# THE EXISTENCE AND FORM OF TAFSIR AL-MUNIR BY WAHBAH AL-ZUHAILI

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### ABSTRACT

Wahbah al-Zuhaili is a well-known scholar who was born in Damascus. He is known for his book Tafsir al-Munir, which explains how to interpret the Quran in a way that is easy to understand and digest. Using a qualitative approach, the goal of this study is to look at different parts of Tafsir al-Munir that have to do with its existence and form, such as the style of interpretation, the methods of interpretation, and the unique parts of the work. The conclusion drawn from this study is that Tafsir al-Munir, written by Sheikh Wahbah al-Zuhaili, is a highly specific and systematic work with complete and perfect explanations, clear and vivid language, and a prominent presence in the field of Quranic interpretation in modern times. In terms of methodology and analysis, it appears that the style of interpretation of Tafsir al-Munir is characterized by literary and socio-cultural elements, as well as nuances of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) in its interpretation.

Keywords: Tafsir al-Munir, existence, Wahbah Al-Zuhaili.

## ABSTRAK

Wahbah al-Zuhaili merupakan seorang ulama besar kelahiran Damaskus yang terkenal dengan salah satu karyanya yaitu kitab Tafsir al-Munir, yang mana penafsirannya menggunakan gaya bahasa yang mudah dipahmi dan dapat dengan cepat dicerna bagi pembacanya. Untuk itu kajian ini akan mencoba menelaah beberapa hal yang terkait dengan eksistensi dan wujud kitab tafsir al-Munir seperti corak penafsiran, metode penafsiran serta keistimewaan kitab tafsir al-Munir dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif. Kesimpulan yang dapat penulis catat yaitu tafsir al-Munir yang ditulis oleh Syeikh Wahbah al-Zuhaili, sebuah karya yang cukup spesifik dan sistemik, penjelasannya lengkap serta sempurna, bahasannya jelas dan terang, penampilannya terkemuka dalam bidang penafsiran al-Quran di zaman modern. Dari segi manhaj atau metode yang digunakan serta analisanya nampak bahwa corak penafsiran Tafsir Al-Munir ini adalah bercorak kesastraan (*adabi*) dan sosial kemasyarakatan (*ijtima'i*) serta adanya nuansa kefikihan (*fiqh*) dalam penafsirannya.

Kata Kunci: Tafsir Al-Munir, Eksistensi, Wahbah Al-Zuhaili

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### A. Introduction

The gradual descent of the Quran over a period of 23 years, in accordance with the events that occurred in the lives of the Muslim community, is something that can aid in facilitating efforts to understand and comprehend the contents of the holy book of Quran. In this regard, the verses that were revealed to the Prophet always addressed the issues that the Muslim community was experiencing at that time. Due to its rationality, the Prophet Muhammad and his companions directly learned the meaning contained in the Quran from this situation.

Meanwhile, in fact, the content of the Quran is very relevant to science, and its meaning is very broad and deep, requiring interpretation to understand its content. Therefore, during the time of Prophet Muhammad, the need for interpretation was already apparent, especially given the role of the Prophet himself as an explainer of the verses of the holy book. After the Prophet's passing, several commentators emerged from among his companions and subsequent generations, and even in modern times, interpretation continues to live and evolve.

Prophet Muhammad appeared to be trying to explain the meaning of global verses, explain vague understandings, and solve various problems faced by Muslims in his time, so they did not feel hesitant to understand it, even though they were very sure of the truth of the contents of the Quran. Interpretation efforts as they occurred in the early days of Islam continued to develop from generation to generation.

The mufassirs who interpret the verses of the Quran use different methods and styles, according to their knowledge capacity and expertise. Wahbah Zuhaili is a fiqh expert who attempts to explain the verses of the Quran with a unique source, method, style, and characteristic. This article will reveal some aspects of Wahbah Zuhaili's commentary. This study is expected to open up a new perspective on Quranic interpretation in the millennial era.

