

Reinterpretation of God: Islamic Kalam Thought in the Era of Global Multiculturalism

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Abstract

God is a transcendent reality that has long been the central object of metaphysical and theological inquiry. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, particularly within the discipline of kalam, the discourse on God has produced diverse interpretations regarding His essence, attributes, and existence. In the contemporary era of global multiculturalism characterized by plural traditions, worldviews, and intercultural encounters the question of how kalam thought about God remains relevant and requires renewed interpretation. The purpose of this study is to reinterpret the concept of God in Islamic kalam thought and to explore its relevance for fostering tolerance, intercultural dialogue, and religious coexistence in the context of global multiculturalism. To achieve this, the research employs a qualitative method with a theoretical-hermeneutical approach, focusing on textual analysis and interpretative reflection on classical and modern kalam discourses. The findings indicate that, according to kalam thought, God is One, possesses both essence (dhat) and attributes (sifat), exists necessarily by Himself, and His existence is independent of human acknowledgment. The plurality of views concerning God within Islamic theology and among world religions should not be regarded as a weakness, but rather as an opportunity to nurture tolerance and mutual respect. In this sense, the reinterpretation of God through kalam thought contributes not only to strengthening rational faith but also to building bridges of dialogue in today's pluralistic and multicultural society.

Keywords

God, Kalam Science, Global Multiculturalism

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Introduction

The initial concept of God originates from human imagination, as humans seek a power greater than themselves and the universe. Humans strive to find the existence of God as the highest entity capable of providing refuge and a place to express grievances. In the early stages of human search for God, He was depicted as the origin of the universe, as seen in the perspective of Theism.¹ This depiction of God then evolved, from the assertion that

¹ Muhammad Noor, "Filsafat Ketuhanan," *Jurnal Humaniora Teknologi* 3, No. 1 (August 2018): 28,

God exists as the Creator to the belief that God is the universe itself, as proposed by adherents of Pantheism, until finally, Monotheism emerged, asserting that God is one, formless, possesses an essence, and is the source of all things². These differing views on God have led to various perspectives on the Concept of God in the Philosophy of Divinity, which often serves as an introductory discussion in philosophy books.³

Discussions about God, including His attributes, essence, and nature, have often sparked debates in the realm of philosophy, particularly within the discourse of Islamic theology (kalam). The mutakallimūn (Islamic theologians)⁴ are known as skilled debaters who excel in the art of rhetoric⁵. For them, knowledge can only be explained through discourse, and true belief can only be instilled through dialogue. The discussions of the mutakallimūn have never strayed from the discourse on God ranging from His attributes and essence to the concept of divine speech (kalām) and human speech.⁶

Islamic theological thought (kalām) emerged as a response to the existence of various schools of thought within Islam, such as the Khawārij, Murji'ah, Mu'tazilah, Jabariyyah, Qadariyyah, Ash'ariyyah, Māturīdiyyah, and others. Each school of kalām interprets and emphasizes different aspects of the fundamental concept of theology, particularly the concept of God. The Khawārij emphasized God's absolute justice, which led them to adopt a strict stance that considered grave sinners as unbelievers. In contrast, the Murji'ah placed greater weight on God's mercy, postponing judgment of sinners to God alone. The Mu'tazilah developed a rationalist approach, strongly affirming divine unity (tawḥīd) and justice while denying the eternal existence of God's attributes independent of His essence. Opposing them, the Jabariyyah stressed predestination (jabr), teaching that human beings have no real free will, whereas the Qadariyyah defended human free will (qadar) and responsibility for actions. Meanwhile, the Ash'ariyyah sought a middle path by affirming both divine omnipotence and a limited human capacity for action, while the Māturīdiyyah, although close to the Ash'ari position, placed greater emphasis on the role of human reason in knowing God and moral responsibility.

These theological schools were not isolated from philosophical inquiry; their engagement with rational arguments enriched Islamic intellectual discourse. Ibn Khaldūn⁷ famously defined kalām as “a discipline that presents theological arguments supported by rational evidence.” This diversity of theological perspectives, combined with their openness to philosophical traditions, positioned Islamic theologians as moderate intellectuals who bridged gaps between different schools of thought within Islam and between Islam and other traditions. Such intellectual plurality is especially relevant in the era of global multiculturalism, where dialogue, tolerance, and mutual understanding are urgently needed.

