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MUQĀTIL IBN SULAYMĀN: A NEGLECTED FIGURE

IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF QUR'ĀNIC COMMENTARY

by

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"Whosoever reads the Qur'an but does not know its meaning, he is illiterate."

Man qara' al-Qur'ān fa lam ya'lam ta'wīlah fa huwa fīhi ummī.

Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767), *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* 1/27.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my patient wife Nona Fitria, my wonderful children

Kaysa, Najma, the late Habibah, and Abqaria, and, last but not least, my parents whose

love for knowledge has been my driving force.

MUQĀTIL IBN SULAYMĀN: A NEGLECTED FIGURE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's (d. 150/767) hermeneutics in his three extant Qur'an commentaries: *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah min al-Qur'ān,* and *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm.* It explains Muqātil's understanding of the Qur'an, his exegetical approaches, and the theological concerns undergirding his endeavors. Despite his early importance, Muqātil is an understudied figure because of stigma attached to his views and methods. Later Muslim tradition accused Muqātil of anthropomorphism, inattention to transmission chains, fabrication of *ḥadīth* (prophetic traditions), and overreliance on biblical narratives, thus rendering his work theologically and methodologically suspect. Two of these accusations are unfounded, and two are only partially correct but misleading as well as anachronistic. Existing modern scholarship on Muqātil and his commentaries has either focused on these accusations or on uncovering his views on specific topics. None has addressed Muqātil's hermeneutics, the focus of this study.

Substantively, Muqātil maintains that the Qur'an consists of divine commands, prohibitions, promises, threats, and narratives of the past. Linguistically, the Qur'an is a complex structure containing utterances of different kinds, which he presents in a series

of binaries: general-particular, clear-vague, equivocal-unequivocal, explicit-implicit, and so forth. Consequently, a proper understanding of the Qur'an necessitates interpretation. Muqātil uses three major exegetical methods, namely paraphrasing, crossreferencing, and narrative, and three techniques, namely fragmentation, specification, and completion.

Muqātil's commentaries persistently focus on theological concerns revolving around the propagation of belief *(īmān)*, in opposition to disbelief *(kufr)*, with regard to the oneness of God *(tawḥīd)* and the validity of Muhammad's prophethood *(taṣdīq)*. He uses theological criteria to evaluate non-Muslim communities as well as Muslims who had shown distrust of or rebellious acts against the Prophet Muhammad.

Though theologically uncompromising, Muqātil is legally a pragmatist with regard to interreligious coexistence, especially in his conception of *muḥkamāt al-Qur'ān* as the perennially unchanging elements of revelation, which serves as the "Islamic Decalogue," laying a common ground for interreligious relations. Furthermore, Muqātil is ethically pacifist in advancing his uncompromising theology, including in propagating *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* and in understanding jihad not merely as an armed fight but also as civilized acts undertaken for God's cause.

ix

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

This dissertation studies a second/eighth century commentator on the Qur'an *(mufassir)*, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767), and his three extant commentaries, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,[1] Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah fī al-Qur'ān,[2]* and *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm.[3]* Muqātil's early life and intellectual activities took place in Khurāsān. He was born in the city of Balkh, and later moved to Merv where he seems to have written his commentaries.[4] The grand Mosque of Merv appears to be the locus of much of Muqātil's teaching activities and a place where, as many reports maintain, he

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[1] There are two published versions of this commentary. The first is the edition of 'Abd Allāh Maḥmūd Shiḥātah entitled *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* (Beirut, Lebanon: Mu'assasat al-Tārīkh al-'Arabī, 2002), and consists of five volumes. The second is the edition of Aḥmad Farīd, with the same title as Shiḥātah's, which consists of three volumes and was published by Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah in Beirut, Lebanon in 2003. In this study, I use Shiḥātah's edition, simply because I have had access to it much earlier than I do to Farīd's. In fact, I do not use Farīd's edition of Muqātil's *Tafsīr* for this study, except in the interpretation of Q5:82 missing in Shiḥātah's edition but found in Farīd's.

[2] There is only one edition of this commentary by Isaiah Goldfeld, *Kitāb Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah min al-Qur'ān 'an Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* (Israel: Maṭba'ah Dār al-Mashriq Shafā 'Amr, 1980).

[3] There are two published versions of the commentary. The first is the edition of Shiḥātah, who also edited Muqātil's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* entitled *al-Ashbāh wa-al-Naẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣrīyah al-'Āmmah lil-Kitāb, 1975). However, Ḥātim Ṣālih al-Ḍāmin argues that the one Shiḥātah edited was actually the work of Abū Naṣr al-Miṣrī (d. 271/884) who transmitted it from 'Abd Allāh ibn Hārūn. In fact, al-Ḍāmin himself had edited the work in 1988. Therefore, al-Ḍāmin edited another version and published it, entitled *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Dubai: Markaz Jum'ah al-Mājid li al-Thaqāfah wa al-Turāth, 2006), p. 8-9. In this study, I am using al-Ḍāmin's edition of Muqātil's *Wujūh.*

[4] There was a report that Muqātil was married to a widow in Merv, and that he, afraid of forgetting his knowledge, dictated his *tafsīr* to his step son, Abū 'Iṣmah ibn Abī Maryam (d. 173/789), until the latter finished the whole commentary. Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Hibat Allāh ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Shāfi'ī (Ibn 'Asākir), *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq,* ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn Abū Su'ūd 'Umar ibn Ghulāsah al-'Amrī (n. p. Dār al-Fikr, n. y.), 60/115. Furthermore, there are reports that other Khurāsānī scholars had seen Muqātil's commentary. See Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī Asmā' al-Rijāl*, ed. Bashār 'Awwād Ma'rūf (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1983)*,* 28/450. Abū Aḥmad 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Adī al-Jurjānī, *al-Kāmil fī Ḍu'afā' al-Rijāl,* ed. 'Ādil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd and 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwaḍ, (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.y.), 8/187-92. Ibn 'Asākir also mentioned that one of the transmitters of *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah*, Abū Nuṣayr Manṣūr ibn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Bārūdī, studied the commentary and lived with Muqātil when he was in Merv. See Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq,* 60/115.

was involved in an intense theological debate with Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 128/746) about divine attributes, after which Muqātil was notoriously accused of anthropomorphism.[5] The second half of Muqātil's life was spent generally in Iraq, first in Baghdād and later in Basrah until he died. There are reports that suggest Muqātil's having sojourned in Yemen, Beirut and Mecca, where he taught in their mosques.[6]

Muqātil is a controversial figure who defies an easy description. Both his life and works appear to have taken a path of tension, while searching for a middle ground, a third space that offers alternatives. His opponents came from both rationalist and traditionalist camps, the two of which had usually been in opposition to one another. The rationalists had accused him of crude anthropomorphism in understanding divine attributes, as commonly represented by literal understanding of the traditionalists. Yet the traditionalists had accused him of unreliability that Muqātil was not credible to participate in religious knowledge transmission, especially ḥadīth. Muqātil's use of extra-Islamic reports, known pejoratively from the tenth century as isrā'iliyyāt, in his commentary has also scandalized his exegetical endeavors, which accordingly leads, albeit misleadingly, to the accusation that he undermines the sanctity of Islamic teaching and prophet.[7] Muqātil was accused of worst things possible that a sincere Muslim scholar

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[5] Shams al-Din Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Mīzan al-I'tidāl fī Naqd al-Rijāl,* ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad Muʿawwaḍ and ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1995), 6/505. Some suggest that the problem between Muqātil and Jahm was not only theological, but also political. For while Muqātil represented the governemnt of Khurāsān, Jahm represented the rebel, al-Hārith b. Suraij (d.120/738). See Mun'im Sirry, "Muqātil b. Sulaymān and Anthropomorphism," *Studia Islamica,* nouvelle édition/new series, 3, 2012, 35-66.

[6] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād wa Akhbār Muḥaddithīhā wa Dhikr Quṭṭānihā al-'Ulamā min Ghayr Ahlihā wa Wāridīhā (Tārīkh Baghdād),* ed. Bashār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2001)*,* 15/215.

[7] For a general overview of isrā'iliyyāt and its scholarly study in western academia, see Roberto Tottoli, "Origin and Use of the Term Isra'iliyat in Muslim Literature," *Arabica*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (1999): 193-210,

could bear: "Muqātil used to take from Jews and Christians the knowledge of the Qur'an that agreed with their books, equate God with creation, and forge ḥadīth."[8] The consequence is almost expected: Muqātil has been condemned and accordingly marginalized from Muslim scholarship. While perpetuation of his condemnation continues, very rarely have people bothered to look at his works in order to evaluate Muqātil based on what he himself had written than what others had said about him. In short, Muslims and non-Muslims alike have taken Muqātil for granted and only a few have given him the benefit of the doubt.

In the meantime, Muqātil's three extant commentaries are the first commentaries of their kind. The second/eighth century was the beginning of literary period in which the codification of a variety of Islamic sciences took place. The first of this activity was related to the compilation of ḥadīth under the auspices of the Caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (r. 99/717). The first scholar who responded to the Caliph's instruction on the compilation and codification of ḥadīth was Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741), and was followed by other scholars, one generation younger than al-Zuhrī. During this period, *tafsīr* was part of ḥadīth compilation and codification.[9] Therefore, the commentary on the Qur'an at the time commonly contained only parts of the Qur'an, such as that of Mujāhid and Sufyān al-Thawrī.[10] Shortly following al-Zuhrī's time, however, *tafsīr* had become

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and Michael Pregill, "Isrā'iliyyāt, myth, and pseudepigraphy: Wahb b. Munabbih and the early Islamic versions of the fall of Adam and Eve," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008): 215-284.
[8] This statement of Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) best reflects the whole range of accusations that scholars have leveled against Muqātil. See Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-Majrūḥīn min al-Muḥaddithīn,* ed. Ḥamdī ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Salafī (Saudi Arabia: Dār al-Ṣumaʿī li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzīʿ, 2000), 2/348.
[9] Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 2000), 1/104.
[10] ʿAlī Aḥmad al-Sālūs, *Maʿa al-Ithnay ʿAshariyyah fī al-Uṣūl wa al-Furūʿ* (Egypt: Maktabah Dār al-Qur'ān, n.y.), 397.

an independent discipline of its own, containing the reported exegetical views of early Muslims, especially the Prophet, and personal exegetical views of the Qur'an's commentators. As a result, the commentary on the Qur'an started to address the whole Qur'an, as Muqātil's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*.[11] Muqātil's commentary was the first complete commentary on the Qur'an that reaches us. There might be other complete commentaries of the Qur'an from that same period, such as al-Kalbī's commentary that is said to be similar to that of Muqātil, but did not survive.[12] Shihātah argues that Muqātil might have been the first person who wrote a complete commentary on the Qur'an.[13]

Muqātil's *Tafsīr al-Khams mi'at Āyah* is the first legal commentary as much as it is the first thematic commentary on the Qur'an.[14] The organization of this commentary is made on how the jurists arranged their books, and is probably written within the Zaydī School of law.[15] Muqātil is said to be the first person who isolated five hundred Qur'anic verses *(khams mi'at āyah,* as the title shows)* pertaining to legal matters, and the first who wrote a book on qur'anic legal commentary. The term "five hundred verses" *(khams mi'at āyah)* in the title of Muqātil's legal commentary, however, "does not point to the exact number, but merely an expression of approximate number" *(wa innamā arāda al-*

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[11] al-Dhahabī, *Tafsīr,* 1/113; al-Sālūs, *Ithnay 'Ashariyyah*, 397.

[12] Shihātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/62.

[13] Ibn Jurayj, Muqātil's contemporary, was often mentioned as the first who wrote tafsīr. However, since he started to write his commentary late in his life, Muqātil should have been earlier than him in writing his commentary since the latter seemed to begin the writing in his youth. Shihātah, 5/68.

[14] Aḥmad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Zahrānī, *al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī 'an al-Qur'ān li al-Karīm wa Namādhij minhu* (al-Maktabah al-Shāmilah)*, 14.

[15] Fahd ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Sulaymān al-Rūmī, *Ittijāhāt al-Tafsīr fī al-Qarn al-Rābi' 'Ashara* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1997), 43. Muqātil was said to be one of the prominent scholars of the Zaydiyyah. See Māni' ibn Ḥammād al-Juhanī, *al-Mawsū'ah al-Muyassarah fī al-Adyān wa al-Madhāhib wa al-Aḥzāb al-Mu'āṣirah* (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Nadwah al-'Ālimiyyah li al-Ṭibā'ah wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 1999), 1/77. I do not, however, study further the allegedly Zaydī orientation of Muqātil's legal thought in this dissertation. Independent studies on this matter therefore still need to be conducted.

ẓāhirah lā al-ḥaṣra).[16] For scholars were of different views in terms of the number of Qur'anic verses which address legal matters due to their different opinion whether these legal verses are those who explicitly talk about law or whether they also include those which only implicitly address legal questions.[17] The last of Muqātil's commentaries that I will study here, *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir,* is the first that addresses the phenomenon of polysemy in the Qur'an. This commentary becomes the standard upon which later authors, who write the same subject matter, model their own works.[18]

Despite an overwhelmingly great amount of criticism toward Muqātil, the majority of Muslim scholars almost unanimously acknowledged his expertise in *tafsīr*, while they rejected his credentials as a transmitter of ḥadīth *(muḥaddith)*.[19] Some prominent scholars, such as al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) and Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), who represent orthodoxy, have been cited to have approved of Muqātil's reputation as a commentator on the Qur'an.[20] Furthermore, as mentioned in the introductory part of his

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[16] See al-Taqrīr wa al-Taḥbīr ʿalā Taḥrīr al-Kamāl, 3/292; Irshād al-Fuḥūl ilā Taḥqīq al-Ḥaqq min ʿIlm al-Uṣūl, 2/207.

[17] Abū al-Mundhir Maḥmūd ibn Muḥammad ibn Muṣṭafā al-Minyāwī, *Al-Muʿtaṣār min Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-Uṣūl min ʿIlm al-Uṣūl* (al-Maktabah al-Shāmilah, 2010), 1/242.

[18] al-Ḍāmin, *Wujūh,* 8.

[19] Al-Naẓẓām (d. between 220/835 and 230/845), the Muʿtazilī, was perhaps the first who criticized Muqātil in his capacity as a *mufassir*, along with a number of other commentators of the Qur'an, such as ʿIkrimah, al-Kalbī, al-Suddī, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, and Abū Bakr al-ʿAṣamm, due to what al-Naẓẓām thought naïve and groundless interpretation. See Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Egypt: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalbī wa Awlāduh, 1965), 1/343. As the earliest work in which an account of Muqātil was found, Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/844) *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr* runs, "Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī, the author of *tafsīr*, transmitting from al-Ḍaḥḥāk and ʿAṭāʾ, but the scholars of ḥadīth were cautious about his ḥadīth and rejected it." See Muḥammad ibn Saʿd ibn Manīʿ al-Zuhrī, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr,* ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad ʿUmar (Cairo: Matabat al-Khānjī, n. y.), 9/377.

[20] Abū al-Maʿāṭī al-Nūrī et al, *Mawsūʿat Aqwāl al-Imām Aḥmad ibn Hanbāl fī Rijāl al-Ḥadīth wa ʿIlalih* (Dār al-Nashr: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1997), 3/392; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh,* 13/161, 15/207-08; Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Mufliḥ, *al-Maqṣad al-Arshad fī Dhikr Aṣḥāb al-Imām Aḥmad*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Sulaymān al-ʿUthaimīn (Riyāḍ: Matkatabat al-Rushd, 1990), 1/162.

al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, Muqātil had received his knowledge of the Qur'an and its interpretation from thirty scholars; twelve of these were Sucessors *(al-tābi'ūn)* and the rest were Successors of Successors *(tābī' al-tābi'īn).* Although Muqātil certainly does not seem to position himself as a compiler of exegetical views, such as al-Ṭabarī, by consistenly adopting a monovalent approach in his interpretation of the Qur'an, his commentary must have preserved some early ideas of *tafsīr.*[21] In fact, it is Muqātil's ingenious use of his personal views that makes his commentaries so valuable, as much as his learning from his predecessors and contemporary scholars. Considering his pioneering works on *tafsīr*, in at least three different genres, the significance of the period within which Muqātil lived and produced his works, and certainly his ingenuity in *tafsīr,* the marginalization of Muqātil and his works from scholarship has caused a major gap in our understanding of early development of *tafsīr* and of early exegetical and religious ideas within Muslim tradition.

Structure of the Dissertation

As this study is an attempt to fill the knowledge gap with regard to early history of *tafsīr* and the dynamics of exegetical and religious ideas by studying Muqātil's extant commentaries, I will structure this dissertation as following. In the introduction, I will first investigate the perception and reception of Muqātil in both traditional Muslim

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[21] By "monovalent approach" I mean an approach in which a commentator only offers his chosen views with regard to the interpretation of qur'anic verses without providing a plethora of differing opinions among scholars with regard to these verses. The approach by which a Qur'an's commentator describes scholarly differences in terms of the interpretation of qur'anic verses before he finally chooses his own views is the method called polyvalent. As an example, Muqatil adopts the first approach, and al-Ṭabarī adopts the second.

scholarship and Western academia in order to understand the circumstances that have led to his marginalization and the later development of scholarly studies of Muqātil and his commentaries. The questions I ask to lead this particular investigation are as follows: (1) How has Muqātil been received by modern scholarship, Muslim and Western? (2) What are the factors that have shaped such receptions? (3) How have such receptions developed through times? (4) What is the state of existing scholarship on Muqātil and his commentaries? In general, in traditional Muslim scholarship, Muqātil has been tainted with a number of accusations—theological, methodological, substantive, and personal—the majority of which proves to be unfounded in his extant commentaries. Some of the accusations that are partially justified do not, however, accurately portray Muqātil as doing what he is doing. While early Western scholars had neglected Muqatil, following their counterparts in the Muslim world, later scholars have, however, began to pay more attention to him, especially because of his early period and his marginalized status, in the hope that he might offer an alternative view with regard to Islam's history.

After examining Muqātil's reception, I will investigate Muqātil's hermeneutics and exegetical ideas by closely reading his three commentaries. This close reading of Muqātil's commentaries will become the subject of three different chapters, each focusing on one commentary of the three. Thus, chapter one will discuss Muqātil's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (or *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, by which the published version has been entitled), chapter two his *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah min al-Qur'ān*, and chapter three his *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm.* For this close reading, I ask a number of leading questions as follows: (1) What is Muqātil's understanding of the Qur'an? (2)

How does Muqātil understand his exegetical endeavor with regard to the Qur'an? (3) What approaches does he use to interpret the Qur'an, (4) what hermeneutic strategies does he apply to support his approaches to the Qur'an, and (5) What primary concerns, if any, are there that he has that undergird his interpretation of the Qur'an in his three commentaries.

In chapter one, in which I read closely *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* I shall argue that Muqātil's exegetical thrust revolves around the propagation of belief *(īmān)*, by upholding the notion of the oneness of God *(tawḥīd)* and accepting the validity of Muhammad's prophethood *(taṣdīq)*, and the condemnation of disbelief *(kufr)*, in the form of associating God with creation in worship *(shirk)* and rejecting Muhammad's prophethood *(takdhīb).* As such, Muqātil's exegetical orientation is highly theological. Muqātil uses his theological framework to argue that Islam is the primordially true religion, propagated by all prophets including Muhammad. As the primordial religion, Islam according to Muqātil has always advocated the same fundamentals that now serve as his exegetical thrust: the propagation of *īmān,* especially with regard to *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*, and the condemnation of *kufr,* especially with regard to *shirk* and *takdhīb.* Consequently, Muqātil employs his theology to evaluate not only other religious communities and traditions but also those who called themselves Muslims, about whom he has atrong views. Subsequently, Muqātil's evaluation leads to his formulation of different scenarios of interrelations that these religious communities may have with each other, in addition to intra-Muslim relations. Given the theological character of Muqātil's exegetical thrust, I have decided to explore Muqātil's views of interreligious subject

uncompromising theology and his fierce criticism of non-Islamic religious communities, Muqātil embraces a legal pragmatism that will enable his vision for admittedly limited interreligious coexistence. Muqātil has however made a great effort to find a common ground for interreligious relations by inventing the so-called "Islamic Decalogue" in his conception of *Muḥkamāt al-Qur'ān* as the perennial fundamentals of religion shared by at least three religious traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Furthermore, Muqātil offers a highly ethical approach in his promotion of what constitutes his exegetical and theological concerns, namely the propagation of *īmān*, through *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq,* and the condemnation of *kufr,* in the form of *shirk* and *takdhīb.* In this respect, he advocates a pacifist and non-volent approach in, for instance, carrying out the doctrine "commanding right and forbidding wrong" by promoting an accessible education for every individual to know what right and wrong are, and to live accordingly.

In chapter three, in which I investigate closely Muqātil's lexical commentary *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir,* which addresses the issue of polysemy in the Qur'an, I shall argue that the role that Muqātil's theology has played in the other two commentaries remains persistent, especially in his selection of the entries, other than the fact that they are selected because they are, in Muqātil's view, polysemic.[24] The majority of Muqātil's entries are theologically charged, and many of these communicate further his exegetical and theological concerns with regard to opposition of *īmān* and *kufr, tawḥīd* and *shirk,* and, finally, *taṣdīq* and *takdhīb.* In fact, this commentary also highlights Muqātil's

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[24] While Muqātil's theology may have also partially governed the organization of his entries, it is less obvious and inconsistent for it is far from being systematic.

uncompromising theology but also his highly ethical approach in promoting it reflected, for instance, in his understanding of jihād as not pointing merely to physical fighting but more importantly to civilized acts, verbal or otherwise, as long as they are undertaken for God's cause.

Finally, to end this study, I conclude with my major findings and recommend further studies that can be undertaken in the future, for instance, in terms of the working of discursivity in orthodoxy making, the relation between Muqātil's works with the socio-political and cultural background in which they are produced, Muqātil's Isrā'iliyyāt and ḥadīth, sīrah in Muqātil's commentary, etc.

Muqātil's perception and reception in traditional Muslim scholarship

In the Muslim sources, Muqātil's scholarly reputation has been marred with tainting accusations. Of these, some are theological, methodological, subtanstantive, and yet others are personal. Two types of accusations, theological and substantive, pertain to Muqātil's activity as a commentator on the Qur'an, while the other two, methodological and personal, are related primarily to his activity in terms of ḥadīth transmission. As long as the traditional Muslim sources are concerned, three of these accusations—theological, methodological, and personal—seem to be contemporary, and only one accusation— substantive— that seems to be anachronistic.[25]

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[25] The theological charge of anthropomorphism is commonly ascribed in the sources to the Hanafites, especially the eponym founder of this legal madhhab, Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767). The methodological charge of the neglect of isnād, which in this case refers more to the institutionalized ways of knowledge acquisition and transmission through oral delivery and face-to-face learning than a formal enumeration of authorities in one's work, is generally attributed to 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak (d. 797). The personal charge of being unreliable or untrustworthy is first attributed to Wakī' ibn al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/812). As such, these accusations are contemporary to Muqātil. The only charge that seems anachronistic is related to

Theologically, Muqātil has been condemned for his allegedly anthropomorphist approach in understanding divine attributes in the Qur'an by applying *tashbīh* and *tajsīm*.[26] *Tashbīh* is usually associated with the Qur'an's description of bodily parts attributed to God, such as *wajh Allāh* (God's face), *yad Allāh* (God's hand), and so forth; *tajsīm* is associated with the idea of God as a corporeal entity which needs to accupy a space, such as *istiwā', kursī, 'arsh, yamīn Allāh, sāq* and so forth.[27] But underlying both *tashbīh* and *tajsīm* is an understanding or treatment that equates God with creation. So convinced were the sources of Muqātil's extreme anthropomorphism that they invented the term "Muqātiliyyah" to name a group of people who, supposedly following in the footsepts of Muqātil, viewed God as a corporeal entity possessing bodily parts such as flesh, blood, hair, bones, and so forth, and, more importantly, to designate them as Muqātil's companions.[28] In this respect, theological accusation of anthropomorphism against Muqātil is often associated with his opposition to Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 128/746) who was a negationist dismissing altogether the possibility of divine attributes and to whom the term "Jahmiyyah"—the very opposite of "Muqātiliyyah—was attributed.[29]

Substantatively, Muqātil has been criticized for the content of his commentary in which he makes a great use of non-Islamic materials, known since the tenth century as

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Muqātil's use of non-Islamic material borrowed from Jewish and Christian sources, which was first made by a tenth century Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī (d. 354/965), two centuries after Muqātil's own period. The extension of this substantive charge is perhaps the charge with regard to Muqātil's style of preaching, reflected in his *tafsīr*, namely storytelling *(qiṣṣah,* pl. *qaṣaṣ)*. The earliest person who made such a charge was an eleventh century scholar, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1070).

[26] Sirry, "Muqātil," 35-66.

[27] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/94-7.

[28] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/80.

[29] See Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Zaybaq and ʿĀdil Murshid (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1995), 4/143-46.

the isrā'iliyyāt, the majority of which he borrowed from the People of Scripture, Jews and Christians.[30] Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) best summed up all accusations against Muqātil when he said: "Muqātil used to take from Jews and Christians the knowledge of the Qur'an that agreed with their books, equate God with creation, and forge ḥadīth."[31]

Methodologically, Muslim scholars have strongly objected Muqātil's inattention to chains of transmission *(isnād)* for any reports that he uses in his commentary.[32] The question is what did the term *isnād* likely mean during the second/eighth century? In the sources, Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 797) was generally mentioned as the first who expressed concerned with respect to Muqatil's problem with *isnād*. When he was shown of Muqātil's *tafsīr*, Ibn al-Mubārak said, "What a fine knowledge, if he had *isnād.*"[33] In another report, Ibn al-Mubārak was said to have said: "What a fine knowledge, if he were reliable."[34] In short, while the content of Muqātil's commentary is fine, according to Ibn al-Mubārak, Muqātil himself as the author has a problem with regard to *isnād* and reliability. Ibn al-Mubārak's two statements are identical, in which *isnād* seems to be

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[30] See Ibn Ḥibbān, *Majrūḥīn,* 2/348. Claude Gilliot calls *al-isrā'iliyyāt* "the Judaica" as the two terms correspond lexically. See his "A Schoolmaster, Storyteller, Exegete and Warrior at Work in Khurāsān: al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim al-Hilālī (d. 106/724), " in Karen Bauer (ed), *Aims, Methods, and Contexts of Qur'anic Exegesis (2nd/8th – 9th/15th C.)* (London: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013): 311-92, 350-1.

[31] Ibn Ḥibbān, *Majrūḥīn,* 2/348.

[32] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh,* 15/209.

[33] Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb,* 4/143.

[34] Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb,* 4/143. Ibn al-Mubārak's statements also suggest that since the second/eighth century scholars have done both *isnād* and *matn* criticism, which scrutinize not only the transmitters of knowledge but also the content of that knowledge. In this respect, the content of Muqātil's commentary is acceptable, although Muqātil's credibility as an author or a knowledge transmitter does not pass the test. Furthermore, this fact suggests that while Muqātil did not religiously participate in the instutionalized way of knowledge acquisition through oral delivery and face-to-face learning, instead chosing to use the written records that other people make with regard to the interpretaion of the Qur'an, his chosen views in his commentary prove to be of fine quality. As such, it also suggests that Muqātil is a fine scholar despite his violation of the scholarly social convention in knowledge transmission.

interchangeable with reliability. As such, *isnād* seems to suggest the interconnection of knolwegde genealogy and trustworthiness. The sources generally described Muqātil as being confused as to the scholars from whom he actually received his ḥadith, deliberately fabricating sources *(tadlīs)* to imbue his reports with weight of authority, and relying on written records *(ṣuḥuf)* that people made with regard to interpretation of the Qur'an rather than gaining his knowledge of *tafsīr* through *samāʿ* (oral delivery or face-to-face learning).[35] Muqātil's confusion with regard to which authorities said what might have been because of his weak memory, or because he did not acquire his knowledge by attending lecture sessions in which it was taught or by gaining it through face-to-face learning from authorities. Consequently, Muqatil had to embellish his reports with authorities to gain acceptance by the people, although he never heard such reports from or never met with those authorities, and hence the accusation of *tadlīs*.[36] In actuality, what Muqatil did was simply to collect people's *tafsīr* and work it out further, without ever hearing from them directly *(wa lam yasmaʿ Muqātilu min Mujāhidin shayʾan wa lam yalqahu, wa innamā jamaʿa tafsīr al-nās wa fassara ʿalayhi min ghayr samāʿ)*.[37] In this respect, *isnād* seems to suggest a social convention in knowledge acquisition and transmission, namely oral delivery and face-to-face learning. Muqatil's alleged violation of this institutionalized way of learning might have caused his lack of precision with regard to who-said-what when he transmitted reports at his disposal. Even worse, he did

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[35] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/121. Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/46; Musṭafā Zayd, *al-Naskh fi al-Qurʾan al-Karim* (n.c.: n.p., n.y.)*,* 1/290; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh,* 13/167-8; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb,* 4/143-4.
[36] Muqātil is, for instance, described in the sources as transmitting reports from Mujāhid and al-Kalbī while he never met (in the case of Mujāhid) or heard (in the case of al-Kalbī) from either of them.
[37] Zayd, *Naskh,* 290-1; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb,* 4/143-4.

not know who-said-what with some of the reports that he had, and he therefore had to name certain authorities for certain reports to achieve a level of social acceptance. Thus, it is possible that in the second/eighth century the accusation of *isnād* against Muqātil is not because he does not formally mention his authorities, but more because he did not follow the social convention and instutionalized way in knowledge transmission through oral delivery and face-to-face learning.[38] While the use of written records was not a liability in itself, the absence of oral delivery and face-to-face learning is a serious violation of scholarly conduct of the time.[39] This violation was further excacerbated by Muqātil's confusion in naming and fabricating the authorities of his reports. What had initially been the problem of method had now become a problem of morality: he lied and thus untrustworthy. This constitutes the last of four accusations against Muqatil: his personality.

In the sources, Muqātil is often described as inclined to lie in order to forge a ḥadīth, so much so that people called him *kadhdhāb* (a constant liar) or even *dajjāl dasūr* (an epic liar).[40] While there are only a few instances of hadith that the sources are able to mention as Muqatil's fabrication, the majority of cases in which Muqātil's alleged habit of lying are reports about his confused naming of authorities, his false attribution of

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[38] Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri: II Qur'ānic Commentary and Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 104.

[39] Abbott maintains that the way by which Muqātil responded to people's doubt of his using some authorities whom he never met or heard from is "evasive, leaving room for the argument that direct personal contact with one's authorities was not necessary." See *Studies,* 97.

[40] Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Jawzī al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-Ḍuʿafāʾ wa al-Matrūkīn,* ed. Abū al-Fidāʾ ʿAbd Allāh al-Qāḍī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1986), 3/136-37. In some sources, Muqātil's alleged reputation for lying is opposed to Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān who is regarded as reliable and his transmitted ḥadīths are therefore accepted. See Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn ʿUmar al-Dāruquṭnī al-Baghdādī, *al-Ḍuʿafāʾ wa al-Matrūkūn,* ed.Muwaffaq ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Qādir (Riyāḍ: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1984), 371.

certain reports to certain authorities, and his attempts to offer the ruling princes reports to their advantage. This charge of lying against Muqatil is also closely connected to his activity as a storyteller *(qāṣṣ),* especially in his use of non-Islamic material in his preaching. While many of early Muslims were also storytellers other than their being commentators on the Qur'an, scholars of ḥadīth, of law, and so forth, storytelling gained a pejorative connotation in later period, especially since the 11th century.[41] Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1070) was perhaps the earliest scholar who brought about many reports that indicated Muqātil's activity as a storyteller. The most formulaic reports indicating his story-telling present Muqātil as sitting, usually in a mosque, saying, "Ask me anything under the sky, I will tell you" *(salūnī ʿammā dunā al-ʿarsh* or *lā tas'alūnī ʿan shay'in mā dūna al-ʿarsh illā anba'tukum ʿanhu).*[42] The ensuing questions were always about exotic stories such as who shaved Adam's hair when he was performing pilgrimage, what the color of the dog of *aṣḥāb al-kahf* was, where the ant's stomach is, and so forth.[43] But it was Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1175) who first explicitly mentioned Muqātil as a story-teller *(qāṣṣ),*[44] to be followed by al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347), stating that Muqātil performed story-telling *(yaquṣṣu)* in the Mosque of Merv.[45] It was the combination of these

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[41] To follow the nuanced development of storytelling see Lyall Richard Armstrong, "The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam" (PhD Diss., University of Chicago, 2013). In the beginning, Wansbrough argued, the Islamic *qāṣṣ* was a transformation of the pre-Islamic *khaṭīb* suggesting some skilled eloquence *(faṣāḥat al-jāhiliyyah).* In its new circumstance, a *qāṣṣ* is pictured as a popular preacher who had irresponsibly purveyed fables. However, rather than suggesting that the designation *qāṣṣ* became an epithet of abuse as a result of such a popular preacher remaining on the periphery of the religious establishment, as Wansbrough did, I would argue that the contrary is true: the designation *qāṣṣ* had caused such a preacher to be pushed to the periphery. See Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies,* 141.
[42] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh,* 15/214.
[43] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh,* 15/211, 214, 215.
[44] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/133, 123, 126, 127, 128, 129.
[45] al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān,* 6/505.

accusations that finally led people to regard Muqātil as the one whose ḥadīth was abandoned and rejected *(matrūk al-ḥadīth, majhūr al-qawl, la shay'a al-battata,* and so forth).[46] So serious was Muqātil's heresy to some scholars that they even contemplated killing him if situation allowed them to do so.[47]

By chronologically scrutinizing a number of biographical dictionaries and books on *rijāl al-ḥadīth* (ḥadīth transmitters), it can be concluded that in the second part of the tenth century, all accusations against Muqātil—theological, methodological, substantive, and personal—had been well formulated, best represented by Ibn Ḥibbān's account of Muqātil above. Similar accusations have since been repeated and reiterated by later scholars in their works by presenting more or less the same reports to support their views of Muqātil.[48] The exception applies to Ibn al-Nadīm's (d. 995) *al-Fihrist* which, for one reason or another, mentioned only positive things about Muqātil, especially the latter's works, including the three commentaries being studied here.[49] If attention is paid to the

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[46] Abū Zakariyyā Muḥy al-Dīn ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-Asmā' wa al-Lughāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah), 2/111; Abū al-ʿAbbās Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān wa Anbā' Abnā al-Zamān,* ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n. y.), 5/256-7.

[47] Sources mentioned that Khārijah ibn Muṣʿab was so outraged by Muqātil's alleged heresy that he would kill him had he had a chance to do it. See, for instance, Ibn Ḥibbān, *Majrūḥīn,* 2/349; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh,* 15/212.

[48] See al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh*, 15/207-19; Ibn ʿAsākīr, *Tārīkh*, 60/109-34; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ḍuʿafā',* 3/136-37; al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb*, 2/111; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 5/255-57; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 28/434-451; al-Dhahabī, *Mīzan,* 6/505-7; Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalā'* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1996), 7/201-2; Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāẓ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n. y.), 1/174; Al-Dhahabī, *al-Mughnī fī al-Ḍuʿafā',* ed. Nūr al-Dīn ʿItr (Qatar: Idārat Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-Islāmī, n. y.), 2/321; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb*, 4/143-46; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb*, ed. Abū al-Ashbāl Ṣaghīr Aḥmad Shāghif al-Bākistānī (n. p.: Dār al-ʿĀṣimah, n. y.), 968, and Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n. y.), 2/330-31.

[49] It is possible that a theological proximity between Ibn al-Nadīm and Muqātil as fellow Shīʿīs, despite different demoninations: one imāmī and another zaydī, created some sort of alliance that shaped the former's account of the latter. See Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist,* ed. Riḍā-Tajaddud (n. p.: n. p., n. y.), 227.

individual scholars whom the authors of these biographical dictionaries cited, it appears that theological accusation came first, usually attributed to Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 767), then came methodological accusation in terms of *isnād*, raised initially by ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak (d. 797), then personal accusation as a liar, raised for the first time by Wakīʿ ibn al-Jarrāḥ (d. 197/812), and finally, substantive accusation in relation to his prolific use of non-Islamic material (*isrāʾiliyyāt*), first mentioned by Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965).

Most sources I use here, however, mentioned both positive and negative traits that scholars had attributed to Muqātil, except al-Jāḥiẓ's (d. 868) *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, which raised only al-Naẓẓām's criticism of Muqātil as a commentator on the Qurʾan,[50] and three works on *rijāl al-ḥadīth* by Ibn Ḥibbān (354/965), al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995), and Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), which mentioned only Muqātil's weaknesses so that he was not justified in transmitting ḥadīth.[51] Nonetheless, the majority of sources that mentioned both positive and negative traits of Muqātil had not emerged until the eleventh century onward, starting with the account by al-Khaṭīb al-Baġdādī (d. 463/1070). Prior to that, the accounts of Muqātil were either negative (al-Jāḥiẓ's, Ibn Ḥibbān's, and al-Dāraquṭnī's) or positive (Ibn al-Nadīm's).

The earliest source that mentioned Muqātil is Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/844)'s *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr.* In it, Ibn Saʿd mentioned Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī, the author of tafsīr, transmitting from al-Ḍaḥḥāk and ʿAṭāʾ, but stated that the scholars of ḥadīth

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[50] al-Jāḥiẓ, *Hayawān,* 1/343.
[51] See Ibn Ḥibbān, *Majrūḥīn,* 2/347-9; al-Dāraquṭnī, *Ḍuʿafāʾ,* 371; and Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ḍuʿafāʾ,* 3/136-7.

were cautious about his ḥadīth and rejected it.[52] Ibn Saʿd himself acknowledged

Muqātil's reputation in tafsīr but dismissed him as a scholar of ḥadīth.

In his *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān,* al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868) criticized Muqātil as a *mufassir*, citing

his teacher al-Naẓẓām's view. In it, al-Jāḥiẓ mentioned al-Naẓẓām's view of a group of

commentators of the Qur'an and their allegedly unwarranted interpretation. Al-Jaḥīz

maintained that al-Naẓẓām used to warn people to restrain themselves from consulting

many commentators of the Qur'an who, despite their dedication to the community by

answering any questions, issued unfounded opinions. Furthermore, these commentators,

according to al-Naẓẓām, were fond of odd things: the stranger the interpretation, the more

they liked it. The commentators that al-Jāḥiẓ mentioned are ʿIkrimah, al-Kalbī, al-Suddī,

al-Ḍaḥḥāk, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, and Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm. These commentators are all

alike *(fī sabīl wāhidah).*[53]

Ibn Ḥibbān's (d. 354/965) *Kitāb al-Majrūḥīn min al-Muḥaddithīn* offers a much

longer description of Muqātil than Ibn Saʿd's and al-Jāḥiẓ's accounts did. Ibn Ḥibbān

first mentioned a brief biography of Muqātil, and threw a very compact, yet the most

complete, accusation against Muqātil, that is, Muqātil used to take from the Jews and

Christians knowledge of the Qur'an that agreed with their books; he was a *mushabbih*

who equated God with creation, and he, in addition, fabricated ḥadīth.[54] As such, Ibn

Ḥibbān viewed Muqātil in an entirely negative way. Furthermore, unlike his predecessors

who only briefly described Muqātil, Ibn Ḥibbān was the first who mentioned people's

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[52] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 9/377.
[53] al-Jāḥīz, *Hayawān,* 1/343.
[54] Ibn Ḥibbān, *Majrūḥīn,* 2/348.

views of Muqātil. He mentioned Sufyān Ibn ʿUyaynah's (d. 198/814) suspicion of

Muqātil's lie for having met with al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 102/721), Abū Ḥanīfah's (d. 150/767)

warning Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798) of two groups of people from Khurāsān, namely the

Jahmiyyah and the Muqātiliyyah, Wakīʿ's view of Muqātil as a liar, Khārijah ibn

Muṣʿab's (d. 168/785) rage of Muqātil that he contemplated to kill the latter had the

chance allowed him to do so, and many other views of Muqātil which are generally

negative.[55]

Al-Dāraquṭnī's (d. 385/995) *al-Ḍuʿafāʾ wa al-Matrūkūn* only focused, if briefly,

on Muqātil in relation to ḥadīth transmission in which he described the latter as a

Khurāsānī who lied [in terms of ḥadīth], as opposed to Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān whose ḥadīth

was fine.[56]

Unlike the negative portrayal of Muqātil in al-Jāḥīz's, Ibn Ḥibbān's, and al-

Dāraquṭnī's accounts, Ibn al-Nadīm's (d. 995) *al-Fihrist* describes Muqātil briefly in a

neutral, if not positive, way. This is due probably to the theological proximity of its

author as a fellow Shīʿī, though the two differed in denominations, with Ibn al-Nadīm as

an Imāmī and Muqātil, as sources have it, as a Zaydī. Ibn al-Nadīm mentioned Muqātil as

a member of Zaydiyyah and his scholarly credentials as a *muḥaddith* and *qāriʾ*, followed

by a number of works that Muqātil had written. Muqātil works that Ibn al-Nadīm

mentioned include *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh, Tafsīr al-Khams Miʾat*

Āyah, al-Qirāʾāt, Mutashābih al-Qurʾān, Nawādir al-Tafsīr, al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓāʾir, al-

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[55] Ibn Ḥibbān, *Majrūḥīn,* 2/348-49.
[56] al-Dāraquṭnī, *Ḍuʿafāʾ,* 371.

Jawābāt fī al-Qur'ān, al-Radd ʿalā al-Qadariyyah, al-Aqsām wa al-Lughāt, al-Taqdīm wa al-Ta'khīr, and *al-Āyāt wa al-Mutashābihāt.* [57]

Starting with al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's (d. 463/1070) *Tārīkh Baghdād,* the account of Muqātil had become more extensive and more balanced, taking both positive and negative traits into discussion. [58] Al-Baghdādi's description of Muqātil is much longer than any of his predecessors, running about twelve pages. In it, al-Baghdādī first mentioned a short biography of Muqātil, his teachers and students, and his compact judgment about him as possessing knowledge of *tafsīr*, but not of ḥadīth. [59] Afterward, al-Baghdādi enumerated positive qualities that Muqātil possessed, such as his impartiality in his interpretation despite being a Zaydī, by respecting the majority of the Companions, unlike other Shī'īs who deplored almost anyone except ʿAlī, his family, and people who were allied with him. [60] Al-Baghdādi also mentioned Muqātil's alleged courage to give

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[57] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist,* 227.

[58] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh,* 14/207-219.

[59] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh*, 15/207.

[60] Zaydiyyah was a group of people who are the followers of Zayd ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 122/740). Although Zayd ibn ʿAlī recognized the superiority of ʿAli, he remained respectful to other Companions, especially Abū Bakr and ʿUmar. Therefore, when Zayd found out that some of his followers condemned Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, he refuted them, or he told them, "You refuted me!" *(rafaḍtumūnī)*, hence the name Rāfiḍah. See Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl al-ʿAshʿarī, *Maqālat al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn,* ed. Muḥammad Muhy al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 1990)*,* 1/136-7. Najam Haider argues that there were two orientations in the early Zaidism, Batrī and Jārūdī. "The earliest layers of Zaydī literature are almost exclusively Batrī, which upheld the legitimacy of Abu Bakr and ʿUmar based on ʿAlı's apparent refusal to lead an armed uprising against their rule. Jārūdī texts only emerge in the middle of the 2nd/8th and early 3rd/9th century. Zaidism became Jārūdī as a result of outside political pressures (e.g. a series of failed revolts) or internal theological developments (e.g. a slow move towards Imāmī Twelver attitudes of the Companions). The Jārūdīs argued that the Prophet had chosen ʿAlī as his successor on a number of public occasions including (most famously) the sermon at Ghadīr Khumm during his final pilgrimage. This evidence was so clear and unambiguous that a denial of ʿAlī's rights was tantamount to disbelief (kufr). Consequently, the Jārūdīs excommunicated a majority of the Companions, judging them unreliable as legal authorities or transmitters of religious knowledge." See Najam Haider, "Zaydism: A Theological and Political Survey," in *Religion Compass* 4/7 (2010): 436–442, 437. In this respect, it is possible that Muqātil was part of Batrī Zaydism, which later became part of proto-Sunnism. See Najam Haider, *The Origins of the Shi'a: Identity, Ritual, and Sacred Space in Eighth-Century Kufah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3-23.

advice to the ruler, such as the Abbasid prince, Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr. Moreover, al-Baghdādī discussed some positive remarks that people made about to Muqātil, such as a certain Shuʿbah who always said something good about Muqātil when people asked him; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, who respected Muqātil's knowledge of the Qur'an despite some controversy around the latter; and al-Shāfiʿī, who said that people were forever indebted to Muqātil in relation to *tafsīr*.[61]

Slowly, following these positive qualities, al-Baghdādī began to shift mentioning a rather negative and even harsh criticism of Muqātil. For instance, al-Baghdādi mentioned people's doubting Muqātil's reliability because of his inattention to *isnād;* or their half-hearted reception of Muqātil acknowledging the breadth and value of his knowledge, yet reluctant to take benefit of it because of its doubtful transmission; or that people's hatred of him was due to jealousy.[62] Likewise, al-Baghdādi mentioned Muqātil's activity as *qāṣṣ* (story-telling preacher), sitting in a mosque challenging people to ask him anything under the sky. As a result, people asked him fantastic questions, and Muqātil was depicted as unable to answer. Muqatil's inability to answer such questions, according to Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah, was a punishment for his overconfidence or his interest in exotic stories.[63] If al-Baghdādī was perhaps the earliest scholar who brought about many reports that indicated Muqātil's activity as a story-teller *(yaquṣṣu),* it was Ibn ʿAsākir who first explicitly mentioned Muqātil as a story-teller *(qāṣṣ)*, to be followed by al-Dhahabī who mentioned Muqātil was performing story-telling *(yaquṣṣu)* in the Mosque of Merv. Thus,

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[61] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh,* 15/207-08.
[62] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh,* 15/209-11.
[63] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh,* 15/214-15.

until the eleventh century, no explicit accusation of storytelling was leveled against Muqātil.

Finally, al-Baghdādī mentioned a number of criticisms, from soft to harsh, that people leveled against Muqātil, such as his lie that he met and heard from al-Ḍaḥḥāk or Mujāhid in person, while he merely collected their *tafsīr* and worked it out further.[64] Furthermore, there were accusations that Muqātil had fabricated ḥadīth and that his ḥadith must therefore be abandoned.[65] Or accusations that Muqātil was a *mushabbih* in opposition of Jahm who was a *muʿaṭṭil,* which had outraged some people to the extent that they would kill Muqātil had they had chance to do so; something that they would never do to the *dhimmīs*, be they Jews or Christians.[66] In the end, Muqātil's alleged fabrication of ḥadīth and his anthropomorphism had accorded him a label as an epic liar whose ḥadīth was to be abandoned *(kadhdhāb matrūk al-ḥadīth).*[67]

Ibn ʿAsākir's (d. 571/1175) account of Muqātil in his *Tārīkh Dimashq* is twice as long as al- al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's, running about twenty five pages.*[68]* It suggests that as time progressed there was a growing material on Muqātil, although the added material may not have brought new insights so much as emphasize what had been said in early sources. Unlike al-Baghdādī who arranged his material from positive to negative traits of Muqātil, Ibn ʿAsākir did not systematically organize his reports on Muqātil; rather, he mixed up between those expressing positive views of Muqātil and those of negative

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[64] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh,* 15/211.
[65] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh,* 15/211-12.
[66] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh,* 15/212. The rage of Khārijah ibn Muṣʿab was also mentioned in Ibn Ḥibbān's *Duʿafāʾ.*
[67] al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh,* 15/215-19.
[68] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/109-134.

views.[69] The number of negative views is, however, larger than that of the positive views, and since he ended his exposition of Muqātil with the negative traits, he may have shaped his readers' mind to do the same when they think of Muqātil.

The first description of Muqātil that Ibn ʿAsākir mentioned is that he was a scholar or author of qur'anic commentary *(ṣāḥib al-tafsīr)*.[70] After mentioning his teachers, from whom Muqātil transmitted knowledge, and his students, who transmitted from him, Ibn ʿAsākir mentioned some examples of ḥadīth in which Muqātil is part of the transmission chain.[71] Ibn ʿAsākir also mentioned Muqātill's alleged *qaṣaṣ* (story-telling) related activity in the Beirut's mosque.[72] It was only then that Ibn ʿAsākir enumerated people's opinions of Muqātil: people abandoned him, and he was nothing at all (al-Bukhārī);[73] he was the author of *tafsīr* whose reports are rejected (Ibn Abī Ḥātim); he was a *ḥāfiẓ* in *tafsīr*, but did not pay a careful attention to *isnād* (Abū al-ʿAbbās ibn Muṣʿab);[74] his commentary would have been fine had he been trustworthy (ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak);[75] Muqātil was an epic liar (Wakīʿ ibn al-Jarrāḥ),[76] and so forth. Among the new material that had never been mentioned in earlier sources is a report that Muqātil asked Abū ʿIṣmah, his stepson, to write down his commentary as he feared that he would forget his knowledge. Muqātil began dictating his commentary one page after another at

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[69] Ibn ʿAsākir also took some of his material on Muqātil from al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī. See Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/111.
[70] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/109.
[71] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/109-10.
[72] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/110-111.
[73] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/111.
[74] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/112.
[75] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/119.
[76] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/121.

night until it was finished. The commentary was then transmitted by Abū Nuṣayr who, during his study of the commentary with Muqātil, impregnated the latter's slave *(jāriyah)* whom Muqātil later freed.[77] There is also a report in which Muqātil defended himself against the accusation of *tashbīh* before the ʿAbbāsid Prince. When the Prince asked him whether he practiced *tashbīh,* Muqātil's answer was reciting to him Q112,[78] and emphasized that anything else people said about him is a lie.[79] Ibn ʿAsākir also brought more material in relation to Muqātil's overconfidence in his knowledge (demonstrated by his challenging people to ask him any questions) and his interest in fantastic stories that usually came from non-Islamic sources.[80] Furthermore, it was Ibn ʿAsākir who first explicitly brought about the accusation that Muqātil was a story-teller whose ḥadīth was abandoned, by citing, in this regard, Ibn al-Ḥakam ibn Bashīr.[81]

Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1201) *Kitāb al-Duʿafāʾ wa al-Matrūkīn* mentions Muqātil with a wholly negative perspective. In a relatively short exposition, Ibn al-Jawzī simply enumerated the views of some prominent scholars of ḥadīth on Muqātil, which are all negative. Muqātil was a liar (*kadhdhāb,* Wakīʿ ibn al-Jarrāḥ, 197/812), whose ḥadīth was nothing (Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn, d. 233/848); a big liar (*dajjāl dasūr,* al-Saʿdī), whose ḥadīth people abandoned (Abū Dāwud); whose ḥadīth was rejected and about whom people were silent, and nothing at all (al-Bukhārī); a liar and whose ḥadīth was abandoned (Zakariyyā al-Sājī and al-Rāzī); one of four whom people known for fabricating ḥadīth in

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[77] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/115.
[78] (1) "Say, 'He is God the One, (2) God the eternal. (3) He begot no one nor was He begotten. (4) No one is comparable to Him.'"
[79] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/121.
[80] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/127-28.
[81] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh,* 60/133.

the name of the Prophet (al-Nasā'ī), and one who took from the Jews and Christians knowledge of the Qur'an that agreed with their books, treating God the same as creation *(mushabbih)*, and lying in terms of ḥadīth (Abū Ḥātim ibn Ḥibbān).[82] In short, there is nothing new in Ibn al-Jawzī's description of Muqātil that focused only on the latter's disreputation in the field of ḥadīth. Ibn al-Jawzī mentioned nothing at all about Muqātil's merit in the field of *tafsīr* and other good traits that people had praised about him, as mentioned in the earlier sources.

While Al-Nawawī's account of Muqātil in (d. 676/1277) *Tahdḥib al-Asmā' wa al-Lughāt* is based on the views of scholars of ḥadīth, like Ibn al-Jawzī's before him, it is relatively balanced. In general, al-Nawawī admitted Muqātil's expertise in *tafsīr* while dismissing him as a scholar of ḥadīth. Nothing is really new in al-Nawawī's exposition of Muqātil, except that one of the reports he used shows that Muqātil was a contemporary of al-Awzāʿī, a Syrian legal scholar, some of whose views Muqātil mentioned in his legal commentary.[83]

In a quite different spirit, the account of Muqātil in Ibn Khallikān's (d. 681/1282) *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān* is the most objective of all. In general, Ibn al-Khallikān was aware of the controversy that surrounded Muqātil, and his biographical exposition of Muqātil was meant to show just that: divided views of Muqātil among people.[84] There were people who accepted Muqātil, but there were others who rejected him.[85] Therefore, Ibn

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[82] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ḍuʿafāʾ,* 3/136-37.
[83] Al-Nawawī, *Tahdḥīb,* 2/111.
[84] ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt,* 5/257.
[85] ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt,* 5/256.

Khallikān did not hesitate to recognize Muqātil's reputation as a commentator on the Qur'an whose commentary was well known *(wa kāna mashhūran bi tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-ʿazīz, wa lahū al-tafsīr al-mashhūr).*[86] In this respect, Ibn Khallikān mentioned al-Shāfiʿī's view that people were indebted to Muqātil with regard to knowledge of *tafsīr*. In addition, Ibn Khallikān also highlighted Muqātil's nerve to give admonition to the political ruler, as in the case of the ʿAbbasid Prince, Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr. On the other hand, Ibn Khallikān mentioned negative comments that people had made about Muqātil. Similar to any assessments given to Muqātil in other sources, Ibn Khallikān related the negative views about Muqātil as someone whose ḥadīth was abandoned (ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak); who spoke about divine attributes in a way that is not to be transmitted (Aḥmad ibn Sayyār); a big liar (Ibrāhīm ibn Yaʿqūb al-Jawjazānī); one of four people well known for fabricating ḥadīth in the name of the Prophet (Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nasāʾī); and, in the most encompassing accusation, one who took from the Jews and Christians knowledge of the Qur'an that agreed with their books, treated God as similar to creation *(mushabbih)*, and fabricated ḥadīth (Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī).[87] In short, all views about Muqātil that Ibn Khallikān mentioned had been mentioned in other sources. What specifically distinguishes Ibn Khallikān's account of Muqātil from others is his explicit statement that there are opposing views on Muqātil, and he intended to show such opposition. Thus, although Ibn Khallikān's organization of the material with regard to Muqātil's account is similar to that of other sources before

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[86] ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt,* 5/255.
[87] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt,* 5/256-57.

him, in which positive traits of Muqātil were put before the negative ones, Ibn Khallikān clearly did not mean to override the positive with the negative, as could be perceived in other accounts of Muqātil in other sources. His intention was from the beginning to show the controvery around Muqātil and that people were divided in terms of the latter's reputation.

