

# Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals Responses To William M. Watts Thought In Islamic Studies

Salamah Noorhidayati<sup>1</sup>, Ahmad Zainal Abidin<sup>2</sup>, Iffatin Nur<sup>3</sup>, Nur Kholis<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>IAIN Tulungagung, Indonesia. E-mail: [salamahnoorhidayati@gmail.com](mailto:salamahnoorhidayati@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>IAIN Tulungagung, Indonesia. E-mail: [ahmadzainal7474@gmail.com](mailto:ahmadzainal7474@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup>IAIN Tulungagung, Indonesia. E-mail: [iffaeltinury@gmail.com](mailto:iffaeltinury@gmail.com)

<sup>4</sup>IAIN Tulungagung, Indonesia. E-mail: [fakhryaqil@gmail.com](mailto:fakhryaqil@gmail.com)

## Abstract

The dialectic of thought among scholars is something that is inevitable even is very beneficial for the development of knowledge. By dialectics, the sides of originality, strengths and weaknesses will be known so that every party can take lessons from other parties. This paper could not be separated with that spirit. The responses of Indonesian Muslim scholars to William Montgomery Watt's thoughts especially in Islamic studies concerning controversial issues became inevitable. With descriptive analytical methods, this paper attempts to map the responses given by those scholars. Some Indonesian Muslim scholars through their writings such as Ilyas, Muslih, Thohir, and Mahmud appreciated and criticized several Watts ideas related to methods, approaches, or content of discourses in Islamic studies. Among those traced in this paper are the responses of Indonesian scholars regarding Watt's thoughts related to the theory of the emergence of Islam in Arabia, the prophetic status of Muhammad, critical studies of the Qur'an to their responses and criticisms to the methods, approaches, and tendencies used by Watt in explaining his ideas. In this paper, those responses are placed as a reception as well as a reaction to a thought that emerge in Watts context and position while at the same time emphasizing how the cultural-social background that encourages both reception and reaction emerge.

**Keywords:** Response, Islamic Studies, Method, Approach, Context

## A. Academic Backgrounds

There are many Indonesian Muslim scholars who have written and discussed Orientalist thoughts. Some of those writings are appreciative and some are criticism. The appreciation is generally given to Orientalists works that tend to be objective when explaining their object of study, especially that related to the Islamic studies. The criticism is addressed to the Orientalists whose works offend the area of faith or ideology that is considered sacred by Muslims. In general, the studies by Indonesian scholars on Orientalist thought that wrestles Islamic studies are responses and reactions of Muslims after the thought was spread among Muslim communities whose religious backgrounds are heterogeneous. Some of them could accept and appreciate those

thoughts and some review and reject part or all of it.

Among Orientalist whose works were relatively widely circulated in Indonesia is William Montgomery Watt. His works were reviewed, cited, translated and published in Indonesia, so it is natural that his thoughts received a lot of response from Muslim scholars in Indonesia, especially that related to religious studies. In addition, Watt has a relatively objective view regarding his study of Islam so that his "relative" work is accepted among Muslims without ignoring some of his views which still be rejected by the majority of Indonesian Muslims.

This paper will explain how the reception and reaction of Indonesian

Muslim scholars to Watts thoughts by studying several works of Indonesian scholars which quote Watts thoughts and give notes or comments to those thoughts. Some of Indonesian scholars who will be studied here are Hamim Ilyas, Muhammad Muslih, Lukman S Thahir and Moh Natsir Mahmud. The choice of these figures is solely because of the ease of finding references and for making space for further research.

By the explanatory descriptive method, this paper is expected to be able to map in what areas the reception of Watt's thoughts is given in area of Islamic studies in Indonesia. How that response arose in the context of the authors thought.

Several writings and research have been carried out to uncover the sides of Watt's thinking and its contribution to Islamic studies. For example, Ilyas responded to Watt's view which blamed Muhammad's mistake when criticizing Christianity;<sup>1</sup> Muslih who saw Watt's contribution as a figure in religious convergence with Massignon and Smith,<sup>2</sup> Thahir criticized Watt's book entitled *Mohammad, Prophet and Statesman*;<sup>3</sup> Haris who responded to Watt's views on the revelation of the Qur'an, and Mahmud who elaborated on Watt's thinking in several themes and his work was relatively deeper in revealing Watt's thoughts in several aspects.<sup>4</sup>

## **B. Brief Biography of William Montgomery Watt and His Thoughts**

William Montgomery Watt was born March 14 in Ceres, Fife, Scotland. He was an expert on Islamic studies, an orientalist and the main historian of Islam in the western world. Watt was a professor of Arabic and Islamic studies at the University of Edinburgh from 1964 to 1979. He once received the title 'Emeritus Professor', which is the highest honorary title for scientists given by Edinburgh University.<sup>5</sup> He is also a visiting professor

at the University of Toronto, the Collège de France Paris, Georgetown University and received an honorary degree in Doctor of Dignity from the University of Aberdeen.<sup>6</sup> In terms of spirituality, Watt was pastor of the Scottish Episcopal Church, and had been a specialist in the Bishop's language of Jerusalem from 1943 to 1946. He became a member of the IONA Community movement in Scotland in 1960.<sup>7</sup>

