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## 5 Interpretation of *Tauhīd* Verses from Said Nursi's Perspective: An Esoteric Approach and Its Influence on Islamic Thought

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### Abstract

6 In the modern context, it is important for Muslims to have a concept of monotheism that does not just remain academic but also helps in strengthening one's faith. Nursi introduces two dimensions of monotheism: birth monotheism and true monotheism, both of which aim to nurture faith in everyday life. Understanding both the esoteric and esoteric interpretations of monotheistic verses is crucial. This research delves into Nursi's esoteric approach to *Tauhīd* 'monotheistic' verses and their impact on Islamic thought. The qualitative research design involves a literature review, gathering data from journals, proceedings, books, and documentaries. The data is analyzed using content analysis techniques, as well as esoteric and historical approaches. The research findings reveal that Nursi's esoteric interpretation of monotheistic verses is in line with other Sufi mufasssirs, with two significant differences. Firstly, Nursi's esoteric approach, particularly in *tafakkur*, offers tangible examples that can be experienced physically. Secondly, as a member of the Naqshbandi Tariqa, Nursi consistently refers to *asmā' al-husnā* and associates it with manifestations reflected in all entities when interpreting the Qur'an. Nursi's interpretation of monotheistic verses has a strong influence at the international level and a socio-religious impact at the national level. However, his interpretation remains significant in addressing religious matters in Indonesia.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is *al-kalām al-mu'jiz* 'a miraculous expression' (Al-Qattān, 1995) and guidance for humans (al-Ni'mah, 2008) that focuses on three main aspects: *i'tiqādiyyah* 'faith', *khuluqīyyah* 'ethics', and *amaliyyah* 'worship and social' (Ajahari, 2018). The issue of *i'tiqādiyyah*, especially those related to *tauḥīd* 'monotheism', is the main theme among these three aspects. Thus, *tauḥīd* emphasizes unity with Allah as the main theme of the apostles' preaching (Al-Ied, 2005; Setia, 2011). The Prophet Muhammad owns the most complete evidence and explanation of monotheism contained in the Qur'an (Q. Shihab, 2007).

The concept of monotheism is a topic of controversy in classical theological studies, despite the Qur'an's comprehensive explanation of it. The debate between the *Mu'tazilah* and *Ahlu al-Sunnah* about monotheism led to conflicting interpretations. The *Mu'tazilites* defined monotheism as the belief that Allah's attributes cannot be separated from His essence, and they rejected anthropomorphism and the beatific vision (Hasbi, 2015). Meanwhile, *Ahlu al-Sunnah* believed in monotheism as the belief that Allah was One in His substances, attributes, and actions. They also believed that Allah was close to creatures and could be seen by humans on the Day of Judgment (Rabbani, 2019).

The conflict between the *Mu'tazilah* and *Ahlu al-Sunnah* arises from variations in their methodological and philosophical approaches to Islamic religious texts. Despite differing opinions, both schools are committed to comprehending and following Islamic teachings with strong beliefs. They have had a significant impact on the intellectual and theological history of Islam. These disagreements have historically reflected the legacy of theological studies.

Furthermore, another controversy on monotheism arose between Salafis (Somad, 2015) and *Ahlu al-Sunnah*, including the monotheism of *rububiyah*, *uluhiyah*, *asmā'*, and *ṣifāt* (A. F. Zarkasyi, 2020). Coined by Ibn Taimiyyah, this term is used by Salafis to describe the practice of *tawaṣul* and *tabarruk* with the Prophet Muhammad or the saints of Allah. However, many people consider this trilogy can be confusing (Kholilurrohman, 2019). This controversy seems to dissociate monotheism from its substance, narrows understanding, and ignores the core teachings of monotheism. The apologetic study of monotheism is also considered less valuable in the current era (M. Q. Shihab, 2002), especially in overcoming the fragility of faith, for instance, teenagers who experience religious doubts (Idrus, 2006).

Nowadays, Muslims need a concept of monotheism that does not only teach the Oneness of Allah but also prioritizes faith due to the fragility of faith (Şentürk, 1998; Tuna, 2017). This innovative idea emerged from a contemporary Turkish interpreter in the 20th century, Badiuzzaman Said Nursi (Ahmad Zahir & Mohd Sharif, 2020; Baker, 2022; Majeed, 2020; Nursi, 2012; Syauqi, 2017; Vahide, 2005). Nursi divides the concept of monotheism into two types (Keskin, 2019; Nursi, 2011). First, *tauḥīd al-zāhirī* is a general belief in the Oneness of Allah that He is One, has no allies, and is the Owner of the entire world. Second, *tauḥīd al-ḥaqīqī*, which is a deep belief in the Oneness of Allah that He has One Power over anything, has no allies in His *uluhiyah*, no enslaved people in His *rububiyah*, and no rivals in His kingdom; the belief that provides calm and serenity to its Owner because He has witnessed the sign of His Power (Amir & Rahman, 2023).

Nursi's view implies that *tauḥīd al-zāhirī* is only limited to recognizing the oneness of God, while *tauḥīd al-ḥaqīqī* creates calmness and tranquility for the soul (Ayathurrahman & Shodiq, 2023; Fitrowan, 2023). In this case, Nursi has the privilege of interpreting monotheistic verses, such as those in Surah al-Anbiyā' verse 22, "*Had there been therein (in the heavens and the earth) gods besides Allah, then verily both would have been ruined. Glorified be Allah, the Lord of the Throne, (High is He) above what they attribute to Him!*". Nursi interprets this verse by emphasizing the oneness of God due to the inseparable nature of His *uluhiyah* and *rububiyah*. According to Nursi, absolute power rejects various forms of intervention, competition, and alliances (Orhan, 2023). He uses an analogy to explain that just as even weak humans would not accept intervention from others in their affairs, the Almighty God, the Sustainer of the universe, should be left to carry out His will (Tee & Shankland, 2014).

