

The Death of Prophet Isa in *Tafsīr al-Manār* by Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida

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Abstract: This study discusses the story of the death of Prophet Isa in *Tafsīr al-Manār* by Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Muḥammad Rashid Rida. Most commentators interpret QS. Ali ‘Imrān: 55 and QS. al-Nisā’: 157-158 by stating that Isa is still alive today. Allah saved Isa from assassination and crucifixion attempts by his enemies by lifting him up to the sky. One day Prophet Isa will come back down to earth before the end of the world to kill the Dajjal who committed destruction and apostasy on earth. This study is a literature review because it relies entirely on literature data from tafsir books, books, and journals, both print and online. Descriptive analysis was used in this study by including a hermeneutic approach that looked at the triadic relationship between text, interpretation, and context of interpretation. This research found that in the *Tafsīr al-Manār* it was mentioned that the Prophet Isa had died a natural death. Prophet Isa was indeed saved by Allah but not by lifting him to heaven. Ordinary methods protected him, finally died naturally, and was placed in a glorious place in the sight of Allah. Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida argue that there is not a single Qur’anic verse that states that Isa is still alive. Thus, the sentences in the Qur’an state that Isa has died. The hadith that explains the appointment of Prophet Isa is also the *ḥadīth āḥād* that cannot be used as a postulate for matters concerning faith or *i’tiqād*. This finding has implications for the understanding that the Prophet will not return to earth before the world’s end.

Keywords: death of Isa; exegesis; *Tafsīr al-Manār*

A. Introduction

The death of Isa al-Masih is still a matter of debate, whether his death was natural like man or lifted by Allah to the sky. In a discussion entitled the Islamic-Christian Dialogue event with the theme of the controversy of death, resurrection, and ascension of Isa al-Masih, Menahem Ali, MA, a lecturer in cultural sciences Fisip Universitas Airlangga who is also a member of *Manuskrip Indonesia* stated, Simon was the one who carried the Cross on his shoulders. The contents of this Jewish document state that Isa said, “They saw me, they condemned me, but others drank wine mixed with bile. It is not me but someone else. It was Simon

who carried the Cross on his shoulders. Others wear crowns of thorns while I am in the highest place and laugh at all the excessive things that the rulers have done to me and all the fruits of their mistakes and foolishness that I have laughed at them.”¹

Several researchers have carried out studies related to the death of Isa, including Akhmad Albed about the death of Isa in the perspective of five Tafsīr. From this research, it can be seen that some *mufassir* said Isa was still alive because of the hadiths of the Prophet stating that Isa al-Masih would descend again before the end of the world; some stated Isa had died with the statement that the hadiths had the status of *ḥadīth āḥād*. This study concluded that Isa had died (died) for various reasons that broke the opinion that Isa was still alive. The theological implications as a result of the death of Isa are of 3 kinds; first, Isa died, and the hadiths about the *nuzūl* of Isa, which had the status of *ḥadīth āḥād* were not used. Secondly, Isa has passed away, but the hadiths about *nuzūl al-Masīḥ* are understood by the coming of Isa’s teachings that are full of peace and make God happy. Third, the understanding of hadith about *nuzūl al-Masīḥ* is understood as a human figure by the people of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him); the Ahmadiyya tradition embraces this understanding.²

Muḥammad Nasyirudin, in his thesis, stated that the death of Prophet Isa was an ordinary death like other normal humans following the Sunnatullah. This conclusion has a significant difference compared to some other *mufassir*, namely that the Prophet Isa has not died and was lifted up by Allah to the sky of his body and spirit. As for the story of the crucifixion of the Prophet Isa, some *mufassir*, even in *Tafsīr al-Manār*, also stated that Isa survived the crucifixion event. The theological implications of belief in Isa’s death and crucifixion are as follows. First, for those who do not believe in the Prophet Isa being lifted by Allah to the sky of his spirit and body and will one day descend into the world in the last days, it is not a guarantee of the salvation of the world and the hereafter. He has been detached from some *khurāfāt* that can damage the creed if this belief has gone

¹ Admin Hidcom, “Perdebatan Kematian Isa Sudah Terjadi sebelum Islam Datang,” Hidayatullah.com, May 10, 2013, <https://hidayatullah.com/berita/nasional/2013/05/10/2955/perdebatan-kematian-isa-sudah-terjadi-sebelum-islam-datang.html>.

