

Scientific Exegesis and Epistemic Boundaries: A Qualitative Study of *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* on Qur'anic Cosmology

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Abstract

The development of modern science, particularly in cosmology and natural sciences, has created epistemological tensions in Qur'anic studies. Scientific exegesis (*tafsīr ilmī*) has emerged as an approach linking revelation with empirical knowledge, yet it often faces criticism for potentially reducing divine revelation to positivistic frameworks. *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*, compiled by the Lajnah al-Qur'an wa al-Sunnah under the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in Egypt, occupies a unique position as an institutional tafsir designed for modern readers. This study analyzes the construction and epistemological legitimacy of scientific interpretation in *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*, focusing on QS. Al-Anbiyā' [21]:30 and QS. Adz-Dzāriyāt [51]:47. A qualitative design employing content analysis and hermeneutic interpretation was used, emphasizing textual fidelity and contextual understanding. Findings show that *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* separates core Qur'anic meanings from supplementary scientific explanations, positions science as an illustrative tool, and balances textual, scientific, and contemporary reader needs. Analysis of cosmological verses reveals understanding of the initial union and separation of heaven and earth, planet formation, emergence of life from water, and cosmic expansion, consistent with modern scientific theories. This approach reflects a moderate scientific tafsir that preserves the epistemic authority of the Qur'an while facilitating constructive dialogue between revelation and science.

Keywords: Scientific tafsir, *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*, Qur'anic Cosmology, Epistemology, Revelation and Science.

Abstrak

Perkembangan ilmu pengetahuan modern, terutama dalam kosmologi dan sains alam, menimbulkan ketegangan epistemologis dalam studi Al-Qur'an. Tafsir ilmiah (*tafsīr ilmī*) muncul sebagai pendekatan yang menghubungkan wahyu dengan pengetahuan empiris, namun kerap menuai kontroversi karena potensi mereduksi wahyu ke kerangka positivistik. *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*, disusun oleh Lajnah al-Qur'an wa al-Sunnah di bawah Majelis Tinggi Urusan Islam Mesir, menempati posisi unik sebagai tafsir institusional yang dirancang untuk pembaca modern. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis konstruksi dan legitimasi penafsiran ilmiah dalam *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*, khususnya QS. Al-Anbiyā' [21]:30 dan QS. Adz-Dzāriyāt [51]:47. Metode penelitian menggunakan desain kualitatif dengan analisis konten dan interpretasi hermeneutik, menekankan kesetiaan tekstual sekaligus pemahaman kontekstual. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* memisahkan makna utama Qur'ani dari penjelasan ilmiah tambahan, menempatkan sains sebagai alat ilustratif, dan menyeimbangkan teks, konteks ilmiah, serta kebutuhan pembaca modern. Analisis ayat kosmologis



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mengungkapkan pemahaman tentang penyatuan dan pemisahan langit dan bumi, pembentukan planet, penciptaan kehidupan dari air, serta ekspansi alam semesta, yang sejalan dengan temuan ilmiah kontemporer. Pendekatan ini menegaskan tafsir ilmiah moderat yang menjaga otoritas epistemik Al-Qur'an sekaligus memfasilitasi dialog konstruktif antara wahyu dan ilmu pengetahuan.

Kata kunci: Tafsir ilmiah, Tafsir al-Muntakhab, Kosmologi Al-Qur'an, Epistemologi, Wahyu dan Sains.

Introduction

In recent decades, the intersection of modern science and Qur'anic studies has generated significant epistemological tension. Rapid advances in cosmology, physics, and natural sciences have led some interpreters to read the Qur'an through the lens of scientific theories that are tentative and subject to constant revision. Surveys indicate that a growing number of contemporary exegetical works attempt to reconcile scripture with science, yet many lack a rigorous methodological framework, leaving the epistemic authority of revelation vulnerable. This situation places *tafsīr 'ilmī*—the scientific interpretation of cosmological verses—at the center of controversy, praised as evidence of the Qur'an's intellectual vitality and universality, yet criticized for reducing divine revelation to positivistic frameworks (Mir, 2017).

Historically, classical exegetes allowed for a rational integration between revelation and empirical knowledge. Al-Ghazali emphasized that the Qur'an contains general principles applicable to all knowledge, while al-Razi (1981), in *Tafsir al-Kabir*, often combined theological analysis, rational reasoning, and empirical observation (Al Balushi & Janabi, 2024). In the modern era, this tendency became more explicit in works such as Thanhawi al-Jauhari's *Al-Jawahir fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim* and Maurice Bucaille (1980) conducted studies that read the Qur'an in light of contemporary scientific understanding.