Nursi also points out the perfect order in the universe as solid evidence of God's oneness. He mentions everything from flies' wings to the stars in the sky, inviting awe and recognition of His majesty (Nursi, 2011). Nursi's interpretation of this verse demonstrates a profound understanding of monotheism in Islam, particularly regarding the oneness of God (*tauḥīd uluhiyah* and *rububiyah*) and its implications for the universe and human life. In this statement, Nursi presents a compelling argument for the significance of acknowledging, respecting, and admiring the oneness of God in all aspects of life (Özdemir & Özdemir, 2022). This interpretation reveals a deep understanding of the connection between humans, the universe, and its creator, emphasizing the importance of relying on Allah when facing life's challenges and trials (Islam & Nasution, 2024).

Meanwhile, Quraish Shihab interprets this verse by explaining three possibilities in human minds if there are two Gods (M. Q. Shihab, 2002). Hamka's thought also strengthens the idea of God's unity by revealing that the existence of more than one God would lead to destructive conflict in the universe, something that is not observed in reality (Hamka, 2001). Quraish Shihab's interpretation and Hamka's thoughts on this verse provide a deep understanding of the oneness of God in Islam and its impact on the universe and human life. They emphasize the importance of recognizing and understanding the oneness of God in Islam as the basis for order and harmony in the universe and human life.

On the other hand, Ibn Taimiyyah used this verse to explain monotheism *uluhiyah*, which states that the universe's destruction occurs due to worship directed at others other than Allah (A. F. Zarkasyi, 2020). Quraish Shihab and Hamka's interpretation of Surah al-Anbiya verse 22 provides a view that reflects criticism of Ibn Taymiyyah's theological thought. Even though there are

similarities between their interpretations and Nursi's, Nursi shows significant differences by reflecting the beauty of the universe, even in the most minor things, such as a fly's wings. Nursi considers it a path to true monotheism, which involves deep belief in Allah (Nursi, 2007). The interpretations of Quraish Shihab, Hamka, and Nursi each provide a unique contribution to understanding the concept of monotheism in Islam and the relationship between the universe and God's existence. Although there are differences in emphasis and approach, they all emphasize the importance of recognizing God's oneness as a solid foundation of faith in Islam (Muqtada, 2023).

Nursi's interpretation is important in combining the concepts of *rububiyah* and *uluhiyah* monotheism without distinguishing between them. Nursi emphasizes that the oneness of God requires a complete understanding of these aspects. Different interpretations often lead to debates, with many considering monotheism solely from a formal perspective and ignoring its true essence (Ikbāl, 2015). Therefore, the author conveys that an esoteric approach is needed to understand monotheistic verses. This approach encourages humans to dig deeper and seek the hidden nature of religious teachings. Thus, the esoteric approach can find a deep essence of monotheistic verses (Khasanah et al., 2023).

A comprehensive overview of recent research in Qur'anic interpretation emerges from multiple theses and journals. Didik Purnomo's thesis delves into Fakhrudin al-Rāzī's interpretation of *Tauḥīd* verses, highlighting similarities with Sunni scholars and emphasizing the concept of *ghair* in interpreting *lā ilāha illā huwa* (Purnomo, 2016). Mirza Hasanul Yani explores the perspectives of al-Ṭabāṭabāī and Quraish Shihab on *Tauḥīd* verses, focusing on differences regarding Shia influences and historical narratives (Yani, 2017). Cemal Sahin analyzes Said Nursi's integration of *Kalām* science and Sufism, proposing a spiritual theory rooted in Qur'anic interpretation (Sahin, 2020). Lutfi Farhan Desky and Zarfi Rizal examine Nursi's Sufistic interpretive style and the concept of *tafakkur*, respectively, elucidating thematic methods and the significance of contemplation in *Risālah al-Nūr* (Desky, 2021; Rizal, 2021). Irwansyah's research investigates esoteric dimensions in interpreting worship verses through KH. Ahmad Hasyim Muzadi's lens emphasizes *Ṣūfī al-Isyārī* exegesis and the utilization of *taqiyya* and *'aliyah* arguments (Irwansyah, 2021). Additionally, Kerwanto's journal underscores the epistemological nuances of esoteric interpretation, stressing the unique set of epistemologies required for its acceptance, which informs contemporary approaches to understanding Qur'anic verses (Kerwanto, 2021).

Based on the literature review above, there is a lack of research on Said Nursi's works that interpret the verse of *tauḥīd* with an esoteric approach and its influence on contemporary Islamic thought. This paper is still relevant for publication and provides novelty in the form of a comprehensive description of Said Nursi's interpretation of the *tauḥīd* verse and its influence on the thinking of contemporary Islamic figures.

