

Analysis of the rational tafsir of Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 164 on the signs of Allah's power in Tafsir Al-Manar by Muhammad 'Abduh and Rasyid Rida

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the rational interpretation of Q.S. al-Baqarah verse 164 concerning the signs of Allah's power in Tafsir al-Manār by Muhammad 'Abduh and Rasyid Rida. This study is motivated by the need to understand the relationship between revelation and scientific reality within the framework of modern Qur'anic exegesis. Muhammad 'Abduh and Rasyid Rida employed a rational ('aqli) approach in interpreting verses related to natural phenomena, emphasizing the role of reason and scientific observation in recognizing the greatness of Allah. This study adopts a library research method, using Tafsir al-Manār as the primary source, supported by relevant books, journals, and academic articles as secondary references. The analysis is conducted descriptively and analytically to identify the interpretive principles (qawā'id al-tafsīr) applied by the exegetes, including al-Tafsīr bi al-Qur'ān, al-Tafsīr bi al-'Aql, al-Tafsīr bi al-Wāqī', and al-Tawhīd wa al-Tajdid. The results show that Tafsir al-Manār interprets natural phenomena such as the heavens, the earth, rain, and wind not merely as physical realities but as āyāt kauniyyah (cosmic signs) that guide human beings to think and strengthen their faith. Revelation and science are viewed as complementary, not contradictory, in affirming Allah's oneness and wisdom.

Keywords: Tafsir al-Manar, Muhammad 'Abduh, Rasyid Rida, Rational Exegesis, Q.S. al-Baqarah:164

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an, the holy book of Muslims, contains guidance for life and addresses various natural phenomena. Some scholars argue that verses that discuss the universe contain scientific indications. The natural phenomena described in the Qur'an are often linked to modern scientific findings, giving rise to studies on the relationship between revelation and scientific realities. One popular approach in this discourse is *scientific exegesis (tafsir 'ilmi)*, which seeks to examine the correspondence between the teachings of the Qur'an and contemporary scientific knowledge.

One of the influential modern exegeses that attempts to connect the Qur'an with the development of rational and scientific thought is *Tafsir al-Manar* by Muhammad 'Abduh and his student, Rashid Rida. This tafsir is well-known among Qur'anic scholars. Initially, the interpretations were published periodically in the *al-Manar* journal in the early twentieth century, before being compiled into book form and disseminated widely across various regions of the Islamic world. *Tafsir al-Manar* plays an important role in enriching religious thought as well as providing guidance for the practice of worship. The contributions of Muhammad 'Abduh and his student, Rashid Rida, to the development of modern Islamic thought are substantial and remain a major point of reference to this day (Khafizuddin et al., 2024).

Based on the above discussion, this study will focus on the following two research questions: (1) How does the rational approach of *Tafsir al-Manar* interpret Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:164 in terms of the signs of Allah's power?; (2) How are exegetical principles (*qawā'id al-tafsir*) applied in *Tafsir al-Manar* to explain this verse?

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs library research. This approach is used to collect data and information from various literary works or written sources that are relevant to the focus of the study. This study examines "The Rational Exegesis of Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 164 on the Signs of Allah's Power in *Tafsir al-Manar*," the primary data are drawn from the Qur'an and from *Tafsir al-Manar* by Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida. Secondary data are obtained from journals, articles, and other scholarly works that address similar topics and support the analysis carried out in this research (Sugiyono, 2017).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Tafsir Method of al-Manar

In the writing of works of Qur'anic exegesis, four principal methods are commonly recognized: *ijmālī*, *tahliḷī*, *muqāran*, and *mandū'ī*. Linguistically, *ijmālī* refers to concise or global interpretation, *tahliḷī* denotes an analytical mode of interpretation, *muqāran* is comparative exegesis, and *mandū'ī* is thematic interpretation based on a specific subject (Kholis, 2008). *Tafsir al-Manar* explains and interprets the verses and surahs sequentially, accompanied by clarification of vocabulary and expressions, followed by an exposition of the meanings of the verses. The structure of the commentary follows the order of the 'Uthmānī codex, beginning from Q.S. al-Fātiḥah to Q.S. Yūsuf verse 53. Therefore, it can be concluded that *Tafsir al-Manar* employs the *tahliḷī* (analytical) method (Ridha, 1927:3).

