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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Epistemological and Hermeneutical Foundations of the Verse of *Wilāyah* and a Critical Evaluation of the Views of *Sālūs*, *Fakhr Rāzī*, and *Rashīd Riḍā*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the epistemological foundations underlying the denial of the Verse of Wilāyah (al-Mā'idah: 55) as evidence for the Imamate by conducting a comparative and critical analysis of the interpretive methodologies of three influential critics: "Fakhr Rāzī, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, and ʿAlī Sālūs." The central research question is whether their rejection of the verse's implication for the Imamate results from an objective textual analysis or is rooted in pre-existing theological presuppositions. Employing a descriptive-analytical method within a hermeneutical framework, the study demonstrates that this rejection is the consequence of a defective hermeneutical circle. In this interpretive process, the prior assumption denying a divinely designated Imamate governs textual interpretation and gives rise to three shared methodological deficiencies: "Semantic selectivity, whereby the term Walī is narrowly restricted to the meaning of "Friendship" or "Mutual Support"; systematic marginalization of decisive textual evidence, including the widely transmitted reports concerning the occasion of revelation and the restrictive function of the particle "Innamā" (exclusively); and disregard for the principles of holistic hermeneutics, which require the integration of all contextual and textual evidence in the interpretive process." Drawing upon both Sunni and Shiʿi sources, together with the responses of leading Imami exegetes, particularly the authors of al-Mīzān and Nemooneh, the study concludes that an accurate understanding of the Verse of Wilāyah requires transcending polemical presuppositions, accepting authentically transmitted traditions, and assigning balanced interpretive weight to all contextual, linguistic, and narrative evidence.

KEYWORDS

Objections to the Indicative Meaning of the Verse of Wilāyah, A Hermeneutical Analysis of the Foundations of Denying the Indicative Meaning of the Verse of Wilāyah, The Epistemological Foundations of ʿAlī Salūs's Views, The Epistemological Foundations of Fakhr Rāzī's Views, The Epistemological Foundations of Rashīd Riḍā's Views..

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Extended Abstract

Educational Implications of the Story of Prophet Adam's (PBUH) Creation with Emphasis on Kashf al-Asrar Interpretation

Introduction

The interpretation of sacred texts is pivotal in shaping theological doctrines. The Verse of Wilāyah (Qur'an 5:55) is a prominent locus of intense debate between Shi'i and Sunni schools, stating: "Your only walī is Allah, His Messenger, and the believers who establish prayer and give charity while they are bowing down (rākiʿūn)." Shi'i scholars present this verse as a definitive cornerstone for the doctrine of Imamate, arguing its context designates Imam ʿAlī (a) as the legitimate successor with comprehensive authority. Conversely, prominent Sunni critics from different historical periods—such as Fakhr al-Rāzī (classical), Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (modern reformist), and Aḥmad ʿAlī al-Sālūs (contemporary)—reject this implication. They contend that *walī* here signifies nothing more than general friendship or support. This divergence raises a crucial epistemological question: Is this denial a methodologically sound conclusion derived from a neutral hermeneutical analysis, or is it fundamentally shaped by prior theological presuppositions, acting as a "hermeneutics in the service of denial"? This study seeks to epistemologically deconstruct the foundations of this denial by critically analyzing the interpretive methodologies of these three scholars.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method combined with a critical-hermeneutical approach. It comparatively examines the exegetical works of Fakhr al-Rāzī (*Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*), Rashīd Riḍā (*Tafsīr al-Manār*), and ʿAlī al-Sālūs (*Maʿa al-Ithnā ʿAshariyyah*) against the foundational principles of holistic Islamic hermeneutics. The analytical framework investigates three key areas: (1) A semantic analysis of the term *walī* by consulting primary Arabic lexicons (e.g., Ibn Fāris, Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, Ibn Manẓūr) to map its full semantic range, from friendship to authoritative guardianship. (2) An analysis of internal textual evidence, including the immediate textual context (*siyāq*) and the restrictive/exclusive force of the particle *innamā*. (3) An evaluation of external evidence, notably the large corpus of definitive and *mutawātir* narrations regarding the verse's specific occasion of revelation (*shaʾn al-nuzūl*). By juxtaposing the critics' interpretive choices with available textual and historical data, the study identifies their shared methodological shortcomings.

RESULT

The findings demonstrate that the denial of the verse's signification of Imamate is not the outcome of an impartial, text-driven investigation, but is fundamentally shaped by overriding theological presuppositions. The a priori rejection of a "divinely appointed Imamate" functions as a powerful interpretive filter, leading to several critical methodological flaws shared by all three scholars:

1. **Semantic Selectivity:** The term *walī* possesses a wide semantic range in classical Arabic, encompassing friendship, support, and authority/guardianship (*awlā bi-al-taṣarruf*). The critics engage in selective semantics by isolating "friendship" (*nāṣir* and *muḥibb*) as the only viable option. This restriction is driven by a theological imperative to avoid the meaning of "authority," ignoring the verse's coupling of this wilāyah with that of God and His Messenger.
2. **Systematic Neutralization of Decisive Evidence:** Critics actively neutralize strong textual and historical evidence. The widely transmitted (*mutawātir*) narrations identifying Imam ʿAlī's act of charity during prayer are dismissed through inconsistent hadith criticism (as seen in al-Sālūs) or overshadowed by strict adherence to linear context (as seen in al-Rāzī and Riḍā). Furthermore, the powerful exclusive function of the particle *innamā* is systematically diluted or ignored.
3. **The Vicious Hermeneutic Circle:** The interpretive process exemplifies a "vicious hermeneutic circle" (دور هرمنوتیکی معیوب). The inquiry begins with an unexamined theological presupposition that denies designated Imamate. This premise dictates the selection of a theologically "safe" meaning for *walī* and necessitates rejecting contrary textual evidence. The final interpretation—that the verse merely encourages general friendship—in turn serves to "confirm" the initial presupposition, preventing an authentic discovery of the text's meaning.

Discussion

The results suggest that the debate over the Verse of Wilāyah is less about linguistic ambiguity and more about conflicting hermeneutical paradigms. Fakhr al-Rāzī relies heavily on textual context (*siyāq*), Rashīd Riḍā on thematic unity (*mawālāt*), and al-Sālūs on polemical hadith evaluation. However, despite their differing techniques, all three instrumentalize hermeneutics to defend an established position. This "hermeneutics in the service of denial" contrasts with a "holistic hermeneutics" (هرمنوتیک جامع‌نگر) which remains open to its presuppositions being challenged by the text. By exposing these methodological flaws, this research elevates the discussion from a repetitive polemic to a meta-level epistemological analysis of the interpretive process itself.

Conclusion

This research concludes that a precise, balanced understanding of the Verse of Wilāyah requires adopting a holistic hermeneutical framework. Such an approach demands rigorous methodological integrity, including critical self-awareness of one's pre-understandings, equitable weighting of all evidence, and acceptance of soundly transmitted traditions (*ṣaḥīḥ al-sanad*). When viewed holistically, the convergence of the exclusive particle *innamā*, the unique description of the charitable act during *rukūʿ*, and the extensive narrations of its revelation strongly point toward a specific, exalted form of wilāyah—namely, authority and Imamate—bestowed upon Imam ʿAlī (a). The critics' methodology, therefore, is not a substantive refutation but a clear manifestation of a vicious hermeneutic circle.

