

QURAN-BIBLE VALIDATION IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA: SOCIAL MEDIA, RELIGIOUS CONVERSION, AND THEOLOGICAL DEBATE

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Abstract: *Religious theological views alter continuously with the context and dynamics of social change. The emergence of digital media and the flow of information has caused a change in the theological views on religious truths and their validation ways. Therefore, this research aimed to explore the theological views and practices of converts in Indonesia who are committed to disseminating validated the Qur'an-Bible relationship in social media as a consequence of their Islamic beliefs. The influence of context and social dynamics on religious theological views was explored by obtaining data through media observations and in-depth interviews with three popular converts on social media, namely Ahmad Kainama, drg. Carissa Grani, and Teressia Pardede. Subsequently, this research concluded that converts to religious theology in Indonesia focus on three basic views, 1) Converts considered Islam as a universal religion and the faith of all prophets and apostles, as Jesus, Moses, and all the bearers of religion in the world are Muslims, 2) Convert judges a historical distortion about Islam and Christianity, 3) Convert claims there is a misinterpretation in understanding Islam and Christianity. This also provided an overview of the impacts that arise due to theological validation in social-religious life by Indonesian converts on social media. This information is expected to contribute to future research as a theoretical-empirical-phenomenological basis about converts and their theological views on social media for the development of relevant investigations.*

Keywords: *Qur'an-Bible Validation; Social Media; Religious Theology; Converts' Views*

Introduction

Theological validation is a process of seeking the validity of truth. One of the efforts to validate theology in religious discourse in the world is the Quran-Bible validation.¹ According to historical evidence, Quran-Bible validation activities have been carried out since classical times. As discussed in the issue the rejection of the Christian and Jews arguments by Muslim scholars. Furthermore, Islamic literature has mentioned the use of biblical narratives to expand the Qur'an in various literary contexts.² Although the driving factors for compiling biblical material in interpreting the Qur'an are very diverse, the scholars discover the great interest of some Qur'anic interpreters (*mufassir*) refers to information and arguments from the Bible.

For example, Muslim scholars, Ibn Barragan and al-Biqā'i conducted interpretations of some texts with this approach, namely validating the Qur'an through the Bible. In this side the Bible includes the two previous scriptures, the Torah and the Bible. This is an unique approach that can eliminate the polemic of hatred against the

¹John Hick, "Theology and Verification," *Theology Today* 17, no. 1 (1960).

²R. Michael McCoy III, *Interpreting the Qur'an with the Bible (Tafsir Al-Qur'an Bi-l-Kitab)*, (2021).

"al-Kitab" (The Bible) ideas as found in Christian-Muslim medieval ages discourses. Ibn Barragan and al-Biq'i adopted canonical Biblical terms to add exegetical material depth to interpret the Qur'an.⁵ Their decision to use the Bible in interpretation shows that some *mufassirin* were involved in efforts to validate the theology of the Qur'an-Bible as well as provide a special approach in explaining the Qur'an, and this validation activity is still implemented by the Muslim community to present.

In the contemporary period, the method of validating the Qur'an-Bible relationship is different from before and supported by the emergence of the digital era. Although the emergence of the digital era and technological developments has expanded the public theological discourse in the public sphere, according to Antje Jackelén⁴, it has also exerted a negative effect that can threaten inter-religious relations in Indonesia.

An aspect that caught the attention of Indonesians was the validation of divinity and theological norms propagated by converts (Ar. *Mualaf*). Religious conversion is a change of belief into a Muslim, where the involved persons are called converts.⁵ In recent years, converts shared their Quran-Bible validation through digital media.⁶ The debate about the validation of the Bible against the Qur'an and vice versa has filled theological discourses in Indonesia. This model of the al-Qur'an-Bible validation sparked a wide debate. Especially regarding to the activist converts that can easily grab the public attention.⁷ This debate gains the interest of religious leaders, adherents, and the government.

The two aspects above show that the phenomenon of the Qur'an-Bible validation in the contemporary period has sparked wider theological debate, discussion, and dialogue. Even though the spiritual experience of religious conversion and its arguments should be a private intra-religious debate, the emergence of this new model has attracted a wider variety of parties, thereby necessitating a new perspective to read this phenomenon.

