


Examining the History of Divine Religion: Theological Relations of Judaism, Christianity and Islam according to William Montgomery Watt

 Anshori

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

 anshoria74@gmail.com*

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the thoughts of Montgomery Watt about Islamic studies, especially Watt's opinion regarding the relationship between the three divine religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). This study aims to show that not all orientalists are subjective in studying Islam. Watt, for example, in his research tries to be objective by taking sources from Islam itself. The research method used in this study is descriptive analysis, which is a qualitative research method concerning library research sources. Then the data was analyzed using Huberman & Miles data analysis, which went through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions or verification. The study results show that Watt and Muslims have the same opinion regarding the theological relations of the divine religion, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The similarity is in terms of the essence of the samawi religion brought by Ibrahim, also called *millah Ibrahim Hanifa*.

Kata kunci:

Montgomery Watt, Masyarakat Arab Pra Islam, Nabi dan al-Qur'an

Abstrak:

Tulisan ini membahas mengenai pemikiran Montgomery Watt dalam kaitannya dengan kajian Islam, khususnya pendapat Watt mengenai hubungan antara ketiga agama samawi (Yahudi, Kristen dan Islam). Tujuan penelitian ini untuk menunjukkan bahwa tidak semua orientalis bersikap subyektif dalam mengkaji Islam. Watt misalnya yang dalam penelitiannya berusaha bersikap obyektif dengan mengambil sumber-sumber dari Islam itu sendiri. Metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam kajian ini ialah deskriptif-analisis, yaitu metode penelitian kualitatif dengan merujuk pada sumber-sumber kepustakaan (library research). Kemudian data dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis data Huberman & Miles yang melewati tiga tahapan, yaitu reduksi data, penyajian data dan kesimpulan atau verifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Watt dan umat Islam memiliki pendapat yang sama mengenai relasi teologis agama *samawi*, Yahudi, Kristen dan Islam. Persamaan tersebut ialah dari segi esensi agama *samawi* yang dibawa oleh Ibrahim atau disebut juga *millah Ibrahim Hanifa*.

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1. Introduction

The orientalists are considered to be very subjective, but on the other hand, some orientalists still try to study Islam objectively. William Montgomery Watt, for example,—starting now written by Watt—is one of the orientalist figures who wanted to position himself objectively when dealing with

Islamic studies. Unlike other orientalists who try to find fault with Islam, Watt provides a different view by trying to see Islam objectively and breaking away from the perspective of the religious ideology he also adheres. Watt is considered an orientalist who is most sympathetic to Islam. That can be seen from his works, regarded as objective when explaining Islam compared to the orientalist works of his contemporaries; among his works is *Muhammad at Mecca* (Sodikin et al. 2022). Watt's objective and neutral attitude in studying Islam made the conclusions of his research different from other orientalists who had a negative view of Islamic teachings. It would be interesting to look further into Watt's thoughts, especially about the theological concerns of *samawi* religions.

Regarding Watt's objectivity, it can be seen in one of his works, *Muhammad at Mecca*, which tries to be moderate, take a neutral position, and break away from the influence of his religion, Christianity. Therefore, his opinion regarding the concept of revelation about the historicity of the Qur'an is the same as what is understood by Muslims, namely through an intermediary and not with an intermediary (Mas'udah, 2018). Watt also admits that the Qur'an is the word of God revealed to the Prophet and that the Qur'an's authenticity is beyond doubt. This opinion is contrary to other orientalists doubting the authenticity of the Qur'an by trying to find loopholes to prove their arguments. Ignaz Goldziher, for example, highlighted the *qiraat* aspect in the Qur'an, who thinks that the existence of *qiraat* is proof of the inconsistency of the Qur'an in its variant readings. In fact, *qiraat* is closely related to *isnad*, and Muslims make history the primary reference for the validity of *qiraat*, not human *ijtihad* as understood by Goldziher (Syahrullah, 2017:124). Ofcourse with this opinion, Goldziher indirectly doubts the authenticity of the Qur'an itself. As for this research, it is not aimed at further questioning the authenticity of the Qur'an, but rather highlighting the side of Watt's objectivity in relation to the theological relations of *samawi*, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religions in his work *Muhammad at Mecca*. It would be interesting to examine further regarding his views on this issue, bearing in mind that Watt himself is an adherent of Christian teachings, as previously explained.

