



# Religious Pluralism in Tafsir Muqaran: A Comparative Study of al-Tabari Jami al-Bayan and Quraish Shihab Tafsir al-Misbah

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## Abstract

This article discusses the value of religious pluralism through a comparative analysis of the interpretations of Abu Ja'far al-Tabari in *Jāmi' al-Bayān* and M. Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir al-Misbāh* regarding Quranic surah al-Hujurāt [49]: 13. This study employs a qualitative approach using content analysis, focusing on exegetical texts as primary sources and academic literature as secondary sources. The results of the analysis indicate that both exegetes affirm the equality of human origins, recognition of diversity, and piety as the primary measure of nobility. Differences in interpretive styles are evident in al-Tabari's textual, hadith-based focus, whereas Quraish Shihab develops contextual meanings in accordance with the realities of contemporary pluralistic society. The implications of this study affirm that the Quran, Surah al-Hujurāt [49]: 13, can serve as an ethical foundation for building tolerant, just, and harmonious interfaith relations without blurring the distinct principles of each religion's beliefs, while simultaneously strengthening the discourse on Islamic multiculturalism.

## INTRODUCTION

Religious, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity is a social reality that is inseparable from modern society. Indonesia is a prime example of a country with a high degree of diversity, both in terms of religion and culture. Formally, Indonesian society adheres to several religions recognized by the state, namely Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. This diversity indicates that the social life of Indonesian society is built upon a pluralistic reality that demands mutual respect, appreciation, and cooperation. In this context, the discourse on religious pluralism is important to examine, particularly because interfaith relations are not only related to theological issues but also concern social life, humanity, and national identity (Indonesia, 2022; Kasmianti & Arbi, 2024; Statistik, 2022).

From an Islamic perspective, human diversity is not viewed as a deviation from God's will, but rather as part of the *sunnatullāh*, which serves social and moral purposes. The Quran guides people to approach differences with an open,

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fair, and respectful attitude. One of the verses frequently cited as a basis for discussing human diversity is QS. al-hujurāt [49]: 13. This verse affirms that humans were created from a common origin, then divided into nations and tribes so that they might come to know one another. This principle indicates that diversity is not a reason to belittle one another, but rather a means to build better social relationships. In the context of a pluralistic society, this verse holds strong relevance as an ethical foundation for fostering tolerant, dialogical, and harmonious attitudes among people of different faiths (Firdaus et al., 2025).

Theoretically, Surah al-hujurāt [49]:13 contains an important message about human equality. This verse shifts the measure of honor from outward identities such as tribe, nation, lineage, or social status to the quality of piety. Thus, the Quran not only acknowledges diversity as a social fact but also provides a normative principle regarding how humans should build relationships amidst differences. This value is crucial in the discourse on religious pluralism, as a diverse society requires an ethical foundation capable of preventing exclusivism, group fanaticism, and identity-based discrimination. An examination of this verse also reveals that exegetes interpret the message of diversity in accordance with their respective scholarly approaches and social contexts (La Diman, 2018).

A study of religious pluralism in the Quran shows that pluralism should not be understood merely as the existence of many religions, but also as an ethical stance that involves acknowledging, respecting, and maintaining social relations amidst differences. From the Quran's perspective, pluralism encompasses several key principles: recognition of the existence of other religions, religious freedom, and Islam's respect for adherents of other faiths. In a broader study, religious pluralism is also understood as an effort to build peaceful coexistence through interfaith dialogue and a willingness to live together in a multicultural society. Meanwhile, in the context of Indonesian Islamic thought, religious pluralism is often associated with Indonesian values, modernity, and the search for common ground among religious groups without erasing each other's beliefs. Thus, religious pluralism in this study is not directed toward the theological equivalence of all religions, but toward the strengthening of social ethics that enable religious communities to live side by side in peace (Azmi, 2023; Bano et al., 2023; Taufiqurrahman, 2018).

