tolerance, although there is still a danger of arrogance because only "you" are privileged with an all-encompassing vision and tolerant attitude, and

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<sup>110</sup> Zamakhsari, "Teologi Agama-Agama," 37.

<sup>111</sup> Hidayat, "Ragam Beragama," 119.

"you" determine the place of others in the universe. As for the third perspective, pluralism, also known as parallelism, has several formulations: (1) other religions are legitimate ways to reach the same truth; (2) other religions speak differently, but they are equally legitimate truths; or (3) every religion expresses an important part of the truth. This paradigm essentially argues that each religion has a unique way of salvation. In contrast to the fourth religious attitude, eclecticism seeks to select and bring together various aspects of religious teachings that are considered most suitable for him, so that religion becomes an eclectic mosaic in the end. Eclecticism is an understanding or school of philosophy that takes the best of all systems. Based on the phenomena we see, religious syncretism emerges as a result of eclecticist philosophy paying less attention to the context and validity of the concepts being combined.<sup>112</sup> Meanwhile, according to the fifth perspective, universalism argues that every religion is basically the same. It is just that, for historical-anthropological reasons, religions appear in plural forms.<sup>113</sup>

Based on research findings by Anindito Aditomo on religiosity and intolerance, especially in Indonesia, if religiosity leads to absolute thinking about religious rules, then intolerance will arise. This result shows that intolerance is not related to religious beliefs. Religious people will not be tolerant if their religious beliefs are not followed by absolutist thinking. This result supports the idea that the religiosity of religious people in Indonesia is diverse and heterogeneous. This diversity will be difficult to understand if religiosity is defined generically in the Western way. The concept of religious absolutism here means capturing the diversity

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<sup>112</sup> Lorens Bagus, *Kamus Filsafat* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1996), 181–82.

<sup>113</sup> "Tipologi Sikap Beragama."

in Indonesia. While religious people may be more inclined to absolutist thinking, that is not always true. Therefore, not all religious people have a tendency to be intolerant. This means that religion should be taught critically and not just dogmatically. This is done so that students get accustomed early on to the fact that there are differences in religious thoughts and beliefs.<sup>114</sup>

Religion and spirituality have deep roots in our psychology and culture, which in turn shape our understanding of existence, purpose, and interconnectedness. Whether through organized religion, personal faith, or a sense of universal kinship, humans are constantly searching for meaning beyond themselves. Religion, although it can be defined in different ways, provides a framework for interpreting human purpose, action, and self-understanding. Religious traditions have served throughout human history to inspire and justify a variety of actions and attitudes, ranging from the heroic to the heinous. Its influence remains strong in the 21st century, despite predictions that it will continue to decline with the rise of secular democracy and the continued advancement of science. Many local, national, and global events and environments have prominent religious dimensions that require careful and critical study in both contemporary and historical contexts. Understanding these religious dimensions requires a form of religious literacy provided by the academic study of religion. Religious literacy helps to enhance understanding of oneself, others and the world one lives in.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Anindito Aditomo, "Mengapa Orang Beragama Cenderung Intoleran?," *Riset Untuk Pendidikan* (blog), June 12, 2019, <https://risetpendidikan.home.blog/2019/06/12/mengapa-orang-beragama-cenderung-intoleran/>.

<sup>115</sup> AAR Board of Directors, "AAR Religious Literacy Guidelines: What U.S. College Graduates Need to Understand about Religion," *Aarweb.Org/* (blog), September 2019,

### C. Religious Literacy Concept

Prothero defines religious literacy as "the ability to understand and use the basic building blocks of a religious tradition—the terms, symbols, doctrines, practices, sayings, characters, metaphors, and essential narratives—in everyday life."<sup>116</sup> Moore defines religious literacy as the ability to see and analyze the fundamental intersections between religion and social, political, and cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will have: (1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts, beliefs, practices, and contemporary manifestations of some of the world's religious traditions as they emerged and continue to be shaped by social, historical, and cultural contexts; and (2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social, and cultural expressions across time and place. This understanding of religious literacy emphasizes a method of inquiry rather than relying solely on specific content knowledge, although familiarity with historical manifestations is an important foundation for understanding the intersection of religion with other dimensions of human social life.<sup>117</sup> Meanwhile, Adam Dinham and Matthew Francis conclude that religious literacy is located at the level of having knowledge of at least some religious traditions and an awareness of and ability to find out about others. The goal is to avoid stereotypes, relate to, respect, and learn from others, and build good relationships despite differences. It is a civic rather than religious endeavor and seeks to support a strong multi-religious

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<https://aarweb.org/AARMBR/AARMBR/Publications-and-News-/Guides-and-Best-Practices-/Teaching-and-Learning-/AAR-Religious-Literacy-Guidelines.aspx>.

<sup>116</sup> Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know and Doesn't* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 12.

<sup>117</sup> Diane L. Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education*, First edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 56, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-60700-2>.

society, which includes people from all faith traditions as well as those without, in a context of suspicion and anxiety about religion and belief.<sup>118</sup> According to the American Academy of Religion (AAR), religious literacy is the ability to understand and analyze how religion affects personal, social, political, professional, and cultural life.<sup>119</sup> Based on some of the definitions above, it can be concluded that religious literacy is more accurately understood as a framework that must be done in context. In this sense, it is better to talk about religious literacy in the plural than literacy in the singular.<sup>120</sup>

There are four principles that must be believed in religious literacy: (1) Religious expression is distinct from the study of religion; (2) religions are internally diverse as opposed to uniform; (3) religions grow and evolve over time as opposed to being ahistorical and static; (4) The influence of religion is embedded in all dimensions of culture, which contradicts the assumption that religion functions in a context separate from everything else, even in isolation, and only in the private sphere.<sup>121</sup>

The first and foremost principle is that "religious expression is different from religious studies." Scholars highlight the difference between the devotional expression of specific religious beliefs as normative and nonsectarian religious studies that ascribe religious legitimacy to diverse normative claims. The importance

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<sup>118</sup> Adam Dinham and Matthew Francis, eds., *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2016), 270.

<sup>119</sup> AAR Board of Directors, "AAR Religious Literacy Guidelines."

<sup>120</sup> Chris Seiple, Dennis R. Hoover, and W. Christopher Stewart, *Literasi Keagamaan Lintas Budaya: Anda, Mereka, Dan Apa Yang Dapat Dilakukan Bersama*, ed. Daniel Adipranata (Jakarta: Perkumpulan Institut Leimena, 2022), 31.

<sup>121</sup> "Core Principles," *Religion and Public Life* (blog), accessed February 24, 2024, <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/what-we-do/our-approach/core-principles>.

of this distinction is that it recognizes the validity of normative theological statements without equating them with universal truths about the tradition itself. Unfortunately, this distinction is often overlooked in public discourse on religion. An example is that there are still many contemporary debates about the role of women in Islam. In this case, there are actually various theological interpretations of the tradition that lead to different, and sometimes even antithetical, practices and statements. Equally common is that different communities will have similar practices but with diverse theological justifications. It is certainly appropriate for members of a given community to assert the orthodoxy (or orthopraxy) of their theological interpretation of the tradition, but it is important to recognize the difference between theological assertions of normativity and the factual truth that there are multiple legitimate perspectives. The latter represents nonsectarian religious studies and is the most appropriate approach to advancing public understanding of religion.<sup>122</sup>

The second principle is “religions are internally diverse,” which is a form of truism that requires explanation in common ways, where religious traditions and practices are often described as uniform. Besides the obvious formal differences in traditions represented by different sects or expressions (e.g., Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant for Christianity; Vaisnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, for Hinduism, etc.), there are differences within sects or expressions because religious communities function in different social and political contexts. One example is the debate over the role of women in Islam. This includes frequent statements such as “Buddhists are non-violent,” “Christians are against abortion,” and “Religion and

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<sup>122</sup> “Core Principles.”

science are incompatible.". All of these statements represent certain theological assertions that contradict the factual claims of the tradition itself.<sup>123</sup>

The third principle that "religion evolves and changes" is another truism but again requires explanation, as common practice represents religious traditions without social or historical context and solely (or primarily) through the expression of rituals and/or abstract beliefs. Religion exists in time and space and is constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by believers. For example, the Confucian concept of the "mandate from heaven" evolved within dynasties, geopolitical regions, and historical eras and continues to evolve to this day. Another example is that the practice of slavery has been justified and vilified by all three monotheistic traditions in different social and historical contexts.<sup>124</sup> A more specific example is the Southern Baptist Convention in the United States, which passed a series of resolutions in the 1970s supporting the moral legitimacy of abortion in certain cases and reversed the resolutions in 2003.<sup>125</sup>

The fourth principle, "Religious influences are embedded in culture," stems from the conception that religion consists of a collection of concepts, customs, values, and stories that are embedded in culture and cannot be understood in isolation from it. Just as religion cannot be understood in isolation from its cultural context, including politics, an understanding of culture must also consider its religious aspects. In the same way, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class, and religion always influence the interpretation and understanding of culture. Whether

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<sup>123</sup> "Core Principles."

<sup>124</sup> "Core Principles."

<sup>125</sup> "Southern Baptist Convention Resolutions on Abortion," *Johnstonsarchive.Net* (blog), November 7, 2010, <https://www.johnstonsarchive.net/baptist/sbcabres.html>.



explicit or implicit, religious influences can almost always be found when one asks “religious questions” about any given social or historical experience. An example is when political theorists highlight the ways that different interpretations of secularism have been shaped by diverse normative assumptions about Christianity. This is just one representation of a fundamental shift in political theory that challenges the legitimacy of the old assertion that religion can and should be confined to the private sphere and separated from political influence. Modernist claims predicting the decline of religious transnational political influence, first formalized in the seventeenth century, have been the basis for much modern political theory for centuries. Despite the ongoing global influence of religions in political life during this period of time, it only came about after the following events: (1) the Iranian Revolution in 1979; (2) the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent rise versus the widely predicted death of religion; and (3) the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks that political theorists in the West began to acknowledge the deeply problematic ways that religion and religious influence had been marginalized and oversimplified. This shift is welcome and paves the way for multi- and interdisciplinary collaborations with religious studies scholars across a wide range of social science inquiries to explore the complex and vitally important role that religion plays in the contemporary world.<sup>126</sup>

Factually, religious literacy can help connect different beliefs and cultures and build social cohesion among people of different religions.<sup>127</sup> Religious literacy, in that context, includes the following: (1) understanding of basic religious concepts

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<sup>126</sup> “Core Principles.”

<sup>127</sup> Yusuf, *Literasi Keagamaan*, 2.

and world religions; (2) awareness and appreciation of different religious traditions, rituals, and expressions; (3) understanding and interpretation of cultural expressions of religion in various contexts and times; and (4) implementation of different religious teachings based on borderless social, political, and cultural contexts.<sup>128</sup> In addition, religious literacy also has several objectives, which include (1) constructing multicultural and multi-religious awareness as a real reality of life; (2) sowing an understanding of the differences and similarities in the teachings of religions; and (3) significantly reducing the existence of truth claims, fanatical religious ways, intolerant behavior, community arrogance, and excessive fear of a group, all of which can trigger religious conflict.<sup>129</sup> In fact, religious literacy can be embedded in both religious and non-religious texts, implicitly or explicitly. Implicitly means that the literacy is not clearly illustrated and is not the main presentation. However, it can be represented through existing signs and language.

In the American context, the field of religious literacy crossed a threshold of public awareness in 2007, with the publication of several important books. At that time, many Americans began to realize that public education was incomplete without providing at least a basic knowledge of religion, and they challenged the widespread misconception of the constitutional separation of church and state as something that precluded the teaching of religion (from a nonsectarian point of view).<sup>130</sup>

The scope of religious literacy competencies, according to the American Academy of Religion (AAR), includes the following:<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Yusuf, *Literasi Keagamaan*, 6.

<sup>129</sup> Yusuf, *Literasi Keagamaan*, 42.

<sup>130</sup> Seiple, Hoover, and Stewart, *Literasi Keagamaan Lintas Budaya*, 27–32.

<sup>131</sup> AAR Board of Directors, “AAR Religious Literacy Guidelines.”

1. Have an accurate and reliable understanding of various religious practices and expressions;
2. Recognize internal diversity within religious traditions;
3. Recognize the process of religious formation from individual, group, to territorial experiences and histories and vice versa, religion shapes all of them;
4. Interpret the process of religious expression utilizing cultural symbols and artistic representations in each period and its context;
5. Distinguishing prescriptive or confessional statements produced by religion from analytical or descriptive statements.

Based on this scope, it can be understood that the objectives of religious literacy are:

(1) to foster skills and knowledge that enable graduates to participate—in an educated way—in social and community life; (2) to work effectively and collaboratively in diverse contexts; (3) to think reflectively about commitments to themselves and others; and (4) to foster self-awareness.<sup>132</sup> Meanwhile, religious literacy has implications for the growth of the following two things: (1) recognition of the implicit difference between diversity and pluralism; and (2) engagement in diversity. It starts with the assumption that religious diversity is something that does exist, but pluralism is not something that just happens.<sup>133</sup>

The absence of religious literacy can lead to dangerous religious illiteracy because religion is the most volatile cultural constituent. On the one hand, religion

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<sup>132</sup> Seiple, Hoover, and Stewart, *Literasi Keagamaan Lintas Budaya*, 34.

<sup>133</sup> Seiple, Hoover, and Stewart, *Literasi Keagamaan Lintas Budaya*, 35.

has been one of the greatest forces for good in world history, but on the other hand, it has been one of the greatest forces for evil.<sup>134</sup>

In its development, religious literacy can and very likely will embrace cultural literacy. Cross-cultural religious literacy requires one to reflect one's own philosophy/theology towards others, towards practical and positive engagement in a multi-faith and globalized world that will require multi-religious partners to serve the common good. In simpler terms, it can be formulated that the first thing to do is to understand oneself (personal competence), next, to learn to understand another person or group in the same way as that person or group understands itself (comparative competence), and finally, to understand the nature and requirements of leadership in crossing cultural and religious barriers in favor of practical collaboration, which tends to result in civic solidarity (collaborative competence).<sup>135</sup>

Based on the various explanations above, it is necessary to understand the limitations of the discussion of religious literacy in tafsir “The Study Quran” as follows:

1. Religious literacy in the interpretation of “The Study Quran” includes: (a) understanding the basic concepts of Islam and the world religions mentioned in the Quran, including Judaism and Christianity, and (b) awareness and appreciation of the various rituals, traditions, and expressions of different religions,
2. Based on the four principles of religious literacy, it is possible for “The Study Quran” to represent three principles, namely: (1) religion is internally diverse;

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<sup>134</sup> Prothero, *Religious Literacy*, 17.

<sup>135</sup> Seiple, Hoover, and Stewart, *Literasi Keagamaan Lintas Budaya*, 39.

- (2) religion is internally diverse; (3) religion develops and changes over time; (4) religious influences are embedded in all dimensions of culture.
3. Related to the purpose of religious literacy, “The Study Quran”’s interpretations have endeavored to (a) build multicultural and multireligious awareness as a real reality of life; (b) instill an understanding of the differences and similarities of different and diverse religious teachings by avoiding stereotypes and constructing good relations regardless of existing differences, both internally and between religious communities; and (c) eliminate truth claims, religious fanaticism, intolerance, group arrogance, and xenophobia that have the potential to trigger religious conflicts.
  4. Referring to the three types of religious literacy competencies initiated by Chris Seiple (personal, comparative, and collaborative), which can be found in tafsir ““The Study Quran”,” there are two types, namely personal and comparative competencies.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**THE REALITY OF RELIGIOUS LITERACY REPRESENTATION IN**

**TAFSIR “THE STUDY QURAN”**

**A. Characteristics of Tafsir “The Study Quran”**

1. Brief Biography of the Tafsir Compilation Team

a. Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University in Washington, DC, is one of the world's leading and renowned scholars in the fields of Islamic studies and comparative religion. Professor Nasr is a well-known and highly respected intellectual figure in both the West and the Islamic world, and he is the author of dozens of books and hundreds of articles that have been translated into several major Islamic, European, and Asian languages. Nasr is a highly sought-after speaker in his field of expertise at academic conferences and seminars, as well as at public lectures, universities, and radio and television programs. He is also an eloquent and charismatic speaker. With over forty years of experience as an educator and scholar, he has an impressive academic and intellectual record.<sup>136</sup> His international credentials in Islamic philosophy, mysticism, art and science, comparative religion, and religion and ecology led HarperOne publishers to choose him to head the book project for “The Study Quran”. Among

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<sup>136</sup> “About Seyyed Hossein Nasr,” *Nasrfoundation.Org* (blog), 2018, <https://www.nasrfoundation.org/biography.html>.

his works are “*The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism*” (2007), “*Islam’s Mystical Tradition*” (2007), “*Islam in the Modern World*” (2010), “*In Search of the Sacred*” (2010), serta terjemahan *Kitāb al-Mashā’ir* karya Mullā Ṣadrā berjudul “*Metaphysical Penetrations*” (2014).<sup>137</sup>

Coming from an educated and respectable family, Seyyed Hossein Nasr was born in Tehran, Iran, on April 7, 1933. His father, Seyyed Valiullah Nasr, was a renowned cleric who also served as minister of education and physician during the reign of Shah Reza Pahlevi.<sup>138</sup> King Shah Reza Pahlevi called them Seyyed, a title of nobility. "Nasr" is a name of honor that means victory. The Persian king gave this name to Nasr's grandfather in recognition of his service.<sup>139</sup>

Nasr's family are members of the traditional Shi'a tradition, which is a branch of Islamic theology. In addition, Mulla Seyyed Muhammad Taqi Poshtmashhad, the Sufi cleric of Kashan, was Nasr's great-grandfather as well. During his studies in Iran, the relationship between the West and the East has been tense. In many ways, Western culture has impacted Muslim countries. This was contrary to the traditional Islam he practiced. This is what motivated Nasr to go to the West to study. At the age of 12, Nasr received a traditional education in Iran. He received informal and formal traditional education from his family, especially

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<sup>137</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 11.

