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QUR'ANIC WORLDVIEW IN M. QURAISH SHIHAB'S THOUGHT: TAWHID, HUMANITY, AND MODERATION IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA

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Abstract

Indonesian Islamic thought has been shaped by an ongoing dialogue among scriptural texts, intellectual tradition, and social change, yet scholarship on M. Quraish Shihab has mostly examined his exegetical method rather than the worldview that underpins it. This article analyzes how a Qur'anic worldview is constructed in Shihab's thought and how it engages contemporary Indonesian Islamic discourse. Using qualitative textual analysis of four works and seven purposively selected verses, it examines Tafsir Al-Mishbah, Membumikan Al-Qur'an, Wawasan Al-Qur'an, and Kaidah Tafsir, read through Izutsu's semantic Weltanschauung and al-Attas's Islamic worldview. The findings identify five interlocking constructs: tawhid as the center of orientation; humans as servants and stewards; nature as signs of God and knowledge as a means of understanding reality; justice, compassion, balance, and moderation as social orientation; and a movement from text to context. The discussion interprets this worldview as neither textual literalism nor secular accommodation but a contextual articulation anchored in revelation, and proposes distinguishing Qur'anic values, exegetical interpretation, and contextual response. The study offers a worldview-based reading of Indonesian exegesis that speaks to global debates on scripture, pluralism, and modernity.

Keywords: *Qur'anic worldview; Quraish Shihab; Tafsir Al-Mishbah; Indonesian Islamic thought; tawhid*

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A. Introduction

The Qur'an occupies a foundational position in the formation of Islamic thought. It is not only a source of law and a guide to worship; it also supplies a conceptual framework for understanding reality, humanity, knowledge, social life, morality, and the ultimate purpose of existence (Shihab, 1994). This formative function is what the concept of *worldview* seeks to capture. Since its emergence in European philosophy as *Weltanschauung*, the concept has described the comprehensive frame through which a community perceives the world and orients its conduct (Naugle, 2002). In the Islamic intellectual tradition the frame is distinctive, because reality is not confined to the empirical order but includes the metaphysical, revelation, the hereafter, and the relation between human beings and God (Zarkasyi, 2012). Al-Attas (1980, 1995) accordingly describes the Islamic worldview as a structure of fundamental concepts, namely God, revelation, the human being, knowledge, happiness, and the afterlife, that determines how reality is interpreted.

Two terms nevertheless need to be distinguished. *Islamic worldview* refers to the comprehensive outlook built from all sources of Islamic teaching, including the Qur'an, the Prophetic tradition, theology, jurisprudence, and the intellectual heritage of the community. *Qur'anic worldview* is narrower: it refers to the structure of perception formed by the fundamental concepts of the Qur'an itself. The object of analysis here is Shihab's articulation of such a worldview, an interpretive layer built on the Qur'an, and not the Qur'anic worldview itself. Izutsu (1964) showed that these concepts do not stand in isolation but form a semantic network in which the meaning of each key term is determined by its relations to the others. Understanding a Qur'anic worldview therefore requires more than listing themes; it requires tracing how the concepts of God, humanity, nature, life, value, and purpose are related (Badrun et al., 2023). Such a worldview has ontological, epistemological, ethical, and practical dimensions. The first concerns the nature of reality, the second the sources and means of knowing, the third

moral orientation, and the fourth the way in which the outlook is embodied in conduct.

In Indonesia, the development of Islamic thought has a long history of negotiation among Islam, local traditions, colonialism, modernity, education, politics, and social organizations (Azra, 1999; Hefner, 2000). The same dynamic is visible in the history of Qur'anic exegesis, which never developed in a social vacuum but reflected the intellectual and social conditions of its authors and readers (Gusmian, 2013; Johns, 1988). Studies of Indonesian exegesis show a continuing dialogue between the universality of the Qur'anic message and the locality of Muslim life, from the early Malay-Nusantara works to modern commentaries such as Hamka's *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (Hamka, 1982) and Shihab's *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* (Bahary & Fitroni, 2022; Federspiel, 1994; Nur, 2021; Shihab, 2002; Zaiyadi, 2018). Each commentary carries a particular conception of the relation among text, interpreter, scholarly tradition, and social reality (Mustaqim, 2009), and therefore articulates, explicitly or implicitly, a view of human beings, society, and knowledge (Wardani, 2022). Exegesis can thus be read as one of the principal media through which an Islamic worldview is formed and expressed in Indonesia (Irfan, 2024).