The relevance of this study is further underscored by the fact that Indonesian society exhibits a dynamic relationship between acceptance of diversity and the potential for social conflict. Religious and cultural diversity in Indonesia is indeed an important form of social capital, but at the same time it can give rise to tensions if not managed through mutual respect and national solidarity. Studies on social conflict in Indonesia also emphasize that the plurality of ethnic groups, religions, races, and intergroup relations should not be automatically positioned as the cause of conflict, as this plurality can serve as social capital for conflict resolution if managed constructively. Therefore, interfaith tolerance must be fostered through the principle of mutual respect for beliefs without blurring doctrinal distinctions, eliminating prejudice, increasing dialogue, and viewing diversity as the nation's wealth. This framework aligns with the concept of religious moderation, which emphasizes balance, tolerance, equality, deliberation, and recognition of the existence of others in communal life (Kasmiati & Arbi, 2024; Khoir & Anshory, 2023; Muchtar et al., 2022; Muliono, 2020).

In the study of exegesis, differences in the approaches of exegetes provide an important lens through which to examine the dynamics of

understanding Quranic verses. One relevant approach used is *muqāran* exegesis, which is a method of comparing interpretations between one exegete and another. This approach not only compares the results of the interpretations but also considers the methods, styles, scholarly backgrounds, and social contexts that influence those interpretations. Through this approach, QS. al-Hujurāt [49]: 13 can be studied in greater depth by comparing the style of classical exegesis based on hadith with the style of contemporary exegesis, which is more contextual. This comparison is important because both can demonstrate continuity between the authority of the exegetical tradition and the social needs of modern pluralistic societies (Zaiyadi, 2023).

Abu Ja‘far al-Ṭabarī, in his work *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, is known as a classical exegete who placed strong emphasis on the hadith tradition. His exegesis relies heavily on the accounts of the Companions and the Successors, linguistic analysis, and the historical context of the verses. In interpreting QS. al-Hujurāt [49]: 13, al-Ṭabarī emphasizes that differences in nations and tribes serve as a means to get to know one another, not to establish social superiority. This emphasis demonstrates that classical exegesis has provided an important foundation for human equality and the rejection of tribal fanaticism. Although al-Ṭabarī does not use the term religious pluralism in its modern sense, his exegesis contains social principles relevant to building a shared life amidst differences (Am, 2015; Ath-Ṭabarī, 2007).

Unlike classical, hadith-based exegesis, *Tafsir al-Misbāh* develops a more communicative and contextual approach to interpretation. This exegesis not only explains the linguistic meaning and structure of the verses but also connects them to the realities of modern society, including issues of tolerance, equality, and respect for diversity. In Indonesia’s pluralistic context, this interpretive approach is crucial as it presents the Quran’s message in a language that resonates with the social concerns of contemporary society. Furthermore, *Tafsir al-Misbāh* also provides space for an inclusive understanding of verses on diversity, thereby allowing the values of pluralism to be internalized within a multicultural social life (Fadlilah & Rohman, 2024; Rezwandi et al., 2025).

In the field of contemporary exegesis, *Tafsir al-Misbāh* holds a significant position because it is regarded as capable of conveying the message of the Quran in language that is easy to understand, while still maintaining strong academic quality. Efforts to make Quranic exegesis more accessible demonstrate that interpretation does not stop at textual meaning but moves to address the evolving social issues of Indonesian society. This aligns with the concept of moderate *da‘wah*, which emphasizes conveying the message of Islam peacefully, wisely, and in accordance with the spirit of “mercy to all the worlds.” In relation to QS. al-Hujurāt [49]:13, the term *al-nās* in that verse refers not only to humans as biological beings but also as social beings living within a network of relationships with fellow humans, society, the environment, and God’s other creations. Therefore, a comparison between classical and contemporary exegesis is essential to understand how the messages of equality, mutual understanding, and piety can be interpreted within the continuity between classical exegetical traditions and contemporary social needs (Al Zamzami, 2019; Alwi et al., 2021).