<sup>138</sup> Mehdi Amin Razavi and Zailan Moris, *The Complete Bibliography of the Works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr from 1958 through April 1993*, First edition (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Islamic Academy of Science of Malaysia, 1994).

<sup>139</sup> Khumaerah, “Hermeneutika Tradisional,” 37.

from his father, while formal traditional education he received at a Tehran madrassa. Nasr then left for the United States to study. Nasr's life began to differ from his life in Iran. Nasr completed his education at Hightstown, The Peddie School, in New Jersey, USA, in 1950.<sup>140</sup>

When Nasr later continued his studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT),<sup>141</sup> He was intellectually and spiritually influenced by Eastern thought, including the perennialism of Frithjof Schuon, A.K. Coomaraswamy, René Guenon, Titus Burchardt, Martin Lings, and Luis Massignon. Nasr earned his doctorate at the age of 25 and completed his formal and non-formal education with great teachers who had religious, intellectual, and spiritual backgrounds. At the MIT campus, Bertrand Russell helped Seyyed Hossein Nasr understand physics and theoretical mathematics. Geogio De Santillana, a metaphysician, introduced Seyyed Hossein Nasr to metaphysics and the diversity of eastern traditions such as Hinduism. Bernard Cohe, H. A. R. Gibb, and Harry A. Wolfson were later responsible for Seyyed Hossein Nasr's dissertation after George Sorton.<sup>142</sup>

During his studies at Harvard, Nasr visited many cities around the world, especially in France, Switzerland, England, Italy, and Spain. During his intellectual journey, Nasr met Schuon and Burkhardt, people who could help him improve his worldview. In Morocco, Nasr also spoke

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<sup>140</sup> Khumaerah, "Hermeneutika Tradisional," 38.

<sup>141</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ramin Jahanbegloo, *In Search of the Sacred: A Conversation with Seyyed Hossein Nasr on His Life and Thought* (Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger, 2010), 36.

<sup>142</sup> Khumaerah, "Hermeneutika Tradisional," 39.



with Shaykh Ahmad al-Alawi. In 1958, he learned Islamic philosophy from renowned teachers such as Mohammed Kazim Assar, Muhammad Husayn Thabathaba'i, and Sayyid Abu al-Hasan Qazwini. Nasr also learned from Sayyidina Fatimah Yashrutiyah, the daughter of the founder of the Yashturiyah Order, which is an offshoot of the Shadziliyah Order.<sup>143</sup>

During the years Professor Nasr was in Iran, he wrote extensively in Persian and English and occasionally in French and Arabic. His doctoral dissertation was rewritten by him in Persian and won the Royal Book Award. Nasr also issued critical editions of some important philosophical texts, such as the complete Persian works of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra, as well as the Arabic texts of Ibn Sina and al-Biruni. Nasr's great interest in the philosophy of one of the greatest later Islamic philosophers, Mulla Sadra, resulted in the publication of *Mulla Sadra*, written by experts in traditional Islamic philosophy. Nasr was also the first to introduce Mulla Sadra to the English-speaking world. Due to the Islamic Revolution in Iran, in 1979 Nasr moved with his family to the United States, where he would rebuild his life and secure a position at a university to support himself and his family. Nasr soon became known in American academic circles as a traditionalist, a major exposé, and a proponent of the perennialist perspective. Most of his intellectual activity and writings since his exile in America have been related to this function

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<sup>143</sup> Nasr and Jahanbegloo, *In Search*, 80.

and also in the fields of comparative religion, philosophy, and religious dialogue. He has spoken with Rabbis Izmar Schorch, John Hick, and Hans Kung, as well as several other well-known Jewish and Christian theologians and philosophers, in many debates and discussions.<sup>144</sup>

b. Caner K. Dagli

Caner Dagli (*Jaan-err Da-li, Adyghe: Къушъхъэ Джанэр*) is a Circassian-American Islamic scholar and professor of Religious Studies on the campus of the College of the Holy Cross located in the city of Worcester in the U.S. state of Massachusetts. In the procurement project of “The Study Quran”, he served as one of the general editors, specializing in Sufism, Islamic philosophy, interfaith dialogue, and Quranic studies. Among his written works are a translation of Ibn al-Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* entitled *The Ringstones of Wisdom* (2004) and *Ibn al-Arabī and Islamic Intellectual Culture: From Mysticism to Philosophy* (2015). He is also the senior editor of *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Science, Philosophy, and Technology in Islam* (2014).<sup>145</sup> Karyanya terbaru adalah *Metaphysical Institutions: Islam and the Modern Project* (2023).<sup>146</sup>

Dagli graduated from Cornell University with a B.A. in Near Eastern Studies and completed an M.A. in religion with a special emphasis on Islam from George Washington University, then earned a

<sup>144</sup> “About Seyyed Hossein Nasr.”

<sup>145</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 11.

<sup>146</sup> Dagli, “Metaphysical Institutions: Islam and the Modern Project,” *Canerdagli.Com* (blog), accessed February 12, 2024, <https://canerdagli.com/books/>.

PhD in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University and was a Fulbright scholar in 2004–2005.<sup>147</sup> From 2005–2008, Dagli was an assistant professor at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia, and served as an advisor for interfaith affairs at the Royal Court of Jordan from 2006–2007. As a Muslim, Dagli was one of 138 people who signed A Common Word Between Us and You, an open letter dated October 13, 2007, from Muslim and Christian leaders calling for peace between Muslims and Christians and the need for equality and mutual understanding between people of the two religions.<sup>148</sup>

c. Maria Massi Dakake

Maria Massi Dakake, one of the general editors of “The Study Quran” procurement project, is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, USA, specializing in Shia studies, Sufism, Islamic philosophy and theology, the Quran, interfaith dialogue, and issues related to women and feminism in the classical Islamic tradition. She is the author of *The Charismatic Community: Shi‘ite Identity in Early Islam* (2007) and is a senior editorial member of *The Routledge Companion to the Quran* book project (2021).<sup>149</sup>

Dakake was born a Roman Catholic and grew up with extensive familiarity with the Bible during his childhood, actively attending church services and masses. Her conversion to Islam was triggered by a reading

<sup>147</sup> “Caner Dagli,” *Berkley Center* (blog), accessed February 12, 2024, <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/people/caner-dagli>.

<sup>148</sup> “Caner Dagli,” *Wikipedia.Org* (blog), December 29, 2022, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caner\\_Dagli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caner_Dagli).

<sup>149</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 11.

of the Quran he did while in college. Recalling her first reading of the second and longest surah of the Quran, Al-Baqarah, she was particularly struck by it, partly because she felt the immediacy of the Quran's voice. Dakake felt that the Bible is often a narrative work that tells a story. In contrast, the Quran felt like a voice calling out directly to her—surprising, unusual, and fascinating.<sup>150</sup>

Dakake researches and publishes books on Islamic intellectual history, Quranic studies, Shia and Sufi traditions, and women's spirituality and religious experience. She is one of the general editors and contributing authors of “The Study Quran”. Her latest publication, *The Routledge Companion to the Quran* (September 2021), is a co-edited book with 40 articles on the history, content, style, and interpretation of the Quran by leading contemporary scholars working from a variety of methodological perspectives. She is also currently completing a monograph, *Toward an Islamic Theory of Religion*, and has begun work on a partial translation of a Persian-language Qur'ānic commentary written by twentieth-century Iranian woman scholar Nusrat Amin.<sup>151</sup>

Dakake earned his B.A. in government with summa cum laude honors at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, in 1990. She went on to earn his M.A. (1998) and PhD (2000) in Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University in New Jersey. In addition, she attended Queens

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<sup>150</sup> Eric Bin Kisam, ““The Study Quran” with Maria Dakake and Joseph Lumbard,” *Bloggng Theology* (blog), December 15, 2015, <https://bloggngtheology.net/2015/12/15/the-study-quran-with-maria-dakake-and-joseph-lumbard/>.

<sup>151</sup> “Maria M Dakake,” *Religious Studies Staff* (blog), accessed February 12, 2024, <https://religiousstudies.gmu.edu/people/mdakakem>.

College, Oxford University (1988–1999), the American University in Cairo (1992), and the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Research, Tehran, Iran (1996–1997). Dakake has received 13 awards between 1990 and 2023. Her courses at the master's level are Islamic Text and Context, Quran and Interpretation, Islamic Philosophy and the Problem of the Soul, Religion and the Natural Environment, Shi'a and Sufi Mysticism, Islamic Feminism, and Critical Issues and Debates in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies. While at the undergraduate level Dakake teaches courses on Religions in the West, Human Religious Experience, Islam, Islamic Thought, Quran and Hadith, Muhammad: Life and Legacy, Islamic Law, Women in World Religions, Modern Islamic Thought, Sufism, Women in Islamic Literature, Women and Islam, Religious Thought in Medieval Islam and Spain, Shi'a Islam, Religion in Safawi Era Iran, and Muslim Women Writers.<sup>152</sup>

d. Joseph E. B. Lombard

Joseph Lombard has been an Associate Professor (Associate Professor) in Quranic Studies at the College of Islamic Studies (CIS), Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Doha, Qatar, since 2018. Previously, Lombard taught at the American University of Sharjah, UAE (2015–2018), Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA (2006–2015), and the American University in Cairo, Egypt (2004–2005). Dr. Lombard has also served as an advisor for interfaith affairs at the Royal Court of Jordan

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<sup>152</sup> Maria Massi Dakake, “Curriculum Vitae Maria Massi Dakake,” 2023, <https://religiousstudies.gmu.edu/people/mdakakem>.

(2005–2006). He earned a BA magna cum laude in English Literature and Religious Studies at George Washington University (1993), then an MA in Religious Studies at the same campus (1995). He further studied religious studies at Yale University, earning an M.Phil. (2001) and a PhD in Islamic Studies with honors (2003).<sup>153</sup>

Lumbard was born in 1969 and grew up in Washington, D.C., USA.<sup>154</sup> He was baptized and raised in the Episcopal Church, and he served as an altar boy for a while. In his teens, he lost interest and was introduced to Islam as a sophomore at George Washington University. He took several classes from Seyyed Hossein Nasr because two of his best friends said he was the best professor they had ever had. Lumbard embraced Islam around February 1993, exactly one and a half years after he took Nasr's lectures. It was then that he realized that everything he was looking for in Christianity was also available in Islam, and everything he valued from his relationship with Jesus as a child would not be lost by ceasing to be a Christian while he could follow Jesus' message fully in the Islamic tradition. Eventually, he concluded that the Islamic tradition worked better for him.<sup>155</sup>

Lumbard has studied classical texts with scholars in Morocco, Yemen, Egypt, and Jordan, and Persian texts with scholars in Iran. Over

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<sup>153</sup> “Dr. Joseph Lumbard (PhD),” *Faculty Biographies* (blog), accessed February 12, 2024, <https://www.hbku.edu.qa/en/staff/dr-joseph-lumbard>.

<sup>154</sup> “Joseph E. B. Lumbard,” *Wikipedia.Org* (blog), September 16, 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph\\_E.\\_B.\\_Lumbard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_E._B._Lumbard).

<sup>155</sup> Joseph E. B. Lumbard, *Revitalizing the Heart of Islam; An Interview with Joseph Lumbard*, interview by Thomas McFarlane, Telefon, July 2006, <https://centerforsacredsciences.org/index.php/Holos/holos-lumbard.html>.

the years, Lombard has researched and written about Islamic civilization, with an emphasis on its intellectual tradition. He has studied Islamic texts in the Quran, law, theology, philosophy, and Sufism with scholars trained in the classical Islamic tradition and has achieved a high level of proficiency in Arabic and Persian. As such, he is conversant with the technical vocabulary and methodological issues relating to the various Islamic disciplines. He has spoken at academic forums around the world, participated in interfaith dialogues at Jewish and Christian forums, and appeared on several radio and television programs. After the events of September 11, 2001, Lombard founded the Islamic Research Institute (IRI), a forum for Muslim scholars to contextualize issues related to Islam and apply traditional Islamic teachings to modern life. His award-winning book *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition* is the result of his vision and leadership in such an important field.<sup>156</sup>

Lombard contributes widely to the fields of Islamic philosophical theology, Sufism, and Quranic studies. He served as author, translator, and general editor for “*The Study Quran*” (HarperOne 2015), which has been heralded as one of the most important contributions to Islamic studies in English. His current research combines aspects of Quranic studies, philosophy, and theology to focus on the development of epistemology in Islam.<sup>157</sup> When “*The Study Quran*” was published,

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<sup>156</sup> “Joseph E. B. Lombard’s Life and Work,” *Worldwisdom.Com* (blog), 2008, <http://www.worldwisdom.com/public/authors/Joseph-Lombard.aspx>.

<sup>157</sup> “Dr. Joseph E. Lombard,” *Islamic Bibliography Info Repository* (blog), accessed February 12, 2024, <https://ibir.hbku.edu.qa/faculty/dr.-joseph-e.-lombard?nid=53857>.

Lumbard was one of the general editors and a lecturer in the Department of Arabic and Translation Studies at the American University of Sharjah, specializing in Quranic studies, Sufism, Islamic philosophy, comparative theology, and Islamic ecotheology. He is the author of *Submission, Faith, and Beauty: The Religion of Islam* (2009) and *Love and Remembrance: The Life and Teachings of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī* (2016). In addition, he co-edited the second edition of *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition* (2010) and served as associate editor for the *Integrated Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* book project (2013).<sup>158</sup>

e. Mohammed Rustom

Mohammed Rustom is a Professor of Islamic Thought and Global Philosophy at Carleton University and Director of the Carleton Center for Islamic Studies.<sup>159</sup> When he became assistant editor on the project to produce “The Study Quran”, he was Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at Carleton University, specializing in Sufism, Islamic philosophy and theology, and Quranic exegesis. His name has become widely recognized since writing *The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mulladr ṣadrā* (2012) and translating Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī’s *The Condemnation of Pride and Self-Admiration* (2017).<sup>160</sup>

Rustom has studied Islamic philosophy under such luminaries as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Michael Elias Marmura, William Chittick, and Todd

<sup>158</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 11.

<sup>159</sup> “Mohammed Rustom,” accessed February 10, 2024, <https://carleton.ca/religion/people/mohammed-rustom/>.

<sup>160</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 11.



Lawson. He feels indebted to these scholars and cites them as the main catalyst behind his interest in Islamic philosophy and Sufism.<sup>161</sup>

Rustom was born on August 21, 1980, in Toronto, Canada. His family, who migrated in the 1970s from Tanzania, were middle-class Muslims in the Richmond Hill neighborhood of Ontario, north of Toronto. The family's origin is of Khoja ethnicity from Karachi, the state of Gujarat, located along India's border with Pakistan. In his late teens, Rustom experienced spiritual yearnings and asked existential questions. At the time, his father was running an accounting business, and the teenage Rustom knew he should move into the company. But he decided to pursue a degree in humanities with the support of his family. At the University of Toronto, he enrolled in Islamic studies and started studying Arabic and Persian. Rustom earned his Honors BA at the University of Toronto in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies in 2004 and a PhD from the same university in Islamic Thought in 2009. After that, he got a job offer from Carleton University, and he accepted it. After a year at Carleton, he was invited to join “The Study Quran” project that had started in 2006. Rustom, who had memorized about a quarter of the Quran, immediately accepted the offer. Over time, working on “The Study Quran” project has made Rustom feel humbled in the face of a vast

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<sup>161</sup> “Mohammed Rustom,” *Wikipedia.Org* (blog), January 19, 2024, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed\\_Rustom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed_Rustom).

tradition of interpretation. He also felt that he was in the presence of a very great company.<sup>162</sup>

In addition to English, Rustom speaks Arabic, Persian, Gujarati, Urdu, French, and German. His research interests include Islamic philosophy and theology, Sufi literature in Arabic and Persian, Quranic exegesis, contemporary Islamic thought, cross-cultural philosophy, and translation theory. His teaching career began with an internship at his alma mater, the University of Toronto (2007–2009), interspersed with being a guest speaker at Stony Brook University (2008), then at Carleton University (2009–present), while being a researcher at the Iranian Institute of Philosophy (2010), the Abu Dhabi Institute of New York University (2017–2020), and a visiting professor at Üsküdar University (2018–present). Since 2021, Rustom has been a professor of Islamic thought and global philosophy at Carleton University and director of the university's Center for Islamic Studies. He has been an editor and advisor to several internationally renowned scholarly journals and serial publications and has received 23 awards, scholarships, and prizes between 1999 and 2023. Among the subjects he teaches are the philosophy of 'Ayn al-Qudat, Qūnawī-Ṭūsī, Ibn Arabi, Al-Ghazali, Rumi, Ibn Sina, and qiraat and tafsir of the Quran (including “The Study Quran”

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<sup>162</sup> Peter Robb, “The Study Quran Provides a Baseline for Understanding Islam,” *Ottawacitizen.Com* (blog), December 4, 2015, <https://ottawacitizen.com/entertainment/books/the-study-quran-provides-a-baseline-for-understanding-islam>.

course), Islamic thought, and comparative religion.<sup>163</sup> Rustom's dozens of books and articles in various scientific journals show his seriousness in Islamic thought and tradition, as well as interfaith relations. His mastery of various languages and the substance of religious teachings is very important to measure his capabilities as one of the editors of "The Study Quran".