Al-Mizzī's (d. 742/1341) account of Muqātil in his *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* is basically a collection of views mentioned earlier in other sources, both positive and negative.[88] In terms of the negative assessment of Muqātil, al-Mizzī mentioned everything that scholars had expressed about him, including the most complete one issued by Abū Ḥātim ibn Ḥibbān.[89] In addition to Muqātil's three major and devastating weaknesses that Ibn Ḥibbān mentioned, which best summed up the whole range of accusations made against him, al-Mizzī also mentioned the view of ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak who said, after someone showed him part of Muqātil's commentary, that it would have been a valuable knowledge had it been accompanied by *isnād* or had Muqātil been trustworthy.[90] If there is something new in al-Mizzī's account of Muqātil, it is his inclusion of a statement by Abū Aḥmad ibn ʿAdī (d. 365/976) that although the majority of Muqātil's ḥadīth was not accepted, there were many trustworthy and famous scholars who transmitted from him and wrote his ḥadīth.[91]

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[88] al-Mizzī, *Tahdḥib*, 28/434-451.
[89] al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 28/450.
[90] al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 28/437.
[91] al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb,* 28/450.

Another account of Muqātil was by al-Mizzī's contemporary, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347) in his *Mīzān al-I'tidāl*.[92] In this short account, al-Dhahabī mentioned a number of scholars who provided negative views on Muqātil such as Abū Ḥanīfah, Wakīʿ ibn al-Jarrāḥ, al-Bukhārī, Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn, al-Nasāʾī, al-Jawjazānī, and Khārijah ibn Muṣʿab.[93] But he also mentioned those who offered Muqātil their positive assessment, such as al-Shāfiʿī.[94] When mentioning some examples of (the alleged fabricated) ḥadīth transmitted from Muqātil, al-Dhahabī argued that one of them might be made, not by Muqātil, but by one of his companions or someone called al-Qādisī.[95] Al-Dhahabī also mentioned Muqātil's legal commentary, *Tafsīr al-Khams Miʾah,* transmitted by Abū Nuṣayr Manṣūr ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Bārūdī, in which there are many ḥadīths, which despite their weak status remain transmitted by Muqātil's students.[96] Likewise, Ibn ʿAdī also argued that other than these weak ḥadīths, there are fine ḥadīths transmitted from Muqātil. Therefore, argues Ibn ʿAdī, despite the fact that the majority of his ḥadīth was not accepted, there were many famous and trustworthy people who kept transmitting from Muqātil and wrote his ḥadīth.[97] As seems customary, al-Dhahabī mentioned the statement of Ibn Ḥibbān that summed up accusations against Muqātil in relation to what was later known as isrāʾiliyyāt, *tashbīh*, and ḥadīth fabrication, just as other scholars before him did.[98] This is in addition to the

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[92] al-Dhahabī, *Mīzan,* 6/505-7.
[93] al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān,* 5/505-7.
[94] al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān*, 5/505.
[95] al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān*, 5/506.
[96] al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān*, 5/507.
[97] al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān*, 5/506.
[98] al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān*, 5/507.

accusation of Muqātil's carelessness of *isnād (lā yaḍbiṭ al-isnād)*, as stated by al-ʿAbbās ibn Muṣʿab.[99] Furthermore, al-Dhahabī was the second person, after Ibn ʿAsākir, who explicitly mentioned Muqātil's activity as a story-teller in the mosque of Merv *(kāna yaquṣṣu fī al-Jāmiʿ bi Marw)*, as stated by al-ʿAbbās ibn Muṣʿab in his *Tārīkh Marw*.[100] Al-Dhahabī also made an account of Muqātil in his other works, such as *Siyar Aʿlām an-Nubalāʾ*,[101] and *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Wafayāt al-Mashāhīr wa al-Aʿlām*.[102] In his *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāẓ,* al-Dhahabī briefly mentioned Muqātil at the end of his account of Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān (who was considered trustworthy), as a commentator on the Qurʾan whose ḥadīth had been abandoned and had also been accused of *tajsīm* despite the fact that he was one of the very knowledgeable in terms of *tafsīr*.[103] A similar short description of Muqātil was also found in al-Dhahabī's other work, *al-Mughnī fī al-Ḍuʿafāʾ:* a commentator on the Qurʾan, disgraced *(hālik)* and rejected by Wakīʿ and al-Nasāʾī.[104]

Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī's (d. 852/1448) *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*[105] and al-Mizzī's *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl* are considered as the two most authoritative *(ṣaḥīḥayn)* autobiographical dictionaries, comparable to the two most authoritative collections of ḥadīth by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.[106] The two works are so comprehensive that almost no

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[99] al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān,* 5/505.
[100] al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān,* 5/505.
[101] al-Dhahabī, *Siyar,* 7/201-2.
[102] al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa Wafayāt al-Mashāhīr wa al-Aʿlām*, ed. Bashār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2003).
[103] Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat,* 1/174.
[104] Al-Dhahabī, *Mughnī,* 2/321.
[105] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb,* 4/143-46.
[106] See the editors' introduction to al-ʿAsqalānī's *Tahdhīb*, 1/7.

other work may add anything to what they have to offer. The likelihood is that these two works would engender shortened versions of them. This was exactly what al-ʿAsqalānī himself did with his book *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb* that squeezed his four huge volume *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* into only one volume, though it remains huge. So, if al-ʿAsqalānī's description of Muqātil in *Taqrīb* is extremely compact, running only one line, in *Tahdhīb* the same account runs in four pages. In *Taqrīb*, Muqātil was mentioned briefly as a person whom scholars rejected and abandoned and against whom the accusation of *tajsīm* was made.[107] Thus, in this short line of description, Muqātil was straightforwardly depicted as an outcast without any merit. However, in his *Tahdhīb,* al-ʿAsqalānī, like most of his predecessors, first enumerated positive traits attributed to Muqātil, such as his breadth of knowledge, especially of the Qurʾan, and his great contribution to *tafsīr*. Gradually, al-ʿAsqalānī introduced the negative traits that people attributed to Muqātil in terms of his credentials in ḥadīth (his carelessness in terms of *isnād*, his alleged habit of lying, and even his intentional fabrication of ḥadīth), in theology (his alleged *tashbīh* and *tajsīm* in terms of divine attributes, resulting from his opposition to Jahm ibn Ṣafwān's *taʿṭīl*), and in *tafsīr,* through his borrowing from non-Muslims in interpreting the Qurʾan.[108]

In al-Dāwūdī's (d. 945/1538) *Tabaqāt al-Mufassirīn,* Muqātil was pictured as one of the prominent scholars of *tafsīr*, as acknowledged by al-Shāfiʿī and al-Dhahabī in the latter's *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥuffāẓ*. Al-Dāwūdī also admitted, however, the fact that Muqātil was

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[107] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Taqrīb,* 968.
[108] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb*, 4/143-46.

also a scholar whose ḥadīth was rejected and against whom the accusation of *tajsīm* was leveled,[109] similar to al-Dhahabī's statement in his *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāẓ* in which he said: "While Muqātil ibn Sulaymān at this time was a person whose ḥadīth was abandoned, and was accused of *tajsīm,* he was among the most knowleagble with regard to *tafsīr*."[110] Furthermore, al-Dāwūdī also mentioned a number of Muqātil's works, such as *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah, al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir*, and many other which were also mentioned in Ibn al-Nadīm's *al-Fihrist*.[111] Al-Dawūdī's account of Muqātil emphasizes that, as far as the Qur'an and its interpretation is concerned, Muqātil is likely to be well-received and respected, at least until the sixteenth century. In fact, respect and recognition of Muqātil had occurred much earlier, as shown by oft-quoted statement by al-Shāfiʿī. In a collection of al-Shāfiʿī interpretations of legal verses in the Qur'an, called *Tafsīr al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī,* there was a statement by al-Shāfiʿī that he had taken advantage of Muqātil's commentary in understanding some parts of the Qur'an that had baffled him for some time.[112]

Accounts of Muqātil in other works: on theology, tafsīr, and ḥadīth

Apart from the biographical dictionaries and books on *rijāl al-ḥadīth,* accounts of Muqātil can also be found in works on theological sects, in *tafsīrs,* and works on *ḥadīth*. In works on theology, theologians generally focused their criticism of Muqātil on his alleged anthropomorphism. According to Ibn Rajab, the early scholars *(al-salaf)* rejected

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[109] al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt,* 2/330.
[110] al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt,* 2/331.
[111] al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt,* 2/330-31.
[112] Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Muṭṭalibī al-Qurashī, *Tafsīr al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī,* ed. Aḥmad ibn Muṣṭafā al-Farrān (Saudi Arabia: Dār al-Tadmuriyyah, 2006), 3/1445.

Muqātil's views when he repudiated Jahm's views using his reason. These scholars,

however, went too far in refuting him *(wa balaghū fī al-ṭaʿn ʿalayh)*, so much so that

some of them, such as Makkī ibn Ibrāhim, the teacher of al-Bukhārī, even allowed for

Muqātil to be killed.[113] The key to the controversy surrounding anthropomorphism was

over the meaning of the Qur'anic phrase *laysa kamilthlihi shay'* ("There is nothing like

Him"), which propagates the uniqueness of God in relation to His creation. The people of

Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah agreed that nothing resembles God in terms of His *Dhāt*

(essense)*, Ṣifāt* (attributes)*,* and *Afʿāl* (acts)*.* A group of Muslims, known as the

Karramite, or the followers of Muḥammad ibn Karrām al-Sijistānī, was said to have

treated God as similar to His creation *(shabbahū Allāh bi khalqihi)*. Al-Ashʿarī (d.

330/941) called such people *al-mujassimah,* those who physicalized God.[114] Muqātil was

said to have followed the same path.[115] Al-Ashʿarī, for instance, mentions that Muqātil

ibn Sulaymān, along with Dāwud al-Jawāribī, said that God is a body and possesses an

image like a human being with a flesh, blood, hair, bones, and physical organs such as

hand, leg, head, and eyes, although God, with all of these, is unlike anything of creation

nor does any of His creation resembles Him in any way.[116] In fact, according to al-Sijzī,

affirming divine attributes *(ithbāt al-ṣifāt)* as they are described in the Qur'an and Sunnah

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[113] Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Bayān Faḍl ʿilm al-Salaf ʿalā ʿIlm al-Khalaf,* ed. Muḥammad ibn Nāṣir al-ʿAjmī (Beirūt: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyyah, 2003), 55.
[114] al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālat,* 1/281; ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī mentioned different groups of people who physicalized God in different ways. See his *al-Farq bayna al-Firaq wa Bayān al-Firqah al-Nājiyah minhum: ʿAqāʾid al-Firaq al-Islāmiyyah wa Ārāʾ Kibār Aʿlāmihā,* ed. Muḥammad ʿUthmān al-Khasht (Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Sīnā, n.y.), 198-201; Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Safārīnī al-Atharī al-Ḥanbalī, *Kitāb Lawāmiʿ al-Anwār al-Bahiyyah wa Sawāṭiʿ al-Asrār al-Athariyyah* (n.p.: n.p., ny.y.)*,* 1/91.
[115] Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Faḍl ʿilm al-Salaf,* 55.
[116] al-ʿAshʿarī, *Maqālat,* 1/283.

does not lead to *tajsīm* and *tashbīh*. For it is only that which is created can be explained *(kullu shay' yataʿallaq bi al-muḥdathāt mukayyaf)*, and divine attributes have no need for *kayfiyyah*.[117]

On the other end, other groups of Muslims negated wholesale the existence of God's attributes *(al-nāfūna li al-asmā' wa al-ṣifāt)*, especially the Jahmiyyah (that is, the followers of Jahm ibn Ṣafwān), and others such as the Muʿtazilah.[118] These two extreme views in relation to divine attributes are in stark difference from the view of the Salaf, as it is portrayed by the Ahl al-Sunnah. Generally depicted as a moderate representing the middle ground, the Salaf's view affirmed God's divine attributes as He attributes them to Himself, and which are different from those belonging to His creation. In short, the Salaf's position with respect to divine attributes is in the middle between the *Mujassimah/Mushabbihah* (those who physicalized God) and *Muʿaṭṭilah* (those who negated divine attributes).[119] The Salaf scholars accepted the description of the Qur'an and ḥadīths with respect to divine attributes without further question *(bi lā takyīf)* and no comparison with creation *(lā tamthīl)*.[120] In the words of Nuʿaym ibn Ḥamād, "whosoever treats God as equal as His creation has committed disbelief; whosoever rejects what God

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[117] Abū Naṣr ʿUbayd Allāh Saʿīd ibn Ḥātim al-Wāylī al-Sijzī, *Risālat al-Sijzī ilā Ahl Zabīd fī al-Radd ʿalā man Ankara al-Ḥarf wa al-Ṣawt,* ed. Muḥammad Bā Karīm Bā ʿAbd Allāh (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Rāyah li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzīʿ, 1994), 191.

[118] ʿUthmān ibn Saʿīd al-Dārimī, *al-Radd ʿalā al-Jahmiyyah,* ed. Badr al-Badr (Kuwait: al-Dār al-Salafiyyah, 1985).

[119] See Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Risālah ilā Ahl al-Thaghr,* ed. ʿAbd Allāh Shākir Muḥammad al-Junaydī (al-Mdīnah al-Munawwarah: Maktabat al-ʿUlūm wa al-Ḥikam, 2002).

[120] Al-Safãrīnī, *Lawāmiʿ,* 1/26.

has attributed to Himself has committed disbelief; and believing in whatever God and His Messenger have mentioned as divine attributes is not an act of *tashbīh*.[121]

Sometimes, Muqātil is mentioned as a member of the Murji'ah, with his alleged view often quoted in the sources in relation to judgment *(al-muwāzanah)* on the believers in the hereafter. According to Muqātil, as the sources have it, believers in divine unicity will not be punished despite their sins, for belief is so stable that it is not affected by deeds.[122] As a result, Muqātil in particular, and Murji'ah in general, was mentioned as the author of the view that punishment is specifically designed for disbelievers. Other members of the Murji'ah, however, were generally described as believing that the believers of *tawḥīd* may be punished if their sins outweigh their good deeds, as stated by Ibn Mu'ādh.[123]

Muqātil in works of tafsīr

In qur'anic commentaries, the accounts of Muqātil are similar to those in the biographical dictionaries or works on *rijāl al-ḥadīth;* some accept his scholarly credentials, and others are critical and hence reject him. The difference is that the two attitudes of accepting and rejecting have rarely been founded together in the same commentary. Authors of commentary, with a few exceptions, either accept Muqātil or reject him.

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[121] Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahbī, *Mukhtaṣar al-ʿUluww li al-ʿAlīy al-Ghffār,* ed. Muḥammad Nāsir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Beirūt and Damascus: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1991)*,* 184.
[122] al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālat,* 1/127.
[123] al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālat,* 1/127.

On the receiving side, al-Thaʿlabī cites Muqātil approvingly, positioning himself as one of the transmitters of Muqātil commentary.[124] Al-Baghawī's use of Muqātil is quite extensive, similar to that of al-Thaʿlabī.[125] Al-Māwardī frequently cites Muqātil in his commentary *al-Nukat wa al-ʿUyūn*.[126] So does al-Wāḥidī in his commentary *al-Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ*.[127] In his commentary, al-Shāʿrawī presents Muqātil as a well-respected person by calling him *sayyidunā* Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. Furthermore, al-Shaʿrawī describes Muqātil's interaction with an Abbāsid Caliph, Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣur, as a *wāʿiẓ (kāna aḥad al-wāʿiẓīn)* who admonished al-Manṣūr in the day of his coronation. [128] On the rejecting side, Al-Samʿānī cites Muqātil, underlining strange reports transmitted from the latter.[129] Al-Zamakhsharī only mentions Muqātil once when commenting on Q68:42-43 in relation to his alleged *tashbīh* in interpreting the term *sāq*.[130] Ibn ʿAṭiyyah mentions Muqātil in several places.[131] Ibn al-Jawzī also frequently cites Muqātil's views in his *Zād*

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[124] Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad al-Maʿrūf al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashsf wa al-Bayān*, ed. Abū Muḥammad ibn ʿĀshūr (Beirūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2002), 1/76, 80, 83.

[125] Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn ibn Masʿūd al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī (Maʿālim al-Tanzīl),* ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh al-Namir et al (Riyāḍ: Dār Ṭayyibah, 1988).

[126] See Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥabībā al-Māwardī al-Baṣrī, *al-Nukat wa al-ʿUyūn Tafsīr al-Māwardī,* ed. Al-Sayyid ibn ʿAbd al-Maqṣūd ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥīm (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n.y.).

[127] Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī al-Nīsābūrī, *al-Wasīṭ fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Majīd*, ed. ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd et al (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n.y.).

[128] See Amstrong's *Quṣṣāṣ,* which provides a more nuanced description of the *quṣṣās* in Muslim community and their roles in scholarship. Furthermore, in it Amstrong rejects a commonly derogatory view of *quṣṣāṣ* as merely unreputable story-tellers, primarily because the majority of early and prominent Muslim scholars played, in one way or another, a role as *quṣṣāṣ*, in addition to their intellectual, social, and political roles.

[129] Mansūr ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Tamīmī al-Marwazī al-Shāfiʿī Abū al-Muẓaffar al-Samʿānī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān,* ed. Abū Tamīm Yāsir ibn Ibrāhīm (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Waṭan, 1997), 3/252.

[130] Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqāʾiq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl wa ʿUyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Taʾwīl*, ed. ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd et al (Riyāḍ: Maktabah al-ʿUbaykān, 1998)*,* 4/594.

[131] Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq ibn Ghālib Ibn ʿAṭiyyah al-Andalusī, *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-ʿAzīz,* ed. ʿAbd al-Salām ʿAbd al-Shāfī Muḥammad (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2001), 1/374, 2/427, 5/442.

al-Masīr fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr[132] and also in his *Nawāsikh al-Qur'ān,* although at times the former disagrees with the latter.[133] Al-Rāzī cites Muqātil in nine places.[134] Ibn Kathīr also mentions Muqātil in several places although sometimes criticizing the validity of the ḥadīths in which Muqātil is a part of the transmission chain.[135] Al-Suyūṭī mentions Muqātil's reported interpretations of the Qur'an in his *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr,* although he seems to hold the commonly circulated view that Muqātil is untrustworthy by comparing him to Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān who was considered trustworthy.[136] Rashīd Riḍā mentions Muqātil once only to highlight his damned reputation as a liar *(al-majrūḥ bi al-kadhib).*[137]

However, there are some exceptions, in which both appreciation and critical acceptance is found in the same commentary. An intriguing example appears, for instance, in al-Ṭabarī's qur'anic commentary. In his *tafsīr,* al-Ṭabarī did not mention Muqātil's name explicitly when he cited the latter's view of the mysterious letters in the Qur'an as numerical counts *(ḥurūf min ḥisāb al-jumal).*[138] Instead, al-Ṭabarī simply stated that he was reluctant to mention the name of the person whose views he was

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[132] Abū a-Faraj Jamāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Jawzī al-Qurashī al-Baghdādī, *Zād al-Masīr fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr* (n.c.: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, n.y.).

[133] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nawāsikh al-Qur'ān,* ed. Muḥammad Ashraf 'Alī al-Malbārī (al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah: al-Jāmi'ah al-Islāmiyyah, 2001).

[134] Muḥammad Fakhr al-Dīn ibn al-'Allāmah Ḍiyā' al-Dīn 'Umar al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī (Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb)* (Beirūt: Dār al-Fikr, 1981).

[135] 'Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'l 'Umar ibn Kathl-Dimasqī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm,* ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998), 3/158.

[136] Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr,* ed. 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (al-Muhandisīn: Markaz Hijr li al-Buḥūth wa al-Dirāsāt al-'Arabiyyah wa al-Islāmiyyah, 2003).

[137] Al-Sayyid Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm (al-Manār)* (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1947).

[138] Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ra'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān,* ed. 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (n.p., Dār Hijr, n.y.), 1/210; Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/28-9.

discussing because he was among those whose views were not to be trusted.

Alternatively, al-Ṭabarī mentions a similar view from al-Rabīʿ ibn Anas. Interestingly, al-Ṭabarī discussed Muqātil's alleged view on the mysterious letters at length, placed it as one among those he chose, and presented the prophetic traditions with which Muqātil justified his arguments.[139] This may suggest that during al-Ṭabarī's time Muqātil's reputation had been so tainted that most people were unwilling to be associated with him. In general, while a number of qur'anic commentaries mentioned Muqātil and his views, sometimes with rehabilitative attempts, his scholarly reputation remains tarnished.[140]

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[139] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/205.

[140] Ibn Abī Ḥātim cites Muqātil in several places in his *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm,* ed. Asʿad Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib (Riyāḍ: Maktabah Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 1997), 7/2261, 9/3128; So does al-Kirmāni in his *Gharā'ib al-Tafsīr wa ʿAjā'ib al-Ta'wīl,* ed. Shamrān Sirkāl Yūnus al-ʿAjalī (Jeddah: Dār al-Qiblah li al-Thaqāfah al-Islāmiyyah, n.y.), 1/98; 2/692; Al-Qurṭubī mentions Muqātil's views in eight places in *al-Jāmiʿ li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān,* ed. Hishām Samīr al-Bukhārī (n.c., Dār ʿĀlam al-Kutub, n.y.); Al-Khāzin mentions Muqātil once in relation to Q105 in explanation of the reason for Abrahah's attack on Mecca, one which was also mentioned by other commentators mentioned above, in his *Tafsīr al-Khāzin (Lubāb al-Ta'wīl fī Maʿānī al-Tanzīl),* ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad ʿAlī Shāhīn (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2004), 4/472; Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalūsī mentions Muqātil four times in his *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ,* ed. ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd et al (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1993); Ibn al-Qayyim mentions Muqātil once in his *al-Tafsīr al-Qayyim,* ed. Muḥammad Uways al-Nadwī (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n.y.); Al-Samīn al-Ḥalbī mentions Muqātil once in *al-Durr al-Maṣūn fī ʿIlm al-Kitāb al-Maknūn* (n.c.: n.p., n.y.)*,* 3/210; Abū Ḥafṣ al-Nuʿmānī also mentions Muqātil in several places in *al-Lubāb fī ʿUlūm al-Kitāb,* ed. ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd et al (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1998); Al-Qummī al-Nīsābūrī also mentions Muqātil in his *Tafsīr Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān wa Raghā'ib al-Furqān,* ed. Zakariyyā ʿUmayrāt (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1996); Al-Thaʿālibī mentions him twice in *al-Jawāhir al-Ḥisān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān (Tafsīr al-Thaʿālibī),* ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad Muʿawwaḍ et al (Beirūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1997); Muḥammad al-Shirbīnī al-Khaṭīb also mentioned Muqātil in his *Tafsīr al-Sirāj al-Munīr* (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n.y.); Al-Shawkānī mentioned Muqātil ten times in four of which, interestingly, he was mentioned together with Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān as propagating the same view, in his *Fatḥ al-Qadīr al-Jāmiʿ bayn Fannay al-Riwāyah wa al-Dirāyah min ʿIlm al-Tafsīr,* ed. Yūsuf al-Ghūsh (Beirūt: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 2007); Al-Alūsī mentions Muqātil five times in *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm wa al-Sabʿ al-Mathānī* (Beirūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.y.); al-Suyūṭī alludes to a ḥadīth that Muqātil mentioned in the beginning of his lexical commentary, *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir,* in *Muʿtarak al-Aqrān fī Iʿjāz al-Qur'ān,* ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1988); Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī cites Muqātil extensively to the extent that the latter serves as the former's major source in providing the *asbāb al-nuzūl* for some Qur'anic verses, in *al-ʿUjāb fī Bayān al-Asbāb,* ed. Abū ʿAbd al-Rahmān Fawwāz Aḥmad Zamaralī (Beirūt: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2002); Abu al-Ḥasan al-Qayrawānī (d. 479 H) mentions Muqātil once in his *al-Nukat fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm,* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, 2007), 102.

[140] Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalūsī, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ,* ed. ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd et al (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1993).

Muqātil in works of ḥadīth

Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī mentions Muqātil in his *Fatḥ al-Bārī* approvingly in which
he called the later as the leader of those who confirmed divine attributes *(ra's al-
muthbitah)* and attributes extreme views of *ithbāt* that suggested anthropomorphism only
to those who later followed Muqātil such as al-Rāfiḍah and al-Karrāmiyyah.[141] Badr al-
Dīn al-ʿAynī (d. 855 H) also mentions Muqātil nine times in his *'Umdat al-Qārī Sharḥ
Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī.*[142] However, the majority of ḥadīth scholars seemed to have dismissed
Muqātil, and if they mentioned them in their transmitted reports they did so for the sake
of freeing themselves from any responsibility *(wa dhikruhū kana abra'a li al-ʿuhdah).*[143]
Thus, it is true that while Muqātil is considered weak in his credential as a ḥadīth scholar,
his transmitted reports continued to be written *(wa maʿa ḍaʿfihī yuktab ḥadīthuhu)*, as Ibn
Maʿin maintained.[144] Even Ibn Ḥajar, who approvingly cited Muqātil's views on *tafsīr*,
clearly indicated Muqātil's defect in relation to ḥadīth transmission in his *Itḥāf al-
Maharah,* by labeling him as *ḍaʿīf,*[145] *matrūk,*[146] and *muttaham.*[147]

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[141] Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Imām Abī 'Abd Allāh ibn Ismāʿīl
al-Bukhārī,* ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Shaybah al-Ḥamd (Riyāḍ: Fahrasah Maktabah al-Malik Fahd al-Waṭaniyyah,
2001).

[142] Badr al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad Maḥmūd ibn Aḥmad ibn al-ʿAynī, *'Umdat al-Qārī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-
Bukhārī* (Damascus: Idārat al-Ṭibāʿah al-Munīriyyah, n.y).

[143] Ibn al-Qaṭṭān al-Faʾsī Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Malik, *Bayān al-Wahm wa al-
Īhām al-Wāqiʿayn fī Kitāb al-Aḥkām*, ed. Al-Ḥusayn Āyit Saʿīd (Riyāḍ: Dār Ṭayyibah li al-Nashr wa al-
Tawzīʿ, 1997), 3/215.

[144] Jamāl al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh ibn Yūsuf ibn Muḥammad al-Zīlaʿī (d. 762 H), Takhrīj al-
Aḥādīth al-Wāqiʿah fī Tafsīr al-Kashshāf li al-Zamakhsharī, ed. ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Saʿd
(Riyāḍ: Dār Ibn Khuzaymah, 1993), 1/153.

[145] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Itḥāf al-Maharah bi al-Fawā'id al-Mubtakirah min Aṭrāf al-ʿAshrah,* ed. Zuhayr
ibn Nāṣir al-Nāṣir et. al (Madīnah: Majmaʿ al-Malik Fahd li Ṭibāʿat al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 1994), 3/245.
[146] Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Itḥāf,* 10/338.

[147] Abū al-Faḍl Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī al-Shāfiʿī (d. 852 H),
al-Talkhīṣ al-Ḥabīr fī Takhrīj Aḥādīth al-Rāfiʿī al-Kabīr, ed. Abū ʿĀṣim Ḥasan ibn 'Abbās ibn Quṭb (n.c.:
Mu'assasah Qurṭubah, 1995).

Muslims' counterarguments to accusations against Muqātil

Amidst the overwhelmingly critical scholars to Muqātil, there are scholars, such as Ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Malṭī (d. 377/987), who considered Muqātil a reliable scholar *(al-thiqah)* among the orthodox *ahl al-sunnah* whose views, especially in his interpretation of the Qur'an, are worth citing to counter the "heretics."[148] In this respect, al-Malṭī's view in which he explicitly positioned Muqātil, who had been been treated as a heretic by the majority, as an orthodox scholar vis a vis heretic opponents is unique. Likewise, al-Shahrastanī (d. 1153), in his *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal,* regarded Muqātil as one the leading Salaf scholars *(min aʾimmat al-salaf)* in the company of other scholars such as Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, who believed in whatever comes in the Qur'an and Sunnah and avoided interpretation *(taʾwīl)* after an acknowledgment that God is different from creation. These scholars, according to al-Shahrastānī, despite their acceptance of God having physical organs as mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah, did not practice *tashbīh*. On the contrary, they avoided it with their best *(yaḥtarizūna ʿan al-tashbīh ʿan ghāyah)*.[149] In fact, most of *ahl al-ḥadith* held the view that God has an image *(ṣūrah)* and organs *(aʿḍāʾ)*.[150] In line with this view, al-Shahrastānī corrected another widely held misconception of Muqātil as someone who propagated the view that bad deeds *(maʿṣiyah)* do not affect the believers of *tawḥīd* and their belief, and that such believers

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[148] See Ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Malṭī, *al-Tanbīh wa al-Radd ʿalā Ahl al-Hawāʾ wa al-Bidaʿ*, ed. Muḥammad Zaynuhum Muḥammad ʿAzb (Cairo: Maktabah Madbūlī, 1992).

[149] Abū al-Fatḥ Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal,* ed. Aḥmad Fahmī Muḥammad (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1992). A similar view in terms of the Salaf's belief in divine attributes is expressed by Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ʿUthmān al-Dhahabī in his *Kitāb al-ʿArsh,* ed. Muḥammad Khalīfah al-Tamīmī (Riyāḍ: Maktabah Aḍwāʾ al-Salaf, 1999), 1/142.

[150] Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal,* 1/187.

never go into hell. The truth is, according to al-Shahrastānī, that Muqātil said that believers who committed sins will be punished according to the extent of their sins, and only then they will be sent to paradise.[151]

Another "defender" of Muqātil was Ibn Taymiyyah who said, "in relation to Muqātil, only God knows what really happened. Al-Ashʿarī took these *maqālāt* from the works of the Muʿtazilah in which there is indisposition against Muqātil. They might have added something to what they transmitted from him or they might have received it from those who were less reliable. Otherwise, it should not be this bad. Al-Shāfiʿī said, "Whosoever desires [to learn] *tafsīr,* he is dependent on Muqātil. Whosoever wants [to study] *fiqh,* he is dependent on Abū Ḥanīfah." Ibn Taymiyyah, therefore, argues that although Muqātil was not among those from whom people transmitted ḥadīth, unlike Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān who was considered reliable, there is no doubt in terms of his breadth of learning, and his knowledge on *tafsīr* and other matters. Similarly, while people may have disagreed with and rejected some of Abu Ḥanīfah's views, they did not deny the latter's authority of *fiqh* and the breadth of his knowledge.[152] The same applies to Muqātil. Ibn Taymiyyah also offered reservations in relation to the accusation of *tashbīh* against Muqātil. He argued that since he could not find any traces of such views in Muqātil's works *(mā wajadtu shay'an min kalāmihi yastadillu bihī ʿalā dhālika)*, it could not be true. Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyyah maintained, those who accused Muqātil took their material from his enemies. Many of Muqātil's works, such as his

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[151] Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal,* 1/143.

[152] Al-Dhahabī, *ʿArsh,* 1/143; Abū al-ʿAbbās Taqīy al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah,* ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim (n.c.: n.p., n.y.), 2/618-20.

commentaries, which would be the place to find such views if they exist, have been published, but there is nothing that suggests he was a *Mushabbih*. This, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, teaches us that we need to verify. To be reliable, one's views must be taken from one's own works, not from his enemies, for the latter may say something that their opponents did not say.[153] In addition, the term *Mushabbih* has become a catch word to accuse one's opponents simply because of their different views.[154] The author of *Sharḥ al-ʿAqīdah al-Wāsiṭiyyah* questioned the validity of the ascription of *tashbīh* to Muqātil since there are also reports in which Muqātil denies that accusation by offering statements that confirmed his upholding views to the contrary. For that reason, al-Mūṣilī concluded that the attribution of *tashbīh* to Muqātil is untrue and that it was merely an accusation that his enemies had circulated against him.[155]

Muqātil's scholarly credential in the fields other than ḥadīth is validated by Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān when he was asked about him. Being asked whether he or Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān is more knowledgeable, Ibn Ḥayyān's answer confirmed the breadth of Muqātil's knowledge *(mā wajadtu ʿilma Muqātil illā ka al-baḥr al-akhḍar fī sā'ir al-buḥūr)*.[156] On the other hand, when asked about Muqātil's alleged *tashbīh*, Ibn Ḥayyān postponed his judgment on this accusation for he knew that Muqātil was a great *mufassir* although his transmission was regarded as weak. None of *tashbīh*-related accusations against Muqātil were mentioned by early scholars except in *maqālāt* works, the earliest of

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[153] ʿAbd Allāh Mūḥammad al-Ghanīmān, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqīdah al-Wāsiṭiyyah* (al-Maktabah al-Shāmilah), 12/8.
[154] Al-Ghanīmān, *Aqīdah*, 12/8.
[155] Al-Ghanīmān, *Aqīdah*, 13/27.
[156] Taqiy al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī, *Mukhtaṣār al-Kāmīl fī al-Ḍuʿafāʾ li Ibn ʿAdī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunnah, 1994), 1/744.

which was al-Ashʿarī's. However, because al-Ashʿari's material originated from the

Muʿtazilah, it may have somehow been tampered with.[157]

In modern time, ones of those posing counterarguments against Muqātil's

opponents was Maḥmūd Shiḥātah, the editor of Muqātil's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr.* In fact,

Shiḥatah's study of Muqātil is the most extensive to date.[158] According to his own study

on ḥadīths Muqātil mentioned in his commentary, Shiḥātah concludes that the majority of

Muqātil's ḥadīths are found in reliable ḥadīth collections *(qad warada fī al-ṣaḥīḥ aw fī*

kutub al-sunan), and only rarely does he find Muqātil ḥadīths that are weak. This,

according to Shiḥātah, suggests that Muqātil's suspect credentials do not creep into his

commentary.[159] Shiḥātah therefore maintains that Muqātil can be used as a reference, on

the condition that his ḥadīth must first be subjected to verification. Furthermore, Shiḥātah

argues, Muqātil's personal views in the commentary are too great an asset for Muslims to

learn their intellectual history to be dismissed.[160] In general, regardless of some alleged

weaknesses that his commentary possess, Shihātah makes a case for the great

contribution that Muqātil can make, for his commentary combines transmitted knowledge

(al-riwāyah) and personal, rational views *(dirāyah)*.[161]

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[157] Ṣadr al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī al-ʿIzz al-Ḥanafī, *Sharḥ al-Ṭaḥāwiyyah fī al-ʿAqīdah al-Salafiyyah*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Riyāḍ: Fahrasah Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Waṭaniyyah, 1997).

[158] Shiḥātah provided an independent volume, after four volumes of Muqātil's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* that he edited, primarily to argue against any accusations leveled against Muqātil.

[159] Shihātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/51. Long before Shiḥātah, Ibn ʿAdī (d. 365/975) made a similar conclusion that although the majority of Muqātil's transmitted ḥadīth was not accepted *(lā yutābaʿ bihi),* there are many that are fine *(ṣāliḥ)*, and that there are many respected and trustworthy scholars who transmitted from Muqātil. See al-Maqrīzī, *Mukhtaṣar,* 745.

[160] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/53.

[161] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/57.

In terms of the accusation of anthropomorphism, Shiḥātah concludes that accusation of *tashbīh* against Muqātil is exaggerated *(mubālagh fīhā)*. With regard to *wajh Allāh* (God's face)*,* muqātil employed a metaphorical interpretation, and understood the phrase to mean the essence of God *(yufassir wajh Allāh ʿalā annahū huwa Allāh)*.[162] Likewise, Muqātil understood the term *yad Allāh* (God's hand) metaphorically, through explicit or implicit interpretation, as fulfilling the good He promised, His power, His bounty, kingdom and treasure, victory or power, and covenant.[163] In terms of God's *ʿayn* (God's eye)*,* Muqātil understood it in one place metaphorically as God's knowledge, and in three other places literally as God's eye. In short, Muqātil combines the ways of the early scholars (Salaf) and the later generation of scholars (the Khalaf) in interpreting some anthropomorphist verses in the Qur'an, that is, the combination of glorifying God (*taʿẓīm;* the way of the Salaf by accepting what God has described himself in the scripture) and purifying him (*tanzīh;* the way of the Khalaf by employing metaphorical interpretation to avoid anthropomorphist understanding).[164]

With regard to accusation of another aspect of anthropomorphism, namely *tajsīm,* Shiḥātah studied Muqātil's interpretation of the terms *istiwāʾ, kursī, ʿarsh, yamīn Allāh, sāq,* and *tajsīm bi al-talmīḥ* in the Qur'an.[165] The result of his study shows that in general Muqātil is not consistently anthropomorphist in his interpretation of some seemingly anthropomorphist verses. Occasionally, Muqātil conducted *taʾwīl* or combined the

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[162] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/90.
[163] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/91-2.
[164] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/94.
[165] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/97.

metaphorical and literal interpretation together. Furthermore, Muqātil's anthropomorphist approach was so mild that people would not recognize it had they not been massively shaped by reception of Muqātil within Muslim scholarship as an anthropomorphist, or had they not known that it is his interpretation.[166] For the sake of fairness and impartiality, therefore, Shiḥātah disagrees with the accusation of extreme anthropomorphism leveled against Muqātil, for he cannot find such views in Muqātil's commentary.[167] While it is true that Muqātil was somewhat anthropomorphist in his understanding of *istiwā', fawqiyyah, sifat al-ʿarsh wa al-kursī, al-yamīn* and *al-sāq*, he was not alone in this. Other early and orthodox scholars shared the same views as his.[168]

It is possible that such extreme views were attributed to Muqātil by his opponents. In this regard, al-Saksakī argued that Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, the anthropomorphist mentioned in the sources, was not our Muqātil ibn Sulaymān the commentator on the Qur'an.[169] Some scholars even regarded Muqātil as a forerunner for those who reject any deviation. In order to know Muqātil and his views, it is an obligation to read his own works.[170] If one reads works on sects, he must be cautious in accepting any attribution of views by opponents to each other. Al-Malṭī (d. 377), one of the earliest authors on Muslim sects, considers Muqātil trustworthy *(thiqah)*, one whose interpretation of the Qur'an can be used to argue against *ahl al-ahwā' wa al-bida'.*[171] Thus, Muqātil's commentary is free from any view that God is flesh and blood that has been attributed to

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[166] Shiḥatah, *Tafsīr,* 5/110.
[167] Shiḥatah, *Tafsīr,* 5/113.
[168] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/113.
[169] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/113.
[170] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/114.
[171] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/114.

Muqātil in works on sects. It is hard to ascertain whether Muqātil expressed such view in the early part of his life but then refrained from it, if it was fabricated by his opponents, if the view could have been espoused by a different Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, if the transmitters of his commentary may have edited and removed such scandalous views from the commentary, or if Muqātil may have expressed such a view in the realm of speculative theology *('ilm al-kalām)* or when he was debating with Jahm on divine attributes, but did not include it in his commentary.[172] In general, Shiḥātah argues, the method with which Muqātil interprets *mutashābih al-ṣifāt* or *ayāt al-ṣifāt* (divine attributes) is similar to the method of the Salaf and the Khalaf, since at times he conducted *tafwīḍ,* made no comments, and at other he conducted *ta'wīl,* despite the fact that some of Muqātil's interpretation gives the impression of *tajsīm* and *tashbīh.*[173] Mun'im Sirry argues that "Muqātil was not an extreme anthropomorphist" because "in a number of instances, he provides a metaphorical interpretation of apparently anthropomorphic passages, while in other cases he interprets them literally or gives no explanation at all."[174]

In terms of the isrā'iliyyāt*,* Shiḥātah agrees that Muqātil's commentary is replete with such reports.[175] A great amount of the isrā'iliyyāt that Muqātil uses in the commentary are related to the stories of past prophets, especially in relation to their alleged shortcomings. My own study suggests that Muqātil's use of the Isrā'iliyyāt is

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[172] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/115.
[173] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/188.
[174] Sirry, "Muqātil," 65.
[175] Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/220.

meant to criticize the People of Scripture while defending Islamic teaching or reality. This is quite contrary to the accusation that Muqātil's borrowing of such material suggests his nodding agreement with non-Islamic views. The use of isrā'iliyyāt in Muqātil's commentary was, borrowing Walid Saleh's words, "no abdication to non-Muslim sensibility as much as cooption of it."[176]

Muqātil's reception in the Western, Modern Scholarship

A growing number of Western scholars have begun to study Muqātil since the second half of the twentieth century. The early generation of these scholars, such as Goldziher (d. 1921) and Noldeke (d. 1930), however, had taken Muqātil for granted and they, just like their counterparts in Muslim world, tended to dismis him.[177] A shift took place since the 1970s when younger Western scholars began to appreciate Muqātil's contribution to the field of *tafsīr* and recognized his authority in this discipline. This increasing appreciation of Muqātil coincided with the emergence of "revisionist" school of thought during the same decade according to which the whole Muslim self-narrative was a pious project and its result therefore was no more than "salvation" or "sacred" history.[178] As such, traditional Muslim scholarship was viewed as working under "a grand conspiracy" which sought to establish a coherent narrative for the Muslim community identity-making, and whose reliability, therefore, was not to be trusted. If the

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[176] See Walid Saleh, "Nishapuri School of Quranic Exegesis," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online:* *http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/exegesis-viii-nishapuri-school-quranic-exegesis*
[177] Isaiah Goldfeld "Muqātil ibn Sulaymān," in *Arabic and Islamic Studies,* Bar Ilan 2 (1973): xiii-xxx.
[178] John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). Patricia Crone and Micahel Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Rippin 1999.

mainstream of the tradition was untrustworthy, what it marginalized and suppressed should then be of use, for it may provide an alternative view to the tradition. Muqātil and his works fit this category well.

Nabia Abbot is probably the first Western scholar who drew people's attention to Muqātil through his study of the manuscript of *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir*.[179] Two years later, M. M. al-Sawwaf wrote a doctoral thesis at the University of Oxford, especially with regard to Muqātil's Zaydī affiliation and his legal commentary.[180] Paul Nwya is one of the earliest western scholars who studied Muqātil's three extant commentaries, primarily to investigate the mystical interpretation of the Qur'an, which involved six or seven authors from the second/eight to fourth/tenth century.[181] In addition, Nwya also noted Muqātil's observation of the general meaning of certain qur'anic vocabularies, which was brought to light first by al-Malṭī (d. 377/987), since even in Muqātil's own major commentary, this line of his thinking is scattered all over the place and is hence unnoticeable.[182] Isaiah Goldfeld writes an essay about Muqātil offering a general explaination of Muqātil's scholarly reputation among traditional Muslim and Western scholarship, and describing the general rejection of Muqātil within both camps of

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[179] Apart from some technicality, Abbott's discussion of the manuscript focused more on understanding the account of Muqātil in traditional Muslim sources. See *Studies,* 92-113.

[180] M. M. al-Sawwaf, "Muqatil Ibn Sulayman, an Early Zaidi Theologian, with Special Reference to His *Tafsir al-Khamsmi'at Aya,"* (PhD Diss., University of Oxford, 1969). For some technical reasons, I have not been able to access his dissertation, after I made a concerted effort to do so.

[181] Paul Nwya, *Exegese Coranique et Langage Mystique: Nouvel essay sur le lexique technique des mystiques musulmans.* (Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq, 1970).

[182] al-Malṭī, *Tanbīh,* 55-61. Al-Malṭī was the probably one of the first scholars who, contrary to the attitude of majority who dismissed Muqatil, regarded Muqatil as an orthodox scholar whose exegetical views could be used to combat heretical views among Muslim sects. So respectful was al-Malṭī toward Muqātil that he called the latter *al-īmām*.

scholarship.[183] The most well known discussion of Muqātil is written by John

Wansbrough who, using the manuscripts of Muqātil's three commentaries among others,

attempts to build a typological development of *tafsīr* in Muslim world.[184] Another essay

by Claude Gilliot is written primarily to investigate the theological accusation of

anthropomorphism in Muqātil's major commentary.[185] In his studies on the genesis of

Arabic grammar and exegesis, C.H.M. Versteegh uses Muqātil's *tafsīr* as one of his

sources to trace the development of technical terms of Arabic grammar.[186] Gordon Nickel

studies Muqatil's commentary, among other, in order to understand the accusation of

scriptural tampering *(taḥrīf)* in early Islam as understood by early commentators of the

Qurʾan.[187] Michael Pregill writes a dissertation on the Golden Calf episode in the Qurʾān

and Islamic commentary literature, in which *Tafsīr Muqātil* was used as one of the

witnesses to how the event was interpreted and understood in early Islam.[188] Similarly but

on a different subject matter, David Powers uses Muqātil's commentary as one of his important sources to trace the origins of the idea "Muhammad as the seal of prophethood."[189]

In fact, there have recently been a growing number of studies, which especially use Muqātil's major commentary. The majority of these studies, in which one of more of Muqātil's commentaries is used, however aim at investigating anything but Muqātil's own hermeneutics. In general, there are at least three orientations in the existing scholarly studies on Muqātil's commentaries or those using his commentaries. First, the majority of these studies intend to explain something (events, technical terms, etc) mentioned in the Qur'an, such as in the case of Nwya (1970), Versteegh (1990, 1993), Nickel (2003, 2011), Pregill (2008, 2012), Powers (2009), etc. Second, there are those that study his commentary to build the typological development of *tafsīr,* as in the case of Wansbrough. Third, there are others that study Muqātil's commentary to disprove the theological and other accusations against Muqātil, as in the case of Gilliot.[190]

In the spirit of the third orientation of the existing scholarship on Muqātil, the majority of Western, modern scholars, like their Muslim counterparts, have posed a number of counterarguments to the mentioned accusations against Muqātil. First, in

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Muhammad. That is, to show that the massacre of Banū Qurayẓah was not unprecedented. It was modeled on the punishment Mūsā imposed on the Jews in the Golden Calf event. While Muqātil himself might not approve of such a violent punishment, his aim by exploiting isrā'iliyyat is to defend Islam's Prophet and its teaching, just like many of his other usages of the same material in his commentary. See ""Turn in Repentance to your Creator, then Slay Yourselves": The Levitical Election, Atonement, and Secession in Early and Classical Islamic Exegesis," *Comparative Islamic Studies,* volume 6 (2012), 101-150.
[189] David S. Powers, *Muhammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).
[190] Mun'im Sirry writes a similar essay, which disproves the anthropomorphist accusation against Muqātil. "Muqātil b. Sulaymān and Anthropomorphism." *Studia Islamica,* nouvelle édition/new series, 3, 2012, 35-66.

relation to Muqātil's methodological failing, the *isnād* negligence, Gilliot argues that at the time when Muqātil was producing his commentaries, the method of *isnād* had just began to emerge and was not yet fixed as the standard norm for knowledge transmission.[191] Likewise, Goldfeld suggests that the biographers of the fourth/tenth century retrospectively projected the assumption that information was supposed to be transmitted from informant to recipient by *samāʿ* (oral transmission)*, according to the rule of *taḥammul al-ʿilm* (knowledge acquisition)*, even in the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries.[192]

Viewed from yet another perspective, the objection toward Muqātil's methodological failing may have something to do with the tension between writing and orality in early Islam. Living in a strongly oral culture, writing a book "proper" *(syngramma),* one that Muqātil possibly did, as opposed to merely mnemonic aids as private records *(hypomnemata)*, would have been scandalous and anomalous.[193] Indeed, Heck argues that writing continued to cause concerns among Muslim scholars of the prophetic tradition *(muḥaddithūn)* even long after it had become widespread in use and accepted in practice. A written transmission differs fundamentally from an oral one in its potential to be anonymous in a way that oral transmission cannot, and anonymously transmitted knowledge bears too close resemblance to the use of reason for the verification of knowledge, something generally impermissible in the case of a revealed

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[191] Gilliot, "Muqāti." Wansbrough argued that "[t]he supplying *isnād*s, whether traced to the prophet, to his companions, or to their successors, may be understood as an exclusively formal innovation and cannot be dated much before 200/815." See *Quranic Studies,* 179.

[192] Goldfeld, "Muqātil."

[193] Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 79.

body of knowledge. Writing is, in a way, dangerous. "Nowhere else we could find the tenacity to maintain the epistemological authority of *isnād* and to preserve the epistemological priority of the *samāʿ* (oral transmission) except in the circle of *muḥaddithūn,* whose prestige, not to mention the entire craft, was based on this principle."[194] The crux of the matter is, however, not the opposition between the written and orality because, as Schoeler has successfully showed, the written material had always been there accompanying the heralded face-to-face and oral method of knowledge transmission. In fact, using and memorizing books had been part of academic activities in early Islamic period in Khurāsān, for instance. Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181/797) was said to memorize books when he was young.[195] Muqātil's written commentaries had also been circulated among some of his contemporaries to see, despite their final critical and at times lamenting judgment, due to some alleged shortcomings in relation to *isnād*. The crux of the problem is that these early Muslims were institutionalizing the face-to-face and oral transmission as a proper way for transmitting certain types of knowledge along with its evaluating apparatuses. The use of written material alone was not a problem in itself although it was considered insufficient; rather, it was the absence of face-to-face and oral delivery of knowledge that had become the point of contention.

In connection with the anthropomorphist accusation, Binyamin Abrahamov said that there is the problem of unreliability of the sources that leveled such a charge against

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[194] Paul L. Heck, "The Epistemological Problem of Writing in Islamic Civilization: al-Ḫatib al-Baġdādī's (d. 463/1071) *Taqyīd al-ʿilm," Studia Islamica,* 94, G. P. Maisonneuve-Larose, Paris, 2002.
[195] Gilliot, "Schoolmaster," 316.

Muqātil, especially when it is confronted with the extant commentary on Muqātil.[196] In a different perspective, Wesley Williams argues that, in early Islam, such anthropomorphism was however not uncommon, especially among the *muḥaddithūn* who were inclined toward literal understanding of religious texts. In fact, "it seems that in an early period, anthropomorphist conceptions enjoyed wide currency among the main body of Muslims."[197] Dealing with such anthropomorphist verses, scholars, including the *muḥaddithūn*, invented the so-called *balkafah* principle. That is, simply saying *bi lā kayfa* (literally, "without how"), in the sense that they accepted the way God describes Himself in the scripture without further questions or asking how.[198] It is true there was a strong opposition to such an anthropomorphist understanding of God from some of the *mutakallimūn*, especially those of the (proto-) Muʿtazilah, whose animosity toward the *muḥaddithūn* was known.[199] With some exceptions, anthropomorphism was likely to be embraced by the more traditionalist Muslims, be they *muḥaddithūn* or *mutakallimūn,* but opposed by the more rationalist Muslims, especially those of the Muʿtazilī affiliation. The reality is, however, much more nuanced than has been thought, for even within the traditionalist circle itself there was internal polemic in which the champions of

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[196] Binyamin Abrahamov, *Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qurʾan in the Theology of al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm* (Leiden, New York, Koln: E. J. Brill, 1996), p. 4. Richard C. Martin, "Anthropomorphism," *Encylopaedia of the Qurʾān.* General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Brill Online, 2012.

[197] Wesley William (2002), "A Body Unlike Bodies: Transcendent Anthropomorphism in Ancient Semitic Tradition and Early Islam," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 129, No. 1 (January-March 2009), pp.
19-44, p. 442.

[198] W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca: History in the Qurʾan* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 88-9.

[199] See Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Kalam* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1976).

anthropomorphic conceptions were confronted by their fellow traditionalists who criticized their views, as in the case of Ibn al-Jawzī, whose *Kitāb Akhbār aṣ-Ṣifāt* was an "impassioned critique of anthromorphic ways of conceiving the divine attributes" among the Hanbalīs.[200]

Faced with the fact that they could not find any explicit anthropomorphism in Muqātil's commentary, these modern scholars argued instead that this charge against Muqātil is unfounded or falsified or, if it is true, it may have been based on Muqātil's other, lost, works.[201] Gilliot, for instance, entertains the idea that Muqātil might have written his theologically anthropomorphist views in another work of his that no longer exists.

In terms of Muqātil's incorporation of the isrāʾiliyyāt material, scholars seem to concur that his extant commentaries indeed confirm this.[202] In particular, Muqātil's *Great Commentary (al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr)*, given its narrative character, is the one with expansive incorporation of biblical materials in order to fill the gaps within the Qurʾān's narrative which is generally truncated, referential, and oftentimes elliptical, if not cryptic. Scholars are of different views as to the impact of Muqātil's great use of isrāʾiliyyāt in his *tafsīr*. Andrew Rippin, for instance, argued that Muqātil only used the isrāʾiliyyāt in the realm

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[200] See Merlin Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzī's Kitāb Akhbār aṣ-Ṣifāt* (Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill, 2002).

[201] Claude Gilliot, "Muqatil, Grand Exegete, Traditionniste et Theologien Maudit," *Journal Asiatique*, CCLXXIX, 1991 (Publie par la Societe Asiatique & Du Centre National de la Recherhe Scientifique): 39-84. Paul Nwya, *Exegese Coranique et Langage Mystique: Nouvel essay sur le lexique technique des mystiques musulmans* ((Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq Editeurs [Imprimerie Catholique], 1970).

[202] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*. C.H.M. Versteegh, "Grammar and Exegesis: The Origins of Kufan Grammar and the *Tafsīr Muqātil*." *Islam*, 67:2 (1990): 206-42. Michael E. Pregill, "The Living Calf of Sinai: Orientalism, "Influence," and the Foundations of the Islamic Exegetical Tradition (Phd Diss., Columbia University, 2008).

of stories or narrative to embellish the Qur'an, and it never had a real relevance to legal

or theological judgments in the Muslim society. In other words, the use of isrā'iliyyāt is

harmless.[203] At some point, Rippin's argument sounds true because criticism against

Muqātil's use of the isrā'iliyyāt did not come about until the second half of the tenth

century raised for the first time by Abū Ḥātim ibn Ḥibbān (354/965). However, contrary

to Rippins view, David Powers demonstrates that the use of isrā'iliyyāt does have legal

and theological ramifications and is not merely a narrative embellishment.[204]

Furthermore, it is possible that criticism against Muqātil's great use of isrā'iliyyāt in the

Muslim scholarship is based on the assumption that such materials might bring about

embarrassment to the later established understanding of Islam, especially in relation to

the Prophet of Islam. This is especially true since in much of the isrā'iliyyāt the early

prophets were pictured as being vulnerable to committing sins and offenses to God, just

like other human beings. Later Muslims treated prophets and, accordingly, Muhammad as

those who upheld the highest standard of morality and hence were infallible. In fact,

given his techniques and goals in using the isra'iliyyāt material, it is possible to argue that

the seed of the doctrine *ismah* (the infallibility of prophets, especially that of

Muhammad) had began to grow during Muqātil's time in his commentary.

Based on all studies of Muqātil we have, conducted by both Muslim and non-

Muslim scholars, it can be concluded that of the four accusations made against him one

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[203] Andrew Rippin, *The Qur'an and Its Interpretative Tradition* (Aldershot, Brookfield USA, Singapore, Sydney: Asghate-Variorum, 2001), 252.
[204] See David S. Powers, *Muhammad Is Not the Father of Any of Your Men* (Philadelphia: University of Pensylvania Press, 2009).

