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# Reform-Oriented Exegesis in the Thought of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi: Methodological Insights from the Risale-i Nur

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# REFORM-ORIENTED EXEGESIS IN THE THOUGHT OF BEDIÜZZAMAN SAID NURSI: METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHTS FROM THE *RISALE-I NUR*

Ahmed S. A. Alqodsi\* and Sharifah Norshah Bani Syed Bidin\*\*

**Abstract:** This study examines Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's reform-oriented exegetical approach grounded in *işlah* (ethical and social rectification) and articulated through *tajdid* (renewal) in the *Risale-i Nur*. It highlights how he connects Qur'anic discourse to contemporary realities and rearticulates Islamic understanding towards the Qur'an's objectives. Unlike previous scholarship that mainly emphasises the social, political, or educational aspects of Nursi's thought, this research foregrounds his exegetical method as a distinctive contribution to modern Qur'anic studies.

Adopting a descriptive-analytical approach, the study analyses selected interpretive passages from the *Risale-i Nur* to identify Nursi's methodological strategies. The findings indicate that he employed multiple interpretive mechanisms: interpretation by the Qur'an, interpretation by the Sunnah, and rational reflection integrated with spiritual insight, while consistently emphasising the purposive and ethical dimensions of the Qur'anic text.

The study concludes that Nursi's reform-oriented exegesis grounded in *işlah* and *tajdid* offers a coherent and integrative framework that integrates textual, rational, and spiritual elements, thereby enriching the field of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation. This framework provides not only a conceptual model for understanding reform within an Islamic intellectual framework, but also practical insights for addressing current intellectual, social, and moral challenges faced by Muslim societies.

**Keywords:** *Reform-oriented exegesis, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, Risale-i Nur, Qur'anic objectives, religious reform*

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## INTRODUCTION

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (1876–1960) is widely regarded as a significant modern Muslim scholar and Qur’anic exegete. Through his monumental work, the *Risale-i Nur*, he articulates a comprehensive reform-oriented intellectual project grounded in *işlah* (ethical and social rectification) and *tajdid* (renewal) that positions the Qur’an as the ultimate source of spiritual guidance and societal rectification and renewal.

Nursi’s reform-oriented thought emerged within a turbulent historical context marked by cultural decline, colonial pressures, and intellectual fragmentation in the Muslim world. In response, he sought to re-establish the dynamic relationship between the Qur’an and contemporary realities, reaffirming the Qur’an’s role in addressing societal crises and reshaping Islamic consciousness.

In this study, the term “reform-oriented exegesis” requires clarification. The term “reform” is not used in the sense of altering the Qur’anic text or its established meanings, as the Qur’an is understood as a fixed and immutable revelation within the Islamic tradition. Rather, it is grounded in the concepts of *işlah* and *tajdid*, referring to the effort to rectify human understanding and renew engagement with the Qur’an in response to contemporary intellectual and social contexts. While sharing a concern for addressing modern challenges, Nursi’s approach emphasises integrating textual fidelity, rational reflection, and spiritual insight within a Qur’an-centred epistemological framework.

Previous scholarship has examined various dimensions of Nursi’s thought. Studies on the social and reform-oriented aspects include Imad Abdullah’s analysis of racism and exploration of social and cognitive reform.<sup>1</sup> Research on the exegetical and miraculous dimensions includes Ahmed Shukri’s investigation of Qur’anic sciences and linguistic miracles.<sup>2</sup> The educational and political dimensions have been highlighted by Shaalan Abdul Qadir in relation to educational reform and concerning political thought.<sup>3</sup> While these contributions illuminate significant facets of Nursi’s legacy, they largely remain descriptive and fragmented, offering limited systematic analysis of his reform-oriented exegetical methodology.

This study addresses this gap by critically analysing the defining features of Nursi’s reform-oriented exegesis grounded in *işlah* and *tajdid* in the *Risale-i Nur* and situating it within the broader field of contemporary Qur’anic interpretation. Specifically, it investigates how Nursi integrated narrative, rational, and purposive dimensions in his interpretive project, and how this methodological synthesis underpinned his vision of Islamic rectification and renewal within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Imad ‘Abd Allah, “Mafhūm al-‘Unşuriyya wa Martakazāt ‘Ilajihā fi Kulliyat Rasa’il al-Nur li Badi’ al-Zaman Sa’id al-Nursi” [The Concept of Racism and its Treatment in the Letters of Light of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi] (Master’s diss., Yarmouk University, 2013), 103–25.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmed Shukri, *Buhuth fi I’jaz wa al-Tafsir fi Rasa’il al-Nur* [Studies in Miraculousness and Interpretation in the Risale -I Nur] (Dar al-Salam, 2004), 47.