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Introduction

The following verse, "Your guardian is exclusively Allah, His Messenger, and those who believe, those who establish prayer and give alms while bowing in prayer" (al-Mā'idah: 55) commonly referred to as the Verse of *Wilāyah*, has held a central position in Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic theology since the formative period of Islam. Due to its significant theological implications for the doctrine of religious authority, it remains among the most debated and influential verses in the history of Islamic interpretation. Two major exegetical traditions have emerged in interpreting this verse. On the one hand, the Imami Shiʿi tradition, relying upon a coherent body of both internal textual indicators, such as the restrictive particle "*Innamā*" and the distinctive descriptive clauses, and external evidence, particularly the extensive corpus of reports concerning the occasion of revelation, regards this verse as an explicit textual designation establishing the Imamate and immediate spiritual and political authority of Imam Ali (Ṭūsī, n.d.: 3, 559; Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 6, 8-9).

On the other hand, a considerable number of Sunni exegetes and theologians, while acknowledging the virtue attributed to the believers mentioned in the verse, reject its implication for a specific doctrine of Imamate. Employing various principles of textual interpretation, they restrict the meaning of *Walī* to "Friendship," "Alliance," or "Mutual support." The central challenge arises when this rejection is presented not merely as a theological disagreement but as the outcome of a systematic interpretive methodology grounded in hermeneutical principles.

Prominent scholars representing three major periods of Islamic intellectual history, *Fakhr Rāzī* (classical period), *Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā* (modern reformist period), and *ʿAlī Sālūs* (contemporary period), have each attempted to undermine or deny the verse's implication for the Imamate through methodological appeals to contextual interpretation, the generality of Qur'anic language, and critical evaluation of the transmitted reports.

At this stage, the present study extends beyond traditional theological debate to engage with the philosophy of interpretation, specifically hermeneutics. The focus shifts from the meaning of the verse itself to the process by which meaning is constructed. More precisely, the study investigates how the interpretive methods and underlying assumptions of these scholars led to conclusions that diverge fundamentally from those of the Imami tradition.

Accordingly, the principal question addressed in this research is whether the rejection of the Verse of *Wilāyah* as evidence for the Imamate is the result of a comprehensive, objective, and methodologically sound hermeneutical reading of the text and all its associated evidence, or whether it is rooted in previously accepted epistemological and theological presuppositions that shape the interpretive process from the outset and direct it toward predetermined conclusions.

In other words, 'Does one encounter a rejection grounded in hermeneutics, or rather a hermeneutical methodology employed in the service of a prior rejection?'

Through a critical examination of the interpretive methodologies of these three influential scholars, this study seeks to answer this fundamental question.

1. Objectives and Significance of the Study

The primary objective of this article is to move beyond conventional responses to theological objections by investigating the epistemological and methodological mechanisms through which such objections are formulated.

While previous studies have generally addressed the substantive content of these criticisms, the present research seeks to explain their origins and development from a hermeneutical perspective.

Accordingly, the principal objectives are:

- To analyze the influence of theological presuppositions on the selection and semantic restriction of key Qur'anic terms, particularly the word "*Walī*."
- To conduct a comparative and critical examination of how these scholars methodologically engage with major interpretive evidence, including the occasions of revelation, textual context, and other semantic possibilities contained within the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition.
- To explain the concept of a defective hermeneutical circle within their interpretive methodology and demonstrate how prior assumptions are imposed upon the text.
- To defend the necessity of adopting a holistic hermeneutical approach, one that considers all relevant elements of textual interpretation in an integrated and methodologically balanced manner.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to a deeper understanding of the epistemological structures underlying divergent Qur'anic interpretations. In addition to clarifying the Verse of *Wilāyah*, the present study offers a methodological case study relevant to the hermeneutical analysis of other contested Qur'anic passages, thereby fostering more rigorous and constructive scholarly dialogue within Qur'anic studies.

2. Research Questions

The present paper addresses the following questions:

- On the basis of which epistemological presuppositions and hermeneutical framework do scholars such as *ʿAlī Sālūs*, *Fakhr Rāzī*, and *Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā* reject or weaken the implication of the Verse of *Wilāyah* for authority and the Imamate?
- What methodological criticisms, from a hermeneutical perspective, may be directed against their interpretive approaches, and what are the principal strengths and weaknesses of their methodology?
- In what way do theological presuppositions generate a defective hermeneutical circle in the interpretation of the Verse of *Wilāyah*?
- What methodological requirements characterize a holistic hermeneutical approach to the interpretation of the Verse of *Wilāyah*, and how can such an approach overcome the limitations of polemical interpretations?

3. Research Method and Structure of the Article

This study employs a descriptive-analytical research method within a critical hermeneutical framework. The descriptive section presents the theoretical foundations of Qur'anic hermeneutics, a semantic analysis of the term "*Walī*," and a systematic exposition of the interpretive views advanced by the three selected scholars.

The analytical and critical section examines their underlying assumptions and hermeneutical methodologies in light of established principles of textual interpretation, identifying the methodological deficiencies that characterize their approaches, particularly the emergence of a defective hermeneutical circle. Finally, the study proposes the essential features of a holistic hermeneutical approach to interpreting the Verse of *Wilāyah* as an alternative interpretive model.

4. Literature Review

The body of scholarship concerning the Verse of *Wilāyah* is extensive and well established. However, to clarify the position and originality of the present study, the literature may be classified into three principal categories.

4-1 Traditional Exegetical and Theological Studies

This category constitutes the principal and classical body of literature on the subject. Prominent Shi'i scholars, from *Shaykh Mufīd* in "*al-Ifṣāḥ fī al-Imāmah*" and *Shaykh Ṭūsī* in "*al-Tibyān*," to Allamah *Ṭabāṭabāʾī* in "*al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*" have demonstrated and established the implication of the Verse of *Wilāyah* for *Wilāyah* in the sense of authority, guardianship, and Imamate. Their arguments are based on a coherent body of linguistic evidence, contextual analysis, the "*Mutawātir*" traditions concerning the occasion of revelation, together with other rational and transmitted proofs (Mufīd, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 114; Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 6, 8-9).

In contrast, the majority of Sunni exegetes and theologians, including *Fakhr Rāzī* in "*Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*" and *Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā* in "*Tafsīr al-Manār*," have interpreted the verse primarily in light of the surrounding verses that prohibit believers from taking unbelievers as allies. Consequently, they restrict the meaning of the term "*Walī*" to "Friendship" and "Support," while questioning either the authenticity or the evidentiary value of the reports concerning the occasion of revelation as proof of Imamate (Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH:. 12, 385; Rashīd Riḍā, n.d.: 6, 443).

Modern works, such as *ʿAlī Sālūs*'s "*Maʿa al-Ithnāʿ Asharīyyah fī al-Uṣūl wa al-Furūʿ*," have continued the same argumentative approach using contemporary language and have systematically formulated objections to the Shi'i interpretation (Sālūs, 2003: 1, 59).

Although these works provide the primary source material for the present investigation, they themselves do not offer a methodological or epistemological analysis of the opposing interpretive framework.

4-2 Studies on Hermeneutics and the Foundations of Textual Understanding

With the introduction and expansion of hermeneutical studies into contemporary Islamic intellectual discourse, valuable contributions have emerged concerning the theoretical foundations of understanding religious texts. Works such as An Introduction to Hermeneutics by Ahmad Vaezi, together with studies addressing the role of pre-understandings (preconceptions) in interpretation, provide the theoretical framework necessary for conducting hermeneutical analyses of disputed Qur'anic passages (Vaezi, 2004 AD/1383 SH; Azad, et al., 2010 AD/1389 SH).

