

Interpretation of the Meaning of the Term Islam in Al-Manār Tafsir and Its Relationship to Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Relations

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Abstract: *This article examines the interpretations of “al-Islām” and its effects on inter-religious and intercultural relationships. It focuses on al-Manar’s interpretation of the terms “al-Islām” in the Qur’an Ali Imran 19 and 85. The research method used is a qualitative content analysis and contextual approach to al-Qur’an interpretation. The findings show that interpreting “al-islām” in the al-Manār commentary differs from other tafsir works and emphasizes the importance of internal reflection and improvement for the Muslim community. The study highlights the complexity of Islam and its various interpretations and how it can affect relationships and attitudes towards different religious and cultural groups. The study provides a unique contribution to Islamic studies by exploring the interpretation of keywords in the Quran and its impact on inter-religious and intercultural relationships.*

Keywords: *al-Manār; al-Islām; Interreligious; intercultural relationships Qur’an interpretation*

Abstrak: *Artikel ini mengkaji tentang tafsir “al-Islam” dan pengaruhnya terhadap hubungan antaragama dan antarbudaya. Berfokus pada penafsiran al-Manar terhadap istilah “al-Islam” dalam Al-Qur’an Ali Imran 19 dan 85. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah analisis isi kualitatif dan pendekatan penafsiran al-Qur’an kontekstual. Hasil temuan menunjukkan bahwa penafsiran kata “al-islām” dalam tafsir al-Manār berbeda dengan karya tafsir lainnya dan menekankan pentingnya refleksi dan perbaikan internal bagi umat Islam. Studi ini menyoroti kompleksitas Islam dan berbagai interpretasinya, dan bagaimana hal itu dapat memengaruhi hubungan dan sikap terhadap kelompok agama dan budaya yang berbeda. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi yang unik untuk bidang studi Islam dengan mengeksplorasi interpretasi kata-kata kunci dalam Al-Qur’an dan dampaknya terhadap hubungan antar agama dan antar budaya.*

Kata Kunci: *al-Manār; al-Islām; Hubungan antaragama dan antarbudaya Penafsiran Al-Qur’an*

INTRODUCTION

The understanding of Islam has a significant impact on inter-religious and intercultural relationships. The word “*al-islām*” in Quran, 3: 19 and 85 is interpreted as the basis of Islam's truth claim in the many interpretation works. This is because Islam is a complex religion with many aspects interpreted in various ways by scholars, leaders, and practitioners. As a result, the interpretation of Islam as the only correct religion is based on the interpretation of QS. 3: 19 and 85 become a source of tension, misunderstanding, and conflict among different religious and cultural group¹. For example, some scholars believe Islam is a peaceful and tolerant religion, while others believe it is a religion of violence and oppression.² This disagreement has real-world consequences, such as the rise of Islamic extremism and terrorism.³ In addition, there is also debate about the meaning of Islamic law and its role in modern society.⁴ These examples illustrate how the meaning of Islam has become a central issue in inter-religious and intercultural relationships and highlight the need for a deeper understanding of this complex religion.

In the context of interpretation, there are at least two verses of the Quran where the word “*al-islām*” is associated with the word “*al-dīn*” (religion), namely

¹ John L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1093/wentk/9780199794133.001.0001>.

² Will Myer, *Islam and Colonialism*, 0 ed. (Routledge, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203221914>; I. M. Lewis, “Rudolph Peters, Islam and Colonialism: The Doctrine of Jihad in Modern History, (The Hague, Paris, New York: Mouton, 1979). Pp. Ix, 242.,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 3 (August 1981): 383–84, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800053587>; Lamin Sanneh and Rudolph Peters, “Islam and Colonialism. The Doctrine of Jihad in Modern History,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 12, no. 1 (1981): 77, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1581019>.

³ Andrew Root, “Between Relativism and Fundamentalism: Religious Resources for a Middle Position Edited by Peter Berger,” *Dialog* 51, no. 3 (September 2012): 250–52, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6385.2012.00692.x>.

⁴ Shahin Gerami, Martin E. Marty, and R. Scott Appleby, “Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements.,” *Contemporary Sociology* 25, no. 1 (January 1996): 55, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2076959>; Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 11 (November 2, 2015): 958–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1051375>.

in QS. al-Bararah, 2: 19 and QS. al-Baqarah, 2: 85.⁵ The word "*dīn*" in the Quran also refers to religions that the Quran itself critiques in various places, such as "*dīnakum*", "*dīnikum*", "*dīnihim*", "*dīnahum*"⁶, and "*dīnukum*." This statement does not mean that the Quran explicitly mentions all the religions known in the Islamic post-revelatory tradition. The socio-cultural-religious context of the early audience of the Quran does not support this.