<sup>3</sup> Shaalan Abdul Qadir Ibrahim, “Al-Bu’d al-Siyasi fi Ḥayat Badi’ al-Zaman Sa’id Nursi” [The Political Dimension in the Life of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi], *Tikrit Journal for Political Science* 4, no. 8 (2016).

Accordingly, this study has the research questions:

1. What are the defining features of Nursi's reform-oriented exegesis?
2. How does his exegetical methodology combine narrative, rational, and purposive dimensions?
3. In what ways does this methodology serve his broader reform-oriented intellectual project grounded in *işlah* and *tajdid*?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the methodology of interpretation of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi has developed progressively in recent decades, particularly in the fields of Qur'anic studies and modern Islamic thought and reform-oriented discourse grounded in *işlah*. However, a review of the literature indicates that many studies tend to adopt a partial focus, often emphasising linguistic, moral, theological, or social aspects without fully integrating these dimensions into a comprehensive framework of exegetical methodology. This section critically examines selected contributions on Nursi's interpretation while highlighting the research gap that this study addresses.

### *Linguistic and Rhetoric Studies*

Among the aspects of Nursi's *tafsir* methodology that have received the earliest attention of scholars is his linguistic approach. In his work *Isharat al-I'jaz fi Ma'ani al-I'jaz* [Signs of Miraculousness in the Subtleties of Conciseness], Nursi uses in-depth analysis of the structure of the Arabic language of the Qur'an, including the arrangement of words, verses, and letters, to reveal aspects of *i'jaz bayani* (rhetorical miracles). Al-Nagmy emphasises that *Isharat al-I'jaz* shows how Nursi connects the phonetics, syntax, and semantics of the Qur'an to prove the accuracy of the Divine structure.<sup>4</sup> This study is important because it connects Nursi's *tafsir* (Qur'anic interpretation) methodology to the classical Islamic tradition of *balaghah* (Arabic rhetoric), but with emphasis on the reform-oriented function grounded in *işlah*, namely how the eloquence of the Qur'anic language can provide social and ethical guidance.

Shukri also emphasises Nursi's attention to the linguistic miracle of the Qur'an, showing how he saw rhetorical structures not only as beauty, but also as pedagogical mechanisms for building religious awareness. These studies indicate that linguistic analysis is the main gateway to understanding Nursi's methodology of interpretation. However, excessive focus on the linguistic dimension often ignores the rational, spiritual, and reform-oriented elements that are also at the core of his methodology.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ihab Said Ibrahim Al-Nagmy, "Linguistical Study in the Book *Isharat al-I'jaz* by Imam Bediüzzaman Said Nursi," *The Journal of Risale-i Nur Studies* 1, no. 1 (2019).

<sup>5</sup> Shukri, *Buhuth fi I'jaz wa al-Tafsir fi Rasa'il al-Nur*, 47.

### ***Thematic and Moral Studies***

Apart from the linguistic aspect, several scholars emphasise the thematic and moral dimensions in Nursi's *tafsir*. Muflih examines the *Risale-i Nur* as a thematic *tafsir* oriented towards moral education. He emphasises that Nursi uses monotheism as the basis of epistemology and pedagogy, making each Qur'anic *tafsir* a moral lesson aimed at building the morals of individuals and society.<sup>6</sup>

This view is reinforced by Majeed,<sup>7</sup> who examines Nursi's intellectual development and the structure of the *Risale-i Nur*. She finds that the work is not simply structured as a commentary on the Qur'an, but as a thematic exegesis that connects the text to contemporary issues. This approach suggests that Nursi uses the methodology of exegesis not only to explain the meaning of verses, but to offer a practical framework for ethical and social rectification (*işlah*).

These two studies confirm that Nursi's interpretation is full of moral and thematic dimensions. However, their analysis is still limited to one aspect (moral or thematic structure) without examining how it is integrated with broader linguistic, theological and epistemological dimensions.

