

**MUSLIM INTELLECTUAL RESPONSES TO CHRISTIANITY: THE  
COMPARATIVE RELIGION WORKS OF H.M. ARSJAD TH. LUBIS  
AND H. YUSUF AHMAD LUBIS**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article examines the Muslim intellectual response to Christianity in early 20th-century Indonesia through a study of the works of H.M. Arsjad Th. Lubis and H. Yusuf Ahmad Lubis, two prominent figures of Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah. The method used is a literature study with a historical and philosophical approach, analyzed through Muhammad Legenhausen's theory of religious pluralism. The research findings show that both figures employed an apologetic approach that emphasized the superiority of Islamic teachings while critically addressing Christian doctrines—particularly concerning the oneness of God, the deity of Jesus, and the authenticity of the Gospel. Their works reflect a pattern of deontic-religious pluralism, namely the belief in the exclusivity of Islamic truth as the final revelation. Nevertheless, a moral-dialogical approach was also adopted through debates and the writing of *da'wah* literature in local languages. This study strengthens the argument that interreligious dialogue within the Indonesian Islamic tradition has deep intellectual roots and offers a model of religious response that is firm yet rational and peaceful.

**Keywords:** Comparative Religion, Interfaith Dialogue, Muslim intellectuals, Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah, Mandailing Muslim Scholars

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The topic of Muslim responses to Christianity has been a subject of discourse since the early days of Islam. David Thomas's research highlights that Muslims generally adopted a critical and often rejecting stance toward Christian doctrines. He identifies several key themes in the Muslim critique of Christian theology, including "the method by which Christians establish their doctrine of God, the manner in which the Persons of the Trinity accomplished the Incarnation of the Son, proofs that Jesus was divine, and new questions asked by Muslims of Christians that compelled them to find new answer." Other recurring themes include "arguments for the unity of the three Persons of the Godhead, the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ, and the integrity of Christian scripture" (Thomas, 2003). These issues continue to attract attention and elicit criticism from Muslim scholars, particularly in the context of responding to Christian missionary activities in Indonesia.

The dialogue between Islam and Christianity in Southeast Asia is a compelling topic. Muslim communities began entering Southeast Asia as early as the seventh century CE, when Muslim traders from various parts of West Asia and southern Arabia visited the region. Some local rulers embraced Islam. Not long afterward, Islam eventually became the religion of the majority population in Southeast Asia (Houben, 2003). On the other hand, several studies have shown that Christianity entered the region during the Portuguese colonization in the 17th century and the

Dutch rule in the 18th century, at a time when local communities were already practicing their respective religions—particularly Islam in coastal areas. Christianity saw significant growth both during the colonial era and in modern-day Indonesia, thus establishing a connection between Christianization and colonialism, although missionaries and colonial officials often pursued different objectives (Fuad, 2007; Schröter, 2010). It was during this period that Muslim-Christian dialogue began to intensify.

Karel Steenbrink's research sheds light on the various perspectives held by Dutch colonial circles toward Islam in Indonesia. According to Steenbrink, Christians perceived Muslims in four ways: as "respected heretics," as heretics who were despised, as the greatest threat to European security, and finally, as a "backward" people. Conversely, Steenbrink also notes the reactions of Muslims, who responded critically and protested against missionary comments on Islam as well as the activities of Christian missionaries in Indonesia (Steenbrink, 1993).

Scholars have also explored how Indonesian Muslims responded to Christian. In the context of Islamic organizations, Alwi Shihab studied Muhammadiyah's response to the presence of Christian missionaries in Indonesia. His research gives special emphasis to how Muhammadiyah addressed missionary activity, examining its encounter with the Christian mission from the early generations of the movement through the Sukarno era and into the present day. This paper also briefly considers some of the causes of the ongoing controversies between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia (Shihab, 1995). Additionally, Ansari's study analyzes the activities of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) missionaries and Al Washliyah in North Sumatra between 1930 and 1965. It highlights the influence of cultural integration, local customs, and sociopolitical contexts on the spread of both Christian and Islamic missions in the Batak region. His work underscores that while missionary work was often associated with colonial policies, it also adapted to local socio-cultural environments, forming an interwoven relationship between religion and native identity (Ansari, 1998).

Ismatu Ropi has conducted an initial bibliographic survey of Muslim responses to Christianity in Indonesia from a historical perspective. In particular, he highlighted the responses of figures such as A. Haanie, Muhammad Natsir, Ahmad Hassan, Hasbullah Bakry, and O. Hashem to Christian missionaries. He also identified three main approaches adopted by Muslim intellectuals: the Traditional-Islamic approach, which interpreted Christian doctrines through Islamic exegesis; the rational-modern approach, which used logic and rational critique to reject Christian teachings; and the historical-critical approach, which employed Biblical Criticism and academic sources (including Western scholarship) to challenge the authority of the Bible and the divinity of Jesus (Ropi, 1999).