Al-Manar is known as a work of tafsir with the label of tafsir with the pattern of social. This means that this work of exegesis is oriented toward improving society. The question that needs to be answered is, "How is the word *al-Islām* interpreted in al-Manār?" and "Is the word *al-islām* in the two mentioned verses understood as the name of a formal religion parallel to the names of other religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, etc.,?" so that the verse becomes a basis for external criticism or truth claims, as can be found in some other interpretative works, or is it understood in such a way as to become a basis for internal criticism, for the improvement of Muslims themselves.

Several studies have been conducted by individuals on using the word *al-dīn* concerning the study of al-Qur'an interpretation and its impact on religious tolerance and human rights. Some authors have conducted comparative studies between different interpretations of the Qur'an, such as Sayyid Quthb's and Rasyid Ridha's interpretation of Surah Al-An'am 6:108⁷, the books Tafsir al-Syarawi and Tafsir al-Wasit li Al-Qurān al-Karim⁸, Hamka and Nurcholish Madjid's views on

⁵ The word "*dīn*" in its various forms appears 94 times in the Quran, both in Makkān verses (revealed before the Prophet's migration) and Madīnan verses (revealed after the Prophet's migration); 65 times in the form of a verbal noun, 26 times in the form of possession (e.g., *dīn-ku* and *dīn-mu*), and only three times in the form of a verb. Zunly Nadia, "Pandangan Farid Esack Tentang Al-Qur'an, Tafsir Dan Takwil Serta Implikasinya Terhadap Bangunan Teologi Pembebasan" 4, no. 1 (2012): 1–18.

⁶ Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, *An-Nisā' - النساء | Qur'an Kemenag* (Kemenag, n.d.), <https://quran.kemenag.go.id/surah/4/171>.; Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, "Al-Mā'idah - المائدة | Qur'an Kemenag" (Kemenag, n.d.), <https://quran.kemenag.go.id/surah/5/77>.; Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, *Āli 'Imrān - آل عمران | Qur'an Kemenag* (Kemenag, n.d.), <https://quran.kemenag.go.id/surah/3/24>.

⁷ Husnul Hotimah, "Toleransi Antar Umat Beragama Menurut Penafsiran Sayyid Quthb Dan Rasyid Ridha Dalam Qs. Al-An'am [6]: 108 (Studi Komparatif Tafsir Fi Zhilāl Al-Qur'ān Dan Tafsir Al-Manār)" (Mataram, UIN Mataram, 2022).

⁸ A.M Shadr, "Keselamatan Non Muslim: Analisis Komparasi Dalam Kitab Tafsir al-Syarawi Dan Tafsir al-Wasit Li Alquran al-Karim" (Surabaya, UIN Sunan Ampel, 2022).

the concept of *Kalimat Sawa'*⁹, Muhammad Rasyid Ridha's Views on the People of the Book¹⁰, human rights perspectives in Al-Marāghī's interpretation¹¹, and the comparison between Tafsīr Al-Manār and Tafsīr Al-Munīr on the People of the Book.¹²

This paper aims to re-represent the interpretation of al-Manār regarding QS. Âli 'Imrân, 3:19 and 85. These two verses in contemporary religious pluralism discourse are often interpreted as scriptural grounds for legitimizing the claim of single religious truth (*al-dîn*) brought by Prophet Muhammad saw, which is Islam. The concept of truth claims in Islam has been an intriguing topic among scholars for centuries.

According to Rasyîd Ridlâ¹³, the term *al-dîn* (religion) linguistically means reward (*al-jazâ'*) and refers to obedience and submission, which is the cause of obtaining the reward. The term *al-dîn* also refers to the shari'ah, a set of obligations that are the servant's responsibility towards Allah. Meanwhile, the term al-islâm is a verbal noun derived from the root word *aslama*, which means submission, surrender, fulfillment of an obligation, and entering peace. According to him, naming the religion correctly with the term "Islam" is in line with all the meanings of the language.

The interpretation of the term *al-dîn* is not significantly different from the interpretation of classical tafsir scholars, such as *al-dîn* with *al-thâ'ah wa al-*

⁹ Harda Armayanto and Adib Fattah Suntoro, "Konsep Kalimat Sawa' Dalam Hubungan Antaragama: Analisis Komparatif Pandangan Hamka Dan Nurcholish Madjid," *Al-Misykah: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 3, no. 2 (January 1, 1970): 199–223, <https://doi.org/10.19109/almisykah.v3i2.15073>.

¹⁰ Muhammad Daffa, "AHLI KITAB DALAM AL-QURAN (PERSPEKTIF MUHAMMAD RASYID RIDHA DALAM TAFSIR AL-MANAR)" (Jakarta, INSTITUT PTIQ JAKARTA, 2022), <https://repository.ptiq.ac.id/id/eprint/738/>.

¹¹ Muammar Muchtar, "Hak Asasi Manusia Dalam Perspektif Hadis," *Dirasat Islamiah; Jurnal Kajian Islam* 3, no. 1 (2022), <http://e-journal.faiuim.ac.id/index.php/dirasatislamiah/article/view/70>.