### ***Theological and Epistemological Studies***

The theological dimension in Nursi's methodology of *tafsir* has received attention from Çoruh, who emphasises that Nursi's *tafsir* can be understood as a form of "kalamisation of tafsir." In his analysis of *Muhakamat* and *Isharat al-I'jaz*, Çoruh shows that Nursi combines *tafsir* with discussion of *kalam*, especially to defend the foundations of Islamic *aqidah* in the face of modern challenges. According to him, Nursi makes the Qur'an not only an expounded sacred text, but also an epistemological basis for constructing contemporary Islamic thought.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, an article on Qur'anic exegesis in the contemporary Islamic world explains the structure of the *muhakamat* methodology.<sup>9</sup> The author argues that Nursi divides his exegetical approach into three elements: *hakikat unsuru* (reality), *balāghah unsuru* (rhetoric), and *'aqidah unsuru* (belief). This structure emphasises that Nursi's exegetical methodology is comprehensive and combines language, theology, and faith.

While both studies emphasise the theological aspects of Nursi's exegesis, they do not connect it to the rational and spiritual dimensions that are also important in his methodology.

<sup>6</sup> Basheer K. Muflih, "Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's Methodology in the Discourse of Moral Education in His Thematic Exegesis (*Rasā'il al-Nūr*)," *Theologia* 24, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>7</sup> Shumaila Majeed, "An Analytical Study of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's Intellectual Development and Composition of *Risale-i Nur* (A Thematic Qur'anic Exegesis)," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 10, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>8</sup> Hakan Çoruh, "Bediüzzaman Said Nursi and his Understanding of Exegesis in his *Risale-i Nur* Collections" (PhD diss., Charles Sturt University, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Niyazi Beki, "Qur'anic Exegesis in the Contemporary Islamic World Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's *Muhakamat*," *Katre Uluslararası İnsan Araştırmaları Dergisi-Katre International Human Studies Journal* 14 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.53427/katre.1168927>.

### ***Spiritual Studies and Rationalism***

Yücel makes an important contribution by emphasising the *suhudi* (spiritual/*ishari* experience) aspect in Nursi's interpretation.<sup>10</sup> He argues that Nursi combines *ishari* interpretation with rationalism, making it unique compared to classical interpretations that emphasise only one aspect. Nursi's interpretation, according to Yücel, is an interpretation that animates the heart while convincing the mind, making it relevant for modern Muslims facing intellectual and spiritual challenges.

This aspect is important because it shows that Nursi's interpretation is not only based on the text, but also on the existential experience of faith. However, Yücel emphasises the spiritual dimension without paying enough attention to the systematic integration between linguistic, moral, theological, and *maqasid* elements that are also at the core of Nursi's interpretation.

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that previous studies have contributed to our understanding of Nursi's *tafsir* from linguistic,<sup>11</sup> thematic and moral,<sup>12</sup> theological,<sup>13</sup> and spiritual<sup>14</sup> angles. However, these studies tend to view Nursi's methodology in isolation.

There is still a lack of studies that integrate the entire instrument of Nursi's *tafsir* – Qur'anic interpretation with the Qur'an, Qur'anic interpretation with the Sunnah, linguistic analysis, rational use, and spiritual experience – into a coherent framework of reformist *tafsir* methodology. This study fills this gap by offering an integrative analysis of the characteristics of Nursi's reformist *tafsir* as contained in the *Risale-i Nur*.

This study addresses this gap by proposing an integrative analysis of Nursi's methodology as a form of reform-oriented exegesis grounded in *işlah* (rectification) and articulated through *tajdid* (renewal), thereby situating the concept of reform within the Islamic intellectual tradition rather than within modernist reformist paradigms alone.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach combined with thematic exegetical analysis. The descriptive dimension is used to identify and present the features of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's reform-oriented exegesis grounded in *işlah* (ethical and social rectification) as reflected in the *Risale-i Nur*. The analytical dimension focuses on examining his interpretive tools, particularly interpretation by the Qur'an, interpretation by the Sunnah, and rational reflection integrated with spiritual insight and articulated through *tajdid* (renewal).

The primary research tools are textual and thematic analyses. Selected passages of the *Risale-i Nur* were examined through thematic coding to extract recurring exegetical strategies

<sup>10</sup> Salih Yücel, "Rereading of the Qur'an in Light of Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* Collection: Shuhudi Exegesis," *Religions* 12, no. 12 (2021).