Several previous studies have examined QS. al-Hujurāt [49]:13 in relation to the values of multicultural education, tolerance, and religious pluralism. These studies generally affirm that this verse embodies the values of equality, respect for differences, and the importance of mutual understanding in social life. Furthermore, research on comparative exegesis (*tafsir muqāran*) indicates that comparisons among exegetes can reveal the breadth of the Qur’an’s

meanings and its relevance across various social contexts. However, studies specifically comparing classical hadith-based exegesis and contemporary contextual exegesis of QS. al-Hujurat [49]:13 within the framework of religious pluralism still need to be strengthened, particularly to examine how these two exegetical approaches can complement one another in fostering a more comprehensive understanding (Firdaus et al., 2025; La Diman, 2018; Zaiyadi, 2023).

Given this gap, this study offers a novel approach by comparing two distinct interpretive models in the reading of the same verse. Al-Ṭabarī represents the classical tradition of exegesis, which is based on narrations and history, while Quraish Shihab represents a contemporary approach that emphasizes the relevance of the Quran's message in modern life. This comparison is expected to demonstrate that understanding religious pluralism in Islam cannot be viewed through a single approach alone, but must be interpreted through the interplay between textual authority, interpretive tradition, and the social needs of contemporary society. Thus, this study can contribute to the development of comparative exegesis (*tafsir muqaran*) while reinforcing a moderate Islamic understanding in responding to religious diversity.

Based on the above discussion, this study focuses on three main questions. First, how does Abu Ja'far al-Ṭabarī interpret QS. al-Hujurat [49]: 13 in relation to human diversity and social plurality? Second, how does M. Quraish Shihab, through Tafsir al-Miṣbāḥ, understand this verse in the context of contemporary pluralistic societies? Third, what are the similarities and differences in their interpretations and their implications for the understanding of religious pluralism? With this focus, this study aims to analyze the value of religious pluralism in QS. al-Hujurat [49]: 13 through a comparative study of the interpretations of al-Ṭabarī and Quraish Shihab.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative method in the form of a literature review. The approach used is muqaran exegesis, which involves comparing the interpretations of two exegetes regarding the same verse to identify similarities, differences, interpretive styles, and the implications of their thought. The material object of this study is QS. al-Hujurat [49]: 13, while the formal object is the value of religious pluralism in the interpretations of Abu Ja'far al-Ṭabarī and M. Quraish Shihab. The selection of this approach is based on the research focus, which does not examine field data but rather analyzes texts, meanings, and the construction of interpretive thought in understanding human diversity (Engkizar et al., 2023, 2025; Kaema & Ulwi, 2025; Kasmar et al., 2019; Rahmiati et al., 2023; Sirin et al., 2021).

The data sources for this study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include QS. al-Hujurat [49]: 13, Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qurān by Abu Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, and Tafsir al-Miṣbāḥ by M. Quraish Shihab. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, and scholarly works relevant to the themes of religious pluralism, comparative exegesis, tolerance, and studies of diversity in the Quran. The primary instrument in this research is the researcher himself, aided by documentation guidelines and data cards to record verses, interpretations, key concepts, and supporting arguments from the various literature used.

Data collection was conducted through a documentary study, which involved reading, examining, recording, and classifying data from exegetical works and relevant scholarly literature. The collected data was analyzed using

descriptive-comparative techniques. The analysis stage involved describing al-Tabari's and Quraish Shihab's interpretations of QS. al-Hujurat [49]: 13, followed by comparing their similarities and differences in terms of method, style, context, and interpretive implications. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation by comparing the main interpretations with credible supporting literature, as well as by re-examining the data to ensure that the resulting analysis remained consistent with the context of the verse and the research objectives.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Al-Tabari's Interpretation of Surah al-Hujurat [49]:13 in the Concept of Religious Pluralism

A study of Abu Ja'far al-Tabari's interpretation reveals that Surah al-Hujurat [49]:13 contains an important foundation regarding human equality and the recognition of social diversity. This verse serves as one of the normative foundations for understanding human plurality, as it affirms that differences in ethnicity, nationality, and social identity are not grounds for mutual disparagement, but rather means for mutual understanding. In the context of the study of religious pluralism, this verse can be interpreted as an ethical foundation for the formation of peaceful social relations within a society of diverse beliefs. Religious pluralism in this context is not interpreted as equating all religions in theological aspects, but as a social attitude to acknowledge the existence of adherents of other religions, respect differences, and build just relationships in life (Bano et al., 2023; Kasmia & Arbi, 2024; Taufiqurrahman, 2018) QS. al-Hujurat [49]: 13 reads:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۗ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