¹² Nur Aisya Fadillah, "AHL AL-KITĀB (STUDI KOMPARASI ANTARA TAFSĪR AL-MANĀR DAN TAFSĪR AL-MUNĪR)" (Jakarta, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2021), <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/57192>.

¹³ Muhammad Rasyîd Ridlâ, *Tafsîr Al-Manâr*, 2nd ed (Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005).

dzillah (compliance and humility) by al-Thabary¹⁴ (923 AD), *al-jazâ`* (reward) and *al-thâ`ah* (compliance) by al-Razy¹⁵ (w. 1210 M), (1210 AD), and *al-thâ`ah* (compliance) and *al-millah* (religion) by al-Qurthuby¹⁶ (1273 AD).

In line with the linguistic definition above, the term *al-islâm* in Allah's words, "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam" encompasses the meanings of the religions brought by the prophets sent before Prophet Muhammad. This refers to other verses in the Qur'an that attribute being a Muslim to Allah's messengers, particularly Prophet Ibrahim as., as will be explained elsewhere.¹⁷ In line with this, al-Suyûthy¹⁸ interprets *al-islâm* as "the monotheistic teachings brought by the Prophets." Unlike the interpretations mentioned earlier, al-Baidlâwy¹⁹ interprets *al-islâm* in that verse as "the teachings of monotheism and Shariah brought by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)." Although not explicitly stated by al-Baidlâwy, al-Zamakhshary²⁰ Also places this verse in the context of Islam as a religion with the principles of justice and monotheism (*al-'adl wa al-tauhîd*), two of the central teachings among the five doctrines of the Mu'tazilah community (*al-ushûl al-khamsah*).

Rasyid Ridlâ view that a true Muslim in the viewpoint of the Qur'an, is "a person who does not associate partners with God, sincere in their actions: no matter their religion, when they lived, and wherever they are"²¹. Rasyid Ridlâ further formulated this view into the idea of religious unity (*wihdat al-dîn*) of the Prophets and Messengers. In formulating the concept of religious unity (*wihdat*

¹⁴ Al-Thabary and Muhammad ibn Jarîr Abû Ja'far, *Jâmi' al-Bayân Fî Ta`wil al-Qur`ân* (Muassah al-Risâlah, 2000).

¹⁵ Fakhr al-Dîn Al-Râzy, *Mafâtiḥ Al-Ghaib* (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, n.d.).

¹⁶ Abû 'Âbd Allâh Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abû Bakr Syams al-Dîn Al-Qurthûby, *Al-Jâmi' Li Ahkâm al-Qur`ân Wa al-Mubayyin Li Mâ Tadlammanah Min al-Sunnah Wa al-Qur`ân* (Beirut: Dâr al-'Ilm, 2001).

¹⁷ Ridlâ, *Tafsîr Al-Manâr*.

¹⁸ Al-Suyûthy Jalâl al-Dîn Muhammad Ibn Ahmad al-Mahally wa Jalâl al-Dîn 'Abd Rahmân Ibn Aby Bakr, *Tafsîr Al-Qur`ân al-'Adhîm* (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, 1981).

¹⁹ Nâsir al-Dîn Abû al-Khair Abd Allâh ibn 'Umar ibn Muhammad Al-Baidlâwy, . . . *Anwâr Al-Tanzîl Wa Asrâr al-Ta`wil* (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, 1998).

²⁰ Al-Zamakhshary, *Al-Kasysyâf*, 1990.

²¹ Ridlâ, *Tafsîr Al-Manâr*; Muhammad 'Abduh, *Al-A'mâl al-Kâmilah Li al-Imâm Muhammad 'Abduh, Tahqîq Wa Taqdîm Muhammad 'Imârah* (Beirut: Dâr al-Syurûq, 1993).

al-dîn), Rasyid Ridlâ²² He presented two verses relevant to the theme, verses on the unity of the community (*ummah wâhidah*), namely Q.S. al-Mukminûn, 23:52, and Q.S. al-Anbiyâ', 21:92.

According to this view, in his work *Al-Wahy Al-Muhammady*, Rasyid Ridlâ²³ Places Q.S. Ali' Imrân, 3: 19 as the foundation for the "principle of unity of the community," one of the eight "principles of universal Islamic unity" that support the reform of humanity, society, politics, and nationality. The other principles are unity of humankind, unity of religion (while maintaining the principle of freedom of religion), unity of law, unity of position in religion, unity of justice, and unity of language.

To reinforce the concept of religious unity (*wahdat al-din*), the verse "whoever denies the verses of Allah" is interpreted by Rasyid Ridlâ as a warning (threat) from Allah to those who do not believe in the unity of religion (*wahdah al-din*) and to those who do not maintain this unity in their daily practices.²⁴

In the contemporary discourse of religious pluralism, the expression of *al-Islâm* in Q.S. Ali' Imran, 3: 85 becomes the focus of debate. The question is whether the use of the word *al-Islâm* in verse is intended to indicate the meaning of "submission" as can be understood from its generic meaning, or to indicate the meaning of Islam as the name of a religion, that is, the religion brought by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Classical Qur'anic exegete al-Thabary (d. 310 H/922 CE), when interpreting the verse in question, presents several narrations which essentially support the idea of the singular truth of Islam brought by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This thesis is supported by a narration containing a test of the acknowledgment of non-Muslim communities, including the Jewish community, who declared themselves Muslims. In that narration, the test given to them was to

²² Ridlâ, *Tafsîr Al-Manâr*.