Watts was among the prolific Orientalists. His works covered many aspects of Islam which are said to reach 35 works. Among those that can be found are: *Der Islam / von W. Montgomery Watt, Alford T. Welch*; [von d (1980), *Islam and Christianity Today: A Contribution to dialogue* (1983), *Islam and Christianity Today: Contribution to dialogue 1* (1991), *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perception and Misperceptions* (1991), *Early Islam: Collected articles* (1990), *Islamic Creeds translated by Montgomery Watt* (1994), *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity*, (1988), *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey* (1985), *Muhammad's Mecca: History in the Qur'an* (1988), *Authenticity of Works Attributed to al-Ghazali, Companion to the Qur'an, based on the Arberry translation, The dating of the Qur'an: A Review of Richard Bell's Theory, A Forgery in al-Ghazali's Mishkat?* / London, Royal Asiatic, *Thought Theology and Islamic Philosophy* (1987), [Translation from English], *Political Islam in Historical Trajectory* (1988), [Translation from English], *Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (1973), *A History of Islamic Spain* (1965), *The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe. Introduction to the Qur'an / completely revised and enlarged* (1970), *Islam and the Integration of Society*. London, Routledge, (1961), *Islam, past Influence and Future Challenge / Edited by Alfor* (1979), *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (1962), *Islamic Political Thought: The Basic Concepts* (1968), *Islamic Revelation in the Modern World* (1969), *The Majesty that was Islam (The Islamic World 661-1100./Lo.)*, *Muhammad at Mecca* (1953,

Muhammad at Medina (1956), Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman (1976), Muslim Intellectual: A Study of al-Ghazali (1963), The Political Attitudes of the Mu'tazilites, Shi'ism Under the Umayyads, Truth in the Religions: A Sociological and Philosophical Approach (1963).<sup>8</sup>

Some Islamic mass media have dubbed him the last orientalist in the context of how he wrestles in full study of Islam in many aspects which until now no one has followed him in terms of reputation among Muslim scholars. Montgomery Watt passed away in Edinburgh on October 24, 2006, at the age of 97.<sup>9</sup>

### **C. Watt and the Recent Islamic Studies**

Islamic studies in the West in general and Quranic studies in particular are considered to experience a shifting paradigm in the hands of W. M Watt. In contrast to his predecessors who tended to use the historical approach, he moved a lot from a closed historical approach to an open phenomenological one. In contrast to majority of his predecessors who use historical approach *an sich*, Watt studied Islam with a convergent approach between historical and phenomenological approach that moved dynamically.<sup>10</sup>

The historical approach in Islamic studies and the Qur'an often presupposes Islamic studies which seek to find the common ground and background of Islamic influence from Judaism and Christianity and Arabia pagan.<sup>11</sup> This equality and influence continues to be sought to be proven through research on existing data and documents to prove that Islam has little contribution to Arab civilization.<sup>12</sup> Arab civilization at that time was a plagiarism and influence of Jewish civilization as stated among others by Guillaume,<sup>13</sup> Torrey<sup>14</sup> and

Wansbrough<sup>15</sup> and Christian influence as stated by Bell.<sup>16</sup> The impact of this approach is the neglect of the independence and authenticity of Islam as a religion that has a unique history and civilization and is therefore considered too much dependent on Jewish traditions and original Christianity and Arabic even considered as a deviation from Christianity.

Whereas the phenomenological approach, in the context of Islamic studies, seeks to lay down and understand Islam in terms of how Islam is understood and appreciated by its own followers, not how Islam is understood by followers of other religions. This approach looks at how Muslims understand according to their beliefs. With this approach, Watt is considered to provide too much space on how Muslims explain and formulate their understandings and beliefs into Islamic religious phenomena and civilizations.

### **D. Watts Islamic Studies and Some Notes from Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals on His Thought**

Watt was a prolific writer. He studied various fields ranging from theology, history, interpretation of the Qur'an to civilization and Islamic literature. His works are widely read, printed and stored in libraries in Indonesia.<sup>17</sup> Because of the limitations of this study, this paper will focus on the responses and receptions of Muslim scholars in Indonesia towards Islamic studies conducted by Watt as described above, more specifically in the fields and literature that can be found when this research is conducted.