## METHODS

This research uses the literature review method (Fahrudin, 2020; Okoli & Schabram, 2012). In this case, the author carries the theme of Nursi's esoteric approach to *tauḥīd* 'monotheistic' verses and their influence on Islamic thought so that the literary sources used are sources such as books, journals, proceedings, magazines, and articles related to this theme. The literary sources related to books are the work of Said Nursi, such as books entitled *Rasāil al-Nūr*, *Al-Kalimāt*, *Al-Mathnawī Al-Nurī*, *Window of Tauhid*, *Risale-i Nur Kulliyatin* and others. The author employs listening techniques to gather data and records the relevant information. They focus on listening to Said Nursi's works and documenting all data related to the interpretation of the *tauḥīd* verse. Once the data is gathered, the author narrows it down by selecting and organizing it to ensure that it aligns with the research objectives. Data analysis uses content analysis techniques (Ahmad, 2018; Sartika, 2014), esoteric approach (Ikbāl, 2015; Putra, 2018), and historical approach (Haryanto, 2017; Pirdaus & Muawanah, 2024; Ridwan et al., 2024).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Nursi's Esoteric Interpretation of *Tauhīd* Verses

Nursi's esoteric interpretation method in *Rasāil al-Nūr* (Al Mahmud, 2023; Amir & Rahman, 2023; Nursi, 1956) can be studied through five approaches (Reflita & Syatri, 2020). These five approaches include: (1) theological approach, discussing the theological concepts underlying Nursi's thought, such as monotheism, prophethood, and resurrection, and how he connects these concepts to his interpretation of Qur'anic verses, (2) philosophical approach, examining Nursi's philosophical foundations in understanding reality and existence, and their influence on how he interprets religious texts, (3) sufi approach, investigating the influence of the Sufi tradition in Nursi's thought, including the use of contemplation and spiritual mediation in his interpretation of the Qur'an, (4) linguistic approach, analyzing the use of language and sentence structure in Nursi's texts, and how it affects the understanding of the interpreted Qur'anic verses, and (5) historical approach, tracing the historical context and Nursi's life when he wrote *Rasāil al-Nūr*, including events that influenced his thinking and how he responded to the developments of his time in his interpretations (El-Khatib, 2019).

First, Nursi uses external meaning as a basic analogy in exploring esoteric (inner) meaning. It can be found in the interpretation of several verses, such as in Surah al-Ra'd verse 28, where Nursi mentions the exoteric meaning 'zahir' that the heart and soul will feel anxious and afraid unless they know Allah. All matters handed over to Him, including the heart and soul, will become calm (Horkuc, 2010). Nursi utilized this exoteric meaning to reveal the hidden esoteric meaning in verse: the calm obtained when a servant only relies on Allah (Nursi, 2011). It suggests that Nursi's esoteric approach reflects the weakness of a servant who requires consecration in his *ubudiyah*. The literal meaning of this verse became Nursi's primary concern in exploring the inner meaning of the Qur'an, ensuring that the resulting esoteric meaning does not conflict with or deviate from the literal meaning of the verse (Reflita & Syatri, 2020). Nursi even manages to avoid contradiction by paying attention to the literal meaning of the verse.

In another interpretation, Nursi interprets Surah al-Mulk verse 2 by equating it with the sun, which reflects the seven names of Allah, such as *al-Ḥakīm*, *al-Karīm*, *al-Raḥīm*, *al-Ṣamadaniyah*, *al-'Ilm*, *al-Qudrah*, and *al-Razzāq*. Nursi associates the Surah al-Mulk verse 2 with the sun, suggesting that just as the sun reflects light, warmth, and sustenance to the physical world, it also reflects the divine attributes or names of Allah. Nursi identifies seven specific names of Allah that are reflected by the sun: *al-Ḥakīm* 'the Wise', *al-Karīm* 'the Generous', *al-Raḥīm* 'the Merciful', *al-Ṣamadaniyah* 'the Eternal', *al-'Ilm* 'the All-Knowing', *al-Qudrah* 'the All-Powerful', and *al-Razzāq* 'the Provider'. By equating the sun with these divine attributes, Nursi emphasizes that the signs of Allah's existence and attributes are evident in the natural world, including in celestial bodies like the sun. This interpretation underscores Nursi's belief in the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual realms and highlights the Quranic theme of contemplating the signs of Allah in creation. He also uses the metaphor of the seven colors of the sun as a representation of providing sustenance, grace, attention, and wisdom in life (Nursi, 2011). In this case, Nursi makes the sun a symbol of life, a symbolic approach in the Sufism tradition (Riexinger, 2017).

Sufi commentators are depicted as utilizing symbols to convey their interpretations, viewing the Qur'an as a vast sea of symbols with hidden meanings accessible to those who delve into its depths (Maulidi et al., 2023). The paragraph emphasizes how Sufi commentators, including Nursi, employ symbolism to uncover the richness and depth of meaning within the Qur'an. It underscores the significance of symbolic interpretation in providing a deeper understanding of Islamic religious concepts and revealing spiritual aspects that may be challenging to grasp through literal language alone. Thus, the paragraph suggests that Nursi's symbolic approach is rooted in the tradition of Sufism, which frequently relies on symbols in religious interpretation.

Al-Qusayr uses the birth-meaning method as a basic analogy in interpreting Surah Ibrahim verses 32-34. In *Zahir*, he explains the sky above and the earth below. However, esoterically al-Qusayr reveals that Allah has decorated the sky of the heart with the lights of reason, the sun of



monotheism, and the moon of gratitude has risen in it (Al-Qusyairi, 2007). Al-Qusayr's approach to interpreting the Qur'an reflects an attempt to understand and reveal the spiritual meanings hidden behind its outward meaning. By using symbolism, metaphor and analogy, al-Qusayr explores the depths of the meaning of the Qur'an to provide a deeper understanding of Islamic religious concepts. His approach, which combines external and esoteric meanings, helps open the door to a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings and humans' relationship with God.