Although these studies recognize the importance of the interpreter's theological assumptions in shaping interpretation and discuss concepts such as the hermeneutical circle, they generally remain at the theoretical level. Only rarely have these analytical tools been applied systematically and in depth to a specific Qur'anic text such as the Verse of *Wilāyah*.

4-3 Contemporary Studies Responding to Objections Concerning the Verse of *Wilāyah*

Over recent decades, numerous books and scholarly articles have examined and refuted the textual and semantic objections raised against the Verse of *Wilāyah*. Although these studies are rich in content and highly successful in addressing detailed objections, their primary focus has been on theological apologetics, hadith criticism, and historical analysis. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to the methodological and epistemological origins of

those objections. In other words, these studies have primarily addressed the question:

'How should these objections be answered?' rather than asking: 'From what intellectual and hermeneutical mechanisms did these objections originally emerge?'

The research gap becomes apparent precisely at the intersection of these three fields: namely, the absence of a systematic study employing contemporary hermeneutical tools, particularly the analysis of pre-understandings and the hermeneutical circle, to undertake a comparative examination of the interpretive methodologies adopted by the major critics of the Verse of *Wilāyah* throughout Islamic intellectual history. This study aims to address this gap by integrating these fields of inquiry. The originality of this research lies in shifting the analytical focus from responding to objections toward investigating their epistemological roots, with particular emphasis on the methodological and epistemological foundations of denial.

Through the direct application of contemporary hermeneutical analysis, this article tests the hypothesis that the critics' approach constitutes not "A denial grounded in hermeneutics" but rather "A hermeneutics employed in the service of denial," wherein the principles of textual interpretation are subordinated to pre-existing theological assumptions.

5. Theoretical Foundations: Hermeneutics, Textual Understanding, and Pre-understandings

Understanding and interpreting the Holy Qur'an, as the revealed Word of God, is a complex and multi-layered process that has, since the earliest centuries of Islam, prompted Muslim scholars to formulate systematic principles governing textual interpretation under disciplines such as Qur'anic sciences and principles of Qur'anic exegesis.

In the modern period, the discipline that systematically investigates the theory of understanding has come to be known as hermeneutics.

Although modern hermeneutics originated within the Western intellectual tradition, its fundamental concerns, including the relationship between interpreter and text, the role of pre-understandings, and the mechanisms through which meaning is attained, are universal issues that provide powerful conceptual tools for analyzing the methodologies of Qur'anic interpretation.

Accordingly, this section establishes the theoretical framework necessary for evaluating the interpretive approaches of the critics of the Verse of *Wilāyah*. It first explains the foundational principles of Qur'anic hermeneutics and subsequently examines two central concepts, pre-understanding and the hermeneutical circle, along with their methodological pathology, namely a defective (or vicious) hermeneutical circle.

5-1 Fundamental Principles of Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Criteria for Critical Evaluation

Achieving a sound, reliable, and defensible understanding of the Holy Qur'an requires adherence to a set of rational and transmitted principles that function as objective criteria for evaluating competing interpretations. Any interpretation that ignores these principles, or applies them selectively, falls outside the bounds of scholarly credibility. The most important of these principles, which enjoy broad acceptance within the Islamic exegetical tradition, are as follows:

1) Primacy of the Arabic language and its literary conventions: The Qur'an was revealed in

"Clear Arabic language." (al-Shuʿarāʾ: 195) Consequently, the first and most indispensable step in understanding the Qur'an is comprehensive mastery of Arabic grammar, rhetoric, literal and figurative meanings, and the semantic usage of Qur'anic vocabulary within the linguistic and cultural context of the revelation (Suyūṭī, 1974: 1,178-180). Any interpretation that disregards the apparent meanings of the text or the accepted conventions of the Arabic language inevitably results in the interpretation based on personal opinion and the imposition of meaning upon the text rather than the discovery of its intended meaning.

2) The centrality of context: Context, understood as the continuity and coherence of discourse, is one of the most important indicators for determining the speaker's intended meaning. Context includes both: "Internal context, the relationship between preceding and succeeding verses and the internal coherence of a single verse; and external context, the broader thematic framework of the surah, the circumstances surrounding revelation, and the overall teachings of the Qur'an." (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 1, 12-14) Ignoring contextual considerations fragments the text and leads to partial and inaccurate interpretations. Nevertheless, appealing to context itself is subject to methodological constraints. Context cannot be invoked as a pretext for dismissing other decisive interpretive indicators, such as explicit textual evidence or mass-transmitted traditions concerning the occasion of revelation.

3) The explanatory role of the prophetic tradition: The Qur'an explicitly entrusts the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) with the task of explaining its verses: "And We have revealed to you the Reminder so that you may clarify to the people what has been sent down to them." (al-Naḥl: 44) From the Imami Shi'i perspective, this explanatory authority was inherited by the Ahl al-Bayt (AS). Accordingly, authentic exegetical traditions play a fundamental and indispensable role in understanding the Qur'an, particularly in explaining details, identifying specific referents, and removing ambiguities (Khūʾī, 1987 AD/1366 SH: 397). Naturally, the authority of such traditions depends upon the authenticity of their chains of transmission and their consistency with the unequivocal teachings of the Qur'an and definitive rational evidence.

4) The authority of definitive reason: The Qur'an consistently invites humanity to reflect and reason. Demonstrative reason, described as God's "Inner Messenger," is an essential instrument for understanding doctrinal principles, distinguishing truth from falsehood, and comprehending the logical implications of divine revelation, provided that it remains free from fallacious reasoning (Javadi Amoli, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 1, 170).

Consequently, any interpretation that contradicts definitive rational proof lacks validity, since the speech of the All-Wise God cannot conflict with sound rational demonstration.

5) The Importance of the Occasion of Revelation: Knowledge of the historical, social, and cultural circumstances surrounding a verse's revelation significantly contributes to a more precise understanding of its message, particularly in identifying its primary referent (Wāḥidī Naysābūrī, 1992: 4-6). Although the well-established exegetical principle states that "Legal consideration is based on the generality of the wording rather than the specificity of the cause," the occasion of revelation nevertheless serves as an important interpretive indicator.

It may decisively clarify ambiguous meanings or identify the foremost instance of a general concept. Ignoring the occasion of revelation therefore amounts to excluding an essential body of evidence relevant to the proper

understanding of the text. These five principles collectively constitute the framework of a sound hermeneutic within the Islamic exegetical tradition. A comprehensive hermeneutical approach requires the interpreter to maintain a balanced consideration of all these principles, ensuring that none is elevated to an absolute position at the expense of completely disregarding the others.

5-2 The Hermeneutical Circle and the Role of Pre-understandings in Interpretation

Modern hermeneutics, particularly through the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher, emphasizes that understanding is not a mechanical or linear process but rather occurs through a circular, or more accurately, dialectical, movement known as the hermeneutical circle. This concept describes the reciprocal and inseparable relationship between the parts and the whole in the interpretive process.

Understanding the whole of a text (such as an entire surah or even the Qur'an as a whole) depends upon understanding its constituent parts (individual verses and words). At the same time, a precise understanding of each individual part is possible only in light of one's understanding of the whole (Palmer, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 92; Azad and La'l Roshan, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 12).

As Schleiermacher explains, the meaning of a word is determined by the sentence in which it occurs, while the meaning of the sentence itself depends upon the meanings of its constituent words (Mojtahed Shabestari, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 12).

