

**RENEWAL CONCEPT OF ISLAM AND ITS URGENCY
IN ADVANCING ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION IN
INDONESIA ACCORDING TO HARUN NASUTION**

Ihwan Agustono
Universitas Darussalam, Gontor
ihwan_agus@unida.gontor.ac.id

Abstract

This article intends to examine the concept of rational theological concepts in Islam with a focus on the thoughts of Harun Nasution. Harun Nasution is a controversial Islamic reformer. His idea was born as a response to and against the traditional ideas that developed at that time; even Harun Nasution dared to go against the flow of traditional ethics that according to him had long been rusty and difficult to remove. The emphasis of this paper is on the presentation of Harun Nasution's progressive thinking in the Islamic theological concept and its importance in advancing Indonesian Islamic civilization. Thus, the qualitative method will be employed in this work, along with a historical study approach gleaned from books, journals, and related publications. The essence of Harun Nasution's theory is the realization that Islam is a universal rational religion, and that via rational theology, people can fully comprehend the meaning of revelation in both the Qur'an and the Hadith. To build the Islamic Ummah such that it always exists exclusively through forming a rational society, a renewal movement through education is required.

Keywords: *Rational, Islam, Harun Nasution, Traditinal, Modern*

Abstrak

Artikel ini bermaksud untuk mengkaji konsep teologi rasional dalam Islam dengan fokus pada pemikiran Harun Nasution. Harun Nasution adalah seorang pembaru Islam yang kontroversial. Ide-idenya lahir sebagai respons terhadap dan sebagai oposisi terhadap gagasan-gagasan tradisional yang berkembang pada saat itu; bahkan Harun Nasution berani melawan arus etika tradisional yang menurutnya sudah lama berkarat dan sulit untuk dibapus. Penekanan dalam makalah ini adalah pada penyajian pemikiran progresif Harun Nasution dalam konsep teologi Islam dan pentingnya dalam memajukan peradaban Islam di Indonesia. Oleh karena itu, metode kualitatif akan digunakan dalam penelitian ini, bersamaan dengan pendekatan studi sejarah yang diambil dari buku-buku, jurnal, dan publikasi terkait. Inti dari teori Harun Nasution adalah pemahaman bahwa Islam adalah agama rasional universal, dan melalui teologi rasional, manusia dapat

sepenubnya memahami makna wahyu dalam Al-Qur'an dan Hadis. Untuk membangun Umat Islam sedemikian rupa sehingga selalu eksis melalui pembentukan masyarakat yang rasional, diperlukan gerakan pembaruan melalui pendidikan.

Kata kunci: *Rasional, Islam, Harun Nasution, Tradisional, Moderen*

Introduction

In the history of Islam, rational thought emerged first, followed by conventional thinking. Rational thought emerged during the Islamic Classical Age, while conventional thought emerged throughout the Islamic Middle Ages (1250-1800 AD). The perception of how high the position of reason is, as found in the Qur'an and Hadith, influences this rational thinking. This combination of Islam and Greek civilization gave rise to rational thought among Classical Age Islamic intellectuals. This was the secret to Islam's glory at the time.¹

Therefore, if secular rational thinking developed in Greece, then in the Islamic Classical Period, religious rational thinking developed. The thoughts of the scholars of philosophy and science, as well as those of the scholars in the field of religion themselves, are bound to the teachings contained in these two main sources. Thus, in the history of Islamic civilization, the thoughts of philosophers and the findings of scientific scholars do not conflict with the Qur'an and hadith.²

After a long decline of Muslims in the middle ages, religious rational thought has returned to grow in the Islamic world, with more emphasis on philosophy, science, and technology, which had previously been shifted by the traditional middle ages thinking model. This progress was accelerated in the twentieth century,

¹ Ajid Thohir, *Perkembangan Peradaban Di Kawasan Dunia Islam* (Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada, 2004), 25.

