

The Renewal of Religious Thought and Its Urgency for the Advancement of Islamic Civilization: A Comparative Study between Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Fazlur Rahman

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Abstract: This study explores the renewal of religious thought (*tajdīd al-fikr al-dīnī*) in Islam through a comparative analysis of the ideas of Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Fazlur Rahman. Both scholars are prominent figures in modern Islamic reform, yet they represent distinct epistemological orientations. Fazlur Rahman approaches renewal through a neo-modernist and hermeneutical lens, emphasising historical contextualisation and rational reinterpretation of revelation, while Yusuf al-Qaradawi advances a practical reform based on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and *fiqh al-waḳī'* to address contemporary socio-religious issues. Employing a qualitative, library-based method with philosophical and comparative approaches, this research examines the conceptual foundations, methodologies, and civilizational implications of their thought. The findings reveal that Rahman's framework stresses theoretical reconstruction of Islamic epistemology, whereas Qaradawi's focuses on applied jurisprudential moderation *wasatiyyah*. The synthesis of both approaches offers a balanced paradigm for developing a dynamic, rational, and ethically grounded Islamic civilization in the modern era

Keywords: Religious thought renewal, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Fazlur Rahman, *Maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, Hermeneutics, Islamic civilization.

Introduction

Religious thought reform constitutes one of the key factors in the advancement of Islamic civilisation, particularly as Muslim societies confront the dynamics of modernity, social transformation, and global challenges that necessitate a creative reinterpretation of religious teachings. The reform of religious thought in Islam can generally be mapped into three major typologies based on modern academic reconstruction. First, classical reformism, which seeks to reconcile the Islamic tradition with the demands of modernity, as demonstrated by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muhammad 'Abduh, and Rashīd Riḍā. These figures emphasised rationality, *ijtihād*, and the revitalisation of religious institutions as the foundation for communal progress, as outlined by Hourani (Hourani, 1983:255) and further reinforced

by Kurzman's analysis (Kurzman, 2002:35), which categorises them as classical Islamic modernists. Second, neo-modernism and hermeneutics, a strand that highlights critical, historical, and contextual readings of religious texts. This typology encompasses Muhammad Iqbal, Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Abdullah Saeed. Iqbal's notion of reconstructing religious thought (Iqbal, 1930:145) and Rahman's theory of double movement (Rahman, 1982:16) constitute the foundational pillars of contextual hermeneutics, which were subsequently expanded by Abu Zayd (Abu Zayd, 1997:35) and Saeed (Saeed, 2005:20).

Third, ideological and socio-critical reform, which evaluates power relations, social structures, traditional discourses, and gender issues. Hasan Hanafi, for instance, proposed the project of *al-Yasār al-Islāmī* as an attempt to liberate Islamic thought from the dominance of classical discourse (Abu

Rabi', 2004:101), while Amina Wadud developed a feminist Qur'anic exegesis that emphasises gender equality through a Qur'anic hermeneutic (Badran, 2004:222). Within this broader spectrum, Yusuf al-Qaradawi occupies a moderate and operational position through his *al-wasatiyyah* approach, which synthesises commitment to the Islamic tradition with responsiveness to contemporary realities. Esposito and Voll (Esposito & Voll, 2001:129), as well as El-Gamal (El-Gamal, 2004:117), point out that Qaradawi's thought is more readily applicable in modern legal and policy contexts due to his emphasis on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and a jurisprudence of contemporary realities. Thus, the underlying thread of Islamic reform lies in the collective endeavour to reconstruct religious understanding so that it remains relevant to the challenges of modern civilisation, even though each thinker differs in terms of method, epistemology and thematic orientation.