Critiques of *tafsīr 'ilmī* are equally strong. Asy-Syatibi emphasized that the Qur'an was revealed as moral and legal guidance, not as a scientific textbook. Relying on tentative scientific theories risks reducing the Qur'an to a positivistic framework, weakening its epistemological autonomy and deviating from the primary purpose of revelation (Mir, 2017). Contemporary scholarship also stresses that the epistemic legitimacy of scientific interpretation depends on its foundation in classical Qur'anic sciences, including Arabic linguistics, *balāghah*, *usūl al-fiqh*, and hadith studies, to avoid speculative readings (Mårtensson, 2022).

In the context of contemporary changes and trends, *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* occupies a unique position as an institutional exegesis compiled by the *Lajnah al-Qur'an wa al-Sunnah* under the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in Egypt. Jamal al-Din Muhammad Mahmoud, in the muqaddimah of *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*, explains that this tafsir was designed to meet the needs of modern readers with concise, clear, and communicative language, presenting the Qur'anic meaning directly while addressing aspects of scientific miraculousness through footnotes separate from the main text. The tafsir emphasizes that the Qur'an is an eternal miracle and an inexhaustible source of knowledge, guiding humans toward both worldly and spiritual welfare (Jamal al-Din Muhammad Mahmoud, 2025).

Ideological and sectarian factors further shape the practice of interpretation, including scientific tafsir. Toru (2024) notes that theological affiliations influence how exegetes interpret cosmological verses. Modern approaches increasingly integrate hermeneutics and contextual analysis, enabling dialogue between the text, historical-social context, and readers while maintaining textual boundaries (Supena, 2024). Emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, introduce new challenges regarding interpretive authority and epistemic validity (Azhar et al., 2025; Syafi'i et al., 2025).

Despite the well-established debate on scientific interpretation, studies on institutionalized scientific tafsir remain limited. Most existing research focuses on theoretical discussions or individual exegetes, without examining how official tafsirs establish epistemic legitimacy, set methodological boundaries, and balance revelation and science. This gap highlights the need for rigorous analysis of tafsir institutions that attempt to synthesize traditional Qur'anic scholarship with contemporary scientific knowledge.

Addressing this gap, the present study analyzes the construction and legitimacy of scientific interpretation in *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*, focusing on cosmological verses, specifically QS al-Anbiyā' [21]:30 and QS al-Dhāriyāt [51]:47. The research question is: *How does Tafsir al-Muntakhab construct and justify its scientific interpretation, and what epistemological principles underpin this approach?*

The study hypothesizes that *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* represents a moderate model of scientific tafsir, which separates the primary Qur'anic meaning from supplementary scientific explanations, avoids direct identification between the Qur'anic verses and specific scientific theories, and positions science as an illustrative tool rather than the foundation of interpretation. By doing so, *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* offers a hermeneutic solution to the tension

between revelation and science, maintaining the epistemic authority of the Qur'an while providing an interpretive dialogue relevant to contemporary readers.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to analyze the construction and epistemological foundations of scientific interpretation in *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*. The unit of analysis is the *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* text itself, specifically the sections addressing cosmological verses, including QS al-Anbiyā' [21]:30 and QS al-Dhāriyāt [51]:47. Focusing on these verses allows the study to examine how the tafsir operationalizes scientific knowledge in dialogue with Qur'anic revelation.

The qualitative design was chosen because the study aims to explore meaning, interpretive strategies, and epistemic reasoning rather than to quantify phenomena. This approach is suitable for textual analysis, hermeneutic interpretation, and epistemological inquiry, allowing an in-depth understanding of both explicit explanations and implicit assumptions within the tafsir.

Data sources include the primary text of *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*, its muqaddimah, footnotes, and any explanations related to scientific or cosmological content. Secondary sources consist of scholarly works on scientific tafsir, classical exegetical texts referenced within the tafsir (e.g., Al-Ghazali, Fakhruddin al-Razi, Thanhawi al-Jauhari), and contemporary studies discussing the epistemology of *tafsīr 'ilmī*.