Previous studies related to *samawi* religious studies, found no studies related to *samawi* religious theological relations according to William Montgomery Watt. For more details, previous studies in this study can be mapped into two patterns. First, with regard to the study of the three religions that is *samawi*, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For this issue, several studies have been carried out which attempt to show that there is a relation of revelation (Maulida & Nurmajah, 2019) and theological (Indriana, 2020) in these three *samawi* religions. Other research attempts to uncover the monotheism problem of the three religions (Arijal, 2015) and seeks links between *samawi* religions and earthly religions (Anisa et al., 2019). Second, a study of William Montgomery Watt. Previous research related to Watt tends to lead to his thoughts on the Qur'an (Masduki, 2008), such as Watt's thoughts regarding the existence of texts in the Qur'an (Jalaludin, 2019). In addition, it also discusses revelation in Watt's view compared to Fazlur Rahman (Jalaluddin, 2021) and Watt's opinion regarding the *Umminess* of the Prophet, whose theory was further criticized by Muhammad Alwi HS in his research "Criticism of William M. Watt's View of History of the Writing of the Qur'an" (HS, 2020). Based on the information that has been mentioned, it shows that Watt's research regarding the theological relations of *samawi* religion has never been done before.

In line with the explanation above, this study aims to find out Watt's thoughts regarding the theological relations of *samawi* religions, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam in his work *Muhammad at Mecca*. Where in his work, Watt uses historical data originating from Islam in explaining his research. It is hoped that knowing that there is a connection between these three religions will give an illustration that there is an attempt by Watt to try to study Islam objectively by referring to historical sources from Islam itself. Therefore, of course it is necessary to look further at how the historicity of *samawi* religion is related to the theological relations between Judaism, Christianity and Islam according to Watt which is then related to its relevance to today's life.

This paper begins with the argument that not all Western or orientalist researchers hate Islam. Some of the Western scholars, trying to be objective in studying Islam, one of them is Watt. This paper will discuss Watt's thoughts in studying Islam. Especially regarding his opinion regarding the theological relations of *samawi*, Judaism, Christianity and Islam religions. This research, consists of three discussion sub-chapters, in the first sub-chapter, as an initial explanation, it is explained regarding the notion of orientalism in general and the approaches and sources used by Watt. The aim is to see Watt's position as an orientalist in researching Islamic teachings. Furthermore, in the second sub-chapter, in order to see Watt's thoughts further regarding his thoughts on Islamic teachings, in this case, he will explain his thoughts on the *Umminess* Prophet, as well as *nasikh mansukh* in the Qur'an. In the last sub-chapter of this research, it is explained about the theological relations of *samawi* religions which include three discussions, namely the term paganism, the concept of God in the understanding of pre-Islamic Arab society and finally, Watt's thoughts regarding the historicity of theological relations of *samawi*, Judaism, Christianity and Islam religions.

2. Methods

In the Big Indonesian Dictionary, the word method is a standard form of a method, which means an orderly or systemic way to facilitate the implementation of activities or research in order to achieve the stated goals. While research is an activity of collecting, processing, analyzing and presenting data that is carried out systematically and objectively to solve a problem or test a hypothesis to develop general principles. The research method is a way of finding the truth about something, whether it is happening in nature, society, or humanity, based on the scientific discipline concerned (Sunendar et al., 2016).

This study will be explained using descriptive analysis with qualitative research methods of library research. That is a research method which focuses on presenting library data related to research (Zed, 2014:1–2) not in the realm of researcher perception but based on facts that need to be presented to support an explanation of the discussion (Evanirosa et al., 2022:2). After being narrated or described, then the data is analyzed to obtain objective results in accordance with the facts from the data obtained. This process is then called descriptive analysis. Furthermore, the collection of these data comes from two data, namely primary data, and secondary data.

If a table is made related to the data source used, it is as follows:

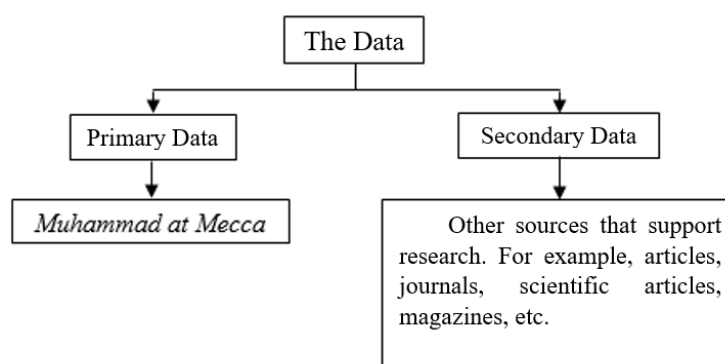


Figure 1: The Picture of taking primary and secondary data sources for research.

Primary data is the main data that is original or directly from the source (Istijanto, 2010:38). Clearly, it is the leading book or source that is related to the research material object being studied (Wibowo, 2011:46). While secondary data are those that are not from the primary source, or a second source (Istijanto, 2010:33) namely books, articles, magazines, scientific works that have no direct affinity with material objects but can be supported because there is relevance to research (Wibowo,

2011:46). In this study, the primary source used was Watt's work entitled *Muhammad at Mecca*. In this work, there is an explanation regarding the theological relations of divine religion which is the main focus of this study. The secondary data is in the form of books, journals, articles, or other sources that can support research.

