

Contextual Qur'anic Studies through Phenomenology: An Analysis of Ninian Smart's Dimensions of Religion

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Abstract:

This article examines the application of the phenomenological approach to religion, particularly Ninian Smart's seven-dimensional model, in the context of the Qur'an. The study aims to explore how these dimensions ritual, narrative, doctrinal, ethical/legal, social, emotional, and material are represented in the Qur'anic text and to assess their relevance for contemporary interpretive methodologies. Using a qualitative-descriptive method and thematic analysis of relevant verses, the findings reveal that the Qur'an encompasses all seven religious dimensions. This suggests that the Qur'an not only conveys theological doctrines and legal injunctions but also constructs a multifaceted structure of religious experience. The article highlights the strengths of Smart's approach in bridging divine revelation with lived religious realities, while also cautioning against the epistemological risks of reducing revelation to mere subjective experience. These insights offer new avenues for developing thematic Qur'anic exegesis and multidimensional Islamic education.

Keywords: contextual study; Ninian Smart; phenomenology of religion; religious dimensions; thematic tafsir; the Qur'an.

INTRODUCTION

The study of the Qur'an in the contemporary scholarly landscape has expanded in both its approach and epistemology (Fitrianto & Farisi, 2025). A textual-normative approach is no longer sufficient; Qur'anic studies must now be more open to contextual and multidisciplinary approaches. This is crucial considering that the Qur'an is not only a universally revealed text but also a dynamic entity that continuously interacts with social, cultural, and historical changes of Muslims throughout the ages (Faris, 2023). Within this framework, the Qur'an is not merely read as a transcendent product but also as a text that has undergone internalization and actualization within the framework of concrete human experience (Sahin, 2021). The development of religious studies in Western academia has opened new horizons for reading holy texts, including the Quran. One approach is through the phenomenology of religion, which places religious experience as the starting point for understanding the essence of religion itself (Zembylas, 2023). This approach emphasizes the importance of examining how religious texts are understood, experienced, and

embodied in the lives of their adherents (Agung et al., 2024). In this sense, sacred texts are not only sources of doctrine but also integral parts of the complex structure of religious experience.

Ninian Smart has become a central figure in the phenomenological approach to religion, offering a distinctive approach: seven dimensions of religion: ritual, narrative, doctrinal, ethical, social, emotional, and material. This multidimensional framework provides a rich analytical tool for understanding the complexity of human religious practices and expressions. In the Islamic context, this approach allows for a reading of the Qur'an that is not trapped in the rigidity of merely normative interpretations, but rather open to the emotional experiences, social expressions, and symbolic constructions that accompany them (Smart, 1996a).

This phenomenological approach becomes highly relevant when confronting the religious realities of Indonesian Muslim communities living in a multicultural, multireligious social landscape. Amidst the plurality of religious experiences, a narrow textual approach often gives rise to exclusivism and ignores the cultural context surrounding the interpretation of sacred texts (van Nes-Visscher & Reitsma, 2023). Therefore, the phenomenological approach to religion offers a middle ground that opens up space for inclusive and humanistic interpretations while still respecting the normative authority of revelation.

In the Indonesian context, studying the Quran through a phenomenological approach to religion is urgent. A more integrative perspective is needed to understand the relationship between the sacred text and the religious life of diverse communities (Goshu & Ridwan, 2024). The religious experiences of Indonesian Muslims, steeped in local traditions, symbolic expressions, and socio-communal values, provide fertile ground for exploring religious meaning beyond mere formalism (Osadchuk, 2023). Thus, understanding the Quran is not merely an epistemic matter, but also a social practice that shapes relationships between individuals and communities.

Starting from this context, this article aims to examine the relevance of a phenomenological approach to religion in the study of the Quran, particularly through the framework of the seven dimensions of religion proposed by Ninian Smart. This study not only explores how the Quran reflects each of these dimensions but also how this framework can broaden the horizons of Quranic interpretation amidst the reality of pluralistic religiosity.

By using the phenomenology of religion as a theoretical framework, this paper attempts to demonstrate that the Qur'an can be understood not only from a theological perspective but also through the religious experiences and expressions of humanity. In this approach, the sacred text is positioned not merely as a normative document, but as a source of meaning that is constantly brought to life by the consciousness, emotions, and actions of its adherents. Analysis of the religious dimensions reflected in the verses of the Qur'an can open up new understandings regarding the position of this sacred text in the lives of Muslims, and how it continues to live and transform with changing historical and cultural contexts (Smart, 2000a).

Phenomenology of religion, as an approach to the study of religion, begins with an attempt to understand religion as it is actually experienced by its adherents (Bowie, 2021). It emphasizes the importance of viewing religion from an internal perspective, rather than from the outside or based solely on theoretical assumptions. In the tradition of phenomenology of religion, researchers are encouraged to conduct *epoché*, namely suspending subjective judgment in order to access the authentic meaning of religious symbols, teachings, and practices (Vincini, 2025). This approach makes space for religious experience as the center of attention, not merely a passive object of analysis.