The aspects examined in this method cover various elements contained in the verse, such as the meaning of individual words, the connotations of sentences, the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), the relationship of a verse to other verses before and after it (*munāsabah*), and the opinions previously put forward regarding its interpretation, whether from the Prophet, the Companions, the Tābi'īn, or later exegetes. The *tahliḷī* method also discusses the objectives and content of the verse, including elements of *i'jāz* (inimitability), *balāghah* (rhetoric), and the aesthetic structure of the wording. In addition, this method elucidates the lessons that can be derived from the verse, whether related to legal rulings in fiqh, scriptural evidence, linguistic meaning, or ethical norms (Khaeruman, 2004:94).

Tafsir al-Manar is also renowned for its scientific approach, namely its effort to relate religious knowledge to the natural sciences. The aim is to enable readers to perceive the relevance of religious teachings to scientific knowledge so that reason and revelation are harmoniously integrated. In many passages, the authors state that

القرآن يقرن المسائل الاعتقادية بدلائلها وبراهينها

“The Qur’an consistently presents matters of creed together with their rational proofs and evidences.”

This sentence is an explicit methodological statement emphasizing that their approach combines thematic–rational and scientific exegesis.

3.2 Analysis of the Interpretation of Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:164 on the Signs of Allah’s Power in *Tafsir al-Manar*

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلْكِ الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَّاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ ۚ وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيْحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the (great) ships which sail through the sea with that which benefits people, and what Allāh has sent down from the heavens of rain, giving life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness and dispersing therein every (kind of) moving creature, and (His) directing of the winds and the clouds controlled between the heaven and earth are signs for a people who use reason” (Al-Baqarah [2]:164).

3.2.1 Lexical Meaning

- “Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth”: The word “creation” (خَلَقَ) here does not only refer to the initial act of bringing them into existence, but also to the orderly arrangement and system that operate in a regular manner. *Tafsir al-Manar* encourages the reader to contemplate this orderliness as evidence of the existence of the One, All-Powerful God.
- “and the alternation of night and day”: This “alternation” (اِخْتِلَافَ) is viewed as a regular and purposeful cycle that makes the existence of life and human activity possible, rather than a mere natural occurrence. It reflects the fixed laws of nature (*sunnatullah*).
- “and the ships that sail through the sea”: The mention of “ships” highlights the human capacity to utilize natural resources (the sea), which are subject to physical laws such as buoyancy established by Allah. This serves as an impetus for the development of science and technology in the field.
- “with that which benefits people”: This phrase underscores the element of benefit (maṣlaḥah) in Allah’s creation and human activity within the natural world. Everything in the universe is created for human well-being, which should evoke gratitude and deepen one’s understanding of the purpose of life.
- “and what Allah sends down from the sky of water”: The word “water” (مَاءٍ) is a vital element that constitutes the source of life. *Tafsir al-Manar* connects this to the hydrological cycle and its role in reviving the dry earth, demonstrating Allah’s power in regulating the ecosystem.
- “and He has dispersed therein all kinds of living creatures”: This indicates biodiversity and the spread of living beings on earth, which are signs of Allah’s power and mercy.
- “and the directing of the winds”: This “directing” or variation of the winds is a complex natural phenomenon that plays an important role (for example, in navigation, pollination, or the movement of clouds). This constitutes clear evidence of the precise calculation and meticulous regulation of the Creator.
- “Surely, there are signs for a people who use reason”: This is the main conclusion of this exegesis. The word “reason” (يَعْقِلُونَ) indicates that these signs can only be truly understood and

internalized by those who employ their intellect deeply and critically. *Tafsir al-Manar* places strong emphasis on the role of reason in faith (Ridha, 1927:57).

3.2.2 Interpretation of Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:164

In Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 164, the greatness of Allah is affirmed through the signs present in the universe. This verse highlights two principal attributes of Allah: His oneness (tawhid) and His mercy. *Tafsir al-Manar* employs a rational approach, inviting human beings to reflect on, observe, and understand the creation of Allah as concrete evidence of His power. The natural phenomena mentioned in this verse are highly diverse and include the following: the heavens and the earth display an astonishing order and system; the planets remain in their orbits; the sun is a source of life; and all creation moves in accordance with the laws of Allah. The alternation of night and day and the change of seasons affirm the order of nature that can be grasped by humans through observation, while also serving as a means to draw lessons and express gratitude (Ridha, 1927:57-64).

