Theological Hermeneutic Dialectics in the Interpretation of the Verses on the Nature of Allah: A Comparative Study of the Four Schools of Tafsir

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Abstract

The divergence in the interpretation of Qur'anic verses concerning the divine attributes has led to theological fragmentation, which has evolved into socio-cultural polarization, potentially undermining the harmony of contemporary Muslim communities. This study examines the hermeneutical dialectics of four theological schools in interpreting the verses on God's attributes, focusing on their epistemological and practical implications within the Indonesian context. Employing a qualitative approach based on library research and al-Farmawi's comparative analytical framework, this research analyzes three representative verses—Q.S. Tāhā [20]:5, Q.S. al-Fatḥ [48]:10, and Q.S. al-Raḥmān [55]:27—through four key exegeses: al-Mīzān (Shi'a), al-Kashshāf (Mu'tazilah), Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb (Ash'ariyyah), and Taysīr al-Karīm (Salafi). The findings reveal distinct interpretive tendencies: the Shi'a emphasize consistent philosophical ta'wīl; the Mu'tazilah prioritize rational and philological reasoning; the Ash'ariyyah construct a complex dialectical hermeneutic; while the Salafi adopt a literalist approach with fluctuating methodological consistency. These divergences extend beyond theoretical discourse, manifesting in Indonesia's socio-cultural contestations across digital spheres, religious institutions, and communal practices. This study argues that the diversity of interpretations regarding the divine attributes should not be perceived as a theological threat but rather as an epistemological richness that calls for a more inclusive and nuanced Qur'anic hermeneutic to preserve Muslim cohesion amid theological plurality. The novelty of this research lies in integrating theological and hermeneutical analysis within a

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comparative study of four major exegetical traditions and situating their interpretive dynamics within the contemporary socio-religious context of Indonesian Islam. This study contributes to advancing Qur'anic hermeneutics through a systematic analysis of methodological consistency across diverse theological schools.

Introduction

The discourse on Islamic theology, particularly the question of the attributes of Allah, is one of the most complex issues in the intellectual heritage of Islam. From the classical to the contemporary period, the debate over the verses concerning attributes has produced a variety of interpretations that not only enrich the scholarly tradition but also contribute to theological fragmentation.[1] Its conceptual foundation is based on the classification of muhkam and mutashabih verses, as affirmed in the word of Allah: "It is He who has sent down the Book to you; among them are the verses that are muhkam, which are the main points of the Book, and the others are mutashabih... (QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]:7). These mutashabih verses are the starting point of theologians' long-standing debate on how to interpret texts that appear to contain anthropomorphic elements (tasybīh), without compromising the principle of divine transcendence (tanzīh).[2]

In the epistemological framework of kalam, the attributes of Allah are classified into two categories: the dzātiyyah attributes, which are inherent to the essence of Allah, such as wajh (face) and 'ilm (knowledge); and the fi'liyyah attributes, which pertain to the actions of Allah, such as istiwā' (establishment) and nuzūl (descent).[3] This classification is important for understanding the range of interpretations of mutashabih mufasir texts. The Qur'an contains several verses that attribute human characteristics to Allah, such as "wajh Allah" (the face of Allah) in QS. al-Rahman [55]:27, "yad Allah" (the hand of Allah) in QS. al-Fath [48]:10, and "istawā 'alā al-'Arsh in QS. al-A'raf [7]:54.

Based on the narration of asbāb al-nuzūl, QS al-Fath [48]:10 was revealed in connection with the incident of Bai'at al-Ridwān. This verse affirms the legitimacy of the covenant between the believers and the Prophet as a covenant with Allah Himself—a context that reinforces the symbolic meaning of the "hand of Allah" as divine strength and support.[4] QS. Taha [20]:5 is revealed in the context of affirming Allah's power and authority over all creation, while QS. al-Rahman [55]:27 emphasizes the immortality of Allah's essence after all mortal beings have perished. Understanding

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[1] Abu Bakri, "A Comparative Analysis of the Interpretation of the Nature of Allah According to the Sunni, Salafi and Shi'a Contemporary Views," *Izzatuna: Journal of Quran Science and Tafsir* 5, no. 1 (2024): 14–25, https://doi.org/https://jurnal.stiuwm.ac.id/izzatuna/article/view/54/45.

[2] Islah Gusmian, *Treasures of Indonesian Tafsir: From Hermeneutics to Ideology* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2013).

[3] Fahru Reza Hakim, "The Meaning of the Words 'Yad' Embedded in Allah in the Qur'an" (PTIQ Institute Jakarta, 2023); Ilyas Supena, "Epistemology of Tafsīr, Ta'wīl, and Hermeneutics: Towards an Integrative Approach," *Jurnal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 12, no. 1 (2024): 122–136, https://doi.org/https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/JITC/article/view/5116/2450.

[4] Muhammad Amin Abdullah, *Religious Studies: Normativity or Historicity?* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Siswa, 2011).

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the context of these verses' revelation helps trace how the mufasirun interpreted these attributes within their respective linguistic, theological, and philosophical frameworks.