² Syaiful Muzani, *Islam Rasional: Gagasan Dan Pemikiran Prof*, trans. Dr Harun Nasution (Bandung: Mizan, 2005), 7.

giving rise to a fresh and rational understanding of the Qur'an and Hadith. This religiously rational thought immediately called into question to traditional Islamic thought. Humans have religious logical thought freedom, and reason plays an important role in interpreting the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. Only the absolute teachings of the two fundamental Islamic sources, namely *qath'i al-wurud* and *qath'i al-dalalah*, are linked to the freedom of reason.³

Harun Nasution, however, is confident that with the development of this rational thinking heritage, Islam would return to its former glory as it did in the old classical age.⁴

Research Method

In this study, the data sources used are self-written works by Harun Nasution, such as Muhammad Abduh dan Teologi Rasional Mu'tazilah (Muhammad Abduh and Mu'tazilah Rational Theology), Islam Rasional: Gagasan dan Pemikiran Prof. Dr. Harun Nasution (Rational Islam: Ideas and Thoughts Prof. Dr. Harun Nasution), Islam Ditinjau dari Berbagai Aspeknya (Islam Viewed from Its Various Aspects), and other works that elaborated on his thoughts, especially in the field of Islamic studies. The data were collected through documentation. The collected data were considered documents, which were then read and understood to find necessary data based on the research problems in this study. After the necessary data were considered sufficient, they were systematized for further analysis. Further, the researcher conducted an interpretation of what is implied behind the data. If necessary, comparison with the results of research or the works of other thinkers was also carried out to provide a more in-depth interpretation. This was done in order to understand and

³ Muzani, 9.

⁴ Abudin Nata, *Peta Keragaman Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada, 2001), 59.

formulate the concept of rational Islam, according to Harun Nasution, through a more objective and critical lens.⁵

This research relies on qualitative methodology with a historical approach to describe Harun Nasution's view on Islamic rational concept of Harun Nasution in advancing Islamic civilization in Indonesia. Historical research is supposed to provide the link that connects the past to the present and can be passed through some stages, which are: looking for the phenomenon, developing the hypothesis, exploring the data, collecting the data, and writing the findings based on the interpretation of the provided evidence.⁶ In addition, the historical study expects to make people learn from the past, and history also gives perspective on the present and investigates the context and situation.⁷

Biography of Harun Nasution

Harun Nasution was born on September 23, 1919, in Pematang Siantar, North Sumatra. He is the son of Abdul Jabar Ahmad, a trader from Mandailing and Qadhi (Penghulu) during the Dutch administration in Simalungun district, Pematang Siantar, as well as a scholar who mastered classic books. Meanwhile, his mother was named Maimunah, one of the most respected people in Mandailing Tapanuli and also a descendant of a scholar. Harun's mother once lived in Mecca and participated in several activities at the Grand Mosque. Harun Nasution comes from a lineage of devout worshippers and descendants of

⁵ Parisaktiana Fathonah, "Thoughts of Fazlur Rahman Education and Its Contribution to The Development of Islamic Education Theory," *DINIKA: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 3 (2018): 359–82, <https://ejournal.uinsaid.ac.id/index.php/dinika>.

⁶ Lisa M Given, *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (London: SAGE, 2008), 396.

⁷ David W Moore, E. Jennifer Monaghan, and Douglas K Hartman, "Values of Literacy History," *Reading Research Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1997).

respectable people, and he has a decent economic strategy. Such family conditions allowed Harun to continue his dream of studying science smoothly.⁸

Harun began his schooling at a Dutch school, Hollandsch-Inlandche School (HIS), when he was seven years old. Harun studied Dutch and sciences in school for seven years. In the family, he was in the proper discipline atmosphere. Harun began his religious education in his family's home by memorizing the Quran, praying, and participating in other forms of worship. Harun wanted to continue his education at MULO (Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs) after graduating from HIS, but his parents refused since they thought his general knowledge from HIS was sufficient. Finally, he finished his studies at the Moderne Islamietische Kweek School (MIK), the MULO counterpart in Bukit Tinggi. Due to parental pressure, he left MIK and proceeded to study in Saudi Arabia.