<sup>11</sup> Alnagmy, "Linguistical Study," Shukri, *Buhuth fi I'jaz wa al-Tafsir fi Rasa'il al-Nur*, 47.

<sup>12</sup> Muflih, "Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's Methodology"; Majeed, "Analytical Study."

<sup>13</sup> Çoruh, "Bediüzzaman Said Nursi and his Understanding"; Niyazi, "Qur'anic Exegesis in the Contemporary Islamic World."

<sup>14</sup> Yücel, "Rereading of the Qur'an."

and reform-oriented (*işlah*-based) themes. This dual method allows for systematic exploration of Nursi’s exegetical methodology and its reform-oriented framework grounded in *işlah* and *tajdid*.

In this context, “reform-oriented” refers to the function of *tafsir* in rectifying intellectual, ethical, and social conditions (*işlah*), while *tajdid* denotes the methodological renewal of interpretive engagement with the Qur’an without altering its foundational meanings.

Research limitations: The scope of this study is confined to the reform-oriented exegetical dimension grounded in *işlah* dimension of Nursi’s thought as represented in the *Risale-i Nur*. It does not cover his entire intellectual legacy nor does it address other theological, political, or philosophical aspects in detail. Furthermore, reliance on available translations may pose limitations in capturing some of the nuanced meanings of the original Turkish text.

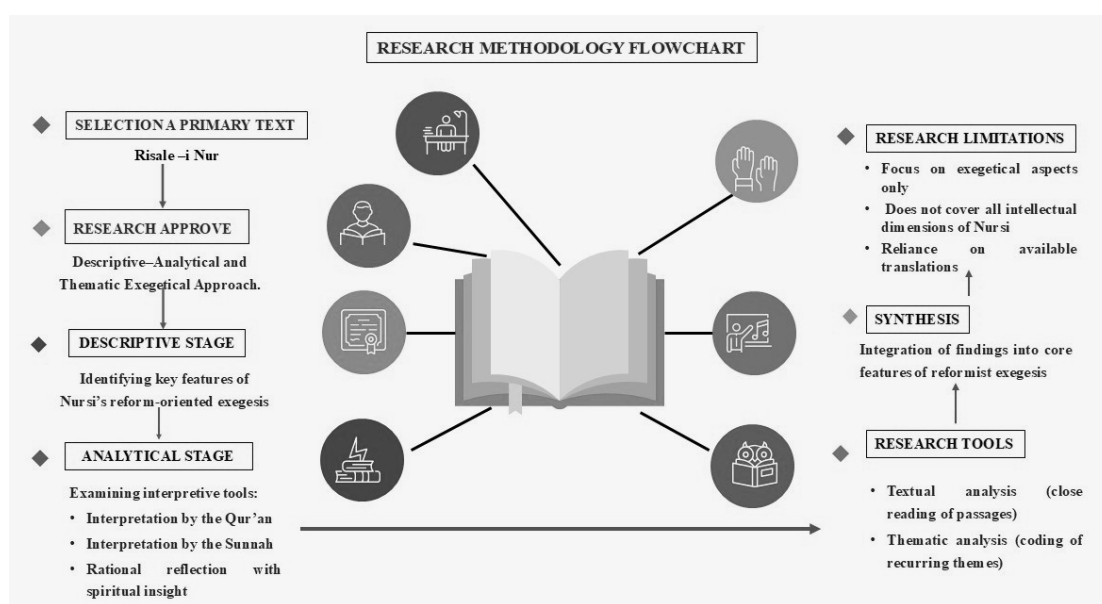


Chart 1: Research methodology flowchart

Source: Author’s analysis

This methodological framework enables a structured analysis of Nursi’s *tafsir* as an epistemological and reform-oriented (*işlah*-based) enterprise.

## RESULT

This study reveals the main features of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi’s reform-oriented exegesis grounded in *işlah* (ethical and social rectification) and articulated through *tajdid* (renewal) as enshrined in the *Risale-i Nur*. The findings can be divided into two broad categories: (i) the *tafsir* instruments used by Nursi, and (ii) the reform-oriented characteristics of his *tafsir*.