²³ Ridlâ.

²⁴ Ridlâ, *Tafsîr Al-Manâr*.

perform the pilgrimage, an obligation that only exists within the Islamic law brought by the Prophet Muhammad²⁵. As for its methodological support, it consists of al-Thabary's²⁶ The explanation is that the verse serves as an abrogating (*nasikhah*) verse concerning the verses about the reward promised to the Jews, Christians, and Shabi'ah (Qur'an 2:62).

This differs from the interpretation of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, who emphasize the meaning of "al-Islam" in verse as "an attitude of submission" rather than as the name of religion. According to him, Islam in verse means affirming God (*al-Tawhid*) and submitting one's self (*al-Wajh Islam*) to Allah. These views are consistent with the content of the previous verse, which is Q.S. Ali' Imran, 3: 84, which emphasizes that the prophets and messengers sent by Allah have an equal position, all bring the same religious truth, both in terms of the teachings and its objectives.

Rasyîd Ridlâ²⁷ It illustrates that the prophets and messengers are like government officials who are assigned to a specific region on a rotating basis with a mission to build the area and improve the well-being of its society. Suppose the conditions of the area and its people desire to progress over time. In that case, the regulations will follow suit while still maintaining the original mission of development and improvement of well-being. The teachings of the successively sent prophets are based on Islam (an attitude of submission).

The perspective applies to all prophets narrated by God in the Qur'an and those who are not. As a result, based on the clarification in Q.S. al-Nisâ`, 4:164, according to Rasyîd Ridlâ²⁸, Eastern countries such as India or China have the potential to be the place where a prophet or prophets receiving revelation were sent before Prophet Muhammad. If the evidence about this is convincing, then their existence also demands the faith of a Muslim. According to Muhammad Abduh, the essence of the teachings of the prophets and Messengers is the same: "faith in God and surrendering one's heart to Him, faith in the Day of Judgment,

²⁵ ibn Jarîr Abû Ja'far, *Jâmi' al-Bayân Fî Ta'wil al-Qur'ân*.

²⁶ ibn Jarîr Abû Ja'far.

²⁷ Ridlâ, *Tafsîr Al-Manâr*.

²⁸ Ridlâ.

and doing good deeds with sincerity." The meaning of this surrender, according to Rasyîd Ridlâ, is to submit with sincerity and not to follow one's desires and lusts in religion.

Among the previous interpreters, some scholars analyzed the meaning of Islam by comparing it with the concept of faith (Iman). Al-Razy (d. 1210 CE) and Alusy (d. 1854 CE) concluded that Iman and Islam are synonymous. They presented that if the concept of Iman differed from Islam, then the concept of Iman would be categorized as "ghair al-Islam" as referred to by the verse under discussion. When this understanding was realized to be inconsistent with Q.S. Al-Hujurat, 49:14, which clearly distinguishes between Iman and Islam, they simultaneously stated that the first meaning which equates the two is terminological (syar'iy), while the second meaning that differentiates Iman and Islam is etymological.²⁹

The interpretation of Al-Thabari and other interpreters who understand al-Islam in the verse as the Islamic religion tend to be more inclined towards a formal understanding of Islam. In contrast, the interpretation of Rasyid Ridla tends to be more inclined towards a substantive understanding of Islam. However, this does not necessarily mean that Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Ridla believe that to be accepted by Allah, a person only needs to be "Islamically substantive" and not "Islamically formal." Other aspects of Quranic teachings, such as prayer, zakat, fasting, pilgrimage, and others, can also be formulated in line with the newly stated interpretation of the verse.

Considering the religious conditions of his time, Rasyîd Ridlâ³⁰ saw that they had strayed from the essence of Islam. They had formally embraced Islam but utilized religion to foster a sense of belonging among groups in the pursuit of worldly interests. He emphasized that religion connects with God by improving

²⁹ Syihâb al-Dîn Mahmûd ibn 'Âbd Allâh al-Husainy Al-Âlûsy, *Rûh Al-Ma'ânî Fî Tafsi'r al-Qur`an al-`Adhîm Wa al-Sab' al-Matsânî* (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, 1998); Al-Râzy, *Ma'âtil Al-Ghaib*.

³⁰ Ridlâ, *Tafsi'r Al-Manâr*.

one's soul, purifying one's heart, and leading the spirit to a state of high nobility and fortune. Beyond that, Islam becomes just a symbol and tradition exploited to create group solidarity, a means of vice, and a tool to achieve worldly success. The divine warning of loss in the afterlife and not obtaining everlasting enjoyment at His side results from a religious model that fails to purify the soul and cleanse the heart for the sake of God alone.