² Akhmad Albed, “Kematian Isa as dalam Perspektif Lima Tafsīr,” [Undergraduate Thesis] (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2009), <https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/1864/>.

through a process of seeking faith. Secondly, for those who still believe that Allah lifted Isa to the heavens of his spirit and body and will one day descend into the world in the last days, he did not become an infidel.³

Dwi Purnomo, in his master thesis, discusses the death of Prophet Isa in the Qur'an according to Ibn Kathīr and Maulānā Muḥammad 'Ali. He compares different Ibn Kathīr with Muḥammad 'Ali in interpreting verses about the death of Isa. Ibn Kathīr used the *bi al-ma'thūr* method, while Maulānā Muḥammad 'Ali preferred the *bi al-ra'yi* method. Ibn Kathīr argued that Isa was not crucified because Allah took him up to the sky. Regarding the death of Prophet Isa, he stated that Prophet Isa had not died until the time when it would be brought back in the end times as evidence of the approach of doomsday. Ibn Kathīr's opinion follows the narrations he mentions in his *tafsir*. Ibn Kathīr's view on the not crucifixion of Prophet Isa is in line with the majority of *mufasssir*, including Ibn Abbas, al- Ṭābarī, Zamakhsharī, Baiḍawī, al-Tanṭawī, Ibn Taymiyah, al-Suyuṭī, al-Wahīdī, and others. Maulānā Muḥammad 'Ali said that Isa was crucified but not to death because the process of crucifixion was so fast that it did not make him die. As for the narration of the Prophet Isa being likened to someone else, this cannot be accepted by reason.

Regarding the death of Prophet Isa, he stated that Prophet Isa had died a natural death, like previous prophets. According to him, the existence of an opinion that the Prophet Isa is still alive and in the sky is denied by reason. Similarly, with the *mutawātir* narration of the coming of Prophet Isa in the last days, he believed the narration but confused it with the one who came in the last days was someone who had qualities like the Prophet Isa.⁴

In his thesis, Roma Wijaya about Maulānā Muḥammad 'Ali's interpretation of the story of Prophet Isa in the Holy Qur'an examines the pattern of Maulānā Muḥammad 'Ali's interpretation of the death of Prophet Isa, which is different from the understanding of scholars in general. According to Roma Wijaya, the

³ Muhammad Nasyirudin, "Kematian dan Penyaliban Nabi Isa as dalam Tafsir al-Manar," [Undergraduate Thesis] (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2016), <https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/23381/>.

⁴ Dwi Purnomo, "Kematian Nabi Isa a.s. dalam al-Qur'an menurut Ibnu Katsir dan Maulana Muhammad Ali (Studi Perbandingan Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azhīm dan Holy Qur'an Arabic Text, English Translation and Commentary by Maulana Muhammad Ali)," [Master Thesis] (Institut PTIQ Jakarta, 2021).

performance of Maula Muḥammad ‘Ali was influenced because he lived in a British colony that could not be separated from Christian missionaries and the domination of Ahmadiyya teachings.⁵ Farhan Iqbal, a preacher and member of Ahmadiyya Muslim Community Canada, stated Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, in his book *Izaala-e-Awḥaam*, lists 30 verses of the Qur’an that prove that Isa died. This list is available in *Ruḥāni Khazā’in*, vol. 3, p. 423-437.⁶ The root of the dispute between Ahmadis and other Muslims was the death of Isa. If Isa had died, the prophecy of His coming should be considered again.⁷

Ahmad Tholabi Kharlie, studying the *tafsir* methods of Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Muḥammad Rashid Rida in *Tafsir al-Manar*, stated that *Tafsir al-Manar*, with its various merits, is recognized as a monumental work that has contributed no less to the treasures of Islamic thought, especially in the realm of modern exegesis.⁸

Unlike previous studies, this study tries to understand Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida’s interpretation of the death of Prophet Isa with all the arguments that corroborate it and looks at the context of the interpretation of the Qur’an in Egypt in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries AD.

This study is library research because this study relies entirely on literary data such as tafsir books and journals. This study uses descriptive analysis with a hermeneutic approach. This hermeneutic approach is used to see the triadic relationship between the Qur’anic text, context, and interpretation. This study aims to see how the concept of the death of the Prophet Isa in *Tafsir al-Manar*, and in what context Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida interpret the Qur’an verses about the death of the Prophet Isa.

⁵ Roma Wijaya, “Interpretasi Maulana Muhammad Ali terhadap Kisah Nabi Isa a.s dalam Kitab the Holy Qur’an: Containing the Arabic Text with English Translation and Commentary,” [Master Thesis] (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2022), <https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/54012/>.