Harun Nasution study didn't last long. He pleaded with his parents to allow him to move his studies to Egypt. In Egypt, he began studying Islam at the Faculty of Ushuluddin of Al-Azhar University. He transferred to the American academic in Cairo after being dissatisfied with his academic education. Harun studied education and social studies in university rather than Islamic law.

After graduating from the university with a diploma and a BA degree, Harun Nasution worked in a private company and then at the Indonesian-Cairo consulate. It was at the Consulate that he married an Egyptian girl named Sayedah, started his diplomatic career. From Egypt, Harun was drawn to Jakarta to work as an employee of the Ministry of Home Affairs and then served as Secretary at the Indonesian Embassy in Brussels.⁹

⁸ Abdul Halim, *Teologi Islam Rasional: Apresiasi Terhadap Wacana Dan Praksis Harun Nasution* (Jakarta: Ciputat Press, 2001), 3.

⁹ Tim U.I.N.Syarif Hidayatullah, ed., *Ensiklopedia Islam Indonesia* (Jakarta: Penerbit Djambatan, 2010), 19.

In the 1960s, the domestic political situation in Indonesia compelled him to quit from his diplomatic position and return to Egypt. In Egypt, he returned to the world of knowledge by enrolling in an Islamic studies high school run by Abu Zahrah, a prominent Egyptian Fiqh professor. Harun earned an opportunity to study Islam at McGill University in Canada. He wrote about Islamic State Thought in Indonesia for his master's degree at this university, and he wrote about The Position of Reason in Muhammad Abduh's Theological Thought for his Ph.D. dissertation.

After obtaining his Ph.D, Harun Nasution returned to his homeland and devoted his attention to the development of Islamic thought through IAIN (Institut Agama Islam Negeri). He had been Chancellor of IAIN Jakarta for two periods (1974–1982). Then he pioneered the establishment of the Postgraduate Program for Islamic Studies at IAIN Jakarta. Then, with the establishment of the Postgraduate program, Harun served as Director of the Postgraduate program of IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta until he died in 1998 at the age of approximately 79 years.¹⁰

Many of Harun Nasution's works describe his thoughts on Islam, both in the form of books and in the form of writings in journals and magazines. A comprehensive paper containing his thoughts on Islam was written when he was still at McGill College.¹¹

Almost all of Harun's works have become textbooks, especially in the IAIN environment, including Muhammad Abduh dan Teologi Rasional Mu'tazilah (Muhammad Abduh and Mu'tazilah Rational Theology), written in 1987. This is Harun Nasution's Dissertation at McGill University, Canada. The final

¹⁰ Ahmad dkk Taufik, *Sejarah Pemikiran Dan Tokoh Modernisme Islam* (Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada, 2005), 161–62.

¹¹ Muhammad Arifin, *Teologi Rasional: Studi Analisis Terhadap Pemikiran Teologi Harun Nasution. Cet.I* (Banda Aceh: Ar-Raniry Press, n.d.), 20–21.

thesis of this book states that the style of theological thought developed by Abduh was heavily influenced by Mu'tazilah Theology. Harun is of the view that this kind of thinking model must be developed in the Islamic world so that Muslims can restore the glory of Islam as it had achieved in the old Classical Age. *Islam Rasional: Gagasan dan Pemikiran Prof. Dr. Harun Nasution* (Rational Islam: Ideas and Thoughts Prof. Dr. Harun Nasution) was written in 1995. This book is the result of his writings on various occasions, which were then compiled into a book. This book discusses social problems from an Islamic point of view. Indirectly, this book also explains that Islam is very responsive to the development of the times and contemporary society.