Rasyîd Ridâ³¹ Distinguishes between two categories of Islam: First, normative Islam, which is sincere Islam because of Allah in tawhid, worship, and obedience to the guidance of His messengers. Second historical Islam, which is Islam that Islamic followers practice. The definition of Islam according to this second category is parallel to the definition of Buddhism, referring to the religion practiced by Buddhists, Judaism to the religion practiced by the Jewish nation, and Christianity to the religion practiced by those who identify themselves as Christian followers. Generally, according to Ridlâ, the actual practice of religion (historical religion) is more sectarianistic. Although among these religions, there are still some aspects of normativity that can be traced, the formation of sectarianism in religion often becomes a closing wall to truth.³²

METHOD

This research is library research using the qualitative content analysis method. Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data (i.e. text). Researchers can then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time surrounding the text.³³ In this case, the researcher analyzed the content and text message of al-Manar, which is the result of Rashid Ridla's interpretation of the text of the Qur'an, namely tafsir QS. 2: 19 and 85.

³¹ Ridlâ.

³² Ridlâ.

³³ Columbia University <https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/research/population-health-methods/content-analysis>.

To gain knowledge about the uniqueness of Rasyid Ridla's tafsir on Q.S. Ali Imran, 3: 19 and 85, his analysis will be juxtaposed with other tafsir works that previous scholars have done. In the end, the content of this interpretation will be analyzed for its contribution to the foundations of the relationship between religions.

In the contemporary discourse on relations between religions, to bring religions closer, we can find various typical terms of relations between religions, such as the essence of religion, the unity of religions, the claim of a single truth, and so on. These terms can also be found in al-Manar when interpreting Q.S. 3:19 and 85. This paper was written to accept or reject the hypothesis that al-Manar was essential to establishing interfaith relations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Concerning the historical context of Q.S. Ali' Imran: 18 and 19, Al-Kalby reports that two Syrian priests approached him when the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was in Medina. Upon seeing the city of Medina, one stated that the city had similar characteristics to the city of the Prophet that would appear at the end of times. Upon meeting the Prophet, they observed his qualities and asked whether his name was Muhammad or Ahmad. Upon receiving a positive answer, they wanted to test him to ensure he was a prophet and avoid following him in error. They asked about the supreme testimony in the Book of God. So, Allah revealed Q.S. Ali Imran, 3: 18, to the Prophet. The two then converted to Islam and acknowledged the truth of the Prophet.³⁴

Ibn Ishâq, Ibn Jarîr, and Ibn al-Mundzir narrated a report which also depicted the historical context of the beginning of the Âli' Imrân surah from Muhammad Ibn Ja'far Ibn al-Zubair. It is mentioned that there were sixty envoys from the population of Najrân, and fourteen of them were prominent figures. The

³⁴ Suyuthi Imam, Andi, and Yasir (Penerjemah), *Asbabun Nuzul: Sebab-Sebab Turunnya Ayat Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1 (Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2017).

Prophet Muhammad invited some of them to engage in dialogue, including Abû Hârîtsah Ibn' Alqamah, al-'Âqib, 'Âbd al-Masîh, and Aiham al-Sayyid. The dialogue concerned the status of Jesus Christ. Amongst themselves, the status of Jesus Christ was disputed as to whether he was the Son of God, God himself, or one of the Three. He was Lord because he could revive the dead, heal various illnesses, convey news of the unseen, and create the form of a bird from clay, and after blowing it, it changed into a living bird. He was the Son (of God) because he had no known father. He spoke while still in the cradle, which had never been done by any son of Adam before.

Regarding their view that Jesus was One of the Three, they argued with the expression of God: "We do what We will, We command what We like, We create what We please, and We decide what We wish." They said that if there were only one, God would have said: "I do what I will, I command what I like, I create what I please, and I decide what I wish." He is himself, Jesus Christ, and Mary. It was through their various views that the Qur'an was revealed.³⁵

When two Najran priests engaged in dialogue with the Prophet, he encouraged them to embrace Islam. The two priests emphasized that they had embraced Islam before Muhammad. Responding to their statement, the Prophet said, "Both of you are lying. Your belief that Allah has a son prevents you from embracing Islam, as does your worship of the cross and consumption of pork." When they inquired about the father of Jesus, the Prophet remained silent until the descent of the early verses of Surah Al-Imran, approximately eighty verses³⁶.

³⁵ Abd al-Rahmân Ibn Abû Bakr Jalâl al-Dîn Al-Suyûthy, *Al-Durr al-Mantsûr Fîal-Ta`wîl Bi al-Ma`tsûr*, II (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, 1998).

³⁶ Al-Suyûthy.

The research results depict the responses of the People of the Book in facing Islam brought by Muhammad (peace be upon him). Some of them were able to accept and then embrace Islam as their religion, while others rejected the religion.

