



## **God in the Perspective of Mawlana Abu Al-Kalam Azad**

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**Abstract;** *The article explores Mawlana Abu Al-Kalam Azad's viewpoint that God cannot be understood using human reason. This study is categorized as library research. The study's findings suggest that the essence of all religions is fundamentally obedience to God and the need to do good. With God's and religion's unity, it is necessary for all human beings, regardless of religion, to appreciate and treat one another kindly.*

**Keywords:** *God; Mawlana Abu Al-Kalam Azad.*

**Abstrak;** *Tulisan ini mengkaji tentang pandangan Mawlana Abu Al-Kalam Azad tentang Tuhan, dimana menurutnya Tuhan tidak pernah dicapai oleh akal manusia. Penelitian ini tergolong dalam penelitian pustaka (Library Research). Hasil penelitian menyebutkan bahwa esensi semua agama pada dasarnya adalah penghambaan kepada Tuhan dan keharusan berbuat baik. Dengan kesatuan Tuhan dan kesatuan agama tersebut, ada keharusan bagi seluruh umat manusia, apa pun agamanya untuk saling menghormati dan saling berbuat baik satu sama lain.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Tuhan; Mawlana Abu Al-Kalam Azad.*

## A. Introduction

It is often assumed that God in Islam is entirely transcendent, as indicated by Islam's focus on God's oneness, majesty, and glory. However, some argue that such a depiction emerges later in forming Islamic theology rather than from the Qur'an itself.

Some religions affirm God's oneness or unity, while others do not. Given these disparities, learning more about God's unity is highly interesting. Furthermore, one of India's most influential figures is deeply reverent of God's oneness or unity. With his firm belief, Mawlana Abul Azad believed that he succeeded in uniting Muslims and Hindus during the conflict involving religious symbols in India. His mastery of various religious and non-religious sciences enabled him to join the majority Hindu community in multiple aspects of Indian society. He eventually played a significant part in establishing Indian nationalism, ultimately leading to India's independence. He ascribed his accomplishment to his faith in the Qur'anic path, which aided his efforts. The path he speaks to is the 'Unity of God and Religion' and the obligation to do good.<sup>1</sup>

This paper is not the only one that explores God from Azad's perspective. Previously, Ahmad Rafiq wrote an essay about God from Azad's perspective based on his interpretation of *Tarjuman Al-Qur'an*<sup>2</sup> and Za'im Kholilatul Ummi wrote an article about the essential traits of God in Azad's view, which are divided

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<sup>1</sup> Mawlana Abu al-Kalam Azad, *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, translated by Syed Abul Latif, (Hyderabad: Syed Abdul Latif for Qur'anic & Other Cultural Studies, 1962), 6-7. Quoted from "Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis Vol. 2, No.1 July 2001: 35-53 by Ahmad Rafiq, *Kesatuan Tuhan dan Kesatuan Agama*. Page. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad Rafiq, "Kesatuan Tuhan" dan "Kesatuan Agama" (Studi Atas Penafsiran Mawlana Abu Al-Kalam Azad), *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis Vol. 2, No.1 Juli 2001*, page. 35.

into three categories: *rububiyah*, *rahmah*, and *'adalah*.<sup>3</sup> Azad was also able to unify India's major religion, Hinduism, with the Muslim minority, as seen by his writings in *Al-Hilal* magazine and his tafsir publications,<sup>4</sup> as well as his response to religious issues in the early twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> It should be pointed out that Azad not only provides a theological foundation for the question of divinity but also adds philosophical nuances and highlights the archeological side.<sup>6</sup> This view can be considered novel from Azad's thought examined in this study.

This study employs an analytical descriptive method to further describe the concept of God in Abul Kalam Azad's view, supplemented with textual analysis of his interpretations. This study takes a theological approach to the study of religion because the issue highlighted is the feature of divinity and its logical repercussions in Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad's ideas. In general, in the study of the Qur'an and Tafsir, this topic appears in the thematic study of figures, which aims to explore the thinking of one of the tafsir figures on the theme that has been presented.<sup>7</sup>

## **B. The Biography of Mawlana Abu Al-Kalam Azad**

Mawlana Abu al-Kalam Azad (1888-1958) was born in Mekkah to a Muslim Indian family known as a religious family

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<sup>3</sup> Za'im Kholilatul Ummi, Tuhan dalam Basic Concept of the Quran: Pembacaan atas Pemikiran Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, dalam *Jurnal El-Afkar*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2020, page. 275.

