SYED MUHAMMAD NAQUIB AL-ATTAS' SEMANTIC READING OF ISLAM AS *DĪN*

Aris Widodo

Lecturer at State College for Islamic Studies (STAIN) Parepare, South Sulawesi, Indonesia

Abstract

This article presents Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' opinion on the scope of Islam—a discourse that has become a hot issue among Muslim scholars since fourteen centuries ago and strongly reappeared along with the presence of a work of an orientalist, H.A.R. Gibb. According to Al-Attas, semantic approach is the best way to figure out whether Islam only touches upon religious matters or also includes a notion of civilization, because it is through this approach that the connotation of Islam will become clearer. As Islam is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'ān as dīn, *so the best way to identify the scope of Islam is to study the word-focus of* dīn *from semantic approach. From this approach, Al-Attas concludes that Islam as* dīn *includes the connotation of civilization, as the word* dīn *is closely related to the word* madīnah, *a word that is also closely related to the word* tamaddun *(civilization). In addition to presenting Al-Attas' ideas, the writer of this article also gives a critical remark on Al-Attas' contention that* dīn *(religion) and* dayn *(debt) are closely related as the two words have the same root:* dāna. *According to the writer, this opinion is not even supported by Qur'anic verses, which become the basis for Al-Attas' semantic construction. Qur'ān itself speaks of the two words,* dīn *and* dayn, *in clearly two different connotations.*

Key Words: Islam, Al-Attas, *dīn, tamaddun* (civilisation)

Aris Widodo

A. Introduction

Throughout the ages Muslim scholars have emphasized various particular meanings when they use the word "Islām". This is understandable since their primary source, the Qur'ān, also gives different connotations when using it. In the Qur'ān, the word Islām is mentioned eight times.[1] Three verses mention Islām explicitly as a religion (*dīn*): sūrat Āli 'Imrān/3: 19, 85, and al-Mā'idah/5: 3. Three other verses speak about Islām as an entity: sūrat al-An'ām/6: 125, al-Zumar/39: 22, and al-Ṣaff/61: 7. Another two verses point to Islām as a personal possession: sūrat al-Tawbah/9: 74 and al-Ḥujurāt/49: 17. These verses have led then to many connotations as far as the word Islām is concerned.

W. C. Smith and Jane I. Smith record many connotations attached to Islām when Muslim scholars use it. In her dissertation,[2] which studies fourteen centuries of Qur'an commentaries, Jane I. Smith comes to the conclusion that Muslim commentators have laid different emphases when they discussed the term Islām. In an earlier stage, Muslim commentators stressed the individual attitude of submission to God, and in a later stage the others have emphasized Islām as the communal entity.

In line with the above finding, W. C. Smith in his study of fourteen centuries of different Arabic book titles concludes that there has been a tendency toward a gradual shift in meaning among Muslim writers when they use the word Islām. In an earlier phase, it was used to signify the personal attitude of submission to God. In a latter phase, Islām was used to designate an idealized institutional system, and finally, especially in more modern times, Islām refers to historical manifestation of civilization[3]. This tendency does not, however, necessarily mean that nowadays Muslim scholars are no longer interested in the issue of Islām as a personal attitude of submission to God or as an idealized

---

[1] Fayḍ Allāh ibn Mūsā, *Fatḥ al-Raḥmān liṭālibi Āyāti al-Qur'ān*, (Indonesia: Maktaba al-Daḥlān, n.d.), p. 219.

[2] Jane I. Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term 'Islam' as Seen in A Sequence of Qur'an Commentaries*, (Montana: Scholars Press, 1975), pp. 230-1.

[3] W. C. Smith, *On Understanding Islam, Selected Studies*, (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1981), p. 64.

system. Indeed, up till now they still discuss those three connotations altogether.

In 1932, H.A.R. Gibb edited a book entitled *Whither Islam? A Survey of Modern Movements in the Moslem World*. In his Introduction to this book, Gibb wrote that Islam is indeed wider than merely a system of theology. Islam is a complete civilization.[4] About four decades later, in 1970, *Majlis 'Ulama' Jawa Barat* (Muslim Council of West-Java) Indonesia, held a *Musyawarah Da'wah Islam* (Conference on Islamic Propagation), in which Sidi Gazalba presented his paper entitled *Tantangan Dakwah Kurun Kini* (The Challenge of Propagation in Contemporary Era).[5] In his paper, Gazalba, in line with Gibb, stated that Islam as *dīn* is more than merely a religion; it includes a civilization.[6] In response to this, another Indonesian Muslim intellectual, Saifuddin Anshari, stated that Islam as *dīn* is distinct from Islam as a civilization, called Islamic civilization. While as *dīn* Islam is completely revealed, Islamic civilization is created by Muslims. So, Islam as *dīn* does not include a civilization, because they both are clearly different.[7] These two standpoints provoked a question of whether or not Islam as *dīn* includes a civilization.

The above question[8] most possibly[9] inspire Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas (1931-….), an eminent Malaysian Muslim thinker, to publish his work, *Islam: the Concept of Religion and the Foundation of Ethics*

_____

[4] H.A.R. Gibb, *Wither Islam? A Survey of Modern Movements in the Moslem World* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1932), p. 12.

[5] *Pandji Masjarakat* (Indonesian half-monthly magazine), No. 62 Th. IV, August 1970, p. 22.

[6] *Ibid*., p. 23.

[7] *Ibid*., p. 34.

[8] This issue reappeared in an artile of Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, "Islam: Agama atau *Din*?," published on 18 October 2004 in the website of Indonesian Liberal Islam, www.islamlib.com; accessed on 13 November 2004. He contends that the two terms, *agama* (religion) and *dīn*, refer to the same thing.

[9] This possibility stems from the fact that Al-Attas is also actively engaged in the Indonesian intellectual discourse. His another work, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), for example, is also a response to a concept espoused by Indonesian Muslim Intellectual, Nurchalish Madjid.

and Morality in 1976.[10] It is his concept of Islam that will be the focus of this article. However, before further presenting his ideas of Islam, I will give a biographical sketch of Al-Attas.

B. An Intellectual Biography of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas

Al-Attas is a reputed scholar with an international recognition. His writings and ideas have been highly appreciated not only by Muslim intellectuals, but also by Orientalists, such as Anne Sofie Roald,[11] Peter G. Riddel,[12] Mona Abaza,[13] and Georg Stauth.[14] This fact has earned him a place as one of the important Muslim figures of the twenty-first century.

Al-Attas, whose full name is Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, was born on 5 September 1931 in Bogor, West Java, Indonesia. His title as "Syed" (Ar: *sayyid*) merits notice. The term *sayyid* is used to signify Husaynid descent.[15] This is true for Al-Attas, since his genealogy can be traced through the 'Alawi *sayyid*s of Hadramaut, back to the Imam Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad.[16] Regarding his name, some of his earlier works, from 1959 until 1972, bore Syed Muhammad *Naguib* Al-Attas (with the letter "g" in "Naguib"). Later,

––––––––––––––––––––

[10] Before published as the first chapter of *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam, An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995) it was firstly published by Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM), Kuala Lumpur, 1976.

