

# **Muslim-Convert Preachers in Indonesia: Religious Authority, Biblical Texts, and Muslims' Acceptance**

**A Thesis**

**Submitted to Master's Study Program of Islamic Studies at  
the Faculty of Islamic Studies in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Arts (M.A.)**



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Islam Internasional  
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by:

**Mufti Labib Jalaluddin**

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## ABSTRACT

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This research examines the emergence of Muslim preachers with the background of *muallaf* (converts) who formerly served as religious figures in Christianity as the newly emerging group in contemporary Indonesian Islam. Their emergence challenges the 'mainstream' Islamic religious authority which common Islamic preachers were Muslim-born. Muslim-Convert Preachers also provide Biblical text materials which are not common in general Islamic preachings. In this project, they are called Muslim-Convert Preachers. This study demonstrates the use of Biblical texts and converts status in sermons of Muslim-Convert Preachers as the source of alternative religious authority. The research focuses on a former nun Irena Handono and a former Christian priest Menachem Ali who represent two different dominant approaches in the use of Biblical texts. The study draws on ethnographic fieldwork for approximately four months (February-May) through digital observation, interviews, content analysis, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with Handono and Ali to dig for more information about their stories and motives of conversion and preaching, while interviews with five followers of each preacher were to discover the reason they follow those preachers and their attitude towards Biblical texts after following the preaching. Through content analysis and digital observation, the research studies the narrative and approach that both preachers present in the use of Biblical texts in either Islamic preachings or podcasts on YouTube social media. The data is analyzed using Alatas' (2021) theory of articulatory labor and Scheppele and Soltan's (1987) theory of authority of alternatives. This thesis found that Biblical texts are approached in two ways. While the first name commonly uses in the polemical approach to criticizing Christianity, the second one which relies prefers the apologetic one to connect Quranic revelation to the former revelation. This research argues that the use of Biblical texts is the main and first element to establish Islamic religious authority by Muslim-Convert Preachers through interest and then articulated with polemical and apologetic approaches that ultimately have an impact on increasing the Islamic faith of their followers and their knowledge of *tahrīf* (corruption) in the Bible.

**Keywords:** *Irena Handono, Menachem Ali, Muslim-Convert Preachers, Biblical texts, isrā'īliyyāt*

## الملخص

الاسم : مفتي لبيب جلال الدين

القسم : الدراسات الإسلامية

الموضوع : الدعاة المسلمون المؤلّفون في إندونيسيا: السلطة الدينية, النصوص المقدسة, و قبول المسلمين

يبحث هذا البحث في ظهور الدعاة المسلمين من خلفية المؤلفين الذين خدموا سابقًا كشخصيات دينية في المسيحية باعتبارها المجموعة الناشئة حديثًا في الإسلام الإندونيسي المعاصر. ظهورهم يتحدى السلطة الدينية الإسلامية "السائدة" التي كان دعاة الإسلام العامون مسلمين المولد. يقدم الخطباء المؤلّفون من المسلمين أيضًا مواد نصية من الكتاب المقدس ليست شائعة في الوعظ الإسلامي العام. في هذا المشروع ، هم يُسمون الدعاة المسلمين المؤلفين. توضح هذه الدراسة استخدام النصوص المقدسة من التوراة والإنجيل وتحويل المكانة في خطب الدعاة الذين تحولوا إلى الإسلام كمصدر للسلطة الدينية البديلة. يركز البحث على الراهبة السابقة إيرينا هاندونو (Irena Handono) والكاهن المسيحي السابق مناحيم علي (Menachem Ali) اللذين يمثلان نهجين مهيمنين مختلفين في استخدام النصوص التوراتية. تعتمد الدراسة على العمل الميداني الإثنوغرافي لمدة أربعة أشهر تقريبًا (فبراير إلى مايو) من خلال الملاحظة الرقمية والمقابلات وتحليل المحتوى والتوثيق. أجريت المقابلات مع هاندونو وعلي للتنقيب عن مزيد من المعلومات حول قصصهم ودوافع الاهتمام والوعظ ، بينما كانت المقابلات مع خمسة من أتباع كل واعظ لاكتشاف سبب اتباعهم لهؤلاء الدعاة وموقفهم من النصوص التوراتية بعد اتباع الوعظ. من خلال تحليل المحتوى والملاحظة الرقمية ، يدرس البحث السرد والنهج الذي يقدمه كلا الدعاة في استخدام النصوص التوراتية في الوعظ الإسلامية أو البوذاكاست على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على موقع يوتيوب. يتم تحليل البيانات باستخدام نظرية العتاس (2021) للعمل المفصلي ونظرية شيبيل وسلطان (1987) لسلطة البدائل. وجدت هذه الأطروحة أن النصوص المقدسة يتم تناولها بطريقتين. بينما يشجع استخدام الاسم الأول في النهج الجدلي لانتقاد المسيحية ، أما الثاني الذي يعتمد على تفضيل الاسم الاعتراري لربط الوحي القرآني بالنزول السابق. يجادل هذا البحث بأن استخدام النصوص التوراتية هو العنصر الرئيسي والأول لتأسيس سلطة دينية إسلامية من قبل الدعاة المتحولين للمسلمين من خلال الاهتمام ثم يتم التعبير عنها بمناهج جدلية واعتدالية تؤثر في النهاية على زيادة العقيدة الإسلامية لأتباعهم معرفتهم التحريف في الكتاب المقدس.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** إيرينا هاندونو ، مناحيم علي ، الدعاة المسلمون المؤلّفون ، النصوص المقدسة ،

إسرائيليات

## TRANSLITERATION GUIDE

Arabic	Roman	Arabic	Roman	Arabic	Roman
ا	a	س	s	ل	l
ب	b	ش	sh	م	m
ت	t	ص	ṣ	ن	n
ث	th	ض	ḍ	و	w
ج	j	ط	ṭ	ه	h
ح	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ي	y
خ	kh	ع	'		
د	d	غ	gh		
ذ	dh	ف	f		
ر	r	ق	q		
ز	z	ك	k		

### Short Vocal

Arab Alphabet	Roman Alphabet	Arabic Example	Transliteration
اَ	a	جَلَسَ	<i>jalasa</i>
اِ	i	رَكِبَ	<i>rakiba</i>
اُ	u	كُتِبَ	<i>kutiba</i>

### Long Vocal

Arab Alphabet	Roman Alphabet	Arabic Example	Transliteration
اِي/اِ	ā	جَرِي/سَافِر	<i>jarā/sāfar</i>
يِ	ī	سَلِيم	<i>salīm</i>
وِ	ū	سُجُود	<i>sujūd</i>

### Diphthong

Arab Alphabet	Roman Alphabet	Arabic Example	Transliteration
اَوْ	aw	مَوْلَا	<i>mawlā</i>
اَيُّ	ay	غَيْب	<i>ghayb</i>

Notes:

1. Consonant with shaddah (◌◌) for instance, أمة is written as *ummah* (double letters).
2. Arabic letter *hamzah* (ء) at the beginning of a word is transliterated into “a” not into “`a”. For instance, أحمد is written as *aḥmad* not *`aḥmad*.
3. Arabic script of *alif-lam qamariyah* (ال) is written as “al” at the beginning of words and *alif-lam shamsiyah* (ا) is written in accordance with the first letter at the beginning of words. For instance:  
المائدة : al-māidah  
الرحمان : ar-rahmān
4. Arabic letter *ta' marbutah* (ة) is written as “h” when it is located at the end of the words, such as البقرة is written as *al-baqarah*. When located in the middle of a sentence is written as “t”, such as أمة وسطا is written as *ummatan wasaṭan*.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of Study

For a long time, in the Indonesian Muslim society context, the religious authority used to be held by the traditionally-educated *ulama* (Muslim scholars) in *pesantren* or those who graduated from modern Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic universities. They are in general Muslim-born and raise in Muslim families and communities. Authority, in a simple way, can be understood as the right to impose uncoercive obedience in the name of a rule of conduct and common values by those who share it and subjectify those who submitted to it. Therefore, we can view religious authority as the right to impose obedience in transmitting and interpreting the will of God legitimized by the sacred texts,<sup>1</sup> though the concept can be defined in various ways. If we understand it this way, religious authority can be probably expressed in the kind of giving a religious opinion and delivering religious sermons and preachings, whereas it can exist in the form of leading religious worship or religious rituals.

Somehow, religious authority is not something stagnant and frozen, but fluid. We can witness the emergence of a group that is “provided” with a stage for religious authority among Muslim communities in Indonesia. It is the Muslim converts (those who converted to Islam) who then preach to Islamic public preachings. Even though this phenomenon has been happening since several years ago, the proliferation of the internet is popularizing it nowadays along with its democratic features. Their status is different from the common preachers or *ulama*, as they are not born as Muslims nor all of them are educated in Islamic educational institutions. In this research, I prefer the term “Muslim-convert preachers” to

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Gaborieau, ‘The Redefinition of Religious Authority among South Asian Muslims from 1919 to 1956’, in *Varieties of Religious Authority: Changes and Challenges in 20th Century Indonesian Islam*, Azyumardi Azrya; Kees van Dijk; Niko Kaptein (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), 1.

mention this kind of preachers. The term conversion to Islam in the context of Islam in Indonesia has not been legally defined to limit certain years,<sup>2</sup> in contrast to the Islamic legal law of Selangor of Malaysia which limits the use of the term to 5 years.<sup>3</sup> Thus, this research will ignore how many years they have been converting.

Of the Muslim-convert preachers are former Catholic priests and nuns whose preachings are about comparative religion, notably Christology. Names to mention, for example, are Yahya Waloni, Ahmad Kainama (a former Protestant Christian), Insan LS Mokoginta, and Irena Handono, a former Catholic nun according to her claim. After conversion, some of them establish *mualaf* centers, a place to cultivate Muslim converts, and are active in encountering Christian missionaries and criticizing doctrines of Christianity, either in offline preachings in mosques or online videos. Some of them have their own YouTube channels, such as Handono's *Irena Handono Official* and Kainama's *Mualaf Center Aya Sofya*, though their videos are also uploaded by other channels.

As converts attempt anything to negate the past and express a form of a new identity,<sup>4</sup> their comparative religion way of preaching, notably Christology, is frequently expressed in offending their previous system of belief using the Biblical texts and history (criticism of religions) and purifying the Islamic doctrine of monotheism. Irena Handono, for instance, preaches about Christology and gives religious opinions related to interreligious relationships in Islam, instead of delivering existing debates among the *ulama*. She frequently raises awareness of the danger of Christian evangelism which she calls "*pemurtadan*," where Christians who constitute 10,53% (total of Catholics and Protestants) are accused to seek domination through missionary and social activities over Muslims who constitute

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<sup>2</sup> Hatim Gazali, 'Para Da'i & Muallaf Perlu Belajar Dulu Sebelum Tampil', *Bulletin Islamina*, 1 June 2020, 34.

<sup>3</sup> Abur Hamdi Usman et al., 'Discourse of Converts: Definitions and Some Implications in the Contemporary Muslim Society', *PONTE International Scientific Researchs Journal* 72, no. 9 (2016): 429, <https://doi.org/10.21506/j.ponte.2016.9.30>.

<sup>4</sup> Diane Austin-Broos, 'The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction', in *Anthropology of Religious Conversion* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 2.

86,88% of the Indonesian population.<sup>5</sup> Her Facebook page, Irena Handono, often posted pictures of the demonstration and quoted some Qur'anic verses, pointing out the urge for the unity of Islam and the struggle against the *kuffar* (disbelievers) during *Aksi Bela Islam* (the Defend Action of Islam) III which was meant to accuse Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, a former Governor of Jakarta and a Christian.<sup>6</sup>

Many such preachers tell their background and conversion process in preaching, given that, according to Stromberg, telling and retelling the conversion process is a central ritual of the new faith, framing personal experience, and recreating that experience in a new perspective.<sup>7</sup> This way of preaching makes them different from the traditional *ulama* whose preachings are about Islamic knowledge of *fiqh*, *akhlaq*, or *kalam* (Islamic theology) discussed by *ulama*. While the traditional *ulama* base their authority on referring to classical Islamic books, at a glance, it seems that those Muslim-convert preachers often tend to base their authority on the Bible which they understand, interpret, and criticize within the Islamic framework. However, their way of preaching, to some extent, is dangerous to religious pluralism. The hate speech toward Christians expressed by Yahya Waloni in one religious preaching got him arrested and sent to jail for 5 years.<sup>8</sup> All the importantly, their instant way to become preachers is a challenge for the traditional Islamic religious authority and the structure of religious knowledge of Islam<sup>9</sup> and their preaching way of criticism of Christianity apparently restricts the

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<sup>5</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik, 'Sensus Penduduk 2010', accessed 25 November 2022, <https://sensus.bps.go.id/main/index/sp2010>.

<sup>6</sup> Fadhli Lukman, 'Tafsir Sosial Media Di Indonesia', *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Tafsir Di Nusantara* 2, no. 2 (30 October 2016): 125–26, <https://doi.org/10.32495/nun.v2i2.59>.

<sup>7</sup> Simon Coleman, 'Continuous Conversion? The Rhetoric, Practice, and Rhetorical Practice of Charismatic Protestant Conversion', in *Anthropology of Religious Conversion* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 16–17.

<sup>8</sup> Yulida Medistiara, 'Yahya Waloni Terima Divonis 5 Bulan Penjara', News, detiknews, 11 January 2022, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5893128/yahya-waloni-terima-divonis-5-bulan-penjara>.

<sup>9</sup> Afif Sholeh and Hatim Gazali, 'Fenomena Muallaf Menjadi Ustadz: Sebuah Tantangan Keberislaman Masa Kini', *Bulletin Islamina*, 1 June 2020.

boundary between Muslims and Christians and shows the discontinuity between Islam and Christianity.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, the case is different for Menachem Ali. He is a former missionary and activist of the Institute for Syrian Christian Studies (ISCS) who converted to Islam and is now establishing the Yeshiva Institute.<sup>11</sup> He is sometimes called to deliver preaching in mosques but is more active in talk shows on YouTube. One of the missions of the foundation he establishes, in addition to encountering Arabic-Christian missionaries, is to disseminate the shared foundation of Judaism and Islam as genuine Abrahamic monotheistic religions.<sup>12</sup> One feature that distinguishes him from other Muslim-convert preachers is his intertextual reading of the Qur'an, Bible, and other ancient manuscripts since he is a philologist who masters ancient manuscripts and comparative Abrahamic religions. Rather than offend other religious dogmas roughly, he attempts to make a continuity between Islam and the former Abrahamic religions and traditions. He prefers doing an intertextual reading in interpreting and relating Qur'anic stories of Jews and Christians, including searching for justification for the Qur'an, with the Hebrew-Biblical texts and traditions critically and academically to criticizing dogmas.<sup>13</sup>

That intertextuality approach reminds us of the concept of *isrā'īliyyāt* which is known in the study of the Qur'an (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān*). The increasing interaction between Muslims and The People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*, refers to Jews and Christians) and the conversion of these people to Islam affected the stories of the Jewish and Christian traditions had been known in the Muslim world and later were borrowed by *mufasssirs* (Qur'an exegetes), who were mostly Muslim-born, to interpret the Qur'an. However, not all stories are borrowed as theologically the

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<sup>10</sup> D.I. Ansusa Putra, 'Quran-Bible Validation in Contemporary Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Conversion, and Theological Debate', *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora* 20, no. 1 (29 July 2022): 111, <https://doi.org/10.18592/khazanah.v20i1.5541>.

<sup>11</sup> *Wawancara Eksklusif: Benarkah Menachem Ali Mantan Petinggi ISCS Muallaf?*, Video YouTube, 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTR\\_4c4xpy4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTR_4c4xpy4).

<sup>12</sup> The Yeshiva Institute, 'Mission Statement', *The Yeshiva Institute* (blog), 28 July 2016, <https://yeshivainstitute.net/statement-of-faith/>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ustadz Menachem Ali 'Utusan Terakhir Penyelamat Bumi Bagi Kaum Ahlul Kitab'*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kP--wI1rLw>.

Qur'an (Q. 2:75-79; 4:46; 5:13; 5:41) states that Jews and Christians have corrupted some of the Biblical texts (*tahrīf*) and the Prophetic tradition (*hadīth*) command not to confirm nor to blame them.<sup>14</sup>

In modern Islam, Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā, whose *Tafsīr al-Manār* inspires many of the modern tafsir including in Indonesia, began to reject *isrā'iliyyāt* in tafsir. However, they as born Muslims are different from the Muslim-convert preachers who were converts and claimed for having been educated in Christian theological background and for being able to access the Biblical texts. Either the way of criticism of religion or the Qur'an-Bible intertextuality approach can influence contemporary Muslims' acceptance of the Biblical texts in Indonesia. Therefore, to discover this phenomenon, I intend to examine the way Muslim-convert preachers gain religious authority offline and online, how that two kinds of Muslim-convert preachers negotiate their Biblical knowledge and their new Islamic faith, and what it means to contemporary Muslims' acceptance of Biblical texts. To unravel this phenomenon, I will focus on Irena Handono as a representative of the first type and Menachem Ali who has a different approach than others.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

This research examines how Muslim-convert preachers are accepted in some Muslim communities to preach Islam, regardless of their previous religious educational background, and the different uses of the Biblical texts in Islamic preachings. Further, it also investigates the impact of the use of Biblical texts on how their Muslim audiences accept them, whether as totally "corrupted" and "untrustworthy" texts or as "sacred revealed texts" that can be accepted critically and carefully. Thus, people understand how contemporary Indonesian Muslims' attitudes toward the sacred texts of the Abrahamic religions as Islam claims to be the successor of the preceding teachings.

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<sup>14</sup> Muḥammad bin Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2002), 17.

### 1.3 Research Questions

This research is investigating three questions. First, how do Muslim-convert preachers build and preserve their religious authority among Muslim societies? Second, how do they use the Biblical texts and comparative religion in their preachings? Third, what does the use of the Biblical texts mean for their Muslim audiences?

### 1.4 Literature Review

Religious authority depends on traditional ulama since Islamic knowledge as the source of religious authority has been orally transmitted for centuries. However, the introduction of printing in the Muslim world has challenged it. Robinson's work is a good start to looking at why historically the change in technology is crucial to the change of the structure of Islamic knowledge and religious authority. He highlighted that Islamic understanding in the modern period has been and is being shaped by print along with the introduction of Islamic religious revivals.<sup>15</sup> When it comes to the 21st century, the situation continues and even becomes more complex. New media based on the internet has been a space to contest religious authority along with the democratic nature and the raising religious spirit in daily life,<sup>16</sup> which possibly leads to the fragmentation of religious authority.<sup>17</sup> We can briefly understand that media leads to and become a space for the shift and contestation of religious authority.

In his ethnographical work on Hadrami and Muslim communities in Indonesia, Alatas found that, rather than charismatically embodied in stagnancy, religious authority is built and maintained through continuous activities which he calls articulatory labor. It can be obtained by connecting the "foundational past"

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<sup>15</sup> Francis Robinson, 'Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print', *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (February 1993): 251, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00016127>.

<sup>16</sup> Gary R. Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, eds., *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, 2nd ed, Indiana Series in Middle East Studies (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003).

and transmitting it to the temporary situation and temporary communal needs. Consequently, religious authority can vanish from individuals who do not preserve it and can be challenged by others who are more active.<sup>18</sup> It is in line with Feillard's and Schmidt's studies on the continuous evolution of the traditionalist NU and their adoption of media technology is aimed to encounter the influence of Middle Eastern religious radicalism to assert and reclaim their religious authority.<sup>19</sup>

Nonetheless, new actors also attempt to build religious authority, where digital media is assessed to be more effective nowadays. Traditional religious authority is threatened by new actors who raise Islamic populism in social media as new narratives,<sup>20</sup> and Islamic learning process.<sup>21</sup> An important name not to miss is Felix Siau, a populist Muslim-convert preacher. Rise from Chinese-Catholic family background, he converted to Islam during his undergraduate school. He has been actively preaching Islamic populism which is related to the ideology of Hizbut Tahrir as he was active in the organization before being banned in Indonesia. His Islamic populism preaching is conducted online and offline with an artistic and populist style, combined with emphasizing his Chinese ethnicity and religious conversion, to strengthen his authority and popularity among his congregation.<sup>22</sup> All of Siau's online populist preaching is arguably directed to three ideas, anti-

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<sup>18</sup> Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority? Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

<sup>19</sup> Andrée Feillard, 'From Handling Water in a Glass to Coping with an Ocean', in *Varieties of Religious Authority: Change and Challenges in 20th Century Indonesian Islam* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), 157–76; Leonie Schmidt, 'Cyberwarriors and Counterstars: Contesting Religious Radicalism and Violence on Indonesian Social Media', *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5, no. 1–2 (14 February 2018): 32–67, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340088>.

<sup>20</sup> Muthohharun Jinan, 'New Media Dan Pergeseran Otoritas Keagamaan Islam Di Indonesia', *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 10, no. 1 (2012): 181–208, <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v10i1.178>; Muzayyin Ahyar, 'Islamic Clicktivism: Internet, Democracy and Contemporary Islamist Activism in Surakarta', *Studia Islamika* 24, no. 3 (29 December 2017): 435–68, <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v24i3.4859>; Muzayyin Ahyar and Alfitri Alfitri, 'Aksi Bela Islam: Islamic Clicktivism and the New Authority of Religious Propaganda in the Millennial Age in Indonesia', *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 9, no. 1 (24 May 2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v9i1.1-29>.

<sup>21</sup> Dindin Solahudin and Moch Fakhruroji, 'Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority', *Religions* 11, no. 1 (31 December 2019): 19, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019>.

<sup>22</sup> Wai Weng Hew, 'The Art of Dakwah: Social Media, Visual Persuasion and the Islamist Propagation of Felix Siau', *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2 January 2018): 61–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416757>.

establishment, anti-authoritarianism, and the call to refer to the pure Qur'an and Sunna.<sup>23</sup>

Notwithstanding the status of Felix Siauw as a Muslim-convert preacher, he was not educated in a Christian theological educational institution. Thus, it distinguishes him in that he rarely uses Biblical texts in his preaching. Meanwhile, the specific topic of Muslim-convert preachers in Indonesia, especially those who have obtained theological education in their previous religions, has not been widely explored. Prominent work is conducted by Putra. He is concerned about the validation of Islamic theology and the Qur'an using the Bible, which he calls Qur'an-Bible Validation, on social media mostly YouTube which occurs usually among converts. He concludes that the converts' use of Qur'an-Bible Validation is based on their view of the universality of Islam but its spread on social media potentially sparks societal polemics and conflicts, thus this method and its actors are not officially recognized by the traditional authority of both Islam and Christian.<sup>24</sup> Somehow, he still misses many data and evidence to come up with his conclusion. Further, his data is mostly library and digital analysis data, lack of investigating data from the actors nor Muslim audience.

However, we still need to pay attention to the phenomenon of conversion of religious leaders to other religions. For example in the case of Sidi Mohammed in North Africa, a convert from Islam to Christianity, who became a priest and converted hundreds of galley slaves in Genoa to Christianity in 1663.<sup>25</sup> The topic of this study will be comparable, though opposite, with the case of Saifuddin Ibrahim, a convert from Islam to Christianity, who becomes a priest and Christian debater. His conversion to spiritual disappointment led him to become a Christian

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<sup>23</sup> Abd Hannan, 'Cyberspace Dan Populisme Islam Di Kalangan Netizen: Studi Kasus Pada Akun Media Sosial Felix Siauw', *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif* 15, no. 2 (2021): 224–49.

<sup>24</sup> Putra, 'Quran-Bible Validation in Contemporary Indonesia'.

