



## Epistemology Of Thematic Interpretation: A Comparison Of The Methodological Frameworks Of Al-Farmāwī And Abdullah Saeed

### *Epistemologi Interpretasi Tematik: Perbandingan Kerangka Metodologis Al-Farmāwī dan Abdullah Saeed*

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#### Article Info

Article history :

Received : 19-12-2025

Revised : 21-12-2025

Accepted : 23-12-2025

Published : 25-12-2025

#### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini mengkaji epistemologi penafsiran Al-Qur'an tematik melalui analisis komparatif kerangka metodologis yang dikembangkan oleh 'Abd al-Hayy al-Farmāwī dan Abdullah Saeed. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi persamaan dan perbedaan epistemologis antara kedua sarjana tersebut, khususnya mengenai sumber otoritas penafsiran, peran konteks, orientasi nilai, dan implikasi metodologisnya untuk penafsiran tematik kontemporer. Dengan menggunakan riset pustaka kualitatif, studi ini menerapkan pendekatan epistemologis dan komparatif pada karya-karya utama kedua sarjana dan literatur akademis yang relevan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa al-Farmāwī mewakili epistemologi penafsiran tematik yang bersifat tekstual-normatif dan sistematis, menekankan koherensi internal ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an. Sebaliknya, Abdullah Saeed mengembangkan epistemologi kontekstual dan berorientasi nilai yang menyoroti interaksi dinamis antara teks Al-Qur'an, konteks historis wahyu, dan realitas kontemporer. Terlepas dari perbedaan-perbedaan ini, kedua pendekatan tersebut bertemu dalam penolakan terhadap interpretasi atomistik dan komitmen terhadap metode tematik yang komprehensif. Studi ini berpendapat bahwa pengintegrasian koherensi tekstual dan relevansi kontekstual menawarkan jalur yang signifikan untuk pengembangan lebih lanjut interpretasi Al-Qur'an tematik dalam kajian Islam kontemporer.*

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**Kata kunci:** *Tafsir Tematik, Epistemologi Interpretasi, Studi Al-Qur'an*

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#### Abstract

This research examines the epistemology of thematic Qur'anic interpretation through a comparative analysis of the methodological frameworks developed by 'Abd al-Hayy al-Farmāwī and Abdullah Saeed. The study aims to identify the epistemological similarities and differences between the two scholars, particularly regarding the sources of interpretive authority, the role of context, value orientation, and their methodological implications for contemporary thematic exegesis. Employing qualitative library research, this study applies an epistemological and comparative approach to the primary works of both scholars and relevant academic literature. The findings indicate that al-Farmāwī represents a textual-normative and systematic epistemology of thematic interpretation, emphasizing the internal coherence of Qur'anic verses. In contrast, Abdullah Saeed advances a contextual and value-oriented epistemology that highlights the dynamic interaction between the Qur'anic text, the historical context of revelation, and contemporary realities. Despite these differences, both approaches converge in their rejection of atomistic interpretation and their commitment to a comprehensive thematic method. This study argues that integrating textual coherence and contextual relevance offers a significant pathway for the further development of thematic Qur'anic interpretation in contemporary Islamic scholarship.

**Keywords:** Thematic Tafsir, Epistemology of Interpretation, Qur'anic Studies.



## INTRODUCTION

The method of interpreting the Qur'an is an important tool in understanding revelation systematically and contextually. In the tradition of Islamic interpretation, thematic interpretation (*tafsīr mawdū'i*) has emerged as an approach that attempts to map the meaning of Qur'anic verses based on specific themes, rather than solely on the order of the surahs/verses. This aims to obtain a complete and coherent understanding of the Qur'anic message on certain issues as a whole. This thematic approach becomes relevant when mufassir want to respond to contemporary challenges that are cross-textual and cross-contextual in nature.(Abdullah, 2014, p. 67)