Furthermore, Nursi also uses an analogy between exoteric and esoteric meanings in several verses. For example, in Surah al-A'rāf verse 185, Nursi describes the throne of Allah as a magnificent Palace that reflects His deeds, names, attributes, and substances. The analogy of a skilled architect implies the existence of neat deeds, perfect qualities, and noble potential (Nursi, 2011). This meaning is considered esoteric because it requires deep religious reflection, not conventional understanding. Nursi's use of the analogy of exoteric and esoteric meanings in his interpretation shows an approach that focuses on deep understanding and spiritual reflection in understanding the verses of the Qur'an. Through analogies, Nursi helps open the door to the deeper meaning of Islamic teachings and increases the reader's understanding of complex religious concepts.

In the second approach, Nursi equates the outer meaning with the inner meaning (equivalent analogy) in interpreting several verses, such as Surah al-Anbiyā' verse 22. He symbolizes the existence of two Gods with the chaos that arises if there were two leaders in one area. Nursi states that even weak humans do not accept intervention from other people in their affairs; they let the power of the Almighty God, the Sustainer of the universe, commit His will (Nursi, 2011). This meaning is considered esoteric because it also requires meditation apart from being hidden (Muflih & Yusoff, 2013). Another example is when Nursi interprets Surah al-Ṭīn verse 4 and Surah al-Dariyat verses 20-21. Nursi compares the human spirit to complete control over the body, similar to Allah, who completely controls the universe (Nursi, 2011). Through appropriate analogies, Nursi explores the esoteric meaning of these verses, which requires the interpreter's expertise in revealing the similarity of the inner meaning with the text's redaction (Reflita & Syatri, 2020).

Al-Alūsī also uses the analogy method of matching exoteric meaning with esoteric meaning in interpreting Surah al-Anbiyā' verse 22. The exoteric verse states that if there are two gods in the heavens and on earth, both will be destroyed. However, Al-Alūsī explains that this command is to return to God and sever all ties and causes in the heart (Al-Sulamī, 2001). The equivalent analogy is that humans who serve a "cause" to God other than Almighty God will experience physical and spiritual destruction. Analysis of Al-Alusi's analogy method of matching exoteric meaning with esoteric meaning in interpreting the verse shows an approach similar to Nursi's in using analogies to describe spiritual concepts in the Qur'an. Al-Alusi's approach shows that using analogies as a means of understanding can help unlock the depth of the Qur'an's meaning and reveal complex spiritual concepts. By using analogies, al-Alusi helps readers understand the esoteric meaning of the verse and stimulate deeper spiritual reflection.

In the third approach, Nursi explains the inner meaning of the verse by highlighting the context 'siyāq' in Surah al-Isrā' verse 44. He conveys that "everything" mentioned in this verse includes things visible on earth, not the unseen. Nursi states that everything in the universe glorifies Allah, like the Rahmani letter, which reflects its Creator (Nursi, 2011). This meaning encourages humans to reflect on the universe, known as *afaki tafakkur*. Al-Qusayr also uses the explanation method of the esoteric meaning of verses in interpreting Surah al-Sajadah verse 7. He describes the beauty of God's creation by detailing the images of His throne, the wings of angels, Gabriel as a peacock, and the beauty of angels, showing that "everything He created in the best way" was not limited to visible things, but also to invisible things (Al-Qusyairi, 2007).

Besides that, Nursi strengthens the interpretation with the evidence of the Qur'an and Sunnah in the fourth approach. This approach is based on *mukāsyafah* science and uses historical information. Nursi's interpretation method involves strengthening his interpretations with evidence derived from both the Qur'an and the Hadith (traditions and practices of the Prophet Muhammad).

This approach is rooted in *mukāsyafah* science, which refers to mystical or spiritual insight and also incorporates historical information. By utilizing this approach, Nursi aims to provide a comprehensive and well-founded interpretation of the Qur'an, drawing upon divine revelation and historical context. This method allows Nursi to present his interpretations in a spiritually profound and intellectually rigorous manner, aligning with his broader goal of elucidating the deeper meanings of Qur'anic verses. Additionally, by grounding his interpretations in both textual evidence and historical context, Nursi seeks to ensure the credibility and authenticity of his interpretations, thereby enhancing their impact and relevance to readers.

In symbolic interpretation, Sufi commentators analogize things based on the Qur'an and the Prophet's hadith. They apply the *al-ma'sūr* exegesis method by interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an and the Prophet's hadith (Reflita & Syatri, 2020). For example, in Najm ad-Din al-Kubra's interpretation, there is an */al-Barq/* 'lightning' word in Surah al-Baqarah verse 20, "It is as if the lightning were about to snatch away their sight. They walk in its light whenever lightning strikes, but when darkness covers them, they stand still. Had Allah willed, He could have taken away their hearing and sight. Surely Allah is Most Capable of everything." This verse implies that Najm ad-Din al-Kubra interpreted "al-Barq" as the light of remembrance and the Qur'an, which guides the heart and body to remember Allah. He connected this verse with Allah's words in Surah al-Mā'idah verse 83, "When they listen to what has been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears for recognizing the truth. They say, "Our Lord! We believe, so count us among the witnesses".

