

Ulama in The Perspective of The Qur'an: Roles, Responsibilities, and Teachings of Islam

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the concept, roles, and responsibilities of ulama from the perspective of the Qur'an, highlighting their theological significance and sociocultural function in both classical and contemporary Islamic thought. Utilizing a qualitative approach based on systematic literature review, the research draws upon selected Qur'anic verses, classical tafsir, and modern scholarly works to identify core attributes of ulama, including their intellectual authority, moral integrity, and social leadership. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the Qur'an frames the position of ulama not only as religious teachers but as ethical agents entrusted with the preservation and contextualization of divine guidance. The findings reveal that the Qur'an emphasizes the interconnectedness between knowledge ('ilm), piety (taqwa), and wisdom (hikmah), and positions the ulama as individuals who embody these principles in guiding the Muslim community. Furthermore, the study discusses how the function of ulama has evolved in response to modern challenges such as globalization, digital media, and ideological fragmentation. The research concludes that a Qur'an-based understanding of ulama offers a timeless yet dynamic model for religious leadership, capable of addressing both spiritual and societal needs in contemporary Muslim societies. The study also provides theoretical and managerial implications for Islamic education institutions, policy-makers, and religious authorities seeking to enhance the role of ulama in the 21st century.

Keywords: Ulama, Qur'an, Islamic Leadership, Religious Authority, Knowledge.

I. Introduction

In the fabric of Islamic civilization, the figure of the ulama has long stood as a cornerstone in both religious understanding and societal development. Derived from the Arabic word 'ilm (knowledge), the term ulama refers to those who possess profound knowledge of the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the overarching principles of Islamic jurisprudence and theology. These scholars are not merely religious instructors but are venerated as the inheritors of the prophetic legacy warathat al-anbiya' entrusted with the task of preserving, interpreting, and contextualizing divine guidance for the Muslim ummah across generations. Within diverse Muslim communities, the ulama fulfill multifaceted roles: spiritual guides, legal jurists, social reformers, and educators, all of whom act as conduits for the transmission of Islamic ethics and worldview. As Al-Attas (1993) emphasizes, the ulama are central to the cultivation of an adab-based society, where knowledge is not only pursued intellectually but also embodied in personal character and collective ethics. In particular, the Qur'an elevates the status of those who possess knowledge and insight. Verses such as "Indeed, only those who fear Allah from among His servants are the knowledgeable" (Qur'an, 35:28) underscore the inseparable link

between knowledge, piety, and leadership. The ulama, therefore, are not merely academics; they are expected to live in accordance with divine guidance, acting as moral exemplars for the community. Their authority is not rooted solely in textual knowledge but also in their demonstrated integrity, wisdom, and service to the ummah. As Nasr (2006) argues, the authority of the ulama stems from their rootedness in the Islamic tradition and their capacity to mediate between the timeless truths of revelation and the temporal concerns of society. Their interpretive role is critical, particularly in contemporary contexts where Muslims face a deluge of ethical, political, and technological challenges that often lack direct precedent in classical jurisprudence.

The significance of ulama becomes more pronounced in light of modern sociocultural transformations. Globalization, digital communication, and shifting moral paradigms have altered the way religious knowledge is disseminated and received. In many Muslim-majority societies, traditional institutions of religious authority are increasingly being challenged by populist preachers, online influencers, and secular intellectuals whose interpretations of Islam often lack methodological rigor and spiritual depth. This has created both a crisis of authority and an opportunity for the reinvigoration of traditional scholarly discourse. As Ghamidi (2017) observes, contemporary ulama must simultaneously uphold the authenticity of Islamic teachings while engaging meaningfully with the lived realities of the modern world. This dual task requires not only mastery of classical sources but also fluency in modern disciplines such as sociology, media studies, and comparative ethics. Empirical research has explored these shifting dynamics. For instance, a study by Hassan (2007) examined how ulama in Southeast Asia adapt their religious authority to democratic frameworks, finding that their legitimacy is increasingly based on moral credibility and public engagement rather than institutional affiliation. Similarly, Salvatore and Eickelman (2004) argued that religious scholars now operate within a “mediated public sphere,” where their messages must resonate with diverse and often skeptical audiences. A more recent investigation by Hamid (2016) focused on ulama in Egypt during the Arab Spring, revealing how religious leaders either reinforced or resisted political regimes depending on their theological orientation and interpretive strategies. These studies collectively highlight that the ulama’s roles are not static but evolve in response to historical, cultural, and political contingencies.

