

Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah and the Purification of Worship: A Tafsir Study of Surah An-Nahl (16:36) and Surah Al-Ikhlâs

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ABSTRACT

Tawhid uluhiyah is the core of Islamic teachings that emphasizes the oneness of Allah in all forms of worship. However, in contemporary religious practices, there are still phenomena of worship mixed with elements of shirk, both explicitly and covertly, thus indicating the urgency of studying the purification of worship based on the Qur'an (Sari et al., 2024; Wahyuni & Febriyarni, 2022). This study aims to analyze the concept of tauhid uluhiyah through an exegetical study of QS. An-Nahl: 36 and QS. Al-Ikhlâs, and to reveal its implications for the purification of worship in Muslim life. This study uses a qualitative method with a thematic interpretation approach (*maudhu'i*), through data collection techniques in the form of literature studies of the Qur'an, classical and contemporary commentaries, and relevant academic literature. The analytical techniques used are content analysis and comparative interpretations to obtain a comprehensive understanding. The results of the study show that QS. An-Nahl: 36 emphasizes the universal mission of the apostles in calling humans to worship only Allah and shun taghut, while QS. Al-Ikhlâs emphasizes the absolute oneness of Allah as the theological foundation of tauhid. The integration of these two verses shows that tauhid uluhiyah contains two main dimensions, namely the dimension of belief (*aqidah*) and the dimension of practice (*ibadah*), which together form the basis for purifying worship from all forms of shirk. This finding contributes to the development of thematic interpretation studies with an integrative approach between the theological and practical aspects of tauhid. The conclusion of this study emphasizes that tauhid uluhiyah is the main foundation in the purification of worship, so that its understanding and practice are key to maintaining the purity of the faith of Muslims. This research also opens opportunities for further studies that integrate the interpretation approach with empirical studies to examine the implementation of tauhid in a modern social context.

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Tawhid occupies a central position in Islamic teachings as the primary foundation that supports all dimensions of faith and religious practice. However, in the dynamics of contemporary Muslim society, there are signs of a weakening understanding of Tawhid, particularly in the aspect of Tawhid Uluhiyah, which emphasizes the purification of worship solely to Allah. Various studies show that religious practices in some Muslim communities are still influenced by local traditions and specific beliefs that have the potential to obscure the purity of Tawhid (Suhernawati et al., 2024). This indicates that the values of Tawhid have not been fully internalized in religious life.

Furthermore, the emergence of hidden shirk *poses* a serious challenge in today's religious reality. Practices such as praying to others than Allah, using intermediaries that are not in accordance with Islamic law, and certain rituals that have the potential to deviate from the principles of monotheism are still found in Muslim communities (Shofiyyurrohman, 2025; Wahidi et al., 2025). Furthermore, several studies have highlighted that the interaction between local culture and religious practices often touches on the realm of faith, thus risking deviation from monotheism if not analyzed theologically (Hasibuan & Miswari, 2024). This situation demonstrates the urgency of returning the community's understanding to the concept of authentic and pure monotheism.

Within this framework, the purification of worship is a crucial agenda for the renewal of Islamic thought. Purification of worship is not only interpreted as an effort to remove elements of polytheism (shirk), but also as ensuring that all forms of worship are carried out sincerely and in accordance with the guidance of revelation. Several studies on monotheism education confirm that efforts to purify Islamic teachings are continuously carried out through various approaches, such as formal education, da'wah (preaching), and the study of Quranic interpretation (Zakariya, 2018; Azahra & Bajubair, 2026). This demonstrates that monotheism is directly related to the quality of worship and the level of faith of a Muslim.

Normatively, the Qur'an has provided a firm foundation regarding the concept of monotheism, especially through QS. An-Nahl: 36 and QS. Al-Ikhlâs. QS. An-Nahl: 36 emphasizes that every messenger was sent to invite humans to worship only Allah and shun thaghut, which is the core of the teachings of monotheism. Meanwhile, QS. Al-Ikhlâs emphasizes the absolute oneness of Allah, which is the theological foundation in understanding the purity of worship (Aliyah et al., 2025). These two verses have a strong relationship in building an understanding of monotheism that unites aspects of belief and practice of worship.