<sup>25</sup> Selim Deringil, "'There Is No Compulsion in Religion": On Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire: 1839–1856', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 3 (July 2000): 549, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500002930>.

polemicist because he claimed to master the Quran.<sup>26</sup> Another well-known case in South Asia is ‘Imad ud-din Lahiz, an *ulama* in India in the early phase of the 19th century who converted to Christianity due to the same reason as Saifuddin Ibrahim: the spiritual interest. He was living at the time of al-Kairanawi who wrote a book to defend Islam and criticize Christianity whom we will discuss later a brief. His autobiography was written, in addition to affirm his conversion, to lay claim to a particular religious experience and a particular kind of knowledge he gained through that experience as well as to claim religious authority within his new community.<sup>27</sup> Or with the case of Mustafa, a self-professed former lecturer in Islamic history at Al-Azhar University and doctoral graduate in Islamic legal studies, who transformed into Mark A. Gabriel post-conversion. He who claimed to be disappointed by the rampant and heated issue of Islamic terrorism in the Middle East and decided to convert to Christianity became famous thanks to several books that criticized Islamic creeds with Islamic sources themselves. Unfortunately, how they reach their path to recognition of their new community has received little attention in scientific studies.

In other parts of the world, especially in non-Muslim majority countries, the conversion of former pastors to Islam and into Islamic preachers is unlikely to be a problem or a new phenomenon. Yusuf Estes, ex Christian priest converted to Islam, became one of the leading Islamic figures in the US. His conversion to Islam was stimulated by his intensive interaction with an Arab Muslim and their conversation about Jesus, the Bible, and theology. His Islamic preachings were inspired by his finding of the new ‘true’ belief and his regret of his previous mistake of being proselytizer of the wrong belief.<sup>28</sup> After his conversion, he frequently writes about

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<sup>26</sup> Eko Nopriyansa, 'Islam Perspectives and Islamic Perspectives on Pastor Syaifudin Ibrahim (Analysis of Reverend Syaifuddin Ibrahim's Views, Assumptions, and Challenges to Muslims)', *Khabar Journal: Islamic Communication and Broadcasting* 1, no. 1 (2019): 31–47, <https://doi.org/10.37092/khabar.v1i1.129>.

<sup>27</sup> Chloe Martinez, ‘Gathering the Threads: Religious Autobiography in Pre-Colonial South Asia’, *The Medieval History Journal* 18, no. 2 (October 2015): 274, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0971945815594058>.

<sup>28</sup> Yusuf Estes (Mantan Penginjil Senior AS) : ‘Kaget Dengan Surat Al Ikhlas! Tuhan Itu Satu!’, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgqnDq-S4KE>.

Islamic Christianity,<sup>29</sup> the modern debate of the Bible, and and the God of Jesus.<sup>30</sup> The strategy of politeness he used to do in his question and answer session makes his popularity grows since it makes people comfortable with him.<sup>31</sup> But, Estes' tendency to Salafism should be taken into an account. Nowadays, the popular Salafi Muslim tele-evangelists<sup>32</sup> may have either intensely studying Christian tele-evangelist (in the case of Zakir Naik) or a background as convert (ex Christian tele-evangelist, such in the case of Yusuf Estes) since they imitate the way of Christian tele-evangelists.<sup>33</sup>

In this study, our focus is to uncover how Muslim-Convert Preachers with a former Christian religious background gained ground among Indonesian Muslims with their public lectures using Biblical texts to some extent. I discover the way Muslim-convert preachers build and maintain their religious authority and its impact on how Muslims accept the Biblical texts or well-known *isrā'īliyyāt*.

## 1.5 Theoretical Framework

In order to answer the questions, this project employs Alatas' theory of articulatory labor<sup>34</sup> to analyze how Muslim-convert preachers build and maintain religious authority. This theory suggests that if someone wants to build religious authority, he has to connect himself to the "authoritative past," cultivate his knowledge of the past, and reconstructs it as daily norms to be an example for the followers. Then, he must preserve it continuously, or otherwise, the authority will vanish from him. While Alatas refers the "authoritative past" to the Prophetic tradition (*sunna*), here

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<sup>29</sup> The concept of Christianity according to Islamic point of view

<sup>30</sup> Yusuf Estes, 'Bible A Closer Look', *Institute Al Islam* (blog), 25 August 2008, <https://www.institutealislam.com/bible-a-closer-look-by-shaikh-yusuf-estes/>; Yusuf Estes, 'Jesus - Son Of Who?', Bible Islam, accessed 27 July 2023, [https://www.bibleislam.com/son\\_of\\_who.php](https://www.bibleislam.com/son_of_who.php).

<sup>31</sup> Rohmatul Ummah, 'Politeness Strategies in Q and A Sessions of Yusuf Estes Public Lectures' (Undergraduate Thesis, Malang, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim, 2018), <http://etheses.uin-malang.ac.id/16612/1/14320128.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Tele-evangelist consists of two words, 'tele' which refers to television and 'evangelist' which obviously means preacher or proselytizer. The word means preacher who is engaged with television and other audio-visual media in their preaching activities.

<sup>33</sup> Sindre Bangstad and Marius Linge, "'Da'wa Is Our Identity"—Salafism and IslamNet's Rationales for Action in a Norwegian Context', *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 4, no. 2 (25 November 2015): 184, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22117954-12341307>.

<sup>34</sup> Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?*

I replace it with the Biblical texts or *isrā'īliyyāt* as the alternative authoritative past of the Muslim-convert preachers to build their theological belief to see if it works or not.

Another theory applied here is the authority of alternatives proposed by Scheppele and Soltan. This theory argues that authority can be found when “*person B being attracted to the state of affairs offered by alternative A and voluntarily choosing that option over others.*”<sup>35</sup> In the context of my research, the Muslim-convert preachers’ use of the Biblical texts is an alternative preaching compared to the common Islamic preachings which teach classical Islamic knowledge.

## **1.6 Research Significance**

This research contributes to the various discussion of religious authority by proposing Muslim-convert preachers as the new emerging figures of religious authority with their use of Biblical texts in Islamic preachings. Indirectly, the discussion also gives an additional view of the sociology of religious conversion, where convert preachers can be categorized into two dominant approaches while using their former religious book, they are apologetics and polemicists. In addition, it also adds a discussion of the different ways of using Biblical texts among Muslim communities and their acceptance of *isrā'īliyyāt* based on those texts.

## **1.7 Methods**

As the research explores the meaning of a phenomenon within Muslim societies in Indonesia, this research makes use of a qualitative method with a semi-ethnological approach. To obtain data, I work on multiple forms of collecting qualitative data: interviews, observation, documentation, and audiovisual information.<sup>36</sup> Drawing semi-structured interviews with two Muslim-convert preachers, Irena Handono and Menachem Ali, is very helpful to dig into the stories of their conversion, the way and the reason they use Biblical texts in their preachings and activities. Semi-

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<sup>35</sup> Kim Lane Scheppele and Karol Edward Soltan, ‘The Authority of Alternatives’, *Nomos* 29 (1987): 170.

<sup>36</sup> John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (London: SAGE, 2018), 257.

structured interviews are also conducted using purposive sampling with five Muslim audiences of each preacher who meet the criteria: (1) following the preaching, either offline or online, at least 3 times, and (2) aged between 20-45 years old. It is aimed to get deeper data on how they accept and percept the Biblical texts as the meaning of the preaching.

To gain more data, this project observes their preachings, either offline or online to understand how they use the Biblical texts and what the audience responds to or comments on them. In observing online preachings, more attention is paid to both preachers' official YouTube channels, Handono's *Irena Handono Official* and Ali's *Menachem Ali Official*. Other channels containing videos of their preaching are considerable to take as I collect audiovisual information too. Meanwhile, documentation will be focused on both preachers' books, certificates of educational background, and the documents of the *Irena Mualaf Center* and *The Yeshiva Institute* as these represent information on both preachers' activities and orientations.

After all of the data is collected, the data is analyzed as follows: (1) organizing and preparing the data to analyze, involving transcription of interview data and video of the preachers and audience, looking at material, making notes, and sorting and arranging data into types; (2) reading or looking at all the data, that is not merely textual or explicit data but also beyond it, to get a general sense and to reflect its overall meaning. For instance, what expression the preachers show when being interviewed is also important to look at to reflect an interpretation; (3) starting to code all the data. The codes are classified into three categories: a) expected codes, directly related to the topic I arise. b) surprising codes, that is findings that could not be anticipated before. c) codes of conceptual or unusual interest. An example of this coding is when I find the preachers' story of starting the preaching (expected code), but their use of the Biblical texts was not intended because they were only asked for the audience (surprising code). (4) Generating a description and themes;

(5) representing the description and themes guided by the theories I apply for this research.<sup>37</sup>

### **1.8 Outlines (Structure of Thesis)**

After chapter I introduces the background of the research, chapter II is discussing the phenomenon of Islamic religious conversion in the global context. Consequently, this chapter explain three discussion points of Islamic conversion: conversion to Islam in history, conversion to Islam in Indonesia, and conversion to Islam in the contemporary world. The following chapter discusses the religious authority of Muslim-convert preachers. In detail, it highlights the shift of religious authority in Indonesia and investigate the emergence of Muslim-convert preachers with the background of the former Christian religious figures as new figures of (alternative) religious authority in Indonesian Islam, taking the case of two Muslim-convert preachers Irena Handono and Menachem Ali. Chapter IV then elaborates on the Biblical texts in the Islamic world. The chapter is pointing out the Biblical texts in Islamic sources and *tafsīr* (Qur'an exegesis), among Muslim-convert preachers represented by Handono and Ali, and among Muslim audiences of both preachers. Chapter V is the last chapter that will come with the conclusion of the research.

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<sup>37</sup> Creswell and Creswell, 268–70.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PHENOMENON OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Religion is a set of beliefs of and worships to the supernatural power or being. Since it also carries on certain norms and moral attitudes, the changing landscape of the religious population will affect societal structures and behaviors. In many cases where powers and their judicial law rely on divine legitimation,<sup>38</sup> the change will impact to the power structure and social life. Religious conversion takes a part in shaping aspiration and reorienting social life<sup>39</sup> as it is embedded with taking new world paradigms and cosmology. Historically, especially in the pre-nation-state era, many power preserved and supported the religions they affiliated with as they sought divine legitimacy from them. When they expanded their territories, mass religious conversion also usually occurred, either voluntarily, forced, or seeking opportunity.

In general, there are some motives for religious conversion. Lofland and Skonovd proposed six motives, intellectual (through reading, reasoning, and investigations on alternative beliefs), mystical (a very personal experience and feeling which cannot be expressed through words), experimental (active participation followed by belief), affectional (through personal approach), revivalist (situated in a strong desire in a group context), and coercive (under social pressure).<sup>40</sup> All factors usually happen to individuals, except the last one which can make mass conversion through conquest. Meanwhile, Lakhdar et al. based on their study among French converts add three motives to complement the previous ones,

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<sup>38</sup> Georges Martyn, 'Divine Legitimation of Judicial Power and Its Iconographical Impact in Western Culture', *Humanities and Rights: Global Network Journal* 1, no. 1 (31 December 2019): 230–71, <https://doi.org/10.24861/2675-1038.v1i1.22>.

<sup>39</sup> Austin-Broos, 'The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction', 1.

<sup>40</sup> John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, 'Conversion Motifs', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 20, no. 4 (December 1981): 373, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1386185>.

negativist (opposing the family), alloic mastery (fighting for the poor), and alloic sympathy (sharing possessions).<sup>41</sup> Many researchers borrow those motives to exercise the current motives of those who convert to Islam. Austin-Broos added market, systematized theology and cosmology, organized ritual forms, and effective socialization of converts as underlined factors leading to world religious conversion.<sup>42</sup> Geopolitical networks have also to be considered an important factor in religious conversion.<sup>43</sup> Overall, it is worth noting that conversion relates positively to the extent of religious pluralism as well as levels of education.<sup>44</sup>

## 2.1 Conversion to Islam in History

Conversion is known in Islamic term as *aslama* (to embrace Islam) and *āmana* (to believe). Ibn Manzūr summarized *aslama* or *islām* as showing obedience and acceptance to what has come from the Prophet Muhammad that his blood is later guaranteed, while *āmana* or *īmān* carries the requirement of faith and confirmation in the heart of its truth.<sup>45</sup> <sup>46</sup> One can be regarded as Muslim since he confesses the *shahāda*, saying *ashhadu an lā ilāha illa Allāh wa ashhadu anna Muhammadan Rasūl Allāh* (أشهد أن لا إله إلا الله وأشهد أن محمدا رسول الله).

Islamic history noted there were some individuals known as *al-sābiqūn al-awwalūn* (the first predecessors/converts) or *awā'il* (the firsts) in the early phase of Islam in Mecca. The Arabic term to mention to convert to Islam is '*aslama*' which means to submit, to embrace Islam. While it is well-known that Khadījah binti Khuwaylid was the first convert and the first among women since she was the wife of the Prophet, Muslim historians dispute on those who was the first to convert to

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<sup>41</sup> Mounia Lakhdar et al., 'Conversion to Islam Among French Adolescents and Adults: A Systematic Inventory of Motives', *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 17, no. 1 (March 2007): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508610709336850>.

<sup>42</sup> Austin-Broos, 'The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction', 3–4.

<sup>43</sup> Danielle Kane and Jung Mee Park, 'The Puzzle of Korean Christianity: Geopolitical Networks and Religious Conversion in Early Twentieth-Century East Asia', *American Journal of Sociology* 115, no. 2 (September 2009): 365–404, <https://doi.org/10.1086/599246>.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Barro, Jason Hwang, and Rachel McCleary, 'Religious Conversion in 40 Countries', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 1 (March 2010): 15–36, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2009.01490.x>.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān Al-'Arab*, n.d., 142.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Manzūr, 142.

Islam, whether Abū Bakr or ‘Alī b. Abū Ṭālib. Ibn Kathīr in his *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya* collected various *riwāya* (narratives) mentioning both individuals claimed to convert earlier. Regardless of who was the first among both of them, we are better to take into account an opinion he noted:

*“Khadījah was the first who converted to Islam among women, and it was clear in that context – and her conversion before the men also, – the first convert among the slaves was Zayd b. Hāritha and the first convert among the youth was ‘Alī b. Abū Ṭālib. He was a child and had not come to puberty as well-known. They all were ahl al-bayt (family or in the household of the Prophet). Meanwhile, the first convert among free men (al-rijāl al-ahrār) was Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq and his conversion was more beneficial.”<sup>47</sup>*

However, we have to consider too the belief of the Buhaira priest and Warāqa b. Nawfal, the cousin of Khadījah, both were *ahl al-kitāb*. Even if we could not completely say they had converted to Islam, we must remember that at that time there was a special context. In the case of the Buhaira priest, he met Abū Ṭālib in Shām whilst bringing the small 12 years old Muhammad, 22 years before prophecy, and told him about Muhammad’s prophecy signs and for bringing him out of the city to escape Jewish threat. This resulted in our consideration that his advice and care for the small Muhammad’s security can be regarded as true faith. Meanwhile, in the case of Warāqa bin Nawfal whom Muhammad and Khadījah consulted with, we can consider his trust in Muhammad in the earliest phase of his prophecy as ‘conversion’ for the continuity of his true belief and his learning of the Holy Books.

Almost every companion (*ṣahāba*) of the Prophet before *fath Makka* (the conquest of Mecca) converted to Islam due to their own will and personal considerations. It usually happened from person to person. But it is a little bit different in the case of *fath Makka* which took place in the month of Ramadan in the eighth of *hijra*. It is arguably the first mass conversion to Islam after the conquest if we put aside the mass conversion of Yathrib or later so-called Madina, either in *Bay‘a al-‘Aqaba* (the covenant of ‘Aqaba) I and II in Mecca or after the

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<sup>47</sup> Abū Fidā‘ Ismā‘īl Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya: Mabda‘ al-Khalīqa wa Qaṣaṣ al-‘Anbiyā‘*, Muhibb al-Dīn, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2015), 223.

Prophet's *hijra* (migration) to Madina, as Madina was not conquered. Though we do not know the exact amount of Meccan people who converted to Islam,<sup>48</sup> narratives told us that all the idols put around the Ka'ba had been destroyed by Khālīd b. al-Walīd during the *fath* and no more idolaters after.<sup>49</sup>

The Medinan Jews were indirectly contributing to the early acceptance of the Medinan people of Islam. Since the Jews told them about the coming prophet at that time, Medinan people were coming out and seeking who the person intended was. When they heard about Muhammad in Mecca who claimed prophecy, they met him and trusted him.<sup>50</sup> After they went back to Medina, the report about Muhammad's prophecy began to widespread. Even though, many Jews remained unbelievers to Muhammad's prophecy as narrated many times in the Qur'an.

In 23 years of Muhammad's prophecy, people converted to Islam due to various reasons and experiences. Islamic ideas of human equality and economic equity attracted the slaves and the poor to convert earlier to Islam, while numerous reputable and influential Quraysh people did not directly convert as they viewed Islamic ideas of economic equality and its consequences threatened their economic and social status though they had already recognized Allah as the Almighty God.<sup>51</sup> In this respect, Gibb proposed three levels of conversion during Prophet Muhammad's lifetime. The first level is a total conversion which produced religious personalities motivated by the complete acceptance of Islamic spirit and principles in activities and decisions. The individuals of this level, which were made up of small but steadily increased numbers, became the nucleus of the later religious institution. The second one is formal adhesion which, according to him, does not assimilate their spirit with the Islamic spirit, but relates to the willing acceptance of

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<sup>48</sup> Al-Ṭabarī took a narrative under the authority of Ibn Iṣḥāq mentioning the amount of Muslims who witnessed the conquest of Mecca was ten thousand people (245 al-Ṭabarī, 2007, p. 291), but it is contrary to what al-Bukhārī narrated that the Prophet was with ten thousand people of Muslims when he was going to Mecca for the conquest (3276 al-Bukhārī, 2002, p. 1046).

<sup>49</sup> Abū Ja'far bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh Al-Ṭabarī: Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā' Wa Mā Qabla al-Bi'tha*, vol. 2 (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2007), 291.

<sup>50</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya: Mabda' al-Khalīqa wa Qaṣaṣ al-'Anbiyā'*, 3:400.

<sup>51</sup> Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam Dan Pembebasan*, Indonesian Translation (Yogyakarta: LKiS Pelangi Aksara, 2013), 8–11.

outward prescription and duties due to gaining advantages by joining in the new community. The third level of conversion is the enforced adherence maintained by the threat of military sanctions in which, Gibb wrote, the Arab Bedouins had mostly engaged this level.<sup>52</sup> However, Shaban raised an objection to this Gibb's categorization. He rejected the first level to be related to religious institutions as they are more likely a feature of the developed Islamic caliphate than of early Islamic times. The second level is also problematic to him since Quraysh, for instance, which was included in this level, later gave its supportive effort for the Prophet even when fought its earlier allies. Lastly, the notion of enforced adherence attributed to the bedouins is, Shaban assesses, over-generalization since not all bedouins were as suspected so.<sup>53</sup>

When Islam began to reach wider areas in Arabian Peninsula to the Byzantine and Persia even to India, Muslim rulers did not merely enforce conversion upon the people of the region. In fact, as Bulliet told us that the conversion occurred gradually over a long time, instead of as a sudden event. Using biographical books of Muslims in the medieval period in the Middle East, he found that Islam penetrated gradually into the expanded region as can be observed through the cultural adoption of Arabic names in terms of conversion. Interestingly, the practice of adopting Arabic names continues in many areas where Muslims live even today.<sup>54</sup>

Somehow, we also cannot avoid that the conversion to Islam was driven by the worldly motives. But we have to be aware too that the notion is written by non-Muslim writers which enable the note to potentially be driven by bias. The Baghdad philosopher and a Jew Ibn Kammūna (d. 1284-5) mentioned fear, seeking glory, being grieved at heavy taxes, and willing to marry to a Muslim woman as motives

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<sup>52</sup> Hamilton A. R. Gibb, *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, ed. Stanford J. Shaw (Princeton, NJ: Univ. Press, 1982), 5.

<sup>53</sup> M Shaban, 'Conversion to Early Islam', in *Conversion to Islam*, Nehemia Levtzion, 2 (New York; London: Holmes & Meier Publisher, 1979), 25–26.

<sup>54</sup> Richard W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 75–77.

of conversion to Islam.<sup>55</sup> No ‘good’ or spiritual reasons he mentioned, raising question whether his assessment is objective or tendentious. Similarly with the analysis of Hunayn b. Ishāq (d. 873), Abū Qurrah (d. 820), and Ḥabīb b. Khidma Abū Rā’iṭa (d. early ninth century), all were Christian leaders, leading to the conclusion that there was no sincere reason for conversion to Islam, but for worldly reasons such as status and power, family and tribal connections, permissiveness in polygamy and divorce, and compulsion. For them, doctrinal conversion only happens to those who lack education and ignorance.<sup>56</sup>

In certain sociopolitical contexts, such worldly reasons also find momentum. As Marc D. Baer has found, in many cases during the time of Sultan Mehmed IV of the Ottoman dynasty, part of the reason was the state's policy of giving people a “lure” of people, especially Christians and Jews, to conversion to Islam. Pardons from corruption, tax breaks, to class politics that privilege Muslims and divert the sacred space of Christians and Jews into of Muslims are political mechanisms run by the sultan who came to power in the early 17th century, encouraged by his Kadizadeli movement. But to some extent, culturally constructed special class for Muslims also drove people to convert to Islam voluntarily.<sup>57</sup> In this favor, motives of conversion are actually various and multifaceted and hardly narrowed to a single reason.

Conversion to Islam did not only affect the converts to fit the needs they sought by conversion. It also implied the later religious development of Islam. Though conversion to Islam required the convert to submit his/her religious worship according to Islam, the culture and knowledge he/she has may remain since not all the culture and knowledge are contrary to the principles of Islam. With the vast population of Muslims, the problems they face may also not be found in the existing structure of Islamic thought. At this point, as Bulliet pointed out, social conversion

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<sup>55</sup> Jack Boulos Victor Tannous, *The Making of The Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), 312.

<sup>56</sup> Tannous, 313.

<sup>57</sup> Marc David Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

created pressure for change in which Muslim converts contributed so much to the religious development of Islam and it made the structure of Islamic knowledge more complex and richer.

Bulliet highlighted four points about how Muslim converts through their existing system of knowledge influenced and impacted the religious development of Islam. First, the development of a formal structure. The system of Islamic governance or the discussion of *fiqh al-siyāsa* (the fiqh of politics) was developed and borrowed from Persian Caesaropapism by Ibn al-Muqaffa', a convert from Zoroastrianism. It is also the case with the rigid religious (priestly) authority structure in the doctrine of Imamate in Shiism since early Islam had not known about hierarchical priest structure. Second, the development of legal autonomy which is exemplified in the development of the understanding of Sharia took shape two centuries after the origin of Islam. It was inseparable from the adopted logic and legal law as well as the existing Islamic law which was not adequate to answer the problems the vast Muslim population began to face. Third, the fusion of language with religion. Since the Arabic language had been taken as the language of the religion, non-Arab Muslims paid attention to the study of the language. It is well-known that early grammarians of Arabic were non-Arabs. Fourth, and it is all the important, conversion to Islam made Muslim converts need persons of religious authority. Individuals who gave efforts by living ascetically (*zāhid*) and learning religious knowledge came out as pious and were taken as an example by their communities as embodied religion. This process is related to the competition between them and adherents of other religions, given that Muslim converts such kind of religious authority among Muslim group to debate and defend their faith against their religiously rivals.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period*, 74.

## 2.2 Early Conversion to Islam in Indonesia

Religious conversion, though in fact often occurs gradually, is not seldom presented in conversion myth as an abrupt and radical change. In Indo-Malay Archipelago, such a myth accompanies the conversion of a ruler. Pasai (nowadays covers Aceh in the southern part of Sumatera), Malaka, and Kedah (both are of Malaysia) had similar, if not to say having been copied by each other but in different actors' names, conversion myths of their rulers.<sup>59</sup> Adding to that, there are other myths of conversion from some regions in the Indo-Malay Archipelago. Jones saw a pattern from ten conversion myths that emerged in the archipelago following the conversion to Islam: the pivot of the ruler. Various conversion myths contain supernatural accidents preceding the conversion, while others relate to political aid of a Muslim or Muslim troop. In his view, this pattern is meant to justify the religious conversion but not the kingship or political authority. He concluded that such myths present show “*the Islamization of the Indonesian states was accomplished by the conversion of the existing ruler to Islam.*”<sup>60</sup> However, we shall consider that the ruler's conversion to Islam does not always mean his entire people do so. It may probably designate the “official conversion” or acceptance of the state to Islam.