Meaning: *O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted* (QS. Al-Hujurat: 13)

The verse begins with the phrase (يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ), which means "O mankind." The use of this address indicates that the verse's message is not limited to Muslims alone, but is directed at all of humanity. Al-Tabari interprets this universal address as an affirmation that all human beings share the same origin of creation, namely from a man and a woman. Thus, there is no basis for humans to feel superior simply because of factors such as lineage, tribe, ethnicity, or social status. This emphasis demonstrates that the verse establishes, from the very beginning, an awareness of the equality of human dignity before Allah (Ath-Tabari, 2007).

In al-Tabari's interpretation, the terms (شُعُوبًا) and (قَبَائِلَ) play a crucial role in understanding the structure of human diversity. (شُعُوبًا) is understood to refer to large groups such as nations, while (قَبَائِلَ) refers to smaller groups such as tribes or clans. These distinctions in social categories are not intended to establish a hierarchy of human worth, but rather to help people recognize one another's identities. In other words, diversity in this verse is not presented as a source of conflict, but as a social tool enabling people to build more orderly relationships and foster mutual understanding (Am, 2015; Wafi & Mardhatillah, 2025).

The primary meaning of this diversity lies in the phrase (لِتَعَارَفُوا), which means so that people may come to know one another. From al-Tabari's

perspective, *ta'aruf* does not merely mean knowing a person's name, tribe, or origins, but also highlights the social function of diversity. Humans were created different so that they could interact, recognize each other's positions, and build better social relationships. This interpretation is important because it rejects the attitude of group fanaticism that often arises in society. In the context of early Islamic Arab society, pride in lineage and tribe was one of the factors that gave rise to an attitude of looking down on other groups. Therefore, QS. al-Hujurat [49]:13 serves as a critique of *'asabiyyah* or tribal fanaticism, which can damage social relations (Alwi et al., 2021; Chozin & Aziz, 2024).

In addition to emphasizing the goal of diversity, al-Tabari also pays close attention to the phrase (إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىكُمْ). This phrase affirms that human nobility is not determined by social identity, but by piety. In al-Tabari's interpretation, piety becomes the primary measure that distinguishes people in the sight of Allah. This means that nobility is not something inherent to lineage, ethnicity, skin color, or social status, but rather to a person's moral and spiritual qualities. This assertion carries strong social implications as it eliminates the foundations of discrimination based on outward identity (Darmadji, 2014; La Diman, 2018).

Within the framework of religious pluralism, al-Tabari's interpretation can be understood as a normative foundation for the recognition of human dignity. Although al-Tabari does not use the term "religious pluralism" as it is understood in modern discourse, the substance of his interpretation reveals the principles of equality, respect for differences, and rejection of social superiority. These principles are relevant to life in a pluralistic society because interfaith relations cannot be built on attitudes of mutual disparagement. Rather, healthy social relations require the awareness that every human being holds an equal standing as a creature of God (Saihu, 2020; Taufiqurrahman, 2018).

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the religious pluralism derived from al-Tabari's interpretation is more social than theological in nature. This means that acknowledging human diversity does not imply equating all religious beliefs. Within the framework of classical exegesis, theological truth is still understood based on the principles of Islamic faith, yet the existence of adherents of other religions is acknowledged in social life. Thus, al-Tabari's interpretation demonstrates a balance between doctrinal commitment and social responsibility. This stance is crucial in fostering peaceful interfaith coexistence without erasing each group's religious identity (Al-Qaradawi, 1992; Khoir & Anshory, 2023).