### *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi’s Instruments of Tafsir*

#### *Linguistic and Rhetorical Tafsir*

One of the dominant features of Nursi's *tafsir* is his emphasis on linguistic and rhetorical analysis of the Qur'an. In *Isharat al-I'jaz*, he interprets the verses in layers. He starts with the overall meaning, then the arrangement of the verses in the *surah*, then the arrangement of the words, and even down to the letters.

For example, in interpreting the words of Allah, "And they spend from what We have provided them,"<sup>15</sup> Nursi explains that the use of the particle *min* (from) indicates rejection of excessiveness in giving. Attributing sustenance to Allah emphasises that all gifts come from Him, thus eliminating the fear of poverty. He also shows that the verb *yunfiqun* (they spend) carries the meaning that wealth should be used for legitimate and beneficial needs.

This example shows how Nursi emphasises the verse's linguistic function to connect the legal, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. This analysis illustrates his skill in combining grammar, rhetoric, and semantics to reveal the Qur'anic *i'jaz*.

#### *Interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an*

Nursi emphasises the principle that some verses of the Qur'an interpret other verses. In *al-Mathnawi*, he states that just as the Qur'an explains itself, so too the universe explains its verses.<sup>16</sup>

For example, the verse "those upon whom You have bestowed favor"<sup>17</sup> is interpreted with Qur'an 4:69, which explains the categories of people who are given favour, namely the prophets, the *siddiqin*, the martyrs, and the *salihin*. By grouping related verses, Nursi emphasises the internal coherence of the Qur'an and shows that each meaning must be understood within the framework of the entire text of revelation.<sup>18</sup>

This methodology highlights his efforts to preserve the authority of the Qur'anic text by prioritising verses as the primary explanation for other verses, an approach that strengthens the authority of the *naqli* argument.

#### *Interpreting the Qur'an with the Sunnah*

Nursi sees the Sunnah as the primary interpreter of the Qur'an. In *al-Kalimat*, he states that the personality of the Prophet ﷺ is the source of understanding the Qur'an.

For example, the verse "The believers are but brothers"<sup>19</sup> is supported by the hadith of the Prophet ﷺ: "The believer to the believer is like a building, each part strengthening the other."<sup>20</sup> This interpretation emphasises that the bond of brotherhood in Islam is not just a moral

<sup>15</sup> Qur'an 2:3.

<sup>16</sup> Said Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi al-'Arabi al-Nuri* [The Arabic Mathnawi al-Nuriyya], 8th ed. (Sozler Publications, 2018), 245.

<sup>17</sup> Qur'an 1:7.

<sup>18</sup> Said Nursi, *Isharat al-I'jaz fi Ma'ani al-I'jaz* [Signs of Miraculousness in the Subtleties of Conciseness], 8th ed. (Sozler Publications, 2018), 34.

<sup>19</sup> Qur'an 49:10.

<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Bukhari, *Al-Jami' al-Sahih al-Mukhtasar* [Summarised Sahih al-Bukhari] (Dar Ibn Kathir, 1987), hadith no. 6026.

principle, but also the basis of ethical and social rectification (*işlah*) that demands unity and solidarity.<sup>21</sup>

The use of the Sunnah in Nursi's interpretation shows he is trying to maintain the continuity of Islamic tradition. He places the Prophet's Sunnah as a practical interpretation of the message of the Qur'an.

#### *Rational and Contemplative Interpretation*

In addition to using the text, Nursi emphasises the role of reason and contemplation as instruments of interpretation. In many explanations, he poses rational questions before providing answers inspired by the Qur'an.

For example, when interpreting the story of Moses and the Children of Israel, he poses the question: why does the Qur'an pay attention to seemingly trivial matters such as the nature of rocks? He answers that this emphasis contains wisdom about God's power over the universe and His grace towards humanity.<sup>22</sup>

This approach shows that Nursi's interpretation functions as an intellectual process that connects science, philosophy, and faith. He does not simply interpret the text literally but also seeks to make the Qur'an relevant to the rational questions of contemporary audiences.

#### *Interpretation through Spiritual Inspiration*

Nursi combines rational argument with spiritual experience (*ilham ruhi*). In *al-Kalimat*, he describes the Qur'an as the greatest interpretation of the "Book of the Universe." This shows that his interpretation is not only based on the text, but also through spiritual awareness of God's signs in nature.<sup>23</sup>

A clear example is when he responds to sceptics' doubts about miracles. Nursi responds that the ultimate answer comes through the light of the Qur'an that illuminates the heart. His interpretation emphasises that revelation can resolve intellectual questions not only through logical argument, but also through spiritual witnessing.