Research on how Islamic intellectuals in North Sumatra province, Indonesia, responded to Christianity remains limited (Ansari, 1998). Such a study is important, given the intensity of Muslim-Christian encounters in the early 20th century, which gave rise to strong religious polemics. The Christian missionary movement in North Sumatra, particularly in the Batak and Karo regions, prompted intellectual responses from local Muslim scholars. These responses did not take the form of oral preaching alone, but also included theological writings and debates. A study of Al Washliyah's response to Christian missionary activity is especially noteworthy, as this organization is considered one of the leading Islamic entities in confronting Christian mission efforts in Indonesia (Ilyas, 2015). Deliar Noer stated that Al Washliyah was active in efforts to counter the Christianization of unconverted Batak communities in North Sumatra, and was seen by other Muslim organizations in the country as a formidable competitor to Christian missionary work in the region (Noer,

1973). Some scholars from Al Washliyah even authored books specifically aimed at countering the wave of Christianization (Ja'far et al., 2022). Two prominent figures in this field were H.M. Arsjad Th. Lubis and H. Yusuf Ahmad Lubis, both of whom were distinguished scholars and founding members of Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah, one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia (Ja'far, 2020a).

## **2. METHODS**

This article examines the intellectual responses of Muslims to Christianity in Indonesia during the early 20th century, with a primary focus on the reactions of two Al Washliyah scholars from Sumatra—H.M. Arsjad Th. Lubis and H. Yusuf Ahmad Lubis. This research is a library-based research study employing both historical and philosophical approaches (Nazir, 1988; Zed, 2018). The primary data consist of rare works by these two scholars in the field of comparative religion, published between the 1930s and the 1980s. The secondary data includes research reports, books, and scholarly articles that explore the lives and writings of these figures, as well as publications directly related to the research topic. The data were analyzed using content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980). Furthermore, this study applies Muhammad Legenhausen's theory of religious pluralism to analyze the patterns of thought represented by both scholars. According to Legenhausen, in the philosophy of religion, there are five types of religious pluralism—soteriological, normative, epistemological, alethic, and deontological (Legenhausen, n.d., 1999, 2013)—each offering a distinct approach to interreligious relations, salvation, truth, and the legitimacy of belief systems. These five forms emphasize the importance of tolerance, equality in the justification of faith, and the recognition of divine revelation as a continuously unfolding process, culminating in the final Islamic message.

## **3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

This section will present the intellectual responses of intellectual Muslim to Christianity in the early 20th century through an examination of the works of H. M. Arsjad Th. Lubis and H. Yusuf Ahmad Lubis. In particular, it will explore the biographies of these two scholars and their contributions to the study of comparative religions. The research findings will be analyzed using Muhammad Legenhausen's theory of the types of religious pluralism to identify the model of religious pluralism adopted by both scholars.

### **3.1. M. Arsjad Th. Lubis's Response to Christianity**

#### **3.1.1. A Brief Biography**

H.M. Arsjad Th. Lubis (Tuan Arsjad) was one of the most prominent Islamic scholars from East Sumatra—a region that now forms part of North Sumatra Province, Republic of Indonesia. He was born in Stabat, Langkat Regency, in October 1908, to Lebai Thalib bin H. Ibrahim Lubis and Markoyom (or Markuyum) Nasution. Several sources describe his father as a devout farmer (Ja'far, 2020c).

Authentic sources detailing his life history are limited. His personal records as a member of the Konstituante (Constituent Assembly) serve as a primary source. Additional references include articles such as "In Memoriam Syekh H.M. Arsyad Thalib Lubis" in *Miqot* (1975), entries in *Sejarah Ulama-ulama Terkemuka di Sumatera Utara* (1983), and Bahrum Djamil's piece *Dalam Kenangan, Seorang Ulama yang Pergi Tiada Kembali* (1991). Among all these, publications by the North Sumatra branch of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia are the most frequently cited due to their wider availability (Ja'far, 2022a).

Tuan Arsjad never received intensive formal education in the Middle East. Although he had studied briefly under Shaykh Muhammad Yasin Padang during his pilgrimage (hajj), most of his education took place in East Sumatra (Pengurus Besar Al Jamiyatul Washliyah, 1985). He studied at local madrasas under scholars who were graduates of Makkah and Egypt. His formal education began at the *Sekolah Rakyat*, where he learned basic literacy and graduated in 1917. At the age of nine, he continued his religious studies at Madrasah Islam Stabat until 1920, under the tutelage of H. Zainuddin Bilah, an alumnus of Makkah. At age thirteen, he pursued further studies at Madrasah Islam Binjai (1921–1922), where he studied with Ustaz Mahmud Isma'il Lubis—a student of Shaykh Hasan Ma'sum—who introduced him to the scholarly tradition and the practice of authorship. Ustaz Mahmud himself was the author of several Islamic texts (Majelis Ulama Sumatera Utara, 1983b).