These findings demonstrate that al-Tabari's interpretation of Quranic Surah al-Hujurat [49]:13 holds strong relevance for fostering social ethics within a pluralistic society. The value of *ta'aruf* can be developed as the foundation for dialogue and social communication, while the concept of piety serves as the basis for rejecting discrimination based on ethnicity, nationality, race, or religion. In contemporary pluralistic societies, this message can be used to strengthen mutual respect and avoid conflicts stemming from differences in identity. Therefore, although al-Tabari is a classical exegete, his interpretation continues to make a significant contribution to the development of a just, moderate, and open understanding of Islam in social life (Busyro et al., 2019; Muchtar et al., 2022).

Thus, al-Tabari's interpretation of QS. al-Hujurat [49]:13 demonstrates that diversity is part of Allah's decree and must be understood positively. Differences in tribe, nation, and social identity are not grounds for fostering exclusivity but rather a path to mutual understanding and maintaining harmony. In the context of religious pluralism, al-Tabari's exegesis provides an initial

foundation that social relationships among humans must be built on the basis of equality, respect, and piety. These values serve as a crucial foundation for formulating a religious attitude that not only upholds one's beliefs but also respects communal life within a pluralistic society.

### **Quraish Shihab's Interpretation in Tafsir al-Misbāh of Surah al-Hujurāt [49]:13 in the Context of Contemporary Pluralistic Society**

A study of M. Quraish Shihab's interpretation in Tafsir al-Misbāh reveals that Surah al-Hujurāt [49]:13 not only addresses ethnic and national diversity but also provides an ethical foundation for life in a pluralistic society. In his exegesis, Quraish Shihab emphasizes that this verse carries a universal message because it begins with an address (يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ), meaning "O mankind." This call indicates that the verse's message is not directed solely at Muslims, but at all humanity without distinction of religion, tribe, nation, or social status. Thus, this verse affirms the fundamental principle that all humanity is bound by a shared humanity and bears the responsibility to build a peaceful social life (Shihab, 2016).

In the context of contemporary pluralistic societies, emphasizing this universal call is of paramount importance. Modern societies no longer exist within homogeneous social spaces but are embedded in networks of interaction involving diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic identities, as well as varying worldviews. Such diversity can be a source of strength when managed with mutual respect, but it can also become a source of conflict if met with prejudice and exclusivity. Therefore, Quraish Shihab's interpretation of QS. al-Hujurāt [49]:13 can be understood as an effort to present the message of the Qur'an within a pluralistic social reality, particularly in fostering more open, just, and harmonious interfaith relations (Rezwardi et al., 2025).

Quraish Shihab views human diversity as part of God's decree. Humans were created from the same origin and then divided into nations and tribes not to boast about their identities, but to get to know one another. In this regard, differences are not something to be eliminated, but must be understood as a reality that holds social wisdom. This interpretation emphasizes that diversity serves a positive function in human life. Differences in language, culture, customs, and social identity create opportunities for people to learn from one another, understand one another, and complement one another. This perspective aligns with studies affirming that QS. al-Hujurāt [49]:13 contains multicultural values that can strengthen attitudes of tolerance and respect for differences (Firdaus et al., 2025; La Diman, 2018).

One of the main concepts in this verse is (التَّعَارُفُ), which means that people should get to know one another. Quraish Shihab offers a broader interpretation of the concept of *ta'aruf*. According to him, getting to know one another should not be understood merely as knowing a person's name, origin, or identity, but also includes a willingness to understand the circumstances, background, and values that exist within other groups. Thus, *ta'aruf* carries a dialogical and active meaning. People are not merely asked to coexist passively but also to build communication, cooperation, and mutually respectful social relationships (Chozin & Aziz, 2024; Khoir & Anshory, 2023).

This interpretation is highly relevant in contemporary pluralistic societies. Many social and religious conflicts arise not merely because of differences, but due to a lack of understanding of other groups. Ignorance often breeds prejudice, while prejudice can escalate into suspicion, rejection, and even conflict. In this context, the concept of *ta'aruf*, as explained by Quraish Shihab, can serve as a crucial foundation for interfaith dialogue. The dialogue in question is not intended to blend religious teachings but to foster better understanding, reduce prejudice, and strengthen social cooperation in communal life (Khoir &

[Anshory, 2023; Muliono, 2020](#)).