### B. Biography Wahbah Al-Zuhaili

The author of the book Tafsir al-Munir is Sheikh Wahbah al-Zuhaili<sup>1</sup> (1351 H/1932 CE–2015 CE), an expert in various Islamic sciences in the modern era who is quite famous. It is not surprising that many of his works have become references in the Islamic higher education curriculum. Wahbah al-Zuhaili is a knowledgeable scholar (*'alim 'allamah*) who masters various disciplines of knowledge (*mutafannin*) as well as related instrumental knowledge in his field. He is a contemporary fiqh scholar (*fuqaha*) with international recognition, and his thoughts and works have spread throughout the Islamic world through his books. His book on Islamic jurisprudence, titled *Fiqh al-Islami wa adillatuh*, is very popular in the Islamic world.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Ummul Aiman, 'METODE PENAFSIRAN WAHBAH AL-ZUHAYLÎ: Kajian Al-Tafsîr Al-Munîr', *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman*, 36.1 (2016), p. 3 < https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v36i1.106>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Abu Samsudin, 'Wawasan Al-Quran Tentang Ulu Al-Bab Studi Komparasi Terhadap Pemikiran Wahbah Zuhaili Dalam Tafsir Al-Munir Dengan Muhammad Quraish Shihab Dalam Tafsir Al-Misbah' (Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, 2016), p. 1.

Wahbah al-Zuhaili was born in *Dir 'Atiyah*, one of the remote areas of Damascus, Syria, on March 6, 1351 H/1932 CE. His full name is Sheikh Wahbah bin Sheikh Mustafa al-Zuhaili. He was the son of Sheikh Mustafa al-Zuhaili, who was known as a simple farmer and a renowned scholar, a hafiz of the Quran, very devout in worship, and fond of fasting.

Under the guidance of his parents, Wahbah al-Zuhaili received a basic education in Islamic religion and knowledge, as well as other sciences. His parents then enrolled him in a primary school (*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*) in his village and continued his formal education to the next level.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to his parents' guidance, Wahbah al-Zuhaili was raised and nurtured in the environment of Hanafi scholars, which later shaped his fiqh thinking in this school of thought. Although he adhered to the Hanafi school, he remained inclusive and not fanatical about his own beliefs and always respected the opinions of other *Fuqaha* schools. This can be seen in his exposition and interpretation of verses related to Islamic jurisprudence.

# C. Education History of Wahbah al-Zuhaili

In his early years, Wahbah al-Zuhaili began his education in the Quran and basic knowledge (*ibtidaiyah*) in his hometown. He completed his education at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* in Damascus in 1946 CE. He then continued his education at the Shariah College and graduated in 1952 CE. He was very enthusiastic and diligent in his studies, which greatly facilitated his journey when he moved to Cairo, Egypt, to continue his education. In this city, he attended several lectures simultaneously, including at the Faculty of Arabic Language at Al-Azhar University and the Faculty of Law at Ain Shams University.<sup>4</sup>

Wahbah al-Zuhaili went to school at Al-Azhar University in Cairo and got a special doctoral degree with *a summa cum laude honor*. In completing his doctoral thesis, he wrote a dissertation entitled "*Atsar al-Harb fi al-Fiqh al-Islami: Dirasah Muqaranah baina al-Madzahib al-Tsamaniyyah wa al-Qanun ad-Dauli al- 'Am*" (The Impact of War in Islamic Jurisprudence: A Comparative Study between the Eight Schools of Thought and General International Law). The dissertation was later recommended as a reference and traded with universities outside his university.<sup>5</sup>

After finishing school, al-Zuhaili worked as a lecturer at the Faculty of Sharia at Damascus University, where he had gone to school, in 1963. His academic career continued to soar until he was appointed vice dean of the same faculty. In a relatively short period of time, al-Zuhaili was able to hold the position of dean as well as head of the Islamic Fiqh department after his appointment as vice dean. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed as a professor of Islamic law at one of the universities in Syria. Al-Zuhaili was a famous figure in the 20th century, comparable to phenomenal figures in the fields of *fiqh*, *tafsir*, and various other Islamic disciplines, such as Muhammad Abu Zahrah, Sa'id Hawwa, Sayyid Quthb, Mahmud Shaltut, Thahir Ibn 'Asyur, and others.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Syaiful Amin Ghofur, *Mozaik Mufasir Al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Kaukaba Dipantara, 2013), pp. 136–37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Khabib Abdul Aziz, 'Implikasi Nilai-Nilai Ibadah Puasa Terhadap Pendidikan Karakter''Studi Tentang Puasa Dalam Kitab Al-Fiqh Al-Islam Wa Adillatuhu Karya Prof Dr Wahbah Az-Zuhaili' (Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo, 2015), p. 70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Maulina Fajaria, 'Hukum Muslim Mewarisi Harta Dari Keluarga Yang Kafir Menurut Prof. Dr. Wahbah Al-Zuhaili Dan Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi' (Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, 2017), p. 56.