Harun Nasution's other work is *Islam Ditinjau dari Berbagai Aspeknya* (Islam Viewed from Its Various Aspects), written in 1974. In this book, Harun explains that Islam is flexible and able to respond to the challenges of the times, and Islam cannot be understood from one aspect only. Islamic history has recorded various interpretations from various times as well as various social problems. *Teologi Islam: Aliran-Aliran Sejarah Analisa Perbandingan* (Islamic Theology: Historical Schools and Comparative Analysis), written in 1977. This book discusses the theological thoughts that have been born and developed in Islam as well as explanations of various aspects of theology according to these schools. *Filsafat dan Mistisime dalam Islam* (Philosophy and Mysticism in Islam) was written in 1978. This book was deliberately titled *Mysticism in Islam* because Harun wanted this book to be welcomed by the audience for its contents. Basically, the contents of this book also discuss Sufism and the chronology of its birth in Islam.¹²

¹² Halim, *Teologi Islam Rasional: Apresiasi Terhadap Wacana Dan Praksis Harun Nasution*, 4.

The Concept of Rational Islam

To fully grasp the concept of rational Islam, at least two major elements must be thoroughly explained: first, the meaning of rational Islam itself; and second, the features of rational Islamic philosophy.

Rational Islam is one of the features of Islamic understanding that is adhered to by a small part of the Indonesian Muslim community, namely by those who have a higher educational background or by those who study Islam in universities in the West. Its existence is often suspected because it is feared that it will lead to Islamic understanding based solely on the will of the mind alone or interpret the teachings of the Qur'an and hadith according to one's heart's desire.¹³

Globally, Islam is a doctrine revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad SAW with the goal of instructing humanity on how to live happily in this world and the next. Meanwhile, rational is derived from the English term rational, which implies reasonable.¹⁴ The following rational word can refer to thoughts, views, and opinions that are consistent with the opinions of reason. While the concept of reason can refer to the power of thought that exists in people and is one of the soul's powers, it also refers to thinking, comprehending, and understanding.¹⁵ The term reason is derived from the Arabic word *'a-qa-la*, which meaning to bind and hold. In the Age of Jahiliyah, intelligent individuals (*'aqil*) are those who can control their emotions and hold back their anger in order to take smart action in dealing with difficulties.¹⁶

¹³ Nata, *Peta Keragaman Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia*, 59.

¹⁴ John M. dan Hassan Shadily Echols, *Kamus Inggris Indonesia, Cet.*, vol. VIII (Jakarta: Penerbit Gramedia, 1979), 466.

¹⁵ Kafrawi Ridwan, *Ensiklopedi Islam, Cet. IX* (Jakarta: Penerbit Gramedia, 1999), 98.

¹⁶ Ridwan, *Ensiklopedi Islam, Cet. IX*.

In terminology, it can be said that what is meant by rational is something that makes sense. Rational can also mean spiritual potential, so that humans can distinguish between right and wrong. Rational Islam is Islam that, in explaining its teachings, does not only rely on the opinion of revelation but also includes reason. Rational Islam also means Islam that respects the opinions of the mind and uses them to strengthen the arguments of religious teachings. And also means Islam, which explains the philosophical wisdom of a text, command, or prohibition contained in the revelation. For example, if Allah SWT commands prayer, then reason is used to seek wisdom contained in prayer orders.¹⁷

Rational Islam has the following characteristics: (1) Using reason in strengthening the arguments of the religious teachings it promotes, without abandoning revelation; (2) Always looking for wisdom that is acceptable to reason from a religious teaching; (3) rational Islam always thinks systematically, radically and universally; (4) Always ask using why questions; (5) His thoughts are in line with God's laws in nature; (6) Looking for adjustments between the opinion of reason and the opinion of revelation; and (7) The results of reasoning are considered not something final, but only temporary. For this reason, the door of *ijtihad* is never closed. Those who have these characteristics can be said to be rational Muslims.¹⁸

Harun Nasution's Rational Islamic Approach

Theologically speaking, there are at least four things, including: power, God's absolute will, God's justice, God's deeds, and the last being destiny.¹⁹ The discussions that have surfaced in Islam, especially in the early days, were more due to the dissatisfaction of a group of Muslim people with the process of

¹⁷ Nata, *Peta Keragaman Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia*, 62.

¹⁸ Nata, 62–63.