Ships sailing on the sea illustrate the interaction between humans and the laws of nature. The movement of ships depends on wind, water, and other physical factors. All of these phenomena show that Allah governs the entirety of creation with wisdom, and that human beings who study them through reason and experience can witness His oneness and mercy (Ridha, 1927:57-64).

Rain and water serve as the source of life for all creatures, including the great rivers such as the Nile. Rainwater seeps into the ground, becomes springs, nurtures plants, and sustains life on the surface of the earth. The regulation of the winds (*tasrif al-riyah*) demonstrates their harmony with rainfall, balancing the climate and fostering fertility, all of which occur in accordance with divine order.

Tafsir al-Manar emphasizes that neglecting reflection on the creation of Allah constitutes a great loss for one's faith. Humans are called to use their intellects to understand the signs of Allah in nature so that faith becomes firm and conviction in His oneness and mercy increases. Overall, Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 164 teaches that all natural phenomena—from the heavens and the earth, night and day, stars, ships, and rain to the winds—are concrete proofs of the existence, power, order, and compassion of Allah, which can be understood through observation, reason, and rational contemplation, as emphasized in *Tafsir al-Manar* (Ridha, 1927:57-64).

“The destruction of religion occurs when the intellect's contemplation of the mysteries of existence and the wisdom behind creation is abandoned.” (Tafsir al-Manar, vol. 2)

Is it not a great loss for this religion when its followers, whose holy book calls them to observe the signs of Allah's power in the universe and draw lessons from them, instead turn away from these matters? Is it not a grave calamity for this religion when its religious leaders abandon the sciences that explain the laws of Allah and the signs of His majesty in His creation, although these sciences are in fact instruments that strengthen and clarify the truth of religion, yet they regard them as disciplines that weaken or even negate religion?

In reality, the Qur'an itself presents these sciences as evidence of Allah's greatness and commands human beings to pay attention to them. Nevertheless, they persist in their old traditions without any valid proof, merely imitating earlier communities that misled their followers. This meaning is consistent with the words of Allah, exalted is He, about the disbelievers in every community who always agree to reject and revile their prophets.

“Is this the legacy they have transmitted, one to another? Nay, they are themselves a people transgressing beyond bounds!” (QS. adz-Dzariyat: 53)

Some who oppose the study of natural sciences in the name of religion argue that merely looking at natural phenomena outwardly is sufficient to recognize the signs of the Creator and His wisdom. However, their example is like that of a person who is satisfied with only gazing at the outer cover of a book without wishing to read the contents and the wisdom contained within it.

The universe is a “Book of Divine Creation” which, through its beauty and order, explains the existence, perfection, majesty, and beauty of Allah. It is this book that Allah alludes to in His words:

"Say, If the sea were ink for [writing] the words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the words of my Lord were exhausted, even if We brought the like of it in [continual] supplement." (QS. al-Kahfi: 109)

"And if whatever trees upon the earth were pens and the sea [was ink], replenished thereafter by seven [more] seas, the words of Allah would not be exhausted. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise" (QS. Luqman: 27).

Thus, the "words of Allah" in creation, when viewed in terms of their effects and concrete existence, are the creatures and entities created by Allah Himself. All of them speak in a language more eloquent than human speech. However, this language can only be understood by those who do not close their ears to the truth and do not oppose knowledge.

Those who believe that knowing Allah can only be achieved through theoretical debate and mere logic, and not through existential proofs and the reality of creation, have gone astray. If their claim were true, Allah in His Book would certainly have set out logical arguments such as *dawr* (vicious circle of causes) and *tasalsul* (endless regress), or other technical terms of *'ilm al-kalām*.

However, Allah does not do this. Instead, He has made the heavens and the earth, the night and the day, the courses of the stars and the ships at sea, the rain and the life that grows from it, and all created things in the universe as clear proofs of His existence and oneness, and the Qur'an calls human beings to investigate, understand, and learn from all of these. Truly, Allah has two books: (a) the created book (*al-kitāb al-makhlūq*), namely the universe, and (b) the revealed book (*al-kitāb al-munazzal*), namely the Qur'an.

The revealed book guides us to understand the created book through the gift of reason granted by Allah. Whoever follows this guidance is counted among the fortunate, whereas whoever turns away is among the losers (Ridha, 1927:64).