In addition to the concept of *ta'aruf*, Quraish Shihab also pays close attention to the phrase (Indeed, the most honorable of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you). This phrase emphasizes that human dignity is not measured by ethnicity, nationality, lineage, position, or social status, but rather by piety. In Quraish Shihab's interpretation, piety is not merely understood as a spiritual relationship between a person and God, but is also reflected in one's social behavior. A pious person should demonstrate fairness, humility, respect for others, and refrain from belittling others. Thus, piety possesses a strong social dimension as it is directly related to how humans treat one another ([Alwi et al., 2021; Darmadji, 2014](#)).

This principle provides an important foundation for rejecting various forms of discrimination. In a pluralistic society, discrimination can take many forms, whether based on religion, ethnicity, race, culture, or social status. Surah al-Hujurat [49:13], as interpreted by Quraish Shihab, emphasizes that outward appearances cannot serve as a basis for determining a person's dignity. All human beings possess equal dignity as creations of Allah. Therefore, interfaith relations must be built on the basis of equality, not on claims of social superiority. This perspective demonstrates that Quraish Shihab's interpretation holds strong relevance in reinforcing universal human values within a diverse society ([Fadlilah & Rohman, 2024](#)).

Nevertheless, Quraish Shihab still sets clear boundaries in understanding religious pluralism. Recognizing diversity does not mean equating all religions in theological terms. Each religion retains its own teachings, beliefs, and principles that must be respected. Thus, religious pluralism from this perspective is more accurately understood as a social attitude for living together in peace, rather than as theological relativism that regards all beliefs as equal. In this regard, Quraish Shihab's interpretation strikes a balance between social openness and religious commitment. A Muslim can respect adherents of other religions without having to abandon their own religious beliefs ([Bano et al., 2023; Taufiqurrahman, 2018](#)).

This balance aligns with the concept of *wasathiyah*, which is frequently emphasized in the thought of Quraish Shihab. The *wasathiyah* approach positions Muslims in a moderate stance: they do not close themselves off to differences, yet they do not compromise their religious principles. In the context of interfaith relations, this moderate stance is crucial as it prevents two extreme tendencies. On one hand, excessive exclusivity can lead to rejection of other groups. On the other hand, unbounded openness can blur religious identity. Therefore, Quraish Shihab's interpretation of QS. al-Hujurat [49]:13 offers a model of religious practice that is open yet firmly rooted in Islamic values ([Busyro et al., 2019; Muchtar et al., 2022; Shihab, 2016](#)).

When applied to the Indonesian context, Quraish Shihab's interpretation holds particularly strong relevance. Indonesia is a country characterized by religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. In such a context, a religious understanding that emphasizes mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation becomes an urgent social necessity. QS. al-Hujurat [49]:13 provides the basis that diversity is not a reason to divide society, but rather a means to build a more mature and civilized life. Quraish Shihab's interpretation helps convey the message of this verse in language that resonates with the reality of Indonesian society, making it easier to understand and apply in social life ([Alwi et al., 2021; Rezwandi et al., 2025](#)).

Thus, Quraish Shihab's interpretation of QS. al-Hujurat [49]:13 demonstrates that religious pluralism can be understood as a social ethic for managing diversity. The core values offered by this verse are human equality,

recognition of differences, the importance of *ta'aruf*, and piety as a measure of nobility. In the context of contemporary pluralistic societies, these values can serve as a foundation for building dialogue, tolerance, and cooperation among people of different faiths. This interpretation demonstrates that the Quran not only provides normative principles regarding diversity but also offers practical guidance for a peaceful, just, and harmonious social life.