A different case is the conversion to Islam in Java. As documents about this island remain many, we can know a little bit better about the spread of Islam in the island which is the most populous island in the country. Riklefs (1979) distinguished three phases of the spread of and conversion to Islam in Java. The

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<sup>59</sup> The myths were written each in *Hikayat Raja Pasai*, *Sejarah Malayu*, and *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa*. Briefly, each myth tells about the ruler of each region to see the Prophet Muhammad in a dream where they confessed (saying *shahāda*) as the Prophet ordered them. Later, the Prophet said that there would arrive a ship from Arabia and ordered them to do whatever the preacher whom they would meet from the ship. When the ruler woke up, he found a similar thing as viewed in his dream. Later, the myth is ended by the confession of the ruler and his embrace of Islam and his order to his people to do so. Meanwhile, the myth of Pasai is a little bit longer, preceded by the story of the Prophet Muhammad who ordered his companions to visit Semudera (another name of Pasai; well-known as Samudera Pasai), and the Muslim ruler named Sultan Muhammad who made it happen. The myth was later similar to the two regions.

<sup>60</sup> Russel Jones, ‘Ten Conversion Myths from Indonesia’, in *Conversion to Islam*, Nehemia Levtzion, 7 (New York; London: Holmes & Meier Publisher, 1979), 153.

first phase is between the 14th to 18th centuries. Though actually there was found a tomb of Fatimah bint Maimun in Gresik dated in the 11th century, Ricklefs ignores the site for its uncertain origin as well as it, he wrote, did not belong to Javanese Muslim.<sup>61</sup> In this phase, the spread of Islam was poorly documented and thus remains a few speculations, though does not mean there is no evidence found from this century for the claim. Gravestones at Trawulan and Tralaya which are indicated to belong to early Javanese Muslims and of royal family existed in the golden era of Majapahit (13th to 14th century). They probably mean Islam had been accepted by and had found favor among upper-class members of the Javanese society through patronage of the traditional elite. It does not necessarily mean that the religion had been widely accepted, as Islam was not mentioned in an epic poem *Negarakrtagama* (1287 saka or 1365 AD),<sup>62</sup> but limited to certain social classes.<sup>63</sup>

Ricklefs borrows Zoetmulder's reading that the adoption of this new faith could provide another source of spiritual energy. In this case, one may borrow Islamic practices without any knowledge of or commitment to its formal requirements, though it could be asserted as heretic to the ideal standard of Islam.<sup>64</sup> It is reasonable since Javanese society held religious tolerance, even religious syncretism. The Siwa-Buddha belief, a syncretism between Hinduism and Buddhism, and the Javanization of an Indian epic Mahabharata can be taken as examples where they were only found in Java and not in India.<sup>65</sup> Islamic mysticism could no doubt help the penetration of Islam toward Javanese culture. In this phase, Islamization took the cultural approach to spread. The famous *wali sanga* (nine saints), especially Sunan Kalijaga, adopted the art of *wayang* and the performance of *Sekaten* supported by the Mataram Islam Sultanate in attracting people to Islam.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia: C. 1300 to the Present*, Repr, Macmillan Asian Histories Series (London: Macmillan, 1981), 3.

<sup>62</sup> M. C. Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries*, 1st ed, Signature Books (Norwalk: EastBridge, 2006), 12.

<sup>63</sup> M. C. Ricklefs, 'Six Centuries of Islamization in Java', in *Conversion to Islam*, Nehemia Levtzion (New York; London: Holmes & Meier Publisher, 1979), 103.

<sup>64</sup> Ricklefs, 103–4.

<sup>65</sup> Ricklefs, 102; Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java*, 5.

<sup>66</sup> Joko Daryanto, 'Gamelan Sekaten Dan Penyebaran Islam Di Jawa', *Keteg* 14, no. 1 (2014): 32–40, <https://doi.org/10.33153/keteg.v14i1.665>.

As a result, Javanese Muslims are well-known to be more open and tolerant of cultural diversity as culture is penetrated by Islamic symbols using an Islamic mystical perspective, though on another side *abangan* (nominal and syncretic Muslims), borrowing Geertz's terminology, remains many. It is different from Sulawesi, for example, which has increasingly become more legalistic.<sup>67</sup>

The second phase is the 19th century when revivalist teachings began to enter Java and influence some Javanese Muslim circles. The influence, to some extent, makes up considerable conflicts and upheaval. There are two independents but colliding each-other factors: Dutch colonialism and Islamic revivalism. Dutch colonialism was seen as a leading factor in the decline of the welfare of Javanese society during this growing population period. There emerged an anti-European movement. This is coupled with Islamic revivalism that originated in the Middle East and resulted in the new zealous and firm preachers who threatened the authority of traditionalist religious teachers who were under the Dutch bureaucracy. *Shari'a* began to be paid attention to on one side and got resistance, as presented in a few Javanese literary works, on another side as something foreign to Javanese culture and was accused of the factor for the decline of the glory of Java.<sup>68</sup>

The Dutch colonial in this century came to support Christian missionaries, something that they avoid previously in order not to rise conflict among Muslim native rulers. It happened after a few rebellions, like the War of Dipanegara (1825-1830) in Java and the War of Padri in West Sumatera, which cost much for the Dutch. Islam was increasingly viewed as a 'hostile' religion that native Indonesians could use to mobilize against the Dutch, while Christian converts were assessed as more likely to develop cooperative attitudes toward them and thus support them in continuing the colonization. Therefore, Muslims became more aware and suspicious of any Christian missionaries who were seen as a threat to 'Christianize' the Dutch Indie as well as a symbol of being colonized. They, thus, began to oppose

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<sup>67</sup> Muhammad Ali, 'Muslim Diversity: Islam and Local Tradition in Java and Sulawesi', *IJIMS: Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 1-35, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v1i1.1-35>.

<sup>68</sup> Ricklefs, 'Six Centuries of Islamization in Java', 112-17.

aggressively any Christian missionary campaigns.<sup>69</sup> To say in short, during this second phase, Islamization in Java increasingly developed to be more active in accepting Islamic sharia and rebelling against colonization, though it got resistance either from the Dutch colonial with Christian missionaries or from the Javanese themselves. However, Islamization succeeded to pass through that century.

However, the response to Christianity actually occurred first in the Aceh region as the earliest region in Indonesia to recognize Islam. The initial response to the Dutch being considered ‘untrustworthy allies’ which led to the bankruptcy of a number of Muslim traders eventually led to a response to Christianity they adhered. The earliest documented response of Indonesian Muslims can be found from Nuruddin al-Raniri (d. 1658), a prominent Acehnese scholar, who relied on classical sources criticizing Christianity doctrines as a deviation from the teachings of Jesus. He also negates religious value in the Biblical texts as a result of falsification and alteration, unless the name of God is written there.<sup>70</sup>

Such phenomena are also found in other countries. The assimilation policy pursued by the Portuguese colonial in Mozambique in the twentieth century by using the values of the Catholic church through mission schooling to spread cultural values in the context of nationalization and ‘Portugalization’ found itself opposed by Swahili Muslims as the majority population of northern Mozambique. This politically fueled awareness of Islamic identity indirectly led to the entry of puritanical Wahhabi scholars who graduated from universities in Saudi Arabia who in turn opposed the Islamic authority of the Sufi *sheikhs* who had long held authority there.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Alexander R. Arifianto, ‘Explaining the Cause of Muslim-Christian Conflicts in Indonesia: Tracing the Origins of Kristenisasi and Islamisasi’, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 20, no. 1 (2009): 76–77.

<sup>70</sup> Ismatu Ropi, ‘Muslim-Christian Polemics in Indonesian Islamic Literature’, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 9, no. 2 (July 1998): 218–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596419808721149>.

<sup>71</sup> Liazzat Bonate, ‘Islam in Northern Mozambique: A Historical Overview: Islam in Northern Mozambique’, *History Compass* 8, no. 7 (2 July 2010): 585, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2010.00701.x>.

The third phase of Islamization in Java is the 20th century when modernist Muslims come to the stage, interlinked with the independence of Indonesia from colonization and the emergence of several Islamic organizations that play role in politics and economics. The Dutch ethical policy (Hol: *Etische Politiek*, Ind: *Politik Etis*) which provided modern education (though limited to certain classes) before Indonesian independence and the adoption of Islamic modernism, notably undertaken and spread by Muhammadiyah, undeniably influenced the face of the orientation of Islam in Java and Indonesia. Borrowing Geertzian trichotomy of *santri-priyayi-abangan*, the policy formerly produced the modern/Westernized *priyayi-abangan*, such as represented by the members of Boedi Oetomo, who were aristocrats or of elite class but had no concern in religious commitment. Since Ahmad Dahlan with his organization, Muhammadiyah, gave an effort in adopting and practicing Islamic modernism, there began integration between modernity and Islam and succeeded in giving birth to *santri-priyayi*, aristocrats with religious concern.<sup>72</sup> Even though *santri-kolot* (old-fashion religious individuals) still remain, likely presented by Nahdlatul Ulama in its earlier period, Islamic modernism has changed much of the role of Islam in the public sphere.

The suspicious attitude toward Christian missionary campaigns was still running, especially among modernist-puritan Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah whose goal was to oppose Christian missionaries. A.D. Haanie, a prominent Muhammadiyah leader, published a book *Islam Against Kraemer* (1929) to respond to Kraemer's book *The Religion of Islam* (1928) which insulted Islam as a religion that thoroughly ignores the moral and spiritual aspect of human life. The goal dates its basis on the spirit of Ahmad Dahlan, as he said,

*“Tidak mungkin Islam lenyap dari seluruh dunia, tapi tidak mustahil Islam hapus dari bumi Indonesia. Siapakah yang bertanggung jawab? (It is*

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<sup>72</sup> Abdul Munir Mulkan, *Kiai Ahmad Dahlan: Jejak Pembaruan Sosial Dan Kemanusiaan: Kado Satu Abad Muhammadiyah* (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2010); Ricklefs, 'Six Centuries of Islamization in Java', 119–22.

impossible for Islam to vanish from the rest of the world, but it is impossible for Islam to wipe out of Indonesian land. Who takes responsibility?)”

### 2.3 Contemporary Conversion to Islam

Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the contemporary era. We can see from the projection by Pew Research Center that Muslims will reach 31.1% of the world population by 2060, significantly increasing from 24.1% in 2015.<sup>73</sup> Though they will still be behind Christians, the increase in Muslims is more significant in percentage. For example, England and Wales whose people were majority Christians are now facing the decline of the religious group. Only less than half (46%) admit as Christians, and “no religion” posits in the second biggest group (37%). The situation is strengthened by the fact that more than 400 churches were closed between 2010-2019.<sup>74</sup> Besides birth, religious missionaries, and migration, religious conversion – or the Pew uses religious switching – contributes to this changing landscape.

**Size and projected growth of major religious groups, 2015-2060**

	Projected 2015 population	% of world population in 2015	Projected 2060 population	% of world population in 2060	Population growth 2015-2060
Christians	2,276,250,000	31.2%	3,054,460,000	31.8	778,210,000
Muslims	1,752,620,000	24.1	2,987,390,000	31.1	1,234,770,000
Unaffiliated	1,165,020,000	16.0	1,202,300,000	12.5	37,280,000
Hindus	1,099,110,000	15.1	1,392,900,000	14.5	293,790,000
Buddhists	499,380,000	6.9	461,980,000	4.8	-37,400,000
Folk religions	418,280,000	5.7	440,950,000	4.6	22,670,000
Other religions	59,710,000	0.8	59,410,000	0.6	-290,000
Jews	14,270,000	0.2	16,370,000	0.2	2,100,000
<b>World</b>	<b>7,284,640,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>9,615,760,000</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2,331,120,000</b>

Source: Pew Research Center demographic projections. See Methodology for details.  
 “The Changing Global Religious Landscape”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

**Table. PEW’s projection of religious growth**

<sup>73</sup> PEW Research Center, ‘Demographic Portrait of Muslim Americans’, Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, 26 July 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/07/26/demographic-portrait-of-muslim-americans/>.

<sup>74</sup> William Booth, ‘England and Wales No Longer Majority Christian Nations, Census Reveals’, *Washington Post*, 29 November 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/11/29/uk-religion-census-christian/>.

Due to Pew Research Center's projection on religion 2015-2060, while the overall global population will grow 32%, Muslims will grow up to 70%. Africa and the Middle East are regions that become home to more than a third of Muslims and are projected to have the biggest population increases. The numerous growths of Muslims is highly related to the fertility rate in which Muslim women have an average of 2.9 children, contrasted to an average of 2.2 for all non-Muslims, even Christians at 2.6. Another factor is that Muslims have the youngest median age at 24 years old based on data from 2015, compared to other religious (and non-religious) groups at 32.<sup>75</sup>

In the United States, Muslims only made up 1% of the country's population. Black Americans are a high number of converts to Islam with 49% of total Muslim converts, contrasted to other races which 15% of nonblack Muslims.<sup>76</sup> Another race is Hispanic which constitutes 8% of the US Muslims.<sup>77</sup> In Latin America, there is a growing number of Latino Muslim converts in the last decade is estimated between 50,000 to 70,000, even jumping to 265,000 people.<sup>78</sup> The conversion to Islam among Latinos in many cases is related to Islamic spirituality and theology, having relationships with Muslim friends and pairs, and the attempt of tracing back to the history of Islam in Spain which contributes significantly to Spanish arts and cultures.<sup>79</sup> Given that, some use the term 'reversion' which means re-conversion or conversion to the previous faith.

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<sup>75</sup> Michael Lipka and Conrad Hackett, 'Why Muslims Are the World's Fastest-Growing Religious Group', *Pew Research Center* (blog), 6 April 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/04/06/why-muslims-are-the-worlds-fastest-growing-religious-group/>.

<sup>76</sup> Besheer Mohamed and Jeff Diamant, 'Black Muslims Account for a Fifth of All U.S. Muslims, and about Half Are Converts to Islam', *Pew Research Center*, 17 January 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/black-muslims-account-for-a-fifth-of-all-u-s-muslims-and-about-half-are-converts-to-islam/>.

<sup>77</sup> PEW Research Center, 'The Changing Global Religious Landscape', *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), 5 April 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/>.

<sup>78</sup> Gaston Espinosa, Harold Morales, and Juan Galvan, 'Latino Muslims in the United States', *JRER: Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 8, no. 1 (2017): 5.

<sup>79</sup> Espinosa, Morales, and Galvan, 43; Tim Padgett, 'Why So Many Latinos Are Becoming Muslims', *WLRN*, 9 October 2013, <https://www.wlrn.org/politics/2013-10-09/why-so-many-latinos-are-becoming-muslims>.

In the United Kingdom in 2021, Muslims become the second largest religious group with approximately 3.9 million adherents (or 6.5% of the population), rising up to 1.2 million (or 4.9%) from the previous decade.<sup>80</sup> Even Muslim communities in the UK are dominated by Muslim immigrants, but that does not mean that no converts to Islam. Since the early 19th century after the famous conversion of (Syeikh ‘Abdullah) Henry William Quilliam, British converts to Islam rose slowly. Some of them were important individuals.<sup>81</sup> Using data from the Scottish 2001 census, there were about 60,699 converts living in Britain at that time. It is estimated there were about five thousand new conversions each year, with the highest estimated number reaching 100,000 converts.<sup>82</sup> Many native British converts to Islam were due to the intellectual aspect and a little bit of affectional.<sup>83</sup>

In the wider context, Europe has witnessed an increasing number of asylum seekers that come from predominantly Muslim countries, especially in the Middle East and Central Asia. Those people who are majority Muslims affected the growth of Muslim communities in Europe. According to the data from the 2016 Pew Research Center, Muslims made up 4.9% of the European population and this would increase as they have quite high fertility rates. Pew made a projection for the trend with three scenarios. It projected that in 2050 with a high migration – as data obtained between 2014 to 2016 – Muslims could make up 14% of the population, and if the migration is medium – meaning that national policies on asylum change in some countries –, they could reach 11.2%. The last scenario projection is

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<sup>80</sup> Aamna Mohdin, ‘Census Says 39% of Muslims Live in Most Deprived Areas of England and Wales’, *The Guardian*, 30 November 2022, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/30/census-says-39-of-muslims-live-in-most-deprived-areas-of-england-and-wales>.

<sup>81</sup> Akil N. Awan, ‘Conversion to Islam in Contemporary Britain: Motivations, Processes and Consequences’ (PhD Dissertation, London, SOAS University of London, 2011), 32–33, [https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/14046/1/Awan\\_3384.pdf](https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/14046/1/Awan_3384.pdf).

<sup>82</sup> Awan, ‘Conversion to Islam in Contemporary Britain: Motivations, Processes and Consequences’; Jerome Taylor and Sarah Morrison, ‘The Islamification of Britain: Record Numbers Embrace Muslim Faith’, News, *The Independent*, 4 January 2011, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/the-islamification-of-britain-record-numbers-embrace-muslim-faith-2175178.html>.

<sup>83</sup> Maha Al-Qwidi, ‘Understanding the Stages of Conversion to Islam: The Voices of British Converts’ (PhD Dissertation, Leeds, University of Leeds, 2002), 185–86, [https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/485/1/uk\\_bl\\_ethos\\_250876.pdf](https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/485/1/uk_bl_ethos_250876.pdf).

Muslims could grow to 7.4% even without migration.<sup>84</sup> With that number, Muslims will affect European culture to adjust Islam as part of their nationhood.

Different motives are found in conversion in European and American prisons. Many prisoners convert to Islam since it provides a moral framework that helps them to cope in jail and pass the sentence through positive activities as well as the conversion to Islam helps them to avoid assault since Muslims have quite strong solidarity in prison.<sup>85</sup> A study involving 279 Muslim prisoners by Wilkinson et al. identifies five broad categories of conversion to Islam in prison; piety, emotional coping, company, protection, and perks and privileges, though the last motif is very rare.<sup>86</sup> The study also distinguishes two types of conversion in prison, switching (from one faith to another faith) and intensification (practicing and learning Islam more intensively than before being imprisoned). Though many converts adopt the mainstream and peaceful view of Islam, somehow, there is still a cynical view of those who convert to Islam in prison from media and politics, especially due to some converts adopt the Islamist view of “The different Us vs Them” in *intensifying* stage<sup>87</sup> and a few numbers turn into terrorist action.<sup>88</sup> This is to say, whilst many converts enjoy Islam as a coping system in prison to live their lives better, the overrepresentation of a small number of radical convert prisoners softly hides the real situation.

Nonetheless, it does not mean that nowadays Muslims and Muslim converts in Europe do not face any problems. Discrimination and abuse are a few problems

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<sup>84</sup> PEW Research Center, ‘Europe’s Growing Muslim Population’, *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), 29 November 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/>.

<sup>85</sup> Basia Spalek and Salah El-Hassan, ‘Muslim Converts in Prison’, *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 46, no. 2 (May 2007): 99–114, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2311.2007.00459.x>.

<sup>86</sup> Matthew Wilkinson et al., ‘Prison as a Site of Intense Religious Change: The Example of Conversion to Islam’, *Religions* 12, no. 3 (3 March 2021): 177, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12030162>.

<sup>87</sup> Spalek and El-Hassan, ‘Muslim Converts in Prison’, 182.

<sup>88</sup> M. S. Hamm, ‘Prison Islam in the Age of Sacred Terror’, *British Journal of Criminology* 49, no. 5 (1 September 2009): 667–85, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azp035>.

they are facing since Islamophobia<sup>89</sup> is also widespread though at the same time, many Europeans are converting to Islam. ‘White’ converts in Manchester, United Kingdom, experienced being re-racialized to lose their ‘whiteness’ after their conversion, either as ‘not-quite-white’ or ‘non-white’ at all and got themselves marked as the Others. Islam was viewed as a ‘non-white’ religion in that Islamophobic climate and eroding ‘whiteness’ identity. The situation is rooted in Europe since Muslims are racialized or semi-racialized as “the Muslim race.”<sup>90</sup>

The racialization begins when Islam is viewed to be brought (or introduced) earlier in Europe mostly by Muslim migrants coming from colonized countries and having lower levels of education and economy who seek jobs and asylum.<sup>91</sup> We can propose Germany, for example, where political elites feared that Germany will lose its identity and culture with the widespread of Islam.<sup>92</sup> Besides racialization, it is useful to understand this phenomenon from the perspective of social conversion. This concept is related to social identity identification, meaning that a convert is seen to identify him/herself to be a member of his/her new religious community and is viewed as leaving his/her tribal or racial identity.<sup>93</sup> Thus, this perspective implies that the conversion is not only a personal or an individual act but rather to his/her social identity to which he/she belongs to after conversion.

However, some new converts also contributed to the rise of Islamophobia by joining radical groups, either committing homegrown jihadism – radical acts in

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<sup>89</sup> This term may have several definitions. Here, I borrow a definition from the UN referring to fear, prejudice, and hatred towards Muslims leading to hostility, provocation, and intolerance by means of threatening, abuse, harassment, incitement, and intimidation of Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the offline and online world. However, criticism of Muslims or the Islamic religion does not necessarily mean Islamophobia.

<sup>90</sup> Leon Moosavi, ‘The Racialization of Muslim Converts in Britain and Their Experiences of Islamophobia’, *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 1 (January 2015): 41–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920513504601>.

<sup>91</sup> Fabio Perocco, ‘Anti-Migrant Islamophobia in Europe. Social Roots, Mechanisms and Actors’, *REMHU: Revista Interdisciplinar Da Mobilidade Humana* 26, no. 53 (August 2018): 28–29, <https://doi.org/10.1590/1980-85852503880005303>.

<sup>92</sup> Esra Özyürek, ‘Convert Alert: German Muslims and Turkish Christians as Threats to Security in the New Europe’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 1 (January 2009): 96–97, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S001041750900005X>.

<sup>93</sup> Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period*, 36.

their own countries – or joining fundamentalist groups in foreign countries, particularly in conflicting countries in the Middle East. Nixon Center’s survey reported eight percent of the 212 suspected and convicted terrorists in Western Europe and North America between 1993-2003 were converts. Other reports revealed at least 48 European citizen converts were involved in terrorist attacks in 10 European countries between 1990-2010. Karagiannis indicated some factors of mechanisms why some converts were involved in jihadi activities, starting from experiencing personal victimization, political grievance (such as offensive media framing or attack on Muslims in other places), to joining radical groups, either accidentally, approached intensively and lovingly or inspired by radical preachers.<sup>94</sup>

Other hypothetical factors may include lacking knowledge of Islam but having zeal or desire to show dedication through fanatical and literal fashion. The problematic backgrounds of converts must be considered too. Though many media and articles emphasize those problems since they are undeniable facts, somehow International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) considerably assessed that much research overrepresented the issue of converts’ involvement in Islamist extremism and terrorism since little data on that was found, even provided a more nuanced picture. The center views the involvement of converts in such activities as complex and multifaceted as radicalism and terrorism in general rather than being strictly related to certain factors since not every factor proposed can answer other converts’ un-involvement.<sup>95</sup>

## 2.4 Conclusion

Given that Islam is a missionary religion, the phenomenon of conversion to Islam is absolute and occurred from the beginning of Islamic history. The early conversion of Islam, apart from the substantial interest in the teachings, could not

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<sup>94</sup> Emmanuel Karagiannis, ‘European Converts to Islam: Mechanisms of Radicalization’, *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 13, no. 1 (March 2012): 99–113, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2012.659495>.

<sup>95</sup> Bart Schuurman, Peter Grol, and Scott Flower, ‘Converts and Islamist Terrorism: An Introduction’, *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies*, 17 June 2016, 14–15, <https://doi.org/10.19165/2016.2.03>.

be separated from the indirect influence of the notion of the last prophet emanating from the Jewish community of Medina. Political victories also contributed to mass conversion in the early days of Islam to the Arabian Peninsula and even to Spain. The conversion to Islam from Judaism and Christianity also influenced the development of the knowledge construction of the Islamic world with the absorption of myths and views of religion and the past of the *ahl al-kitāb*. In the Indonesian context, the development of Islamic proselytization that occurred since the twelfth and fourteenth centuries which led to mass conversion took several protelyzation strategies.