Therefore, this research answered the main question about the reasons for the validation of the Qur'an-Bible relationship by Indonesian converts on social media. This issue was resolved by examining several aspects, namely 1) The view of the Al-Qur'an-Bible validation by converts, 2) Converts to Islam and the use of social media, and 3) The impacts that arise with the presence of this validation on Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia.

This research can serve as a conceptual basis for further investigations on

³Ibid.

⁴Antje Jackelén, "Technology, Theology, and Spirituality in the Digital Age," *Zygon* 56, no. 1 (2021).

⁵Fakhri Sungit et al., "Discourse of Converts: Definitions and Some," *PONTE International Scientific Researches Journal* 72, no. 9 (2016).

⁶Anita Nuraeni, "Pembinaan Keluarga Mualaf Upaya Membentuk Pribadi Muslim" 5, no. 2 (2019): 125–138.

⁷Gazi Saloom, "Indonesian Celebrities Conversion: The Quest for Meaning and Social Environment," *Ulumuna* 23, no. 2 (2020).

relevant themes and discussions. It can function as a reference for policymakers and the government to minimize the occurrence of inter-religious conflicts while managing inter-religious relations in a multi-ethnic country such as Indonesia.

Qur'an-Bible Validation in Cross-Religious Discourse

Theological validation is an activity to verify the truth of religious doctrines through various information and evidence from religious arguments present in texts and human experiences.⁸ Several existing parallels of the Qur'an with the Bible could not have occurred without preceding scriptures as subtexts, such as *muşaddiq/taşdıq* (confirming), *muhaimin* (corrector), and *tafsıl* (elaborating) on the previous books. Therefore, the Qur'an has been validated against the Bible and vice versa since the development of science in the classical period.

The use of the Bible to validate the statements of the Qur'an occurred in the Medieval Ages, while its employment as a source of interpretation by Muslim scholars was in the first and second century Hijri. Ibn Kathir, Ibn Qutaybah, Ibn Barragan, and al-Biqai⁹ used biblical information to enrich the interpretation of the Qur'an. The validation of the Qur'an-Bible relationship is supported by the existence of holy books that emerged from the Abrahamic religions. According to Reuven Firestone, the Qur'an experiences similar tensions with the previous holy books (Reeves, 2004). Hence, the occurrence of the Qur'an-Bible validation in the interpretation tradition is interesting considering both holy texts have different theological attitudes and the religions possess contradictory socio-historical experiences.

This fact confirms that the validation of both has existed and contributed to enriching their respective religious discourses. The Al-Qur'an-Bible validation is also believed to have a positive and negative impact on the understanding and thoughts of adherents. Meanwhile, it gave rise to a special term in the science of interpretation called *Israiliyyat*.¹⁰ *Israiliyyat* is the narration originating from Jews and Christians found in the Bible, Bible explanations, stories of the prophets, and others.¹¹ Ibn Taimiyyah attempted to purify the interpretation of the Qur'an from the effects of non-Islamic information by proposing the term *ad-Dakhil fı al-Tafsır*.¹² Although some scholars consider this Qur'an-Bible validation activity negatively, some others appreciate it as a dialogical step between the two. For example, Reynolds proposed the theory of

⁸Paul L. Allen, "Is There Verification in Theology?," *Open Theology* 3, no. 1 (2017).

⁹McCoy III, *Interpret. Qur'an with Bible (Tafsır Al-Qur'an Bi-l-Kitab)*.

¹⁰L. B. Maevskaya, "The Influence of Israiliyyat on The Teachings of the Sect of Early Anthropomorphists, The History of The Hanbali Madhhab and The Formation of Religious and Philosophical Views of Ibn Taymiyyah," *Innovative Solution in Modern Science* 4, no. 40 (2020).

¹¹Ismail Albayrak, "Reading the Bible in the Light of Muslim Sources: From Israiliyyāt to Islāmiyyāt," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23, no. 2 (2012).