This verse emphasizes that the light of remembrance and the Qur'an almost grab the vision of the *nafs*. However, the darkness of the *nafs* and emotions overwhelm them, causing them to be seduced by the world and fall into perdition. It explains the relationship between verses '*munāsabah*' in the Qur'an, where one verse explains another (Al-Kubrā, 2009). Hence, this interpretation implies that Sufis, such as al-Kubra, do not only rely on intuitive knowledge but also their reading of the Qur'an. They study the relationships between verses '*munāsabah*' to understand the inner meaning. Sufis also refer to the Prophet's explanations to reveal the esoteric meaning of verses, as contained in the interpretation of Surah al-Duhā, verse 8, "And He found you as someone who was lacking, then He gave you sufficiency". The interpretation of al-Kubra above highlights the importance of studying and reading the Qur'an in-depth and using the Prophet's explanations to understand the esoteric meaning of these verses. The combination of intuitive knowledge and study of the Qur'an allows Sufis to better understand its spiritual messages.

Sahl at-Tustarī, in the word of */āilān/* understanding, emphasizes that it does not only refer to a lack of wealth but also to the *nafs'* longing for *ma'rifah* 'knowledge of God' and the soul's need for its Creator. According to him, God found that the human soul longs to know Him and needs Him. Allah provides sufficiency to the soul through the Qur'an and wisdom. For Sahl, wealth '*ginā*' is the wealth of the soul; meanwhile, according to the hadith of the Prophet, wealth is not the most significant number of worldly possessions but rather the wealth of a heart that feels sufficient (Reflita & Syatri, 2020). Sahl at-Tustarī's views on the meaning of */āilān/* and the richness of the soul demonstrate a deep approach to spiritual concepts in the Sufi tradition. A broad understanding of wealth, an emphasis on sufficiency through the Qur'an and wisdom, and the distinction between spiritual wealth and worldly wealth are essential elements in the Sufi view of life and true blessings. This understanding is based on the Prophet's word, "Rich is not measured by the amount of luxury in the world, but rich is a rich heart (a heart that always feels enough) (al-Bukhari, 2002; Al-Naisaburi, 2015). This approach emphasizes that Sufi *bāṭiniyyah* interpretation does not only rely on intuitive understanding but is also supported by a solid textual foundation from the Qur'an and Hadith.

In the fifth approach, Nursi expresses an understanding opposite to the denotational meaning of several verses. First, in Surah al-Zumar verse 62, he states that the highest cause of occurrence cannot be created and affected, similar to the rain that falls not due to external causes but God's will. Nursi strengthens his interpretation with the proposition of the Surah Hūd verse 123, which

states that everything returns to Allah (Nursi, 2011). Second, in Surah al-Ra'd verse 28, Nursi expresses an understanding opposite to its exoteric meaning that anxiety and fear are signs that humans need their Creator as a place where the peace rests (Nursi, 2011). Third, in Surah al-Qaṣaṣ verse 88, Nursi expresses a meaning opposite to its exoteric meaning. He conveys that the death of a creature is also a witness to the immortality of the Eternal Being (Nursi, 2011). Fourth, in Surah al-Ṭīn (95): 4 and Surah al-Dāriyāt verses 20-21, Nursi describes human weakness as a mirror that introduces God's strength, wealth, and mercy. He also mentions the darkness of the human condition as the light at night and day and gained a point of support in Allah (Nursi, 2011).

Al-Qusayr and al-Sullamī also express understanding of the opposite of the exoteric meaning, to obtain the esoteric meaning in several verses. Al-Qusayr interprets Surah al-Ra'd verse 28 by stating that if a servant does not find peace in his heart by remembering Allah, it is due to a defect in his heart (Al-Qusyairi, 2007). Al-Sullamī interpreted Surah al-Zumar verse 62 to reveal that although Allah wants to insult everything, He maintains all creatures with the clothes of creation, and keeps insults away from His nature and words (Al-Sulamī, 2001). Al-Qusayr and Al-Sullamī's approach to interpreting the Qur'an shows their efforts to explore the esoteric and spiritual meaning hidden behind the exoteric meaning of these verses. Their approach prominently emphasizes equanimity, God's protection of His creatures, and the importance of contemplation and spiritual reflection. This reflects their efforts better to understand Islamic teachings and man's relationship with Allah. Hence, it can be implied that Nursi applies five methods of esoteric interpretation of *ṣūfi mufasssir*, including making external meaning the basis of analogy, substituting external meaning with inner meaning (equivalent analogy), explaining inner meaning by considering the context, strengthening interpretation with the evidence of the Qur'an and Sunnah, and expressing understanding that is opposite to the denotational meaning.

There are two main differences between Nursi and other commentators: his background from the *Naqshbandi Tariqa*, which emphasizes the practice of dhikr (Abitolkha & Muvid, 2020), and the use of *asmā' al-ḥusnā* in interpreting the Qur'an. Nursi always refers to the manifestation of *asmā' al-ḥusnā* in all entities, especially in interpreting verses. Zaprukhan also states that Nursi's interpretation always concerns Allah Almighty's name, nature, or actions (Zaprukhan, 2019). Nursi even emphasizes that the practice of dhikr and *wird* is one of the practices of his order, especially reading dhikr after prayer (Nursi, 2011). In addition, Nursi differentiates himself in interpreting certain verses, such as Surah al-Sajdah verse 7. While other commentators, such as al-Qusayr, tend to mention metaphysical things, such as the throne of Allah, angels with their wings, and angels, Nursi focuses on physical examples, such as birds with feathers, as the best of creation (Nursi, 2011). The author believes that Nursi's esoteric approach, especially in the context of meditation, is relevant because it emphasizes physical things that can be sensed rather than metaphysical things.