The hermeneutical circle is therefore an unavoidable aspect of every encounter with a text. What renders this process both more complex and more vulnerable is the role of the interpreter's pre-understandings or prior assumptions. Hans-Georg Gadamer, one of the foremost philosophers of philosophical hermeneutics, argues that no interpreter approaches a text as a blank slate. Rather, every interpreter brings with them a horizon shaped by cultural inheritance, theological commitments, expectations, questions, and intellectual presuppositions formed before engaging with the text (Gadamer, 1994: 361-367). These pre-understandings function as the lens through which the interpreter views the text and inevitably influence the interpretive process.

Such pre-understandings are not inherently problematic. Familiarity with the Arabic language, knowledge of the historical context of revelation, and a thoughtful, inquisitive disposition all constitute constructive pre-understandings that facilitate and deepen textual comprehension.

The real danger, however, lies in negative pre-understandings. Sectarian and theological biases, unexamined prejudgments, and non-scholarly motivations may divert interpretation from its proper course, replacing the discovery of the text's meaning with the imposition of preconceived meanings upon the text (Vaezi, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 153-165).

5-3 The Defective Hermeneutical Circle: The Epistemological Mechanism of Denial

The hermeneutical circle is neither problematic nor misleading so long as it remains a dynamic, open, and self-critical process. In such a constructive hermeneutical circle, the interpreter approaches the individual parts of the text with an initial understanding of the whole. Examination of these parts then leads to the revision and refinement of the initial understanding of the whole. Armed with this revised understanding, the interpreter returns once again to the individual parts, continuing this iterative process until a coherent and internally consistent interpretation is achieved.

However, when the interpreter is either unaware of his own pre-understandings or unwilling to revise them in light of textual evidence, this dynamic hermeneutical circle degenerates into a defective or vicious circle. Within such a defective circle, an initial presupposition (for example, a dogmatically accepted theological doctrine) becomes an unquestionable axiom that governs and directs every subsequent stage of interpretation. In this situation, rather than allowing the text to speak for itself, the interpreter searches only for evidence that confirms his prior assumption, while ignoring contrary evidence or neutralizing it through strained interpretations (Parsayian, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 246). The mechanism of a defective hermeneutical circle in the interpretation of theological texts may be summarized in the following stages:

1) First Level: Theological presupposition as the governing principle: The interpreter approaches the text with a firmly established doctrinal belief (for example, Imamate cannot be divinely designated by explicit textual appointment).

2) Second level: Presupposition-guided interpretation of the text: When encountering the words and verses of the text, the interpreter selects only those meanings that are compatible with the initial assumption, while disregarding alternative semantic possibilities that contradict it.

3) Third level: Marginalization or weakening of contrary evidence: Any textual or traditional evidence that challenges the preferred interpretation is excluded from consideration through various methodological devices, such as questioning its authenticity, offering remote or forced interpretations, or claiming that it conflicts with stronger contextual evidence.

4) Fourth level: Conclusion consistent with the initial presupposition: Ultimately, the interpreter concludes that the text teaches precisely what his original theological assumption had already required. In reality, the interpretive conclusion becomes nothing more than a reproduction of the initial premise. In formal logic, this constitutes the fallacy of begging the question (Qorbaniyan, 2022 AD/1401 SH). This theoretical framework will serve as the principal analytical tool for examining the methodologies of the critics of the Verse of *Wilāyah* in the following sections.

6. Presentation and Comparative Analysis of the Critics' Views

To provide a comprehensive and well-founded hermeneutical analysis of the epistemological foundations underlying the denial of the Verse of *Wilāyah*'s implication, it is insufficient merely to summarize the critics' positions in general terms. Rather, their arguments must be reconstructed in detail on the basis of their original writings. Accordingly, this section examines three influential critics representing three distinct periods in the history of Islamic thought, each emphasizing a different line of argument: "*Fakhr Rāzī*, representing the classical theological-exegetical tradition and emphasizing textual context and the alleged contradiction between Qur'anic verses; *Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā*, representing the modern reformist movement and emphasizing thematic interpretation and the restriction of the concept of *Wilāyah* to mutual alliance; and *Ali Sālūs*, representing contemporary Salafi scholarship, who seeks to provide a comprehensive critique combining both textual and historical arguments."

This comparative approach enables tracing both the origins and the historical development of the principal arguments advanced by opponents of the Imami interpretation.

6-1 *Fakhr Rāzī* (d. 606 AH): The Primacy of Textual Context and the Alleged Contradiction between Verses

The Ash'arite theologian and eminent Qur'anic exegete *Fakhr Rāzī* presents one of the most influential arguments against interpreting the Verse of *Wilāyah* as evidence for Imamate. His argument is founded upon the coherence of the Qur'anic text and the interpretive authority of context. In his "*Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*," he introduces this argument as the fourth proof against the Shi'i position.

Detailed reconstruction of *Rāzī*'s argument: *Rāzī* first argues that the verse immediately preceding the Verse of *Wilāyah* (al-Mā'idah: 54): "O! You who believe! Whoever among you turns back from his religion, Allah will soon bring forth a people whom He loves and who love Him…" constitutes one of the strongest Qur'anic proofs supporting the legitimacy of *Abū Bakr*'s caliphate.

According to *Rāzī*, the characteristics mentioned in this verse, a people beloved by God, humble toward believers, firm against unbelievers, and striving in God's cause, apply perfectly to *Abū Bakr* and the Muslim forces that fought the "Apostasy Wars" following the Prophet's death (Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 12, 379-381; Dezhabad, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 62).

Having established this premise, he formulates his principal argument as follows: "The fourth proof: "We have already demonstrated with clear evidence that the preceding verse constitutes one of the strongest proofs for the legitimacy of *Abū Bakr*'s Imamate. Therefore, if this verse [the Verse of *Wilāyah*] were also to establish the legitimacy of Ali's Imamate after the Messenger, a contradiction would necessarily arise between these two consecutive verses. Since contradiction within the Qur'an is impossible, it must therefore be concluded that this verse contains no indication whatsoever that Ali was the Imam after the Messenger." (Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 12, 385)

Explanation of his reasoning: Put simply, *Rāzī* argues that the Qur'an, as an internally coherent revelation, cannot affirm the leadership of two different individuals in two consecutive verses. Since, in his view, al-Mā'idah: 54 conclusively establishes the caliphate of *Abū Bakr*, al-Mā'idah: 55 cannot simultaneously establish the Imamate of Ali. Consequently, preserving textual coherence requires denying that the Verse of *Wilāyah* refers to Ali's divinely appointed leadership. Thus, *Rāzī* elevates contextual coherence beyond an interpretive aid, treating it instead as a decisive criterion for excluding an otherwise plausible interpretation.

Methodological strength of *Rāzī*'s approach: One of the principal strengths of *Rāzī*'s exegetical methodology is his insistence upon the internal coherence of the Qur'an. He correctly maintains that Qur'anic verses should not be interpreted as isolated semantic units but rather understood in harmony with their neighboring verses and with the Qur'an as a whole. This holistic approach constitutes a widely accepted principle of hermeneutics and guards against fragmented and contradictory interpretations. By invoking this principle, *Rāzī* poses a significant challenge to his opponents: 'How can one simultaneously preserve the internal coherence of the Qur'an while interpreting the Verse of *Wilāyah* as establishing the Imamate of Ali?' Although, as will be argued in the critical analysis, the major premise of his argument, namely, that al-Mā'idah: 54 establishes *Abū Bakr*'s caliphate, is itself highly disputable, the logical structure of his argument rests upon a hermeneutical principle that is, in itself, methodologically defensible.