The next step is to process these primary and secondary data using data analysis initiated by Huberman & Miles. There are three data analyses offered by Huberman & Miles: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions or verification. More details will be described regarding these three stages. The first is data reduction. In the Big Indonesian Dictionary, reduction means reduction or cutting (Sunendar et al., 2016). In this first stage, the researcher collects data related to the research. Once collected, the data is selected to be adjusted to what is needed in the study. The aim is to facilitate research and make the study more specific and not broad. In short, data reduction is the work process of researchers in selecting data according to the needs of research studies with the aim that the study does not expand (Umrati & Wijaya, 2020:88).

Second, the presentation of data. This process is the first continuation. After selecting the required data is presented, then the next step is to narrate the data. According to Huberman & Miles, the process of presenting data by way of narration is the part of the qualitative model that researchers most often carry out. The aim is to facilitate understanding of the data obtained and also make it easier to plan further research (Umrati & Wijaya, 2020:88). Third, drawing conclusions or verification. In this qualitative research, the findings obtained should be something new or new. So, the results of the research should be able to lead to new findings that have never been found by previous researchers (Umrati & Wijaya, 2020:88). In this case, information regarding the literature review or previous studies related to the research being studied needs to be explained. The aim is to find out to what extent this study has been carried out by previous researchers and to avoid repeating the same research.

The table regarding the stages of data analysis by Huberman & Miles is as follows:

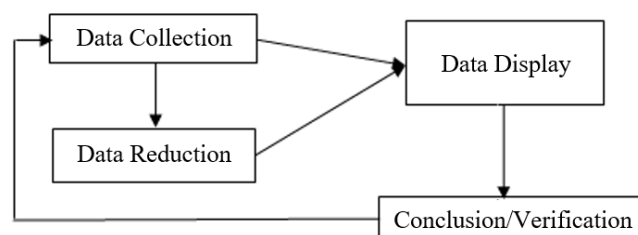


Figure 2: Figure of the stages of data analysis by Huberman & Miles (Umrati & Wijaya, 2020:88).

3. Result and Discussion

a. Orientalism in General and William Montgomery Watt: Approaches and Sources of Reference

This discussion will explain the meaning of orientalism in general as a first step to see what orientalism is and the objects of study they carry out. Next explains Watt, which focuses on his approach and data sources. That is useful for explaining the data taken by Watt and finding out Watt's position in viewing Islamic teachings.

1) The Definition of Orientalism

Orientalism linguistically is the science of the east (Al-Makin, 2017:36). There are three terms in the word orientalism, namely Orient, Orientalist, and Orientalism. The first term, Orient, has the meaning of the eastern region, eastern nation, or eastern culture. Second, the term Orientalist refers to Eastern scholars or experts interested in studying Eastern culture, from philologists, sociologists, anthropologists, linguists, scientists and theologians. Third, the term Orientalism consists of two words,

orient, which means east and ism, which means understanding, so the meaning of Orientalism leads to ideology or knowledge of the east (Budiyadi, 2018:205). Another understanding of orientalism can be found in the opinions of several experts. Like Denis Sinor's opinion, orientalism is a branch of scholarship that examines problems in the East using Western methods. Then the opinion of Muhammad Salih al-Bunadq, as quoted by Saifullah in his research "Orientalism and its implications for the Islamic World", is as follows:

“A movement with scientific discourse and religious aims based on their number, which often creates polemics (generally consisting of Westerners and others). This movement has a tendency to study eastern matters such as literature, culture, science, religion, history, language, anthropology and so on. A group of them paid great attention to the Islamic religion, such as studying the Qur'an, the Prophet, hadith, its groups, language, history and what was related to the Islamic religion. They study Arabic to achieve that goal and develop the research results for political purposes.” (Saifullah, 2020:5–6)

From the explanation above, it can be said that, in general, orientalism is a science that discusses the affairs of the Eastern world in terms of culture, history, science and religion. However, in its development, Western scholars have specialized in Islam as an object of study with a focus on the problem of the authenticity of the Qur'an, hadith and the Prophet Muhammad (Idri, 2013:306). Research activities on Islam have been going on for centuries sporadically but only emerged into the public sphere since the 19th century AD (Budiyadi, 2018:206 - 207).

There are differences of opinion in addressing research conducted by Western scholars on Islam. At least, there are two opinions. First, those who object to this study question the main principle of Western scholars on the use of reason which is too dominant in researching the study of Muslim holy texts (Mulawarman 2016:231). Due to making reason the basis for research, placing sacred Islamic texts is like studying texts in general, such as identifying the text of the Qur'an with other literary books.