⁶ Farhan Iqbal, “30 Verses of the Holy Quran which Prove the Natural Death of Jesus Christ (As),” *Alislam.Org*, n.d., <https://www.alislam.org/articles/30-verses-of-holy-quran-which-prove-natural-death-of-jesus-christ/>.

⁷ Talat Syam, “Why Is Jesus’ Death so Important for Muslims?,” *Alhakam.org*, January 8, 2021, <https://www.alhakam.org/why-is-jesus-death-so-important-for-muslims/>.

⁸ Ahmad Tholabi Kharlie, “Metode Tafsir Muhammad Abduh dan Muhammad Rasyid Ridha dalam Tafsir al-Manar,” *Tajdid* 25, no. 2 (2018): 119–40, <https://doi.org/10.36667/tajdid.v25i2.323>.

B. Biography of Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Muḥammad Rashid Rida and *Tafsir al-Manar*

Muḥammad ‘Abduh

Muḥammad ‘Abduh was born in Mahallat Nasr, Egypt, in 1849 AD./1265 AH. His father, Abduh Hasan Khairullah, came from Turkey and had long lived in Egypt. At the same time, his mother was from the Arabs, who traced his lineage to ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb.⁹ ‘Abduh has an intelligent brain. Still, at a very young age, he could memorize the Qur’an. He then went to study the basics of Islam at the Shaykh Ahmad Mosque in Tanta in 1862. But because it did not fit the learning model that relied on rote memorization, he left the city two years later and returned to his hometown.¹⁰ In 1865, at the age of 16, he married. Not long after married, he was forced to return to study in Tanta. Finally, he hid in the house of his uncle, Shaykh Darwish Khadr, who was also a pious man in Islamic sciences. He also learned Islamic sciences from his uncle. At the persuasion of his uncle, he was willing to return to Tanta to continue his studies.¹¹

In 1869-1877, ‘Abduh continued his studies at al-Azhar University and obtained the title “*al-‘ālim*”. He met and studied with Jamaluddin al-Afghani, a prominent reformist at that college. Al-Afghani’s ideas of renewal influenced much of his thinking. His involvement in political actions led to his two exiles abroad. In 1883, with al-Afghani, he published the magazine *al-Urwah al-Wuthqā*, which inflamed anti-Western expansion into Muslim countries. His great ideas came from al-Afghani, while Abduh expressed these ideas in the form of articles in the magazine. But this magazine only lasted for eight months.¹²

After completing his exile sentence, in 1888, he returned to Egypt and was appointed district court judge. In between his busy life, he also teaches at al-Azhar University and fills studies in the community. Among his students and admirers was Muḥammad Rashid Rida. In 1899 he was appointed *mufti* of Egypt, a strategic

⁹ Harun Nasution, *Pembaharuan dalam Islam: Sejarah Pemikiran dan Gerakan* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang 1987), 58.

¹⁰ Ṭāhir al-Tanahi, ed., *Mudhakkirāt al-Imām Muḥammad ‘Abduh* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 2003), 29.

¹¹ Mark Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 1–5.

¹² Nurlaelah Abbas, “Muhammad Abduh: Konsep Rasionalisme dalam Islam,” *Jurnal Dakwah Tabligh* 15, no. 1 (2014): 51–68, <https://doi.org/10.24252/jdt.v15i1.338>.

post tasked with interpreting Islamic laws in the country. In the same year, he was also selected as one of the members of the council of Shuro in the country.¹³ He had planned the establishment of the Egyptian University, which the government and Egyptian citizens enthusiastically welcomed. However, he did not have time to see the establishment of the university, later known as Cairo University, because he died on July 11, 1905.¹⁴

Muḥammad Rashid Rida

Sayyid Muḥammad Rashid Rida was born in Lebanon on 27 Jumadal Ula 1282 H. Because he had a direct line of descent to Hussein, son of Ali and Fatimah, daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad, he got the title of '*Sayyid*' in front of his name.¹⁵ His father, a scholar of the Shadziliyyah order, sent him to the Ibtidaiyyah Rashidah Madrasa in Tripoli to study tools (Nahwu and Sharaf), Aqidah, Fiqh, Geography, as well as Arabic and Turkish. Seeing that the school's students were only prepared to become government employees, Rida felt less interested in continuing to study there. Therefore in 1299 AH/1822 AD, he moved to Madrasah al-Waṭaniyyah al-Islāmiyyah in Tripoli, a school founded by Shaykh Ḥusayn al-Jisr, an admirer of al-Afghani. It was this scholar who later influenced the development of Rida's thought.¹⁶ He greatly admired al-Ghazali's thoughts, leading him to join the Naqsyabandiyah Order. Still, he later abandoned it after becoming acquainted with Muḥammad 'Abduh's reform ideas through the magazine *al-Urwah al-Wuthqā*.¹⁷