Early figures in this approach, such as Gerardus van der Leeuw and Mircea Eliade, have emphasized that religion cannot be understood simply as a belief system or moral structure, but as an existential experience that touches all aspects of human life (Jensen, 2022). (Van der Leeuw, 2014) emphasizes the importance of *emphatic understanding* and symbolic meaning in reading religious reality, while (Eliade, 1959) introduced the concept of the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane as the foundation of how humans experience the religious world.

As a continually evolving approach, the phenomenology of religion is not only a descriptive method but also a rich paradigm for understanding religious diversity across cultures. It facilitates mapping the structure of religious experience and how symbols, myths, and rituals serve as vehicles for the articulation of human spirituality (Ergen, 2023). In the context of Quranic studies, this approach opens up a reading space that relies not only on linguistic and normative analysis but also on how the sacred text is understood, experienced, and lived out in the daily lives of Muslims (El Qorny, 2025).

Amidst the challenges of methodological reductionism in religious studies, both overly normative from a theological perspective and overly positivistic from a sociological perspective, the phenomenological approach to religion offers a reflective and empathetic middle ground (Zembylas, 2023). It maintains a balance between the depth of meaning from within and the socio-cultural context from without. As explained (Mahmudulhassan, 2024), the phenomenological approach provides an opportunity for a more contextual and humanistic understanding of the sacred text, including how the Quran is interpreted and lived by Muslims in their diverse socio-cultural backgrounds.

In the landscape of modern religious phenomenology, (Smart, 1996a) occupies an important position with his contribution in the form of a seven-dimensional framework of religion. This model includes: (1) ritual and practice dimensions, (2) narrative and mythological, (3) doctrinal and philosophical, (4) ethical and legal, (5) social and institutional, (6) emotional and experiential, and (7) material and symbolic (Smart, 1996). Through this model, Smart presents a broad and open perspective in understanding religion as a complex reality that cannot be reduced to just one aspect.

Smart's multidimensional approach is highly relevant to the study of the Qur'an because it allows for analysis of how this holy book not only contains normative teachings but also serves as a source of rituals, sacred narratives, ethical principles, social institutions, and spiritual experiences that shape the collective life of Muslims (Smart, 2000a). In other words, the Qur'an is positioned not only as a theological text but as the center of the Islamic religious system that lives in many forms of expression.

The strength of this model lies in its flexibility and applicability in analyzing religion across traditions, without being trapped by biases or generalizations. In the Islamic context, this model opens up space to read the Quran as a text that inspires not only faith but also the social and spiritual practices of the community (Faris, 2023). Although some critics consider these seven dimensions to be overly systematic and to simplify the complexity of religious experience, this approach still makes an important methodological contribution to understanding the relationship between text and experience.

Therefore, the phenomenological approach to religion, particularly Smart's multidimensional model, serves as a strategic framework for exploring the meaning of the Quran in a more contextual and dynamic way. It encourages readings that connect the text to social realities, personal spirituality, and the collective culture of Muslims. In the context of Indonesia's multicultural Muslim society, this model holds significant significance for formulating a religious understanding that is inclusive, reflective, and sensitive to the lived experiences of the community (Anas et al., 2025).

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative-descriptive approach, aiming to describe and analyze religious phenomena as reflected in the Quran through the lens of religious phenomenology. A qualitative approach allows researchers to capture symbolic meanings and religious experiences that cannot be measured quantitatively but rather understood through in-depth interpretation of the text and context (Stanley, 2023). The research method used is a literature review. Data were obtained from relevant primary and secondary sources, such as the works of Ninian Smart, literature on the phenomenology of religion, and thematic interpretations and contextual studies of the Qur'an. The analysis was conducted by identifying Qur'anic verses related to Smart's seven religious dimensions, then explaining how these dimensions are present in the construction of the religious experience of Muslims (Connaway & Radford, 2021).

The data analysis technique used in this study is content analysis (Tunison, 2023), which qualitatively interprets the meaning of the Quranic text using a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach. Data are analyzed interpretively and contextually to illustrate how the Quran shapes and is influenced by religious dynamics in Muslim society. The validity of the interpretation is maintained through theoretical triangulation and dialogue with contemporary scholarly literature in religious studies.