¹²D.I. Ansusa Putra, *Otoritas Tafsır: Pendekatan Nalar dalam Tafsır Ibn Taimiyyah* (Ciputat, Tangerang Selatan: Cinta Buku Press, 2016), <https://opac.perpusnas.go.id/DetailOpac.aspx?id=982977>.

alluding (intersection/allusion) to prove the existence of a subtext that connects the Qur'an with pre-Qur'anic traditions.¹³ The view that the Qur'an produces its religious message according to the context of its audience is applied to determine the natural relationship between Qur'an texts alongside intersecting Jewish and Christian subtexts. Therefore, the discourse on the validation of the Qur'an-Bible relationship is called the homiletics¹⁴ of the Qur'an with allusions in the scope of the study of Qur'an literature.¹⁵

In the following period, the Qur'an-Bible relationship was validated in the context of interfaith dialogue and debate, such as Ahmed Deedat in his comparative religion discourse with the main focus on Islamic Christology. Deedat's efforts to validate the Qur'an-Bible relationship aim to help Muslims understand the similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity. The basic points in his activities are recorded in his greatest work entitled 'The Choice: Islam and Christianity' involving books that mention statements of the Qur'an and Bible, which are validated with historical and linguistic facts.

This model comprising dialogue and debate was continued by other Muslim figures, such as Zakir Naik, his meeting with Ahmad Deedat in 1987 became starting point for his existences. Naik's world-wide appearance inspired by Deedat's genius and skill of debate. His *da'wah* (evangelical) activities of spreading the message of Islam began in 1991 and have strongly influenced dialogue and comparative religion in the world.

Zakir Naik attempted to explain his validation of the Qur'an-Bible scientifically within the framework of debates with scholars and theologians of other religions on the concept of God, prophethood, revelation, and other controversial topics such as terrorism and extremism. His theological validation was executed by citing textual references from the Qur'an and other religious books, such as the Vedas, the Bible, and the Torah. Zakir spoke emphatically by making cross-references to all the different scriptures and in a public lecture entitled "The Similarity between Islam and Christianity." In this lecture, he stated that Islam was founded on five pillars, namely the creed, prayer, zakat, fasting in Ramadan, alongside pilgrimage, and that the Qur'an described monotheism in Islam.¹⁶

Although many admired his intellectual abilities and memory in his attitude and arguments for Islam, several religious organizations, academics, and media journalists have criticized Naik's provocative remarks and cynicism against scriptures and other religious dogmas. The validation of the Qur'an-Bible relationship by Zakir Naik is

¹³Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext, The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, 2010.

¹⁴Philip Harvey, "New Catholic Encyclopedia. 2nd Edn," *ANZTLA EJournal*, no. 51 (2019).

¹⁵Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, *The Quran in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Quranic Milieu, The Quran in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Quranic Milieu*, vol. 6, 2009.

¹⁶Maziah Mustapha and Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, "A Critical Appraisal of Zakir Naik's Islamic Evangelism," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 15 (2019).

considered to potentially disrupt social cohesion and diversity among religious communities in all countries. As a result, Naik's methodology has been criticized several times by Muslim and non-Muslim academics, where the latter claim that his interpretation of their scriptures can be problematic.¹⁷

Presently, the Qur'an-Bible validation method has been continued by converts at the national and international levels, such as Yusuf, Yusuf Estes, Shabir Ally, and the famous Bilal Philips. In Indonesia, several names such as Irene Handono, who was popular in the 1998-the 2000s, gave many massively recorded public lectures, creeds, as well as philosophical and theological seminars in all regions. Even though the videos were spread and have been referred to by Muslim and Christian communities in Indonesia, they have occasionally caused polemics and controversies amid this multicultural and multi-religious society.

These controversies were caused by efforts to validate converts to the concept of divinity, which were sourced from Qur'anic and biblical texts and information. Converts discussed the concept of divinity by conducting arguments, criticisms, and comparative research, most frequently involving the Oneness of God, Prophethood, and the Concept of the Trinity. The theological validation performed by converts is a personal interpretation of the Qur'an and the religious Bible against the Qur'an-Bible.

Converts validated and analysed religious dogmas, then concluded with experience instruments. They acquired rationalistic knowledge by analysis and inferring, where the Qur'an-Bible validation was not only performed by cross-analysing religious texts but also by matching with the socio-historical facts of mankind.