Literalist circles, such as the early Hanbali tradition and the contemporary Wahhabi movement, adhere to a zāhiri interpretation without takwīl to preserve the authenticity of the text. Ibn Kathīr, in Tafsīr *al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, asserts that the verses should be accepted as they are without questioning the "how" (bilā kayf), while avoiding any anthropomorphic likeness to creatures. Al-Qurṭubī, in *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, emphasizes the importance of caution to avoid tajsīm (the embodiment of Allah), whereas al-Bayḍāwī advocates for a balanced approach between tafwīḍ and takwīl as a moderate methodology[5] In contrast, rationalist groups such as the Mu'tazilah and the Shia tradition developed the methodology of takwīl to uphold the principle of tanzīh, rejecting any form of anthropomorphism that could compromise the purity of monotheism. The Ash'ariyah school, on the other hand, seeks to reconcile these approaches through takwīl muqayyad (limited interpretation) of verses that might lead to theological misunderstandings.

This methodological divergence extends beyond the theoretical realm and has tangible implications for the socio-political dynamics of Muslims. The Mihnah incident during the reign of Caliph al-Ma'mun (813–833 AD) serves as a historical example of how theological doctrines concerning the nature of Allah's kalam were employed as tools of political legitimacy.[6] Scholars who reject the view that the Qur'an is a created entity face systematic persecution, including imprisonment and torture. This phenomenon confirms that the issue of interpreting the nature verses is not only a hermeneutical challenge but is also closely linked to the structure of power and religious authority. In the tradition of interpretation, the theological bias of the mufasir is reflected in their interpretive methodology. Al-Zamakhshari (d. 538 AH), in *al-Kashshaf*, firmly rejects anthropomorphism and emphasizes *takwil majazi* (metaphorical interpretation) to uphold the principle of *tanzih* (divine transcendence). In contrast, Wahhabi commentaries, such as al-Sa'di's *Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman*, affirm the literal meaning with the principle of *ithbat* (affirmation of attributes) without *ta'kif* (inquiring into modalities). [7] The Ash'ariyah tradition, through al-Rāzī's *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, seeks to mediate this polarization using a complex dialectical framework, while the Shia tradition incorporates the imamological dimension into its hermeneutics, as exemplified in al-Mīzān by Ṭabāṭabā'ī. Previous studies have addressed certain aspects of interpreting nature-related verses. For example, Abdurrahman compares the methodology of takwīl in al-Mīzān with the tafsir of al-Sha'rāwī, identifying a fundamental difference between the Shia rational-philosophical approach and the Sunni textual moderation. Rohman examines the issue of ru'yatullāh from the perspectives of al-Zamakhshari, Ibn Kathir, and al-Syaukani, demonstrating the correlation between theological orientation and hermeneutical methods. However, research that integrates theological and hermeneutical analysis within a comparative framework encompassing the four main traditions (Salafi, Ash'ari, Muktazilah, and Shia) remains unavailable.

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[5] Mohd Affandi and Moḥd Yusuf, "The Concept of Imamah in the Shi'ah Madhhab," *International Journal of Al-Qur'an and Knowledge (IJQK* 1, no. 1 (2021): 9–21, https://doi.org/https://ejurnal.kqt.edu.my/index.php/kqt-ojs/article/view/20/15.

[6] Abdurrahman, "Takwil Ayat Mutasyabihat in the Qur'an" (Thesis, PTIQ Institute Jakarta, 2019).

[7] Abdul Rohman, "Discourse on Seeing Allah in Theological Interpretation," *Ash-Syukriyyah Journal* 23, no. 1 (2022), https://doi.org/https://jurnal.asy-syukriyyah.ac.id/index.php/Asy-Syukriyyah/article/view/205/150.

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There are three fundamental gaps in the academic literature. First, no analytical framework systematically integrates theological and hermeneutic dimensions in the comparative study of attribute interpretation. Second, previous research often employs a dichotomous (literal versus metaphorical) approach without exploring the internal methodological nuances within each tradition. Third, the praxis dimension of interpretative methods—that is, their impact on behavior, authority, and social cohesion—has been insufficiently studied, despite its importance for understanding the dynamics of Islam in the modern era.

The context of Indonesian Islam underscores the urgency of this research. Differences in the interpretation of nature-related verses directly impact ritual practices, the legitimacy of tawassul, and the formation of religious communal identity. Conflicts between puritan and traditionalist groups often stem from divergent interpretations of the nature of God, which then escalate into contests over religious authority (Farhan, 2013). In the digital era, the dissemination of rigid textual interpretations is becoming increasingly widespread, potentially fueling religious exclusivism and radicalization (Penangsang, 2024). Within this context, the study of theological dialectics in interpreting nature verses is not only academically significant but also strategically important for promoting Islamic moderation and fostering a more inclusive Qur'anic hermeneutics.

Specifically, this study aims to analyze the patterns of theological dialectics in the interpretation of three representative verses—QS. Taha [20]:5 concerning istiwā', QS. al-Fath [48]:10 regarding yad Allāh, and QS. al-Rahman [55]:27 about wajh Allāh—through four representative interpretations from each sect. Additionally, it evaluates the implications of these differing interpretations on religious praxis and the formation of contemporary Indonesian Muslim communal identity.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach based on library research with a comparative design aimed at mapping and analyzing the hermeneutic dialectics of the verses concerning the nature of God across four major theological traditions. The primary data consist of four representative commentaries: *al-Mīzān* (Ṭabāṭabā'ī; Shia), *al-Kashshāf* (al-Zamakhsharī; Mu'tazilah), *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī; Ash'ariyah), and *Taysīr al-Karīm al-Raḥmān* (al-Sa'dī; Salafi/Wahhabi). Secondary data include additional classical commentaries (Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, al-Bayḍāwī), neutral digital commentary sources (e.g., *al-Tafsir al-Muyassar*, digital edition of *Tafsir al-Ṭabarī*), journal articles, theses, and relevant academic literature.