6-2 *Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā* (d. 1354 AH): Restricting the Meaning of *Wilāyah* Within the Framework of Mutual Alliance

Rashīd Riḍā, the distinguished disciple of *Muḥammad ʿAbduh* and author of "*Tafsīr al-Manār*," represents the late modernist reformist school of Qur'anic interpretation. Like *Rāzī*, he places considerable emphasis on textual context, but he does so through a somewhat different interpretive strategy that may be appropriately described as the thematic interpretation of a coherent Qur'anic unit. **Detailed presentation of *Rashīd Riḍā*'s argument:** *Rashīd Riḍā* argues that al-Mā'idah: 51-57 constitutes a single coherent thematic passage, all of whose verses revolve around one central subject, *Wilāyah*, understood as friendship, mutual alliance, loyalty, and mutual support.

His argument may be summarized in the following stages:

1) Identifying the main theme of the passage: *Rashīd Riḍā* argues that the thematic unit begins with al-Mā'idah: 51, which explicitly prohibits believers from taking Jews and Christians as *Awliyāʾ* (allies, patrons, or intimate supporters): "O! You who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians as *Awliyāʾ*…" (al-Mā'idah: 51) According to him, this verse establishes the principal subject of the entire passage: *Wilāyah* understood as alliance, friendship, and mutual support.

2) Interpreting the intermediate verses: The following verses (52-53), in his view, continue this same theme by describing the hypocrites who hasten to seek the protection and alliance of Jews and Christians. Thus, the discussion remains focused on the question of legitimate and illegitimate political and social alliances.

3) Interpreting the verse of *Wilāyah* within the same framework: *Rashīd Riḍā* maintains that the Verse of *Wilāyah* introduces the legitimate counterpart to the prohibited form of *Wilāyah* mentioned earlier. Consequently, since *Wilāyah* in the preceding verses denotes friendship, loyalty, and mutual assistance, the same meaning must be preserved in *al-Mā'idah*: 55.

4) Confirmation from the subsequent verses 57 returns once again to prohibiting alliances with the People of the Book and the unbelievers. This, in his opinion, reinforces the thematic unity of verses 51-57.

Accordingly, *Rashīd Riḍā* writes in "*Tafsīr al-Manār*": "Since the preceding verses discuss the inclination of the hypocrites toward the Jews and Christians in order to seek their support, it becomes clear that the word *Wilāyah* in this verse likewise refers to support and assistance: "O! Believers, your supporters are only God, His Messenger, and the believers." (Rashīd Riḍā, n.d.: 6, 443)

Therefore, according to *Rashīd Riḍā*, the entire passage conveys a single coherent message: abandon allegiance to the unbelievers and instead adhere to the *Wilāyah*, that is, the friendship and support, of God, His Messenger, and the believers. Within this interpretive framework, any understanding of *Walī* as "Leader," "Guardian," or "Imam" departs from the passage's contextual flow and disrupts its thematic unity.

Methodological strength of *Rashīd Riḍā*'s approach: The principal hermeneutical strength of *Rashīd Riḍā*'s approach lies in his effort to produce a coherent thematic interpretation of an entire Qur'anic unit rather than concentrating exclusively on a single verse. Instead of isolating verse 55, he attempts to identify the dominant theme governing the entire passage and to interpret each verse in light of that overarching framework.

This approach closely resembles what contemporary textual studies describe as structural or discourse-oriented interpretation. It is a recognized interpretive methodology that often contributes to a deeper understanding of textual meaning. On this basis, *Rashīd Riḍā*

argues that the meaning assigned to a key term should remain consistent with the dominant theme of the surrounding discourse.

6-3 *Ali Sālūs* (Contemporary): A Comprehensive Textual and Historical Critique

The contemporary Egyptian scholar *Ali Sālūs*, one of the leading modern critics of Shi'ism, attempts in his work "*Maʿa al-Ithnā ʿAshariyyah fī al-Uṣūl wa al-Furūʿ*" to compile and systematize virtually all historical objections raised against the interpretation of the Verse of *Wilāyah* as evidence for Imamate. His arguments may be classified under several principal categories.

6-3-1 The Textual Criticism: Alleged Weakness of the Reports on the Occasion of Revelation

Sālūs cites two principal reports concerning the occasion of revelation from *Ṭabarī*'s exegesis and argues that both are weak in terms of their chains of transmission. He writes: "The first narration contains *Ayyūb ibn Suwayd* and *ʿUtbah ibn Abī Ḥakīm* in its chain. *Aḥmad* and *Ibn Maʿīn* considered *Ayyūb* weak, while *Ibn Maʿīn* also weakened *ʿUtbah*. Therefore, this narration possesses a weak chain of transmission. The second narration includes *Ghālib ibn ʿUbayd Allāh*, who has been judged unknown hadith and abandoned." (Sālūs, 2003: 1, 55)

He subsequently cites *Ibn Kathīr* to conclude that none of the narrations concerning this occasion of revelation are authentic as a whole and therefore that the Shi'i claim regarding the verse's occasion of revelation lacks evidential value.

6-3-2 First Substantive Objection: Charity During Prayer Is Incompatible with Perfect Devotion

Drawing upon the arguments of *Ālūsī*, *Sālūs* contends that the perfection and excellence of ritual prayer consist in complete concentration and freedom from extraneous actions. Paying attention to a beggar and donating one's ring during prayer, he argues, detracts from that ideal state of devotion.

He writes: "The excellence of prayer lies in its being free from actions unrelated to it… This act [giving charity during prayer] undoubtedly diminishes the perfection involved in establishing prayer." (Sālūs, 2003: 56, citing Ālūsī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 2, 331)

According to him, the spiritual rank of Imam Ali (AS) is too exalted for him to have performed an act that would compromise the perfection of his prayer.

6-3-3 Second Substantive Objection: Why Was the Act Not Repeated by Others?

Sālūs further asks why, if giving charity while bowing in prayer were indeed such an extraordinary virtue, neither the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) nor the other Companions, or even the remaining Imams, according to Shi'i belief, performed this act or promoted it as an established religious practice. He asks: "If this act is among the virtues by which the father of the Imams was praised… then why was the Master of all creation (AS) not eager to perform this virtue? And likewise, why did the rest of the community not do so?" (Sālūs, 2003: 1, 57)

6-3-4 The Linguistic Objection: Interpreting *Rukūʿ* as Humility and *Walī* as Helper

Sālūs argues that the word *Rukūʿ* in the verse should not be understood as referring to the specific posture in ritual prayer, but rather to its broader lexical sense of humility and submission. To support this interpretation, he appeals to usages found in classical Arabic poetry as well as other Qur'anic passages, such as God's command to Mary: "Bow together with those who bow."

Accordingly, he interprets the relevant portion of the verse as meaning: "…And they give alms while being humble and submissive before their Lord." (Sālūs, 2003: 56) Likewise, following *Rashīd Riḍā*, he argues from contextual considerations that *Walī* should be understood exclusively as helper, supporter, or friend, rather than leader or guardian (Sālūs, 2003: 58).

6-3-5 The Legal-Theoretical Objection: Appealing to the Principle "Consideration Is Given to the Generality of the Wording"

Finally, *Sālūs* invokes the well-established legal maxim: "It is well known among all scholars, Shi'i and Sunni alike, that legal consideration is based upon the generality of the wording rather than the specificity of the occasion of revelation. Therefore, even if what has been reported regarding the occasion of revelation were authentic, the verse would apply to everyone characterized by faith, the establishment of prayer, and the payment of alms while bowing." (Sālūs, 2003: 58)

Accordingly, even if the reported occasion of revelation is accepted as authentic, the verse merely describes a general virtue shared by all believers possessing these qualities and in no way establishes the Imamate of any particular individual.