## 2. Behind the Compilation of Tafsir

Today, if not always, the Quran is the most mentioned book and the most misunderstood, misinterpreted, and vilified book. Terrorists choose phrases to use as excuses for violence. Racists use different words to incite hatred and fear. Amidst this heated rhetoric, a new study of the Quran has been released. "The Study Quran" is a new translation and commentary on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad that has been prepared by five western Muslim scholars. The book aims to be an accessible and accurate translation of the Quran that offers a rigorous analysis of its teachings and theological, metaphysical, historical, and geographical background. In other words, it provides a foundation for those who want to better understand one of the world's great religions. The idea is to provide a context for understanding the Quran as it has been historically understood by scholars for 1,400 years in the Islamic tradition. There are also fifteen essays from scholars discussing various issues in Islam, such as women in society, as well as essays on war and peace. The main aim is to provide a new, highly accurate

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<sup>163</sup> Mohammed Rustom, "Mohammed Rustom CV 2023" (mohammedrustom.com, 2023), <https://www.mohammedrustom.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Rustom-CV-2023.pdf>.

translation (into English) of the Quran with all the necessary context to help explain what the words mean. The team has tried to provide the widest possible commentary from Sunni, Shia, Ismaili, and other communities without favoring one perspective over another. One fact that has emerged in this project is that the two main communities of Islam, Shia and Sunni, are largely in agreement with each other. The idea of “The Study Quran” is to put ownership of the holy book back in the hands of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. And it will probably hold people who misquote the Quran, for whatever reason, to a higher standard. The value of the study of the Quran is that it dispels all sorts of misconceptions. The reader will learn how many preconceived notions or how certain verses are quoted to mean one thing and when the reader digs into the literature it turns out not to be so. The study of the Quran reveals that claims of religious justification for the actions of groups (such as ISIS) are false in every way. “The Study Quran” also challenges the teachings of those who support the ultra-conservative Wahabi version of Islam. But to directly challenge these views, the book needs to be translated into Arabic.<sup>164</sup>

About nine years before the publication of this book in 2015, the publisher HarperSanFrancisco (later renamed HarperOne) asked Nasr to be the lead editor on a project to write “The Study Quran” to counterbalance the already published The Harper Collins Study Bible. Ultimately, Nasr accepted the offer on the condition that the team he would lead be made up

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<sup>164</sup> Robb, “The Study Quran.”

of Muslim scholars and that the work would not be determined or influenced by the pronouncements of non-Muslim Western scholars who had studied the Quran as a historical document, linguistic text, or sociology but did not accept it as the word of God and original revelation. Therefore, Nasr chose only Muslim scholars to work with him in the effort to compile this tafsir.<sup>165</sup> Nasr then selected three editors for this endeavor: Caner Dagli, Maria Dakake, and Joseph Lumbard. All three editors were American Muslim scholars with doctorates in Islamic Studies from American universities, had first-hand experience with the Islamic world, were familiar with traditional Islamic scholarship, and were proficient in classical Arabic. After the translations were written and the essays edited, the team needed an assistant editor. Nasr chose Mohammed Rustom, a doctor of Islamic studies from a Canadian university, for the position. Nasr was clearly not arbitrary in choosing these four scholars. This shows, in Nasr's view, that the team shares the same scholarly attitude, spiritual perspective and intellectual vision.<sup>166</sup>

The benefit of this work is to provide contemporary readers with an opportunity to learn about the various approaches that the Muslim community has used for over fourteen centuries to understand the Quran. Therefore, this tafsir aims to re-present the previous 'traditional'

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<sup>165</sup> Nasr et al., *"The Study Quran"*..., xi.

<sup>166</sup> Nasr et al., *"The Study Quran"*..., xii.

interpretations without quoting a single exegesis from modern and contemporary interpretations.<sup>167</sup>

### 3. Systematization of Tafsir

This work of translation and commentary of thirty juz, organized in the order of the Mushaf, is the result of an interpretation undertaken by five Muslim scholars in the West. In this collective interpretive effort, Seyyed Hossein Nasr acted as editor-in-chief, Caner Dagli, Maria Dakake, and Joseph Lumbard acted as general editors, following which Mohammed Rustom was recruited as assistant editor.

The following is the division of labor in translating and interpreting the Quran by “The Study Quran” team:

<i>Surah</i>	<i>Juz</i>	First translator	First interpreter
1	1	Joseph E. B. Lumbard	Joseph E. B. Lumbard
2–3	1–4	Caner K. Dagli	Caner K. Dagli
4–7	4–9	Maria Massi Dakake	Maria Massi Dakake
8–9	9–11	Caner K. Dagli	Caner K. Dagli
10–12	11–13	Maria Massi Dakake	Mohammed Rustom
13	13	Joseph E. B. Lumbard	Mohammed Rustom
14–15	13–14	Maria Massi Dakake	Mohammed Rustom
16–19	14–16	Maria Massi Dakake	Maria Massi Dakake
20	16	Maria Massi Dakake	Mohammed Rustom
21	17	Maria Massi Dakake	Caner K. Dagli
22–28	17–20	Caner K. Dagli	Caner K. Dagli
29–114	20–30	Joseph E. B. Lumbard	Joseph E. B. Lumbard

The results of the first translation and interpretation were then corrected by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and discussed by all team members. If there was a difference of perception between the members, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the

<sup>167</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., xi.

supervisor and head of the book procurement project for “The Study Quran”, was the one who decided the final result.

The book “The Study Quran” A New Translation and Commentary itself consists of three parts, namely the introduction, the core, and the addition. The introduction is divided into several subsections: (1) the editorial board contains the team members who play a role in the preparation of the interpretation; (2) Editors' Contributions contains the distribution of the work of the members of the drafting team; (3) the acknowledgement contains thanks to those who made the book successful; (4) Abbreviations contains important abbreviations for readers. (5) Arabic Transliteration and Pronunciation contains the writing of the Arabic script to English along with its pronunciation; (6) General Introduction contains a general explanation by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the head of the interpretation project; (7) Approaching “The Study Quran” A New Translation and Commentary contains a guide for readers to enjoy the book in a good and correct way; (8) Understanding The Citations in the Commentary contain socialization of how to quote in tafsir; and (9) Commentator Key contains the code names of classical scholars referred to in tafsir.<sup>168</sup>

The second part of the book is the core, which is the American English translation and tafsir from the beginning of Surah Al-Fatihah to the end of Surah An-Nas. The Arabic text of the Quran that usually characterizes the mushaf is not included in the book based on the

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<sup>168</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., iii.

considerations of the compiling team.<sup>169</sup> The third part of “The Study Quran” A New Translation and Commentary, which is an additional support for understanding for readers, is filled with (1) a collection of essays written by experts in the field of Quranic studies from the West and the East, both Sunni and Shi'a theologians accompanied by brief biographies of these figures; (2) an appendix of Hadith Citations which contains hadith quotations used in interpretation accompanied by a bibliography of the Hadith books cited; (3) a timeline of various important events related to the revelation and codification of the Quran; (4) an appendix of biographies of forty-one classical commentators referenced in “The Study Quran”; (5) an index of important words included in the book along with the location of surahs and verses; (6) several old maps including the area of Ancient Arabia, the Middle East of the VI century, the Prophet Muhammad's missionary area, the Hijaz region, Makkah and the location of Hajj, the location of Umrah and the Grand Mosque, the local topography of Madinah, as well as the areas of warfare mentioned in the Quran including the battle of Uhud and the opening of the city of Makkah.<sup>170</sup>

Because it is aimed at readers from various groups and religions, the presence of essays is one of the features of “The Study Quran” to explain things that are still polemic in the Qur'an. Walid Saleh's essay provides a readable yet detailed historical overview of the classical genre of Qur'anic exegesis. The essay by Muhammad Abdel Haleem discusses the literary

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<sup>169</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., iv.

<sup>170</sup> Khumaerah, “Hermeneutika Tradisional,” 53–56.



features of the Qur'ān as well as the Qur'ān's impact on Arabic literature. Several essays provide the reader with an introduction to important aspects of how faithful Muslims approach the Qur'ān: (1) Ingrid Mattson's essay outlining the structure and place of the Qur'ān in Muslim piety; (2) Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami's essay presenting Muslim beliefs about the revelation and written compilation of the Qur'ān; (3) Ahmad Muhammad al-Tayyib's essay discussing the Qur'ān as an important source of Islamic law; and (4) Hamza Yusuf's essay discussing themes of death and the afterlife in the Qur'ān. In addition to these four essays, there are several other writings that discuss Qur'ānic interpretation in relation to some of the topical matters that are often vigorously debated today: (1) Muzaffar Iqbal's essay opposing the practice of interpreting certain verses of the Qur'an in reference to modern scientific discoveries or theories; (2) Joseph Lumbard's essay presenting a theological reading of the Qur'an's sacred history that positions the Qur'an as the final divine revelation, but does not imply that previous scriptures or religions were abrogated with the coming of the Prophet Muhammad; (3) Maria Massi Dakake's essay that situates Qur'anic ideas about ethics and rights within a broader social vision; (4) Caner Dagli's essay that argues that the Qur'an permits defensive jihad but prohibits military aggression, and moreover, the Qur'an does not encourage conquest or attempts to spread Islam throughout the world. The essays that follow outline a number of interpretive prejudices that underlie the translations and commentaries provided in "The Study Quran": (1) Joseph Lumbard's essay

discussing some of the limitations of Qur'ānic translations; (2) Toby Mayer's essay introducing key ideas on which esoteric interpretations of the Qur'ān are based; (3) Mustafa Muhaqqiq Damad's essay discussing schools of Islamic theology and philosophy and the Qur'ān; followed by (4) William Chittick's essay on the Qur'ān and Sufism; and finally (5) Jean-Louis Michon's essay on Islamic art, which he argues is rooted in the Qur'ān.<sup>171</sup>

#### 4. Rules of Reference in the Preparation of Tafsir

According to Nasr in the preface to this commentary, the purpose of this interpretation is twofold: (1) to expose readers to the diverse ways in which the Quran has been understood and explained by Muslims over a thousand years of classical Islamic tradition,<sup>172</sup> (2) to present more than just the literal meaning of the Qur'anic text to its deepest meaning, clarify abstruse and mutasyabih verses, and bring out credible sources related to various issues by diverse traditional Islamic authorities. The implication is that readers are expected to interact at various levels with the Qur'an and eliminate misperceptions from non-Muslims who assume that Muslims are intellectually incompetent when interacting with the Qur'an which has the status of God's revelation. In fact, according to Nasr, the Qur'an itself has instructed its scholars to think about the teachings and values contained in it.<sup>173</sup>

To succeed in these goals and expectations, there are several principles that are used as a reference for the work of the drafting team.

<sup>171</sup> Geissinger, ““The Study Quran”,” 270–71.

<sup>172</sup> Nasr et al., *“The Study Quran”*..., xl.

<sup>173</sup> Nasr et al., *“The Study Quran”*..., xliii.

Affirming the sacredness of the Quran is the first principle. Nasr said that it is this Quran that will make its readers cry even if they do not understand Arabic when they read it, and that its meaning, language, and every word and sentence are considered sacred when read. It is not simply an important text for the study of ancient Arabic manuscripts or simply a documentation of the sociocultural conditions of first-century hijri Arab society.<sup>174</sup> Based on this idea, the team refused to cite the opinions of orientalist and non-Muslim Western Quranic scholars who see the Quran only as a linguistic, historical, or social document and reject the credibility or validity of the Quran as God's revelation.<sup>175</sup>

The second principle is that the Qur'an is a book that contains all the teachings about the nature of reality at all its levels, from Absolute Reality, i.e. God, to macro and micro realities. It is the source of all Islamic thought, from the arts and sciences to social, economic and political structures, including being the source of metaphysics, angelic studies, cosmology, to law and ethics.<sup>176</sup> The compilers of the tafsir were compelled to refer to the many books of tafsir in various styles written over fourteen centuries because they believed that the Quran covers everything, and this is manifested in the books of tafsir of various styles and schools.<sup>177</sup>

The Qur'anic message of religion applies to everyone, that is the third principle. An example is when the Qur'an talks about Islam, where it

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<sup>174</sup> Nasr et al., *"The Study Quran"*..., xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>175</sup> Muchlisin, "Kesarjanaan Tradisionalis," 299.

<sup>176</sup> Nasr et al., *"The Study Quran"*..., xxv-xxvi.

<sup>177</sup> Muchlisin, "Kesarjanaan Tradisionalis," 299.

talks about submission in general, not just the religious entity brought by the Prophet Muhammad. The implication is that the position of Prophet Ibrahim and Prophet Isa is also said to be Muslim, namely with reference to this understanding.<sup>178</sup>

Providing traditional interpretations is the fourth principle. Hence, it does not include modernist and fundamentalist interpretations that have emerged in many parts of the Muslim world over the last two centuries. In line with the third principle, this tafsir is universal but also traditional because it only conveys traditional Islamic perspectives. The focus of this tafsir is to represent the various Muslim groups that have understood the Quran throughout history, as well as traditional Muslim groups today.<sup>179</sup>

Regarding traditional interpretation, Nasr and his team do not limit its characteristics to grammatical, linguistic and historical analysis, but also include scientific, philosophical, legal, cosmological, theological, metaphysical, mystical, esoteric or all approaches. Before the emergence of various specialized books on tafsir, works of history, sunnah, and prophetic traditions actually contained traditional interpretations of the Qur'an. Nasr also considers that the interpretation of the Qur'an also includes the creation of Islamic architecture with stone media and others to Rumi's mystical mathnawi literature<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Nasr et al., *"The Study Quran"*..., xxix.

<sup>179</sup> Nasr et al., *"The Study Quran"*..., xi.

<sup>180</sup> Nasr et al., *"The Study Quran"*..., xiv.

## 5. Methods, Patterns and Tendencies of Tafsir

This work uses the *tahlīlī* method because each verse of the Quran is interpreted with a very long explanation and arranged in the order of *tartīb mushafī* (sequentially from the first surah *al-Fātihah* to the last surah *al-Nās*).<sup>181</sup> The tafsir text is given at least three or four times the amount of the translation text.<sup>182</sup>

The work begins by discussing whether the surah being interpreted belongs to the *makiyyah* or *madaniyyah* category, along with the explanations of previous commentators, before beginning to interpret the surah as a whole.<sup>183</sup> For example, when interpreting *al-Fātihah*, it is reported that Mujāhid (d. 104 AH/722/3 CE) said that this surah belongs to the category of *madaniyyah* surahs. However, most commentators argue that the surah could not have been revealed in the Medinan period because what is to be recited when establishing prayer could not have been revealed in the Medinan period.<sup>184</sup> In addition, some explanations are given as a basis for the interpretation of these suras. In explaining certain suras, Nasr and his team often quote some of the prophet's traditions. The English translation of the verses begins after the introduction is complete. Once the translation is complete, each verse is given a full explanation. To produce a better translation, Nasr and his team often collaborate with some of the best English translations of the Quran, such as those by Muhammad Marmaduke

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<sup>181</sup> Muchlisin, "Kesarjanaan Tradisional," 301.

<sup>182</sup> Fudge, "Study the Quran," 577.

<sup>183</sup> Muchlisin, "Kesarjanaan Tradisional," 301.

<sup>184</sup> Nasr et al., "*The Study Quran*"..., 4.

Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, A. J. Arberry, Muhammad Asad, Muhammad Abdel Haleem, and Ali Quli Qara'i. However, Nasr's translation relies on the original text of the Quran, not previous translations. Nasr and his team say that they have tried to be as cautious as possible when translating the Quran and that the collaborative efforts of several scholars have helped them avoid personal opinions that could affect the translation process.<sup>185</sup>

Directly below the English translation of the Quranic verse is the interpretation of the verse. When citing tafsir, the team chose the traditional interpretations that are most recognized by the various schools, plus some tafsir that have rare data or opinions. Of the forty-one commentaries referenced, the earliest is the commentary of Muqatil ibn Sulaiman (d. 150 AH/767 CE), and the latest is *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qurān* by Muhammad Hussain Tabathabai (d. 1401 AH/81 CE).<sup>186</sup> However, "The Study Quran" is not just a collage of selections from these books, but a new work. There is selection in the inclusion and exclusion of earlier texts, as well as commentary in places not found in earlier sources.<sup>187</sup> This selection process refers not only to works of exegesis but also to any text or phenomenon (even medieval Muslim philosophy and art) that the editors consider to be a source of "traditional Islamic thought" that can function exegetically.<sup>188</sup> In addition to quoting the opinions of previous interpreters, the drafting team also practiced intra-Quran hermeneutics by linking the understanding of one

<sup>185</sup> Nasr et al., "*The Study Quran*"..., xiii.

<sup>186</sup> Muchlisin, "Kesarjanaan Tradisional," 299.

<sup>187</sup> Nasr et al., "*The Study Quran*"..., xliii-xliv.

<sup>188</sup> Geissinger, "'The Study Quran'," 272.

verse to other verses of the Quran that are in line with the classical interpreters.<sup>189</sup> The addition of something new lies largely in the realm of new interpretations of certain verses, and these are, of course, made from an insider's or faith perspective.<sup>190</sup>

The drafting team attempted to recognize religious expressions across fiqh to theology, including Sunni and Shia. An example is "Surat al-Fātihah, which is recited at the beginning of every rak'ah of prayer by all Sunnis and many Shias."<sup>191</sup> Another example is related to the following attribution of 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib: "...'Alī ibn Abī Tālib (d. 40 AH/661 CE), grandson and son-in-law of the Prophet, who became the first Imam in Shia (632-661) and the fourth caliph in Sunni Islam (656-661)...".<sup>192</sup>

The commentaries provided in "The Study Quran" have presented interpretations of the Qur'an that can be broadly characterized as neo-traditionalist at times, the approach to certain topics such as Mary, Jesus, and religious diversity takes on a somewhat Perennialist tone (i.e., in keeping with the belief that at their core, all "traditional" religions share one universal truth).<sup>193</sup> Based on perennial philosophy, every authentic religious tradition has two levels of truth: esoteric and exoteric. On the exoteric level,

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<sup>189</sup> Muchlisin, "Kesarjanaan Tradisional," 304.

<sup>190</sup> Fudge, "Study the Quran," 578.

<sup>191</sup> Nasr et al., "The Study Quran"..., 3.

<sup>192</sup> Nasr et al., "The Study Quran"..., 4.