In modern tradition, thematic interpretation methods have received serious attention. For example, Abdul Hay al-Farmāwī's study of comprehensive interpretation methods shows that he accommodates thematic interpretation as an important approach in interpreting the Qur'an. Studies on al-Farmāwī's thinking state that thematic interpretation is considered the most comprehensive method because it allows the interpreter to discuss a theme in detail and based on relevant verses from various parts of the Qur'an, thus offering a complete understanding of an issue.(Syukkur, 2020, p. 127)

Meanwhile, the thematic interpretation approach in contemporary thought has developed further through efforts to integrate text, socio-historical context, and value hierarchy. Abdullah Saeed, a contemporary Islamic thinker active at the University of Melbourne, Australia, developed a thematic interpretation method with an emphasis on contextualization and Qur'anic values. This approach is referred to as contextual thematic interpretation, in which the interpretation process does not only stop at collecting thematic verses but also considers multiple meanings, the historical context of revelation, and the hierarchy of values in the Qur'an.(Muqit, 2021, p. 102)

Several empirical studies on Abdullah Saeed's thematic interpretation method confirm that this approach considers three main principles: (1) paying attention to and selecting relevant meanings from various possible meanings of the text; (2) examining the socio-historical context in which the verse was revealed as a basis for determining its meaning; and (3) examining the hierarchy of Qur'anic values to decide which verses are definitive (*qath'i*) or open to reinterpretation (*dhanni*).(Muqit, 2021, p. 118)

Although various studies have discussed thematic interpretation methods separately, both from the perspectives of al-Farmāwī and Abdullah Saeed, research that systematically examines the epistemological differences between the two approaches is still relatively limited. Some studies focus more on procedural methodological aspects (the steps of thematic interpretation) without placing the analysis on the epistemological foundations of each mufassir, such as the source of meaning authority, the relationship between text and context, and the integration of values in the interpretation process. This creates a significant research gap in contemporary exegesis literature, particularly in the realm of epistemological comparisons of thematic exegesis methods (Faiz, 2024, p. 271).

Thus, this research is important to reveal the fundamental differences in the epistemological frameworks of al-Farmāwī and Abdullah Saeed. Such a study is expected not only to enrich the wealth of tafsir knowledge, but also to help build a tafsir methodology that is more contextual, comprehensive, and responsive to contemporary issues.



## METHOD

This research is library research with a qualitative-descriptive approach (Sugiyono, 2019, p. 45). Literature research was chosen because the objects of study were ideas, concepts, and methodological frameworks of thematic interpretation developed by 'Abd al-Hayy al-Farmāwī and Abdullah Saeed, as described in their written works and related academic studies. A qualitative approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the epistemological constructs of these two figures without involving statistical data or field experiments.

Approach aims to examine the knowledge base in thematic interpretation methods, including sources of knowledge, authority of meaning, ways of obtaining interpretive knowledge, and criteria for the validity of interpretation. Meanwhile, the comparative approach is used to systematically compare the similarities and differences in the methodological frameworks of thematic interpretation between al-Farmāwī and Abdullah Saeed, thereby obtaining a clear mapping of the epistemic characteristics of each approach.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The Epistemology of al-Farmāwī's Thematic Interpretation

#### 1. Intellectual Background and Context of Thought: Abd al-Hayy al-Farmawī

Abd al-Hayy al-Farmawī grew and developed as a scholar firmly rooted in the academic tradition of al-Azhar—an institution that has long been a center for the study of tafsir, ushul al-dīn, and Qur'anic sciences. Al-Farmawī studied tafsir and 'ulūm al-Qur'ān at al-Azhar, then pursued a career as a lecturer and eventually obtained a position as a professor in the relevant faculty. The intellectual consequences of this affiliation are evident in al-Farmawī's writing: he prioritizes the systematic study of Qur'anic texts and methodologies that can be adopted in academic life and teaching at al-Azhar. This connection explains why his works (including *Al-Bidayah fī al-Tafsīr al-Mawdū'i*) became the main reference for teaching mawdū'i tafsir in the Ushul al-Dīn and Qur'anic studies programs.