When 'Abduh visited Beirut to meet his friend Shaykh 'Abdullāh al-Barākah, who taught at al-Katuniyyah school in 1885, Rida met him and discussed with him about al-Zamakshari's *Tafṣīr al-Kashshaf*. The discussion made Rida very

¹³ Harun Nasution, *Muhammad Abduh dan Teologi Rasional Mu'tazilah* (Jakarta: UI Press, 1987), 17–18.

¹⁴ M. Quraish Shihab, *Studi Kritis Tafṣīr al-Manar Karya Muhammad Abduh dan Muhammad Rasyid Ridha* (Bandung: Pustaka Hidayah, 1994), 17; Atik Wartini, "Corak Penafsiran M. Quraish Shihab dalam Tafṣīr al-Misbah," *Hunafa: Jurnal Studia Islamika* 11, no. 1 (2014): 109–26, <https://doi.org/10.24239/jsi.v11i1.343.109-126>.

¹⁵ Aḥmad al-Shirbāsh, *Rāshid Riḍā Ṣāhib al-Manār* (Cairo: Majlis A'lā Lishnun al-Islāmiyyah, 1970), 100–104.

¹⁶ Shihab, *Studi Kritis Tafṣīr al-Manar Karya Muhammad Abduh dan Muhammad Rasyid Ridha*, 60.

¹⁷ Shihab, 64.

impressed and amazed by ‘Abduh’s intelligence in explaining aspects of Islam. That made him decide to emigrate to Egypt in 1898 AD. After several months of studying with ‘Abduh, the teacher and student published al-Manar magazine. On 22 Shawwal 1315 AH/March 17, 1898 AD, the magazine, for the first time, later received rave reviews in Egypt and other Islamic countries.¹⁸ The ideas of ‘Abduh and Rida were published in this magazine; later, many of them were republished in book form, entitled *Tafṣīr al-Qur’ān al-Ḥakīm*, later famously called *Tafṣīr al-Manār*.

Rida died when the car he was driving had an accident after taking Prince Faisal al-Saud home on 23 Jumadal Ula 1354 AH/August 22, 1935 AD.¹⁹

C. *Tafṣīr al-Manār*

Its original name was *Tafṣīr al-Qur’ān al-Ḥakīm*, but because it was originally the subject of study in the magazine *al-Manār*, the work of *tafṣīr* is more famously known as *Tafṣīr al-Manār*. The authors of this *tafṣīr* introduce the work as a book of *tafṣīr* that collects authentic narrations and a firm sense that explains the wisdom of shari’a and *Sunatullāh* (the prevailing laws of Allah) to man and explains the function of the Qur’an as a guide for all humankind, at every time and place, and compares its instructions with the condition of Muslims today (at the time of its publication) who have turned away from them, and (compare also) with the *salaf* (ancestors) who clung to the rope of *hidāyah*.²⁰

Tafṣīr al-Manār is the result of transcriptions of Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s recitations and lectures at al-Azhar Mosque since Muharram 1317 AH. Before publishing in the magazine, Rida usually showed his writing to ‘Abduh to be corrected first. Sometimes ‘Abduh corrected it by subtracting or adding explanations as necessary.²¹

‘Abduh gave *tafṣīr* lectures from QS. al-Fātiḥah to QS. al-Nisā’: 125. He could only give lessons up to that verse because he died. Using the method used by his

¹⁸ Shihab, 64.

¹⁹ Kharlie, “Metode Tafṣīr Muhammad Abduh dan Muhammad Rasyid Ridha dalam Tafṣīr al-Manār.”

²⁰ Shihab, *Studi Kritis Tafṣīr al-Manar Karya Muḥamad Abduh dan Muḥammad Rasyid Ridha*, 67.