<sup>193</sup> Geissinger, "The Study Quran," 271.

religions may look different, but they are all the same on the esoteric level. That is, there is a transcendental unity in religion.<sup>194</sup>

There are many concise commentaries authored by scholars that generally show a lexicographic approach and the context of Prophet Muhammad's life (*asbābun nuzūl*) to explain or interpret Quranic verses. “The Study Quran” is completely different.<sup>195</sup> This is because “The Study Quran” is more like The Study Bible, both published by HarperOne. This resemblance lies not in the commentaries themselves but in the form and structure of the work and its approach to scripture. The observant reader will see the irony of claiming to exclude "modernist" interpretations when “The Study Quran” itself, from which it emerged, is a product of its own time. Innovation is not obvious on every page, but it is there, not only in the commentaries but also in the structure of the book itself. The resulting tension between innovation and respect for tradition is “The Study Quran”'s most prominent characteristic.<sup>196</sup> Another peculiarity is the absence of Qur'anic Arabic so that if it is asked whether “The Study Quran” is (mushaf) the Qur'an or not. Of course, the answer is definitely "no." In addition, there is also another peculiarity that is not found in any tafsir, namely in terms of rehabilitation of the meaning of several important terms in the Qur'an, such as Allah, piety, and Islam. In addition, “The Study Quran” hermeneutic is also consistent in accepting the absoluteness of the entire Quranic text and

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<sup>194</sup> Mujiburrahman, *Feeling Threatened: Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia's New Order*, ISIM Dissertations (Leiden: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 289.

<sup>195</sup> Fudge, “Study the Quran,” 576.

<sup>196</sup> Fudge, “Study the Quran,” 577.



does not use contemporary ethical norms that often override the sacredness of revelation.<sup>197</sup> Another peculiarity is the absence of Qur'anic Arabic so that if it is asked whether “The Study Quran” is (mushaf) the Qur'an or not. Of course, the answer is definitely "no." In addition, there is also another peculiarity that is not found in any tafsir, namely in terms of rehabilitation of the meaning of several important terms in the Qur'an, such as Allah, piety, and Islam. In addition, “The Study Quran” hermeneutic is also consistent in accepting the absoluteness of the entire Quranic text and does not use contemporary ethical norms that often override the sacredness of revelation.<sup>198</sup>

### **B. "Representation" of Religious Literacy**

Tafsir The study of the Quran as a source, mechanism, phenomenon, and strategy of culture, as well as culture itself, has apparently represented many things, both explicit and implicit. Among those implied is religious literacy. This is understandable because religious literacy is not the main domain of interpretation, so it needs to be explored more carefully through the interpretation of linguistic signs that imply the existence of religious literacy. Based on Fiske's assumption that all communication involves signs and codes, including the representation of religious literacy in the interpretation of “The Study Quran”. The sign is represented by the diction used by the compiler of the tafsir, while the code is represented by a structured conception of religious

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<sup>197</sup> Fudge, “Study the Quran,” 577.

<sup>198</sup> Fudge, “Study the Quran,” 579.

literacy. These codes are used to dissect the reality and social construction in the interpretation media. The social reality in the tafsir has a meaning that is not single and has been pre-constructed by individuals in the world of reality, that is, everyone takes part in the effort to publish this tafsir.

The codes of religious literacy that appear in the interpretation of “The Study Quran” are interconnected to form a meaning. However, to become a reality, not only does the code need to emerge, but it also needs to be processed through the sensory organs according to the references that the reader already has, and therefore each code must be appreciated differently by different readers. Although different, there are at least three levels of reference initiated by Fiske to read religious literacy codes in the media interpretation of “The Study Quran”, namely the level of reality, representation, and ideology. The reality referred to in “The Study Quran” tafsir is the text of the tafsir; representation is the words or sentences that actualize the discourse of religious literacy; and ideology is the implied code that researchers capture from the selection of words or sentences.

Based on the understanding of the construction of the three levels of Fiske's Semiotics, the researcher describes the analysis of the reality and representation of religious literacy in the selected verses according to the grouping clusters in the following table:

Surah: verse	Cluster
Al-Fatihah [1]: 1-7	Understanding the basic concepts of Islam
Al-Baqarah [2]: 208; Ali Imran [3]:19, 85; Al-Maidah [5]:3,	

Al-Maidah [5]:48, Ali Imran [3]:64, Al-Hujurat [49]:13	Multireligious & multicultural awareness
Al-Baqarah [2]: 62, 113, 120, Al-Maidah [5]: 18, 51, 69, 72, 82, At-Taubah [9]: 30, Al-Hajj [22]: 17	

In order to facilitate reading and reduce repetition of quotations, from the quotations of tafsir texts that constitute the "reality," sentences that mark the "representation" of religious literacy are underlined, while the ideology captured by researchers from these sentences is reviewed and analyzed in the description of the related verses.

#### 1. Understanding the basic concepts of Islam

##### a. Surah Al-Fatihah as the basic literacy of every Muslim

Religious literacy has been represented in "The Study Quran" since the early pages. Starting from Surah al-Fatihah, which marks the literacy of every Muslim because it must be read in every prayer, there are several examples of religious literacy found by researchers. First, in the introduction to the tafsir of Surah al-Fatihah, we find the following description:

The Fātiḥah is recited at the beginning of each cycle of prayer by all Sunnis and many Shiites. In Shiite law one is allowed to recite the Fātiḥah in the third and fourth cycles or to recite, "Glory be to God, and praise be to God. There is no god but God, and God is great." <sup>199</sup>

The interpretation not only shows an effort to harmonize opinions between groups in Islam by presenting Sunni and Shia in one discourse

<sup>199</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 1.

space, but there is also uniqueness in the mention of god (with a small “g”) and God (with a big “G”) without mentioning the specific identity of the deity commonly used in Muslim literature, namely Allah. The mention of “God” in place of the standard term “Allah” also applies to all the words of monotheism and basmalah in the 30 juz tafsir of “The Study Quran”.

“The Study Quran”’s acknowledgment of the existence of other groups, especially Sunnis and Shiites, is also clearly recorded when mentioning the status of figures in another paragraph of the introduction to the tafsir of surat al-Fatihah. The acknowledgment is clearly seen in the following quote:

According to a famous saying attributed to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, who became the first Imam of Shiite Islam (632–61) and the fourth Caliph of Sunni Islam (656–61), “The whole of the Quran is contained in the Fātiḥah, the whole of the Fātiḥah in the basmalah [‘In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful’], the whole of the basmalah in the bā’ [the opening letter], and the whole of the bā’ in the diacritical point under the bā’.”<sup>200</sup>

Of course, the mention of Sunni or Shia opinions in tafsir is an opinion that can be accepted by any group, especially the differences in fiqh opinions that are quoted without any attitude of favoring one opinion over another. An example is the interpretation of basmalah whose status in Surah al-Fatihah is still debated to this day. Here is the quote:

Whether or not it is considered a numbered verse, in most schools of Islamic Law, with the exception of the Shāfi’ī and Ja’farī schools, the basmalah is not recited with any of the sūrahs during

<sup>200</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 2–3.

the daily prayers. .... Based upon a saying of Ja‘far al-Şādiq (d. 148/765), the sixth Shiite Imam, who was also a pivotal intellectual figure in the Sunni tradition, which states that the basmalah is “the greatest verse in the Book of God,” Shiite scholars all maintain that the basmalah is a verse of the Fātiḥah and of every other sūrah that begins with it (Ṭb, Ṭs).<sup>201</sup>

Being a tafsir that wants to be acceptable to all readers, “The Study Quran” consistently tries to present universal opinions. In Surah al-Fatihah, this is exposed in several places, including when interpreting the universality of the word 'Allah' in the introduction to the tafsir of Surah al-Fatihah, which in many places in “The Study Quran” is not specifically mentioned, and is only 'just' called 'God'.

Allāh is not only the most universal and all-embracing Name, but also the most specific of the Divine Names in that it cannot be used to describe any being other than God, whereas some other Divine Names may (al-Ghazzālī, Divine Names).<sup>202</sup>

Universality also seems to be the main rhetorical element for “The Study Quran” in explaining various concepts related to language, especially the diction used by the Qur'an. Among them are related to the description of the words *al-ḥamd* and *al-'ālamīn* in the interpretation of QS. Al-Fatihah [1]: 2 below:

But whereas thanks (shukr) is given for what one has already received, praise is given for the qualities the One Who is praised possesses prior to having bestowed anything and is thus more universal (Q). .... Thus some say that in the most universal sense the worlds refers to all existent things other than God (IK, Q).<sup>203</sup>

The choice of universal meanings is also used in many places in “The Study Quran” so that readers can avoid a narrow understanding or

<sup>201</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 3.

<sup>202</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 4.

<sup>203</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 5.

narrowing of meaning that might occur. This is quite noticeable when encountering verses that contain terms with multiple meanings. For example, the meaning of the word 'khalīfah', which is understood by some Muslims to mean 'leader' only, where “The Study Quran” does not present this meaning as the main interpretation, but tends to mean the meaning that shows the universal responsibility of humans, from the aspect of their inner reality.<sup>204</sup>

In addition to universality, “The Study Quran” also offers readers to look more at previous interpretations that focus on the substance or essence of a matter. Then, these interpretations are strengthened by the rationalization efforts built by the team compiling the interpretation of “The Study Quran”, instead of directly offering a single meaning. An example is the description given in the interpretation of QS. Al-Fatihah [1]: 6 below:

Following upon the previous phrase, in which one asks for God’s help in servitude and obedience, guide us can be understood as a prayer for perseverance in following the straight path and thus for continued aid (T) and for being made firm in following the way of truth (Ts), since those who believe and perform righteous deeds, their Lord guides them by their faith (10:9; Ts). The request for guidance also implies seeking to be led to God Himself and thus a desire for intimacy with Him, nearness to Him (Q), knowledge of Him, and love for Him. In this sense, it is also understood to mean, “Make our hearts incline unto Thee; direct our aspirations unto Thee; and be our guide from Thee, unto Thee, in order that we not be cut off by Thee from that which is Thine” (Bq, Su). On the intellectual level, following the straight path can be understood to mean using one’s God-given intelligence correctly in order to reach the truth, rather than deviating from the

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<sup>204</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 58.

straight path of thinking and intellection and thus thinking in a manner that will lead to error.<sup>205</sup>

Based on the description above, “The Study Quran” has negated other interpretations that immediately offer readers that the "straight path" in question is the Qur'an, Islam, the Prophet and the Imams, the Prophet and his companions, or the straight path that all people must pass on the Day of Judgment before entering heaven or hell. The effect is to avoid the potential polarization of thought that gives rise to the opposite meaning, that the non-straight path is all that is non-Qur'an, non-Islamic, or even non-sectarian.

It is also often found that “The Study Quran” uses intra-quranic hermeneutics<sup>206</sup> and shifts the position of influential interpretation quotes that have not been considered valid or bring negative stigma to certain religions. An example is in the interpretation of QS. Al-Fatihah [1]: 7 below:

Regarding those who incur wrath, 16:106 says, Whosoever opens his breast unto disbelief, upon them shall be the Wrath of God, and 42:16 says of those who argue about God after having responded to Him, their argument is baseless in the eyes of their Lord. Wrath shall be upon them, and theirs shall be a severe punishment. In addition, 48:6 says of the hypocrites and the idolaters, God is wroth with them, curses them, and prepares Hell for them. God’s Wrath is also said to be upon those who murder believers (see 4:93). Regarding those who are astray, a far more prevalent Quranic concept, 3:90 states, Truly those who disbelieve after having believed, then increase in disbelief, their repentance shall not be accepted, and they are the ones astray;

<sup>205</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 9.

<sup>206</sup> Metode yang merujuk kaidah “*al-Qur’ān yufassiru ba’dhum ba’dan*”. Lebih lengkap terkait metode ini bisa dibaca di: Sohaib Saeed Bhutta, “Intraquranic Hermeneutics : Theories and Methods in Tafsir of the Qur’an through the Qur’an” (Disertasi PhD, London, SOAS University of London, 2018), <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/30286>.

2:108 states, Whosoever exchanges belief for disbelief has gone astray from the right way; and 4:136 declares, Whosoever does not believe in God and His angels and His Books and His messengers and the Last Day has wandered far astray (cf. 4:167). Addressing the psychology of being astray, 28:50 asks rhetorically, Who is more astray than one who follows his caprice without guidance from God? <sup>207</sup>

The paragraph above continues with four other paragraphs that are full of interpretations of verses with other verses in the Quran positioned as the main interpretation and urging interpretations that are more popular among Muslims so that even though it is mentioned, it is placed at the end and gets comments that can shape the reader's discourse (especially readers who are unfamiliar with interpretation) that it is only a "minority interpretation" because it only refers to six interpreters compared to forty-one interpretations that are referenced in "The Study Quran". In fact, the tafsir that is positioned at the back is actually sourced from the Prophet's hadith narrations, even though they are not of sahih quality. The following is an excerpt of the text:

Based upon a saying attributed to the Prophet, though not considered to be of the highest degree of authenticity, one interpretation given by a number of commentators is that those who incur wrath and those who are astray refer to Jews and Christians, respectively (IK, JJ, Q, T, Z). In this vein, those who incur wrath is often connected with verses such as 2:61; 2:90; 3:112; 5:60, which speak of God's Wrath and Anger coming upon the Children of Israel or upon the Jews. Likewise, those who are astray is often read in connection with 5:77, which warns, Follow not the caprices of a people who went astray before, and led many astray, and strayed from the right way, and is understood as a reference to Christians (Q, T, Ts). <sup>208</sup>

<sup>207</sup> Nasr et al., "The Study Quran"..., 11.

<sup>208</sup> Nasr et al., "The Study Quran"..., 12.



b. Discourse on the Truth and Perfection of Islam

“The Study Quran” offers a quite different perspective for its readers in interpreting religion and Islam. There are four verses that can give an idea of the construction of this point of view, including QS. Ali Imran [3]:19, QS. Ali Imran [3]:85, QS. Al-Maidah [5]:3, and QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:208. In the following descriptions, we will discuss them one by one.

1) QS. Ali Imran [3]:19

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ ... ﴿١٩﴾ (أَلِ عِمْرَانَ/3: 19)

In QS. Ali Imran [3]:19, the general translation is "Verily the religion (pleasing) in the sight of Allah is Islam."<sup>209</sup> However, the verse is translated by “The Study Quran” as "Verily, religion in the sight of God is submission.". In addition, the commentary emphasizes the most universal meaning of this verse, which is submission to Allah, although not in the context of Islam as a specific religion. The excerpt is as follows:

Submission (islām) is both the proper name of the religion revealed through the Prophet Muhammad and a state that describes the adherents of any true religion who conform themselves to God’s Will. The Quran describes previous prophets as “those who submit”—Abraham and Jacob (2:132); Abraham and Ishmael (2:128); the apostles of Christ (3:52; 5:111)—and hence as followers of islām. Many Muslims say that this verse shows that the only religion acceptable to God is the one revealed to the Prophet of Islam, but the most universal meaning of it, which been emphasized by many Islamic authorities over the ages, is that islām in this verse refers to submission to God even if it is not in the

<sup>209</sup> *Al-Qur’an Dan Terjemahnya*, Penyempurnaan 2019 (Jakarta: LPMQ Balitbangdiklat Kemenag RI, n.d.), 68.

context of Islam as the specific religion revealed through the Quran. Cognizant of the broader Quranic sense of submission, the commentators do not restrict islām to simply denoting the proper name of the revelation to the Prophet Muhammad; yet a number of them assert that, after the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, no religion other than his will be accepted by God. They apply a similar conclusion to 3:85: Whosoever seeks a religion other than submission (islām), it shall not be accepted of him.<sup>210</sup>

For a fuller discussion of Islam's unique view of validity, “The Study Quran” then offers the reader to examine the interpretation of QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:62, as well as QS. Ali Imran [3]:3-4, 85, and 113–115, as well as the essay entitled “The Quran's View of Sacred History and Other Religions” at the end of “The Study Quran” written by one of its commentators, Joseph Lombard.

2) QS. Ali Imran [3]:85

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ  
الْخَسِرِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾ (آل عمران/3: 85)

In interpreting this verse, “The Study Quran” not only emphasizes the concept of Islam etymologically but also gives the impression of rejecting the status of this verse as a *nasikh* (verse that erases) the existence of QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:62 on the grounds that what can be erased is only a law or legal order, not a truth or a history. The following is an excerpt from the interpretation of QS. Ali Imran [3]:85 in “The Study Quran”:

<sup>210</sup> Nasr et al., “The Study Quran”..., 244–45.

It is reported that this verse was revealed in connection with one of the Companions who left Islam along with twelve other people and went to Makkah (Q, M, Th). Although some commentators record the opinion that considers 2:62 (Whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord) to have been abrogated by this verse, this type of abrogation is not recognized by mainstream Islamic Law and Quran interpretation, since only a ruling or legal command can be abrogated, not a truth or a report, such as one has here (see 2:62c). However, the idea that 3:85 abrogates 2:62 is connected to the interpretation expressed by some commentators (R, T) that this verse denies the “acceptability” of any form of religion other than that brought by the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>211</sup>

“The Study Quran” adds the explanation that this is not an inconsistent understanding, as it does not consider the more general and universal use of *islām* and *muslim* in the Quran to refer to all true monotheistic religions. Readers themselves are expected to enrich their understanding by reading the interpretations of other related verses, namely in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:128, 131–132, then QS. Ali Imran [3]:19, 52, and QS. Al-Maidah [5]:111, as well as reading the essay entitled “The Quran's View of Sacred History and Other Religions” at the back of the book. Instead of enriching understanding directly in the interpretation of this verse, “The Study Quran” chooses to open a new discussion in the second paragraph of the interpretation of this verse.

In 2:62 the issue is whether the notion of belief or faith (*īmān*) can be applied to Jews, Christians, and Sabians, while in this verse the question is whether *islām*, or submission to God, can include others beyond the followers of the Prophet

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<sup>211</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 273.

Muhammad. Opinions seem to leave the interpretation open. Ibn Kathīr, for example, understands a religion other than submission here to mean, “A path other than what God has laid down,” which can include the People of the Book, while al-Zamakhsharī says that in this verse *islām* (submission) means recognizing Divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) and submitting one’s face to God, attributes not limited to the followers of Muhammad. Moreover, reading this verse in the context of those that precede and follow it and taking into consideration the occasion of revelation mentioned above, one could reasonably conclude that the scope of this verse is limited to those people who, after having accepted Islam, then make a conscious decision to leave it. This would echo the themes brought up in vv. 79–80 as well as v. 86, which mention those who disbelieve in Islam after having believed in it.<sup>212</sup>

It is evident that “The Study Quran” “secures” the reader’s opinion by immediately presenting the opinion of the interpreter who is in line with the team’s vision and mission, and reinforcing it with a discussion of the context of the verses that accompany QS. Ali Imran [3]:85.