When interpreting Q.S. 3:19, the author of Al-Manâr appears not to present these two reports and does not connect his interpretation to the historical context. Rasyid Ridla tends to use the internal context of the verse by presenting other verses to help understand the verse rather than understanding it based on the external context of the verse, both micro (*sabab al-nuzul*) and macro (socio-historical-cultural). With this approach, it can be seen that al-Manar's view is more appreciative of followers of other religions.

The view generated from understanding the verse is that all religions have a common essential point: surrendering oneself to God. The essence of religion (*haqiqah al-dîn*) is the attitude of surrender (*al-Islâm*). This view is difficult to express if the interpretation of the verse is based solely on external context. As mentioned before, the two narratives about the external context of the verse indicate the diverse attitudes of the People of the Book in responding to Islamic preaching. The macro context of the verse indicates the general attitude of the People of the Book who reject Islam. In contrast, the micro context of the verse indicates the individual events of the People of the Book who accept Islam. With this context, the word *al-Islâm* (using "*al*" *ta'rif*) feels closer to the meaning of formal religion, which is Islam as a religion brought by Prophet Muhammad saw.

The idea of the unity of religion, which is associated with Q.S. Āli Īmrān, 2: 19 is presented by al-Manâr as a consequence of the universal interpretation of *al-Islâm*. A similar term, *wahdah al-adyân* (the unity of religions), can be found in contemporary discussions about religious pluralism. The term *dîn* as the singular form of the word *adyân* is commonly found in the Qur'an, while the term *adyân* (the plural form of the word *dîn*) is never used throughout its verses. The use of the term *wahdah al-dîn* in al-Manâr in interpreting this verse deserves attention,

given that all existing tafsir works do not use this term, particularly when interpreting this verse.

The concept of *wahdat al-dîn* in this work relates to the internal context of the analyzed verse. This study model aligns with one of the principles that underlie the interpretation of al-Manâr: the paradigm of the unity of all verses in the Qur'an. The author of al-Manâr is confirmed to have understood the legitimacy of the term al-Islam, historically and linguistically, to refer to the totality of teachings proclaimed by the Prophet Muhammad. Two external contexts of this verse suggest the latter meaning. However, Muhammad' Abduh and Rasyîd Ridlâ choose a universal meaning to emphasize the connotative meaning of the unity of religion discourse (*wahdat al-dîn*). The indicator that supports this thesis is the emphasis that the expression "verses of Allah" at the end of the verse refers to "verses about the unity of religion" and "verses about the obligation to maintain the unity of religion."

The idea becomes sounder when the study is conducted by considering two other verses that contain the expression "*ummah wahidah*," which is interpreted as "religious unity," namely Q.S. Al-Mukminun, 23: 52 and Al-Anbiya', 21: 92. Previous interpreters did not carry out this type of contextual interpretation. In general, earlier Qur'anic interpreters, when interpreting Q.S. Ali' Imran, 3: 19, did not mean the word with *al-millah* (religion), but rather with an active noun, such as *al-tha'ah wa al-dzillah* (obedience and humility) by al-Thabary³⁷ (w. 923 CE), *al-jaza'* (reward) and *al-tha'ah* (obedience) by al-Razy (n.d.) (d. 1210 CE), and *al-tha'ah* (obedience) and *al-millah* (religion) by al-Qurthuby³⁸ (w. 1273 CE).

Meanwhile, relatively detailed explanations of the works can be found in the interpretations of the word *al-Islām*. With each approach, the previous interpretations can be divided into three groups, (1) interpretation of *al-Islām* with a linguistic approach, (2) interpretation of *al-Islām* as the religion of the prophets,

³⁷ ibn Jarîr Abû Ja'far, *Jâmi' al-Bayân Fî Ta'wil al-Qur`ân*.

³⁸ Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' Li-Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1996).

and (3) interpretation of *al-Islām* as a religion brought by Prophet Muhammad saw.

With the literal approach, the word *al-Islām* is interpreted as submitting, humbling oneself, and being exclusively devoted. Al-Thabary presents two narratives that define *al-Islām*, the narratives of Qatadah and Abu al-‘Aliyyah. Qatadah defines *al-Islām* as "bearing witness that there is no deity but Allah and acknowledging that what was brought by the Prophet is true from Allah." Meanwhile, Abu al-‘Aliyyah interprets *al-Islām* as "true sincerity for Allah and pure worship free from polytheism." In his work,³⁹ *al-Durr al-Mantsur fi al-Tafsir bi al-Matsur*, al-Suyuthy (d. 1505 AD / 910 H) relates the interpretation of *al-Islām* from Qatādah and al-Dlahāk. Both of them interpret *al-Islām* as the religion of Allah that is legislated through its messengers, and it is the only religion they brought. Meanwhile, al-Baidlawy⁴⁰ interprets *al-Islām* as "the teachings of tawhid and shariah brought by Prophet Muhammad saw."