A common way is to combine two foundations into one, namely the foundation of the old religious culture and Islam. This is reflected in the conversion myth spread in Pasai or contemporary Aceh and sultanates in Malaysia as well as in Java with its *Babad Tanah Jawi*. Thus, conversion to Islam seems to have gained a foothold from the old foundation of authority so that it is considered a continuation, rather than a radical change. This may also explain the subsequent impact of the Islamic style in Indonesia, particularly in Java, which was more assimilative and, at some point, syncretic. Meanwhile, conversion to Islam is also happening globally with rapid growth. Rational and social factors are the main factors in this phenomenon. Western countries are witnessing this growth, from the interaction of Muslim immigrants to the conversion of native whites. This phenomenon will in turn encourage the emergence of new religious authority coming from such converts who preach which we refer to in this study as Muslim-Convert Preachers which we discuss shortly in the Indonesian context.

Worldwide, Islam has witnessed its very good development and is known in regions which may be difficult to reach. It owes to the development of globalization and migration. Technological information enabled information about Islam reaching people who even do not live with Muslims, as well as migration made non-Muslims finally meet and live with Muslims and more or less know about Islam. Even in many cases migration is caused by bad situation such as civil war, political chaos, and poverty, among Muslim-majority lands, an *ulama* said, “it is the mercy

of Allah that makes Islam spreaded even due to war among Muslims in which finally they migrate to other lands and have other people know Islam from them.”

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY OF MUSLIM-CONVERT PREACHERS**

Authority or imperative coordination, which means a legitimacy to seek obedience by a given group or individuals,<sup>96</sup> moves up and down. One might be obeyed in the present, but he or she has no guarantee to be that in the future. As it lies in the recognition of other groups or persons, one has to preserve factors regarding obedience. Different from coercive power which can put punishment on those who disobey the command, legitimate authority deals with conscious obedience where an authoritative person is obeyed voluntarily. It is more likely relates to social and cultural recognition though is interconnected with political decisions as well.

Max Weber (1947) was well-known for early discussing the sources of authority: legal-rational or bureaucratic authority, traditional, and charismatic. The first type deals with the legality of the normative rules which has someone to legitimately issue a command. Weber departs this type from the law of administration of a 'corporate' that is intentionally and socially based on communal agreement. Someone obeys another who has authority only to "obey the law" which is represented by him. However, when we apply this type regarding political context, it is closer to coercive power than the social agreement of authority. Later, the second and the third type of this classification are more likely social and cultural than the former. Traditional authority in almost all cases depends on the 'blood' or inheritance of the former authoritative figure. We can easily find this type in kings of the kingdoms and tribal chiefs of the tribes. Meanwhile, charismatic authority lies in individuals with a certain sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character. This type is applied to individuals with virtue and treated as having supernatural,

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<sup>96</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. Talcott Parsons, 1. pbk. ed., reprint (New York, NY: Free Press, 1997), 324.

superhuman, or divine power. Therefore, in the Weberian concept, the authority is likely stagnant whereas it is a fluid situation.

On the contrary, in the Islamic world, authority is fluid to some extent. Because of that, we know the concept of *'adāla* for preserving such an authority. This concept is well-known in the tradition of *ahl al-ḥadīth* (the people who study the tradition of the Prophet) as a personal virtue in which one is Muslim, already mature, mentally healthy, and avoids hypocrisy and behavior that demeans dignity.<sup>97</sup> A person could be authoritative in transmitting a hadith when he preserves his *'adala* or, otherwise, his transmission is rejected. It means that in Islamic history, authority is personal virtue that is built, preserved, and not a stagnant status nor taken for granted.

This research stands with the same notion of the nature of authority that is built and preserved. Therefore, I see Alatas' theory of articulatory labour which has the same notion proper to apply in this research to see how Muslim-convert preachers who were leaders of their former (non-Islamic) religions can claim religious authority among Muslim communities. This research owes him for his theory applied here. The theory argues that the authority of Islamic religious leaders lies in the way they recognize the connection to the Prophetic past which is the foundational past and depends on a hierarchical relationship that enables them to articulate Prophetic teachings for others without involving coercion. Such an authority consists of three elements: the notion of and connection to the temporal foundation (foundational past and present situation); the capacity to transform that foundation into examples; and the ability to effect obedience without coercion.<sup>98</sup>

However, as research subjects Alatas studied are *ulama* (Islamic scholars) who are born and arose among Muslim families as well as are educated in Islamic educational institutions, I consider that lying only in his theory is, though proper, inadequate. As this research will study the religious authority of Muslim-convert

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<sup>97</sup> 'Uthmān b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Shahrazwarī, *'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth Li Ibn al-Ṣalāh*, ed. Nūr al-Dīn 'Itr (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āṣir, 1986), <https://archive.org/details/molsalPDF/molsal/>.

<sup>98</sup> Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?*, 4.

preachers – the converts to Islam who later become Islamic preachers – particularly those who were formerly religious leaders of Christianity – and preach delivering comparative religions and quoting the Biblical texts which are rarely found in mainstream Islamic preaching, certain elements of the theory of articulatory labour may be inadequate to explain factors that build the authority. The theory posits *sunna* (the Prophetic past) in their preachings as the foundational past in which Islamic religious leaders mostly base their religious authority, whereas Muslim-convert preachers are more likely to deliver their preachings with their understanding of the Biblical texts and comparative religions, in this respect is Christology. Therefore, I will borrow Scheppele and Soltan’s (1987) theory of the authority of alternatives. As this theory premises the authority can be found when “*person B (is) attracted to the state of affairs offered by alternative A and voluntarily choosing that option over others,*”<sup>99</sup> it may be beneficial to see whether the preachers’ discussion of the Biblical texts and Christology is a prominent factor for their religious authority.

### **3.1 Newly Emerging Actors of Religious Authority**

One commonly chosen strategy for spreading Islam in the early history of Indonesia is to borrow authoritative elements from local beliefs or politics to link with Islam, as I present in the previous chapter about the myths accompanying the entry of Islam. The linkage between the two political authorities i.e., local and global means an attempt to strengthen the political authority that will undergo change by adopting Islam. On the other hand, the religious and cultural portrait of the king before his conversion to Islam was an attempt to remain recognized by his subjects, while the connection between this political authority and the myth of the vision of inspiration to meet the Prophet can be understood as an attempt to combine political authority

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<sup>99</sup> Scheppele and Soltan, ‘The Authority of Alternatives’, 170.

and religious authority.<sup>100</sup> Thus, Muslim rulers can politically protect and assist the spread of Islam.

While the Muslim rulers seek religious authorities to bolster their political authority by means of these connections, Islamic clerics also make similar efforts to spread Islam among the unfamiliar public. They synthesize elements of local culture and beliefs with elements of Islam to create the impression that Islam has roots in their culture. A common example can be seen in Babad Tanah Jawi which contains a ‘problematic’ double genealogy where the genealogy of the Islamic Mataram kings is linked to the kings of Majapahit, then to the gods in Javanese Hindu mythology and ends with the genealogy of the early prophets in Islam. As a literary work, one of which is intended for political purposes, the genealogical sequence cannot be accounted for. But if we look at the cultural mindset of his time, the effort is like the integration of political and religious authority as in the previous paragraph through literature and myth.

Another example is the myth of Sunan Kalijaga, one of the original Javanese early Islamic preachers, who straightened out both the direction of the Demak Mosque and the Qibla in Mecca to be in harmony. Alatas suggests that this myth, which was also one of his inspirations in formulating his theory of articulatory labor, contains a philosophy in which authority can be obtained by connecting between two poles, not only one temporal party of society currently faced but also the source of authority itself so that it can be contextualized.<sup>101</sup> In addition, the religious authority associated with early Islamic preachers, especially in Java known as Wali Sanga, is generally represented by various myths of mystical and spiritual abilities (Javanese: *kesaktian*) so that they are considered to carry charismatic authority within them. However, the myth, which has its roots in pre-Islamic local beliefs about the depiction of religious leaders, also has an impact on

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<sup>100</sup> Russel Jones, ‘Ten Conversion Myths from Indonesia’, in *Conversion to Islam*, Nehemia Levtzion, 7 (New York; London: Holmes & Meier Publisher, n.d.), 129–58. This book section includes the narrative of the myths that is recommended for those who need the detail.

<sup>101</sup> Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?*, 33–34.

the aspect of emphasis received, namely on the side of mystical forces, rather than on the depth of religious knowledge possessed.<sup>102</sup>

At the time when Islam had begun to spread, religious authority was generally attached to the leaders of *pesantren*, a place where students studied Islamic knowledge. The transmission of Islamic knowledge that makes it, Robinson said, trustworthy and authoritative<sup>103</sup> that takes place in *pesantren* finds it to be associated with religious authority. In this case, the book of Islam becomes the source of religious authority and whoever controls and transmits it is considered to hold that authority. In addition, the personal virtue and moral stability maintained by *pesantren* leaders (Javanese: *kiai*) also help them maintain charismatic authority until, to some extent, they are believed to have *barokah* (blessings) which they could share with others.<sup>104</sup> This type of charismatic authority then evolved into the existence of traditional authority based on heredity. The leaders of *pesantren* who are considered to have charismatic authority pass traditional authority down to their descendants, making them have traditional authority, so that they are respected and treated preferentially. Such practices are common today, especially among traditionalist Muslims.

However, in the Indonesian context, there has been a struggle, if not to say division, of religious authority, especially since the 1900s when the idea of Islamic renewal from the Middle East was adopted and voiced by so-called Muslim modernists, later closely associated with the Muhammadiyah organization founded in Yogyakarta, 1912. Carrying the jargon *al-rujū' ilā al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunna*, they want to purify religious beliefs and practices from all forms of deviation that they believe is the cause of the lagging and stagnant of Muslims from Western

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<sup>102</sup> Anasom, Naili Anafah, and Nor Lutfi Fais, *Karamah dan Kharisma: A Study of Critical Discourse Analysis of Walisongo Comics* (Semarang: Lawwana, 2021), 3–4.

<sup>103</sup> Robinson, 'Technology and Religious Change', 234.

<sup>104</sup> Ferry Muhammadsyah Siregar, 'Religious Leader and Charismatic Leadership in Indonesia: The Role of Kyai in Pesantren in Java', *Jurnal Kawistara* 3, no. 2 (17 August 2013): 149–50, <https://doi.org/10.22146/kawistara.3977>.

modernity.<sup>105</sup> Not spared their criticism is the traditional practice of Islam that does not accept modernity. This challenge to religious authority gained even greater momentum when modernists adopted printing technology by creating magazines and newspapers that allowed them more freedom to consume and produce their thoughts. In contrast, traditionalists (represented by Nahdlatul Ulama founded in 1926) who in later years finally began to adopt the same technology countered the modernists whom they considered to have departed from Islam as a source of authority.<sup>106</sup> The media became a fighting space for authority. The contestation of religious authority through the media has become more intense, evolving, and complex today as the media itself evolves.

The boundary between the authority of one figure and another figure becomes blurred. This does not mean that authority disappears, but rather that authority becomes decentralized and distributed so that the monopoly of authority becomes reduced. Since religious authority has much to do with the consumption of religious discourse, the distribution of discourse is important in an era of media contestation. The existence of new media allows a person who was previously no one in the real world to be considered an authority thanks to the intense production and distribution of the discourse he voices through the media. Authority no longer belongs to individuals alone, but also to impersonal media.<sup>107</sup>

Despite the democratic nature of the media, and as the sacredness of Islam began to erode with the acceptance of printing technology in Muslim lands,<sup>108</sup> the

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<sup>105</sup> Changes in the structure of distribution of Islamic knowledge and religious authority can be said to have begun since the introduction of printing technology in Ottoman Turkey in the 17th century which, although initially rejected by scholars due to fears of repercussions, its adoption was unstoppable. This condition was further made possible by the global colonization by Europeans who generally brought the technology to their colonies. For more, read Robinson, 'Technology and Religious Change'.

<sup>106</sup> Jajat Burhanudin, 'Traditional Islam and Modernity: Some Notes on the Changing Role of the Ulama in Early Twentieth Indonesia', in *Varieties of Religious Authority: Changes and Challenges in 20th Century Indonesian Islam*, Azyumardi Azra, Kees van Dijk, and Nico J.G. Kaptein (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2010), 55–57.

<sup>107</sup> Muthohharun Jinan, 'New Media and the Shift of Islamic Religious Authority in Indonesia', *Journal of Religious Literature* 10, no. 1 (2012): 181–208, <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v10i1.178>.

<sup>108</sup> Robinson, 'Technology and Religious Change'.

tendency toward the doctrine of *sola scriptura* (return to scripture) brought by modernist-puritans<sup>109</sup> goes hand in hand with the accessibility of the Holy Scripture where the media sound is accompanied by postulates. This is one of the features that make Salafi media which often issue religious opinions – commonly literal based on texts – widely followed. The discourse of Islamic populism and the call for the revival of Islam in the public sphere through the media in an interesting packing attracted and influenced Muslim netizens to scatter around the world. At this point, new actors emerge who are considered to have religious authority insofar as they bring interestingly packaged discourses. This can be observed for example by the large number of Salafi media followers and social media influencers who bring populist religious issues and how they respond.<sup>110</sup> At some point, the religious education background of the holder of a media account is sometimes ignored if he displays Islamic symbols or voices discourse that claims to be based on Islam.

Here we can see new actors of religious authority emerging, although traditionalists continue to try to maintain their authority, such as through performativity<sup>111</sup> and following evolving trends.<sup>112</sup> In addition to Salafists who offers a new Muslim identity with their proliferating media,<sup>113</sup> Islamists and conservatives have also emerged with the political Islamic agenda they offer, although the authority they claim is generally related to political views. There are

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<sup>109</sup> Abdul Munir Mul Khan, *Kiai Ahmad Dahlan: Traces of Social and Humanitarian Renewal: A Century Gift of Muhammadiyah* (Jakarta: Kompas Book Publisher, 2010), 66.

<sup>110</sup> Ahyar and Alfitri, 'Aksi Bela Islam'; Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*; Solahudin and Fakhruroji, 'Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia'; Mutohharun Jinan, 'New Media Dan Pergeseran Otoritas Keagamaan Islam Di Indonesia', *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 10, no. 1 (29 June 2012): 181–208, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v10i1.178>.

<sup>111</sup> Syamsul Rijal, 'Performing Arab Saints and Marketing the Prophet: Habaib and Islamic Markets in Contemporary Indonesia', *Archipel. Études Interdisciplinaires Sur Le Monde Insulindien*, no. 99 (2020): 189–213.

<sup>112</sup> Wahyudi Akmaliah, 'The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities', *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (2020): 1–24; Schmidt, 'Cyberwarriors and Counterstars'.

<sup>113</sup> Chris Chaplin, 'Salafi Activism and the Promotion of a Modern Muslim Identity: Evolving Mediums of *Da'wa* amongst Yogyakarta University Students', *South East Asia Research* 26, no. 1 (March 2018): 3–20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967828X17752414>.

also television preachers who tell their spiritual conversion narratives and their distinctive themes. The themes were managed attract audiences and place themselves holding religious authority in front of the public, regardless of their background who were not formally educated in Islamic educational institutions.<sup>114</sup>

The growing contestation of religious authority generally involves individuals who grew up in Muslim families. However, there is a new group participating in this contestation: converts. So far, the one that is famous and has received attention is a populist preacher Felix Siau who carries on the global Caliphate ideology of Hizb ut-Tahrir. However, this Chinese preacher who is famous for his visual *da'wa* art and performance style<sup>115</sup> usually conveys (the romanticism of) Islamic history and the need for the global Caliphate. This contrasts with converts who have a background or claim to be former religious leaders from other religions whose topic of Islamic preaching will be related to comparative religion or criticism of old religious doctrines they even quote the scriptures of other religions in validating Islam as their new religion, such as Irena Handono and Mochammad Ali alias Menachem Ali which we discuss next.

### **3.2 Authority of Irena Handono**

One day, a book discussing criticism of Christian theology attracted me when I was in high school living in a *pesantren* in Lamongan, East Java. It later took me further curious to learn about the topic. From a book written by the famous Muslim Christologian Ahmad Deedat from Africa to his controversial disciple Zakir Naik's videos, my desire at that time to learn to criticize Christianity was increasingly rising. One time when I found a convert woman to Islam claiming to be formerly a nun, it attracted me so much to listen to her preaching online through YouTube. She was the so-called Irena Handono. Born in Surabaya, East Java on July 30, 1954, and coming up from a rich Chinese-Catholic family, she took nun education at

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<sup>114</sup> Ahmad Najib Burhani, 'Muslim Televangelists in the Making: Conversion Narratives and the Construction of Religious Authority', *The Muslim World* 110, no. 2 (June 2020): 154–75, <https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12327>.

<sup>115</sup> Hew, 'The Art of Dakwah'.

Institut Filsafat Teologia Katolik (Seminari Agung) (the Institute of Theological Philosophy of Catholic, the Great Seminary) in Bandung, West Java as she claims. However, during my interview with her in her residence in Bogor, East Java, she did not answer about this educational institution in detail. To make sure, I google the institution but found nothing about it. What I found is the article of a woman named Gayatri Wedotami Muthari quoting the statement of Suster Lucyana, a nun who was in the same educational institution as Irena Handono, that Handono never graduated as a nun since she did not finish her study.<sup>116</sup> Somehow, the article provides an obvious name of the institution where Handono ever took her study: postulant of the Ursuline Sisters convent located in Supratman I Street, Bandung in 1974. The similar city mentioned both by Irena Handono and the article at least ensured me that she might be really trained in nun education as her claim, though a doubt could be addressed to the status she claims.

Before converting to Islam, she was married to a Catholic man and had children. But, her doubt about the Trinity doctrine was always accompanying her life. In short, she finally decided to convert to Islam one day before Ramadan in 1983 and apply for a divorce from her husband since both were religiously different. After several moments, she was married to a Muslim preacher Tengku Mansur Muhammad Amin who supported her preaching activity. In 1992, she made a pilgrimage to Mecca and held the title *hājja* which she has been carrying on until today, moreover in profile and posters containing her name. She is engaged in many Islamic organizations and especially in *Pondok Muallafah Irena Center* which she founded.

### **3.2.1 Conversion Process and the Beginning of *Da'wa***

For a preacher, the motive is undoubtedly the central foundation to undergo the way he/she takes and the rhetoric he/she chooses. Therefore, I asked Irena Handono what motivated her to preach. She answered normatively for the

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<sup>116</sup> Gayatri Wedotami Muthari, 'Dusta Ustazah Irena Handono\*', *bergelora.com* (blog), 12 January 2017, <https://bergelora.com/dusta-ustazah-irena-handono/>. Muthari confirmed this statement when I texted her personally via WhatsApp (May 29, 2023).

command of the Qur'an and hadith, to tell the truth. Somehow, we can still identify a kind of motivation to cut her past life by siding with Muslims as his new identity by 'against' the Christian side which is her old side which she now judges as rivals and even enemies. There was a kind of disappointment with his old religion. She expressed her antipathy toward Christians by saying, "*Umi tidak peduli yang sana mau masuk jurang atau masuk comberan, itu pilihan mereka. Tapi supaya umat kita itu paham banget*" ("*I do not care whether they (Christians) will fall into a ravine or into a sewer. But for our Islamic community to understand very well*"). But, to some extent, her motive is not for penance since she did not pursue people to convert from Islam to Christianity before.<sup>117</sup> Her former religiosity was personal to herself.

In many opportunities, she repeatedly told the procession of her conversion. When she was studying, she took the subject of comparative religions with particular concern to Islam or Islamology. She accused the subject was designed, rather than to understand Islam comprehensively, to criticize Islam from the inside. The story she always underlines is rational searching as the main factor of her conversion to Islam in which in a moment she read the translation of the al-Ikhlāṣ chapter that consists of the foundational monotheistic theology of Islam which she contrasted with the Christian Trinity that got her confused. Her unsatisfying with Trinity dogma remains even today as it is always expressed in her conversion storytelling. Through this story, Handono gives an effort to express a form of relatedness to Islam and a new identity as a Muslim by voiding her past social life.<sup>118</sup> As retelling the story of conversion is the central ritual of faith by framing personal experience and recreating it in canonical language through preaching activities,<sup>119</sup> we can think it is the way she run on to be accepted as well as gaining attention among Muslim communities. It is what Coleman identifies

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<sup>117</sup> Irena Handono, Exclusive Interview with Irena Handono, 10 May 2023.

<sup>118</sup> Austin-Broos, 'The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction', 2.

<sup>119</sup> Coleman, 'Continous Conversion?', 16.

as “reaching out into the world in order to convert others is a self-constitutive act for the charismatic.”<sup>120</sup>

Before her conversion to Islam, she had consulted KH Ahmad Sujaib. She converted to Islam under the guidance of Kiai Misbach, one of the leaders of *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI, Indonesian Council of Ulama) of East Java. Other names of ulama she mentioned for teaching her Islam are K.H. Engkin Zaenal Muttaqien, B. Arifin, and a former lecturer of Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN, the State Islamic Institute)– nowadays known as university or UIN – Sunan Ampel Surabaya Abdul Syakur Thawil.<sup>121</sup> The two names, Kiai Misbach and Muttaqien, were active in Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII, the Indonesian Council for Islamic Propagation), an Islamic organization whose focus is to protect Muslims from other religious missionaries. The relationship between Irena and Kiai Misbach can also be traced to the early history when she was provided a place to preach at Masjid al-Falah Surabaya where she made the *shahāda* vow to convert to Islam. This issue was linked to the idea of M. Natsir, a prominent Islamist politician in the Old Order, about to organize Islamic propagation since political Islam was removed.<sup>122</sup>

The organization’s efforts in the Muslim empowerment movement and against other religious missionary movements, especially from Christianity, are structured as possible in order to stem the missionaries that are said to be increasingly massive through many ways as was the case in Aceh after the 2004 Tsunami.<sup>123</sup> Given the connection between Irena Handono and DDII scholars, it is not surprising that she is a woman who inherits the ideology and mission voiced by the organization. The ideological inheritance of DDII is

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<sup>120</sup> Coleman, 17.

<sup>121</sup> Handono, Irena Handono.

<sup>122</sup> Darwin Zainuddin and Fakhur Adabi Abdul Kadir, ‘Dinamika Gerakan Dakwah Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia Di Indonesia’, *Journal Analytica Islamica* 2, no. 1 (2013): 3–4.

<sup>123</sup> Jan S. Aritonang, ‘Christians in Indonesia’, in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Indonesia*, Hefner, Robert W., 21 (New York: Routledge, 2018), 260; Jasafat, ‘Kontribusi Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Aceh dalam Menangkal Kristenisasi’, *Jurnal Al-Bayan* 23, no. 1 (2017): 52–76.

obviously articulated by Handono through her preachings that repetitively sound the danger of *Kristenisasi* (literally means Christianization; Christian missionary) or sometimes using the term “*awas pemurtadan*” (watch out for the apostasy).

The inheritance of organizational ideology for converts may influence their religious view so much to spread. Such a case is the encounter of Felix Siauw with Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) that influences him so much in upholding the organizational ideology of the global Caliphate in his preachings.<sup>124</sup> Her status claim as a former nun though controversial and doubted by other parties, helps her to claim what she said about missionaries has a basis. As converts can only cooperate somewhat in any project to negate the past,<sup>125</sup> Handono’s involvement in the project of DDII to fight against missionary activities of her old religion could mean her effort to negate her past as well as uses her past to build authority among Muslim communities.