However, studies specifically integrating the interpretation of Surah An-Nahl: 36 and Surah Al-Ikhlâs within the framework of monotheism and the purification of worship are still relatively limited. Most studies tend to discuss monotheism in general or examine these verses separately. Therefore, there is a research gap *that* needs to be filled, namely through a thematic interpretation analysis that comprehensively links the two verses within the context of the purification of worship. Therefore, this research is crucial for providing a more

complete, systematic, and applicable understanding of monotheism in the lives of Muslims.

B. Formulation Of The Problem

Based on the background description, the problem formulation in this research is:

1. What is the concept of Tauhid Uluhiyah contained in QS. An-Nahl: 36 and QS. Al-Ikhlâs?
2. What is the interpretation of these two verses in explaining the prohibition of shirk and the commandment of worship?
3. What are the implications of understanding these verses for the purification of Muslim worship?

C. Research Purpose

This research aims to:

1. Examining the concept of Tauhid Uluhiyah in QS. An-Nahl: 36 and QS. Al-Ikhlâs.
2. Analyze the interpretations of classical and contemporary commentators of the two verses.
3. Explaining the relevance of the contents of the verse to efforts to purify the worship of Muslims.

D. Benefit of research

Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to the development of studies on monotheism and Quranic interpretation, particularly through a thematic approach to the concept of monotheism. Furthermore, this research is also expected to enrich Islamic scholarship by understanding the relationship between aspects of faith and the practice of worship.

Practically, this research is expected to serve as a reference for Muslims in maintaining the purity of their worship and assist in identifying and avoiding practices that could potentially lead to shirk (polytheism). Thus, this research has significant relevance in developing a more authentic religious awareness aligned with the teachings of the Quran.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The concept of Tawhid in Islam

The study of monotheism in Islam generally develops within the framework of three main classifications, namely *monotheism rububiyah*, *monotheism uluhiyah*, and *monotheism asma wa Sifat*. In classical and contemporary literature, monotheism uluhiyah is positioned as the core teaching because it is directly related to the practice of human worship to Allah (Shofiyyurrohman, 2025). Recent research trends show increasing attention to the applicative aspects of monotheism, especially in relation to socio-religious practices and the phenomenon of deviation of faith in society. These studies emphasize that monotheism is not only theological-conceptual, but must also be realized in the form of *purified worship* free from elements of shirk (Harith & Khadijah, 2025). Thus, monotheism uluhiyah becomes an important focus in contemporary Islamic studies because of its direct implications for the validity of a Muslim's worship.

In this context, monotheism uluhiyah is defined as the oneness of Allah in all forms of worship, such as prayer, tawakal, nadzar, and total servitude. Violation of this principle gave birth to the concept of shirk, both in the form of major shirk (*shirk akbar*) and minor shirk (*shirk asghar*). Studies show that the practice of shirk is not always explicit, but often appears in the form of *covert shirk* , such as spiritual dependence on other than Allah or intermediary practices that are not in accordance with the teachings of monotheism (Chasan & Zamhari, 2021). Therefore, the discussion about monotheism uluhiyah cannot be separated from the analysis of the forms of shirk in Muslim worship practices.

B. Previous Research

Several previous studies have examined monotheism and its relevance to religious life. First, Harits and Khadijah's (2025) study highlights the importance of purifying worship from the perspective of monotheism, emphasizing that worshipping anyone other than Allah constitutes a fundamental deviation from the creed. Second, Shofiyyurrohman (2025) specifically discusses the practice of asking others for help, which is categorized as a form of shirk in worship, and emphasizes the importance of returning to the concept of pure monotheism.

Third, Chasan and Zamhari's (2021) study examined monotheism within the context of the tradition of reverence for saints, demonstrating a tension between cultural practices and the purity of faith. Fourth, Hanik (2015) analyzed monotheism verses in the Qur'an through a thematic interpretation approach, but this approach was still general and did not specifically link monotheism with the purification of worship in depth. Fifth, Lingga et al. (2023) developed the concept of monotheism education based on the Qur'an, but focused more on pedagogical aspects than on specific interpretations of specific verses. Overall, these studies make important contributions to understanding monotheism, but they are still partial and do not integrate comprehensive interpretations of key verses.