The validity of the Qur'an-Bible in the concept of divinity, prophethood, and the Trinity is a debate that is supported by information from religious texts and Muslim-Christian socio-historical experiences. Based on interviews, some converts referred to validation through historical and sociological scales. For instance, Ahmad Kainama, Teresia Pardede, and Carissa Grani mentioned several converts' arguments related to church dogma that have been analysed historically, including:

1. The Bible explicitly states that God is One without a trinity.
2. Jesus was only approved as a god in 532 AD (Council of Nicea).
3. There was a misinterpretation of the word 'son' of God in the Bible by a translation from the original language (Hebrew-Greek) (Exodus 4:22, Genesis 6:1-15).
4. The Bible contains laws about sin and punishment for sinners.
5. There is no single witness that says Jesus was crucified (Mark: 14:50-52).
6. There are doubts for Christians about the crucifixion of Jesus.
7. Sins cannot be forgiven only by confessing Jesus as God.
8. Jesus was sent only for the Israelites.
9. Jesus did not bring a new religion, only continued the teachings of the law.
10. Jesus announced the coming of the next prophet Muhammad.

¹⁷Raouf Mir, "Zakir Naik and His Audiences: A Case Study of Srinagar, Kashmir," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 7, no. 2 (2018).

The explanation above describes that the Qur'an-Bible validation activity is a tradition that has long been performed by Muslim scholars. Occasionally, it becomes a discourse that colours the dialogue between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, with the difference being the execution by diverse groups. The Qur'an-Bible validation was performed by qur'anic scholars and commentators in the classical period, by preachers in the following period, and by converts in current times. These three validation periods were motivated by different objectives, and the most frequent material in this Qur'an-Bible validation is about the Oneness of God, the concept of prophethood, and the debate around the trinity.

Theological Arguments Validated by Converts

The validation of the Qur'an-Bible about divinity, prophethood, and revelation by converts comprehensively describes the construction of their views on religious theology. Their views contain the basic principles of religion after validation and verification with various sources of information on religious texts and socio-historical experiences in the context of Islam and Christianity. Although this view of theology has little difference from the official understanding of religious authorities, namely Islam and Christianity, it has a huge impact on the building and construction of beliefs that are understood and accepted by all religious communities.

Several religious theological principles were built by the converts after the validation of the Qur'an-Bible and confirmation with the socio-historical experience of mankind. First, converts view Islam as a universal religion through a perspective that is not simplistic as before. Their view of Islam is not only as the religion brought by Prophet Muhammad but also by the prophets and apostles as well. Islam etymologically comes from the word "aslama," meaning people who surrender (to Allah).¹⁸ This is found in QS: 16:102 and, according to Ahmad Kainama, is confirmed in Isaiah: 42 by the Bible.

Second, the Qur'an and Bible preach that God is One and the similarity of the concept of divinity and the oneness of God in these books are validated by converts. The Qur'an mentions the concept of the oneness of God in the Al Ikhlas, where God is regarded as Almighty, independent, childless, and not begotten, and there is no one similar to Him. This statement is confirmed in the Bible, as found in the Torah, Deuteronomy 6:4, and the Gospel of Mark 12:29-32. Converts added that the trinity doctrine is the Church's interpretation of the expression 'son of God' in the Bible. Kainama mentioned that this phrase does not solely refer to Jesus but also people that follow the teachings of God as in Matthew 5:9 or Luke 6:35. In addition, the New and Old Testaments of the Bible use the term 'son of God' to refer to a pious person.¹⁹

¹⁸D.I. Ansusa Putra, "New Concept of Ignorance: An Islamic Epistemological Approach to the Story of Moses AS Relevant Reference for Contemporary Ulama," *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic & Social Studies* 5, no. 2 (December 8, 2019): 114, http://ejournal.iainbukittinggi.ac.id/index.php/Islam_realitas/article/view/2339.

¹⁹Ahmad Kainama, *Teologi Katolik-Kristen*, 2020.