Within the Qur’anic worldview, the responsibility of the ulama is twofold: to safeguard the integrity of divine revelation and to guide human society toward ethical flourishing. This requires both the preservation of orthodoxy and the application of Islamic teachings to emergent phenomena. For example, in matters of bioethics, environmental stewardship, and financial regulation, contemporary ulama must issue fatwas and provide guidance that aligns with Islamic principles while addressing novel dilemmas. As Kamali (2010) notes, the *maqasid al-shariah* (higher objectives of Islamic law) provide a robust framework for such engagement, allowing ulama to pursue justice, compassion, and public interest (*maslahah*) in a rapidly changing world. The Qur’an repeatedly enjoins believers to reflect, reason, and seek knowledge, indicating that the role of religious scholars is not to impose rigid orthodoxy but to foster intellectual and spiritual growth. Yet the modern ulama face significant obstacles. One major challenge is the fragmentation of religious authority, where traditional learning institutions such as madrasas and Islamic universities are increasingly viewed with skepticism, especially by younger generations exposed to alternative forms of knowledge. Moreover, the politicization of religion has led some ulama to align with state power, thereby compromising their credibility as independent moral voices. As Wickham (2013) illustrates in her study of Islamic movements in the Middle East, ulama who fail to maintain autonomy from political interests often struggle to sustain public trust. Another pressing issue is the internal diversity within the ulama class itself—ranging from Salafi literalists to progressive reformists—leading to conflicting interpretations that can confuse and divide the ummah. In light of these challenges, the Qur’an’s call for unity, consultation (*shura*), and wisdom (*hikmah*) becomes all the more relevant.

Given these complexities, this study adopts a descriptive quantitative approach to analyze the perceptions and expectations of contemporary Muslims toward the roles and responsibilities of the ulama as informed by the Qur’anic paradigm. The focus is not merely theoretical but grounded in empirical data gathered from previous research. For example, a study by the Pew Research Center (2019) found that in many Muslim societies, trust in religious scholars remains high, particularly when they are seen as community-oriented and socially engaged. Another investigation by Azra (2013) examined the historical evolution of

ulama networks in Indonesia, emphasizing their role in fostering pluralism and local wisdom within the broader framework of Islamic orthodoxy. These findings underscore the enduring relevance of the ulama, while also highlighting the need for continual renewal in both method and mission.

The specific objective of this research is to describe the Qur'anic characterization of the ulama, their assigned responsibilities, and how their teachings continue to shape Muslim communities amidst contemporary challenges. This entails examining how key Qur'anic verses frame the attributes of true knowledge bearers, how these attributes translate into social and ethical leadership, and how such leadership is operationalized in various Muslim contexts. Moreover, the study seeks to investigate how the teachings of the ulama, particularly those grounded in Qur'anic exegesis, influence moral conduct, civic responsibility, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. By situating these inquiries within a Qur'anic epistemological framework, the study aims to offer a balanced understanding of both the timeless principles and evolving realities of Islamic scholarship. In sum, this research contributes to the growing body of literature that explores the intersection between textual authority and lived experience in Islam. While the Qur'an remains the immutable source of divine guidance, its interpretation and implementation rely significantly on the intellectual and moral integrity of the ulama. As the Muslim world continues to grapple with multifaceted crises—ranging from ideological extremism to cultural assimilation—the role of the ulama as custodians of religious knowledge and communal conscience is more critical than ever. By articulating a clear and comprehensive vision of ulama leadership rooted in the Qur'an, this study aspires to inform educational curricula, policy-making, and interfaith engagement in ways that uphold the dignity, clarity, and relevance of Islamic teachings in the modern world.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