However, it is not immediately concluded that all Western or orientalist researchers have the same tendency to study Islam. Because of this, the second opinion group thinks that orientalists are not always very subjective. Some of them try to research Islam objectively based on the methods and approaches they offer. There are four models of practice that they take, as cited by Yusuf Rahman in Mun'im Sirry's book *Kontroversi Islam Awal*, that is traditional descriptive approach, radical scepticism, source criticism and traditional criticism.

The first approach, traditional descriptive, does not question the historicity of early Islamic sources and accepts them as data. The second approach, radical scepticism, is the opposite, critically rejecting and questioning the historicity of early Islamic sources. The third approach, source criticism, does not entirely reject the historicity of early Islamic tradition sources but also does not take them for granted. Therefore, the Islamic sources were verified with other data of the same theme and then compared with non-Muslim sources. The fourth approach, tradition criticism, focus this study on aspects of transmitting information from one generation to the next. In this case, the study focuses on the oral process, namely the narration of hadith narrated by narrators (Rahman 2015:135–37). The existence of these four approaches, presumably, can illustrate that not all orientalists have a negative attitude toward studying Islam. They try to study Islam scientifically through several methods and approaches.

2) Approach and Sources used by William Montgomery Watt

Montgomery Watt, is a Western scholar who concentrates on Islamic studies, especially those related to the Qur'an. Watt is one of the orientalists who uses a rational-analytical approach. Orientalist figures from this approach are Ignaz Goldziher, Joseph Schacht, John Wansbrough with his controversial work *Qur'anic Studies*, and also Patricia Crone (Luthfi et al., 2009:34). Referring to the previous division of Mun'im Sirry, Watt can be categorized using a third approach, namely source

criticism. Although critical of Islamic studies, Watt does not necessarily reject literature originating from Islam. Montgomery Watt is an orientalist whose research can be trusted to be used as a reference because of his objectivity in studying Islam (Nurcholish, 2018:ix). In one of his monumental works, *Muhammad at Mecca*, Watt's explanation is based more on early Islamic sources. In the Introduction to his book, there are at least four books that are his references, namely *Sirah* by Ibn Hisham (d. 833 M/218 H), *Tarikh al-Tabari* by Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 922 M/310 H), *Maghazi* by al-Waqidi (d. 822 M/207 H) and *al-Tabaqat* by Ibn Sa'd (d. 845 M/230 H) (Watt, 1960:xi).

It could be said that Watt accepted these early Muslim sources as references. Watt believes that the source originates from the time of Muhammad, even though there will be changes in subsequent developments, that's only in the editorial, the essence remains the same. In addition, in his study, Watt tries to be neutral and objective towards Islam. Like when the Prophet married Zaynab, the wife of his adopted son, Zayd. In Watt's view, this was not caused by lust but seen from political and ethnic aspects. The marriage was intended to unite the tribe of Zaynab ibn Jash from Bani Abd Shams with the Prophet and to attract the sympathy of the members of that tribe (Al-Makin 2017:118).

Watt also admits that the Qur'an reveals God's revelation to the Prophet. As Hillenbrand said, quoted by al-Makin in his book *Antara Barat dan Timur*, the Qur'an is truly a revelation from God, and Muhammad truly had a genuine religious experience. Watt also criticized Western scholars who still maintain wrong views of the Prophet Muhammad (Al-Makin, 2017:119). Regarding the matter of the revelation of the Qur'an, Watt emphasized that the revelation of the Qur'an has not changed since it was revealed to the Prophet. In contrast to the Old and New Testaments, which, according to him, have undergone intervention and changes in terms of content (Masduki, 2008:353). In this case, Montgomery Watt's difference is seen in placing the Qur'an as God's revelation that was actually revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Unlike the orientalists in general, who position the Qur'an as a literary text, like other literary texts. This different point of view from the usual orientalists is what makes him called an orientalist who is sympathetic to Islam.

There is a different footing between orientalists and Muslim thinkers in viewing Islam. Montgomery Watt said that the fundamental difference between Western scholars and Muslim scholars in studying the history of Islamic thought is that orientalists assume that Islam is not yet perfect. Its studies will continue to experience development and change. In contrast, Muslim scholars consider that Islam has been finally marked by the end of the career of the Prophet Muhammad. The difference lies in words "change" and "development" (Arif 2008:50–51).