Data collection was conducted through systematic reading and coding of relevant passages in *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*, aiming to identify patterns of scientific explanation, integration of classical knowledge, and epistemic justification. Footnotes and marginalia were analyzed as supplementary data to understand the tafsir's approach to scientific miraculousness and integration with modern knowledge. Citations within the text were also examined to assess intertextual connections and methodological consistency.

Data analysis was carried out through qualitative content analysis and hermeneutic interpretation, which involved grouping passages based on the type of scientific reasoning employed, analyzing the relationship between Qur'anic meaning and scientific explanation, and evaluating the epistemological principles underlying the tafsir's methodology. The analytical process emphasizes both textual fidelity and contextual understanding, ensuring that conclusions reflect the author's interpretive intent and the broader intellectual framework of scientific tafsir.

By combining textual, hermeneutic, and epistemological approaches, this study provides a comprehensive account of how *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* constructs its scientific interpretation, maintains the authority of revelation, and engages with contemporary scientific discourse.

Results and Discussion

A. Cosmological Exegesis and Scientific Illustrations in *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*

Based on the *muqaddimah* of *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*, this exegesis was compiled to present the meaning of the Qur'an in a clear, concise, and communicative manner, while addressing aspects of scientific miraculousness through footnotes separate from the main text. Jamal al-Din Muhammad Mahmoud emphasized that this tafsir is intended to guide modern readers in understanding the Qur'an as an eternal miracle and an inexhaustible source of knowledge.

Analysis of *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* shows how this institutional tafsir constructs a scientific interpretation of cosmological verses while preserving the primary Qur'anic meaning and emphasizing the dialogue between revelation and science. This study focuses on QS. Al-Anbiyā' [21]:30 and QS. Adz-Dzāriyāt [51]:47, which discuss the origin of the universe, the creation of living beings, and cosmic expansion.

QS. Al-Anbiyā' [21]:30 reads:

أَوَمْ يَرَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْنَقَ فَقَطَقَنَا هُمَا وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَتَّىٰ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

“Do not those who disbelieve see that the heavens and the earth were initially joined together, and We separated them, and from water We created every living thing? Then will they not believe?”

In its exegesis, *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* emphasizes that this verse contains scientific meanings aligned with modern findings regarding the formation of planets and the earth. The tafsir states:

«تقر هذه الآية معانٍ علمية أيدتها النظريات الحديثة في تكوين الكواكب والأرض، إذ أن السموات والأرض كانتا

في الأصل متصلة بعضها على شكل كتلة متصلة متماسكة .. والحقيقة العلمية التي اتفق عليها هي أن

السموات والأرض كانتا متصلتين، واستدل على ذلك بأدلة علمية عديدة . أما الفتق فهو انفصال، وهو ما قررته

الآية الشريفة وأيداها العلم بعد ذلك ... وجعلنا من الماء كل شيء حي»

“This verse asserts scientific meanings supported by modern theories on the formation of planets and the earth, in which the heavens and the earth were initially connected as a single dense mass. The scientific fact agreed upon is that the heavens and the earth were connected, as evidenced by numerous scientific proofs. The term ‘fataq’ (separation) indicates their splitting, as affirmed by the verse and later confirmed by science. And from water We created every living thing.” (Majelis al ’A’la li al Syuun al Islamiyyah Mesir, 2001).

The tafsir further explains two scientific theories supporting the interpretation of this verse. The first theory addresses the formation of the solar system through the aggregation of gas and dust particles, planet formation, and the role of solar activity and photosynthesis in producing free oxygen in the atmosphere. The second theory explains the creation of the universe in general, stating that the early universe was a dense mass of atoms under extremely high pressure, which then underwent a massive explosion forming planets, the sun, and other celestial bodies.

QS. Adz-Dzāriyāt [51]:47 reads:

وَالسَّمَاءَ أَبْيَنَاهَا بِأَيْدٍ وَإِنَّا لَمُوسِّعُونَ

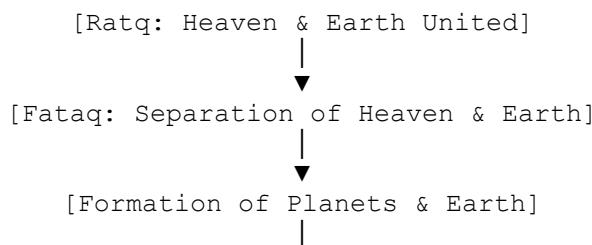
“And the heaven We constructed with might, and indeed We are expanding it.”