[11] Anne Sofie Roald, *Tarbiya: Education and Politics in Islamic Movements in Jordan and Malaysia* (Lund: Graphic Systems Malmoe, 1994), pp. 246-248.

[12] Peter G. Riddel, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* (London: Hurst & Company, 2001), pp. 234-237.

[13] Mona Abaza, *Debates on Islam and Knowledge in Malaysia and Egypt: Shifting Worlds* (London: Routledge Curson, 2002), pp. 88-105.

[14] Georg Stauth, *Politics and Cultures of Islamization in Southeast Asia: Indonesia and Malaysia in the Nineteen-nineties* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2002), pp. 217-232.

[15] C. van Arendonk-[W.A.Graham], "Sharīf," in B. Lewis et. al (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (*New Edition*), (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1971), vol. 3. p. 329.

[16] Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998), p. 1.

however, his publications bear the name Syed Muhammad *Naquib* Al-Attas (with the letter "q" in "Naquib").[17]

Although born in Indonesia, Al-Attas and his works are firmly associated with Malaysia, since he has spent the largest part of his academic and working life in Malaysia.[18] Al-Attas began his first career in the academic world when he was appointed as a lecturer, then a senior lecturer/reader, in Classical Malay Islamic Literature at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, from 1964-1969.[19] In 1968, he became the Head of the Division of Literature in the Department of Malay Studies at the University.[20] From 1969-1970, he was appointed as Dean of the Faculty of Arts. Al-Attas was one of the senior founders of the National University of Malaysia when it was established in 1970.[21] From 1987 to 2003, he was made the Director of the

_____

[17] This slight alteration in his name has provoked speculation. Mona Abaza ventures the idea that this change was made to increase the sense of Al-Attas' *Arabness* and elitist position. In contrast, Abaza compares, Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' elder brother presents his latinized name as Syed Hussein *Alatas* (not *Al-Attas*) precisely to give less weight to his *Arabness*. See Mona Abaza, *Debates on Islam and Knowledge in Malaysia and Egypt*, pp. 93, 249 (note 21). However, this interpretation is debatable, since both the words "naguib" (*najīb*) and "naquib" (*naqīb*) refer to Arabic words. So, there is no increase in the weight of *Arabness* here. Moreover, if Al-Attas wanted to give more weight to his Arabness, why did not he, one might ask further, change his title "Syed" for the Arabic "Sayyid" as well? In addition, he has signed his name from the very beginning of his earlier works with *Al-Attas*, and not *Alatas*. Nevertheless, Abaza's conjecture that the shift from "naguib" to "naquib" might be to give more emphasis to Al-Attas' elitist position is plausible, as the term "naquib" (*naqīb*) is familiar and has been used for the Husaynid descents since the time of Abū Ahmad al-Husayn b. Mūsā (d. ca 400/1009-10) and his two famous sons, al-Sharīf al-Rāḍī (d. 406/1016) and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044). See C. van Arendonk-[W.A.Graham], "Sharīf," p.332.

[18] Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, p. 234.

[19] *Who's Who in the World*, 9th edition (Illionis: Marquis Who's Who Macmillan Directory Division, 1989-1990), p. 14.

[20] Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy,* p. 6.

[21] *Ibid*. Besides this pioneering spade-work, he was also given the task of conceptualizing the philosophical basis of the faculty of Science and Islamic Studies. As the Head of the Department of Malay Language and Literature at this university, Al-Attas proposed a new concept of and method for studying the Malay language, literature and culture. This new concept, that marks the paradigm shift in Malay Studies, lies in his call to unearth the role of Islam in the history of Malay-Indonesian Archipelago. So

International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), Malaysia.[22]

For his earlier education, Al-Attas spent some time in Indonesia and some time in Malaysia. At the age of five, he was enrolled at Ngee Heng Primary School in Johore for his primary education (1936-1941). Completing this level, Al-Attas continued his education, this time in Arabic, at Madrasah *al-ʿUrwat al-Wuthqā* in Sukabumi, West Java (1941-1945). At the age of fifteen, Al-Attas returned to Johore again to continue his education, first at Bukit Zahrah School, and then at English College (1946-1951).[23] It was during this period that Al-Attas' keen interest in Malay literature began to flourish, since he lived at this time with one of his uncles, Ungku Abdul Aziz bin Ungku Abdul Majid, who had a good library of Malay manuscripts, especially on Malay literature and historical subjects. Al-Attas spent much of his time reading these manuscripts.[24] Al-Attas' keen interest in Malay manuscripts is evident in his personal collection, which includes some of the rare Arabic and Malay manuscripts, such as *Risālat al-Aḥadiyya,*

––––––––––––––––––

far, when we talk about Malay-Indonesian history, we refer only to the history of the Hindu-Buddhist period, of colonialism, and of modern period, tending to pass over the role of Islām. From now on, Al-Attas suggested, studying the role of Islam in the Malay-Indonesian world is a must if we want to elucidate its history comprehensively. See Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, *Islam dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1972), p. 56. To implement this new concept, in 1973 Al-Attas founded and became first director of the Institute of Malay Language, Literature, and Culture at the university. See Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy,* pp. 6, 7.

[22] Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy,* pp. 6, 7.

[23] *Ibid,* pp. 2-3.

[24] *Ibid.,* p. 3. His interest in and involvement with these Malay manuscripts—in addition, later, to his training in philology—has been very useful. Once in 1984, his cousin, Ungku Abdul Aziz bin Abdul Hamid of Johore, formerly Royal Professor and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malaya, asked Al-Attas to identify a manuscript that had just been purchased from a dealer in London. See Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, "Preface," in his *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: A 16ᵗʰ Century Malay Translation of the ʿAqāʾid of al-Nasafī* (Kuala Lumpur: Department of Publications, University of Malaya, 1988), no page. Thanks to his training, he succeeded in establishing the author, the general nature as well as the date of the manuscript. This was published in 1988 as *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: A 16ᵗʰ Century Malay Translation of the ʿAqāʾid of al-Nasafī.* See Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy,* p. 3.

also known as the *Risālat al-Ajwiba,* attributed to Ibn al-'Arabī or sometimes to his disciple 'Abdullāh al-Balyānī/Balbānī, and the *al-Tuḥfat al-Mursala ilā rūḥ al-Nabī* (the Malay version) by Faḍl Allāh al-Burhānpurī.[25]

For his high academic achievement, Al-Attas is indebted to many scholars, including some Orientalists. While at the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal Canada, he was taught by many eminent Orientalists such as Sir Hamilton Gibb from England and Toshihiko Izutsu from Japan.[26] Al-Attas is greatly indebted to Izutsu for methodological concepts, in particular the semantic approach,[27] which he has applied in many of his works such as *Rānīrī and the Wujūdiyyah of 17th Century Acheh,* and *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri.* Al-Attas also worked with many prominent Orientalists such as A.J.Arberry, Richard Winsted, and Martin Lings, when he was at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.[28] In this sense, Mona Abaza correctly points out that Al-Attas is a product of Orientalism.[29] Yet, this does not necessarily mean that Al-Attas is deprived of his critical faculties toward Orientalists.[30] Al-Attas maintains this kind of criticism in his works, and continues to hold on to his "independence of spirit" even when under the supervision of Orientalists.[31] When we grasp this essential character of Al-Attas, we will not come to the same conclusion made by Mona Abaza that his critical attitude toward the West and Orientalists is paradoxical.[32]

_____

[25] Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy,* p. 3.