<sup>4</sup> Md Yousuf Ali dan Osman Bakar, Hindu-Muslim Unity In Abul Kalam Azad's Writings With Spesific Reference To Al-Hilal And Tarjuman Al-Qur'an, dalam *Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, Vol, 21, No, 1, 2022, hlm. 1

<sup>5</sup> Toipah, Tafsir Al-Qur'an Atas Problematika Lintas Agama: Kajian Atas Tafsir Tarjuman Al-Qur'an Karya Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad, *Jurnal Qof*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2017, 66

<sup>6</sup> Dakhirotul Ilmiyah, Tuhan Dalam Buku Basic Concept Of The Quran Karya Abul Kalam Azad, *Jurnal Mutawattir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2018, page. 348.

<sup>7</sup> Abdul Mustaqim, Model Penelitian Tokoh (Dalam Teori dan Aplikasi), *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2014, page. 265.

and settled in the holy city.<sup>8</sup> Muhyiddin Ahmad was his given name. Khairuddin Ahmad is a great scholar and descendant of Syekh Jamal al-Din al-Dihlawi, who lived during the reign of Mughal Emperor Jalal al-Din Muhammad Akbar.

In 1890, his father and her entire family moved to Calcutta, Bengal, India. His original intention was to visit briefly, but his friends and followers refused to let him return. Thus, they lived there ever since. A year later, his mother passed and was buried in the city.

Khairuddin Ahmad was a conservative scholar whose way of thinking was extremely cautious while dealing with new material emerging at the time. He believed that modern education would ultimately abolish religious ideas. At the same time, he did not support madrasa education. As a result, young Azad was schooled secretly by himself and some of his father's ulema colleagues, following a strict traditional curriculum. At 16, Azad had completed the standard curriculum for Indian children, which included Persian, Arabic, Philosophy, Geometry, Algebra, and Theology.<sup>9</sup> Most Indian children in madrasahs completed these courses between 20 and 25. Later, his father enrolled him in higher-level Philosophy, Mathematics, and Logic classes.

Azad confesses that Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's books inspired him to study English and other modern disciplines. Since then, he has read the Bibles frequently, including the Urdu and Persian copies, in detail. He also read historical and philosophical literature in English. Azad's perspective shifted away from the traditional thinking style instilled in him by his family. He was dissatisfied with the faith he'd been taught.

The first thing that troubled me was the exhibition of differences among the different sects of Muslims. I could not understand why they should be so opposed to one another when they all claimed to derive their inspiration from the same source. ... If religion expresses a universal truth, why should such differences and conflicts exist among men professing different religions? Why

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<sup>8</sup> Taufik Mandailing, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Muslim Nasionalis India, cet-II (Yogyakarta: Goen's Media, 2013), 60

<sup>9</sup> Taufik Mandailing, 62

should each religion claim to be the sole repository of truth and condemn all others as false?.<sup>10</sup>

Azad admitted to being an agnostic around this period. This restlessness lingered for the next two or three years until he eventually discovered his original answer and decided to go his path, rejecting the orthodoxy instilled in him by his family. Then, he gave himself the name 'Azad, which means free in thought.

Azad began his political career by engaging with leaders of the Indian independence movement. His presence among them was initially viewed with mistrust, as the majority of them were explicitly recruited middle-class Hindus who had grown to perceive Islam and Muslims as collaborators with their adversaries, the colonial powers. Fortunately, Azad persuaded them not to generalize the facts because the invaders were their common opponents as human beings and Indians seeking freedom. Azad then attempted to approach Muslim activists in Bengal and Bihar and persuade them of the shared cause.<sup>11</sup>

Once Azad could travel outside India, he traveled to Egypt, Syria, Turkey, and France. Following the trip, he learned much about communicating his thoughts. Finally, in 1912, he published the weekly magazine *al-Hilal* for the first time, which proved reasonably effective in resurrecting the spirit of revolution among the masses. One of the magazine's primary aims was to develop a spirit of cooperation among Indian Muslims and Hindus in their efforts to expel British colonists from their nation. In line with this purpose, Azad was among those who opposed the foundation of the state of Pakistan on religious (Islamic) grounds.