This article examines two key figures, Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Fazlur Rahman. A comparative analysis of the two demonstrates that Rahman offers a more philosophical and theoretical epistemological–methodological framework, whereas al-Qaradawi provides an operational model that is more readily applicable within the sphere of communal policy and contemporary juridical concerns. Consequently, the reformist thought of both scholars not only contributes to the revitalisation of Islamic intellectual tradition but also lays the foundation for the development of an Islamic civilisation that is progressive, adaptive, and firmly rooted in the values of divine revelation.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in library-based inquiry, combined with content analysis and a comparative analytical approach. A library research method is utilised because the object of study consists of intellectual ideas dispersed across books, journal articles, and the primary works of both thinkers, as recommended by George (George & Bennett, 2008:121) in text-based qualitative research. Content analysis is applied to identify epistemological and methodological themes, as well as the broader

framework of religious thought reform, within Fazlur Rahman's works such as *Islam and Modernity* (1982) and *Revival and Reform in Islam* (2000), and within Yusuf al-Qaradawi's works, including *Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt: Dirāsah Jadīdah fī Daw' al-Nuṣūṣ wa al-Maqāṣid al-Syar'iyyah* (1992), *al-Ijtihād al-Mu'āṣir baina al-Indhibāt wa al-Infirāt* (1994), *al-Shahwah al-Islāmiyyah* (2001), among others. The comparative approach is employed to identify points of convergence, methodological divergences, and practical orientations between both scholars, in line with Sartori's (1991:243–257) framework on the comparative method in the study of thought. Through the integration of these three approaches, the research aims to produce a comprehensive mapping of each thinker's contribution to Islamic intellectual reform and its relevance for the development of contemporary civilisation.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of Fazlur Rahman's Framework of Religious Thought Reform

Fazlur Rahman proposes a highly methodical and systematic framework for the reform of religious thought through his theory of the double movement, which constitutes the core of his Qur'anic hermeneutics. Within this theory, the first movement involves a historical–social understanding of the context of Qur'anic revelation (that is, the "revelatory context"), while the second movement entails the application of the universal moral values derived from this analysis to contemporary realities (the actualisation of values in the present). This approach enables a Qur'anic interpretation that is neither literalist nor static, but dynamic and responsive to modern challenges (Az Zahra & Fukoroh, 2024:7705).

The concept of the double movement introduced by Fazlur Rahman constitutes the core of his hermeneutical methodology in interpreting the Qur'an. In *Islam and Modernity* (Rahman, 1982:6–8), Rahman explains that the first movement involves returning to the historical context of a given verse, that is, understanding the social, political, and moral background at the time of revelation while simultaneously extracting the ethical principles and universal objectives (*maqāṣid al-Qur'ān*) embedded

within it. The second movement then involves bringing these universal principles into engagement with contemporary realities in order to address modern issues that were unknown during the period of revelation. Through these two steps, Rahman asserts that the Qur'an must be read not merely textually, but historically and ethically, so that its teachings remain relevant to the challenges of the age and continue to function as a living normative guide for modern society.

In the epistemological context, Rahman underscores that classical exegesis, which focuses primarily on the text and juridical rulings, is markedly limited because it neglects social change and the moral needs of the Muslim community in the modern era. The double movement method enables interpreters to synthesise the moral understanding of Qur'anic texts with contemporary challenges in a critical and constructive manner (Fikriyah & Ansharuddin, 2022:5). Thus, Rahman seeks to avoid both the dominance of pure textualism and the moral relativism that could potentially undermine the integrity of religious teachings.

In the domain of the application of Islamic law (fiqh), Rahman's theory also proves highly productive. For instance, Zumaroh and colleagues, in the journal *Tadhkirah*, demonstrate that Rahman's double movement can be applied to issues of inheritance and family law in Indonesia by interpreting Qur'anic inheritance texts through their original historical context and subsequently actualising them in relation to contemporary problems without compromising the Qur'an's moral essence (Zumaroh et al., 2025:216–220).

Furthermore, in the domain of social ethics, Rahman does not merely interpret the Qur'an as a sacred text, but as a foundation for universal moral principles. For example, in the article "Nilai-nilai Universal QS. al-Mujâdalah [58]:11" by Muhammad Arsyad, the application of Rahman's double movement demonstrates that the values of social inclusivity and respect for knowledge can be derived as moral principles suitable for implementation within contemporary society, particularly in the fields of education and social relations (Arsyad, 2023:114–118).