Important note: al-Farmawī's position at al-Azhar was not merely an administrative one; al-Azhar's epistemic tradition—which balanced the authority of classical texts with the need for scientific systematics— influenced al-Farmawī's emphasis on detailed and teachable methodological procedures. This distinguishes his writing style from more expository or non-systematic thematic traditions of exegesis. (Muyasaroh, 2017, p. 25)

#### 2. Methodological Steps in al-Farmāwī's Thematic Interpretation

The thematic interpretation method (*tafsīr mawdū'i*) formulated by 'Abd al-Hayy al-Farmāwī is systematically and operationally structured so that it can be applied academically. In *al-Bidayah fī al-Tafsīr al-Mawdū'i*, al-Farmāwī details the methodological stages aimed at obtaining a complete Qur'anic picture of a particular theme. These steps are as follows: (Al-Farmāwī, n.d., pp. 61–62)

##### a. Determining the Theme

The first step in thematic interpretation according to al-Farmāwī is determining the theme to be studied. The theme is chosen based on a specific issue, whether theological,



ethical, social, or legal. Determining the theme is the main foundation because it will determine the direction of the overall analysis. Al-Farmāwī emphasizes that the theme must be formulated clearly and focused so that the interpretation does not stray and lose coherence. This stage reflects al-Farmāwī's epistemological orientation, which places the Qur'an as the main source of thematic meaning.

b. Compiling All Verses Related to the Theme

Once the theme has been determined, the exegete compiles all verses of the Qur'an that are relevant to the theme, without being bound by the order of the surahs. This compilation is carried out comprehensively so that there is no partial selection that could affect the objectivity of the conclusions. According to al-Farmāwī, this step is important to uphold the principle of *al-Qur'ān yufassiru ba'dhuhu ba'dhan* (the Qur'an interprets itself), so that the meaning is not based on a single verse in isolation.

c. Arranging Verses Based on the Chronology of Revelation (*Tartīb al-Nuzūl*)

The next step is to arrange the verses that have been compiled based on the chronology of their revelation (*makkīyyah–madāniyyah*). The purpose of this stage is to understand the gradual development of Qur'anic concepts on a particular theme. Al-Farmāwī believes that the chronology of revelation helps mufassir understand the dynamics of the Qur'an's message and avoid generalizing meanings without considering the context in which the verses were revealed.

d. Analyzing Correlations Between Verses (*Munāsabah*)

The next step is to analyze the correlation and relationship between verses that discuss the same theme. This analysis includes similarities in wording, differences in context, and the reinforcement or limitation of meaning between verses. Through this step, al-Farmāwī attempts to construct a coherent and complementary thematic structure of meaning, resulting in a complete and systematic Qur'anic concept.

e. Supplementing with Hadith and Opinions of Scholars

Al-Farmāwī emphasized that thematic interpretation does not stand alone in the verses of the Qur'an, but needs to be supplemented with the hadith of the Prophet, the opinions of his companions, and the views of relevant classical exegetes. This step aims to maintain the continuity of thematic interpretation with the authoritative interpretation tradition. However, references to hadith and opinions of scholars are still positioned as explanations, not as the main determinants of meaning that stand above the verses of the Qur'an.

f. Drawing Thematic Conclusions (*Istikhlās al-Natījah*)

The final stage is drawing conclusions in the form of comprehensive Qur'anic concepts regarding the theme being studied. These conclusions are a synthesis of all the verses and previous analyses, reflecting the Qur'an's holistic and normative view. At this stage, al-Farmāwī's strong epistemological character in the textuality and internal coherence of the Qur'an is evident, with an emphasis on normative conclusions derived from revelation.