Among Watt's studies which later received receptions from Indonesian Muslim scholars were related to the history of Jewish and Christian theology which was alluded to by the Qur'an.<sup>18</sup> Textually, the Qur'an mentions that Jews believe in the prophet Uzair or Ezra as sons of God and prophet Isa or Jesus as sons of God. The statement in the verse which states thus according to Watt is the

fault of the Qur'an or Mohammed. According to Hamim Ilyas, the Qur'anic statement that Jews have faith Uzair as a child of God is not a mistake.<sup>19,20</sup> According to Hamim Ilyas, the statement of the Qur'an is based on what was found by Muhammad from a group of Jews who believed this, not all Jews. According to Hamim Ilyas, Watt forgot or pretended not to know that Jews were diverse groups with different levels of understanding and science. For Ilyas, what was revealed by the Qur'an was not intended to describe the building of a majority of orthodox Jewish religious understandings but wanted to inform the existence of religious beliefs among Jews encountered by Muhammad at that time. According to him cross-checking of sources of information related to it is indeed not easy to do. Such information is not necessarily wrong because the religious understanding of a community can differ from one region to another. The current information is indeed unilateral because it is only found in the Islamic tradition and has not been found in the Jewish tradition.<sup>21</sup>

This is also found in other cases where Watt considers that the Qur'an has been wrong because it calls Mary as one of the elements of the trinity as mentioned by QS Maidah: 116. According to Ilyas, the conclusion of Watt is apparently not appropriate because in groups Christians found an antideco-Marianite sect or group that worshiped Mary and considered her as the God of women.<sup>22</sup> It seems that Ilyas's argument is related to data in history which states that in the Christian community different beliefs arise regarding the relationship between God and Jesus. Some believe that God's essence is the essence of Jesus; some believe Jesus is one of the elements of the trinity; some believe in Jesus as God; some believe that Jesus has two characteristics, namely lahut and nasut; some believe that Jesus is the prophet whose birth was a miracle.<sup>23</sup>

In one of his writings, Watt stated that the Koran's critical attitude towards ahl al-Kitab appeared later. In this case, Ilyas criticized Watt's thesis as saying that intellectual attacks and criticism of the scribes by Al-Qu'an were only launched when the Prophet in Medina after the scribes refused to follow the teachings of the new religion brought by Muhammad.<sup>24</sup> According to Ilyas, Al-Quran's criticism is relatively coherent and systematic, and this is different from Watt's hypothesis which states that the word nasara related to criticism of Christianity were only inserted by Al-Qu'an in the past after Christians resisted religion that new one. For Ilyas, Al-Qur'an as a set of 6000 verses can not be immediately added to one verse unless there must be changes to other related verses. If not, there will be a lot of discrepancies in the verses.

For example, if the word nasara is the result of the inclusion by Muslim community in later period, said Ilyas, it means that the words lam yulad and other verses that reject Jesus' divinity are also the result of insertion. If so, how many verses of the Qur'an will be added to meet the needs of Muslims throughout its history. The fact is that when faced with resistance from the Majusi, the Qur'an does not add the word al-Majusi or when dealing with Hindus the Qur'an does not add the word al-Barahimah. Muslims believe that even the smallest change in Al-Qu'an will be detected. This might happen because the Qur'an is not only written in pages but also memorized by thousands of people from many generations enthusiastically to maintain its originality and authenticity.<sup>25</sup>

The attitude of appreciation was given by Muhammad Muslih to Watt who was actually an instructor of Arabic in Islamic studies at the University of Edinburgh. Since most of the students are Muslim students, Watt has also shown an appreciative attitude towards Muslims who are loyal students and listeners even though he remains committed to adhering to Christianity in the general sense. The focus of the study and the themes that

have come in contact with Muslims with a thick Islamic tradition make many Watt's religious thoughts must also relate to Islamic traditions. Watt acknowledged that he felt himself like someone who had a dialogue looking for the truth and in such circumstances he tried to break away from the orthodoxy of his personal religion. This, according to Muslih, is solely for the sake of being able to appreciate more the traditions of other religions. At this point, Watt is a dialectical seeker of truth with other people who may have different religious experiences.<sup>26</sup>

His dialectics with other traditions, on one occasion, caused Watt to get an attack from a number of his Christian colleagues,<sup>27</sup> especially related to the prophetic status of Muhammad because based on the main doctrine of the church, he was considered to have left Christian beliefs. Obviously, Christianity states finality and truth in belief in Jesus, but Watt seeks to understand in a different way with the recognition that Muhammad was a Prophet. Therefore, he was considered to have come out of the official Christian theological formula.<sup>28</sup> As a truth seeker through passing over, Watt, according to Muslih, experienced a kind of isolation that is commonly felt by people who want to convert between initial beliefs and new beliefs but he realizes that on the one hand he was considered half out of a people, but he was fully accepted in the community of others. Such academic character has brought Watt in a state of uncertainty as a Christian on the one hand, and as an academic who was demanded objectively and openly, on the other side.<sup>29</sup>