3) QS. Al-Maidah [5]:3

...الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتَمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ  
الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا ... ﴿٣﴾ (المائدة/5: 3)

In response to the concept of the perfection of Islam and Allah’s pleasure in Islam as a religion in QS. Al-Maidah [5]:3, “The Study Quran” not only relates it to the Shia tradition as in the following text excerpt:

According to some early Shiite traditions, this verse was reportedly revealed at the site of Ghadīr Khumm in Juhfah, where the Prophet and the rest of the pilgrims had halted on

<sup>212</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 273.

their return journey to Madinah after the final pilgrimage. At this site, the Prophet reportedly declared, “For whomever I am his master (mawlā), ‘Alī is [also] his master (mawlā).” Both Sunni and Shiite sources record this event, but it holds special significance for Shiites, who understand the Prophet’s statement on this occasion to have been a direct nomination of ‘Alī as spiritual and political leader of the Muslim community after the Prophet, an interpretation not accepted by Sunnis. According to these Twelver Shiite traditions, the “perfection of religion” and “completion of blessing” in this verse are thus said to refer to the establishment of spiritual authority (walāyah/wilāyah or imāmah) in the line of ‘Alī (Qm, Ṭū). Some Shiite traditions, however, place both the Prophet’s statement regarding ‘Alī and this verse at the time of the Prophet’s Farewell Sermon at ‘Arafah, rather than at the site of Ghadīr Khumm on the return trip to Madinah.<sup>213</sup>

“The Study Quran” also asserts at the end of its commentary on this verse that monotheism is superior to Allah's verbal affirmation of his approval of Islam as a religion, despite the earlier acknowledgment that the Islam referred to in this verse is the religious entity brought by the Prophet Muhammad, not merely Islam in its etymological meaning of submission:

Approved for you as religion, Submission (Islām) could also be rendered, “chosen for you as religion, Submission (Islam).” Here, Islām is widely considered to be used in the confessional sense of those who follow the religion revealed in the Quran through the Prophet Muhammad, rather than in the universal sense of submission to God that the terms islām and muslim have elsewhere in the Quran (see, e.g., 2:131; 3:19, 85; and the essay “The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions”). According to a report in alṬabarī, however, islām here indicates the full submission of one’s heart to the principle of Divine Oneness (tawhīd) and represents a level higher than merely the verbal affirmation of this truth.<sup>214</sup>

<sup>213</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 485.

<sup>214</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 485.

## 4) QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:208

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ كَافَّةً ... ﴿البقرة/2: 208﴾

As for the interpretation of QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:208, “The Study Quran” presents several opinions, so that the single interpretation that is commonly found, namely "enter Islam as a whole," does not appear. That is, there is an implied message that silm does not necessarily mean Islam, taking into consideration the opinions of the interpreters as listed below:

Many interpret peace (silm) here to mean “submission” (islām; R, T), but acknowledge that this is not the word’s literal meaning. Others interpret it to mean “enter into obedience” (IK). All together renders kāffatan, an adverb that can also be read as “altogether” (R), in which case the command would mean “enter into all of it,” not “all of you enter it.” Some report that this verse was revealed in connection with a group of Jewish converts who still desired to observe the Sabbath and other specifically Jewish rituals that did not explicitly contradict Islamic teachings (e.g., by continuing to abstain from certain foods that Muslims are permitted to eat). One possible interpretation is that, if it does mean islām and is addressed to Muslims, it means that Muslims should immerse themselves more deeply and completely in islām and not omit any of its rites and commands (R). Others think that it is addressed to Jews and Christians (i.e., believers in Moses and Jesus), urging them to convert en masse to Islam or to embrace the totality of Islam (Q). The verse can also suggest that when people enter into peace, they should do so together and not be factionalized. Follow not the footsteps of Satan also appears in v. 168; 6:142; 24:21. <sup>215</sup>

Outwardly, it appears that “The Study Quran” is more inclined to interpret the word silm with the meaning of "peace"

<sup>215</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 161.

rather than with the meaning of "Islam" as a religious entity that can provide a space for coexistence for readers, especially scholars from outside Islam.

## 2. Multireligious & multicultural awareness

### a. Religious and cultural diversity

“The Study Quran” has attempted to instill awareness in its readers to recognize religious and cultural diversity just as the Qur'an does. More specifically, it can be traced in the interpretation of QS. Al-Maidah [5]:48, QS. Ali Imran [3]:64, and QS. Al-Hujurat [49]:13.

#### 1) QS. Al-Maidah [5]:48

..لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَا جَا<sup>ظ</sup> وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً  
وَلَكِنْ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَيْتُمْكُمْ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ... ﴿٤٨﴾ (المائدة/5: 48)

The interpretation of QS. Al-Maidah [5]:48 begins with the thesis of the legitimacy of Jews and Christians in terms of their own scriptures, each of which has its own unique legal system, although there are essential principles in common. Following is an excerpt from the interpretation of QS. Al-Maidah [5]:48 in “The Study Quran”:

Although vv. 41–47, taken together, suggest the validity of Jews and Christians judging by their own scriptures, and thus the continuing spiritual guidance to be found in those scriptures, this verse goes farther by asserting the providential nature of different religious communities and their distinct laws and practices. Indeed, the verse does not pertain only to Jews and Christians, but rather makes a universal statement about all religions. For each among you We have appointed a law and a way indicates that different

religious communities may have different ritual and legal formulations specifically “appointed” for them by God, and that each religious community is independent of the laws of other such communities, even if the essential truths and principles of the religions are the same (IK, Q, R, T). <sup>216</sup>

After that, “The Study Quran” criticizes the exclusivity of one interpretation that is inconsistent with the implications of the verse. The fact that the verse already implies the existence of several religious communities is the divine will.

Law here translates shir‘ah, from the same root as sharī‘ah, the technical term for religious law, and Islamic Law in particular; way (minhāj) denotes a path that is smooth and clear (T, Z). For some commentators, these different “laws” and “ways” are not valid simultaneously; rather, God ordains a particular “law” and “way” for each era (Bḍ, Z). A minority opinion attributed to the early commentator Mujāhid understands a law and a way as a reference to one law and one way, namely, Islam (T). Ibn Kathīr argues that in for each among you We have appointed a law and a way, the word “Quran” was elided, but meant to be understood, so that the phrase would read, “for each among you We have appointed [the Quran] as a law and a way,” indicating the universality of Quranic rulings. These more exclusivist readings, however, seem inconsistent with the verse’s clear implication that it is the Divine Will that there be multiple religious communities, as expressed in the next line of this verse, had God willed, He would have made you one community (T). Grammatically, this is a counterfactual conditional statement indicating that human beings do not exist as one (religious) community, because God has not willed it as such. See also 2:213; 10:19; 11:118; 16:93; 42:8, where the reality of multiple human religious communities is also mentioned. <sup>217</sup>

<sup>216</sup> Nasr et al., “*The Study Quran*”..., 520.

<sup>217</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran*..., 521.



The last part of the interpretation of this verse is the submission that the test of obedience as the goal of a plurality of religious forms and communities is a form of divine wisdom:

Moreover, the present verse goes on to state a Divine purpose for this plurality of religious forms, namely, that He might try you in that which He has given you, by testing your obedience (T). Thus like other modes of human differentiation mentioned in the Quran—including gender, race, and social status (cf. 49:13)—the existence of different religious communities can be understood as a matter of Divine Wisdom whose intention is advancing the spiritual good of human beings. A good example of religious differentiation as a test of obedience can be seen in 2:143–45, where God is said to appoint different directions of prayer (qiblahs) for different communities; He appointed for the Muslims a qiblah different from that of the People of Book, so that He would know those who follow the Messenger from those who turn back. Commentators who interpret the different revealed religious forms as having validity only in particular historical situations, however, suggest that the existence of different religions is a “trial” to distinguish the faithful from those who disbelieve (Q) with regard to the religious form that was ordained by God for their own time, abrogating those that came before it (IK).<sup>218</sup>

2) QS. Ali Imran [3]:64

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ  
وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ  
تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾ (آل عمران/3: 64)

In this verse, “The Study Quran” presents a non-Islamic-centric view. Most commentaries explain that the Qur'an calls upon the People of the Book to follow what Christianity and Judaism have in

<sup>218</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran*..., 521.

common with Islam. However, here “The Study Quran” attempts to form an opinion for the reader that the essence of this verse is the mainstreaming of justice among all religions. In other words, there is an attitude of moderation that wants to be fought for, even without having to be the dominant group. This is reflected in the following quote:

Interpreting this verse hinges on the understanding of common (*sawā'*), a word sometimes understood as meaning “just” or “fair.” *Sawā'* comes from a root meaning “level [with],” “same,” “equal,” “straight,” “sound,” “well-proportioned,” or “middle [of],” as in *sawā' al-sabīl*, which literally means “the middle of the road,” but idiomatically means “the right way” (e.g., 28:22). Thus, this phrase is interpreted by some to mean not that the Quran is calling the People of the Book to observe what Christianity or Judaism have in common with Islam, but that this word (or these words) to which the Prophet is calling the People of the Book are just and fair (R). Al-Rāzī glosses it thus: “Come to a word in which there is fair treatment from each of us to the other.” Others, while accepting the gloss of “just,” go on to explain that it refers to what these religions have in common, since they all claim to worship God (M), and others similarly say that *sawā'* refers to that regarding which the Quran, the Torah, and the Gospel do not differ (Z). Al-Tha‘labī quotes an opinion of Ibn Mas‘ūd that to call some to the *sawā'* of something is to call them to the middle of it. For some, the command in this verse was meant to address the Jews in and around Madinah, while for others it was directed at both Jews and Christians (Ṭ), but some restricted it to the Christians of Najrān in particular (Q).<sup>219</sup>

<sup>219</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 264–65.

## 3) QS. Al-Hujurat [49]:13

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ  
 لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٣﴾ )  
 (الحجرت/49: 13)

Through this verse, “The Study Quran” assures readers that religious and cultural diversity is a source for them to gain a deeper appreciation of the reality of the human condition. The following is an excerpt from the interpretation of QS. Al-Hujurat [49]:13 in “The Study Quran”:

This is among the most famous verses of the Quran. From a male and a female can be understood as a reference to Adam and Eve (Q), but also to the creation of each human being from the fluid of a man and a woman (T). That people have been divided into diverse peoples and tribes that they may come to know one another indicates the manner in which differences in tribe, race, ethnicity, language, nationality, and religion can be sources through which human beings gain a deeper appreciation for the reality of the human condition. In this regard, the Prophet has said, “God does not look at your bodies, nor at your forms. He looks at your hearts.” In another ḥadīth, the heart is presented as the reality that determines all other dimensions of one’s being: “There is in man a clump of flesh. If it is pure, the whole body is pure. If it is polluted, the whole body is polluted. It is the heart.” The outward diversity that divides human beings is thus one of the greatest tests that human beings confront in the life of this world, as in 5:48: And had God willed, He would have made you one community, but [He willed otherwise], that He might try you in that which He has given you. So, vie with one another in good deeds. Unto God shall be your return all together, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ.<sup>220</sup>

<sup>220</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 2262–63.

In the next section, “The Study Quran” presents the concept of taqwa not as a feeling of fear, but rather reverence. Rather than interpreting the word "taqwa" to mean "piety" as is commonly found in other commentaries, the authors of “The Study Quran” prefer to interpret the word to mean "reverence." In this sense, the most obedient and respectful person, regardless of religious background, is the most beloved. In this sense, the most obedient and respectful person, regardless of religious background, is the most beloved by God on the Day of Judgment.

The combination of nobility and reverence marks a remarkable transition from the attitudes of pre-Islamic Arabia, in which reverence (taqwā), which also has the sense of “God-fearing,” or just “fearing” in pre-Islamic Arabia) and nobility were considered polar opposites. This late Madinan verse thus signals a revamping of the moral order of Arabia to one in which true worth is no longer determined by lineage and grandiose displays of valor and generosity, but by the depth of faith and piety. In this vein, the Prophet is reported to have said, “Truly God has ennobled those who were lowly during the Age of Ignorance. Through Islam, God removed the zealotry of the Age of Ignorance and its custom of vainglorious boasting regarding kinsfolk and noble descent. Today, all the people, be they white, black, Qurayshī, Arab or non-Arab, are seen to be descendants of Adam. And, assuredly, God created Adam from clay, and the people most beloved by God on the Day of Resurrection will be the most obedient and the most reverent among them.”<sup>221</sup>

b. Inter-religious relations

“The Study Quran” is often seen in its efforts to pave the way for coexistence with the major world religions, namely Judaism,

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<sup>221</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 2263.

Christianity, and Islam along with other religions that are also mentioned in the Quran such as the Magi and Sabines. These efforts can be traced in the Quran in all the verses relating to religions and their respective followers. More specifically, the interpretation is found in verses that state directly about relations between religions. Among the interpretations of these verses is the interpretation of QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 62, 113, 120, QS. Al-Maidah [5]: 18, 51, 69, 72, 82, QS. At-Taubah [9]: 30, and QS. Al-Hajj [22]: 17. The following is a description of the interpretation of these verses.

1) QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 62

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصْرَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ  
وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ  
وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾ (البقرة/2: 62)

At the beginning of the interpretation of QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 62,

“The Study Quran” describes quite succinctly but clearly the origin of the term religions listed, namely Sabiin, Christianity and Judaism. In this case, it means that “The Study Quran” is trying to introduce the reader to the concept of (other) religions that need to be understood. For example, by providing evidence that Sabiin are monotheists.

Cf. 5:69. Sabeans renders *ṣābi*, which some derive from the verb *ṣabaʿa* insofar as it can be used to mean “to go from one religion to another.” It also means “to rise,” as in the case of stars, or “to come upon,” “to emerge,” or “to arise.”

Others read it as coming from *ṣabā*, meaning “to incline,” as in from one religion to another (Ṭ). The pagan Arabs used to call the Prophet Muhammad a *ṣābi*’ in this sense, in that he had left the religion of his forefathers (R). According to the commentators the *ṣābi*’ could be: (1) people who have no recognizable religion; according to some accounts, there were people who declared, “There is no god but God,” but had no rites or books or prophet, and did not accept the Prophet Muhammad; (2) people who worshipped angels and faced the *qiblah*, reciting the Psalms; (3) a group of the People of the Book who left their religion; (4) people who think they are following the religion of Noah; or (5) monotheists who believe in the effects of the planets, and hence are unbelievers (R, Q, Ṭ). In the early centuries of Islamic history, the people of Ḥarrān in Syria who followed a religion deeply influenced by esoteric elements in earlier Greek and Near Eastern religions called themselves Ṣabeans to enjoy the status given to the *ṣābi’ūn* in the Quran. Members of the present-day Mandaean sect in southern Iraq and Iran are also called *ṣābi*’. They are monotheists and consider John the Baptist to be their prophet; their main ritual is baptism, and many believe that they migrated to their present site from the Jordan Valley.<sup>222</sup>

In fact, in many places, including in the interpretation of this verse, “The Study Quran” uses other religious scriptures as references to interpret or help understand the interpretation of the verse in question. For example, in this verse, Acts 24:5 is mentioned to give additional reasons for the mention of Christians in the Quran with the term *naṣārā*.

Christians renders *naṣārā* (sing. *naṣrān* or *naṣrānī*), which most plausibly derives from Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth (al-Nāṣirah), but several other etymologies are also given. Acts 24:5 describes an accuser who speaks pejoratively of Paul as “a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes,” which is the only time this term appears in the Bible. This pejorative use continued in the early centuries of Christianity, but later developed, in some quarters, as a way of labeling “Jewish

<sup>222</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 73.

Christians” as distinct from “Pauline Christians,” and other terms, such as the Middle Persian tarsāg and of course kristiyān, came into use as labels for the followers of Christ. The precise origin of naṣārā has, for some, some bearing on whether certain beliefs mentioned in the Quran, such as the worship of Mary and Jesus (5:116) or God’s taking a consort (72:3), stem from a local sect of Christians with beliefs different from mainstream Chalcedonian Christianity. Using etymologies in this way, although often interesting, can be misleading, since the origin of a word often has scant connection with its later use; for further discussion of these issues, see 3:3–4c; 4:171c; 5:17c; 5:73c.<sup>223</sup>

In addition, it explains how Jews are named with various syntactic derivations of the root, although it must be admitted that this explanation is shorter than the explanation of the words Sabi’in and Nasrani.

Those who are Jews makes use of the verb hād a /yahūd u, which is very likely derived from the noun yahūd, or “Jew,” and is literally something like “those who hād,” where hād is a verb. Among the etymologies given are that hād means “to be repentant,” “to incline” toward one other, or “to move” (as when one recites the Torah; Th).<sup>224</sup>

After the reader has been introduced to the religions mentioned in these verses, “The Study Quran” then opens a discussion on the important topic of these verses, namely soteriology. It is interesting that the first commentary to be presented is that of al-Qusyairi, whose opinion is in fact quite different from that of most classical commentators. Here is an excerpt:

<sup>223</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 73.

<sup>224</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 73–74.