## **The Epistemology of Abdullah Saeed's Thematic Interpretation**

### **1. Background of the Contextual Interpretation Method**

In many of his works, Abdullah Saeed states that the interpretation model he supports and has developed is the “contextualist” interpretation model. Saeed also mentions several figures in his book Interpreting the Qur'an whom he considers to be contextualist exegetes, such as Fazlur Rahman and Khaled Abou el-Fadl, who contributed to the interpretation of ethico-legal verses and therefore had points of contact with his project.(Hamzah, 2010, pp. 208–209)

Saeed's influence by Rahman is so obvious in his way of thinking. That's why, besides being a Rahmani, Saeed is also seen as continuing and perfecting Rahman's interpretation methodology. As we know, Rahman's concerns are very much related to the uncertainty of Muslims in facing modernity.(Saeed, 2006, pp. 127–128)

Unlike Rahman, the concern or background of Abdullah Saeed's interpretive methodology project is the prevalence of interpretive models from textualists who tend to interpret the Qur'an literally. Such interpretations, according to Saeed, have ignored both the context of revelation and interpretation. From this perspective, Saeed developed a context-sensitive interpretation model, which is evident both in his theoretical foundations and in his epistemological principles.(Hamzah, 2010, pp. 209–210)

### **2. Epistemological Principles of Contextual Interpretation**

Contextual interpretation stems from the epistemological awareness that the Qur'an was revealed in a specific historical and social context, so that its understanding requires a connection between the text, the context of revelation, and the reality of contemporary readers. Within an epistemological framework, contextual interpretation views the Qur'an as a normative text rich in values, not merely a collection of literal rules. Therefore, interpretation is directed toward exploring the ethical principles and normative purposes of revelation so that it remains relevant in addressing contemporary issues, without compromising the authority and legitimacy of the sacred text.

#### **a. Recognition of the complexity of meaning**

Interpretation of the Qur'an that contains ethico-legal content requires ijtihad efforts to determine a more relevant and appropriate understanding of meaning in order to interpret this group of verses (Hamzah, 2010, p. 123). In this case, Saeed rejects the contextualists' idea that the meaning of a word is embedded in the object it refers to. According to him, this model of meaning reference is only relevant to certain words and is very limited, such as names and physical objects. Saeed emphasizes several principles in this scope of meaning, namely: 1) recognition of the uncertainty and complexity of meaning; 2) consideration of ethico-legal text as discourse; 3) recognition of the existence of things that limit the meaning of text; and 4) literal meaning as the starting point for interpretation (Fiena, 2015, pp. 71–74).

#### **b. Attention to the Socio-Historical Context**

According to Saeed, context is an important element, if not the most important element in interpreting the Qur'an. Internally, context forms the basis for understanding the relationship between the ethical and legal instructions in the verses of the Qur'an and the



reasons for introducing these commands to the society of the Hijaz in the 7th century (Saeed, 2006, p. 116).

In classical times, attention to context was demonstrated by tracing asbāb al-nuzūl. However, this was not utilized in a framework to demonstrate the connection between the text of the Qur'an and its socio-historical context. In principle, understanding asbāb al-nuzūl has not yet reached the point of viewing the Qur'an in a broader context. (Fiena, 2015, pp. 74–75)

**c. Formulating a hierarchy of values in ethico-legal verses: what remains constant and what changes**

Exploring this hierarchy of values is useful for interpreting ethico-legal verses. Of course, knowledge of this will be very useful for understanding and applying the values contained in the Qur'an, especially in the current context. Below are some tentative explanations of the various categories of value hierarchy offered by Abdullah Saeed:

1) Obligatory values

These values span both the Mecca and Medina periods and are not culture-dependent, due to their fundamental nature and emphasis in the Qur'an. In detail, these values include: First, values related to the belief system, namely values traditionally known as the pillars of faith. Second, values related to worship practices emphasized in the Qur'an (prayer, fasting, hajj, zakat, and remembering Allah). These values are emphasized repeatedly in the Qur'an and do not change with changing conditions, which is why they are universal. Third, what is halal and haram, which is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an and does not take into account changing conditions. According to Saeed, this category is very small in the Qur'an and is, in principle, universal. (Abdullah Saeed, 2016, p. 111)

2) Fundamental values

Fundamental values are values that are repeatedly emphasized in the Qur'an, supported by a number of significant textual evidences. Many early scholars recognized these values, and their discussions on this subject can be found mainly in literature on the concept of maqashid al-shari'ah, which al-Ghazali referred to as al-kulliyat al-khamsah (five universal values). These universal values refer to the protection of religion, life, reason, lineage, and property.