Third, the position of Jesus in theology is similar to Moses, Abraham, and Muhammad, as the Prophet who delivered God's commandments. At this point, converts argue that Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and all the prophets are the links of the previous prophetic lineage (Ahmad Kainama, 2020b). They base their arguments on quranic and biblical statements, which are validated by the prophetic history of mankind. Kainama mentioned that Jesus came as a prophet to continue the laws based on Matthew 5:17. Jesus denied coming to overthrow the law and the prophets but declared His arrival as a means to fulfil a prophetic message. Kainama also cited other verses, such as John 5:30 and Luke 10:16, which were stated to validate the information and arguments contained in the Qur'an, including Surah Ali Imran 3 : 48-49, Qs 43 Az Zukhruf: 59, and Qs 61 Ash Shaff: 6.

Fourth, converts validate the values contained in the Qur'an and the Bible. For instance, Carissa Grani stated that Islamic teachings are full of tolerance and promote coexistence and respect for followers of other religions.²⁰ The Qur'an also discusses the prohibition of coercion in embracing religion and does not justify the existence of this element in selecting a faith (Ibrahim, 2015). In addition, Islam upholds human rights because it is closely related to individuals that should get awarded after spreading messages from the Qur'an.²¹ This shows that religious conversion to Islam does not support coercion from anyone, as the Qur'an contains instructions about universal morals for mankind throughout time.²²

Furthermore, Islam is a universal religion and has no relationship with any particular people, class, or country. Carissa Grani, one of the converts, argued that the word 'Islam' is the name of a universal religion and not affiliated with any particular person, group, race, or nation, unlike other religions. In this aspect, Islam emphasizes mercy for humans, animals, plants, and even the environment and universe. Grani stated that Islam is perfect and comprehensive teaching that regulates the balance of life between this world and the hereafter, discussing aspects of life as a whole. Many teachings from the Qur'an and Hadith are related to doing good to slaughtered animals by sharpening knives and prohibiting the abandonment of the land. Grani promoted the universal, rather than the partial, understanding of Islam (Grani, 2020) to avoid misunderstandings about the religion, which may result in terrorism and radicalism.

All of the Qur'an-Bible validations by these converts can be seen in the following table:

²⁰Carissa Grani, *Islam Agama Universal*, 2020.

²¹Fadi Zadari, "Religion as a Pillar for Establishing a Civilization: Al-Māwardī's Perspective," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 11, no. 1 (2021): 241–257.

²²M. Kamali, "Civil Society and Islam: A Sociological Perspective," *Archives Europeennes de Sociologie* 42, no. 3 (2001).

Table 1. Table of Theological views of the Convert

Statement apriori (Dogma, Creed)	Inferential argument (Historical-Sociological Experience)	VALID/ INVALID	
Christianity (sourced from the Bible and church dogma)	God is One in three (trinity)	- The Bible explicitly states that God is One without a trinity	Invalid
	Jesus is the son of God	- Jesus was only approved as a god in 532 AD (Council of Nicea) - There was a misinterpretation of the word 'son' of God in the Bible by a translation from the original language (Hebrew-Greek)	Invalid
	Jesus was crucified for penance because Christianity is the religion of love	- The Bible contains laws about sin and punishment for sinners	Invalid
	Jesus on the cross	- There is no single witness that says Jesus was crucified (Mark: 14:50-52) - There are doubts for Christians about the crucifixion of Jesus	Invalid
	All sins are forgiven by acknowledging Jesus as God	- Sins are impossible to be forgiven only by confessing Jesus as God	Invalid
	Jesus was sent for all mankind	- Jesus was sent only for the Israelites	Invalid
	Jesus taught Christianity	- Jesus did not bring a new religion but continued the teachings of the law	Invalid
	Jesus has nothing to do with Muhammad	- Jesus announces the coming of the next prophet Muhammad	Invalid

Islam (sourced from the Qur'an)	Jesus is a Prophet and Apostle	-	Jesus vowed that he would continue the Old Testament, meaning his status was the same as Moses	Valid
	Jesus was not crucified	-	Historically, there are doubts about the crucifixion of Jesus	Valid
	Jesus preaches the prophethood of Muhammad	-	Muhammad's name appears in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments	Valid
	Islam is a universal religion	-	The name Islam does not refer to the name of a certain character, race, or nation	Valid

As shown in the table above, converts validated, tested, and strengthened the statements of divinity contained in the Qur'an and the Bible with the socio-historical context of the two religions. Their view of the concept of the Qur'an-Bible theology is an argument for their conversion to Islam, where they assess this understanding comprehensively to describe the theological concepts contained in the Qur'an and the Bible. This is because the understanding contains the basic principles of Islam and Christianity and combines their theological similarities.