7. A Hermeneutical Critique of the Foundations of Denial

After reconstructing the principal critics' arguments in detail, the next step is to evaluate them from a hermeneutical perspective. The objective of this section is not simply to provide traditional theological rebuttals but to conduct a methodological diagnosis of the interpretive process that leads to the denial of the Verse of *Wilāyah*'s implication for Imamate.

The analysis demonstrates that, although these critics invoke certain legitimate principles of textual interpretation, particularly contextual analysis, and their interpretive approaches are ultimately compromised by the dominance of unexamined theological presuppositions. Consequently, their methodology exhibits fundamental hermeneutical deficiencies and results in a defective hermeneutical circle, wherein prior doctrinal commitments determine the outcome of interpretation before the textual evidence is impartially considered.

7-1 Methodological pathology (1): Selective Use of Lexical Sources and the Unwarranted Restriction of the Meaning of *Walī*

The first and most fundamental methodological flaw in the critics' approach is their selective treatment of the semantic range of the key term *Walī*. All three critics, *Fakhr Rāzī, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā*, and *Ali Sālūs*, rely primarily on contextual evidence to restrict the meaning of *Walī* to "Helper" or "Friend," while either dismissing or overlooking the well-established meaning of "*Awlā bi al-Taṣarruf*" (one vested with authority, guardian, or one possessing rightful authority). A comprehensive hermeneutical analysis, however, requires that an interpreter first examine the entire semantic field of a term on the basis of the most authoritative lexical sources before privileging one meaning over another. The major Arabic lexicons explicitly demonstrate that the root (*w-l-y*) is fundamentally grounded in the concept of proximity and closeness, from which several related meanings, including authority and guardianship, naturally derive.

- *Ibn Fāris*, in "*Muʿjam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*," identifies a single underlying meaning for the root, namely closeness, and explains that all derivative meanings, including assistance, friendship, and authority over affairs, originate from this central concept (Ibn Fāris, 1979: 6, 141).

- *Rāghib Iṣfahānī*, in "*al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qurʾān*," distinguishes between *Wilāyah* (with kasrah), meaning "Assistance," and *Walāyah* (with fatḥah), and meaning the "Assumption of authority or governance." He further explains that *Walī* and *Mawlā* may function either actively (one exercising authority) or passively (one under another's authority) (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 885-886).

- *Ibn Manẓūr*, in "*Lisān al-ʿArab*," likewise includes, alongside the meanings of friendship and support, the explicit definition: "One who undertakes or administers an affair." (Ibn Manẓūr, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 15, 407)

This broad semantic spectrum demonstrates that restricting *Walī* exclusively to "Friendship" or "Assistance," while disregarding the equally established meaning of "Guardian" or "One possessing authority," cannot be regarded as a neutral methodological decision. Rather, it constitutes a selective interpretive choice. Significantly, numerous leading Sunni exegetes themselves acknowledge this broader semantic potential.

- *Zamakhsharī*, in "*al-Kashshāf*," recognizes "One possessing greater authority" as one of the legitimate interpretive possibilities (Zamakhsharī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 1, 649).

- *Abū Ḥayyān Andalusī*, in "*al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*," likewise refers to the meaning of *Walī* as "Guardian" or "Administrator of affairs" (Abū Ḥayyān Andalusī, n.d.: 4, 149).

- *Ālūsī*, in "*Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*," although ultimately preferring the meaning of "Assistance" based on contextual considerations, nevertheless presents the Shiʿi interpretation of "*Walī as Awlā bi al-Taṣarruf*" in considerable detail and acknowledges it as a serious interpretive position (Ālūsī, 1994 AD/1415 AH: 6, 167).

Accordingly, the approach adopted by the critics examined in this study exemplifies semantic selectivity, whereby one meaning is chosen from among several well-established alternatives, not because it is linguistically superior, but because it conforms to a pre-existing theological assumption rejecting the doctrine of Imamate. Other equally legitimate semantic possibilities are effectively excluded from consideration. This constitutes the first stage in the formation of what may be described as a defective hermeneutical circle.

7-2 Methodological Critique (2): The Exclusionary Treatment of Key Interpretive Evidence

If restricting the meaning of *Walī* to "Assistance" represents the first step in the interpretive process, the second, and indispensable, step for securing that interpretation is the weakening or dismissal of the evidence supporting the meaning of "Guardianship" or "Authority." In their treatment of two particularly significant indicators, the reports concerning the occasion of revelation and the restrictive particle "*Innamā*," the critics adopt methodological strategies that warrant serious scrutiny.

7-2-1 The Systematic Weakening of the Reports on the Occasion of Revelation

The principal external evidence identifying the referent of "Those who believe" and explaining the historical background of the verse consists of numerous narrations linking the revelation of the Verse of *Wilāyah* to the incident in which Imam Ali (AS) gave his ring in charity while in the state of bowing (*Rukūʿ*). The critics' approach particularly that of *Sālūs*, is to dismiss this entire body of evidence by challenging the chains of transmission of a few selected narrations and then extending the weakness of those particular reports to the entire corpus. A comprehensive examination, however, reveals a very different picture. - The mass transmission of the reports:

These reports have been transmitted through numerous independent chains, more than thirty according to Sunni sources, and are narrated by multiple Companions, including *Ibn ʿAbbās, Abū Dharr, Jābir, ʿAmmār, Anas ibn Mālik*, and even Imam Ali (AS) himself (Amīnī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 3, 221 ff.).

Prominent Sunni exegetes and hadith scholars, including *Wāḥidī* in "*Asbāb al-Nuzūl*," *Ḥākim Ḥaskānī* in "*Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*," *Suyūṭī* in "*al-Durr al-Manthūr*," *Ṭabarānī* in "*al-Muʿjam al-Awsaṭ*," and even *Zamakhsharī* in "*al-Kashshāf*," have either explicitly affirmed or referred to this occasion of revelation (Wāḥidī Naysābūrī, 1992: 201; Ḥākim Ḥaskānī, n.d.: 1, 209-240; Suyūṭī, n.d.: 3, 105).

The sheer multiplicity of independent transmission routes elevates these reports to the level of mass transmission in meaning, rendering them immune to refutation merely by demonstrating weakness in one or two individual chains.

In addition to their attaining the level of meaning-based mass-transmitted, contrary to *Salūs*'s sweeping claim that all the chains of transmission are weak, there also report whose chains are fully authentic according to Sunni hadith standards, leaving no room for outright denial. As an example, *Ibn Abī Ḥātim Rāzī* records in his *Tafsīr* a tradition with the following chain of transmission: "*Abū Saʿīd Ashajj* narrated to us; he said: "*Faḍl ibn Dukayn* narrated to us; he said: "*Mūsā ibn Qays Ḥaḍramī* narrated to us, from *Salamah ibn Kuhayl*..." (Ibn Abī Ḥātim, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 4, 1162)

A biographical evaluation of this chain, based on authoritative Sunni sources, demonstrates that all of its transmitters are trustworthy: "*Abū Saʿīd Ashajj* (the leading scholar of his time and a trustworthy narrator), *Faḍl ibn Dukayn* (trustworthy and exceptionally reliable), *Mūsā ibn Qays* (declared trustworthy by *Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn*), and *Salamah ibn Kuhayn* (trustworthy and precise in transmission). Consequently, the claim that all the narrations concerning this subject are weak is factually untenable and stems from a selective and tendentious treatment of the hadith corpus.