3) Protectional Values

These protective values serve to preserve fundamental values. For example, the protection of property is a fundamental value; however, this value is useless if it is not practiced. This practical application can be done through, for example, prohibiting theft and applying appropriate penalties. Because protective values are very important for the preservation of fundamental values, the aspect of universality can be extended to protective values (Abdullah Saeed, 2016, p. 114).

4) Implementational Values

Implementational values are specific measures used to practice protective values in society. For example, the protective value of prohibiting theft is practiced in society by



establishing specific measures against thieves, as stated in QS al-Ma'idah [5]: 38. When the Qur'an establishes measures such as cutting off the hands of thieves, it seems that the Qur'an took into account the cultural context at that time. Because corporal punishment and other forms of physical punishment or social disgrace were accepted as forms of punishment in 7th century Arabia, these measures were very effective in the context of that time (Abdullah Saeed, 2016, p. 114).

### 5) Instructional Values

These values refer to a number of specific instructions, directives, guidelines, and advice in the Qur'an relating to various issues, situations, and contexts. According to Saeed, a large number of the values in the Qur'an appear to be instructional. These instructional texts use various linguistic tools, such as imperative sentences (amr) or prohibitions (nahy), simple statements about good deeds, parables, stories, or references to specific events (Abdullah Saeed, 2016, p. 116).

#### d. Abdullah Saeed's Interpretation Model

In his methodology, there are four stages of interpretation formulated by Saeed. Stages I and II have actually been extensively studied by classical interpreters (textualist mufassir) in their books of interpretation. Therefore, modern mufassir do not need to bother finding them. Meanwhile, in stages III and IV, modern mufassir devote all their abilities to contextualizing the text in the present day. The details are as follows:

Stage I discusses the discovery of the textual world. Here, mufassir search for and collect verses in the Qur'an related to the issues they want to study.

Step II relates to critical analysis, which means examining the meaning intended by the Qur'an without linking it to the context of the recipients of the revelation and current conditions (first seeking the raw meaning). This can be done by examining the linguistic aspects (the use of words, phrases, and sentences in the verse), the context of the verse or surah (which came first and which came later), understanding the form of the text (identifying whether the verse belongs to historical, parable, theological, ethical, legal, or other texts), understanding the interrelationships between texts (exploring and collecting verses related to the theme), and identifying texts that have similar content and meaning.

Step III relates to linking the meaning of the text with the first recipient of the revelation (determining the historical meaning of the verse in accordance with the conditions of its revelation and adding several reviews from the perspective of the first recipient of the revelation). This can be done by analyzing the context (taking into account history, social life, politics, culture, and so on), considering the worldview (i.e., whether it is related to maqashid shari'ah or not), then identifying the texts that are the focus of discussion, after which drawing a 'common thread' from the identified texts to capture the 'natural' meaning (the complete meaning) in the Qur'an. Next, evaluate how the text was received by the first community (the time of the Prophet and his companions) so that it could be applied at that time.

Step IV is the final step and the process of interpretation, and this step has a very important role that has not been touched upon by classical exegetes. At this stage, the exegete



attempts to link the text and the current context. Things to consider at this stage are: analyzing the context (issues/needs) of the present that are considered relevant to the messages in the context. Next, ‘colliding’ (comparing) the current context with the socio-historical context in which the text was received (whether there are similar values, legal reasons, social, political, and cultural contexts or not), after comparing (finding similarities or differences in context), a reason can be narrowed down; how the text was applied in the early days and can be accepted today, after finding a solid reason; then “collide” again between the universality and locality of the text's message to identify whether the text can be applied universally or not (of course, considering all aspects of universality, maqashid al-shari'ah, human rights, justice, and so on).