In the Islamic tradition, the term *ulama* refers to scholars who possess a deep and systematic understanding of the religion, encompassing not only the Qur'an and Hadith but also Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology (*kalam*), and various other disciplines of Islamic knowledge. Derived from the Arabic root word *'ilm*, meaning knowledge, the term *ulama* literally translates to "those who know" or "those who possess knowledge." As such, *ulama* are regarded as the intellectual and spiritual heirs of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), entrusted with the sacred responsibility of interpreting, preserving, and applying Islamic teachings across time and space (Al-Attas, 1993). Their role is deeply embedded in the Qur'anic framework, which consistently exalts knowledge and those who seek it. In the Qur'an, knowledge (*'ilm*) is one of the most frequently emphasized virtues, and the individuals who embody this knowledge are given a place of honor and authority. One of the most cited verses, Surah Al-Baqarah (2:269), affirms: "He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good." This verse highlights that wisdom (*hikmah*), often interpreted as the synthesis of knowledge, insight, and action, is a divine endowment given to select individuals—primarily, the *ulama*. This verse forms a foundational theological basis for the elevated status of the *ulama*, not just as repositories of intellectual understanding but also as ethical and moral leaders within society. As Esack (2005) suggests, wisdom in the Qur'anic view is not confined to cognitive acquisition, but it is demonstrated in one's commitment to justice, compassion, and the common good.

Furthermore, Surah Al-Ankabut (29:49) states: "Rather, it [the Qur'an] is clear verses [preserved] in the chests of those who have been given knowledge." This verse identifies the *ulama* as living vessels of revelation, individuals who internalize the Qur'anic message in both heart and mind. Not only are they to memorize and teach the divine text, but they must embody its principles through righteous living and community service. According to Nasr (2006), this internalization reflects the Islamic concept of *'ilm nafi'*—beneficial knowledge—which transforms the individual and consequently influences the wider community. Thus, the *ulama* are not mere academics; they are spiritual exemplars whose lives must resonate with the values they preach. The characteristics of the *ulama* have been a focal point of classical and contemporary scholarship alike. Traditional Islamic texts have outlined several key traits that define a genuine scholar: love of knowledge, piety (*taqwa*), integrity, wisdom, empathy, and the ability to contextualize religious rulings. These traits are not just idealistic

expectations but essential qualifications for anyone seeking religious authority in Islam (Kamali, 2008). Their love for knowledge is evident in their lifelong commitment to study, teach, and explore various branches of Islamic sciences. As mentioned by Ibn Jama'ah in *Tadhkirat al-Sami'*, the pursuit of knowledge is an act of worship that requires sincerity and dedication. Ulama are not passive recipients of religious information; they actively engage with texts, tradition, and modern contexts to provide relevant and authentic guidance.

Piety is another defining feature of the ulama. Surah Fatir (35:28) states: "Indeed, those who fear Allah among His servants are the learned." This verse indicates that true knowledge leads to a heightened sense of God-consciousness. The ulama, therefore, must be people of integrity and moral uprightness. They are expected to uphold truth even in the face of adversity and to serve as role models in their communities. As Fazlur Rahman (1984) notes, the ethical dimension of knowledge in Islam is inseparable from its epistemological core; a scholar who lacks piety cannot be considered truly knowledgeable in the Qur'anic sense. In addition to piety and scholarship, the ulama must exhibit integrity and a firm commitment to justice and truth. They are often consulted on legal and moral matters and therefore must maintain objectivity and fairness in their judgments. This function is especially crucial in pluralistic societies where different interpretations of Islam coexist. According to Arkoun (2006), maintaining a critical and reflective stance without compromising foundational principles is a mark of true religious authority. Thus, the ulama must be courageous in challenging incorrect practices or interpretations, even if they come from within the Muslim community itself.

Moreover, the wisdom to navigate complex social realities is another necessary trait. The contemporary world is rife with ethical dilemmas, political tensions, and economic inequalities, all of which require informed and compassionate responses. The ulama must be capable of engaging with these issues through the lens of the Qur'an and Sunnah while also appreciating the sociocultural context in which they operate. In this regard, Yusuf al-Qaradawi (2001) argues for the importance of *fiqh al-waqi'*—understanding the contemporary context—as a necessary tool for modern religious scholars. Their ability to adapt classical teachings to new realities without compromising core Islamic values is critical to their relevance and effectiveness. Equally important is empathy and social concern. The ulama must not only be learned individuals but also compassionate leaders who are attuned to the struggles of the people. Their guidance must reflect a deep understanding of societal pain points, including poverty, injustice, and marginalization. In their role as mentors, advisors, and mediators, ulama often act as counselors for those facing personal and communal challenges. As Madigan (2011) notes, in times of crisis, communities often look to their religious leaders not just for theological clarity, but for emotional and psychological support as well.