The era of global multiculturalism is a period marked by frequent encounters

<https://doi.org/10.34128/Jht.V3i1.31>.

² Agustinus Nicolaus Yokit, “Konsep Tuhan Dan Agama Menurut Alfred North Whitehead,” *Media (Jurnal Filsafat Dan Teologi)* 3, No. 2 (October 2021): 173–84, <https://doi.org/10.53396/Media.V3i2.37>.

³ Michael J Murray, *An Introduction To The Philosophy Of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1–57.

⁴ Nunu Burhanuddin, *Ilmu Kalam Dari Tauhid Menuju Keadilan* (Jakarta: Prenadamedia Group, 2016), 9.

⁵ Harun Nasution, *Teologi Islam* (Jakarta: Ui Press, 1972), 7.

⁶ Burhanuddin, *Ilmu Kalam Dari Tauhid Menuju Keadilan*, 9.

⁷ Ibn Khaldun Was An Egyptian Historian Born In Tunisia In 1332 Ce. He Was Also Known As An Expert In Politics And Islamic Economics. His Expertise In Economics, Sociology, Politics, Philosophy, And Anthropology Makes Ibn Khaldun's Views On Islamic Scholarship Highly Worthy Of Consideration. See Ibn Khaldun, *Al Ta'rif Bi Ibn Khaldun Wa Riblatihi Gharban Wa Sharqan* (Beirut: Dar El Kitab Al Lubnani, 1979), 79. (Beirut: Dar El Kitab Al-Lubnani, 1979)

between different cultures and religions, influencing various perspectives and approaches.⁸ Multiculturalism recognizes and deeply values cultural and religious diversity within society, even providing formal acknowledgment and full support for minority cultures and religions. This poses a significant challenge to Islamic theological thought (kalām).

In this era, the mutakallimūn are expected to remain relevant and uphold the banner of Islam in societies with diverse traditions, cultures, and religions. If Islam is recognized as a religion of peace that upholds tolerance and serves as a "mercy to all creation" (rahmatan lil 'ālamīn),⁹ then it will continue to be accepted in this diverse society. However, if Islam is perceived as rigid and indifferent to how other religions view it, disregarding the differences in cultural and societal traditions, it will struggle to sustain itself and gain acceptance in the era of global multiculturalism.

Thus, the crucial question arises: how do the thinkers of kalām respond to global multiculturalism? How do they conceptualize God in this context? These questions are significant and worth examining in-depth, as they stimulate intellectual inquiry and encourage further research into what kind of concept of God the mutakallimūn can offer in the era of global multiculturalism. Such an exploration ensures that Islam remains beloved and deeply embedded in the hearts of people in this highly complex era.

To explore these questions, this study employs a qualitative¹⁰ research method with a theoretical-hermeneutical approach¹¹. This method enables a critical interpretation of classical and contemporary kalam texts in order to reinterpret their conceptualization of God and examine their relevance in the context of global multiculturalism. Through this methodological framework, the study seeks to demonstrate the enduring vitality of Islamic theological thought and its constructive contribution to interreligious dialogue, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence in plural societies.

Result and Discussion

The Concept of God in Kalām Thought

God, as a transcendent, abstract, and supreme being, renders human beings weak and incapable of defining Him with absolute accuracy. The human conception of God is limited by human reasoning, as the conceptualization of God is merely a result of human thought and both external and internal experiences whether derived from rational inquiry or spiritual contemplation, which manifest through ideas and understandings about God. Within the discourse of kalam, this epistemological limitation is explicitly acknowledged. Human reason ('aql) is considered a valid means to attain knowledge of God, but its scope remains finite, for it cannot fully encompass the divine essence (dhāt). Thus, kalam scholars differentiate between what can be rationally demonstrated such as the necessity of God's existence, His oneness, and certain attributes and what transcends human comprehension, which must be accepted through revelation (waḥy). This balance between rational argument and scriptural authority forms the epistemological framework of kalam, ensuring that while reason is employed to defend and explain faith, ultimate knowledge of God's reality remains beyond human capacity¹².