¹⁹ Harun Nasution, *Teologi Islam: Aliran-Aliran Dan Sejarah Analisa Perbandingan* (Jakarta: UI Press, 1985), 11.

tabkim, or arbitration. The excesses of this situation have forced certain groups to use logic and justify their views by using the Qur'an and punishing groups outside of them. This long feud has given rise to various groups and sects with distinctive thoughts and views. Among these groups are the Khawarij, Murji'ah, Mu'tazilah, Qadariyah, and Jabariyah.²⁰

The Khawarij are the first group. At first, the Khawarij questioned the Imamate, but in the end, they no longer questioned the Imamate, but they entered a theological issue where the Khawarij questioned who is a believer and who is called a disbeliever, who is still in Islam and who is not, because according to the Khawarij, a person who commits a grave sin can be considered a disbeliever. Meanwhile, Murji'ah is a group that believes that humans who commit major sins are still recognized as believers, not disbelievers. Regarding the sins he committed, they assume that it is God's right to forgive or not.²¹

The Mu'tazilah are a very extraordinary group in Yaman. Mu'tazilah considers that people who commit major sins are not Muslims and also not infidels, but these people are between believers and infidels, so they think that in the hereafter there will be a place between heaven and hell for the perpetrators of major sins. The name of the place is, *Manzilab Bayna al-Manzilatayn*. Qadariyah is a group that says that every human being is free to act according to their own will and that there is no intervention from God, so in English they are known as free will and free act. This is the human concept, according to the Qadariyah group. The last is Jabariyah. This group has the ideology that humans do not have the rights and abilities stated by Qadariyah, but according to Jabariyah, all human actions and behaviors are coercion from God.²²

²⁰ Nasution, 18.

²¹ Syed Amir Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (Jakarta: UI Press, 1998), 228.

²² Ali, 230.

In a hadith narrated by Abu Daud, Rasulullah SAW said that Allah SWT will raise up a reformer among the Muslims at every peak of one hundred years who renews their religious teachings. This hadith is quite popular among modernists of all time, and many consider it a trigger for certain people to rise up and become religious reformers for their people in history.²³

In contrast to that, Harun Nasution is more focused on the reality of what is happening. He believed that renewal in Islam only occurred in the modern century, which began in the 18th century AD. And at that time, the Eastern world, which was mostly Muslim, was dominated by the West. Along with politics and economics, Muslims must also accept contact with Western culture that is presented to them. Because Muslim culture in general is still experiencing degradation, it is only natural that Western culture is more dominant and dominates them in all aspects of life.²⁴

It was with this contact with Western culture that Islamic figures moved to reform their religious teachings. Initially in social, economic, political, and defense issues, but then spreading to the religious sector. This is what happened in Egypt, Turkey, and India. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, renewal occurred after influences from these countries touched the archipelago in the modern era.

With that view, Harun considers reforms in Islam triggered by the contact of Muslim life with Western culture that came to their colonies in the East. So that he interprets renewal in Islam with the thoughts or movements of Muslims to change their customs, thoughts, actions, or institutions with something new as found in the modern western world.²⁵

²³ Albani, *Muhammad Nasbiruddin Sunan Abu Daud Jilid 6. Terj. Yaser Qadhi* (Riyad: Darussalam Press, 2008), 364.

²⁴ Muzani, *Islam Rasional: Gagasan Dan Pemikiran Prof.* 8.

²⁵ Muzani, 8–9.

For example, if modernists strongly encourage Muslims to be confident in facing a problem in life because this is what religious teachings recommend, then with this understanding, the modernist's recommendations are due to their desire to change people's destructive attitudes to become dynamic because such an assumption exists in the West. Such an attitude existed among the thoughts of classical theologians, but it was only sought as an explanation for already held beliefs.