### **Similarities and Differences in the Interpretations of al-Tabarī and Quraish Shihab and Their Implications for Understanding Religious Pluralism**

The results of this comparative study indicate that the interpretations of Abu Ja'far al-Tabarī and M. Quraish Shihab regarding Quranic Surah al-Hujurāt [49]: 13 share a strong common ground in affirming the principle of human equality. Both interpret that humans originate from the same source of creation, namely a man and a woman. This common origin serves as the foundation that no human or social group is inherently superior to another. In this context, the verse eliminates the grounds for superiority based on lineage, tribe, nation, race, or social status. This principle is crucial in fostering an understanding of religious pluralism, as interfaith relations must be grounded in the awareness that all humans possess equal human dignity (Darmadji, 2014).

Another similarity lies in the understanding of diversity as part of God's decree. Al-Tabarī and Quraish Shihab both emphasize that differences among nations and tribes are not something to be contested, but rather should be understood as a means of getting to know one another. In al-Tabarī's exegesis, diversity is understood through the explanation of the terms *shu'ūb* and *qabā'il* as human social structures that serve to distinguish identities, not to foster group pride. Meanwhile, Quraish Shihab expands on this meaning by emphasizing that diversity must be actively managed through communication, dialogue, respect, and social cooperation. Thus, both reject group fanaticism that can lead to conflict in society (Chozin & Aziz, 2024; Wafi & Mardhatillah, 2025).

Both exegetes also agree on placing piety as the primary measure of human dignity. The phrase (إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىكُمْ) is understood as an affirmation that dignity is not determined by outward identity, but by a person's moral and spiritual qualities. Al-Tabarī emphasizes that the measure of human dignity in the sight of Allah is piety, not lineage or social status. Quraish Shihab also understands piety as a value that is not merely ritualistic but is also reflected in social attitudes, such as justice, respect, humility, and the ability to treat others humanely. In the context of religious pluralism, this principle serves as a crucial foundation for rejecting discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, or social status (Darmadji, 2014; La Diman, 2018).

Although they share some fundamental similarities, there are significant differences in their approaches and the development of the verses' meanings. Al-Tabarī, as a classical exegete, employs the approach of *tafsīr bi al-ma'tsūr*, which is an interpretation grounded in the narrations of the Companions and the Successors, linguistic analysis, and historical context. This approach makes al-Tabarī's interpretation more oriented toward preserving the original meaning of the verse as understood within the classical Islamic scholarly tradition. In the context of QS. al-Hujurāt [49]:13, al-Tabarī places greater emphasis on criticizing the pride in lineage and tribal fanaticism prevalent in Arab society. Therefore, the main message evident in his exegesis is the affirmation of human equality and the rejection of social superiority based on lineage (Al-Dzahabi, 2005; Ath-Tabarī, 2007).

In contrast, Quraish Shihab, as a contemporary exegete, employs a more contextual and communicative approach. While he remains attentive to the

linguistic aspects and the core message of the verse, he also relates it to the realities of modern society. In Tafsir al-Misbāh, QS. al-Hujurāt [49]:13 is understood not only as a verse about differences in tribes and nations, but also as an ethical guideline for building a pluralistic society. Quraish Shihab expands the meaning of *ta'aruf* into a social process that encompasses mutual understanding, mutual respect, dialogue, and cooperation. Thus, his interpretation is more applicable in addressing contemporary issues, particularly in the context of religious and cultural diversity in Indonesia (Rezwandi et al., 2025).

These differing approaches are influenced by the historical and social backgrounds of each exegete. Al-Tabari lived during the early development of the science of exegesis, when the primary concern of scholars was to preserve the authenticity of the Quran's meaning through reliable traditions. Consequently, his exegesis tends to feature many opinions from the early generations of Islam and emphasizes textual and historical meanings. Meanwhile, Quraish Shihab lived in the context of modern society, characterized by increasing interfaith interaction, the development of the nation-state, and the need for an exegesis capable of addressing contemporary social issues. This context makes his interpretation more open to the actualization of the Quran's message in a pluralistic society (Al Zamzami, 2019; Alwi et al., 2021).