⁸ Valentino Lumowa, "Diskursus Multikulturalisme Dan Wajah Indonesiannya," *Jurnal Filsafat* 32, No. 2 (November 2022): 311, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jf.66815>.

⁹ *Al Qur'an Al Karim* (Bandung: Sinar Baru Algensindo, 2018). Al-Anbiya: 21

¹⁰ Gumilar Somantri, "Memahami Metode Kualitatif," *Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia* 9, no. 2 (December 2005): 57–65, <https://doi.org/10.7454/mssh.v9i2.122>.

¹¹ Humar Sidik And Ika Putri Sulistyana, "Hermeneutika Sebuah Metode Interpretasi Dalam Kajian Filsafat Sejarah," *Agastya: Jurnal Sejarah Dan Pembelajarannya* 11, No. 1 (January 2021): 21, <https://doi.org/10.25273/Ajsp.V11i1.6224>.

¹² Jauharotina Jauharotina Alfadhilah, *Petuah-Petuah Sunan Bonang Tentang Ketubanan Dalam Suluk Wujil*

God is an entity that cannot be disregarded and holds great significance for humanity. His importance to humans is so profound that they willingly submit themselves to His authority. God's sovereignty over humankind and the universe, along with everything within it, affirms His existence as the Supreme Being. God is manifest as the Almighty Creator, Omniscient, and Eternal. He is the ultimate judge and the determiner of destiny for the universe.¹³

In Islam, God is not only regarded as the Most Supreme but also as a personal deity. His presence is believed by Muslims to be closer than a person's own jugular vein. To them, God is ever-responsive to those in need and grants the supplications of those who earnestly pray. Muslims recognize Him by the name "Allah."¹⁴

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ۝ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ۝ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ۝ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ ۝

"Say (O Prophet Muhammad), He is Allah, the One and Only. Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is He begotten. And there is none comparable to Him." (QS. Al-Ikhlās: 1-4)

The Qur'an, as the sacred scripture of Islam, defines the concept of God in Surah al-Ikhlās, verses 1–4. In this surah, Allah is described as the One and Only God. He neither begets nor is begotten, and nothing is comparable to Him. At first glance, this depiction of God appears concise and straightforward, making it easily comprehensible to any believer¹⁵. However, within the tradition of kalām, Surah al-Ikhlās is regarded as a profoundly complex metaphysical text that encompasses fundamental debates on tawḥīd (divine oneness), the doctrine of asmā' (divine names), and the discourse on ṣifāt (divine attributes)¹⁶.

The mutakallimūn interpreted this surah in diverse ways. The Mu'tazilah understood "Allāhu Aḥad" as an affirmation of God's absolute unity, thereby rejecting the independent existence of divine attributes apart from His essence; for them, attributes were merely expressions of the divine essence. In contrast, the Ash'arites viewed this verse as affirming God's oneness while simultaneously acknowledging His eternal attributes, which are inseparable from His essence. The Māturīdīs emphasized that through Surah al-Ikhlās, human beings can know God both through revelation and reason, highlighting the essential role of rational inquiry in understanding divinity. Meanwhile, the Jabariyyah and Qadariyyah employed this surah in their debates over the relationship between God's omnipotence and human free will.

Thus, although the wording of Surah al-Ikhlās seems simple, the mutakallimūn treated it as a central locus of theological reflection¹⁷. Its verses became the foundation for profound debates on the nature of God, His attributes, and His relationship with creation, establishing this surah as one of the cornerstones of Islamic theology and a perpetual source of intellectual dialogue throughout Islamic history.¹⁸

The abstraction in Surah Al-Ikhlās can be observed in the complete absence of any visual representation of God. Nowhere in this surah is there a description of God's form, as

Dan Primbon Bonang, 1 (Yogyakarta: Q-Media, 2021). *Tentang Ketuhanan Dalam Suluk Wujil Dan Primbon Bonang*, 1 (Yogyakarta: Q-Media, 2021), 103.

¹³ John Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (Uk: Oxford University Press, 1998), 22.

¹⁴ Society Of Gentleman, *Islam* (London: Encyclopedia Britannica Company, 2007), 3.