Concerning this verse the commentator al-Qushayrī writes, “The differences in paths, with the oneness of the origin, does not hinder the beauty of acceptance. Whosoever affirms [God] the Real in His signs, and believes in the truth and His Qualities of which He informs them—namely, the Truth and His Qualities—then the differences in religious paths [or laws, shar‘] and the differences in the appellation of names do not impinge on the realization of the good pleasure [of God].”<sup>225</sup>

In addition to proposing al-Qusyairi's thesis in its interpretation, “The Study Quran” also raises a similar thesis attributed to al-Gazali regarding the criteria of non-Muslims who may enter heaven and receive God's mercy in the future. Non-Muslims who grow up with "unfair" social situations and conditions in facilitating the arrival of religious guidance provide a loophole that Allah's grace can still descend, as long as they believe in Him and in the hereafter and do good. Al-Ghazali's opinion can be seen in the following quote:

The theologian and mystic Abū Hamid al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), in his famous work *Fayṣal al-tafriqah*, argues that the “Christians of Byzantium” and the “Turks” (still outside the Islamic world at that time) would come under God’s Mercy. Those who know the teachings and virtues of the Prophet and yet still deny him deserve to be called disbelievers, but al-Ghazzālī gives wide latitude in recognizing the obstacles to this knowledge. How could a Turk who had never heard of Muhammad be faulted? Moreover, why should a person who grows up hearing the Prophet Muhammad referred to as “the great liar” investigate his truth claims, since one would not expect the same from a Muslim who hears of someone accused of being a false prophet? Hearing the name Muhammad means nothing if one learns only of the opposite of his true attributes. One could extend this reasoning to point out that

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<sup>225</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 74.



one is unlikely to deem a religion good or desire to learn about it, if the only followers one meets are bad. Such mitigating circumstances, namely, that birthplace, upbringing, and social experience mediate one's knowledge of religion, provide ample space for God's Mercy to encompass those who believe in Him and in the Hereafter and act righteously. <sup>226</sup>

“The Study Quran” then continues the argument that followers of religions outside Islam can get their salvation in the afterlife. The argument is based on the opinion of some interpreters who state that non-Muslim groups who accept the truth of the Prophet Muhammad but still carry out rituals according to their respective religions are included in the context of this verse, as illustrated in the following quote:

Some argue that these other groups are believers simply insofar as they affirm the truth of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). However, Christians who affirm the message of Muhammad would no longer be Christian at all, just as those who practice idolatry would no longer be idolaters if they accept Muhammad. Still, it is not uncommon for commentators to insert the phrase “and follows Muhammad and acts according to his Law” as a gloss on whosoever believes in God (Aj). <sup>227</sup>

Furthermore, “The Study Quran” adds to the argument by refuting the opinion of Ibn Abbas quoted by al-Qurtubi, as illustrated in the following quote:

Al-Qurtubī mentions an opinion, attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās, that 3:85 (Whosoever seeks a religion other than submission, it shall not be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he shall be among the losers) abrogates this verse. But a widely accepted principle of abrogation is that only

<sup>226</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 74.

<sup>227</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 74–75.

legal rulings or commands can be abrogated, not descriptive statements, especially as regards one's status in the Hereafter. <sup>228</sup>

The interpretation of this verse then concludes with the explanation that the absence of fear or sadness after death is the core of the concept of salvation in Islam, as well as the criteria for who can get the chance to be saved in the future, as the following quote shows:

No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve is a description of one's life after death, the equivalent of what might be called salvation. It describes the reward of those who follow God's Guidance (v. 38), those who submit with faith (2:112), whoever believes and is righteous (6:48), the friend of God (10:62), and those who say, "Our Lord is God" (46:13). <sup>229</sup>

2) QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 113

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ لَيْسَتِ النَّصْرَىٰ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ ۖ وَقَالَتِ النَّصْرَىٰ لَيْسَتِ  
الْيَهُودُ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ ۖ وَهُمْ يَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ ۚ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ مِثْلَ  
قَوْلِهِمْ ۗ فَاللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾  
(البقرة/2: 113)

In this verse, "The Study Quran" tries to convey that based on the teachings of their respective religions, they should affirm rather than deny the truths in other religions, as the truth in matters of religious dispute is the right of God, which will be revealed on the Day of Judgment. Basically, the mission of the prophets was to

<sup>228</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 75.

<sup>229</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 75.

explain the different teachings to their people, not to attack other people. Here is the full quote from the tafsir of QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:

113 above:

...But, as others point out, this would negate the obvious intent of censure in the verse, which 104 indicates that the Jews and Christians are wrong to make this accusation against each other (IK). They make these claims even though they recite the Book, which means that in what they espouse they should affirm rather than deny the truths in the other religion; in the case of the Jews, the Torah speaks to the truth of Jesus, and in the case of the Christians, the Gospel affirms Moses and the Torah (T) ... The suspension of a final verdict regarding religious differences is a consistent theme in the Quran. God's Judgment or disclosure of the truth in matters of religious disagreement on the Day of Judgment is also mentioned in 3:55; 5:48; 6:164; 10:93; 16:92; 16:124; 22:69; 32:25; 39:3, 46. The Quran states that at one time mankind was but one community (10:19), and that even if all were made one community again, they did not cease to differ (11:118). In other instances, the prophets are given the mission of making clear these differences (16:64, in the case of Muhammad; 43:63, in the case of Jesus).<sup>230</sup>

3) QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 120

وَلَنْ تَرْضَىٰ عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلَا النَّصَارَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ قُلْ إِنْ هَدَىٰ اللَّهُ  
هُوَ الْهُدَىٰ وَلَئِنْ اتَّبَعْتَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ بَعْدَ الَّذِي جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ  
مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ﴿١٢٠﴾ (البقرة/2: 120)

In QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 120, "The Study Quran" seems to be deliberately silent about the "unwillingness of Jews and Christians" at all. Instead, the authors propose a thesis based on al-Qurtubi's opinion that *akidah* means *millah*, a word that can also mean "community". Furthermore, the word

<sup>230</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 105.

can be used to refer to religious law (sharia) or the "way" defined as a particular religious community (Q). The verse that should provide a way of indoctrination for Muslims that Jews and Christians are "enemies", it turns out that in this interpretation it can be used to reduce the tension by shifting the focus to a term that can better embrace all religions, namely millah. A complete description of this interpretation can be seen in the following quote:

For some commentators this verse is a confirmation that the question in v. 118 is not sincere, but a taunt (Q). Creed renders millah, a word that also can mean "community," but that can furthermore be used to refer to the religious law (sharī'ah) or "way" that defines a particular religious community (Q) and is used this way elsewhere (2:130, 135; 3:95; 4:125; 6:161; 7:88; 12:37; 14:13; 16:123; 18:20; 22:78; 38:7). See v. 145 for a similar message about the following of others' caprices, meaning their egocentric whims rather than the truth. Some commentators report that when the qiblah was changed to the Ka'bah away from Jerusalem, this created resentment among the Jews and Christians, who wanted to use a truce as a delaying tactic while trying to turn the Prophet away from the new religion (Th).<sup>231</sup>

4) QS. Al-Maidah [5]:18

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ وَالنَّصْرَى نَحْنُ أَبْنَاءُ اللَّهِ وَأَحِبَّاؤُهُ قُلْ فَلِمَ يُعَذِّبُكُمْ بِذُنُوبِكُمْ  
بَلْ أَنْتُمْ بَشَرٌ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقَ ... ﴿١٨﴾ (المائدة/5: 18)

In QS. Al-Maidah [5]:18, "The Study Quran" even dares to take references from the Bible in the letters of Matthew, Luke and John in order to provide a more valid picture for (Muslim) readers about the nature of the term "child" in the Christian tradition. Such boldness falls within the corridor of comparative competence in religious literacy

<sup>231</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 110.

because it allows readers to "ask" or learn directly from the Bible as the highest source of authority for Christians. Here is the full quote:

The Quran frequently criticizes the idea that God has sons or daughters (2:116; 6:100; 9:30; 10:68; 17:40, 111; 18:4; 19:35, 88–93; 21:26; 25:2; 37:149, 153; 39:4; 43:16, 81–82; 52:39; 72:3). This is the only place, however, where the Quran criticizes Jews and Christians for referring to themselves as the children of God, an idea mentioned explicitly in the Christian Gospels (see, e.g., Matthew 5:9; Luke 20:36; John 11:52). In the Hebrew scriptures, the Israelite people are collectively referred to as the “firstborn son” of God (see Exodus 4:22–23), and as the royal representatives of Israel, both David and Solomon are referred to as the “son” of God (see Psalm 2:7; 1 Chronicles 28:6). According to Ibn ‘Abbās, this verse was intended as a response to some Madinan Jews who rejected the Prophet’s calls to Islam and warnings of Divine punishment by asserting that, as the children of God, and His beloved ones, they had nothing to fear (Ṭ, Z). Although the Quran does not criticize their claim as an explicit assertion of divinity for individual Jews and Christians (JJ, R), the verse refutes this general claim, at least partly, in the same manner that it refutes claims of divinity for Jesus or Mary, that is, by reminding Jews and Christians that they are mortals and beings of His creating and so bounded by a birth and a death over which they have no ultimate control.<sup>232</sup>

Once again, “The Study Quran” offers the discourse that the terms "son of God" and "Father" are metaphorical notions that have been misunderstood by many Muslims who believe that Christians are not monotheists based on their doctrine of the trinity. This view can be seen in the following quote:

The commentators are generally aware that the Jewish and Christian claim to be children of God is not a literal one; rather, they assert that it is a metaphorical and/or a genealogical extension of their respective claims about Ezra and Jesus being His “sons” (IK, R, Z; cf. 9:30). Some cite the Gospel passage in which Jesus says to his followers, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father” (John 20:17), as a possible source for this

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<sup>232</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 498–99.

misunderstanding (IK), although the metaphorical idea of God as “Father” is found in various places in the Judeo-Christian scriptures and seems to have been well established in the Judaic context prior to the Gospel accounts. Al-Rāzī links Jewish and Christian claims to be the children of God to implicit claims of special Divine Mercy and favor that they are said to have made for themselves according to other passages in the Quran (cf. 2:111, 135). The verse also refutes the claim of Jews and Christians that they are the children of God, and His beloved ones by arguing that such a status would preclude His punishing them for their sins—something that, the commentators observe, both Christians and Jews accept, even if Jews believe they will be punished for only a brief period (cf. 2:80; 3:24).<sup>233</sup>

5) QS. Al-Maidah [5]:51

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصْرَىٰ أَوْلِيَاءَ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ  
 وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ مِنْكُمْ فَاِنَّهُ مِنْهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٥١﴾  
 (المائدة/5: 51)

In QS. Al-Maidah [5]:51, the word *awliyā'* has several meanings, and one of the most common is protector. Admittedly or not, the choice of meaning means allowing Muslims to befriend and relate to non-Muslims in the context of daily life, not the context of power. In addition, “The Study Quran” also balances the discourse by stating that in other verses there are also instructions that the disbelievers (not the People of the Book) should also not be used as protectors, as well as Jews and Christians. In other words, the main focus that must be considered is not to reject these religious communities, but to support the stability of Muslims at the beginning of the government which still has many

<sup>233</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 499.

challenges. The following is a complete quote from the interpretation of QS. Al-Maidah [5]:5:

This verse addressed to Muslims (O you who believe) forbids them to take Jews and Christians as protectors (awliyā'). Awliyā' (sing. walī) can also mean "friends" or "allies" (see also 3:28c; 4:139c), but here more likely denotes those whom one would turn to as a protector or dominant authority. This term and the verbal noun from the same root, walāyah, are used in the Quran to denote the bonds of loyalty, mutual protection, and friendship that ideally mark the relationship between members of the same religious community (see, e.g., 8:72; 9:71). Although this is the only verse in the Quran in which believers are urged not to take Jews and Christians, specifically, as protectors, believers are elsewhere urged to avoid taking as protectors those who disbelieve (3:28; 4:89, 139, 144), those who mock their religion (v. 57), God's enemies (60:1), and even close relatives who prefer disbelief to belief (9:23). That Jews and Christians are protectors of one another indicates that they realize those bonds of loyalty among themselves, as separate religious communities; and in vv. 80–81, they are criticized for having themselves taken "disbelievers" as protectors.<sup>234</sup>

Furthermore, to showcase the tolerant and inclusive side of Islam, "The Study Quran" provides key analysis so that readers do not misunderstand this verse. Firstly, the phrase "alliance of protection ... at the time of the Prophet" means that it must be interpreted that the ruling of this verse is tied to the context of state stability at that time. Secondly, the phrase "and it is important to note ... non-Muslim political entities" will strengthen the argument that the use of this verse has been very dynamic even since the Prophet's companions as the first living generation. An illustration of this can be seen in the following quote:

The verse's prohibition against alliances of protection with those outside the Muslim community likely had much to do with the

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<sup>234</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 523.

fluid and somewhat precarious social and political situation of the fledgling Islamic community during the time of the Prophet; and it is important to note that Islamic Law, developed after the Islamic state had become fully established, allowed agreements of mutual protection with non-Muslim states and political entities. According to some commentators, this verse also means, in part, that the relationships of inheritance between those who ally themselves with another group and the members of the Muslim community are nullified, since the root for awliyā'/walī can relate to inheritance as well as to mutual protection (Q, Ṭs).<sup>235</sup>

In fact, “The Study Quran”'s argumentation regarding this verse reaches its peak when at the end of the commentary it proposes the thesis that forbidding friends with people of other religions is tantamount to opposing the spirit of the Quran regarding interfaith relations as stated in the commentaries of QS. 5:5 and 60:7-8 below:

The word for protector (awliyā'/walī) can also mean “friend,” and thus the verse may cast doubt on the acceptability of Muslims maintaining amiable relations with Jews and Christians, leading some but not all to conclude that one should not have close relationships with them or confide in them (Z). Some commentators include a report that the second Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, adduced this verse in an (unsuccessful) attempt to persuade his provincial governor, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, to stop employing the services of his Christian scribe (IK, R, Z). Nonetheless, most commentators as well as the reported occasion of revelation for this verse make clear that here the word connotes something closer to “protector” or “ally” and situates it in a context of the Islamic community struggling to define and establish itself against those who were enemies of the religion. The verse should not be interpreted as forbidding friendly relations with Jews and Christians on a purely personal level, since such a reading would contradict v. 5, which allowed for the most intimate of personal relationships—marriage—to exist between Muslim men and Jewish and Christian women, and 60:7–8, which states that Muslims may behave justly and kindly to any who do not fight them on account of religion or otherwise oppress them.<sup>236</sup>

<sup>235</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 523–24.

<sup>236</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 524.



## 6) QS. Al-Maidah [5]:69

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئُونَ وَالنَّصْرَىٰ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ  
 الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾ (المائدة/5: 69)

QS. Al-Maidah [5]:69 is one of the main supports of “The Study Quran”’s thesis that non-Muslims have the potential for salvation, even including the followers of beliefs outside the Abrahamic religions. This salvation will be obtained by them as long as they fulfill the requirements, namely believing in God and the Last Day and doing good.

Here is an excerpt of the interpretation in full:

This verse is nearly identical to 2:62; see 2:62c. Compare this verse also to 22:17, where it is said that God will judge between those who believe, the Jews, the Sabeans, the Christians, and the Magians (or Zoroastrians, majūs), on the Day of Resurrection. This present verse, however, situated as it is within a sūrah largely devoted to the People of the Book, and within a long section that discusses the People of the Book critically, represents one of the most important Quranic affirmations of the potential of those outside the Muslim community to achieve salvation. Although Jews, Christians, and Sabeans are mentioned specifically, the verse also refers more broadly to whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness, thereby opening the possibility of salvation even beyond the Abrahamic faiths. This verse, along with v. 5, which allows intermarriage between Muslim men and People of the Book, and v. 48, which indicates that God has ordained more than one religious “law” and “way,” argues for the continued validity of Judaism, Christianity, and by extension other Divinely revealed religions, despite the strong criticism of certain Jewish and Christian doctrines and practices found here and elsewhere in the Quran.<sup>237</sup>

<sup>237</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 540.

## 7) QS. Al-Maidah [5]:72

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَقَالَ الْمَسِيحُ يَبْنِي  
 إِسْرَائِيلَ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ مَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ  
 الْجَنَّةَ وَمَأْوَاهُ النَّارُ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ ﴿٧٢﴾ (المائدة/5: 72)

In QS. Al-Maidah [5]:72, “The Study Quran” also provides a balance of sources by mentioning other verses as well as verses in the Bible. This is done in an effort to solidify the conception of Jesus' humanity, as seen in the following quote:

See v. 17, where the specific belief that God is the Messiah is also criticized as “disbelief,” and the commentary on this verse as well as other verses where the divinity of Jesus is directly or indirectly refuted (3:59; 4:171–72; 5:75, 116–17; 9:31). In the present verse, the words of the Messiah—that is, Jesus son of Mary—are adduced to refute any belief in his divinity. From the Islamic perspective, Jesus’ statement that God is my Lord and your Lord (also found in 3:51; 5:117; 19:36; 43:64) asserts his full humanity and “servanthood” in relation to God. The only parallel in the Gospel to the words attributed to Jesus in this verse is found in John 20:17, where Jesus refers to God as “my father and your father,” although this is not in the context of a command to worship God, as it is in the Quran, and the conception of God as “father,” as noted elsewhere, is problematic from a Quranic perspective (see, e.g., 5:18, where Jews and Christians are criticized for their claim to be the “children of God”).<sup>238</sup>

## 8) QS. Al-Maidah [5]:82

﴿٨٢﴾ لَتَجِدَنَّ أَشَدَّ النَّاسِ عَدَاوَةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا وَلَتَجِدَنَّ  
 أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصْرِي ذَلِكَ بَانَ مِنْهُمْ قَسِيصِينَ  
 وَرُهْبَانًا وَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾ (المائدة/5: 82)

<sup>238</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran*..., 542.

Regarding the verse QS. Al-Maidah [5]:82, in QS. Al-Maidah [5]:82, “The Study Quran” chooses the opinion that the statement in this verse does not apply absolutely throughout the ages, but is limited to the time of revelation by relying on existing facts. In this way, the potential for negative stigma, especially against the Jewish people, can be avoided.