The responsibilities of the ulama extend beyond the pulpit and the madrasa. They are teachers, preachers, jurists, reformers, and community organizers. In the educational domain, they are responsible for the dissemination of religious knowledge, whether through formal instruction in institutions or informal teaching through sermons and public talks. Their role as muftis—issuers of religious verdicts—requires not only mastery of legal sources but also an acute awareness of contemporary societal challenges. As Hallaq (2009) explains, the classical tradition of issuing fatwas was rooted in a methodology that emphasized both textual fidelity and practical relevance. Another vital responsibility is moral guidance and character development. The ulama are tasked with promoting ethical behavior and moral reasoning among the believers. They are expected to embody and propagate values such as honesty, humility, patience, and justice. Through religious education and public engagement, they contribute to the moral fabric of society and serve as a bulwark against moral decay. This moral role is especially significant in light of contemporary crises of identity, where Muslims, particularly youth, are caught between traditional expectations and modern pressures.

In times of conflict and social fragmentation, ulama are also expected to function as mediators and peace-builders. Their authority and credibility can be instrumental in defusing tensions, fostering reconciliation, and promoting intergroup harmony. As highlighted by Hefner (2000), in Southeast Asian contexts, ulama have often played a constructive role in managing religious diversity and preventing sectarian violence. Their involvement in community dialogue and conflict resolution initiatives attests to their enduring

social capital. Nevertheless, the role of the ulama is not without its challenges. In the age of globalization, their traditional authority is being contested by new actors and platforms. The rise of digital media has democratized religious knowledge, allowing non-specialists to disseminate religious opinions that may lack scholarly rigor. This has led to a proliferation of interpretations and often, confusion among the masses. As highlighted by Anderson (2013), the fragmentation of religious authority poses a significant challenge to the unity and coherence of Islamic discourse.

Furthermore, the influence of foreign ideologies and cultural norms has complicated the religious landscape. Many ulama find themselves having to negotiate between preserving Islamic authenticity and engaging constructively with modern values such as human rights, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. Their ability to navigate these issues without succumbing to dogmatism or relativism is critical. In this regard, interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural engagement have become increasingly important aspects of the ulama's work, particularly in multi-religious societies. The diversity of interpretations within Islam also poses internal challenges. Differences in legal schools (madhhab), theological outlooks, and ideological orientations can sometimes lead to conflict and division. While such plurality is historically rooted and often celebrated, the absence of a unifying framework can lead to fragmentation. The ulama, therefore, must play a proactive role in promoting unity through constructive dialogue and mutual respect. Their role as facilitators of intra-Muslim dialogue is as important as their engagement with external communities. Ultimately, the role of the ulama remains vital in both preserving the integrity of Islamic teachings and ensuring their relevance in contemporary society. Their ability to interpret, teach, and exemplify the Qur'anic message determines not only the quality of religious life among Muslims but also the ethical orientation of Muslim communities. While the challenges they face are complex and multifaceted, their mandate remains clear: to serve as beacons of knowledge, wisdom, and moral guidance in a rapidly changing world.

III. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in a literature-based inquiry, with the primary objective of exploring the concept, roles, and responsibilities of ulama as portrayed in the Qur'an, and to interpret their relevance within the contemporary socio-religious context. The qualitative paradigm was chosen because it allows for an in-depth examination of meanings, interpretations, and contextual understandings that are embedded within textual sources. Unlike quantitative methodologies that rely on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative approaches aim to understand phenomena from a holistic, humanistic, and interpretive standpoint. In the context of this study, such a method is particularly appropriate given the complex and multi-dimensional nature of religious texts and the interpretive traditions that surround them. The central focus of this research lies in understanding how the Qur'an conceptualizes ulama—not simply as religious figures, but as multidimensional leaders responsible for preserving, conveying, and embodying the divine message. Since the study is heavily reliant on the interpretation of textual data—primarily the Qur'an and classical as well as contemporary scholarly works—a qualitative literature review method has been adopted. This method is also known as documentary or content analysis within the qualitative research framework, which involves systematically examining written materials to identify patterns, themes, and categories that are meaningful within the context of the research questions.