(theological, in terms of anthropomorphism) is exagerated, one (methodological, with regard to *isnād*) needs to be understood differently from the later understanding of the term *isnād*, one (substantive, with respect of isrā'iliyyāt) is only partially correct but misleading as well as anachronistic, and one (personal, in relation to his alleged unreliability) has no credible evidence to support it. Three of these accusations—namely theological, methodological, and personal—are contemporary as they were first raised, as far as traditional Muslim sources are concerned, by Muqātil's contemporaries. Therefore, it is only the substantive accusation with regard to isrā'iliyyāt that is anachronistic as it was only raised in the tenth century.

The charge of anthropomorphism appears to have been exaggerated and hence innacurate, for Muqātil uses different techniques of interpretation between literal and metaphorical, a combination of the two, or even non-interpretation at all *(tafwīḍ)* when it comes to Qur'anic verses with an anthropomorphist coloring. The charge of Isrā'iliyyāt is anachronistic for it emerged two centuries after Muqātil's own time; it is also misleading because, unlike what Ibn Ḥibbān thought, Muqātil's use of isrā'iliyyāt in his *tafsīr* was not a nodding agreement with non-Muslims. In fact, Muqātil' use of the isrā'iliyyāt actually aims at defending Islam's teachings and its Prophet in addition to attacking non-Muslims using their own arsenal. Moreover, to suggest that his use of such material shows his agreement with non-Muslims is incongruent with Muqātil's theologically unfriendly attitude to non-Muslims, although he may have been legally pragmatist in terms of possible, peaceful coexistence with them.

The charge on his inattention to *isnād* should be understood more as related to Muqātil's alleged violation of the social convention in knowledge acquisition and transmission than to his inconsistent enumeration of his authorities in his commentaries. *Isnād* as a technical term for the formal enumeration of authorities in one's work had just emerged and had not not yet been standardized.[205] But *isnād* as the term for personal contact in knowledge acquisition and transmission seems to have been socially established and hence relevant in Muqātil's case. Thus, *isnād*-related accusation against Muqātil appears to have emerged because Muqātil relied more on written records than acquiring his knowledge of the Qur'an through oral delivery or by attending lecture sessions, a social convention for knowledge transmission that had been somewhat followed at the time. Muqātil's violation of this institutionalized way of how knowledge should be acquired does not, however, make his commentary less reliable, for people admired his work and lamented only his weakness in terms of *isnād*, which most likely refers to how he gained his knowledge. This is also supported by the existing scholarship that shows that the majority of ḥadīths used in Muqātil's commentary are confirmed in the later and well-accepted compilations of ḥadīth. Furthermore, Muqātil could have had different priorities and sensibilities when he wrote his commentaries. By that I mean that Muqātil might not have prioritized the inclusion of only sound traditions in his commentary as much as he used what was circulating at his time that could serve his

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[205] Joseph Schacht, one of the sceptists with regard to the reliability of *isnād,* posit the year 100/719 as the beginning of the use of the *isnād*s. See his *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 5. See also Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: the Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2000), 68.

exegetical agenda. Moreover, in terms of the use of *isnād*, it is not that Muqātil did not use it altogether; rather he used it inconsistently, based on the standard that only developed more fully much later than his time. As such, criticism against his use of *isnād* does not necessarily point to how Muqātil should have formally and more diligently mentioned his authorities in his commentaries, but rather to the fact that he did not follow the institutionalized way of knowledge transmission, especially religious ones, through face-to-face and oral delivery, as the only way to have access to *isnād*. While the use of written material was already there from beginning, it did not constitute the proper way for knowledge transmission.

Muqātil's reliance on written records, instead of dependence on knowledge through oral delivery and face-to-face learning, might have some bearing on how he responded to people who questioned him as to the authorities from whom he studied his reports. Traditional Muslim sources often described him as confusing his authorities, or as committing *tadlīs* by transmitting from someone whom he met but never learned from, or transmitting from a contemporary whom he never met as if he heard from him, as in the case of Muqātil's transmission from al-Kalbī and Mujāhid. If the sources are correct, what initialy was a methodological problem had become a moral problem. That is, because Muqātil did not gain his knowledge by meeting authorities personally or by attending their lectures, but rather made use of people's records or other circulating written material, he could not remember who-said-what. Consequently, when people were asking him for the authorities of certain reports he taught, Muqātil had to mention names to endow his reports with the weight of authority. However, since he sometimes

was inconsistent, people had began to doubt his reliability, and hence the accusation of lying. This is further exarceberated by some allegation that Muqātil did not hesitate to offer some of the 'Abbāsid Princes reports that would enhance their status. This suggests that Muqātil will not mind to lie or fabricate some reports. Nonetheless, there is no solid evidence to support the charge that Muqātil had fabricated ḥadīth. Some sources did mention a few reports allegedly fabricated by Muqātil, but they are largely disputed. Some scholars ascribed such fabrication to other individuals. Therefore, the charge against Muqātil's personality must also be discarded because it is unfounded.

Above all, as valuable as the existing scholarship on Muqātil and his commentaries, they are largely partial in the sense that they do not offer a complete picture of Muqātil and his exegetical endeavor. In fact, the majority of these studies have aimed more toward understanding everything but Muqātil and his commentaries. Therefore, it is time to understand Muqātil's exegetical project by investigating his hermeneutics, his exegetical concerns and agenda through a close reading of his extant commentaries. This is what I intend to do in the next chapters of this study.

CHAPTER ONE

Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr: Narratives of the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān is revealed in five aspects: his [God's] command, his prohibition, his promises, his threat, and narrative of past generation.[206]

In the Qur'an, [there is] the particular and the general, particular for Muslims and for polytheists, general for the whole humanity, ambiguous and unambiguous, well-explained and vague, elliptic and explicit, redundant, abrogating and abrogated, … the same words with multiple meanings… and interpretation; an interretation is subject to another interpretation.[207]

Muqātil ibn Sulaymān

By reading closely Muqātil's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* in this chapter, I will investigate

Muqātil's hermeneutics with regard to his views of the Qur'an and its interpretation, his

methods of interpretation, as well as his exegetical thrust and its consequences for his

views of Islam and non-Islamic traditions such as Arab Paganism, Judaism, Christianity,

and also the internal dynamic within Muslim community with regard to hypocrites and

hypocrisy.[208]

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[206] *Unzila al-qur'ān 'alā khamsat awjuhin amruhū wa nahyuhū wa wa'duhū wa wa'īduhū wa khabar al-awaalīn*. Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* 1/26.

[207] *Fī al-qur'ān khāṣṣ wa 'ām, khāṣṣ li al-muslimīn wa khāṣṣ fī al-mushrikīn, wa 'ām li jamī' al-nās, wa mutashābih wa muḥkam, wa mufassar wa mubham, wa iḍmār wa tamām, wa ṣilāt fī al-kalām, ma'a nāsihk wa mansūkh, wa taqdīm wa ta'khīr, wa ashbāh ma'a wujūh kathīrah… wa tafsīr, wa li al-tafsīr tafsīr*. Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* 1/27.

[208] Luis Alonso Schökel set up "a clear triple distinction within the task of interpreting literary text…to give hermeneutics its appropriate position, defined relative to other levels of interpretation, comprehension and explanation of literary texts. (l) Exegesis: the exercise of comprehending and interpreting a text. (2) The exegetical method: the way of proceeding systematically in the interpretation of a text. (3) Hermeneutics: the theory of the activity of understanding and interpreting texts." See his *A Manual of Hermenutics,*

Muqātil's hermeneutics is founded upon four principles: the identification of the building blocks of the Qur'an, a typology of qur'anic utterances, the necessity of interpretation for understanding qur'anic meanings, and the virtue of qur'anic education. In general, Muqātil's exegesis aims at clarifying the Qur'an as best as possible by resorting to three different methods: paraphrastic, crossreferencing, and narrative.

Muqātil's exegetical thrust revolves around the opposition of *īmān* (belief) and *kufr* (disbelief)*. The notion of *īmān* manifests in the belief in the unity of God *(tawḥīd)* and in the acknowledgement of Muhammad's prophethood *(taṣdīq)*, while *kufr* manifests in the association of God with creation *(shirk)* and the rejection of Muhammad's prophethood *(takdhīb)*. Muqātil views *al-islām* as the primordial religion that all prophets, including Muhammad, had preached.[209] Consequently, he considers other religions human creations that are false, and their followers as therefore having deviated from the truth. Despite his harsh criticism of Jews and Christians, along with their alleged self-made religions, Judaism and Christianity, respectively, Muqātil is, however, of the view that their scriptures are divinely valid.[210] His criticism is aimed more at the fact that

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Translated by Liliana M. *Rosa Further editing by Brook W.R. Pearson* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 13.

[209] In the pre-Christian era, following Cicero, the term "religion" was synonymous with "tradition," which represents "the teachings of one's ancestors and was essentially not open to question." The Latin *religio* "involved performing ancient ritual practices and paying homage to the gods…clearly denotes an inherently pluralistic context." In the third century CE, the Christian Lactantius, argued that *religio* derives from *re-ligare*, "meaning to bind together or link," thus refuting Cicero's view that it derives from *relegere*, meaning to re-trace or re-read. In the new Christian view, *religio* means "the Covenant between the true God and man…to exclude certain groups from equal consideration. Those who did not bow down to the Almighty and Supreme Deity, worshipping other gods, were now 'alterized' as pagan and superstitious. The redefining of *religio* also served to establish the monotheistic exclusivism of Christianity as the normative paradigm for understanding what a religion is." See Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'the Mystic East'* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 35-6.

[210] The fact that Muqātil criticizes both *al-yahūdiyyah* and *al-naṣrāniyyah* as man made suggests that he understands *al-islām* in the Qur'an as the institutionalized religion of Islam, more than just a term that

some of the Jews and Christians had been unfaithful to their scriptures, especially in the

case of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq,* but also with regard to some points of law, such as stoning

(rajm), blood money (diyah), and *qiṣāṣ (lex talionis).*

      As long as the People of Scripture *(ahl al-kitāb)* practice what their scriptures

taught, Muqātil believed that they need not convert to Islam.[211] While Muhammad used

to expect that the People of Scripture would follow him, Muqātil maintains that

Muhammad's primary mission was to invite them to uphold *tawḥīd* and accept his claim

of prophethood *(taṣdīq).* These two principles are the common ground that would unite

these three monotheistic religions. The only people upon whom Muhammad imposed

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means "submission". Of course the original use of *al-islām* in the Qur'an is elusive for it opens to posssibilty to mean "submission" or the institutionalized religion called Islam. Regardless of how elusive the term *al-islām* and it use in the Qur'an has been, it paves the way for its use that denotes the institutionalized religion of Islam. Wilfred Cantwell Smith argued, "of all the world's religious traditions the Islamic would seem to be the one with a built-in name." see his *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: Mentor Books, 1964), 75. Fred M. Donner however maintains that it would have not been historically accurate to apply the term "Islam" to the early Believers' movement. Therefore, Donners points to the time of the Umayyad Caliph ʿAbd al-Mālik (65/685–86/705) in which Islam was redefined as the religion of Muhammad and his followers distinct from that of the Jews and Christians. See his *Muhammad and the Believers: at the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 195, 204-5. In understanding Q5:3, revealed at the conclusion of Muhammad's farewell speech at the last pilgrimage, Afsaruddin notes that the term *islām* in the verse could be "understood in the universal Qur'anic sense as referring to the primordial monotheistic religion of submission to the one God or in a narrow, confessional sense, which became the predominant understanding." See Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims: History and Memory* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2007), 15. Since Muqātil seems to have taken it for granted that Qur'anic *islām* is a term for religion, especially that of Muhammad, this may indicate that in the middle of the second/eighth century, the term Islam had been used to refer to the "religion" brought about by Muhammad.

[211] Garth Fowden noted early Islam is more receptive to converts rather than actively proselytizing, as in the case of Christianity. "Always potentially and usually by tendency universalist, monotheism may also be ethnically based (Judaism)." See his *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 5-6. Mahmoud Ayoub is "convinced that the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an did not expect Jews and Christians to give up their religion and become Muslims unless they wanted to but only to observe God's continuous care for humankind and acknowledge that the revelation he gave to the Prophet Muhammad is a genuine revelation and that Muhammad is a genuine prophet." See his *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub,* ed. Irfan A. Omar (New York: Orbis Book, 2007), 14.

Islam were the Arab polytheists, after whose submission the principle that "there is no compulsion in religion" (Q2:256) must be upheld.

Muqātil's Hermeneutics: the Qur'an and the necessity of interpretation

In the introduction of the commentary, four reports transmitted from Muqātil explain his hermeneutics in relation to the Qur'an.[212] They describe the major themes and messages in the Qur'an, set out typological classes of qur'anic utterances, emphasize the necessity of interpretation in understanding the Qur'an and of knowing such interpretation, and, finally, explain the virtue of the Qur'an's education.[213] The first two reports offer Muqātil's theoretical understanding of what the Qur'an is, and the last two describe practices to be undertaken for understanding the Qur'an and sustaining that understanding through education, so that Qur'an's main function as guidance can be applied in the believers' lives.

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[212] There is a series of seventeen *isnād*s in the beginning of the commentary that convey traditions about the Qur'ān and its interpretation. Of these, only eight *isnād*s mention Muqātil as an authority. In six out of the eight, Muqātil is mention as the ultimate authority, while in two other *isnād*s, authorities from which Muqātil received the information are mentioned. The rest nine *isnād*s do not mention Muqātil as an authority. Instead, Muqātil's immediate transmitter, Abū Ṣāliḥ al-Hudhayl ibn Ḥabīb, mentions other authorities from which he gained his information, such as al-Musayyab (ibn Sharīk), Abu Qilābah, Ismāʿīl ibn ʿAyyāsh al-Ḥimṣī, Sufyān al-Wāsiṭī, Ibn ʿĀsim, Ibn al-Musayyab, Abū Jaʿfar al-Rāzī, and Abū Bakr al-Hudhlī. Of the eight *isnād*s in which Muqātil is mentioned as an authority, only four convey traditions that speak to Muqātil's exegetical concepts. Some *isnād*s, although their content may be relevant to the discussion of exegetical task, are ignored primarily because they do not name Muqātil as an authority, and therefore do not communicate his hermeneutics. Instead, these reports, along with their *isnād*s, may have been added to the commentary by Muqātil's commentary. See *Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān,* 1/26-28.

[213] There is actually another important view of Muqātil but mentioned without an *isnād* in the introduction, and is less relevant to the theoretical explication of his hermeneutics. This view explains a numerical interpretation *(ḥisāb al-jumal)* of Qur'anic alphabets, pertaining specifically to those sets of letters that open 29 nine chapters of the Qur'an, generally known as the mysterious letters *(al-ḥurūf al-mutaqāṭiʿah* or *al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭaʿah).* Thus, letter *alif* is one, *bā'* two, *jīm* three, *yā'* ten, *kāf* twenty, *qāf* a hundred, *ghayn* a thousand, and so forth. Such a numerical interpretation of Qur'anic alphabets will be discussed when I deal with the question of *al-āyāt al-mutashābihāh*. Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/26-28.

First principle: five major themes of the Qur'an

The first of Muqātil's hermeneutic principles is the knowledge of the building blocks of the Qur'an. In this respect, Muqātil mentions that the Qur'an consists of five aspects: a divine command *(amruhu),* prohibition *(nahyuhu),* promise *(waʿduhu)*, threat *(waʿīduhu)*, and narrative of past generations *(khabar al-awwalīn)*.[214] These five aspects, which make up the totality of the Qur'an, illuminate the relative position between God and human beings. God is the source of any rules pertaining to human beings' conduct in life, and He also requires their complete submission by heeding what He has revealed. The divine set of rules includes commands, the adherence to which leads to the promise of good tidings, and prohibition, the violation of which is threatened with punishment. The realization of both command and prohibition, along with their concomitant promise and threat, had been played out in the past generations, a medium for learning and reflection for the present and upcoming generations. Thus, the Qur'an is a collection of divine commands with the rewards for adherence, divine prohibitions with their accompanying punishment, and narratives of the past communities in which the combinations of command-promise and prohibition-threat had been equally communicated, acted upon, and finally unfolded for later generations to learn. This first principle therefore offers an ethical-moral basis in terms of the relation between God and human beings with regard to divine revelation sent through his prophet(s).

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[214] *Qāla: ḥaddathanā ʿAbd Allāh, qāla: wa ḥaddathanī Abī, qāla: ḥaddathanā al-Hudhayl ʿan Muqātil, qāla: "Unzila al-Qurʾān ʿalā khamsat awjuh amruhū wa nahyuhū wa waʿduhū wa waʿīduhū wa khabar al-awwalīn.* Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/26.

By mentioning these five aspects of the Qur'an, Muqātil has provided a fundamental framework to categorize the diverse messages of the Qur'an. The identification of these five aspects that build the qur'anic structure has enabled Muqātil to give an identity to what the Qur'an is, and eventually lead him to conceptualize ways to approach it, define its fundamental principles and worldview, and identify the supporting elements of these principles and worldview. As such, Muqātil has made the interpretive act of the Qur'an more purposeful, for he has been able to imagine the Qur'an as a coherently cohesive book.

Second principle: typology of qur'anic utterances

The second of Muqātil's hermeneutic principles is related to the language through which the content of the Qur'an (first principle) is communicated. The report runs as follows:

> In the Qur'an there is the particular *(khāṣṣ)* and the general *('āmm)*; particular for the Muslims and particular for the polytheists; general for the whole of human beings; there is the equivocal *(mutashābih)* and the unequivocal *(muḥkam)*, the explained *(mufassar)* and the obscure *(mubham)*, implicit *(iḍmār)* and explicit *(tamām)*, the redundant *(ṣilat fī al-kalām)*, along with with the abrogator *(nāsikh)* and abrogated *(mansūkh)*, advancement *(taqdīm)* and postponement *(ta'khīr)*, *ashbāh* (equivalents) and their multi-meanings *(wujūh kathīrah)*, an answer [for a question in a *sūrah*] in another *sūrah*, and metaphors God made of Himself, of disbeliever, of idol, of the world, of resurrection, of hereafter, and narratives of early generations, of what is in heaven and hell; and particular for a single polytheist; and obligations *(farā'iḍ)*, laws *(ahkam)*, and punishments *(ḥudūd)*, and narrative of what is in the heart of the believers and of the disbelievers, and the hostility of Arab polytheists; and there is interpretation, and interpretation of that interpretation.[215]

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[215] *Qāla: ḥaddathanā 'Ubayd Allāh, qāla: wa ḥaddathanā Abī 'an al-Hudhayl 'an Muqātil annahū qāla: "Fī al-Qur'ān khāṣṣ wa 'āmm, khāṣṣ li al-muslimīn wa khāṣṣ fī al-mushrikīn wa 'āmm li jamī' al-nās wa mutashābih wa muḥkam wa mufassar wa mubham wa iḍmār wa tamām wa ṣilat fī al-kalām ma'a nāsikh wa*

The report suggests that the qur'anic utterances are of different types. There are particular utterances *(khāṣ)*, specifically pointing to the believers, polytheists, and so forth. But there are also general utterances *('āmm)* that apply to the whole of humanity. There are utterances whose meanings seem contradictory *(mutashābih),* but others are clearly discerned *(muḥkam)*. There are utterances whose subject matter is well explained *(mufassar)*, but others are obscure *(mubham)*. Some utterances mention their subjects explicitly *(tamām)*, while others conceal them *(iḍmār)*. There are utterances that, despite their presence, do not affect anything; hence they are redundant *(ṣilah fī al-kalām)*. Some utterances override *(nāsikh)* another *(mansūkh)* in terms of their legal consequences, their recitation or both. There are also utterances that are placed in reverse order: either put forward *(taqdīm)* or backward *(ta'khīr)*. Some utterances *(al-ashbāh)* offer different meanings *(wujūh kathīrah)* depending on where they occur in the Qur'an. Utterances pertaining to certain questions in one chapter might find their answers in other utterances in another chapter. There are metaphorical utterances, utterances of laws, of obligations, and so forth. More importantly, these utterances are subject to interpretation, which may well lead to further interpretation.

Muqātil's second hermeneutic principle demonstrates that qur'anic utterances are of different kinds and whose categorization depends on their relative relations to each other. The interaction between them brings about unending possibilities, which can only

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mansūkh wa taqdīm wa ta'khīr wa ashbāh ma'a wujūh kathīrah wa jawāb fī sūrah ukhrā wa amthāl ḍarabahā Allāh—'azza wa jalla—linafsihī wa amthāl ḍarabahā li al-kāfir wa al-ṣanam wa amthāl ḍarabahā li al-dunyā wa al-ba'th wa al-ākhirah wa khabar al-awwalīn wa khabar mā fī al-jannah wa al-nār wa khāṣṣ li mushrik wāḥid wa farā'iḍ wa aḥkām wa ḥudūd wa khabar mā fī qulūb al-mu'minīn wa khabar ma fī qulūb al-kāfirīn wa khuṣumat mushrikī al-'Arab wa tafsīr wa li al-tafsīr tafsīr. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/27.

be mitigated by an interpretive act. Such interpretation is of two layers: first, based on their internal and intratextual interactions, and second, based on external knowledge that anchors revelation within a particular, larger context than merely linguistic context. These typological classes of qur'anic utterances are therefore not readily-made or simply to be found in the Qur'an. On the contrary, Muqātil suggests that while the utterances are there in the Qur'an, their identification as general, particular, and so forth, has to be "invented". Interpretation is the only way to do so.

The fact that Muqātil closes his statement with an emphasis that upon interpretation is further interpretation *(wa li al-tafsīr tafsīr)* is rather unexpected, given his general monovalent approach, it therefore is so refreshing. This phrase may point to two layers of interpretation that Muqātil is explaining—the intratextual and the extratextual or contextual—and the need for the two modes of interpretation to be subjected to one another. This phrase may bear further consequence suggesting a continuous process of interpretation in which every product of interpretation is always subject to another interpretation.

Muqatil's contribution in defining the typology of utterances in the Qur'an is valuable, but his emphasis on the interpretative nature of the identification of those utterances is equally valuable. The rigidity of his conceptual pairs (e.g., *khāṣ-ʿāmm, muffasar-mubham,* etc.), which he always presents in a series of a binary opposition, contrasts with the plasticity of an act of interpretation that he suggests. While it sustains tension, the combination of rigidity and elasticity in Muqātil's hermeneutics energizes the process of seeking the best possible in relation to qur'anic exegesis. Furthermore, the

sincerity required by the ethico-moral obligation to submit to divine precepts (resulted from the first hermeneutic principle) is combined with the realization of the huge undertaking that an interpretative act requires in understanding the Qur'an (resulted from the second hermeneutic principle). But it is the product of the second principle that brings us further to Muqātil's third hermeneutic principle.

Third principle: knowing meaning is literacy

Muqātil's third hermeneutic principle underlines the intended goal of interpretation, namely the pursuit of meaning of qur'anic utterances. Muqātil says, "Whoever reads the Qur'an but does not know its meaning, he is illiterate."[216]

What this third principle may further suggest is that understanding the Qur'an by knowing qur'anic meaning, not necessarily undertaking an interpretive task, is an individual reponsibility and obligation. Not every individual is able to undertake an act of interpretation. But knowing the result of such interpretation, even if it is the result of others' undertaking, which leads to understanding the Qur'an, is a necessity without which it is impossible to even understand the building blocks of the Qur'an, let alone to feel the obligation to submit to the divine precepts. This principle thus suggests a minimum knowledge that a believer must have in order to be qur'anically literate, that is, to know its message, or the meaning of qur'anic utterances. How can every believer attain such knowledge of qur'anic meaning if not every body is capable for undertaking his own interpretative endeavors due to different reasons? What does Muqātil envision to

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[216] *Qāla: ḥaddathanā ʿUbayd Allāh, qāla: ḥaddathanā Abī ʿan al-Hudhayl ibn Ḥabīb ʿan Muqātil qāla: "Man qaraʾa al-Qurʾān fa lam yaʿlam taʾwīlahū fa huwa fīhī ummī.* Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/27.

overcome the fact that the believers are of different ability in terms of their knowledge and understanding of the Qur'an? This leads us to the fourth principle of Muqātil's hermeneutics.

Fourth principle: the virtue of qur'anic education

Now we know Muqātil's hermeneutics in relation to the structure of the Qur'an, the typology of its utterances that necessitates an interpretative act, and the individual nature of the obligation to know the Qur'an's message. The question is how, with their differing abilities to understand the Qur'an, it is possible to make every individual have access to knowledge of qur'anic message. Muqātil's answer is education: "I do not find something more worthy of reward on the Day of Judgment than one who learns the Qur'an and teaches it."[217] Education is Muqātil's solution to overcome the different abilities that people have in terms of understanding the Qur'an and knowing its message. Those who are able to undertake their own act of interpretation may teach those who are unable to do so. While such education may or may not produce more people with interpretive capacity, at the very least it can lead people to some sort of literacy in terms of the Qur'an by knowing its meanings, which will lead them subsequently to be submissive to the divine precepts.

In its own right, Muqātil's commentary plays the role of teaching his interpretation of the Qur'an to his immediate students and his distant readers. In fact, in

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[217] *Qāla: ḥaddathanā 'Ubayd Allāh qala: ḥaddathanī Abī 'an al-Hudhayl 'an Muqātil 'an 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jazawī qāla: "Mā ajidu a'ẓama ajran yawm al-qiyāmah min man [ta]'allama al-Qur'āna wa 'allamahu.* Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/27.

addition to offering the interpretation of the Qur'an, Muqātil's commentary has provided

his readers with hermeneutic principles that explain not only why they must possess such

knowledge but also how to attain it. For specalists and learned, understanding the Qur'an

may be attained through a continuous act of interpretation and they disseminate the

product of that interpretation to a wider audience. For lay people, their ways of

understanding the Qur'an is by learning it from those who possess such knowledge. In

this way, the Qur'an is accessible to all. Muqātil's hermeneutic thus comes full circle: it

lays out the ethico-moral foundation for submission to the divine precepts, by

understanding the Qur'an through a continuous act of interpretation, the knowledge of

which is to be disseminated through education so that every believer attains some literacy

of the Qur'an. As such, the function of the Qur'an as divine guidance can be realized.

Methods of interpretation: techniques and devices

The *Tafsir Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* or *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* is a commentary on the

whole Qur'an. As such, Muqātil's commentary is a step further from the type of

commentary that had previously circulated among his predecessors, later known as *al-*

tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr ("inherited interpretation"). This last kind of commentary does not

encompass the whole Qur'an, but merely some parts of it, by which a number of

exegetical reports, be they from Prophet Muhammad or his Companions, were passed

down to later generation, in a format traditionally known as *ḥadīth, akhbār*, or *āthār*.[218]

The conventional Muslim view states that before it became an independent discipline,

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[218] G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in chronology, provenance and authorship in early Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 33-4.

qur'anic exegesis might have been a part of a larger endeavor in *ḥadīth* collection. [219]

Modern studies, however, suggest the contrary; that is, *tafsīr* initially began as attempts

of early Muslim scholars to explain the Qur'an as they were reciting it. In fact, "John

Burton paints a different picture of the relationship between *tafsīr* and sunna… at least in

some cases, exegetical dicussions came first which then led to their expansion in the form

of *ḥadīth*s."[220] Whatever the state of origins and early development of *tafsīr* was,

Muqātil's commentary is among the earliest, if not the first, complete commentary on the

Qur'an. It may represent the transition from *tafsīr* as subdivision of *ḥadīth* to *tafsīr* as a

discipline of its own, or it may well be the crystallization of exegetical ideas and attempts

as an independent discipline.

In the commentary, Muqātil provides comments on almost all verses of the

Qur'an. As such, Muqātil's exegetical undertaking seems to aim at clarifying everything

in the Qur'an and making it as comprehensible as possible by either paraphrasing the

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[219] To follow the development of the term *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* as an analytical term and a way of fashioning the mainstream Sunnī *tafsīr* see Walid Saleh, "Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of tafsīr in Arabic: A History of the Book Approach," in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 12 (2010): 6–40, 36. In it, Saleh argues, "The term is now fully entrenched on the two sides of the historiography of tafsīr, in the Arab world, and in the West. A confusion has ensued since, in which we all are cognisant of the inadequacies of this term, yet since we are all under the illusion that it is an old native analytical term, we are obliged to abide by it and try to understand what Muslims meant by it. The irony is that this term is of recent appearance, and as such is analytically useless unless a clear understanding of the genealogy of the term has been established." However, distinction needs to be made between a practice for compiling the legacy of tafsīr of early Muslims by later Muslims, and the technical term that refers to it and emerged only much later after such practice had been well established. The tendency to find precedent, including in terms of tafsīr, is a resilient feature in the Muslim intellectual history. Prior to Muqātil's time in the second/eighth century, the field of tafsīr seems to operate largely in this precedent-based framework. Muqātil's time however opens a new orientation in tafsīr in which this precedent-based framework is combined with the creative interpretive endeavors of the Qur'an's exegetes by using their personal views and borrowing other interpretative traditions. Thus, Saleh's argument remains useful to argue against those who maintained that *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* is the only legitimate way for doing tafsīr.
[220] Berg, *Development,* 92. The more precise picture of the origins and early development of *tafsīr* still needs further studies.

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verse or parts of it, providing the verse's counterparts from other places in the Qur'an, or giving a relevant narrative report that provides the context within which the verse was revealed or the context within which the story unfolded in the verse took place. On occasions, Muqātil combines these three methods—paraphrasing, crossreferencing, and narrativizing—together if the verses he is commenting on require it, and if he has the material at his disposal.

The paraphrasing method uses techniques such as fragmentation of a verse into smaller parts, completing a verse with complementing phrases, and specifying the intended meaning or reference of a verse. The crossreferencing method connects similar words, phrases or relevant passages mentioned in different places in the Qur'an. Finally, the narrativizing method mentions any narrative reports that either situate the revelation of a verse, traditionally known as *asbāb al-nuzūl* ("occasions of revelation"), or relate the story unfolded in the verse to the narratives of the past, biblical or otherwise, conventionally known as *isrā'iliyyāt*.

Muqātil's use of these three methods suggests that he views the Qur'an as a unified whole whose elements are interconnected with each other sustaining its structure. These three methods recall his second hermeneutic principle in which interpretation of the Qur'an is performed at two levels: interpretation based on internal and intratextual relation between different parts of the Qur'an, best represented by his paraphrasing and crossreferencing methods, and interpretation based on a larger socio-historical contexts, carried out through his narrativizing method. When he employs the paraphrasing and crossreferencing methods, his comments are relatively short and straightforward.

However, when he uses the narrative method, Muqātil's comments on the qur'anic passages are relatively long, sometimes even quite extensive, running a few pages long.

Throughout the commentary, Muqātil presents monovalent interpretive ideas of his choosing, and provides nothing about scholarly differences in interpretation of Qur'ānic passages, as later commentators would do.[221] This is interesting, not only because it is mentioned that he received his knowledge of *tafsīr* from about thirty scholars, but also because of his idea with regard to the endlessly generative nature of interpretation. While he might have been a "container" of knowledge *(aw'iyat al-'ilm)*, as some scholars said, Muqātil apparently does not present himself as a "compiler" of exegetical views, such as al-Ṭabarī. Rather, he plays the part of an independent commentator who, among several choices that he has, offers his chosen views with more authority to influence his potential readers.

Muqātil is straightforward in his exegetical style. Simplicity is perhaps the most notable characteristic of his commentary. Despite this simplicity, Muqātil is able to create an aura that the Qur'an is a coherently cohesive unity. If his primary aim is to make the Qur'an as comprehensible as possible, Muqātil does succeed in achieving it. Just imagine how one verse is explained using a combination of three different methods—

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[221] In this regard, there are at least three types of commentaries. First, there are commentaries which expose only the ideas chosen by the commentators that best represent their own views and present no differences of opinions among scholars. Examples of these are commentaries of al-Bayḍawī, al-Nasafī, *al-Jalālayn,* al-Saʿdī, and certainly Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. Second, there are commentaries that simply present different exegetical views among scholars without offering any preferences, such as the commentaries of al-Māwardī and Ibn al-Jawzī. Third, there are commentaries that elaborate different exegetical opinions among scholars with regard to certain Qur'anic passages, choose some of these views as preferable, and provide the reasons for that preference. Exmples of these are the commentaries of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn ʿAṭiyyah, al-Qurṭubī, Abū Ḥayyān, Ibn Kathīr, al-Shanqīṭī, and others. See Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn al-Ḥarbī, *Qawāʿid al-Tarjīḥ ʿinda al-Mufassirīn: Dirāsah Naẓriyyah Taṭbīqiyyah* (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Qāsim, 1996), 11.

paraphrasing, crossreferencing, and narrativizing—at the same time. It is almost certain there is nothing in the verse left untouched. Muqātil's exegetical strategies work and are entirely justified by the fact that, without such commentaries and clarifying statements, the Qur'an would have been very hard to discern. The Qur'an is, as some would have it, disjointed;[222] it is not written cohesively from the very beginning as a book. Rather, the Qur'an is a compilation of a series of revelations sent down during the period of twenty-three years, and later codified not in chronological order of its revelations, but randomly under the direction of the Prophet. In this respect, the commentary is almost unavoidable not only to connect different parts of revelations but also to make sense of thie newly acquired composition in the post-oral recitation of the Qur'an. As such, commentary on the Qur'an does not only enhance the content of scripture, but "the scriptural style is itself incomplete without commentary."[223]

Paraphrastic Method

Muqātil uses the paraphrastic method in almost every part of the Qur'an on which he is commenting. In general, when he uses this method, he breaks up a verse into smaller meaningful parts, either in words or phrases **(fragmentation technique)**.

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[222] Carlyle maintained that "It [the Qur'an] is as toilsome reading as I ever undertook, a wearisome, confused jumble, crude, incondite." However, after years of close study of the Qur'an, he suggested that "there is a merit quite other than the literary one. If a book comes from the heart, it will contrive to reach other hearts; all art and authorcraft are of small account to that." See H. A. R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 36.

[223] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies,* 100, 131. G. R. Hawting maintains, "Reading the Koran on its own terms, trying to interpret it without resorting to commentaries, is a difficult and questionable exercise because of the nature of the text – its allusive and referential style and its grammatical and logical discontinuities, as well as our lack of sure information about its origins and the circumstances of its composition. Often such a reading seems arbitrary and necessarily inconclusive." See his *The Idea of idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: from polemic to history* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 48.

Subsequently, he provides a synonym or a paraphrase to clarify the intended meaning of such a word or phrase used in the verse **(specification technique)**. To separate his comments from the original qur'anic passages, Muqātil very often uses a number of connective, "paraphrastic" devices such as *yaʻnī, yaqūlu,* or *ay,* which in English may be rendered "that is." Occasionally, Muqātil uses none of these devices, but instead he immediately provides complementary statements that complete the qur'anic statements, such as giving an object for a qur'anic verb, an adverbial explanation, or simply paraphrasing qur'anic passages with his own phrases with a pattern similar to the original **(completion technique)**. [224]

As examples of how Muqātil uses the paraphrastic method, let us see his commentary on some parts of the Qur'an, in which he argued for the two most important messages of the Qur'an that has occupied his exegetical concerns, namely propagation of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*. Consequently, condemnation of their opposites, namely *shirk* and *takdhīb* occupies an equally important place in Muqātil's exegetical endeavor. In his commentary on Q2: 21-22, Muqātil emphasizes the question of *tawḥīd:*

> [21] People, worship your Lord, *that is (yaʻnī),* [the intended people were] *the hypocrites and the Jews, worship only your one God (waḥḥidū rabbakum),* who created you, *before you were nothing,* and [created] those before you, *among the bygone communities,* so that, *in order (likay),* you may be mindful, *of associating him with anything else (al-shirk),* and worship only Allāh, the Powerful and the Exalted, if you contemplate on your own creation and the creation of those before you. God then drew attention to Himself through what he had done so that these people only worshipped Him by mentioning His favors, in which the Greatest the Exalted said, worship your God, [22] who spread out the earth for you, *that is (yaʻnī) as if it is a carpet (bisātan),* and built the sky, *that is, as a roof (saqafan)*; who sent water down from it, *that is (yaʻnī) rain (al-maṭar),* and with that water [He] produced, *God says (yaqūlu) that He produced with that rain out the earth a*

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[224] Wansbrough called this phenomenon "zero connective." See his *Quranic Studies,* 124.

variety of, fruits for your sustenance. Do not set up rivals to God, *God says (yaqūlu) do not create along with God associates,* while you know, *that everything He mentioned is His creation, then how come you worshipped anything else?*[225]

In the example above, the connective devices that Muqātil uses to separate his commentary from the original qur'anic passages are *yaʿnī* and *yaqūlu.* There are times when Muqātil does not use any connective, but inserts clarifying statements, such as when the Qur'an says "[who created] those before you", Muqātil immediately follows it up with his *"among the bygone communities"* just to clarify that the people intended are the communities of past prophets, not just their parents or their grandparents.

To specify the addressees intended in the verse, which the Qur'an generally renders as people *(al-nās)*, Muqātil mentions the hypocrites *(al-munāfiqīn)* and the Jews *(al-yahūd).* The imperative term *uʿbudū* which in general means *worship!* was paraphrased *as waḥḥidū* to specify that the intended meaning was to belief in the unity of God, thus worshipping Him alone. As Muqātil specifies *ʿibādah* (worship) as *tawḥīd* (belief in unity of God and worship Him alone), he also contrasts it with *shirk* (associating God with anything else of His creation), something that these people should avoid *(laʿallakum tattaqūn).* Subsequently, Muqātil also explains the reason why they must embrace *tawḥīd* and avoid *shirk*: because God has created them and gave them favors and sustenance. If they contemplate this, Muqātil argued, they would not worship anything else.

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[225] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/93.

The next example is Muqātil's commentary on Q2: 16, in which Muqātil condemns the rejection of Muhammad *(takdhīb)*:

[16] They have bought error in exchange for guidance, *[God] says (yaqūlu) they traded guidance in which they were with regard to believing in Muhammad before he was sent [as a messenger] with error to which they enter after Muhammad was sent, due to their rejection of him (min takdhībihim bi muḥammad); that is the worse trade ever,* so their trade reaps no profit, and they are not rightly guided.[226]

In his commentary, Muqātil uses the connective *yaqūlu* to facilitate his comments on the first half of the verse that he fragments from the second half. The people who traded guidance with error, the Jews, were, according to Muqātil, actually expecting the coming of a Prophet. They had had some knowledge of what this prophet would look like, as he was already described in the Torah. They believed in him and even prayed in his name before they went to war so that God granted them victory. However, when they found out that the expected prophet was Muhammad, they rejected him. They did so because in their imagination, the upcoming prophet would be of Isḥāq's descendant; instead, it was Muhammad who claimed the prophethood, an Arab, and thus Ismāʿil's decendant.[227] If in his previous commentary on Q2: 21-22 Muqātil contrasted *tawḥīd* to *shirk*, this time in his interpretation on Q2: 16, *īmān bi Muḥammad* (belief in Muhammad) is contrasted to *takdhīb bi Muḥammad* (rejection of Muhammad).

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[226] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/91.
[227] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/91.

Crossreferencing Method

Muqātil uses the "crossreferencing method" to connect the verse on which he is commenting to other verses in the Qur'an which either possess linguistic similarities or shared messages. Identifying and linking qur'anic counterparts is one of Muqātil's strategies to show the cohesiveness of the Qur'an. Furthermore, his linking of qur'anic verses to one another is a pioneering step into what was later regarded as the best interpretation of the Qur'an, namely interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an. The intratextual approach that he takes in terms of qur'anic interpretation is later furthered by his more firmly thematic studies of, among other, legal and lexical questions that resulted in the composition of *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah* and *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir*, which I will study in the next two chapters. If Muqātil's legal commentary is not entirely based on interpretation of the Qur'an with the Qur'an, as he also uses external resources such as prophetic traditions and some of scholarly views of early Muslims, his lexical commentary was purely qur'anic, since the multi-meanings that a word has are generated fully from its qur'anic use.

Using this crossreferencing method, Muqātil treats the Qur'an as a structure of its own in which its different parts have the ability to explain one another. In applying this crossreferencing method and in order to distinguish it from other methods that he uses, Muqātil employs some devices, such as *mithl qawlihī* ("like [God's] saying")*, ka-qawlihī* ("like [God's] saying")*,* and *naẓīruhā* ("the counterpart [of the verse]")*. Following these devices, Muqātil mentions other verses or parts of those that shared commonality with the present verse being discussed either in linguistic form or content.

The following is the example where Muqātil uses his crossreferencing method in

commenting on Q38: 5-9,

[5] How can he [Muhammad] claim that all the gods are but one God? What an astonishing thing [to claim]!', *that is when 'Umar al-Khaṭṭāb—may God be pleased with him—was accepting Islam; 'Umar's becoming a Muslim had created a fissure among the Quraysh people, but created an excitement among the believers,* [6] Their leaders depart, *there were twenty seven of them…such as al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīra, Abū Jahl ibn Hishām, Umayyah and Ubayy sons of Khalaf, and some others. Then al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah was* saying, 'Walk away! *To Abū Ṭālib,* Stay faithful to your gods! *[wa ṣbirū--wa thbutū--'alā alā ālihatikum]* That is what you must do. *And **the counterpart (naẓīruhā)** of this is in al-Furqān [Q25: 42] [lawlā an ṣabarnā 'alayhā, "had we not been steadfast in worship of Him"], that is (ya'nī) we had been steadfast. But God said in reponse: **Fain yaṣbirū fa al-nāru mathwan lahum,** The Fire will still be their home, even if they resign themselves to patience. These people then went to Abū Ṭālib, saying: "You are our leader and the most senior among us, you have seen yourself what those stupid people did. We came to you so that you adjudicate between us and the son of your brother [Muhammad]. Abū Ṭālib then sent someone to Muhammad, after which the latter came. Abū Ṭālib said [to Muhammad]: "These are your people. They are asking from you justice. So please don't let your heart be inclined only to your followers." Muhammad replied: "What did they ask from me?" The people replied themselves: "Stop mentioning our gods, then we'll leave your god alone!" The Prophet replied: "Give me one word so that the Arabs and non Arabs would be united!" Abū Jahl soon replied: "For God and your ancestor, we'll give that word and even ten more." The Prophet told them: "Say **Lā ilāha illā Allāh!"** They eschewed that request, saying: "How can he [Muhammad] claim that all the gods are but one God? What an astonishing thing [to claim]!', that is (ya'nī) abhorrent that our gods become only one.* [7] We did not hear, *the thing that Muhammad has just said,* in the last religion, *that is (ya'nī) Christianity (al-millah al-naṣrāniyyah); it is the last among religions because the Christians thought that God is 'Īsā son of Maryam. Al-Walīd then said: "it, [the Qur'an'], is all an invention," from Muhammad that he made it up himself. Al-Walid then said again: "[8] Was the message sent only to him out of all of us?"', "while we are more senior and nobler?" In response to Walid's saying that "It is all an invention", God said: "In fact they doubt My warning, that is (ya'nī) the Qur'an; in fact they have not tasted My punishment yet [bal lammā ya'nī lam yadhūqū 'adhābi], such God's saying (mithl qawlihī) (… wa lammā yadkhul al-īmān fī qulūbikum…) [Q49:14], that is (ya'nī) belief has not entered their hearts yet (ya'nī lam yadkhul al-īmān fī qulūbikum)* . [9] Do they possess the treasures of your Lord's bounty **(am 'indahum khazā'in raḥmat rabbik)**, *that is, what was meant with "your Lord' bounty" was prophethood (nubuwwah), and **its counterpart (wa***

naẓīruhā) is in al-Zukhruf [Q43:32]: "… Are they the ones who share out your Lord's grace?..." *[ahum yaqsimūn raḥmat rabbik], that is prophethood; God said: "It is on their hands the keys for prophethood and messengership and that they can put them wherever they like? No, they are not in their hands, but in the hand of the Mighty, and in the property of the All Giving; lies the prophethood and messengerhood of Muhammad.*[228]

The example above, pertaining to Muhammad's prophethood, shows not only Muqātil's use of the crossreferencing method, but also, as always, his use of the paraphrasing method, indicated by the repeated use of connective *ya'nī* and *yaqūlu*, and the narrative method, to be dealt with later, by providing the background narrative within which the verses were revealed or to be understood. To focus on our main topic discussion, Muqātil's crossreferencing method, let me now deal with this at the moment.

Based on the devices used, there are three instances where Muqātil is employing the crossreferencing method. First, when Muqātil explains that the word *ṣ-b-r* used in Q38: 6, *wa ṣbirū 'alā ālihatikum,* and in 25: 42, *lawlā an ṣabarnā 'alayhā,* share the same meaning as *th-b-t*, "being steadfast". Therefore Muqātil interprets *iṣbirū* as *uthbutū* ("be steadfast), and *ṣabarnā* as *thabatnā* ("we had been steadfast"). The two are thus counterparts *(naẓīr).*

Second, when Muqātil explains that particle *lammā* in the phrase *bal lammā yadhūqū 'adhābi* in Q38: 8 has the same meaning as particle *lam.* Therefore, in his commentary Muqātil said: *bal lammā ya'nī lam yadhūqū 'adhābi,* "they have not tasted My punishment yet". Furthermore, Muqātil alludes to another qur'anic phrase in Q49: 14, *wa lammā yadkhul al-īmān fī qulūbikum,* in which the same particle *lammā* also

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[228] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/635-37.

presents. Thus, the two-particle *lammā* in the two verses, Q38: 8 and 49: 14, have the meaning of particle *lam,* "not yet". The two are therefore counterparts *(naẓīr),* which Muqātil connects with each other using the device ***mithl qawlihī***.

Third, when Muqātil couterparts ***raḥmat rabbik*** ("God's bounty") in Q38: 9 with the same phrase in Q43: 32. Muqātil interprets the phrase ***raḥmat rabbik*** in *am ʿindahum khazāʾin **raḥmat rabbik*** (Q38: 9) and in *ahum yaqsimūn **raḥmat rabbik*** (Q43: 32) as "prophethood and messengership". The device Muqātil employs for this crossreferencing of the two is ***wa naẓīruhā***. If noticed, Muqātil uses the crossreferencing method not only to show the connection that different verses have with each other but also, more specifically, to demonstrate that the same words may share the same meaning, although they take place in different places in the Qurʾan. The contrary is true, that the same words may have different meanings when they are used in different places in the Qurʾan, as I will discuss in the third chapter when I deal with Muqātil's *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓāʾir*.

Narrative Method

Muqātil uses the narrative method in his commentary when he has at his disposal the material by which he can illuminate either the context of revelation or the context within which certain passages in the Qurʾan should be understood. In general, the narrative materials that Muqātil uses may fall into one of two categories: first, narratives that, partly due to their transmission through reliable people and partly due to the agreement of their content with with the teaching of Islam, can be accepted, and others which, because their transmitters were suspect or their content was not in accord with and or even against the teaching of Islam, are denied. The first group of materials is usually

known as *asbāb al-nuzūl* consisting of prophetic ḥadīths, *akhbār,* or *athār.* The second group of materials is usully categorized as *isrā'iliyyāt*.[229]

Some scholars have argued that some of what has traditionally been known as *asbāb al-nuzūl* (literally, "causes of revelation") might only be a commentary or an extended explanation of revelation, rather than real triggers for revelation.[230] This and similar material that Muqātil incorporates to shed light on the qur'anic passages come from a body of traditions called *ḥadīth* (prophetic traditions) and *akhbār* (traditions that convey the views of the Companions and Successors).[231] In the meantime, the *isrā'iliyyāt* reports usually relate to the narratives of past prophets and bygone generations. Unlike *ḥadīth* and *āthār* that come from what is related to the Prophet and his Companions as well as Successors, this body of material, as the term indicates, comes from non-Muslim

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[229] In the Muslim scholarship, the Isrāiliyyāt reports are divided into three categories: first, those which are in agreement with Islamic teaching, hence acceptable; second, those which are in disagreement with Islamic teaching, and threrefore are rejected, and third, those about which Islamic teaching has nothing to say, either in acceptance or rejection, and therefore is no judgment about it is made. See Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā'iliyyāt fi al-Tafsīr wa al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1990), 35-41; Ramzī Naʿnaʿah, *al-Isrā'iliyyāt wa Atharuhā fī Kutub al-Tafsīr* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1970); Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Abū Shahbah, *al-Isrā'iliyyāt wa al-Mawḍū'āt fî Kutub al-Tafsīr* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunnah, 1987).

[230] Perhaps for this reason that the term *asbāb al-nuzūl* is often rendered "occasions of revelation" in English. In traditional Muslim literature, *asbāb al-nuzūl* is understood primarily as having historical validity, not simply an exegetical tool. Therefore, Muslim scholars maintained that *asbāb al-nuzūl* should pertain to two things: (1) an event because of which revelation came, and (2) a question about which the Prophet was asked and in which revelation came as the answer to it. Thus, for a narrative report to be called *asbāb al-nuzūl* it must suggest that it has triggered or caused revelation. Al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī maintained that *asbāb al-nuzūl* have "to be limited to events contemporaneous with the revelation; those which were only connected to events mentioned in the Qur'an were reclassified as *akhbār*." See Andrew Rippin, "The Exegetical Genre "asbāb al-nuzūl": A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey," in Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, vol. 48, No. 1 (1985), pp. 1-15, 15.

[231] There are a great amount of *ḥadīth* and *akhbār* in the commentary although the majority of them are with truncated *isnād*s. While Muqātil did not meet with any Companions and the Prophet, they are often mentioned in many *isnād*s as Muqātil's immediate authorities. See for instance (1/28): *wa ḥaddathanā 'Ubayd Allāh qāla: wa ḥaddathanī abī 'an al-Hudhayl 'an Muqātil qāla: qāla Rasūl Allāh…* (2/630): *ḥaddathanā 'Ubayd Allāh qāla: ḥaddathanī abī 'an Abī Ṣāliḥ 'an Ibn 'Abbās:…* and so forth.

sources, be they Jewish, Christian, or other.[232] Both types of the narratives of the past--

ḥadīth and isrā'iliyyāt—however, serve the same function, that is, to explain and

contextualize the text.

The status of the *isrā'iliyyāt* reports is controversial within Muslim scholarship,

primarily because their content is sometimes deemed counterproductive to the well-

accepted teachings of Islam.[233] As an example for the scandalous views that may result

from the use of the isrā'iliyyāt reports was related to the idea of infallibity of the prophets

('iṣmah) in Islam.[234] If in Islam the prophets are considered protected from committing

sins or inappropriate conduct *(maʿṣūm, 'iṣmah)*, the isrā'iliyyāt reports often depict them

as people who, just like ordinary people, were able to do innapropriate actions, especially

in relation to their sexual conduct.[235]

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[232] Many of the *isrā'iliyyāt* reports were attached to the Companions and even to the Prophet himself, the phenomonon which Muslim scholars have certainly denied as fabrication. See Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *Isrā'iliyyāt,* 6.

[233] Al-Kawtharī states that many commentators of the Qur'ān incorporated *isrā'iliyyāt* in their commentaries because they saw some advantage in them for explaining some parts of the Qur'ān. In doing so, these commentators left the task of scrutiny for later generation. One of the reasons they did this is because they did not want to miss passing knowledge that might be of use for later generation. See al-Ṭūfī, *al-Iksīr fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr,* 32; Walid Humaymil ʿAwajān, "Tafsīr Khams Mi'at Āyah min al-Qur'ān al-Karīm fī al-Amr wa al-Nahy wa al-Ḥalāl wa al-Ḥarām li Muqātil ibn Sulaymān," in *Dirāsāt, 'Ulūm al-Sharī'ah wa al-Qānūn,* vol. 33, edition 2, 2008, 444.

[234] Jewish tradition does not recognize any infallibility of its prophets and ancestors. Instead, it acknowledges that these people have, in one way or another, committed sins. This view has resulted in the emergence of Islamic anti-Jewish polemic in the medieval period. See Shari L. Lowin, *The Making of A Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2006), 64-5.

[235] See, for instance, how Muqātil comments on Q38: 21 that he relates to the story of Dāwūd who desired the wife of one of his soldiers after he saw her bathing naked (3/639-40); how in his commentary on Q12: 24, Muqātil relates to the story of Yūsuf who almost fell for the sexual seduction of the Egyptian prime minister's wife by loosening his own pants and sitting in between the woman's feet, ready to have a sexual intercourse (2/328-30), and how Muqātil, in his commentary on Q33: 37, describes the story of how Muḥammad fell in love with his adopted son's (Zayd) wife, Zaynab, due to her sexual appeal (3/493-496). However, it seems that, in doing this, Muqātil does not have ill-intention to disgrace the Prophet, for he also presents the view of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb that says, "If there is something of the Qur'an that the Prophet would conceal, he would have concealed this verse for it exposes him" (3/495-6). Furthermore, in his commentary on Q33: 54, Muqātil is defending the Prophet when the Jews mocked the the Prophet as a womanizer by showing that their own prophets, Dāwūd, was married to ninety nine women, and Sulaymān,

Muqātil uses the *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *isrā'iliyyāt* reports to provide more details of

an event or story told in the Qur'an only obliquely. To do so, Muqātil usually hints their

presence in his commentary using some devices, such as *nazalat fī* ("the verse(s) was

revealed to/in the context of"), *fa lammā* ("the verse(s) was revealed when…"), *wa

dhālika ḥīna* ("that is when…"), and *wa dhālika anna* ("that is when…"). Bringing about

such detailed narratives, which mention names, places, and dialogues that occurred

among the actors, Muqātil makes the stories in the Qur'an more alive and engaging.

As an example of how Muqātil uses the narrative method, let us see his

commentary on Q2: 6-10. In the verses that address both Arab polytheists (Q2: 6-7) and

the Jewish hypocrites (Q2: 8-10), Muqātil employs not only the narrative method, but

also the paraphrastic and crossreferencing methods as well. However, it is arguably his

use of the narrative method that makes the verses more imaginatively vivid as he names

the alleged actors involved and narrates the lively dialogue between them. Now, the

message of the Qur'an is understood not only through its wording, but more importantly

through the unfolding of the story, the dialogue between actors, and the real life that they

experienced. As such, the understanding that emerges from the qur'anic passages is much

more nuanced than if it were merely conveyed through language alone.