It is difficult to reject the notion that Harun Nasution is considered a modernist and reformer of Islam. In fact, he carried out reforms, unlike what other modernist figures generally did, through organizational, social, and political means. He launched his renewal ideas through IAIN Jakarta and his postgraduate program, which generally became the center of all IAINs in Indonesia. But to say that all IAINs and postgraduates throughout Indonesia are Harunistic in character is also not entirely true. It's a risk for every modernist; there are pros and cons to the idea of renewal. However, the spirit of Harun's ideas is always felt in every IAIN, although with different nuances.²⁶

Reading Harun Nasution's renewal ideas must be done proportionally. Maybe an idea of renewal from several decades ago is now considered normal because the world's development is accelerating. Harun's opinion that reforms in Islam were triggered by contact with the West is indeed a historical fact.²⁷

What is the basic or background for Harun Nasution regarding the importance of changing the theological concepts adopted and understood by Indonesian society today, whether the theological concepts generally believed by the majority of Indonesian Muslims are no longer relevant.

²⁶ Taufik, *Sejarah Pemikiran Dan Tokoh Modernisme Islam*, 163.

²⁷ Taufik, 162–63.

According to some of Harun Nasution's publications on the significance of improving Indonesian Muslim's theological understanding, this process is vital since Indonesian's general grasp of theological principles has caused them to be weak and lethargic in production. This is due to the knowledge of God's absolute power, which is taught by Ash'ariyah theology. As a result, Harun Nasution attempted to change this understanding by using the theological approach developed by the Mu'tazilah group, which holds that humans have the power and ability to take advantage of all of their potential by using the ability to think and cultivate the mind. For this reason, it is hoped that the Indonesian people will not stand idly by and accept their fate but try to change it with real effort.

Harun Nasution is a Muslim intellectual who is known to be very rationalist. This is reflected in his views, such as how to bring Muslims, especially in Indonesia, towards rationality and how to grow the capacity for recognition of Qadariyah people among Indonesian Muslims.²⁸ Harun often stated that one of the reasons for the decline of the Indonesian Muslim community was the result of the domination of Asyharism, which was very Jabariyah in nature (too surrendered to fate). These two questions are enough reasons for Harun Nasution's rational views. This rational understanding can be seen in several of Harun's writings, which state that the dynamics among Muslims must be revived by distancing themselves from the ideology of *zuhud*, namely the ideology that leaves worldly life and emphasizes spiritual life, which is widely found in Sufi orders and diverts the attention of the people from worldly life to the life of the unseen.

Besides that, Muslims must return to theology, which contains an understanding of dynamics and belief in ratios within the limits determined by revelation, and must be stimulated to think and

²⁸ Dewan Redaksi, *Ensiklopedi Islam* (Jakarta: PT. Ihtiar Baru Van Hoeve, 2001), 20.

make a lot of effort.²⁹ Harun added that the theology of God's absolute will with traditional, non-philosophical, and non-scientific thinking has greatly influenced Indonesian Muslims since its inception. Many Indonesian Muslims firmly believe that fate absolutely lies in God's hands; humans are helpless and can only surrender to God's will and decree. Due to the development of this theology of God's absolute will, many Muslims are doubtful and do not believe in the existence of the sunatullah, so human effort is meaningless; only a few efforts are carried out, and prayers are increased. To be sure, this similar attitude does not help much to increase productivity.³⁰

Harun Nasution promotes the idea of rational Islam, which emphasizes what is meant by revelation and human faith. Revelation is a sign of God's justice, kindness, and human obligation, so from a human standpoint, faith is a human response to God's revelation. Therefore, revelation and faith are two entities that respond to each other. Only God's revelation truly has meaning if it is responded to by human faith.³¹ Meanwhile, in developing his rational understanding, Harun Nasution showed that the Qur'an highly values reason. The decline of Muslims in Indonesia is partly due to the notion of taklid, namely passively following other people's opinions. This understanding causes Muslims to be static, uncritical, and lack respect for science.³² For this reason, in his various writings, Harun always connects reason with revelation and more clearly sees the function of reason, which is so important and independent.

²⁹ Harun Nasution, *Pembaharuan Dalam Islam, Sejarah Pemikiran Dan Gerakan* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1992), 201.