Moreover, the scope of Rahman's hermeneutics also encompasses existential reflection. In the article "Hermeneutika Double Movement Fazlur Rahman: Mewujudkan Hukum Islam yang Lebih Eksistensial" by Mohamad Yufidz Anwar Ibrohim and Nur Muhammad, the authors demonstrate that Rahman develops an epistemology of Qur'anic interpretation that integrates philosophical, social, and humanistic disciplines, thereby enabling the formulation of Islamic law that is not merely legal-formal but also existentially meaningful in the life of modern human beings (Ibrohim & Muhammad, 2022:105–110).

Analysis of Yusuf al-Qaradawi's Framework of Religious Thought Reform

Yusuf al-Qaradawi's reformist thought is rooted in the concept of *al-wasathiyah* and the operational application of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* within contemporary life. In his work *Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt* (Qaradawi, 1992:15–22), al-Qaradawi emphasises the need for methodological reconstruction through the establishment of Shari'ah-based priorities so that Islamic law may adequately address the demands of modernity without losing its normative foundation. Meanwhile, in another key work, *al-Sahwah al-Islāmiyyah baina al-Juhūd wa al-Tatarruf* (Qaradawi, 1990:34–40), he critiques two extreme tendencies—literalist scripturalism and unrestrained liberalism—and proposes a moderate reformist framework grounded in the principles of ease (*taysīr*), balance (*tawāzun*), and flexibility (*murūnah*). Furthermore, in *al-Ijtihād al-Mu'āṣir baina al-Indhibāṭ wa al-Infirāt* (Qaradawi, 1994:24–31), he explains that contemporary *ijtihād* must be anchored in *maqāṣid* and socio-realities (*fiqh al-wāqi'*) so that Islamic law can generate fair and relevant solutions for modern societies. Through this integrative approach, al-Qaradawi offers a model of reform that is not only theoretical but also practically applicable to the development of Islamic civilization.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi's framework for the reform of religious thought is grounded in the concept of *al-wasathiyah* (moderation), which he positions as both a methodological and epistemological principle for interpreting religious texts. According to Luthfi's study (Luthfi, 2020:51–52), al-Qaradawi views

moderation not merely as a middle position but as a “method of thinking” that rejects both literalistic extremism and unfettered liberalism. This principle is then translated into a framework of contemporary *ijtihād* that emphasises the integration of textual sources (*nash*), the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*), and social reality. Thus, reform, according to al-Qaradawi, is not a revision of doctrine but a revitalisation of methodology, enabling Islam to remain compatible with societal change while maintaining its normative authority.

In the field of Islamic legal methodology, al-Qaradawi developed what he calls “*ijtihādmanhajī*”, namely *ijtihād* at the level of method rather than merely at the level of legal products. In Aravik’s study (Aravik, 2019: 155–157), *ijtihādmanhajī* requires a comprehensive understanding of *maqāṣid*, *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt* (the jurisprudence of priorities), and *fiqh al-ma‘ālāt* (consideration of consequences), which he formulates as the pillars of *tajdīd* (Aravik, 2019: 160–162). Through this framework, al-Qaradawi seeks to ensure that Islamic law is not understood as a set of static regulations, but rather as a dynamic ethical–moral system. This approach also serves as an implicit critique of traditional *fiqh*, which he considers overly oriented towards literalism and insufficiently attentive to the lived realities of the Muslim community.

Moreover, al-Qaradawi extends the scope of renewal into the social and civilisational domain through the concept of *fiqh al-wāqī‘* (the jurisprudence of reality). This concept requires scholars to understand social, economic, and political conditions prior to issuing legal rulings. According to Supriyadi’s study, al-Qaradawi emphasises that changes in legal verdicts often depend on changes in empirical reality; thus, the ability to interpret and assess reality constitutes an integral part of scholarly competence (Supriyadi, 2021: 89–91). Accordingly, al-Qaradawi’s vision of *tajdīd* combines historical sensitivity, *maqāṣid*-based rationality, and a pragmatic orientation in addressing the contemporary challenges faced by Muslim communities, ranging from economic and political issues to questions concerning Muslim minorities.