Based on the understanding that Islamic teachings are constantly developing and changing, orientalists also try to make approaches to understanding Islam as well as Watt. His book *Muhammad at Mecca* explains the importance of historical aspects in research. The reason is that the Qur'an's explanation of Islam, as in the study of Mecca, most of the literature that discusses this theme only explains it from a theological perspective. Watt felt that this was not enough. In order to get a balanced and comprehensive picture of Mecca, it is necessary to explain other aspects, such as the economic, social, political and religious background of the Arab community at that time (Montgomery Watt, 1960:xiii). Watt refers to early Islamic sources as research data to find out these aspects.

b. William Montgomery Watt's Thoughts on Islamic Teachings: The Generality of the Prophet and *Nasikh Mansukh* in the Qur'an

Before entering into Watt's thoughts regarding *samawi* religious, theological relations, it is necessary to know Watt's thoughts on Islamic teachings. In this case, he will explain his opinion about the *Umminess* of the Prophet and *Nasikh Mansukh* in the Qur'an. Here, Watt's rational-analytical attitude can be seen when he presents his argument about the *Umminess* of the Prophet. Even though he made Islamic sources as a reference, he did not take them for granted. Because of this, Watt has a different view from the majority of Muslims regarding the Ummah of the Prophet.

1) The *Umminess* of the Prophet

Watt is indeed known as an orientalist who sympathizes with Islam, but his views are not necessarily the same as those of the clergy. One example is his opinion regarding the *Umminess* of the Prophet, which is different from most scholars. He considered that the Prophet was an *Ummi* who could read and write. In contrast to some Muslim scholars who say that the Prophet was an *ummi*, in the sense that he could not read and write according to the scholars, this is the value of the miracles of the Qur'an itself.

To strengthen his opinion that the Prophet was someone who could read and write, Watt associated it with the social history of pre-Islamic Arab society, which emphasized oral and rote traditions. The tradition of memorizing also took place in the era of revelation, referring to the process of preserving the Qur'an. Watt believed that the tradition of writing existed at that time but was deliberately hidden to show the miracles of the Qur'an by saying that the Prophet was an *Ummi* (could not read and write). The basis he uses is an explanation of explanation of several verses of the Qur'an, namely surah Yunus (10) verse 38, sura Hud (11) verses 13-16 and sura al-Qasas (28) verse 49.

As for the explanation of the *asbab al-nuzul* from sura al-'alaq, according to him, it makes the history of the authorship of the Qur'an difficult to accept. The description of the verse, according to Watt, seems to confirm that the tradition of writing is a miracle in the era of revelation. Like the meaning of the words "*alladzi 'allama bi al-qalam, 'allama al-insana ma lam ya'lam*", namely "*one who teaches people things that are not known through the intercession of the pen*". But according to Watt the meaning of this verse should lead to regret that what is meant by the pen refers to a writing or a book. Apart from that, Watt also strengthened his argument by explaining that surah al-Baqarah;282 also refers to writing activities, namely orders to record debt transactions.

Based on the argument above, Watt believes that the Prophet Muhammad was someone who could read and write. This possibility was also due to the environmental factors of the Prophet in Mecca with the ignorant people who could read and write, even though the oral tradition was stronger at that time. If it is associated with the Prophet's youth as a trader, of course, writing skills are needed. Moreover, at that time, the Prophet was taking care of Khadijah's trade. Of course, writing skills were needed to make trade records for Khadijah or for the Prophet himself. The arguments he mentioned became the basis for Watt to believe that the Prophet Muhammad was someone who could read and write, like Arab traders in general. As for the term *ummi*, which is believed by the majority of scholars to be someone who cannot read and write, Watt thinks that the meaning of *ummi* is more directed to the meaning that the Prophet did not know and had never read the previous books, as the information stated in surah al-Baqarah:78 (HS, 2020:96–99).

Watt's explanation, which is different from most Islamic scholars, is the result of the approach he uses, namely source criticism and showing his rational-critical side. By observing several verses of the Qur'an, as well as from history, he came to a different conclusion. However, on this issue, he only differed on the generality of the Prophet, who was able to read and write, and that did not change his opinion about the authenticity of the Qur'an as a revelation brought by the Prophet.

2) *Nasikh Mansukh* in The Qur'an

As for Watt's opinion about the Qur'an, he is in line with what the majority of Muslims believe. He said that the Qur'an is purely the word of God which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and was not a product of the Prophet's consciousness. In addition, Watt also said that revelation, in contrast to the books of the Old and New Testaments, according to him, had undergone changes in content. Whereas the Qur'an does not undergo revision, if there is any change, it is not from the text, but from

the aspect of interpretation, because the Qur'an is always relevant to be interpreted according to the times.

Even though Watt said that the Qur'an had never been revised, he still tried to reveal the Qur'anic data that led to it. For example, regarding the existence of the concept of *nasikh* and *mansukh* which is recognized by Muslims. The basis for the development of this doctrine is that there are some verses in the Qur'an that are temporary in nature and then replaced by others due to orders from Allah, because these are also considered part of the verses of the Qur'an (Masduki, 2008:350–355).