²¹ Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Muḥammad Rāshid Riḍā, *Tafṣīr al-Qur’ān al-Ḥakīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), Juz 1: 12-13.

teacher, Rida then continued writing the *tafsir* until QS. Yūsuf: 101, which was published as a 12-volume book only until QS. Yūsuf: 52. It is noteworthy here that *Bihjat al-Baithar* continued the interpretation of Rida and published it under the name Rashid Rida.²²

Regarding its interpretation that uses a lot of reason and logic, *Tafsir al-Manar* is included in the category of *tafsir bi al-ra'y*. However, sometimes it also uses a lot of the narration of the Prophet and companions.²³ While in terms of style, this interpretation belongs to the category of "*tafsir al-adab al-ijtimā'iy*", which is a literary and cultural interpretation of society, because its interpretations are widely associated with the condition of society to encourage progress and development.²⁴

D. Death of Prophet Isa in *Tafsir al-Manar*

The death of Prophet Isa is described by Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida while interpreting QS. Āli 'Imrān: 55 and QS. al-Nisā': 157-158. 'Abduh understood QS. Āli 'Imrān: 55 which reads: "*Innī mutawaffika wa rāfi'uka ilayya wa muṭahhiruka min al-ladhīna kafarū*" by explaining that the word *tawaffi* linguistically means to take something perfectly. The word is used for the meaning of death, as the word of Sunatullāh in QS. al-Zumar: 42 which reads: "*Allāh yatawaffa al-anfusa hīna mautihā* (Allah holds the life of a person at the time of death ...) and QS. al-Sajdah: 11 which reads: *qul yatawaffākum malak al-maut al-ladhī wukkila bikum* (Say: "The angel of death who is given up for (taking your life) will kill you, then to your Lord, you will be returned."). So, the word *innī mutawaffika wa rāfi'uka* can be interpreted: "Verily I put you to death and put you after death in a glorious place by My side." As well as the word of Allah in QS Maryam: 57 which reads *wa rafa'nāhu makānan 'aliyyā* (We have raised him - Idris- to high dignity). Meanwhile, what is meant by the purification of Isa from the unbelievers is to save him from the accusations of the unbelievers who intend evil.²⁵

²² Muḥammad Ḥussain al-Dhahabi, *al-Tafsir wa al-Mufasssirūn* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Hadīthah, 1999), Juz 2: 243.

²³ Rifat Syauqi Nawawi, *Rasionalitas Tafsir Muhammad Abduh: Kajian Masalah Akidah dan Ibadah* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2002), 110.

²⁴ Abdul Muin Salim, *Metodologi Ilmu Tafsir* (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2005), 45.

²⁵ 'Abduh and Riḍā, *Tafsir al-Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm*, 316.

'Abduh goes on to say that such a perspective is understood by readers whose mind is clear, corroborated by arguments and verses of the Qur'an. But the *mufassir* diverted the discussion from its literal meaning (*zāhir*) to be in harmony with the narrations about the existence of the Prophet Isa, who was taken up to the sky with his body.²⁶ 'Abduh further explained that some *mufassir* stated that '*innī mutawaffika*' means: Verily I put you to sleep. Others say the phrase means: Verily I pulled you from the earth with your spirit and body. While the word *wa rāfi'uka ilayya* is an explanation of the word *tawaffī*. Others explain it with: Verily I save you from those who transgress those limits. It is impossible for them to kill you. I shut you down naturally and lift you up to My side. 'Abduh further explained that scholars have two methods of understanding it. One of them is very famous, that the Prophet Isa was lifted in a living condition with his spirit and body, would descend in the end times and rule by adhering to Islamic law, then Allah put him to death. Concerning the question of why "killing you" takes precedence over "lifting you up" which clearly contradicts the text of the verse, it is said that the letter '*wau* – that means and' in the verse is not to *li al-tartib*, to show the chronological order in its mention, in a clear discussion, unless there is a point. While there is no point in the verse to put death before the rapture because the rapture is more important because of the good news of salvation and elevation to a high degree.²⁷

The second method is that understanding the verse must necessarily be based on its *zāhir*, where the word *tawaffī* is interpreted in literal meaning, where it is a common thing to happen. While the rapture of Prophet Isa occurred afterward because what was meant was the rapture of the spirit. Besides, mentioning *khiṭāb* to someone while the meaning is his spirit. The spirit is the essence of man, while the body is like a loaned cloth that can decrease, increase, or change. In this regard, 'Abduh argues that the hadith that explains the descent of Isa in the end times is *ḥadīth āḥād*, while it concerns the issue of *i'tiqād* (faith). Matters concerning the issue of *'aqīdah* that are closely related to the belief must be *qaṭ'iy*. In this case, there is no *ḥadīth mutawātir* that explains it. In addition, it conquered the descent of Isa to earth by winning the opinion that his spirit was appointed and winning his apostolic secret to man. It means preferring the

26 'Abduh and Riḍā, 316.