The analysis follows al-Farawi's comparative method, which consists of five explicit stages: 1) Determination of the topic and focus—establishing thematic verses (QS. Isa [20]:5—istiwā'; QS. al-Fath [48]:10—yad Allāh; QS. al-Rahmān [55]:27—wajh Allāh) as well as defining the scope of the tafsir studied; 2) Collection of thematic sources and verses—compiling tafsir texts and supporting literature, including the history of asbāb al-nuzūl and variants of readings; 3) Linguistic analysis and asbāb al-nuzūl—examining the semantic, morphological, syntactic, and socio-historical context of the verse's descent, along with relevant qirā'āt variants; 4) Comparative analysis of interpretation—comparing hermeneutic procedures, the use of takwīl, tafwīḍ, itsbāt, imamological dimensions, and the influence of the kalam science framework on each mufassir; 5)

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Comparative thematic synthesis and validation—formulating interpretive patterns, epistemological and practical consequences, and validating findings through triangulation of sources and expert review. To enhance validity and reliability, the study employed several mechanisms: Text triangulation involves comparing primary tafsir with other classical tafsir works (such as those by Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Bayḍāwī) as well as neutral digital tafsir sources (including al-Tafsīr al-Muyassar and the digital version of Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī) to identify continuity or disparities in interpretation.

Triangulation method: a combination of textual analysis (content analysis), linguistic analysis, historical context studies (asbāb al-nuzūl), and kalam science frameworks used to capture the influence of theological affiliation. Expert validation involves consultation with at least two interpreters or theologians from diverse backgrounds (e.g., one traditional Sunni interpreter and one Shia interpreter or contemporary hermeneutic scholar) to evaluate the accuracy of interpretations and the implications of the findings. Data audit: a systematic recording of sources and citations, including notes on pages, editions, and digital versions. Each data extraction is accompanied by a complete reference to ensure traceability.

The analysis was conducted using a content analysis approach aimed at revealing the patterns of interpretation, theological backgrounds, and methodological implications of each mufassir. This research employs a traditional Islamic hermeneutic framework that focuses on the dynamics of tanzīh and tasybīh within the discipline of Kalam (Islamic Theology). This analytical framework is strongly influenced by the traditions of Mu'tazilah, Ash'ariyah, and Hanbali/Salafi thought, which position theological affiliation as the primary variable influencing hermeneutic methodology (the choice between takwīl or tafwīḍ) when engaging with mutashābih texts. By combining content analysis with perspectives from Kalam science, this study seeks to systematically map the dialectic of interpretation of verses concerning the nature of Allah.

Technically, data analysis is conducted through a systematic content analysis involving: (a) manual thematic coding for each interpretation based on predetermined categories (trait types: dzātiyyah vs. fi'liyyah; hermeneutic orientation; use of takwīl, tafwīḍ, or itsbāt; references to asbāb al-nuzūl), (b) an inter-sectarian comparison matrix to identify patterns of consistency and contradiction, and (c) a narrative synthesis that connects theoretical findings with practical implications. To minimize interpretive bias, the study employed cross-coding by two independent researchers, reconciling differences through expert discussions and consultations. The entire procedure is illustrated in the flowchart of the al-Farmawi Method (Diagram 1) and the comparative diagram between schools (Diagram 2) to facilitate readers' understanding of the research steps and the categories of analysis used.

Comparative Analysis of the Interpretation of Verses Concerning the Nature of Allah

The fundamental difference in the interpretation of verses concerning the nature of Allah reflects the epistemological contestation between rationalist and traditionalist approaches to Qur'anic hermeneutics. This study analyzes four interpretive paradigms representing the theological spectrum of Islam: Shia philosophical takwīl, Mu'tazilah linguistic takwīl, Ash'ari rational takwīl, and the Salafi literal approach. Through the analysis of three verses—QS Taha [20]:5 about istiwā', QS al-Fath [48]:10 about yad Allāh, and QS al-Rahman [55]:27 about wajh Allāh—this study reveals how each sect constructs an interpretive methodology that reflects its respective theological foundations.

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Interpretation of QS. [20]:5 About *Istiwā'*

The verse "الرَّحْمٰنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَىٰ" is one of the most controversial in Islamic theological discussions because it has the potential to promote an anthropomorphic understanding of Allah. Different schools of thought develop various hermeneutic strategies to address these challenges. Al-Tabataba'i, in al-Mīzān, demonstrates methodological consistency by applying the principle of transcendence as the primary hermeneutic filter. He interprets istiwā' as "al-haymanah wa al-sayṭarah, which denotes Allah's dominion and authority over His kingdom. This approach is not merely a defensive strategy to avoid anthropomorphism but rather a positive framework that affirms the metaphysical relationship between God and the universe. This interpretation reflects a philosophical methodology of takwīl, wherein each interpretation must be filtered through transcendence without sacrificing the relational dimension.[8]