In 1923, at the age of fifteen, Tuan Arsjad continued his education at Madrasah al-Ulumil Arabiyah in Tanjungbalai along with his elder brother. However, he only studied there for a year. At that time, the madrasa was managed by Ustaz Abd. Hamid, a student of prominent scholars in Makkah such as Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi, Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Mandili, and Shaykh Abdullah al-Zawawi (Syahnan et al., 2019). The direct relationship between Abd. Hamid and Tuan Arsjad remains unclear, as his study period was short and no specific interactions are documented (Majelis Ulama Sumatera Utara, 1983b).

The pinnacle of his education was marked by five years of study at Madrasah Al-Hasaniyah in Medan, under the direct guidance of Shaykh Hasan Ma'sum (Maisyaroh & Iqbal, 2023; Majelis Ulama Sumatera Utara, 1983a; Mona, 1936). After graduating at the age of twenty-two, he continued studying the Qur'an and its interpretation, hadith, *ushul al-fiqh*, and *fiqh* with his highly respected teacher. In his biographical records, Shaykh Hasan Ma'sum is mentioned with particular reverence. Mahmud Yunus noted that Shaykh Hasan Ma'sum was a disciple of Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi and was known as a prolific author who wrote in both Arabic and Malay (Yunus, 1993).

From his entire intellectual journey, Tuan Arsjad developed into a scholar through a robust local educational path. He grew up and pursued his studies during Dutch colonial rule, amidst a complex sociopolitical landscape. Although he did not study directly in the Middle East, his teachers were deeply rooted in Middle Eastern scholarship and instilled in him a strong writing culture and academic discipline. This influence is evident in his later thought and written works.

Tuan Arsjad passed away at the age of 63, on Thursday, June 6, 1972 (23 Jumada al-Awwal 1392 AH), after a period of illness. He was buried on waqf land on Jalan Mabar, Medan City, Indonesia, not far from his residence. His funeral was attended by numerous mourners, especially from the Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah community. In fact, several mosques in Jakarta held *shalat al-ghayb* (funeral prayer in absentia) the following day as a final tribute to this great scholar (Washlijah, 1956).

H.M. Arsjad Th. Lubis was a prominent Islamic scholar in Indonesia. In addition to co-founding the Islamic organization Al Washliyah with several of his colleagues and serving as a religious teacher, he later became a member of the Constituent Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia (1955–1959) and a member of the Majelis Syuro of the Masyumi Party, which was the largest Islamic political party during the Old Order regime (Harahap, 2021). He was among the key figures who actively resisted Christianization efforts in Indonesia and successfully carried out a mission of Islamization in North Sumatra—one of the regions that had become a primary focus of Christian missionary activity in the country (Ilyas, 2015). He was an influential Islamic scholar who played a key role in founding Al Washliyah,

actively engaged in Islamic politics, and successfully countered Christianization efforts while strengthening the Islamization process in Indonesia.

### 3.1.2. His Contributions to Comparative Religions Studies

Tuan Arsjad demonstrated a profound interest in comparative religions and religious history from a young age. One of his earliest works, *Rahsia Bijbel*, was written in Medan and completed on 28 Shawwal 1350 AH (March 7, 1932), when he was only 26 years old and serving as a religious teacher. In the preface, he stated that the purpose of writing the book was to prove that the Bible was “not truly a sacred scripture.” The book was advertised several times in the magazine *Medan Islam*, indicating its significance and distribution among Muslim readers (M. A. T. Lubis, 1932).

According to Chalidjah Hasanuddin, *Rahsia Bijbel* was compiled as a guide for Al Washliyah preachers, particularly for missionary work in Porsea, a region with a Muslim minority and a target of Christianization. The fact that this book was written at such a young age to Tuan Arsjad’s intellectual depth and his serious commitment to *da’wah*, earning him recognition as a pioneer in the study of comparative religion in Indonesia (Hasanuddin, 1988).

Two years later, in 1934, Tuan Arsjad published another work titled *Pemimpin Islam dan Christen*. This book was also heavily promoted in *Medan Islam*, including in the August 1934 edition. In this work, he sought to prove the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him) by referencing acknowledgments and testimonies from the Christian scriptures themselves. Like his previous work, this book carried an apologetic tone and aimed to strengthen the position of Islam while countering Christian missionary efforts, especially in areas such as North Tapanuli and the Karo region.