³⁰ Muzani, *Islam Rasional: Gagasan Dan Pemikiran Prof*, 120.

³¹ Taufik, *Sejarah Pemikiran Dan Tokoh Modernisme Islam*, xv.

³² Nata, *Peta Keragaman Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia*, 75.

The Urgency Of Rational Islamic Thought For The Advancement Of Islamic Civilization

According to Harun Nasution, in the history of Islam, initially rational thinking developed, but then traditional thinking developed. This rational thinking developed in the Islamic Classical Age (650–1250 AD), while traditional thinking developed in the Islamic Middle Ages (1250–1800 AD).

Classical-century rational thinking, according to Harun, was influenced by the perception of how high the position of reason is as found in the Qur'an and hadith. This perception met with the same perception from Greece through Greek philosophy and science, which were in the central cities of Greek civilization in the Classical Islamic World, such as Alexandria (Egypt), Jundisyapur (Iraq), Antakia (Syria), and Bactra (Persia). This is one of the main factors in the progress of classical Islam, as it has been recorded in the history of Islamic civilization. This rapid development was not only in the Eastern part of the Islamic world, which was centered in Baghdad, but also in the Western part of the Islamic World, namely Andalusia (Islamic Spain), with its two cities, Cordoba and Seville.³³

When the tradition of Islamic rational thought moved to Europe and developed there, in the Islamic Middle Ages, traditional thinking developed to replace rational thinking. In traditional Islamic thought, the scholars were not only bound by the Qur'an and Hadith but also by the teachings of the *ijtihād* of the scholars of the Classical Age, who were very numerous. Therefore, the scope of Islamic thought among the Islamic scholars of the Middle Ages was very narrow. They have no freedom of thought. As a result, science and philosophy, even religious sciences, did not develop in the Islamic Middle Ages. Philosophy and science even disappeared from circulation. This is in stark contrast to the situation in modern-day Europe, where

³³ Muzani, *Islam Rasional: Gagasan Dan Pemikiran Prof.*, 7.

philosophy and science are developing very rapidly and far surpassing the achievements of the Islamic world. This is what underlies the rational thought of Harun Nasution.³⁴

History has indeed recorded that a school of philosophy that exalts the truth of human thought as scientific truth has triumphed, even though scientific truth at that time was indeed not determined by rational truth plus empirical truth as it is now. It was at that time that Islam was born and developed. Because of this, there are some Islamic leaders who try to rationalize the Islamic teachings that they practice so that Islam is also considered to have scientific truth. They used the rational elements of Greek philosophy that they already knew to formulate religious teachings. This happens because of stimulants, both internal and external.

Humans, in facing the problems of their lives on earth, have been equipped by God with reason, something that He did not give to other creatures. He is not just like a piece of coir that drifts where the ocean waves throw it. Therefore, Islam, as a religion of nature, will certainly value reason in its teachings.³⁵

According to Harun, the Quran and Hadith of the Prophet SAW also respect reason. In his various writings, he quotes several verses of the Quran that require Muslims to use reason. Likewise with the hadith of the Prophet. But in the history of Islamic thought, he found a theological school that highly valued reason in all its opinions, namely the Mu'tazilah.³⁶

At the time when the revelation had not yet been sent down by God, the Mu'tazilah believed that the human mind could know the good and bad of an action and that reason could oblige humans to follow good deeds and distance themselves from bad

³⁴ Muzani, 7–8.

³⁵ Muzani, 122.

³⁶ Harun Nasution, *Akal Dan Wahyu* (Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia (UI) Press, n.d.), 5.

deeds, which were considered the Shari'a of that time. According to Harun, this was not found in Asy'ariyah, who only acknowledged that reason could know good and bad actions but could not oblige or prohibit humans from doing so. Because of that, he emphasized that the Mu'tazilah valued the ability to reason more than the Ash'ariyah. So that the Mu'tazilah's opinions are more rational than other opinions in responding to issues of Islamic theology.