Al-Zamakhshari, in his work *Al-Kashshaf*, developed a methodology that can be described as philological rationalism. He employs linguistic analysis as a means of theological justification, explaining that the phrase is an established Arabic idiom expressing power rather than physical existence. His linguistic approach demonstrates how he uses Arabic linguistic conventions to support the rational interpretation favored by the Mu'tazilah.[9]

Al-Razi, in *Mafātīḥ al-Gayb*, presents the most methodologically complex approach through dialectical hermeneutics. He developed ten logical arguments to reject the literal understanding of *istiwā'* as "physically seated, then established the meaning of *istīlā'* (mastery) based on definitive reasoning postulates. His impressive methodological rigor demonstrates how each interpretation is preceded by a systematic exploration of possible alternative meanings, followed by a critical evaluation grounded in the postulates of reason and revelation.[10]

Al-Sa'di, in *Taysīr al-Karīm*, presents one of the most methodologically controversial approaches. He adopts a moderate stance by accepting the literal meaning of *istiwā'* while affirming that it is "yalīqu bi jalālih" (in accordance with His majesty). This approach aims to preserve the literal meaning without falling into anthropomorphism; however, it faces challenges regarding methodological consistency when applied to other verses (al-Sa'di, 2000).

Al-Ṭabarī (a conventional Sunni scholar) combines the approaches of tafwīḍ and isbāt; he rejects excessive rational takwīl but also maintains that Allah does not resemble His creation. "As for the meaning of his words, it is profound and exalted, as illustrated by the saying that so-and-so 'flattened his bed.' He emphasized that the meaning of "eventful" is "to master, without investigating its true essence. Ibn Kathīr quotes the opinion of a Salaf scholar. "The ancestors passed it down as it came, without any alteration. That is, the verse is accepted as it is, without questioning how (bi lā kayf) and without likening it to anything (bi lā tasybīh).

Table. 1 Comparative Analysis of QS Interpretation. Side [20]: 5

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[8] Muhammad Husain al-Thabathaba'i, *Al-Mīzān Fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lāmī, 1997).

[9] Mahmud bin Umar al-Zamakhsyari, *Al-Kasysyāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Al-Tanzīl Wa 'Uyūn Al-Aqāwīl Fī Wujūh Al-Ta'Wīl*, 4th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotoob al-'Ilmiyyah, 2006).

[10] Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Mafātīḥ Al-Gayb* (Cairo-Egypt: Maktabah al-Taufiqiyyah, 2003).

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Method	Ta'wīl	Ta'wīl	Ta'wīl	Isbāt	Tafwīḍ-Isbāt	Tafwīḍ
Pendekatan	Philosophy	Linguistik	Rational	Literal moderat	Traditional moderate	Traditional
The Meaning of Istiwa'	al-Haymanah wa al-Sayṭarah (penguasaan)	Istil' (menguasai)	Istil' (menguasai)	Istiwa' haqīqī bi lā takyīf	Al-'uluw (height of meaning)	Eventing without tasybīh

Interpretation of QS. al-Fath [48]:10 About *Yad Allāh*

The verse "يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ" In the context of Bai'at al-Riḍwān, a different yet equally complex hermeneutic challenge arises. The historical context of Bai'at provides a practical dimension that influences the interpretative strategies of each school. Al-Tabataba'i maintains methodological consistency by interpreting *yad Allāh* as a manifestation of Allah's power and an instrument of action in the event of *baiat*. This interpretation demonstrates how he avoids a literal reading without sacrificing profound spiritual meaning. His philosophical approach integrates the metaphysical dimension with the historical reality of the *baiat* events, creating an interpretation that is coherent with its theological framework.[11] Al-Zamakhshari rejected the literal interpretation and understood it as a figurative expression of Allah's closeness and attentiveness to the event of bai'at.[12] His linguistically flawed approach is consistent with the methodology he applies to istiwā' verses, demonstrating a commitment to non-literal interpretations supported by philological analysis. However, the flexibility he shows in this verse indicates that the application of his figurative theory is not always rigid but can be adapted to specific contexts.

Al-Razi developed two approaches to interpretation. First, he viewed *yad Allāh* as a favor from Allah that surpasses the contributions of the companions. Second, he interpreted it as a form of Allah's protection of the *bai'at*, analogizing it to the role of an intermediary in the buying and selling transactions among the Arab people. This duality of interpretation reflects its hermeneutic richness but also raises questions about methodological consistency when a single verse can have multiple interpretations without sufficient theoretical justification.[13] Al-Sa'di employs a practical takwīl approach by interpreting the verse as a figurative expression of Allah's presence and blessing during the event of bai'at (al-Sa'di, 2000). The methodological shift from the literal interpretation of the istiwā' verse to a more figurative understanding in this context reveals inconsistencies in the application of its principles. This change suggests that the claim of methodological purity in the Salafi approach is more rhetorical than reflective of actual practice. Al-Rāzī presents two alternatives: "Allah's favor" and "Allah's protection of the bay'ah. "The hand of God, i.e., His grace, is above their hands, signifying His preservation and satisfaction." Al-Sa'dī engaged in practical takwīl, interpreting "yad Allāh" as a symbol of Allah's presence and blessing

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[11] al-Thabathaba'i, *Al-Mīzān Fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān*.

[12] al-Zamakhsyari, *Al-Kasysyāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Al-Tanzīl Wa 'Uyūn Al-Aqāwīl Fī Wujūh Al-Ta'Wīl*.