The theological differences between these religions are solely caused by the interpretation of religious texts. In addition, converts validate the occurrence of a corrupt understanding of the Bible by the Church. The Qur'an mentions its existence as a corrector and confirmation of the previous books due to the attachment of various designations, such as *taḥrīf* (distortion), *tabdīl* (replacement), *kitmān* (concealment), etcetera, to previous scriptures.

Social Media impact to Theological Debate

The Validated Qur'an-Bible has been spread by converts and is available to millions of people around the world through the internet, YouTube, and social media.²³ Previously, their experiences and arguments for their religious conversion were only

²³Mohammad Hidayatullah and D.I Ansusa Putra, "The Role of Technology and Social Media in Spreading the Qur'an and Hadiths by Mubalig," *DINIKA: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 4, no. 1 (December 19, 2019): 45, <http://ejournal.iainsurakarta.ac.id/index.php/dinika/article/view/1858>.

discussed at intra-religious meetings in certain assemblies with limited membership. Similar to Irene Handono's religious conversion in 1998-1999, which received extensive public attention, the controversy was not examined by discussion groups within the same religion.

In recent decades, religious conversion in Indonesia has been in the public spotlight and has caused controversies in the community. Currently, the dissemination and information about religious conversion use internet media that pass across countries, ages, groups, and religions.²⁴ These controversies are supported by the phenomenon of conversion to Islam displayed through digital media.²⁵ Converts share their experiences and journey to religious conversion on YouTube, which garners millions of views. For example, Deddy Corbuzer's spiritual journey has 7.2 million views, Marcell Siahaan, Ahmad Kainama, Carisa Grani have 6.6 million, 4.3 million, and 5.2 million views, respectively, while Teresia Pardede's testimony video has been watched 38 thousand times. Three of these five persons (Deddy Corbuzer, Marcell Siahaan, and Teresia Pardede) are public figures who work in the entertainment sector. As a result, their profession added to the controversy of the religious conversion, as they easily acquired the attention of the Indonesian urban community who enjoy sensational experiences. This fact shows that the phenomenon of religious conversion has sparked digital debate, discussion, dialogue, and partly conflicts on social media by being shared in a wider space through popular tools, such as Youtube.

According to the Pew Research Center, Indonesia was one of 25 largely populated countries, along with four other nations, namely India, Egypt, Pakistan, and Russia, which majority was heavily influenced by government restrictions and social animosities involving religion in 2018.²⁶ An article on Asian society by Sidney Jones, the Executive Director of the Asia Division, Human Rights Watch, mentioned several factors that have triggered religious conflicts in Indonesia throughout history. It also discussed the increasing effect of the information technology revolution on people's social lives as an influencing factor.²⁷ The development of information technology has almost totally resulted in the eradication of local conflicts. However, there is an increase in national conflicts or at least the attraction of co-religionists or members of an ethnic group from across provinces in a way that results in a national conflict. An example is a religious conflict in Poso in 2004, where Christians and Muslims mobilized supporters from outside Ambon with media provocations, which only exacerbated the conflict.

This conflict is also visible from the debate concerning the phenomenon of religious conversion. Before a religious conversion, various situations cause pros and

²⁴Budiawan Budiawan, "New Media and Religious Conversion Out of Islam Among Celebrities in Indonesia," *IKAT: The Indonesian Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 3, no. 2 (2020).

²⁵Nuraeni, "Pembinaan Keluarga Mualaf Upaya Membentuk Pribadi Muslim."

²⁶Pew Research, "Restrictions on Religion among the 25 Most Populous Countries in 2018."

²⁷Sidney Jones, "Causes of Conflict in Indonesia," *Asia Society*, last modified 2021, <https://asiasociety.org/causes-conflict-indonesia>.

cons in life, causing social anxiety and requiring a settlement consideration. These changes impact diverse expressions of Muslim and Christian attitudes, giving rise to various debates in popular media, such as YouTube. This is because the changing views of life for converts and conversions lead to negative relationships, where every individual in society is suspicious of followers of other religions. Following the conversion, many debates occur in the surrounding environment, leading to attacks on the statements made by converts. Although still limited to cyberspace, the conflict may expand and transcend from the digital area into the realm of reality in the future.