Here is an excerpt of the interpretation:

Although some commentators consider these statements to be absolute in nature and not limited to a particular historical situation (Th), such an interpretation is belied by the fact that at various points in Islamic history Muslims had better relations with the Jews than with Christians and Christian dynasties—the Crusades and the Spanish Reconquista would be two clear examples of this fact. It thus seems more plausible to contextualize this verse within the life of the Prophet and the early Muslim community. The Jews of Madinah and of the surrounding region presented a continual challenge to the Prophet’s authority as a prophet, and some of them reportedly colluded with the Makkan idolaters to harm the Prophet and his community. By contrast, certain Christian figures played positive and pivotal roles in the Prophet’s early life and mission. The Christian monk Bahīrah first recognized Muhammad as a prophet; Waraqah, the Christian cousin of the Prophet’s wife Khadījah, identified the early revelations the Prophet received as being Divine in origin and consistent with the Christian scriptures he knew (see the introduction to Sūrah 96); and the Negus, the Christian king of Abyssinia, sheltered some of the Makkan Muslims from persecution by keeping them as guests in Abyssinia for years until they could later journey to Madinah. The Negus reportedly recognized the affinity between the Islamic teachings and his own religious beliefs as a Christian and thus refused to hand over the Muslim refugees to the idolatrous Quraysh, who demanded their return.<sup>239</sup>

In fact, this verse itself is also the most valid example of recognition and even praise for the category of Christians who recognize the truth of Islamic teachings while still following Christian laws and the

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<sup>239</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 548.

Bible. In fact, in the same context, the Christian king became the protector of Muslim refugees who were oppressed in his homeland, as illustrated in the following quote:

One early commentator claimed that this verse came in response to the Muslims' first encounter with the Negus, when they were seeking shelter from the Makkan idolaters, although this does not make chronological sense, since this sūrah is widely considered to have been revealed in full in Madinah, and the original encounter with the Negus was during the Makkan period (IK). According to most commentators, however, the occasion for the revelation of these verses was the later visit of a delegation sent by the Negus to the Prophet in Madinah. When the Quran was recited to the Christian delegation, they began to weep and became believers (IK, T, Th, Z). Some accounts state that the delegation returned to the Negus and recited the Quran to him, whereupon he became a believer as well (T, Th). However, there is no historical evidence that the Negus later became Muslim, and the verse attributes positive attributes to Christians in general, not only to those who later embraced Islam (Th), since the Christians are described as nearest ... in affection toward those who believe, rather than as Muslim believers themselves (see also 57:27, where the virtues of Christians are similarly praised). Some say that this refers to those Christians who heard the message brought by Muhammad and believed in his prophethood, although they continued to live according to the "sharī'ah (religious law) of Jesus" or the "way of the Gospel," thus remaining "Christian" in a confessional sense (IK). Nonetheless, the report about the Negus does illustrate the good relations between the Prophet's community and an important Christian dynasty in the region and suggests that a certain spiritual affinity between the Christians and the Muslims was a basis for their good relations.<sup>240</sup>

"The Study Quran" has brilliantly elaborated on other verses that contain fair assessments of Christian teachings and behavior, some of which are off the mark and some of which are exemplary. The closeness of Christians to Islam is presented with detailed reasons with the

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<sup>240</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 548.

intention of warming up coexistence in the present. The following is an excerpt of the interpretation:

In v. 82, the Christians' nearness to the Muslim believers is attributed partly to the presence of priests and monks among them, suggesting that these men serve as exemplars of Christian virtue ... See also 3:113, where it says in reference to the People of the Book, they are not all alike. Among the People of the Book is an upright community who recite God's signs in the watches of the night, while they prostrate. Christians are also said to be "near" to Muslim believers, because they are not arrogant. Arrogance is a vice derided in all religious traditions, and the Quran repeatedly connects arrogance to the spiritual blindness that leads people to reject the signs of God, which include the prophets and their messages.<sup>241</sup>

9) QS. At-Taubah [9]: 30

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ عُزَيْرُ ابْنُ اللَّهِ وَقَالَتِ النَّصْرَى الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ قَوْلُهُمْ  
بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ يُضَاهِئُونَ قَوْلَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ قَاتَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ أَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ )  
(التوبة/9: 30)

In QS. At-Taubah [9]: 30, "The Study Quran" presents ar-Razi's opinion that the mention of "son of God" could be an honorific like the term "lover of God," as seen in the following quote:

It is said that Ezra is the son of God was the opinion of one Jew, a certain Finhās ibn 'Āzūrā', or that it was the belief of some Jews at one time, but that this belief eventually disappeared (R, T). Some mention an opinion that the Jews elevated the status of Ezra because of his role in restoring adherence to the Torah (Q, R). As to why the Christians considered Jesus the son of God, al-Rāzī, for example, speculates that they may have called him "son" by way of honor, the way Abraham is called God's "friend" (khalīl; see 4:125), and that because of various sectarian conflicts they may have taken this idea to an extreme; on the question of Jesus as son of God, see 4:171; 5:17; 19:35. Words from their mouths is taken to mean that they are simply sounds with no meaning and

<sup>241</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran*..., 548–49.

therefore different from those that are supported by evidence and demonstration (Q). God curse them! renders a kind of interjection that, though it literally reads “God fight them!” acquired in Arabic the sense of an expression of amazement (Q, R, Z).<sup>242</sup>

10) QS. Al-Hajj [22]: 17

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ وَالنَّصْرِيَّةَ وَالْمَجُوسَ وَالَّذِينَ  
 أَشْرَكُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿١٧﴾  
 (الحج/22: 17)

In this verse, “The Study Quran” presents the debate on the status of the Magi or Zoroastrians as monotheists or not. By bringing up the opinions of Islamic jurists, including Syafii et al, at the end of the commentary, it can be assumed that the tendency of the drafting team is also to approve the classification of the Magi or Zoroastrians as scribes, as can be clearly seen in the following quote:

*On the identity of the Sabeans, see 2:62c. Magians translates majūs, the only instance of this word in the Quran. It likely comes from the Greek magos, which comes from the Old and Middle Persian mugh; it was originally a reference to a line of Persian priests (from which the word “magic” derives as well as “Magi,” the three who came from the East to visit the newly born Christ, as the use of sorcery was attributed to them by the ancient Greeks). To this day, however, majūs is understood by most Muslims to be a reference to Zoroastrians in general, not just the special class of priests. Historically, there has been debate, especially among Arabs, as to whether the Zoroastrians could be considered People of the Book, and it was common for different ritual and legal matters to be judged differently; for example, many jurists forbade intermarriage with Zoroastrians but permitted the consumption of meat purchased from them, while others debated whether one could use their animals to hunt (Q); see also 9:29c, which addresses the legal treatment of the People of the Book. During Islamic history, many jurists (such as*

<sup>242</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 885.

*alShāfi'ī) accepted Zoroastrians as People of the Book, as we also see very generally in Persia and among Muslims of the Indian subcontinent.* <sup>243</sup>

### C. Forms of Representation of Religious Literacy in Tafsir “The Study Quran”

Based on the reality of the tafsir texts and the representation of religious literacy captured by the researcher through the linguistic signs expressed and implied in the texts mentioned above, namely the description in sub B of this chapter, it can be concluded that the form of representation is as follows:

1. The harmonization of opinions between groups in Islam by presenting Sunni and Shia in one discourse space;
2. Universality is used as a key rhetorical element to explain various religious concepts, including: (a) the mention of “God” in place of the standard term “Allah”; (b) the translation of all the words Islam in the Qur'an with “submission” or “surrender”; and (c) the tendency to choose peace as the meaning of “*al-silm*” over the more popular meaning of Islam;
3. Focus on presenting interpretations on the substance or essence of a matter and then reinforce them with rationalizations that are built to avoid single meanings and potential polarization of thought;
4. Intra-quranic hermeneutics is often used with a dominant portion when the opinions of traditional interpreters are not in line with the vision and mission of the drafting team;
5. Shifting the position of quotations of influential interpretations that have not been considered valid or that negatively stigmatize certain religions to

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<sup>243</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran...*, 1471.

a certain position and minimizing their portion, and accompanied by comments that give the impression that these opinions are “merely” quoted, and certainly do not represent the general views of the drafting team;

6. Rejecting the status of QS. Ali Imran [3]:85 as nasikh (abrogation) of QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:62 on the grounds that only legal verses can be abrogated, not verses containing truth or history;
7. Favoring the mainstreaming of monotheism in general over Allah's verbal affirmation of his approval of Islam as the only true religion;
8. Criticizing the exclusivity of the opinions of traditional interpreters who disapprove of the diversity of religious communities as divine will;
9. Bringing up the concept of taqwa is not a feeling of fear, but more towards respect. The implication is that there is an impression of closeness to God through the diction of "respect", whereas the diction of "fear" will actually give the impression of man's distance from God;
10. Quoting verses or verse numbers from other scriptures to balance the discourse and acknowledge the validity of other religious scriptures as sources of truth. This includes comparative competence in religious literacy because it allows Muslim readers to "ask" or learn directly from other religious scriptures. Generally, tafsir books refer their interpretations to similar Qur'anic verses, Prophetic traditions, opinions of the companions and early generations of Islam, as well as previous interpreters. Quoting israiliyat stories is no longer sourced directly from



the Torah or Gospels, but through the stories of monks or priests. Making the Bible as one of the references to add to the interpretation is certainly not an option for scholars because its truth status can be doubted, given the doctrine that holy books other than the Qur'an have been changed. Unlike “The Study Quran”, which often quotes verses in the Bible to add to the treasures of understanding on certain verses;

11. Synthesizing the opinions of al-Qusyairi and al-Ghazali that non-Muslims who grow up in social situations and conditions that are "unfair" in facilitating the arrival of religious guidance, can provide an opening that they can get salvation in the afterlife, as long as they believe in God and the afterlife and do good;
12. Educate that based on the teachings of their respective religions, they should affirm some truths in other religions instead of denying them altogether.
13. Seeking interpretations that can reduce tension between religious communities by shifting the focus (or issue) to other topics in the verse that are more inclusive of all parties.
14. Choosing the opinion of traditional interpreters that allows more room for coexistence. For example, when interpreting the word *awliya'* with the meaning of "protector" or "ruler", rather than with the meaning of "friend" in the context of QS. Al-Maidah [5]:51 so as to eliminate the assumption of the prohibition of making friends with followers of other religions.

15. Stating that there is a verse of the Qur'an whose context is limited in time. An example is QS. Al-Maidah [5]:82. This is intended as an effort to eliminate or reduce the stereotype that Jews are "enemies" of Muslims.
16. Quoting the views of interpreters who can solidify the concept of monotheism of other religions. An example is the citation of: (a) ar-Razi's opinion that the reference to Jesus as the "son of God" in the Bible is as much an honorific as the term "beloved of God" for Abraham in the Qur'an; and (b) as-Shafii's opinion that Zoroaster was a monotheist.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**THE REPRESENTATION OF RELIGIOUS LITERACY FACTORS IN**

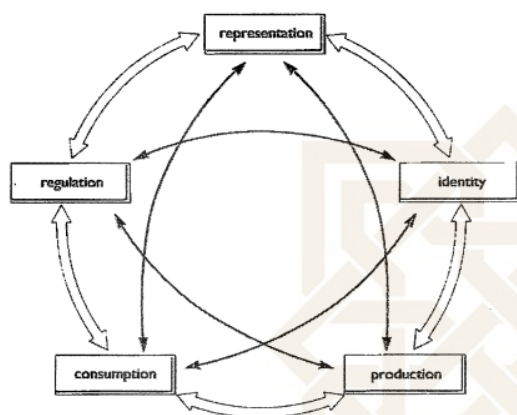
**TAFSIR “THE STUDY QURAN”**

**A. Critical Discourse Analysis of Religious Literacy Representation in Tafsir “The Study Quran”**

As Stuart Hall stated, cultural identity is always in process and will never be finished. The same thing can also be attributed to the interpretation of “The Study Quran”. This interpretation has been dynamic as a culture of “speculation” of meaning that comes from the totality of intellectual activities carried out by the academics compiling the interpretation and continues to move like a production process that will continue to produce meaning even though the interpretation has been published. This is because cultural identity does not necessarily exist and stagnate but continues to change with the influence of space, time, history, and culture. The ideas developed by “The Study Quran” tafsir represented through language are never the true meaning. This is because any meaning can always be debated, especially if the representation is not appropriate. Even so, the team compiling “The Study Quran” as producers of meaning has an interest in embedding certain meanings in the media texts they work on. The social power of being an academic and having the privilege of being chosen as the team that determines the direction of the tafsir can try to spread ideology in media texts (tafsir), encouraging preferred messages or interpretations, including when dealing with religious literacy

discourse. Understanding the signs and meanings implied by the language used in the tafsir will reveal the point of view, bias, and political position of the tafsir producer.

“The Study Quran” tafsir drafting team has agreed on a regulation that must



be followed. In this case, there are four principles that oversee every step of the interpretation work, namely: (1) the Quran is a sacred revelation, not a historical document, so that the interpretation or interpretation of any

non-Muslim orientalist figure will be denied; (2) The Qur'an contains all the doctrines about the nature of reality, from the Absolute Reality, i.e., God, to the macrocosmic and microcosmic realities, and is the source of Islamic thought. As a result, interpretations from various styles and times are treasures that need to be considered; (3) the message of the Quran regarding religion is universal; (4) it reflects the classical tradition of interpretation so that contemporary interpretation models will not be used.

Based on these four principles, it begins to appear what can be represented in the interpretation and what identity is to be highlighted. In this case, from the beginning, “The Study Quran” was intended to be a representation of both academic and ecumenical interpretation. As a result, many researchers assume that there is an underlying ideology of pluralism. Regardless, a consistent view has been represented by “The Study Quran”; at least this interpretation has clarified its identity, both in the culture of interpretation and in scientific culture. The production of meaning

produced by this tafsir has apparently opened a new discourse in the debate space that previously tended to be dichotomous, classical-contemporary, bil ma'tsur-bil ra'yi, or textualist-contextualist. To say that the interpretation of “The Study Quran” can be widely consumed does require more time and effort, considering that some of its views are quite anti-mainstream among readers (not reviewers) of the interpretation of the Qur'an. Thus, tafsir “The Study Quran” has built a new cultural building in the world of tafsir.

The building blocks of this new culture can be seen in the principles or rules that are implemented in the interpretation. Regarding the universality (message) of religion, for example, “The Study Quran” has taken the view that the Prophet Muhammad was not sent to destroy previous religions but to reaffirm their core content. From this perspective, every revelation is a formal manifestation of a formless, eternal truth. The various forms of religion do not contradict the validity and efficacy of each other, but rather are part of the test that humans face in this world, as the test is emphasized in QS. Al-Maidah [5]:48.<sup>244</sup>

This new culture produced by “The Study Quran” includes a deeper re-reading of the Quran's "statements.” An example is the rereading related to the meaning of QS. Al-Hajj [22]:67–69. In this verse, there are different ways of worshipping God for different human communities. God does not reveal a single law but many laws, where for each law there is a particular way based on the performance of rituals specific to that form of worship.

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<sup>244</sup> Joseph E. B. Lombard, “The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions,” in *The Study Quran A New Translation and Commentary* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2015), 2.

In addition, there are other verses that state that the Quran has confirmed the existence of other revelations and even previous religions, for example in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:97, QS. Ali Imran [3]:3, QS. Yunus [10]:37, QS. Fatir [35]:31, and QS. Al-Ahqaf [46]:30.<sup>245</sup> According to “The Study Quran”, religion was created to bring humans back to fitrah, the primordial norm that maintains balance within human beings. But over time, humans lost sight of this reality and read their prejudices and inclinations into religion. Religions came to be regarded as absolutes in themselves and not as paths to “the Absolute.”

As for the Prophet Muhammad's statement that "Every child is born according to his fitrah, then it is his parents who make the child a Christian, Jew, or Mussulman," it does not mean that all previous religions were deviant but implies that the religions that humans have corrupted no longer serve to bring about the basic balance through submission that the prophets had practiced and taught. From there, Allah asks people to follow in the footsteps of Prophet Ibrahim, who was straight in religion and always surrendered, commonly referred to as "*hanīf*" and "*muslim*". To be *hanīf* means to be a pure monotheist with unwavering faith, while *muslim* means to submit oneself completely to Allah. The fundamental reality of submission cannot be limited to a single form. Rather, universal and non-sectarian submission is a necessary condition for keeping God's covenant and precedes the religion called 'submission', Islam. This universal and prescriptive attitude of submission is presented throughout the Quran as the essence of all religions. In many different verses, the prophets Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, Ishmael, and Joseph all refer to

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<sup>245</sup> Lumbard, “The Quranic View,” 2.

themselves, are referred to as Muslims, or pray to Allah to make them Muslims.<sup>246</sup> In short, every believer who meets the criteria of 'ḥanīf' and 'Muslim' is guaranteed salvation by Allah in this world and the next, even without having to carry the identity of Islam as a formally practiced religion.

Meanwhile, “The Study Quran”’s acknowledgment of the validity of the Torah and the Bible as holy books that remain sacred to this day—unlike most commentaries that assume that there have been distortions and excessive changes to both books—rests on an understanding of several Qur'anic verses, including QS. It seems contradictory for the Qur'an to speak of the efficacy of judging on the basis of the Torah and Injil if it also states that these scriptures have been annulled or excessively altered. It is also absurd to say that the religions that used these scriptures are no longer valid, or at least were no longer valid at the time the Quran was revealed. Indeed, it is the methodologies developed within those religions that have actually given their followers the ability to judge in accordance with those scriptures. If the previous religions were nullified by the Quranic revelation, then it would not make sense to tell the Prophet Muhammad to seek advice from them, as stated in QS. An-Nahl [16]:43 and QS. Al-Anbiya' [21]:7 below:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوْحِي إِلَيْهِمْ فَسَأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ  
وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوْحِي إِلَيْهِمْ فَسَأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

What is done by the composing team, when viewed from the typology of the religious version of Komaruddin Hidayat, means that the ideology carried by “The Study Quran” actually cannot be categorized absolutely into any category. On the

<sup>246</sup> Lumbard, “The Quranic View,” 12–16.

one hand, it is very clear that “The Study Quran” does not represent exclusivism or eclecticism. This is because the authors never state that the only true teaching is their own religion, accompanied by a statement that other religions are false. In addition, the drafting team also never mixed the teachings of various religions to be synthesized into one new teaching. On the other hand, if it is said that “The Study Quran” promotes inclusivism, it is also inaccurate. Although all members of the team are Muslims and recognize the truth of Islam, two members of the drafting team have embraced other religions, but there is not a single interpretation that states the truth of other religions is not as perfect as Islam. In line with this, the opinion of Nurcholis Madjid, as quoted and reiterated by Fatimah Husein, is that the verses of the Qur'an relating to diversity and religious relations must be realized whether their status is in the corridor of “statement of fact” or in the corridor of “statement of truth,” especially on the topic of the truth of Islam and the irrelevance of other religions to Muslims.<sup>247</sup> According to The Study Quran, Islam as the truest religion is indeed a fact that every Muslim needs to believe without having to negate the existence of truth in other religions. Proving the truth claim of a religion cannot be done in this world because it violates the sunnatullah of religious diversity and has no right to be done by humans because disclosure can only be done by God in the hereafter.