Among contemporary figures, Muhammad Quraish Shihab occupies a prominent place. Rahmatullah et al. (2021) show that he has significantly influenced Indonesian Qur'anic studies, particularly through an approach that links the content of verses to the concerns of society. Previous research has examined his exegetical method and its specific features (Alfikar & Taufiq, 2022), the Indonesian context of *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* (Andriawan, 2022; Nimah et al., 2024), its relevance to modern society (Amin & Abror, 2025), and his moderate interpretation of Islam (Ulinnuha & Nafisah, 2020; Zamimah, 2018). The question matters beyond Indonesia. With one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, Indonesia is a prominent setting in which Muslims negotiate piety, plurality, democracy, and science (Hefner, 2000), and religious moderation has been formalized as a national policy

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orientation (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). At the same time, global debate on scripture and modernity asks how a normative text can inform life in changing contexts without being either frozen or dissolved (Rahman, 1982; Saeed, 2006).

Approaching Shihab only through exegetical method, however, does not fully explain the architecture of his thought. Behind the choices of method, language, context, and theme lies a set of assumptions about God, humanity, nature, knowledge, and society that gives those choices their coherence. The studies cited above have illuminated individual components, namely method, locality, moderation, and relevance, but they have not, to the best of the author's knowledge, treated these components as parts of a single constructed worldview. Work on the Qur'anic worldview itself, such as Badrun et al. (2023), applies Izutsu's concept to the Qur'an and not to the way a modern Indonesian exegete articulates it. The gap is therefore conceptual: the worldview that integrates Shihab's method with his social orientation remains unmapped, and with it the way that worldview relates to the wider dynamics of Indonesian Islamic thought. The novelty of this article lies in shifting the unit of analysis from method to worldview, and in using that shift to reread Shihab as a case of how the Qur'an and a changing society are brought into dialogue.

This article therefore asks how a Qur'anic worldview is constructed in Shihab's thought and how that construction relates to the dynamics of Indonesian Islamic thought, in which the Qur'an and social reality are brought into dialogue. The concept of a Qur'anic worldview within Islamic thought is clarified in this Introduction and serves as the analytical frame. The scope is deliberately delimited. The analysis concentrates on four of his major works, on five thematic constructs, and on seven key verses through which he articulates them; it does not attempt a comprehensive history of Indonesian Islamic thought or an evaluation of the theological correctness of his positions. The article aims to describe the structure of the worldview, to explain how it connects with the social realities of contemporary Indonesia,

and to contribute a worldview-based perspective to the study of Indonesian exegesis.

B. Method

This study uses a qualitative design based on textual analysis, a form of library research that treats written sources as the primary data. Qualitative textual analysis is suitable because the research questions concern meanings, conceptual relations, and the way ideas are constructed rather than the measurement of variables (Mustaqim, 2014). The approach is interdisciplinary. It draws on Qur'anic and exegetical studies to read the texts, on philosophy of religion to define and operationalize the concept of worldview (Al-Attas, 1995; Izutsu, 1964), and on the intellectual history of Indonesian Islam to situate the figure studied (Azra, 1999; Gusmian, 2013). Shihab was selected as the object of study because his works are widely read, span exegetical, thematic, and methodological genres, and have been repeatedly identified as influential in contemporary Indonesian Qur'anic studies (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). The study treats him as an exemplary case of an influential exegete whose works span several genres, and not as a representative of all Indonesian exegetes.

The primary data are four works by Shihab: *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* (2002), *Membumikan Al-Qur'an* (1994), *Wawasan Al-Qur'an* (1996), and *Kaidah Tafsir* (2013), supplemented where relevant by *Secercah Cahaya Ilahi* (2007). Together they cover verse-by-verse commentary, thematic exposition, and explicit reflection on the principles of interpretation. Seven verses were selected purposively because they are the loci at which Shihab articulates the foundational concepts examined here: Q. 112:1–4 and Q. 2:255 for tawhid, Q. 51:56 and Q. 2:30 for the human being as servant and steward, Q. 16:90 and Q. 21:107 for justice, ihsan, and compassion, and Q. 2:143 for moderation. Secondary data consist of books and journal articles on Islamic worldview, contemporary exegesis, Nusantara exegesis, the dynamics of Indonesian Islamic thought, and studies of Shihab himself. Sources were collected

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through documentation of the printed works and review of the scholarly literature, and claims attributed to Shihab are tied to a specific work and, wherever the argument rests on a particular passage, to a volume or page range so that the analysis can be checked.