¹⁵ *Al Iklas* (Penerbit Serambi, n.d.), 79–85.

¹⁶ Ning Ratna Sinta Dewi, "Konsep Ketuhanan Dalam Kajian Filsafat," *Abrahamic Religions: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 1, No. 2 (September 2021): 36–38, <https://doi.org/10.22373/Arj.V1i2.10728.s>

¹⁷ Siti Lailatul Qomariyah, "Keutamaan Surat Al-Ikhlās (Studi Atas Hadis Dalam Sunan Abu Dawud Nomor 1461)," *Journal Of Islamic Studies And Humanities* 5, No. 2 (2020): 130–45, <https://doi.org/10.21580/Jish.V5i2.6292>.

¹⁸ Komaruddin Hidayat, *Psikologi Ibadat: Menyibak Arti Menjadi Hamba Dan Mitra Allah Di Bumi* (Jakarta: Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2008), 43.

Islam strictly prohibits such depictions. For Muslims, knowing God is an obligation, but delving too deeply into His nature and discussing His essence is prohibited. This aligns with the words of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as narrated by Ibn Ḥibbān:

تَفَكَّرُوا فِي آيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَ لَا تَتَفَكَّرُوا فِي اللَّهِ، فَإِنَّكُمْ لَمْ تُقَدِّرُوهُ حَقَّ قَدَرِهِ

"Think about the power of Allah, but do not think about His essence. Indeed, you will never be able to comprehend His reality." (Hadith narrated by Ibn Ḥibbān)

The abstraction of Allah is a testament to His greatness, which makes it impossible for human beings to depict Him in any form. The name "Allah" that Muslims recognize is not, in essence, the actual name of God, but rather a symbol. The relationship between God and His creation leads to Him being referred to as Allah. Where there is a Khāliq (Creator), there is also a makhlūq (creation). Where there is an 'ābid (worshiper), there is a ma'būd (the One being worshiped). Without a name, it would be difficult to distinguish each entity within a relationship. Therefore, the name Allah exists as a means for Muslims to recognize their God, who is profoundly abstract.¹⁹

In the concept of Kalām thought, one of the key indicators of God that frequently becomes a subject of debate is the nature of God's attributes. The oneness of God is an absolute principle acknowledged by all Kalām schools within Islam. However, the question of whether Allah possesses attributes or not is a matter of contention among different theological schools.²⁰

The Mu'tazilah, a Kalām school that heavily incorporates philosophical thought into its ideology, argues that God should not possess attributes. They believe that if God has attributes, then His attributes must be eternal (qadīm), just like His essence. If all God's attributes were eternal, then there would be multiple eternal beings (qadīm). This multiplicity of eternals (ta'addud al-qudamā') would lead to polytheism (shirk), which is theologically unacceptable in Islam.²¹

Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā',²² as a leading figure of the Mu'tazilah school, even asserted that whoever affirms the existence of eternal (qadīm) attributes for Allah has effectively affirmed the existence of two gods. This is because eternality (qadīm) must belong to only one entity, which is the essence (dhāt) of Allah, and nothing else. Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā's view, which negates the attributes of God, is based on Surah Al-Shūrā (42:11):

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

"There is nothing like unto Him. He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing." (QS. Al-Shūrā: 11)

قُلِ اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ

"Say, 'Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is the One, the Supreme.'" (QS. Ar-Ra'd: 16)

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ سُبْحَانَهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

And they were not commanded except to worship one God; there is no deity except Him. Exalted is He above whatever they associate with Him." (QS. At-Tawbah: 31)

The rational interpretation of these verses, according to Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā', is that the essence of God is fundamentally different from that of creation. The distinction between the two lies in the fact that God's essence is immaterial and not composed of substances, whereas creation consists of substances, accidents, and other elements.

¹⁹ Hidayat, *Psikologi Ibadah: Menyibak Arti Menjadi Hamba Dan Mitra Allah Di Bumi*, 44–45.

²⁰ Abdul Rozak, *Ilmu Kalam* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2019), 199.

²¹ Nasution, *Teologi Islam*, 135.