From all these steps, what Saeed offers is nothing less than capturing the complete message that the Qur'an wants to convey. This is because understanding the Qur'an does not stop at linguistics alone (although according to Saeed, linguistic understanding is the first step in finding the basic meaning); rather, it must be studied in depth to find new meanings/understandings in accordance with contemporary realities.

## **Epistemological Similarities between the Interpretive Methods of al-Farmāwī and Abdullah Saeed**

### **1. The Qur'an as the Primary Epistemic Source**

Al-Farmāwī explicitly asserts that thematic interpretation must be based on the principle of al-Qur'ān yufassiru ba'ḍuhu ba'ḍan, meaning that the verses of the Qur'an interpret each other within a thematic unity. This principle forms the epistemological foundation of mawḍū'i interpretation, in which the primary authority of meaning remains with the text of the Qur'an itself (Al-Farmāwī, n.d., pp. 24–27). Abdullah Saeed, while emphasizing contextualization, still places the Qur'an as the primary normative source. Context and values in his approach serve as interpretive tools, not substitutes for the authority of the text (Saeed, 2006, pp. 37–39).

### **2. Rejection of Partial and Atomistic Interpretation**

Al-Farmāwī criticized tafsir tahlīlī, which understands verses separately and fragmentarily, because it has the potential to give rise to a partial understanding of certain themes. Therefore, he offered a method of collecting all thematic verses as an epistemological solution (Al-Farmāwī, n.d., pp. 30–32). A similar epistemological stance is also evident in the thinking of Abdullah Saeed. He rejects literal readings that are detached from other verses and from the context of revelation, because they produce normative conclusions that are incomplete and ethically problematic (Saeed, 2006, pp. 7–9).

### **3. Historical Awareness in the Interpretation Process**

Al-Farmāwī included makkiyyah–madaniyyah analysis and the chronology of revelation as part of the thematic interpretation process. This historical awareness was used to read the gradual development of the meaning of the Qur'an (Al-Farmāwī, n.d., pp. 45–48). Abdullah Saeed places the socio-historical context of revelation as the main epistemological prerequisite in interpretation, particularly in understanding ethical and legal verses (Saeed, 2006, pp. 116–120).



#### **4. Orientation toward the Normative and Ethical Goals of the Qur'an**

In al-Farmāwī's thematic interpretation, the ultimate goal of interpretation is to formulate normative conclusions that reflect the Qur'an's comprehensive view of a theme (Al-Farmāwī, n.d., pp. 52–55). Abdullah Saeed articulates this normative orientation through the concept of the Qur'anic hierarchy of values, distinguishing between fundamental, protective, and implementational values (Saeed, 2006, pp. 129–134).

#### **5. Interpretation as a Methodological Scientific Activity**

Al-Farmāwī viewed interpretation as a scientific activity that must have standard procedures and be replicable in an academic context. This is reflected in the formulation of systematic steps for mawdū'ī interpretation (Al-Farmāwī, n.d., pp. 18–23). A similar view is held by Abdullah Saeed, who emphasizes the need for a transparent and academically responsible methodological framework so that interpretations do not fall into subjectivism (Saeed, 2006, pp. 20–22).

#### **Epistemological Differences Between al-Farmāwī and Abdullah Saeed's Methods of Interpretation**

Although al-Farmāwī and Abdullah Saeed share certain epistemological points of convergence, they differ fundamentally in their epistemological foundations, orientation toward meaning, and the relationship between text and context. These differences reflect a paradigm shift in interpretation from a textual-normative model toward a contextual-value approach.

##### **1. Differences in Sources of Meaning Authority**

Al-Farmāwī places the text of the Qur'an as the dominant center of meaning authority. In his thematic interpretation, the validity of interpretation is determined by the internal coherence of the verses of the Qur'an that are compiled thematically. Historical context is used in a limited and explanatory manner, not as a major determining factor of meaning. (Al-Farmāwī, n.d., pp. 24–27). Conversely, Abdullah Saeed views that the authority of meaning does not only rest on the text, but also on the context of revelation and contemporary social reality. Qur'anic meaning is understood through a dialogue between the text, the original context, and the current context of the reader (Saeed, 2006, pp. 37–39).