The word *nasakha*, which forms the basis for the theory of *nasikh* and *mansukh*, appears twice in the Qur'an. The two verses are sura al-Baqarah verse 106 and sura al-Hajj verse 52 which, according to Watt, both have a "cancellation" tendency. In the first verse, Watt thinks that the verse describes several aspects of the Prophet's experience of receiving revelation. Meanwhile, according to Watt, the intent of the second verse relates to Satan's attempt to insert words that are contrary to Islamic monotheism into the mouth of the Prophet in reading the Qur'an but were abolished by Allah.

Watt said that what is meant by "cancellation" is deletion. He does not mean cancellation by forgetting, which according to him, understanding by forgetting will lead to the loss of verses from the Qur'an. With the existence of these textual verses, according to Watt, the Qur'an hints at the possibility that the Prophet could have forgotten the revelations sent down to him but was then reminded by Allah. Even so, this did not necessarily show the weakness of the Prophet, but it was God's will. Thus, Watt wants to emphasize that the existence of a text is a way of the Qur'an implying a revision by cancelling or deleting a verse. Therefore, Watt considers that the verses of the Qur'an also undergo revision, but do not eliminate these verses. The existence of *nasikh* and *mansukh* is a sign that this is a form of adapting the verses of the Qur'an to the changing social conditions faced by Muslims at that time. In other words, said Watt, *nasikh* and *mansukh* in the Qur'an are adaptations of messages expressed to the life of the people who are experiencing development (Jalaludin 2019:124).

c. Examining the History of *Samawi* Religion: Theological Relations of Judaism, Christianity and Islam according to William Montgomery Watt

Before explaining about the theological relations of *samawi* religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam according to Watt, it is necessary to explain the terms paganism and the concept of God according to pre-Islamic Arab society first. An explanation of the two themes is necessary as a connecting link to explain Watt's opinion regarding the theological relations of divine religions.

1). The term Paganism

Jahiliyah literally means stupid, mindless, the age of ignorance or the period of pre-Islamic Arab paganism. Jahiliyah can also mean the era before the arrival of Islam (As-Sahbuny, 2016:235). In a sense, the era where people's ignorance of God's guidance brought by the Prophet Muhammad. Meanwhile, according to scholars, ignorance is a condition of pre-Islamic Arab society that does not know about Islamic teachings (Hendra, 2015:2). They are considered ignorant in the field of morals, as well as belief in Allah, but in fact, they are a cultured society, for example, this can be seen from their expertise in literature. Umayyah bin Abi al-Shalt, was a pre-Islamic poet who talked a lot about the afterlife. Toshihiko Izutsu says that pre-Islamic Arab views of the afterlife existed, and their views were influenced to some extent by Judaism and Christianity. However, this view did not influence the pagan society that many Arabs believed in. They do not believe in the existence of the hereafter, so they focus on worldly life, not on the hereafter (Chodjim 2005:116).

Pre-Islamic Arab society was the majority of paganism people, even though at first they were familiar with the teachings of monotheism (Rofiq 2017:43). Paganism people are also known as paganism. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary, paganism is a condition in which society believes in worshipping nature and many gods. It can also mean not having a religion or understanding

in the pre-Islamic era (Sunendar et al., 2016). Goldziher associates the term paganism with *sunnah*, according to him, the term *sunnah* is taken from the notion of paganism which refers to the customs of the Arab people inherited from their ancestors. He considers that *sunnah* is a religious view and practice that developed in the early generation of Islamic communities. Thus, Goldziher argues that the birth of the term *sunnah* adopted the meaning of paganism which incidentally reflected the views of the ancient Arabs. This conclusion was obtained because he defined the term from a historical point of view, not etymology (Idri, 2017:101–102). Based on some of these meanings, paganism means an understanding or belief in gods or nature before the arrival of Islam. It is a custom or tradition in that environment, as believed by pre-Islamic Arab society.

The belief in paganism in pre-Islamic Arab society, especially in Mecca, originated from 'Amr bin Luhay, the leader of the Khuza'ah tribe. Luhay was influenced by paganism in the land of Sham. The Khuza'ah tribe played an important role in controlling the holy city of Mecca after the Jurhum tribe (Montgomery Watt, 1960:4–5). Therefore, as a leader, of course he has influence on the members of his tribe, as well as on other tribes. When he put the Hubal idol in the form of a human into the Kaaba, his actions were then followed by every tribe who also had their own idols to put in the Kaaba. Counted there are 360 idols placed around the Kaaba which they believe that the idols are representations of their gods (Rofiq, 2019:52).

According to Fred M. Donner, paganism is very suitable for Arab society when viewed from its social environment. The status of the Kaaba reinforces this as a holy place; bloodshed should not occur there because it gave the opportunity for different tribes to perform the rites of worship of the gods safely. In addition, the condition of the sacred area is safe, not only used by various tribes for worship, but also used for shopping, visiting markets, holding important meetings and holding marriages and alliances (M. Donner, 2015:33). The existence of activities other than worship is in accordance with the belief of the Arab community that the life of the world is better than the hereafter. They do not believe in resurrection after death and highly respect and prioritize only their worldly life. According to them, Mecca is the right place to make this happen, because it is considered the safest place for performing paganism rituals and worldly activities (Chodjim 2005:118).