His commitment to comparative religions continued through a number of other works, including *Pendapat Islam dan Keristen tentang Keaslian Bijbel*, *Debat Islam-Kristen tentang Kitab Suci*, *Berdialog dengan Kristen Advent*, *Keesaan Tuhan Menurut Ajaran Kristen dan Islam*, and *Perbandingan Agama Kristen dan Islam*—the latter written just a year before his death. These works are marked by a critical approach to Christian doctrine and reflect Arsjad’s consistent defense of Islam through scholarly argument and theological debate.

Interestingly, some of Tuan Arsjad’s works were translated and published in various local languages spoken in North Sumatra, Indonesia. These books were intended to support Islamic missionary efforts among newly converted Muslim communities who required basic religious literature in their native tongues. Among these titles are *Haporseaon ni Islam*, *Peladjaren Sembahjang*, *Parsiadjaran Sombajang*, *Peladjaren Gendek Kerna Sembahjang*, *Bena-bena Kepertjajaen Ibagessen Agama Islam*, *Dasaring Kapertjajan Ing Agama Islam*, *Palas-palas Kiniteken Ibas Agama*, *Tola Wamati Ba Ugamo Islam*, and *Bona Ni Haporseaon Dibagasan Agama Islam*. Generally, these works cover the fundamentals of Islamic belief and practice, particularly the pillars of faith and prayer, using concise and accessible language (Ja’far, 2022b; Ja’far & Iqbal, 2023).

This intellectual legacy clearly shows that Tuan Arsjad’s writings were not only tools for *da’wah* but also formed a foundational basis for the development of comparative religions studies in Indonesia. The following is a brief review of his major contributions to the field of Christology:

1. *Pendapat Islam dan Keristen tentang Keaslian Bijbel*. First published by Firma Islamyah in Medan in 1964 (1383 AH), this book was written in response to questions and claims made in *Tuhan Yesus di dalam Agama*

*Islam* by Dr. F. L. Bakker. Bakker asserted that Prophet Muhammad merely continued the same revelation as Moses and Jesus, and implied that Jews and Christians do not recognize Muhammad's prophethood due to alleged distortions in divine messages. Arsjad counters these claims using a polemical and apologetic approach, referencing earlier refutations of similar Christian texts. Written in the distinctive style of the 1960s, the book aims to correct misunderstandings and reinforce Muslim belief in the authenticity of the revelation received by Prophet Muhammad, in contrast to the perceived alterations in previous scriptures (M. A. T. Lubis, 1964).

2. *Perbandingan Agama Kristen dan Islam*. Published by Firma Islamyah in Medan, the first edition of this book was originally written in December 1969 (Shawwal 1389 AH). It presents a systematic comparative analysis between the fundamental doctrines of Christianity and Islam. The content is divided into four parts: (1) an explanation of Christian teachings, (2) a presentation of Islamic perspectives on the same issues, (3) a comparison with critical responses from an Islamic viewpoint, and (4) appendices with extended quotations and supporting evidence. The author states that the book is intended to help both Muslim and Christian readers understand the core differences between the two religions objectively, while clarifying the theological positions of each based on their respective sources (M. A. T. Lubis, 1969).
3. *Berdialog dengan Kristen Adventis*. Published by Da'wah Islam in Medan in 1968 (1388 AH), this book responds to Christian evangelists who often visited Muslim homes to spread their teachings through books and magazines. In the introduction, the publisher notes that the book is meant to help Muslims resist being misled by such propaganda. The main content recounts a dialogue that took place on August 7, 1968, between H.M. Arsjad Th. Lubis and three Adventist book vendors. The discussion covered doctrines, similarities, and differences between Adventism and Islam, especially concerning lifestyle and dietary laws. This work is a clear example of apologetic literature that stresses the importance of vigilance against conversion efforts and the readiness of Muslims to respond to interreligious challenges (M. A. T. Lubis, 1968b).
4. *Rahsia Bijbel*. This book, first published in 1932 in Medan, is a critical study written in classical Malay using the van Ophuijsen spelling system. The author presents views and arguments on the authenticity of the Christian holy book—the Bible—from both Islamic and scholarly perspectives. The book argues that many parts of the Bible cannot be regarded as unaltered sacred scripture, based on historical textual evidence. The author clarifies that his intention is not to attack, but to educate and foster awareness in society. With its scholarly and apologetic tone, this book stands as one of the earliest documented interreligious polemics in the Dutch East Indies, reflecting the intellectual spirit of Muslim scholars in responding to cross-religious challenges (M. A. T. Lubis, 1932).
5. *Adjaran Islam dan Kristen tentang Ke-Esaan Tuhan*. Published by the North Sumatra chapter of the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah in 1968 (1388 AH), this book is based on a public lecture delivered at Universitas Al Washliyah. It aims to explain the conceptual differences between Islamic and Christian understandings of the oneness of God. Systematically organized into eleven chapters, the book discusses Islamic views on tawhid, biblical teachings on divine unity, the Christian concept of the Trinity, and offers rational and textual critiques of Trinitarian doctrine. The author draws upon both Islamic

and Christian sources, including the Qur'an, tafsir, theological texts, and apologetic literature. With an argumentative approach to comparative religion, this book is a vital reference for religious studies and interfaith dialogue in Indonesia (M. A. T. Lubis, 1968a).