Data analysis followed three stages. In the first stage, concept identification, the primary texts were read closely and passages that define, explain, or apply the concepts of God, humanity, nature, knowledge, value, and purpose were coded. The coding was carried out by the author alone. In the second stage, thematic categorization, the coded passages were grouped into clusters according to their semantic relations, following Izutsu's (1964) premise that Qur'anic concepts acquire meaning within a network. The clusters were then examined against four analytical dimensions of worldview, the ontological, epistemological, ethical, and practical, derived from the literature reviewed above. In the third stage, interpretation, the relations among the clusters, and between the clusters and the dynamics of Indonesian Islamic thought, were interpreted through the frameworks of Izutsu and al-Attas and compared with the secondary literature. To maintain trustworthiness, findings were cross-checked across the four works, and the author's interpretation was kept analytically separate from Shihab's own statements. Qur'anic verses are cited by surah and verse number, with English renderings given for readability, and passages from Indonesian-language sources were translated into English by the author.

This study did not involve human or animal participants and therefore did not require ethical approval. All sources are acknowledged through citation and listed in the References, and translations of Indonesian-language passages are the author's own.

C. Results and Discussion

The data analyzed in this section are textual: passages from Shihab's principal works and the seven verses through which he articulates the foundational concepts of his worldview. The analysis proceeded by identifying concepts, grouping them into themes, and tracing the relations

among them. The Results subsection reports what the texts say, organized under five thematic clusters and summarized in Table 1 and Figure 1. The Discussion subsection then interprets these findings through the frameworks of Izutsu and al-Attas, positions them within debates on Qur'anic interpretation, and sets out their theoretical, practical, and international implications.

1. Results

Five thematic clusters recur across the four works: tawhid as the center of orientation; humanity as servant and steward; nature as signs of God and knowledge as a means of understanding reality; justice, compassion, balance, and moderation as social orientation; and a movement from text to context that governs how the other four are actualized. Table 1 summarizes each cluster with its principal verses and sources, and Figure 1 shows how the clusters are connected in Shihab's presentation.

Table 1. Thematic clusters of the Qur'anic worldview in Shihab's works

Cluster	Formulation in Shihab's works	Key verses	Main sources
Tawhid	God as the center of orientation; oneness carries ethical and social consequences	Q. 112:1–4; Q. 2:255	Shihab (1996, 2002)
Humanity	Servant ('abd) whose worship covers all beneficial activity, and steward (khalifah) responsible for the earth	Q. 51:56; Q. 2:30	Shihab (1994, 1996, 2002)
Nature and knowledge	Nature as signs of God; understanding the Qur'an as scholarly work that joins revelation, language, context, and knowledge	—	Shihab (2007, 2013)
Social orientation	Justice and ihsan; compassion for all the worlds; moderation as proportionality	Q. 16:90; Q. 21:107; Q. 2:143	Shihab (1996, 2002, 2019)
Text–context movement	Normative authority of the text; contextual space for actualizing its values	—	Shihab (1994, 1996, 2002, 2013)

Tawhid as the center of orientation

Across the corpus, Shihab places the recognition of God at the foundation of understanding life's problems. In *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, verses that speak of God, humanity, and nature are read in relation to one another so that together they form a God-consciousness (Shihab, 2002), and in *Wawasan Al-Qur'an* tawhid is presented as the principal foundation of a Qur'an-based outlook on life, shaping how people see themselves, nature, knowledge, and all of life (Shihab, 1996, pp. 3–7). The first verse of Surah al-Ikhlas serves as the anchor text:

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

(Q. 112:1: "Say: He is God, the One"). In his reading, the word *ahad* signals an absolute oneness that, unlike the numerable *wahid*, admits neither division nor a series. God is not one element among others in reality but the sole Deity who is the center of human orientation, and the consequences of tawhid therefore extend from theology to attitude and action (Shihab, 2002, Vol. 15, pp. 609–614). Verse 255 of Surah al-Baqarah is read in the same direction:

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ

(Q. 2:255: "God, there is no deity but Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of all existence"). Shihab explains *al-Hayy* and *al-Qayyum* as the One who lives and who continuously sustains all creatures, and he links awareness of these attributes to human recognition of both personal limits and dependence on God (Shihab, 2002, Vol. 1, pp. 545–551). The texts draw an explicit social consequence from this: acknowledging the oneness of God means that no human being may be made an object of oppression, since all humans are God's creatures (Shihab, 1996, pp. 13–20). In his formulation, humans cannot understand their existence apart from God; freedom and the capacity to think are real but remain within the framework of servanthood.