The views of DDII’s religious orthodoxy were deeply imprinted and strongly embraced by Handono where this influenced the views or phenomena he criticized. He stands up against the views of secularism, pluralism, and liberalism that its opponents often dismiss with the word *sepilis*, referring to a sexually transmitted disease. In this regard, Handono’s suspicious tendency towards any movement and idea that she judged to be potentially damaging to Islam and attacking Muslims was very likely based on a feeling of threat and a position as a target of many parties. In line with the orthodoxy of the MUI which issued its fatwa haram the three ideas above,<sup>126</sup> she several times criticized supporters of this idea, especially the

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<sup>124</sup> Hew, ‘The Art of Dakwah’.

<sup>125</sup> Austin-Broos, ‘The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction’, 2.

<sup>126</sup> Indonesian Ulema Council, ‘MUI Fatwa on Pluralism, Liberalism and Religious Secularism’, 25 July 2005, <https://mui.or.id/wp-content/uploads/files/fatwa/12.-Pluralisme-Liberalisme-dan-Sekularisme-Agama.pdf>.

Network of Liberal Islam (JIL) which in the early 2000s was rising in popularity.<sup>127</sup>

### 3.2.2 Christology Preaching

Irena Handono may be among the first Muslim-Convert Preachers who is known for carrying on comparative religion, particularly Christology, as the main topic in Islamic preaching in Indonesia. She is the first convert for the issue since the famous Muslim Christologist was Abdullah Wasian. Handono holds the traditional view of gender in her composition of congregation where she obviously limits her face-to-face audience to women since the beginning of her preaching. We may assume that her previous study in nun education and her engagement with the DDII's religious view are factors. Somehow, it is also common for female preachers to preach only in front of women as the direct audience, such as in the case of the television program Mamah Dedeh, though it is finally able consumed by men as well in cyberspace.

Handono serves a new topic in her preaching; comparative religion with Christology in particular, while claiming her status as a former nun. The topic is uncommon in mainstream Islamic sermons delivered by traditional or regular *ulama* in Indonesia. In the modern age, the topic has been raised. Somehow, not many *ulama* are concerned and mastering it and its material. With her status as a convert from Catholic, she undertakes what is called Qur'an-Bible validation – validating the Qur'an by Bible, particularly in divinity, theology, and prophethood, as well as by human experience.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ustadzah Hj. Irene Handono / Theme: Beware of the Dangers of Secularism (Sahabat Al Ihsan, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kK7IvCJZqsY>; Irena Handono, 'Study of Hj. Irena Handono: Hajjah Irena Handono's Criticism of Prof. Syafi'i Ma'arif', blogspot, Study of Hj. Irena Handono (blog), November 9, 2016, <https://kajianirenahandono.blogspot.com/2016/11/kritikan-hajjah-irena-handono-terhadap.html>; Irena Handono, 'Study of Hj. Irena Handono: Hermeneutics Damaging the Quran', blogspot, Study of Hj. Irena Handono (blog), 13 October 2016, <https://kajianirenahandono.blogspot.com/2016/10/hermeneutika-merusak-al-quran.html>.

<sup>128</sup> Putra, 'Quran-Bible Validation in Contemporary Indonesia', 113–14.

Therefore, she stands up to the messages of the Qur'an as a standard and strengthens them with Biblical texts she could cite.<sup>129</sup>

Her rhetoric indicates she is a likely ideologue who normatively as a Muslim believes in every word the Qur'an says but often does not explain the detail. For instance, regarding the critic of the Qur'an to *ahl al-kitāb* (People of the Book).<sup>130</sup> For her, *ahl al-kitāb* has corrupted many of their Holy Book so she denied the existence of *ahl al-kitāb* in the contemporary era since the Qur'an has criticized them for having changed the word of God in their Holy Books.<sup>131</sup> A bad and non-Islamic representation of the prophets as committing big sins might explain why she does not engage in making use of Biblical texts for exploring and explaining the Quranic stories of the prophets.

Central to Handono's *da'wa* is the issue of anticipating Christian missionaries and criticizing Christianity that she has been consistently raising since the beginning after her conversion in the 1980's even until today. Looking at the socio-religious context, the issue was interesting and quite hot regarding the early beginning of the New Order regime in the 1960s to 1970s when mass conversion to Christianity occurred.<sup>132</sup> The phenomenon was accused to be linked to the massive efforts of Christian missionaries through education and economic aid.<sup>133</sup> Muslims felt threatened by the massive activities of Christian missionaries and worried their domination would be removed by their worldwide rival: Christians. Therefore, some Muslim scholars thought that proselytism activities in religious rivalry were important to develop and undertake.<sup>134</sup> For her, strengthening *tawheed* (monotheistic faith) as well as understanding the 'fallacy' of Christian theology and history

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<sup>129</sup> Handono, Irena Handono.

<sup>130</sup> The term likely refers to the Jews and Christian since they have been revealed Holy Books.

<sup>131</sup> Handono, Irena Handono.

<sup>132</sup> Yanuar Nugroho and Sofie Shinta Syarief, *Beyond Click-Activism?: New Media and Political Processes in Contemporary Indonesia* (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012), 13.

<sup>133</sup> Aritonang, 'Christians in Indonesia', 260.

<sup>134</sup> Mujiburrahman, *Feeling Threatened: Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia's New Order*, ISIM Dissertations (Leiden: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

are central to encountering Christian missionaries. Handono actively involves the topic in the preachings as the main foundation to encounter other religious missionaries.



**Figure 1.** A poster taken from @irenahandono Instagram account.

Somehow, rather than referring to the tradition of Islamic theology or strengthening the deductive premise for constructing Islamic monotheism, she prefers criticizing Christian theological doctrine while delivering about *tawheed*. To some extent, we can assess her for constructing orthodoxy based on her understanding of the history of the Church and Christianity. For example, she issued a religious opinion by prohibiting (stating *harām*) Muslims to join the celebration of Christmas and Valentine’s Day which she claims is the Western and Christian ‘cultural penetration’ in Indonesian Muslims. She links the celebration to paganistic rituals historically. Rather than referring her religious view to various debates of ulama on this issue, she merely relates to the attempts of Christian missionaries to erode the faith of Muslims through such celebrations and Christmas greetings which she said as being intended by

the Church.<sup>135</sup> At this point, she establishes her boundary of ‘orthodoxy’ since she does not return to various discussions of Muslim scholars, though her opinion is the same as some *ulamas’* opinions.

Handono’s preachings are indeed more in offline activity. But she is also engaged with utilizing social media. Through the Facebook account ‘Irena Handono’ which is as of May 31, 2023, followed by 476.294 Facebook users and liked by 470.254, she shares about Christology. In this media, she cited academic references, such as the Encyclopaedia Britannica and Catholic Encyclopaedia, about the polemic over the birthday of Jesus and the origin of the celebration of Christmas, which she meant as both criticism and an attempt to “fortify the creed.”<sup>136</sup> Facebook actively posted her ideas between 2012 to 2016, but later does not engage too much, except with pictures and promoting books she had written with rare engagement with commentators. After that year, the account only shares videos to communicate Handono’s ideas. The same is her Instagram account @irenahandono which since 2020 more often shares videos. Her writing activity slowly decreases over the years since she came to 60 years old in 2014. Another piece of evidence is her last post in her blog ‘kajianirenahandono.blogspot.com’ which ended on November 9, 2016 which she addressed her criticism of Ahmad Syafi’i Ma’arif, the former chairman of Muhammadiyah, whom she regarded as deviating Qur’anic exegesis of a prominent Muslim scholar Hamka to justify the equality of religions.<sup>137</sup>

### 3.2.3 An Overview of the Religious Authority of Irena Handono

We thoroughly associate the religious authority of Irena Handono mainly constituted from her *articulatory labor* in rearticulating the feeling of being

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<sup>135</sup> *Kesesatan Sejarah Natal, Hj.Irena Handono - Wwww.Islamterbuktibenar.Net*, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkvGHtJKB\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkvGHtJKB_k); *Sejarah Natal 25 Desember | Ustadzah Irena Handono*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YE4YLWzIXik>.

<sup>136</sup> Irena Handono, ‘Irena Handono | in Search: Natal | Facebook’, Facebook, 17 December 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/page/169101077637/search?q=natal>.

<sup>137</sup> Handono, ‘Kajian Hj. Irena Handono’, 9 November 2016.

threatened by the issue of *Kristenisasi* agenda through positing herself as the guardian of the faith for Indonesian Muslims from cultural penetration of the Church. It is then strengthened by her attempt to provide ‘common’ Islamic knowledge as well such as in her *Pondok Mualafah* program. In addition, as *kiai*’s religious authority is recognized for their Islamic knowledge and their religio-social engagement by generally leading *pesantren*,<sup>138</sup> Handono’s establishment and running of *Pondok Mualafah* even strengthen her religious authority through her direct and intensive contact and teaching with her *mualafah santri*. However, her main foundational authority of Handono is different from the observation of Alatas where the religious authority of ulama generally and mainly lies on the attempts of rearticulating *sunna* in daily life. Her way to emphasize the exclusivity and purity of Islam is also different from the way of *Wali Sanga* in borrowing and combining authoritative elements from Islam itself and Javanese culture.<sup>139</sup>

Although this study does not specifically examine the fragmentation and distribution of acceptance of her authority, I do not think it is a problem to discuss it a bit. In her claim, Handono claimed to be accepted in various organizations, Muhammadiyah, NU, and other urban communities. This acceptance meant that she was invited several times to deliver Christological studies.<sup>140</sup> We can, of course, not necessarily take her claim. At the earliest, at least at first glance, we need to recall the structure and system of authority among NU members that we consider representing Muslim traditionalists. The religious authority among traditionalists is generally centered on *kiai* who generally receive traditional *pesantren* education, study ‘the yellow books’ (*classical Islamic books*), master classical Islamic knowledge, and have *sanad* (genealogy) of Islamic knowledge taken from the path of their teachers who are *kiai* as well and can lead religious ceremonies in the community. In

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<sup>138</sup> Fazlul Rahman, ‘Contestation for Authority: Internet and Islam among Pandalungan Kiais’ (Doctoral Dissertation, Yogyakarta, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2017), 152–53.

<sup>139</sup> Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?*, 37–39.

<sup>140</sup> Handono, Irena Handono.

addition, her religious views on radical Islamic purification are also not in line with traditionalist religious practices that still accept a culture. Moreover, she herself rejects the idea of Islam Nusantara, which is proposed by NU, by accusing it of a liberalization project, that deviated from the straight path, and should have its own prophet.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, it seems difficult to take for granted Handono's claims that are (easily) accepted in traditionalist circles such as NU.

On the contrary, acceptance of such authority might be relevant among purist Muslims in Indonesia, such as Muhammadiyah and Hidayatullah as well as LDII, since they have a similar concern to purify the Islamic faith and rituals from anything coming from outside Islam as well as oppose (or at least compete with) Christian missionaries. Through her sermons, she shows herself caring for Muslim communities and her commitment to defending and justifying Islam as well as preserving the purity of Islam which, in turn, gives her authority among people who are attracted to her ideas. Moreover, for Irena, Islam has had an obvious rivalry with the Jewish and Christianity throughout history and, thus, needs a defense against its rival's infiltration. Of course, this is a theoretical assumption and lacks empirical data since this research is not designed for tracking the spread and fragmentation of the acceptance of such Muslim-Convert Preachers like Irena Handono among Muslim communities and Islamic organizations.

Regardless, at least, we can look at the limited data from my interviews with five of her followers. By borrowing Scheppele and Soltan's theory of the authority of alternatives that authority is found regarding the attractiveness offered by a particular property in a choice situation,<sup>142</sup> we find that followers are interested in her preaching by bringing rare materials. Muhammad Lutfi A (25), a youth from Purwokerto graduating from UIN Jakarta, is attracted to topics delivered that are frequently "*related to the history of the previous*

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<sup>141</sup> Handono.

<sup>142</sup> Scheppele and Soltan, 'The Authority of Alternatives', 170.

people and sometimes take from the source of other people's books, such as the Gospel so that it is more interesting because it is seen from various points of view."<sup>143</sup> Rafiqa Lutfiyana (25), a friend of Lutfi from Lampung, agreed with him. Somehow, both limited their recognition of Handono's authority only in regard to Christology but still resist her religious opinion or *fatwa*. Three others, Lida (21, Pekalongan, studying in UIN Semarang), Irham (Gresik), and Yasmin, were further interested because of the anticipation of evangelism movements that have the potential to threaten Indonesian Muslims.<sup>144</sup> Yasmin, who is from Bandung, now lives with Handono and helps with the affairs of the 69-year-old woman at her *Pondok Muallafah* in Bogor. At this point, the feeling of being threatened becomes a factor of interest alongside Christology and apology material for Islam. However, in some cases of worshippers, Handono's religious authority is limited to comparative religious studies, and her religious opinions about *halal-haram* are not accepted.

### 3.3 Religious Authority of Menachem Ali

The first time I learned of Menachem Ali was from a video featuring him presenting in Malaysia discussing the origin of the name "Allah." He recited Q2:133, normal as usual, but which amazed me further: he followed it up by reading the Hebrew translation.<sup>145</sup> For me, his ability to master Hebrew is very rare for Muslims because it is considered unrelated to the teachings of Islam which uses Arabic. It was only a while that I became familiar with the term Muslim-Hebraist which is used to refer to Muslims who are able to speak Hebrew<sup>146</sup> like Menachem Ali.

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<sup>143</sup> Muhammad Luthfi Assidiqi, Interview with Irena Handono's Audience, 26 May 2023.

<sup>144</sup> Muhammad Irham, Jamaah Irena Handono Interview, 2 June 2023; Maulida Qurrotu'aini, Interview with Jamaah Irena Handono, 5 June 2023; Yasmin, Jamaah Irena Handono Interview, May 10, 2023.

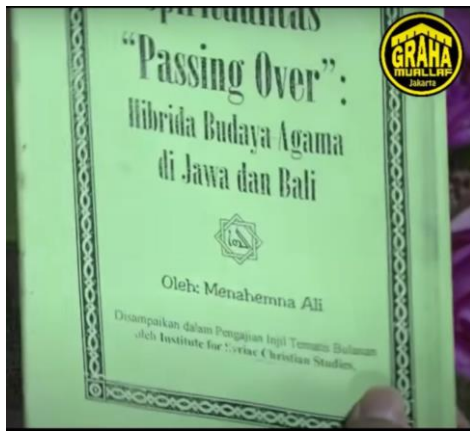
<sup>145</sup> *The Origin of the Word Allah by Professor DR. Menachem Ali*, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFSM7nTPjfk>.

<sup>146</sup> For example, see Walid A. Saleh, 'A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist: Al-Biqā'ī and His Defense of Using the Bible to Interpret the Qur'ān', *Speculum* 83, no. 3 (2008): 629–54.

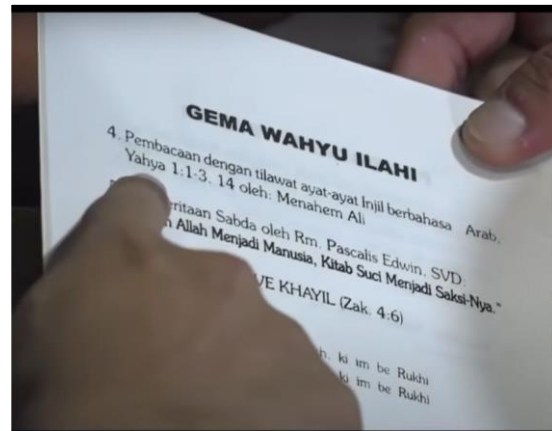


**Figure 2.** Menachem Ali delivering preaching in a mosque.

His name is Mochammad Ali, a philology lecturer at Airlangga University Surabaya East Java, but he more often and likes to use the name Menachem Ali. I do not know why he prefers that name in his preachings, and I regret missing out on asking that question when interviewing him. I guess Menachem was an old name he had used since he was a Christian, based on a book he wrote that used the name “Menahemna Ali” while active at the Institute for Syriac Christian Studies (ISCS, nowadays Institute for Syriac Cultural Studies). As I explored, the Hebrew word “Menachem” means comfort or comfort. Therefore, the name Mochammad Ali that he uses now is his Islamic name after conversion.



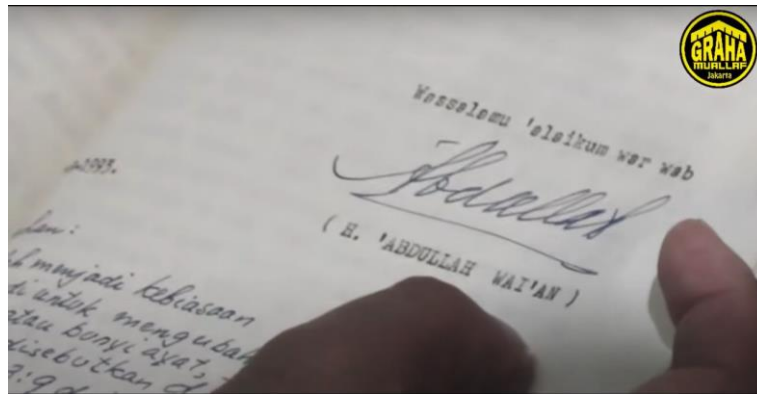
**Figure 3.** Menachem Ali's book in ISCS



**Figure 4.** Menachem Ali's activity in ISCS

Unlike Irena Handono who often tells her conversion process, Ali as far as I know is not blunt and never even discusses it in his studies. I was not very informed during the interview with him. His attitude not to highlight his status as a convert to Islam, even tends to avoid it in Islamic public sermons, amid the phenomenon of some Muslim-Convert Preachers who highlight that status, in my view, is so that Muslims do not necessarily accept what he says, especially with regard to Islamic-Biblical preaching, because of status alone, but to pay attention to the quality and truth of the content itself.

In an interview video of Dondy Tan, who is also a convert to Islam and Muslim debater, with Ali, this young lecturer recounts his activities when he was a Christian. He attended a retreat, a meeting of Christians for the purpose of spiritual growth, while still in high school. This 51-year-old man born in Gresik also admitted that he had argued with Wasian through correspondence since he was in high school until he was in his third year of college in 1989 whose letters he still archived. One of the debates that impressed him was when the two argued about which of Ismail or Ishaq was sacrificed by Prophet Abraham, who, with a clear and structured explanation, Ali intellectually accepted that the answer was Ismail as Muslims believed. At that time, he studied bachelor's degree in philology at Universitas Airlangga.



**Figure 5.** The archived Ali and Wasian's debate letters

While in college, her interest in studying Hebrew as a capital to study ancient Semitic manuscripts led her to study the language of Judaism and Judaism with a person named Mama Rifkasis, a female Shamas or Jewish synagogue guard, located on Jl. Kayoon no. 4 Surabaya.<sup>147</sup> Ali's interest, the author believes, is inseparable from his identity as a Jew which he implicitly affirmed when I asked about a distinctive Jewish icon displayed in his home. After graduating with his bachelor's degree, he together with Bambang Noorsena and Henney Sumali initiated the establishment of ISCS in the 2000s where the beginning of the movement was to introduce Christianity to Middle Eastern culture to bridge the cultural gap between Islam (Middle East) and Christianity (considered synonymous with the West and colonialism) by introducing Syriac orthodox Christianity. In this way, Christianity was reintroduced to Arab culture so that the mission of evangelism and infiltration

<sup>147</sup> Based on the search, the synagogue in question is Beth Hashem Synagogue. It was originally a Dutch architectural style house built in 1939 and purchased by the Jewish community in Surabaya who officially functioned as a synagogue in 1948. In 2009, the Surabaya city government designated it as a cultural heritage, but unfortunately, it was bought by a private party in the same year before the decree. In 2013, fueled by religious sentiments over Israel's attack on Palestine, Islamic organizations in Surabaya rallied in front of the synagogue and demanded the government cancel its status as a cultural heritage which was eventually implicitly granted by the then mayor. The private party who bought it also razed the building with land that is now built into a 17-story hotel called Grand Dafam Signature. It is recorded that more than 500 people from the Jewish community had lived in Surabaya during the Dutch colonial period until finally during Sukarno's time many migrated to Israel and the United States due to national and global political factors. See 'Surabaya Synagogue', in *Wikipedia Indonesian, the free encyclopedia*, 13 February 2023, [https://id.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sinagoge\\_Surabaya&oldid=22937495](https://id.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sinagoge_Surabaya&oldid=22937495); Abraham Utama, 'History of the Jewish Community in Surabaya', News, CNN Indonesia, 3 August 2016, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20160802210548-20-148775/riwayat-komunitas-yahudi-di-surabaya>; Mochammad Ali, Menachem Ali Interview, 6 June 2023.

of Christianity could be more accepted. One result was the publication of the bilingual Arabic-Indonesian Bible in 2003 which was aimed at Indonesian Muslims. In the same year, Ali completed his master's degree at the Indonesian Baptist Theological Seminary in Semarang, Central Java, and obtained a Master of Arts in Ministry (M.A. Min) which signified his ability to act as a pastor.<sup>148</sup>

### 3.3.1 Conversion Process and the Beginning of *Da'wa*

The path of destiny is indeed unpredictable. Two years after graduating with his master's degree, precisely in 2005, when he went to Europe, his meeting with Muslims there with logical and academic explanations accompanied by awake emotions made him amazed and interested, a feeling different from what he was used to seeing among Indonesian Muslims, which in turn triggered his conversion to Islam.<sup>149</sup> On another occasion, he said that there were two reasons that led him to convert to Islam. First, the word of God that became the book for him was a problem. The reason for this was the disagreement of major Christian denominations over the number of their canonical books which resulted in books being considered apocryphal for one denomination but becoming canon for another. Second, God's words manifesting into flesh are problematic for many reasons as well.<sup>150</sup>

He converted to Islam at the age of approximately 33 years with the guidance of Abdullah Wasian who also taught him many things about Islam. Given that Wasian is a member of Muhammadiyah, he recommended Ali *fiqh tarjih Muhammadiyah* to read and discuss. Just as Handono brought LDII's religious views, Ali was also impressed with Muhammadiyah and, to a certain point, took an interest in Muhammadiyah. In his confession, the *fiqh tarjih* of Muhammadiyah attracted him because from the beginning it was introduced by Wasian, it introduced his dialogical side and reasoning thinking. The *fiqh*

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<sup>148</sup> Wawancara Eksklusif.

<sup>149</sup> *Nabi Bani Kedar in the Book of Samawi Religions* by DR. Menachem Ali (Surabaya), 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQI3eQtYY8g>.

<sup>150</sup> Wawancara Eksklusif.

can also, according to him, accommodate the opinions *of madhhabs* (schools of Islamic jurisprudence) but is not oriented to any one *madhhab*. This closeness also made him accepted in Muhammadiyah and even offered structural positions in the Regional Board of Muhammadiyah Surabaya to the National Board, but after some consideration, he was subtly rejected.<sup>151</sup> But we can still find that closeness, for example, when Ali was invited an online discussion about the truth of the early generation of *fiqh* of Muhammadiyah that inherited the Shāfi'ī *fiqh* tradition that is currently preserved by NU.<sup>152</sup>

This man in the early days of conversion did not necessarily give a lecture or at least his conversion story like many converts do. As he recalled, he only started his *da'wa* ten or eleven years ago, at the age of between 40-41 years. He began with student studies from which he was invited to fill Islamic studies at a mosque near his home in Rungkut, Surabaya, and eventually became known for lecturing in mosques and YouTube. According to him, his motive of preaching was based on efforts to educate Muslims as well as Christians who watched it. In the socio-religious context of Muslims in Indonesia, this motive finds its justification because adherents of the majority religion often stutter in response to polemics, mostly from Christians, addressed for the mission of evangelism. Another motive he carries is also related to the rebuilding of relations between Islam and Judaism which have been considered severed for two reasons, the Quranic criticism of Jews and the global geopolitical situation of contemporary Israel-Palestine which is considered to represent Judaism *vis-à-vis* Islam. This motif is illustrated in his lectures which tend to portray the similarities of Jewish and Islamic theology and tradition and the figure of the Prophet Abraham as the meeting point and father of these two monotheistic religions.

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<sup>151</sup> Ali, Menachem Ali interview.