The debate between Muslims and Christians is inevitable, as some statements appear to attack the credibility of converts and doubt their testimonies. Conflicts for religious converts emerge easily and have created a debate in responding to their testimonies. Therefore, there is a need for knowledge, motivation, patience, advice, and continuous motivation in handling each stage to achieve peace in adhering to the religion.²⁸ The existence of a decision-making process on conversion raises many contradictions from the previous religion and has even caused various reactions from Muslims and Christian²⁹. This has given rise to various expressions and forms of debates in popular media, such as YouTube, when adherents of previous religions hurl accusations while responding to Muslim converts.

These debates do not solely occur between Muslims and Christians but also within Islam and Christianity. For example, Ahmad Kainama was accused of being an intruder by Islamic religious leaders, resulting in many misunderstandings in popular media, such as YouTube, that he respected and followed the orders of Jesus by converting to Islam.³⁰ Furthermore, this convert was accused of being a liar by Christian religious leaders by showing himself as a former priest, being paid to get a respectable position with a large salary, and being unable to read Hebrew.³¹ He was also accused of deceiving Islam in conveying the message that Jesus is not God.³² Therefore, religious conversions involve numerous pros and cons in Muslim-Christian relations, where various kinds of impacts such as attacks and accusations from different parties occur while converting religions.

In interpreting and re-understanding religious texts, the criticism of religious arguments that are sacred and private to certain religious groups is not uncommon. This motivates retaliatory behaviour from religious communities who feel aggrieved by the criticisms, statements, and arguments of converts, inevitably leading to debates

²⁸Titian Hakiki and Rudi Cahyono, "Komitmen Beragama Pada Muallaf (Studi Kasus Pada Muallaf Usia Dewasa)," *Jurnal Psikologi Klinis dan Kesehatan Mental* (April 2015): 20–28.

²⁹Arafat Noor Abdillah, "Pemberdayaan Mualaf Pasca Konversi di Mualaf Center Yogyakarta" 11, no. 1 (2020): 23–30.

³⁰Mualaf Center Aya Sofya, "Pembahasan Seru: Apakah Ustadz Kainama adalah Kristen Penyusup?," 2021.

³¹Inyo Manis, "GP54) Permalukan Ahmad Kainama (Part 4) Gratia Pello Diusir. Mualaf Center, Sahabat Yamima, Qaf Media," 2020.

³²Juniawan channel, "Akhirnya Ketahuan, Ustad Kainama Menipu Muslim," 2021.

between Muslims and Christians. This specifically occurs in the phenomenon of religious conversion during which various pros and cons are experienced by converts, resulting in social anxiety and requiring a settlement consideration.

These changes have impacted Muslim-Christian attitudes, giving rise to various debates that occur in popular media, such as YouTube. The reason is the changing views of life for converts, which lead to negative relationships and cause individuals to become suspicious of followers of other religions. After conversion, many debates and attacks of the statements made by converts occur in cyberspace, though these conflicts may spread to the realm of reality in the future.

In the most recent case that occurred on August 26, 2021, the Indonesian Police announced the arrest of Islamic preacher, Yahya Waloni and his appointment as a suspect in a case of alleged blasphemy conveyed through a YouTube channel. Yahya Waloni was reported by elements of society.³³

Yahya Waloni is known as a hard preacher of Islam against Christianity. Yahya delivered his teachings massively through social media. On 27 April 2021, Yahya was reported to the police for violating the ITE Law and the Blasphemy Law. On the Christian side, there is Muhammad Kece (not his real name) who is considered to have committed blasphemy. Both, Yahya Waloni and Muhammad Kece, proved that the debate around the validation of the quran-bible that had occurred on social media had penetrated into realist life.