[26] *Ibid.,* p. 5.

[27] Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fanṣūrī* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1970), p. 142 (note 2).

[28] Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy,* p. 5.

[29] Mona Abaza, *Debates on Islam and Knowledge,* p. 90.

[30] When we trace the scarlet thread through the writings of Al-Attas, we find that he has always been critical of almost every person but always makes sure his criticism is scientifically grounded. In his first publication *Rangkaian Ruba'iyat,* for instance, Al-Attas refers to the translations by Orientalists Edward Fitzgerald and A.W. Hamilton, and is not sparing in his criticism of them. See Naguib Al-Attas, *Rangkaian Ruba'iyat* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1959), pp. ix-xiii.

[31] Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fanṣūrī,* p. xi.

[32] Mona Abaza, *Debates on Islam and Knowledge,* p. 90.

However, Mona Abaza is not wrong in recording her impression that "Al-Attas' silver-white beard and curly hair might remind us of a lion who might easily be provoked."[33] Al-Attas himself, when designing the logo for the National University of Malaysia, used a tiger as one of the symbols. "The tiger's pose is not that of looking back," writes Al-Attas, "but of an attacking position." This could also be said of a lion. He explains further, saying that "What are attacked are Ignorance, Evil and Falsehood which are the causes of human suffering and tragedy."[34] Therefore, although the tiger "symbolises a Malaysian society rooted in Malay culture,"[35] it more or less reflects Al-Attas' own personality. That explains why, like the tiger or the lion, he has been so eagerly active in correcting the misrepresentations of Islam and its messages.[36] It is in this regard that Riddel classifies Al-Attas as a scholar co-existing with a Muslim apologist/polemicist.[37]

Through his active debate, Al-Attas has encouraged a dynamic atmosphere for the development of knowledge. In addition, he puts down his ideas in the form of books.[38] Many of his books, more of which have been written in English than in Malay, have been translated into other languages, such as Korean, Persian, and Indonesian. This translation will, if not exerts an influence on, at least introduce, the readers in those countries to the various ideas espoused by Al-Attas.

_____

[33] *Ibid,* p. 89.

[34] S.M.N. Al-Attas, Maksud (an explanation of the logo of the National University of Malaysia), n.d., circa 1971, quoted in Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy,* p. 301-2.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy,* p. 6.

[37] Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World,* p. 236.

[38] This, in turn, has enabled later generations to further evaluate Al-Attas' ideas. Abdollah Vakili, for example, has benefited from the debate between Al-Attas and Drewes, and made a study on "Sufism, Power Politics, and Reform: al-Raniri's Opposition to Hamzah al-Fansuri's Teachings Reconsidered," in *Studia Islamika*, Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies, vol. 4, Number 1, (1997). In this article, Vakili tries to figure out the factors underlying the attack of al-Rānīrī on Fanṣūrī's teachings, with special reference to the arguments espoused by Al-Attas and Drewes. Even so, in the end he does not give a definitive account of the issue at stake.

However, his ideas have spread not only through his books, but also through his colleagues and students, especially those connected to ISTAC. If we want more visible proof of the influence of Al-Attas, we can read this, for example, in the writings of his colleagues and his students, particularly at ISTAC, such as Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, Zaini Uthman, Ugi Suharto, Hamid Fahmi Zarkasyi, Adnin Armas, and Adian Husaini. Al-Attas' opinion about the Islamization of knowledge, his resistance to hermeneutics to be applied in Quranic Studies, his attitude towards Orientalists and the West, reappear in the works of those persons with, sometimes, more detailed substantiation.[39] This means that Al-Attas' ideas will still be passed on to the future generations, especially because of the presence of ISTAC that mainly reflects his thought. One of Al-Attas' main thoughts is his ideas of Islam as a *dīn*.

C. Al-Attas' Semantic[40] Reading of Islam as *Dīn*[41]

The word *dīn* is usually rendered into English as "religion."[42] However, Al-Attas argues that the English word "religion" cannot

––––––––––––––––––

[39] See, for example, on the website of Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought and Civilization (www.insistnet.com) the articles of Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, "Tafsir bukanlah Hermeneutik," posted on Monday, 16 June 2003; Hamid Fahmi Zarkasyi, "Ibn Sina's Islamization of Aristotle's Concept of God," posted on Wednesday, 9 April 2003; Adnin Armas, "Politik Sekular versus Politik Islam," posted on Friday, 13 August 2004; Ugi Suharto, "Apakah al-Qur'an Memerlukan Hermeneutika?" posted on Wednesday, 9 April 2003; Amran Muhammad, "Menjernihkan Gagasan Islamisasi Ilmu Prof. Al-Attas," posted on Monday, 16 June 2003. Accessed on 20 December 2004.

[40] Semantics is a science that deals with the theory of meaning in its widest sense. It is so wide that everything concerning the study of meaning is included in the scope of semantics. Unfortunately, according to Toshihiko Izutsu, a theorist of semantics, there is no single unanimity among scholars as to how to deal with the meaning of words. Every scholar feels entitled to advance his own theory in elucidating the meaning of certain words. Izutsu himself has also articulated a particular methodology of his own. See Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung*, (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964).

[41] Al-Attas acknowledges that he is greatly indebted to a Japanese scholar, Toshihiko Izutsu, for the methodological concept of semantic analysis that he applied

convey the exact idea of *dīn*. On the one hand, the notion of religion is still vague and is not yet definitive. Many Western scholars have tried to define what religion is. Yet, they have not reached a consensus about it. This is why there are so many definitions of religion, because almost every scholar gives a different accentuation in defining religion. The term *dīn*, on the other hand, is definitive, if only it is explored comprehensively.[43]

According to Al-Attas, the term *dīn* contains many significations as reflected in the Qur'ān and in Arabic language to which it pertains. Exploring those significations will help to understand the notion of *dīn* comprehensively. This is the reason why he strives to expose the significations of *dīn*, so that the connotation of Islam can be reproduced properly.[44] In order to unravel the significations of this term, he refers to the Arabic lexicon, *Lisān al-'Arab* of Ibn Manẓūr, and to some verses of the Qur'ān. In this way, he claims to have succeeded in providing a coherent meaning of *dīn*. We will see whether or not his claim is true by looking more closely at his exposition of Islam as *dīn*.

Al-Attas starts his formulation by stating that the word *dīn*, which is derived from the Arabic root *d-y-n*, has many primary significations

––––––––––––––––––

in many of his works, particularly in *Rānīrī and the Wujūdiyyah of 17ᵗʰ Century Acheh* and in *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fanṣūrī*. Although he does not explicitly mention it, in reality he also applied the semantic approach in his formulation of Islām as *dīn*. In fact, Al-Attas is not only indebted to Izutsu for his approach, but also partly for the subbject under examination, as Izutsu has paved the way in discussing the term *dīn* in its relation to *jāhiliyyah* and Islām. See Izutsu, *God and Man*, pp. 219-229. However, Izutsu's treatment is not intended to cover all the verses of Qur'ān which contain the word *dīn*. Instead, he wants to emphasize the meaning of "obedience" as an important element of religion (*dīn*), as is shown by the subtitle: "The Conception of Religion (*Dīn*) as 'Obedience'" (p. 219)

[42] In Arabic-English dictionaries, we will find that *dīn* is usually translated as "religion." See, for example, Elias A. Elias, *Elias' Modern Dictionary: Arabic-English*, (Cairo: Elias Modern Press, 1925), p. 197; Rūḥī al-Ba'albakī, *al-Mawrid*, (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li'l-Malāyīn, 1988), p. 558; Hamdi A. Qafisheh, *NTC's Gulf Arabic-English Dictionary*, (Chicago: NTC Publishing Group, 1997), p. 239.