> [6] As for those who disbelieve, it makes no difference whether you warn them or
> not: they will not believe, *that is (yaʿnī) they will not accept*. [7] God has sealed
> their hearts, *that is (yaʿnī) God has shut off their hearts that they could not
> contemplate on guidance,* and their hearing, *that is (yaʿnī) their ears so that they
> could not hear guidance,* and their eyes are covered, *that is (yaʿnī) veiled so that*

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who was married to three hundred free women and possessed seven hundred slave women (1/379-80). Thus
said, Muqātil seems to merely describe what he believes to have happened and what he receives from older
generation about past communities and their prophets. It may further be argued that Muqātil's use of the
isrā'iliyyāt is meant to defend the Prophet of Islam and attack non-Muslims using their own arsenal.

they could not see guidance. They will have great torment, *that is (yaʿnī) abundant and endless. These two verses were sent in relation to the Arab polytheists (nazalat hātānī al-āyātānī fī mushrikī al-ʿArab), such as Shaybah and ʾUtbah sons of Rabīʿah, al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, Abū Jahl ibn Hishām—whose name was ʿAmr--, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Abī Umayyah, Umayyah ibn Khalaf, ʿAmr ibn Wahb, al-ʿĀṣ ibn Wāʾil, al-Ḥārith ibn ʿAmr, al-Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith, ʿAdī ibn Muṭʿim ibn ʿAdī, ʿĀmir ibn Khālid, Abū al-Bukhturī ibn Hishām; then God returned to [addressing] the hypocrites, saying:* [8] Some people say, 'We believe in God and the Last Day,' *that is (yaʿnī) we accepted that God is One having no associate and we also accepted that there would be the Resurrection Day in which deed are rewarded; but God rejected [the truthfulness of their statements] saying:* when really they do not believe, *that is (yaʿnī) [they did not] accept the unity of God (tawḥīd) nor the Resurrection Day in which deeds are rewarded* [9] They seek to deceive God, *when they show their belief in Muhammad, while hiding their rejection [of him],* and [they seek to deceive] the believers, but they only deceive themselves, though they do not realize it. *These verses were sent down to the Jewish hypocrytes among the People of Scripture (nazalat fī munāfiqī ahl al-kitāb al-yahūd), such as ʾAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl, Judd ibn Qays, al-Ḥārith ibn ʿAmr, Mughīth ibn Qushayr, and ʾAmr ibn Zayd. [Instead] God will deceive them in the hereafter when He says in chapter al-Ḥadīd [Q57:13] 'Go back and look for a light.' God said this just to mock them, just like when they mocked the believers on earth by saying: 'We believed', while they were not believers. That is when God said: 'The hypocrites try to deceive God, but it is He who causes them to be deceived' [Q4: 142]. Likewise, [when God said to the hypocrites when they were] on the Bridge (ṣirāṭ): 'Go back and look for a light' [Q57:13].* [10] There is a disease in their hearts (*fī qulūbihim maraḍ*), *that is (yaʿnī) doubt about God and Muhammad; its counterpart (naẓīruhā) is chapter Muhammad [47:29]:* **am ḥasiba alladhīna fī qulūbihim maraḍ,** *that is (yaʿnī) doubt;* to which God has added more, *that is (yaʿnī) doubt in their hearts,* agonizing torment awaits them, *that is (yaʿnī) excruciating [punishment] in the hereafter,* for their persistent lying, *due to their saying 'We believed in Allāh and in the Day of Judgment'. That was when (wa dhālika anna) ʾAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy, the hypocrite, said to his companions: 'Look at me and what I have done, and learn from it, and look how I got rid of those people from me and from you all.' His companions replied: 'O our Master and Teacher, were it not for you, we would not be able to mingle with them.' ʾAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy told Abū Bakr by holding the latter's hand: 'Welcome, the Leader of Banū Tamīm ibn Murrah, the second of the two, and his [Muhammad]'s companion in the cave, the chosen among his people who dedicated his life and wealth.' He [ʾAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy] then took ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's hand, saying: 'Welcome, the Leader of Banū ʾAdī ibn Kaʾb, who is strong in terms of God's affair, and who dedicated his life and wealth.' Then he took ʾAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's hand, saying: 'Welcome, the Leader of Banū Hāshim, second only to another [Muhammad who was also from Banū Hāshim] whom*

God chose for prophethood, known for ghis sincerity and belief.' 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb then said: 'Woe unto you, Son of Ubayy. Fear of Allāh. Stop pretending and repent. Don't corrupt. Verily a hypocrite is the worst of all God's creation, the most malicious, and the most deceitful!' 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl interrupted: 'O 'Umar, slow down, for God sake. I believed as you did, and proclaimed my belief as you did!' They then parted a way. Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Alī then went to the God's Messenger and told him what 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubay ibn Salūl has just said. [It was then when] God revealed: 'Some people say, 'We believe in God and the Last Day,' when really they do not believe' [Q2:8].[236]

In the example above, Muqātil uses not only the narrative method, but also the paraphrastic and crossreferencing methods. Throughout the commentary, the paraphrastic method is likely the most prominent and one that guarantees that Muqātil's inspection of the Qur'an is thorough. With it, Muqātil embarks on almost every inch of the qur'anic passages, commenting on them and providing further explanations.

The crossreferencing method plays a major role in creating an aura of cohesieveness and coherence of the Qur'an by interconnecting verses with one another. This method takes a place between the paraphrastic method, which focuses on a smaller level of interpretation by investigating qur'anic verses and their fragmented parts, and the narrative method, which pays attention to the larger socio-historical context in understanding of the Qur'an. It moves across the whole Qur'an, connecting the already established meaning of some parts of the Qur'an with its other parts on which Muqātil is commenting. It also serves as the basis for Muqātil's theory on the multiplicity of words' meanings in the Qur'an depending on the context of their uses.

However, the narrative method seems to create more of an impression and gives a stronger sense of presence to the readers. This perhaps owes to the fact that the narrative

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[236] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/88-90.

method contributes better to clarifying the understanding of the Qur'an for it involves not only intellectual aspect of the readers but also all their sensory aspects, thanks to the strong visualization that this method produces. The readers of Muqātil's commentary could feel that they are present in the moments of revelation or other situations that the Qur'an tries to depict. The narrative method not only feeds their intellect by providing information they need, but also indulges their imagination, emotion, and even their vision. Just consider how much Muqātil's readers could learn when he is employing this narrative method: names of the actors involved, the setting within which an event occurs, and the dialogue between the actors that very often than not arouse feelings and emotions.

In his commentary, Muqātil follows the narrative flowing of the Qur'an, very closely and loyally, not only in procedure but also in proportion. Procedurally, Muqātil proceeds at the same rate as the Qur'an proceeds, supplying his interpretation of words and phrases, identifying individuals and groups intended by the Qur'an, providing contexts and places referred to in the Qur'an, or suggesting other events associated with the recent discussions at hand, and so forth. When the qur'anic verses discuss past generations, Muqātil follows suit, but by presenting more material to complete the picture of the story. If the qur'anic verses discuss the legal matters, Muqātil jumps in by clarifying the wider context of discussion to make the otherwise compact handling of the Qur'an more comprehensible. If the Qur'an discusses matters of ritual and worship, Muqātil joins in by providing more insight and information that would never be gained by reading the qur'anic passages alone.

Take for instance, Muqātil's comment on Q2: 75, "So can you [Muhammad] hope that such people will believe you, when some of them used to hear the words of God and then deliberately twist them, even when they understood them?" Based on Muqātil's commentary, the verse suggests that Muhammad's hope that the Jews of Medina would someday accept his mission is in vain. The Jews, or some of them, to be more precise, had a bad history in relation to rebellion to their prophets, especially Mūsā.

> That is, seventy people whom Mūsā chose [to accompany him to receive the Torah] said to him: "Let us see God with our own eyes!" God punished them because of that request by taking their lives. Mūsā was left alone, crying. When God brought them to life again, they said: "We know now that you [Mūsā] did not see God [with your eyes], but you only heard His voice. [Therefore] let us hear His voice!" Mūsā replied: "This [hearing of God's voice] is possible." Mūsā then talked to God: "O God, Your servants, the Children of Israel, want to hear Your Speech." God replied: "Those who want to hear my speech should avoid their wives for three days, take bath in the third day, and wear new attires. Afterward they come to the mountain, and I will let them hear my speech." These people did exactly that, and they went up to the mountain with Mūsā. Mūsā then told them: "If you see a cloud becoming dark, you'll see a light and hear a voice, then prostrate yourselves in front of your God and pay heed to what He commands you, and do it!" "Fine," they said. Mūsā ascended to the mountain, and the cloud blocked between him and his people who were now seeing a light and hearing a voice like a trumpet. They kneeled and listened to God saying: "Verily, I am your Lord. There is no God but I am, the Everlasting, the Self-Existent. I am who took you out from the land of Egypt with the hand of a slave and a strong arm. Don't worship any god but me. Don't ever associate anything with me, nor make any resemblance of me. You will never see me, but you will hear my speech." When they heard the Speech, their souls were gone due to the shock of what they heard. When they were conscious, they told Mūsā: "We are incapable of hearing God's Speech, be intermediate between us and Him. God talks to you, and you tell us." Mūsā talked to God again: "O God, the Children of Israel could not hear Your Speech, please talk to me, and I will tell them." God replied: "What a plan!" God then gave His command to Mūsā, and Mūsā tell the people. They said: "We pay heed and obey, Our Lord." When God was finished giving His command and prohibition, the cloud rose up, the voice dwindled, and the people raised their heads, and went back to their community. Their community asked them: "What did God command

and prohibit you?" Some of them replied: "We were commanded so and so, and forbidden so and so." Some others added to that [something which God did not tell them]: "If you are unable to avoid what is prohibited, then you do whatever you can."[237]

As such, the aura of narrativity is strongly present in his entire exegetical endeavor. The narrative power of his commentary gives an impression that it is a storybook-like and a cohesive work, indeed. Reading Muqātil's commentary, one would be transported to a state where he feels he is reading a storybook, or probably a combination of story and history book, with a nice flow of narration. Muqātil's commentary's narrativity owes partly to the effect of the presentation of the Qur'an, which is largely narrative. In fact, as scholars of the Qur'an would concur, about two thirds of the Qur'an is actually (a collection of) stories, especially of past generations, which Muqātil calls *khabar al-awwalīn*. It is important, however, to underline that the

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[237] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/116-117. Q2: 75 on which Muqātil is commenting is one of the twenty five verses in which the charge of scriptural tampering *(taḥrīf)* was leveled against the Jews. See Gordon Nickel, "Early Muslim Accusations of *Taḥrīf:* Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's Commentary on Key Qur'anic Verses" in ed. David Thomas, *The Bible in Arab Christianity* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2007), 207-223. In this instance, Muqātil seems to have adapted rather freely by weaving together Exodus 19 and 20, and also Deutoronomy 5. These parts of the Bible that deal with God's revelation at Mount Sinai where Moses received the Ten Commandments were modified as such by Muqātil in order to emphasize his point with regard to the presumptuous and rebellious act of the Jews against God, especially in relation to *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*. At least, Muqātil's redaction of the Sinai event reflects his understanding of the people of Israel who often lacked trust in their prophets, twisted their teaching, and their return to commiting *shirk,* as in the case of Golden Calf following Mūsā's reception of divine law at Sinai. Furthermore, parts of the Bible that recount the event at Sinai are of different if contradictory, versions that, according to Aaron Rothkoff, "[t]he attempts to reconcile these accounts internally and with each other are not convincing." See "Decalogue" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* vol. 5, 522. This was perhaps one of the reasons why Muqātil offers his own redaction of the story that is relatively different from the biblical versions. In respect to the Ten Commandments, the historian Josephus, writing in the First century, summed it up nicely: "The first commandment teaches us that there is but one God, and that we ought to worship him only. The second commands us not to make the image of any living creature to worship it. The third, that we must not swear by God in a false matter. The fourth, that we must keep the seventh day, by resting from all sorts of work. The fifth, that we must honor our parents. The sixth that we must abstain from murder. The seventh that we must not commit adultery. The eighth, that we must not be guilty of theft. The ninth, that we must not bear false witness. The tenth, that we must not admit of the desire of any thing that is another's." See Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews,* trans. William Whiston (2006), 86.

narrativity of the Qur'an, and for that matter Muqātil's narrative method, is not simply mimicking or repeating the whole narratives that had been circulating in the vissicitues in which it emerged. Rather, the Qur'an frequently shaped, modified and even made new the existing narratives to serve its own goals. Thus, the Qur'an's use of *khabar al-awwalīn* is not an innocent recast of the past, but more an active act of discursivity.[238] Likewise, Muqātil's use of these narratives of the past is often an attempt to serve his exegetical agenda, for while his narratives were often thought of as an isrā'iliyyāt, they have no counterparts in the biblical literature, as in the case of his commentary on Q2: 75 above. Furthermore, some of Muqātil'use of the isrā'iliyyāt is, contrary to general assumption, to defend the teachings of Islam and its prophet, rather than noddingly agreeing with non-Muslims and thus embarrassing Islam.

But why this emphasis on narrativity? What does Muqātil think of narrative and narrativity in relation to the Qur'an? Looking back at what Muqātil asserts in the beginning of his commentary, especially in relation to five aspects of the Qur'an, namely divine obligation, prohibition, promise, threat, and finally the narrative of past generations, may provide a tentative answer. Since the very beginning, Muqātil has already noticed the centrality of narrative in the Qur'an. Therefore, narrative constitutes one of five central elements with which his hermeneutical project would deal. In fact, the

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[238] See, for instance, Angelika Neuwirth's "Foreword" to Hosn Abboud, *Mary in the Qur'an: A Literary Reading* (New York: Routledge, 2014), xiii-xviii. There are other instances where the Qur'an seems to recast biblical stories, but they are not found in the Bible or biblical literature, such as the story of the Feast *(al-mā'idah)*.

predominance of narrative in the Qur'an is so unmistakable that Muqātil may have thought of it as a fundamental element in its function as guidance *(hudan)*.

The idea of guidance is closely related to the idea of wisdom. Although wisdom can be reached in different ways, one way that has been mostly standing out is through story telling. Narrative is, in a way, one of the best methods to teaching wisdom, therefore it was adopted in the Qur'an itself. Lessons are learned from stories, and so is God's guidance. This may explain why the Qur'an is so narrative regardless of the varying contents that it attempts to communicate to human beings. This is perhaps how Muqātil has understood the Qur'an.

Furthermore, presented as a series of stories, the interpretation of the Qur'an cannot be undertaken in a linear and straightforward, let alone literal, way. The interpretation of the Qur'an is always a mediated process, for behind every part of the Qur'an there are stories presupposed by its revelation. The "revelation" of this revelation requires one to understand what operates behind the scene that might have been forgotten or overlooked. The rich cultural and sociological background that accompanied the revelation of the Qur'an must be included in the process of understanding of the Qur'an, despite the fact that such anchoring can only approximate what had really happened. [239] For grounding qur'anic passages to particular historical contexts or events such as this

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[239] Any attempts to evoke the moments of revelation in the order the Qur'an as we have it now are always approximation of those moments that are basically unreconstructable. Angelika Neuwirth maintains, "By focusing exclusively on the final, canonised form of the Qur'an, by ranking the achievement of its fixation as the crucial event in Qur'anic genesis, a momentous epistemic course has been set: the stages of the emergence of the Qur'an preceding the canonisation fade into a kind of pre-history; something no longer possible to reconstruct." See her "Qur'an and History —a Disputed Relationship: Some Reflections on Qur'anic History and History in the Qur'an," in Journal of Qur'anic Studies, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2003), 1-18, 3.

helps the readers of the Qur'an relate their own situations to those being told in it. Bringing the context of revelation to the forefront, Muqātil's commentary seems to bring back the intimacy that the Qur'an once had when it was first revealed and circulated orally among its first listerners, but slowly diminished once time progressed away from those moments of revelation and once the Qur'an was codified into a closed corpus.

Muqātil's Exegetical Thrust

Reading Muqātil's commentary closely, one is faced with terms repeated overwhelmingly often that Muqātil always puts in opposition to each other, namely the propagation of belief *(īmān)* against condemnation of disbelief *(kufr)*. This propagation of belief *(īmān)* was manifested into two more specific terms, that is, *tawhīd* and *taṣdīq*, which are opposed to two specified terms of disbelief *(kufr),* namely *shirk* and *takdhīb*. Furthermore, Muqātil relates almost everything to this theme.

The strong emphasis that Muqātil put on the significance of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* as the defining traits of Islam, not only as the name of the religion that Muhammad propagated but also of the primordial religion which all prophets, before Muhammad, had also advocated, suggests that the two serve not only as the nonnegotiable fundamentals for the true religion, but also as a distinguishing tool from the false religion(s). Consequently, *shirk* and *takdhīb* constitute the two most serious violations of the true religion. Muqātil's conception of what constitutes the thrust of the qur'anic message will eventually shape his views not only of other religious communities, such as Jews and Christians, but also of those called themselves Muslims but were lukewarm in their upholding of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*, as is the case with hypocrites.

In order to understand how Muqātil's exegetical thrust plays out in his commentary, I will discuss a number of topics to which they are closely related. This is in part to show how consistent Muqātil has been in advancing his theological center of Islam, and how everything else is often closely associated with the question of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*. There are four topic groups that I shall discuss, including Islam as the primordial religion, the Arab Disbelievers, the People of Scripture, and the hypocrites.

These four topics are closely related to one another. Hence, the following discussion of each of them may overlap in one place and another. My argument in presenting these religious communities is this: *īmān* and *kufr*, each with its two fundamental elements--*tawḥīd wa taṣdīq* and *shirk wa takdhīb*, respectively—are traits the Qur'an always mentions when it deals with different confessional communities. It is the relative adherence to *īmān* and *kufr* that subsequently defines whether a community or its individual members are Muslim, Jewish, Christian, polytheist, or, to some extent, hypocrites.

At the extreme ends of the spectrum are Muslim community and polytheist community, whose religio-communal identity is really defined and distinguished by their adherence and rejection of the principle of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*. In between, stand the Jewish, Christian, and hypocrite communities. While qur'anic criticism of the polytheist community is clear-cut, the same cannot be said about its criticism of the Jewish, Christian and hypocrite communities. Since the Jews, Christians, and hypocrites are, in one way or another, believers, the ways by which the Qur'an addresses them are selective and situational.

Primordial Religion: Islām

In his commentary on Q10: 19, Muqātil states that at the time of Ādam, human beings were one community *(ummah wāḥidah)* united under one religion *(millah wāḥidah)*. They were all believers and knew nothing about idolatry.[240] However, they have since split into different communities and differed in terms of their religious views and practices. Some people began to worship idols *(al-aṣnām wa al-awthān).* God then sent prophets to different human communities to invite them back to worshipping God and to leave idolatry (Q10: 47). Those who responded positively to this prophetic call would be rewarded with paradise, and others who rejected would be led to hellfire.[241] Indeed, people had different responses, positive and negative, to this prophetic call. Q16: 36 mentions that only people who received divine grace would worship God and uphold the principle of *tawḥīd*, while others would follow different religions.[242] This, according to Muqātil, is simply the implementation of Q16: 93, which states that God gains control over whom He would provide guidance and whom He would lead astray.[243]

The religion that had originally united human beings, but was then abandoned by some, was Islam (*millat al-islām, dīn al-islām).[244]* After God sent punishment through the flood, supposedly in Noah's time, human beings were, once again, united under this religion, Islam.[245] Since then, Islam has been the religion, as Muqātil states in his

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[240] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/232.

[241] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/240.

[242] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/468, 2/301-302.

[243] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/485.

[244] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/764.

[245] See Gerald Hawting's "The Religion of Abraham and Islam," in Martin Goodman, *et al*., eds., *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2010), 477-501.

commentary on Q21: 92 and Q23: 52, embraced by early prophets and believers saved from that punishment.[246] But it appears that human beings could not, once again, resist differences, especially in relation to their religious views and practices. Once more, God sent prophets to different communities, to call human beings back to Islam and worship of only one God. Prophets Ibrāhīm, Ismāʿīl, Ishāq, Yaʿqūb, and Lūṭ, they all came as both *mubashshirūn* (carrier of good news of paradise for those obedient) and *mundhirūn* (carrier of bad news of hellfire for the disobedient). These prophets adjudicated people's differences in terms of religion (Q2:213), inviting them to worship only one God *(tawḥīd).*[247] But the cycle of differences and disobedience came again and again, to the extent that God states in many places in the Qurʾān, that had He willed He would have made human beings one community united under one religion. It appears, however, that God, after some attempts to unite human beings under one religion by sending them prophets, finally allows such differences and even disobediences not only to provide human beings with choices and responsibility that comes with that freedom to choose, but also as a test to see how well human beings pay heed to divine commands.

Despite this space for a tolerated, but condemned, disobedience, God's decision to acknowledge Islam as the only true religion is unshakeable. The Qurʾān invites people to this primordial religion, Islam.[248] In his commentary on Q23: 52, *Wa innā hādhihī ummatukum ummatan wahidatan wa ana rabbukum fa'budūnī,* "This community of yours is one– and I am your Lord: be mindful of Me," Muqātil glosses, *yaqūlu hādhihī*

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[246] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/92, 158.
[247] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/181-182.
[248] See Afsaruddin, *First Muslims*, xii.

millatukum allatī antum ʿalayhā yaʿnī millat al-islām millatan wahidatan ʿalayhā kanat

al-anbiyāʾ—ʿalayhim al-salām—wa al-muʾminūn alladhīna najaw min al-ʿadhāb',

"[God] says this is your religion that you have held, that is, the religion of Islam, the

same religion that the prophets—peace be upon them—and the believers who were saved

from punishment, have held."[249] Muhammad's mission with this religion is universal, at

least according to Muqātil's understanding of otherwise very limited Q26: 214, "Warn

your nearest kinsfolk." On his commentary on this verse, Muqātil says, "When this verse

is sent down, the Prophet said, "I am sent to human beings in general, and especially to

you, O Banū Hāshim and Banū al-Muttalib."[250]

Indeed, people had left this primordial religion and split into different groups:

Jews, Christians, *Ṣābiʾīn,*[251] *Majūs,*[252] and many more groups *(yaʿnī firaqan fa ṣārū*

ahzāban yahūdan wa naṣārā wa ṣābiʾīn wa majūsan wa aṣnāfan shattā kathīrah).[253]

Instead of worshiping God alone *(faʿbudūnī bi al-ikhlāṣ),*[254] these religious *aḥzāb*[255]

worshiped creations, such as angels, the sun, the moon, fire, and other idols.[256] Even

worse, each of these groups was rejoiced with themselves, *kullu ḥizbin bimā ladayhim*

fariḥūn,[257] *yaqūlu kullu ahlin bimā ʿindahum min al-dīn rāḍūna ʿanhu,* "[God] says every

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[249] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/158.

[250] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/281, 764.

[251] *Ṣābiʾīn,* according to Muqātil, is a group of people who worshiped angels, prayed toward qiblah, and read Zābūr. *Tafsīr,* 3/119.

[252] *Majūs* is a group of people worshipping the sun, the moon, and fire. Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/119.

[253] *Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān,* 3/159. This is Muqātil's commentary on Q23: 53, "but they have split their community into sects, each rejoicing in their own."

[254] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/159.

[255] The term *aḥzāb* reminds us of how the Qurʾan pejoratively calls those involved in conspiracy against Muhammad, and it is used to name one of the Qurʾanic chapters, *al-Aḥzāb.*

[256] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/119.

[257] Q23: 53.

people rejoiced with what they have in terms of religion."[258]

Muqātil has a very strong opinion about these religious *aḥzāb*. This is reflected in his commentary on Q22: 17.[259] In it, Muqātil says that of the six religions that exist, namely Judaism, Sabian, Christian, Magian, polytheism, and Islam, only the last [Islam] is for God, while the other five are for Satan.[260] The strength of Muqātil's opinion of these religions other than Islam is primarily due to the fact that in his view, they are not more than deviation from the true path that all prophets have preached, and the one that Muhammad was now preaching to bring back these religious *aḥzāb* to its fold.

The fundamental message of Islam is *īmān* (belief), whose two central elements are *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*. In general, *īmān* stands in opposition to *kufr* that also has two central elements, namely *shirk* and *takdhīb*. Thus, a belief in both *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* is a thread of prophetic mission that Muqātil strongly emphasizes, in opposition to *shirk* and *takdhīb*. In this respect, it is not surprising to find out that the word *tawḥīd* and its various derivatives, and its opposite, *shirk*, with its various derivatives, are arguably the most recurrent words used by Muqātil in his commentary, followed closely by the term *taṣdīq* and its derivatives, as well as *kufr* and *takdhīb*. In this regard, Muqātil interprets a number of other terms as suggesting *tawḥīd:* such as *īmān* and its derivative,[261] *'ibādah* and its

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[258] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3 /159.
[259] Q22: 17: 'As for the believers, those who follow the Jewish faith, the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, and the idolaters, God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection; God witnesses all things.'
[260] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/119.
[261] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/92.

derivative,[262] al-ḥaqq,[263] ḥunafā' and its derivative,[264] al-maʿrūf,[265] ḥasanah,[266] etc.

Likewise, Muqātil understands several words as pointing to *shirk,* such as *ẓulm* and its

derivative,[267] al-munkar,[268] al-zūr,[269] al-ḍāl,[270] al-sayyi'ah,[271] al-isrāf,[272] jarīmah,[273] etc.

Apart from the terms that he has constantly understood as connoting either *tawḥīd* or

shirk, very often Muqātil relates almost anything to either, hence the highly frequent

appearance of the terms *tawḥīd* and *shirk* throughout the commentary.

    If there is only a little mention of the *Sabians* and *Magians* in the Qur'an, most of

qur'anic discourse is centered around the other four religions mentioned earlier: Judaism,

Christianity, Paganism, and, certainly, Islam. Except Islam, the other three religious

aḥzāb can be categorized into two: *ahl al-kitāb* (the People of Scripture), that is, the Jews

and Christians, and *mushrikū Makkah* or *al-ʿArab* (Meccan or Arab polytheists). The

qur'anic criticism of these two groups of people are always related to their worshiping

idols other than, and together with, God, as well as their rejection of Muhammad's

prophethood. This, for instance, is illustrated in Q17: 111.[274] In his commentary on the

verse, Muqātil sets out a context of revelation in which the Jews said, "Uzayr is son of

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[262] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/97.
[263] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/161.
[264] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/126.
[265] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/130.
[266] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/358.
[267] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/155.
[268] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/130.
[269] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/123, 242.
[270] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/270.
[271] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/318, 372.
[272] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/415, 576.
[273] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/ 418.
[274] "And say, 'Praise belongs to God, who has no child nor partner in His rule. He is not so weak as to need a protector. Proclaim His limitless greatness!"

God"; the Christians said, "The Messiah is son of God";[275] and the Arabs said that God

has associates, namely the angels.[276] Likewise, Muqātil provided a commentary on Q25:

2-5, in relation to the supposedly polytheistic activities of the Jews, Christians, and

Arabs, and also their rejection of Muhammad and the Qur'an that he received. In his

commentary on Q25: 4-6,[277] Muqātil set out a context of revelation in which al-Naḍr ibn

al-Ḥārith from Banū ʿAbd al-Dār said that the Qur'an was nothing but a lie forged by

Muhammad *(mā hādhā al-Qur'an illā kadhib ikhtalaqahū Muḥammad—ṣalla Allāhu*

ʿalayhi wa sallam—min tilqā'i nafsihi). In doing so, al-Naḍr argued, Muhammad was

aided by three people of *ahl al-kitāb* who then converted to Islam, namely ʿAddās the

client of Huwayṭib ibn ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā, Yasar *ghulām* of al-ʿĀmir ibn al-Ḥaḍramī, and

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[275] "In the Synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke) Jesus never speaks of himself as Son of God, and rarely, if ever, as Son. Cullmann speaks of Jesus' 'reserve' in using this title, and points out that his primary designation for himself was not 'Son of God' but ' Son of Man'. 'Son of God' was said about Jesus by others, demoniacs, disciples, the high priest and the crowds at the cross. But Jesus himself clearly wished to avoid the misunderstandings that might be attached to this title, ideas that expressed wrong notions of the Messiah." "The Gospel according to John uses the title Son of God most frequently, but also the 'only begotten Son', and especially 'the Son'. Paul also writes often of' the Son of God', 'the Son', and 'his Son'. This usage by these two great theologians, John and Paul, shows Christianity moving out into the Greek world. On the other hand it is remarkable that 'Son' and 'Son of God' are not used at all in the Pastoral Epistles (Timothy and Titus) or in Peter and Jude, once in Revelation, and only twice in Acts." See Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 128-130.

[276] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/556. Parrinder argued that "The Qur'an also, here and in other verses, denounces the current pagan ideas of Mecca and Arabia of families of gods. Pagan deities were male and female and had children. We saw in the last chapter that it is probably here that lies the Muslim reluctance to use the term 'Son of God', because it might seem to imply physical procreation by God. This is in the Arabian context. But among the Jews, who were monotheists of long standing and had rooted out all fertility notions from their highly purified religion, the New Testament did not hesitate to speak of the Son of God, meaning the Messiah. Similarly, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity rigidly excludes all suggestions of physical generation, and any idea of polytheism or tritheism. God is one God, as Paul said, 'A false god has no existence in the real world. There is no God but one. ' (I Cor. 8,4)…It is in the light of the above that other Quranic references to 'three' gods may be understood." See *Jesus,* 136.

[277] "(4) The disbelievers say, 'This can only be a lie he has forged with the help of others'—they themselves have done great wrong and told lies—(5) and they say, 'It is just ancient fables, which he has had written down: they are dictated to him morning and evening.' (6) Say, 'It was sent down by Him who knows the secrets of the heavens and earth. He is all forgiving, all merciful.'"

Jabr[278] the client of ʿĀmir ibn al-Ḥaḍramī.[279]

Based on the Muqātil's explanation above, it becomes clearer now that the fundamental message of Islam in the Qur'an, and one that has become a center of polemics is *īmān*.[280] The target of qur'anic criticism, in this respect, are specifically three religious *aḥzāb* (Jewish, Christian, and Arab Pagan), for their performance of *kufr*, specifically in relation to their violation of both *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* and in their committing *shirk* and *takdhīb*.

Islām, dīn, and millah in the Qur'ān and Muqātil's commentary

In order to better understand how Islam is depicted in the Qur'ān and Muqātil's commentary, I would like to briefly discus how the term *islām* and other related terms, such as *dīn* and *millah* are used in both sources, and how these three terms related to each other.

The word *islām* appears five times in four different qur'anic chapters of the Medinan period.[281] Of these five, four are rendered as *al-islām*, and one as *islāmakum*. The word *islām* is one of the most used terms in Muqātil's commentary.[282] Verbal derivatives of *s-l-m*, such as *aslama, aslamū, aslamnā, yuslimu, yuslimūn, tuslimū*, occur

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[278] According to Muqātil, Jabr *mawlā* of ʿAmir ibn al-Ḥaḍrami was threatened by the Meccan leaders, including ʿUqbah ibn Abī Muʿayṭ, to stop teaching Muhammad, otherwise they would purchase him from his master and butcher him. Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/819.

[279] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/226.

[280] Jonathan P. Berkey notes that "[o]ne of the characteristic features of the religious literature of late antiquity is its highly polemical nature. Polemics helped the traditions to define themselves, but also betrayed the underlying uncertainties and competition which fueled them in the first place." See his *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19.

[281] They are: Q3:19 and 85, Q49:17, Q61:7, and Q5:3, based on the chronological order of revelation.

[282] It appears in Muqātil's commentary for about 301 times, encompassing a number of other terms, which Muqātil interpret as *islām*.

in twelve chapters, in both Meccan and Medinan period. Nominal derivatives of *s-l-m,* such as *muslim, muslimah, muslimūn, muslimīn, silm,* appear in twenty four chapters, in both Meccan and Medinan period.[283]

Most of nominal derivatives of *s-l-m* are in the form of *muslimū/īn,* which Muqātil glosses as *mukhliṣūn,*[284] *muhkhliṣūn li Allāh,*[285] *mukhliṣūn bi al-tawḥīd,*[286] *mukhliṣūn li Allāh 'Azza wa Jalla bi al-tawḥīd,*[287] *muwaḥḥidūn,*[288] *muqirrūn bi al-tawḥīd,*[289] *mukhliṣūn fī al-dunyā bi al-tawḥīd,*[290] *muhkliṣūn bi tawḥīd Allāh 'Azza wa Jalla.*[291] Thus, as far as the nominal derivatives of *s-l-m* used in the Qur'an are concerned, they always point to a complete and sincere devotion to God (the meaning of the root *kh-l-ṣ*) by acknowledging and upholding *tawḥīd.*

Verbal derivatives of *s-l-m* in the Qur'an are *aslama, yuslimu, uslimu, tuslimūn, aslim,* and *aslamnā.* Similar to the nominal derivatives of *s-l-m,* these derivatives are interpreted by Muqātil to be a complete and sincere devotion to God *(ikhlāṣ),* glossing *aslama* as *akhlaṣa li Allāh,*[292] *akhlaṣa,*[293] *akhlaṣa li rabb al-'ālamīn.*[294] Likewise,

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[283] Chapters of the Meccan period (17 chapters) are Q68:35, Q7:126, Q72:14, Q27:31, 38, 42, 91; Q28:53, Q10:72, 84, 90; Q11:14; Q15:2, Q6:163, Q39:12, Q41:33, Q43:69, Q46:15, Q51:36, Q21:108, Q30:53, Q29:46; and chapters of the Medinan period (7 chapters) are Q2:71, 128, 132, 133, 136, 208; Q3:52, 64, 80, 84, 102; Q33:35, Q94:92, Q22:78, Q66:5, and Q5:111.
[284] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/461-464, 131; 3/743, 97.
[285] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/55.
[286] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/306, 308, 319, 385, 420, 802; 2/275; 4/20.
[287] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/349.
[288] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/244.
[289] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/246.
[290] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/424.
[291] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/672.
[292] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/131; 4/464.
[293] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/552, 267.
[294] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/140.

Muqātil glosses *yuslimu* as *yukhliṣu*.[295] Similarly, Muqātil interprets *uslimu* as *ukhliṣu al-tawḥīd li rabb al-ʿālamīn*.[296] Muqātil understands the word *tuslimūna* as *tukhlisūna ilayhi bi al-tawḥīd*.[297] Similarly, Muqātil interprets *aslim* as *akhliṣ*.[298] But when it comes to *aslamnā* ("We surrender"), unlike previous verbal derivatives of *s-l-m* that possess a positive meaning as a complete devotion to God by upholding *tawḥīḍ*, Muqātil ascribes to it a negative meaning, that is, *aqrarnā bi al-lisān*, which suggests that the proclamation of *islām* in this respect is merely a "lip service." This negative meaning is given to the profession of *islām* by the *Aʿrāb* (Bedouins)—of Juhaynah, Mazīnah, Aslam, Ghifār, and Ashjaʿ who lived in between Mecca and Medina—who pretended to be believers when the Muslim army passed by their places in order to secure their lives and property.[299] In the verse where the phrase *aslamnā* takes place, the bedouins' profession of *islām* is opposed to *īmān*, the second being the true expression of belief, not merely a lip service, as the former would indicate. It seems here that the Qur'an, and Muqātil as well, insinuates that the understanding of the term *islām* by these Bedouins is a merely socio-political submission or surrender to Muhammad, not a religious surrender as it demands: a complete and sincere devotion to God by upholding His *tawḥīd*.

A similar phenomenon occurs in Q49: 17, in which the word *islāmakum*, which Muqātil relates to a group of Bedouin *(Aʿrāb)* of Banū Asad ibn Khuzaymah, is interpreted as more or less a nominal submission for political, rather than religious,

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[295] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/437.
[296] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/719.
[297] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/481.
[298] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/140.
[299] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/98.

reasons. Muqātil explains that these Bedouins came to the Prophet and professed their *islām* peacefully, and they thought by doing so they had done favor to the Prophet. Unlike many Arab tribes that professed their submission only after they were defeated in war, the Bedouins of Banū Asad ibn Khuzaymah claimed that their peaceful submission to the Prophet had made things easier for him. In response, the Prophet told them, 'Do not consider your submission a favor to me; it is God who has done you a favor, by guiding you to faith, if you are truly sincere.'[300] Therefore, the phrase *aslamū* in the verse is understood with a grain of salt as a submission unaccompanied by a sense of *ikhlāṣ* (complete and sincere devotion to God), as seen in the majority of Muqātil's commentary on the root *s-l-m*. Moreover, while the Prophet seems to accept such lukewarm profession of *islām* by the bedouins, Muqātil appears to be so cynical about it.

Thus, with the exception of the case of the Bedouins of the Banū Asad ibn Khuzaymah, the meaning of the verbal derivatives of *s-l-m* here is congruent with the majority of how the terms have been understood and interpreted by Muqātil, a complete and sincere devotion to God. Likewise, the meanings of both nominal and verbal derivatives of *s-l-m* point to a sincere devotion to God *(ikhlāṣ)* by acknowledging and upholding *tawḥīd*. A surprising development of the meaning of the root *s-l-m* occurred in Medinan context, in which a political nuance appeared, one that was completely absent during the Meccan period. If during the Meccan period, the root *s-l-m* meant a sincere devotion to God by upholding *tawḥīd,* the core meaning that the Qur'an intends as far as Islam is concerned, in the Medinan period, the meaning of the term was no longer

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[300] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/99-100.

confined to the spiritual realm as sincere submission and devotion to God, but suggests also a sense of nominal submission, a political submission. In that sense, such submission is merely a lip service.

There are two other terms Muqātil often relates to *islām,* namely *dīn* and *millah.* The word *dīn*, appears in seven chapters, two of which are of the Meccan period, and the rest of which are of the Medinan period.[301] Muqātil interprets *dīn* that takes place in two Meccan verses as *alladhī antum ʿalayhi* or *alladhī anā ʿalayhi,*[302] and *ḥukm.*[303] As seen, there is no elaborate understanding of the term. Instead, the definition remains very general, pointing to general system or law that a community follows. During the Medinan period, Muqātil understands *dīn al-qayyimah* as *al-millat al-mustaqīmah,*[304] *fī dīn Allāh* as *fī amr Allāh,*[305] *dīn al-haqq* as *al-islām.*[306] Thus, it is during the Medinan period that the term *dīn* received a more religious meaning according the qur'anic perspective and finally pointed to Islam.

Meanwhile, the word *millah* occurs eight times in seven chapters, in both the Meccan period[307] and the Medinan period.[308] When the term *millah* stands alone, Muqātil interprets it as a generic term that points to either "wrong religion" or "correct religion. The "wrong religions" refers to the sorcerers and magicians of Egypt who neither upheld *tawḥīd* nor believed in the Resurrection Day; while the "correct religion" is the religion

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[301] They are Q109: 6, Q12: 76 (Meccan), and Q3: 3, Q98: 5, Q24: 2, Q9: 29, Q110: 2 (Medinan).
[302] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/888.
[303] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/346.
[304] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/780.
[305] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/182.
[306] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/167.
[307] Namely Q12: 37, 38; Q6: 161, Q16: 123.
[308] Namely Q2: 130, 135; Q3: 95, Q4: 125, Q22: 78.

of prophets such as Ibrāhīm, Isḥāq and Yaʿqūb in which *shirk* is forbidden. Muqātil calls such a correct religion Islam. [309] When rendered as *millat Ibrāhīm*, that takes place in both Meccan and, mostly, Medinan chapters, Muqātil interprets it as Islam as well. Muqātil glosses *millat Ibrāhīm* in Q2: 130 as *al-Islām*.[310] Likewise, Muqātil interprets *millat* Ibrāhīm in Q2: 135 as *al-Islām*.[311] In Q3: 95, Muqātil does not provide any comment on *millat Ibrāhīm* here.[312] In Q4: 125, although Muqātil does not specifically address the term *millah,* it can be understood that the term points to Islam as a religion that God had chosen from among several religions.[313] In the Qur'an, things that characterized Islam, such as being *ḥanīfan, mukhliṣan*, also characterize *millat Ibrāhīm*. In Q22: 78, the term *millat* is again attached to Ibrāhīm, and it points to Islam.[314] During the Meccan period, the term *millat* is always attached to Ibrāhīm, and it always points to Islam, the chosen religion, due to its upholding of *tawḥīd* and opposition to *shirk*. Thus, based on previous explanation, it can now be said that the terms *islām* and its derivatives, as well as *dīn* and *millah* converge in the idea of *ikhlāṣ bi al-tawḥīd,* a sincere devotion to God by upholding His oneness *(tawḥīd)*, in opposition to *shirk*.

In what follows I will discuss in more detail the intensity of qur'anic criticism, as Muqātil has understood it, toward each of three religious groups: the Arab polytheists, Jews, and Christians. In addition, there is yet another socio-religious community that receives some important notices in the Qur'an and is therefore worth a separate

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[309] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/334.
[310] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/140.
[311] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/141.
[312] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/291.
[313] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/410.
[314] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/140.

discussion, namely the *munāfiqūn* (hypocrites)—those who converted to Islam but not wholeheartedly. Their double-faced attitude toward Muhammad and Islam had caused troubles for Muslims that the Qur'an did not leave them free from its harsh criticism, similar to the other three religious communities.

The Meccan Polytheists (mushrikūn)

The term *mushrikūn* appears in thirty-four verses,[315] in one of which it is accompanied by the single female form *mushrikah*, single male form *mushrik,* and plural female form *mushrikāt.* In Muqātil's exegetical framework, the majority of the term *mushrikūn* points to the Arab idolaters in general and polytheists of Mecca in particular. But there are places where Muqātil relates the term *mushrikūn* to Jews and Christians who contested the status of Ibrāhīm.[316] The term *mushrikūn* that Muqātil understands as

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[315] 16 verses of the Meccan period, namely: Q28:87, Q10:105; Q12:106, 108; Q15:94; Q6:14, 23, 79, 106, 121, 137, 161; Q16:100, 120, 123; Q30:31, 18 verses of the Medinan period, namely: Q2:105, 135, 221; Q3:67, 95; Q22:31; Q61:9, Q9:1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 17, 28, 33, 36, 113.

[316] In his book, *The Idea of Idolatry,* Hawting questioned the Muslim tradition that asserts that Islam "arose in arguments with real polytheists and idolaters." Instead, Hawting suggested "that it was concerned rather with other monotheists whose monotheism it saw as inadequate and attacked polemically as the equivalent of idolatry" (xi). As such, the Qur'anic charge of polytheism is polemical. "It does not mean what it says. It is nonliteral. But the Muslim scholars misread the Qur'anic polemic by understanding it in a literal sense" (p. 150). Or, "If not because of misleading, the early Muslims creatively worked out to explain the milieu of revelation in order to create their own salvation history by creating this myth of idolatry" (pp. 150-51). As Hawting often emphasized, his criticism of the origins of Islam was targeted not to the Qur'an, but the Muslim traditional literature—such as "the commentaries on the Koran, the traditional lives of the Prophet, the collections of material describing conditions in the *jāhiliyya* and providing information about the idolatrous pre-Islamic Arab religion, and other such works" which "constantly made clear that the koranic *mushrikūn* were Arab polytheists and worshippers of idols in the Hijāz at the time of Muhammad" (45). However, Hawting also acknowledged that "it is not impossible that such an emphasis could result from an initial struggle with a real idolatry" (xiii), "but it does seem remarkable and is a reason for suggesting that the traditional account might be questioned" (7). As a result of his study, Hawting suggested that if the traditional narrative of Islam's origins "found not to be persuasive, then we might conclude either that the *jāhilī* Arabs were in fact monotheists whom the Koran was attacking polemically, or – and this is the alternative favoured here – that we need to rethink more drastically our ideas about when and where Islam emerged" (67). My general response to Hawting is that while he was correct to situate Islam's emergence in its polemic with other monotheists, he could be wrong in discounting altogether the possibility of the presence of polytheism in Hijāz at the time and in his sweeping conclusion of the traditional Muslim

literature. Berkey argues that "…the story of the struggle and decline of paganism is incomplete… the actual death of paganism was a protracted affair– and again, one which was by no means complete at the rise of Islam. Signs of the survival of pagan traditions abound throughout the Near East." See *Formation,* 34. Furthermore, in relation to the Qur'an's depiction of Islam's origins, which Hawting himself acknowledged, "[t]he tendency to associate *shirk* with idolatry and polytheism is evident in the Koran itself (68). Therefore, I argue, first, the charge of polytheism in the Qur'an targets both polytheists and the People of the Book. The Qur'an implies that some of its audience practiced some sort of henotheistic religion which syncretically worshiped a supreme God—they called *Allāh—*and lesser gods, such as al-Lāt, Manāt, ʿUzzā, and so forth. In their book, *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Stephen Mitchell and Peter Van Nuffelen argued, "[t]he affirmation of the powers of one god in the superlative, not the exclusive sense, was not a statement of strict monotheism, but acknowledged, while it also devalued, those of other divinities… The readiness to fuse these divine figures by a process of syncretism did not generally lead to monotheism. There was much religious competition, but the promoters of successful cults had no interest in annihilating or denying the existence of other gods; it served their interests much better to prove the superiority of their own" (10-11). Mitchell and Van Nuffelen maintained that the monotheism historically calls for "a fundamental moral revolution within religious thought" (10). "These include the replacement of an indefinite mass of written and unwritten traditions by a fixed body of religious texts; the prevalence of exclusive belief in one God rather than the inclusive acceptance of the existence of many gods; the capacity of monotheism to be used as an instrument for social and political control at a supra-national level; and the emergence of religious identities as a key element in social organization" (4). Such a "revolution" or massive transformation in the Arab society of seventh century Hijāz arguably happened only after Muhammad came with his prophetic mission. In this respect, the question I am asking (to Hawting) is the same as was asked by Mitchell and Van Nuffelen, "Is the term monotheism, or any of the other modern coinages that have been used to denote belief in one god, or at least belief in a supreme god, adequate to describe not only the narrow phenomenon, but also the sum of the changes that it brought about?" (4-5). To see further the revolution that Muhammad's preaching of Islamic monotheism brought about, not only in terms of theological matters—such as faith and rituals, but also communal identity-making, political and military achievements, see, for instance, Richard A. Gabriel, *Muhammad: Islam's First Great General* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 2007)*,* and Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*. Second, although the majority of traditional Muslim literature does not account for the origins of Islam as the result of influence of older monotheist religions, i.e. Judaism and Christianity, that is expected due to the fact that its Muslim authors believed in that Islam was the product of divine revelation, yet the same tradition also describes the presence of other Jewish and Christian monotheists in Hijāz and its vicinity, which opens the possibility of interaction and therefore influence, albeit it is reluctantly admitted. While modern scholarship has not found any archaeological evidence, the settlements of the Jews in Medina and its vicinity were mentioned in the traditional Muslim literature; the Jewish population is Yemen was also mentioned; and so was the presence of Christians in both Mecca and Medina. Using traditional Muslim literature, Ghada Osman, for instance, wrote "Pre-Islamic Arab Converts to Christianity in Mecca and Medina: An Investigation into the Arabic Sources" in *The Muslim World* (Vol. 95, January 2005), which describes how the people of Hijāz interacted with the Christians from adjacent cities in the Near East, and finally converted to Christianity. Hawting might be true to emphasize that Hijāz, at the time of Muhammad, was not as isolated as the traditional Muslim tradition would have it. But Hawting's large reference to a book such as Hishām ibn al-Kalbī's (d. 206/821) *Kitāb al-Aṣnām*, which describes intensively the prevalence of idolatry in Hijāz, has probably led him to his conclusion that the Muslim tradition asserts the emergence of Islam in the polytheistic and idolatrous environment, a portrayal he readily dismissed. As Hawting himself acknowledged, "Ibn al-Kalbī's book on the idols of the Arabs has been of central importance for discussions of pre-Islamic Arab religion. It was extensively cited in the *Muʿjam al-buldān* of Yāqūt (d. 626/1229) and, lacking access to any manuscript of Ibn al-Kalbī's work, Wellhausen used those citations as a main source in his *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (first edition 1887). Wellhausen's *Reste*, although it was not the first western investigation of pre-Islamic Arab religion, is undoubtedly the most important and influential and is still widely regarded as authoritative in that field…

pointing to the Jews and Christians takes place in three verses of the Meccan period, namely Q6: 161;[317] Q16: 120[318] and 123,[319] and three verses of the Medinan period, namely Q2: 135[320] and Q3: 67[321] and 95.[322] Thus, the use of the term *mushrikūn* in the Qur'an, as long as Muqātil's commentary is concerned, points to two major meanings: the pure polytheists or idolaters, and the Jews and Christians. As such, the Qur'an sees all Muhammad's opponents as idolaters or polytheists in one way or another, and it establishes Islam as the only rigorous upholder of monotheism.

Muqātil interprets the term *mushrikūn* as both Jews and Christians in verses where both religious communities are making an exclusive truth claim for their own religion and each justified itself by referring to Ibrāhīm as the prototype of their own.[323] But the Qur'an rejects categorically their claims, and it argues instead that Ibrāhīm whose

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Since the *Kitāb al-Aṣnām* is so central to the subject, much of the discussion here about the nature of Muslim tradition in general will refer to it: conclusions about Ibn al-Kalbī's work will affect our attitude to the tradition as a whole" (89). But Much of Hawting's general view of traditional Muslim literature was not necessarily true, if Muqātil's commentary is considered, especially how Muqātil understands the use of the term *mushrikūn* in the Qur'an.

[317] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/600.
[318] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/492.
[319] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/493.
[320] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/141.
[321] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/283.
[322] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/291.
[323] These are how the Qur'an presents such polemics between the Jews and Christians, and how it builds the real position of Ibrāhim:
Q2: 135, "They say, 'Become Jews or Christians, and you will be rightly guided.' Say [Prophet], 'No, [ours is] the religion of Abraham, the upright, who did not worship any god besides God.'"
Q3: 67, "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was upright and devoted to God, never an idolater."
Q3: 95, "[Prophet], say, 'God speaks the truth, so follow Abraham's religion: he had true faith and he was never an idolater.'"
Q6: 161 Say, 'My Lord has guided me to a straight path, an upright religion, the faith of Abraham, a man of pure faith. He was not a polytheist.'
Q16: 120, "Abraham was truly an example: devoutly obedient to God and true in faith. He was not an idolater."
Q16: 123, "Then We revealed to you [Muhammad], 'Follow the creed of Abraham, a man of pure faith who was not an idolater.'"

religion it considers the true religion was neither a Jew nor a Christian.[324] Ibrāhim's religion is Islām, the same religion that the Qur'an and Muhammad are now propagating.

Meanwhile, the term *mushrikūn* used in the remaining twenty-eight verses and which Muqātil understands as pointing to general idolaters or polytheists usually refers to Arab or Meccan polytheists, with probably one exception. That is, when Muqātil understands the term *mushrikūn* in Q30: 31[325] as pointing to *ahl al-adyān* (the people of religions) who split their primordial religion (Islām) into sects *(shiya'an),* that is, religious groups *(aḥzāban fi al-dīn),* namely Jews, Christians, Magians, and others.

In relation to the *mushrikūn* and the reasons—religious and political—as to why they rejected Muhammad's prophetic mission, Muqātil offers the following. First, Muqātil shows that, contrary to widely accepted view, Hijāz at the time of Muhammad was not as isolated in terms of interaction between monotheists—here Jews and Christians—and polytheists. Second, rejection of Muhammad's mission was primarily because Muhammad's strict preaching of *tawḥīd* was unsuited to the environment of the Hijāz, which was polytheistic and tolerant of multiple divinities.[326] Third, the rejection of

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[324] Much of the early Christian polemics against Jews indicate the contestation between these two communities concerning who were the true heirs of Abrahamic tradition. By the latter part of the first century C.E., as James Raymond Lord points out, "The Abrahamic tradition then became something of a focus of Jewish-Christian polemic." James Raymond Lord, *Abraham: A Study in Ancient Jewish and Christian Interpretation,* (PhD Diss., Duke University, 1968), 288. Jeffrey S. Siker in his detailed study of the uses of Abraham in early Christian controversies suggests that "the use of Abraham in early Christian controversy with Judaism moved away from appealing to Abraham as the father of Jew and Gentile alike and moved increasingly toward the portrayal of a Christian Abraham who has abandoned and disinherited his children, the Jews." Jeffrey S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 27.

[325] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/414.

[326] Gibb notes that "[t]he resistance of the Meccans appears to have been due not so much to their conservatism or even to religious disbelief (though they ridiculed Mohammed's doctrine of resurrection) as to political and economic causes. They were afraid of the effects that his preaching might have on their economic prosperity, and especially that his pure monotheism might injure the economic assets of their

Muhammad's mission was due partly to the eschatological teaching that Muhammad brought, which stood in contrast to the pragmatic approach of the polytheistic culture that saw life as being here and now, and which was also flexible in adopting divinities that best supported their pragmatic vision of life. Fourth, the rejection was due to the impact of hierarchically social classes on people's socio-political and religious perspectives; on the one hand, the Meccan aristocracy saw that Muhammad would not be a chosen prophet favorable to their interests, and on the other, some of the poor and weak feared the consequences of believing in Muhammad that the aristocracy would impose on them. Fifth was probably the influence of monotheistic tradition; Muhammad's inability to fulfill the Meccans' request for miracles held them back from believing in him.

When Muhammad first proclaimed his prophethood and began to preach Islam to the Meccan audience, people were curious of his motivation. In his commentary on Q40: 66,[327] Muqātil sets out a context of revelation in which the Meccan disbelievers of Quraish asked Muhammad, "What brings you to what you have brought to us? Don't you look at the religion of your father 'Abd Allāh, and of your grandfather 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, and at the leaders of your people who worshiped al-Lāt, al-'Uzzā, and Manāt,[328] that you bring what you bring? Nothing will make you do that except that you want something.

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sanctuaries." See his *Mohammedanism,* 26, 28. F. E. Peters seems to offers a similar view that the Meccans feared for their "business of polytheism" whose annual income through pilgrimage was threatened by Muhammad's mission. However, Peters soon qualified his statement that "it is too simple to dismiss the degree of personal devotion to the deities of polytheism" and "that it was the loss of their gods that disturbed the Quraysh." See his *The Monotheists: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conflict and Competition* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 91, 94.

[327] "Say [Prophet], 'Since clear evidence has come to me from my Lord I am forbidden to serve those you call upon besides God: I am commanded to submit to the Lord of the Worlds.'"

[328] Muqātil mentions a number of idols worship by different social and tribal groups of the Arab, such as al-Lāt worshipped by people of Ṭā'if; al-'Uzzā by the Meccans; Manāt, Hubāl, Usāf, and Nā'ilah by Qurayshī clans; etc. see Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/233.