²² Wāṣil Ibn 'Aṭā' Was An Islamic Theologian Known For His Rationalist Thought. He Was A Highly Intelligent And Critical Student Of Abu Hāshim 'Abdullāh Ibn Muḥammad Al-Ḥanafīyyah But Later Deviated From His Teacher's Views And Founded A New School Of Thought Called The Mu'tazilah. See: Asy-Syahrastani, *Al-Milal Wa An-Nihal* (Beirut: Dar El Fikr, 1980), 46.

The Mu'tazilah argue that the absence of divine attributes does not imply a deficiency in God. The lack of attributes does not mean that God does not know, does not have power, or is not strong. Instead, for them, God remains all-knowing, all-powerful, and almighty—yet not through attributes in the conventional sense. Rather, God knows through knowledge, and that knowledge is God Himself Interpretasi.²³

According to Al-Jubbā'ī²⁴, God knows through His essence. This means that in order to know something, God does not depend on an attribute such as "knowledge" or a state of "knowing." Rather, God knows through His very essence.²⁵ Thus, God is eternally knowing, living, powerful, seeing, and hearing not through separate attributes such as knowledge, life, power, vision, or hearing—but through His own divine essence.

The Mu'tazilah school of thought grants significant authority to human reason, leading them to assert that God cannot be described as having corporeal attributes. If God were said to possess physical attributes, then He would necessarily have dimensions, such as width and length, like any corporeal being.²⁶ Therefore, they interpret Qur'anic verses that seem to suggest God's corporeality metaphorically. Any verses describing God with physical characteristics are given ta'wīl (figurative interpretation) by the Mu'tazilah, assigning meanings that are appropriate to God's majesty and greatness.²⁷

In response to Mu'tazilah ideology, the Ash'ariyah argue instead that God possesses attributes.²⁸ God knows, has power, and wills, in addition to possessing knowledge, strength, and will.²⁹ However, the attributes of God should not be understood literally, but rather symbolically, because for them, God's attributes are unique and incomparable to human attributes, even if they appear similar in wording.³⁰ Thus, the Ash'ariyah reject the notion that God has physical attributes. However, they do not permit reinterpretation (ta'wīl) of Qur'anic verses that describe God's physical features; rather, such descriptions must be accepted as they are, according to their literal meaning. In Ash'ariyah theology, God is said to have eyes, a face, hands, and a throne on which He is established (istiwa').³¹

Al-Ghazālī³², one of the most prominent Islamic theologians, stated that God's attributes are not identical to His essence, but they exist just as God's essence exists. God's attributes are not God Himself, but they originate from God. The attributes of God are not part of His essence, yet they are inseparable from it. This view became the theological foundation of Ash'ariyah thought in understanding God's attributes and served as their

²³ Al-Asy'ari, *Prinsip-Prinsip Dasar Aliran Teologi Islam* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2000), 197.

²⁴ Al-Juba'ī Was A Prominent Figure Of The Mu'tazilah School. His Full Name Was Abū Muḥammad Bin 'Abd Al-Wahhāb Bin Salām Bin Khālīd Bin 'Imrān Al-Juba'ī. He Was Born In Juba'ī, A Region In Kazakhstan, In The Year 235 Ah And Passed Away In 303 Ah. See: Abdul Qahir Bin Thohir Bin Muhammad, *Al Farq Baina Al Firoq* (Kairo: Maktabah Muhammad Ali Syubaih Wa Auladuhu, 1997), 183.

²⁵ Al-Asy'ari, *Prinsip-Prinsip Dasar Aliran Teologi Islam*, 200–201.

²⁶ Metaphor Is The Use Of A Word Or Group Of Words Not In Their Literal Meaning But As A Figurative Representation Or Illustration Based On Similarity Or Comparison. Metaphor Is A Rhetorical Device That Expresses Something Directly Through An Analogical Comparison By Omitting Comparative Words: *Kbbi* (Abc.Web.Id, 2023).

²⁷ Rozak, *Ilmu Kalam*, 203.