### ***Reform-Oriented Characteristics of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's Tafsir***

#### *Guidance Orientation (Hidayah)*

One of the main characteristics of Nursi's reform-oriented exegesis is the guidance orientation. In *al-Lama'at*, he emphasises that every verse of the Qur'an contains a light of guidance for the human heart. For example, when interpreting the prayer of Prophet Ayyub in Qur'an 21:83, he emphasises that this verse is not just a historical story, but a living and relevant prayer for every believer who is being tested.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Said Nursi, *Al- Maktubat* [The Letters], 8th ed. (Sozler Publications, 2018), 350.

<sup>22</sup> Said Nursi, *Al- Kalimat* [The Words], 8th ed. (Sozler Publications, 2018), 143.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>24</sup> Said Nursi, *Al-Lama'at* [The Flashes] (Sozler Publications, 2018), 10.

This shows that his *tafsir* aims to bring the Qur'an to life in the existential experience of Muslims, making it a direct guide to overcoming suffering and crisis.

### *Expanding the Meaning of Verses*

Nursi repeatedly emphasises that the Qur'anic stories are not limited to history but represent universal principles. For example, the story of Prophet Adam is interpreted as an eternal dialogue between God and all humanity. This demonstrates his approach of expanding the meaning of the Qur'anic text from specific events to general principles that are always relevant.<sup>25</sup>

### *Focus on the Maqasid of the Qur'an*

Nursi formulated that the Qur'an has four main objectives: *tauhid* (monotheism), *nubuwwah* (prophecy), *ma'ad* (resurrection), and *'adl* (justice). In *Isharat al-I'jaz*, he emphasised that all verses, directly or indirectly, are guided by these four principles.

His focus on the *maqasid* makes his rectification (*işlah*) within the Islamic intellectual tradition because it connects the teachings of the Qur'an with the socio-political and ethical needs of the people. For example, the concept of justice is not only explained in legal terms, but also as a basis for reforming a just and humane society.<sup>26</sup>

### *Emphasis on the Miracles of the Qur'an*

In *al-Mu'jizat al-Qur'aniyyah* and *Isharat al-I'jaz*, Nursi emphasises that the miracles of the Qur'an include rhetorical and scientific aspects. For example, when interpreting Qur'an 34:12 about the wind submitting to Prophet Solomon, he emphasises that this verse is not only a historical miracle, but also a sign of the development of modern technology, such as flight.<sup>27</sup>

This emphasis shows his open approach to scientific advances, while maintaining the authority of the Qur'an as a source of revelation.

### *Social Dimension*

Nursi's *tafsir* contributes to the intellectual and moral rectification (*işlah*) of the Muslim community from its intellectual and moral decline. He emphasises that the Qur'an is the basis for educational reform, social solidarity, and moral development. His commentary makes revelation a practical framework for overcoming the social and spiritual crises that beset the community.

### **Summary of the Study Results**

The results of this study emphasise that Nursi's *tafsir* is not merely linguistic or spiritual but is a coherent reform-oriented exegetical framework grounded in *işlah* and articulated through *tajdid*. Through five instruments of *tafsir* – linguistics, the Qur'an with the Qur'an, the Qur'an with the Sunnah, rationality, and spiritual inspiration – as well as the four main reformist

<sup>25</sup> Nursi, *Al-Kalimat*, 271.

<sup>26</sup> Said Nursi, *Sayqal al-Islam* [The Polisher of Islam], 8th ed. (Sozler Publications, 2018), 31.

<sup>27</sup> Nursi, *Al-Kalimat*, 283.

characteristics (*hidayah*, expansion of meaning, *maqāṣid*, and *i'jaz*), he successfully formulated an approach to *tafsir* that integrates text, reason, and contemporary reality.

## DISCUSSION

Analysis of the *Risale-i Nur* demonstrates that Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's methodology of interpretation is not simply a textual effort, but a reform-oriented epistemological framework grounded in *iṣlah* (ethical and social rectification) and articulated through *tajdid* (renewal) aimed at renewing engagement with the function of revelation as a source of guidance, knowledge, and ethical and social rectification.