2). The Concept of God in the View of Pre-Islamic Arab Society

Pre-Islamic Arab society, as explained earlier, was a people of paganism who worshipped gods. Even so, they still acknowledge the existence of God. However, the concept of Allah that they believe in is different from the concept of Allah in the view of Muslims. Pre-Islamic society acknowledged the existence of Allah, but not as a single person, but as the supreme God or as the Lord of the Kaaba. Actually, they also use the word Allah in mentioning it as their supreme God. The word Allah is already known in the pre-Islamic Arabic tradition, both among the Jews as well as Christians and the Hanifs. The word God is equated with the Greek word *hot heos* which means God. All Arab people are familiar with this abstract term. Each tribe has a god and has a local meaning for that God. In a sense, they know the term Allah, *hot heos* as a term, but have their own understanding of the gods they worship (Sahidah 2018:221).

The use of the word Allah is also allegedly due to cultural contact between Jews and Christians, who also use the word Allah to refer to God in their Bibles. Therefore, this influences their way of thinking about the concept of God towards a higher concept, not just limited to ethnicity. Izutsu thinks that pre-Islamic Arab society already had ideas, at least vague ones, about belief in Allah as a supreme God above the level of local idols (Izutsu, 2003:103). This statement is in line with Watt's opinion that it is possible that at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the Meccan Arabs used the word Allah to denote a god or as the main God of the Kaaba. They acknowledge the existence of God, but the

polytheistic concept they believe in is not in line with the monotheistic concept brought by the Prophet Muhammad.

According to Watt, the influence of Christian teachings on Arab monotheism was influenced by social and political conditions at that time. He said that Christianity at that time was embraced by several kingdoms that had military and political power, such as the Byzantine empire, whose strength and civilization was higher so that they were greatly admired, a position similar to that of Abyssinia. Christianity in the Persian Empire was still strong with Christianity, and al-Hirah, a country under Persian rule, also embraced this religion. Hence, the combination of power, military and political might and that higher civilization must have impressed the Arabs. The influence of the Jews on the Arabs was not as great as that of the Christians, only a few may have had closer contact. This can be seen when the Arabs lived side by side with the Jewish community in Medina, quite a number of Jews also lived in the Arab oases and in the fertile Arab areas in the south. (Montgomery Watt 1960:27)

According to Watt, the connection between pre-Islamic society's religious understanding and Judaism and Christianity also had an influence on Islamic teachings. He said that the revelation of the Qur'an, in its early part, explained eschatological matters aimed at people who already believed in the existence of God. In a sense, the early verses conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad adapted to the understanding of pre-Islamic Arab society at that time who believed in the existence of God. Although some of the verses conveyed use new words and may confuse them, such as the word saqar in surah al-Muddatsir verse 27, the word al-Qari'ah in sura al-Qari'ah verse 1, and the word al-Hutamah in surah al-Humazah verse 4. Apart from that, there is also a description of the word Kaaba in sura al-Quraysh which shows that the condition of the Meccans at that time was the dominant worship of Allah there. (Montgomery Watt 1960:26)

3). Divine Religious Theological Relations: Judaism, Christianity and Islam

In line with the explanation above, Watt believes that Judaism and Christianity have contributed to the divine understanding of pre-Islamic Arab society. Watt related his statement to the social and political conditions of pre-Islamic society at that time. The monotheism of the pre-Islamic Arab society who acknowledged the existence of Allah as the highest God also became the initial concept that they understood in accepting Islamic monotheism. Therefore, as Watt believes that the influence of monotheism in pre-Islamic Arab society by Judaism and Christianity shows that these two religions also adhere to monotheism as believed by Muslims.

Watt tries to explain that Judaism, Christianity and Islam have the same essence, namely the *Hanifiyah* religion brought by Ibrahim. The explanation in the Qur'an of the concept of a trinity consisting of Father, Son and Mother Mary, is undoubtedly a criticism of some minority Christian Arabs who hold this view. On the Jewish side, too, most of the explanations do not come from the writings of the first sources, but from the second (Watt, 1960:28). From this, it is clear that Watt is trying to show that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are basically the same in terms of understanding the concept of God, namely monotheism. If at this time there is a different understanding of the concept of monotheism on the part of Jews or Christians, it is none other than because some of its followers have views that are not in accordance with the actual understanding. Because of this effort, Watt is known as an orientalist who tries to dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Al-Makin 2017:119).