²⁸ Nida Wafa Nabilah, Eti Eti, And Kambali Kambali, "Kajian Periode Klasik Ilmu Kalam: Sejarah, Pemikiran Dan Pengaruhnya," *Ta Dib Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 13, No. 1 (February 2024), <https://doi.org/10.29313/Tjpi.V13i1.12956>. Hal. 15

²⁹ Interpreting God's Attributes Literally Makes It Seem As If God Is Similar To Humans. Therefore, The Ash'ariyah Interpret God's Attributes Symbolically. This Distinction Sets The Ash'ariyah Apart From The Proponents Of The Sifatiyyah School Of Thought. See: Rozak, *Ilmu Kalam*, 206.

³⁰ C.A Qadir, *Filsafat Dan Ilmu Pengetahuan Dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 1991), 67–68.

³¹ Yunan Yusuf, *Alam Pemikiran Islam: Pemikiran Kalam* (Jakarta: Perkasa, 1990), 93–94.

³² Al-Ghazālī Was A Muslim Philosopher And Theologian Known For Adhering To The Ahl Al-Sunnah Wa Al-Jamā'ah School Of Thought. See: Alfadhilah, *Petuah-Petuah Sunan Bonang*, 69–70.

response to the Mu'tazilah rejection of multiple eternal entities (ta'addud al-qudamā').

The Mu'tazilah Emphasis on Reason and the Understanding of God. The Mu'tazilah emphasize the importance of reason in understanding God, as they believe that God must be comprehended rationally. In addition to this, they uphold core beliefs about justice and human free will. According to their perspective, God cannot commit injustice or wrongdoing because of His absolute justice. Meanwhile, the Ash'ariyah, as a school within Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah, place greater emphasis on God's absolute power. The Ash'ariyah teach that human reason is limited and must be guided by divine revelation. However, despite this, they still employ a rational approach while maintaining a balance between reason and revelation.

The differences among Kalām schools in their understanding of God ultimately lie in the extent to which they emphasize logic and reason in examining God's existence. In the context of an increasingly multicultural world, the diverse theological perspectives on God within Kalām thought teach that theological differences should not be a source of division. Instead, they can serve as a platform for dialogue that enriches knowledge and strengthens faith and belief in God.

Challenges of the Global Multicultural Era

Historically, multiculturalism in Indonesia emerged due to external influences, including the presence of major religions, socio-cultural exchanges, colonialism, modernism, and uneven globalization across the archipelago.³³ Multiculturalism has become a highly popular concept in academic literature, especially in social sciences and humanities,³⁴ however, despite its popularity, multiculturalism remains a concept with multiple interpretations.³⁵

According to Chandran in his book *Theories of Multiculturalism*, multiculturalism is a term that evokes strong and complex emotions in responding to differences.³⁶ The concept of multiculturalism raises an important analogy: how can people from different backgrounds coexist in a community? It also seeks to answer to what extent cultural diversity should be tolerated in a society. This is because multiculturalism encompasses ideas, perspectives, policies, attitudes, and actions that acknowledge the plurality of ethnicity, culture, and religion³⁷.

Similarly, Bloemraad, in his book *Citizenship and Immigration*, describes multiculturalism as a widely accepted concept with two primary meanings:

1. A demographic description of society, which portrays the population and characteristics of a community, including age, race, and gender.
2. An ideology, held by individuals or governments, asserting that racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity should be valued and upheld. The diversity within a population should not be avoided, but rather nurtured and preserved through tolerance.

³³ I Made Pageh, "Multikulturalisme Dan Tantangannya Di Indonesia: Jejak Kesetaraan Etnis Dan Kultur Di Pura Republik/ Gambur Angalayang Kubutambahan Bali," *Sosio-Didaktika: Social Science Education Journal* 3, No. 2 (3 Juli 2021): 115–25, <https://doi.org/10.15408/Sd.V3i2.4344>.

³⁴ *Transnationalism And Multiculturalism: An Intellectual Culdesac Or Path For Further Research*, Journal Of Ethnic Studies, Vol. 79 (2017): 33–51.

³⁵ Umar Suryadi, *Multikulturalisme Dan Politik Identitas: Dalam Teori Dan Praktik*, 2nd Ed. (Depok: Pt Raja Grafindo Persada, 2021), 1.