27 'Abduh and Riḍā, 317.

teachings of Prophet Isa about the commandment to teach compassion, love and salvation, and taking the purpose and purpose of the Sharia, not just stopping at the *zāhir* aspect. Isa did not come to the Jews with a new Sharia but came with the spirit to break over Moses' teaching of the Sharia to be in harmony with the substance of his teachings. It is also important to remember that the last religion's followers are not frozen (*jumūd*) in understanding religious education in their own way, but must understand them correctly and clearly. Spiritual understanding will only remove substance and wisdom from religious teachings. It means taking substance from the teachings of the Qur'an, which they cannot understand correctly because their *taqlid* is actually a danger to religion. The hadith that describes the descent of Prophet Isa to earth is a hadith that is transmitted meaningfully, as most hadiths exist. The person transmitting the information will usually do it according to his understanding. While related to the Dajjal,²⁸ who the Prophet Isa would later kill, 'Abduh explained that the Dajjal is a symbol of *khurāfāt* and ugliness that will disappear with the establishment of substantively understood religious teachings.²⁹

The issue of the death of Prophet Isa was then explained by Rashid Rida, a disciple of 'Abduh who succeeded him in continuing the writing of *Tafsīr al-Manār*, in his presentation when interpreting QS. al-Nisā': 157-158. Rashid Rida who continued 'Abduh's interpretation is still the same as other *mufassir* that the Jews did not kill and crucify the Prophet Isa, but the other who was likened to him. They were unsure what they saw, whether Isa was crucified. The doubt spread to all who saw it.³⁰ In this regard, Rida refers to several Bibles held by Christians (Matthew 24: 31 and Mark 14: 28) that Isa said to his disciples: "You are all doubt on this night (the night on which Isa was sought to be killed)."³¹ By referring to all the narrations of the earlier scholars, Rida states that all the narrations make it clear that Isa survived from assassination attempt made by those who wanted his death.³²

²⁸ 'Abduh and Riḍā, 317.

²⁹ 'Abduh and Riḍā, 318.

³⁰ 'Abduh and Riḍā, Juz 6: 18.

³¹ 'Abduh and Riḍā, 19.

³² 'Abduh and Riḍā, 19.

When interpreting verses “*bal rafa’ahullāh ilaih*,” Rida then repeats ‘Abduh’s explanation in interpreting Ali ‘Imrān: 155. By quoting the narration of Ibn ‘Abbas, who states that the word *tawaffī* means deadly, Rida explains that the word ‘*rafu*’ means Prophet Isa survived from the unbelievers because of the help of Allah who chose and drew him closer to Him. So, what is meant is not to lift Isa to the sky with his spirit and body. Rida then explained the postulate of most *mufassirs* in the form of hadith *mi’rāj*, which demonstrates that the Prophet Muhammad in the *mi’rāj* event met with Prophet Isa and his cousin Prophet Yahya in the 2nd layer of the sky. Rida then stated that if the hadith is used as an argument for the elevation of Prophet Isa to the sky, then the hadith will also be a postulate for the appointment of Prophet Yahya and all the apostles and prophets seen by Prophet Muḥammad in the *mi’rāj* event, while no one said so.³³ Thus, both ‘Abduh and Rida argued that Isa died naturally, was not killed or crucified, nor was he taken up to the 2nd layer of the sky.

E. Death of Prophet Isa: The Role of Reason and the Position of *Hadīth Āḥād* in the Interpretation of the Qur’an

Death is a situation in which the spirit is separated from the human body. Biologically, death is of two types: clinical and cerebral. Clinical death is the absence of pulse and breathing and is a reversible process, for example, with the help of CPR (*Cadiac Pulmonary Resuscitation*). While cerebral death is death that occurs when all cerebral functions stop and are irreversible/can not return.³⁴ This death is then interpreted as real death because the body can no longer carry out life activities, such as breathing and moving.³⁵ All humans will experience this death without exception to various causes: illness, accident, murder, old age, and due to other causes.

This human death is a necessity that will surely happen to anyone following the laws of nature (*Sunnatullāh*). This way of understanding death led Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida to argue that anyone, including the Prophet

³³ ‘Abduh and Riḍā, 20.