C. Research Position

Based on this literature review, it can be concluded that numerous studies on monotheism have been conducted, from theological, social, and educational perspectives. However, there are significant limitations in research that specifically examines the integration of Surah An-Nahl: 36 and Surah Al-Ikhlas within a thematic interpretation framework oriented toward the purification of worship. Most studies only discuss the concept of monotheism in general or highlight one aspect without linking it to an in-depth analysis of the verses.

Therefore, this research takes the position of a thematic (*maudhu'i*) *interpretation study* focusing on these two key verses to comprehensively uncover the concept of monotheism (uluhiyah). This research also seeks to bridge the normative dimension (the text of the Quran) and the practical dimension (the reality of Muslim worship), thus producing a more contextual and applicable understanding. With this approach, the research is expected to make new contributions to the study of monotheism, particularly in the aspect of the purification of worship.

D. Novelty in Research

This research has novelty that shows distinction from previous research, as follows:

1. Integration of Tafsir of Two Key Verses (An-Nahl: 36 & Al-Ikhlâs) hereby attempts to combine two verses which are rarely studied simultaneously within the framework of monotheism uluhiyah and purification of worship.
2. The Maudhu'i Interpretation Approach Based on Purification of Worship focuses more not only on the meaning of monotheism, but also its practical implications in purifying contemporary worship practices.
3. Analysis of Covert Shirk in a Modern Context Novelty: Examining contemporary forms of shirk (e.g. popular spirituality, cultural rituals) on the basis of verse interpretation.
4. Comparison of Classical vs Contemporary Interpretations Novelty: Comparing the understanding of classical (Ibn Kathir, al-Tabari) and contemporary interpreters in interpreting tauhid uluhiyah.
5. Reconstruction of the Concept of Tauhid Uluhiyah as a Framework for New Worship Practices : Making tauhid uluhiyah a normative framework for evaluating current Muslim worship practices.

E. Theoretical Framework

a. Theory of Tauhid Uluhiyah (Classical and Contemporary Scholars)

Tawhid uluhiyah is one of the main pillars in the concept of monotheism, which emphasizes that only Allah has the right to be worshipped and is the goal of all forms of worship. From the perspective of classical scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathir, tauhid uluhiyah is often referred to as *tauhid al-'ibadah*, namely the oneness of Allah in all forms of worship, whether in prayer, tawakkul, or other worship rituals. Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized that the core of the prophets' da'wah was to invite humans to realize tauhid uluhiyah and abandon all forms of shirk (Saputra, 2022). Meanwhile, in classical commentaries such as al-Tabari and al-Qurthubi, QS. An-Nahl: 36 is explained as a universal proof regarding the obligation of worship to Allah and the rejection of taghut.

In the development of contemporary thought, the concept of monotheism (tawhid uluhiyah) has undergone more contextual elaboration. Thinkers such as Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Ridha interpret monotheism (tawhid uluhiyah) not only as a theological concept but also as a principle of human liberation from dependence on anything other than Allah, including in social and cultural aspects (Wahyuni & Febriyarni, 2022). Modern research also shows that monotheism (tawhid uluhiyah) has transformational implications in the lives of Muslims, as it forms the basis for the formation of ethics, spirituality, and authentic worship practices (Rasyidah & Akbar, 2025). Thus, the theory of monotheism (tawhid uluhiyah) in this study is understood as an integration between the normative dimension (the text of revelation) and the practical dimension (the implementation of worship).

b. The Concept of Worship in Islam

The concept of worship in Islam is broad, encompassing not only formal rituals such as prayer and fasting, but also all activities intended to draw closer to God. Within the framework of monotheism (tawhid uluhiyah), worship is defined as all forms of obedience based on sincerity and in accordance with the guidance of sharia. Scholars emphasize that the conditions for acceptance of worship are the fulfillment of two main aspects: *sincerity* (purity of intention) and *ittiba'* (conformity with the sunnah) (Masduq, 2024). This demonstrates that worship is not only external but also has an inner dimension that significantly determines its quality.