³⁶ Chandran Kukathas, *Multicultural Citizens: The Philosophy And Politics Of Identity* (Melbourne: Thecentre For Independent Studies, 1993), 1.

³⁷ Jauharotina Alfadhilah, Dwi Nurul Hidayah, and Lathifah Fianur Laila, "Implementasi Nilai-Nilai Tauhid Dalam Dakwah Islamiyah Di Era Digital," *ASWALALITA: Journal of Da'wah Management* 4, no. 1 (July 2025): 19–27, <https://ejournal.iainutuban.ac.id/index.php/aswalalita/article/view/1202>.

Additionally, multiculturalism can also serve as a political theory that outlines principles for governing diverse societies.³⁸

Linguistically, multiculturalism originates from the English words "multi" (many) and "cultural" (culture). Etymologically, multiculturalism can be understood as a belief system that respects multiple cultures within a society. It is also interpreted as a philosophy, program, and policy that appreciates cultural diversity. Therefore, multiculturalism is always associated with terms like multi-racial, multi-identity, multi-lingual, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic.³⁹

Multiculturalism is a doctrine that asserts that multiple distinct cultures (rather than a single national culture) can coexist peacefully and equitably within a nation. As explained by Bhikhu Parekh in *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, multiculturalism is fundamentally about cultural diversity and deeply embedded cultural differences. In other words, Bhikhu seeks to clarify that multiculturalism is a concept that recognizes that humans are, in many ways, products of their unique cultural backgrounds. Consequently, public policies within a society should accommodate cultural beliefs and practices to enhance the meaning and value of life for its citizens.⁴⁰ From the various interpretations of multiculturalism, at least three distinct approaches emerge⁴¹:

1. Multiculturalism as an empirical fact

This means that the world we inhabit is inherently diverse. In a multicultural society, people from different ethnic backgrounds must coexist, interact, and collaborate with one another. Everyone must learn to tolerate and accept differences. Multiculturalism as an empirical fact reflects the actual pluralism present in society, where diverse cultures coexist, as seen in Indonesia.

2. Multiculturalism as an ideology

As an ideology, multiculturalism encompasses normative ideals that seek to balance minority rights with national interests and public welfare. As an ideological concept, multiculturalism often refers to social reform programs aimed at building equitable relationships among different groups to establish some degree of equality and social justice. However, some critics label multiculturalism as an anti-nationalist policy or program.

3. Multiculturalism as a policy or program

Policies that promote multiculturalism encourage governments and institutions to implement public policies that accommodate cultural or religious minorities. Multicultural policies ensure that every citizen can maintain their identity with pride.

The global multicultural era creates a space where diverse perspectives on God and His existence can be exchanged.⁴² On one hand, this fosters interfaith dialogue and promotes a more inclusive understanding of theological concepts. However, on the other hand, it can also lead to tensions when differing beliefs come into conflict. Nevertheless, from the author's perspective, religious tensions in the global multicultural era actually contribute to the development of Kalām thought. This is because Kalām provides a positive response by emphasizing that doubt and questioning are integral parts of the faith journey.

Kalām thought has the potential to serve as a bridge for understanding theological

³⁸ Irene1 Bloemraad, *Citizenship And Immigration: Multiculturalism, Assimilation And Challengers To The Nation-State*, Annual Review Of Sociology, Vol. 34 (2008): 153–79.

³⁹ Suryadi, *Multikulturalisme Dan Politik Identitas: Dalam Teori Dan Praktik*, 4.

⁴⁰ Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity And Political Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 4–5.

⁴¹ Augie Fleras, *The Politics Of Multiculturalism: Multicultural Governance In Comparative Perspektif* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4.

⁴² Saepudin Mashuri, *Kesinambungan Dan Kesamaan Agama-Agama Menuju Multikulturalisme Beragama*, N.D.

differences. It not only functions as a tool for defending religious beliefs but also as a means to appreciate and understand diverse perspectives through rationality and logical argumentation. Thus, Kalām thought in understanding the concept of God in the global multicultural era has the capability to bridge faith and reason. Furthermore, it creates a space for intercultural dialogue, fostering a deeper understanding of God's existence and exploring how humans can coexist peacefully despite religious differences.