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Although al-Zuhaili lived in the scope of the Hanafi school of scholars, which directly influenced his thinking in the fiqh school of thought, he left his fanaticism far away from his school of thought and appreciated the diversity of differences of opinion by being neutral, moderate, and proportional towards the opinions of other schools of thought. This is reflected in his interpretation when he discusses verses related to *fiqh*. In his development, he is known for his high independence and objectivity regarding the existing differences of opinion, so he is familiarly referred to as a figure of the comparative school of thought (*muqaranat al-madzahib*), with one of the monumental works being his book *al-Fiqh al-Islami wa Adillatuhu*.

As a scholar born in his time, it cannot be denied that teachers and students have a certain color that cannot be separated. In the field of *fiqh*, al-Zuhaili's teachers include Muhammad Hasyim al-Khathib as-Syafi'i and Abd ar-Razzaq al-Hamasi. In the field of *hadith*, al-Zuhaili first studied with Mahmud Yassin, and in the field of *tafsir*, he studied with Sheikh Hasan Jankah and Sheikh Shadiq Jankah al-Madani. He learned Arabic from Muhammad Shalih Farfur. Meanwhile, when he was in Egypt, he studied with Mahmud Syalthuth, Abd ar Rahman Taj, and Isa Manun, who was his teacher in the field of comparative fiqh. His teacher in the field of usul al-fiqh was Mustafa 'Abd al-Khaliq and his son, 'Abd al-Ghani, as well as many other teachers.<sup>6</sup>

## D. Works of Wahbah al-Zuhaili

The intellectualism and popularity of Sheikh Wahbah al-Zuhaili's scientific works are clearly proportional to his productivity in the field of scientific writing. In addition to writing scientific papers for various journals, Wahbah al-Zuhaili has also completed no less than, and even more than, 40 titles of books. Among his works are the following:

- 1. The commentary book that is the subject of this article is titled *Tafsir al-Munir fi al-Aqidah wa al-Shariah wa al-Manhaj*, published in 1991 and consisting of sixteen volumes, published by Dar al-Fikr, Damascus.
- 2. The complete *fiqh* book titled *Al-Fiqh al-Islami wa Adillatuhu*, published in 1984, consisting of eight volumes, was printed and published by Dar al-Fikr, Damascus.
- 3. The book on the fundamentals of *fiqh* law published in 1987, titled *Ushul al-Fiqh al-Islami*, consisting of two volumes, was published by Dar al-Fikr, Damascus.
- 4. The University of Damascus, where he taught, also published the book *Al-Wasit fi Ushul al-Fiqh* in 1966, which dealt with the fundamentals of *fiqh* law.
- 5. The book on comparative law titled *Atsar al-Harb fi al-Fiqh al-Islami*, *Dirasah Muqaranah*, was published in 1963 by Dar al-Fikr, Damascus. This book was his doctoral dissertation completion program at al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt.
- 6. The book on the science of hadith titled *Takhrij wa Tahqiq Ahadits*, published by Tuhfat al-Fuqaha, consists of five volumes; the year of publication is not found.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Eko Zulfikar and Ahmad Zainal Abidin, 'Kecenderungan Tekstual Pada Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Gender: Telaah Penafsiran Wahbah Az-Zuhaili Dalam Kitab Tafsir Al-Munir', *AL QUDS : Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis*, 3.2 (2019), pp. 137–38 <a href="https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v3i2.829">https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v3i2.829</a>>.

- 7. The book on law titled *Nazhariatul ad-Dhamman Au Ahkam al-Mas'uliyatal Madaniyyah wa al-Janaiyyah fi al-Fiqh al-Islami*, published in 1970 by Dar al-Fikr, Damascus,
- 8. The book on law titled *Al-Washaya wa al-Waqf fi al-Fiqh al-Islami*, published in 1987 by Dar al-Fikr, Damascus,
- 9. At-Tanwir fi At-Tafsir 'ala Hamasy al-Quran al-'Azhim
- 10. Al-Quran Syariah al-Mujtama'
- 11. Al-Fiqh al-Islami fi Uslub al-Jadid Maktabah al-Hadist, Damascus, 1967.<sup>7</sup>

# E. Tafsir Al-Munir by Wahbah al-Zuhaili

Wahbah al-Zuhaili worked on this commentary book from 1975 to 1991 AD, a period of about 16 years. The commentary book extensively explains all verses of the Qur'an, starting from Surah al-Fatihah to Surah al-Nas, and consists of 16 volumes, with each volume containing 2 juz, making a total of 32 juz. For the last two juz, al-Zuhaili indicated them as *al-fahras al-syamil*, containing an alphabetically arranged index.