The selection of the verses of the Qur'an in this study was based on two main criteria: first, thematic representation of each dimension offered by Ninian Smart; and second, the popularity and interpretative clarity of the verses in classical and contemporary tafsir literature. For example, QS al-Baqarah [2]:183 was chosen because it is the most representative verse in explaining ritual practices (*shchest*) which also contains ethical content (*piety*). Thus, each verse analyzed is not merely an illustration, but rather represents a meeting point between normative doctrine and the religious experience of Muslims.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Representation of Smart Religious Dimensions in the Qur'an

The multidimensional approach formulated by Ninian Smart emphasizes that religion is not merely a system of doctrines, but rather a human experience encompassing dimensions of life, including ritual, social, emotional, and material aspects (Martikainen & Moberg, 2024). In the Islamic context, the Quran represents these dimensions comprehensively. The following is a description of these dimensions, along with their representations in Quranic verses:

First The ritual dimension is one of the main pillars of Ninian Smart's phenomenological approach to religion. This dimension encompasses religious practices that are performed repeatedly and are rich in symbolic meaning, which function not only as religious obligations but also as a bridge between humans and the transcendent (Smart, 1996b). In Islam, this dimension holds a very central place, and the Qur'an explicitly contains various forms of ritual practices that are manifestations of faith in concrete actions.

Rituals in Islam are not merely formal acts, but existential expressions that represent human relationships with God, with oneself, and with the community (Sulaeman et al., 2022). Every act of worship commanded by the Qur'an has layers of symbolic, pedagogical, and transformative meaning. Among the most important rituals are ṣalāh (prayer), ṣawm (fasting), zakat (charity), and ḥajj (pilgrimage), all four of which are also pillars of Islam. Each of these rituals not only reflects obedience to the law but also serves as a means of purifying the soul, strengthening social solidarity, and instilling spiritual discipline (Terefe, 2023).

For example, fasting (ṣawm) is represented in QS al-Baqarah [2]: 183:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

"O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you so that you may become pious."

This verse not only contains normative commands regarding fasting but also explains its spiritual purpose, namely piety. Here, a direct correlation between the ritual dimension and the moral and spiritual dimensions is apparent. Within the framework of religious phenomenology, this demonstrates that fasting is not merely a physical act of abstaining from hunger and thirst, but rather a symbolic practice that brings awareness of self, limitations, and the divine presence into everyday human life (Goswami, 2025). (Smart, 2000a) emphasizes that rituals always contain symbolic intentions, namely directing the participants to experiences that transcend worldly routines. In the case of fasting, the postponement of basic human needs symbolizes the human ability to control desires and direct desires toward something more sublime: spiritual awareness. The repetition of this practice at a specific time and structure (such as every year during the month of Ramadan) forms an existential rhythm for Muslims that is not only individual but also collective—a shared spiritual experience that strengthens social cohesion and builds religious identity.

Likewise, prayer, as a daily ritual repeated five times a day, is a form of integration of time and space in worship. It not only regulates the vertical relationship between humans and God, but also regulates human life patterns holistically. QS al-'Ankabūt [29]: 45 states that prayer prevents from indecency and wrongdoing, which means that this worship has an ethical-transformative dimension inherent in its implementation (Nurrahim & Zamimah, 2023).

Other rituals, such as zakat and ḥajj, also have a symbolic function. Zakat, while appearing to be an economic activity, is essentially a spiritual expression of social bonding and a recognition of collective responsibility towards others (Hasan et al., 2024). Meanwhile, ḥajj, with all its series of symbolic rituals of tawaf, sa'i, wuqf at Arafah is a reenactment (symbolic repetition) of sacred history and prophetic spirituality that revives the values of sacrifice, brotherhood and total submission to Allah (Sahli, 2025).

From Smart's perspective, religious practices like these not only shape behavior but also profoundly mediate religious experience. They become a form of symbolic language that internalizes theological teachings into the body and real life. Rituals become the meeting point between text and experience, between doctrine and emotional reality, between symbol and transformation (Bhandari et al., 2024).

Thus, the ritual dimension of the Qur'an reflects the way Islam integrates normative teachings with existential practices. It asserts that religion cannot be understood conceptually but must be experienced embodied and internalized through the body, movement, time, and repetition. A phenomenological approach

to this dimension opens up a new understanding that ritual is a living narrative written in the actions of the people, not simply a recited verse or memorized dogma (Katajala-Peltomaa & Toivo, 2022).

Second, the narrative dimension plays a crucial role in shaping the identity, moral orientation, and collective religious consciousness of a religious community. Narratives or stories are not merely historical or fictional accounts, but rather symbolic vehicles containing spiritual meaning, ethical values, and existential reflections on humanity in its relationship to the transcendent. (Lawrence, 2024). In the context of the Qur'an, the narrative dimension is very dominant and closely integrated with the theological structure and morality of Islam.

The Qur'an explicitly presents itself as a book that contains stories full of wisdom. One of the key verses that confirms this is QS Yūsus [12]: 3:

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ أَحْسَنَ الْقَصَصِ

" We tell you the best stories by revealing the Koran to you."