Although it is said that when interpreting the Qur'an, Muhammad Abduh did not use references to these works, he conducted a comprehensive or partial study of them. From the perspective of its originality, the interpretation discourse of al-Manâr about this verse, as seen above, is not a purely new interpretation product. What Rashid Rida did was to make a choice and support one of the discourses that had existed before and deepen his analysis using his own chosen terminology.

The attention of previous interpretation writers when repeatedly interpreting the verse was focused on the resolution of the complexity of the reading of the word "*inn*" in "*inn al-dīn' ind Allāh al-Islām*," and all the consequences of its interpretation, whether it is read as "*inna*" or "*anna*." Based on the methodology advocated from the beginning, the author of al-Manâr, although not avoiding linguistic discussion, attempted to delve into a universal meaning relevant to his time. That universal meaning is (1) the essence of religion, total surrender to

³⁹ ibn Jarīr Abū Ja‘far, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān Fī Ta‘wīl al-Qur‘ān*.

⁴⁰ Al-Baidlāwī, *Anwār Al-Tanzīl Wa Asrār al-Ta‘wīl*.

Allah, and (2) the encouragement to avoid disputes. These two aspects are the focus of al-Manâr in interpreting the verse, with the key terms al-Islam and *Ahl al-Kitâb*.

According to Rasyîd Ridlâ, the emergence of positive and negative reactions as a result of something, including divine revelations, is a regular occurrence and can even be considered a universal phenomenon. Therefore, the conflicts experienced by the People of the Book after the arrival of a divine revelation (*al-ilm*) can also be experienced by the community of Muhammad. Unlike some Quranic commentators, such as Al-Baidlawi, who clarify the object of the People of the Book's conflicts as "the arrival of Prophet Muhammad (saw)," Rasyîd Ridlâ prefers to explain that the conflicts experienced by the People of the Book are general without specifying the object of their conflict.

The People of the Book's response or perception of the divine revelations is expressed in the form of a tradition practiced in life as a manifestation of that perception. The actual religion practiced or perceived by its followers is historical and cannot be guaranteed to be parallel with the normative or ideal definition of religion. The unity of religion expressed earlier refers to the ideal definition of religion. In other words, conceptually, all religions that God reveals through His messengers are equal and based on revelations. The thoughts of Muhammad Abduh and Rasyîd Ridlâ, that "a true Muslim is someone who does not associate any partners with God, who is sincere in his deeds, regardless of his religion, when he lived, and where he is located," seem to be intended to support their argument about the unity of religion.

As previously mentioned, the verse has a social context, both in the form of the historical background of the descent of the verse, both in micro and macro aspects. Both histories described the variety of Muslim relationships with the People of the Book when the verse was revealed. The history of the micro background (*asb*) is related to the acceptance of some People of the Book towards Islam, while the history of the macro background of the verse is related to the general attitude of the People of the Book who reject Islamic preaching. If so, the

expression of al-islâm in verse is closer to Islam as a religion brought by Muhammad (peace be upon him). However, Rasyid Ridlâ considers the internal context of the verse and chooses the interpretation of al-islâm with its literal meaning, which is the attitude of surrender. Specifically, Rasyid Ridlâ, in interpreting this verse about the essence of religion, chooses to consider the internal context and is reinforced by the literal meaning. Therefore, *al-islâm* in verse is not interpreted as the religion of Islam brought by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Regarding Q.S. Ali' Imran, 3:85, Rasyid Ridha also emphasizes the universal meaning of *al-Islām* that encompasses all the religions brought by the Prophets sent by Allah. The interpretation of the word *al-Islām* in verse as "surrender" originates from his consideration of the internal context of the verse, namely other verses written previously (Q.S. Ali' Imran, 3:84). This differs from Al-Thabary tended to the external context, which is the reason for revelation, that has been revealed beforehand, implying that the meaning of *al-Islām* in Q.S. Ali Imran, 3:85 is the religion of Islam brought by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

With the paradigm of unity of Qur'anic verses, al-Manâr can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of the verses. Just like when interpreting Surah Âli' Imrân, 3: 19, the author of al-Manâr strives to place Islam in the context of interpreting this verse in its relationship with previous religions. By considering this context, Rasyîd Ridlâ gives a broader meaning of *al-Islām* that does not just refer to a specific religion, such as Islam religion, as given by most previous interpreters.

A comprehensive interpretation of three verses (Q.S. Ali' Imrân, 3: 84, 85, and al-Nisâ', 4: 164) can lead to the understanding that Islam is the core of the teachings of all of God's messengers, whenever and wherever they were sent. The possibility of the existence of God's messengers at a certain time in China, India,

or elsewhere, bearing the teachings of Islam as revealed by Rasyid Ridla, provides an opportunity for the religions born in Eastern countries, such as Confucianism and Buddhism, to become revealed religions. Generally, earlier tafsir book writers did not explore the meaning of *al-Islam* in those verses in greater depth as Rasyid Ridlâ.