Humanity as servant and steward

The second cluster concerns the nature of the human being. Surah al-Dhariyat verse 56 is the key text for servanthood:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

(Q. 51:56: "I did not create jinn and humankind except to worship Me"). Shihab reads worship as a purpose of creation that is not confined to ritual. It covers all human activity performed in obedience to God and beneficial to life (Shihab, 2002, Vol. 13, pp. 355–357). The second text is the announcement of the vicegerent in Surah al-Baqarah:

إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً

(Q. 2:30: "I am going to place a vicegerent on the earth"). The concept of *khalifah* is, in Shihab's presentation, a responsibility to manage the earth, not as unlimited power over nature. The trust carries a moral duty to preserve balance and welfare (Shihab, 1994, pp. 157–160). Shihab describes humans as endowed with intellect, knowledge, and the ability to choose, capacities that must be used responsibly (Shihab, 1996). The texts thus describe two relations at once: a vertical relation to God as *'abd* (servant) and a horizontal relation to life as a being with social responsibility, which yields the sequence of tawhid, servanthood, stewardship, and responsibility toward life.

Nature, knowledge, and reason

The third cluster concerns the cosmos and the means of knowing it. Like the fifth cluster, it is not tied to one of the seven key verses; it rests on Shihab's general discussion of nature, knowledge, and interpretation, and so carries a different kind of evidence from the verse-based clusters. Shihab presents nature not as a self-standing reality but as part of the signs (*ayat*) of God's greatness, and humans are commanded to observe, reflect, and draw lessons from natural phenomena (Shihab, 2007). In this presentation, the

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development of science is not set against religion, and the two are placed in a dialogical relation.

The texts also address the relation between revelation and reason. According to *Kaidah Tafsir*, interpreting the Qur'an requires an understanding of language, context, the coherence of verses (*munasabah*), Prophetic traditions, and the development of knowledge (Shihab, 2013). Shihab describes openness to reason as a way of grasping the message of revelation more comprehensively rather than a subordination of revelation to reason, and understanding the Qur'an is treated as a scholarly activity that demands adequate scholarly tools. The attention to coherence is already signaled in the subtitle of *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, "message, impression, and harmony" (*pesan, kesan, dan keserasian*) of the Qur'an.

As the texts present it, this openness is qualified by an orientation. Developments in science, technology, and social life are acceptable and even encouraged insofar as they are directed toward the welfare of human beings (Shihab, 2007). Knowledge is therefore presented as a means of understanding reality and of fulfilling the responsibility of stewardship, and it is not presented as an end that stands apart from ethical purpose.

Justice, compassion, balance, and moderation

The fourth cluster presents the social orientation of the worldview. Surah al-Nahl verse 90 is the key text for justice:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ

(Q. 16:90: "Indeed, God commands justice and excellence"). Shihab treats justice not as an abstract concept but as something to be realized in relations among people, and he connects the verse to concrete problems such as injustice, poverty, education, discrimination, and humanitarian concerns (Shihab, 2002, Vol. 7, pp. 361–365). In *Wawasan Al-Qur'an* he further distinguishes several senses of *'adl*, among them equality, balance, giving each party its due, and the justice attributed to God (Shihab, 1996). Compassion is anchored in Surah al-Anbiya verse 107:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

(Q. 21:107: "We have not sent you except as a mercy to all the worlds"). The word *al-'alamin* is read as indicating the breadth of the mercy, which is not limited to a particular group (Shihab, 2002, Vol. 8, pp. 498–500). Moderation is derived from Surah al-Baqarah verse 143:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا

(Q. 2:143: "Thus We made you a middle, balanced community"). The concept of *ummatan wasatan* is presented as practicing religion proportionally, neither excessively nor neglecting its basic principles, and not as a reduction of religious commitment (Shihab, 2002, Vol. 1, pp. 437–441; see also Shihab, 2019). The four values of justice, compassion, balance, and welfare (*maslahah*) correspond to what has been described in the literature as the universal values of the Qur'an's objectives (Sulaeman, 2024).