³⁴ Etty Indriati, “Mati: Tinjauan Klinis dan Antropologi Forensik,” *Berkala Ilmu Kedokteran* 35, no. 4 (2003): 231–39.

³⁵ Ozi Setiadi, “Kematian dalam Prespektif al-Quran,” *Al Ashriyyah* 3, no. 2 (2017): 69–93, <https://doi.org/10.53038/alashriyyah.v3i2.27>.

Isa, had died. The death of Prophet Isa is something that goes according to the laws of nature and can be reasoned by the human brain. Physically, Isa was an ordinary man who would experience phases of life that ended in death. Understanding the word “*Innī mutawaffīka wa rāfi'uka ilayya*” with “I killed you by natural death and put you to your noble degree by My side” makes more sense and corresponds to *sunnatullāh* than “I saved you by lifting you up to the 2nd layer of the sky”.

For ‘Abduh and Rida, the use of reason and the logic of life in understanding the verses of the Qur’an is a non-negotiable necessity.³⁶ So great was the role of reason in interpreting the Qur’an that ‘Abduh and Rida were very careful in using the hadiths of the Prophet. Both of them do not readily accept the hadiths of the Prophet to be used as arguments in interpreting the Qur’an, especially in the context of understanding the life and death of Prophet Isa which concerns *i'tiqād* and belief. ‘Abduh and Rida argued that in matters of faith, the *ḥadīth aḥād*³⁷ cannot be used as an argument for interpreting the Qur’an, although they are found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Accepting or rejecting the use of hadith must be based on the reasons of the discipline of hadith itself.³⁸ In explaining questions of belief, the source of argument should be used in the Qur’anic verses that explain it, or at least the *ḥadīth mutawātir*.³⁹

For ‘Abduh and Rida, when the verses of the Qur’an and the *ḥadīth mutawātir* do not explain clearly (*ṣarīḥ*), then the clear and independent reason must be used to provide interpretation. A clear intellect will connect the Qur’anic verses with

³⁶ For ‘Abduh and Rida, interpreting the Qur’an must be based on a number of basic assumptions, namely: each surah in the Qur’an is a unified verse, the content of the teachings of the Qur’an is generally accepted throughout the ages, the Qur’an is the first and main source for the Shari’a, the need to combat the taiguance of Muslims, the importance of the use of reason in reasoning and the use of the scientific method, relying on the authority of reason in understanding the verses of the Qur’an, does not explain in detail the problems that the Qur’an alludes to with *mubham*, is very careful with the earlier *tafsīr bi al-Ma’tsūr* and with the so-called *Isrāīliyyāt* message, and the importance of creating order in people’s lives referring to the Qur’anic instructions. See ‘Abdullāh Maḥmūd Shahatah, *Manhaj Imām Muḥammad ‘Abduh fi Tafsi'r al-Qur'an al-Karīm* (Cairo: Nashr al-Rasā'il al-Jāmi'ah, 2003), 34.

³⁷ *Hadīth aḥād* is hadith that narrated by one or several persons whose number does not reach the degree of *mutawātir*. See Syuhudi Ismail, *Pengantar Ilmu Hadis* (Bandung: Angkasa, 1992), 139.

³⁸ Ilyas Daud, “Pemikiran Muhammad ‘Abduh tentang al-Qur’an Tafsir,” *Farabi* 10, no. 1 (2013): 15–34, <https://journal.liaingorontalo.ac.id/index.php/fa/article/view/764>.

³⁹ *Hadīth mutawātir* is a hadith narrated by a number of people in each *thabaqat* (level) of their *sanad*, which because there are so many, it is customary for them impossible to agree to lie. See Muh. Zuhri, *Hadis Nabi: Telaah Historis dan Metodologis* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 1997), 80.

the natural laws prevailing in society. A clear intellect will also carefully and carefully look at the redactions of the verses of the Qur'an. In QS. Āli 'Imrān: 55 and QS. al-Nisā': 157-158 which discuss the death of Prophet Isa, no word explains that Allah saved Prophet Isa by lifting him up to the second layer of the sky. So that the interpretation of the Qur'anic verse that Prophet Isa had died and was placed in a noble position before Allah could be accepted by the public easily. People will be easier to understand God's messages in the Qur'an because their interpretation is connected with natural laws, events, or events that arise in society.