Furthermore, al-Qaradawi’s conception of *tajdīd* also carries implications for a more humanistic re-reading of the scriptural texts. Hasanah’s study

demonstrates that al-Qaradawi rejects interpretive patterns that are strictly scripturalist when their outcomes conflict with tangible public welfare or the moral purposes of the Sharī‘ah (Hasanah, 2018: 44–46). Although he remains committed to the authority of the *nash*, he insists that interpretation must take into account intention, the effective cause (*‘illah*) of legal rulings, and the social context—an epistemological structure that renders his thought more applicable than that of many earlier reformers. A critique often directed at this approach is that an excessively broad space for public welfare may open the door to subjectivity, although al-Qaradawi himself has delineated the boundaries of *maqāṣid* to avoid falling into legal relativism.

A Comparative Study of the Reformist Thought of Fazlur Rahman and Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Its Urgency for the Advancement of Islamic Civilization.

The religious thought reform carried out by Fazlur Rahman and Yusuf al-Qaradawi is grounded in the shared need to revitalize Islamic methodology so that it aligns with the demands of modernity, although both figures take distinct epistemological paths. Fazlur Rahman emphasizes reform through a historical–hermeneutical approach with his double-movement method, namely the movement from the historical context of the text toward its universal moral principles, and then a return to the modern context in order to formulate relevant legal and ethical conclusions (Ibrohim & Muhammad, 2023:45–46). This approach is philosophical and epistemological in nature, aiming to construct an intellectual foundation for the conceptual transformation of Islamic thought. In contrast, Yusuf al-Qaradawi develops a more operational model of reform through the concepts of *al-wasatiyyah*, *manhajī ijtihad*, and *fiqh al-wāqī‘*, which are oriented toward integrating the scriptural texts (*nash*), the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*), and contemporary social needs (Aravik, 2019:160–162). While Rahman seeks to construct an interpretive paradigm that structurally critiques and reconstructs classical methodologies, al-Qaradawi strives to maintain the continuity of the tradition through methodological innovations that can be directly applied in the spheres of law, economics, and public life.

The comparison between the two shows that Rahman is more focused on long-term intellectual reconstruction, whereas al-Qaradawi emphasizes legal reform and socially pragmatic practices that are quickly adaptable. Rahman critiques the legalism of classical fiqh and proposes a moral-contextual reading, yet this approach has been viewed by some scholars as opening space for subjectivity due to its reliance on historical reconstruction, which is not always certain (Fikriyah&Ansharuddin, 2020: 58–59). On the other hand, al-Qaradawi presents a more structured model of *tajdid* through the legal priorities of *fiqh al-awlawiyyāt* and the consideration of consequences in *fiqh al-ma'ālāt*. Nevertheless, he is also criticized for the broad scope of *maṣlahah*, which can open the door to overly flexible interpretations (Hasanah, 2018:44–46). Thus, the fundamental difference between the two lies in their epistemological emphases and methodological orientations: Rahman is more philosophical-normative, whereas al-Qaradawi is more fiqh-oriented and pragmatic.

Critiques of Fazlur Rahman and Yusuf al-Qaradawi indicate that the reform of religious thought is inseparable from the tension between fidelity to tradition and the demands of modernity. Fazlur Rahman is criticized for his historical-critical approach, which is viewed as overly rationalistic and too closely aligned with Western hermeneutical methodologies, thereby risking a rupture in epistemological continuity with the classical intellectual heritage. Sherman Jackson (Jackson, 1999:148–150) notes that some scholars regard Rahman's double-movement method as an 'epistemic rupture' that is excessively bold in dismantling the structure of traditional exegesis. A similar critique is offered by Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Zaman, 2012:77–85), who show that Pakistani 'ulama' have accused Rahman of westernizing Islamic thought. Conversely, the critiques of Yusuf al-Qaradawi are more operational in character, particularly that his moderate approach is not radical enough to enable a comprehensive reconstruction of Islamic law. Bettina Gräf and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen (Gräf&Skovgaard-Petersen, 2009:160–167) argue that although al-Qaradawi introduced a discourse