Another response to Watt's thought was given by Thahir who considered Watt to have his own description of the process before the Prophet received revelation. The problem is different when Watt states that the revelation was obtained when the Prophet was sleeping or the Prophet actually received revelation in a dream state.<sup>30</sup> As Muslim intellectual, Thahir

proposed at least two reasons. First, when the Prophet was looking for the nature of God's truth, the revelation came suddenly and shockingly. It comes from an element outside himself and not from Muhammad's will. For this reason, the Prophet was frightened, then immediately went home and met Khadijah, his wife, in a state of fear because he had never experienced a situation like this before. Thahir said, if what Muhammad experienced was only in a dream, surely there would be no need for such extraordinary fear and no need to go down the verse QS. 53: 11-12. The second reason, said Thahir, as a rebuttal to Watt, is a history of Ayesha ra that the revelation of Muhammad began with a dream when the Prophet slept. In the dream he saw the morning light. After waking up, the Prophet wanted to pray and immediately prepared provisions and went to Gua Hira. There the Prophet prostrated a few nights before returning home when the supplies were finished. This happened several times and for this reason Khadijah always provided provisions, until finally al-Haq arrived, through the angel Gabriel.<sup>31</sup> If the events that influenced the Prophet were dream experiences, such Watt's statement, then that would not make sense because the Qur'an also denied those who claimed the revelation through the process of dreams (QS. 21: 15).<sup>32</sup>

Watt's view which also received a response from Indonesian Muslim scholars was the belief that Muhammad believed that revelation came to him from God but it did not prevent Muhammad from rearranging the material of the revelation, and corrected it by reducing and adding to and according to Muhammad's taste. In the Qur'an, Watt writes, there are a number of signs from God that cause Muhammad to forget a few verses, or not to examine the text in depth which makes it almost certain that certain words or expressions were added by Muhammad. For example, said Watt, orthodox Islam acknowledges that several verses of the Qur'an which contain rules for Muslims have been mansukh (deleted and replaced) by verses that came later, so

that the rules before were not valid again.<sup>33</sup>

Responding to such Watt's view, Thahir stated that it is true what Watt said that there are several verses in the Qur'an which Muslims consider to be *mansukh* as reflected in the discourse of Muslim thought from the past until now. This cannot be denied by Muslims. However, the substitution referred to was not on the initiative and merely the imagination of the Prophet as Watt's accusation, moreover the Prophet forgot and added a number of verses to his personal tastes and for Muhammad's personal interests. The Qur'an, Thahir said, has explained that when the Makkah people urged Muhammad to change the Qur'anic doctrine they could accept, Muhammad replied: "Only Allah can make that change, while he is totally helpless" (QS. 15: 15-16).<sup>34</sup> This expression cannot arise except by someone who is aware that he is not the one who wants a doctrine but he appears in the framework of accepting the holy word and continuing God's message to be conveyed and proclaimed to his followers while still seeing Muhammad's position as a human being who has interests but not to replace God's teachings with personal will. Moreover, in the *Ulum al-Qur'an* works, there were found many words of the Qur'an which were dynamic when describing a verse: sometimes God's subjects use pronouns I, Him, Us, which occur sporadically. If so, then in Muslim beliefs, it is illogical if Muhammad made a verse according to his own taste.

Critical response was given by Haris to Watt's thoughts about the revelation of the Qur'an. Haris could accept Watt's view of how the situation in Mecca demanded that Muhammad seek inspiration by seclusion as an initial sign of his prophethood. But Haris's attitude became critical when Watt considered that the condition of the Qur'an's revelation to Muhammad as an internal expression of the prophet to stimuli or gestures that came from outside and then verbalized himself. Critical attitude also arose when Watt held the view that the Prophet

developed a conception in the Bible based on his meeting with and teaching by Waraqah. These two attitudes that appear to be different, according to Haris, are Watt's inconsistencies in reading the phenomenon.

Likewise with Watt's view that Islam is a religion of grafts from Christians. If Islam is a graft religion from Christianity, he said, why are there so many differences, especially the absence of Islam-Christian meeting points in theology: one is monotheist and another is polytheist. With a more serious and deep context, Nasir Mahmud responded to Watt's views on many issues and themes. There are those related to methods, approaches, substances related to Islam and the Qur'an, even Muslim relations with other religions. According to Mahmud, Watt tried to combine two approaches in reading Islam and the Qur'an namely historical and phenomenological approaches.