Furthermore, from a theological perspective, worship is a direct manifestation of the monotheism of the uluhiyah (oneness of God). Therefore, any deviation from worship, such as asking others for help or believing in powers other than His, is categorized as shirk (polytheism). Research shows that the monotheism of uluhiyah is often identified with the monotheism of worship because the two are inseparable (Sari et al., 2024). Therefore, a correct understanding of the concept of worship is key to maintaining the purity of monotheism and avoiding deviant practices.

c. Thematic Interpretation Theory (Maudhu'i)

Thematic interpretation (*tafsir maudhu'i*) is a method of interpreting the Quran that focuses on collecting verses related to a particular theme, then systematically analyzing them to produce a comprehensive understanding. This method developed in response to the need for more contextual and integrative Quranic studies. In maudhu'i interpretation, the steps taken include: collecting verses related to a theme, classifying them, analyzing the relationships between them, and drawing comprehensive conclusions (Riyadi & Rahman, 2023).

The advantage of this method lies in its ability to provide a complete understanding of a concept in the Al-Qur'an, including the concept of monotheism uluhiyah. Several studies show that the maudhu'i approach is effective in uncovering the values of monotheism scattered in various verses of the Qur'an, as well as connecting them with contemporary reality (Naqib & Darnoto, 2025). In the context of this research, the thematic interpretation method is used to integrate understanding of QS. An-Nahl: 36 and QS. Al-Ikhlās in one coherent conceptual framework.

d. Purification Approach in Islamic Studies

The purification approach (*tathhīr al-'aqīdah wa al-'ibādah*) in Islamic studies refers to efforts to purify Islamic teachings from elements inconsistent with the Qur'an and Sunnah. This approach has been an important part of the history of Islamic thought, particularly in the renewal movement (tajdid) that emphasized a return to the purity of monotheism. In the context of monotheism, purification of worship means eliminating all forms of shirk, both overt and covert, and ensuring that all worship practices are directed solely to God (Wahyuni et al., 2022).

In contemporary studies, the purification approach is understood not only as a critique of deviant religious practices but also as a constructive effort to build a more authentic awareness of monotheism. Studies show that integrating thematic interpretation and the purification approach can produce a

more applicable understanding in addressing modern religious challenges (Nurdiatin & Ghianovan, 2025). Therefore, this study adopts the purification approach as an analytical framework to evaluate Muslim worship practices based on the principle of monotheism derived from the Qur'an.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research type, namely research that aims to understand and interpret the meaning of the text in depth, especially in the context of Islamic studies. The approach used is thematic interpretation (*maudhu'i*), namely the method of interpreting the Qur'an by collecting verses related to a particular theme, then analyzing them comprehensively to obtain a complete understanding (Manshur, 2026; Ash-Shiddiq & Rahmi, 2025). This approach is considered relevant because the research focuses on the theme of monotheism and purification of worship with the main object of QS. An-Nahl: 36 and QS. Al-Ikhlâs. In a methodological context, *maudhu'i* interpretation allows for the integration of the normative dimensions of the Qur'an and systematic conceptual analysis to produce a contextual and applicable understanding.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. The primary data is the Qur'an, specifically QS. An-Nahl: 36 and QS. Al-Ikhlâs as the main object of study. Meanwhile, secondary data includes various classical and contemporary tafsir books such as Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Tabari, Tafsir al-Qurthubi, as well as supporting literature in the form of tauhid books and related scientific journals. The data collection technique is carried out through library research, namely by tracing, reviewing, and organizing literature relevant to the research theme (Umam & Hambali, 2025). This method is commonly used in tafsir research because the object of study is text, so it does not involve human subjects or samples. Therefore, this study does not use sampling techniques, but rather the selection of sources is done purposively, namely based on the relevance and scientific authority of the source to the theme of tauhid uluhiyah.