As for the tendency of “The Study Quran” to debate between two understandings, namely pluralism and universalism, the evidence in the tafsir is more inclined to pluralism. This is evidenced, both explicitly and implicitly, that the content of its religious literacy has opened a space for discussion that: (1) other

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<sup>247</sup> Fatimah Husein, “Statement of Fact or Statement of Truth” (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, May 31, 2024); Fatimah Husein, *Muslim-Christian Relations in the New Order Indonesia: The Exclusivist and Inclusivist Muslims' Perspectives* (Bandung: Mizan, 2005).



religions are legitimate ways to reach the same truth; (2) other religions speak differently, but they are equally legitimate truths; (3) every religion expresses an important part of the truth; (4) every religion has a unique way of salvation. Even so, of course, “The Study Quran” still provides the prerequisites for salvation guaranteed by God, namely only for humans who believe (believe in the existence of one God as an absolute reality), believe in the existence of a judgment day or afterlife, and do good and right. In other words, the study of the Quran is generally not in sync with universalism, which argues that every religion is basically the same and emerges in a plural form for historical-anthropological reasons. This is because, as recognized by the authors of “The Study Quran”, religious diversity is *sunnatullah*, or God's destiny, created as a test of human life, not merely for historical-anthropological reasons.

The Study Quran, whether we realize it or not, is in line with the view of pluralism or perennialism initiated by Nasr<sup>248</sup> because its interpretive principles have the following three characteristics: (1) rejecting contemporary interpretation because Nasr's philosophy also criticizes the crisis of modern humans who experience spiritual emptiness due to the secularistic paradigm that exists in the dynamics and progress of modern Western science and technology; (2) favoring the traditions and opinions of traditional interpreters because Nasr's philosophy also focuses on extracting and strengthening the traditional wisdom possessed by religions (including Islam) as well as local and authentic cultures and traditions (including mysticism and the legacy of Persian Islamic culture and civilization); and (3) priority on the universality of meaning and coexistence of religious communities because Nasr's

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<sup>248</sup> Syarif Hidayatullah, Mahmud Arif, and Arqom Kuswanjono, “Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s Perennialism Perspective for the Development of Religious Studies in Indonesia,” *Jurnal Filsafat* 33, no. 2 (August 30, 2023): 365, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jf.82439>.

philosophy sees the need for the unification or meeting point of religions in timeless universal principles. From there, the distinctive characteristics of religious literacy in the interpretation of The Study Quran are rooted.

In order to integrate the ideology of pluralism in tafsir, especially related to the discourse of religious literacy, the drafting team conducted exclusion and inclusion strategies. Of the three exclusion strategies formulated by The van Leeuwen in an effort to eliminate social actors (interpreters) in the text (tafsir), nominalization strategies are often carried out (using pe-an affixes to replace verbs into nouns). An example is the statement, “Historically, there has been debate, especially among Arabs, whether Zoroastrians can be considered People of the Book.” The statement does not mention who the debaters are and simply says “debate.” This is done to keep the reader's focus on the main idea that Zoroastrians are monotheists and not get distracted by who the debating scholars are, which, if the reader knows that the debaters are influential figures, might make the reader lean towards the opinion of the figure he or she likes.

Meanwhile, the application of inclusion in an effort to include social actors (interpreters) in the text of the interpretation of “The Study Quran”, for example, is through a categorization strategy, which is giving information that shows more detailed characteristics of actors, such as physical form, behavior, religion, race, and so on. An example is the statement, “Based on the words of Ja'far al-Şādiq (d. 148/765), the sixth Shia Imam, who is also an important intellectual figure in the Sunni tradition, who stated that the basmalah is ‘the greatest verse in the Book of Allah’.” The attribution of Ja'far al-Şādiq with two identities at once aims to ensure

that there are similarities between Sunnis and Shias so as to minimize the stigma that Shias are “different” or even “not Islamic.”

The exclusion and inclusion in “The Study Quran”'s commentary, as in the example above, are evidence that the selection of commentators' opinions quoted as the responsibility of the drafting team is not ideologically biased. In fact, pluralism is quite deeply rooted in interpretation, although it is not the main goal. On the other hand, the behavior of the interpretation holds other motives and factors that form the distinction of “The Study Quran”'s interpretation in the constellation of traditionalist interpretations trapped in the contemporary world.

#### **B. Representation of Religious Literacy Factors in Tafsir “The Study Quran”**

Tafsir is not only a collection of various sign systems but also a collection of discourses. From here, it must be understood that the study of the Quran as a collection of interpretive discourses certainly affects and is influenced by the social context. The personal habits and social status of the team of compilers of “The Study Quran” as the authors of the text will be reflected in the content of the text and its context. The context here, for example, is the use of language in accordance with certain situations and conditions so that the desired goal is achieved. Readers, in turn, can understand the discourse related to religious literacy in the interpretation of “The Study Quran”. This is because there is a special situation that exists in the speech, namely the context. Thus, knowledge of the context is the premise of analyzing the discourse of religious literacy represented in the interpretation of “The Study Quran”.

Knowledge of the context in this research refers to the timeline of the publication of “The Study Quran”. As narrated by the authors, the beginning of the existence of this book was marked by the HarperOne publisher's offer to Seyyed Hossein Nasr to work on the interpretation of the Quran because the publisher had “succeeded” in bringing up the interpretation of the Torah and the Bible, which received an enthusiastic response from the American public, especially at the beginning of the new millennium. The need for English-language commentaries that are “clean” from elements of radicalism and “neutral,” that is, not taking sides with one group or sect in Islam, was considered urgent at that time, given the multicultural and multireligious American society in particular.

Negative sentiment towards Islam has intensified since the events of September 11, 2001, followed by the US military aggression against Iraq in 2003. Understanding the urgency of the situation and the importance of the task of interpretation, although he had refused, Nasr finally agreed with a non-negotiable prerequisite. His capacity as a non-expert commentator did not allow him to work on the commentary alone, just as HarperOne's Torah commentary was done by a single author. The prerequisite that Nasr requested was related to his teammates, who had to be Muslim academics and in line with Nasr's own thinking. As a result, some of the recruits were Nasr's own ideological disciples. When the team agreed that the tafsir should represent both traditional and universal thought, two fundamental problems arose: (1) which parties could support the universality moriously and materially, and (2) which traditional thoughts or who would be represented. The first problem was related to who would be needed to support the years of painstaking research, for

which it was unlikely that publishers would pay royalties up front. However, Nasr's prominence and the credibility of his team have helped to bring in various institutions, both to supply reference resources and adequate funding.

The second problem is related to the policy of choosing 41 traditional tafsir books as references. This problem will certainly raise new problems as well. For one verse that is interpreted, how is the art of choosing tafsir that should be referred to so as to create a menu that is not monotonous but also not too “noisy”? Reference noise can be a boomerang because the purpose of this interpretation is not an encyclopedic interpretation. In fact, as much as possible, it is summarized so that the Arabic text of the verse is not included. Finally, as stated by the drafting team, the selection of the referred tafsir is the absolute responsibility of the team, of course, with final supervision by Nasr. Admittedly or not, there is a process of inclusion and exclusion of social actors (read: interpreters) in every verse interpreted. There are some figures that often appear in the interpretation, such as al-Qurtubi, but there are also those who only become mere extras, whose appearance in thirty juz of interpretation can be said to be very rare.

Based on Fowler's view, the text of “The Study Quran” is the realization of the mode of discourse (interpretation) initiated by the composing team. The ideological content in the interpretation text will appear in the form of change or the desire to maintain the status quo contained in the text. This means that the interpretation text is a linguistic phenomenon that is formed socio-culturally and ideologically. In accordance with the idea of recontextualization introduced by Theo van Leeuwen as one of the models of critical discourse analysis and to support the

objectives and legitimize the action of the team compiling the interpretation of “The Study Quran”, a discourse strategy is carried out through the process of exclusion and inclusion by presenting social actors (in the form of interpreters) in the interpretive discourse. This is done by utilizing word games or diction, sentences, language styles, and certain ways of telling stories to display the desired social actors (interpreters) in an interpretive discourse.

The exclusion process is carried out by hiding the opinions of certain interpreters who are not in line with the principles of the team of compilers of “The Study Quran”'s interpretation, which can change the reader's mind about a discourse, even potentially legalizing certain understanding positions. Meanwhile, when exclusion runs, the process of inclusion automatically runs, namely by including the opinions of certain interpreters who are in line with the principles of the team of compilers of “The Study Quran” interpretation into the discourse. When the opinion of the interpreter who becomes a reference is not in accordance with the ideas or principles of the team, then the team's own opinion is included. The latter is, of course, on condition that it fulfills the existing rules of interpretation, especially by relying on intra-quranic hermeneutics.

The context of religious literacy, in fact, is not only a cognitive process but also a social action. Therefore, there are several factors that motivate the authors of “The Study Quran” to represent religious literacy in their commentaries. These factors can be classified by researchers into two categories, namely internal and external factors.

## 1. Internal factors

### a. Scientific and religious background (personal role)

There is a personal role that is the main basis for the representation of religious literacy in the interpretation of “The Study Quran”. This happens because each member of the team compiling the interpretation of “The Study Quran” has a different scientific and religious background, in addition to the general similarity, which is certainly a prerequisite for becoming a team member, namely both Muslims.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the team supervisor, was born a traditional Shi'a and has seen Sunni-Shi'a, west-east, and Muslim-non-Muslim tensions during his life in Iran, Morocco, Europe, and America. The philosophies of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra have embellished his thinking and made him a true perennialist who captured the hearts of many disciples. Joseph Lumbard was one of the pupils who was impacted by his way of thinking and eventually joined him as a teammate.

Joseph Lumbard, who was born into a family of Episcopal Church members, once felt spiritual aridity and then received enlightenment from Nasr. The experience of Christianity contributed to understanding the Qur'anic verses about the people of Prophet Isa from a richer perspective. Although later, when he embraced Islam, he did not explicitly state his tendency to be Sunni or Shia, his academic research trips to Morocco, Yemen, Egypt, Jordan, and Iran with a mastery of Arabic and Persian made him loudly voice the need for religious literacy through tafsir and explanatory

essays on “The Study Quran”. Tim's general views on this matter are written clearly and systematically in his essay entitled *The Quranic View of Sacred History and Other Religions*.

In addition to Lombard, Maria Massi Dakake was a member of the team with Christian experience. Dakake, who was raised in a devout Catholic family, was taken aback by the Quranic structure and reading style when she studied it in college, in contrast to Lombard, who was enlightened by Nasr. As the only woman on the team, Dakake has an important capacity to color the team's decisions in interpreting verses related to gender and humanitarian issues in a balanced manner. The team's views on human relations were well written by her in an essay titled *Quranic Ethics, Human Rights, and Society*.

Unlike Lombard and Dakake, who have experience outside of Islam, Caner Dagli and Mohammed Rustom have been Muslims since childhood. However, Dagli was an advisor for interfaith affairs at the Royal Court of Jordan for two years. It was this experience that influenced him to participate in religious literacy efforts when he took part in “The Study Quran” commentary project. Meanwhile, Rustom, who was Nasr's favorite student, has experience teaching comparative religion and researching cross-cultural philosophy and theology, making him familiar with the religious literacy that “The Study Quran” promotes.

When all these personal capitals are united in a work unit that manifests in the form of a shared vision and mission, the second internal factor emerges, namely integrity in upholding work principles.



b. Adhering to work principles (team role)

Referring to Fudge's analysis, "The Study Quran"'s hermeneutic is consistent in accepting the absoluteness of the entire Quranic text and does not use contemporary ethical norms to override revelation in some places.<sup>249</sup> This aligns with the drafting team's guiding principles, vision, and mission, as articulated in "The Study Quran"'s initial introduction. The consistency can also be seen in the religious literacy efforts that are carried out implicitly or explicitly in various verses of the Quran that are interpreted.

2. External factors

a. National and global socio-religious situations and conditions (role of the environment)

The need for an English-language tafsir that is "clean" from radicalism and "neutral," i.e., does not favor one group or sect in Islam, was urgent when Nasr was asked to work on "The Study Quran" project. This is because American society, in particular, is multicultural and multireligious. Negative sentiments towards Islam have intensified since the events of September 11, 2001,<sup>250</sup> followed by the US military aggression against Iraq in 2003. Islam was identified with terrorists, while at the same time, the fundamentalist currents from the Middle East were also getting stronger. In fact, in the midst of working on this tafsir project, the Islamic States of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

<sup>249</sup> Fudge, "Study the Quran," 579.

<sup>250</sup> Kuang Keng Kuek Ser, "Data: Hate Crimes against Muslims Increased after 9/11," *The World* (blog), accessed March 4, 2024, <https://theworld.org/stories/2016-09-12/data-hate-crimes-against-muslims-increased-after-911>.

emerged,<sup>251</sup> which further increased the number of anti-Muslims in western countries that lack religious literacy. One thing that cannot be denied is the existence of Muslims as a minority in the United States, so the need to clarify through various media that Islam does not teach radicalism is very urgent. The national and global situation, whether the authors realize it or not, is very influential on the efforts to integrate religious literacy content into the interpretation of the study of the Quran.

b. Responsibility for funding outputs (role of research support agencies)

According to the authors, multiple parties funded the tafsir research, which ran for nearly ten years, from 2006 until the first edition was published in 2015. The El-Hibri Foundation and the Institute for Religion and Civic Values contributed significantly to “The Study Quran”’s funding.<sup>252</sup>

The Institute on Religion and Civic Values (IRCV) is a national (United States) nonprofit research center based in Fountain Valley, California, with a mission to strengthen civil society by exploring issues at the intersection of religion, civics, and pluralism and to be a catalyst for aligning public policymaking with the core values of the American nation. IRCV's mission is to promote religious freedom, religious pluralism, and religious literacy. IRCV was founded in 1991 as the Council on Islamic Education (CIE). The organization plays an important role in increasing coverage of the

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<sup>251</sup> “Timeline: The Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State,” *Wilson Center* (blog), October 28, 2019, <https://5g.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>.

<sup>252</sup> Nasr et al., *The Study Quran*..., xii.

world's religions in textbooks and history and social studies materials, using guidelines for constitutionally-compliant "teaching about" religion.<sup>253</sup>

The El-Hibri Foundation, another donor, aims to support the creation of an inclusive America by promoting peace and respect for diversity, which are inspired by the universally shared values of Islam. This includes fostering greater inclusion within the American Muslim community. The Foundation envisions a society in which everyone can realize the "American Dream" in a diverse and inclusive world. The charitable foundation, which is headquartered in Washington, D.C., was established in 2001 by Ibrahim El-Hibri, a devoted Muslim who highlights the parallels rather than the differences between the three monotheistic religions of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. His focus on tolerance, community involvement, and social responsibility is expressed in many philanthropic endeavors.<sup>254</sup>

With the financial support from these two institutions, of course the tafsir drafting team has a big responsibility to sow and integrate their vision and mission in the interpretation of the Quran, especially in verses related to inclusivism, pluralism, religious literacy, and religious freedom.

c. Proximity to The HarperCollins Study Bible (publisher role)

In 2001, Richard Elliott Friedman, a professor at the University of Georgia and an emeritus professor at the University of California, San Diego,<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> "IRCV Background," *The Council on Islamic Education* (blog), accessed December 27, 2023, <http://www.cie.org/our-services/>.

<sup>254</sup> "About Vision & Mission," *El Hibri Foundation* (blog), accessed December 27, 2023, <https://www.elhibrifoundation.org/>.

<sup>255</sup> Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah: With a New English Translation* (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

published Commentary on the Torah, The Old Testament commentary intended for the Jewish academic community, through Harper Publishers. Later, in 2006, The HarperCollins Study Bible was published as a revision of the 1964 and 1993 versions. With the full support of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), the largest and most prestigious academic association of biblical scholars, Harold W. Attridge, Ph.D., Dean of Yale University Divinity School and Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament, wrote this highly academic "commentary" of the Bible.<sup>256</sup> In line with the publication of The HarperCollins Study Bible, the publisher became interested in publishing a tafsir of the Quran and offered the project to Seyyed Hossein Nasr. According to Fudge's review, "The Study Quran" and The HarperCollins Study Bible are similar in that they are both authored by scholars with an ecumenical perspective. The proof of this is that "The Study Quran" is also an academic work and recognizes the various schools of Islam: Sunni, Shia, and Sufi, as well as variants within those labels.<sup>257</sup> The difference is that while the Commentary on the Torah is the work of a single author and the HarperCollins Study Bible is the work of a team of authors with the help of annotations from members of the organization, "The Study Quran" is the work of a small team but is supported by a millennia-old tradition of interpretation represented by 41 reference books. Based on Seyyed Hossein

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<sup>256</sup> Harold W. Attridge and Wayne A. Meeks, eds., *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Including the Apocraphal/Deuterocanonical Books with Concordance*, Fully rev. and updated ; 1st ed (San Francisco, Calif: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).

<sup>257</sup> Fudge, "Study the Quran," 576.

Nasr's admission,<sup>258</sup> the similarity of the title with a previous scriptural interpretation project by the same publisher is the simplest reason why his team's interpretation work is also named identically, “The Study Quran.”



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<sup>258</sup> Nasr, “On the Making,” 97.