<sup>152</sup> *Fiqh Salat // K.H. Sholeh Darat Until Tarjih Muhammadiyah 1927 - 1974 A.D.*, 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m\\_Z4IYSc2hs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_Z4IYSc2hs).

In simple terms, he revealed that “*politically, Islam and Judaism are distant, while Jews and Christians are close. But theologically, Islam and Judaism are close, while Jews and Christians are far away.*”<sup>153</sup> Although the Quran does criticize the Jewish denial of the Prophet Muhammad, the monotheistic traditions of the two do find a point in common. In addition, we can also consider not releasing Jewish blood and consciousness in this mission in a positive connotation, namely the Islamic view of Judaism. That is, the awareness of his Jewish blood identity which is now Muslim makes him take what he can from Jewish tradition but within the frames and standards of Islam and the Quran.

At the same time, we cannot let go of the motive of “penance” from the Muslim-Convert Preachers, especially among those who have put effort into inviting Muslims to convert to the old religion of the preachers. Therefore, we can see at least in the digital world that former pastors and missionaries when converted to Islam, they carry out the same activities in the context of their new religion. The motive for this “penance” has nothing to do with feeling remorse for their activism in the old religion and wanting to retaliate by doing the same for their new religion as a form of repentance. Menachem Ali was the same when I interviewed. His former activities at ISCS targeting Muslims for conversion to Christianity have been regretted after his conversion to Islam. He also claimed to be against Christianization, especially polemic-apologetics that fooled Muslims. However, the approach he uses is more dialogical and intellectual and does not carry sentiments and emotions. This distinguishes him from some other Muslim-Convert Preachers, especially those who carry wild interpretations of the Bible that he does not like because they tend to trigger conflicts between religious communities.

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<sup>153</sup> Ali, Menachem Ali interview.

### 3.3.2 Quranic-Intertextuality Preaching

The reason I named this point, instead of Christology Preaching like in the previous one, is because Ali did more exploration of the meaning of Quranic verses and stories by reading the intertextuality of Biblical and extra-Biblical texts and did not focus, despite this, on Christology material in Islamic public preaching. His sermons tended to be intellectual in establishing linkages and continuity between Islam and earlier religions, especially Judaism. In many of his sermons, he seemed to carry books. Sometimes he brought the Quran and Hebrew translations, the Tanakh (commonly known as the Old Testament in Christianity) Arabic translation, to the Hindu scripture Bhagavad Gita, Matsya Purana, and Manawa Dharmasastra, something I did not even foresee and amazed me (and perhaps other audience).

We will find out why by listening to one sentence that he always repeats “*Allah tidak mau menghilangkan barang bukti*” (Allah will not lose the evidence). He did believe and prove in his own academic research the existence of textual *tahrīf* (corruption, change) in the Bible. But on the other hand, he believed there were irreversible points that showed the truth of divine revelation. Therefore, he brought these verses and juxtaposed them in an intertextual reading of the Quran. One example is the similarity of the story of the great flood during the time of Noah, both in the Quran, the Bible, and even the Matsya Purana. While it is generally accepted that Quranic and Biblical stories may share similarities,<sup>154</sup> the existence of the story in the

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<sup>154</sup> In both the Quran and the Bible, the story of Noah’s Flood revolves around a righteous prophet named Noah, chosen by God to deliver a warning to his people, who have strayed from the path of righteousness and indulged in wickedness. Noah diligently calls his people to worship only the one true God, urging them to repent and seek forgiveness before a catastrophic Flood befalls them. Noah's sincere efforts span centuries, but only a few people, primarily his family members, respond positively to his message and embrace faith in God. In preparation for the impending Flood, God commands Noah to construct a massive ark, and with divine guidance, he diligently builds the vessel to save his family and pairs of animals from the calamity. When the time comes, the Floodwaters surge from both the sky and the earth, covering the entire land. The ark, carrying Noah, his family, and the animals, floats upon the vast expanse of water. Meanwhile, the rest of humanity, blinded by their disbelief and arrogance, is overwhelmed by the deluge and perishes. The Flood lasts for an extended period, testing the patience and faith of Noah and those with him. Ultimately, God’s

Hindu scripture is not widely known among Abrahamic faiths. This is where Ali explains the existence of a figure named Manu and the great flood that occurred in his time.<sup>155</sup> The lexical similarity of the names Nūḥ, Noah, and Manu and the similarity of the great flood events led him to relate the stories of these three great traditions.<sup>156</sup> His approach is in line with other research that the same story is found in some cultural tales and even affirmed by scientific evidence that the great flood had actually happened.<sup>157</sup>

To some extent, the similarity of teachings and stories, both explicit and implicit, that he found from intertextual readings of the scriptures of religions led him to intellectually think that they all showed the existence of vestiges of evidence for the existence of divine revelation. For him all religions were coming from the same divine source but were distorted historically and culturally and, therefore, he rejected the dichotomy of heavenly religion and earth religion. He even privately included Hinduism and Buddhism as *ahl al-kitāb* but did not dare to take legal consequences in the Islamic legal debate for the group, such as the permissibility of marrying women and eating their slaughtered meat.<sup>158</sup> This attitude of intellectual openness is contrary to Irena Handono's belief in the irrelevance of *ahl al-kitāb*'s existence today.

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mercy prevails, and the Floodwaters recede, allowing the ark to come to rest on a mountain peak (in the Quran, mentioned *al-Jūdī* mountain). After the ordeal, the survivors disembark from the ark, thankful for their salvation. Noah, full of gratitude and humility, renews his devotion to God, and in return, God establishes a covenant with him, promising never to destroy humanity in such a manner again. In the Quran, the story can be found in Q. 71 (the Chapter of Nūḥ), Q.7:59-64, Q.11:25-49, Q.23:23, Q. 26:105-122, and Q.54:9-16. While in the Bible, it is found in the Book of Genesis chapters 6-9.

<sup>155</sup> In the appearance of a fish, Lord Vishnu warns the righteous ruler Manu of an approaching deluge. Manu constructs a great ark, rescuing numerous creatures, seeds, and sages. Manu is regarded as the founder of humanity and assists in the restoration of life after the flood. One of Hinduism's eighteen Mahapuranas is the Matsya Purana, where this story is found. In 291 chapters, it covers a wide range of subject matter.

<sup>156</sup> *Manu (Nuh) Versi Kitab Weda, Bible dan Quran | Kajian Linguistik*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Br1lccYWaU>.

<sup>157</sup> Hossien Hossieni, 'Great Floods from Primary Scientific Hypothesis to Myths', *European Journal of Science and Theology* 14, no. 6 (2018): 41–46.

<sup>158</sup> Ali, Exclusive Interview with Menachem Ali.

It was at this point that the religious studies delivered by Menachem Ali seemed to be a new point in the oral approach to Qur'anic exegesis. Like most Muslims, the Quran became the standard and point of departure for reading stories from interreligious texts. Validation of the Quran with interfaith texts became the keyword to see the purpose of his sermon. The elaboration of meaning that he did was that he tried to source from the text in the original language of the text. His capacity as a philologist he applied in this reading. In the framework of interfaith dialogue, he founded a study group called The Yeshiva Institute which was concerned with studying religious texts as well as seeking the birth of Muslim apologists. It is specifically intended, to some extent, against non-academic attempts at Christian missionaries by attempts at intellectual religious dialogue while simultaneously re-establishing Islamic-Judaist relations as fellow monotheistic Abrahamic religions.<sup>159</sup>

### **3.3.3 An Overview of the Religious Authority of Menachem Ali**

We can relate to the reading of the intertextuality of the Qur'an by Menachem or Mochammad Ali as the foundation of the first element of the articulatory labor theory of Alatas. Although he has the same standing point as other Muslim-Convert Preachers, namely as the apologist of Islam, the apologetic image he builds tends to avoid polemics. His attempts to link Islamic theological genealogy to the monotheism of the prophets Abraham and Muhammad through Ismail became a construction of his religious authority. His ability to master the languages of other texts is an attraction, which in the authority of alternatives theory is a source of authority in situations of choice.<sup>160</sup> For Mawla (Palu, a teacher in Ar Royyan Pesantren Jombang),<sup>161</sup> Usman (Jombang, a principal in Ar Rayyan *Pesantren*),<sup>162</sup> and Hafid (Jombang, Usman's assistant),<sup>163</sup> Ali's language skills and intertextual

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<sup>159</sup> The Yeshiva Institute, 'Mission Statement'.

<sup>160</sup> Scheppele and Sołtan, 'The Authority of Alternatives', 170.

<sup>161</sup> Mawla, Interview with Jamaat Menachem Ali, 3 March 2023.

<sup>162</sup> Usman, Interview with Jamaat Menachem Ali, 3 March 2023.

<sup>163</sup> Hafid, Interview with Jamaah Menachem Ali, 3 March 2023.

approach appealed to them in gaining such a broad perspective on the Quran and comparative religion that the latter invited him to give regular preaching at the *pesantren*'s mosque afore mentioned.

Given that the nature of Ali's studies is intellectual or insightful and not related to practice, we can say that it is difficult to apply the second element of articulatory labor theory, namely the transformation of the foundational past into examples. Perhaps, the measurement of examples in the case of intellectually based studies can be changed insofar as they are still accepted and consciously or unconsciously form certain thoughts that lead to certain indirect behaviors. This also relates to the third element, the capacity of effecting obedience without coercion, in which worshippers claim to accept Ali's explanation and instill it as a truth they can hold. Daffa and Nabil, *santri* in Ar Rayyan Jombang, said what Ali has delivered increased their Islamic faith.

However, it is interesting to briefly discuss Ali's narrative regarding the acceptance of his da'wah. He admitted that it was easier to be accepted in Muhammadiyah because in addition to the cultural affiliation he built from Abdullah Wasian, his apologetic da'wah model for awareness in fighting Christianization was also one of Muhammadiyah's *da'wa* missions, even becoming an external factor in the birth of Muhammadiyah and its modern education.<sup>164</sup> Ali's intellectual explanation is also in harmony with the tendencies of Muslim purists. On the contrary, he admitted that it was a bit difficult to be accepted among NU even though what he conveyed was similar to what the NU *kiai* said.<sup>165</sup> Perhaps it is because of the religious authority structures there that tend to be culturally exclusive as I discussed earlier. But

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<sup>164</sup> Abu Deedat Syihab, 'Muhammadiyah and Christianization Movement', official website, Muhammadiyah, 1 January 2012, <http://yogya-kota.muhammadiyah.or.id/berita-705-detail-muhammadiyah--dan--gerakan--kristenisasi.html>; 'Muhammadiyah Against Christianization - Suara Muhammadiyah', 27 November 2019, <https://suaramuhammadiyah.id/2019/11/27/muhammadiyah-melawan-kristenisasi/>.

<sup>165</sup> Ali, Menachem Ali interview.

that doesn't mean he isn't welcome among NU at all. Thanks to a recommendation from a regional NU figure named Kiai Ma'ruf Khozin, he was invited to give a lecture at an NU mosque, although it was still limited. This at least illustrates the fragmentation of his acceptance of religious authority based on his own experience, that Muslim-Convert Preacher authorities like himself are more easily accepted among puritan-modernists than traditionalists who have their own hierarchy and authority system.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

The emergence of new authorities and contestation of authority in the Muslim public sphere has been going on for a long time, but it has begun to accelerate since the use of mass media. However, the emergence of the new authority is still limited to fellow those who were born and raised in Muslim families and acknowledged Islamic education since childhood. In some cases, there are indeed figures who did not receive intensive Islamic education but emerged with new religious authority thanks to self-image in the media and the establishment of Islamic institutions. The last few decades have seen the emergence of new authority figures among Muslim-Convert Preachers who come from the Christian religion, especially in the Indonesian context. They actively preach by bringing new features among new authorities, although in the context of the world as we will discuss hereafter is the old feature, the use of Biblical texts in interpreting the Quran and comparative religion preaching, with Christology in particular.

Both Irena Handono and Mochammad Ali a.k.a. Menachem Ali converted to Islam for the intellectual motif, borrowing Lofland and Skonovd's observation.<sup>166</sup> They who previously had authority in Indonesian Christianity and gained religious authority in Indonesian Muslims today present an illustration of how religious authority can be built by Muslim-Convert Preachers. While one preaches for "penance", another is not. The fact that both were converts and had just learned Islam post-conversion but were accepted to give religious lectures illustrates the

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<sup>166</sup> Lofland and Skonovd, 'Conversion Motifs'.

fluidity of religious authority at some point. The topic of the relationship between Islam and religions along with the preceding texts, as well the attempt for validating Quran with Bible,<sup>167</sup> can be said to be the key to building their religious authority. The new perspective they offered became a selling point to be accepted and provided facilities to gain religious authority. In certain cases, such as those represented by Handono, the topic of the feeling of being threatened by Christian missionaries in the Indonesian context can be the key to unlocking religious authority. At some point, however, acceptance of their authority was limited to certain topics and fragmentation of certain circles, with puritanical modernists more receptive to them, but not traditionalists who had their own hierarchies and systems of authority. Yet, we have to take into account that active social service as undergone by Handono through *Pondok Muallafah Irena Center* has her authority rooted in Muslim society in terms of social approach, though Ali's interfaith and peaceful interreligious approach is more acceptable in terms of intellectual approach but not his pasive social activity in the Yeshive Institute. Next, we will discuss how the authority of this new model of *da'wa* gained space in the Islamic world and what effect it had on Biblical texts, especially in Indonesian Muslim communities.

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<sup>167</sup> Putra, 'Quran-Bible Validation in Contemporary Indonesia'.

## CHAPTER IV

### BIBLICAL TEXTS IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

After discussing the phenomenon of conversion in certain contexts and the phenomenon of the emergence of Muslim-Convert Preachers, which in this case represented by Irena Handono and Menachem Ali, as a new group in the arena of contestation of religious authorities, we are about to discuss their studies related to the use of Biblical texts. Before that, we will also discuss the relationship between the *Quran* and the Bible to see the context of their study. Furthermore, this discussion will lead to how the use of Biblical texts in Islamic studies affects the acceptance of pilgrims in perceiving the Bible which the Quran says contains corruption.

#### 4.1 Discourse in the Bible and the Quran

The Quran claims to continue the tradition of the Abrahamic faith preceded by Jews and Christians. He inherited revelation that had the same source as that of the Jewish prophets and Bibel.<sup>168</sup> The Quran itself mentions the Scriptures relating to those handed down to earlier prophets, namely *Tawrā* (Torah) of Mūsā (Moses), *Zabūr* (Psalms) of Dāwūd (David), *Injīl* (Gospel) of ʿĪsā (Jesus), *al-ṣuhuf al-ūlā* (the *earlier sheets*), and the other *ṣuhuf* (sheets) of Ibrāhīm (Abraham) and Mūsā. Therefore, it is not surprising to find topics and stories that have similarities between the Quran and the Bible. Unfortunately, some 18th- and 19th-century orientalist, such as Abraham Geiger, John E. Wansbrough, and Richard Bell, considered this similarity, using the theory of borrowing and influence, to be a form of Muhammad's deviation from Judeo-Christian teachings. Several other orientalist, particularly the late 19th and 20th centuries such as William M. Watt

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<sup>168</sup> The word Bible in this paper refers to the general sense of the *canonical* scriptures believed by Christians, consisting of the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament was taken and adopted from a traditional Jewish script called the Hebrew Bible, while the New Testament is a new tradition of Christianity but is not recognized by the Jewish community.

and Heribert Busse, as well as Muslim thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman, refuted the accusation by emphasizing the independence of Islam.<sup>169</sup>

The Quran has similarities with the Bible on the one hand, although not infrequently on the other hand expresses different versions of the same topic. Take for example the coming out of Adam, the Father of mankind, from heaven. The Quran and the Bible relate that the reason for Adam's expulsion from heaven was that he and his wife ate the forbidden fruit (in the Quran: *shajarat al-khuld* or Tree of Immortality; in the Bible: *etz ha-hayyim* or Tree of Knowledge) after being tempted that the fruit could give them both immortality and wisdom like God. After both had eaten the fruit of the forbidden tree, they realized that they were naked and immediately covered their bodies (Q.2:35-39, 7:19-25, 20:120-123; Genesis 3:5-22). But in some ways, the Quran presents a somewhat different version of the Bible. The same case is the story of the Golden Calf worshipped by the Israelites after the exodus after Moses went to Mount Sinai to receive the revelation of the Tablets of the Testimony.<sup>170</sup> In Exodus 32, Aaron, the brother of Moses, is mentioned as the one who made the Golden Calf for the worship of the Israelites. Meanwhile, the Quran clears the name of the Prophet Aaron (Hārūn) for dissuading his people from idolatry because it contradicted monotheism, and proposes al-Sāmirī as the idol maker (Q.20:85-97). In Islamic belief, prophets may make mistakes, but may not commit major sins because they are guarded (*ma'ṣūm*), moreover if associating with God which is the greatest sin.

Another important example relates to the lives of Jesus and Mary. The narrative of the two is recorded in the four canonical books of the New Testament which scholars say were written decades after 'the crucifixion of Jesus'. Although both the Bible (New Testament) and the Quran report that Mary, a pious Jewish woman, was visited by an angel who told her she would conceive Jesus as a virgin, the emphasis on this miracle in the two books is very different. While the New

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<sup>169</sup> Yusuf Hanafi, 'Quranic Studies in the Historical Trajectory of Orientalism and Western Islamology', *Hermeunetik* 7, no. 2 (2013): 246–48, <https://doi.org/10.21043/hermeneutik.v7i2.922>.

<sup>170</sup> The Jews interpreted the revelation at the time as the Written Torah and Christians as the Ten Commandments, while the Quran only calls it *alwāh* (s. *lawh* [tablet], Q.7:145).

Testament connects Jesus' miracles to divinity, the Quran depicts them as evidence of his prophecy. Both Holy Books share similarities of Jesus' miracles as well as differences. Similar miracles are healing the sick, curing diseases, restoring sight to the blind (Matthew 4:23, 9:27-31, John 9:1-7, Mark 1:34; Q. 3:49), and bringing the dead back to life (John 11:1-44; Q. 3:49). New Testament also notes miracles of Jesus are not found in the Quran and otherwise. At this point, *“though many Quranic verses represent Biblical patriarchs and prophetic traditions known in Bible... (some others) recast significantly versions of familiar Pentateuchal and prophetic narratives.”*<sup>171</sup>

However, there are also stories in the Quran that are like other Judeo-Christian traditions outside the Bible canon which is called extra-Biblical texts. This similarity can be found in parts of the Midrash,<sup>172</sup> Haggada,<sup>173</sup> and Targum.<sup>174</sup> One story that we can take as an example is (still) the story of the prophet Adam. The conversation between God and the angels when creating a *khalīfa*<sup>175</sup> on earth and the angelic 'protest' against the plan (Q. 2:30) and God's command to angels to 'bow down' to Adam and Iblīs' defiance of that command (Q. 2:34) are not found in the biblical canon but can be found in other literature. Conversations between

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<sup>171</sup> Michael E. Pregill, 'The Hebrew Bible and the Quran: The Problem of the Jewish 'Influence' on Islam', *Religion Compass* 1, no. 6 (2007): 647–48.

<sup>172</sup> A Jewish literary genre that consists of interpretive and expository writings, expanding on the narratives, laws, and teachings found in the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh). Midrashim are an essential part of rabbinic literature and have played a significant role in shaping Jewish thought, interpretation of scripture, and religious practice. They reflect the creativity, wisdom, and devotion of Jewish scholars throughout history.

<sup>173</sup> A Jewish text that is used during the Passover Seder, which is a special meal and ritual observed on the first two nights of the Jewish holiday of Passover (Pesach). The Haggadah serves as a guidebook or script for the Passover Seder, providing the order of the service and the specific readings, prayers, and rituals to be performed. It tells the story of the Jewish people's liberation from slavery in ancient Egypt and recounts the events leading up to and during the Exodus.

<sup>174</sup> Refers to ancient Aramaic translations and paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh). Aramaic was a widely spoken language during the Second Temple period, and the Targumim were created to help the Jewish people understand the Hebrew scriptures, especially during times when Aramaic had become the vernacular language of the Jewish community. The Targumim served as interpretive translations, not literal word-for-word renditions. They aimed to provide explanations, clarifications, and expansions of the original Hebrew text, making the biblical content more accessible to the average person, and bridging the gap between Hebrew and Aramaic speakers.

<sup>175</sup> It etymologically means either 'successor', 'representative', or 'viceroy'. Quranic exegetes choose the meaning differently, but all agreed to contextually interpret it Ādam, the first human being.

God and angels can be found in the Babylonian Talmud (*Sanhedrīn* 38b) Genesis 1.26 and Psalm 8.4, while the command of prostration can be found in the *Life of Adam and Eve, the Gospel of Bartholemew, and the Gospel of Nicodemus*.<sup>176</sup> This is what Reynolds called the Quranic subtext, meaning “the larger literary and religious tradition in which the Quran is participating.”<sup>177</sup>

Due to the similarity between the Quran and the Bible and other Jewish oral traditions, in Islamic history, some Jewish stories were borrowed to explain the stories contained in the Quran, considering that the Quran and hadith do not explain details. These stories attributed to Jews are called *isrā’īliyyāt*.<sup>178</sup> The penetration of *isrā’īliyyāt* into the Islamic world cannot be separated from the historical and social context of Arab society at that time. Arabs who were illiterate and lacked a pre-Islamic advanced civilization had mingled with Jews who migrated to Arabia, especially in the 70s. Jews whose possession of scriptures, religious traditions, cosmological views, and earlier stories had a place in the hearts of Arabs. So, it is Christians who inherit Biblical scripture. They gained authority among the Arabs regarding knowledge of prophets, past stories, and prophecies by being a place of inquiry.<sup>179</sup> We can easily identify this in the Khadījah event that brought Muhammad to Nawfal b. Waraqa who was an *ahl al-kitāb* regarding the appearance of angels in the Cave of Hira that marked the apostleship of Muhammad. Even the Jewish tradition of the last prophet’s prophecy that the people of Medina, as written

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<sup>176</sup> The last two are apocryphal Gospels or non-canonic but influential in the early community among the Christian literature. See Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, Routledge Studies in the Quran 10 (London ; New York: Routledge, 2010), 47–50.

<sup>177</sup> Reynolds, 23.

<sup>178</sup> The term actually includes the narratives coming from Christians but commonly refers to narratives narrated among the Jewish tradition since they were the big and long-lasting religious community. It also refers to other Jewish religious literature, such as Midrash, Haggada, and Targum. Muhammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā’īliyyāt fī al-Tafsīr wa al-Hadīth* (Cairo: Maktaba Wahbah, n.d.), 15–16, <https://ia600305.us.archive.org/14/items/FP0033/0033.pdf>; Muhammad b. Muhammad Abū Shahba, *al-’Isrā’īliyyāt wa al-Mawḍū’āt fī Kutub al-Tafsīr* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Sunna, 1987), 13–14.