[43] Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: an Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995), p. 41.

[44] *Ibid.*

that seem to be contradictory to one another. Yet, these significations are all interconnected, so that in fact they present a whole unity of the concept of *dīn*.[45] In order to expose those significations of *dīn*, he proceeds from what he calls the "human secular context" to the "religious context." What he means by the former term is the relationship between human beings; while by the latter term he means the relationship between human beings and God.[46]

1. *Dīn in Human Secular Context*

In the context of human relations, Al-Attas extracts ten terms, that is, *dāna, dayn, dīn, dā'in, daynūnah, idānah, madīnah, dayyān, maddana,* and *tamaddun*. These terms will be used to explain what the word *dīn* means. The word *dīn* is the infinitive noun (*maṣdar*) of the verb *dāna* (in the past tense), and *yadīnu* (in the present form). Another form of the infinitive noun of the verb *dāna-yadīnu* is *dayn*. So, the verb *dāna-yadīnu* has two forms of infinitive noun: *dīn* and *dayn*.[47] Still, there are different, yet interrelated, connotations between these two terms, *dīn* and *dayn*. This will become clearer in what follows.

To explore the relationship between *dīn* and *dayn*, Al-Attas begins with the verb *dāna*, of which the meaning is to owe something or to be indebted. A person who owes a debt is termed a *dā'in*. Yet, the person to whom the first person is indebted is also designated a *dā'in*. So, the term *dā'in* signifies both the debtor as well as the creditor.[48] The term for the debt itself is *dayn*. So far, there are two components involved in this transaction, that is, a *dā'in* in the sense of the debtor, and another *dā'in,* signifying the creditor.

Between those two components, there is usually a regulation regarding the debt; for example, over what period or how many times the debtor will return the loan; how much the debtor will pay for each time he repays part of his debt; what is the sanction if the debtor fails

_____

[45] Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, p. 41.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[47] Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, (London and Edinburg: Williams and Norgate, 1867), Book I, Part 3, p. 942.

[48] The ambiguity of the term *dā'in* reflects in fact, says Al-Attas, the ambiguity in human nature.

to accomplish his obligation and so forth. This regulation, in which is established a particular mode or manner of acting for both sides, is offered first by the creditor. Only if the would-be debtor agrees to the regulation will the transaction of debt occur. In other words, the creditor will give the debt to the debtor if the latter submits to the regulation made by the former. When the regulation has been agreed upon, and the contract has been signed up, both the debtor and the creditor are then bound by the regulation. With this regulation, there will be a conviction (*idānah*) on both sides.[49]

After a certain period of time, there will be a reckoning (*dīn*) and judgement (*daynūnah*) as to whether or not the debtor has fulfilled his obligation to the creditor according to the agreement between the two. Al-Attas adds that a debtor, who has signed up to a contract to take a credit, or debt, usually has a natural tendency (*dīn*) to repay his debt.[50] That is the reason why if a debtor succeeds in accomplishing his obligation, he will feel free or tranquil. On the other hand, if he fails to repay his debt, he will feel upset because he still has this burden on his shoulders.

In the process of reckoning and judgment, what happens if there is a dispute between the debtor and the creditor regarding the reckoning? Who in this case can serve as the judge? Al-Attas introduces another term that also has root of *d-y-n*, that is, *madīnah*,[51] meaning literally "town" or "city," which serves as the place where all regulations concerning the debt can work properly. This *madīnah* is under the authority of a ruler (*dayyān*). Therefore, many problems arising from the contracting of the debt, including a dispute if any, between the debtor and the creditor can be solved by the existence of the *dayyān*, of which the meaning is also "judge."[52]

From the above exposition, we can see that Al-Attas has explored many significations that centre on the term that has Arabic root *d-y-n*, showing the relation between *dīn* and *dayn* by giving the idea of debt with many items involved in it. He has also said that all the regulations

_____

[49] Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, pp. 42, 44.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[51] See the entry of *d-y-n* in Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, Book I, Part 3, p. 945.

[52] Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, p. 43.

governing the debt will work properly in an organized society termed a *madīnah*, with a *dayyān* serving as the ruler as well as the judge. In his further explanation, he argues that the term *madīnah* is closely related to a verb, *maddana,* meaning "to build or to found cities, to civilize, to refine and to humanize," of which infinitive noun is *tamaddun*, meaning civilization and refinement in social culture. In this light, according to Al-Attas, *madīnah* is a picture of an organized society where not only regulations concerning the debt (*dayn*) may function properly, but also a civilization (*tamaddun*) may flourish.[53]

2. Dīn *in Religious Context*

After exposing some significations of *dīn* and showing its relationship with *dayn* in the context of human relations, Al-Attas proceeds to carry those significations into the religious context. If in the former context the idea of debt (*dayn*) occurs between human beings, now in the latter context, the debt takes place between human beings and God. In this case, who is indebted and who is the creditor? Another basic question is, "What does the debtor owe the creditor?"

In answering the above questions, Al-Attas refers to the Qur'ān, sūrat al-Mu'minūn/23: 12-13. From these two verses, which describe how God creates a human embryo from a quintessence of clay, then as a drop of sperm in a womb, next in the form of a clot of congealed blood, which turns into a lump of which bones are made, and the bones are clothed with flesh and thus develop another creature, Al-Attas points out that human being is indebted to God, his Creator (*al-Khāliq*) and Sustainer (*al-Qayyūm*), for bringing him into the light and maintaining him in his existence until a determined time (*ajal-un musamman*). Another verse, sūrat al-Insān/76: 1, says that man once was nothing and did not exist, and now he is. Although man now exists, he did not himself cause his own existence. Even his development as an embryo in a womb from the very beginning till he proceeds to a perfect creature is not due to his own effort. Moreover, even when he reached to a mature state as an embryo, he is not able to provide his sense of sight or hearing for himself. It was God who caused man to

---

[53] *Ibid.*

exist and grow from one state to another. In this case, then, man was being indebted to God for his existence and his growth.[54]

The nature of man's debt to God is, according to Al-Attas, definitely total because man, when he is ushered into reality, is already in a state of utter loss (*khusr*), since he possesses really nothing himself. He bases his argument on sūrat al-'Aṣr/103: 2, which says: "Lo! man is in a state of loss (*khusr*)."[55] Everything in a human being belongs to God. In other words, a human being is God's property.[56] If a human being has nothing with which to repay his debt of creation and growth, seeing that he is himself the very substance of the debt, the question that arises is, "How can he repay his debt to God?" According to Al-Attas, the only way to repay man's debt to God is by "returning himself to Him", the Creditor of human existence and growth.