Recognizing his efforts, the British colonial authority began to exert pressure and even threatened to assassinate him. War broke out in 1914, and *al-Hilal* collapsed in 1915, but Azad established a new magazine, *al-Balag*, five months later. Azad was exiled from Calcutta in April 1916 and imprisoned in Ranchi for

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<sup>10</sup> Abu al-Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom: An Autobiographical Narrative*, (London: Orient Longman Ltd., 1978), page. 3. Quoted from "Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis Vol. 2, No.1 Juli 2001: 35-53 by Ahmad Rafiq, *Kesatuan Tuhan dan Kesatuan Agama*. Page. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Taufik Mandailing, 62

six months before being released on December 31, 1919. Following his release from prison, he became involved in the Indian National Congress and was elected as one of its chairmen in 1939. In 1942-1945, he was imprisoned in Ahmadnagar again for his Congress efforts. In prison, he met several other Congress activists. The Indian people's struggle grew stronger after they were released from prison, culminating in independence in 1947. The new government of India appointed him Minister of Education, a position he held until he died in 1958.<sup>12</sup>

In the meantime, Azad had composed *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* since the founding of al-Balag. When he left Calcutta in March 1916, he finished some work. However, he was imprisoned that year and came to a realization:

“... Indeed, although every form of liberty had been snatched from me, I knew that there was a form of liberty which no one could take away from me –the liberty of reading and writing and conserving the result of my thought...”

Recognizing that no one could ever take away his freedom to read, write, and record his thoughts, he finished parts of the work by the end of 1918, and when he was released from imprisonment, some of it was transcribed in Urdu. In November 1921, the first Arabic edition was published. However, in December of the same year, he was re-arrested along with other Indian National Congress activists. During his imprisonment, he resumed his writing and finished the manuscript for the tafsir on July 20, 1930, in Meerut District Prison.

Furthermore, Maududi's most significant contribution through written work was a thirty-year translation and interpretation of the Qur'an in Urdu titled *Tafhim al-Qur'an* (1942–1972). This tafsir book employed a style and language that appealed to the reader's mind and emotions. It conveyed a message from the Qur'an that applies to the everyday difficulties Muslims

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<sup>12</sup> The brief biography is extracted from: Abu al-Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom: An Autobiographical Narrative* (London: Orient Longman Ltd., 1978). And Ian Henderson Douglas, *Abu al-Kalam Azad: An Intellectual and Religious Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Quoted from “Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur’an dan Hadis Vol. 2, No.1 Juli 2001: 35-53 by Ahmad Rafiq, *Kesatuan Tuhan dan Kesatuan Agama*.”

encounter in both personal and social lives. Maududi believed that the Qur'an offered principles for human existence and instructions on how to put them into practice.

Shabi Ahmad divides Azad's life journey into four phases: as a journalist (1911), as a revivalist and editor of al-Hilal magazine (1911-1920), as a theorist of the Khilafat movement and other similar movements (1920-1923), and finally as a defender of Indian nationalism and designer of the formation of secular India (1923-1958).

With its twists and turns, Mawlana Abu Kalam Azad's (1888-1958) lifelong journey eventually made him one of the Indian Muslim leaders embraced by all. Therefore, his death was a major loss not just to his family, close friends, and colleagues but to the entire Indian people. This long journey also made him exceedingly critical of Islamic philosophers before and throughout his time and the outcomes of previous and current Qur'anic interpretations. His criticism also served as the basis for his understanding of the Qur'an.<sup>13</sup>

### C. Al-Qur'an's Perspective on God

Divinity is the most important component to examine when studying religion. Maulana Abul Azad believed that human reason has never led to belief in the existence of God. Thus, one conceivable path for its upward development is inherent in human nature.<sup>14</sup>

According to the Qur'an, the first concept mankind perceives of God is his oneness or unity. This viewpoint depicts an oneness that no creature can see in the creator of all that exists. This viewpoint continuously evolves, marked by decline, and can lead to the concepts of diversity and polytheism.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted from "Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis Vol. 2, No.1 Juli 2001: 35-53 by Ahmad Rafiq, *Kesatuan Tuhan dan Kesatuan Agama*. Page. 37-40.

<sup>14</sup> Syed Abdul Latif, *Basic Concepts of the Qur'an*, (Published By Dr. Syed Abdul Latif Trust for Quranic and Other Cultural Studies 4-1-536, Qaderia Nasheman, Troop Bazar), page. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Syed Abdul Latif, *Basic Concepts of the Qur'an...* page. 1.