<sup>179</sup> Abū Shahba, *al-’Isrā’īliyyāt wa al-Mawḍū’āt*, 93; Subi Nur Isnaini, 'Manhaj Ibn 'Aṭīyyah Fī al-Ta’āmul Ma’a al-Isrā’īliyyāt Fī al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz', *Journal of the Study of the Quranic Sciences and Hadith* 23, no. 2 (30 July 2022): 262, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v23i2.3756>.

in chapter 2, contributed to the significant mass conversion to Islam among Medinan Muslims.<sup>180</sup>

This religio-social structure, though changing, to some extent still persisted even as Islam developed. Jewish and Christian religious leaders still have a place to tell some of the stories of the prophets' past. Some Jews who mastered the Holy Book converted to Islam, such as 'Abd Allāh b. Salām, Ka'b al-Ahbār, and Wahb b. Munabbih which we can say that those with the knowledge of Scripture acquire some form of religious authority. This is evidenced by that some of the Companions of the Prophet, such as Abū Hurayra, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās, and 'Abd Allāh b. 'Amrū b. al-'Āsh, are known to have narrated their narrations and some of these narratives were later quoted in books of tafsir. In some *hadīths*, 'Abd Allāh b. Salām received assurance of heaven. *Ahl al-hadīth* agreed to call him *thiqa*<sup>181</sup> and accepted the narration derived from him even though related to *isrā'iliyyāt* because he was considered to have both Jewish and Islamic traditions to sort out which was true from the Jewish tradition. Even, it is strengthened by some narrations that *asbāb al-nuzūl* (revelation context) of Q. 46:10 relate to his conversion to Islam.<sup>182</sup>

In its development, *isrā'iliyyāt* cannot be separated from its influence on the Islamic world. The claim of the *Quran* as the successor to previous revelations coupled with the similarity of several accounts between the *Quran* and the Bible (the Old and New Testament) and extra-Biblical texts makes discussion of *isrā'iliyyāt* inevitable. In turn, it was slowly adopted as an explanatory (*bayān*) of the *Quran* in the books of tafsir and stories of the early Ummah in the building of the Islamic worldview. To some extent, Muslim scholars go beyond by using Biblical texts as a tool to criticize commonly Christianity. Many works were produced in this regard. However, the doctrine of *tahrīf* presented by the *Quran* and

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<sup>180</sup> Abū Fidā' Ismā'il Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya: Mabda' al-Khalīqa wa Qaṣaṣ al-'Anbiyā'*, *Muhibb al-Dīn*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2015), 400.

<sup>181</sup> Literally means reliable. In the tradition of *hadīth* studies, the term is given to a narrator who is viewed as trustworthy and whose narratives are reliable.

<sup>182</sup> al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā'iliyyāt fī al-Tafsīr wa al-Ḥadīth*, 68–70.

the Prophet's warning to be neutral (neither confirming nor blaming the narration of *ahl al-kitāb*) create a tug-of-war in accepting Biblical texts or *isrā'iliyyāt*.

#### 4.2 Muslim-Convert Preachers and Their Biblical Interpretation

What Muslim-Convert Preachers who come from a clerical background, especially in the context of this Christian study, in their lectures quoting or studying the Bible and Judeo-Christian tradition is similar to that of the converts of earlier Jews who began narrating *isrā'iliyyāt*. They also share similarities with other Muslim Christologians, such as the famous Ahmed Deedat and Zakir Naik, in some respects and differences in others. Ahmad Deedat, a modern Muslim debater who was inspired by al-Kairanawi's *Izhār al-Haqq*, motivated Naik to study Christology to counter missionaries supported by the West. His approach to polemical apologetics toward the Bible in turn inspired the establishment of the Islamic Propagation Centre and its branches in many countries and <sup>183</sup> marked the comparative religion-based theological 'resistance' to contemporary Christian missionaries aided by television and video tapes. His controversial approach was also followed by his student Zakir Naik who was even more rigorous, challenging the conversion even to an ordinary questioner and not his debate opponent. Naik's impressive rhetorical skill and amazing memorization by citing verbatim from religious scriptures and texts, that of Islam-Christianity and even Hindu, does not only affects the atmosphere of comparative religion. He also contributed to the dissemination of Salafism and framed it as a rational belief-system based on logic and reason rather than merely literalist.<sup>184</sup>

At this point, we will discuss what Muslim-Convert Preachers, especially Irena Handono and Menachem Ali, have to say in their talks on Christology and comparative religion. In this regard, borrowing the concepts of apologetics and

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<sup>183</sup> David Westerlund, 'Ahmed Deedat's Theology of Religion: Apologetics Through Polemics', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33, no. 3 (2003): 267, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006603322663505>.

<sup>184</sup> Abdul Fahad and Saad Ahmad, 'Islamic Media and the Muslim Public Spheres in India: The Case of Zakir Naik's Peace TV', *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 7, 27, no. 9 (2022): 54.

polemicism will greatly help me in analyzing their both uses of Biblical preachings. In the next discussion, the term *isrā'īliyyāt* is used interchangeably with Biblical texts and, to some extent, extra-Biblical texts.

In her numerous Islamic preachings and interviews, Irena Handono, in addition to repeatedly prefacing her conversion narrative, often criticizes Christian doctrine. Her critics of the doctrine of the Trinity she built with the logic of the impossibility of God having a genealogy. This is of course a doctrine that Muslims must have believed. She frequently stated that “before 325, Jesus was never worshipped,”<sup>185</sup> With this approach, the Trinity, for her, is a syncretism of paganism with ‘the Original Christianity’ originally carried out by Paul, the true founder of Christianity today, to destroy ‘the original teaching of Jesus’ from within as well as to attract the Roman Emperor and obtain asylum and political assistance.<sup>186</sup> We can say that Handono shares similarities with Ahmed Deedat. In summary, the similarities between the two, which in line with traditional Muslim views of Jesus, are that: (1) sin is not and cannot be inherited; (2) the doctrine of the Trinity is a fabrication and not taught by Jesus; (3) God does not beget neither begotten; (4) Jesus was neither crucified nor killed; thus (5) Jesus is not God.<sup>187</sup>

Another similarity is the view of *taḥrīf*, which is the view that Jewish and Christian scriptures, as stated several times by the Quran, have been corrupted, supplemented, and replaced.<sup>188</sup> In her ‘orthodox’ Islamic view, Bibel has been corrupted and changed by *ahl al-kitāb* which makes its distortion gone so far. In turn, she rejects the existence of *ahl al-kitāb* in the contemporary period because, according to her, “*there is no longer the ‘same’ ahl al-kitāb such in the reign of the Prophet Muhammad.*”<sup>189</sup> In line with Deedat, she believes the Jews and Christians

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<sup>185</sup> Irena Handono, May 10, 2023; *Ummi Irene Handono: I converted to Islam for reading this verse!* - *Amazing Muharram 9*, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUXMikDO2Og>.

<sup>186</sup> *um Irene Handono.*

<sup>187</sup> Westerlund, ‘AHMED DEEDAT’S THEOLOGY OF RELIGION’, 269.

<sup>188</sup> We will discuss more about it in the next point.

<sup>189</sup> Handono, Irena Handono; Irena Handono, ‘Kajian Hj. Irena Handono: Bagaimana Islam Memandang Soal Pernikahan Beda Agama?’, *Kajian Hj. Irena Handono* (blog), 29 December 2014, <https://kajianirenahandono.blogspot.com/2014/12/bagaimana-islam-memandang-soal.html>.

must convert to Islam. This approach, arguably, very rarely makes use of Biblical texts as *isrā'iliyyāt* to extend explanation to Quranic stories of the prophets.

Besides the changing law of the harmfulness of the pig, she takes an example of the different meaning of the book of Isaiah 42:1 between the Indonesian version and the English King James Version (KJV). While that verse of KJV writes “*Behold My Servant, whom I uphold, Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth: I have put My Spirit upon Him; He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles,*” the Indonesian version writes “*Lihat, itu hamba-Ku yang Kupegang, orang pilihan-Ku, yang kepadanya Aku berkenan. Aku telah menaruh Roh-Ku ke atasnya, supaya ia menyatakan hukum kepada bangsa-bangsa.*” She points out the changing translation of “the Gentiles” which literally means “*kafir*” (the unbeliever) to “*bangsa-bangsa*” (nations).<sup>190</sup> Somehow, we can actually find a similar version to this Indonesian version by *Lembaga Alkitab Indonesia* (LAI, the Indonesian Biblical Institution) in Christian Standard Bible (CSB) which is also using “nations” instead of “the Gentiles.”<sup>191</sup> Thus, we can assume that the Indonesian version is translated from CSB instead of KJV.

Drawing from her intensive critics of Christianity in various moments, we can identify her as a polemicist. The polemicist tends to criticize other faiths or beliefs to justify his or her religion. The polemicist tells the false and the untrue about someone else’s religion.<sup>192</sup> She not only makes use of Biblical texts and historical criticism to falsify religious doctrines of Christianity but also to show what is morally wrong in Christianity. In one preaching, for instance, she quoted Biblical texts from Psalm 137:9 and 68:22 and preached them in front of her audience as the foundational texts for Christians to do violence.<sup>193</sup> Somehow, she did not explain

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<sup>190</sup> Umi Irena Handono: *Bukti Nabi Muhammad SAW Disebut Dalam Alkitab (Part.2 Habis)*, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a\\_zDIc0zMb0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_zDIc0zMb0). Somehow, if we check the Christian Standard Bible (CSB), we will find the use of “*the nations*” also, instead of “*the Gentiles*.”

<sup>191</sup> ‘Bible Gateway Passage: Isaiah 42 - Christian Standard Bible’, Bible Gateway, accessed 25 June 2023, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2042&version=CSB>.

<sup>192</sup> David Biale, ‘Between Polemics and Apologetics: Jewish Studies in the Age of Multiculturalism’, *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1996): 174.

<sup>193</sup> *Kajian Muslimah: Kontradiksi Ayat Di Dalam Bible | Hj Irena Handono | Kajian Shafiyah*, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3QGzlmzlw>.

the context of the text nor refer to the Christian tradition about the verse, whereas the verses talk about the context in which Israelites calling for God to exact the just judgment for Jerusalem had been destroyed and they had been enslaved by their enemies.<sup>194</sup> To some extent, such cases potentially raise the tension between Muslim-Christian relationships in Indonesia due to the misinterpretation of the Holy Book of religion by another religious adherent.<sup>195</sup> In this regard, such a comparative religion preaching should know the boundaries so it will not provoke religious conflict, either latently or obviously.<sup>196</sup>

However, such a way is what makes Muslims pay attention to her preachings, given that the socio-religious context in Indonesian Muslims is still surrounded by the issue of Christian missionaries, particularly among those who experienced the New Order. Handono's polemical criticism, which is rarely undertaken by general preachers, I would like to say, offers an alternative in Islamic preaching materials. Her use of Biblical texts and knowledge of Church history gives her additional legitimation for applying her authority to criticize Christianity among her Muslim audience. Many comments on YouTube support her and pray for her healthy. Lida (21) says she supported Handono for she has opened her eyes and mind about the fallacy of Christianity. Through Handono's preaching, she claims "I now understand what is going wrong with Christianity and my faith in Islam significantly increases."<sup>197</sup> This condition illustrates that for some Muslims, polemical studies such as this help their understanding of the errors of other religions which ultimately increases their faith and knowledge of Islam.

At the same time, she also interprets (or re-reads) the Bible to justify the truth of Islam, particularly about the prophethood of Muhammad. She takes her role as a Muslim apologist by making use of Biblical texts. She interprets Isaiah 42:1 above as the prophecy about a prophet who would be sent thoroughly and universally for

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<sup>194</sup> Joseph R. Nally, 'Does the Bible Encourage Murder? - Psalm 137:9', Thirdmill, accessed 5 June 2023, <https://thirdmill.org/answers/answer.asp?file=46657>.

<sup>195</sup> Putra, 'Quran-Bible Validation in Contemporary Indonesia', 123.

<sup>196</sup> Gazali, 'Para Da'i & Muallaf Perlu Belajar Dulu Sebelum Tampil'.

<sup>197</sup> Qurrotu'aini, Interview with Irena Handono's Audience.

all humankind. She makes use of Isaiah 42:11 to prove that the prophecy will be fulfilled by a descendant of Kedar (the second son of Ishmael, Gen. 25:13) in which Muhammad was.<sup>198</sup> This feature of apologetics is actually common among Muslims and converts who (claim to) have knowledge of the Bible.<sup>199</sup> However, her preaching gives more portion to the polemical approach rather than this apologetical approach. For this, Assidiqi (25) said he was interested in her because,

*“The discussion given is often related to the history of the previous people, which in fact, I personally am very unfamiliar with it. In addition, her preaching sometimes takes from other people’s book sources, such as the Gospels, so that the discussion of study topics becomes more interesting because they are seen from various points of view or perspectives.”<sup>200</sup>*

The testimony suggests that there have not been many Islamic studies that explore the history of the previous people with other people’s book sources that are useful for enriching Islamic and historical understanding.

Mochammad Ali or well-known as Menachem Ali, contrary to Irena Handono and other Muslim-Convert Preachers, prefers to undergo such an apologetical approach and avoids a polemical approach. The topics of his study are related to explaining the stories of the Quran with both Biblical texts and extra-Biblical texts. The aim is to seek validation from other documents related to the Quran, especially its stories, to show it as a historical fact, not just an imaginary fairy tale or doctrine, so that the truth of the Quran can be universally accepted, not doctrinal.<sup>201</sup> For Ali, this apologetic approach has an inclusive nature that is generally acceptable, on the contrary, the polemical approach tends to cause tension between religious communities and make Islam viewed badly.

Many of his sermons dealt with explaining the stories of the Quran in terms of positive apologetics. It is generally preceded by reading verses of the Quran and interpreting them. Early tafsir generally used *tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi al-Qur’ān* or the

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<sup>198</sup> Umi Irena Handono.

<sup>199</sup> Putra, ‘Quran-Bible Validation in Contemporary Indonesia’, 115,119.

<sup>200</sup> Assidiqi, Interview with Irena Handono’s Audience.

<sup>201</sup> Ali, Exclusive Interview with Menachem Ali.

notion that Quranic verses could interpret other Quranic verses, or shortly the Quran interprets itself. One of Ali's main features is linking these Quranic verses with other texts: Biblical texts, extra-Biblical texts (i.e., Jewish and Christian religious interpretation manuscripts, and other historical documents regarding to Jews and Christians), and even Hindu religious books. The purpose, once again, is to show the truth of the Quran as well as to show the continuity between the Quran and the earlier holy books. Like Handono, Ali did not deny the existence of *tahrīf* in the books of the earlier people, but it was more related to the process of copying and translation so as to distort the original meaning. He criticized Christians' incomprehension of the original text of their scriptures for relying too heavily on distorted translations.<sup>202</sup>

In a sermon at Ar-Rayyan Mosque, Jombang, East Java, Ali emphasized that *“Islam is not built from fairy tales. Islam is built on data... Concretely with evidence that can be seen physically, namely archaeological... written data.”*<sup>203</sup> It represents his scholarly paradigm as a philologist who tends to and highly values written records from the past. In his lecture, as well as Handono's apology of Muhammad's prophecy, Ali connected the text of the Quran with an earlier book. Here, Ali explains the prophecy of a prophet from the descendant Kedar (Isaiah 21:13-17), because so far, according to him, Jews and Christians deny the existence of an Arab prophet or descendant of Ishmael.

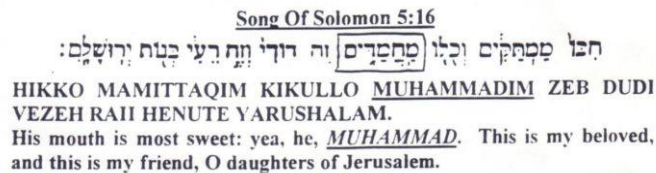
Ali quotes *Shir HaShirim* (known as Song of the Songs or Song of Solomon of the Old Testament) which is also found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (which he often refers to it in many of his preachings) and read it in its Hebrew language. Referring to his reading of the book 5:16, he states the existence of a prophecy of the coming of *“Muhammadim”* which is textually clear Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, prophesied by King Solomon himself or Prophet Solomon in the Islamic tradition. Ali also quoted Grand Rabbi Moses b. Maimon or known as Maimonides in order

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<sup>202</sup> *Nabi Bani Kedar in the Book of Samawi Religions by DR. Menachem Ali (Surabaya)*, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQI3eQtYY8g>.

<sup>203</sup> *Prophet Bani Kedar in the Book of Samawi Religions by DR. Menachem Ali (Surabaya)*.

to justify the Prophet Muhammad’s message that reached Prophet Ismail through the Kedar or Qaidār (Arabic) route.



**Figure 6.** The Hebrew Bible of Song of Solomon 5:16

The verse, somehow, is translated into English in King James Version “*His mouth is most sweet: yea, **he is altogether lovely**. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.*” The translation of “*Muhammadim*” or “*Mahamadim*” in another reading as “*altogether lovely*” or “*wholly desirable*” is different from what Ali believes as it is meant the Prophet Muhammad. Ali’s reading is also different obviously from the Christian interpretation that the verse refers to Jesus Christ as the prophesied one.<sup>204</sup> To some extent, Muslims’ claim to the prophecy of the Prophet Muhammad using the verse is also challenged and refused by Christians.

*“To any Christian remotely familiar with Song of Solomon, the first appropriate response to this argument is honestly a hearty laugh. This is obviously a love song between Solomon and his bride, and to put Muhammad in the place of the bride’s beloved turns the book into nonsense. The context is clearly about the passionate love of a marriage and is sometimes rather descriptive. It could not possibly be about some future prophet bringing a new book.”*<sup>205</sup>

<sup>204</sup> ‘Song of Solomon 5:16 - Bible Verse Meaning and Commentary’, Bible Study Tools, accessed 28 June 2023, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/song-of-solomon-5-16.html>; ‘Song of Solomon 5:16 Commentaries: “His Mouth Is Full of Sweetness. And He Is Wholly Desirable. This Is My Beloved and This Is My Friend, O Daughters of Jerusalem.”’, Bible Hub, accessed 28 June 2023, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/songs/5-16.htm>.

<sup>205</sup> Luke Wayne, ‘Does Song of Solomon 5:16 Predict the Coming of Muhammad?’, *Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry* (blog), 25 May 2016, <https://carm.org/islam/does-song-of-solomon-516-predict-the-coming-of-muhammad/>.

It shows that this kind of apology, related to the Prophet Muhammad's prophecy adapted to the Biblical texts, did cause a defensive reaction among Christians because it was considered to have "jumped fences," although not explicitly critical polemics. Polemic will appear implicitly for the interpretation means that either Jewish or Christians have changed and corrupted the Holy Book.

On another occasion, on a podcast, Ali attempted to explain or seek validation of the Quranic account of the Prophet Abraham being burned (Q. 21:51-70).<sup>206</sup> This effort, as he repeatedly stated, is so that the truth of the Quran can be validated by other documents so that it does not become a one-sided truth or even a mere fairy tale. He relates the Quranic story to Genesis 15:7 saying "He also said to him (Abraham), *'I am the Lord who brought you from your of the Chaldeans ('ūr kaš-dîm), to give you this land to possess,'*" or the Indonesian Bible version saying "*Lagi firman TUHAN kepadanya: "Akulah TUHAN, yang membawa engkau keluar dari Ur-Kasdim untuk memberikan negeri ini kepadamu menjadi milikmu."*" While the English version mentions "Ur of the Chaldeans," the Indonesian version still mentions "*Ur-kasdim.*" Christian traditions, as formerly proposed by Henry C. Rawlinson (1810–1895) and then taken for a standard doctrine by Sir Leonard Woolley (1880–1960), commonly refer the term to a city named "Ur" located in the Sumerian city of Ur, today Tall al-Muqayyar (or Mughair), about 200 miles (300 km) southeast of modern Iraq,<sup>207</sup> while Jewish tradition refers to the city of Urfa or Şanlıurfa located about 80 km east of the Euphrates River, in modern southeastern Turkey.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> This story is broadly related to Ibrahim threatening to destroy the idols of his people and the realization of that threat, where he destroys all small idols and left a big one on which he put an axe, accompanied by a debate won by Ibrahim regarding the helplessness of the idols so that they do not deserve to be deified. The courtier of his people eventually ordered his army and people to burn Ibrahim after losing the debate rather than being shame. But Abraham, who was burned, was saved by Allah by making the fire cold, unable to burn him.

<sup>207</sup> André Parrot, 'Abraham - Migration, Ur Kasdim, Harran, and Mari Texts | Britannica', Britannica, 17 May 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Abraham/The-Genesis-narrative-in-the-light-of-recent-scholarship>.

<sup>208</sup> Gary Rendsburg, 'Ur Kasdim: Where Is Abraham's Birthplace?', TheTorah.com, accessed 29 June 2023, <https://www.thetorah.com/article/ur-kasdim-where-is-abrahams-birthplace>.

Ali explores the meaning of the word “‘ūr” in this respect. He quoted Targum Jonathan that “‘ūr kaś-dîm,” means “fiery furnace of the Kasdai.”<sup>209</sup> The Targum which is authoritative in Jewish tradition gives him authority in relating the narrative of Abraham in the Bible and the Quran. This implied meaning for him indicates an event related to the “fiery furnace of fire” that would be clearer if it relied on the Quran, namely the incident of the Prophet Abraham being burned for opposing the idolatry of his people. Therefore, the term ‘ūr kaś-dîm in Gen 15:7 implicitly relates to the Quranic narrative of Abraham. This is further reinforced by the context of verses, in both the Quran and the Bible, which speak of the exodus of Prophet Abraham to the promised land after the arson.<sup>210</sup>

If we look at *Tafsîr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, a well-known commentary book full of *isrā’iliyyāt* written in the early second century of Islam, for example, we find no explanation of exactly where Abraham's country of origin and the burning incident took place. But Muqātil b. Sulaymān gives several details of events, such as the king who came to power and ordered the burning of Ibrahim named Namrūdh b. Kan‘ān; the people of Abraham had one festival a year in which they made food offerings and prostrated themselves to their idols before and after going out for the festival; their idols were seventy-two in number and made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and wood; while the large idol that Abraham left behind was made of gold and jewels, had eyes of red rubies that could glow in the dark like the flames of a burning torch.<sup>211</sup> Details like this which have no strong precedent in the two main Islamic sources are also called *isrā’iliyyāt*, because they are thought to have come from the folk tales of the People of the Book. Ali, in this regard, choosed to use extra-Biblical texts, the Targum, rather than Quranic exegesis since he aimed to prove the truth of Quranic story through interreligious texts.

<sup>209</sup> ‘Targum Jonathan on Genesis’, Sefaria, accessed 29 June 2023, [https://www.sefaria.org/Targum\\_Jonathan\\_on\\_Genesis](https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Genesis).

<sup>210</sup> *The Story of Ibrahim Being Burned Is Not Just a Fairy Tale | Forgotten Historical Facts*, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mx5OTyMxZlo>.

<sup>211</sup> Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsîr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, vol. 3 (Beirut, Lebanon: Mu’assasa al-Tārīkh al-‘Arabī, n.d.), 73–75.

This style of narrative apology is very similar to the *isrā'īliyyāt* narration we discussed earlier. This also made his worshippers interested in what he said, especially since Ali could not only access and read the Bible in Hebrew, but also referred to Jewish traditions such as the Targum he had read. When I interviewed five people from Ali's audience, all agreed that Ali's sermons added new insights and perspectives to them, even solidified their faith. Mawla (22), a teacher in Ar Rayyan *pesantren* in Jombang, said:

*"I get three aspects of perspective, namely history, interpretation and creed. From the historical side I can capture the stories of other religions, from the interpretation side I can capture the interpretations of other religious books and from the creed side all his interpretations are able to thicken my creed."*<sup>212</sup>

In line with him, Usman, a principal of the *pesantren*, stated that Ali's sermon "strengthens the creed and increases (my) monotheistic faith with evidence of ancient manuscripts."<sup>213</sup>

In addition to delivering apologies for Islam using Biblical and extra-Biblical texts, as well as critiques of the Quran and other Muslim-Convert Preachers from Christians in Indonesia, Ali also delivered his critique of *ahl al-kitāb* from Jews and Christians. He criticized the attitude of the Jews who did not want to believe in some of the prophets sent to them. The prophet Yahya (John), who was born to the Prophet Zacharias (Zecharia) and his wife who were both from the Children of Israel, was rejected by them. Jesus, who was born of a virgin Maryam without a father, rejected him and even accused him of adultery with a Roman soldier. The Prophet Muhammad who was born of Abrahamic descent through Ismail and Kedar, Jews refused him even though, according to Ali, they knew it. This is only because Muhammad did not come from the lineage of Ya'qūb (Jacob) which became the prophetic path for Jews or *Banī Isrāīl*.<sup>214</sup> This kind of criticism is actually a doctrine in Islam as the Quran conveys. But so far, Ali's criticism has

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<sup>212</sup> Mawla, Interview with Menachem Ali's Audience.

<sup>213</sup> Usman, Interview with Menachem Ali's Audience.