In addition to historical factors, their academic backgrounds also influenced the style of their interpretations. Al-Tabarī is known as a scholar with strong authority in the fields of exegesis, hadith, history, and the Arabic language. His scholarly background made his exegesis rich in classical narratives and arguments. Meanwhile, Quraish Shihab developed an exegesis that combines linguistic analysis, social understanding, and a contextual approach. This style makes Tafsir al-Misbāh more easily applicable to the issues facing Indonesian society, particularly regarding tolerance, moderation, and interfaith relations. These differences in scholarly approaches do not indicate a contradiction but rather demonstrate the breadth of the Islamic exegetical tradition in responding to the needs of the times (Fadlilah & Rohman, 2024).

The implications of these similarities and differences can be seen in the understanding of religious pluralism. Al-Tabari's interpretation provides a normative foundation that all humans are equal and should not belittle one another due to differences in identity. This foundation is crucial because religious pluralism cannot be established without recognition of human dignity. However, the pluralism derived from al-Tabarī's interpretation is more social in nature than theological. This means that the existence of other groups is acknowledged in social life, but it does not imply that all religions are equated in matters of belief. This view aligns with the idea that relationships with non-Muslims in an Islamic society can be built on the basis of justice, respect, and social responsibility (Al-Qaradawi, 1992; Khoir & Anshory, 2023). Meanwhile, Quraish Shihab's interpretation offers more practical implications in the context of contemporary pluralistic societies. He not only emphasizes that people are different and must get to know one another, but also encourages managing these differences through dialogue and cooperation. In modern societies, particularly in Indonesia, such an understanding is highly relevant because social life cannot be separated from interfaith and intercultural encounters. Thus, Quraish Shihab's interpretation can help foster religious pluralism as a social ethic that is, a way of life that respects differences without blurring the distinct beliefs of each religion (Fadlilah & Rohman, 2024; Rezwandi et al., 2025).

Viewed from a broader perspective, these two interpretations can complement one another. Al-Tabarī provides a strong textual and normative

foundation, while Quraish Shihab offers a contextual elaboration relevant to modern life. A normative foundation is necessary to ensure that the understanding of religious pluralism remains rooted in the text of the Quran and the tradition of classical exegesis. Meanwhile, contextual development is necessary so that the message of the verse does not remain merely conceptual but can be applied in a constantly changing society. The combination of the two yields a more comprehensive understanding of QS. al-Hujurāt [49]:13 as a verse that affirms equality, diversity, and social ethics in communal life (Azmi, 2023; Bano et al., 2023; Taufiqurrahman, 2018).

Thus, it can be affirmed that Quran 49:13 provides an important foundation for understanding religious pluralism in Islam. This verse does not advocate the elimination of differences, but rather guides people to manage differences wisely. Differences in religion, ethnicity, nationality, and culture should not be a source of conflict, but rather a path to getting to know one another and building a more harmonious life. The interpretations of al-Tabarī and Quraish Shihab demonstrate that Islam has a strong foundation for building just and tolerant social relations, while upholding the principles of each individual's faith. Therefore, this comparative study demonstrates that religious pluralism in QS. al-Hujurāt [49]:13 is more appropriately understood as a social attitude that values diversity, rejects discrimination, and promotes peaceful coexistence within a pluralistic society.

## CONCLUSION

This study finds that religious pluralism in Surah al-Hujurat [49]:13 is not only related to the recognition of human diversity but also provides an ethical foundation for building just, dialogical, and harmonious social relationships. A key finding of this article lies in the comparison of two complementary interpretive approaches. Al-Tabarī, through a hadith-based exegetical approach, asserts that differences in nations and tribes serve as a means for mutual understanding and reject social superiority based on lineage or group identity. Meanwhile, Quraish Shihab, through a contextual approach, extends the verse's meaning into the life of contemporary pluralistic societies by emphasizing the importance of tolerance, dialogue, respect for differences, and social cooperation. Thus, this article demonstrates that religious pluralism in the perspective of QS. al-Hujurāt [49]: 13 is more appropriately understood as a social ethic, rather than a theological equivalence between religions. The impact of this study is to strengthen the understanding of a moderate and multicultural Islam, while also contributing to the development of comparative exegesis in addressing issues of religious diversity in modern society.

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