From the above interpretation, it can be understood that *Tafsir al-Manar* by Muhammad Abduh explains Q.S. Al-Baqarah 164 using a rational and scientific approach, viewing the universe as a Book of Divine Creation that contains signs of the greatness of Allah. The natural phenomena of the heavens, the earth, the alternation of night and day, the stars, ships, rain, and wind are not merely physical events, that is, phenomena that can be directly observed by the human senses, but are part of an orderly, harmonious, and interconnected system that can be examined and understood through human reasoning. Therefore, humans are commanded to reflect on, investigate, and comprehend Allah's creation so that their faith becomes firm and rational, rather than relying solely on tradition or dogma. This tafsir emphasizes that observation and scientific reasoning do not contradict revelation but rather serve as a means to strengthen faith.

Thus, it can be analyzed that, according to Muhammad Abduh, the ships that sail upon the sea are among the signs of His greatness. A ship is not merely a means of transportation but a concrete phenomenon that points to Allah's order and wisdom. Ships enable humans to traverse long distances across the sea by utilizing wind, currents, and the orderly laws of nature.

Subsequently, according to Muhammad Abduh, rain is not merely a natural phenomenon but part of an orderly system within Allah's creation. Water evaporates from rivers, lakes, or soil, then forms clouds that are driven by the wind until they condense and fall as rain. Rain brings many benefits for human life: it fertilizes the soil, replenishes rivers and lakes, and sustains living beings.

Each sign of Allah's greatness mentioned in this verse affirms two principal attributes: His oneness (tawhid) and His mercy. The orderly solar system affirms the singular sovereignty of Allah, while rain and ships that carry benefits for human beings affirm His mercy. Through this approach, *Tafsir al-Manar* invites human beings to integrate reason, science, and revelation, to regard nature as concrete evidence for faith, and to engage in deep reflection on the oneness and compassion of Allah in all His creation. Thus, Muhammad Abduh shows that science and human reason are in harmony with the teachings of the Qur'an, since the Qur'an frequently calls human beings to reflect, investigate, and draw lessons from the creation of Allah.

3.3 Exegetical Principles Applied by Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida in *Tafsir al-Manar*

Muhammad ‘Abduh and his student Rashid Rida are modern Islamic reformers who sought to interpret the Qur’an in a rational and contextual manner. In their monumental work *Tafsir al-Manar*, they endeavored to revive the awareness of the Muslim community regarding the importance of understanding the Qur’an through a method that integrates revelation and reason. To achieve this aim, they applied a number of *qawa’id al-tafsir* (exegetical principles) that characterize their distinctive approach to understanding Qur’anic verses.

3.3.1 The Principle of al-Tafsir bi al-Qur’an (Interpreting a Verse by Means of Other Verses)

Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida affirm that the best way to interpret the Qur’an is by the Qur’an itself. They frequently relate one verse to other verses that share similar meanings or themes, since the Qur’an is a unified whole whose parts elucidate one another. In interpreting Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 164, for example,

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلْكِ الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَّاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ ۚ وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيْحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the [great] ships which sail through the sea with that which benefits people, and what Allah has sent down from the heavens of rain, giving life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness and dispersing therein every [kind of] moving creature, and [His] directing of the winds and the clouds controlled between the heaven and the earth are signs for a people who use reason” (Q.S. Al-Baqarah:164) (Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019:26). They refer to other verses such as Q.S. Yunus [10]:6.

إِنَّ فِي اخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَمَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَّقُونَ

“Indeed, in the alternation of the night and the day and [in] what Allah has created in the heavens and the earth are signs for a people who fear Allah” (Q.S. Yunus:6) (Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019:26).

According to Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida in *Tafsir al-Manar*, this verse has a close connection in meaning with Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 164, because both employ a rational (*‘aqli*) approach in presenting proofs of divinity (Abduh & Rida, 1905). They explain that the alternation of night and day is not merely a physical phenomenon that occurs routinely, but a regulated system that reflects divine wisdom (Abduh & Rida, 1905). This alternation maintains the balance of life: night for rest and day for activity (Shihab, 2002:72). Furthermore, they emphasize that the creations of Allah in the heavens and on earth are *ayat kawniyyah* (signs in the natural world) that must be examined through reason and scientific observation, not merely through blind belief (Syukri, 2019:61). For *al-Manar*, knowing Allah through observation of His creation constitutes a form of scientific piety, namely an intellectual and spiritual awareness of the majesty of God (Nasution, 1991:45). Q.S. Ali ‘Imran verses 190–191 likewise call human beings to pay attention to natural phenomena as signs of Allah’s power (Abduh & Rida, 1902:88).