### The Influence of Said Nursi in the World of Islamic Thought

Nursi's thought had a universal impact in various countries, primarily through the influence of his disciple, Nurculuk. One of Nursi's globally renowned disciples is Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish Muslim scholar known as a Sufi figure, preacher, and contemporary educator. The Gülen Movement, the movement he led, took inspiration from Nursi's concept of monotheism. Gülen's thought construction, especially in monotheism, is based on *al-hubb* 'love', both vertically towards God and horizontally towards others, built on divine values (Fawaid, 2015). Gülen said in his book: "God created the universe to manifest His love for His creatures, particularly humanity, and Islam became the fabric woven out of this love. In the words of Bediüzzaman, love is the essence of creation" (Gülen, 2004, p. 40).

According to Gülen, love is the most critical aspect of human life, with the existence and essence of this world mainly depending on love (Said, 2016). This concept was influenced by Nursi's Sufism values, which place love or *al-syafaqah* as the path to Allah. Nursi also associates Allah's names, such as *al-Rahmān*, *al-Rahīm*, and *al-Razzāq*, with the manifestation of Divine love in creation (Nursi, 2011). In Gülen's interpretation, he also associates Allah's names, such as al-



*Rahmān*, *al-Rahīm*, and *al-Razzāq*, with the manifestation of Divine love in creation. Inspired by Nursi, Gülen articulated monotheism by emphasizing the unity of all things as proof of Divine unity. Gülen's view of the role of love in human life, inspired by Nursi's Sufism values, shows a deep understanding of the relationship between humans, love, and God in the Islamic tradition. This view is essential to understanding the concepts of monotheism, Divine love, and unity in human life and the universe.

In the 1995 International Seminar, Samī' 'Afifī Hijāzī's article discusses three signs of Divine unity according to Nursi: the unity of all things, the order of the universe, and His power expressed figuratively. The critical point is that Nursi links belief in Divine Oneness to human powers and abilities. According to Nursi, these signs encompass the unity inherent in all things, the harmonious order prevalent in the universe, and the figurative expressions of Divine power. What stands out in Hijāzī's discussion is Nursi's linkage of belief in Divine Oneness with human capacities and capabilities. Nursi's assertion implies that recognizing the unity and order in the universe and the manifestations of Divine power serves not only as a spiritual belief but also as a recognition of the inherent potential and abilities bestowed upon humans by the Divine. This perspective suggests a profound intertwining of faith and human agency, highlighting the importance of understanding Divine unity as a catalyst for realizing and harnessing human capabilities. Through this lens, Nursi's teachings offer a holistic framework that integrates spirituality with empowerment, emphasizing the interconnectedness between belief in the Divine and the potential for human growth and accomplishment.

Sa'ad al-Din Taftazani emphasizes that human knowledge is acquired through healthy senses, accurate information, and reason. He posits that the unity between humans' physical and spiritual dimensions and their collaboration leads to the maturity of personality and the perfection of beliefs (Hijazi, 1997). Nursi's perspectives, along with the contributions of Taftazani, epitomize a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the oneness of God, human knowledge, and the development of human character within the Islamic tradition. They underscore the significance of acknowledging the oneness of God in shaping human perspectives and behaviors while emphasizing the critical role of employing reason and senses to acquire genuine knowledge. Moreover, they highlight the importance of unity between human development's physical and spiritual aspects, emphasizing the necessity of harmony in fostering spiritual growth and nurturing human character (Habibi et al., 2023).

In addition, Hijāzī asserts that the Qur'an employs evidence that appeals to reason and the senses to instill belief in Divine unity and dispel doubts. Drawing inspiration from Nursi's *Rasā'il al-Nūr*, Hijāzī's work adopts methods grounded in reality, human reasoning, and observations of the universe, fostering a connection between the physical and spiritual realms rather than focusing on abstract or lifeless concepts. Through this perspective, Hijāzī underscores the significance of utilizing reason, acknowledging reality, and recognizing the interplay between the physical and spiritual dimensions to strengthen faith. This pragmatic and holistic approach encourages individuals to cultivate a firm belief based on tangible experiences applicable to their everyday lives.

In the 1995 International Seminar, Muhammad Sa'id Ramadhan al-Buṭī ('Ashry & Firdausiyah, 2022) examined Nursi's involvement in the political sphere, highlighting three key aspects of his experience. Firstly, Nursi's foray into politics was driven by lofty ideals and self-respect, as he sought to engage with officials who held him in high regard. Secondly, Nursi ultimately withdrew from politics due to his unwavering sincerity and pure intentions, which he found to be incompatible with the political landscape and the demands of his mission of jihad. Thirdly, an important lesson emerges from Nursi's journey, emphasizing the importance of promoting comprehensive Islam and engaging in sincere da'wah without succumbing to the allure of politics or aligning with exclusive groups that marginalize others (al-Buthi, 1997). This analysis underscores Nursi's principled stance and commitment to his mission and the broader significance of maintaining integrity and inclusivity in religious activism and advocacy efforts.