The texts apply compassion and moderation explicitly to a plural setting. Differences of religion, culture, ethnicity, and tradition are presented as a field for mutual respect and not as a source of conflict, and moderation is distinguished from taking a position without principle (Shihab, 2019; Zamimah, 2018). In the same line, the social values are not left at the level of doctrine: the texts move from the statement of a value to its bearing on concrete matters such as education, poverty, discrimination, and relations among citizens.

The movement from text to context

The fifth cluster describes how the other four are actualized. *Kaidah Tafsir* addresses the relation between the normative message of the Qur'an and a changing social reality (Shihab, 2013, pp. 6–12), and *Membumikan Al-Qur'an* argues that the message of revelation must be made relevant to human life (Shihab, 1994). *Wawasan Al-Qur'an* reads the Qur'an through themes connected to human and social problems (Shihab, 1996). *Tafsir Al-*

Mishbah combines linguistic explanation, coherence, verse context, social content, and relevance to Indonesian life (Shihab, 2002, Vol. 1, pp. xvii–xxiv), and its reception has been linked to this combination (Andriawan, 2022). The use of the Indonesian language, social examples, and local concerns has been identified as a feature of its engagement with Indonesian context (Nimah et al., 2024; Wardani, 2022).

The texts also treat universality and particularity together. The Qur'anic message is universal, but its understanding and actualization take place in particular cultural spaces. In the Indonesian case this is visible in the choice of language, in social illustrations, and in the problems selected for discussion (Wardani, 2022). Indonesian exegesis in this sense is described as more than a commentary written in Indonesia; it is an encounter between the universal message of the Qur'an and the social experience of Indonesian society (Wardani, 2022). Attention to context, however, proceeds without removing the structure and content of the text (Shihab, 2013; Zaiyadi, 2018).

Across the four works, the movement can be described in three steps, which this article labels interpretation, contextualization, and actualization; this is an analytical reconstruction and not a sequence that Shihab himself names. Interpretation yields an understanding of the text, contextualization connects that understanding with reality, and actualization translates Qur'anic values into an orientation for life. Figure 1 presents the relations among the five clusters as they appear in the texts: tawhid at the center, the human and natural-epistemic clusters in a two-way relation with it, both leading to the social orientation, and the text–context movement at the base as the procedure through which these values are carried into practice. Arrows indicate conceptual dependence in the texts and not causal sequence.

In summary, three patterns stand out in the data. First, tawhid is the point from which the other clusters are explained, and it is repeatedly given an ethical and social consequence. Second, the human cluster is consistently framed by two relations, to God and to life, which keeps servanthood and responsibility together. Third, the text–context movement is the procedure through which values are carried into practice, and it operates in all four

works whether the genre is verse-by-verse commentary, thematic exposition, or methodological reflection. Read against the four analytical dimensions introduced in the Method, tawhid and the human cluster carry mainly the ontological dimension, the nature-and-knowledge cluster the epistemological, the social cluster the ethical, and the text–context movement the practical.