In its exegesis, this verse indicates the vastness of the universe and Allah’s power, in line with the modern concept of cosmic expansion. *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* emphasizes:

«تشير هذه الآية الكريمة إلى معانٍ علمية كثيرة، منها أن الله سبحانه وتعالى خلق هذا الكون الواسع بقوّة وهو على ما يشاء قادر. ومعنى السماء في الآية كل ما علا الجرم ... وعبارة الآية الكريمة (وإنا لموسعون) تشير إلى تلك السعة المذهلة التي عليها الكون منذ خلقه»

“This verse conveys many scientific meanings, including that Allah created this vast universe with might, and He is All-Powerful over everything. The term ‘heaven’ in the verse encompasses all bodies above the earth, including planets, stars, and solar systems, which are so vast that human intellect cannot comprehend them. The phrase ‘and indeed We are expanding it’ refers to the astonishing expanse of the universe since its creation.” (Majelis al ’A’la li al Syuun al Islamiyyah Mesir, 2001).

Figure 1. Illustration of the Early Universe According to QS. Al-Anbiyā’ [21]:30 and Tafsir al-Muntakhab

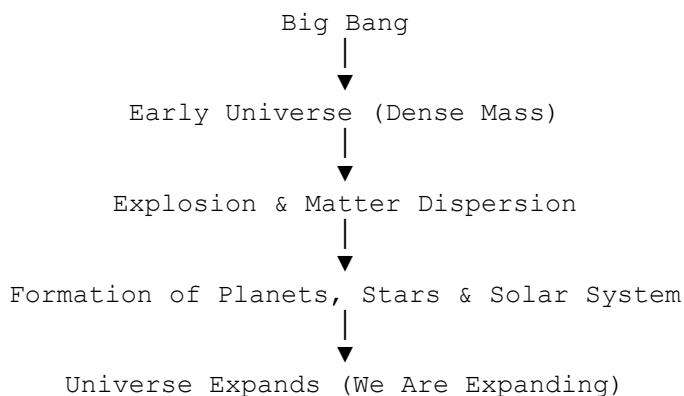


▼
[From Water, Life Emerges]

Notes:

- **Ratq (united)** → represents the initial state of the universe, where heaven and earth were a single, dense, connected mass.
- **Fataq (separated)** → represents the separation of heaven and earth, in line with modern scientific understanding.
- **Subsequent stages** → formation of planets, atmospheric evolution, and emergence of life from water, consistent with *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*.

Figure 2. Illustration of Cosmic Expansion According to QS. Adz-Dzāriyāt [51]:47



Notes:

- Illustrates how the universe expanded from an initial dense mass.
- The phrase “and indeed, We are expanding it” is interpreted as cosmic expansion.
- The diagram helps readers connect Qur'anic verses with modern scientific concepts of universal expansion.

The analysis confirms an important pattern in *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*: the primary Qur'anic meaning is separated from supplementary scientific explanations, so science functions as an illustrative tool enriching readers' understanding without absolutizing scientific theory. This approach reflects a moderate scientific tafsir that balances text, scientific context, and modern readers' needs, while maintaining the epistemic authority of the Qur'an.

B. Scientific Exegesis and Qur'anic Hermeneutics

Qualitative analysis of *Tafsir al-Muntakhab*, focusing on QS. Al-Anbiyā' [21]:30 and QS. Adz-Dzāriyāt [51]:47, demonstrates a careful integration of modern scientific knowledge and the Qur'anic text. Based on systematic reading, coding, and content analysis, the tafsir places scientific explanations regarding cosmological phenomena—such as the initial unity of the heavens and the earth (*ratq*) and their separation (*fataq*)—in footnotes separate from the

main text. This strategy allows readers to understand scientific interpretations without altering the primary Qur'anic meaning (Jamal al-Din Muhammad Mahmoud, 2025; Mauluddin, 2024).

The hermeneutical approach emphasizes a dialogical relationship between revelation and modern knowledge. Rational insight functions to illuminate, not replace, divine guidance, in line with Al-Ghazali's principle (as cited in Al Balushi & Janabi, 2024) that reason can support but does not supplant the authority of revelation. Further analysis reveals patterns in the use of modern science to explain planetary formation, atmospheric evolution, and the emergence of life from water, consistent with contemporary scientific tafsir approaches (Mir, 2017; Afandi, 2021).