The interpretations of 'Abduh and Rida are very different from those of *jumhur ulamā'* in general. For example, the interpretation of some scholars in general, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭābary and Ibn Kathīr, states that Isa is still alive, not crucified or killed. Isa was saved by lifting him up to the sky.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, some commentators agree with 'Abduh and Rida, Maulānā Muḥammad 'Ali, and most Ahmadiyya groups, for example. But despite both claiming that Isa had died, there was a difference between them. Maulānā Muḥammad 'Ali and the Ahmadiyya did say that Isa had died a natural death, but Roman soldiers crucified Isa for a while but did not die. Allah later saved Prophet Isa, migrated to India, died, and was buried in Srinagar, Kashmir.⁴¹ While 'Abduh and Rida give more logical interpretations by saying that the word "*wamā qatalūhu wa mā ṣalabūhu*" in QS. al-Nisā': 157 that the Prophet Isa was indeed saved by Allah, neither killed nor crucified. Because, indeed, the redaction of the verse explains so. But the word "*innī mutawaffika wa rāfi'uka*" in QS. Āli 'Imrān: 55 clearly shows that Prophet Isa had certainly died and was placed on the side of Allah the Glory.

In this case, 'Abduh and Rida were independent interpreters who were not devoted to any school of thought. It is in their position as independent people that both of them become forward-thinking and dynamic interpreters, giving great authority to reason in understanding the verses of the Qur'an so, that his interpretations dwell not only on the literal meaning of the verse being explored, but also its metaphorical meaning.

The rational interpretation of Isa' death in QS. Āli 'Imrān: 55 and QS. al-Nisā: 157-158 can be understood in the context of the social, political, economic, and

⁴⁰ Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭābarī, *Jāmi'u al-Bayān* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1431), Juz 4: 800; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsi'r al-Qur'an al-'Azīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmyyah, 1433), Juz 1: 523.

⁴¹ Syafi R. Batuah, *Beberapa Persoalan Ahmadiyah* (Jakarta: Sinar Islam, 1978), 7.

cultural background in Egypt at the end of the 19th century AD, which includes 'Abduh and Rida. After entering the 19th century, modern scientific and technological progress has entered the Islamic world, including Egypt. At a time in Islamic history seen as the initial phase of the modern period, the Islamic world had many contacts with the Western world, which resulted in bringing new ideas to the Islamic world, such as rationalism, nationalism, democracy, and so on. Thus, in the Islamic world and Egypt in particular, thoughts and movements arose to adapt Islamic religious understandings to new developments.⁴²

At that time, Egypt seemed to be the axis of a new consciousness that the Islamic world had indeed been completely left behind in the context of its relations with the West. This new realization moved Muslim activists in Egypt, Jamaludin al-Afghani, Muḥammad 'Abduh, Muḥammad Rashid Rida, Muḥammad 'Ali Pasha, and others to call for the revival of Islam. They called for the revival of Islam in social, political, military, economic, cultural, and religious thought. The renewal of Islamic thought, the basis for the movement of all aspects of Muslim life, was echoed. In this context, 'Abduh and Rida's interpretation of the death of Prophet Isa appears in *Tafṣīr al-Manār*.

F. Conclusion

From this elaboration, Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida argued that the Prophet Isa had died naturally. Prophet Isa was saved by natural means and eventually died and was placed by Allah in a glorious place in the sight of Allah. Most commentators understand that Isa was not saved by lifting him to heaven. 'Abduh and Rida argue that in the verses of the Qur'an there is not a single word that explains that Isa is still alive. The word '*innī mutawaffika*', which means 'I have killed you,' is clear enough to state that Isa has died. The hadiths that explain that Isa was taken up to heaven are *ḥadīth āḥād* that cannot be used as an argument in explaining matters related to beliefs and creeds. Matters about beliefs and creeds should be explained with the sharia verses of the Qur'an or *ḥadīth mutawātir*. The interpretation of 'Abduh and Rida can be understood in Egypt in the late 19th and early 20th century AD, which became the epicenter of the Islamic renewal

⁴² Muhajirin Muhajirin, "Ide-Ide Pembaharuan Jamaluddin al-Afghany, Muhammad Abduh, dan Rasyid Ridha," *Dirasat Islamiah: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman* 3, no. 1 (2022): 63–80, <https://doi.org/10.59638/dirasatislamiah.v3i1.82>.

movement. The Islamic renewal movement begins with the renewal of Islamic thought, which must all be done with apparent reason. Islamic thought must not only be supported by *naṣ qat'iy*, such as the clear verses (*ṣārīḥ*) of the Qur'an and *ḥadīth mutawātir*, but must be acceptable to human reason.[]

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