However, according to Mahmud, it is rather difficult to determine the main approach used by Watt from his writings. As an Islamologist, he sometimes used methods of religion history for example through two works, namely *Muhammad at Mecca* and *Muhammad at Medina*. In the same book, Watt also uses a sociological approach especially about his theory of the origin of Islam in a social context. While the sociological and psychological approach he uses in his book *Truth in the Religions*.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, there are other methods that are also used by Watt. Philologically, for example, Watt used to understand and interpret the verses of the Qur'an in his book *Muhammad at Mecca* *History in the Qur'an* which explains the Qur'anic background of pre-Islamic Arab society, the history of Muhammad's life, prophetic experience, and the reaction of the infidels to Muhammad who was considered to have made changes that damaged the traditions of the ancestors. In this work, Watt expressly states that the Qur'an can be an authentic source of Muhammad's biography.<sup>36</sup>

Another approach used by Watt is the theological approach. He usually uses this when explaining the different principles between Islam and Christianity which he adheres to. He clearly acknowledges that his book *Islamic Revelation In the modern Word* is not a pure academic work but also mixes with his personal theological views, this is evident when Watt maintains his theological Christianity compared to and faced with the concept of the Qur'anic revelation for example. Watt's historical approach is very apparent in his theory of endosoma and ectosoma. The thesis of that theory says that Islam grows and develops through processes as other organisms in the organism have nucleus as a place of energy and strength. From that power arises the activity of the organism towards development and maturity. Widespread religious organisms can be in the form of increasing numbers of adherents and the expansion of religious propaganda out. Nucleus is endosoma as the core strength, endosoma is a form of family; Ectosoma is a home and garden arranged by the family. Thus the revelations and teachings of religion are endosomes while the ectosomes are the surrounding environment. According to him, the response to revelation gradually spread into ectosoma and endosoma gradually met in endosoma.<sup>37</sup>

Likewise in the history and chronology of religions. According to Watt, the Jewish religion has endosoma and ectosoma which in the development of Jewish ectosoma becomes Christian endosoma. Christian endosomes develop into the ectosoma. After the arrival of Islam, Christian ectosomes became endosomes of Islam. Thus what is the core or nucleus or endosoma of Islam comes from Christian endosomes. Particularly regarding Christian-Islamic meetings, according to Watt, the relationship between the two religions today is relatively undeveloped because the two religions are geographically relatively developed in far-flung regions.

Watt's phenomenological approach is explored by Mahmud through three issues. First, the orthodox Muslim view

which states that the Qur'an is the supernatural word of God that was not created. Second, the western secular view that states the Qur'an as the work of Muhammad. Third, another view that states the Qur'an is a work of God but is produced from and through Muhammad's taste and intentions.<sup>38</sup> Regarding the three views, Watt stated:

(... I try to remain neutral because the three problems mentioned above are outside the study of religious historians. With respect, I try to speak not as people who reject fundamental Islamic beliefs, therefore I always use the words "Al-Qur'an said" and not "Muhammad said". On the other hand, when I speak of a revelation verse to Muhammad, for example, it does not mean accepting the first opinion of the three opinions above, I only use the description of the Muslim to present the reader with say "as Muslims say" or such an expression. It does not cause chaos).

The quotations above implicitly contain phenomenological properties, which are characterized by three things: first, the study of the Qur'anic revelation is beyond the reach of religious historians; second, Watt did not want to reject fundamental Islamic beliefs, especially related to the basic beliefs of Muslims; and third, when speaking of verses revealed to Muhammad, he did not say "Muhammad said", but said "Al-Qur'an said". When describing Muslim opinions, he said "as Muslims say". This is in accordance with the epoche principle in phenomenology.

However, on the other hand, said Mahmud, if we look at Watt's other opinions, he also used the historical approach because he tended to see the influence of religion / Jewish and Christian scriptures on the Qur'an and saw that there are human elements in the revelation, including in the Qur'an. Revelation in the previous Books and the Quran are addressed in parallel by Watt. Therefore, it can be concluded that Watt

combined the two approaches according to the theme he faced, so that it is more appropriate to say that Watt used the historical-phenomenological approach in his opinion about the existence of the Qur'an.<sup>39</sup>

According to Mahmud, Watt clearly followed Noldeke's view which stated that Muhammad was the true Prophet, a view that is actually unpopular among classical Western scholars whose majority reject this view. Similar to Noldeke's argument, Watt acknowledges Muhammad's prophetic truth because he saw the historical reality that Islam taught can form and develop a large religious community of Muslims and Muslims make Islam a way of worshipping God.<sup>40</sup> The fact of the existence of existing religious communities with doctrine, beliefs, scriptural rules and other laws led him to recognize the leader as a prophet.