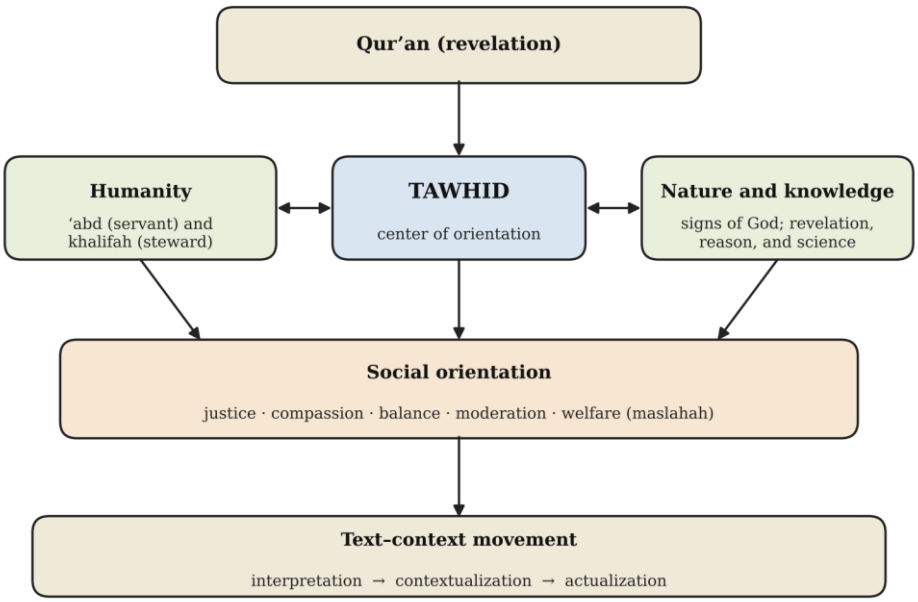


Figure 1. Structure of the Qur'anic worldview in Shihab's works (author's synthesis; arrows indicate conceptual dependence, not causal sequence)

2. Discussion

Reading the findings through Izutsu and al-Attas

The findings support reading Shihab's thought as a network of related concepts rather than a list of topics. In Izutsu's (1964) terms, the meaning of each key concept is fixed by its position relative to the others. Tawhid occupies the position of a focal concept whose semantic field extends to the human being as servant and steward, to nature as signs, to knowledge

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as a means of understanding reality, and to society through justice, compassion, and balance. This is consistent with the way Shihab moves from Surah al-Ikhlas to social ethics without a sense of discontinuity: the move follows the internal relations of the network, although the pastoral genre and his intended readership may also contribute to that continuity. The finding resonates with al-Attas's (1995) claim that the Islamic worldview is organized around a small set of fundamental concepts, but there is a difference of emphasis. Al-Attas's project is metaphysical and is directed at an epistemological critique of secularism (Al-Attas, 1993), whereas Shihab's articulation is pastoral and ethical-practical. The ontological and epistemological dimensions are present in his work, but they are consistently translated into a social orientation. In the Indonesian setting, then, a Qur'anic worldview appears to be expressed less as a systematic metaphysics than as an ethics of life derived from exegesis.

Tawhid and the realities of plural Indonesia

Linking the worldview to Indonesian reality shows why the tawhid-centered structure matters. In a plural society undergoing rapid change, tawhid cannot remain only a marker of religious identity; the texts present it as translated into justice, responsibility, and respect for persons and, through the stewardship cluster, as a basis for care for the environment. This reading is consistent with the way questions of Islamic thought in Indonesia are tied to education, poverty, discrimination, the environment, and social relations. The human cluster supports the same point: because the human being is both servant and steward, religious commitment and social responsibility are not alternatives but two faces of one orientation. Reading tawhid in this way also guards against two reductions, one that confines religion to ritual and one that treats social action as detached from belief.

A dialogical position between literalism and accommodation

The text–context cluster clarifies why Shihab's position cannot be reduced to either textual literalism or secular accommodation. The text retains normative authority, while context provides the space in which its

values are actualized (Shihab, 2013). This distinction between modernizing the way revelation is understood and secularizing revelation itself is crucial, and it matches the broader observation that Indonesian Islamic thought has negotiated tradition and modernity rather than abandoning either (Azra, 1999; Mustaqim, 2016). The position is comparable in spirit to other contemporary approaches. Rahman's (1982) double movement proceeds from the concrete case of revelation to a general principle and then back to the present, and Saeed's (2006) contextualist approach gives priority to the ethico-legal content of the text in relation to its context. Shihab shares with both the conviction that Qur'anic values must be actualized in changing contexts. In the texts analyzed here, however, he works chiefly through the exegetical genre, by accumulating exegetical judgments within a pastoral voice, rather than through a single formalized hermeneutical model. This helps explain why his thought is received as accessible and why it is open to different appropriations.

The attention to coherence discussed in the findings gives this dialogical position a safeguard. Because verses are read in relation to one another and to the theme of their surah, contextual reading is constrained by the internal structure of the text, and the move from text to context cannot become an arbitrary selection of verses to suit present concerns. This differs from readings that begin from a contemporary problem and then look for supporting verses. His thematic work, however, is organized around human and social problems, which shows that the difference lies in procedure rather than genre: what matters is whether the verses or the problem set the limits of what may be said. The present data, drawn from selected verses, cannot establish that this discipline holds across all of that work's themes, which remains a question for further study. It is also the reason that his contextualism can be described as rooted in the text: the context determines where the emphasis falls, while the text determines what may be said.