Tafsir al-Muntakhab also situates itself within classical traditions by referencing works such as *Tafsir al-Kabir* by Fakhruddin al-Razi and *Al-Jawahir fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim* by Thanhawi al-Jauhari (1350H), which emphasize rational and empirical integration in the interpretation of cosmological verses. The distinction between literal exegesis and *ta'wil*, as established by al-Māturīdī, is carefully observed to maintain the epistemological boundaries of revelation (al-Māturīdī, 2020).

Managing the tension between divine authority and scientific explanation is a key concern in Qur'anic studies. Strategies relevant to *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* include:

1. **Historical and Contextual Analysis** – Understanding the historical and situational background of verses, as in Muqātil's exegesis of the Battle of Badr (Güler, 2021), underscores the importance of context in interpreting revelation.
2. **Integration of Science and Revelation** – Some modern tafsirs, including Malaysian interpretations, incorporate scientific findings to interpret Qur'anic verses, aiming to demonstrate compatibility between the Qur'an and modern science (Syamimi Mohd et al., 2014).
3. **Dialectical Process** – Deductive-falsification and inductive-verification procedures, as applied by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in medical fatwas (Sodiqin, 2025), position revelation as the primary authority while using science to support decision-making.
4. **Philosophical and Theological Considerations** – Phenomenological approaches to revelation, considering pre-linguistic experience and textual symbolism, help bridge the gap between abstract theological concepts and practical scientific understanding (Graves, 2021).

Epistemological challenges are also acknowledged, including distinctions between *tafsir* (contextual meaning) and *ta'wil* (deeper interpretation), as outlined by al-Māturīdī and al-Isfahānī (Ünsal, 2022). Methodological integration from linguistic, hermeneutical, and *ta'wil* perspectives ensures a holistic interpretation, relevant for modern readers, while respecting the authority of revelation and highlighting the illustrative function of science in understanding Qur'anic cosmology (Mårtensson, 2022; Supena, 2024; Azhar et al., 2025).

This multifaceted approach ensures that *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* successfully manages the tension between revelation and scientific knowledge, preserving the authority of the sacred text while facilitating a productive dialogue with contemporary science.

C. Epistemic Legitimacy and Methodological Boundaries

Tafsīr al-Muntakhab demonstrates a systematic effort to preserve the epistemic legitimacy of the Qur'an by establishing a clear distinction between the primary textual meaning of revelation and supplementary scientific explanations. This distinction is not merely a technical or editorial choice—implemented through footnotes and marginal annotations—but reflects a deeper epistemological stance rooted in Islamic intellectual tradition. Within Islamic theology and historiography, revelation (*wahy*) is understood as the ultimate source of knowledge, providing absolute and divine guidance that is free from error and indispensable for comprehending historical, cosmological, and existential truths (Arifin & Haqqi, 2024).

This epistemic priority of revelation is further reinforced by contemporary Muslim scholars who emphasize that *wahy* offers foundational knowledge that transcends the inherent limitations and variability of human reasoning and scientific theorization. Unlike empirical knowledge, which remains contingent upon methodological frameworks and historical contexts, revelatory knowledge is regarded as transhistorical and immutable, thereby constituting the normative reference point for all other forms of knowing (Hosseinieskandian et al., 2023). This conceptual framework underlies *Tafsīr al-Muntakhab*'s methodological orientation, in which the Qur'anic text retains epistemic autonomy and is not subordinated to scientific discourse.

Conversely, science within *Tafsīr al-Muntakhab* is positioned as an auxiliary and illustrative tool that complements, rather than determines, Qur'anic meaning. In Islamic thought, scientific inquiry is not treated as an independent or primary source of truth but as a means to support and elucidate divine realities articulated through revelation (Mezei, 2024). Given that scientific theories evolve through observation, experimentation, and continual

revision, scientific knowledge is inherently contingent and provisional. This epistemic contingency stands in contrast to the absolute and stable nature of revelatory knowledge, a distinction that *Tafsīr al-Muntakhab* carefully maintains (Mezei, 2024; Arifin & Haqqi, 2024).

Coding analysis of footnotes and supplementary explanations in *Tafsīr al-Muntakhab* reveals that modern scientific theories are not employed as normative frameworks for interpreting Qur'anic verses. Rather, scientific references function as contextual illustrations aimed at assisting contemporary readers in engaging with cosmological signs mentioned in the Qur'an. By adopting this approach, *Tafsīr al-Muntakhab* avoids *scientific overdetermination*—the methodological tendency to allow scientific paradigms to dictate the meaning and validity of revelation. This restraint reflects an epistemological awareness that scientific knowledge remains relative and subject to ongoing testing, whereas revelation retains absolute epistemic authority (Arifin & Haqqi, 2024; Mezei, 2024).