6. *Debat Islam dan Kristen tentang Kitab Suci*. This book documents a public debate held on April 21, 1967, between H.M. Arsjad Th. Lubis, a prominent Muslim scholar, and Dr. Sri Hardono, a Christian leader. The discussion focussed on the authenticity and content of each religion's scriptures. Published by the Da'wah Council of Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah's Central Board, the book contains a full transcript of the debate, compiled by several witnesses and note-takers, along with a preface explaining the background and purpose of the event as a scholarly effort to compare the Qur'an and the Bible. First published in April 1967 and reprinted in April 2002, the book was intended primarily for internal reflection and religious education (M. A. T. Lubis, 1967).
7. *Risalat Djaminan Kemerdekaan Beragama dalam Islam*. Published by Islamyah Press in 1955, this work argues that Islam guarantees religious freedom as a fundamental human right. The author refers to the Qur'anic verse, "There is no compulsion in religion," to counter common misconceptions that Islam was spread by force. Topics addressed include the non-coercive nature of faith, Islam's cultivation of belief, the prohibition of insulting other religions, the status of non-Muslims in Islamic law, treatment of war captives, maintaining good relations with non-Muslims, marriage with Christians and Jews, business interactions, defensive warfare, and Islam as a religion of mercy and compassion (M. A. T. Lubis, 1961).

In conclusion, H.M. Arsjad Th. Lubis emerges as a pioneering figure in the field of Christology in Indonesia. He consistently employed apologetic and scholarly methods in addressing the challenges of Christianization, particularly in North Sumatra. Although he never studied in the Middle East, he cultivated a strong and productive tradition of Islamic scholarship at the local level, as reflected in his numerous works on comparative religion that were systematic, critical, and communicative. Through books such as *Rahsia Bijbel*, *Pemimpin Islam dan Kristen*, *Adjaran Islam dan Kristen tentang Ke-Esaan Tuhan*, and records of interfaith debates, he not only equipped Muslim preachers with sharp theological arguments but also made significant contributions to the early foundations of comparative religions in Indonesia—affirming Islam's position in the context of da'wah and interreligious tolerance.

### **3.2. H. Yusuf Ahmad Lubis's Response to Christianity**

#### **3.2.1. A Brief Biography**

Yusuf Ahmad Lubis was a prominent Muslim scholar and one of the founders of the Islamic organization Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah (Sjihad, 1951). He was born in Medan on January 10, 1912, to H. Ahmad bin Musa and Halijah. His father originated from Sayur Maincat, Kotanopan, South Tapanuli, and passed away while performing the pilgrimage in Mecca. As a child, Yusuf briefly lived in the holy land before returning to Medan, where he completed his primary education in 1923 (Said, 2012; Said & bin Hj. Mohd Yusoff, 2011; Said & Yusoff, 2013).

His religious education began at Maktab Islamiyah Tapanuli (MIT), an Islamic educational institution founded by Mandailing scholars in 1918 (Asari & Tanjung, 2019; Tanjung, 2012). He graduated in 1928 and continued his studies at Madrasah al-Hasaniyah, led by Shaykh Hasan Ma'sum—one of the most renowned scholars in East Sumatra, who had studied under the tutelage of Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-

Minangkabawi. Shaykh Hasan Ma'sum was known as the Imam Paduka Tuan of the Deli Sultanate and authored seventeen scholarly works in various Islamic disciplines. Yusuf studied under his guidance until 1935 (Maisyaroh, 2023).

Yusuf Ahmad Lubis's involvement in Al Washliyah began when he actively participated in Debating Club meetings alongside young intellectuals such as Abdurrahman Sjihab, M. Arsjad Th. Lubis, and Ismail Banda. In October 1930, a crucial meeting was held at his home to discuss the formation of the organization that would later be named Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah. He became one of its founding members when it was officially established on November 30, 1930 (Washlijah, 1955).

Throughout his life, Yusuf remained deeply involved in the organizational structure of Al Washliyah. He served as Second Secretary (1932–1933), a member of the Central Board (1953–1958), Chair of the Tabligh Council (1953–1956), and Chair of the Council for Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil (1959). Notably, he became a member of the Majelis Al-Fatwa (Fatwa Council) as early as 1933, at a remarkably young age, working alongside senior scholars (Ja'far, 2020d).