The data analysis techniques used were content analysis and comparative interpretations. Content analysis was conducted by systematically identifying, categorizing, and interpreting the meanings contained in the verses of the Qur'an and the explanations of the commentators (Barokah & Alamsah, 2023). Furthermore, a comparative interpretation was conducted by comparing the views of classical and contemporary commentators to identify similarities, differences, and the relevance of the interpretations to the current context. The analysis procedure included: (1) collecting verses and related literature, (2) classifying the themes of monotheism and purification of worship, (3) interpretive analysis of the interpretation texts, and (4) drawing inductive conclusions. With this method, it is hoped that the research will produce valid, systematic, and academically accountable findings, as well as contribute to the development of thematic interpretation studies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Interpretation of QS. An-Nahl: 36

The analysis results show that QS. An-Nahl: 36 is a fundamental verse that emphasizes **the universal mission of the sending of the apostles**, namely calling people to worship Allah and stay away from taghut. Textually, this verse contains two main messages: (1) the command to worship Allah (اعبدوا الله) and (2) the prohibition against staying away from taghut (اجتنبوا الطاغوت). Based on classical interpretations such as Ibn Kathir and al-Tabari, taghut is defined as anything worshipped besides Allah, whether in the form of idols, supernatural powers, or deviant belief systems (Ibn Kathir, n.d.; Al-Tabari, n.d.). This finding confirms that monotheism is not only a theoretical aspect, but is the core of the preaching of the prophets throughout history.

In more detail, the results of the comparative interpretations show substantial similarities between classical and contemporary commentators. Classical commentators emphasize the normative aspects (commands and prohibitions), while contemporary commentators such as Quraish Shihab highlight the relevance of this verse in a modern context, including forms of "new taghut" such as materialism and excessive dependence on others than God. The following is a summary of the findings:

Aspect	Classical Interpretation	Contemporary Interpretation
The meaning of worship	Total servitude to Allah	Worship as a life orientation
The meaning of taghut	Idols & offerings	Ideology, material, power
Focus	Normative-theological	Social-contextual

From this analysis, it can be concluded that the monotheism of uluhiyah in QS. An-Nahl: 36 demands the exclusivity of worship to Allah and the total rejection of all forms of shirk.

B. Interpretation of QS. Al-Ikhlās

In this research, QS. Al-Ikhlās shows its position as the theological foundation of monotheism. The verse "Qul huwa Allahu ahad" affirms the absolute oneness of Allah (ahadiyyah), which not only means one numerically, but also unique and has no equal. The interpretations of Ibn Kathir and al-Qurthubi explain that this letter denies three main things: (1) the existence of partners, (2) the existence of descendants, and (3) the existence of equality with creatures (Al-Qurthubi, n.d.).

The analysis also shows that scholars agree that Surah Al-Ikhlās is the core teaching of monotheism, even in some hadiths, it is said to be equivalent to one-third of the Quran. From the perspective of monotheism, this surah provides a strong theological foundation for purifying worship. Key findings can be summarized as follows:

Draft	Meaning of Interpretation	Implications
Sunday	The absolute oneness of God	There is no partner in worship
Ash-Shamad	Place to depend on	All prayers are only to Allah
Lam yalid wa lam yulad	Not having children	Rejecting anthropomorphism
Lam yakun lahu kufuwan ahad	Not equal	Reject all forms of shirk

Thus, QS. Al-Ikhlâs functions as a conceptual basis for monotheism uluhiyah, which emphasizes that all worship must be directed only to Allah without any intermediary.

C. Integration of the Two Verses

The results of the study indicate that there is a strong conceptual integration between QS. An-Nahl: 36 and QS. Al-Ikhlâs. QS. An-Nahl: 36 emphasizes the practical-operational aspect (the command to worship and the prohibition of shirk), while QS. Al-Ikhlâs emphasizes the theological-conceptual aspect (the essence of the oneness of Allah). This integration results in a complete synthesis of tauhid uluhiyah, as summarized below:

Dimensions	QS. An-Nahl: 36	QS. Al-Ikhlâs
Focus	Worship practices	The concept of divinity
Key message	Worship & anti-shirk	The Oneness of God
Function	Action guidelines	Foundation of belief

Thus, monotheism (tawhid uluhiyah) is the result of the integration of belief (aqidah) and practice (ibadah). This finding strengthens the argument that purifying worship cannot be achieved without a proper theological understanding.