##### **2. The Position of Context in the Interpretation Process**

In al-Farmāwī's epistemology, historical context is implicitly present through makkīyyah–madāniyyah analysis and the chronology of revelation. However, context does not function as the main instrument of meaning transformation, but rather as a background for understanding the structure of the Qur'anic message (Al-Farmāwī, n.d., pp. 45–48). Conversely, Abdullah Saeed places context as a key epistemological element. The socio-historical context of revelation and the modern context of the reader both play an active role in the process of interpretation, especially in understanding ethical and legal verses (Saeed, 2006, pp. 121–125).

##### **3. Meaning Orientation: Normative-Textual vs. Conceptual-Value**

The epistemology of al-Farmāwī's interpretation is oriented towards normative textual formulations, namely thematic conclusions taken directly from verses of the Qur'an as the



normative view of revelation on an issue (Al-Farmāwī, n.d., pp. 52–55). Abdullah Saeed, on the other hand, focuses on Qur'anic values. He distinguishes between levels of values—fundamental, protective, and implementational—so that the meaning of verses can undergo transformation in their application without losing their moral purpose (Saeed, 2006, pp. 129–134).

#### 4. Attitude toward Social and Historical Change

Al-Farmāwī viewed the message of the Qur'an as being relatively stable in normative terms, so that the task of the exegete was to uncover a coherent textual meaning, not to reconstruct meaning based on social change (Al-Farmāwī, n.d., pp. 18–23). Conversely, Abdullah Saeed explicitly acknowledges that social change requires a reinterpretation of certain verses, particularly those concerning law and ethics, as long as they remain consistent with the moral objectives of the Qur'an (Saeed, 2006, pp. 141–144).

#### 5. Methodological Characteristics: Procedural-Standard vs. Flexible-Reflective

Al-Farmāwī's method of interpretation is procedural and standard, with clear and structured methodological steps (determination of themes, collection of verses, chronology, munāsabah, and thematic conclusions) (Al-Farmāwī, n.d., pp. 18–32). Meanwhile, Abdullah Saeed offers a more flexible and reflective methodology, with an emphasis on interpretive frameworks rather than rigid technical procedures. This flexibility is intended to maintain the relevance of interpretation in an ever-changing context (Saeed, 2006, pp. 41–43).

### CONCLUSION

Based on an epistemological-comparative analysis of al-Farmāwī and Abdullah Saeed's thematic interpretation methods, it can be concluded that both represent two important trends in the development of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation methodology. Al-Farmāwī presents thematic interpretation as a systematic, textual, and normative method by placing the Qur'an as the center of meaning authority through the principle of *al-Qur'ān yufassiru ba'duhu ba'dan*. Meanwhile, Abdullah Saeed develops thematic interpretation within a contextual epistemological framework that places the text of the Qur'an in a dynamic dialogue with the socio-historical context of revelation and contemporary reality. This approach is oriented towards Qur'anic values and the ethical goals of revelation through the concept of a hierarchy of values, thus enabling the contextual reinterpretation of ethico-legal verses without relinquishing the legitimacy of the text.

The epistemological similarities between the two lie in their rejection of partial interpretations, their recognition of the importance of a comprehensive thematic approach, and their view that interpretation is a scientific activity that requires a clear and responsible methodological framework. The differences include the center of meaning authority, the function of context, normative versus value orientation, and attitudes toward social change.

Thus, this study confirms that thematic interpretation is not singular and monolithic, but rather has a broad epistemological spectrum. Al-Farmāwī and Abdullah Saeed can be understood as two complementary models: the former excels in methodological order and textual coherence, while the latter is strong in contextual relevance and value sensitivity. These findings open up space for the development of an integrative thematic interpretation model that combines the strengths of textuality and contextuality in responding to contemporary Islamic challenges.



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