This verse not only marks the narrative as part of revelation, but also implies that the narrative possesses the highest quality (aḥsan al-qaṣaṣ), namely, a story that touches on the deepest aspects of human life: love, conflict, betrayal, hope, forgiveness, and wisdom. Surah Yusuf as a whole is a prime example of the narrative dimension in the Qur'an, which not only conveys the story of the past but also presents it as a reflective mirror for human life throughout the ages (M. Mohiuddin & Radhilufti, 2025).

The narrative of the Prophet Joseph contains complex symbolic layers. The betrayal by his brothers, the temptation by Zulaikha, Joseph's unjust imprisonment, and finally his appointment as leader of Egypt constitute a spiritual journey imbued with prophetic values (Ramadhani, 2022). This story is not merely a historical document, but a prototype of the narrative self in the religious experience of Muslims: that every human being is tested, rejected, and humiliated, but also has the potential to grow through patience, steadfastness of faith, and wisdom (Smart, 2000b). This kind of story not only conveys the content of a religious message, but also influences the way people view reality and forms a collective horizon of meaning.

The stories in the Qur'an also have a performative function: they are not merely to be told, but to be lived out in the practices and consciousness of the people. The stories of the prophets (qaṣaṣ al-anbiyā') such as Moses, Abraham, Noah, and Jesus serve not only as historical transmissions, but also as structures that transform collective moral and spiritual consciousness (Rashwani, 2024). In this case, the narrative of the Qur'an functions as an archive of holiness that crystallizes human experience in interacting with revelation and prophetic reality.

Moreover, the narrative dimension of the Quran presents an open dialogue between humanity and God. The narrative is not merely one-way, but invites the reader or listener to enter the context of the story, experience the feelings of the characters, and absorb the wisdom contained within (Thompson, 2024). In Islamic tradition, this is part of the teaching method (ta'lim) and instilling values (tarbiyah), where stories are used as a means of internalizing religious values and identity.

Thus, within the framework of the phenomenology of religion (Smart, 1996a), kisah dalam al-Qur'an adalah bentuk pengalaman religius yang diceritakan. Ia bukan hanya medium untuk menyampaikan hukum atau doktrin, tetapi juga medium untuk menghayati dan membangun kesadaran spiritual yang hidup. Ia menjadi arena tempat simbol dan makna bertemu, tempat sejarah bertaut dengan mitos, dan tempat manusia belajar mengenali dirinya melalui cermin profetik yang ditawarkan wahyu.

Third, the doctrinal dimension in the phenomenological approach to religion (Smart, 1996a) refers to the structure of beliefs that form the intellectual and spiritual foundation of a religion. It involves a systematically structured belief system that serves as a conceptual framework for understanding the nature of God, humanity, the universe, and life. In Islam, this dimension is crystallized most essentially in the doctrine of tawhid, the belief in the oneness of God, which is the central point of all structures of faith and religious practice (Choudhury, 2024b).

The Qur'an as the central text in Islam not only contains ritual commands and religious narratives, but also conveys a very clear and explicit doctrinal building. One of the strongest and most concise theological statements in the Qur'an is found in Surah al-Ikhlāṣ [112]: 1-4:

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

"Say: He is Allah, the Almighty. God is the one on whom everything depends. He neither begat nor was he begotten. And there is nothing equal to Him."

These four verses summarize very concisely but profoundly the essence of the doctrine of monotheism. From the perspective of (Smart, 1996a), This is a perfect representation of the doctrinal dimension: a theological affirmation that not only forms the conceptual basis of religion but also influences the entire religious experience and practice of its followers. The statement "Allah Ahad" affirms the absolute unity of God, rejecting any form of plurality in the divine essence. This is the doctrine of radical monotheism that is the main distinction of Islam from forms of polytheism or tritheism. This unity is not mathematical, but metaphysical, implying that only God is absolute, while everything else is relative and dependent on Him (Michaud, 2023).

The concept of "al-Samad" adds metaphysical depth to the understanding of monotheism. Al-Samad demonstrates that Allah is the one on whom all creatures depend, the Most Perfect and in need of nothing (Yazicioglu, 2022). This is not merely an acknowledgment of God's power, but also an affirmation that the entire existential structure of the universe rests on one absolute reality. From a phenomenological perspective, this demonstrates that religious experience is not only directed toward a divine being as an object of worship, but also as the ontological axis of all existence (van der Braak, 2025).

The statement "lam yalid wa lam yūlad" is an explicit rejection of theological concepts that attribute biological attributes to God, such as the concept of the trinity or the myth of the birth of the god. By this, Islam establishes God as a transcendent entity, not within the biological or historical realm like humans. This verse establishes a clear dividing line between creator and creature, between the sacred and the profane (Pérez-Jara et al., 2022).