In the academic world, al-Zuhaili carried out an educational mission in universities for approximately 30 years and conducted extensive research in various disciplines, including *fiqh*, *tafsir*, and *hadith*. Along with this, al-Zuhaili authored the book Tafsir al-Munir after completing his two monumental and comprehensive works, *Ushul Fiqh al-Islam* and *al-Fiqh al-Islam wa Adillatuhu*. Tafsir al-Munir was first published in 1991 AD/1411 AH by Dar al-Fikr Beirut, Lebanon, and Dar al-Fikr Damascus, Syria. Thus, this commentary was written by al-Zuhaili when he reached the peak of his intellectual career, and the book has been translated into various countries such as Malaysia, Turkey, and Indonesia.<sup>8</sup>

# 1. The Interpretive Style of Tafsir Al-Munir

Observing the various styles of interpretation, Tafsir Al-Munir also has its own distinctive style of interpretation. By looking at the approach and method used, as well as analyzing the assessments of other writers, the interpretation style of Tafsir Al-Munir is characterized by literary (*adabi*) and social community (*ijtima'i*) aspects, as well as a touch of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) due to the explanation of laws contained therein. Despite the fact that it also includes jurisprudence in its discussion, the explanation is, as previously mentioned, tailored to the advancement and needs of society. Thus, it can be said that the interpretation style of Tafsir Al-Munir is ideal because it is in harmony with its literary, social, and jurisprudential aspects.<sup>9</sup>

# 2. The Method of Interpreting Tafsir Al-Munir

In the introduction, he stated that his goal was to compile a tafsir (Quranic exegesis) that connects Muslim and non-Muslim individuals with the Book of Allah Ta'ala, the explanation of God and His only revelation that has been definitively proven to be unmatched, as it is the Word of Allah SWT. Therefore, it will become a *tafsir* that combines *ma'tsur* (narrations) and *ma'qul* (rational arguments) by using reliable references as well as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Samsudin, pp. 3–5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Zulfikar and Abidin, p. 140.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Samsudin, p. 9.

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books discussing the Holy Quran, including its history, explanation of the reasons for the revelation of verses, or the grammatical analysis that helps explain many verses.

Wahbah Zuhaili always begins each surah in his *tafsir* by first explaining the virtue and contents of the surah, as well as some of the main themes. Every theme that is raised and discussed covers linguistic aspects by explaining several terms contained in a verse and by explaining aspects of its *balaghah* and grammar.<sup>10</sup>

The method used or framework of the discussion in the book of Tafsir al-Munir can be summarized briefly as follows:

- 1) This interpretation divides the verses of the Quran into topical or theme units and follows them with titles for their explanations
- 2) Tafsir al-Munir explains the content of the chapters of the Quran in a concise and global (*mujmal*) manner.
- 3) This tafsir also explains linguistic aspects (*lughawiyah*), and this pattern becomes one of the distinctive features of the al-Munir tafsir itself.
- 4) An important aspect is that this interpretation also presents the reasons for the revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*) of the verses of the Quran in the most authentic narrations and avoids weak narrations. It also includes explanations by supplementing them with stories of the Prophets and major events in Islam, such as the battles of Badr and Uhud, as well as famous and reliable books of the Prophet's biography (*sirah*).
- 5) This interpretation is equipped with sufficient information and explanations.
- 6) This commentary (*tafsir*) reveals the laws that are cited (quoted) from the verses (*tafsir ayat bi al-ayat*).
- 7) This interpretation also explains the *balaghah* (rhetoric) and *i'rab* (syntax) of many verses of the Quran. This approach seems very helpful in explaining the meaning of the verses themselves. In relation to this, Wahbah avoids terms that hinder the understanding of the interpretation for people who do not pay attention to the intended aspects of *balaghah-i'rab*.<sup>11</sup>

Analyzing the method of interpretation used, it can be understood that this interpretation is an analytical and semi-thematic method. Wahbah al-Zuhaili interpreted the Qur'an from *Surah al-Fatihah* to *Surah an-Nas* by always giving a theme to each study of the verses that is in accordance with their content. For example, in interpreting *Surah al-Baqarah* verses one to five, he titled it the characteristics of the believers (*mukmin*) and the reward for those who fear God. As for reaching *Surah an-Nas*, he gave a theme for the discussion in each group of related verses (*munasabah*). He explains the meaning of the content of the verses of the Qur'an, verse by verse and surah by surah, in accordance with their order in the mushaf.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Sayyid Muhammad 'Ali Iyazi, *Al-Mufassirun Hayatuhum Wa Manhajuhum* (Taheran: Mu'assasah al-Thiba'ah wa al-Nasyr Wizarah al-Tsaqafah wa al-Irsyad al-Islami, 1373), p. 685.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Wahbah Al-Zuhaili, *Tafsir Al-Munir* (Depok: Gema Insani, 2005), pp. 107–8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Nasruddin Baidan, Metode Penafsiran Al-Qur'an (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2002), p. 68.