What does "returning himself to God" mean? Before arriving at the answer to this question, another crucial question must first be solved. The question concerns the acceptance of the debtor to the regulations governing the debt. As explained in the human relations context a transaction of a debt will not occur without the acceptance of the debtor of the regulations offered by the creditor, the question is then, "When did man sign up the contract to take a debt from God?" To answer this question, Al-Attas refers to the Qur'ān , sūrat al-A'rāf/7: 172, that a human being has signed up the contract to take out a debt when his soul (*nafs*) replied "Yes" to a question presented by God, "Am I not your Lord?" This reply implies that a human being has accepted the transaction offered by God. This transaction means that a human being has sealed a covenant with God, so that he is bound to that transaction.[57] This soul's covenant with God, which occupies a central position in the concept of *dīn* both in individual and societal life of Islamic society, will become clearer in the later exposition.

Having shown that man has signed up to a transaction of debt to God, implying that the former has been bound to the Latter, Al-

---

[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46. However, Al-Attas' contention that human being is indebted to God for his existence and his growth is problematic. See section D of this article.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 46. I will also give a critical remark on this statement in section D.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

[57] *Ibid.* pp. 46, 50, 51.

Attas now comes to the meaning of "returning oneself to God" as a way to repay man's debt to God. Al-Attas explains this expression in four instances. In the first instance, he explains that "returning oneself to God" means "to enslave oneself to God," which means "to give himself up in service to God as his Lord and Master." This signifies that a human being is ready to abase himself before God, which implies that a human being is ready to follow whatever commands and prohibitions He imposes. It is in this regard that *dīn* means to abase oneself before God by following the dictates of His law.[58]

The concept of "abasing oneself" here has a close relationship with the covenant between human's soul (*nafs*) and God as mentioned above. It was said in the covenant that man has acknowledged that God is his Lord. In other words, man admits that his position *vis-à-vis* God is as His servant, or slave (*'abd*).[59] To explain this aspect, Al-Attas adds another point. Apart from being the Creator (*al-Khāliq*) and the Sustainer (*al-Qayyūm*), God is also characterized as the King (*al-Mālik*). As King (*mālik*), God exercises His authority (*mulk*) in His kingdom (*malakūt*). Everything in His kingdom, including human being, is possessed (*mamlūk*) by Him. As the *mamlūk* is possessed by the *mālik*, the former serves as servant or slave (*'abd*) of the latter. The *'abd* must submit (*aslama*) to the will of his Master and do whatever his Master asks him to do. This behaviour of the *mamlūk* to his *mālik* is then called *'ibādah*, meaning the act of the former to the latter in the former's position as the *'abd* of the latter. *'Ibādah* is the manifestation of submission (*islām*) from an *'abd* to his Master (*rabb*). By *'ibādah*, man is realizing his covenant with God.[60]

Apart from realizing the covenant, *'ibādah* is also the way by which to fulfill the purpose of a human's creation [Qur'ān ; sūrat al-Dhariyat/51: 56]. The expression of "fulfilling the purpose of his creation" points to the second instance of "returning human being to God," that is, "a return to man's inherent nature." How can "a return to man's inherent nature" also mean "returning human being to God"?

---

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 46-47.
[59] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 50-51.

To explain this meaning, Al-Attas introduces a term called *fiṭrah*. *Fiṭrah* is a pattern according to which God has created all things. It is, according to Al-Attas, God's manner of creating, *sunnat Allāh*, the law of God. What is the *fiṭrah* of a human being? The answer to this question is, again, related to the covenant mentioned above that man has sealed. It is clear from the covenant that the *fiṭrah* of a human being is to be the *'abd* of God. Accordingly, the act of *'ibadah* is felt by a human being to be normal because it comes as a natural inclination on the man's part to do so. This is the signification of *dīn* as a natural inclination; submission (*islām*) to this natural inclination brings harmony (*salām*).[61]

What does the term "submission" (*islām*) allude to? To explore the notion of this term, Al-Attas presents the third instance of "returning oneself to God" with the word *'uwwida*. The word *'uwwida*, according to him, means, "return to the past, to a tradition." This is the signification of *dīn* as a custom or habit.[62] How can, one might ask again, "returning oneself to God" be the same as "a return to the past, to a tradition"? He points out that what is meant by the "tradition" here is the tradition (*millah*) of the Prophet Ibrāhīm. *Millah* is, according to him, the manner in which submission to God is enacted in our life; and Ibrāhīm is a *ḥanīfan musliman*, that is, a person who presents real submission (*Islām*) to God. So, in this case, the *millah* of Ibrahim is a representation of a "human being returning to God," that is by a "real submission to Him."[63]

Now, what does "real submission" (*islām*) mean? Al-Attas spells out that real submission (*islām*) refers to conscious and willing submission, for were it neither conscious nor willing it cannot mean *real* submission.[64] Real submission is not a kind of submission that is only momentary, nor is it a kind of submission that is manifested in

_____

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 47, note 8.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 54.

[64] The concept of willing and unwilling submission refers to Sūrat Āli 'Imrān/ 3: 83, which says: "Seek they other than the religion (*dīn*) of Allah, when unto Him submitteth (aslama) whosoever is in the heavens and the earth, *willingly* or *unwillingly*, and unto Him they will be returned."

one's own obstinate way. A real submission is not a kind of submission that takes place only within the realm of the heart without manifestation in the action.[65] In this case, Al-Attas points to *Iblīs*, who believes in the One True God and acknowledges Him as his Creator and Sustainer, is yet considered a disbeliever (*kāfir*), because he disobeys His command to prostrate before Ādam.[66] This indicates that submission should consist in both belief (*īmān*) in the heart and action (*'amal*).[67] Submission is a harmony between both soul and body. The verb denoting this sense of submission is *aslama*, of which the infinitive noun is *islām* . In short, real submission is signified by *islām* . In this regard, Al-Attas refers to the Qur'ān , sūrat al-Nisā'/4: 125, "Who can be better in religion (*dīn*) than one who submits (*aslama*) his face to God?" This is the signification of *dīn* as a real submission (*islām*). Another verse, sūrat Āli 'Imrān/3: 19, says clearly that "Verily the *dīn* in the sight of God is Islām (*al-Islām*)." Islām is then said to be the true religion (*dīn al-ḥaqq*; *dīn al-qayyimah*), as it signifies the real submission to God as a manifestation of "returning oneself to Him."[68]

In true religion (*dīn al-ḥaqq*), there should be no compulsion, because the false and the truth are clear in it. In other words, the choice of the true religion is based on consciousness and willingness. This is the reason why "submission," as heretofore mentioned, points to conscious and willing submission. Accordingly, one must not compel other persons to subjugate themselves to the true religion and to submit to it; let every person choose in accordance with his own willingness. Al-Attas goes further, stating that even with oneself, one must subjugate and submit oneself wholeheartedly and willingly, so that one will enjoy the submission. On the other hand, any compulsion towards a certain preference will imply unwilling submission; and this will transform into arrogance, disobedience, and rebellion as represented by Iblīs.[69]