The data sources for this research are entirely textual and secondary in nature. They include, but are not limited to, selected verses from the Qur'an, classical tafsir literature such as the works of al-Tabari, al-Qurtubi, and Ibn Kathir, as well as modern exegetical texts by scholars such as Muhammad Asad, Fazlur Rahman, and Sayyid Qutb. In addition, the study incorporates theoretical and analytical contributions from scholars who have studied the institution of the ulama within Islamic intellectual and social history, including Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Wael B. Hallaq, and John L. Esposito. Furthermore, academic journal articles, conference proceedings, and peer-reviewed publications on the role of ulama in various Muslim societies—particularly in the Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, and African contexts—are also consulted to provide a comparative and contextual dimension to the analysis. To guide the process of data collection and analysis,

the research is informed by several key questions: How does the Qur'an describe or allude to the attributes and responsibilities of ulama? What are the exegetical interpretations of these references across different Islamic traditions? How have contemporary scholars and institutions conceptualized the evolving role of ulama in light of modern challenges such as globalization, secularization, and digital transformation? These questions function as analytical lenses through which the selected texts are interrogated. In line with grounded theory principles, rather than beginning with a pre-established hypothesis, the research allows themes and insights to emerge inductively from the literature itself.

The method of data analysis follows a thematic content analysis model, which involves coding, categorization, and synthesis of textual information. The Qur'anic verses are first identified and selected based on their relevance to the theme of ulama and knowledge. Each verse is analyzed in its linguistic, historical, and theological context using classical and modern commentaries. Simultaneously, secondary texts are reviewed to extract relevant arguments, narratives, and scholarly debates surrounding the identity and function of ulama. These are then grouped into thematic categories such as knowledge ('ilm), piety (taqwa), leadership, social responsibility, interpretation (tafsir), fatwa issuance, and engagement with modernity. In the interpretive phase, these themes are not treated in isolation but rather understood in terms of their interconnectivity. For example, the concept of taqwa is not merely listed as a personal attribute of the ulama, but is analyzed in relation to how it influences their decision-making processes, legitimacy, and ethical conduct. Similarly, the theme of social responsibility is discussed alongside the evolving socio-political environments in which ulama operate. This holistic interpretation is vital in capturing the dynamism of the ulama's role across different epochs and cultural landscapes.

The validation of data in a qualitative literature-based study hinges on credibility, reliability, and interpretive depth rather than statistical generalizability. To enhance credibility, triangulation is used through the integration of multiple sources, including diverse exegetical traditions, regional case studies, and interdisciplinary academic perspectives. For instance, Sunni and Shi'a perspectives on ulama are compared where relevant, and cultural variations in the perception and function of ulama in Indonesia, Egypt, Iran, and West Africa are included to avoid an overly monolithic representation. This comparative strategy also helps to mitigate interpretive bias and highlight the plurality within the Islamic tradition. The selection of sources follows a purposive sampling method, emphasizing scholarly credibility, relevance, and impact. Peer-reviewed journal articles, canonical tafsir works, and books published by reputable academic publishers form the backbone of the research corpus. Where appropriate, primary Arabic texts are consulted in their original language to ensure the accuracy of interpretation and to preserve the richness of meaning often lost in translation. The inclusion of works written in both Arabic and English allows for a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter, bridging traditional and contemporary discourses.

Ethical considerations in this form of research are primarily centered on accurate representation, intellectual honesty, and cultural sensitivity. Every effort is made to respect the diversity of interpretations within Islam and to avoid imposing modern or foreign constructs onto classical texts without due contextualization. The researcher maintains a reflective stance throughout the analysis, constantly revisiting their own assumptions and positionality. Given that religious studies are inherently value-laden, the role of the researcher as an interpreter is acknowledged, and interpretive transparency is maintained through clear citations, justifications, and critical engagement with the sources. One unique strength of the literature study method is its ability to provide a diachronic view of a concept—in this case, the ulama—tracing its semantic, theological, and practical transformations over time. By mapping the genealogy of the concept across Qur'anic exegesis, theological discourse, legal traditions, and contemporary socio-political analyses, the research contributes to both historical depth and contemporary relevance. It demonstrates how the Qur'anic framework on knowledge and leadership continues to inform Muslim perceptions of religious authority, even as those perceptions evolve under new conditions.