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Theoretical contributions

The study makes three contributions. First, by shifting the unit of analysis from method to worldview, it shows that the features already identified in the literature, such as attention to coherence, locality, moderation, and relevance (Alfikar & Taufiq, 2022; Ulinnuha & Nafisah, 2020), are expressions of a single underlying structure rather than separate traits. Second, it extends Izutsu's semantic analysis from the Qur'anic text to a layer of interpretation. If Izutsu reconstructed the worldview of the Qur'an itself, the present analysis suggests that exegetes produce articulated worldviews, secondary and human but systematic, that can be analyzed with the same relational logic. Third, it offers a heuristic that responds to a persistent difficulty in exegetical studies, namely how to distinguish what the Qur'an says from what an interpreter says and from how a society responds. The heuristic separates three layers: Qur'anic values, which are grounded in revelation; exegetical interpretation, which is the human understanding of those values; and contextual response, which is the socially situated actualization of the interpretation. The first two layers build on the familiar distinction between revelation and its human interpretation; the added element is the third layer, which separates an interpreter's reading from a society's response to it. The heuristic is derived from a single case and has not yet been tested on other exegetes. Distinguishing the layers allows critique of an interpretation or a social response without treating the critique as a critique of revelation, and it clarifies why Shihab's thought should be understood as one articulation of a Qur'anic worldview and not its sole representation. The same lens can be used to compare Shihab with other Indonesian exegetes, such as Hamka, whose commentary reflects a different intellectual and social setting (Yusuf, 2003).

Two engagements with the literature sharpen this contribution. Rahmatullah et al. (2021) locate Shihab's influence mainly in his approach to exegesis. The present findings suggest that the influence may also operate at the level of outlook: what readers receive is not only a way of explaining verses but a way of connecting God, the human being, society, and

knowledge. Similarly, studies of moderation in his work (Ulinnuha & Nafisah, 2020; Zamimah, 2018) tend to present moderation as a characteristic of his interpretation. The worldview perspective adds that moderation is derived and not foundational: it follows from the chain of tawhid, human dignity, justice, and compassion, and this explains why it is framed as proportion rather than as compromise. For practical use, the three-layer heuristic can be turned into diagnostic questions. Is a claim anchored in an explicit verse or concept? Which interpretive tools, such as language, coherence, or context, mediate between the verse and the claim? Which contextual factors shape the application? Asking these questions in turn makes it possible to see where a disagreement actually lies.

A methodological implication follows. Worldview analysis can complement established typologies of the technical and hermeneutical features of Indonesian commentaries (Gusmian, 2013; Mustaqim, 2016) by asking what picture of reality each commentary presupposes. Typologies classify commentaries by source, method, and style; a worldview reading asks which concepts are central and how they are related. Applied to other commentators, it would yield comparable conceptual maps and would help the field move from describing individual commentaries toward explaining patterns in the history of Indonesian exegesis (Wardani, 2022).

Practical and international implications

Practically, the findings suggest that discourse on religious moderation is more convincing when it is grounded in a worldview than when it is presented as a slogan. The chain visible in Shihab's texts, from tawhid to human dignity, justice, compassion, and proportionality, supplies a scriptural rationale for moderation that complements policy formulations (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019) and is relevant to plural societies (Hefner, 2000). The stewardship cluster provides a basis for ecological ethics, since the vicegerent's responsibility is explicitly tied to balance and welfare, and the nature-and-knowledge cluster supports a dialogical stance toward science and technology. For Islamic higher education, a worldview-based reading

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offers a way to teach exegesis that connects verses to the formation of outlook and conduct, for example through courses that trace how Indonesian commentaries articulate concepts such as khalifah and justice in light of local problems.

The findings may also inform debates beyond Indonesia, although they rest on four works by one exegete and the comparisons below are therefore suggestive. Shihab's articulation shows how a Qur'anic worldview can be expressed in a Muslim-majority but religiously and ethnically plural society, where the questions of justice, compassion, and moderation are lived daily and not merely discussed. Comparison with Esack's (1997) reading of the Qur'an for liberation and pluralism in apartheid South Africa is instructive: the two contexts differ sharply, yet both treat justice and mercy as central values and both insist that the Qur'an be read in relation to the situation of the community. This suggests that a Qur'anic worldview is better understood as a relational concept network that takes different emphases in different settings than as a culturally fixed system. The same point applies to the global discussion of wasatiyyah, which has been developed in international scholarship as a Qur'anic principle of moderation (Kamali, 2015). The Indonesian case adds a specific example of how that principle is derived from a commentary tradition and connected to everyday plural life, and it provides material for cross-cultural studies of scripture and modernity.