Watt rejected the Orientalist opinion that Muhammad was exposed to epilepsy, as also stated by Noldeke. If Muhammad was not normal, crazy or epilepsy, there would be no one who likes his religious teachings, there would not be such a solid community following him especially in his lifetime.<sup>41</sup>

Mahmud's appreciation to Watt was also given regarding Muhammad's personality. Watt recognized the Prophet's sincerity and honesty. Watt points out some evidences of Muhammad's greatness, for example the ability to overcome the difficulties faced by being ostracized by society, very high moral character and Muhammad as a great leader.<sup>42</sup> But elsewhere, Watt also doubted Muhammad's honesty in other cases. Watt only believed in the honesty of the Prophet Muhammad in certain cases, but in other cases he doubted his honesty.<sup>43</sup>

It seems that Watt's unsteady attitude is related to Watt's position as a Christian who is obliged to hold firmly to his own religious beliefs as the most correct. According to Watt, if Muhammad

declared the Qur'an to be from God, then the statement did not need to be fully accepted and if it was said that the Prophet Muhammad was an honest person as acknowledged by his people, including the written confession in history, Muhammad's honesty does not guarantee everything he said is true. Honest people can be mistaken so there is a statement that is considered wrong.<sup>44</sup>

According to Watt, Muhammad's mistake was because he did not understand Christianity well, which later became the basis of the Qur'an's view of it.<sup>45</sup> According to Watt, a modern Western scholar rejected the Prophet Muhammad as an ordinary or literate blind person because it meant that the Prophet Muhammad had never read the Bible. Watt interpreted ummi with illiteracy in the sense that Muhammad was not very good at writing but not reading and writing blind. The Prophet Muhammad was not influenced by the Bible through writing but was received verbally. Because the Prophet Muhammad met with Jews and Christians, it was they who told the Prophet Muhammad material from the Bible. Many Christians were found on the Arabian Peninsula, especially on the Syrian border as one of the places where the Prophet Muhammad traded while young. There also Christians from Yemen came to trade or become slaves. Many important groups of Jews in Medina and other places could provide information to the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>46</sup> Regarding this, in contrast to Watt's view, according to Mahmud, Muhammad's normal state does not mean that Muhammad knew and studied the Bible from other people to become the foundation of the Qur'an. What is more appropriate is that he got inspiration from God through a relatively critical revelation of their attitude so far.

Another aspect described by Mahmud is the view of Watt who believes in the Qur'an as the word of God but produced personally by Muhammad<sup>47</sup> who was in a social and cultural situation around him, for example with the concept of the crucifixion of Jesus. Watt

acknowledged the essential truth of the Qur'anic teachings in rejecting Jesus' crucifixion which meant that the Qur'an sided with Jesus and that Jesus received God's help and won. On the one hand, Christianity saw that overtaking Jesus showed his victory while the Qur'an stated that it was not overtaken by Jesus as a victory for Christians and the failure of Jews. According to Watt the Qur'anic story which states the refusal of the crucifixion of Jesus originated from people's perceptions in Muhammad's environment. For Watt, the refusal of the crucifixion of Jesus in his nature favored and approved Christianity and rejected Jewish victory over Christians. It was here that Watt saw the closeness of Christianity and Islam.<sup>48</sup>

Another problem that became Watt's concern is the method of revelation by God. According to Watt, there are four ways God delivers revelation: first, through Signs or revelations; second, from behind the hijab; third, by sending an Apostle or Angel; fourth, revealed by Spirit. Watt looks at the four ways in a sequence and not the way that it continues to occur so that the four form the development of the first way to the next. In this case Watt identified revelation in Islam with the Christian concept of receiving revelation by the way of the Holy Spirit as the last stage of development of revelation.<sup>49</sup>

Watt looks at socio-economic factors as the primary factor in the emergence of Islam while religious factors are only secondary factors. According to Mahmud, it seems that the Marxist sociological theory has inspired Watt to observe the social phenomena of the emergence of Islam and the mission it carries out which is more easily explained materially.<sup>50</sup>

Watt's view is based on the thesis that before the coming of Muhammad there had been a decline in idolatry in Mecca and then a trend of tribal solidarity emerged which had a tendency to help the weak. It is this norm that governs the life of tribal wholeness in Arab society where

each group member must help each other in the face of difficulties.<sup>51</sup> The atmosphere changed when Muhammad was young, where the city of Mecca was the center of trade traffic from various regions of India, Ethiopia, which was caused by continuous war by Bizertium and Persia. Mecca which was strategic as a trade caused the Quraysh community become a commercial society and took advantage of the greatest possible trade from this city.<sup>52</sup>

In this case, according to Mahmud, Watt has emphasized the change in the pattern and structure of the Quraysh community from nomadic communities to the individualistic trading society. Nomadic tribal social ties began to break and were replaced by selfishness. This causes stronger dominance of people against weak people. In the context of such social inequality, Muhammad appeared as a reformer or agent of social change.<sup>53</sup>

According to Mahmud, Watt has used the theory of Marxism to explain the birth of Islam in Mecca with the initial thesis that to take power from a group of rich people, a physical revolution is needed. In Mecca Muhammad only conveyed the teachings of faith and morality which Watt saw as a repositioning attitude towards the bourgeois mentality of the Arab community. From here the nature of the Muslims who were initially defensive moved towards the offensive movement by making hijrah and giving pressure and attacks to the people of Mecca.<sup>54</sup>