- The existence of authenticated chains: Beyond their cumulative strength, some reports possess independently reliable chains of transmission according to Sunni standards. For example, *Ibn Abī Ḥātim Rāzī* narrates the report through the following chain: "*Abū Saʿīd Ashajj* narrated to us; *Faḍl ibn Dukayn* narrated to us; *Mūsā ibn Qays Ḥaḍramī* narrated to us from *Salamah ibn Kuhayl*…" (Ibn Abī Ḥātim, 1998 AD/1419 AH:4, 1162)

The disregard of such an extensive body of transmitted evidence, combined with a selective concentration on weaker reports, constitutes a serious methodological deficiency. It suggests that the objective is not an impartial evaluation of the hadith evidence but rather the identification of grounds upon which it may be dismissed.

7-2-2 Disregarding the Restrictive Force of "*Innamā*"

Another highly significant internal textual indicator that the critics largely overlook is the restrictive particle *Innamā,* which appears at the beginning of the verse. In Arabic rhetoric, *Innamā* is among the strongest and most explicit particles of exclusivity, confining the stated ruling exclusively to the entities mentioned (Ibn Hishām, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 19). If the verse merely intended to affirm the general mutual friendship and support among believers, such restriction would be redundant and devoid of rhetorical purpose, since this type of mutual guardianship is already universally affirmed elsewhere in the Qur'an, for example: "The believing men and believing women are allies of one another." (al-Tawbah: 71)

In that verse, this form of *Wilāyah* is established for all believers without any restrictive expression. The use of *Innamā* in *al-Mā'idah*: 55 therefore clearly indicates that the verse describes a particular and exclusive form of authority, limited to God, His Messenger, and believers who possess the specific characteristics mentioned (those who establish prayer and give alms while bowing). Such an exclusive form of *Wilāyah* corresponds naturally to the meaning of guardianship, authority, and leadership, whereas it is difficult to reconcile with the universal concept of friendship or mutual assistance. The critics' neglect, or at least their insufficient consideration, of this clear rhetorical indicator constitutes another important methodological weakness in their interpretation.

7-3 Methodological Critique (3): The Dominance of Theological Presuppositions and the Formation of a Defective Hermeneutical Circle

The foregoing methodological observations lead directly to the fundamental source of the critics' interpretive approach: the dominance of an unexamined theological presupposition and, consequently, entrapment within a defective hermeneutical circle. The underlying assumption governing the exegetical methodology of *Fakhr Rāzī*, *Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā*, and *Ali Sālūs* is the theological principle denying the existence of a divinely designated Imamate. They approach the text with the prior conviction that the Prophet's succession was determined through human selection rather than explicit divine appointment. This presupposition functions as an epistemological filter, directing every subsequent stage of interpretation. The process may be summarized as follows:

1. Initial Presupposition: Imamate and religious-political authority are not matters explicitly designated by God and His Messenger for any specific individual.

2. Influence on Semantic Choice: Based on this assumption, the term *Walī* in the Verse of *Wilāyah* cannot signify "Guardian" or "One possessing authority," since such an interpretation would imply divinely designated Imamate. Consequently, it must instead be interpreted as "Friend" or "Helper."

3. Influence on the Evaluation of Evidence:

- Context: In the approaches of *Rāzī* and *Rashīd Riḍā*, contextual continuity becomes the decisive and overriding interpretive principle. Contextual evidence supporting the meaning of "friendship" is elevated above all other interpretive indicators. Contemporary Imami exegetes have offered substantial methodological critiques of this approach. Allamah *Ṭabāṭabā'ī*, in "*al-Mīzān*," argues that reliance upon textual context is authoritative only when there is conclusive evidence that the surrounding verses were revealed as a single unit. In the case of the Verse of *Wilāyah*, however, numerous mass-transmitted reports indicate an independent occasion of revelation; consequently, contextual considerations cannot override explicit textual evidence and well-established reports concerning the occasion of revelation.

Comparative studies further demonstrate that *Ṭabāṭabā'ī* attributes many of *Rāzī*'s interpretive deviations regarding the verses of *Wilāyah* to sectarian bias and preconceived theological commitments (Naseri Karimvand and Musallayipour, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 66-67).

Likewise, Nemooneh exegesis presents a compelling response to the critics' interpretation of *Walī* as merely "Friend." It argues that if *Walī* simply meant "Friend," the ruling would apply universally to all believers and would not require the highly specific qualifying descriptions contained in the verse, namely, establishing prayer and giving alms while bowing. These

restrictive qualifications significantly narrow the scope of the verse, demonstrating that it refers not to ordinary friendship but to a distinctive office involving guardianship and legitimate authority (Makarem Shirazi, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 4, 429).

- Occasion of revelation: The reports identifying Imam Ali (AS) as the referent of the verse reinforce the interpretation of *Wilāyah* as authority and guardianship. Consequently, these reports must either be declared weak in transmission, as *Sālūs* attempts to do, or be regarded as subordinate and ultimately insignificant when compared with contextual considerations, as argued by *Rāzī* and *Rashīd Riḍā*.

- The restrictive particle *Innamā*: The restrictive force of *Innamā*, which conflicts with the broad and universal meaning of friendship, must likewise be minimized or overlooked.

4. Final conclusion: The Verse of *Wilāyah* does not establish a specific Imamate but merely affirms the mutual friendship and support among believers.

5. Confirmation of the initial presupposition: The conclusion simply reproduces and confirms the original theological assumption that no divinely designated Imamate exists.

This process exemplifies a defective hermeneutical circle because the interpretation of the text does not challenge or refine the interpreter's prior assumptions. Instead, the text is employed merely to justify and reproduce those assumptions. Rather than allowing the text to reshape the interpreter's understanding, the interpreter imposes preconceived doctrinal commitments upon the text itself. Ultimately, this approach undermines authentic hermeneutics by sacrificing the fundamental principles of textual interpretation, namely, the comprehensive evaluation of all relevant evidence and the willingness to revise one's presuppositions in light of the text, in favor of rigid theological dogmatism.

Conclusion: Toward a Comprehensive Hermeneutic

1. Summary of findings: Identifying the methodological defects of a "Hermeneutics in the service of denial"

The present study sought to examine the epistemological and hermeneutical foundations underlying the denial that the Verse of *Wilāyah* indicates the doctrine of Imamate. Through a comparative and critical analysis of the interpretive methodologies of three influential critics from different periods of Islamic intellectual history, *Fakhr Rāzī, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā*, and *Ali Sālūs*, it has demonstrated that their rejection of the verse's implication rests less upon a comprehensive and impartial reading of the text than upon the dominance of an unexamined theological presupposition: namely, the denial of divinely designated Imamate.

This presupposition directs the entire interpretive process toward a predetermined conclusion. The present study characterizes this phenomenon as "Hermeneutics in the service of denial" and identifies three principal methodological deficiencies common to all three critics.

- Selective use of lexical sources and the unwarranted restriction of meaning: The analysis has demonstrated that all three critics selectively privilege the meanings of "Friendship" and "Assistance" for the term *Walī*, while overlooking its broader semantic range documented in the principal Arabic lexicons (Ibn Fāris, 1979: 6, 141; Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 885) and acknowledged even by prominent Sunni exegetes such as *Zamakhsharī* (1986 AD/1407 AH: 1, 649). Accordingly, the preference for "Friendship" and "Assistance" cannot be

regarded as the outcome of an objective linguistic investigation. Rather, it reflects a theological necessity designed to avoid the implications of the equally well-established meanings of guardianship, authority, and rightful governance.