3.3.2 The Principle of al-Tafsir bi al-‘Aql (Interpreting with a Rational Approach)

A key characteristic of *Tafsir al-Manar* is its use of a rational (*‘aqli*) approach. Muhammad Abduh rejects interpretations that rely solely on transmitted reports without logical and empirical consideration. He maintains that reason is a divine gift that must be used to understand the meanings of Allah’s verses (Syukri, 2019:55). Thus, verses concerning natural phenomena are understood not only in a spiritual sense but also in a scientific one. This is evident in the interpretation of Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 164, where nature

is viewed as an ordered system subject to the laws of Allah, which can be studied by human beings (Ridha, 1927:91).

3.3.3 The Principle of al-Tafsir bi al-Waqi' (Interpreting in Light of Social and Contextual Reality)

Rashid Rida continued his teacher's ideas by emphasizing the importance of understanding the Qur'an within an evolving social and historical context. In his view, interpretation must not be separated from the needs and challenges of modern society (Nasution, 1992:101). Therefore, *Tafsir al-Manar* frequently connects Qur'anic verses with the social, political, and intellectual conditions of the Muslim community at that time. In the context of Q.S. al-Baqarah verse 164, they stress that paying attention to natural phenomena is not merely a spiritual reflection but also an encouragement to develop scientific knowledge and technology that benefit humanity (Shihab, 2018:214).

3.3.4 The Principle of al-Tawhid wa al-ibadah (Affirming Tawhid as the Foundation of Exegesis)

All forms of interpretation in *Tafsir al-Manar* are consistently directed toward strengthening the value of *tawhid*. Abduh and Rida view all natural phenomena as concrete proofs of the oneness of Allah (*tawhid rububiyah*) and as a basis for human beings to worship with full awareness. In their interpretation of Q.S. al-Baqarah verse 164, they affirm that the order of the cosmic system indicates a single sovereign power that governs all creation (Ridha, 1927:95).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and analysis of *Tafsir al-Manar* by Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida, it can be concluded that the interpretation of Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 164 represents a rational (*'aqli*) exegetical approach that emphasizes the use of reason and scientific observation in understanding the signs of Allah's power in the universe.

Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida affirm that natural phenomena such as the creation of the heavens and the earth, the alternation of night and day, rain, wind, and the existence of living beings are not merely physical realities, but *ayat kawniyyah* that indicate the greatness, order, and mercy of Allah. This verse conveys the message that faith and reason cannot be separated; both must work together in building human spiritual and scientific awareness.

Through *Tafsir al-Manar*, the two scholars also apply several *qawa'id al-tafsir* (interpretive principles), including: (a) al-Tafsir bi al-Qur'an, namely interpreting a verse by other verses with similar themes, such as Q.S. Yunus 6 and Ali 'Imran 190–191; (b) al-Tafsir bi al-'Aql, that is, making reason a means to understand and uncover the wisdom contained in the verses of Allah; (c) al-Tafsir bi al-Waqi', namely taking social reality and scientific knowledge as an interpretive context; (d) al-Tawhid wa al-Tajdid, that is, affirming the value of *tawhid* and the spirit of renewal in every interpretation.

Thus, the interpretation of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida shows that revelation and knowledge are not two opposing entities, but two complementary sources of truth. The universe is understood as the "*kitab makbluq*" (the created book), while the Qur'an is the "*kitab manzul*" (the revealed book). Both serve as means to know the greatness and oneness of Allah.

Overall, *Tafsir al-Manar* makes a significant contribution to the development of modern Qur'anic exegesis that is rational, contextual, and scientific, and it inspires Muslims to treat reason, science, and revelation as a unified whole in understanding and practicing the teachings of the Qur'an in the modern era.

Ethical Approval

Not Applicable

Informed Consent Statement

Not Applicable

Authors' Contributions

VS contributed to the conceptualization, legal framework analysis, and supervision of this study. She also served as corresponding author. JN and HI contributed to empirical data collection through interviews, literature reviews, and the preparation of the manuscript draft.

Disclosure Statement

The Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest

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