After explaining the phrase of "returning oneself to God" as (1) "to enslave oneself to Him," [:*'ibādah*] and (2) "to return to man's inherent nature," [:*fiṭrah*] and (3) "to return to the past, to a tradition,"

_____

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
[66] Sūrat al-Baqarah/2: 33-4
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 54-55, note 28.
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

[:*millah*] Al-Attas expounds on the fourth meaning of it. In this case, he refers to the Qur'an, sūrat al-Ṭāriq/86: 11, "By the heaven that hath rain." The word "rain" here is the interpretation of the word *raj'*, of which the literal meaning is "a return". The word *raj'* is, Al-Attas argues, interpreted as "rain" as God "returns it time and again." This time-and-again return refers to a good return in the sense of benefit. *Raj'* is therefore used identically in this regard with *rabaḥ*, meaning gain, as the opposite to *khusr*, meaning loss. In brief, he compares the word "return" with the use of the word "*raj'*", whose meaning is recurrent rain alluding to benefit and gain. He wants to show that the "return of human being to God" is for the benefit of the human being himself. Returning himself to God as a mechanism of repaying the debt of the former to the Latter is, like the returning rain, a gain unto the former. Al-Attas confirms this sense with the saying, "He who enslaves himself (*dāna nafsahu*) gains (*rabiḥa*; the verb of the infinitive noun *rabaḥ*)."[70]

The expression of "he who enslaves himself gains" can be explained in two ways. In the first meaning, the word *rabaḥ* implicitly indicates a kind of commercial life. This is, according to Al-Attas, exactly true as in the Qur'an, it is attached to the term *al-tijārah*, trade. There are thus *rabiḥa al-tijārah,* meaning "gains in the trade" and *mā rabiḥa al-tijārah*, meaning "no gains in the trade." How could it be that he who enslaves himself gains in the trade? Al-Attas explains this matter as follows. The human being is in fact the subject as well as the object of trade. He sells (*bā'a*) himself to another party. In the religious context, the other party is God. This refers to the Qur'an, sūrat al-Tawbah/9: 111, "Verily God has purchased (*ishtarā*) of the believers themselves."[71] When a man has sold himself to God, and God has bought his sale (*bay'ah*), the man will prosper in his trade, since God will pay with multiplied pleasurable things in the Hereafter.

How could, one might ask, a human being "sell" himself to God while at the same time "be indebted" to Him? To answer this question, we can turn to the second meaning of "he who enslaves himself gains."

_____

[69] *Ibid.*, p. 54-55, note 28.
[70] *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

Al-Attas refers to the Qur'an, sūrat al-Baqarah/2: 245, which says that "Who is he who will lend (*yuqriḍu*) to God a beautiful loan (*qarḍan ḥasanan*) which God will double to his credit and multiply many times?" He explains that the word loan (*qarḍ*) does not have the same connotation as debt (*dayn*): while the latter is only applicable to man, the former may be applicable to man and to God. Still, he adds, the word loan (*qarḍ*) has a metaphorical significance when it is applied to God, as He is actually the owner of all things. The word loan has this sense of "the return of that which is owned 'originally' by the One Who now asks for it, and which is to be returned to Him." So, the expression "man gives loan to God" means in fact "man does service to Him," and "does good works in accordance with His commands." Since the servitude and good works can be attributed to, and belong to man, so they can be said as the 'loan' that man gives to God. In turn, God will return this 'loan' multiplied to man.[72] In line with this explanation, the expression "man sells himself to God" can be understood properly. Man 'sells' himself to God by obeying all His commands, and God 'buys' this by giving multiple pleasurable things to man in the Hereafter, that is, life after death, which is called the Day of Judgment (*yawm al-Dīn*).

After exploring the four meanings of "returning oneself to God" as the significations of *dīn*, Al-Attas comes to the concluding section in which he postulates that Islām as *dīn* entails many points. First, Islām as *dīn* reflects a social order.[73] In this context, he mentions the significance of the changing name of the city once known as Yathrīb to Madīnah, which occurred soon after the Prophet made his Emigration (*hijrah*). This change is, according to him, not without purpose. It indicates that there is close relationship between *dīn* and *madīnah*. The relation is that both terms point to Muslims; whereas the former term refers to Muslims as individuals, the latter refers to Muslims as a community.[74] At this point, Al-Attas introduces two terms: "subjective, personal Islām " and "objective, communal Islām ." These

_____

[71] *Iibid.*, p. 57.
[72] *Iibid.*, p. 49.
[73] *Ibid.*, p. 55.
[74] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

terms are not meant to separate the two entities; rather, they are intended only to distinguish the two. We can distinguish between "subjective, personal Islām " and "objective, communal Islam," but we cannot detach the two from each other, since the latter is in fact made up of the former. The distinction is only made to show that at the level of individuals, every Muslim may experience Islām in accordance with his or her own capacity. Yet, at the level of community, every individual is considered Muslim irrespective of their variations in practising Islām .[75] With the distinction, Al-Attas wants to make a point that every individual in the Muslim community is in fact responsible to the covenant that they have made with God; they cannot pass the responsibility onto others. Although the members of the community must help each other in practising Islām, the responsibility before God remains on each member's own shoulders.[76] In this regard, it is clear that God is actually the real King of the community. Al-Attas then relates this fact to the concept of a human's position as the vicegerent of God. Every individual Muslim is the vicegerent of God. As the vicegerent of God, to whom the government is entrusted, a Muslim must exercise his government in harmony with God's will and pleasure. Yet, the concept of government here refers not only to the relationship between one person and the others in society, but also to the relation between elements within one's own self. So, as the vicegerent of God, every Muslim has to command himself in accordance with the ordinances revealed by God.[77]

His explanation clearly argues that Madīnah is actually the Kingdom of God, because God is the real King in this society, in the sense that it is His law that must govern the society. Madīnah signifies the place where true *dīn* is enacted collectively under the authority of the Prophet Muḥammad as its ruler (*dayyān*). In this Madīnah, every Muslim enslaves him- or herself to God by obeying the ordinances and law (*sharī'ah*) that God has revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad. In other words, Madīnah and its members are the epitome of Divine

---

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 60, and note 38
[76] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[77] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Cosmic order.[78] If in Madīnah the Prophet Muḥammad serves as its ruler to command the members of the society to walk in the path of divine guidance, who will function as the ruler of every individual Muslim, since every Muslim is actually also a government?

The answer to the above question forms the second point of Islām as dīn. In this point, Al-Attas contends that Islām as dīn serves as the foundation of an ethics, exemplifying how to reach happiness in life and to avoid misery.[79] Happiness and misery rely, according to him, on how an individual rules himself: if he rules himself with justice he will be happy; on the contrary, if he rules himself with injustice, he will be afflicted by misery. What does it mean "to rule oneself with justice"? Justice (ʿadl) is to put something in its proper place. On the contrary, injustice (ẓulm) is to put something not in its proper place. "To rule oneself with justice" means thus "to rule oneself in accordance with its proper place."[80] To explain this issue, Al-Attas advances the concept of human nature. He claims that a human being consists of physical and spiritual entities. The spiritual being itself is made up of two aspects, that is, the rational and the animal soul. One of these two souls, either the rational or the animal, will take the position as the commander in one's self; and the other one will be the follower. If the rational soul takes the position as the leader of one's self, the animal soul will submit to it; conversely, if the animal soul gains the function as the commander, the rational soul will submit to it. Al-Attas argues that one's self will achieve happiness, if the former situation is the case, and will be afflicted by misery if the latter condition prevails. Happiness in this sense is the attainment of the freedom of the rational soul from the fetters of the human vices, so that it experiences the supreme peace. Al-Attas adds that the "supreme peace" is also referred to by "islām ," which indicates that the condition of supreme peace is the consequence of submission: the animal soul submits to the rational soul, and the rational soul submits to God.