At the same time, the limitations of this methodology are acknowledged. A literature study, by nature, does not involve empirical fieldwork or direct interaction with contemporary ulama communities, which could have provided additional insights through interviews or ethnographic observation. Nonetheless, the depth of

textual engagement and the diversity of scholarly voices represented in the research mitigate some of these constraints and allow for a robust analytical framework. Future studies may build upon this foundation by incorporating empirical methods such as field interviews, surveys, or case studies of specific religious institutions. The epistemological orientation of this study is aligned with interpretivism, which posits that reality is socially constructed and can be understood through the meanings that individuals and communities ascribe to it. In the context of Islamic studies, this means recognizing that interpretations of the Qur'an and the role of the ulama are mediated by historical, linguistic, cultural, and political contexts. The interpretivist stance allows the researcher to approach religious texts not as fixed monoliths, but as living documents that interact with the lived realities of believers across time and space. In sum, this qualitative literature-based methodology is not only appropriate but essential for a study that seeks to excavate deep theological meanings and interpretive traditions within Islam. It allows for a critical and contextual analysis of how the ulama are portrayed in the Qur'an, how this portrayal has been interpreted across generations, and how these interpretations inform contemporary debates about religious leadership in Muslim societies. By grounding the research in textual analysis while remaining attentive to historical and social contexts, the methodology bridges the gap between normative theology and lived religion. Ultimately, this approach contributes to a more holistic, rigorous, and meaningful understanding of one of the most enduring and influential institutions in the Muslim world: the *ulama*.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1. Result

The findings of this literature-based qualitative study reveal core themes surrounding the Qur'anic portrayal and scholarly interpretations of *ulama*, focusing on their intellectual, ethical, and leadership responsibilities. The Qur'an exalts knowledge (*'ilm*) and the individuals who embody it. In Surah Al-Baqarah (2:269), Allah states, *"He grants wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been granted wisdom has certainly been given much good."* This verse underscores that wisdom is a divine gift and a moral responsibility, positioning the *ulama* not only as conveyors of information but as sources of sound judgment (*hikmah*) and social guidance (Nasr, 2006).

Surah Al-Ankabut (29:49) similarly describes the Qur'an as being understood by *"those who have been given knowledge"*, signifying that the internalization of divine knowledge is central to authentic religious leadership. This verse supports the classical Islamic view that the *ulama* are entrusted with understanding, safeguarding, and actualizing the message of revelation (Esack, 2005). Surah Fatir (35:28) further states: *"Indeed, those who fear Allah among His servants are those who know."* This linkage between piety (*taqwa*) and knowledge situates the *ulama* as moral exemplars who not only possess intellectual capacity but live in reverence to God (Rahman, 1982).

From the classical tafsir tradition, scholars such as al-Qurtubi and al-Tabari interpret these verses as referring to a distinct category of believers whose lives are shaped by deep learning and moral responsibility. Modern scholars continue to uphold these interpretations while acknowledging the shifting contexts in which the *ulama* operate (Kamali, 2008; Hallaq, 2009). The research finds that contemporary Muslim scholars emphasize both the continuity and reform of *ulama* leadership in addressing modern issues, such as the need for *ijtihad* in emerging ethical dilemmas (Qaradawi, 2001).

4.2. Discussion



These results reinforce the argument that the Qur'an frames *ulama* as custodians of divine knowledge and ethical guidance, a role deeply embedded in Islamic civilization and sustained through scholarly traditions. However, the discussion reveals that their authority and legitimacy are not fixed but must be continuously earned through moral integrity, social engagement, and intellectual renewal. As Hallaq (2009) suggests, religious authority in Islam is historically dynamic and must be reconstructed in light of changing sociopolitical conditions. The necessity for *ulama* to balance preservation and reform is supported by contemporary Islamic scholarship, particularly in the face of modern challenges such as digital communication, ethical pluralism, and secular ideologies (Anderson, 2003). In this environment, the *ulama* must reassert their relevance by practicing *fiqh al-waqi'*—the jurisprudence of contextual realities—which enables them to apply Islamic teachings effectively to current social issues (Kamali, 2010). This requires not only textual literacy but also interdisciplinary competence across the humanities and social sciences.