Kalām thought plays a crucial role in shaping Islamic theology, particularly in discussions about the nature of God, divine attributes, and human free will. Throughout Islamic history, theological debates have often focused on the relationship between reason and revelation, leading to the emergence of schools such as the Mu'tazilah and Ash'ariyah. In the era of global multiculturalism, where various religious and secular perspectives coexist, Kalām thought becomes increasingly relevant. The diversity of views on God's existence, ranging from monotheism to agnosticism, requires deeper engagement with philosophy, science, and interfaith dialogue. One of the main challenges for Kalām today is the interaction between faith and rationality in an increasingly pluralistic and interconnected world.

Moreover, scientific advancements in cosmology, artificial intelligence, and bioethics have reshaped discussions on God's existence and human autonomy. Contemporary Kalām scholars seek to redefine theological concepts through a rational and systematic approach. Despite these challenges, Kalām also offers opportunities for interfaith dialogue and social harmony. Its rational methodology serves as a bridge between faith-based and rationalist worldviews, fostering open theological discussions. By adapting to modern intellectual challenges, Kalām remains relevant in defending Islamic theology and engaging with the complexities of the global era.

The concept of God in Kalām thought asserts that God is a transcendent entity that cannot be accurately defined by humans. Human understanding of God is limited by reason and spiritual experience, whether through rationality or revelation. In Islam, God is understood as the One and Only Creator, with nothing comparable to Him. This concept is affirmed in Surah Al-Ikhlās, which declares that God neither begets nor is begotten and has no equal among His creation.

The theological debate in Kalām thought revolves around the nature of God's attributes. The Mu'tazilah school rejects the existence of eternal attributes of God, arguing that such a concept contradicts the principle of Tawḥīd (Divine Oneness). Meanwhile, the Ash'ariyah believe that God possesses unique and eternal attributes. These differences reflect rational and philosophical approaches to understanding God, without diminishing the essence of His Oneness.

In the era of global multiculturalism, differences in theological perspectives should be viewed as an opportunity to enrich interfaith dialogue, rather than as a source of conflict. Kalām thought can serve as a bridge for understanding God through both rational and revelatory approaches. With an open and analytical mindset, the understanding of God can strengthen faith and promote harmony within theological diversity.

Conclusion

Kalām Thought in the Era of Global Multiculturalism presents a challenge for Islamic theology, particularly Ilm al-Kalām, in addressing the complexities of multiculturalism. Amidst cultural, religious, and global value diversity, the understanding of God remains a frequently debated topic. Global multiculturalism brings forth various perspectives on God, ranging from monotheism to secular and agnostic viewpoints.

Kalām thought seeks to preserve Islamic belief in God through rational and

philosophical arguments. However, in today's global context, it faces new challenges due to the increasing diversity of religious and cultural perspectives. Despite these challenges, the rational nature of Kalām thought allows it to adapt and provide responses to philosophical and theological questions concerning God's existence, attributes, and relationship with humanity, particularly in cross-cultural and interfaith interactions. To address these complexities, Kalām thought strives to explore the essence of Islamic creed ('aqidah) through a rational ideological approach, making it easier to reflect an inclusive and open understanding of theological differences while still preserving the essence of Islamic belief.

The adaptability of Kalām thought can be seen in several ways. First, it continues to employ rational arguments to defend the existence and oneness of God in dialogue with contemporary philosophy and science, such as cosmology or metaphysics. Second, it provides a framework for understanding divine attributes in a manner that balances transcendence and immanence, allowing constructive engagement with other religious and philosophical traditions. Third, in the context of global multiculturalism, Kalām emphasizes principles of tolerance, mutual respect, and recognition of pluralism without compromising the Islamic doctrine of tawḥīd. These features demonstrate that Kalām thought is not a static discipline confined to medieval debates, but a living theological method capable of responding to modern philosophical questions, fostering interreligious dialogue, and strengthening peaceful coexistence in diverse societies.

Author Contribution Statement

Jauharotina Alfadhilah, contributed as initiator and drafter of the article; Euis Farida, contributed as data analyzer and interpreter; Hasan Akbar Fathullah as collecting data, validator of data and analysis results. All authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of this work.

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