D. Implications for the Purification of Worship

Based on the analysis of the two verses, this study found that purification of worship includes several main aspects:

1. Eliminating *riya'* → worship must be purely for Allah.
2. Rejection of deviant *tawassul* → all forms of baseless intermediaries must be avoided.
3. Affirmation of dependence only on Allah → avoiding spiritual practices that lead to shirk.

In the modern context, this implication is seen in the need to critique potentially deviant popular religious practices, such as the cult of personality or excessive reliance on specific objects. Studies show that monotheism plays a crucial role in shaping authentic and rational spiritual awareness (Aliyah et al., 2025).

E. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that monotheism is not only theological but also practical and applicable. This finding aligns with Ibn Taymiyyah's

theory, which asserts that the essence of monotheism is devotion to Allah alone (Saputra, 2022). The integration of QS. An-Nahl: 36 and QS. Al-Ikhlâs reinforces that monotheism encompasses two main dimensions: belief and practice. This is also supported by research by Aliyah et al. (2025), which states that Al-Ikhlâs is a hierarchical framework for understanding monotheism.

The main contribution of this research lies in the integration of two verses within the framework of purification of worship, a practice rarely addressed specifically before. Compared with previous studies that tended to be partial, this study offers a holistic approach that connects the Quranic text with religious reality. Furthermore, it expands the concept of *thaghut* into a modern context, making it more relevant to contemporary challenges.

However, several factors influenced the research results. First, the limited sources of interpretation analyzed can influence the breadth of interpretation. Second, the text-based qualitative approach does not include empirical data from community practices, so the practical implications remain conceptual. Therefore, further research is recommended to combine the interpretation approach with field studies to test the implementation of monotheism in real life.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that the purification of worship can only be achieved through a correct understanding of monotheism, derived from the Qur'an and interpreted comprehensively. Thus, this research makes a significant contribution to the development of thematic interpretation studies and the strengthening of the Islamic faith in the modern era.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

This study concludes that monotheism is the core of Islamic teachings, demanding total and exclusive devotion to Allah, as affirmed in Surah An-Nahl: 36 and Surah Al-Ikhlâs. The results of the interpretation analysis show that Surah An-Nahl: 36 represents the practical dimension of monotheism through the command to worship and the prohibition of *shirk* (avoiding *thaghut*), while Surah Al-Ikhlâs emphasizes the theological dimension of the absolute oneness of Allah without partners, sons, and equality (Gufroni, 2022; Suryana et al., 2024). The integration of these two verses produces a comprehensive understanding that the purification of worship can only be achieved through the unity of true belief and worship practices in accordance with the guidance of revelation. These findings strengthen the classical theory of monotheism while providing new contributions to an integrative thematic interpretation approach. Socially and culturally, the results of this study are relevant in addressing the phenomenon of hidden *shirk* and deviant religious practices in modern society. However, this research has limitations in the textual approach (library research) without empirical verification in the field, thus opening up opportunities for further research to examine the implementation of *tauhid uluhiyah* in a more contextual manner through an interdisciplinary approach.

B. Recommendations

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that the education of monotheism be systematically strengthened in society, whether through formal educational institutions, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), or digital da'wah (preaching), so that the community has a correct understanding of the purity of worship. Academics need to develop monotheism studies with a more contextual approach, including the integration of thematic interpretations and contemporary social realities. Furthermore, the results of this study can be implemented in Islamic education curricula as a foundation for the formation of solid faith and authentic worship practices. For further research, the use of triangulation methods, such as combining interpretation studies with field research, is recommended to examine the practice of monotheism in real life in greater depth. Thus, further exploration is expected to enrich the body of Islamic scholarship and make a broader contribution to building monotheism awareness in the modern era.

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