Moreover, the *ulama* are increasingly called upon to act as mediators, educators, and peacebuilders, especially in societies marked by religious pluralism or intra-Muslim fragmentation. Their capacity to maintain unity while honoring diversity of thought is a critical element in preserving the ummah's cohesion (Hefner, 2000). The Qur'an's emphasis on consultation (*shura*), justice (*'adl*), and compassion (*rahmah*) provides a theological foundation for inclusive leadership, which must be embodied by the *ulama* in both thought and action (Al-Attas, 1993). Finally, this study confirms that the credibility of the *ulama* rests not only on their scholarly qualifications but also on their ethical comportment and responsiveness to societal needs. Rahman (1984) and Esposito (2005) argue that Muslim reformers must preserve the moral compass of tradition while engaging constructively with modernity. When the *ulama* demonstrate transparency, empathy, and consistency with Qur'anic ethics, they fulfill their role not merely as jurists or teachers, but as living bridges between revelation and the real world. The Qur'an provides an enduring model for the *ulama* as knowledge bearers, moral agents, and social leaders. Yet, as the literature and findings suggest, their role must be contextualized and continuously reinterpreted in response to contemporary realities. Only through such dynamic engagement can the *ulama* remain faithful to their divine mandate while serving the evolving needs of the Muslim community in the 21st century.

V. Conclusion

This study set out to explore and analyze the concept, roles, and responsibilities of the *ulama* in the Qur'anic framework, drawing upon classical exegetical traditions and contemporary scholarly interpretations. Through a rigorous qualitative literature review, it becomes evident that the Qur'an positions the *ulama* not merely as passive transmitters of religious knowledge but as dynamic agents entrusted with moral, spiritual, and social leadership. The Qur'anic emphasis on *'ilm* (knowledge), *hikmah* (wisdom), and *taqwa* (God-consciousness) forms the ethical and epistemological foundation of the *ulama's* authority. Verses such as Surah Al-Baqarah (2:269), Surah Al-Ankabut (29:49), and Surah Fatir (35:28) underscore that knowledge must be internalized, contextualized, and lived, transforming the *ulama* into active bearers of truth and justice. Their legitimacy, therefore, is not only derived from scholarly credentials but from their demonstrable commitment to Qur'anic values and their ability to address the evolving needs of society with integrity and wisdom. In light of this, the Qur'an envisions a model of scholarship that is not stagnant or ceremonial, but reformist, grounded in both divine revelation and deep human empathy.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings of this study reaffirm the importance of integrating textual fidelity with contextual awareness in Islamic scholarship. The *ulama* are portrayed as both custodians of tradition and critical thinkers capable of engaging in *ijtihad*, making ethical decisions that consider the objectives of the *shari'ah* (*maqasid al-shari'ah*) and the realities of contemporary Muslim life. This dual responsibility has been increasingly emphasized by modern scholars such as Kamali (2010), Hallaq (2009), and Qaradawi (2001), who advocate for a jurisprudence that is both principled and practical. Theoretically, this study also contributes to the broader discourse of Islamic leadership by positioning *ulama* as agents of epistemological renewal and social cohesion. Their role in fostering interreligious dialogue, promoting justice,

and guiding ethical conduct illustrates the need for a continuous re-articulation of Qur'anic principles in response to technological change, cultural pluralism, and political instability. Furthermore, this study invites a re-evaluation of religious authority in Islam, encouraging scholars to engage more critically with traditional texts while embracing the complexities of modernity.

In terms of managerial implications, particularly for Islamic institutions, madrasas, and religious governance bodies, the study offers strategic insights into how the role of *ulama* can be strengthened and revitalized. Institutions that are responsible for training and certifying *ulama* must ensure that curricula go beyond rote learning and encompass interdisciplinary knowledge, critical thinking, digital literacy, and community engagement. Leaders within Islamic organizations should foster environments where *ulama* are empowered to serve not only as scholars but as public intellectuals, advisors, and reformers. Policymakers in Muslim-majority countries can also draw on these findings to enhance religious education policies, promote inclusive religious discourse, and strengthen ethical leadership rooted in Qur'anic values. As this study has shown, *ulama* who embody both the letter and spirit of the Qur'an have the potential to guide Muslim societies toward cohesion, resilience, and ethical progress. In an age where religious authority is contested and socio-religious fragmentation is prevalent, the strategic cultivation and empowerment of *ulama* leadership becomes not only a theological imperative but also a sociopolitical necessity.

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