We will collect our wealth for you." Accordingly, the Meccan disbelievers asked Muhammad to leave his worship of God, following which this verse is revealed, 'Say, O Muhammad, "I am forbidden from worshiping what you worship other than God".'[329]

Muhammad's preaching of worshiping only one god was quite strange from the Meccan view. [330] The Qur'an best expresses their view in Q38: 5, "How can he [Muhammad] claim that all the gods are but one God? What an astonishing thing [to claim]!" The Meccans maintained that they did not hear such a view even from the last monotheist religion, that is, Christianity, according to whose view Allāh has an associate in ʿĪsā ibn Maryam.[331] One incident is mentioned by Muqātil in his commentary on Q38: 5-6.[332] This was following the conversion of ʿUmar ibn Khaṭṭāb to Islam that had strengthened the negotiation power of the believers, and had a significant impact on the relationship between them and disbelievers. Some twenty seven people of Meccan leadership—including al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, Abū Jahl ibn Hishām, Umayyah and Ubay sons of Khalaf, etc.—went to meet with Abū Ṭālib, Muhammad's uncle, asking him to adjudicate between them and Muhammad. Abū Ṭālib sent someone asking Muhammad to come to the assembly. Abū Ṭālib said [to Muhammad], "These are your people requiring justice *(sawā')* from you, so please don't be inclined to your own

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[329] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/719. In fact, similar commentary is given on Q 39: 11; see Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/672.
[330] Mitchell and Van Nuffelen maintained that "[i]n a polytheistic environment the divine world is generally seen as a source of support and legitimation for society at large, rather than as an independent source of absolute moral authority. In polytheism, if one god did not serve a society's purpose, another could be called upon to do so. The will of the gods for mankind, therefore, was not absolute but relative, and was adaptable to the needs and circumstances of a particular society. This was true even within the henotheistic but not exclusive religious systems." See *One God,* 8.
[331] *Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān,* 3/636-7. Q38: 5 describes well the polytheistic or henotheistic nature of the religion of the Arabs that while worshiping the supreme God, Allāh, they also worshiped lesser gods.
[332] Q38: 6, "Their leaders depart, saying, 'Walk away! Stay faithful to your gods! That is what you must do."

followers." The Prophet said, "What did they ask from me?" The Meccans replied, "Stop

mentioning our gods, and we'll leave you and your God alone!" The Prophet said, "Give

me one word that will unite both Arabs and non-Arabs!"[333] Abū Jahl responded, "By God

and your father, I will give you that one word and even ten more." "Say: '*Lā ilāha illā*

Allāh," Muhammad told them. The Meccan leaders refused that, stood up and said

something whence Q38: 5, *ajaʿala al-ālihāt ilāhan wāḥidan, inna hādhā lashay'un ʿujab,*

"How can he [Muhammad] claim that all the gods are but one God? What an astonishing

thing [to claim]!'[334]

The fact that the Meccan leaders cited Christian views *(millat al-naṣārā)* with

regard to their understanding of god suggests that, in Muqātl's view, Christianity was

relatively known to the Meccan pagans at the time of Muhammad, either through trading

travels they conducted regularly, or the presence of the Christians in Mecca in particular

or Hijāz in general.[335] This demonstrates that, unlike Hawting's thesis, traditional

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[333] In this case, the Prophet asked the group of the Meccan leaders to say one word, that is, *lā ilāha illā Allāh,* by which they would control not only the Arabs, but also non-Arabs. Before they knew that the one word Muhammad asked them to say was *lā ilāha illā Allāh,* the Meccan leaders said to Muhammad that they would not only say that one word, but added more if Muhammad liked. But once they knew that the one word Muhammad asked them to say is *lā ilāha illā Allāh,* they refused immediately. What is startling is that here the Prophet had predicted that the Muslims (those who said *lā ilāha illā Allāh)* would reign over the Arabs and non-Arabs.

[334] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/636.

[335] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/636. Ira M. Lapidus maintained that monotheistic religions "were introduced into Arabia by foreign influences: Jewish and Christian settlements, traveling preachers and merchants, and the political pressure of the Byzantine Empire and Abyssinia. By the sixth century, monotheism already had a certain vogue. Many non-believers understood the monotheistic religions; others, called *ḥanīf* in the Quran, were believers in one God but not adherents of any particular faith. Christians settled in Yemen, in small oases, and in the border regions of the north; they were a minority but were profoundly influential and, to many people, deeply appealing, both by the force of their teaching and by force of representing what was felt to be a more powerful, more sophisticated, and more profound civilization." See his *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 16. J Spencer Trimingham argued, however, that their recognition of Allāh "had nothing to do with either Judaism or Christianity, both exclusivist religions. The opposition of the Meccans to Muhammad arose only when he proclaimed the

Muslim literature, such as Muqātil's commentary, does tell possible contact and interaction between the Hijāzi people, who were polytheists and idolators, with monotheists, including Christians. And to their understanding, Christianity taught, or at least allowed, some sort of polytheism.[336]

Therefore, instead of following Muhammad's preaching to *tawḥīd,* the Meccan disbelievers accused Muhammad of committing similar *shirk,* for, at a time, he calls his God Allāh, and, at another, *al-Raḥmān.* Apparently, during that time, the term *al-raḥmān* had been attached to Musaylamah, a person who also claimed prophethood for himself in Yamāmah and had been well known as such to the Arabs. In his commentary on Q12: 60,[337] Muqātil sets out a context of revelation in which a dialogue runs between Abū Jahl and Muhammad, in relation to the Qur'an. Abū Jahl claimed, "O Muhammad, if you know a poem, we know it, too." The Prophet replied, "This is not a poem. This is *kalām al-Raḥmān* (the speech of *al-Raḥmān).*" Abū Jahl said, "Yes, right. This is the speech of *al-raḥmān* who is in Yamamah. He who teaches you!" The Prophet explained, "*al-Raḥmān* is Allāh who is in heaven and from whom Jibrīl receives commands." Abū Jahl mocked, "O the family of *Ghālib,*[338] who can help me understand Ibn Abī Kabshah[339]

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exclusiveness of the worship of Allāh." See *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London, New York, and Beirut: Longman & Librairie du Liban, 1979), 249.

[336] The fact that the presence of Christian ideas among the pre-Islamic Arabs could not entirely persuade them toward monotheism suggests "its failure to influence the Arab soul in any profound sense." Such failure was due to two factors, namely the unchallenging interpretations of the Gospel to the Arab way of life, and the exceptional power of resistance that their way of life had. The Arab social consciousness, which was largely tribal, had made them in no need for religion, for the meaning of life was derived from the community. See Trimingham, *Christianity,* 6, 258, 309.

[337] "Yet when they are told, 'Bow down before the Lord of Mercy,' they say, 'What is the Lord of Mercy? Should we bow down before anything you command?' and they turn even further away."

[338] Gālib was the maternal ancestor of the Prophet: Gālib ibn 'Āmir ibn al-Ḥārith. See footnote below.

[339] This is a nickname for the Prophet Muhammad. Some Qurashī leaders called Muhammad Ibn Abī Kabsah because some of his paternal and maternal ancestors were called the same. Wahb ibn 'Abd Manāf

[Muhammad]; He said his God is one; yet he said that 'Allāh teaches me', and '*al-Raḥmān* teaches me'? Don't you think that these are two different gods?" In response, al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, 'Utbah, and 'Uqbah said [mockingly], "We don't know, except that Allāh and *al-Raḥmān* are two different names. Allāh, we have known Him. He who has created everything we see. But *al-Raḥmān* we don't know him except [that he is] Musaylamah al-Kadhdhāb ("the Liar")." Abū Jahl then asked, "O, Ibn Abī Kabshah, you do invite [us] to worship the one in Yamamah!"[340]

With this short conversation between Muhammad and Abū Jahl, it appears that Muqātil wants to show at least three things. First, he desired to show that the revelation that Muhammad received and that he accordingly propagated to the people seemed similar to the poetic convention of the Arabs. Second, he wanted to demonstrate that while the central mission of Muhammad is *tawḥīd*, the Meccans had misunderstood it as another form of polytheism because he called his God with two different names. Finally, he wanted to explain that the prevalence of polytheism among the Meccans who could easily use polytheistic framework to understand both Christianity's teaching and

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ibn Zuhrah, Aminah's [the Prophet's mother] father was called *(yukannā)* Abū Kabshah. 'Amr ibn Zayd ibn Labīd was also called Abu Kabshah. He was 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib's grandfather, Salmā's [his mother] father. The Prophet's maternal grandfather, Wajīz ibn Ghālib ibn 'Āmir ibn al-Ḥārith ibn 'Umar ibn Buayy ibn Malakān ibn Afsayy ibn Ḥārithah, was also called Ibn Kabshah. He was worshipping the star *al-shi'rā* (Sirius). According to Muqātil (4/166), the Bedouins of Khuzāʿah, Ghassān, and Gaṭafān also worshiped this star. al-Ḥārith ibn 'Abd al-'Uzzā ibn Rifāʿah ibn Malan, the brother of Banū Saʿd ibn Bakr ibn Hawāzin, husband of Ḥalīmah bin al-Ḥārith ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Shajnah ibn Jābir ibn Nāsirah who nursed Muhammad when he was a baby, was also called Ibn Kabshah. Thus, the Prophet was nicknamed this after these people who were also known with the same nickname: Abū Kabshah. The reason for this is because they thought Muhammad, with his mission, had deviated from the religion of the Arabs religion. See Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Habib, *Kitab al-Muḥabbar* (Beirut: Dar al-Āfāq al-Jadidah, N.Y.); Al-Qurtubi also mentions this in his *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'an*, when he comments on Q53: 49, so did al-Baghawī in his commentary and al-Shawkānī in his *Fatḥ al-Qadīr*.
[340] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/239.

Muhammad's mission held them back.[341]

In another place in his commentary, Muqātil also brings forth similar reasons for the polytheists' rejection of Muhammad's Qur'an, namely the insult that the Qur'an threw to their gods and its imposition to renounce them altogether. As explained, Muhammad's mission of converting people to the worship of only one God and the renunciation of other gods seemed to be too harsh within the tolerant polytheistic environment of multiple divinities. In reponse, the polytheists sought ways to counter Muhammad, one of which by accusing him as making up the Qur'an out whim *(taqawwalahū min tilqā'i nafsihi),* under the guidance of a Satan called *Rayy.* To that accusation, the Qur'an responded back by challenging them to produce the like of it.[342]

It turns out that their accusation that the Qur'an was of Muhammad's own making was to prepare a way for their next move, when they asked Muhammad to bring them "another Qur'an." One that is more tolerant to their gods. If Muhammad could not bring this friendly version of Qur'an from his God, they wanted him to just create it himself *(i'ti bi-qur'ānin ghayri hādhā laysa fīhi tark 'ibādat ālihatinā wa la 'ayyabaha, aw baddilhū anta min tilqā'i nafsika).*[343] Despite his strict monotheist mission, upon hearing this request, Muhammad was tempted to soften his voice against their gods hoping that

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[341] In such a polytheistic environment, as Mitchell and Van Nuffelen (2010) argued, tolerance of different divinities was common, and the demand was to respect each other's beliefs and practices. In other words, the religious practices of the Meccans lacked one of the most important defining characteristics of monotheism, that is, the strict requirement to worship one God and renounce all others. There might be a religious competition between different groups that worshiped different divinities, "but the promoters of successful cults had no interest in annihilating or denying the existence of other gods; it served their interests much better to prove the superiority of their own." Mitchell and Van Nuffelen, *One God,* 10-11.
[342] See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/275-5.
[343] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/273-274; 231.

they would eventually follow him. God however soon reminded him of his original

mission as *nadhīr* (reminder of God's threat of punishment) by revealing Q11: 12.[344]

Furthermore, the beyond-worldly matters also overwhelmed the Meccans to

whom Muhammad preached, which either seemed to be out of their rational reach, or

which they simply rejected. Muqātil, for instance, notes their doubts toward resurrection

and hell, when he comments on Q44: 33-36.[345] In his commentary on their response to

the matter of resurrection in Q23: 81-2,[346] Muqātil maintains that the question they asked

was rhetorical, simply to deny the existence or possibility of resurrection. Such a

rhetorical question was posed by a number of people, such as the family of Talḥah ibn

'Abd al-'Uzzā, including Shaybah, Talḥah, 'Uthmān, Abu Saʿīd, Mushāfiʿ, Arṭa'ah, Ibn

Shuraḥbil, al-Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith, and Abū al-Ḥārith ibn 'Alqamah.[347] Some of the

Meccans, such as Abū Jahl ibn Hishām even challenged Muhammad, "O Muhammad, if

you are truly a prophet, resurrect for us two or three people who had died among our

forefathers, including Qusayy ibn Kilāb who was trustworthy and their leader, so that we

could ask him and he would tell us what is there after death; whether it is true or

false?"[348]

In another place, upon his commentary on Q36: 76-83, Muqātil sets out a similar

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[344] "So [Prophet] are you going to abandon some part of what is revealed to you, and let your heart be oppressed by it, because they say, 'Why is no treasure sent down to him? Why has no angel come with him?'? You are only there to warn; it is God who is in charge of everything.'"

[345] "When the Prophet told them that they will be resurrected after their death, they denied him; instead they said, "Nothing but our life in this world." Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/823.

[346] "(81) But, like others before them, (82) they say, 'What? When we die and turn to dust and bones, shall we really be resurrected?'"

[347] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/163.

[348] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/823.

scene of revelation that Ubayy ibn Khalaf al-Jumaḥī[349] discussed *amr al-'aẓm* (the matter

of bone) with some of his companions, including Abū Jahl, al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah,

'Utbah and Shaybah sons of Rabī'ah, 'Uqbah, al-'Ās ibn Wā'il. Ubayy said,

"Muhammad thought that God would resurrect the dead, and I came to him bringing

some bones, and I asked him, "O Muhammad, you think that God would resurrect the

dead after their bones dry and we have become dust. You think that He will create us

anew?" Ubayy then broke the bone into pieces and threw it to the air, saying, "O

Muhammad, who will bring them to life again?" The Prophet replied, "God will bring

them to life again, then He will put you into death, resurrect you, and throw you into the

hell of Jahannam!"[350] To the Meccans, the resurrection was merely an ancient fable: "We

have heard such promises before, and so did our forefathers. These are just ancient

fables."[351] And in Q11: 7, the Meccan disebelievers called such teaching on resurrection

a flat magic *(siḥr mubīn).[352]*

The disbelief in eschatology by the polytheist Meccans was not shared by the

monotheists, such Jews and Christians. Just like Islam, which came after them, both

Judaism and Christianity taught eschatology as one of the fundamentals of their teaching.

Thus, the difficulty of the Meccans to accept the possibility of resurrection after death

might only vindicate the fact that they were still living in a polytheistic culture, and even

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[349] He is probably Abū al-Ashaddīn whose name is Usaid ibn Kildah ibn Khalaf al-Jumaḥī. He was nicknamed "Abū al-Ashaddīn" for his strong fist. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/603.
[350] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/585-6.
[351] Q23: 83. A similar response is mentioned in Q 27: 67-8, "[67] So the disbelievers say, 'What! When we and our forefathers have become dust, shall we be brought back to life again? [68] We have heard such promises before, and so did our forefathers. These are just ancient fables.'"
[352] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/272.

if they possessed some knowledge of the monotheistic religions, they had not yet completely acculturated with monotheist teachings. Instead, they picked things from those monotheistic religions that well suited their own religious belief and practice, that is, the worshiping of many gods, the polytheism itself. The disbelief in eschatology may also, if anything, hint at their pragmatic view of life as merely here and now. Such a pragmatic view of life was congruent with polytheistic culture in which the divine world was called for as "a source of support and legitimation for society at large, rather than as an independent source of absolute moral authority. In polytheism, if one god did not serve a society's purpose, another could be called upon to do so."[353]

In their attempts to understand the working of prophethood, the Meccans also consulted the Jews in Medina. Once, Abū Jahl said to the Quraish, "Send some people among you to the Jews of Yathrib, to ask them about your friend [Muhammad], whether he is a prophet or a liar?" Following that, they decided to choose five people as delegation including al-Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith and ʿUqbah ibn Abī Muʿayṭ. Upon their arrival in Medina, this delegation told the Jews, "We came to you because of what happened to us and it keeps growing. We don't like it. We are afraid that he [Muhammad] will destroy our religion and confuse our matter. He is of lower class, poor, and an orphan calling for *al-Raḥmān* whom we know nothing about but [that he is] Musaylamah al-Kadhdhāb. You do know that he [Musaylamah] commands nothing but decay and war *(al-fasad wa al-qitāl)*. And that's under the auspices of Jibrīl—peace be upon him[354]—who is your

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[353] Mitchell and Van Nuffelen, *One God,* 8-9.
[354] Given the negative tone of the whole statement, the benediction to Jibrīl was likely addition of Muqātil, not stated by the Meccan delegation to the Medinan Jews. Muqātil also likely provided similar

enemy. So please tell us whether you find him [Muhammad] in your Book?"

The Jews responded, "We found his description as you have just said." The Meccans said, "In his [Muhammad] people, there is other who is nobler and older than him." "But we don't believe him [Muhammad]," the Meccan said. The Jews responded, "We found his people are the toughest against him, and this is about the time in which he will appear." The Meccans said, "He is taught by Musaylamah 'the liar.' Tell us some questions to ask [Muhammad], ones that Musaylamah knows nothing of and that no one else knows but a prophet." The Jews said, "Ask him three questions, if he answers them correctly, he is a prophet; if he doesn't, he is a liar. Ask him about *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf.*" The Jews then told the Meccan the story of *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf.* "And ask him about *Dhū al-Qarnayn;* he was a king, and so, so. And ask him about *rūḥ* (soul). If he teaches you something about it [*rūḥ*], a little or a lot, then he is a liar." The Jews then told the Meccan the story of soul.

The Meccans went home with everything they heard, and were amazed. They then came to Muhammad—peace be upon him,[355] to whom Abū Jahl said, "O the son of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, we will ask you three things; if you know the answers then you're right, otherwise you're a liar. And leave our gods alone!" The Prophet asked, "What are they? Ask me anything you like." They responded, "We are asking you about *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf.* We have been told about them. We are asking you about *Dhū al-Qarnayn*. We have

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benedictions, some of them to Muhammad, in his commentary that are unlikely put by the actors involved in the scenes told in the commentary.

[355] This is another instance of a benediction that Muqātil likely provided for Muhammad. It seems unlikely that the Meccan Polytheists—who were hostile to him—would give it to Muhammad.

also been told about him. We are asking you about *rūḥ*. We have also been told about its amazing matter. If you know all the answers, you are then pardoned, but if you don't, you are actually deceivably possessed!" The Prophet responded, "Come back to me tomorrow, I will tell you," but Muhammad failed to say "God Willing."[356] Muhammad waited (for the revelation) for three days, until Jibrīl came to him. The Prophet told him, "O Jibrīl, my people have asked me three questions." "I came to you with respect to these questions," replied Jibrīl.[357]

This anecdote, if anything, supports the idea that the Arab polytheists did exist and indeed have contact with the monotheists, and in this case with the Jews of Medina. As seen through their dialog, the delegation of the polytheist Meccans learned a lot from the Jews of Medina and were amazed with what they had learned. The Jews provided the Meccans with "a test for prophecy" in the form of three points of knowledge—of *asḥab al-kahf, Dhū al-qarnayn,* and *rūḥ*--whose possession or otherwise would vindicate or invalidate Muhammad's claim of prophecy. Prior to their encounter with the Jews, it seems that the Meccans perceived prophecy as something to be attached to someone who was noble and coming from a high class, in term of social standing, wealth and even seniority. And Muhammad, in their view, did not match these categories.

If anything, these Meccan polytheists believed that there were at least two other people who were more deserving to prophethood than Muhammad due to their social standing, namely Abū Masʿūd al-Thaqafī whose real name was ʿAmr ibn ʿĀmir ibn

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[356] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/581.
[357] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/574-6.

'Awf, and al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah.[358] Al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah himself was reported to say, "Had the Qur'an been true, it would have been sent down to Abū Masʿūd al-Thaqafī."[359] Therefore, some of the Meccan aristocracy saw that Muhammad's mission is best suited to people from a lower social class than people like they were. His teaching was more appropriate for poor people or non-Arab clients, such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd, ʿAmmār ibn Yāsir, Ṣuhayb, Bilāl, Khabāb ibn al-Art, Jabr client of ʿĀmir ibn al-Ḥaḍrami, Sālim client of Abū Ḥudhaifah, al-Namr ibn Qāsiṭ, ʿĀmir ibn Fuhairah, Mahjaʿ ibn ʿAbd Allāh, and so on.[360] If the Qur'an posits that every prophet has his own enemy,[361] it portrays that the resistance to the prophetic mission usually came from the upper class of society it calls *mala',*[362] and that the early followers of the prophets are usually lowly people *(ardhalūn).*[363]

To further challenge Muhammad's claim of prophethood, after throwing a number of accusations against him,[364] the Meccans demanded that he perform

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[358] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/794.

[359] Muqātil,*Tafsīr,* 3/793.

[360] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/230.

[361] Q 15: 31, and see Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/233.

[362] Q 38: 6, and see Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/636.

[363] Q 26: 111, and see Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/278-81; 3/272. According to Lapidus, "Significantly, the first converts were rootless migrants, poor men, members of weak clans, and younger sons of strong clans - those people most dissatisfied with the changing moral and social clirnate of Mecca, for whom the Prophet's message proved a vital alternative. See *History,* 21.

[364] In his commentary on Q 15: 95, Muqātil mentions that al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah al-Makhzumi, when the pilgrimage season came, convened a meeting with the people of Quraish to discuss what to tell people who would come to Mecca to perform *ḥājj* when they asked about Muhammad. The result was that there must be some delegates in all ways to Mecca to answer all questions regarding Muhammad. The answers were set. If anyone asked who Muhammad was, these delegates must answer, "Muhammad was a magician *(sāḥir)* who separate a husband and a wife"; or "he was a sorcerer *(kāhin)* that prophecies the future", or "he was a liar magician *(sāḥir kadhdhāb)*"; or "he was a poet *(shāʿir)*"; or "liar possessed" *(kadhdhāb majnūn)*. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/437-8.

miracles,[365] such as illustrated in Q21: 5 and Q17: 90-93,[366] the performance of which would serve as a condition for their believing in him. Upon hearing these challenges, as suggested by the Qur'an itself, Muhammad had to admit that he could not fulfill their request[367] and could only say, *Subḥāna rabbī hal kuntu illā basharan rasūlan,* "Glory be to my Lord! Am I anything but a mortal, messenger." In this regard, Muqātil argues that had Muhammad been able to perform the requested miracles, the Meccans would not necessarily have believed in him, for Abū Jahl was said to have said this: "By God, I am not sure, had you done that, whether I would become a believer or not."[368] Their request for miracles was merely to mock Muhammad. In the end, the best answer to any challenges that required the performance of miracles, as suggested by the Qur'an especially Q2: 164, was that Muhammad should ask the people to simply look at God's creation.[369]

Apart from this religiously strong opposition, Muqātil offers another reason for the Meccan reluctance to follow Muhammad, which had to do with real social, economic, and political concerns. In commenting on Q28: 57-8, Muqātil sets out a context of revelation in which al-Ḥārith ibn Nawfal ibn 'Abd Manāf al-Qurashī said to the Prophet, "We know that what you said is true, but we fear that the Arabs would push us out of

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[365] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/233.
[366] "(90) They say, 'We will not believe for you [Muhammad] until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us; (91) or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers pour through them; (92) or make the sky fall on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen; or bring God and the angels before us face to face; (93) or have a house made of gold; or ascend into the sky– even then, we will not believe in your ascension until you send a real book down for us to read.'" Say, 'Glory be to my Lord! Am I anything but a mortal, messenger.'"
[367] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/549-50.
[368] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/550.
[369] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/153-4.

Mecca if we follow the guidance with you. That is what has prevented us from doing so. We are only a minority and we have no power over them" *(fa-innamā naḥnu akalatu ra'sin wa la ṭāqata lanā bihim).*[370]

Muqātil maintains that the Qur'an does not, however, justify such a fear. These people have enjoyed God's provision even when they were worshiping something other than God; why wouldn't they enjoy the same after embracing Islam?[371] On the contrary, if they persisted in their disbelief even after God sent to them a messenger, they would receive punishment, similar to that of the bygone people *(umam khāliyah)* due to their rejection of their prophets: the people of Lūṭ were punished with a stoning storm *(ḥāṣiban),* the people of Ṣāliḥ, Shuʿayb, Hūd, and Ibrāhīm were punished with Jibril's shout *(ṣayḥat Jibrīl),* others were buried under the earth *(wa khasafnā bihī al-arḍ)* as were Qārūn and his people, and drowned as in the case of the people of Nūḥ and Firʿaun.[372] In the same way, the people of Muhammad who rejected him would receive similar punishment, not only in the hereafter but also in this world.

In his commentary, based on the precedence of ancient Prophets and their people, Muqātil seems to understand the resistance against Muhammad, along with its concomitant violence, as part of a larger divine scenario that had also occurred to earlier prophets and their peoples. This divine scenario runs as follows: God sent prophets, these prophets preached to their respective people, the people rejected them, and finally

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[370] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/351. Such a fear of hardship as a result of joining Muhammad was, according to Lapidus, an invitation to hardship, expressed in the aftermath of the Meccan boycott against him and his followers. Therefore, since 615 or 616, Muhammad did not make more converts, and his followers were at the time around 100 people. See *History,* 22.
[371] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/351, 390.
[372] Q 29: 40, and see Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/383-4.

punishment ensued. With this perspective in mind, Muqātil believes that Muhammad's people would also receive punishment for their rejection of him, just like early generations when they rejected their own prophets. In the case of the Meccan polytheists, Muqātil views that their punishment was inflicted with their defeat in the battle of Badr.[373]

The purpose of God mentioning the past narrative of rejection of the prophets in the Qur'an, according to Muqātil, is to remind the Meccan disbelievers that they would bear similar consequences if they did the same.[374] This is what Muqātil understands about the term *sunnat Allāh* ("God's custom") in the Qur'an:[375] the people who rejected the prophets would soon be punished once the prophets left them. This had been the case with the bygone people *(umam khāliyah).* God commanded the prophets and the believing followers to leave the place where they used to live before divine punishment was sent down. In the case of the Meccans, it happened exactly one year after Muhammad left Mecca to Medina, at the Battle of Badr. When Muhammad was at Mecca, God had commanded him to be patient against the Meccan resistance, for God's promise was coming;[376] the Meccan disbelievers would be punished in this world. Upon hearing such a threat, the Meccans mockingly challenged Muhammad, asking, "When will this that you promised us happen?"[377] Thence came God's command to Muhammad to be patient, as the punishment will come for them at the Battle of Badr in which the

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[373] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/302; 3/243.
[374] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/273.
[375] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/545-6; 3/723.
[376] See Q 40: 55, 77; and Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/721.
[377] Q 21: 38; Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/80.

angels would attack them from front and back and send their souls right away to hell.[378]

The People of Scripture (Ahl al-Kitāb): Jews and Christians

The term *ahl al-kitāb* is mentioned thirty times in the Qur'an, dispersed unevenly in nine chapters.[379] In general, the term refers to both Jews and Christians.[380] But there are times when the term refers only to one of the two, as explained in *tafsīr*. There are at least three other terms the Qur'an uses to refer to the People of Scripture, namely *alladhina ātaynāhum al-kitāba* ("those whom We gave scripture"),[381] *alladhīna yaqra'ūn al-kitāba* ("those who recite scripture"),[382] and *alladhina ūtū al-kitāba* ("those who were given scripture").[383]

When the Qur'an uses the phrase *alladhīna ātaynāhum al-kitāba,* in both Meccan and Medinan chapters, in Muqātil's commentary, it points to the Christians and Jews who believed that the Qur'an was a revelation from God, because they understood correctly what they read in the Bible, especially in relation to Muhammad's prophecy. In this respect, Muqātil mentions, there were forty people among the Christians, thirty-two of

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[378] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/717. In commenting on Q32: 21, Muqātil maintains that there are two types of punishment in this world for the Meccan rejection of the Prophet, namely *al-'adhāb al-adnā,* that is, hunger for seven years (due to drought) till they ate bones, corps, *jif,* dogs; and *al-'adhāb al-akbar*, that is, murder in the Battle of Badr. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/452.

[379] Chronologically, the term *ahl al-kitāb* is mentioned in Q29:46; Q2:105, 109; Q3:64, 65, 69, 70, 71, 72, 75, 98, 99, 110, 113, 199; Q33:26; Q4:123, 153, 159, 171; Q57:29; Q98:1, 6; Q59:11; Q5:15, 19, 59, 65, 68, 77.

[380] In the religious term, *ahl al-kitāb* usually refers to the Jews and Christians; but in the political term, as in the case of who will have the choice to pay jizyah, it may be expanded to include other people such as the Magians. It had happened since the time of the Prophet in which he accepted jizyah from the Zoroastrians from Hajar, a decision that was criticized by the hypocrites on the ground that these Zoroastrian were not People of Scripture. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/214, and also al-Wāḥidi, *Asbab Nuzūl al-Qur'ān.* Legal scholars, such al-Shāfi'ī, undertake further discussion on this that I will deal with when I study Muqātil's legal commentary.

[381] It is mentioned in Q28: 52 and Q2: 121.

[382] It is used in Q10:94.

[383] It appears in Q2: 121, Q3: 186 and 187, Q4: 131 and 160.

whom came to Medina from Abyssinia and eight others from Syria.[384] Meanwhile, for Jewish representative, as usual, Muqātil mentions 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions.[385]

Likewise, the Qur'an uses the phrase *alladhīna yaqra'ūn al-kitāba* ("those who read scripture") in the early Medinan chapter in a positive manner referring to people with whom God commanded Muhammad to consult should he have some doubt about God's revelation to him. In this case, Muqātil mentions, again, 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām as the prototype.[386] However, when the Qur'an uses the term *alladhīna ūtū al-kitāba* ("those who were given scripture"), which occurs only in the Medinan chapters, it generally brings a negative tone with regard to the People of Scripture, especially the Jews. Not only did they, for the sake of material interest, conceal some truth in the Bible—the description of Muhammad's prophecy and their obligation to follow him—they also spoke hurtful comments with regard to the revelation that Muhammad received. Furthermore, they did not stop with merely verbal assault but would proceed with physical assault to Muhammad and the believers.[387]

If the Qur'an asserts that all human beings were previously united under one (religious) community *(ummah wāḥidah),* the Qur'an depicts both religious communities of the Jews and Christians as engaging in constant polemics and competition with each other. Q2: 111-113, best illustrate their relationship:

"(111) They [the people of the Book] also say, 'No one will enter Paradise unless

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[384] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/348-9.
[385] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/135.
[386] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/248.
[387] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/320-21, 413,

he is a Jew or a Christian.' This is their own wishful thinking. [Prophet], say, 'Produce your evidence, if you are telling the truth.' (112) In fact, any who direct themselves wholly to God and do good will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve. (113) The Jews say, 'The Christians have no ground whatsoever to stand on,' and the Christians say, 'The Jews have no ground whatsoever to stand on,' though they both read the Scripture, and those who have no knowledge say the same; God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences."

In this stalemate, the Qur'an invites both parties to come back to common ground *(kalimat sawā')* in Q3: 64, "Say, 'People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords.' If they turn away, say, 'Witness our devotion to Him.'" As stated, the common ground that would once again unify the Jews, Christians, and Muhammad's followers is *tawḥīd,* the upholding of the belief in and worship of only one God.

When Muhammad invited the People of Scripture to this *kalimat sawā'*, according to Muqātil, some of the Jewish leaders, including Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf, Abū Yāsir, Abū al-Ḥaqīq and Zayd ibn al-Tābūh, and the Christians of Najrān, each group claimed Ibrāhīm, the father of monotheism, for themselves, against Muhammad. The Jews said, "Ibrāhīm is with us, just like our (other) prophets were of our religion. You [Muhammad] want nothing but to make us take you as our lord, just like the Christians take ʿĪsā as their lord." Likewise, the Christians said, "You [Muhammad] want nothing with your invitation but to make us take you as our lord, just like the Jews take ʿUzayr as their lord." The Prophet replied, "I seek refuge to God from all of that. My invitation to all of you is to worship God and not associate Him with anything." It is in this situation where

God revealed Q3: 65-68, [388]

"(65) People of the Book, why do you argue about Abraham when the Torah and the Gospels were not revealed until after his time? Do you not understand? (66) You argue about some things of which you have some knowledge, but why do you argue about things of which you know nothing? God knows and you do not. (67) Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was upright and devoted to God, never an idolater, (68) and the people who are closest to him are those who truly follow his ways, this Prophet, and [true] believers– God is close to [true] believers."

In Q3: 95, similar commandment is mandated, "[Prophet], say, 'God speaks the truth, so follow Abraham's religion: he had true faith and he was never an idolater.'" But in his commentary on this verse, Muqātil brings forth a ḥadith in which the Prophet was related to have said to the Jews and Christians who said that Ibrāhīm was on their religions: "Ibrāhīm performed pilgrimage to the House [at Mecca], and you know that, but why do you reject god's signs, namely pilgrimage *(hajj)*?" Here, Muqātil interprets the descriptive *ḥanīfan* for *millat Ibrāhīm* as *ḥājjan,* "the one who was performing pilgrimage."[389] In this regard, Muqātil argues that if the People of Scripture claimed Ibrāhīm as their model, they should also perform pilgrimage to God's House in Mecca. But they rejected pilgrimage.

Based on the above, it is known that the common ground to which Muhammad and the Qur'an invited the people of the Book *(ahl al-kitāb)* is *tawḥīd*, that is, to worship God alone and not associate Him with anything else. In other words, the common ground is Ibrāhīm's religion *(millat Ibrāhīm),* which exists prior to the religious *aḥzāb* of the Jews and Christians. Ibrāhīm's religion is Islam, the same religion of Mūsā and ʿĪsā.[390]

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[388] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/282-3.
[389] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/290-91.
[390] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/279.

Ibrāhim's religion is one that teaches pilgrimage as one of its rituals. Yet, while the Jews and Christians themselves claimed to be embracing Ibrāhīm's religion, they did not acknowledge pilgrimage to the House as one of their religious obligations.[391]

A similar competition between these religious groups was shown by Muqātil's commentary on Q2: 135. There, Muqātil mentions that leaders of the Jews, including Kaʿab ibn al-Ashraf, Kaʿb ibn Usayd, Abū Yāsir ibn Akhṭab, Mālik ibn al-Dayf, ʿĀzar, Ishmāwīl, and Khumaysha, as well as Najrāni Christians, including al-Sayyid and al-ʿĀqib and their companions, said to the believers: "Be on our religion, there is no other religion but ours." But God rejects their claim, and suggests instead that *millat Ibrāhīm*, which is Islam itself, is the true religion. And Ibrāhīm was not part of *mushrikūn;* he was neither a Jew nor a Christian.[392] Instead, the Qur'an suggests that believers invite these people to believe in God and in the revelation sent down to Muhammad, Ibrāhīm, ʿIsmāʿīl, Isḥāq, Yaʿqūb, the Israelite tribes (*al-asbāṭ),* Mūsā, and ʿĪsā, and even to what had been previously given to Dāwūd and Sulaymān, that is, the Psalter *(Zabūr).*[393] But the People of the Book insisted on believing in some prophets while rejecting others. The Jews did not believe in ʿĪsā and Muhammad; meanwhile, the Christians did not believe in Muhammad.[394]

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[391] It is intriguing that Muqātil does not use Q3: 64 as the foundation of the common ground for interreligious relations that he envisions in his legal commentary. Instead, he builds such common ground on Q6: 151-3 that he regards as *muḥkamāt al-Qur'ān* as the permanent fundamentals shared by at three religious traditions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This *muḥkamāt* is Muqātil's version of the Islamic Decalogue. One possible reason that Muqātil does not use the *kalimah sawā'* verses for his envisioned common ground because it is highly polemical and was revealed following the polemic between Jews and Christian in relation their relative status to Ibrāhīm. Meanwhile the *muḥkamāt* verses seem to be more balanced in treating other religious communities that they invite to join on an equal footing.
[392] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/141.
[393] Q2: 136; Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/141.
[394] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/141.

Muqātil's commentary on Q4: 123 above shows that while previously only the Jews and the Christians were involved in disputes and claims of superiority, now another religious community, the *muslimūn,* Muhammad's followers, joined in. It also shows that while he is so critical of the supposed *shirk*-related conducts of the Jews and Christians, Muqātil does not espouse the superiority claim that each of the three monotheist communities claimed for itself, especially the one by the Muslims. As such, Muqātil views the three monotheist religions as valid paths to salvation because they all stand on the same common ground *(kalimat sawā')* that the Qur'an propagated, namely the belief in and worshiping only of one God. But, like the Qur'an, Muqātil is very critical toward the followers of both Judaism and Christianity, who he deems have deviated from the true teachings of their religion, especially in relation to *tawḥīd*, and also *taṣdīq*; therefore, Muqātil's calls them *mushrikūn* and *kāfirūn* at times.[395]

Despite his equal acknowledgment of the three monotheistic religions, there are times when Muqātil seems to suggest that the alternatives that Islam offers are better than the ones that Judaism and Christianity provide. Muqātil's commentary on several verses in Q2, for instance, seems to suggest Islam's "superiority," over Judaism and Christianity. In commenting on Q2: 178, for instance, Muqātil explains different legal systems that Islam, Judaism and Christianity have, especially in relation to *qiṣāṣ*. In the Jewish tradition, a person who murders is to be killed, with no chance of forgiveness, and no compensation *(diyah)* to be accepted; in Christianity, such a killer is forgiven and not

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[395] See, for instance, how Muqātil uses the term *kuffār al-yahūd* in his commentary when commenting on Q2:2 (1/86), Q3:74 (1/285), Q3:112 (1/296), Q5:57 (1/487), Q29:48 (3/386), Q29:50 (3/387); or *kuffār ahl al-kitāb* when commenting on Q3:56 (1/279), Q4:125 (1/410), Q4:136 (1/414), Q13:25 (2/376).

to be killed with *qiṣāṣ,* and his family will receive no compensation; and for Muhammad's followers *(ummat Muḥammad),* God provides them with *takhfīf* ("easement") that gives the family of the victim possibilities to choose, either to kill the murderer or to forgive the killer if they will, or to accept compensation *(diyah).*[396]

Although Muqātil's commentary on the verse seems neutral, it nevertheless gives an impression that Muhammad's Islam, by comparison, offers a better alternative than that in Judaism and Christianity. Similar understanding can be gained from Muqātil's comment on Q2: 208. In his commentary on the verse, Muqātil mentions that some Jewish converts, such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām, Salam ibn Qays, Usayd and Asad sons of Kaʿb, Yāmin ibn Yāmin, whom Muqātil calls the believers of *ahl al-Tawrāt (muʾminū ahl al-Tawrāt),* asked the Prophet's permission to read the Torah in the prayer, observe Sabbath and to practice something from the Torah. In response, Muhammad told them that Allāh allows them to take only Muhammad's examples and commandment *(sunnat Muḥammad wa sharāʾiʿuh)* as Muhammad's Qurʾan abrogates *(yansakh)* every scripture before it. In this respect, Muqātil understands the phrase *udkhulū fī al-silm kāffah* in this verse as "to follow all *sharāʾiʿ* of Islam."[397] Furthermore, Muqātil considers *al-sunnat al-ulā* (that is, the *sunnah* of early communities), to be invalid, not simply because of the coming of Muhammad, but primarily because of their conversion to being Muhammad's followers. Conversion renders this *al-sunnat al-ulā* as *ḍalālah,* part of *khuṭuwāt al-shayāṭīn* (satanic steps).[398] This view is consistent with Muqātil's attitude, mentioned

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[396] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/157.
[397] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/179-80.
[398] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/180.

earlier in relation to other five religious *aḥzāb,* in which he considered them aberrations from the primordial religion. Their religions were human invention and were therefore for Satan. It was only Islam that is a religion for God.

However, Muqātil's ambivalent attitudes toward Judaism and Christianity as religions, the followers of these two religions, and also the followers of the two religions who converted to Islam, can be actually differentiated. The fact that Muqātil disagrees with the superiority claim of the followers of three monotheistic communities demonstrates something about Muqātil's acknowledgement of the People of the Book. In addition, Muqātil very often shows how Muhammad actually encouraged the People of the Book to be more faithful to the teaching of the Bible. This happened, for instance, when the Jews of Medina wanted to adjudicate some cases of murder and adultery in their community. Knowing that the punishment for these crimes was severe in their religion—that is, killing and stoning, respectively—they considered asking Muhammad for judgment, hoping that his adjudication would result in a much lighter punishment than what they had if they derived it from their scripture. To their shock, Muhammad decided the punishment by referring to what the Bible would do to such cases. Muhammad even accused the Jews of hiding some teachings of the Bible and challenged them to look at what the Bible said about punishment for murder and adultery. When he knew he was right, Muhammad took pride as someone who revitalized the law of the old prophecy.[399] But at the same time, this gave Muhammad leverage to accuse the Jews not only of

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[399] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/476. The Prophet was related to say, "God is Great. I am the first who revitalized the law of God's Laws" *(Allāh akbar. Fa anā awwalu man aḥyā sunnatan min sunan Allāh).*

hiding *rajm* and *qiṣāṣ,* but also of hiding the description of his own prophecy as told in the Bible.

As such, it seems that Muqātil actually acknowledges that the Bible is a legitimate scripture sent down by God. Likewise, Muqātil also believes that the People of the Book are in the same religious community *(ummah wāḥidah)*, namely Islam, as long as they were faithful to the teaching of their scripture. In fact, Muqātil's respect for the People of Scripture is attributable more to their affiliation to the Bible rather than their religious practices, which he regards as having deviated from the true scriptural teaching of the Bible. Furthermore, Muqātil sees the reality of religious difference is a divine test to see who follows God's commands, especially in relation to *rajm* and *qiṣāṣ,* about which Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have relatively different laws.[400] To Muqātil, Muhammad actually respected the plurality of distinct religious laws that these three monotheist communities possessed, and did not attempt to overwrite it with Islamic law. Muqātil equally suggests that what Muhammad expected from the People of the Book was that they would uphold stricter *tawḥīd,* and acknowledge the line of prophets, including his own prophethood.

In this perspective, conversion to Islam by the People of the Book was a matter of choice. They might do so if they wanted, or they might remain in their religions, but by upholding the correct *tawḥīd* and conducting *taṣdīq* by acknowledging Muhammad as one of God's prophets. However, once they converted to Islam, they had to leave their old religion altogether and follow only Muhammad's teaching. For once the people of the

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[400] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/482, 475, 479.

book converted, the teaching of their old religions was considered abrogated by

Muhammad's teaching.[401] The reason was that their old religious teaching was regarded

as "old traditions" *(sunnat ūlā)* that had been contaminated by deviations. For these

converts the command to embrace Islam in totality *(udkhulū fī al-silm kāffatan)* applies,

which, in Muqātil's view, is "to follow all *sharā'i'* ("laws") of Islam.[402] Muhammad's

invitation to the people of the Book was to be faithful to their scriptures in which the

same teaching of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* was instructed. This is different from Muhammad's

preaching to the Arab polytheist in which he imposed Islam to them. Therefore,

according to Muqātil, after their submission, the principle that there is no compulsion in

religion is to be upheld.[403]

The Jews

There are a number of terms with which the Qur'an addresses the Jews. Of these

is the term *yahūd.* The term *yahūd* is used in the Qur'an in eight places dispersed over

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[401] Wansbrough said that "abrogation as supercession of earlier dispensations was of cource fundamental to the character of Judaeo-Christian polemic." See his *Quranic Studies,* 199. But Islamic supersession has a slightly different, but significant, view from that developed in the Judaeo-Christian polemic. According to Muqātil, Islam supercedes the earlier religions when the followers of these religions chose to adopt Islam and leave their old religions. If these people would remain in their old religions, the minimum requirement that the Qur'an and Muhammad make is that they will uphold *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*, and be faithful to the teaching of their scriptures.

[402] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/179-180.

[403] While not all Arabs at the time submitted to Muhammad sincerely religiously, but more in a political term, Muqātil mentions however that Muhammad's invitation to Islam was to be understood more in a religious term. In his invitation to the people of Hijr, for instance, Muqātil defined being a Muslim as proclaiming the same *shahādah*, eating the Muslim slaughtered animals, accepting the same *qibla*h, and embracing the same religion as Muslims. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/213-14. But, Gabriel maintains that the Arabs of Muhammad's contemporary may have viewed their alliance or even submission to Muhammad was just like any other traditional alliances made in their social system. This was indicated, for instance, by the fact that soon following Muhammad's death, some groups felt that their alliance with Muhammad was automatically annulled. See Gabriel, *Muhammad*, 205-206.

three chapters.[404] Some uses of *yahūd* in the Qur'ān point to the polemics between the

Jews with the Christians, each proudly claiming the truth for themselves while devaluing

each other, as stated in Q2: 113.[405] Instead of responding to Muhammad's prophetic call,

the two religious communities invited Muhammad to follow their religion, as recorded in

Q2: 120.[406] Q5: 18 conveys that the Jews thought they were the children of God and His

beloved ones; therefore they had the best place in the eyes of God, and therefore, they

believed, God would never punish them except for a very short period.[407] In his

commentary on Q5: 51, Muqātil maintains that in the aftermath of the believers' defeat in

the Battle of Uḥud, they were quite disheartened. For that reason, Muslims would pretend

to be Jews or Christians when they encountered the People of Scripture for fear of their

abuse.[408]

In Q5: 64, the Jews in particular were depicted as impatient and ungrateful to

God's bounty; instead they said something inappropriate about God ("God is tight-

fisted") and acted rebelliously to His commands, for instance, by concealing some

teachings of the Bible, such as in the case of *rajm*, *qiṣāṣ,* and the description of

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[404] Namely Q2: 113 (twice), 120; Q5: 18, 51, 64, 82; and Q9: 30.

[405] Q2: 113, "The Jews say, 'The Christians have no ground whatsoever to stand on,' and the Christians say, 'The Jews have no ground whatsoever to stand on,' though they both read the Scripture, and those who have no knowledge say the same; God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences." Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/132.

[406] Q2: 120, "The Jews and the Christians will never be pleased with you unless you follow their ways. Say, 'God's guidance is the only true guidance.' If you were to follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, you would find no one to protect you from God or help you." Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/135.

[407] Q5: 18, "The Jews and the Christians say, 'We are the children of God and His beloved ones.' Say, 'Then why does He punish you for your sins? You are merely human beings, part of His creation: He forgives whoever He will and punishes whoever He will. Control of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to Him: all journeys lead to Him." Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/464-5.

[408] Q5: 51, "You who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as allies: they are allies only to each other. Anyone who takes them as an ally becomes one of them– God does not guide such wrongdoers." Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/483-4.

Muhammad in their book.[409] In his commentary on Q9: 30, Muqātil lays out a context for interpreting the verse—that the Jews killed the prophets who came after Mūsā. As a result, God punished them by lifting up the Torah and erasing it from their hearts. With the teaching of Jibrīl, ʿUzayr recovered the lost Torah and taught it to the Jews. The Jews seemed so amazed with the recovery of the Torah and saw it as a miraculous event.[410] For that reason, the Jews believed that ʿUzayr was God's son, otherwise he would not have been able to recover the Torah in such a way. This is Muqātil's view as to how the Jews eleveated ʿUzayr to divine sonship. Following in their footstep, the Christians did the same, by declaring ʿĪsā as God's son.[411]

The Jews are also called *hūdan* ("those given guidance") in the Qur'an.[412] The term *hūdan* is used in the Qur'an, only in the Medinan chapter, namely Q2: 111, 135, and 140, with pejorative connotations. All three verses in which the term *hūdan* used are

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[409] Q5: 64, The Jews have said, 'God is tight-fisted,' but it is they who are tight-fisted, and they are rejected for what they have said. Truly, God's hands are open wide: He gives as He pleases. What has been sent down to you from your Lord is sure to increase insolence and defiance in many of them. We have sown enmity and hatred amongst them till the Day of Resurrection. Whenever they kindle the fire of war, God will put it out. They try to spread corruption in the land, but God does not love those who corrupt." Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/490.

[410] "According to the Bible, Ezra was the one who brought the Torah to the returning exiles, read and interpreted it publicly, and oversaw the people's solemn recommitment to its teachings (Neh. chs 8-10). Thus Ezra is like a second Moses. The Rabbis imply this by stating: "Ezra was sufficiently worthy that the Torah could have been given through him if Moses had not preceded him"…In addition, he is celebrated for other important accomplishments: He is said to be involved in the writing of the book of Psalms (Song Rab. 4. 19), and he had the Torah restored to its "original Mosaic" Assyrian characters, thereby leaving the old Hebrew characters for the Samaritans (e.g., b. Sanh. 21b). These legal innovations, along with other notable accomplishments, reflect the way Ezra is received and embraced by rabbinic Judaism. Ezra is both an authoritative scribe and priest, as well as a kind of proto-Rabbi who also has the authority of a prophet." See Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1669-70.

[411] Q9:30, The Jews said, 'Ezra is the son of God,' and the Christians said, 'The Messiah is the son of God': they said this with their own mouths, repeating what earlier disbelievers had said. May God confound them! How far astray they have been led!" Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/167.

[412] That is in Q2: 111, 135 and 140.

related to the exclusive truth that the Jews claimed for their religion over that of Muhammad, who was prophesied in the Bible and was actually following the *millat Ibrāhīm* as the correct version of religion God had taught humanity. The term *hūdan* is always used in the Qur'an together with the term *naṣārā*. The Qur'an denies the Jewish claim of truth, along with the Christian counterpart, and considers such claims wishful thinking.[413]

In his commentary on Q2: 135,[414] for instance, Muqātil lays out a context in which some of the leaders of Jews—such as Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf, Ka'b ibn Usayd, Abū Yāsir ibn Akhṭab, Mālik ibn al-Ḍayf, 'Āzār, Ishmawīl, Khumayshā—and some of the leaders of Christians from Najrān—such as al-Sayyid and al-'Āqib—along with their companions told the believers: "Be on our religion, for there is no other religion except ours." But again God rejects their claims. Instead He tells them that it is Ibrāhīm's religion *(millat Ibrāhīm),* namely *al-Islām,* which is the pure *(mukhliṣan)*, true religion *(ḥanīfan)*, says Muqatil. Ibrāhīm was not a polytheist; that is to say, he was part of neither the Jews nor the Christians. Thus, here the Qur'an uses terms such as *millat Ibrāhīm* and *hanīfan* as the true religion, while Muqatil interprets the two as *al-Islām* and *mukhliṣan* ("purely devoted to God"), respectively.[415]

The Qur'an also calls the Jews Banū Isrā'īl. Banū Isrā'īl appears in fifty-seven places in the Qur'an. As long as the Qur'an is concerned, the term refers to predecessors

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[413] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/131, 141, 143.
[414] Q2: 135, "They say, 'Become Jews or Christians, and you will be rightly guided.' Say [Prophet], 'No, [ours is] the religion of Abraham, the upright, who did not worship any god besides God."
[415] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/141.

of the Jews, including those of Muhammad's contemporaries. The Qur'an mentions Banū Isrā'īl to remind the Jews of both the rebellious tendency of the Israilites despite God's favors upon them and of the covenant that they had made with God.

Muqatil understands the Quranic portrayal of the Jews in the following way. During the Meccan period, the term Banū Isrā'īl was used to point to Jewish predecessors in general, and those of Mūsā's contemporaries living in the land of the Pharaoh. Special mention of Jewish prophets was made to emphasize their obedience to God. At the same time, however, the Qur'an mentions the fact that the ancient Israelites were easily tempted to fall into *shirk* and to argue with one another in terms of their religion. During the Medinan period, the term Banū Isrā'īl was used to remind the Jews of Medina of the covenant that their ancestors made with God, in which they were obliged to obey God's commands and avoid His prohibitions. Furthermore, the use of the term also served to remind them of countless favors that God had given them and how God had privileged their ancestors over other people at the time so that they might be thankful and obedient to God. Yet, some of the ancient Jews insisted on their rebellious acts and disbelief to the extent that they deserved God's punishment, such as being cursed by both Dāwūd and 'Īsā.[416]

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[416] In his commentary on Q5:78, Muqātil mentions that the verse is recounting two prophetic curses, those of Dāwūd and 'Īsā, respectively, along with their consequences on the ancient Jews. That is, some disbelievers of Banū Isrā'īl went fishing on Sabbath (Saturday), while they were prohibited to do so. Dāwud said: "O God, verily your servants broke your command and ignored it. Make them as a sign and example for the rest of your creation." God then turned them into monkeys. This was David's curse *(la'nat Dāwud)*. While 'Īsā's curse is this: after the Jews eat what God had sent them on the Table, they remained disbelievers. In the wake of God's lifting up what was on the table, 'Īsā said: "O God, verily you have promised us that whoever remains disbelief after he eats from the table, you will punish him with something you have never punished anyone in the world. O God, punish them as the people of Sabbath *(aṣḥab al-sabt)* were punished." God turned them into pigs. They were 5000 adult male at the time, no women nor children. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/496.

When the Prophet migrated to Medinah, Muqātil maintains, the Jews of the city, especially Huyay ibn Akhṭab, were not excited. As a token for their rejection of his prophethood, the Jews told Muhammad that it would be better to go to Syria, the land of prophets. They said, "Since when do you think God would send prophets to the land of Tiḥamah? If you are truly a prophet, then go to Syria. Sure, they will stop you from entering the city lest that you gain victory over Rome. But if you are truly a prophet, that is what you expect to happen, for it also happened to the prophets before you!" Interestingly, Muqātil mentions that Muhammad listened to the Jews and headed toward Syria, camping three miles away [from Medina] at Dhu'l Ḥalīfah to wait for his companions to join. Jibrīl came to Muhammad with this verse, Q17: 76-77,[417] following which Muhammad then went back to Medina, praying with Q17: 80, which, according to Muqātil's commentary, was also a prayer when he was later conquering Mecca *(fatḥ Makkah):* "Say, 'My Lord, make me go in truthfully, and come out truthfully, and grant me supporting authority from You.'"[418]

With his migration to Medina, Muhammad wished that the People of the Book, i.e. the Jews, would accept him, for, he believed, his prophecy was mentioned in the Torah. As part of gaining the Jews' acceptance, after the *hijrah*, the Prophet was commanded to pray toward Bayt al-Maqdis to appease the Jews, despite his preference to pray toward Ka'bah at Mecca.[419]

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[417] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/545.
[418] "They planned to scare you off the land, but they would not have lasted for more than a little while after you (76); such was Our way with the messengers We sent before you, and you will find no change in Our ways (77)." Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/546.
[419] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/144. See Lapidus, *History,* 24.

But this did not work; the Jews remained resistant toward him and his claim of prophethood. Like their Meccan Arab counterpart, the Jews asked Muhammad to provide them with another Qur'an that was written in heaven and a complete one, just like the one that Mūsā received.[420] The Jews also hid the truth about the description of Muhammad's prophecy in the Torah, not only from Muhammad but also from their Jewish followers, lest that they would lose their annual income they gained from them had they decided to follow Muhammad.[421] Some of the Jews provoked some newly converted [Jewish] Muslims to come back to their old religion and persuaded them in different ways to leave Islam.[422]

Besides *takdhīb,* the Jews were also reminded of their ancestors' violation of *tawḥīd,* when they called 'Uzayr as God's son.[423] The Jews of Medina themselves were

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[420] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/419.

[421] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/321, 156, 118, 296, 168-9.

[422] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/283, 297.