Finally, the statement "wa lam yakun lahu kufuwan aḥad" concludes the doctrine of tawhid with the affirmation that nothing is comparable, similar, or equal to God. This is a complete denial of all forms of anthropomorphism and the likening of God to creatures. Thus, tawhid is not only the basis of belief but also an epistemological and ethical guide: humans must recognize their limitations and may not worship anyone other than the One God (Choudhury, 2024a).

Thus, the doctrinal dimension of the Qur'an, particularly as reflected in Surah al-Ikhlāṣ, is evidence that Islam offers a belief system that is not only rational and theological but also existentially profound. It forms a structure of thought as well as a structure of feeling, which is integrated into the religious experience of Muslims. In this approach (Smart, 2009), this confirms that doctrine is not merely an abstraction, but rather the center of gravity of all religious dynamics.

Fourth, the ethical and legal dimensions reflect the system of values and behavioral norms derived from religious beliefs and serve as guidelines for the lives of individuals and society (Ahmad et al., 2023). This dimension encompasses not only formal legal rules but also moral principles that govern human relationships with each other, with nature, and with God. In the Islamic context, the Qur'an plays a central role as the primary source of ethics and law, where universal values such as justice, compassion, social responsibility, and respect for human rights are positioned as integral parts of religious experience (Bhat, 2024).

One of the verses that explicitly reflects the power of this dimension is QS al-Mā'idah [5]: 8:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ

"O you who believe, be upholders of justice for the sake of Allah."

This verse embodies a fundamental principle in Islamic ethics: justice ('adl) is not merely a social obligation, but a form of worship and spiritual expression performed by Allah for the sake of and because of Allah. This demonstrates that in Islam, ethics cannot be separated from theological doctrine. Acting justly is not merely a civil obligation, but a religious responsibility inherent in the identity of faith (Dalimunthe & Riza, 2025).

In the perspective of the phenomenology of religion, as explained by (Smart, 1996a), The ethical dimension is an expression of the internalization of values derived from religious texts and experiences. This means that when someone chooses to act justly, honestly, or refrain from injustice, it is not merely a

rational or legal-formal act, but part of a religious consciousness embedded within the framework of faith. The above verse emphasizes the importance of bearing witness to justice (*syuhadā'a bil-qist*) as a form of moral responsibility towards God and others.

The ethical dimension of the Qur'an is vast and encompasses all aspects of human life: from personal behavior such as maintaining trust, keeping promises, and telling the truth; to collective issues such as wealth distribution, women's and children's rights, protection of the weak, and economic and political justice. The Islamic legal system (*sharia*) itself is built on a moral foundation derived from the ethical values of the Qur'an, not merely on legalistic commands. Thus, ethics and law in Islam cannot be seen as separate entities, but rather as a normative unity integrated with the spiritual dimension (*Sharia Law in the Twenty-First Century*, 2021).

A phenomenological approach helps us see that the implementation of ethics is not merely external, but rather part of a profound religious experience. A Muslim who upholds justice, defends the oppressed, or refuses bribery is affirming his faith through concrete actions (Bagasra, 2021). In this case, the ethical dimension not only explains what is right and wrong, but also how humans respond to the divine calling in their social life.

Fifth, the social dimension emphasizes that religion does not only function in the personal or ritualistic sphere, but also plays a significant role in shaping social relations networks and institutional structures within society, (Smart, 2009), influences how humans interact, build communities, manage conflicts, and create a just and cohesive social order. In the Islamic context, the Qur'an places strong emphasis on the importance of solidarity, cooperation, and social responsibility, making interpersonal relationships an integral part of the religious experience (Anshori et al., 2024).

One of the most representative verses that displays this social dimension is QS al-Hujurāt [49]: 10:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ

"Indeed, believers are brothers. So make peace between your two brothers."

This verse explicitly affirms the concept of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) as both theological and social foundation in Islam. The brotherhood in question is not merely an emotional bond, but an ethical commitment and social responsibility that fosters harmony, reconciliation, and justice in society (Rahman et al., 2024). From a phenomenological perspective, the concept of *ukhuwah* is not merely a normative doctrine, but a manifestation of religious experience that is experienced collectively by the Muslim community.

(Smart, 1996a) He called the social dimension a crucial element of religious expression because religion is fundamentally lived within a community. Beliefs and rituals only acquire full meaning when shared and articulated within the context of social relationships. In this regard, the Qur'an not only offers principles for interpersonal relations but also forms a normative foundation for building an Islamic community, the *ummah*, that upholds brotherhood, peace, and social responsibility.

The social significance of brotherhood in this verse can also be understood in the context of conflict resolution and maintaining social integrity. The call to "make peace between two brothers" is not merely a moral imperative, but a reflection of Islamic social ethics that reject fragmentation and division. Within this framework, being religious is not merely a matter of personal worship, but also an active commitment to reconciliation and the restoration of social relations. The act of repairing relationships between members of society is a concrete manifestation of faith (Thames & Scolaro, 2022).