Another issue that concerns Watt is the issue of interfaith dialogue. Mahmud responded to Watt's view in this theme at length. Watt's main view, which is the main concern, is Watt's determination that every believer can establish mutual understanding. The basis of Watt's thought is that the direction of human social life today leads to the "one world".<sup>55</sup> According to Watt, dialogue must be directed at efforts to learn from

each other and change the views between exclusive adherents of religion so that they can be mutually open between one religious group and another.<sup>56</sup> The concept of dialogue between religions according to Watt is an effort to eliminate mutual apology from the two religions. However, in the interpretation of Watt, it tends to be biased, as explained by C.W. Troll, that Watt himself acknowledged his partiality to the truth of his own religion in an effort to establish harmonious relations between Muslims and Christians.<sup>57</sup>

There are several views of the Qur'an which are considered apology by Watt. Therefore, he wants to change it by giving an interpretation according to Watt's own version. According to Watt, if the Qur'an opposes the existence of three Gods (5: 73, 4: 171), then in fact the Qur'an does not oppose the teachings of the Trinity in Christianity, but opposes tritheistic. Explanation of the Watt can be understood that Christians do not believe in the existence of three gods, but it can be ascertained that the three Gods in question are God-creators of all things. In terms of God the creator of all things, then Islam is the same as Christianity: the only one God is Allah. Because of that, according to Watt, if the Qur'an opposes the beliefs of the three Gods, it is actually not genuine Christianity that is opposed but perhaps some heretical groups deviate from actual Christian teachings.<sup>58</sup>

Watt also stated interesting developments in relation between Muslim and followers of other religions. Unlike the era of the development of Islam in Mecca, in the Medina era, Jewish and Christian followers were classified as weak, while Muslims were superior. In this strong position, Muslims began to launch criticism against the two religions.<sup>59</sup> In this case, the political order is considered by Watt as a driver of change in the attitude of the Qur'an towards Jews and Christians and is not purely based on core considerations of religious teachings. In other words, the critical attitude of the Qur'an arises because Muslims have

become strong and able to face opponents when the State of Medina has been established.<sup>60</sup>

According to Mahmud, there was an attempt by Watt to change the negative perceptions of Christians towards Islam, while at the same time encouraging interfaith dialogue, even if only to some degree. Watt, for example, acknowledges Muhammad's prophethood, even though it is only equated with the Prophets in the Old Testament. He also wanted to acknowledge the Qur'an as the word of God but because of Muhammad's mistake by misunderstanding Christianity, then a number of errors appeared in the Qur'an.<sup>61</sup>

Mahmud did not forget to acknowledge the great contribution of Watt. For him, Watt as a Western Islamologist has contributed in Islamic thought through no less than twenty books on Islam and some topics related to it and articles and works of translation on Islam. His works also provide color in the universe of Islamic studies in Indonesia, although in the study of the Qur'anic revelation, his ideas have not been fully accepted by Islamic society. In Qur'anic study, Watt combines the historical and phenomenological approaches. In terms of historical approach, Watt saw the origin of the Qur'an from biblical ideas because the Bible had been introduced by Jews and Christians in the Arabian peninsula before Islam. In terms of its phenomenology, Watt understands the existence of the Qur'an in order not to oppose fundamental Islamic beliefs, because of that, Watt stated that the Qur'an originates from God,<sup>62</sup> as Muslims believe.

In connection with the above ideas, there was an idea that also received Mahmud's reception, namely Watt's thinking on Muhammad's prophetic problem. Watt stated that Muhammad was a prophet, but his status was only equated with the prophets in the old covenant which only meant the disciples of Jesus. In his response, Mahmud saw that Watt had considered the Prophet Muhammad to make a mistake in the Qur'an because the

teachings of the Bible were not fully understood. According to him, this error was caused by Muhammad's mistake in understanding the Christian doctrine which was later incorporated into the Qur'an, so that in some ways the Qur'an opposed the doctrine in the Bible.<sup>63</sup>

Related to revelation, Watt's view was repeated by Mahmud. If supporters of historical-phenomenological approach consider there are human elements in revelation, this is so that revelation does not fully dominate human authority,<sup>64</sup> as if revelation completely ignores socio-cultural contexts. The idea of Watt was also perceived by Mahmud so that there was a remnant of space for reasoning and rationalization of humanitarian problems touched by revelation. This is to assert that revelation descends in concrete human space which requires a solution from revelation on the one hand, and reality encourages the emergence of revelation ideas for the problem and Arabic reality on the other. In this case Watt's ideas and Mahmud's dialectics to answer the difficulties explain the relation between revelation which skyrocketed with the context of grounded Arab society.