- Systematic exclusion and weakening of key contextual evidence: The analysis demonstrated that the decisive evidence supporting the Imami interpretation has been systematically weakened or disregarded. The reports concerning the occasion of revelation, despite being transmitted through numerous chains in both Sunni and Shi'i sources, reaching the level of meaning-based mass-transmitted (Amini, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 3, 221 ff.), and despite the existence of authentic chains of transmission (Ibn Abī Ḥātim, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 4, 1162), have either been dismissed as weak in terms of *Isnād* (the approach of *Sālūs*) or considered insignificant in comparison with contextual evidence (the approach of *Rāzī* and *Rashīd Riḍā*). Likewise, the restrictive particle *Innamā*, which rhetorically conveys the exclusive nature of the *Wilāyah* mentioned in the verse, has not been accorded due significance in the critics' analyses, and its semantic function has largely been overlooked.

- The formation of a defective hermeneutical circle: Finally, the overall analysis demonstrated how these two preceding methodological deficiencies are themselves products of the critics' entrapment within a defective hermeneutical circle. The unquestioned theological presupposition denying the divinely designated Imamate serves as an unchallengeable starting point, directing the entire interpretive effort not toward discovering the text's intended meaning but rather toward justifying and reaffirming that original assumption. Within this closed interpretive loop, exegesis ceases to function as an instrument for understanding the text and instead becomes a means of raising the question and imposing prior assumptions upon it (Qorbaniyan, 1980 AD/1401 SH). These findings confirm the central hypothesis of this study: namely, that the analytical approach adopted by the critics, rather than exposing any inherent weakness in the evidence for Imamate, constitutes a clear example of "Hermeneutics in the service of denial."

2. A Proposed Alternative: The Requirements of a Comprehensive Hermeneutic

In contrast to the selective, predetermined approach adopted by critics, a deeper, more defensible understanding of verses such as the Verse of *Wilāyah* requires a comprehensive hermeneutic. This is not a distinct exegetical method in itself but rather a set of epistemological and methodological commitments that call upon the interpreter to engage the text more responsibly. The most important of these commitments are as follows:

- Hermeneutical self-awareness and critical examination of presuppositions: The first and most fundamental requirement is that the interpreter becomes consciously aware of his or her own theological, historical, and cultural presuppositions. Rather than unconsciously submitting to these pre-understandings, the interpreter should provisionally suspend them and remain willing to revise them in light of the textual evidence (Vaezi, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 153-165).

- Giving fair weight to all contextual indicators: A comprehensive hermeneutic rejects the absolute dominance of one interpretive indicator over all others. Although textual context is undeniably important, it is only one among several interpretive indicators. It cannot, by itself, invalidate other decisive evidence such as mass-transmitted reports concerning the occasion of revelation or explicit lexical and rhetorical evidence. The interpreter's task is therefore to establish a coherent balance

among all available evidence, lexical, contextual, narrative, rational, and historical, and to produce an interpretation capable of integrating them into a consistent explanatory framework.

- Attention to the text's speech act: Drawing upon insights from contemporary hermeneutics (Skinner, 2010 AD/1389 SH), the interpreter should ask not merely what the verse says, but what God intended to accomplish by uttering it. 'Was the verse merely describing a general moral virtue, namely friendship, which had already been established elsewhere in the Qur'an?' Or 'Was it performing a specific constitutive divine act; namely, appointing and designating legitimate leadership?' The structure of the verse strongly supports the latter interpretation. Its emphatic restriction through *Innamā*, together with its description of uniquely identifying characteristics (while they are bowing) points toward a specific historical individual rather than a general category of believers. By adopting such an approach, one arrives at an interpretation of the Verse of *Wilāyah* in which every meaning-bearing element occupies its proper place within the interpretive framework. The restrictive particle *Innamā* establishes the exclusivity of a particular form of *Wilāyah*; the mass-transmitted reports concerning the occasion of revelation identify its unique referent; and the term *Walī* naturally assumes its highest and most contextually appropriate meaning, guardianship, authority, priority in governance, and Imamate. Such an interpretation remains faithful to all the fundamental principles of hermeneutics while avoiding the impasse of polemical interpretations rooted in defective hermeneutical circles.

Suggestions for Future Research

As a case study in the field of critical hermeneutics of disputed Qur'anic verses, the present study opens several avenues for further investigation. Future research may fruitfully explore the following topics:

- A comparative analysis of the role of theological presuppositions: A methodological study of how Sunni and Shi'i exegetes approach other key Qur'anic verses concerning Imamate and succession, such as the Verse of *Ulul Amr*, the Verse of Conveyance, and the Verse of Completion, through the lens of contemporary hermeneutical analysis.

- A critical examination of the legal principle "*al-ʿIbrah bi ʿUmūm al-Lafẓ*" (consideration is given to the generality of the wording): Such research could investigate how this principle has been employed across different exegetical traditions and clarify its precise relationship with the interpretive significance of the specific occasion of revelation.

- Developing a model of "Ecumenical Hermeneutics": A theoretical framework could be proposed that, while preserving the doctrinal commitments of different Islamic schools, identifies shared methodological principles and reduces interpretive misunderstandings concerning disputed Qur'anic passages, thereby fostering more constructive scholarly dialogue. This study aspires to contribute to a more rigorous, balanced, and academically grounded treatment of one of the most significant theological and exegetical issues in Islamic thought, and to encourage more sophisticated methodological analyses within the field of Qur'anic studies.

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«مقاله پژوهشی»

مبانی معرفت‌شناختی و هرمنوتیکیِ آیه ولایت و نقد دیدگاه‌های سالوس، فخر رازی و رشید رضا

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چکیده

این پژوهش با هدف کالبدشکافی معرفت‌شناختی انکار دلالت آیه ولایت (مائده: ۵۵) بر امامت، به تحلیل تطبیقی و انتقادیِ روش‌شناسی سه منتقد شاخص یعنی فخر رازی، محمد رشید رضا و علی سالوس می‌پردازد. مسئله اصلی این است که آیا انکار دلالت آیه توسط این منتقدان، محصول یک تحلیل متنی بی‌طرفانه است یا ریشه در پیش‌فرض‌های کلامی دارد؟ یافته‌های پژوهش با روش توصیفی-تحلیلی و رویکرد هرمنوتیکی نشان می‌دهد که این انکار، ناشی از شکل‌گیری یک «دور هرمنوتیکی معیوب» است. در این فرایند، حاکمیت پیش‌فهمِ «انکار امامت منصوص» منجر به آسیب‌های روش‌شناختی مشترکی شده است: ۱) گزینشگری معنایی در تحدید واژه «ولیّ» به «دوستی»؛ ۲) تضعیف روشمند قرائن قطعی همچون روایات شأن نزول متواتر و دلالت حصر «إنّما»؛ و ۳) نادیده‌انگاری اصول هرمنوتیک جامع‌نگر. در نهایت، با استناد به منابع فریقین و پاسخ‌های مفسران امامیه (همچون صاحب المیزان و تفسیر نمونه)، اثبات می‌شود که فهم دقیق آیه مستلزم عبور از پیش‌فرض‌های جدلی، پذیرش روایات صحیح‌السند و وزن‌دهی عادلانه به تمامی قرائن سیاقی و روایی است.

واژه‌های کلیدی

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