Using anthropological data from the oldest human societies, Abul Azad concluded that almost everyone was subject to the same divine power that transcended their lives. This submission is then manifested via distinct rituals. However, they are all aimed at a force beyond our understanding. Thus, he reasoned that all humans, from generation to generation, are monotheists. He based this conclusion on Q.S. al-Taubah (10): 19 and al-Baqarah (2): 203.<sup>16</sup>

The oneness of God is the result of each human nation progressing from its initial, restricted, intellectual beliefs about God to the same conclusion. This evolution can be viewed in three ways:

1. From anthropomorphism or antropophisme to freedom from them or transcendentalism,
2. From polytheism to monotheism.
3. From the vision of a God of awe and terror to that of a God love.<sup>17</sup>

A question arises: Why is man's initial perception of God comprised of awe, horror, or fear? The explanation is obvious: the beauty of God's nature is created out of awe and fear. They cannot comprehend the hidden beauty in the early stages of human intelligence. The human mind has a preconceived notion that God is feared because it is impossible to comprehend the form of God's beauty. For this, insight or inner vision is required, which he acquired progressively over time.<sup>18</sup>

When a human thinks of God's characteristics, the first image that springs to mind is His might or destructive power. Thunder and lightning in the sky, volcanic eruptions in the mountains, earthquakes, floods, and storms at sea--all of these destructive occurrences surprised and horrified human beings, and

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<sup>16</sup> Syed Abdul Latif, *Basic Concepts of the Qur'an...* page 14. Quoted from "Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis Vol. 2, No.1 Juli 2001: 35-53 by Ahmad Rafiq, *Kesatuan Tuhan dan Kesatuan Agama*. Page. 48.

<sup>17</sup> Syed Abdul Latif, *Basic Concepts of the Qur'an...* page 14. Quoted from "Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis Vol. 2, No.1 Juli 2001: 35-53 by Ahmad Rafiq, *Kesatuan Tuhan dan Kesatuan Agama*. Page. 48.

<sup>18</sup> Syed Abdul Latif, *Basic Concepts of the Qur'an ...* page 15.



they began to see God as a horrible or terrifying God. They could not see the beauty of God in the dreadful thunder and lightning or the molten lava spewing from the volcano.<sup>19</sup>

Because of their amazement and dread, humanity experienced both despair and enormous hope. Then they sought salvation from God, and when God did save them, it appeared that God was caring and beautiful.<sup>20</sup>

Before the revelation of the Qur'an, the highest kind of human knowledge was the ability to think of God without the need for symbols. However, no concept could be established in "God" other than human traits.<sup>21</sup> In Q.S. 6:104, God allows us to observe Him from a transcendental perspective.<sup>22</sup>

The Quranic concept of God's Oneness is definite, with both positive and negative implications. The positive side is that God is one and only one. The negative side is that He is unlike anything else and will never be. These sides indicate that God's traits will not exist in anything else.<sup>23</sup>

Azad extended the same principle to all subsequent religions and schools of philosophical thought. To support his point, he listed some later religions and schools of thought, including Chinese indigenous religion, Shamanism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Mazdaisana, Judaism, Christianity, and Greek Philosophy: Alexandrian School and Neo-Platonism.<sup>24</sup>

Of all the religions previously mentioned, Azad recognized it as part of the course of God's nurturing (*rububiyah*) towards mankind, which will lead to the One God in the view of all mankind. Therefore, when the Qur'an teaches the same thing,

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<sup>19</sup> Syed Abdul Latif, *Basic Concepts of the Qur'an* ... page 15-16.

<sup>20</sup> Syed Abdul Latif, *Basic Concepts of the Qur'an* ... page 16.

<sup>21</sup> Syed Abdul Latif, *Basic Concepts of the Qur'an* ... page 16.

<sup>22</sup> Syed Abdul Latif, *Basic Concepts of the Qur'an* ... page 17, the verse

is:

قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بَصَائِرُ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ أَبْصَرَ فَلِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ عَمِيَ فَعَلَيْهَا وَمَا أَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ بِحَفِيظٍ.

<sup>23</sup> Syed Abdul Latif, *Basic Concepts of the Qur'an*... page 19.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted from "Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis Vol. 2, No.1 Juli 2001: 35-53 by Ahmad Rafiq, *Kesatuan Tuhan dan Kesatuan Agama*. Page. 48.

the Qur'an is touching and reminding the human heart of the deepest value within him, namely submission to the One God that exists in all the religions they adhere to, even though with different forms of manifestation.<sup>25</sup>

Azad referred to the characteristics of God as *Rabb al-'Alamin*, *al-Rahman*, *al-Rahim*, and *Malik Yawm al-Din*. These four characteristics were classified into three technical names, which he precisely discussed: *Rububiyah*, *Rahmah*, and *'Adalah*. *Rububiyah*, for Azad, was more than just maintenance or nurturing in the narrow sense, but rather the process of continuously developing and sustaining everything step by step to reach its ideal nature at each level. When this quality is assigned to *al-'Alamin* in the surah above, it refers to all beings, regardless of their nature or form.<sup>26</sup>