With this discovery, Harun often expressed that Islam is a religion that highly values reason when making the Mu'tazilah as its prototype. He really wanted Muslims to be able to progress because they used their rationality in all fields, and during the development of the Mu'tazilah, Muslims were experiencing a golden period in history. Likewise, in the West, people are progressive because they are rational in life.³⁷

The attitude of the Mutazilah, which Harun also greatly appreciated, was his open attitude. The school, which is considered the true founder of the science of Kalam, has indeed always adopted various foreign ideas, such as Greek philosophy, which at that time could be said to be general knowledge for Muslims. They use elements of that knowledge in formulating Islamic teachings, especially in the field of theology. Almost all of the themes used in Islamic theology to date have come from the Mutazilah, who have made Greek philosophy one of their references.

Apart from that, Harun also criticized the Mu'tazilah for being intolerant of their opinions. Although they value reason, they cannot tolerate differences of opinion. Many of the characters disbelieve one another because of differences in opinion, even though they are bound by the relationships between students and teachers and even children and their parents. The *mihnah* incident, which caused misery to many religious leaders who had different

³⁷ Nasution, 126.

opinions from the Mu'tazilah and was carried out during the reign of Caliph al Mu'tashim, often received sharp criticism from Harun Nasution. He considered this action un-Islamic because Islam highly values the ratios used in arguing.³⁸

Conclusion

Harun Nasution is an Indonesian reformist whose major idea is rationalism. Harun's rationalist thought is divided into four main ideas: (1) rational religion as the foundation for Islamic worldview and morals; (2) rational theology as the foundation for people's renewal and development; (3) rational society as the foundation for social aspirations, politics, and interreligious relations; and (4) rational culture as the foundation for educational and scientific development. The understanding of rationalism also leads to the conclusion that the fatalism ideology that exists among Muslims must be replaced with an awareness of human freedom in choice and action, since this is what will cause the dynamism of Muslims to return, or, as Muhammad Abduh said, the old school ideology, which is then replaced with the understanding of dynamic.

In fact, the main teachings conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad broadly cover three aspects. The first is Tawhid, or monotheism; the second is being rational, not only with worldly matters but even in matters of religious belief; and the third is the moral lessons that humans need for the happiness of the world and the hereafter. Of these three things, it is closely related to the essence and existence of humans who are born into the world, which consist of physical and spiritual elements. The physical needs material needs, and the spiritual needs spiritual activities (worship).

³⁸ Muzani, *Islam Rasional: Gagasan Dan Pemikiran Prof*, 137.

Harun's firm description in his book *Reason and Revelation in Islam* concludes that in Islamic teachings, reason has a high position and is widely used, not only in the development of science and culture but also in the development of religious teachings themselves. Reason never cancels revelation; reason remains subject to the text of revelation. The text of revelation remains true and is considered absolutely true. Reason is only used to understand the text of revelation and never to oppose it. Reason only gives an interpretation of the revealed text according to the inclination and ability of the interpreter.

The essence of Harun Nasution's thought is the understanding that Islam is a universal rational religion, and with a rational theology, humans can fully understand the essence of revelation in both the Qur'an and Hadith. To develop the Islamic society so that it always exists only by forming a rational society, the way to do this is through a renewal movement through education. The concept of thought is contained in Harun Nasution's movement through other educational institutions. Some of Harun's ideas that have become a culture in the world of Indonesian education today include: (1) Changing the lecture system, which has been considered feudal so far, into something very humane; (2) Changing from an oral culture to a written culture; and (3) Introducing an approach to understanding Islam as a whole and universally.

Social problems that have been difficult to tackle can now be solved because of the advances in modern science and technology. As a result, there is little doubt that community stability is an essential prerequisite for the successful execution of development projects. Creating societal stability, of course, necessitates social change, beginning with changing mental attitudes, which can only be accomplished through educational changes. Such is the case with a Muslim intellectual who has made significant contributions to the establishment of a scientific ethos and is the driving force behind Islamic thought reform in

Indonesia. Religious education is essential for the continual development of concepts and contents for a new Indonesia.

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