of moderation into the global Islamic public sphere, he nonetheless retained many traditional fiqh boundaries, which prevented his reforms from moving beyond an orthodox framework. In addition, Mona Siddiqui (Siddiqui, 2014:54–59) shows that al-Qaradawi's views on gender and politics contain inconsistencies, as they often combine maqāsid-based principles with a literal reading of certain texts. Accordingly, the critiques of these two figures reveal two poles of reform: Rahman is considered overly progressive in his epistemology, while al-Qaradawi is viewed as overly moderate in implementation. Together, they demonstrate that the reform of Islamic thought requires a balance between theoretical reconstruction and practical transformation.

Civilizationally, the contributions of these two figures are highly significant for the renewal of Islamic intellectual life. Rahman's hermeneutical model provides a foundation for developing critical and relevant textual studies, thereby encouraging Muslims to cultivate historical awareness and the ability to anticipate the future. This approach is relevant for the development of an Islamic civilization grounded in scientific inquiry, social ethics, and modern rationality (Zumaroh et al., 2023: 92–94). Meanwhile, al-Qaradawi's concepts of moderation and contemporary *ijtihād* play a major role in shaping an inclusive, responsive, and benefit-oriented socio-political civilization, particularly through the application of maqāsid in economic governance, interreligious dialogue, and public policy within the Muslim world (Luthfi, 2020:51–52). Thus, the two complement one another: Rahman provides the philosophical and methodological foundations, whereas al-Qaradawi offers the applicative tools that can be implemented within the realities of modern society. The combination of both figures produces a comprehensive paradigm of *tajdid*—at the level of ideas as well as practice—which is crucial for accelerating the advancement of Islamic civilization in facing global challenges. In summary, the researcher outlines the comparison between the two figures and their significance for the progress of Islamic civilization in the following diagram.

Figure	Framework	Methodology	Focus	Urgency for the Advancement of Islamic Civilization
Fazlur Rahman	Double Movement	Hermeneutics	Contextual, universal-moral orientation	Establishing an intellectual foundation
Yusuf al-Qaradawy	Al-Wasatiyyah	Ijtihad manhaji, fiqh al-waqi'	Legal, social, economic spheres	Preserving legal and social continuity

Tabel 1. A Comparison of the Reform of Religious Thought

Conclusions

The reform of religious thought as formulated by Fazlur Rahman and Yusuf al-Qaradawi demonstrates that the advancement of Islamic civilization depends greatly on the community's ability to reinterpret religious teachings in creative, critical, and contextual ways. Fazlur Rahman emphasizes methodological reconstruction through a historical-ethical approach aimed at uncovering the Qur'an's universal moral values so that they can address the challenges of modernity. Meanwhile, al-Qaradawi develops the frameworks of *wasathiyah*, *fiqh al-maqāsid*, and *fiqh al-muwāzanāt*, which are more operational and applicable within contemporary socio-political life. Although differing in their epistemological approaches, both thinkers affirm the central importance of *ijtihād* as a mechanism for dynamizing Islamic law so that it remains relevant to modern society.

Comparatively, the contributions of the two thinkers lead to significant intellectual and social transformations in the Islamic world: Rahman provides the theoretical and methodological foundations for the reform of religious thought, whereas al-Qaradawi offers practical instruments for implementing Islamic values in the governance of communal life. Their differences, in fact, enrich the discourse of reform, as Rahman shifts the focus toward epistemological reconstruction, while al-Qaradawi prioritizes the application of the Shari'ah in a *maṣlahah*-oriented manner. Thus, the urgency of reforming religious thought in the context of advancing Islamic civilization lies in the ability to integrate profound methodological analysis with careful social praxis, enabling Islam to emerge as an

adaptive, solution-oriented, and competitive religion in the face of global dynamics.

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