[423] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/168. Muqātil mentions that after the Jews killed their prophets after Musa, God lifted the Torah from them and erased it from their hearts. Then 'Uzayr came wandering on earth. Jibrīl approached him, saying, "Where are you going?" "Seeking knowledge," 'Uzayr answered. Jibrīl then taught 'Uzayr the whole Torah, and 'Uzayr taught it to Banū Isrā'īl. In this respect, due to their amazement, Banū Isrā'īl said, "'Uzayr will not know this knowledge (of the Torah) unless he is God's son." In her book, *Theologies in conflict in 4 Ezra: Wisdom, Debate, and Apocalyptic Solution* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2008), Karina Martin Hogan maintains that in the "Fourth Ezra, a Jewish apocalypse written around 100 c.e." (1), "Ezra's reputation as a scribe of the Torah was well established" (208). Ezra was proceeding with the restoration of the Torah or twenty-four books of the Hebrew Scriptures that were burned in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The restoration began when Ezra received the revelation of these twenty-four books of the Hebrew Scriptures, and also seventy additional books that contain "the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom and the river of knowledge" (205). "[T]he noteworthy point here is the break in the chain of scribal transmission of Scripture occasioned by the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. From this author's perspective, the textual tradition of written revelation goes back only to the time of the Babylonian Exile, to Ezra and his five scribes. Hence Ezra is depicted as a second Moses in the epilogue. The total of forty days of fasting in the previous six episodes is balanced by Ezra's forty-day fast in the epilogue, during the writing of the ninety-four books (14:42–44), recalling Moses' forty day fast during the rewriting of the tablets of the law (Exod 34:28). The forty-day fast in the epilogue may be meant to draw an analogy between the re-inscription of the commandments on the second set of stone tablets after Moses destroyed the first set (Exod 32:19; Deut 9:17) and Ezra's inspired dictation of the ninety-four books, after the Babylonians burned the "law" (4 Ezra 14:21–22)" (205-6).

accused of violating the agreements with Muhammad more than once in terms of the security of the city about which they shared some responsibility.[424] Even worse, the Jews built a conspiracy with the Arab disbelievers to kill Muhammad.[425] This series of violations that the Jews of Medina committed added more to the already long list of sins that their predecessors, Banū Isrā'īl, committed in the past,[426] despite divine favors that they received.[427] This, in Muqātil's view, drew a larger picture of the Jews as a thankless community that deserved God's punishment.

Based on Muqātil's commentary, however, the Jews were not uniform. Rather, they were of different kinds. There were at least three Jewish groups in relation to Muhammad, Qur'an, and Islam. The first was a group of the believing Jews *(mu'minū ahl al-Tawrāh)*, such as 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions, including Salām ibn Qays, Tha'labah ibn Salām, Qays son of 'Abd Allāh ibn Salam's sister, Usayd and Asad

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[424] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/122.

[425] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/378-9. See also F.E. Peters, *Islam: A Guide for Jews and Christians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 194.

[426] The Qur'an enumerates the sins that Banū Isrā'īl had committed, such as insisting Musa to ask God so that they could see him directly *(arinā Allāh jahratan)* of which they were incapable, their worshipping of golden calf *(ittakhadhū al-'Ijl)* when Musa was away to receive the Torah, their violation of Sabbath, their disbelief in the Gospel and Qur'an *(wa kufrihim bi āyāt Allah)*, their murdering the prophets *(wa qatlihim al-anbiyā'),* their accusation against Maryam (bint 'Imrān ibn Mathān) of adultery with her uncle's son (Yūsuf ibn Mathān), their conviction that they had killed 'Īsā, one that the Qur'an rejects as a false claim, their obstructing the way to Islam *(wa biṣaddihim 'an sabīl Allāh)* that is from believing in Islam and Muhammad, their practice of *ribā* and unlawful consumption of other's wealth. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/419-22.

[427] Muqātil maintains, despite their sins, God had favored Banū Isrā'īl on many occasions. When they were still in Egypt, God has already given them His mercy in what is called "nine signs" *(āyāt al-tis')* in which the Jews and the Copts were saved by god from a number of natural disasters. In addition, the Jews were favored by God, such as when God saved them from Pharaoh and his troop, when God destroyed their enemy by dividing the sea, when He sent them *manna wa salwa* (food and drink from heaven), when He shaded them with the cloud during the day and shed them light during the night when they were in wilderness *(arḍ al-tīh)*, when He sprang twelve fountains of water from a rock, and when He gave them the Torah so that they worshipped God alone, etc. It is in the Torah that God set out a covenant over human beings to worship Him and not associate Him with anything else and to believe Muhammad as well as other prophets and *al-kitāb*. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/100-103, 124; 3/30, 35, 298.

sons of Kaʿb, Yāmin, and Ibn Yāmin.[428] Second was a group of the disbelieving Jews *(kuffār ahl al-kitāb),* such as Qays ibn ʿAmr, ʿĀzar ibn Yunḥūm,[429] Kaʿb ibn al-Ashraf, and so forth.[430] Third was a group of the hypocritical Jews *(munāfiqū ahl al-kitāb al-yahūd),* such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salūl, Judd ibn Qays, al-Ḥārith ibn ʿAmr, Mugīth ibn Qushayr, and ʿAmr ibn Zayd.[431]

These three Jewish groups had different responses when invited to believe in Muhammad, the Qurʾan, and Islam. The response of the believing Jews would be "we believe" *(yaqūlūna āmannā bihī);*[432] the disbelieving Jews would mock Muhammad's invitation to Islam, and they instead said that believing is the work of stupid people,[433] or else, some of them—including Abū Yāsir, al-Nuʿmān ibn Awfā—would say *"We believe in what has been sent down to us, and reject everything after it"*, that is, the Gospel and the Qurʾan.[434] The hypocritical Jews would show off their belief when they were with the believers and mocked Islam when they were back with their own people.[435] If pushed, they would argue that they were believers just like the Muslims, and they had proclaimed *shahādah* just like the Muslims had.[436]

The Jews, according to Muqātil, had actually found the description of Muhammad in the Torah, far before Muhammad proclaimed his prophethood. Their expectation was,

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[428] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/81, 120.
[429] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/129.
[430] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/91.
[431] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/89.
[432] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/87.
[433] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/90.
[434] Q2: 91; Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/123.
[435] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/89-91.
[436] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/90.

however, that the awaited prophet would be Isḥāq's descendant. Once they knew that the
Prophet they were expecting was an Arab and descended from ʿIsmāʿīl, they rejected him
out of envy,[437] and blamed Jibrīl for giving Prophethood to Muhammad. As a result, they
considered Jibrīl their enemy.[438]

Some Jews—including Rifāʿah ibn Zayd and Zayd ibn ʿAmr—doubted the truth
of the Qur'an claiming it to be Muhammad's own forgery,[439] and therefore God's
revealing the "verses of challenge" *(āyāt al-taḥaddī)* to them to produce the like of the
Qur'an. Such a rejection *(takdhīb)* was characteristic of the Jews, as they had previously
violated the first covenant and what had been written in the Torah, namely to worship
only one God and not to associate Him with anything else, and to believe in the Prophets,
including both ʿĪsā and Muhammad; the Jews, however, believed only in some prophets
and disbelieved in others.[440]

The Christians

Apart from the general terms such as *ahl al-kitāb,* the Christians are mentioned in
the Qur'an using the term *naṣārā.* There are fifteen uses of the term *naṣārā* in the
Qur'an, one of which is in singular form—*nasrānī*—dispersed in fourteen verses in five

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[437] *Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān,* 1/91. The biblical account of Ishmael is ambiguous. "In Genesis 17 he is
circumcised, yet because of divine favoritism, a few chapters later in Genesis 21 he is expelled from his
father's home. Banished into the desert, he is no longer a collateral member of Abraham's household." This
ambiguity influences Ishmael's portrayal in rabbinic literature. In the pre-Islamic midrashim, as a
marginalized figure in the Bible, Ishmael is presented as "Israel's imagined antipode…representing a
rabbinic conceptualization of Other that serves to reaffirm Jewish identity...to affirm Judaism's status as
chosen Israel." See Carol Bakhos, *Ishmael on the Border: Rabbinic Portrayals of the First Arab* (Albany:
State University of New York Press, 2006), 129.
[438] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/547-8.
[439] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/93.
[440] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/94-95, 123-4.

different chapters.[441] Of these fiveteen apperances, the term *naṣārā* or *naṣrānī* is mostly

accompanied by other terms referring to Jews, namely *yahūd, hūd* and *alladhīna hādū*.

There are only two places where the term *naṣārā* is accompanied not only by terms that

reference the Jews but also by those referencing other religious communities such as the

Sabians *(ṣabi'īn)*,[442] Magians *(majūs)*, and the polytheists *(alladhīna ashrakū)*.[443] Only

once does the term *naṣārā* appear alone, in Q5: 14. In general, however, "the whole tone

of the Koran is less friendly toward Jews than it is toward Christians."[444]

Because the number of terms referencing Christians—*ahl al-kitāb* and *naṣārā*—is

much smaller than those that refer to the Jews—such as *yahūd, hūd, alladhīna hādū, ahl*

al-kitāb, alladīna ātaynāhum al-kitāb, alladhīna yaqra'ūn al-kitāb, alladhīna ūtū al-

kitāb—their shared appearances have meant that the discussion of Christians and

Christianity has always been overshadowed by the Qur'an's discussion of the Jews, to

whom it refers with more terms and more frequently. Thus, if we only rely on the

Qur'an's description of the Christians, there is not much information we can get about

them, except a few verses dealing with their claims about 'Isā. This raises a question as to

why there is so little mention of the Christians. Is it because Muhammad very rarely had

contact with them during the moments of revelation Muhammad very rarely had contact

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[441] They are: Q2: 62, 111, 113 (twice), 120, 135, 140; Q3: 67; Q: 22, 17; Q5: 14, 18, 51, 69, 82; Q9: 30.

[442] Parrinder maintains that the identity of the Sabaeans is unclear. Some scholars have identified him the the Mandaeans, who were "sometimes called 'Christians of St John'." But since they are mentioned in the Qur'an, along with Jews and Christians, as 'People of the Book' it seems that they were more likely monotheists, "pagan monotheists of Mesopotamia who were mentioned with interest by Arabic writers from the fourth Islamic century onwards." "They were a distinct pagan sect at Ḥarrān in Mesopotamia." The rituals of orthodox Mandaeans are close to ancient Zoroastrian practices. See *Jesus,* 59, 153.

[443] See Q2: 62 and Q22: 17.

[444] Aubrey R. Vine, *The Nestorian Churches: A Concise History of Nestorian Christianity in Asia from the Persian Schism to Modern Assyrians* (London: Independent Press, 1937), 85.

with them? Or is it because the Christians did not pose a real danger to Muhammad's prophetic mission, perhaps due either to their more affectionate character or to the rare contact with Muhammad?

It is possible that Muhammad's relatively intensive contact with the Jews and the concomitant problems that arose as a result of the latter's disbelief in the former may explain some of the reasons for relative disparity in terms of the appearance of the Jews and Christians in the Qur'an. And if the Qur'an does not say much about the Christians, except for their fundamental characteristics—such as 'Isā's divinity, trinity, and their rivalry with the Jews—the commentaries, such as Muqātil's, may promise to give us more information on Christians and Christianity, partly because the part of Iraq where Muqātil lived witnessed a significance presence of Christians.[445] Contrary to the depiction of the Jews, however, the Qur'an and Muqātil's commentary say almost nothing about the Christians' enmity to Muhammad and the believers.[446]

When the term *naṣārā* appears in the Qur'an together with either *yahūd* or *hūd,* it

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[445] In Baghdad, for instance, the population was diverse comprising different cultures and religions. The most prominent were the Christians, who had lived and built their churches and monasteries in the area long before the city was built in 145/762. Religious encounters and debates between Muslims and non-Muslims occurred in Baghdad. There was a report of a debate supposedly taking place in the mid second/eight century between a Christian leader named Barīha and the Muslim theologian Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, who himself made his way from his native Baṣra to the new city as a market trader. Furthermore, Baghdad in the mid second/eighth century was a city in which Christian priests felt free to appear in public in great, even intimidating numbers, and that discussions about points of religious difference were held in the most public places. This suggests that Baghdad in its earliest years was a place of frequent and free encounters between Muslims and Christians. David Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity: Abū ʿĪsā al-Warrāq's "Against the Incarnation,"* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3-4.

[446] Trimingham maintains that "Whereas Christianity was non-existent among the Arabs of western Arabia south of the Judham tribes, Judaism was well-established in self-governing and self-sufficient colonies stretching south from Madyan along Wādi 'l-Qurā to the oasis settlement of Yathrib, soon to be called Madinat an-Nabī, "the City of the Prophet". Nothing is known about their origins." *Christianity,* 249-50. See also Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An analysis of classical and modern exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

usually brings up a negative tone of religious sectarianism. Indeed, the Qur'an depicts the Christians and the Jews as equally proud of themselves, placing themselves not only over other people but also over each other—thus their rivalry. In the Qur'an, God has always categorically rejected their claims of superiority. When the two people claimed to be God's children and his Beloved and that they would therefore never be punished, in Q5: 18[447] God rejected their claim. When the two people claimed that only they could enter paradise, God again rejected their claim as a wishful thinking.[448] When the two arrogantly claimed that only their religions were the true path of guidance, God rejected them,[449] not once, but several times.[450] Jews and Christians showed their pride by placing themselves not only over other people, but also over each other while dismissing each other's religion's validity.[451]

The Qur'an also asserts that the Jews and Christians would never stop trying to persuade Muhammad to follow their religion,[452] but God soon responded by commanding Muhammad to tell them that "God's guidance is the only true guidance," which in

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[447] "The Jews and the Christians say, 'We are the children of God and His beloved ones.' Say, 'Then why does He punish you for your sins? You are merely human beings, part of His creation: He forgives whoever He will and punishes whoever He will. Control of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to Him: all journeys lead to Him.'"

[448] Q2: 111, "They also say, 'No one will enter Paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian.' This is their own wishful thinking. [Prophet], say, 'Produce your evidence, if you are telling the truth.'"

[449] Q2: 135, "They say, 'Become Jews or Christians, and you will be rightly guided.' Say [Prophet], 'No, [ours is] the religion of Abraham, the upright, who did not worship any god besides God.'"

[450] See Q2: 140 and Q3: 67

[451] Q2: 113, "The Jews say, 'The Christians have no ground whatsoever to stand on,' and the Christians say, 'The Jews have no ground whatsoever to stand on,' though they both read the Scripture, and those who have no knowledge say the same; God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences."

[452] Q2: 120, "The Jews and the Christians will never be pleased with you unless you follow their ways. Say, 'God's guidance is the only true guidance.' If you were to follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, you would find no one to protect you from God or help you."

Muqātil's commentary, means that it is Islam that is the true guidance.[453] Instead, God commanded Muhammad and the believers not to take the Jews and Christians as allies: they are allies only to each other.[454] Such a warning was given because the two people might possess hatred and enmity toward Muhammad and the believers as stated in Q5: 82.[455]

It is interesting, however, that while the Qur'an depicts the Jews and the Polytheists as the most hostile to Muhammad and the believers, in the same verse (5:82) it also describes the Christians as the most affectionate to Muhammad and the believers, especially those Christians whose lives were devoted mostly to asceticism and learning. In his comment on second part of the verse (5:82), "you are sure to find that the closest in **affection** *(mawaddatan)* towards the believers are those who say, 'We are Christians,' for there are among them people devoted to learning and ascetics. These people are not given to arrogance." Muqātil interprets *mawaddatan* "not in terms of love, but in terms of their quick response to belief" *(wa laysa yaʿnī fī al-ḥubb wa lākin yaʿnī fī surʿat al-ijābah li al-īmān).[456]* Muqātil provides a similar interpretation of Q28:52-3 that emphasizes the prompt belief that the Christians quickly showed when they heard the Qur'an.[457] Indeed,

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[453] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/135.

[454] Q5: 51, "You who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as allies: they are allies only to each other. Anyone who takes them as an ally becomes one of them– God does not guide such wrongdoers."

[455] "You [Prophet] are sure to find that the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with God; you are sure to find that the closest in affection towards the believers are those who say, 'We are Christians,' for there are among them people devoted to learning and ascetics. These people are not given to arrogance."

[456] The pages that address this verse and Muqātil's commens on it are missing from Shiḥātah's edition. Instead, I found them in Farīd's edition of Muqātil's commentary.

[457] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/349-50. In this respect, Muqātil understands *alladhīna ātaynāhum al-kitāba* as those upon whom God gave the Gospel *(al-Injīl).* More specifically, these people are the foutry believing Christians *(muslimī ahl al-injīl wa hum arbaʿūn rajulan)* who, together with Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib, headed to Medina to meet the Prophet.

there were events in Muhammad's life that showed how some Christians built a good relationship with Muhammad and his followers. When life in Mecca became worse for Muhammad's followers, they migrated first to Abyssinia, before they finally migrated to Medina.[458] There, the believers were welcome and treated well, and the Abyssinian King al-Najāshī (Negus) acknowledged Muhammad's prophethood. Reciprocally, when Muhammad heard that the king died, he commanded his companions to perform prayer for the deceased king,[459] though it is unclear whether the latter remained in his old religion. The Abyssinian king was often depicted as acknowledging Muhammad's prophethood *(taṣdīq)* and agreeing with the Qur'an's depiction of Maryam and ʿĪsā in the Chapter Maryam recited in front of him.[460]

In addition to remarking on their unwarranted pride and their rivalries with the Jews, the Qur'an's criticism toward the Christians targets their neglect of covenant with God and their violation of *tawḥīd* by committing *shirk*. Q4: 14 mentions, "We also took a pledge from those who say, 'We are Christians,' but they too forgot some of what they were told to remember, so We stirred up enmity and hatred among them until the Day of Resurrection, when God will tell them what they have done." In his commentary on this verse, Muqātil maintains that God had made a covenant with the People of Gospel *(ahl al-injīl),* the same as God made with the People of the Torah *(ahl al-Tawrāh),* that they will believe in Muhammad, follow him, and accept his prophethood. Such a covenant

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[458] The migration to Abyssinia was conducted to escape "[a]n economic boycott imposed on the Muslims by the Quraysh (the Prophet's tribe) [that] caused unbearable financial and social hardships for the former." See Afsaruddin, *Early Muslim,* 3.

[459] Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿil al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirūt: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2002), 319-320.

[460] Parrinder, *Jesus,* 46.

was written in the Gospel. But the Christians forgot it. Because of their disbelief and
neglect of the covenant, Muqātil continues, God created enmity and hatred among their
different sects, namely the Nestorians, the Mar-Jacobites,[461] and the angel-
worshippers.[462] These different Christian denominations would be inimical to each other
until the Day of Judgment.[463] God will unfold their rejection of the Prophet as well as
their rebellion against God in the hereafter. Such rebellion, according to Muqātil, is

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[461] Trimingham maintains "The Syriac-speaking communities separated from the Byzantine Church
through a painful process by which they attached themselves to two main lines of interpretation that
acquired the designations of Monophysite or Jacobite (in Syria) and Dyophysite or Nestorian. The first in
broad terms was the line that Christians within the Roman sphere took, and the second that of those who
fell within the Persian sphere." It is noteworthy that Trimingham underlined the fact that Syriac
Christianity took two different lines of interpretation depending whether it was under Persian or Roman
empires. In the first, it was Nestorian, and in the second it was a Monophysite or Jacobite. Thus, Muqātil's
term *al-Mār Ya'qūbiyyah* is a way to call the Monophysite or Jacobite Christians attributable to Mar Jacob,
the bishop of Edessa, who played a major role in the organization of the Monophysite Church in Syria and
Mesopotamia alongside the Imperial Church. See Trimingham's *Christianity,* 137, 145, 168.

[462] "The Jews of Jesus's time were split on their faith in angels: the **Essenes** not only believed in them, but
elaborated their roles and categories. On the other hand, the **Sadducees** denied their existence. Jesus, whose
ideas were closer to those of the **Pharisees** on this subject, made frequent mention of angels. In fact, the
New Testament period is full of references to both angels and **demons**, indicating a general belief in them
and their activities among humankind. Apparently, the liveliness of the belief in the spirit world became a
threat to the young church, where some of its members turned to angel-worship. The New Testament
specifi cally prohibits the worship of angels (Rev. 19:10, 22:9). In fact, demons may sometimes
masquerade as angels (2 Cor. 11:14–15). See Nancy M. Tischler, *All Things in the Bible: An Encyclopedia
of the Biblical World* (Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 2006), 22. Gustav Davidson maintained
that angels are mentioned frequently enough in both the Old and New Testaments, but they are not named,
save in two or three instances. Virtually all the named angels in this compilation are culled from sources
outside Scripture." See his *Dictionary of Angels Including the Fallen Angels* (New York: the Free Press,
1971), ix.

[463] In the commentary, Muqātil mentions three Christian denominations, namely Nestorian *(al-Nisṭūriyyah),*
Jacobite or Monophysite *(al-Mār-Ya'qūbiyyah)*, and Melkite *(al-mulkāniyyūn).* Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/462-3,
2/580, 628, 3/800-1. Muqātil's relatively passionate discussion of Christology in the commentary perhaps
represents the first, but crude, polemic against the Christians, shaped largely by the Qur'an's lead. On the
Christian side, the earliest polemical account of Islam is that of John of Damascus (d. *c.* 132/750), who was
brought up in the Umayyad court. To see the development of polemic between Muslims and Christians, see
Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic.* In relation to Arab Christians, Trimingham maintains that "The fifth-
century controversies concerning the nature of Christ mark, though they do not explain, the division of
Syrian Christians into opposing communions, of which the most defined were the Melkite (Chalcedonian),
the West Syrian (Monophysite), and the East Syrian (Nestorian). In consequence of these divisions, those
northern Arab Christians, nomadic and sedentary alike, who fell within the spheres of Byzantium and
Persia also became distinguished ecclesiastically as Monophysites or Nestorians." The term Melkites
"came to be applied to all who remained in communion with Constantinople, whether Syrian or Greek."
See his *Christianity,* 159, 213, 216.

evidenced when the Nestorians said that ʿĪsā was God' son, the Mar-Jacobites said that

God is the Messiah son of Maryam,[464] and the angel-worshippers said that God is one of

the three: He is a god, and so were ʿĪsā and Maryam.[465]

In his commentary on Q9: 30,[466] which spells out explicitly the Christians'

violation of *tawḥīd* and their committing *shirk,* Muqātil says that when they said that

"The Messiah is the son of God," they merely and unjustifiably imitated the Jews who

earlier said that "Ezra is the son of God."[467] But Muqātil also suggests that the elevation

of ʿIsā to the rank of divinity by the Christians was also due to their excessive religiosity,

as shown by his commentary on Q4: 170-172.[468] Muqātil interprets "the People of the

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[464]Q5: 17, 72. Parrinder argued, "To say that God is Christ is a statement not found anywhere in the New Testament or in the Christian creed… But in the early Christian centuries there arose heresies, such as that of Patripassianism, which so identified Christ and God as to suggest that God the Father had suffered on the cross. About A.D. 200 Noetus had taught that Christ was God the Father, and therefore that the Father himself was born and suffered and died. These views were taken to Rome by Praxeas, of whom Tertullian said that 'he drove out prophecy and brought in heresy, he put to flight the Comforter and crucified the Father'. The orthodox teaching of the Logos, the Word or 'Son' of God, was a defence against such heretical teaching, though it must be admitted that writers in later ages were not always careful enough in their use of these titles." See *Jesus,* 133-34. However, as far as the Syrian Christian society is concerned, which largely influenced the kind of Christianity the Arabs embraced, "the majority adopted the Monophysite dispensation which took no halfway measures about recognizing Christ as God." Trimingham, *Christianity,* 213.

[465] "It has often been thought that the Qur'an denies the Christian teaching of the Trinity, and commentators have taken its words to be a rejection of orthodox Christian doctrine. However, it seems more likely that it is heretical doctrines that are denied in the Qur'an, and orthodox Christians should agree with most of its statements… The Qur'an denies Christian heresies of Adoption, Patripassianism, and Mariolatry. But it affirms the Unity, which is at the basis of trinitarian doctrine." Parrinder, *Jesus,* 133-37. To understand how the Christians understand trinity see Parrinders' explanations, *Jesus,* 138-40. Or it is also possible that such a Trinitarian Christianity was the one called "Tritheistic heresy" developed in the Monopysite communities during the reigns of the Ghassānī Ḥārith ibn Jalaba and his successor Mundhir ibn al-Ḥārith (c. 569). See Trimingham, *Christianity,* 183-4.

[466] "The Jews said, 'Ezra is the son of God,' and the Christians said, 'The Messiah is the son of God': they said this with their own mouths, repeating what earlier disbelievers had said. May God confound them! How far astray they have been led!"

[467] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/167.

[468] "The Messenger has come to you [people] with the truth from your Lord, so believe– that is best for you– for even if you disbelieve, all that is in the heavens and the earth still belongs to God, and He is all knowing and all wise. People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word, directed to Mary, a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of a

Book" *(ahl al-kitāb)* in this verse as Christians from Najrān, including al-Sayyid and al-ʿĀqib, whom the Qur'an warns not to be so excessive in their religiosity by divinizing Jesus and Mary, and not to talk about trinity by making God as the third after Jesus and Mary.[469] When commenting on Q3: 59,[470] Muqātil explains the reasons for the Christian excessive religiosity are due to ʿĪsā's unusual birth and a number of miracles that God had bestowed upon him. In setting out the context for his commentary on the verse, Muqātil mentions that the Christian delegates of Najrān came to meet with the Prophet in Medina, including al-Sayyid and al-ʿĀqib, al-Asqaf, al-Ra's, Qays and his sons Khalid and ʿAmr.[471] Their leaders, al-Sayyid and al-ʿĀqib, said to the Prophet,

"O Muhammad, why do you curse and criticize our Lord *(ṣāhibanā)*?" The Prophet replied, "Who is your Lord? "'Īsā, son of the virgin Maryam. Show us any creation that is like him, who was able to bring the dead to life, cure the blind and leprous, and made a bird out of soil" [they said this, according to Muqātil, without ever mentioning "with God's Will"]. "Every descendant of Adam has a father, but ʿĪsā does not have one. Thus, follow us in that ʿĪsā is God's son, and only then we will follow you. You either make ʿĪsā the son (of God) or make him God (himself)." The Prophet replied, "I seek refuge from God, He has no son and there is no other God than He is."[472]

'Trinity'– stop [this], that is better for you– God is only one God, He is far above having a son, everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him and He is the best one to trust. The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of God, nor would the angels who are close to Him. He will gather before Him all those who disdain His worship and are arrogant."

[469] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/424-5.

[470] "In God's eyes Jesus is just like Adam: He created him from dust, said to him, 'Be', and he was."

[471] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/279-80.Trimingham maintains that "The fact that the people of Najran were the only group of Yemenites that treated with Muhammad during "the period of delegations" shows them to have been the only considerable body of native Christians in south-west Arabia." *Christianity,* 307.

[472] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/280.

Despite a long list of criticism, the Qur'an still offers a chance for Jews and Christians, as well as other religious communities, to receive God's reward by beliving in one God *(tawḥīd)* and in the Last Day, and by doing good deeds, as stated in Q2: 62. According to Muqātil, this verse was revealed when Salmān al-Fārisī, who came from Jundishapur, was converting to Islam. Salmān told the Prophet about the Christian monk *(rāhib)* and his companions who were persistent in their religion, praying and fasting. Upon hearing that story, the Prophet immediately said that they would be in hell. But revelation soon came to correct the Prophet, stating that as long as they believe, sincerely and not hypocritically, in Muhammad and what he taught, believed in one God *(tawḥīd)* having no associate and the Last Day, and did good deeds, their reward is assured before God.[473] This context of revelation is interesting since it suggests that the Qur'an corrects Muhammad's hasty judgment about people who did not answer his call. This divine correction was to advise Muhammad to be more patient and open to possibility that they would eventually accept his prophethood and worship God even in their old religions. At least, Muhammad had known of such person, that is, King Nergus in Abyssinia, and also some thirty two Abyssinian and eight Syrian Christians who, according to Muqātil, held ʿĪsā's religion until Muhammad came *(wa aqāma unasun minhum ʿalā dīn ʿĪsā--ʿalayh al-salām--ḥattā adrakū Muḥammadan)*, and they accordingly believed in him.[474]

Muqātil mentions this group of the believing Christians *(muslimū ahl al-Injīl)*

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[473] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/112.
[474] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/246.

when he was commenting on Q 28: 52-3.[475] There were some forty people of *ahl al-Injīl* who came to Medina with Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib, eight of who came from Syria, including Bahīrā, Abrahah, al-Ashraf, Durayd, Tammām, Ayman, Idrīs, and Nāfiʿ.[476] For these believing Christians, there were two rewards, one for their preserving Islam—that is, *tawḥīd*—and another for believing in Muhammad when they found him, despite their community's condemnation.[477]

The Hypocrites

Another social element of the Medinan society frequently addressed in the Qur'an are the *munāfiqūn* or hypocrites, that is, a group of people who converted to Islam, yet often acted against Islam and Muhammad. The term that points to the hypocrites is always mentioned in the plural form, male and female, as *munāfiqūn* and *munāfiqāt*. The term *munāfiqūn* appears twenty five times in twenty-five verses, and the term *munāfiqāt*, always accompanying *munāfiqūn,* appears only five times.[478] In many places in the Qur'an, the *munāfiqūn* are put in the same position with either disbelievers *(kuffār, kāfirūn)*[479] or polytheists *(mushrikūn)*,[480] and are therefore threatened with equally severe punishment in the hereafter. The difference between the *munāfiqūn*, on the one hand, and the *kuffār* and *mushrikūn*, on the other, is that while the latter two publicly proclaimed

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[475] "(52) Those to whom We gave the Scripture before believe in it, (53) and, when it is recited to them, say, 'We believe in it, it is the truth from our Lord. Before it came we had already devoted ourselves to Him.' (54) They will be given their rewards twice over because they are steadfast, repel evil with good, give to others out of what We have provided for them."

[476] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/348-350.

[477] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/349.

[478] The verses are: Q29: 11; Q8: 49; Q4: 61, 88, 138, 140, 142, 145; Q33: 1, 12, 24, 48, 60, 73; Q57:13; Q63:1, 7, 8; Q 66:9; Q48:6; Q9:64, 67, 68, 73, 101.

[479] Such as in Q4: 138, 140; Q9: 68, 73; Q33: 1, 48; Q66: 9.

[480] Such as in Q33: 73; Q48: 6.

their disbelief in Muhammad and the Qur'an, the former, in one way or another, professed some sort of submission and acceptance of Muhammad and the Qur'an, despite their nominal recognition and many instances of rebellious acts.

There are a number of descriptions given to the *munāfiqūn* in the Qur'an. The Qur'an describes them as those unwilling to follow what has been revealed to the Prophet (Q4: 61), whose conviction is unstable as their belief and disbelief are on and off (Q4: 138), ridiculing and making fun of revelation (Q4: 140, Q33: 12), deceitful by showing off belief absent in their hearts (Q4: 142, Q63: 1), in whose heart there is illness (Q8: 49, Q33: 12, 60), and commanding evil and forbidding right (Q9: 67). For these reasons, the Qur'an threatens the *munāfiqūn* with severe punishment (Q9: 68, 101) in hellfire of Jahannam (Q4: 140, Q9: 68, 73; Q66: 9), and even the lowest depths of Hell (Q4: 145). However, God still gives the *munāfqūn* a chance to repent, if they will (Q33: 24).

In his commentary, Muqātil presents a more elaborate and detailed description of the *munāfiqūn*. In doing so, he not only comments on those verses in which the terms that refer to hypocrites are found, but also brings in other verses that he sees as relevant. Muqātil mentions names, places, and events within which the rebellious acts of the *munāfiqūn* unfolded. By doing so, Muqātil clarifies who these *munāfiqūn* really were. Based on the presentation of the *munāfiqūn* in both the Qur'an and Muqātil's commentary, the most important characteristic of these people is that they had no trust in the Prophet, religiously and politically. Consequently, they were deceitfully two-faced in order to avoid possible harms from both Muhammad and his opponents at the same time. From a religious perspective, their profession of Islam was only nominal and largely

opportunistic, used to serve their temporal interests—such as security of their lives and property, or avoiding duties applied to non-Muslims.[481] Politically, their conduct was against the Prophet, and they were more inclined to support his opponents. The hypocrites attempted to weaken the morale of the believers by exploiting their lowly psychological conditions when they had just experienced a defeat in war, discouraging the believers' participation in war, and even cooperating with Muhammad's opponents.

One of the main reasons, according to Muqātil's understanding of Q4: 61, why the *munāfiqūn* did not have a complete trust in the Prophet is that they felt uncertain whether Muhammad would finally prevail, politically, over his opponents, be they the Arab polytheists or the Jews of Medina. But at the same time, these *munāfiqūn* were cautious that Muhammad would do them any harm if they did not submit to him. This split situation had created doubt in their hearts, which accordingly marked the very hypocrisy they embraced.[482]

In short, according to Muqātil's commentary on Q4: 139, since the *munāfiqūn* could not predict the matter of Muhammad *(lā yatimmu amr Muḥammad),* they had to be cautious. While, on the one hand, they professed their embracing of Islam, on the other, they kept their alliance with the Jews of Medina and took them as protectors *(awliyā'),* primarily because the Jews had built a coalition with the Meccan polytheists against Muhammad too.[483] Likewise, in his commentary on Q5: 52, Muqātil deals with the same

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[481] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/337.
[482] Q4: 61, "When they are told, 'Turn to God's revelations and the Messenger [for judgement],' you see the hypocrites turn right away from you [Prophet]." Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/385.
[483] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/415.

question, in which he mentions that eighty four of the *munāfiqūn*, such as 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy (whom he considers their leader, *ra's al-munāfiqīn*), Abu Nāfiʿ, and Abū Lubābah, made a covenant with the Jews seeking their protection *(wilāyat al-yahūd)* because they were uncertain about what was going to happen tomorrow, and Muhammad might not be victorious.[484] In his commentary on Q5: 58, Muqātil mentions that the *munāfiqūn* made a deal of loyalty with the Jews, that should the latter be expelled from Medina, the *munafiqūn* would go along with them.[485] But the Qur'an dismisses this loyalty pledge, suggesting instead that the *munāfiqūn* were two-faced, and that they were neither here nor there, which in the language of the Qur'an is called *mudhabdhabīn bayna dhālika* (Q4: 143).[486]

The *munāfiqūn* of Medina were also in active communication with the polytheists of Mecca. In his commentary on Q33: 1, Muqātil provides a context in which he understands the verse as related to such a coalition between the *munāfiqūn* and the Meccan polytheists. That is, a group of Medinan hypocrites, such as 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubay, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Saʿd ibn Abī Sarḥ, Tuʿmah ibn Ubayraq, sent a letter to the leaders of Meccan polytheists of the Quraish, such as Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb, ʿIkrimah ibn Abi Jahl, and Abū al-Aʿwar. The letter was an invitation for these Meccan leaders to visit Medina and form an alliance against Muhammad. The Medinan hypocrites promised the Meccans polytheists that they would rebel against Muhammad, if necessary, so that he might follow their pagan religion.

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[484] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/484.
[485] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/487.
[486] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/417.

To that invitation, the Meccan leaders replied that they would only visit Medina if the Medinan hypocrites were able to make a pact with Muhammad that would guarantee their safety during the visit. The Medinan hypocrites agreed, and they met with Muhammad to ask his protection for Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb, Abū al-Aʿwar, and ʿIkrimah ibn Abū Jahl for their upcoming visit to Medina. This was a time when they would play their two-faced strategy. To the Meccan polytheists, the hypocrites said that their visit to Medina might persuade Muhammad and his followers to come back to their old religion; but to Muhammad, when asking his permission, the hypocrites told him that a visit to Medina by the Meccan leaders could be a great opportunity for him to invite them to Islam.[487]

In another point of evidence for their lack of trust and loyalty to the Prophet, some *munāfiqūn* disserted by secretly leaving Medina and went back to Mecca after they had migrated to the city. In his commentary on Q4: 88, Muqātil mentions that there were nine people who did this, and one of them is Makhramah ibn Zayd al-Qurashī. Upon their arrival at Mecca, they wrote to the Prophet, saying that their return to Mecca was not to break ties with the Prophet, but was merely because they missed their homeland and their family at Mecca.[488]

The same lack of trust was also shown by a number of *munāfiqūn* who resided in Mecca and did not migrate to Medina. Muqātil mention their names when he is commenting on Q8: 49, such as Qays ibn al-Fākih ibn al-Mughīrah, al-Walīd ibn al-

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[487] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/468-471.
[488] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/394-96.

Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, Qays ibn al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, al-Walīd ibn ʿUtbah ibn Rabīʿah, ʿAlāʾ ibn Umayyah ibn Khalaf al-Jumaḥī, and ʿAmr ibn Umayyah ibn Sufyān ibn Umayyah. These people might have, at some point, proclaimed their belief in Muhammad when he was in Mecca, but opted to remain there when he and other believers migrated to Medina. According to Muqātil, their decision to remain in Mecca, while they were capable of migrating to Medina, living side by side with Muhammad's opponents, was a sufficient evident of their lack of commitment to the prophet and his prophetic mission. When the Meccan disbelievers went out to the Battle of Badr, these *munāfiqūn* went out with them. Knowing that the believers only made up a small number of fighters, and were thus very unlikely to achieve victory against the much larger number of their Meccan polytheist opponents, these *munāfiqūn* began to doubt and question their newly embraced religion (Islam). Furthermore, they thought Muhammad's companions were deluded by their religion for daring to face a much larger and more powerful enemy. As a response to this thinking, God sent down the verse, telling them that for whoever trusts God, He will give them victory.[489]

The Qur'an, and for this matter Muqātil, often uses a person's attitude to and participation in war for the sake of the religion as a litmus test whether a believer was truly sincere or simply a hypocrite. Muqātil would call those who were able to go to war but they instead opted to stay home hypocrites. Likewise, he would call hypocrites people who made excuses to leave the battle ground, such as Banū Ḥārithah ibn al-Ḥarth and

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[489] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/120-121.

Banū Salamah ibn Jushum, as indicated in Q33: 13.[490] Muqātil also calls *munāfiqūn* the people who, because of the small number of believers, did not believe Muhammad and the believers would finally be victorious. Likewise, Muqātil also calls people who discouraged others from participating in a war when it was commanded *munāfiqūn*.[491] Participation in a war was a serious matter. People who were willing to participate in it must have had a strong belief in the cause for which the war was waged. People whose heart and belief was weak, to say the least, such as those *munāfiqūn*, would likely opt to avoid participating in it,[492] or if they happened to participate in one, would go half way by leaving the battle ground with many excuses.[493] They saw no reason to sacrifice their lives for something in which they did not really believe.

Not only did the *munāfiqūn* possess weak hearts and weak belief, but they also attempted to make other people to distrust the Prophet and the revelation he received. For instance, in his commentary on Q2: 214, Muqātil mentions what the *munāfiqūn* said to the believers in relation the Battle of Uḥud, in which the believers suffered a severe loss: "Why did you sacrifice your life for something unworthy?"[494] "Why did you kill yourselves and destroy your property?" Similarly, in commenting on Q3: 142, Muqātil mentions what the *munāfiqūn* said to the believers: "If Muhammad was a real prophet, he would not ask for a war." In response, the believers said that those who died among them would enter paradise.[495] In many places, Muqātil mentions how the *munāfiqūn* used the

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[490] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/478-79.
[491] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/481.
[492] See Q9:73. Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/182-183.
[493] See Q33:13. Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/478-79.
[494] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/182.
[495] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/304.

low points in the believers' lives, such as the loss in the Battle of Uḥud, to weaken their

faith and belief so that they go back to their old life with its social and religious

practices.[496]

For the *munāfiqūn, "islām"* was "surrender" or "submission" in a political sense,

not "a complete and sincere devotion to God" in the religious sense, as the Qur'an and

Muhammad would have it. It is in this respect that the Qur'an rejected the Bedouins's

claim that they had "surrended" *(aslamnā, islāmakum),* because there was no faith in

their surrender. [497] Their submission was simply to save themselves and their property

from any harm that either Muhammad or his opponents may have inflicted upon them.

The *munāfiqūn* came from both Arab and Jewish communities. In his commentary

on Q2: 9, Muqātil mentions several names of the *munāfiqūn* from the People of Scripture,

such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl, Judd ibn Qays, al-Ḥārith ibn ʿAmr, Mugīth ibn

Qushayr, ʿAmr ibn Zayd.[498] With respect to *munāfiqūn* from the Arab, especially the

Bedouins *(Aʿrāb),* Muqātil mentions five clans, namely Juhaynah, Mazīnah, Aslam,

Ghifār and Ashjaʿ, who lived in between Medina and Mecca.[499] The fact that these names

are mentioned suggests that there was a rather significant number of converts from

among Arab, and especially the Jews at the time.

But a chance for repentance is always open for the *munāfiqūn.* Some of them

indeed repented, while others remained persistent in their *nifāq.* Those who repented, did

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[496] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/309.
[497] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/98. 99-100.
[498] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/89.
[499] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/192.

As a result of his exegetical endeavor, Muqātil suggests that the most important duty that human beings must fulfill in relation to God is *īmān* (belief) by upholding *tawḥīd* (the belief in divine unity) and *taṣdīq* (the belief in prophethood, especially that of Muhammad). Consequently, the most serious offense to God is *kufr* (disbelief) by committing the opposites of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*, namely *shirk* and *takdhīb,* respectively. Furthermore, Muqātil understands Islam, the religion that Muhammad preached, actually to be the same religion that all prophets before him had preached. Therefore, the Qur'an calls all prophets as *muslimūn.* As such, Islam is the primordial religion. The thread that has united this primordial religion is its core teaching of *īmān* manifested in *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*. The challenges that it faced have generally been similar, the performance of *kufr* in the form of *shirk* and *takdhīb.* This perspective has accordingly shaped Muqātil's attitudes in measuring people's responses to Muhammad's prophetic mission.

Since, in his understanding, Islam is the only true religion, Muqātil considers other religions human invention and satanic.[502] Interestingly, however, the Qur'an itself never mentioned the religions it criticized as institutionalized entities. Rather, it discussed Judaism or Christianity through their followers, namely *yahūd* or *nasārā,* respectively. Likewise, the Qur'an calls *majūs* and *ṣābi'ūn* religious communities. Like the Qur'an, Muqātil only rarely mentioned the religions other than Islam by their proper names when he criticized the followers of these religions.[503] Sometimes, when mentioning them

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[502] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/246, Muqātil says: *fa rajaʿa baʿḍuhum ʿan dīn ʿĪsā--ʿalayh al-salām—wa-btadaʿū al-naṣrāniyyah* ("some of them deviated from ʿĪsā's religion, and invented Christianity"); 3/119, in which he says: *fa-l adyān sittatun fa wāḥidun lillāh wa khmastaun li al-shayṭān* ("Religion is six. One of them is for God, and the rest are for Satan").

[503] Muqātil did mention terms such as *millat al-naṣrāniyyah* (3/236, 4/246, 849); *dīn al-yahūdiyyah* (1/140, 376, 2/489)

positively, Muqātil called the Jews "the People of the Torah" *(ahl al-Tawrāh)*, and

Christians "the People of the Gospel" *(ahl al-Injīl),* based on their affiliation with their

scriptures. This suggests that Muqātil acknowledged the validity of their scriptures and

that, as long as they followed the teaching of these scriptures, the Jews and Christians

might remain in the true teachings of their prophets. If sometimes Muqātil makes a

critical assessment of these religious communities by mentioning their affiliation with

their scripture, for instance, by using the phrase *al-munafiqūn min ahl al-Tawrāh* (the

hypocrites of the People of Scripture), he does this to distinguish between the pious

among the people of the Bible and those who are not.

To Muqātil, and the Qur'an alike, God sends all these scriptures. Any tampering

(taḥrīf) allegedly committed by the followers was committed in relation to their

understanding or interpretation, and it therefore did not change the nature of these

scriptures. [504] It means Muqātil acknowledged that the Bible, especially the one that exists

in his time, was valid. Muqātil's fierce criticism of the Jews and Christians is because

they had not been faithful to the bibilical teachings, especially pertaining to *tawḥīd* and

tasdīq, in addition a number of legal matters, such as as stoning *(rajm)* and *lex taliones*

(qiṣāṣ). Consequently, as long as the Jews and Christians upheld *tawḥīd* and

acknowledged Muhammad's prophethood, Muqātil did not see any necessity for them to

convert to Islam; they could follow their own scriptures in terms of legal matters. If they

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[504] According to Gordon Nickel, "[t]he focus of early Muslim accusations of *taḥrīf* was not corruption or falsification of the text. Rather, the commentators were more concerned about the response of non-Muslims—primarily the Jews of Madīna—to the Muslim claims that Muḥammad is a prophet and that the recitations he is speaking are from Allah." See his "Early Muslim Accusations of *Taḥrīf,* 207.

happened to accept Islam, however, they would have to leave their old religions altogether and fully practice Islam.

In terms of the Arab polytheists, Muqātil sees an entirely different treatment that the Qur'an offers. They were the only community upon whom Muhammad was allowed to impose Islam. After their submission, regardless of their sincerity, the principle that "there is no compulsion in religion" must be upheld, although social and political arrangement with the People of Scripture, such as the duty to pay *jizyah,* is in order.

In relation to the hyporcrites, Muqātil addresses them with highly moralistic language, similar to how the Qur'an itself treats them. While admitting that they are part of the believers, Muqātil always treats them with harsh criticism as a result of their constant rebellious acts against the Prophet and the believers. So harsh is Muqātil's view of the hypocrites that he often positions them on a par with disbelievers or even polytheists. But when commenting on Q66: 9,[505] Muqātil differentiates between the real enemy of Islam and the hypocrites, saying that striving against the disbelievers *(kuffār)* is done with swords, and against the *munāfiqīn* it is done with words.[506]

In terms of religious laws, Muqātil is of the view that every community could practice their own religious laws. Socio-political laws, such as how these religious communities are to coexist, are another matter and needs another arrangement. This is precisely what Muhammad did briefly after his migration to Medina when he was ratifying the Constitution of Medina. In this respect, Fred Donner is correct when he

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[505] "Prophet, strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites. Deal with them sternly. Hell will be their home, an evil destination!"
[506] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/379.

notes that Muhammad first sought to build an ecumenical society whose members were believers from all three-monotheist communities. Likewise, Afsaruddin notes that the Constitution of Medina provides not only "a very clear idea of the nature of the polity," but also "of inter-faith relations envisaged in this early period.[507]

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[507] See her *First Muslims,* 4-6. See also Lapidus, *History,* 23-4.

CHAPTER TWO

Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah min al-Qur'ān: The Laws of the Qur'an

"…No acts would be accepted without [correct] belief."
Muqātil ibn Sulaymān[508]

In his major, narrative commentary, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* which I discussed in the previous chapter, Muqātil advocates the idea that Islam is based fundamentally on the idea of belief *(īmān),* manifested especially in a pair of principles, namely the belief in the unity of god *(tawḥīd)* and in the validity of Muhammad's prophetic mandate *(taṣdīq)*. Setting up *īmān* and its two supporting principles--*tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*—as the defining features of Islam as an ideal type, Muqātil considers any denial of *īmān,* especially the rejection of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq,* an act of disbelief *(kufr),* especially manifested in the association of God with creation *(shirk)* and rejection of Muhammad's prophethood *(takdhīb)*. As such, Muqātil uses *īmān* and its two supporting principles as identity and communal boundary markers between Muslims and non-Muslims during the prophetic period in his commentary on the Qur'an. As a unified community marked by their adherence of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq,* Muqātil portrays Muslims as drawing their existential identity from their constant, if conflictual, encounters with non-Muslim communities,

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[508] Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Kitāb Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah min al-Qur'ān,* 11: *wa lā tuqbal al-a'māl illā bi al-īmān.*

both polytheist *(wathanī)* and people of Scripture *(kitābī)*, characterized by varying

degrees of *shirk* and *takdhīb.*[509]

In the process of social, political, and religious interaction between Muslims and

non-Muslims, however, it is not only differences that are underlined; commonalities are

also identified. The most important and tangible effort to establish coexistence between

different communities in Medina is perhaps the ratification of the Constitution of Medina

that acknowledged a common sense of belonging and responsibility as the city's citizens

amidst their differences, social and religious.[510] With the People of Scripture, Muhammad

recognized not only their shared, physical space and citizenship, but also their shared

religious affiliation to the same God as fellow believers. For Muhammad, religious

conversion of People of Scripture to Islam was not necessary, although it might have

been desireable to him in the beginning of his relocation to the city.[511] Given the

circumstances, expecting the Jews and Christians to fully follow him seemed to be

unrealistic, and Muhammad therefore proposed a minimum request: that they would

acknowledge the legitimacy of his prophetic office while they kept adhering to their

religious traditions. The Medinan Arabs were treated accordingly on the basis of their

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[509] David Cook argued that "[f]or the earliest period of Islam relationship between the groups has, at its core, been a religious one." See his "The Beginning of Islam in Syria during the Umayyad Period," (PhD Diss., University of Chicago, 2012), 16-17.

[510] See Frederick M. Denny, "Ummah in the Constitution of Medina," in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies,* Vol. 36, No. 1 (Jan. 1977), 39-47; Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: the Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (England: Pearson-Longman, 2004), second edition, 34-5. However, I see nowhere in the commentary Muqātil mentions about this constitution.

[511] Heribert Busse maintained that Muhammad quickly realized that "[i]t was a hopeless venture to want to convert the Jews to Islam," and hence the change of the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Kabah in Mecca. See his *Islam, Judaism, and Christianity: Theological and Historical Affiliations,* trans. Allison Brown (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1988), 19. Fowden noted early Islam is more receptive to converts rather than actively proselytizing, as in the case of Christianity. See his *Empire,* 5-6.

allegiance with the believers, Muslims or People of Scripture. In this respect, distinction and commonness are simultaneously recognized, and that allows different identities to coexist.

However, a more rigid opposition was drawn between Muslims and people of Mecca, the paragon of polytheism *(al-mushrikūn)*. Medina, as a geographical location and political establishment, is opposed to Mecca, but theologically the former represents the community of believers in opposition to disbelivers, though these are ideal types. There was a possibility that allegiance with one of the two cities did not guarantee perfect adherence to the defining elements of each city, especially their religious view. Muqātil seems to suggest that not all of those "surrendered" (the basic meaning of *muslim*s) are religiously sincere; some have "surrendered" out of political motivation. In short, the Prophet was establishing an alliance with some Arab groups whose adherence to Islam was nominal at best.

As such, the ideal type opposition between Muslims and non-Muslims is actually, on closer examination, a graded continuum. The same can be said about the ideal type opposition of *tawhīd* and *taṣdīq* that represent Muslims, on the one hand, and *shirk* and *takdhīb* that represents non-Muslims, one the other. Such opposition, while real, is also a continuum, for while distinctions between groups are made, commonality is also established. Absolute *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*, on one extreme, are opposed to *shirk* and *takdhīb*, on the other extreme; in between, there is an alledged gradation. Those who believed in *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq,* namely the followers of Muhammad, are on one side, and those who committed *shirk* and *takdhib*, particularly the Meccan idolaters, are on the

other. In between, with relative closeness or remoteness from the two extremes, are those who do not conform to the full criteria of believers or disbelivers set by the Qur'an, as in the case of the People of Scripture and hypocrites.

In his legal commentary, *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah min al-Qur'ān,* Muqātil also uses *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* as the yardstick in deriving the Qur'anic laws. If we can call *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* theology, then, internally, Muqātil's assertion is that it is fundamental for a Muslim to have a correct theology before anything else, including law.[512] Externally, Muqātil uses the same theology to evaluate other religious communities and their worth before the Muslim community's eye. As stated, this theology first and foremost serves as Muslim self-identification against other religious communities, pagan *(wathanī)* and scripturist *(kitābī)* alike. By the same token, this theology constitutes an act of "othering," for while it defines who can be called true Muslims, it likewise clarifies who cannot. Theology draws the communal boundary by the power of inclusion and exclusion and brings with it legal consequences. To those defined as Muslims, the believers who followed Muhammad's religious teaching, applied a set of laws different from those applied to those who were believers but followed the teachings of the earlier prophets—namely the People of Scripture—and those who were disbelievers. Such laws, while they targeted both religious and non-religious aspects—such as their political status—was manifested largely in the form of sociopolitical setting, such as imposing

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[512] It appears that the same view is generally held among Muslim legal specialists in which they put the knowledge of law as second to the correct theology *(ashraf al-ʿulūm baʿd al-iʿtiqād al-ṣaḥīḥ maʿrifat al-aḥkām al-ʿamaliyyah).* See Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Bahādir ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Shāfiʿī al-Zarkashī, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh,* ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿĀfī and ʿUmar Sulaymān al-Ashqar (al-Ghardaqah: Dār al-Ṣafwah li al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzīʿ, 1992), 1/12.

certain tributary payments on non-Muslims to the Muslim polity, as in the case of the People of Scripture, or imposing surrender using peaceful or violent means, as in the case of the pagans. With regard to lukewarm Muslims, Muqātil finally admits their status as Muslims only after he makes it clear that hypocrisy is a crime almost as serious as *shirk,* but one whose punishment is to be given not in this world but in the hereafter.

This interreligious perspective on Qur'anic law in Muqātil's legal commentary is the main agenda that I would like to pursue in this chapter. As I have argued, Muqātil's exegetical thrust is the promotion of *imān,* especially *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq,* in opposition to *kufr,* especially *shirk* and *takdhīb.* This leads him to using these principles as the yardstick to define both Muslim and other communities. The next step, then, would be to study how Muqātil discusses the legal implications that a theology-based communal identity brings about. Apart from topics which deal with internal Muslim affairs, such as rituals and other personal as well as public laws, much of Muqātil's discussion in the commentary deals with interreligious affairs as intermarriage, food sharing, and matters of peace and war.

In order to be consistent with the previous chapter, I will present Muqātil's views on the basis of religious community or people—such as People of Scripture, polytheists, and hypocrites—with whom the Muslims were to have relationship. Thus, for instance, there would be People of Scripture-related laws, polytheist-related laws, and so forth, pertaining to matters such as intermarriage, food sharing, agreements, war, etc. Some topics, such as jihād, will be treated as an independent discussion given the relatively large attention that Muqātil pays to it, in addition to its close connection to interreligious

matters. I will also study some of Muqātil's peculiar topics that are not normally discussed in any legal work by Muslims, such as the doctrine "commanding right and forbidding wrong," and the question of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* in the Qur'an, which all have some bearing on interreligious relations.

Apart from topics that Muqātil discusses compactly in one place, such as jihād, I will gather a number of relevant topical discussions, and make it part of one larger discussion on a certain theme. For example, Muqātil deals with the People of Scripture in a number of topical discussions, each addressing a specific question pertaining to them. In order to gain a fuller picture of Muqātil's views on People of Scripture in different legal questions, I will bring these dispersed topics into one large theme as "People of Scripture related laws" that will deal with a variety of questions which Muqātil brings up, such as intermarriage, food sharing, war and peace, etc.