Al-Buṭī's scholarly contributions regarding Nursi's engagement in political endeavors significantly expanded the scope of studies on Nursi's legacy despite his article not directly addressing monotheism. Through an analysis of al-Buṭī's study, it becomes evident that he possessed a profound comprehension of Nursi's intricate journey in advocating for Islamic principles through his involvement in politics. Al-Buṭī's examination shed light on Nursi's multifaceted roles within political spheres, revealing the depth of Nursi's commitment to advancing Islamic values across various domains. By delving into Nursi's political experiences, al-Buṭī's work provided valuable insights into Nursi's broader contributions to promoting and preserving Islamic ideals, underscoring the pivotal role Nursi played in championing Islamic values within the political arena. This comprehensive understanding of Nursi's endeavors in politics serves to enrich our appreciation of his enduring impact on the Islamic landscape, highlighting his enduring legacy as a proponent of Islamic principles in diverse contexts (al-Buthi, 1997).

Nursi's influence on Indonesian thought seemed different from that in Türkiye. Azyumardi Azra stated that Nursi's name was not popular among Indonesian intellectuals (Azra, 2002). In answering this, Andi Faisal Bakti mentioned several factors, including the limited dissemination of Nursi's works and the lack of translations into Indonesian in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, Indonesian students are more interested in political activists' work than Nursi, who was more prominent as a cleric (Ridwanuddin, 2015, 2017). Azyumardi Azra's statement and Andi Faisal Bakti's answer about the influence of Nursi's thoughts in Indonesia highlight several factors that influence Nursi's lack of popularity in Indonesia, especially compared to Turkey. Several factors, such as the limited dissemination of Nursi's works, the lack of translations into Indonesian, and the lack of interest in the ulama's works in a political context, contributed to the lack of popularity of Nursi's thoughts in Indonesia. This showed the importance of increasing accessibility to Nursi's work and increased understanding and appreciation of his contributions in the context of Islamic scholarship and thought.

Some efforts have been made to introduce Nursi to Indonesia. The 2001 International Seminar and the 2002 International Conference became platforms to familiarize the Indonesian people with Nursi. Nursi's second-generation disciple, Hasbi Sen, founded the Nur Semesta Foundation in Indonesia in 2007 to spread Nursi's thoughts. Dershane, or study council at this foundation, showed the development of Nursi's influence on socio-religious aspects in Indonesia (Amin, 2015). Analysis of the efforts made to introduce Nursi in Indonesia showed that concrete steps have been taken to increase the understanding and influence of Nursi's thoughts in Indonesia, such as through seminars, international conferences, and the establishment of foundations and study councils. These are essential steps in increasing understanding and influence of Nursi's thinking in Indonesia. This showed an awareness of the importance of Nursi's contribution to the context of Islamic thought in Indonesia and the efforts to expand its dissemination among society.

Several Indonesian intellectual figures also spread Nursi's thoughts. Andi Faisal Bakti, in his article "Good Deeds as Positive Actions in Nursi's Work", examined the concept of piety in the Qur'an by emphasizing the horizontal aspect of human interaction. Although it did not explicitly discuss the concept of monotheism, this article provided an appropriate Theo-anthropocentric contribution to the Muslims' needs (Bakti et al., 2020). From the analysis above, Andi Faisal Bakti contributed significantly to enriching the understanding of the concept of piety in Islam by emphasizing the horizontal aspect of human interaction. This reflects the relevance and need for Muslims to understand and apply religious values in everyday life. Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi (Sulaeman et al., 2022), In his article "Knowledge and Knowing in Islam," he compared Nursi's concept of knowledge with al-Attas' epistemology. Both agreed that a secularist and atheistic-naturalistic worldview influenced modern science. They connected the scientific process to rational and spiritual aspects and the primordial covenant between humans and God. Although there were differences in knowledge and the process of knowing, both showed a connection between intellectual and spiritual readiness.

Al-Attas used Muslim philosophers' approaches and believed that spiritual preparation would bring a person to a higher position '*maqām*', namely *al-Nafs al-Mutmainnah*. This highest achievement was the arrival of oneself at the level of acquired intellect '*al-aql al-mustafad*', which is none other than the Holy Spirit '*al-aql al-qudsi*'. From this spiritual effort, humans can reach the level of the Holy Spirit and, from an intellectual perspective, attain acquired intellect. However, Al-Attas reminded humans that everything will return to Allah (H. F. Zarkasyi, 2018). Several vital points in this analysis included similarities in responding to the influence of the secular and atheistic world, the connection between the scientific process and rational and spiritual aspects, differences in the concept of knowledge and the process of knowing al-Attas's more philosophical approach, reminders of devotion to Allah. From the points above, this analysis comprehensively compared Nursi's concept of science and al-Attas' epistemology. Even though there were differences in approaches and concepts, both emphasize the importance of integration between rational and spiritual dimensions in the search for actual knowledge.

Muhammad Machasin, a professor in Islamic Cultural History, contributed views on Nursi in his article "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi and The Sufi Tradition". Nursi considered the Sufi tradition a valuable treasure of Islamic scholarship and identified Sufi teachings as incompatible with modern times. He emphasized that Sufi practice must be within the corridors of sharia and not abandon Islamic principles (Machasin, 2005). Muhammad Machasin's view of Nursi in the context of the Sufi tradition illustrates Nursi's respect for Islam's spiritual heritage while maintaining a critical and conservative attitude towards Sufi practices that are not by Islamic principles and modern times. This showed the complexity and relevance of Nursi's views in the context of Islamic religious and cultural developments.