Watt's opinion regarding the essence of *samawi* religion, Judaism, Christianity and Islam is the religion brought by Abraham or also called *millah Ibrahim hanifa*, in line with what is understood by Muslims. The word *millah*, according to al-Tabari is *hanif*, which means straight with the meaning of monotheism. Al-Razi said that Ibrahim's *millah* is similar in meaning to the *millah* brought by the prophet Muhammad, they both teach humans about monotheism or teachings about the oneness of God (Anggraeni, 2016:52). The form of Ibrahim's opposition to idol worship and as the foundation of monotheism can be seen in QS. al-An'am (6) 74-83; QS. Maryam (19):41-51; QS. al-Shaffat (37):83-

99; QS. al-Anbiya (21):51-71; and QS. al-Syu'ara' (26):9-104 (Afdillah, 2016:98–99). Apart from that, the Qur'an explicitly gives messages that essentially have the same message between the Qur'an and the previous books. This can be seen from the explanation that the presence of the Qur'an as a complement to the treatise that was previously revealed to previous prophets, as stated in QS. Ali Imran (3):3-4 (Afdillah, 2016:98–99). The existence of this explanation implies that all semitic religions have a continuity of God's message that leads to the prophet Abraham as. So that the semitic religions have the same mission to purify monotheism while at the same time showing that the arrival of the prophet Muhammad was to perfect the teachings of previous religions (Anggraeni 2016:50).

According to Watt, the existence of inter-religious dialogue is an attempt to change the views of religious adherents so that they can be open to each other and can learn lessons from one another. Apart from that, Watt also hopes that dialogue can eliminate the mutual condescension of each religion. To be able to realize this, it is necessary to carry out cooperation between adherents of religions, realizing that dialogue can be carried out outside of fundamental debates that lead to theological issues and in the end always find no common ground. This dialogical theology approach can help provide understanding to each adherent regarding beliefs and practices that may have been misunderstood. Of course, each religion can emulate positive things as long as these actions are not related to the principles of the creed of each religion (Mustafa 2006:136–137). Simply put, as Azyumardi Azra in his article “Religious Tolerance in a Pluralist Society: Indonesian Muslim Perspective”, presents Watt's opinion quoting Mahmud Ayoub's statement that the application of humanizing between adherents of religion—in this case the social field—can realized when Muslims live seriously with the piousness of their faith in balance with the demands of social, political, ethical and economic (Azra 2011:26). Of course, this principle also applies to adherents of other religions, both Judaism and Christianity.

4. Conclusion

Montgomery Watt is one of the orientalist who studies Islam by prioritizing early Islamic sources as a reference. He tries to examine Islam from the Islamic sources themselves, and then criticizes these sources. In a sense, he is an orientalist figure who uses a source criticism approach in his research. As for examples of early Islamic sources that he studied, such as the book *Sirah* by Ibn Hisham (d. 833 M/218 H), *Tarikh al-Tabari* by Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 922 M/310 H), *Maghazi* by al- -Waqidi (d. 822 M/207 H) and *al-Tabaqat* by Ibn Sa'd (d. 845 M/230 H) (Al-Makin, 2017:117). At least, there are three points related to Watt's mongtomery thoughts. First, regarding the Prophet which Islamic scholars said was an ummi, or a person who could not read and write, he did not simply accept this argument, but provided other arguments which also came from Islamic sources themselves. Like his argument about the Prophet being someone who could read and write based on surah Yunus (10) verse 38, sura Hud (11) verses 13-16 and sura al-Qasas (28) verse 49.

Second, he sees Islam from a historical perspective, therefore he considers that Islam is a complement to the previous monotheistic religions, namely Christianity and Judaism. Islamic teachings also have something to do with the two religions which aim to complement their teachings. For this, he is said to be an orientalist who tries to dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Third, regarding the holy book, according to him the Qur'an is purely a revelation sent down from God, different from previous religious books which according to him had been intervened by humans. Even though nasikh and mansukh are considered as revisions to verses of the Qur'an, that is God's will, not from humans. Moreover, *nasikh* and *mansukh* in the Qur'an indicate revelation descending according to the development of society at that time and at the same time show the historicity of the revelation of the Qur'anic text.

Watt tries to study Islam objectively, engage in dialogue between religions, position the revelation of the Qur'an as Muslims believe in it. According to him, studying the Qur'an by equating the text with literature will eliminate the uniqueness and authenticity of the Koran itself (Watt, 1960:26). Even so, it does not necessarily only refer to explanations of the Koran, other aspects are needed to explain Islamic matters. For example, in his book *Muhammad at Mecca*, he not only explains the emergence of early Islam in Mecca from the Qur'an, but also explains the aspects that influenced its emergence at that time, both from the economic, social, and religious aspects. political. Therefore, he tries to study Islam not only from a theological perspective, but also from a historical perspective.

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