Given that Muqātil's *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah* is a legal commentary, one might expect that his exposition of the same topics in it would lead to more precise and specified legal rulings, compared to his more discursively theological exposition in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr.* Yet, I shall argue, there is no significant difference in Muqātil's tone in approaching these similar topics in the two commentaries. Methodologically, however, there are two notable differences.

First, Muqātil employs a formulaic style of opening statements in his interpretation of Qur'anic verses in his legal commentary, one which is absent in the major, narrative commentary, but also present, albeit differently, in his *Wujūh*. Second, the type of supporting ḥadith reports used in the narrative commentary is primarily that of

asbāb al-nuzūl that clarify the circumstances within which certain qur'anic verses were revealed or within which such verses must be understood. In the legal commentary Muqātil uses traditions that clarify the qur'anic statements, although they do not necessarily offer more "practical" guidance. Instead, the majority of traditions used in this legal commentary seem to be echoing the statements made in the Qur'an that they purportedly clarify without further specified explanations. There are, however, few traditions that have shaped the legal decisions Muqātil made more decisively than the influence of the content of the qur'anic verses themselves. In this respect, such traditions bring about nuances that Muqātil's interpretation of the Qur'an offers.

Both commentaries remain, to a great extent, theological in character and emotionally ethical in tone. Despite its legal orientation, Muqātil's *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah* is a theologically and morally shaped commentary, nothing like the proper legal treatises that later Muslim scholars wrote. To be able to differentiate Muqātil's legal enterprise in his commentary from proper legal works of later Muslim jurists, I will undertake a minor comparative study on some of the topics that Muqātil discusses in the commentary with that of al-Shāfi'ī in his work on substantive law, *al-Umm*.[513]

Description of the commentary

Just like Muqātil's narrative commentary, *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah min al-Qur'ān* is the first of its kind within Muslim scholarship.[514] It is the first qur'anic

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[513] Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Umm,* ed. Rif'at Fawzī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (al-Manṣūrah: Dār al-Wafā' li al-Ṭibā'ah wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 2001).

[514] 'Alī ibn Sulaymān al-'Ābid, *Tafasīr Āyāt al-Ahkām wa Manāhijuhā* (Riyāḍ, Saudi Arabia: 2010), 101.

commentary whose discussion of law in Islam is inspired by and derived primarily from the Qur'an.[515] The fact that the Qur'an had been the major, if not primary, source of Islamic law in this early period poses a challenge to the views of some scholars who upheld that Islamic law at that point in time derived from sources other than the Qur'an and the prophetic precedent, and in which the role of the Qur'an, if any, was minor and insignificant.[516] A number of scholars have, however, criticized the view that undermined the important role that the Qur'an played in legal ratification in early Muslim community.[517]

The commentary begins with a chain of transmission *(isnād)* identical to that of Muqātil's *al-Tafsīr Kabīr.*[518] The authorities mentioned in this *isnād,* according to Goldfeld, reached the second half of the fifth/eleventh century. Of those authorities,

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[515] Muqātil's heavy reliance on the Qur'an in discussing legal topics is in a stark contrast with Mālik in his *Muwaṭṭa'* who, was contemporary with him, relied more on traditions that convey the Medinan practices. See Yasin Dutton, *The Origins of Islamic Law: the Qur'an, the Muwaṭṭa' and Madinan 'Amal* (New Delhi, India: Lawman Private Limited, 2000). However, there is one case in which Muqātil does not provide a qur'anic basis for his discussion, but merely ḥadīth reports. See "wiping the shoes [in the case of purification prior to performing *salah*]" *(Fi al-mash 'ala al-khuffayn)*. Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Āyah min al-Qur'ān 'an Muqātil ibn Sulaymān,* ed. Isaiah Goldfeld, (Shfaram, Israel: al-Mashriq Press, 1980), 22.
[516] See for instance Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).
[517] See Harald Motzki, although he resorts more to a work on *ḥadīth* rather than a Qur'anic commentary in his arguments, that is, the *Muṣannaf* of the Yemeni ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, he was able to show the untenability of Schacht's theses that championed the marginal role of the Qur'an in terms of early development of Islamic law. See Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools* (Leiden, Boston & Koln: Brill, 2002). Likewise, Wael B. al-Hallaq argues "that the Qur'ān was a source of Islamic law since the early Meccan period, when the Prophet Muḥammad began to receive the Revelation. This conclusion, supported by extensive evidence from the Qur'ān itself, compels a modification in the standard narrative about the genesis of Islamic law." See his "Groundwork of the Moral Law: A New Look at the Qur'ān and the Genesis of Sharīʿa," in *Islamic Law and Society* 16 (2009) 239-279.
[518] With the exception of the last two transmitters, al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr Muḥammad 'Aqil ibn Zayd al-Shahrazūri and al-Qāḍī Abu 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn al-Zadalj, the rest of transmitters are the same people mentioned in Muqātil's major narrative commentary; they are successively: 'Abd al-Khāliq ibn al-Ḥasan (d. 962 or 968) related from 'Abd Allāh ibn Thābit (d. 921) from his father (Thābit ibn Yaʿqūb) in the year 857, from al-Hudhayl ibn Habib in the year 808, from Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767). Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 9-11.

according to Goldfeld, it was 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Thābit (d. 921) who gave the commentary its final shape *(sighat akhirah)* by adding a number of ḥadīth reports from Muqātil and other authorities; he also added some linguistic explanation from his contemporaries.[519] Meanwhile, the last three names—al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr Muḥammad 'Āqil ibn Zayd al-Shahrazūrī, al-Qāḍī Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Zadalj, and Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Khāliq ibn al-Ḥasan—were merely transmitters *(nuqqāl)* of the work and did nothing to add to it.[520]

The premise of the commentary is to derive qur'anic legal views on the basis of identified five hundred verses. The phrase "five hundred verses of the Qur'an" *(al-khams mi'at ayah min al-Qur'ān)* in the commentary's title is intriguing. It suggests that Muqātil believed there are about five hundred legal verses in the Qur'an.[521] While this number does not receive a consensus among the Muslims, it gains the support of many, if not the majority. Muslims have agreed that, as a whole, the number of qur'anic verses is six thousand, two hundred "something" *(sittat alaf wa mi'ata ayah wa kasr),*[522] although that "something" may be four verses, or ten, or fourteen, or seventeen, or twenty-seven, or even thirty six. These differences do not, however, imply that there are more or fewer words in the Qur'an if one chooses to adopt one view or another. They merely are the

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[519] This phenomenon is also found in Muqatil's narrative commentary. Goldfeld also believed that 'Abd Allāh ibn Thābit was the one who "composed" *al-Ashbāh wa al-Naẓā'ir* that was also ascribed to Muqātil. See Goldfeld, "Introduction," 8.

[520] Goldfeld, "Introduction," 7. In one instance, 'Abd al-Khāliq ibn al-Ḥasan was said to have said, "I found in the book of 'Ubaydallah ibn Thabit…"

[521] My own counting suggests that, disregarding repetition, there are four hundred and seventy nine verses mentioned in the commentary. These verses are taken from fifty-nine out of one hundred and fourteen chapters of the Qur'ān.

[522] al-'Ābid, *Tafasīr,* 45.

result of differences in terms of how people understand where a verse starts and where it
ends. Some view that two qur'anic verses are actually one, while they are two separate
verses for other people. Despite these different views, the material upon which they are
based is exactly the same, no less no more.[523]

Similar differences also occurred among scholars in terms of identifying the legal
verses in the Qur'an as a result of their differences in understanding which of the
Qur'anic verses that have legal implications *(āyāt al-aḥkām)*. Thus, there are scholars
who said that there are one hundred and fifty *āyāt al-aḥkām* in the Qur'an; others said
two hundred verses; and the rest said five hundred.[524] Of these different views, the
number "five hundred" has become one of the most adopted views although not
unanimously, [525] and that, according to Muhammad al-Khidr ibn al-Husayn, is thanks to
Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, the first person who identified such a number of the qur'anic legal
verses and accordingly composed an independent work on it.[526] Such different views of
the number of legal verses in the Qur'an may have been the result of the fact that as
guidance, every qur'anic verse may have potentially legal consequences or implications
even though it may not be explicitly legal in its character.[527]

The legal verses in the Qur'an are found in both Meccan and Medinan parts of
revelation. Based on Muqātil's commentary, however, there are more legal verses in the

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[523] See al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān,* 1/232; Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Aẓīm al-Zarqānī, *Manahil al-'Irfan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an,* ed. Fawwāz Aḥmad Zamarālī (Beirūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1995), 1/277-8; Muḥammad Sālim Muḥaysin, *Fi Riḥāb al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Madīnah al-Munawwarah: n. p., 1989), 118-20.
[524] al-'Ābid, *Tafasīr,* 46.
[525] Mannā' al-Qaṭṭān, *al-Tashrī' wa al-Fiqh fi al-Islām: Tārīkhan wa Manhajan* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 2001), 68-70.
[526] al-'Ābid, *Tafasīr,* 47.
[527] Ibn Daqīq al-'Īd, *Risālat al-Islāḥ,* 3/21-22.

Medinan chapters *(sūrah,* pl. *suwar)* than they are in the Meccan chapters, although the number of the Meccan chapters from which these legal verses are derived is greater than that of the Medinan chapters.[528]

Structure of the Commentary

Unlike Muqātil's narrative commentary, *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah min al-Qur'ān* is not a commentary on the whole Qur'an. Rather, it is a commentary on supposedly legal verses in the Qur'an presented as a series of legal topics. It appears that the arrangement of the legal topics is based on the religious priority and the relative significance of such topics according to Muqātil's theological concerns. Thus, after the first heading on *tafsīr al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥaram* (interpretation of the licit and illicit), which signifies the very legal character of the commentary, the next heading that follows is *tafsīr al-īman* (interpretation of belief),[529] which is theological.

As such, while the commentary is meant to provide the legal rulings of the Qur'an, it pays a great attention to theological questions that became a main concern of Muqātil throughout his major commentary. Thus, this commentary, to a certain extent, brings forth together Muqātil's legal and theological concerns. Or, to put it differently, Muqātil seems to suggest that legal concerns should be based on valid theological concerns. This can be seen in Muqātil's large framework that is concerned first and foremost with the importance of having correct theological views before anything else.

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[528] Out of fifty-nine qur'anic chapters from which Muqātil cites his legal verses, thirty-seven are Meccan, and twenty two are Medinan. However, the number of Medinan legal verses is twice as many as Meccan legal verses, three hundred and twenty eight and one hundred and fifty one, respectively. Al-ʿĀbid, *Tafāsīr,* 51.
[529] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 12.

Law or a legal concern, in this respect, comes second to theology, which determines the former's orientation within the latter's parameters.[530]

Muqātil's *Khams Mi'ah* deals, successively, with legal topics pertaining to ritual *('ibādāt),* to familial *(munākahāt)*, and to social and public affairs *(muʿāmalāt).*[531] In general, the commentary is divided in larger sections of eight *abwāb* ("chapters"), each followed by a series of subheadings, entitled *tafsir* ("interpretation"). The eight chapters consist of (1) *abwāb al-ṣalāh* (Prayer Chapter), (2) *abwāb ṣadaqat al-taṭawwuʿ maʿa al-farīḍah* (Chapter on Voluntary and Obligatory Alms), (3) *abwāb al-siyām wa naskh min al-ṣaum al-awwal* (Fasting Chapter), (4) *abwāb al-maẓālim* (Misdeed Chapter), (5) *abwāb qismat al-mawārīth* (Chapter on Inheritance Division), (6) *abwāb al-ṭalaq* (Divorce Chapter), (7) *abwāb al-zinā wa ma fīhi al-ḥadd ʿala man zanā min al-aḥrār wa ḥad al-qādhif* (Chapter on Adultery and the Punishment for Adulterers, and Those Who Accuse Others of Adultery), and (8) *abwāb al-jihād* (Jihād Chapter). For reasons not entirely clear to me, this commentary does not discuss, among other things, any trade-related topics, which is usually included in any legal treatises by Muslim scholars. It is possible that the division and selection of Muqātil's legal topics is based on what he thinks is legally unambiguous in the Qur'an and which is very important in relation to the

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[530] The fact that very often theology takes precedence over law in Muqātil's commentary will appear even more clearly when I compare it with al-Shāfiʿī's *al-Umm* in some of the cases with which Muqātil deals.
[531] Al-ʿĀbid maintains that legal commentaries usually set up their discussion by following the chronological arrangement of the qur'anic chapters in the standard muṣḥaf of the Qur'an, from *al-Fātiḥah* to *al-Nās.* A few exceptions to this rule are Muqātil's *Khams Mi'at* and al-Bayḥaqī's *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* of al-Shāfiʿī. See his *Tafāsīr,* 80.

correct theology that a believer must have; such are the mentioned topics which he decides to tackle.[532]

As a whole, there are one hundred and sixty one *tafsīr* subheadings scattered in these eight *abwāb.* Although the majority of these *tafsīr*s have been systematically arranged based on the concerns of each chapter, there are some that seem to be misplaced. For example, topics of ritual purification and almsgiving are put together in the chapter on prayer *(abwāb al-ṣalāh).*[533] The same can be said of a number of *tafsīr*s related to sin that would have been better if they were placed in the chapter on *maẓālim.* Another case of *tafsīr*s, such as ones related to pilgrimage and *maẓālim*, take place in two different chapters *(abwāb)*, namely chapter on prayer and chapter on fasting.[534] While the chapter on inheritance seems to be well arranged, one of its *tafsīr*s comes in a chapter before its proper chapter. Furthermore, there are *tafsīr*s that could have been put together and formed an independent, new chapter, such as *tafsīr*s on marriage, rather than putting them in the chapter on inheritance. Likewise, *tafsīr*s on ritual purification, pilgrimage, and slavery, for instance, could have been given their independent chapters rather than

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[532] Al-Qaṭṭān, for instance, argues that some of the legal verses in the Qur'an appear explicitly in which the room for difference as to their legal character is small, as in the case of the obligation of prayers, alms, and fasting, verses on inheritance, the illicitness of adultery/fornication, unlawful murder, etc. Other verses suggest legal ramifications but in more implicitly and therefore open to different views and interpretation. The more explicit legal verses in the Qur'an usually have more to do with correct theology *(bi manzilat al-'aqā'id)*, the abandoning of which would exclude one from the faith. See al-Qaṭṭān, *Tahsrī',* 68.

[533] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'ah,* 14-52. Generally, any legal works by Muslims would put purification-trelated topics prior to chapter on prayers on the chapter of purification *(bāb al-ṭahārah).* Furthermore, this chapter on prayer also discusses some topics related to alms giving which should be part of the next chapter, *abwāb ṣadaqat al-taṭawwu' wa al-farīḍah* (chapters on recommended and obligated charities).

[534] For example, "interpretation of combining of 'umrah and hajj" *(tafsīr al-mut'ah bi al-'umrah bi al-ḥajj)* takes place in *abwāb al-ṣalāh;* Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 35.

being blended with other chapters that are unrelated, as in the present arrangement of the commentary.

In order to grasp better the hybrid character of the commentary, in the sense that it is legal as much as theological, and the religious priority upon which the commentary's arrangement is based, let us follow Muqātil's own explanation on first two *tafsīr*s that seem to serve as an introduction to the commentary. The first is *tafsīr al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥarām ʿan Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Khurāsānī* (interpretation of the permitted and the forbidden from Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Khurāsānī).

> Muqātil said: 'On the bridge of *Jahannam*, there are seven[535] arcades in which a servant would be questioned, first of all about *īmān* (belief) in God Almighty. If one could pass it perfectly, he is allowed to go to the second arcade, and is asked about *ṣalāh* (prayer). If one passes it well, he is allowed to go to the third arcade, and is asked about *zakāh* (alms-giving). If one passes, he is allowed to proceed to the fourth arcade and is asked about *siyām* (fasting). If one passes, he is allowed to go to the fifth arcade and is asked about *hajj* (pilgrimage). If one passes, he would be allowed to go to the sixth arcade and is asked about *ʿumrah* (lesser pilgrimage). Once one passes this, he would be allowed to go the seventh arcade, and is asked about *maẓalim* (crimes). If one does no wrong to anybody, one would be allowed to go to heaven. This is God's commandment [Q89: 14]: "Your Lord is always watchful," *yaʿnī*, the angels are always watching over the servants on the bridge of *Jahannam* in these seven arcades; they will ask them about these seven matters. Deeds *(aʿmāl)* will not be accepted unless [they are accompanied] with [correct] belief *(īmān).*'[536]

The above passage revolves around the concept of licit and illicit *(ḥalāl wa ḥarām)*, which reminds us, specifically, of the first two of Muqātil's five fundamental

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[535] It seems there is a typo in the printed commentary in which *tisʿ* (nine) instead of *sabʿ* (seven) is written.
[536] Muqātil, *Khams Miʾat*, 11.

aspects of the Qur'an in his narrative commentary in the previous chapter, namely divine commands and prohibitions *(amruhū wa nahyuhū)*.[537] Thus, for Muqātil, to understand the Qur'an is first and foremost to understand what God commands and allows us to do in life, and what He prohibits us from doing. In other words, to deal with the Qur'an is first to deal with God's laws as they are delineated within. Such divine law regulates what is commanded and allowed *(amruhū)* on the one hand, and forbidden *(nahyuhū)* on the other. As such, these two terms are parallel with two other terms that Muqātil introduces in this commentary, namely licit *(halāl)* and illicit *(ḥaram)*. In a way, this legal commentary is the realization of two out five fundamental aspects that Muqātil delineates in his major commentary.

This passage then enumerates a number of commands and prohibitions that God imposed upon people the adherence of which would lead them to heaven. Divine commands in the passage consist of belief, prayer, alms giving, fasting, and pilgrimage; while divine prohibitions are couched in a term *maẓālim* ("crimes"). While all elements of these divine commands and prohibitions pertain to legal matter, one—that is, belief *(īmān)*—is more a matter of theology. The fact that belief is mentioned twice in the beginning and end of the passage suggests the relative importance that Muqātil puts on it. In fact, belief is so central in Muqātil's view that without it no deeds are valid and a person cannot proceed to the next arcade. This, again, shows how in Muqātil's view theology takes precedence upon law. That is to say, acts have no legal value if not performed by someone with the correct belief. As such, despite dealing with legal

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[537] Muqāti, *Tafsīr,* 1/26.

questions in the Qur'an, the tone of Muqātil's commentary is more theological than legal.[538]

The centrality of belief or faith in Islam has led Muqātil to tackle it once more in the next discussion, which follows his general delineation of the licit and illicit in *tafsīr al-īmān.*[539] In this part, Muqātil opens his explanations, saying: "Whoever believes what is in the Qur'an, he then believes in God's commandment."[540] By adducing Q2: 1-3,[541] Muqātil emphasizes that the Qur'an is from Allah, providing guidance for those who fear *shirk*, those who believe that the Qur'an was sent down to Muhammad, those who adhere to God's commandment in terms of what is licit and illicit *(yuḥillūna ḥalālahu wa yuḥarrimūna ḥarāmah)*, and those who apply what is in the Qur'an.[542]

Muqātil then proceeds to describe what he calls *aṣl al-īmān* (foundation of faith), namely *tawḥīd*, belief in the Day of Resurrection *(ba'th)*, belief in angels *(malā'ikah)*, in every revelation that God has sent down *(kitāb),* and in all prophets.[543] Afterward, Muqātil adduces a ḥadīth that conveys the definitions of *īmān, islām,* and *iḥsān.*[544] And at the closing of the discussion, Muqātil stresses the importance of *tawhid* as the source of all goods *(al-khayr kulluhū min al-tawḥīd).*[545] Muqātil also reiterates his statement in *tafsīr al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥarām,* which precedes *tafsīr al-īmān,* in terms of the relationship

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[538] This will become much clearer in my comparison of Muqātil and al-Shāfiʿī in later section of the chapter.
[539] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 12-14.
[540] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 12.
[541] Q.2: 1-3, "(1) *Alif Lam Mim,* (2) This is the Scripture in which there is no doubt, containing guidance for those who are mindful of God, (3) who believe in the unseen, keep up the prayer and give out of what We have provided for them."
[542] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 12.
[543] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 12-13.
[544] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 12.
[545] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 13.

between faith *(īmān)* and deeds *(aʿmāl)*, asserting that it is *tawḥīd* that determines the acceptability of any deeds.[546] "A *mushrik* who donated his wealth without *īmān*, his *shirk* would annul his donation."[547] This view, which connects this commentary to Muqātil's major commentary in which the opposition of *tawḥīd* and *shirk* is addressed constantly, also suggests that the formulation of law and its application must be built on a solid theological foundation, namely a correct belief or faith. It is also this belief that Muqātil uses as the main criterion for his interpretation of the legal verses in the Qur'an.

As I have argued before, the arrangement of legal topics in the commentary reflects Muqātil's religious priority and his larger theological framework. This is further vindicated by the topics that immediately follow *tafsīr al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥarām* and *tafsīr al-īmān,* namely *abwāb al-ṣalāh* (prayer chapter). Obligatory prayers are arguably the most important rituals in Islam. In fact, prayers are the pillars of Islamic religion. Islam will remain strong as long as Muslims continue to perform prayers. On the contrary, Islam will collapse if Muslims abandon them: *al-ṣalat ʿimād al-dīn, fa man taraka al-ṣalat hadam al-din* ("prayer is the pillar of religion. Whosoever abandons it, he destroys religion").[548]

The paramount significance of prayer in Islam allows no excuse for a Muslim not to perform it. If one could not do it in the properly prescribed ways, she is allowed to perform it in any other ways she is capable. Dying, or perhaps insanity and menstruation, are the only acceptable reasons for a Muslim to free herself from this obligation. Such a

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[546] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 14.
[547] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 56.
[548] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 14.

topical arrangement in the commentary supports my argument that Muqātil organizes his legal material of the Qur'an based on the scale of religious priority as well as his theological concerns, and not based on the chronological occurrences of these legal verses in the standard *muṣḥaf,* like the organization *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir.*

Exegetical Methods

Throughout the commentary, Muqātil employs a formulaic statement in the beginning of each legal topic with which he deals. That is, "In the qur'anic chapter in which X is mentioned, God says X, *yaʻnī...*" *(Fī al-sūrah allatī yudhkaru fīhā X qawluhu subḥānahū X, yaʻnī...).* The first X points to the chosen words—be they names of persons, certain phrases—in the chapter, which often serve as the name of the chapter itself. The second X points to the wording of the verses being discussed. The term *yaʻnī* ("that is" – roughly meaning) is used to separate qur'anic wordings from that of Muqātil's glossing and interpretation.

Within each topic, Muqātil collects all relevant verses and interprets them by piecing these verses into smaller fragments. To support his commentary on the verses, Muqātil provides ḥadīth reports, which originated from the Prophet, Companions, or Successors.[549] Furthermore, Muqātil also employs his own opinions in much of his interpretation. In this regard, his exegetical methods in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* and *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah* are similar except in two respects.

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[549] Muqātil himself lived at the period where its people—especially its religious scholars—are traditionally called "Successors of the Successors" *(tābīʻ al-tābiʻīn).*

First, if Muqātil frequently provides traditions that specify the background of revelation *(asbāb al-nuzūl)* in an extensive way and generally without the accompanying chains of transmission *(isnād)* in his narrative commentary, in this commentary he presents traditions that specify the intended meanings of otherwise general qur'anic verses, or those that will direct his legal decisions derived from these verses.[550] Second, if Muqātil very rarely provides *isnād*s for traditions that he uses in his major commentary, he always provides *isnād*s for traditions that he uses in this legal commentary.[551] Furthermore, while not all traditions mentioned in his major commentary necessarily originate from Muqātil but may be taken from other authorities by his transmitters, as their *isnād*s show, in this commentary Muqātil is always mentioned as part of the chain of transmission. Otherwise, Muqātil has been cited as the "speaker" of some views that could have been [prophetic] traditions but presented as if they are Muqātil's personal views.[552]

The following is a more systematic explanation of Muqātil's exegetical method in his *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah min al-Qur'ān.*

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[550] However, the traditions that Muqātil uses to specify the qur'anic messages will prove not as specific when compared with those that al-Shāfi'ī uses in *al-Umm,* which are really able to specify the general qur'anic verses to the extent that the latter produces legal rulings that are not necessarily stated in the Qur'an.

[551] The tendency to be more careful with *isnād* is common among Muslim scholars when they deal with legal questions. With regard to qur'anic commentary, Muslim scholars had a more relaxed attitude toward *isnād* as long as the traditions they cited could provide better explanations. This is resonant with Ibn Hanbal's statement that categorized *tafsīr, maghāzī* and *sīrah* as disciplines that have no "root" *(lā aṣla lahā),* which, according to scholars, means that they have no chains of transmission. Al-Shāfi'ī was reported to have said that the sound traditions related to *tafsīr* reported from Ibn 'Abbās coming directly from the Prophet are no more than a hundred pieces. But the actual number of traditions reported from Ibn 'Abbās from the Prophet in qur'anic commentaries is larger by far than a hundred pieces. See al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn,* 1/115; also Na'nā'ah, *Isrā'iliyyāt.*

[552] Harald Moztki found a similar phenomenon in his study of Abd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf.* See his *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence.*

Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān

One of the characteristics of Muqātil's exegetical methods in this commentary is
that he collects all relevant verses to the legal topics he discusses. In doing so, Muqātil
applies the so-called "interpretation of the Qur'an with the Qur'an" or "parts of the
Qur'an interpret each other" *(tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān* or *al-Qur'ān yufassiru
ba'ḍuhu ba'ḍan).* Later Muslim scholars consider this technique the best means of
qur'anic interpretation.[553] Such a technique can only be undertaken if the Qur'an as a
whole is known to the commentator so that he can relate verses that address the same
problems but occupy different places in the Qur'an with one another.[554] In a way, this is
an extended application of the crossreferencing method Muqātil used in *al-Tafsīr al-
Kabīr.*

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[553] "The fourfold process approved by Ibn Taymiyya offers a discreet methodological idealization of
exegetical steps. In the order in which they should be followed, these are (1) interpreting the Qur'an by the
Qur'an, (2) interpreting it by the surma of the prophet Muhammad, (3) interpreting it by the statements of
his Companions, those of his own generation who had direct access to him, and (4) interpreting it by the
statements of the Successors, those of the next generation whose access to the Prophet's statements was
mediated through one or more of the Companions. As is immediately obvious, this is a hermeneutical
hierarchy, arranged in decreasing order of probative value. It reflects not so much an actual working
process, at least in this rigidly sequential format, as a means of assessing and establishing the comparative
worth of particular exegetical views." See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "An Introduction to Medieval
Interpretation of the Qur'an," in *With Reverence for the Word*: *Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism,
Christianity, and Islam,* ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 311-
19, 315.
[554] This technique of interpretation may refute the thesis that the Qur'an was codified much later that it was
traditionally believed. Wansbrough, for instance, argued that the Qur'an as it we know it today was not
codified until the late second/ eighth century or later. However, Muqātil's commentaries prove that such a
thesis is no longer tenable. See Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the beginnings of Islamic
historical writings* (Princeton, NJ: the Darwin Press, Inc. 1998), 35-63. Emran el-Badawi offers the longest
range of period within which the Qur'an might have been canonized, but still earlier than the period that
Wansbrough suggested, namely 610-714, allegedly starting from when Muhammad began to receive
revelation to when "…'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (d. 86/705) and al-Hajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 95/714) played a
significant role in standardizing the Qur'ān text as we possess today..." see his "Sectarian Scripture: the
Qur'ān's dogmatic re-articulation of the Aramaic Gospel Traditions in the Late Antique Near East (PhD
Diss., University of Chicago, 2011), 16, 43.

An example of this is *tafsīr mā umira min wafā' al-'ahd fī mā baynahum wa bayna al-mushrikīn wa ghayrihim* (interpretation of what is commanded in terms of fulfilling covenant between the believers and polytheists and other [people]).[555] Muqātil says,

> In the chapter in which God mentions *al-mā'idah* [the feast] is God's saying, 'You who believe, fulfil your obligations,'[556] that is, your covenants, between you and [other] people; and God's saying in the chapter in which He mentions *Banū Isrā'īl*, "Honor your pledges,'[557] that is, the covenants between you and [other] people, 'you will be questioned about your pledges,' that is, God will question those who broke their promises *(al-'ahd)* why they did so. And also God's saying in the chapter in which He mentions *al-an'ām* [lifestock], 'keep any promises you make in God's name,'[558] that is, the covenant between you and [other] people.

As seen, in his interpretation of a number of Qur'anic verses he cites for the topic—namely Q5: 1, 17:34, and 6:152—Muqātil renders the other party with which the believers made an agreement anonymous and general. He simply calls them: "other people." It is not until Muqātil cites Q16: 91-94 that he specifies who these "other people" were—polytheists, people of war, and others *(al-nās min ahl al-shirk wa ahl al-ḥarb wa ghayrihim)*.[559] In this respect, Muqātil does not only collect all relevant verses but also uses them to explain each other in relation to legal topics being discussed.[560]

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[555] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 244-45.

[556] Q5: 1.

[557] Q17: 34.

[558] Q6: 152. Remind me – are you using a particular translation of the Qur'an for your citations of Qur'anic material?

[559] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 244. However, Muqātil actually has already specified "other people" as polytheists *(mushrikūn)* in his commentary on Q.5:1 that he first cites. See *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān,* 1/448. Indeed, he does not do that in his commentary on the second verse cited [Q17:34], in which the glossing he provides is "between you and other people" *(fī mā baynakum wa bayna al-nās)* without specification. *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, 2/530. Curiously, Muqātil actually does not specify who these people are in his commentary on Q.16: 91 in his major commentary, but it is his commentary on this verse in this legal commentary that specifies who these people are. See Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 2/484.

[560] al-'Ābid, *Tafasīr,* 104.

Furthermore, not only is collecting all verses relevant to the topics being discussed helpful to the commentator in identifying how many times and where in the Qur'an God has addressed the same topics, but it is also helpful in clarifying or specifying what is only vaguely indicated in certain verses using other verses. The Qur'an thus interprets itself, or its parts interpret each other.

Interpreting the Qur'an with prophetic traditions

Muqātil also uses traditions—be they from the Prophet, Companions, or Successors—to support his interpretation of the Qur'an. There are forty-seven *isnād*s, perfect and defective, in the commentary indicating that the traditions Muqātil cites came from the Prophet. As an example for the prophetic traditions with the perfect *isnād* to the Prophet can be found in *abwāb al-ṣiyām wa naskh min al-ṣawm al-awwal* (chapter on the fasting and abrogation of early fasting).[561] Of course, as usual, in the beginning of his discussion of any topic, Muqātil first mentions Qur'anic verses he deems revelant, and sandwiches them with his interpretation. In this respect, Muqātil cites Q2: 183-184, 185, 186, and 187.

In his commentary on Q2: 183-184, Muqātil lays out a context to understand the verses. Muqātil maintains that before the obligation of Ramaḍān fasting, the Muslims used to fast 'Āshūrā, that is, on the tenth of the month of Muḥarram. He also states that the Ramaḍān fasting was previously obligated to Christians at the time of Jesus *(ahl al-Injīl ummat 'Īsā)*.[562] Muqātil continues to explain the rules of fasting in eary Islam that

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[561] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 71-77.
[562] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 71.

were burdersome to early Muslims. At the time, after the Muslims performed evening prayer *(al-'ishā' al-akhīrah)* or they fell asleep before they even performed the evening prayer, their fasting started immediately. They could not eat or perform any sexual activity. The same rules, according to Muqātil, applied to the People of Gospel at the time of Jesus. Since there were some Companions who fell short of following these rules, God then revealed Q2: 186[563] and also Q2: 187[564] which lifted the burdensome rules. From that time on, the Muslims have been allowed to do anything forbidden during the daytime of fasting from after sunset until the dawn came. Likewise, Muqātil explains the abrogation of Q2: 184[565], which obligated all Muslims to fast whenever the Ramaḍān came regardless of their hardship, by Q2: 185,[566] which offers some easement to those who were sick or on a journey to choose whether to fast or not, and if they could not do it during the month, they were allowed to replace the missing days at other times.[567] After commenting on fasting related verses, Muqātil presents eight traditions, two of which are

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[563] Q.2: 186: "[Prophet], if My servants ask you about Me, I am near. I respond to those who call Me, so let them respond to Me, and believe in Me, so that they may be guided."

[564] Q.2: 187: "You [believers] are permitted to lie with your wives during the night of the fast: they are [close] as garments to you, as you are to them. God was aware that you were betraying yourselves, so He turned to you in mercy and pardoned you: now you can lie with them– seek what God has ordained for you– eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct from the black. Then fast until nightfall. Do not lie with them during the nights of your devotional retreat in the mosques: these are the bounds set by God, so do not go near them. In this way God makes His messages clear to people, that they may guard themselves against doing wrong."

[565] Q.2: 184: "Fast for a specific number of days, but if one of you is ill, or on a journey, on other days later. For those who can fast only with extreme difficulty, there is a way to compensate– feed a needy person. But if anyone does good of his own accord, it is better for him, and fasting is better for you, if only you knew."

[566] Q.2: 185: "It was in the month of Ramadan that the Qur'an was revealed as guidance for mankind, clear messages giving guidance and distinguishing between right and wrong. So any one of you who is present that month should fast, and anyone who is ill or on a journey should make up for the lost days by fasting on other days later. God wants ease for you, not hardship. He wants you to complete the prescribed period and to glorify Him for having guided you, so that you may be thankful."

[567] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 74-75.

from the Prophet.[568] The two prophetic traditions laid out the timing of the starting and ending of the fasting, and how long it lasts.[569] The other six traditions are from the Companions, which relate the kind of excuses that allow one not to fast and other excuses that ruin one's fasting and is punishable.[570] Muqātil seems to think that these traditions offer clear enough explanations that he does not need to add anything to them, but simply lays them out following his commentary on fasting-related verses. Methodologically, Muqātil shows gradual steps for interpreting the Qur'an, first, by using intratextual interpretation and then using prophetic traditions (ḥadīth). Furthermore, Muqātil considers the precedents that the Prophet and his Companions set as a model for how the Muslims should act.

Interpreting the Qur'an with traditions from Companions and Successors

There are seventy-two *isnād*s in the commentary indicating that Muqātil gains his information from the Companions, and twenty-two *isnād* from the Sucessors.[571] Muqātil

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[568] The *isnād* of first of prophetic tradition runs as follows: Muqātil→ Nāfiʿ → Ibn ʿUmar →the Prophet, while the *isnād* for the second is Muqātil→Muḥammad al-Munkadir→Jābir ibn ʿAbd Allāh→the Prophet. See Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 76.

[569] The two prophetic traditions relate the length of fasting of either thirty or twenty nine days, and that the beginning and end of fasting is by witnessing *hilāl.*

[570] Two traditions (one from ʻAmr ibn Shuʻayb's grandfather, and another from Abū al-Dardā') suggest that for some justified reason, such travel, one may opt to fast or not, just as the Prophet did. One tradition from ʻAmr ibn Shuʻayb's grandfather relates the story of a man who deliberately had a sexual intercourse with his wife in the month of Ramaḍān, to whom the Prophet told to choose, for expiation of his violation, whether to free a slave, or slaughter a sacrificial animal, or fast in two consecutive months, or feed sixty poor Muslims, and replace the day he was missing due to the sexual intercourse. One tradition from Ibn ʻUmar that allows a pregnant and nursing woman not to fast, fearing for their baby, but she will have to feed one poor Muslim everyday without having to replace the missing day. The last tradition from Anas ibn Mālik that he was skipping fasting due to age and did that without having to replace the missing days until he died. See Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 76-7.

[571] I need to give a caveat in this regard. There could be more traditions Muqātil uses in the commentary but they are not given their due *isnād*. Some of the Companion whose traditions Muqātil uses are: Ibn ʻAbbās (19x), Ibn Masʻūd (11x), ʻAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (9x), ʻUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (8x), Ibn ʻUmar (4x), Abū al-Dardā' (3x), Abū Bakr (2x), ʻUtmān ibn ʻAffān (2x), Abū Hurayrah (2x), Anas ibn Mālik (2x), and

uses the traditions from both Companions and Successors to clarify and specify the general explanation given by the Qur'an, similar to the way he uses traditions from the Prophet. Frequently these traditions supply the Qur'an with real cases alledgedly occurred among the early Muslim society. As such, these traditions are the exemplification or realization of potential cases that the Qur'an is addressing but not in detail. It is Muqātil's habit in the commentary that he never discusses any traditions he uses. What he does is he simply lays them out, assuming that they provide clear explanations as to how Muslim should act on certain occasions.

Tafsir al-Qur'an bi al-ra'y

For an obvious reason, Muqātil's personal views determined the last shape of his commentary. Not only are his views present in his commentary through his textual glossing on the fragments of qur'anic verses, but also in his selection and arrangement of material from other authorities. There are, however, views in the commentary that, while attributed to Muqātil, seem likely to have originated from older authorities, especially the Prophet. Attributed to Muqātil, these views convey information that can only be derived from revelation, and hence are not within the realm of personal opinions. The direct attribution to Muqātil and the absence of accompnying *isnād*s have made such views Muqātil's although the very content they relate suggests this is unlikely. In his study on al-Ṣanʿānī, Motzki found out that there are places in which ʿAṭāʾ, a Successor and one of al-Ṣanʿānī authorities, gives his seemingly personal views, and only in some other instances

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others. Of the Successors, Muqātil receives his information from Aṭāʾ ibn Abī Rabāḥ (9x), Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī (4x), al-Ḍaḥḥāk, Mujāhid, Ṭāwus, Ibn Sīrīn, Bishr ibn Tayyim, and others.

does Motzki learn that ʿAṭāʾ actually knows a prophetic tradition that supports his view.[572] Thus, it is possible that Muqātil rephrases traditions, which he learned from other authorities, in more or less his own renditions. This phenomenon may indicate Muqātil's less rigid attitude with regard to *isnād,* or a possibility that at some point, including during Muqātil's time, citing prophetic traditions did not have to be verbatim, as long as the originally prophetic meanings is preserved.

An example of this is *tafsīr ṣifat aʿmāl al-muʾminin wa mā aʿadda Allah ʿAzza wa Jalla lahum fī aʿmālihim* (interpretation of characteristics of the believers' deeds and the rewards God has prepared for them). "Muqātil said, 'Whoever performs a four-*rakaʿat*-prayer after *ʿishāʾ* in late night *(al-ʿishāʾ al-ākhirah)* in which *taslīm* separates [between *ʿishāʾ* and the four *rakaʿāt* prayer] and he does not talk in between, for him a reward similar to [the prayer performed] in the *laylat al-qadar.*'"[573] The view attributed to Muqātil in terms of the reward of a ritual practice seems to be something that only the Prophet could know, for it is not something that allows for personal opinion, but something of *tawqīf,* God's discretion communicated through his prophet.[574] Ibn Abī Shaybah (d. 235/849) mentioned a number of similar traditions as that attributed to

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[572] See Motzki, *Origins.*
[573] Muqātil, *Khams Miʾat,* 255.
[574] Although such a ḥadīth is *mawqūf* in the sense that its transmission does not show that it comes from the Prophet, its content makes it in the category of *marfūʾ*, as if it comes from the Prophet, as stated by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī. He said that there are ḥadīths whose content allow no room for personal opinions or that it is not an explanation of the language nor of the understanding of the content; rather, the content deals with matters such as narratives of the past, e..g., genesis, stories of the prophets, the prediction of the future, the conditions of the Day of Judgement, the reward of any rituals, the punishment for any sins. Knowledge of such matters cannot be invented but should be derived from the teaching of the Prophet himself. See his *Nuzhat al-Naẓar fī Tawḍīḥ Nukhbat al-Fikar fī Muṣṭalaḥ Ahl al-Athar,* ed. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḍayf Allāh al-Raḥīlī (Riyāḍ: Fahrasat Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Waṭaniyyah, 2001), 133-4.

Muqātil whose chains of transmission either end with a Companion—such as Ibn ʿUmar and ʿĀʾishah—or a Successor—such as Mujāhid.[575]

There are more cases in the commentary that attached some views to Muqātil but they likely originated from older authorities, including the Prophet. For instance, a well-known ḥadīth on gradation of acts that Muslims must perform in relation to forbidding wrong but presented as Muqātil's view in the commentary.[576] Because Muqātil does not relate such views to authorities before him, we will never be sure unless we know of well-known traditions in circulation, which advocate the same views as Muqātil. Thus, for the time being, I will assume that everything couched as *qāla Muqātil* ("Muqātil said") represents Muqātil's views.

Textual glossing

Like in his major and narrative commentary *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Muqātil also uses textual glossing or paraphrasing method in this legal commentary. In this respect, he pieces qurʾanic verses into smaller fragments—be they words or phrases—and provides his glossing in the form of synonyms, clarifying statements, or parallels.

Such a textual glossing is constantly present throughout the commentary amidst other exegetical methods. Not only does he employ this method to clarify the intended meaning of qurʾanic utterances, but also, perhaps as importantly, he does it to emphasize his point of views. Muqātil seems to transpire to make his readers not to think

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[575] Abū Bakr ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Abū Shaybah al-ʿAbsī, *al-Muṣannaf,* ed. Abū Muḥammad Usāmah ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad (Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadīthah li al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 2007), 281-2.
[576] Muqātil, *Khams Miʾat,* 279-280.

differently from the way he does in understanding the Qur'an for he explains almost any words or phrases in the Qur'an that they may understand differently.

Asbāb al-nuzūl

In his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* Muqātil employs a great amount of reports that illuminate the circumstances of revelation, traditionally called *asbāb al-nuzūl.* So extensive is Muqātil' use of such reports that his commentary appears to be a narrative work or storytelling book. However, *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports have a great impact on understanding the Qur'an not only because they brings light on the circumstances within which its fragments were revealed or how they should be understood, but also because they are able to transport the readers of Muqātil's commentary to a foreign space and time of the past. Thus, Muqātil's commentary feeds not only readers' intellectual faculty but also their sensual as well as emotional faculties, for they are situated as experiencing the process of revelation itself.

In his legal commentary, Muqātil also uses similar material, although not as extensively as he did in his major commentary.[577] But similar to usages in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* in his use of these narrative materials Muqātil generally does not provide the accompanying *isnād*s. Given the provenance of these narratives as inherited traditions, Muqātil must have learned them from other and an older authority, for it is the only way in which *asbāb al-nuzūl* material passed across generations of Muslims.

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[577] The use of narrative material in both commentaries is not accompanied by *isnād*s.

Unlike other acts of interpretation of the Qur'an, *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports cannot be invented anew by generations after the prophetic period. They are inherited.[578] Since these *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports are part of *riwāyah*,[579] that is, transmitted knowledge, and not *dirāyah*, that is, learned knowledge, the later generations' possession of that knowledge must have gone through relatively long processes of transmission, thus involving a relative great number of people of different times. In Muqātil's time, such a transmission had travelled across at least two generations, that is, the generation of the Prophet and Companions, and of the Successors *(tābiʿūn)*. Ideally, therefore, Muqātil's use of *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports should provide chains of transmission that declare the authorities from which he received information. However, this is not the case. Therefore, the readers of Muqātil's commentary are left without the possibility of probing the reliability of the reports he uses, and they can only accept what Muqātil provides them with and attempt to evaluate whether his use of such reports makes sense within the context of qur'anic verses upon which Muqātil is commenting.

Despite being the legacy of the past, differences abound when it comes to *asbāb al-nuzūl.* Of such differences is which of these reports is assigned to which qur'anic verses. Thus, the legacy of the past does not pertain only to these *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports, but also to differences in assigning them to certain qur'anic verses. Such differences suggest that the use of *asbāb al-nuzūl* is first and foremost exegetical. It is the attempt of

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[578] Al-Wāḥidi, however, suggests that one of the reasons why he wrote his *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* is because people of his time had deliberately invented such reports to support their opinions. See Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī Aḥmad al-Wāḥīdī al-Nīsābūrī, *Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qur'ān,* ed. Al-Sayyid Aḥmad Saqar (nc., n.p., n.y.), 5-6.

[579] Roslan Abdul-Rahim, "Naskh al-Qur'an: A Theological and Juridical Reconsideration of the Theory of Abrogation and Its Impact on Qur'anic Exegesis," (PhD Diss, Temple University, 2011)*,* 79.

early Muslims to understand parts of revelation by anchoring them to certain moments in the Prophet's life.[580] For instance, the Companions of the Prophet, namely Mu'awiyah and Abū Dhar al-Giffārī, had different views with regard to the addresses of Q9: 34. According to Mu'awiyah, the verse was revealed in relation to the People of Scripture; Abū Dhar thought that it was for them as much as for Muslims.[581] This suggests that the connection between an *asbāb* report and a particular verse is not necessarily readily identifiable; rather, the process of such connection is exegetical, and hence is discursive. In this case, al-Wāḥidī suggests that connecting an *asbāb* report with particular revelatory moment and qur'anic verses is an exegetical endeavor, especially among the Companions of the Prophet and also the exegetes of the Qur'an.

Wansbrough maintains that *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports fit well with legal concerns. In fact, "the mention of the occasion of revelation is essentially halakhic."[582] If reports of occasions of revelation take place in a haggadic commentary, such as Muqātil's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* their function is "exclusively anecdotal, and may provide the narrative framework for an extended interpretation."[583] There are some cases, however, where the *asbāb* reports appear in haggadic exegesis whose purpose seems to be halakhic, as in the case of Sufyān al-Thawrī's commentary as well as Muqātil's.[584] As a result, Wansbrough distinguished such reports into a cause *(sabab)* of revelation and a report *(khabar)* about

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[580] Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* 132. That is why, in Wansbrough's view, *tafsīr* traditions are "to demonstrate the Hijazi origins of Islam." *Quranic Studies,* 79.
[581] Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb,* 243.
[582] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies,* 143.
[583] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies,* 141, 143.
[584] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies,* 142.

it.[585] Positing that the occasion of revelation is the characteristic of halakhic exegesis,

Wanbrough argued that its present in the haggadic exegesis was a symptom of its

underdevelopment.[586] However, my findings partially go against Wansbrough's thesis,

for while *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports take place in Muqātil's legal commentary, their number

is by far smaller than those found in Muqātil's narrative commentary, and Muqātil's legal

exegesis therefore must be credited more to other elements, such as the use of traditions,

prophetic or otherwise.[587]

In this respect, I agree with Andrew Rippin who argues that *asbāb al-nuzūl*

reports may well serve as the narrative context for revelation, and not necessarily

exclusively legal in character.[588] In fact, *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports may serve both goals

mentioned together; these goals are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In this case,

Muqātil best represents an exegetical enterprise that employs *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports for

different purposes, legal or otherwise, in his qur'anic commentaries. Muqātil's

commentaries prove that *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports are helpful in illuminating the historical

and cultural circumstances of revelation in general, including not only the legal aspect of

the Qur'an, but also the entirety of its discourse. Suggesting that *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports

serve better legal concerns is not always true if we consider some early legal scholars and

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[585] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies,* 142.
[586] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies,* 141.
[587] It is odd that while he argued that the use of *asbāb* reports is particularly for halakhic purposes, Wansbrough called Muqātil's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* haggadic in which these reports were still underdeveloped. Furthermore, while Muqātil's *Khams Mi'at* is a legal commentary, Wansbrough considered it a commentary in which "the halakhic theme had priority over the scriptural evidence marshalled in its support" and whose style "is unmistakably haggadic, characterized by the serial repetition of explicative elements and by a profusion of anecdote." *Quranic Studies,*170-1.
[588] See Andrew Rippin, "The Exegetical Genre "asbāb al-nuzūl": A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey," in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 48, No. 1 (1985): 1-15.

their work, including Muqātil and al-Shāfiʿī, the latter of which I will discuss later. In fact, it is the knowledge and use of prophetic traditions *other than* those *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports, which have shaped legal rulings of scholars like al-Shāfiʿī more than his knowledge and use of *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports.

Other and much later legal scholars, e.g. *maqāṣidī* scholars, may have resorted more to using *asbāb* reports, not only to establish a chronology of revelation but also to derive the spirit of Islam in their promulgation of legal rulings. In this respect, *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports are one of the best windows to understand why the Prophet or his Companions did what they did. But my point is that *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports are not only limited to legal needs but, more than that, to understanding the Qur'an as a whole. Therefore, the idea that legal commentaries can only emerge after the narrative ones, as Wansbrough's sequential scheme of *tafsīr* development would suggest, is not necessarily true for the two can possible develop simultaneously, using *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports.[589] Narrative and legal aspects of understanding the Qur'an can develop in tandem.[590]

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[589] Wansbrough had actually acknowledged the possibility of a simultaneous development of different types of exegesis, although he did this in relation to the haggadic and the masoteric. *Quranic Studies,* 146.
[590] Karen Bauer argues that while Wansbrough, in his *Quranic Studies,* lays out the chronological as well as typological development of *tafsīr* as haggadic (narrative), halakhic (legal), masoteric (lexical), rhetorical and allegorical, his "main inconsistency is that he does not provide much evidence for the chronological element of his argument. Muqātil is used as the primary example for both haggadic and halakhic exegesis, and no evidence is provided to indicate that Muqātil's 'legal' work of exegesis was written significantly later than his 'narrative' work." Likewise, Bauer maintains, the typological categorization also suffers a deep flaw in "that elements of all these typologies can be found in all works." See her "Introduction" to *Aims, Methods, and Contexts of Qur'anic Exegesis,* 5-6. Consequently, as Michael E. Pregill argued, Wansbrough's proposed literary and stylistic criteria cannot reliably demonstrate the dating of exegesis works. See his "Methodologies for the Dating of Exegetical Works and Traditions: Can the Lost *Tafsīr* of Kalbī be Recovered from *Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās* (also known as *al-Wāḍiḥ)?*" in *Aims, Methods, and Contexts of Qur'anic Exegesis* (2nd/8th – 9th/15th c.) (London: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, (2013), pp. 393-453, 408.

Naskh al-Qur'ān

Abrogation *(naskh)* in the Qur'an applies exclusively to verses related to law.[591] Generally, it applies to contradictory texts that cannot be harmonized.[592] It deals with the sequence of revelation of qur'anic verses in which those sent down later cancel or annul the legal implications of others revealed earlier.[593] Thus, *naskh al-Qur'ān* is the function of the chronology of revelation in which later revelation influences the working of legal implications of earlier revelation. Nonetheless, determining the chronology of the qur'anic texts is a difficult task, and it is generally based on the testimonies of the Companions of the Prophet. Their testimonies are fundamental in this regard.[594]

In relation to time, the abrogation process was limited only to the prophetic period *(zamān al-risālah)*, and as such, it could only be decided by God through his Prophet *(shāri')*,[595] and nobody else, not even the Companions, especially in the Sunnī perspective, is imbued with authority to declare an abrogation event that is not traceable to the Prophet. Abrogation cannot be based on *ijtihād*, but must be reported from the

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[591] Abdul-Rahim, "Naskh," 281.

[592] Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunnī Uṣūl al-Fiqh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 68. In al-'Asqalānī's scheme, *naskh* is the second mechanism to use when there are contradictory religious texts. The first mechanism is the unification of those contradictory texts *(al-jam' in amkana)*. If this fails, the alternative is *naskh*. If that also fails, making preference among the contradictory texts available *(al-tarjīh in ta'ayyana)* is the next step. But if *tarjīh* is also not possible, the last resort is allowing the right to choose to act on one of the contradictory texts *(al-tawaqquf 'alā al-'amal bi aḥad al-ḥadīthayn)*. See al-'Asqalānī, *Nuzhat,* 97.

[593] General discussion of *naskh* by Muslim scholars identifies three modes of abrogation: the first is *naskh al-ḥukm wa al-tilāwah*, that is, those qur'anic verses that had been removed from the memory of the Prophet and the Muslims since the prophetic period; second is *naskh al-tilāwah dūna l-ḥukm*, that is, the removal of qur'anic verses but the retention of their applicable legal implications; third is *naskh al-ḥukm dūna l-tilāwah*, that is, the abrogation of legal implications of earlier revealed qur'anic verses with later verses while retaining their recitaton. As far as the Qur'an is concerned, Muqātil's commentaries included, it is the third mode of abrogation that is being discussed. See Andrew Rippin, "Abrogation," *EI3*.

[594] Hallaq, *History,* 70.

[595] Zayd, *Naskh,* 1/279, 107.

Prophet. Therefore, Muṣṭafā Zayd argues, any claim of abrogation that does not provide any sound *isnād* to the prophetic period was unwarranted, and hence should be rejected immediately. Likewise, Zayd maintains, any claim of *naskh* that was not related to the Prophet or his Companions reporting from him in a sound, continuous way was groundless and not worth accepting.[596]

Muqātil mentions a number of abrogation cases in his commentary.[597] An example of abrogation in the commentary takes place in *tafsīr mā ḥurrima min nikāḥ al-mut'ah* (interpretation of the prohibition of temporary marriage).[598] In this respect, Muqātil maintains that temporary marriage was used to be permitted by the Prophet only for a very short period (three days), based on Q4: 24, but then was forbidden and abrogated by Q5: 102 and 4: 12.

Prominent Topical Legal Discussions

In the previous chapter, I have argued that the thread of Muqātil's exegetical enterprise of the Qur'an revolves around propagating *īmān* with its two supporting principles, *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*. Therefore, following qur'anic polemics against its

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[596] Zayd, *]Naskh,* 1/12.

[597] Some of Muqātil's cases of abrogation in his *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, however, do not fit the proper definition of *naskh* as complete replacement of one legal ruling of qur'anic verses with another from other verses. Instead, they only represent "specification" of more general legal rulings. Not until al-Shāfi'ī, who specified the definition of *naskh* as it is now understood and made it part of his notion of *bayān*, early Muslims understood *naskh* in its general, linguistic meaning as "removing something with something else." As such, they employed *naskh* to delimitation of the unlimited *(taqyīd al-muṭlaq)*, specifying the general *(takhṣiṣ al-'ām)*, explanation of the obscure *(bayān al-mubham wa al-mujmal)*, as well as the alteration of a religious law with another *(raf' al-ḥukm al-shar'ī bi dalīl shar'ī muta'akhkhir 'anhu)*. In his major commentary, Muqātil mentions fourty four cases of abrogation, sixteen of which are verses abrogated by the "Sword Verse" (Q9:29). Of these cases, only three verses to which the proper definition of *naskh* applied. The rest of Muqātil's cases are not events of abrogation as understood by legal scholars *(uṣūliyyūn)*. See Shiḥātah, *Tafsīr,* 5/155-184. Also Zayd, *Naskh.*

[598] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 159.

opponents, Muqātil is engaged intensively with those whom he sees as deviating from monotheistic religion of Islam, namely the polytheists of Arabia, especially the Meccans, as well as the People of Scripture.