# 3. The Special Features of the Book of Tafsir al-Munir

The special features of the book of Tafsir al-Munir can be seen from several aspects, one of which is its method of discussion, which is even, systematic, and complete, starting from the beginning of the Quran with *Surah Al-Fatihah* to its conclusion with *Surah An-Nas*, based on the order of the Surahs in the *Uthmani Mushaf*. This pattern appears to greatly facilitate understanding of the meaning and explanation of each Surah in the Tafsir al-Munir itself.

The main excellence and uniqueness of Tafsir al-Munir by Sheikh Wahbah al-Zuhaili is its use of the exegesis style and methodology of *Tafsir bi al-ma'thur* as well as *Tafsir bi al-ra'yi*. *Tafsir bi al-ma'thur* refers to interpreting the Quran with Quranic verses, interpreting the Quran with the Hadith of the Prophet, and interpreting it with the narrations from the Companions, the Successors, and the Successors of the Successors.

As in Ibn Kathir's and Imam al-Zarkashi's exegesis of the Quran, the methodology put forth by Sheikh Ibn Taymiyyah is the best methodology.<sup>13</sup> Sheikh Wahbah al-Zuhaili presents his interpretation with a very precise and meticulous style of language and wording, and he also adjusts and takes into account the evolving situation and needs of modern society in his time.

In this regard, we can take an example of Sheikh Wahbah al-Zuhaili's interpretation of the legal verses by considering that he is truly one of the jurists who understands the situation. For example, the theme highlighted is *'al-Haidh wa Ahkamuhu*," mentioned in the Quran in Surah al-Baqarah verses 222, which reads:

وَيَسْئَلُوْنَكَ عَنِ الْمَحِيْضَ ۖ قُلُ هُوَ اَذًى لَفَاعَتَزِلُوا النِّسَآءَ فِي الْمَحِيْضِ وَلَا تَقْرَبُوْهُنَّ حَتَّى يَطْهُرْنَ ۚ فَاِذَا تَطَهَّرْنَ فَأْتُوْهُنَ مِنْ حَيْثُ اَمَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَابِيْنَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِرِيْنَ

And they ask you about menstruation. Say, "It is harm, so keep away from wives during menstruation. And do not approach them until they are pure. And when they have purified themselves, then come to them from where Allah has ordained for you. Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves."

In the sense that a person should distance themselves from their spouse, the meaning is to not have sexual intercourse with a woman during her menstrual period. Do not approach them until they are clean, meaning after they have finished their menstrual period and have taken a mandatory bath (due to menstruation). In this case, there are also scholars who interpret it as after the cessation of bleeding.

In explaining this matter, Syeikh Wahbah Zuhaili did not establish or determine his personal opinion and did not make tarjih (determining and selecting the strongest opinion) regarding the differences of opinion. This is a characteristic of the al-Munir commentary itself, namely presenting differences of opinion across schools of thought without giving preference to any of those opinions.

From the available information, it appears that Syekh Wahbah Zuhaili is very inclusive in his opinions and very tolerant in providing explanations. What he presents is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> 'No Title' <http://pemudabugis.multiply.com/journal/item/257/ Tafsir Munir/ 3Feb2009>.

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like bringing dew that can bring coolness to his readers, even tending to always respect the opinions of existing scholars and not making ultimatums that can become the seed of division.

### F. Conclusion

Syeikh 'alim 'allamah Wahbah az-Zuhaili, a renowned Syrian scholar from Damascus, wrote the modern and contemporary tafsir known as Tafsir al-Munir. In interpreting the Qur'an, as presented in his great work entitled Tafsir al-Munir, he uses a language style that is easy to understand and comprehend. His explanations and analyses are considered very relevant in answering questions that arise in the present and possibly in the future. It seems that the information contained therein answers the author's concern about the current state of society, where the tendency towards a hedonistic lifestyle is increasingly distancing people from the Qur'an.

The book Tafsir al-Munir by Syeikh Wahbah al-Zuhaili is highly recommended for academics and researchers as a reference and study material, as well as a model of interpretation. This phenomenal 16-volume book could also be used as a basis for academic curriculum, especially in the field of *Ulum al-Quran*, to better understand the content of the Qur'an in this modern and developing era. Wallahu 'alam bi al-Shawab.

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