[13] al-Razi, *Mafātīḥ Al-Gayb*.

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during the event of bai'at. Al-Ṭabarī affirms the meaning of *majāziyyah*, which aligns with the tradition of the salaf. strength and ability." Ibn Kathīr quoted a Salaf scholar:"أي قوّة الله فوق قوتهم" *(The power of God is above their strength.)*

Table. 2 Comparative Analysis of **the Interpretation of QS. al-Fath [48]:10**

Aspects	al-Mīzān	al-Kasysyāf	Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb	Taysīr al-Karīm	al-Ṭabarī	Ibn Kathīr
Method	Ta'wīl	Ta'wīl	Ta'wīl	Ta'wīl praktis	Symbolic Ta'wīl	Tafwīḍ
Approach	Philosophy	Linguistik	Rational	Practical	Traditional	Traditional
Makna Yad Allāh	Qudrah & irādah	'Ināyah & qurb	Ni'mah / ḥifẓ	Divine Presence	Divine Power	The Power of God

Interpretation of QS. al-Raḥman [55]:27 About *Wajh Allāh*

The verse "وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ" presents a challenging hermeneutic complexity as it concerns the concept of eternity and the essence of God. The variety of approaches that appear in the interpretation of this verse is the most diverse compared to the previous two verses. Al-Tabataba'i uses a philosophical takwil approach by interpreting wajh as the noble qualities of Allah who mediate relationships with creatures.[14] This interpretation demonstrates philosophical depth consistent with its overall methodology, analyzing each element of the verse through a lens of transcendence without losing the relational dimension. Al-Zamakhshari adopts a linguistic approach to takwil by interpreting wajh as a figurative expression that refers to the Substance of Allah, not in a literal or outward sense. He maintains methodological consistency through the systematic application of figurative theory; however, he faces the challenge of explaining how figurative language can refer to a transcendent reality without resorting to excessive abstraction.[15] Al-Razi developed six systematic arguments for rejecting anthropomorphic understanding, emphasizing *wajh* as a symbol of the eternal essence or Substance of God.[16] The complexity of the argument demonstrates methodological maturity, but it also presents challenges in terms of interpretive accessibility for a wider audience. His complex dialectical approach sometimes results in ambiguity rather than expected clarity. Al-Sa'di shows a methodological shift by using a surrender approach without theological debate and focusing on the global meaning of the verse about the eternity of God.[17] The change from the literal and practical stipulations of the previous verses to total surrender reveals the instability of the theoretical foundations in his approach. This inconsistency suggests that contemporary Salafist methodologies have not succeeded in developing a coherent hermeneutic framework.

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[14] al-Thabathaba'i, *Al-Mīzān Fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān*.
[15] al-Zamakhsyari, *Al-Kasysyāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Al-Tanzīl Wa 'Uyūn Al-Aqāwīl Fī Wujūh Al-Ta'Wīl*.
[16] al-Razi, *Mafātīḥ Al-Gayb*.
[17] Abd al-Rahman bin Nasir al-Sa'di, *Taysīr Al-Karīm Al-Raḥmān Fī Tafsīr Kalām Al-Mannān*, 1st ed. (Riyadh: Maktabah Ibn al-Jawzi, 2000).

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Al-Ṭabarī & Ibn Kathīr: affirms **tafwīḍ salaf** — The face of Allah is an existing attribute, but its reality is unknown. "We believe in Him, as He says, without asking how, and without any representation."

Table. 3 Comparative Analysis of **the Interpretation of QS. al-Rahman [55]:27**

Aspects	al-Mīzān	al-Kasysyāf	Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb	Taysīr al-Karīm	al-Ṭabarī	Ibn Kathīr
Method	Ta'wīl	Ta'wīl	Ta'wīl	Tafwīḍ	Tafwīḍ-Isbāt	Tafwīḍ
Approach	Philosophy	Linguistik	Rational	Traditional	Traditional	Traditional
Makna Wajh Allāh	God's Noble Qualities	Dzat Allah	The Essence of the Substance of Allah	Surrender of meaning	The nature of Allah without takyīf	The Dzat of Allah without tasybīh

Implications of Different Interpretations on Theology and Religious Practice

The significant transformation in Indonesia's Islamic theological landscape demonstrates that the various interpretations of the verses concerning the nature of Allah have evolved into a complex socio-cultural phenomenon with multidimensional implications for the religious life of the community.[18] Significant transformations in Indonesia's Islamic theological landscape reveal that differing interpretations of the nature of Allah have evolved into complex socio-cultural phenomena with multidimensional implications for people's religious lives. No longer confined to doctrinal discourse among scholars, these interpretative differences have become ideological identities that shape the social, educational, and political orientations of Muslims. Unlike previous research, which tends to treat interpretative differences as a closed theological issue, this study emphasizes that such differences are part of ijtihad muktabar, recognized within shari'i law. The variety of tafsir arising from the approaches of tafsir bi al-ma'tsur (based on transmitted reports) and tafsir bi al-ra'y (reasoning-based) reflects the dynamic ijtihad of Muslims in responding to the complexity of both text and context. Within this framework, diversity of interpretation should not be viewed as a deviation from creed but rather as a manifestation of the breadth of grace and freedom of thought accommodated by the Qur'an.[19]

Systematic documentation reveals how digital media has significantly amplified theological polarization to alarming levels. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram have not only become mediums for da'wah but have also transformed into arenas for theological narrative battles, directly impacting social fragmentation. Thousands of Salafi da'wah channels,

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[18] Bakri, "A Comparative Analysis of the Interpretation of the Nature of the Istiwa of Allah According to the Sunni, Salafi and Shi'a Contemporary Views."