Subsequently, the trend of blasphemy cases increased to the same number as in 2009 and 2010, during which 10 cases occurred. One occurred on August 22, when Gregory Luke, a US citizen living in Central Lombok, came to the mosque to protest the sound from the loudspeaker. Following this, there were 3 cases of blasphemy in the following years, 14 in 2012, 10 in 2013, 6 in 2014, and the majority of 14 in 2016. One of the highlights was the video of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or Ahok's speech during a working visit to the Thousand Islands, accompanied by a quote from Al Maidah verse 51, which went viral through Buni Yani's Facebook network.³⁴

According to a sociologist from the National University, Nia Elvina, the development of 'criticism' against religion in Indonesia is a natural phenomenon generally expressed by individuals with lacking knowledge. For example, following criticism of Islam, the ustadz's job is to take a persuasive approach to the individual or the priest's function in the case of Christianity and Catholicism. There are prejudices in sociology that are common in societies comprising individuals with minimal knowledge. Therefore, persuasion by explaining or adding knowledge to the critics is an effective approach.

The criminal cases of blasphemy in Indonesia require the presence of the state

³³Katharina Reny Lestari, "Indonesian Cleric Nabbed for Insulting Christianity," *Agust* (Jakarta, 2021), <https://www.ucanews.com/news/indonesian-cleric-nabbed-for-insulting-christianity/93895#>.

³⁴Kari Telle, "Islam, Blasphemy, and Human Rights in Indonesia: The Trial of Ahok," *South East Asia Research* 29, no. 2 (2021).

to handle unpredictable social changes with information technology and tools in the digital era. Furthermore, the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion and principle is a logical continuation and ontological acknowledgment of the facts of social, cultural, and even religious pluralism that has existed in the nation for hundreds of years. The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia was founded on principles of pluralism³⁵, thereby requiring the state to be neutral and impartial in cases of internal disputes between and within religious communities.

Religious beliefs, which are essentially personal, must be guaranteed by institutional democracy for the implementation of social and political stability. This means that tolerance must become the norm for interreligious and interreligious relations, with the state acting to protect the freedom of believers at the individual and group levels. In a pluralistic society, religious tolerance is the main condition that must be maintained by the state as a constitutional mandate.³⁶

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results are as follows, first, the Qur'an-Bible has long been validated by Muslim scholars from the classical period to the present. The validation method varies according to the demands of the context and social dynamics, beginning with the interpretation of the Qur'an by commentators in the classical period. Other methods include the interfaith debate and dialogue by Muslim preachers and Evangelists and the use of testimonies and arguments for the conversion of beliefs.

The view of converts to the theology of religion concludes that Islam is the universal religion of all prophets and apostles. They also conveyed the concept of divinity, prophethood, and revelation, which were validated from the Qur'an and the Bible based on their rationalization, understanding, and consideration.

Second, the use of social media in disseminating arguments for the conversion of faith is driven by their understanding of the universality of Islam. They consider social media as the fastest universal medium to spread this understanding and believe in their responsibility to share their experiences as a consequence of their faith.

Third, the spread of the Qur'an-Bible validation by converts on social media has the potential to spark societal polemics and conflicts. Their understanding of the universality of Islam is not necessarily approved by official religious leaders, both the Muslim and Christian communities. Both sides consider converts unauthorized to reinterpret and validate the Qur'an-Bible relationship, as those activities are concerned as the duty of Islamic and Christian authorities. This causes both religions to reject the

³⁵Sudjito and Tatit Hariyanti, "Pancasila as a Scientific Paradigm for Studying Legal Pluralism in Indonesia: A Literary Perspective," *SHS Web of Conferences* 54 (2018); Robert W. Hefner, "Islam and Covenantal Pluralism in Indonesia: A Critical Juncture Analysis," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 18, no. 2 (2020).

³⁶Ayub Mursalin, "Indonesian Blasphemy Laws and the Gradual Shrinking of the Domain of Religious Freedom since 1965," *Archipel*, no. 98 (2019).

theological understanding conveyed by the converts, as the validation is considered a form of religious syncretism by Muslim authorities and a blasphemous act against the church doctrine by Christian authorities.

Therefore, this research suggests policymakers understand the phenomenon of the Qur'an-Bible validation in Indonesia wisely. As a multicultural country, validation by converts to Islam will result in a long public theological debate and discourse. Hence, the public should be able to act wisely in using social media to avoid provoking polemics and threatening national unity by directing theological discussions to fill the role of religion in social life and its activities in the development of the country.

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