The approach is also portable. Because its analytical dimensions are drawn from general discussions of worldview (Naugle, 2002) and from the conceptual network of the Qur'an itself (Izutsu, 1964), it can be applied to exegetes writing in other languages and regions, which would support comparative work among Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, and Western Muslim interpreters and place the Indonesian case within a wider map of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study is conceptual and text-based, and it analyzes four works and seven verses selected

purposively, so other verses and works may complicate the picture drawn here. Because the verses were chosen as the places where Shihab articulates the concepts, the verses and the clusters partly reinforce each other; the findings reconstruct how Shihab articulates the worldview and do not test whether other verses would yield the same structure. It addresses the construction of the worldview in the texts and not its reception by readers, which would require empirical data. Nor does it trace the intellectual sources of Shihab's thought or its development across works published between 1994 and 2019, so the worldview is described synchronically. Izutsu's semantic method was adapted to an interpreter's prose, without a full lexical analysis of basic and relational meanings. The interpretation of Shihab's statements inevitably involves the author's judgment, even though it was cross-checked across works, and the coding was done by one researcher without an independent second coder. The translation of Indonesian-language sources and Arabic terms into English may also lose some nuance. Finally, Shihab is treated as one significant representation of Indonesian Islamic thought and not as a representative of all of it; his thought remains a human interpretation of revelation and is open to critical engagement.

D. Conclusion

This article has examined how a Qur'anic worldview is constructed in Shihab's thought and how that construction relates to the dynamics of Indonesian Islamic thought, understood as a continuing dialogue among the Qur'an, intellectual tradition, and social reality. The case suggests that a worldview frame reads that dialogue more deeply than method alone. In Shihab's thought, the worldview is constructed through five interlocking constructs: tawhid as the center of orientation; the human being as servant and steward; nature as signs of God and knowledge as a means of understanding reality; justice, compassion, balance, and moderation as social orientation; and a movement from text to context through which these are actualized. The worldview that results is dialogical and contextual yet rooted in the text, and it is more an ethics of life derived from exegesis than a

systematic metaphysics. These constructs are not independent: tawhid explains the human being's double relation, the human relation explains the ethic of justice and compassion, and the text–context movement explains how that ethic is brought into plural, changing circumstances.

The main contribution is twofold. Theoretically, the study moves the analysis of Indonesian exegesis from method to worldview and proposes a distinction among Qur'anic values, exegetical interpretation, and contextual response that can be used to evaluate other interpretations and social responses. Practically, it shows how a scriptural worldview can ground discussions of moderation, justice, ecological responsibility, and the relation between religion and science in plural societies. The Indonesian case also enriches international discussion by illustrating how a Qur'anic worldview takes shape in a specific, plural, and rapidly changing setting.

The study also has a reflective implication. The difficulty identified in the Discussion, namely how to distinguish values that originate in the Qur'an, the interpretation of an exegete, and a response to social context, is not only a scholarly problem but a practical one for communities that debate religious authority. A worldview-based reading does not settle disagreements, but it makes visible the layer at which they occur and thereby supports a more disciplined and charitable discussion. In this sense the contribution of Shihab's thought lies not only in the number of commentaries he has produced but in his sustained effort to bring the Qur'an into the life of modern Indonesian society while keeping the text as the source of orientation.

Future research can build on the limitations identified above in several directions. Comparative studies could map the worldviews articulated by other Indonesian exegetes, such as Hamka and Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy, using the same analytical dimensions. Reception studies, using interviews, surveys, or discourse analysis, could examine how readers and institutions internalize and apply the worldview in education, public discourse, and policy. The framework could also be extended to concepts not covered here, such as gender relations, ecology, and ethics in digital society,

and the three-layer distinction could be tested on other exegetical works. Such research would help determine whether the dialogical-contextual articulation found in Shihab's thought represents a wider pattern in contemporary Muslim engagement with the Qur'an, and how far it travels beyond the Indonesian setting.

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