The interpretation of Islam by Al-Thabary (d. 310 H/922 CE) of the religion brought by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was derived from an analysis of the external context (*sabab al-nuzûl*)⁴¹. And after analyzing the internal context, specifically towards Q.S. Al-Baqarah, 2: 62, it is viewed that Q.S. Ali' Imrân, 3: 85 has abrogated (nâsikh) Q.S. Al-Baqarah, 2: 62.

According to the context in which and when the verse is interpreted, Rasyid Ridlâ's interpretation of *al-Islâm* with the attitude of submission is used to criticize religious practices of Muslim community that do not reflect the attitude of "submission" to Allah. This interpretation orientation certainly gives a different understanding when compared to the interpretation of the same verse with an external criticism orientation. The internal criticism refers to an effort to explain and provide guidance for the Muslim community that has been plagued by religious practices that are not in line with the essence of Islam. In contrast, external criticism in this context is an explanation of the errors of others who do not embrace Islam, as reflected in some interpretations based on the context of the revelation of the verse.

When seen in the context in which and when the al-Manâr interpretation was written, the use of this verse as an internal criticism is more significant, and the interpretation discourse that occupies a position as external criticism has been written by many scholars before. It is believed that the author of al-Manâr considered that, although the Muslim community at the time of writing this interpretation work was in a backward condition and filled with dullness and taqlid, they remained in their belief in the truth of Islam brought by Prophet Muhammad and that is why they still embrace and defend Islam. However, as

⁴¹ ibn Jarîr Abû Ja'far, *Jâmi' al-Bayân Fî Ta'wil al-Qur`ân*.

discussed in the previous chapter, the author of *al-Manâr* saw that Islam at that time was only carried as a symbol and a tool of social solidarity, politics, and so on and did not reflect the essence of Islam. This religious model caused the decline, dullness, and spread of blind *taqlid* among Muslims. This condition needs to be improved through a correct understanding of the source of Islamic teachings.

Furthermore, such an interpretation orientation, under the socio-political context of the time, provides a breath of fresh air for improving Muslim-Non-Muslim relations that are building a spirit of nationalism for the people of Egypt in facing the Western colonial government that is dominating them. One of the political strategies applied by England, as mentioned in the social setting of this *tafsir* writing, is the policy of divide and conquer, especially between Muslims and Coptic Christians, and propagating that the resistance of the Egyptian people was driven by religious fanaticism, not national spirit.

Such an interpretation orientation, in the opinion of the author, does not eliminate the original meaning or objective meaning of the verse, which is an external criticism of groups or individuals who have turned away from the essence of Islam and also a criticism of the People of the Book community due to their sectarianist attitude. The interpretation of the verse according to its context or subjective meaning when interpreting Islam in *al-Manar* can still be controlled through its objective meaning. The author of *al-Manar* found the contextual meaning and used it as internal criticism of the religious practices of the Muslim community itself, which he considered superficial, symbolic, and sectarian. That contextual meaning applies to all followers of religion, including the People of the Book, who are the target of the criticism in the verse. Because as repeatedly stated by Muhammad Abduh, the mission carried by the envoys of Allah is the same: faith and surrender to Allah, faith in the Day of Judgment, and doing good deeds sincerely.

Based on the unity of religion in the sense above, the theological aspects of religion do not experience annulment (*naskh*). In their original condition, the theological teachings of monotheistic religions do not undergo changes, developments, or renovations. In other words, the mission of all religions brought by the messenger of Allah is the same. However, it must be acknowledged that the aspects of the *shari'ah* of each religion change following the changes in cultural level and human readiness in accepting religious commandments, as analyzed by Rasyid Ridla when interpreting Q.S. al-Maidah, 5: 48.

CONCLUSION

The resulting perspective shows that Al-Manar has an appreciation for other religions, as all religions have an essential aspect in common, which is the overall devotion to God. The essence of religion is the attitude of devotion (*al-islām*). This perspective is difficult to arrive at if the interpretation of the verse is based solely on external context. The concept of *wahdat al-din*, related to Q.S. Ali Imran, 3:19 in this work, is presented by Al-Manār as a result of the universal interpretation of *al-islām*. This term is nearly synonymous with *wahdah al-adyān* (the unity of religions) in contemporary religious pluralism discussions. The use of the term *wahdat al-din* in Al-Manar is noteworthy, as previous works on interpretation, especially regarding this verse, did not use this term. The context of the concept of *wahdat al-din* arises in the internal analysis of the verse. This model aligns with one of the underlying principles of Al-Manar's interpretation: the paradigm of the unity of all Quranic verses. The author of Al-Manar acknowledges the validity of the term *al-Islām*, both historically and linguistically, to refer to the teachings accepted by the Prophet Muhammad. Both external contexts indicate this final meaning, but Muhammad' Abduh and Rasyid Ridla, in this work, chose a universal meaning to emphasize the connotative meaning of the unity of religion (*wahdat al-din*).

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