Beyond his organizational activities, Yusuf also played a major role in education. He taught at Madrasah Al Washliyah Gelugur, Madrasah al-Qismul 'Aly, Asiatic English School, and Zending Islam Indonesia. He was also a lecturer in the Al Washliyah student leadership training program, teaching courses in Comparative Religion and *Hikmah al-Tasyri'* (Philosophy of Islamic Legislation).

Yusuf's *da'wah* (Islamic preaching) extended beyond Indonesia to Malaysia and Singapore. Since 1932, he frequently preached in Kedah, Penang, Selangor, and Perak. He was involved in founding Madrasah Dar al-'Ulum al-'Arabiyah in Kedah and Madrasah Tarbiyah Islamiyah in Perak. To financially support these institutions, he authored a book entitled *Tafsir Surah al-'Asr* (Said, 2012).

Yusuf Ahmad Lubis was known for his firm stance against deviant teachings. He opposed the Tarekat H. Jalaluddin and was actively involved in countering the Ahmadiyya Qadiyani movement. His religious outlook was exclusivist, yet not radical. He firmly rejected religious pluralism in the sense that all religions are equally true, but he remained committed to dialogical and argumentative approaches.

Yusuf Ahmad Lubis briefly led the local branch of the Masyumi Party in Gelugur. Although his name did not attain the same national prominence as figures like M. Arsjad Th. Lubis or Abdurrahman Sjihab, his contributions to education and *da'wah* were highly significant, both within Indonesia and abroad.

Toward the end of his life, Yusuf Ahmad Lubis served as Chair of the Fatwa Council, Advisor and Member of the Advisory Board of Pengurus Besar Al Washliyah (1978), and Executive Chair of the Majelis Ulama of North Sumatra. He passed away on July 9, 1980, while leading a prayer at the Mayor of Medan's residence, shortly after returning from a *da'wah* mission in Karo. His final positions reflected the widespread recognition of his religious authority, both within the organization and the broader region.

The intellectual and spiritual legacy of Yusuf Ahmad Lubis stands as a testament to his unwavering dedication as an Al Washliyah scholar in advancing Islam across Sumatra and Southeast Asia. He was not only an organizational leader but also a steadfast defender of faith and a pioneer of cross-border Islamic outreach.

### **3.2.2. His Contributions to Comparative Religions Studies**

Yusuf Ahmad Lubis was also recognized as an outstanding Christologist (Christian theologian). He began engaging in this field from a young age, alongside M. Arsjad Th. Lubis (Ja'far, 2020b). He served as an editor for *Medan Islam*, the Al Washliyah



magazine that actively countered the wave of Christian missionary activity. His articles were often published as serials and presented critical analyses of Christian dogmas. As a prolific writer, he produced 27 articles and 54 books. Of the 27 articles, five focused on Christianity:

- a. "Keesaan Allah dalam Bijbel Disampingkan Kaoem Christen." *Medan Islam*, nos. 22–23, Year 3, August 1935. This article asserts that the doctrine of divine unity (*tawhid*) is in fact found in the Bible but has been neglected by Christians who uphold the concept of the Trinity. By citing verses from both the Old and New Testaments, the author demonstrates that God is referred to as the one and only deity, incomparable to anything or anyone. He critiques the alteration of this doctrine as a result of church council decisions, such as the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE, and calls on Christians to re-evaluate their beliefs objectively. The article serves as a defense of Islamic monotheism and a rebuttal of Christian theological doctrines (Y. A. Lubis, 1935b).
- b. "Kerasoelan Jesus dalam Bijbel." *Medan Islam*, nos. 24 and 25, November, Year 3, 1935. This article presents theological arguments from an Islamic perspective to refute the divinity of Jesus as depicted in the Gospels. The author cites passages from the Gospel of John (Jahja) to show that Jesus never claimed to be divine but rather identified himself as a messenger of God. The article emphasizes that the miracles performed by Jesus were not by his own power but by God's permission. It also refers to Jesus' rejection of worship and his acknowledgment of being sent by the Father to argue that Jesus was a chosen human being with a prophetic mission—not God. The article contributes to the religious polemics that circulated among Indonesian Muslim intellectuals at the time (Y. A. Lubis, 1935c).
- c. "Bandingan Islam dan Christen: Benarkah Kemadjoean Europa Itoe Berasal dari Christen." *Medan Islam*, nos. 19, 20, and 21, Year 3, 1935. This article refutes the claim that Europe's modern progress stems from Christianity. The author argues that many scientific and civilizational advancements in Europe were in fact rooted in Islamic civilization, particularly during its golden age in Andalusia. By comparing the moral teachings and historical trajectories of Islam and Christianity, the article highlights how even Christian thinkers have acknowledged the significant contributions of Islam to knowledge and global development. It critiques the moral inconsistencies and historical shortcomings of Christianity and urges Muslim readers to recognize Islam as the true foundation of civilization and progress (Y. A. Lubis, 1935a).
- d. "Jezuz Boekan Toehan." *Medan Islam*, no. 31, May 1936. This article explains that the Prophet Isa (Jesus) is not God but a messenger and servant of Allah, as stated in the Qur'an. The author emphasizes that Jesus' teachings about worship being reserved solely for God have been misunderstood by some Christians. The article presents various Qur'anic verses along with their translations to illustrate that Jesus explicitly rejected worship and never claimed divinity. The author also stresses that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) came to correct such misconceptions and to clarify Jesus' true position in Islam—as a noble messenger of God, not a divine being (Y. A. Lubis, 1936b).
- e. "Benarkah Islam itoe Disiarkan dengan Kekoeatan Mata Pedang?" *Medan Islam*, nos. 28 and 30, 1936. This article rebuts accusations by Christian missionaries that Islam was spread through violence or coercion. The author asserts that Islam is in fact a religion of compassion, patience, and wisdom, and does not endorse religious coercion, as explicitly stated in the Qur'an. The