_____

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 55.
[79] *Ibid.*, p. 64.
[80] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

So, in the eyes of Al-Attas, Islām as *dīn* signifies the submission of oneself to God as his Lord. This submission is manifested through obedience to all the commands and ordinances that God has revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. The manifestation of the submission is enacted in the whole life span and in all aspects of life of a Muslim. In other words, his actions in life, whether in the context of individual, family, social, or state, are the reflection of his submission to the commands of God.[81] The benefit of this submission reverts, however, to the Muslim itself, since God does not in fact need the worship of human being.[82]

D. A Critical Remark

Al-Attas lays such emphasis on the idea of "debt" when he tries to elaborate the meaning of *dīn*, that he even bases his formulation on it. This is, on the one hand, plausible, as the verbal form of *dīn* and *dayn* "debt," is the same, that is, *dāna*. Yet, on the other hand, the *Lisān al-'Arab* as well as the *English-Arabic Lexicon* deal with the terms *dayn* and *dīn* in separate parts. Although the two lexicons deal with the terms *dayn* and *dīn* in the same entry, it is very clear to the reader of these lexicons that they are distinguished in a major way. This fact raises a question, "Is Al-Attas' practice of mixing up the terms *dīn* and *dayn* tenable?"

Qur'anic verses use the term *dayn* (debt) explicitly and conclusively with different meanings from that of *dīn*, such as is mentioned in surat al-Baqarah/II: 282, "O ye who believe! When ye contract a debt (*dayn*) for a fixed term, record it in writing," and surat al-Nisa'/4: 11-12, "and if he have brethren, then to his mother appertaineth the sixth, after any legacy he bequeathed, or debt (*dayn*) (hath been paid)[verse 11]. But if they have a child then unto you the fourth of that which they leave, after any legacy they may have bequeathed, or debt (*dayn*) (they may have contracted, hath been paid)… after any legacy they may have bequeathed, or debt (*dayn*) (they may have contracted, hath been paid)… after any legacy they may have

_____

81 *Ibid.*, p. 64.
82 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

bequeathed, or debt (*dayn*) (they may have contracted, hath been paid)…[verse 12]."

We have seen that Al-Attas also refers to some verses of the Qur'an for his argument that *din* centers on the idea of debt. He stated that human being is indebted to God for his existence. Human being is already in a state of loss (*khusr*) since he started to exist, for he possesses really nothing for his existence. Al-Attas bases this argument on surat al-'Aṣr/103: 2, which says: "Lo! man is in a state of loss (*khusr*)." This statement implies that all human beings are in a state of loss (*khusr*) when they start to exist. Yet, what escapes his attention is that this verse is followed by an exception, "Save those who believe and do good works, and exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to endurance" (al-'Aṣr/103: 3). This exception clearly shows that not all human beings are in a state of loss. So, al-'Aṣr/103: 2 does not indicate the situation of human beings when they start to exist. Accordingly, Al-Attas' statement that human beings are in a state of loss when they start to exist is not sound.

More fundamentally, is it true that human's existence and his growth a debt? Or, is it an endowment? To answer this question, we can refer, for instance, to sūrat al-Baqarah/2: 152, which runs: "Give thanks (*shukr*) to Me, and reject (*kufr*) not Me." This verse clearly indicates that the ideal attitude of human being to God is to be thankful (*shukr*) to Him, and the bad attitude is to reject (*kufr*) Him, which is the manifestation of unthankfulness. The point that I want to make here is that if thankfulness to God is the ideal attitude to Him, so human's life, including his existence and his growth, is an endowment, not a debt. Because, if it is a debt, the right attitude to Him is to repay his debt to Him. Moreover, thankfulness, not repayment, is the manifestation of *'ibadah* (enslaveness) to Him, as mentioned in sūrat al-Baqarah/2: 172 "And render thanks (*shukr*) to Allah if it is (indeed) He Whom ye worship."

Al-Attas also stated that the covenant mentioned in sūrat al-A'raf/7: 172 marks human being's agreement to take a debt offered by God. Is it true that it is an agreement of human beings to a transaction of debt with God? In a transaction of debt, one party never forces the other party to take debt from the former. Only if the would-be debtor

willingly agrees on the requirements and ordinances offered by would-be creditor will the transaction of debt take place. This is different from the question, "Am I not Your Lord" which does not provide an alternative answer of "Yes" or "No," because the answer has been provided with affirmative form: "Yes." This verse, which runs: "And (remember) when thy Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their reins, their seed, and made them testify of themselves, (saying): Am I not your Lord? They said: Yea, verily. We testify" is intended that "lest ye should say at the Day of Resurrection: Lo! Of this we were unaware; or lest ye should say: (It is) only (that) our fathers ascribed partners to Allah of old and we were (their) seed after them. Wilt Thou destroy us on account of that which those who follow falsehood did?" (al-A'raf/7: 172-3)

So, the above critical remarks show that the answer to the question of "Is Al-Attas' practice of mixing up the terms *din* and *dayn* tenable?" is clearly negative.

E. Conclusion

In response to the debate on the question of whether Islām as *dīn* includes, apart from religion, a civilization, Al-Attas has tried to advance a systematic formulation of Islām by explaining and exposing some significations of *dīn*. He has presented the significations of *dīn* in what he terms the "human secular context" and the "religious context."

Where the "human secular context" is concerned, Al-Attas mentions some significations of *dīn* which center on the idea of debt, as the translation of the verb *dāna*, meaning "to owe something." This notion of debt becomes the basis of his further formulation of *dīn* in the "religious context." According to him, human beings are totally indebted to God, since He has brought them into existence. In other words, their very existence is a manifestation of their debt to God. Since human beings owe their existence to God, and cannot repay their debt to Him, the only way to repay their debt is by "returning themselves to God." It is in his effort to interpret this phrase that Al-Attas conceptualizes *dīn* in the "religious context."

Al-Attas interprets the phrase "returning oneself to God" with four meanings: (1)"to enslave oneself to God" [: *'ibādah*]; (2)"to return to man's inherent nature" [:*fiṭrah*]; (3)"to return to the past, to a tradition" [:*millah*]; and (4) "to return to one's self" [:*rabaḥ*]. This interpretation indicates that the word *dīn* refers to the effort of the human being to repay his debt to God by returning himself to Him, which takes the form of enslaving himself to Him; by following the inherent nature that He has created for him; and by following the footsteps of the *millah* of Ibrahim, so that he will eventually prosper.