From the perspective of *tafsīr* epistemology, this strategy reflects a conscious recognition of *epistemic asymmetry* between revelation and science. Revelation is treated as transhistorical knowledge with universal truth claims, while science is understood as a human construct characterized by methodological uncertainty and potential falsification. Consequently, *Tafsīr al-Muntakhab* deliberately refrains from identifying specific scientific theories as definitive interpretations of Qur'anic verses, thereby preventing the subordination of the sacred text to temporally bound scientific frameworks.

Hermeneutical analysis of the main text, preface (*muqaddimah*), and marginal annotations further demonstrates a cautious and reflective epistemic strategy. Scientific illustrations are employed to highlight the Qur'an's dimension of *i'jāz* (miraculousness), understood here as an indicative harmony between revelation and cosmic reality rather than a strict equivalence between Qur'anic language and modern scientific terminology. Within this framework, science operates as a *confirmatory discourse* that reinforces awareness of divine signs in nature, rather than as a *normative discourse* that governs textual meaning.

These methodological boundaries also function as a safeguard against *anachronistic readings*, wherein sacred texts are interpreted exclusively through the lens of contemporary scientific knowledge. *Tafsīr al-Muntakhab* preserves the autonomy of Qur'anic meaning by prioritizing classical exegetical principles, including Arabic linguistic analysis, lexical semantics, and established methodologies of Qur'anic sciences, before introducing scientific elaborations as secondary layers of interpretation. This practice underscores that epistemic

legitimacy in *tafsīr* derives not from alignment with scientific developments but from fidelity to the methodological foundations of Qur'anic scholarship.

Within the broader framework of integrating revelation and science, *Tafsīr al-Muntakhab* aligns with Islamic intellectual thought that encourages the use of reason and scientific investigation to interpret divine signs in the natural world. Such integration is not intended to equate scientific knowledge with revelation but to foster a constructive epistemic dialogue in which scientific inquiry enriches human understanding of creation while remaining anchored to divine guidance (Syuhud, 2021). Moreover, this integrative approach is viewed as essential for cultivating a civilized and ethically grounded Muslim society, wherein scientific progress is harmonized with religious belief and moral responsibility (Qatawneh & Hamat, 2020).

In sum, *Tafsīr al-Muntakhab* offers a methodological model that affirms the epistemic supremacy of revelation while allowing a controlled and reflective engagement with scientific knowledge. This approach demonstrates that meaningful dialogue between the Qur'an and modern science is possible without compromising the epistemological integrity of the sacred text. Within contemporary debates on scientific *tafsīr*, *Tafsīr al-Muntakhab* thus represents a form of *epistemic moderation*—one that neither rejects science outright nor subjects revelation to the shifting claims of empirical inquiry.

D. The Relationship with Classical and Contemporary Qur'anic Exegesis

Through intertextual analysis, *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* demonstrates clear methodological continuity with the classical tradition of Qur'anic exegesis, particularly in its rational and integrative approach to cosmological verses. A prominent example of this tradition is *Mafātīh al-Ghayb*, also known as *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, by Fakhruddin al-Razi. This classical exegetical work integrates theological reasoning, philosophical reflection, logical argumentation, and elements of the natural sciences in interpreting the Qur'an. Al-Razi emphasizes the role of reason and dialectical inquiry as tools for deepening exegetical understanding, including in metaphysical and cosmological discussions, while firmly maintaining the authority of revelation by positioning reason as an auxiliary means rather than a substitute for divine guidance.

In contrast, *Al-Jawāhir fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* by Thanthawi Jauhari represents an early modern model of scientific exegesis (*tafsīr 'ilmī*) that explicitly incorporates modern scientific knowledge into Qur'anic interpretation. This *tafsir* links verses concerning nature and the cosmos directly to contemporary scientific discoveries, seeking to demonstrate

harmony between revelation and empirical reality. As several studies note, Thanhawi Jauhari's approach reflects a strong integration of natural sciences and theology, presenting the Qur'an as a text deeply connected to the structure and laws of the universe (Zulfikar et al., 2025).