Regarding the issue of interfaith dialogue, Mahmud highlighted Watt's view of trying to reject and eliminate the critical view of the Qur'an on Jewish and Christian teachings in the matter of deviations from the scriptures and the teachings of the Trinity. Watt argued that the Qur'an does not oppose the teachings of the trinity but rather triteism.<sup>65</sup> But Mahmud saw that there was a doctrine of the trinity that had been misunderstood by Christians so that it was still incompatible with the holiness of God as it is in Islam. Criticism of the doctrine of the trinity is not merely a change in the attitude of the Qur'an towards that Christianity, but because the doctrine from the beginning contradicts the fundamental theology of Islam.<sup>66</sup>

## E. Conclusion

---

From a few descriptions above it can be concluded several things here. First, the responses of Muslim scholars to Watt's view in some respects are relative appreciation and in some are critical respects. An appreciative attitude towards Watt arose when Watt could accept religious views which incidentally came from and or in accordance with Muslim beliefs. The critical attitude is addressed by Muslim scholars to Watt's views which are not in accordance with Muslim attitudes born from Muslim beliefs and views. Watt who should be phenomenological in relation to the teachings of Islam was sometimes doing historical-reductive.

Second, the response of Indonesian Muslim scholars shows a dialogic passion for knowledge that deserves appreciation. Their attitude was born in the context of their religion which is different from Watt's position. From here, both parties can learn from each other to continue to enrich themselves with religious views from other parties. Appreciative and critical attitudes towards the views of other religions need to be carried out but carried out in the spirit of scientific dialectics without having to consider themselves superior to other religions.

## References

1. Arif, Syamsuddin. *Orientalisme Dan Diabolisme Pemikiran*. Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2008.
2. Bell, Richard. *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment*. London: Macmillan, 1926.
3. Benaboud, Muhammad. "Orientalism on the Revelation of the Prophet: The Cases of W. Montgomery Watt, Maxime Rodinson, and Duncan Black MacDonal." *The American Journal of Islamic Sciences* 3, no. 2 (1986): 309.
4. CC Torrey. *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*. New York: The KTAV Publishing House Inc, 1967.
5. Guillaume, Alfred. "The Influence of Judaism in Islam." In *Legacy of Israel*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1927.
6. Holloway, Richard. "William Montgomery Watt." *Guardian News*

- and Media. November 14, 2006. [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com).
7. Ilyas, Hamim. "Pandangan Al-Quran Terhadap Bigetisme Yahudi Dan Kristen." *Al-Jamiah: Journal of Islamic Studies* XII, no. 62 (1998).
  8. Lestari, Lenni. "Abraham Geiger Dan Kajian Al-Quran: Telaah Metodologi Atas Buku *Judaism and Islam*." *SUHUF Jurnal Pengkajian Al-Quran Dan Budaya* 7, no. 1, Juni (2014).
  9. Lukman, Thahir. *Studi Islam Interdisipliner: Aplikasi Pendekatan Filsafat, Sosiologi, Dan Sejarah*. Yogyakarta: Qirtas, 2004.
  10. Maan, Bashir, and Alastair McIntosh. "The Whole House of Islam, and We Christians with Them: An Interview With The Last Orientalist." *Coracle: The Magazin of the IONA Community*. London, August 2000.
  11. Mahmud, Moh. Natsir. *Orientalisme Al-Quran Di Mata Barat (Sebuah Studi Evaluatif)*. Semarang: Dina Utama, 1997.
  12. Masad, Joseph. "Image of the Prophet Muhammad in the West: A Study of Muir, Margoliuth and Watt." *The Middle East Journal* 4, no. 51 (1997): 628.
  13. Masduki. "Teori Collective Unconscious: Pemikiran W. Montgomery Watt Tentang Al-Quran Dalam Islamic Revelation in the Modern Word." *Al-Fikra: Jurnal Ilmiah Keislaman* 7, no. 2, Juli—Desember (2008).
  14. Muslih, Muhammad. *Religious Studies Problem Hubungan Islam Dan Barat Kajian Atas Pemikiran Karel A. Steenbrink*. Yogyakarta: Belukar Budaya, 2003.
  15. Wansbrough, John. *Quranic Studies: Source and Methods of Scripture Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
  16. Watt, William Montgomery. *Muhammad at Mecca*. London: Oxford University Press, 1953.
  17. ———. *Muhammad at Medina*. London: Oxford University Press, 1956.
  18. ———. "The Making of Last Prophet." *The Middle East Journal* 44, no. 1 (1990).
  19. Wijaya, Aksin. *Sejarah Kenabian Dalam Perspektif Tafsir Nuzuli Muhammad Izzat Darwazah*. Bandung: Mizan, 2016.
  20. Wiliam, Montgomery Watt. *Pengantar Studi Al-Quran*. Edited by Taufik Adnan Amal. Jakarta: Raja grafindo Persada, 1995.