Zuly Qodir, the author of a book about Muhammad Machasin, conveyed that Machasin's behavior, which was not "bossy" and tended to take care of him, was probably influenced by Nursi and the *Sadjaliyah* Sufism teachings he adhered to. Machasin practiced Nursi's concept of *al-'ajz*, where helplessness is shown only to Allah and not humans (Ichwan & Rafiq, 2021). From the analysis above, Nursi's influence and *Sadjaliyah*'s Sufism teachings have helped shape Muhammad Machasin's behavior and approach to life, especially his dependence on Allah and his ability to take care of himself without being authoritarian towards others. This shows that spiritual teachings can profoundly impact a person's character and attitudes in everyday life.

Gus Dur, or Abdurrahman Wahid, applies Nursi's thoughts to Islamic education. Gus Dur emphasizes the importance of nurturing a generation of intelligent Muslims who possess modern technology and knowledge while embodying commendable morals. Gus Dur acknowledges the contribution of Nursi and Fethullah Gülen in Turkey, which focuses on the formation of noble morals in the education system (Muhammad & Jacob, 2005). Gus Dur quotes Nursi, saying that it was not necessary to establish an Islamic state directly. However, building a generation of Muslims with technological intelligence and modern knowledge was more important than upholding commendable morals. Gus Dur also believes that the moral vacuum in the Indonesian education system has led to violations and corruption; thus, learning from Nursi's and Gülen's experiences can help overcome the education crisis in Indonesia (Chair, 2013). Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that Gus Dur or Abdurrahman Wahid's application of Nursi's thoughts in the context of Islamic education reflects efforts to integrate modern knowledge with Islamic moral values and awareness of the importance of forming an intelligent and noble generation in overcoming social and moral challenges faced by society.

Then, Gus Dur formulated a theory of character education by recognizing the importance of local wisdom, or Islamic indigenization. This concept made traditional norms a moral foundation and religious teachings a guide to life by the guidance of Allah. Gus Dur implements this concept in Islamic boarding schools, where religious knowledge was taught, and culture was respected as part of the teachings of the Islamic religion (Mufidah, 2015). Although Gus Dur did not directly adopt Nursi's thoughts, the concept of character education he developed can be seen as a response to Nursi's thoughts. Similar to Nursi's success in developing an education system in Turkish culture

(Hariyanti & Roqib, 2024), Gus Dur attempted to adapt principles based on Indonesian culture. Analysis of Gus Dur's concept of character education reflects efforts to accommodate local cultural values in education and a response to the challenges and needs of education in Indonesia. Even though he did not directly adopt Nursi's thinking, the influence and relevance of Nursi's thinking in the educational context can be seen in Gus Dur's efforts to develop an education system based on Indonesian cultural values.

Nursi's influence in Islamic theological thought appears to have emerged internationally through Fethullah Gülen's theory of social monotheism and Hijazi's writing entitled "Tawhid: The Affirmation of Divine Unity in Badiuzzaman's Thought". However, Nursi's influence in Indonesia focused on education, communication, knowledge, and individual behavior. It was demonstrated by establishing a *dershane* in Ciputat before the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as concrete evidence of Nursi's socio-religious influence. Even though it is not directly visible in Islamic theological thought in Indonesia, Nursi's impact is still visible through various dimensions of social and religious life in the country.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, this study reveals two crucial points about Nursi's interpretation of *tauḥīd* 'monotheistic' verses. Firstly, Nursi's esoteric interpretation shares similarities with other Sufi commentators, such as using the external meaning as a basis for analogy, combining external meaning with inner meaning, focusing on context, reinforcing the interpretation with evidence from the Qur'an and Hadith, and expressing interpretations that differ from the literal meaning. One significant difference from other Sufi commentators is Nursi's esoteric approach, which consistently provides sensory and physical examples and references to *asmā al-ḥusnā* and its manifestations when interpreting the Qur'an. Secondly, the impact of Nursi's interpretation of monotheistic verses can be observed internationally, influencing Fethullah Gülen in formulating the theory of social monotheism and Samī' Afīfī Hijāzī in formulating the theory of the confirmation of Divine Oneness. In Indonesia, Nursi's influence is primarily focused on education, communication, knowledge, and individual behavior. This influence is evident in figures such as Abdurrahman Wahid, Andi Faisal Bakti, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, and Machasin. Indonesian socio-religiousness also reflects Nursi's influence, seen in the establishment of *dershane* in Ciputat before the end of the 21st century. One limitation of the research is its focus on Nursi's interpretation of monotheistic verses within the context of Sufi commentary. While providing valuable insights into his approach and influence, the research may overlook other dimensions of his thought and the broader context of his writings. Additionally, the study primarily examines the influence of Nursi's interpretations on specific individuals and contexts, such as Fethullah Gülen, Samī' Afīfī Hijāzī, and Indonesian socio-religious movements. Further research could explore additional aspects of Nursi's impact and delve into the reception of his ideas in different cultural and religious contexts.

Based on the findings of this research, further studies should expand the scope to encompass a more comprehensive analysis of Nursi's thought and its influence. This could involve examining Nursi's interpretations in comparison with other exegetical traditions within Islam and exploring the reception of his ideas in different regions and among diverse religious communities. Additionally, further research could investigate the practical implications of Nursi's teachings in contemporary society, particularly in addressing social, political, and ethical challenges. Moreover, efforts to promote dialogue and understanding between different religious groups could benefit from a deeper exploration of Nursi's ideas and their potential for fostering interfaith cooperation and harmony.

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