Overall, God's creative activity occurs in four stages: *takhliq* (creation), *taswiyah* (perfection), *taqdir* (decision), and *hidayah* (direction). These four stages strive to improve the quality of life for all beings. If things that appear harmful to life are discovered later in the world, this is not a contradiction but serves as an amplifier of this objective. It serves a balancing function by reminding all creatures, particularly intelligent humans, to quickly return to the original purpose of creation. Asghar Ali Engineer named Azad's idea 'Theological Creativity', which gave birth to 'Creative Theology.' The orderliness of God's entire creation process demonstrates the kind of *Rahmah* that God has. Azad deduces this quality from two essential Qur'anic terms: *al-Rahman*, which means the One who possesses mercy, and *al-Rahim*, which indicates the One who not only has the trait of mercy but places mercy on all creatures without distinction. This verse also promotes the progressive process of *rububiyah* across the

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted from "Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis Vol. 2, No.1 Juli 2001: 35-53 by Ahmad Rafiq, *Kesatuan Tuhan dan Kesatuan Agama*. Page. 48-49.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted from "Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis Vol. 2, No.1 Juli 2001: 35-53 by Ahmad Rafiq, *Kesatuan Tuhan dan Kesatuan Agama*. Page. 45-47

universe.<sup>27</sup>

However, God does not always bestow it in the external form humans see as something lovely or good, per His other nature of *'adalah*. More specifically, this phrase refers to the logical outcomes of human acts, whether good or harmful. This characteristic stems from God's teachings on the afterlife, where all human activities will be accounted for. This attribute teaches the never-ending process of rectification in human life, as everything we are born with is prone to erroneous. This process of calculation and correction is also an expression of God's mercy.<sup>28</sup>

With this Oneness of God, all faiths on earth are essentially the same; what distinguishes them is simply their external form, which is shaped by the minds and environments of their leaders. Evolutively, all human beings originate from the same source, are split by the impact of diverse things around them, and are reminded to return to being one by God's direction and revelation. That process is what all religions teach.<sup>29</sup>

With God's and religion's unity, it is vital that all humans, regardless of religion, respect and do good to one another. Because, in essence, no faith encourages violence against others. According to the key traits of God, when there is a deviation in the normal process of human life, another human being must remind him. This concept underpins his interpretation of the phrases *ma'ruf* and *munkar*.

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted from "Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis Vol. 2, No.1 Juli 2001: 35-53 by Ahmad Rafiq, *Kesatuan Tuhan dan Kesatuan Agama*. Page. 45-47

<sup>28</sup> Quoted from "Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis Vol. 2, No.1 Juli 2001: 35-53 by Ahmad Rafiq, *Kesatuan Tuhan dan Kesatuan Agama*. Page. 45-47

<sup>29</sup> Quoted from "Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis Vol. 2, No.1 Juli 2001: 35-53 by Ahmad Rafiq, *Kesatuan Tuhan dan Kesatuan Agama*. Page. 49.

Finally, Azad believed all religions are about service to God and the need to do good. With this notion, Azad attempted to reach all components of multifarious Indian society, particularly Muslim and Hindu populations, to realize the similarities and work together to achieve the justice they deserved, namely Indian independence. Regarding historical facts, Mawlana Abu al-Kalam Azad's career and life path can be considered successful, evidenced by the accomplishments listed in the biography above.<sup>30</sup>

#### **D. Conclusion**

According to Abul Azad, the Qur'an emphasizes the concept of one God. With anthropological justifications, he developed an understanding that all humans and religions essentially come down to One God before suffering by imposing a rational concept of God and the effect of the environment. The Qur'an, the most recent revelation, has touched on and reminded us that all religions lead to the same God. Abul Azad concluded that all humans are subject to the same transcendent power that governs their lives. This submission is then manifested via distinct rites. However, they are all aimed at a force beyond our understanding. Thus, he reasoned that all humans, from generation to generation, are monotheists. As a result, the concepts of divine unity and religious unity evolved. All religions are fundamentally about serving God and doing good. With God's and religion's unity, it is vital that all humans, regardless of religion, respect and do good to one another.

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted from "Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis Vol. 2, No.1 Juli 2001: 35-53 by Ahmad Rafiq, *Kesatuan Tuhan dan Kesatuan Agama*. Page. 49-50.

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