[19] Muhammad Zainal dan Hafizah Abidin and Yulia, "Conflict and Integration in The Salafi Wahabi Purification Movement in South Kalimantan," *Source: Scientific Journal of Religion and Socio-Culture.* 4, no. 2 (2019): 191–201, https://doi.org/https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340820139_Conflict_and_Integration_in_The_Salafi-Wahabi_Purification_Movement_in_South_Kalimantan.

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with millions of subscribers, aggressively attack the traditions of Islamic boarding schools through provocative content that accuses the practice of takwil of heresy.[20] This phenomenon differs fundamentally from classical theological conflicts, which are typically confined to the circle of scholars and academics. A surprising finding not identified in previous studies is the micro-social impact of family disintegration caused by differences in theological interpretations. Young people exposed to Salafi da'wah through social media undergo a drastic shift in their religious paradigm, which affects not only their theological views but also alters patterns of social relationships within their families and communities.[21] They reject religious traditions that have become deeply rooted in Indonesian society, such as tahlilan, yasinan, and grave pilgrimages, creating intergenerational tensions that have never been systematically documented before.

The institutional competition within Islamic education, as a tangible expression of theological polarization, exhibits a unique dynamic. Salafi educational institutions, such as the Integrated Islamic School and various ma'had, have successfully attracted the urban middle class by promoting themselves as centers that teach "pure" and "authentic" Islam, in contrast to traditional Islamic boarding schools, which are often viewed as being tainted by heresy and superstition.[22] This phenomenon creates unfair competition that threatens the sustainability of the tradition of Islamic boarding school education, which has been the backbone of Indonesian Islamic education for centuries. The political dimension of theological polarization reveals aspects that previous studies have not uncovered. Political actors exploit polarized religious sentiments to mobilize the masses by positioning themselves as defenders of "true Islam" against "perverted Islam".[23] Labels such as heresy, kafir, and ahl al-hawa are no longer used purely in theological contexts but have become political tools to delegitimize opponents.

This politicization restricts the space for healthy theological dialogue and replaces it with an exclusive narrative that erects walls of identity within Indonesia's Muslim society. The most significant findings suggest that this polarization is not merely a manifestation of differences in interpretation but rather a crisis of religious identity in the era of globalization. Each group seeks to maintain authenticity through claims of exclusivity, even though all theological traditions in Islam have made important contributions to the development of religious thought. This contrasts with previous studies that assume polarization is a natural consequence of interpretive diversity.[24]

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[20] Romario, "Moderate Islam and Conservative Islam on Youtube," *KPI Selasar Journal: A Reference to Communication and Da'wah Media* 4, no. 1 (2024): 1–15, https://doi.org/https://ejournal.iainu-kebumen.ac.id/index.php/selasar/article/view/1901/864.

[21] Ahmad dan Aziz Sahal and Munawir, *Islam Nusantara: From Ushul Fiqh to Counter-Radicalism* (Bandung: Mizan, 2015).

[22] Muhammad Ridwan and Rizqulloh Afandi and Muhammad Naufan, "The Development of Salafi Educational Institutions and Their Influence on Education in Indonesia," *Journal of Islamic Education* 16, no. 1 (2025): 31–42, https://doi.org/https://journal.uhamka.ac.id/index.php/jpi/article/view/18893/5456; Irham, "Manhaj Salafi Islamic Boarding School: New Model Islamic Education in Indonesia," *Ulul Albab Journal* 17, no. 1 (2016): 1–18, https://doi.org/https://ejournal.uin-malang.ac.id/index.php/ululalbab/article/view/3252/pdf.

[23] Nur Kholis, "The Dynamics of the Salafi Da'wah Movement in Multicultural Societies in Indonesia," *Al-Ubudiyah: Journal of Islamic Education and Studies* 4, no. 2 (2023): 52–65, https://doi.org/https://www.researchgate.net/publication/376383869_Dinamika_Gerakan_Dakwah_Salafi_pada_Masyarakat_Multikultur_di_Indonesia/link/6575acd8ea5f7f02055b0c94/download?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1Y mxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19.

[24] Harun Nasution, *Reform in Islam: A History of Thought and Movement* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1992).

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The practical implications highlight the need for a fundamental transformation of the Islamic educational paradigm and the creation of a theological ecosystem that values plurality as epistemological wealth. A comprehensive strategy—including the development of an integrative curriculum, the establishment of a center for theological literacy, and the strengthening of clerics' roles as agents of peace—is urgently needed to address the growing fragmentation. Overall, the various interpretations of the verses concerning the nature of Allah have transcended doctrinal theology and evolved into a socio-cultural phenomenon that threatens the social harmony and unity of Indonesian Muslims. Unlike previous studies that focused solely on doctrinal aspects, empirical evidence shows that the polarization of contemporary theology encompasses digital, generational, institutional, and political dimensions, necessitating a holistic approach to its resolution.