Furthermore, the social dimension in Islam is also reflected in the formation of social institutions such as *zakat*, *waqf*, the Islamic boarding school education system, and social mediation institutions (Mohd Hussin et al., 2024). All of this is rooted in the principles laid out in the Quran, and affirms that Islam is a religion that builds society, not merely forms pious individuals. Communal ethics are a distinctive characteristic that distinguishes Islam as a religion that lives in the public sphere, and not simply an individual belief system.

In the phenomenological approach to religion, as explained (Jirásek, 2024), The social dimension serves as a bridge between religious experience and social structure. This means that spirituality does not stop at personal piety but must have a real impact on the formation of a humane, just, and compassionate social order. The Qur'an, as a sacred text, not only directs Muslims to piety but also demands that they maintain social harmony as part of practicing their faith.

Sixth, the emotional dimension in a multidimensional framework (Smart, 1996a) refers to the deepest human emotional experiences that arise in a religious context, such as awe, hope, love, fear, surrender, and inner peace. These emotional experiences are not merely fleeting affective responses, but rather an integral part of the structure of authentic religiosity. In Islam, this dimension is most evident in the spiritual relationship between humans and God, as enshrined in verses of the Qur'an that awaken inner awareness and touch the deepest layers of the soul.

One of the verses that clearly represents this dimension is QS al-Ra'd [13]: 28:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ۗ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

“Those who believe and their hearts are at peace by remembering Allah. Remember, only by remembering Allah can your heart be at peace.”

This verse places *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) at the center of spiritual peace, while also illustrating how the emotional dimension becomes a means of transcendent spiritual encounter. Dhikr is not merely a verbal ritual, but a profound expression of love, longing, hope, and surrender to the Most Holy. It is a deeply personal and collective religious experience, connecting human consciousness with the absolute source of meaning (Al-Daghistani, 2022).

In the perspective of the phenomenology of religion, as stated (Smart, 1996a), The emotional dimension is one of the most tangible elements of religious practice. He asserts that without emotional engagement, religion risks becoming merely a dry and mechanical formal system. Religious emotions are not only an expression of faith, but also a means of spiritual transformation (Van Cappellen et al., 2021). In this case, Islam places great emphasis on the balance between the rational (reason) and emotional (qalb) aspects, both of which are seen as doors to understanding and closeness to God.

The above verse emphasizes that peace (*ṭama'nīnah*) is not achieved through material accumulation or power, but rather through an inner connection with the Divine. This is where the emotional experience of religion becomes central to Islamic practice (Almila Akca et al., 2022). When someone meditates and feels calm, they are experiencing a deep spiritual dimension, both personal and universal. This experience touches on the existential aspects of humankind, namely the need for closeness, certainty, and meaning in life.

As explained (Almirzanah, 2023), Spirituality in Islam is not just about doctrinal understanding, but also about direct and intimate experience with God. This is what makes emotions a driving force in religious practice. In the Quran, we see numerous verses that elevate fear (*khauf*), hope (*rajā'*), love (*ḥubb*), and gratitude (*shukr*) as forms of emotional engagement in worship and spiritual life. These emotions are not weaknesses, but inner strengths that lead humans to transcendental awareness.

Seventh, the material dimension refers to the physical elements in religion such as holy places, buildings of worship, ritual objects, and visual symbols that play an important role in realizing and affirming religious experiences in a concrete way (Kailo, 2025). This dimension is not only about artifacts, but also about how these objects are perceived, respected, and used as a means of approaching the transcendent. In Islam, this dimension holds a crucial position, because spirituality is not separated from its outward manifestation; in fact, the material dimension is part of the expression of faith that lives in space and time (Ameen, 2024).

One of the verses that clearly represents the material dimension is QS al-Tawbah [9]: 18:

إِنَّمَا يَعْمُرُ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ مَنِ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ

“Indeed, those who prosper in Allah's mosque are only those who believe in Allah.”

This verse contains two important messages: first, that the mosque as a physical space is a revered entity; and second, that human involvement in its prosperity is a spiritual act that reflects faith. A mosque is not simply a building, but a sacred place that serves as a center of spirituality, sociality, and learning for Muslims. It is the meeting point between heaven and earth, between the transcendent dimension and profane reality (Shiferaw et al., 2023).

From the perspective of the phenomenology of religion, material symbols such as mosques, the Kaaba, and the Qur'an not only have aesthetic or historical value, but also become a medium of transcendence

(Gonzalez, 2024). They facilitate the encounter between humans and the Divine. As emphasized (Smart, 1996a), The material dimension cannot be reduced to a mere complement to other dimensions, but rather constitutes a crucial pathway in the construction of religious meaning. In Islam, worship practices such as prayer rely on the direction of the Qibla (the Kaaba), a dedicated place (the mosque), and physical objects such as prayer mats and mushafs. All of this creates a tangible and internalized sacred space within the religious experience.