article discusses historical facts, including the Prophet Muhammad's migration to Medina due to persecution—not aggression—and refutes narratives portraying Islamic expansion as bloodthirsty conquest. The author contrasts the behavior of Muslims with the violent histories of other religions, especially Christianity and Judaism, to argue that accusations against Islam are unfounded. Supported by scriptural references and historical context, the article concludes that Islam spread due to the truth of its teachings, not by the sword (Y. A. Lubis, 1936a).

Six of his 54 books dealt with Christian theology, as follows:

- a. *Pendjelasan tentang Taurat dan Indjil*. This scholarly work aims to provide a critical understanding of the contents and status of the Torah and the Gospel from an Islamic perspective. Published in 1967 in Medan, the book targets both Muslim and Christian audiences, particularly those seeking clarity about the authenticity and alterations of these scriptures. With its classical language style and arguments rooted in both *da'wah* and intellectual rigor, the author hoped the book would serve as a tool for interfaith dialogue and mutual understanding, while also clarifying Islam's position regarding the earlier scriptures mentioned in the Qur'an (Y. A. Lubis, 1967).
- b. *Ketuhanan dan Salib*. Published by Usaha Penerbitan MASA in Medan in 1973, this polemical work critiques Christian doctrines from an Islamic standpoint. The book offers a critical analysis of the Christian concept of divinity and the crucifixion, citing biblical verses and contrasting them with Islamic monotheistic principles. Using an apologetic approach, the author argues that the doctrines of the Trinity and Jesus' divinity are inconsistent with both Jesus' own statements and earlier scriptures. The book, typed in the characteristic manual style of the 1970s, reflects the spirit of intellectual *da'wah* and addresses pressing theological issues in interreligious discourse (Y. A. Lubis, 1973a).
- c. *Pendjelasan Kitab Suci Al-Qur'an (Tentang Yesus/Kristen/Pendeta2Nya)*. This book, published by Usaha Penerbitan MASA in Medan on May 28, 1973, embodies the spirit of Islamic scholarship and defense of faith in the early New Order era. It appears to be a response to contemporary Christian preaching and theological claims about Jesus. Employing a Qur'anic exegesis approach, the author aims to clarify Islam's position on key theological issues such as Jesus' divinity, the crucifixion, and fundamental differences between Christianity and Islam. The narrative reflects the religious polemics of 1970s Indonesia and serves as a record of Muslim intellectual engagement with interfaith debates (Y. A. Lubis, 1973b).
- d. *Keesaan Allah dalam Biybel*. This book, published by Usaha Penerbit MASA at Gg. Peringatan No. 110, Medan, was prefaced on March 25, 1974. The author states that the book's primary aim is to enlighten the faithful, particularly Christians, about the concept of God's oneness as expressed in their own scriptures. The author attempts to present evidence for this view by directly referencing biblical content. The book is intended to be a means toward clarity and truth, while strengthening cross-religious understanding of monotheism (Y. A. Lubis, 1974a).
- e. *Perselisihan Ayat-Ayat Biybel*. Also published by Usaha Penerbitan MASA in Medan and written on March 25, 1974, this book offers a critical response to biblical texts from a Muslim point of view. In his preface, the author notes that the book was compiled to highlight various weaknesses and contradictions in the Christian Bible, based on what he considers authentic evidence.