This discussion illustrates how Nursi integrates linguistic, textual, rational, and spiritual approaches into a coherent and *maqāṣid*-oriented framework. This approach renders his *tafsir* not only explanatory but also transformative.

### *Tafsir as a Reform-Oriented Epistemological Framework*

Nursi asserts that the Qur'an is not just a religious text, but the primary source of Islamic epistemology. In *Isharat al-I'jaz*, he writes that each verse contains "infinite knowledge," and humans are responsible for exploring its meaning according to their intellectual and spiritual capacities. This suggests that *tafsir*, according to Nursi, is a process of enlightenment (*tanwir*), in which the knowledge born of revelation is used to improve thought, morality, and society.

Through a linguistic approach, Nursi emphasises the precision of the Qur'an's structure as rational proof of divinity; through a rational approach, he strengthens faith based on logical arguments; and through a spiritual approach, he highlights the connection of the human heart with the source of revelation. The integration of these three dimensions forms the basis of the reform-oriented epistemology grounded in *iṣlah* and articulated through *tajdid* of *tafsir*; a framework of knowledge that unites reason (*'aql*), revelation (*naql*), and spiritual sense (*dhawq*) as complementary components in understanding truth.

This approach positions Nursi's *tafsir* not merely as a reaction to modernism, but as a reformulation of exegetical practice that affirms the continued relevance of revelation in addressing contemporary intellectual and ethical concerns.

### *Integration between Text, Reason, and Reality*

One of the unique features of Nursi's *tafsir* is his ability to connect the text of revelation with historical and social reality without compromising Islamic legal principles. In many places, he rejects literalistic *tafsir* that is divorced from the context of life. Instead, he insists that each verse must be understood by considering social reality, human needs, and the challenges of the times.

For example, his *tafsir* on the verse on *zakat*, Qur'an 2:3, is not only a description of *fiqh* (law), but also a call to social solidarity. By emphasising that spending from the sustenance

“granted by God” is a way to establish justice and eliminate social inequality, he positions *tafsir* as a mechanism for ethical and social rectification (*işlah*).

In this context, Nursi practiced what is now known as *tafsir waqi'i*; *tafsir* that observes social reality and uses it to revive the practical function of the Qur'an in life. He did not stop at the meaning of the language but revived it in the form of values that could be implemented in the contemporary context.

### ***Rationalism and Divine Inspiration as Sources of Knowledge***

Nursi's interpretation also displays a unique balance between rationalism and Divine inspiration (*ilham*). In many parts of the *Risale-i Nur*, he raises rational questions arising from modern experience; questions about miracles, destiny, human freedom, and Divine justice. However, his answers are not based solely on deductive logic, but also on spiritual inspiration that stems from contemplation of God's verses in nature and in the human self.

This approach combines two epistemological dimensions: *burhan* (rational evidence) and *nur* (spiritual enlightenment). The rationalism in Nursi's interpretation does not reject spirituality, and his spirituality does not deny the role of reason. This combination results in an interpretive approach that is neither extreme in the literal nor the mystical.

In terms of methodology, this makes Nursi's *tafsir* a bridge between *tafsir 'aqli* (based on reason) and *tafsir ishari* (based on spiritual signs). However, he rejects the use of subjective signs without rational and textual support. Therefore, his *tafsir* remains rooted in the traditional discipline but is expanded through philosophical and spiritual reflection.

### ***Maqasid Orientation and Social Reform***

The results of the analysis show that the *Risale-i Nur* is organised around the four main objectives of the Qur'an: monotheism, prophecy, resurrection, and justice. These are not just thematic categories, but the basis of Nursi's interpretation methodology. By focusing his interpretation on these four *maqasids*, he restores the focus of the Qur'an as a book of guidance (*huda*), not merely a source of law.

Nursi emphasises that *tauhid* is the basis for all forms of reform because it instils awareness of responsibility and submission to God. *Nubuwwah* provides a moral and epistemic example, *ma'ad* instils orientation to the hereafter that shapes social ethics, while justice (*'adl*) becomes the principle of balance in all human affairs.

This *maqasid* orientation makes Nursi's interpretation a reform-oriented framework grounded in *işlah*. It does not simply explain the verse's meaning but interprets the values of the Qur'an within the framework of rebuilding society. This is where his interpretation is stronger than descriptive interpretations, which only repeat classical views without adapting them to contemporary reality.