<sup>214</sup> *Prophet Bani Kedar in the Book of Samawi Religions* by DR. Menachem Ali (Surabaya).

taken a more subtle style and has not been the main topic in his lectures compared to the harsher Handono and the main topic in her critical sermons. The reason Ali is not too frontal is that such criticism in many ways does not add much good, in fact it has more potential to cause conflict and tension between religious communities.<sup>215</sup>

Presumably, Muslim-Convert Preachers' lectures using Biblical and extra-Biblical texts seem to generally boil down to these two approaches, apologetics and polemics. The apologetic approach was in order to confirm the truth of Islam, especially its monotheistic doctrine which he inherited from Abraham and the prophecy of the Prophet Muhammad as a promised prophet. This approach will inevitably be challenged and challenged by Jews and Christians. In the Indonesian context, Christianity is of course represented to refute Islamic apologies that are based on or use Biblical texts. However, this apologetic approach generally does not cause extreme tension between religious communities, especially Muslim-Christian relations, because it is only based on claims of interpretation of Judeo-Christian scripture. Meanwhile, the polemical approach of critiquing Jewish and Christian beliefs and scriptures theologically and historically, which of course departs from the Quran and hadith, shows an attempt to justify the truth of Islam by exposing the errors of other religions. The simple logic is that Islam is right because others are wrong. In the Indonesian context, the polemical approach is to criticize Christian teachings, especially the doctrine of the Trinity by presenting postulates in the Bible that show the apostolate and human aspects of Jesus so that it is sufficient to reject the divinity of Jesus. It is in addition to historical criticism of the development of Church and Christianity.<sup>216</sup>

The cases of Irena Handono and Menachem Ali show a different typology in the style of Muslim-Convert Preachers' lectures. We can classify Irena Handono into the first type, which tends to deliver polemics to discover the errors of her old religion, both in theological and historical reviews, in the context of Islamic lectures

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<sup>215</sup> Ali, Exclusive Interview with Menachem Ali.

<sup>216</sup> Putra, 'Quran-Bible Validation in Contemporary Indonesia', 115,119.

that use Biblical texts. Although this type also conveys an apology of Islam with an interpretation of the Biblical texts, this apology does not receive a large portion as the main topic in the lecture. The biblical texts used by this type are generally translated versions or versions used by Christians, in the context of this study, in Indonesia. This type does not focus much on the use of Biblical texts as explanatory sources in order to explore the Quranic narrative to earlier peoples as *isrā'īliyyāt* functioned. This type of polemicist differs from Jewish scholars who converted to Islam in the early days of Islam as discussed earlier. On the contrary, the second type as represented by Menachem Ali indicates the existence of different styles in which apology is the main topic. Apology in this type tends to focus on connecting and justifying the Quranic narrative with Biblical texts (and extra-Biblical texts). At this point, the use of Biblical texts functions like *the isrā'īliyyāt* narrated by early Jewish converts.

In the analysis of religious authority using Alatas' theory of articulatory labor, when we examine the first element of the construction of religious authority, namely the foundational past as a source of authority, against Irena Handono and Menachem Ali, we arguably find that the foundational past that both use is different from Alatas' proposal. If Alatas presents in his research the *sunna* or the Prophetic past as a source of religious authority in Islam to be further articulated into social norms and practices based on needs and temporal situations, we find the source of authority articulated by Handono and Ali is the Quran validated and the Quranic standards elaborated with Biblical and extra-Biblical texts. At some point, the apologetic and polemical approach to the "perverted and perverted earlier religions" claimed to be based on the Quran became a special feature presented by Muslim-Convert Preachers as a factor to attract the believers and gain religious authority among them. Furthermore, the second element of the theory, "the capability to transform that foundational past into examples" are rarely found in their Quranic standard of Biblical preachings, given that their preachings are more intellectuals rather than practical. However, in some respects, we can find this transformation of the foundational past in the form of religious opinion that leads

to opposition to the “non-Islamic Judeo-Christian tradition” in order to maintain the purity of Islam, as we found in the case of Irena Handono. At least, what we can conclude is that, both the tendency of polemical and apologetic approaches by Muslim-Convert Preachers who are of Christian religious origin (at least according to their claims) in our research, their authority rests on the Quran with the validation of previous revelations.

Given that the object of this study is still limited to two people, such a typology may not be satisfactory or sufficient. However, so far, the common phenomenon that occurs in Indonesia I can say runs in this pattern. Other Muslim-Convert Preachers who came from Christian scholars, such as Insan L.S. Mokoginta and Yahya Waloni are also on the same track. The latter even served a criminal sentence for his polemical style that was too frontal so that it was reported for violating religious freedom.<sup>217</sup> Regardless, both types agree to actively apologise in terms of defending Islam when attacked (and blasphemed) by adherents of other religions theologically. Both also agreed to make the Quran the standard of value in reading and using Biblical texts, in the sense that they only accept what is in harmony with the Quran and reject other than that.<sup>218</sup> It is a consensus in the Islamic tradition to keep the Quran as a benchmark and the Biblical texts (*isrā'īliyyāt*) as supporters.<sup>219</sup>

### 4.3 Muslims' Acceptance of Biblical Texts

The Quran repeatedly states that *the ahl al-kitāb* perverted their holy book. The Quranic critique of this kind of misappropriation came to be commonly known as the criticism of *tahrīf*. There are several words and terms that the Quran uses in expressing this idea:

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<sup>217</sup> Yulida Medistiara, 'Yahya Waloni Receives 5 Months in Prison', News, detiknews, January 11, 2022, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5893128/yahya-waloni-terima-divonis-5-bulan-penjara>.

<sup>218</sup> Ali, Menachem Ali interview; Handono, Irena Handono.

<sup>219</sup> al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā'īliyyāt fī al-Tafsīr wa al-Ḥadīth*, 93; Abū Shahba, *al-'Isrā'īliyyāt wa al-Mawḍū'āt*, 70.

- 1) Covering up the truth with falsehood (*wa lā talbisū al-haqq bi al-bāṭil*, Q.2:42).
- 2) Concealing the truth and witnesses (*taktumū, yaktumūna al-haqq* and *katama shahāda*, Q.2:42, 140, 146, 159, 174, Q.3:71, 187).
- 3) Exchanging the declaration (*baddalū al-qawl*, Q. 2:59. Q.7:162).
- 4) Falsifying the revelation (*yaktubūna al-kitāb bi aydīhim thumma yaqūlūna hādihā min ʿind Allāh*, Q.2:79).
- 5) Twisting their tongues to be thought of the revelation (*yalwūna alsinatahum bi al-kitāb*, Q.3:78, Q.4:46).
- 6) Shifting words out of their context (*yuharrifūna al-kalima ʿan mawāḍiʿihi*, Q 2:75; 4:46; 5:13, 41).
- 7) Forgetting a portion of what was recounted to them (*nasū haẓẓan mim mā dhukkirū bihi*, Q.5:13-14, Q.7:53, 165).
- 8) Hiding of the truth (*tukhfūna min al-kitāb*, Q.5:15).

Reynolds classifies this understanding of *tahrīf* in the Islamic world into four layers: 1) *scriptural falsification*, 2) *textual alteration* (*tahrīf al-naṣṣ*), 3) *misinterpretation* (*tahrīf al-maʿānī*), and 4) *shifting words out of their contexts* (*tahrīf al-mawāḍiʿ*).<sup>220</sup> The first layer is the overall concept or the broad umbrella of Quranic criticism of the misappropriation of Jewish and Christian scriptures. But furthermore, Reynolds found in this layer most medieval Islamic texts are concerned with Christians by examinations of the New Testament, while critics towards Jews were prominent themes formerly in the life of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>221</sup> The second layer is commonly addressed to Christians who make changes by adding, subtracting, and altering the text of the script and treating it as if it were revelation, while the third is concerned with Jews who fail to understand in particular the Old Testament regarding the sending of Jesus as a prophet for them.<sup>222</sup> The fourth layer is related to both groups framing the text of scripture for

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<sup>220</sup> Gabriel Said Reynolds, 'On the Qur'anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (Tahrīf) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130, no. 2 (2010): 190.

<sup>221</sup> Reynolds, 190.

<sup>222</sup> Reynolds, 200.

their agenda, generally by displaying part of the content of the script and hiding others, or interpreting scriptures that do not match the meaning only to support a certain idea. Reynolds argues that these four layers of *tahrif* are not mutually exclusive and that they can often overlap as well as the accusation rooted in the different ways in which Muslims and Christians understand the relationship between scripture and revelation. Reynolds's layer classification is helpful in how Muslims responded and understood the doctrine of *tahrif* perceived by Muslim scholars.

The development of the absorption of *isrā'īliyyāt* into the structure of Islamic knowledge made the attitude of Islamic scholars not as simple as imagined. Attitudes towards acceptance of *isrā'īliyyāt* in the Islamic world varied and discussions over the history of *isrā'īliyyāt* grew. Apart from the authority of converts from recognized Jewish scholars in the early history of Islam, the need for explanations of some Quranic stories that in some places are only brief, makes *isrā'īliyyāt* a place. It is recorded that the books of Quranic exegesis were the first works to adopt *isrā'īliyyāt* into the structure of Islamic religious knowledge. We find quite a few books of exegesis in the early phase or classical period that use *isrā'īliyyāt* in tafsir. The exegesis of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 767), *al-Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr 'āy al-Qur'ān* by al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), *al-Kashf wa al-Bayan 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by al-Tha'labī (d. 1035) and *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* by Ibn Kathīr (d. 1374) are of famous Quranic exegesis incorporating *isrā'īliyyāt* but providing different ways in quoting the narratives. Not only in the books of tafsir, *isrā'īliyyāt* is also absorbed in other Islamic literature, such as the stories of the prophets (*qīṣaṣ al-'anbiyā'*) such as of Ibn Kathīr and of al-Ṭabarī out of their exegesis. It was from there that *isrā'īliyyāt* was absorbed and took part in the formation of Islamic knowledge. In these works, absorption of *isrā'īliyyāt* is generally obtained through oral transmission, such as hadīth, instead of direct quotations so it is known as *al-aḥādīth al-isrā'īliyyāt*.

However, as the doctrine of *tahrif* still remained believed, the absorption of *isrā'īliyyāt* was inseparable from criticism and discussion in the future. Muslim

scholars then formulated the law of transmission of the history of *isrā'īliyyāt*. First, it is permissible to narrate what we know to be true from *isrā'īliyyāt* and in accordance with the Islamic creed. Secondly, it is not permissible to narrate what violates the teachings and creeds of Islam. Third, be neutral (*maskūt 'anhu* or *mawqūf*) because of uncertainty over the status of validity of the *narrated isrā'īliyyāt*.<sup>223</sup> Such laws show variations and standards of acceptance of *isrā'īliyyāt* among scholars. Therefore, we will also find other Muslim scholars who reject *isrā'īliyyāt* especially in the book of tafsir. The general reason is that *isrā'īliyyāt* is useless in understanding the meaning that the Quran conveys, instead it can take the meaning of the Quran out of context so that it can cause distortions. We find most Muslim scholars in this position from the *Khalaf* (contemporary, modern period). Among them were Muhammad 'Abduh, Rashīd Riḍā, al-Marāghī, Muhammad Shalṭūt, Maḥmūd al-Alūsī, and Abū Zahrah.<sup>224</sup>

From there, we find that while quite a few interpreters in the classical era accepted the narration of *isrā'īliyyāt* in their tafsir, Muslim scholars and interpreters in the modern era avoided or even criticized the use of *isrā'īliyyāt* in the interpretation of the Quran. But we can also find opinions mediating acceptance and rejection of it from some scholars. Ibn Taymiya (1263-1328) agreed on three laws of *isrā'īliyyāt* narration plus an explanation of the third commandment. For him, it is permissible to use *isrā'īliyyāt* which we do not know the truth of is only enough to be treated as support or knowledge but should not be taken as a belief because it is not part of the teachings of Islam. The same opinion was echoed by al-Biqā'ī,<sup>225</sup> who even insisted on quoting Biblical texts in his tafseer which, according to him, could be used to defend the Quran, despite criticism from other Muslim scholars of his contemporaries.<sup>226</sup>

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262. <sup>223</sup> Isnaini, 'Manhaj Ibn 'Aṭīyyah Fī al-Ta'āmul Ma'a al-Isrā'īliyyāt Fī al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz',

<sup>224</sup> Arma Arma, 'Israiliyat in Tafsir Al-Qur 'An', *Al-Fath* 6, no. 2 (2012): 229.

<sup>225</sup> al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā'īliyyāt fī al-Tafsīr wa al-Ḥadīth*, 53–54.

<sup>226</sup> Saleh, 'A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist'.

In addition to functioning the Bible as an explanation of the stories of the Quran, some Muslim scholars also use (their interpretation of) Biblical texts as a theological apology about the prophecies of the Prophet Muhammad, like contemporary Irena Handono and Menachem Ali are doing, as well as polemics or sources of criticism, especially to Christianity. Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī (785-860) famous for his masterpiece *al-Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā*, Abū Muhammad ‘Abd Allāh b. Muslim b. Qutayba (828-889) in *A‘lām al-Nubuwwa*, and Abū al-‘Abbās al-Ya‘qūbī (d. in or after 905) quoted numerous Biblical texts for Islamic apologetics, while Ibn Ishāq (d. 767) made use Islamicized quotation of John 15:23-16:1 in his *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya* (the biography of the Prophet) as a scriptural intimation of the Prophet.<sup>227</sup> Similarly, Muhammad Rahmatullah b. Khalil al-Rahman al-Kairanawi (1818-1892) described his philosophical critique of Christianity as well as apologetics of the Prophet Muhammad’s prophecies using Biblical texts that he assembled with the Quranic approach in his masterpiece *Izhār al-Haqq*. His work was countering the propaganda book of Karl Gottlieb Pfander (1803-1865), a German missionary, entitled *Mīzān al-Haqq* and at the same time dissecting the problem of authenticity the Holy Scripture of Christianity.<sup>228</sup> His work is prominent in the modern theological debate between Muslims and Christians in term of the Biblical Christianity. Pfander’s literalist view is countered by al-Kairanawi who uses modern findings and debates on the historical-critical exegesis of European scholars as well as confirming traditional belief of *tahrīf* in the Islamic world “with the rival’s weapon.”<sup>229</sup> It is on trails like this that Irena Handono undergoes her preaching activities.

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<sup>227</sup> Sabine Schmidtke, ‘The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials: Ibn Qutayba and His A‘lām al-Nubuwwa’, in *Muslim Perceptions and Receptions of the Bible: Texts and Studies* (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2019), 50–51.

<sup>228</sup> Wan Haslan Khairuddin, Indriaty Ismail, and Jaffary Awang, ‘Method of Criticism of al-Kairanawi Against the Bible Based on Analysis of Izhar Al-Haq’, *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 4, no. 1 (1 December 2013): 65–73, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.04.2013.008>.

<sup>229</sup> Klaus Hock, ‘Transculturation - Some Exploratory Remarks’, in *Transculturation: Mission and Modernity in Africa*, ed. Adam Jones, University of Leipzig Papers on Africa, Mission Archives Series (Leipzig: University of Leipzig, Institut für Afrikanistik, 2003), 26, <https://d-nb.info/1250279976/34#page=29>.

The emphasis on polemical treatise by Handono had an impact on how her followers perceived the Bible. Five followers of Handono I have interviewed believe in the existence of *tahrīf* in the Bible. Muhammad Irham believed this because the Bible represents prophets poorly and leaves it as if only Jesus was perfect and had divine qualities. While recalling Handono's explanation that such representation is a framing for Christianization, he admitted to being more aware of the dangers of Christianization. Lida also agreed on the same basis based on Handono's explanation of the contradiction of the verses in the Bible, which for him was evidence of the *tahrīf*, while Rafiqa, who had initially been neutral towards the Bible, now found himself doubting the authenticity of the Bible and believing that the Bible circulating today was not the original revelation. However, Irham and Lida still believe in the remnants of the existence of revelations in the Bible related to the prophecy of the Prophet Muhammad that Handono delivered, while Rafiqa claimed to be dissatisfied with Handono's apologetic explanation. A slightly different condition was experienced by Yasmin. A follower and assistant to Handono who has lived with her for the past few months, Yasmin now studies Christology and reads the Bible to critique Christianity based on their scriptures, a polemical mission Handono has carried out for decades. Muhammad Lutfi, who believed in *tahrīf* from the beginning based on his experience reading the Bible, on the other hand, claimed that he could now accept the Bible but based on Handono's selection even if it was related to Islamic apology and refused to do so. The available data show similar beliefs in *tahrīf* and have similar implications, namely anticipation of Christian missionaries and increased passion for the study of Christian polemics. However, *tahrīf* is excluded if apologetic verses are found in favor of Islam.

In some respects, the belief in *tahrīf* was also held by the followers of Menachem Ali. This is for example from Daffa's statement when I was interviewed at the Ar Rayyan Islamic Boarding School Jombang, he said "I consider that the present gospel has been distorted and there are important points that are

distorted.”<sup>230</sup> Correspondingly, according to Hafid, who followed Ali’s preaching for more than a year, Ali’s explanation of the Bible was accompanied by “details of which parts were altered and exemplified verses in the Quran, the Gospel with evidence that he believed, so that it became clear.”<sup>231</sup> In fact, Uthman who brought Ali to the Ar Rayyan Foundation went so far as to “believe that the gospel circulating today is not the original gospel. The original gospel is according to me the gospel of Barnabas, but they rejected the gospel.”<sup>232</sup> Regardless of whether Uthman ever studied the apocryphal gospel or read only a few opinions about it, we see at least the same direction of conversation about the belief in *tahrīf* in the Bible. Two other persons, Mawla and Nabil, also thought the same, even before attending the Airlangga University lecturer’s study.<sup>233</sup> This gives us an idea that for the followers of Muslim-Convert Preachers, such preachers explain to them the *tahrīf* information that the Quran conveys thus adding to their Islamic faith.

At some point, however, Ali’s explanation, which emphasizes exploring the interrelationship of Quranic and biblical information (especially in Hebrew and positioning it as containing divine revelation) also influences how they receipt the Bible. The Bible and extra-Bible, for them, can serve as explanatory, corroborator, and validator of the Quran. This is similar to Irena Handono’s acceptance of Bible verses that are in line with Islamic apology. The difference is, Handono’s apology focuses more on theological apology, Menachem Ali’s apology is more concerned with explaining the story of the Quran. This influence can be seen from Daffa’s confession regarding the story of Prophet Ibrahim who slaughtered his son. “Before I was still vague, when I followed his study now, I know who was slaughtered, namely Ismail. This was reinforced by Ustad Ali’s study of the Hebrew Old Testament.”<sup>234</sup> Ali’s innovation in bringing extra-biblical sources took part in the validation of the Quran with the tradition of previous revelations, as Mawla

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<sup>230</sup> Daffa, Interview with Jamaat Menachem Ali, March 4, 2023.

<sup>231</sup> Hafid, Interview with Jamaah Menachem Ali, 3 March 2023.

<sup>232</sup> Usman, Interview with Jamaat Menachem Ali.

<sup>233</sup> Mawla, Interview with Jamaat Menachem Ali; Nabil, Interview with Jamaat Menachem Ali, 4 March 2023.

<sup>234</sup> Daffa, Interview with Jamaat Menachem Ali.

conveyed.<sup>235</sup> In fact, Ali's presentation that tends not to attack the other party is also taken by his worshippers.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The similarity between the teachings of the Quran and the Old and the New Testament, especially in terms of story, gives opportunity to the reading of the intertextuality between the *Quran* and the Bible. Not only "imitation" of stories and images, but the Quran also gives new color by correcting the stories recorded in the Bible, especially regarding the image of the preservation of the prophets from great sin (the doctrine of *'isma*), which in turn becomes corroborating evidence for the existence of *tahrīf* in the Bible. Historically, this discussion of intertextuality has been very lengthy and has resulted in varied views commonly known as referring to attitudes towards *isrā'īliyyāt*. The reading of the intertextuality between the Quran and the Bible as a precursor has paved the way since the early days of Islam. However, at that time religious authority was very limited and the Muslim community had restrictions on receiving religious authority from converts. This is what distinguishes it from current conditions.

The reading of intertextuality with the standard Quranic validated and elaborated with the use of Biblical and extra-Biblical texts is a feature that provides an opportunity for them to gain religious authority among Muslim communities in Indonesia as well as a source of authority or foundation for them. This is due to a socio-religious situation in which authority is more distributed and no longer monopolized by certain parties. In some cases, the foundation was articulated with a ban on imitating non-Islamic Jewish and Christian traditions. This use of Biblical and extra-Biblical texts in turn influenced the perception and attitude of Muslim convert-Preachers towards Biblical texts, namely the awareness and knowledge of the existence of *tahrīf* in the Bible. However, the concern for *tahrīf* perceived by pilgrims depends on the concern of Muslim-Convert Preachers. The polemical approach makes the congregation tend to marginalize, in this context, the Bible and

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<sup>235</sup> Mawla, Interview with Jamaat Menachem Ali.

Christianity, on the contrary, the apologetic and elaborative approaches have an impact on the congregation to see the Bible more broadly as a precursor that still contains revelation and to understand more clearly the meaning of the Quran.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

As a missionary religion, Islam continues to spread its wings and invite new followers to convert to Islam. Historically, since Islam claimed to inherit Abrahamic religious traditions and interaction with Jewish and Christian communities or known as *ahl al-kitāb*, the conversion of some knowledgeable figures from both religions gave color to Islam. Views derived from Biblical texts and extra-Biblical texts refer to both the book of *Tanakh* (the Old Testament) and the New Testament which later became known as the *isrā'liyyāt* narrations entered, absorbed, and influenced the Islamic worldview, especially regarding creation, the past, and the stories of the prophets, especially through the books of exegesis and historical books. However, this idea contains pros and cons that give rise to three laws and attitudes in the acceptance of *isrā'liyyāt*, Islamic religious authority is generally still held by Muslim scholars who were born and raised as Muslims and studied Islamic sciences from an early age.

The phenomenon of the fluid distribution of religious authority made possible by the media and influenced by the idea of democracy provides an opportunity for the emergence of a new group in gaining Islamic religious authority, namely Muslim-Convert Preachers, namely Muslim preachers who have the status of converts and study Islam after conversion. For those preachers, especially those from religious circles in Christianity in Indonesia, in the context of our research, the feature of using Biblical (as well as extra-Biblical) texts is one of the attractions which in the theory of Scheppele and Sultan (1987) is a form of authority to then be listened to, and in Alatas' (2021) theory of articulatory labor becomes the first element of authority. This authority was aided by establishing institutions devoted to Muslims and the topic of intertextual reading of the Quran.

The use of biblical texts can be framed in both polemical and apologetic approaches. For polemicists like Irena Handono, the issue of the feeling of being threatened and the articulation of pure faith became the key to maintaining authority as long as she was considered the guardian of the Muslim fortress. Meanwhile, for apologists like Menachem Ali, the mission of validating the Qur'an with earlier religious books articulated by bringing in new topics and texts considered close to the original became a factor in maintaining authority. This is not to say that polemical and apologetic approaches belong only to one party, but that they are dominant for a particular party because both parties share them.

Finally, the use of Biblical texts in their preachings is considered to enhance the Islamic faith of their followers as well as provide clarity on the Quranic accusations of *tahrīf* against earlier scriptures. Therefore, I argue that the use of Biblical texts is the main and first element to establish Islamic religious authority by Muslim-Convert Preachers through interest and then articulated with polemical and apologetic approaches that ultimately have an impact on increasing the Islamic faith of their followers and their knowledge of *tahrīf* (corruption) in the Bible.

Regardless, this study lacks a thorough and specific examination of the fragmentation of religious authorities' acceptance of this group among Muslim communities and organizations in Indonesia. This topic will be relevant in seeing clearly how the fluidity and rigidity of acceptance of new religious authorities in Indonesian Islam. In addition, a further discussion of the validity of the Muslim-Convert Preacher interpretation from the point of view of the "owner" of the biblical text in question in a dialogical manner will certainly help complement the content of this study in the future.

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