Theoretical and Epistemological Dimensions

A comparative analysis of the four schools of tafsir—Mu'tazilah (al-Zamakhsharī), Ash'ariyah (al-Rāzī), Shia (al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī), and Salafi (al-Sa'dī)—reveals distinct epistemological approaches to understanding the relationship between text, reason, and reality.

1. *Al-Zamakhsyarī* used philological rationalism, combining linguistic analysis and logic as theological legitimacy.
2. *Al-Rāzī* exemplifies the distinctive argumentative diversity of the Ash'ariyah school, which aims to balance tanzīh (divine transcendence) with metaphorical interpretation
3. *Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī* highlights the consistency in philosophical ta'wīl, which affirms the metaphysical relationship between Allah and nature
4. *Al-Sa'dī* exemplifies a variation in the application of literal methods aimed at preserving the apparent (zahir) meaning of the text without attributing any resemblance between Allah and His creatures.

This comparison demonstrates that each school holds a legitimate theological and spiritual role within the Qur'anic framework. All aim to understand the attributes of God proportionally, according to their respective epistemic perspectives. Therefore, the "true-perverted" dichotomy in evaluating interpretations cannot be academically justified; rather, what exists is methodological diversity within the framework of ijtihad muktabar.

Conceptual and Practical Implications

The findings of this study recommend three strategic steps:

1. Strengthening Inclusive Theological Education by Incorporating Comparative Studies of Madhhab Tafsir into the Islamic Curriculum Using Historical and Hermeneutic Approaches.
2. Development of Theological Digital Literacy – training the younger generation to think critically about online da'wah content, ensuring they are not easily influenced by exclusive narratives.
3. Cross-Sectarian Theological Dialogue – facilitating an academic and social space for constructive interaction among adherents of diverse interpretative traditions.

Overall, the implications of differing interpretations of the verses concerning God's nature have transcended the boundaries of doctrinal theology and evolved into multidimensional phenomena:

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social, digital, generational, institutional, and political. These differences in interpretation are not sources of division but rather reflections of the breadth of revelation's meaning, which creates space for the intellectual diversity of Muslims—a process of ijtihad that is both legitimate and continually evolving throughout Islamic history.

Theological Dimension in the Dialectic of Tafsir

The comparative findings concerning the four paradigms for interpreting the verses about the nature of Allah confirm and expand the theoretical framework developed by Gusmian regarding the correlation between theological orientation and the hermeneutic praxis of the Qur'an.[25] However, in contrast to the Gusmian focus, which emphasizes methodological and theoretical aspects, the analysis of these four schools reveals dimensions that have not been systematically explored: how theological affiliation not only influences methodological choices but also determines the consistency and stability of the hermeneutic framework in response to variations in the textual context.

The pattern of methodological consistency revealed through the analysis of three different verses challenges assumptions in previous literature that tend to generalize the approaches of each school. Abdurrahman, who compares the methodology of takwīl in the tafsīr of al-Mīzān and al-Shaʿrāwī, identifies a difference between the Shiʿa rational-philosophical approach and the Sunni textual moderation but does not examine how methodological consistency is tested through variations in the contextual interpretation of the verses.[26] The analysis results indicate that al-Thabathaba'i maintains a consistent philosophical approach to takwīl across the three verses. In contrast, al-Sa'di demonstrates methodological inconsistency by shifting from a literal isbāt interpretation in the istiwā' verse to a practical takwīl in the ayat yad Allāh, and then to tafwīḍ in the verse wajh Allāh. These findings suggest that claims of methodological purity within the contemporary Salafi tradition are more rhetorical than reflective of consistent practice.

The hermeneutic complexity encountered by al-Razi in *Mafātīḥ al-Gayb* enriches the understanding of the Ash'ariyah tradition, which has often been characterized as a straightforward mediator between literal and metaphorical interpretations. Rohman, who examines the issue of *ru'yatullāh* from the perspectives of al-Zamakhshari, Ibn Kathir, and al-Syaukani, demonstrates the close relationship between theological orientation and hermeneutical methods. However, he does not explore how methodological complexity can yield multiple interpretations within a single verse.[27] Al-Razi develops a duality of interpretation regarding the ayat yad Allāh without providing adequate theoretical justification, suggesting that the richness of Ash'ari hermeneutics may compromise clarity of interpretation in order to accommodate a broad theological spectrum.

The phenomenon of philological rationalism demonstrated by al-Zamakhshari expands the understanding of the Mu'tazilah methodology, which has traditionally been viewed as mere rational takwil (interpretation). His linguistically nuanced approach reveals a complexity

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[25] Gusmian, *Treasures of Indonesian Tafsir: From Hermeneutics to Ideology*.
[26] Abdurrahman, "Takwil of the verses of mutasyabihat in the Qur'an."
[27] Rohman, "Discourse on Seeing God in Theological Interpretation."