However, *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* does not merely replicate either classical rational exegesis or early modern scientific tafsir. Instead, it introduces a significant methodological adaptation shaped by contemporary epistemic awareness. Whereas al-Razi frequently embeds philosophical and natural speculation directly within the exegetical discussion, and Thanhawi Jauhari places modern science at the core of cosmological interpretation, *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* adopts a more cautious and moderate position. Its primary innovation lies in its institutional format, which systematically separates the core textual meaning of Qur'anic verses from scientific commentary through controlled footnotes and supplementary explanations. In this framework, science functions as an illustrative aid rather than as an interpretive foundation.

This structural separation reflects a broader epistemological shift within contemporary Qur'anic studies. Contemporary tafsir is increasingly understood not as a repetition of classical methodologies, but as a response to present-day intellectual and social challenges while remaining anchored in established exegetical principles (Muttaqin, 2024). Within this paradigm, *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* treats the Qur'an as a living and context-sensitive text that engages with modern realities without compromising its normative authority (Rohmah, 2013).

Such an approach resonates with recent scholarship that characterizes modern exegetical practice as a dialogical space between classical heritage and contemporary innovation, particularly in the context of modern and digital knowledge cultures (Ilmiah, 2025). Siddiqui (2025) further emphasizes that harmonizing classical and modern approaches enables Qur'anic exegesis to address pressing contemporary issues, including scientific ethics, bioethics, and interreligious dialogue. In this regard, *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* functions as an epistemological mediator, maintaining the primacy of revelation while constructively engaging with scientific discourse.

Moreover, the paradigm underlying *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* reflects a shift away from overly speculative or apologetic models of scientific exegesis toward a contextual and pedagogical orientation. Contemporary tafsir increasingly responds to the normative and social needs of modern audiences rather than attempting to equate Qur'anic verses directly with specific scientific theories (Darmawan, 2024). Data coding and analysis of secondary references indicate that *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* seeks to balance three core dimensions: fidelity

to the Qur'anic text and classical exegetical methodology, particularly in theological and rational aspects; selective and illustrative engagement with modern scientific knowledge; and sensitivity to the epistemic expectations of contemporary readers living in a rational and scientific intellectual climate.

Accordingly, *Tafsir al-Muntakhab* should be understood not merely as a continuation of classical and modern exegetical traditions, but as a reconstruction of those traditions within a standardized and institutionally guided framework. In this context, institutional tafsir plays a crucial role as a guardian of both theological and scholarly legitimacy, while simultaneously mediating between the authority of revelation and the dynamic nature of modern scientific knowledge—without severing its foundational epistemological roots.

Conclusion

This study finds that *Tafsīr al-Muntakhab* embodies a carefully balanced model of scientific exegesis that preserves the epistemic authority of the Qur'an while engaging constructively with modern scientific knowledge. Through qualitative content analysis and hermeneutic interpretation of cosmological verses—especially QS. al-Anbiyā' [21]:30 and QS. adz-Dzāriyāt [51]:47—the study demonstrates that scientific explanations are consistently positioned as illustrative complements rather than determinants of Qur'anic meaning. The systematic separation between the main exegetical text and scientific commentary, primarily through footnotes, reflects a conscious strategy to avoid positivistic reductionism and to maintain the primacy of revelation amid evolving scientific paradigms.

From a scientific and academic perspective, this research contributes to contemporary Qur'anic studies by offering an empirically grounded analysis of institutional *tafsīr 'ilmī* as a distinct hermeneutical model. Unlike classical rational exegesis or early modern scientific *tafsīr* that often integrated scientific reasoning directly into the interpretive core, *Tafsīr al-Muntakhab* represents a methodologically refined approach that aligns with modern epistemological awareness. The study thus advances discussions on the epistemology of scientific exegesis by demonstrating how moderation, structural separation, and methodological discipline can facilitate dialogue between revelation and science without compromising textual integrity.

Nevertheless, this study is limited to selected cosmological verses and focuses primarily on textual and epistemological analysis. It does not examine reader reception, pedagogical impact, or comparative institutional *tafsīr* across different Muslim contexts. Future research may expand the scope by analyzing other thematic domains, such as bioethics

or environmental ethics, comparing *Tafsīr al-Muntakhab* with similar institutional tafsīrs, or exploring how its scientific hermeneutics are received and utilized in educational and public religious discourse. Such studies would further enrich understanding of how Qur'anic exegesis continues to negotiate tradition and modernity in a rapidly changing intellectual landscape.

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