In a phenomenological framework, the act of caring for a mosque or kissing a mushaf is not merely a cultural expression, but a reflection of an emotional and spiritual relationship with the sacred (Gonzalez, 2023). These practices indicate that religion does not only exist in the mind or soul, but is also concretely manifested in actions and objects. This strengthens the thesis (Smart, 1996a) that every religion always requires a physical manifestation to maintain the continuity of memory, identity, and religious experience across generations.

Table 2
 Ninian Smart's Representation of Religious Dimensions in the Qur'an

Dimension	Examples of Verses	Arabic Texts	Short Meaning
Ritual	QS 2:183	يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ...	Fasting as a means of spirituality and piety
Narrative	QS 12:3	نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ أَحْسَنَ الْقَصَصِ	Stories as instruments of morality and faith
Docterine	QS 112:1-4	قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ...	Tawhid as the core doctrine of Islam
Ethics & Legality	QS 5:8	كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ	Justice as a universal value
Social	QS 49:10	إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ	Brotherhood as the basis of social relations
Emotional	QS 13:28	أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ	Dhikr as a source of peace of mind
Material	QS 9:18	إِنَّمَا يَعْمُرُ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ...	The mosque as the center of spiritual life

Table 1 above shows that the religious structure of the Qur'an substantially encompasses the seven dimensions formulated (Smart, 1996a) in the phenomenology of religion approach. This demonstrates that the Qur'an is not merely a normative text speaking in the language of commands and prohibitions, but also a living text rich in narrative, symbolism, emotional experiences, and complex social structures.

Through the ritual dimension, Islam fosters spiritual piety through elaborately regulated acts of worship. In the narrative dimension, the stories of the prophets and previous generations in the Quran serve as instruments of collective education, shaping the community's identity (A. Mohiuddin, 2023). The doctrinal dimension affirms the principles of monotheism and faith as theological foundations, while the ethical and legal dimensions encompass a system of values and laws that guide social life in a just and balanced manner (Zi-Kang Chua, 2023).

Furthermore, the social dimension is reflected in the teachings of brotherhood, zakat, and the structure of Islamic communities that prioritize social solidarity (Ali et al., 2024). The emotional dimension, such as love, hope, and fear of God, demonstrates that religiosity is not merely logical-legalistic, but also affective and existential (Ayers, 2011). Finally, the material dimension affirms the existence of physical symbols such as mosques, mushafs, and the Kaaba, which serve not only as places of worship but also as markers of God's presence in the worldly space (DeLong-Bas, 2022).

The correlation between Smart's religious dimensions and the content of the Qur'an demonstrates that the phenomenological approach has broad analytical power in examining religion as a holistic human experience. This approach can enrich contextual studies of the Qur'an because it does not limit the text to merely legal categories or linguistic interpretations, but also opens up space for an integrative understanding of the normative and existential dimensions of religion. Thus, an analysis of the Qur'an based

on Smart's multidimensional framework not only provides a broader perspective but also a deeper understanding of how revelation lives and functions in Muslim society (Smart, 2000b).

The Relevance of Ninian Smart's Approach to the Contextual Study of the Qur'an

The phenomenological approach to religion developed by Ninian Smart offers a significant methodological contribution to the contextual reading and understanding of the Quran. This approach views religion not merely as a system of normative doctrines but as a multidimensional reality reflecting the existential experience of humanity toward the transcendent. In the context of Quranic studies, this approach can be used as a hermeneutic tool to more comprehensively explore the dimensions of religious life reflected in the revealed text (Ramadhan, 2024).

Salah satu keunggulan utama dari pendekatan ini adalah kemampuannya menjembatani antara pengalaman spiritual personal dan struktur sosial-keagamaan yang lebih luas. Misalnya, al-Qur'an tidak hanya menyeru kepada tauhid sebagai keyakinan teologis (dimensi doktrinal), tetapi juga mengajarkan penghayatan emosional seperti takut, harap, dan cinta kepada Tuhan (dimensi emosional), serta mendorong pembangunan institusi sosial seperti zakat dan wakaf (dimensi sosial-material). Dengan menggunakan kerangka Smart, pembaca al-Qur'an diajak untuk melihat keterhubungan antar-dimensi ini sebagai satu kesatuan utuh dalam membentuk kehidupan religious (Smart, 1996b).

One of the main advantages of this approach is its ability to bridge personal spiritual experience and broader socio-religious structures. For example, the Qur'an not only calls for monotheism as a theological belief (doctrinal dimension), but also teaches emotional experiences such as fear, hope, and love for God (emotional dimension), and encourages the development of social institutions such as zakat and waqf (socio-material dimension). Using Smart's framework, readers of the Qur'an are invited to see the interconnectedness of these dimensions as a unified whole that shapes religious life (Jeniva & Tanyid, 2025).