Employing an apologetic style, the author hopes to raise Muslim readers' awareness of the essential differences between Islam and Christianity, reinforcing their confidence in Islamic truth. The book reflects a strong spirit of religious polemics and forms part of the broader discourse on comparative religion in Indonesia, particularly within the context of Islamic *da'wah* (Y. A. Lubis, 1974b).

- f. *Haloean Islam dan Christen*. This theological work seeks to explain the differences and possible common ground between Islam and Christianity. Published in Medan and written in old Malay spelling, the book reflects its early 20th-century origins. In the preface, the author expresses his intent to provide a fair and objective explanation for Muslim readers about Christian beliefs, while reaffirming the truth of Islamic teachings from his perspective. The book represents an early example of interreligious literacy, aiming to reduce prejudice and open pathways for dialogue between faith communities (Y. A. Lubis, n.d.).

Other works have not yet been located. However, Khairuddin bin Said mentions three additional works by Yusuf Ahmad Lubis: *Muhammad dan Yesus dalam Al-Qur'an*, *Kerasulan Yesus dalam Biybel*, and *Isa Anak Maryam* (Said, 2012). These also fall within to the genre of comparative religion literature.

H. Yusuf Ahmad Lubis was a key figure within Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah, who played a central role in the fields of *da'wah*, education, and Christian theology both in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. As one of the founders and early driving forces behind Al Washliyah, he helped shape the direction of the organization through his structural involvement, teaching activities, and cadre development. He was widely known as a leading Christologist, with dozens of argumentative and apologetic works that defended Islamic creed while critically engaging with Christian theology in a scholarly manner. His thought and activism reflected a unique combination of intellectual militancy, organizational loyalty, and transnational *da'wah* commitment, positioning him as one of the most important figures in the history of Islam in Sumatra and the broader Malay region. In responding to Christian missionary efforts, H. Yusuf Ahmad Lubis took a firm yet intellectual approach by publishing critical articles in *Medan Islam* and authoring books that scrutinized Christian doctrines from an Islamic perspective. His stance demonstrated a strategic effort to protect the Muslim community from missionary influence—not through coercion, but through *da'wah*, reason, and religious literacy.

Based on Muhammad Legenhausen's theory of the five types of religious pluralism (Legenhausen, n.d., 1999, 2013), the works of H.M. Arsjad Th. Lubis and H. Yusuf Ahmad Lubis tend to reflect the approach of deontic-religious pluralism, which posits that Islam, as the final revelation, demands universal acceptance as a form of obedience to God's will. Neither scholar viewed other religions as possessing equal truth; instead, they regarded them as belief systems that required correction through rational argumentation and religious texts. This is clearly evident in the apologetic orientation of their writings, which consistently uphold the supremacy of Islamic teachings while sharply critiquing Christianity—especially on issues of the oneness of God, the deity of Jesus, and the authenticity of the Bible. Their approach does not merely reject normative or epistemological pluralism as proposed by John Hick, but rather affirms Islam's position as the bearer of the final and complete truth.

Nevertheless, elements of moral-religious pluralism can also be found in their *da'wah* strategies—particularly in their efforts to publish *da'wah* literature in local languages and respond to Christianization efforts through non-violent means. While theologically rejecting the notion of equality among religions, they still upheld values

of tolerance and open dialogue, as evident in public debates, *Medan Islam* articles, and transnational teaching engagements. Their critical and scholarly methods indicate that interfaith dialogue was not merely aimed at conversion, but also served as a platform for affirming Muslim faith. Thus, their response can be seen as a hybrid of deontic pluralism—emphasizing the exclusivity of Islamic truth—and moral pluralism—which creates space for engagement through rational, peaceful, and intellectual means.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the works of H.M. Arsjad Th. Lubis and H. Yusuf Ahmad Lubis represent an apologetic approach in responding to Christianity, rooted in the belief in the absolute truth of Islam. Through writings that are critical of Christian doctrine and supportive of *tawhid*, both scholars exhibit a form of religious pluralism aligned with Muhammad Legenhausen's concept of deontic-religious pluralism. In this context, pluralism is not understood as the acceptance of all religions as equally valid paths to salvation, but rather as an acknowledgment of the existence of other religions that must be addressed dialogically—yet within the framework of Islam's superiority as the final revelation. Theoretically, this research enriches the discourse on religious pluralism in Indonesia by exploring a local intellectual heritage that has been largely overlooked in comparative theology studies. Practically, the study emphasizes the importance of critical religious literacy in engaging with pluralism and the dynamics of contemporary *da'wah*, especially in multi-religious societies. However, this research has limitations in its scope. It only reviews the scholars' works without offering in-depth critical analysis of the themes and discourses throughout their entire corpus. Future research is therefore recommended to explore these issues across their full body of writings, employing diverse methodological approaches.

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