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overlooked in previous studies: how Arabic linguistic conventions function as theological justification for rational interpretation. This approach fundamentally differs from a purely rational method that relies solely on reasoning, as al-Zamakhshari incorporates the philological dimension as a bridge between the text and rationality. The methodological inconsistencies revealed in the contemporary Salafi tradition through al-Sa'di's analysis present findings that contrast with the apologetic literature promoting the superiority of the literal approach. Bakri noted theological fragmentation due to methodological divergence but did not recognize that this fragmentation also occurs internally within the Salafi tradition itself. Al-Sa'di's methodological instability indicates that the claim of authenticity for literal interpretation faces serious challenges when applied consistently to verses with varying hermeneutic characteristics.The dialectic between transcendence and relationality, revealed through comparative analysis, demonstrates that each theological tradition confronts the same fundamental challenge: how to uphold the principle of tanzih without compromising the relational dimension between God and the universe. Al-Thabathaba'i addresses this dialectic through positive constructions that affirm metaphysical relations; al-Zamakhshari employs linguistic mediation; al-Razi limits the scope of takwil; and al-Sa'di adopts a more flexible approach but encounters challenges regarding methodological consistency. This variation highlights that the philosophical depth within the hermeneutic tradition determines the capacity to overcome theological challenges. the most significant aspect of these findings is the identification of the epistemological patterns underlying each interpretive tradition. Unlike previous studies that focused on superficial methodological differences, the analysis in this study reveals that each school employs a distinct epistemology to understand the relationship between text, reason, and reality. the theoretical implications of these findings highlight the need to revise the dichotomous categorization (literal vs. metaphorical) that has long dominated the hermeneutic study of the Qur'an. The spectrum of interpretation revealed demonstrates a complexity that transcends this simple binary, underscoring the necessity for developing a more profound and nuanced hermeneutic typology to better understand the dialectic of interpretation within the Islamic tradition. This contributes to the advancement of a more comprehensive and accurate hermeneutic theory of the Qur'an, effectively capturing the richness of the Islamic interpretive tradition.

Conclusion

This study reveals the complexity of theological dialectics in interpreting verses concerning the nature of Allah through a comparative analysis of four interpretive paradigms representing the spectrum of Islamic theology: Shia, Mu'tazilah, Ash'ariyah, and Salafi. The results show that differences in the interpretation of QS. Dhaka [20]:5, QS. al-Fath [48]:10, and QS. al-Rahmān [55]:27 do not merely reflect methodological variations on the surface but also embody the epistemological dialectic between rationalist and traditionalist approaches to Qur'anic hermeneutics. The Shia tradition, as exemplified in al-Mīzān, demonstrates a consistent philosophical ta'wīl that prioritizes the principle of transcendence as the primary hermeneutic filter. In contrast, the Muktazilah tradition, represented in al-Kashshāf, develops a philological rationalism that incorporates linguistic analysis to establish theological legitimacy. The Ash'ariyah tradition, illustrated in

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Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb, exhibits a rich and complex dialectical hermeneutic approach. Meanwhile, the contemporary Salafist methodology in Taysīr al-Karīm reflects a variation in the application of literal methods aimed at preserving the meaning of the zahir (apparent) text. These methodological differences highlight the diversity of Islamic interpretation as a manifestation of ijtihad muktabar, recognized within the Islamic scholarly tradition.

Qur'anically, this finding confirms that the Qur'an itself allows for a plurality of meanings through the concept of mutashabihat, as explained in Āli 'Imrān [3:7]. Some verses are muḥkamāt (clear and unambiguous), while others are mutashabihat (ambiguous or possessing layered meanings). Thus, the diversity of interpretations regarding the nature of Allah is an epistemological necessity that aligns with the character of revelation—opening a diverse space for interpretation according to the capacity of reason and the context of the people.

The socio-cultural implications of these interpretative differences reveal a shift from academic discourse to complex social dynamics. The polarization of theology in Indonesia has extended beyond the realm of scholarly debate, evolving into a conflict over religious identity that disrupts social harmony—particularly through the amplification of digital media and the institutional fragmentation of Islamic education. This phenomenon underscores the need for a moderate, adaptive, and contextual theological approach to prevent interpretative differences from escalating into societal divisions. The strength of this research lies in the development of an analytical framework that systematically integrates theological, hermeneutical, and sociological dimensions. This study identifies patterns of methodological consistency across four schools of interpretation by examining variations in the contextualization of verses and uncovers the multidimensional implications of different interpretations on the religious life of the Indonesian people. However, its limitation is that it focuses on only four representative tafsir books, which do not fully encompass the entire spectrum of Islamic interpretive traditions, nor does it provide an in-depth comparison across Muslim-majority countries. This research paves the way for long-term studies on the evolving interpretation of the verses describing Allah's attributes within a digital and global context. Practical scientific recommendations that can be implemented include:

1. Integration of comparative interpretation teaching within the UIN/IAIN environment aims to help students understand the diversity of interpretation as a valuable scientific asset rather than a source of deviation.
2. Strengthening interpretive moderation in the digital era through religious media literacy and curricula that foster an ethic of interpretation and respect for diversity.
3. A follow-up study across the archipelago's interpretations aims to explore local treasures in presenting a contextual, inclusive, and rahmatan lil-'ālamīn tafsir.

Reflecting on the words of Allah in QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]:13, "O people, verily We created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you might know one another." This principle serves as the spiritual foundation that differences—including interpretations of the verses concerning God's nature—should foster mutual understanding and enrich religious insights, rather than cause confusion or misguidance. Thus, this study confirms

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that the plurality of interpretation is an inherent aspect of Sunnatullah within the dynamics of revelation and human reason. The dialectic of interpretation that arises from the diversity of schools is not a threat to faith but rather a foundation for developing a more comprehensive and reflective hermeneutic theory of the Qur'an. This approach aligns with the spirit of the Qur'an, which values differences as a blessing for all people

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