So, in the eyes of Al-Attas, Islām as *dīn* signifies the submission of oneself to God as his Lord. This submission is manifested in *madīnah* through obedience to all the commands and ordinances that God has revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. The manifestation of the submission is enacted in the whole life span and in all aspects of life of a Muslim. In other words, Muslims' actions in life, whether in the context of individual, family, social, or state, which form the Islamic *tamaddun,* are the reflection of their submission to the commands of God. Therefore, Al-Attas' interpretation of Islām as *dīn* is closer to the standpoint of Gibb and Gazalba, who contend that Islam is more than a religion; it is a complete civilization.

As a critical remark, Al-Attas' practice of basing *dīn* on the idea of debt is problematic. Firstly, as far as "basic meaning" is concerned, although both the Arabic Lexicons of *Lisān al-'Arab* of ibn Manẓūr and the *Arabic-English Lexicon* of E.W. Lane deal with *dīn* and *dayn* (debt) in the same entry, they discuss these two terms in clearly distinguished sections. Secondly, Qur'anic verses clearly use the word *dīn* differently from the word *dayn*. The former term never points to the latter, nor does the reverse occur. Thirdly, Al-Attas' opinion that human beings are indebted to God both for their lives and existence is questionable. In the Qur'anic world view, human beings' lives and existence are an endowment, not a debt, so the ideal attitude for them is to Give thanks for (*shukr*) God's mercy, not to repay it.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abaza, Mona, *Debates on Islam and Knowledge in Malaysia and Egypt: Shifting Worlds*, London: Routledge Curson, 2002.

Abdalla, Ulil Abshar, "Islam: Agama atau *Din*?" in www.islamlib.com, published on 18 October 2004.

Al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Al-Naquib, *Rangkaian Ruba'iyat*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1959.

—, *Comments on the Re-examination of Al-Rānīrī: A Refutation*, Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Negara, 1975.

—, *Islam dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1972.

—, *Rānīrī and the Wujūdiyyah of 17th Century Acheh,* Monographs of the Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society III, Singapore: Malaysia Printers Limited, 1996.

—, *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fanṣūrī*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1970.

—, *A Commentary on the Ḥujjat al-Ṣiddīq of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī*, Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Culture Malaysia, 1986.

—, *Islam and Secularism*, Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993.

—, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam, An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995.

—, *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: A 16th Century Malay Translation of the 'Aqā'id of al-Nasafī*, Kuala Lumpur: Department of Publications, University of Malaya, 1988.

—, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1969.

—, *Some Aspects of Sufism as Understood and Practised among the Malays*, Singapore: Malaya Publishing House, 1963.

—, *The Origin of the Malay Sha'ir*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1968.

Al-Ba'albakī, Rū-hī, *al-Mawrid*, Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li'l-Malāyīn, 1988.

Anshari, Saifuddin, "Agama, Din, Islam dan Kebudayaan," in *Pandji Masjarakat*, No. 62/IV, August 1970.

Arendonk-[W.A.Graham], C. van, "Sharīf," in B. Lewis et. al (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (*New Edition*), Leiden: E.J.Brill, vol. III, 1971.

Armas, Adnin, "Pembela dan Penghadang Sekularisasi," in *Suara Hidayatullah*, 11/XVI March 2004.

—, "Politik Sekular versus Politik Islam," in www.insisnet.com, posted on Friday, 13 August 2004.

—, "Sekularisasi Menghempaskan Agama," in *Suara Hidayatullah*, 10/XVI February 2004.

—, "Seputar Istilah Sekularisasi," in *Suara Hidayatullah,* 09/XVI January 2004.

Daud, Wan Mohd Nor Wan, "Tafsir bukanlah Hermeneutik," in www.insistnet.com, posted on Monday, 16 June 2003.

—, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization*, Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998.

Drewes, G.W.J., "Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī 's Ḥujjat al-Ṣiddīq li-daf' al-Zindīq, re-examined," in *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 47, December 1974.

—, *The Poems of Hamzah Fanṣūrī*, Dordrecht-Holland and Cinnaminson-U.S.A.: Foris Publications, 1986.

Elias, Elias A., *Elias' Modern Dictionary: Arabic-English*, Cairo: Elias Modern Press, 1925.

Gibb, H.A.R., *Wither Islām? A Survey of Modern Movements in the Moslem World*, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1932.

Izutsu, Toshihiko, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966.

—, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung*, Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964.

Aris Widodo

King, Winston L., "Religion" in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, vol. 12, 1987.

Lane, Edward William, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, London and Edinburg: Williams and Norgate, Book I, Part 3, 1867.

Madjid, Nurcholish, "Keharusan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam dan Masalah Integrasi Ummat," in *Pandji Masjarakat*, No. 51/ IV, February 1970.

—, "Sekularisme Bertentangan dengan Islam: Beberapa Tjatjatan Pendjelasan sekitar Pembaharuan Pemikiran dalam Islam," *Pandji Masjarakat*, No. 57/IV, Juni 1970.

Manẓūr, Ibn, *Lisān al-'Arab*, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, vol. II., 1119 AH.

Mūsā, Fayḍl Allāh ibn, *Fatḥ al-Raḥmān li-Ṭālibi Āyāti al-Qur'ān*, n.d., Indonesia: Maktaba al-Daḥlān, n.d.

Muhammad, Amran, "Menjernihkan Gagasan Islamisasi Ilmu Prof. Al-Attas," in www.insisnet.com, posted on Monday, 16 June 2003.

Pickthall, Marmaduke, *The Glorious Koran*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976.

Qafisheh, Hamdi A., *NTC's Gulf Arabic-English Dictionary*, Chicago: NTC Publishing Group, 1997.

Riddell, Peter G., *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses*, London: Hurst & Company, 2001.

Roald, Anne Sofie, *Tarbiya: Education and Politics in Islamic Movements in Jordan and Malaysia*, Lund: Graphic Systems Malmoe, 1994.

Smith, Jane I., *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term 'Islam' as Seen in A Sequence of Qur'an Commentaries*, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975.

Smith, Wilfred C., *On Understanding Islam, Selected Studies*, New York: Mouton Publishers, 1981.

Stauth, Georg, *Politics and Cultures of Islamization in Southeast Asia: Indonesia and Malaysia in the Nineteen-nineties,* Bielefeld: Transcript, 2002.

Suharto, Ugi, "Apakah al-Qur'an Memerlukan Hermeneutika?" in www.insisnet.com, posted on Wednesday, 9 April 2003.

Sweeney, Amin, "Malay Sufi Poetics and European Norms," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 112/Number 1, January-March, 1992.

Teeuw, A., "The Malay Shā'ir, Problems of Origin and Tradition," in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, deel 122, 's-Gravenhage, 1966.

Vakili, Abdollah, "Sufism, Power Politics, and Reform: al-Raniri's Opposition to Hamzah al-Fansuri's Teachings Reconsidered," in *Studia Islamika*, Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies, vol. 4, Number 1, 1997.

White, Alan R., "Coherence Theory of Truth," in Paul Edwards (ed), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, New York: The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, vol. 2, 1967.

Who's Who in the World, 9th edition, Illionis: Marquis Who's Who Macmillan Directory Division, 1989-1990.

Zarkasyi, Hamid Fahmi, "Ibn Sina's Islamization of Aristotle's Concept of God," in www.insisnet.com, posted on Wednesday, 9 April 2003.