### ***Scientific and Cosmological Dimensions of the Qur'an***

Nursi also develops the relationship between revelation and nature (cosmos). In *al-Kalimat* and *al-Mathnawi*, he states “the universe is a book that is read,” and the Qur'an is “the interpretation of the book of nature.”<sup>28</sup> This perspective illustrates that science is not opposed to revelation but is an offshoot of the manifestation of Divine wisdom.

For example, when interpreting the verse about the winds subduing Prophet Solomon (peace be upon him) in Qur'an 34:12. This verse explains the miracle of Prophet Solomon (peace be upon him) subjugating the wind, meaning he was able to travel through the air in one day a distance that would normally take two months. The verse also indicates that the path is open for human beings to cover such distances through the air in a shorter time and it is possible for humanity to reach this level and achieve this goal. This interpretation demonstrates a scientific approach that is not secular but rooted in monotheism, where worldly knowledge is seen as a sign of God's greatness, not a challenge to Him.

This scientific dimension reinforces the role of Nursi's interpretation in bridging the gap between modern science and faith. He also asserts that true Islamic renewal requires the integration of revealed and empirical knowledge, not separation between the two.

### ***Social and Pedagogical Functions of Tafsir***

In addition to its epistemological and scientific aspects, Nursi's *tafsir* also functions as a tool for education and social reform. He sees *tafsir* as a process of educating the people, not just teaching the meaning of the text. In the *Risale-i Nur*, each explanation is structured like a lesson in faith (*dars al-imani*), which invites the reader to think, feel, and act based on the guidance of revelation.

Nursi repeatedly emphasises that the crisis of the Muslim community does not stem from lack of knowledge, but from darkness of heart and loss of meaning. Therefore, *tafsir* for him is a path of spiritual and social healing. In this context, his *tafsir* becomes a vehicle for simultaneous *da'wah*, *tarbiyah*, *işlah* and *tajdid*, making the *Risale-i Nur* a living and educational work of *tafsir*, not just an academic text.

### ***Tafsir as a Contemporary Model***

Overall, these findings show that Nursi's methodology of *tafsir* offers a relevant model for contemporary Islamic reform. In a modern world facing moral crises, secularism, and relativism, Nursi's *tafsir* shows that the Qur'an can be the basis for building balanced critical, rational, and spiritual thinking.

This model of *tafsir* makes two major contributions: first, it provides an epistemological framework that unites revelation, reason, and human experience; and second, it shapes a discourse of Islamic renewal that is rooted in the sacred text but open to the challenges of the

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<sup>28</sup> Nursi, *al-Kalimat*, 60; Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi al-Arabi al-Nuri*, 275.

times. In other words, Nursi's *tafsir* is not just about understanding the text of the Qur'an but about reviving it as a force for transformation in the lives of the people.

### ***Summary of Discussion***

This discussion shows that Nursi successfully integrated various approaches to interpretation into a coherent reform-oriented exegetical framework grounded in *işlah* and articulated through *tajdid*. Through a combination of linguistic analysis, rationalism, spirituality, and *maqasid*, he established a holistic form of interpretation that was the basis for the reformation of Islamic thought. Therefore, his interpretation methodology can be summarised as:

1. Textual in terms of source (based on the Qur'an and Sunnah),
2. Rational in terms of approach (based on reason and logic), and
3. Spiritual in terms of goal (reviving faith and Divine awareness).

This approach shows that interpretation is not only a field of knowledge, but also a framework for rectification (*işlah*) and renewal (*tajdid*). This makes Nursi one of the most influential reformist interpretation figures in modern Islamic history.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's interpretive methodology represents a reform-oriented exegesis grounded in *işlah* (ethical and social rectification) and articulated through *tajdid* (renewal). His approach integrates textual fidelity, rational enquiry, and spiritual insight, thereby offering a coherent framework for engaging the Qur'an in contemporary contexts without altering its foundational meanings.

The findings indicate that Nursi's *tafsir* functions as an epistemological and ethical model, linking interpretation to the *maqasid* of the Qur'an and addressing modern intellectual and social challenges.

This study contributes to contemporary Qur'anic studies by clarifying the concept of reform within an Islamic intellectual framework and proposing an integrative model of exegesis. Future research could explore its application in areas such as Islamic education, ethics, and the relationship between religion and contemporary knowledge.

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