However, Smart's approach is not without limitations. One of these is the risk of generalizing and reducing the specificity of Islamic revelation if it is not accompanied by Islamic epistemological principles. The phenomenology of religion is fundamentally based on human experience, while in Islam, revelation is a source of transcendental truth that is not merely a product of human consciousness (Vahid & Morvarid, 2024). Therefore, this approach must be carefully integrated to avoid violating the principle of monotheism and the uniqueness of the Qur'an as the word of God.

Nevertheless, the potential of this multidimensional approach is enormous, especially in the development of Islamic education and contemporary exegetical studies. In Islamic educational institutions, this framework can be used to design religious curricula that address affective, social, and practical aspects, not just cognitive-doctrinal ones. Meanwhile, in exegetical studies, this approach can accommodate the needs of modern readers who want to see the relevance of the Quran to current issues such as pluralism, social justice, and spiritual crisis (Khattab, 2024).

Thus, the phenomenological approach to religion (Smart, 1996a) makes an important contribution to enriching the contextual study of the Qur'an, provided it is used critically and integratively within an Islamic epistemological framework. This underscores the urgency of collaboration between Western methodology and the Islamic exegetical tradition in building a contextual, comprehensive, and transformative understanding of Islam.

Table 3

The Relevance of Ninian Smart's Phenomenological Approach to Religion in Contextual Studies of the Qur'an

Aspect	Information	Examples in the Study of the Qur'an
Superiority	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe religion as a multidimensional phenomenon 2. Aligning spiritual, social, and emotional aspects 3. Enables thematic and applicable interpretation reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - QS al-Baqarah 2:183 is understood not only as the law of fasting, but also as a means of piety (ritual and moral dimensions) - QS Yusuf is read as a symbol of psychological resilience and prophetic ethics

Weaknesses	1. The risk of generalization and reduction of revelation to subjective experience. 2. Not all Smart dimensions are suitable for application to all religious systems, including Islam.	- The material dimension is not enough to explain the sacred meaning of the mushaf and the Kaaba in the concept of barakah and tauhid.
Potential in Islamic Education	Promote a balanced curriculum between cognitive (doctrinal), affective (emotional), and psychomotor (social-ritual) aspects.	- Moral education integrates the interpretation of QS al-Hujurat 49:10 in the formation of social character
Potential in Thematic Interpretation	Helping to develop interpretations based on real-life issues and dimensions, such as social justice, spirituality, environment, and social relations.	- Thematic interpretation of "social justice" combines QS al-Nisa' 4:135 and QS al-Ma'idah 5:8
Epistemological Prerequisites	Requires integration with the principles of monotheism and revelation as a source of transcendence so as not to get caught up in the secularization of religious experience.	- The Smart approach is used as a complement, not a substitute for classical interpretation methods.

Table 2 briefly represents how the phenomenological approach to religion, particularly Ninian Smart's model, offers both relevance and challenges for context-based studies of the Quran. It opens up a connection between human experience and the message of revelation, yet still requires an Islamic theological foundation to avoid losing its normative direction.

CONCLUSION

Ninian Smart's phenomenological approach to religion, formulated through seven religious dimensions: ritual, narrative, doctrinal, ethical/legal, social, emotional, and material, offers a rich interpretive lens for understanding religion as a holistic and multidimensional human experience. When this approach is applied to the contextual study of the Qur'an, it becomes clear that the Qur'an not only presents doctrinal and legal teachings, but also permeates various layers of human life, from the symbolic realm to social practice. Each dimension outlined by Smart is concretely represented in the text of the Quran, demonstrating that this holy book functions not only as a source of law and faith, but also as a narrative that shapes identity, an emotional guide, a social structure, and even a symbolic means of God's presence in physical space. Thus, the Quran can be understood as a text that not only informs but also shapes the spiritual and cultural experiences of Muslims as a whole.

Phenomenology of religion, within this framework, plays a crucial role as a hermeneutic approach capable of bridging the meaning of revelation with the reality of human experience. It does not deny the normative authority of the Qur'an as the word of God, but rather enriches its meaning by considering how the sacred text is experienced, internalized, and actualized in the dynamics of people's lives. Therefore, this approach opens new opportunities for constructing more inclusive, reflective, and contextually grounded interpretations, especially amid the complex and pluralistic challenges of modern religiosity. However, applying a phenomenological approach to the Quran demands epistemological maturity. Efforts to understand the revealed text through the framework of human experience must be accompanied by critical awareness to maintain the integrity of the revelation and avoid falling into interpretive relativism. Striking a balance between the Quran's transcendent authority and the historical and existential dimensions of the ummah is crucial to implementing this method responsibly and productively.

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