In most cases, Muqātil makes religious difference trump all other considerations in building relations with other religious communities. Despite the prominent role of religious difference in determining his attitude towards these communities, however, Muqātil also takes mundane reasons into consideration when deciding the kinds of relationship that Muslims may build with other people. In his commentary, Muqātil appears to hold the view that the relative presence of hostility among non-Muslims against the freedom of preaching and practicing Islam in its early period had played an important role in shaping the Qur'an's view of non-Muslims. In fact, it can be argued that, in Muqātil's understanding, it is non-Muslim hostility toward the nascent Muslim community, both in Mecca in relation to polytheists and in Medina in relation to Jews, which first triggered the responses of the Prophet, even before his consideration of religious differences.

In the following pages I will discuss some prominent topics in the commentary that deal with how Muqātil envisions different relational scenarios between Muslims and non-Muslims (Meccan Pagans, People of Scripture, and other) in both peaceful and war situations, as well as within internal Muslim community, especially in relation to the rebellious Muslims (hypocrites). Furthermore, I will delineate Muqātil's attempts at finding a minimalist common ground for a viable, interreligious coexistence of these different communities. In addition, I will also discuss a number of particular topics,

namely jihād, *al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*, and *muḥkamāt al-qur'ān,*
whose relation to the interreligious affairs may seem unclear but it is vital.

The polytheist-related laws

The Meccan, or generally Arab, polytheists are among the primary targets of
Muhammad and the revelation of the Qur'an. In the Qur'an and, likewise, in Muqātil's
commentary, the polytheists *(mushrikūn)* are depicted not only refuting Muhammad's
mission but also obstructing it with different scenarios: secret plots, open fights, etc. As
such, the climate appeared highly hostile in terms of the relationship between the
believers and the polytheists to the extent that the two are mutually exclusive. As a
continuum, the Muslims and the polytheists stood at the two different ends of it.

It seems, however, that there had been attempts—especially by Muhammad—to
bridge this stalemate situation on both religious and political grounds. The phenomenon
of the so-called "Satanic verses" in the Qur'an (53:19-20)—in which the revelation that
Muhammad received approved of the gods that the polytheists worshipped—was a
manifestation of Muhammad's great desire to accommodate his people's religious
tradition that he was unknowingly receptive to—what the Qur'an (22:52) says as—the
satanic voice as if it was revelation from God.[599] Politically, the Truce of Ḥudaibiyyah in
628 was ratified between Muhammad and the Meccans, which proved to be a turning
point, especially for Muhammad and the believers, in which the two opponents were now

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[599] See Yohannnan Friedman, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam: Interfaith Relations in the Muslim Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 28-34. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, 3/132, 680; 4/162, 884.

on equal footing.[600] It is likely this Truce of Ḥudaybiyyah that Muqātil meant when he

was talking about making an agreement with the disbelievers in this commentary.[601]

After the conquest of Mecca in 630, however, Muqātil seems to suggest that the attitude

of the Qur'an and Muhammad toward Arab polytheists had changed dramatically, in

which the possibility of building a peace treaty with the polytheists diminished

completely. The only choice left to the Arab polytheists was either to accept Islam or to

be fought against. This is when Muhammad was imposing Islam on the Arab people,

whose submission had a great impact on how other religious communities were to be

dealt with. Muqātil maintains that after the whole of the Arab people had converted to

Islam, no compulsion of religion was allowed. With regard to non-Muslims, including the

People of Scripture (Jews and Christians) and other communities such as Zoroastrians,

Sabians, and others, received different policies in terms of their religious and political

rights. In general, the Islamic policies on non-Muslims treated them as one of two

statuses: either as *ahl al-kitāb* or *ahl al-dhimmah,* each of which determines the extent of

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[600] Ibn Isḥāq saw the Truce of Ḥudaybiyyah as the greatest victory of Islam. "Some of Muhammad's advisers thought this agreement's provision was humiliating, but Muhammad saw it as a small price to pay for having the Meccans deal with him as an equal and recognize his status as the leader of Islam. Muhammad finally had the prestige and recognition he both desired and required if he was to convince other chiefs to join him." Furthermore, "[t]he agreement permitted all the tribes of the region the freedom to make alliances with either side. This implied, as Muhammad saw it, that all prior alliances were no longer in force or, at least, that the tribes were now free to change sides or remain neutral. If they joined an alliance, the general truce applied to them for ten years." In fact, following the ratification of the agreement, as stated by Ibn Isḥāq, "double as many or more than double as many entered Islam as ever before." Thus, "[i]n one deft stroke Muhammad had altered the political power balance in the region. The powerful alliance of the Quraish, the Jewish tribes of Kheibar, and the large bedouin tribes of Ghatafan and Fazarah that had so effectively opposed Muhammad was formally dissolved by the truce. Muhammad could now deal with each opponent separately without having to worry that the other's allies would come to their aid. His strategy of divide and conquer had provided Muhammad with a long-awaited opportunity." See Gabriel, *Muhammad,* 150-1. See also Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/377-8; 4/67.
[601] See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/165.

their religious and political rights.[602] The *ahl al-kitāb* status offers non-Muslims more rights and possible relational scenarios with Muslims, religious and political, and it automatically includes the rights assigned in the *ahl al-dhimmah* status, but not the other way around. The *ahl al-dhimmah* status specifically aims at building political relations with non-Muslims whose religious denominations were not directly mentioned in the Qur'an, and they therefore did not enjoy certain interreligious rights that *ahl al-kitāb* possessed, such as intermarriage with Muslims. What the *ahl al-dhimmah* had was political relations with Muslims, especially with regard to political protection and agreements, including protection for their religious freedom. In the end, the definition of *ahl al-kitāb* and *ahl al-dhimmah*, and who are included in each, which will play a pivotal role in determining the implications of the the terms, as it will become clearer throughout the comparison of Muqātil's and al-Shāfiʿī's views in this respect in the next pages.

There are six *tafsīr*s in the commentary that deal with polytheists. Two of them are related to peace agreement making; another two pertain to intermarriage, and the last two *tafsīr*s address the conduct of war and spoil distribution. From these *tafsīr*s, it will be known that while some socio-political arrangement may be made between the Muslims and the polytheists, there are some social affairs, such as intermarriage, that cannot be undertaken primarily for the reason of religious difference. Unlike with *kitābī*s, in terms

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[602] In later parts of this chapter, I will discuss more the legal ramifications that non-Muslims may have with regard to their status as *ahl al-kitāb* or *ahl al-dhimmah*. The term *ahl al-kitāb* refers to Jewish or Christian communities, or those who had some sort of affiliation with them, who may conduct some relations with the Muslims such as intermarriage and food sharing, as well as political agreements. The term *ahl al-dhimmah,* however, refers to non-Muslims who were not *ahl al-kitāb* but may have some political arrangement with the Muslims. The two terms for non-Muslims represent a scholarly attempt to cope with the fact that Muslims would have to deal with non-Muslims in their ever-expanding rule in its early period.

of a peace agreement, although the period within which it might be ratified was limited to the time of Hudaybiyyah and before the conquest of Mecca, as long as Muqātil is concerned, once it is agreed on, the Qur'an counsels the Muslims to respect it if it is made with good intention.

Different paths of relation-building with Polytheists

Peace agreement

In relation to possible coexistence between Muslims and polytheists, Muqātil provides two *tafsīr* headings in his commentary, namely "interpretation of the command to fulfill the agreement between the believers and the polytheists and other people," *(tafsīr mā umira min wafā' l-'ahd fī mā baynahum wa bayna al-mushrikīn wa ghayrihim)*[603] and "interpretation of the command of what Muslims should do in terms of a betrayal of agreement by the polytheists" *(tafsīr mā umira al-muslimūn an yaf'alū min naqḍ al-'ahd min al-mushrikīn)*.[604]

In the first of the two, Muqātil adduces a number of qur'anic verses, namely Q5:1,[605] Q17:34,[606] and Q16:91-94,[607] which convey God's command to believers to be

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[603] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 244-45.

[604] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 245-46.

[605] Q5: 1, "You who believe, fulfil your obligations…"

[606] Q17: 34, "…Honor your pledges: you will be questioned about your pledges."

[607] Q16: 91-94, "[91] Fulfill any pledge you make in God's name and do not break oaths after you have sworn them, for you have made God your surety: God knows everything you do. [92] Do not use your oaths to deceive each other– like a woman who unravels the thread she has firmly spun– just because one party may be more numerous than another. God tests you with this, and on the Day of the Resurrection He will make clear to you those things you differed about. [93] If God so willed, He would have made you all one people, but He leaves to stray whoever He will and guides whoever He will. You will be questioned about your deeds. [94] Do not use your oaths to deceive each other lest any foot should slip after being firmly placed and lest you should taste the penalty for having hindered others from the path of God, and suffer terrible torment."

loyal to any agreements they made with other people, including *ahl al-shirk* and *ahl al-ḥarb* (people who are at war with Muslims)*,* and other.[608] If the two parties kept their words in terms of the agreement, no justification whatsoever was given to the believers to betray it, even if the Muslims were the majority.[609] In Muqātil's view, God deliberately created differences among His creations as a test to be accounted for in the hereafter. Had he willed, he would have made the believers and the polytheists into one (religious) community, namely Islam *(millat al-islām waḥdah).*[610] Consequently, Muqātil sees any violation of an agreement as a serious offense leading to severe punishment. As long as such an agreement was made with good intention and without deceit, Muqātil urges that it has to be honored, and the Muslims were counseled to be loyal and self-controlled.

In second *tafsīr* that discusses the possibility of polytheists to violate the agreement made with the Prophet and the believers, Muqātil cites Q2: 194,[611] in which God gave assurance that if the Polytheists did betray the agreement, God would protect the Prophet and the believers. The verse, according to Muqātil, was revealed at the time when the Prophet and the believers were heading toward Mecca to perform a minor pilgrimage *(muḥrimīn bi ʿumrah)* made in 629, a year after the ratification of the Truce of Ḥudaybiyyah in 628, and one year before the conquest of Mecca in 630.

In the two *tafsīr*s that discuss a peace agreement with the Meccan polytheists above, Muqātil provides an important guideline as to how Muslims should act vis-à-vis

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[608] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 244.
[609] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 245.
[610] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 245.
[611] Q2: 194, "A sacred month for a sacred month: violation of sanctity [calls for] fair retribution. So if anyone commits aggression against you, attack him as he attacked you, but be mindful of God, and know that He is with those who are mindful of Him."

other communities. More importantly, the community being exemplified here is the most extremely hostile to the Prophet and the Muslims, and its guideline therefore paves an easier path for the believers to imagining what they can do with other communities that are less harmful than the Meccans, although they are different religiously, as in the case of the People of Scripture *(ahl al-kitāb)* and non-Muslim other than the Jews and Christians *(ahl al-dhimmah)*.

Thus, putting aside religious differences, Muqātil advocates for a vision of the Qur'an that allows peaceful coexistence for Muslims and other people through a mutual treaty that is honest and just. Such a qur'anic vision is translated through its warning on the Muslims to be self-controlled and loyal to any treaty once it is made. The Qur'an forbids Muslims to contemplate any betrayal even when they have become majority. It also prohibits Muslims to initiate war, but commands them to defend themselves if war has to occur. The fact the Qur'an allows the Prophet and Muslims to make a peaceful treaty with polytheists *(al-mushrikūn)* and people of war *(ahl al-ḥarb),* arguably the most hostile of all, makes it much easier for Muslims to envision the same with other communities who posed a lesser or no threat at all. However, the Qur'an is also at the forefront in underlining the condition that such agreement should be made with good intention and justice to all parties involved.

However, this vision of peaceful coexistence through treaty was only one phase in terms of the relations between Muslim and non-Muslims of Mecca, especially prior and up to the establishment of the Ḥudaybiyyah Treaty.[612] Following the conquest of Mecca

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[612] In relation to the Ḥudaybiyyah treaty, see Gabriel, *Muhammad,* 150-152, 166, 167.

in 630, Muhammad imposed Islam to the whole Arabs and made different policies for People of Scripture and and other non-Muslims, such as Zoroastrians, who lived in Arabia. For these non-Muslims, Muhammad allowed them to retain their religions, but required from them the payment of *jizyah* (poll tax) as a token for political submission. In this regard, Muqātil says that there is no compulsion over anyone in terms of religion after the submission of the Arabs *(ba'd islām al-'arab)* as long as they pay jizyah *(idhā aqarrū bi al-jizyah)*.[613]

Interreligious Marriage with polytheists

Two consecutive *tafsīrs* in Muqātil's commentary address interreligious marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims. They are "interpretation of what is prohibited to marry *kitābī* fornicators and polytheist female slaves *(walā'id)*" (*tafsīr mā ḥurrima min nikāḥ al-zawānī min ahl al-kitāb wa min walā'id mushrikī al-'Arab)*[614] and "interpretation of the prohibition to marry polytheist females and non-*kitābī* females" (*tafsīr mā ḥurrima min tazwīj al-mushrikāt wa ghayr ahl al-kitāb)*.[615] Since these two

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[613] Muqātil says that in the beginning, the Prophet only accepted jizyah from *ahl al-kitāb*. When the Arabs surrendered, willingy or unwillingly, the Prophet accepted *kharaj* from non-*ahl al-kitāb*. However, after his invitation to the people of Hajar through their leader, al-Mundhir ibn Sāwā, the Prophet accepted from jizyah from all those who rejected Islam, be they *ahl al-kitāb* proper—such as Jews and Christians—and other people, such as Zoroastrians. The fact that the Prophet had accepted jizyah from non *ahl al-kitāb*, e.i. Zoroastrians *(majūs ahl hajar)*, had had stirred up problems among the hypocrites, for in their knowledge the prophet was allowed to accept jizyah only from *ahl al-kitāb*. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/213-14.
[614] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 160. In his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* commenting on Q42:3, Muqātil maintains that a *kitābī* fornicator should marry only a female fornicator, be she from *ahl al-kitāb* or *al-'arab*, that is *walā'id* who committed fornication publicly for payment *(yaznīna bi al-ajri 'alāniyatan)*. In other words, these *walā'id* are prostitutes. Muqātil mentions nine of such *walā'id*, including Umm Sharīk *jāriyah* of 'Amr ibn 'Umayr al-Makhzūmī, Umm Mahzūl *jāriyah* of Ibn Abī al-Sā'ib ibn 'Ānid, Sharīfah *jāriyah* of Zum'ah ibn al-Aswad, Jalālah *jāriyah* of Suhayl ibn 'Amr, Qarībah *jāriyah* of Hishām ibn 'Amr, Farashī *jāriyah* of 'Abd Allāh ibn Khaṭl, Umm 'Ulayṭ *jāriyah* of Ṣafwān ibn Umayyah, Ḥannah al-Qibṭiyyah *jāriyah* of al-'Āṣ ibn Wā'il, Umaymah *jāriyah* of 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy, Masīkah bint Umayyah *jāriyah* of 'Abd Allāh ibn Nufayl. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/182-3.
[615] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 161-62.

*tafsīr*s also discuss People of Scripture, some overlap is expected when I discuss the topics again in dealing them. Furthermore, most of Muqātil's discussion in these two *tafsīr*s focused more on the *kitābī* females than on the polytheist female slaves about whom Muqātil provides almost no discussion.

In "interpretation of the prohibition to marry *kitābī* adulteresses and polytheist female slaves *(walā'id),*" Muqātil mentions Q24: 3,[616] and explains the context of its revelation. When Muhammad's Meccan followers migrated to Medina, they found their lives so modest, with their property and family left in Mecca. Meanwhile, some of *kitābī* women and Arab polytheist *walā'id* solicited a well-paid sexual service as prostitutes. On their houses' doors, they put a sign showing their available service, like the ones used by veterinarians, says Muqātil. These prostitutes were among the most prosperous people in Medina. The poor Meccans consulted the Prophet on whether it would be better for them to marry these women so that they might take advantage of their financial situation, but leave them after they were better off economically. In the wake of this, a revelation came prohibiting such an idea of marrying unchaste women.[617] These adulteresses—*kitābī* and ʿArab *walā'id*—should only be married to people like them, adulterers. Thus, Muqātil assigns the reason for prohibiting marriage to polytheist female slaves (*walā'id)* to the fact that they, like some of their *kitābī* females' counterparts, are unchaste.

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[616] Q24:3, "The adulterer is only [fit] to marry an adulteress or an idolatress, and the adulteress is only [fit] to marry an adulterer or an idolater: such behavior is forbidden to believers."
[617] See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/182-3.

In "interpretation of the permission to marry free *kitābī* women,"[618] however, Muqātil explains that prohibition of marrying *kitābī* females does not apply to all of them, but only to those who publicly or secretly unchaste. Citing Q5: 5,[619] Muqātil maintains that believers may indeed be married to free and respectful *kitābī* women. Thus, in Muqātil's view, there are two traits that *kitābī* women should possess in order for a Muslim to be able to marry her: chastity *('afāfif)* and freedom *(ḥarā'ir)*. Although this *tafsīr* does not deal directly with polytheists, like the earlier *tafsīr* in which *kitābī* women and polytheists *walā'id* are dealt with, it may shed light on why Muqātil supports the prohibition of marrying polytheist *walā'id*. Muqātil explains that to be marriageable by a Muslim, *kitābī* women must be chaste and free. At least one of these traits—that is, freedom—is not in polytheist *walā'id's* possession, and the lack of freedom may put her in a vurnerable position in relation to chastity. Thus, Muqātil's minimal discussion of polytheist *walā'id* in the *tafsīr* suggests that he has taken it for granted that these female slaves do not fulfill even the minimum condition to be marriageable to a Muslim. Therefore, Muqātil simply neglects them.

But a further implication may be drawn from Muqātil's discussion of permitted marriage with chaste and free *kitābī* female by Muslims: that is that the prohibition of intermarriage with polytheists, males and females alike is due to the belief aspect, in which they do not uphold *tawḥīd*, the very defining trait of Islam and one on which

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[618] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 167-8.

[619] Q5: 5, "Today all good things have been made lawful for you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them. So are chaste, believing women as well as chaste women of the people who were given the Scripture before you, as long as you have given them their bride-gifts and married them, not taking them as lovers or secret mistresses. The deeds of anyone who rejects faith will come to nothing, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers."

Muqātil has always insisted in propagating. Taking this into consideration, there is no chance, in Muqātil's view, that such interreligious marriage between Muslims and polytheists would ever happen. In this case, unlike in the case of agreements for peaceful coexistence mentioned earlier, consideration of religious difference seems to trump any other considerations. Within Muqātil's theological framework, interreligious marriage between Muslims and polytheists is out of consideration, because the latter's religious view does not pass his litmus test, which is monotheism.

Muqātil's view on the prohibition of interreligious marriage between Muslims and polytheists finds more vindication in his "interpretation of what is prohibited from being married to female-polytheists and non-*kitābī* women" *(tafsīr mā ḥurrima min tazwīj al-mushrikāt wa ghayr ahl al-kitāb)*.[620] In this respect, Muqātil mentions one verse, that is, Q2:221.[621] If in the case of polytheist *walā'id,* the prohibition of intermarriage is based on blatant promulgation of adultery by these female slaves who practiced some sort of prostitution, in the present context, the Qur'an bases its prohibition of such intermarriage more explicitly on a religious basis. The Qur'an states that a Muslim man cannot be married to a non-*kitābī*, polytheist women until they have acknowledged *tawḥīd*. A slave, but believing, woman is much better than even a free non-*kitābī*, polytheist woman. In the same vein, Muqātil asserts that a Muslim woman cannot be married to a polytheist male although he is of the People of Scripture, until he acknowledges *tawḥīd*. It is

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[620] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 161-2.
[621] Q2:221: "Do not marry idolatresses until they believe: a believing slave woman is certainly better than an idolatress, even though she may please you. And do not give your women in marriage to idolaters until they believe: a believing slave is certainly better than an idolater, even though he may please you. Such people call [you] to the Fire, [while God calls [you] to the Garden and forgiveness by His leave. He makes His messages clear to people, so that they may bear them in mind]."

ambiguous what Muqātil really means in this respect: whether a *kitābī* male should embrace Islam, or simply to acknowledge *tawḥīd,* while retaining his old religion, to be able to marry a Muslim female.[622] What is clear is that Muqātil opens to a possibility that a polytheist may be of the People of Scripture (*kitābī)* or pagan *(wathanī).* Since Muqātil conditions the possible intermarriage between non-Muslim male and a Muslim female on the admission of *tawḥīd,* it is likely sufficient for *kitābī* male to marry a Muslim female by declaring his upholding of *tawḥīd* while retaining his old religion (Judaism and Christinity). When it comes to *wathanī* male, however, it appears that he has to renounce his old religious belief altogether and to embrace Islam before he can marry a Muslim female. In this context, religious belief plays a determining role in the possibility for intermarriage. Muqātil, therefore, argues that a believing male slave is much better for a Muslim female. Likewise, a Muslim man cannot marry non-*kitābī,* polytheist females, but he is allowed to marry *kitābī* women who are free and respectable.[623]

The *tafsīr*s on interreligious marriage show that, despite the qur'anic vision of peaceful coexistence between different people, including those with religious differences, Muqātil sees that not all social relations and contracts between Muslims and non-Muslims are always possible. Interreligious marriage is a case in point in which, based on his understanding of the Qur'an, Muqātil does not allow a marriage between Muslims,

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[622] With regard to the *kitābī* male, it is unclear whether Muqātil is suggesting that he needs only to declare his admission of the unity of God, or whether he has to embrace Islam to be able to marry a Muslim female. It is possible that the first option would be sufficient for a *kitābī* male to marry a Muslim female by acknowledging *tawḥīd* that will remove the *shirk* predication from himself. This, however, suggests that in addition to the religious consideration, there was a gender aspect to the question of intermarriage, which I will address when I am dealing with People of Scripture later.
[623] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 161-2.

male and female, with polytheists, nor between a Muslim female with a non-Muslim *kitābī* male, until he admits *tawḥīd*. Muqātil, however, sees permissible a marriage between a Muslim male with *kitābī* women if the latter are free and respectable. Muqātil does put more limitations on Muslim females than on Muslim males in terms of interreligious marriage, about which he does not provide any reasoning.[624]

It is Muqātil's view, based certainly on his understanding of the qur'anic point of view that both People of Scripture and Arab pagans are, in one way or another, all polytheists. These two groups of people either violated *tawḥīd* or *taṣdīq,* or both, by their worshipping other gods *(shirk)*, with or without God, and refusing to accept Muhammad's prophethood *(takdhīb).* In this respect, Muqātil sometimes uses nuanced terms such as "*kitābī* polytheist" *(mushrik min ahl al-kitāb)*, or non-*kitābī,* polytheist woman *(mushrikah min ghayr ahl al-kitāb)*. These terms suggest that polytheists may be members of People of Scripture and also of Arab pagans.[625] But this is not all completely unexpected from Muqātil whose insistent propagation of *tawḥīd* has equipped him with fierce criticism to both Arab pagans and People of Scripture whom he charges with some sort of polytheism, in addition to their refusal of his prophethood *(takdhīb).*

In war with polytheists

The last two *tafsīr*s in the commentary that I would like to discuss in relation to polytheists are war-related matters. These are "interpretation of what God has previously

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[624] See Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics & Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 13-23.
[625] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 162.

tightened upon Muslims with regard to fighting against polytheists but then relaxed"

(tafsīr mā kāna shaddada Allāh 'alā l-muslimīn min qitāl al-mushrikīn thumma

rakhkhaṣa)[626] and "interpretation of the division of booty gained from war against the

polytheists" *(tafsīr qismat al-qismah min fay' al-mushrikīn min ahl al-ḥarb).*[627]

The former deals with how Muslims should face the enemy. In this respect,

Muqātil adduces a number of qur'anic verses, namely Q8: 15-16,[628] 65-66,[629] Q3: 155,[630]

and Q9: 25.[631] Q8: 15-16 conveys God's command on the believers to be steadfast in

their participation in the war and enduring whatever consequences it may have on them,

and to never escape from the battleground. In Q8: 65-66, God prescribed the ratio of the

believers' army and the enemy's whom they have to defeat in the first verse (8:65), but

then abrogated in the second (8:66). Previously, God commanded, and indeed assured,

that twenty people of steadfast believers should be able to face, and indeed defeat, two

hundred of the enemy's army, or a hundred to defeat a thousand. Thus, during the battle

of Badr, one believer should fight against ten disbelievers. Although the believers came

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[626] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 269-70.

[627] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 271-72.

[628] Q8: 15-16, "[15] Believers, when you meet the disbelievers in battle, never turn your backs on them: [16] if anyone does so on such a day– unless manoeuvring to fight or to join a fighting group– he incurs the wrath of God, and Hell will be his home, a wretched destination!"

[629] Q8: 65-66, "[65] Prophet, urge the believers to fight: if there are twenty of you who are steadfast, they will overcome two hundred, and a hundred of you, if steadfast, will overcome a thousand of the disbelievers, for they are people who do not understand. [66] But God has lightened your burden for now, knowing that there is weakness in you– a steadfast hundred of you will defeat two hundred and a steadfast thousand of you will defeat two thousand, by God's permission: God is with the steadfast."

[630] Q3: 155, "As for those of you who turned away on the day the two armies met in battle, it was Satan who caused them to slip, through some of their actions. God has now pardoned them: God is most forgiving and forbearing."

[631] Q9: 25, "God has helped you [believers] on many battlefields, even on the day of the Battle of Hunayn. You were well pleased with your large numbers, but they were of no use to you: the earth seemed to close in on you despite its spaciousness, and you turned tail and fled."

up victorious in the battle of Badr, God knew that the prescribed ratio between the

combatants of the two warring parties, in which a believer had to face ten enemies, could

be of a great burden to the believers which would accordingly lead to their defeat.

Muqātil maintains that Q8: 66 was revealed after the Battle of Uḥud in which the

believers suffered a major defeat.[632] In this respect, God abrogated Q8: 65 with Q8: 66 by

narrowing the difference in terms of the number of combatants of the believers and the

enemy, from one tenth to a half. This abrogation, according to Muqātil, is the easement

that God gave the believers after a more burdensome obligation *(rukhṣah baʿd al-

tashdīd)*. Muqātil, however, is quick to suggest, by mentioning Q9: 25, that the number of

combatants alone is not sufficient determinant for either victory or defeat, for while the

believers were so numerous during the Battle of Ḥunayn, they suffered an uexpected

defeat, because their confidence, especially in their number, had led to their

negligence.[633]

In "interpretation of the division of booty gained from a war against the

polytheists," Muqātil discusses how war gain should be distributed. In this regard,

Muqātil adduces Q8: 41.[634] Muqātil explains that at the time of the Prophet, Muslims

used to set aside one fifth of the booty, which was then further divided into four. The first

one fourth was for the Prophet and his relatives, in which each received the same amount;

the second one fourth was for the orphans; the third was for the poor, and the fourth was

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[632] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 270.

[633] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 270.

[634] Q8: 41, "Know that one-fifth of your battle gains belongs to God and the Messenger, to close relatives and orphans, to the needy and travellers, if you believe in God and the revelation We sent down to Our servant on the day of the decision, the day when the two forces met in battle. God has power over all things."

for *ibn al-sabīl.* The rest of the booty was to be distributed to Muslims according to their relative contribution and participation in the war.[635] After the Prophet died, Abū Bakr took back the portion for the Prophet's relatives and allocated it to the cause of *sabīl Allāh.* When ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib came to Abū Bakr requesting the share for the Prophet's relatives, which they used to receive during the Prophet's time, Abū Bakr told him that he heard that ʿĀʾishah (his daughter and a wife of the Prophet) had heard the Prophet saying: "The Prophet does not leave inheritance." ʿAlī then came to meet ʿĀishah, confirming what Abū Bakr just told him. "Did you hear the Messenger of God saying that the Prophet does not leave inheritance?" "Yes," replied ʿĀʾishah. ʿAli complied. Since then, Abu Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿAlī distributed what used to be the portion of the Prophet's relatives for the cause of *sabīl Allāh*, along with the shares of the orphans, the poor, and *ibn sabīl.*[636]

Although the two *tafsīr*s on war with polytheists are not related directly to the question of religious or non-religious considerations in the promulgation of law, the two cases that they convey communicate the change of legal rulings that occurred in early Islam. The change in the ratio between the Muslim combatants and the polytheist enemy in war, for instance, is a legal change that later Muslim scholars called abrogation.[637] In this regard, it is the case of abrogation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an. But Muqātil does not call such a legal change with the term *naskh* (abrogation) although in many other cases he does use the term for similar changes. Instead, Muqātil casually calls it *rukhṣah baʿd al-*

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[635] Muqātil, *Khams Miʾat,* 271.
[636] Muqātil, *Khams Miʾat,* 271-72.
[637] See Rippin, "Abrogation," *EI3.*

tashdīd ("easement after tightening").[638] This may suggest that during Muqātil's lifetime the term abrogation *(naskh)* was not yet well defined as a technical, legal term. The fluidity of the term *naskh* may also provide the reason why Muqātil refers to some cases in his commentary as abrogation while they are actually cases of specification *(takhṣīṣ)* in which some new legal rulings do not completely alter the older ones but only partially modify them. If Muṣṭafā Zayd is correct, it was decades later with al-Shāfiʿī that the definition of abrogation was refined and its parameters identified.[639]

There was second legal change regarding the division of battlegain from the one prescribed in Q8: 41 and applied during the Prophet's lifetime to a new one after the Prophet's death. This was based on ʿĀ'ishah's report of the Prophet's saying, and was stipulated at the time of Abū Bakr as Caliph. It also communicates a case of abrogation of the Qur'an by the Sunnah. While Muqātil does not call this legal change abrogation, later Muslim scholars debated whether the Qur'an can abrogate the Sunnah, and vice versa.[640]

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[638] Muqātil, *Khams Miʾat,* 270.

[639] Al-Shāfiʿī, however, did not deliberately put theoretical explanation on the difference between *naskh,* on the one hand, and *takhṣīṣ al-ʿām* or *taqyīd al-mutlaq,* on the other. What he did was to put forth examples for each case of the three from which differences can be drawn. This is what Muhammad Abū Zahrah understood from his reading of al-Shāfiʿī's *Risālah*. From al-Shāfiʿī's explication, it was concluded that *naskh* could happen only when a law was previously applied before it was removed totally and was replaced by a new one *(rafʿ hukm al-nass baʾda an yakuna thabitan).* However, if some legal replacement only partially changes the old one, and not in its totality, such a case can only be called *takhṣīṣ al-ʿām* (specification of the general). Al-Ṭabari, for instance, clearly followed al-Shāfiʿī's suit by stating that *naskh* only occurred when the old, applied law was removed by a new one. If such replacement was only partial—such as suggesting exception *(istihna'),* takhsis al-'am (specifying the general)—it was not *naskh*. Al-Ṭabari, however, did not provide a definition of *naskh* but merely explained it by providing examples, similar to that done by al-Shāfiʿī. It was an Andalusian traditionist, Abu ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ḥazm, who came after after al-Ṭabari, who first gave *naskh* a formal definition. After Ibn Ḥazm, an Egyptian grammarian, Abu Jaʿfar al-Naḥḥās offered a linguistic as well as legal definition of *naskh*. Afterward, al-Jaṣṣāṣ added that *naskh* sometime occurred only on the recitation while the law remained applicable *(fī al-tilāwah maʿa baqāʾ al-ḥukm),* or occurred only on the law while the recitation (or the verses) remained *(fī al-ḥukm maʿa baqāʾ al-tilāwah).* See Zayd, *Naskh,* 1/75-108. Also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ,* 2/4235.

[640] See J. Burton, "Naskh." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition.* Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2014. Reference. Boston University. 04 June

Furthermore, the last two cases in relation to the war against polytheists suggest that the Qur'an anticipates all possibilities with regard to how believers should build relationship with other people, including in both peaceful and conflict situations. Such anticipation underlies the importance of agreement making as an important instrument for social order within which all different elements of society may live a normal life. At some point, however, especially after the establishment of the Hudaybiyyah treaty and the conquest of Mecca in 630, the agreement-making between Muhammad and the Arab polytheists seems to be halted, and he began to impose Islam on them. A different set of policies were made with regard to other non-Muslims living in Arabia, including the Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians by which they were allowed to practice their beliefs while required to pay jizyah as a token of political submission.

People of Scripture-related laws

People of Scripture *(ahl al-kitāb)* have a special status within Islamic point of view simply because of their possession of scripture. Despite qur'anic criticism of some of their alledgedly polytheistic practice[641] and their rejection of Muhammad's prophethood, the Qur'an treats them differently from those Arab pagans who worshipped idols and possessed no scripture. Of course there were Jews of Medina who followed

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2014 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/naskh-SIM_5832 First appeared online: 2012.

[641] The only polytheistic practice of which the Qur'an accuses the Jews is their alleged statement that ʿUzayr is son of God. Another polytheistic scandal that the Qur'an mentions occurred at the time of Mūṣā by their predecessors, not the Jews of Muhammad's time. Other than this, qur'anic ciriticism against the Jews is due to persistent rejection of Muhammad's prophethood by some of them, or qur'anic reminder of their predecessor's persistent transgression against God's law as well as their stubborn ungratefulness to what they had received from God.

Muhammad and became Muslims, as Muqātil mentions in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr.*[642]

Notwithstanding, Muqātil himself does not seem to require non-Muslim conversion to Islam, as long as they were willing to uphold *tawḥīd* and recognize Muhammad's claim of prophethood, while being faithful to their own scriptures. This, however, does not deny the fact that, given his persistent advocacy of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq,* in Muqātil's view such conversion would be desireable.

What Muqātil implies throughout his major commentary, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* is that the Qur'an's minimalist invitation to People of Scripture is to believe in Muhammad's mission as a part of a long prophetic chain while they kept practicing the teachings of their own scriptures, in which *tawḥīd* constituted the fundamental teaching. The problem with People of Scripture, especially with regard to the Jews, in Muqātil's view, is that while they refused to believe in Muhammad, they were also unfaithful to their own scriptures. In the case of Christians, in addition to their similar rejection of Muhammad's prophethood, they practiced Trinitarian polytheism by which they elevated Jesus into divinity claiming him as the son of God and the third of the three. All these sins that the People of Scripture committed had made them one of the main targets of qur'anic criticism, as Muqātil mentions in his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr.*

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[642] In several places, Muqātil mentions "'Abd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions"—such as Usayd ibn Zayd, Asad ibn Ka'b, Salām ibn Qays, and others—as the represntatives of Jewish converts. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/81, 87, 90, 120, 135, 139-40, 179, 264, 268, 285, and many more. 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām was "a Jew of Medīna, belonging to the Banū Ḳaynuḳāʿ and originally called al-Ḥusayn… Muḥammad gave him the name of ʿAbd Allāh when he embraced Islam. This conversion is said to have taken place immediately after Muḥammad's arrival at Medīna, or, according to others, when Muḥammad was still in Mecca." See J. Horovitz, "'Abd Allāh b. Salām." *Encyclopaedia of Islam.*

In the light of this Qur'anic criticism, how then does Muqātil explain some of the Qur'an's policies that allow the Muslims to have certain encounters with the People of Scripture? To shed light on this question, I will discuss a number of civil and political interrelations that the Qur'an prescribes with regard to the Muslims and the People of Scripture.

Interreligious marriage with the People of Scripture

There are three *tafsīr*s in Muqātil commentary that address interreligious marriage with People of Scripture, namely "interpretation of the prohibition to marry *kitābī* adulteresses and polytheist female slaves" (*tafsīr mā ḥurrima min nikāḥ al-zawānī min ahl al-kitāb wa min walā'id mushrikī al-ʿArab*),[643] "interpretation of the permission to marry free *kitābī* women" *(tafsīr mā uḥilla min tazwīj ḥarā'ir ahl al-kitāb)*,[644] and "interpretation of God's prohibition of causing damage in divorcing wives" *(tafsīr mā nahā Allāh ʿAzza wa Jalla ʿanhu min al-iḍrār fī ṭalāq al-nisā')*.[645] Since I have already discussed the first of the three *tafsīr*s, namely "interpretation of the prohibition to marry *kitābī* adulteresses and polytheist female slaves," in the following I will deal only with the last two *tafsīr*s.

Earlier, I stated that Muqātil sees that intermarriage with *kitābī* females is permissible if they are free *(ḥarā'ir)* and chaste *('afāʾif)*. If a *kitābī* female is a slave or she is known, either privately or publicly, as unchaste, then she is not marriageable to a

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[643] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 160. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/182-3. I have discussed this *tafsīr* when I was discussing intermarriage with polytheists above.
[644] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 167-8.
[645] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 183-5.

believer. Muqātil discusses the permissibility of intermarriage with a free *kitābī* female in his "interpretation of the permission to marry free *kitābī* women."[646] In this regard, Muqātil mentions Q5: 5 to support the idea of interreligious marriage between a Muslim male and a *kitābī* woman, whether she is a Jew or a Christian.[647] Apart from mentioning the condition of chastity and freedom, Muqātil seems to accept, albeit critically, that these *kitābī* women were upholding *tawḥīd*. For when the Qur'an states that whosoever disbelieves in *tawḥīd* will be losers in the hereafter, these *kitābī* women, according to Muqātil, responded that they, too, believed in *tawḥīd*, for had God not been pleased with what they were, He would not have allowed the Muslims to marry them.[648]

Concomitant to the question of interreligious marriage with People of Scripture, although its heading seems unassuming at first, is "interpretation of God's prohibition of causing damage in divorcing wives"[649] in which, at the very end of the discussion and in a very short statement, Muqātil maintains that a free Muslim man and his *kitābī* wive(s),[650] be they Jews or Christians, or his slave wife, have no mutual inheritance rights; neither do a free woman and her slave husband.[651] In this respect, Muqātil maintains that mixed marriages, one interreligious and another intersocial group, hinder the rights for mutual inheritance of the couples. While such mixed marriages are legally

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[646] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 167-8.
[647] Q5: 5, "Today all good things have been made lawful for you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them. So are chaste, believing, women as well as chaste women of the people who were given the Scripture before you, as long as you have given them their bride-gifts and married them, not taking them as lovers or secret mistresses. The deeds of anyone who rejects faith will come to nothing, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers."
[648] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 167.
[649] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 183-5.
[650] Muqātil allows polygamy with *kitābī* women. See Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 168.
[651] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 184.

valid, they produce another legal consequence in terms of the couple's rights to inherit each other upon their demise. Thus, while permitted, intermarriage with *kitābi* women suggests a hierarchy or inequality between the Muslim groom and the *kitābī* bride, seemingly on the basis of religious difference. Likewise, "intermarriage" between a free believer with her slave also suggests a similar hierarchy or inequality but more on the ground of social standing of the bride and the groom. In all cases, religious or social standing difference brings a legal consequence in the diminishing of mutual inheritance rights of the couples.

Like Muqātil, al-Shāfiʿī also discusses intermarriage with the People of Scripture in his *al-Umm,* although with much more detailed, yet also limiting. In "detestation [for marrying] *kitābī* women of the people of war" *(karāhiyat nisā' ahl al-kitāb al-ḥarbiyyāt),* al-Shāfiʿī says that God has made the women of *ahl al-kitāb* licit for Muslims to marry, so is their food to consume.[652] In this respect, al-Shāfiʿī maintains that the *kitābī* women whom the Muslims may wed are those belonging to the well-known People of Scripture, namely the people of the Torah and Gospels *(ahl al-Tawrāh wa al-Injīl).* [653] While excluding Zoroastrians, al-Shāfiʿī regards Sabians and Samaritans as part of Jews and Christians, and, as long as they follow the fundamental teaching of *ahl al-kitāb,* their women are marriageable to Muslims.[654]

In "Arab Christians" *(Naṣārā'l 'Arab),* al-Shāfiʿī rules out the possibility of Muslims marrying Arab Christian women, because he does not regard them as *ahl al-*

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[652] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/655.
[653] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/655, 6/16-17.
[654] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 6/17.

kitāb proper. Al-Shāfiʿī maintains that the original religion of these Arab Christians was *ḥanīfiyyah,* but they went astray by worshipping idols.[655] Adducing a number of traditions, al-Shāfiʿī asserts that it is only the children of Israel to whom God had sent the Torah and Gospel who are *ahl al-kitāb*, while non-Israelite people, despite their embracing the religions of *ahl al-kitāb,* are not. Moreover, basing specifically on traditions from ʿUmar ibn Khaṭṭāb and ʿĀlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, al-Shāfiʿī maintains that Arab Christians may be treated as protected people *(dhimmīs)* from whom jizyah is taken, but their women are not licit for Muslims. In this case, the legal status of the Arab Christians is similar to that of the Zoroastrians.[656] In this respect, al-Shāfiʿī differentiates two types of non-Muslims *dhimmī*s (protected people), namely, first, people whose slaughtering was licit and their women were marriageable to Muslims *(ahl al-kitāb,* including Jews, Christians, Sabians, and Samaritans), and second, people whose slaughtering was illicit and whose women were unmarriageable for Muslims, but from whom jizyah was accepted *(ahl al-dhimmah,* including Zoroastrians).[657]

While Muqātil does not discuss in detail the identity of *ahl al-kitāb* and *ahl al-dhimmah,* he appears to equally distinguish between *ahl al-kitāb,* who are marriagble to the believers and whose slaughtered animal is consumeable and whose jizyah is accepted, and *ahl al-dhimmah* from which only their jizyah is accepted. While Muqātil is of the view that Muhammad was allowed to impose Islam on the Arabs, he does not include those Arabs who had embraced the religions of the People of Scripture, including the

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[655] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 6/17.
[656] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/690-691.
[657] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/691.

Christians of Najrān. In addition, provided his inclusive definition of the People of Scripture, Muqātil appears to hold the view that Arab Christians are People of Scripture whose women are marriageable to Muslims and their slaughtered animals are consumeable to them. In this respect, Muqātil holds different views from al-Shāfiʿī whose definition of People of Scripture is ethnically limited to the Israelite, thus excluding other people despite their embracing the former's religions.

In general, the Qur'an deals with the question of intermarriage in three verses, namely Q2:221, 60:10, and 5:5.[658] The first verse (2:221) prohibits intermarriage with polytheists, men and women; the second (60:10) has been understood to convey the same message, although an emphasis is made in relation to that a believing women is not to be married to polytheists (athough the term that the Qur'an uses in this respect is *kuffār,* instead of *mushrikūn);* the third (5: 5) allows Muslims to marry free *kitābī* women *(muḥṣanāt)*, but does not explicitly prohibits giving Muslim women in marriage to *kitābī* men. Thus, while there is no question pertaining to the prohibition of intermarriage with polytheists, which applies to both Muslim males and females, some question may arise as to why it is only Muslim men who can marry *kitābī* women, but not Muslim women marry *kitābī* men. Despite the lack of explicit prohibition in the Qur'an for a Muslim woman to marry a *kitābī* man, "this possibility is firmly and unanimously rejected in the

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[658] Friedmann, *Tolerance,* 161.

books of tradition and law."[659] A possible answer might be found in the way Muqātil and al-Shāfiʿī explains some of these intermarriage verses.

Understanding Q5:5, Muqātil maintains that intermarriage with polytheists is entirely prohibited, although a Muslim may marry a *kitābī* woman, one who is free and chaste. However, Muqātil argues, Muslim women are prohibited to marry all polytheists, *kitābī* or otherwise, until they acknowledged *tawḥīd*.[660] Up to this point, the ambiguity of Muqātil's requirement for non-Muslim males to acknowledge *tawḥīd* in order to marry Muslim females, may lead to different interpretations. On one hand, such acknowledgement of *tawḥīd* may suggests that those non-Muslim males and prospective husbands to Muslim females should embrace Islam and become members of Muhammad's community; on the other, acknowledging *tawḥīd* may suggest that these non-Muslim males may retain their old faiths while emphasizing their adherence to divine unity. As such, *kitābī*, namely Jewish and Christian, males may wed Muslim females as long as they can prove their admission of *tawḥīd*. Muqātil, however, also maintains that a polytheist may come from the People of Scripture *(mushrik min ahl al-kitāb)* or Arab pagan *(wathanī)*. For Muqātil, they all, in one way or another, had deviated from pure monotheism *(shirk)* and reject Muhammad's prophethood *(takdhīb)*. It is perhaps for this reason that Muqātil requires acknowledgment of *tawḥīd* as a condition for a *kitābī* male to be able to marry a Muslim female. Muqātil does not,

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[659] Friedmann, *Tolerance,* 161. Kecia Ali disagrees with Friedmann in that a marriage between a Muslim female and a *kitābī* non-Muslim female rather is assumed to be forbidden by the vast majority of thinkers rather than being explicitly rejected. See her *Sexual Ethics,* 13-23.
[660] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 161-2.

however, provide any reasons why the stigma of polytheism aplies only to *kitābī* men and not *kitābī* women in this regard.

If the wordings of the three interreligious marriage verses are compared, it is found that when the law applies to both sexes, the Qur'an explicitly uses terms pertaining to both sexes: *wa lā tankiḥū **al-mushrikāt** ḥattā yu'minna…wa lā tunkiḥū **al-mushrikīna** ḥattā yu'minū, **mu'minah-mushrikah, mu'min-mushrik*** (Q2:221); *lā hunna ḥillun lahum wa lā hum yaḥillūna lahunna* (Q60:10). However, there are no such explicit terms for both sexes in Q5:5. Instead, it is only the *kitābī* women who are explicitly mentioned in the verses as those who are licitly able to be married by Muslim men: *wa al-muḥṣanāt min alladhīna ūtū al-kitāba min qablikum. Kitābī* men as possible husbands for Muslim women are not mentioned. The absence of *kitābī* men in the verse may have suggested that God does not include them as ones who are marriageable to Muslim women.

Linguistically, if it is the masculine plural pronoun *(jamʿ mudhakkar)* that is used in Arabic, and for that matter in the Qur'an, there is possibility that the message applies to both male and female, unless there is an indication to the contrary. However, if it is a feminine plural pronoun *(jamʿ mu'annath)* that is being used, the message generally applies only to a female audience. Since it is the feminine plural pronoun *(muḥṣanāt min alladhīna ūtū al-kitāba min qablikum)* that is mentioned, as the women who are licit for Muslims to marry, it can only suggest that Muslim men can marry *kitābī* women, but Muslim women cannot marry *kitābī* men. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Muslim

scholars understood Q5:5 as permitting intermarriage only between Muslim men and
kitābī women, but not the other way around.[661]

Some scholars have speculated on possible answers for the question why Muslim
scholars unanimously reject the idea of Muslim women marrying *kitābī* men. Some of
these answers can be found in gender and religious difference assumptions. Both
assumptions relate to the question of superiority: superiority of male over female (in this
case, a husband over a wife), and of Islam over other religions. Muslims believe that
husbands are the leaders of the family who have the power to navigate and make the final
decisions as to where it will go. As such, husbands have an important position that will
determine the situation of their families, including their wives and children. At the same
time, Muslims also believe that Islam is superior to all other religions *(al-Islām yaʿlū wa
lā yuʿlā ʿalayhi)*. According to Friedmann, it is the motif of Muslim exaltedness that
serves as the main reason for prohibiting Muslim women from wedding infidel
husbands.[662] In fact, the idea of Muslim exaltedness is the background for numerous
sharʿī regulations concerning the *dhimmī*s.[663] Friedmann maintains that "[t]he fact that
intermarriage is permitted only to Muslim men, in turn, gives social expression to the

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[661] Q5:5 can be divided into three distinct parts based on its registers: male-plural with regard to food share *(uḥilla lakum al-ṭayyibāt…)*, female-plural with regard to women, including Muslim and non-Muslim *kitābī,* who are marriageable to Muslims *(wa al-muḥṣanāt min al-muʾmināt wa al-muḥṣanāt min alldhīna ūtū al-kitāb min qablikum…)*, and male-singular, the message of which applies for generality *(wa man yakfur bi al-īmān fa-qad ḥabiṭa ʿamaluhu…)*. However, Muqātil himself relates the last part of this verse, with its singular-male register, to the *kitābī* women's response that had God not been pleased with them he would have not allowed Muslims to marry them. See footnote 127, and Muqātil, *Khams Miʾat,* 167.
[662] Friedmann, *Tolerance,* 35. See also his Ch. Five, section 1.
[663] Friedmann, *Tolerance,* 39.

superiority of Muslims over the People of Scripture, affinities notwithstanding."[664]

Furthermore, Friedman argues that

> A marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man would result in an
> unacceptable incongruity between the superiority which the woman should enjoy
> by virtue of being Muslim, and her unavoidable wifely subservience to her infidel
> husband. In terms of Islamic law, such a marriage would involve an extreme lack
> of *kafā'a,* that is of compatibility between husband and wife, which requires that a
> woman not marry a man lower in status than herself.[665]

Thus, the permission for a Muslim to take *kitābī* Muslim women in matrimony

and the prohibition for a Muslim woman to wed a non-Muslim is closely related to the

idea of exaltedness of Islam over other religions and the superiority of men over women

in the family. Since men are imagined to have more authority than women in the

household, Muslim women cannot marry *kitābī* men that would put her in a vulnerable

position, including in protecting the sanctity of her religion that is believed to be superior

over her *kitābī* husband's.[666] By their faith, Muslim women are deemed superior over

their *kitābī* husbands. A very telling tradition from Ibn ʿAbbās may well describe this

situation: "God sent Muḥammad with the truth to make it prevail over all religions(s).

Our religion is the best of religions and our faith stands above [all other] faiths. Our men

are above their women, but their men are not to be above our women."[667]

 Rashīd Riḍā, however, argues that Q5:5 is actually silent when it comes to

possible intermarriage between a non-Muslim [*kitābī*] man and a Muslim woman.

Nonetheless, Riḍā also argues that such intermarriage has been prohibited, based not on

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[664] Freidenreich, "Five Questions about Non-Muslim Meat," p. 86.
[665] Friedmann, *Tolerance,* 161-2.
[666] See for instance Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsir al-Qur'ānal-Karīm (al-Manār),* 2/351.
[667] Friedmann, *Tolerance,* 173.

the statement of the Qur'an, but more on the Sunnah and consensus.[668] Al-Ṭabari also holds the same opinion. Although he does not independently discuss the question of intermarriage between non-Muslim [*kitābī*] men and Muslim women, al-Ṭabarī mentions a number of traditions suggesting the prohibition of such intermarriage. For instance, he mentions a tradition from ʿUmar saying: "a Muslim male may marry a Christian female, but a Christian male may not marry a Muslim female"; another is a prophetic tradition, saying: "We may marry *kitābī* women, but they [*kitābī* men] may not marry our women."[669] Thus, Muqātil, Riḍā and al-Ṭabari are among scholars whose definition of People of Scripture is most inclusive, embracing whoever is affiliated to Judaism and Christianity, with no regard to race or time of their conversion. In fact, al-Ṭabarī criticized al-Shāfiʿī who defined *ahl al-kitāb* as limited only to Banū Isrāʾīl and their descedants.[670] Riḍā in particular is a scholar who views intermarriage between Muslims and non-Muslims as positive medium for channeling the message of Islam. Riḍā, however, following the lead of his mentor, Muḥammad ʿAbduh, agrees with the consensus that intermarriage between a non-Muslim [*kitābī*] male and a Muslim female is prohibited, when he could have actually opted to allow such intermarriage had he based his view on his understanding of Q5:5 alone.

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[668] Riḍā, *Manār,* 2/351.
[669] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ,* 4/366-367.
[670] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ,* 9/589.

Kitābī slaughtering

In terms of the meat prepared by the People of Scripture, Muqātil devotes only one place to discuss it, namely "interpretation of the permission for Muslims to consume the slaughtered animals by *ahl al-kitāb*" *(tafsīr mā uḥilla li al-muslimīn min dhabāʾiḥ ahl al-kitāb).*[671] Muqātil has taken it for granted that slaughtering done by the People of Scripture is licit for Muslims to consume. Indeed, that is how he understands Q5:5 to which he is referring when he justifies his view in this regard: Muslims are allowed to marry *kitābī* women and also to consume their prepared meat. Unlike al-Shāfiʿī whose definition of People of Scripture is very specific to the Israelites, Muqātil has no apparent problem to include as broad people as possible to be members of People of Scripture, as long as there is a good evidence for their religious affiliatioan with them *(man dakhala fī dīnihim min ghayrihim),* even their slaves *(walāʾid).*[672]

Muqātil's inclusive definition of the people whose prepared meat is consumable to Muslims is even assuring when he explains the circumstances within which Q5:5 was revealed. According to Muqātil, this verse was revealed in order to respond to the alleged caution that early Muslims had when it came not only to the marriageability of *kitābī* women but also to the edibility of their prepared meat. By saying that, Muqātil asserts that not only God has permitted Muslims to marry *kitābī* women, but that He has also allowed them to consume the meat prepared by the People of Scripture and by whosoever affiliated with them and their religions, including their slaves.[673]

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[671] Muqātil, *Khams Miʾat,* 250.
[672] Muqātil, *Khams Miʾat,* 250.
[673] Muqātil, *Khams Miʾat,* 250.

Muqātil's views in this regard are in relative contrast to those of al-Shāfiʿī whose stricter criteria in defining the People of Scripture and how they perform their slaughtering have created more limitation. Similar to his discussion on intermarriage with the People of Scripture, al-Shāfiʿī devotes a considerable space to discuss food and meat prepared by the People of Scripture.

In "chapter on the slaughtering of people of Scripture" *(bāb al-dhabāʾiḥ ahl al-kitāb),* al-Shāfiʿī says that God has made the food of *ahl al-kitāb,* including their slaughtered animals, licit for Muslims to consume.[674] However, al-Shāfiʿī also argues that *ahl al-kitāb*'s slaughtering is licit only if it is named after God and not after something else, including Jesus.[675] In "slaughtering of the Arab Christians" *(dhabāʾiḥ Naṣārāʾl ʿArab),* al-Shāfiʿī again considers Arab Christians not the People of Scripture proper, basing his view on traditions from both ʿUmar and ʿĀlī. These two traditions, according to al-Shāfiʿī, suggest that Arab Christians did not properly follow the religious laws of *ahl al-kitāb,* including in their slaughtering. They also suggest that, by definition, *ahl al-kitāb* are those who were originally given the scripture, namely Banū Isrāʾīl and their descendants. [676] As a consequence, in al-Shāfiʿī's view, non-Israelites who embraced the Israelites' religion(s), especially after the revelation of the Qurʾān, are not People of Scripture. If such non-Israelite people embraced *ahl al-kitāb*'s religion before the revelation of the Qurʾan and made a peaceful agreement *(hudnah)* with the Muslims, such as Banū Taghlib, they might be treated like the People of Scripture only in relation to

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[674] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 3/603.
[675] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 3/603.
[676] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 3/604.

jizyah. In this respect, these people are treated more as *ahl al-dhimmah* (protected people), but whose slaughtering is illicit for Muslims to consume. In al-Shāfiʿī's view, slaughtering and jizyah have different laws *(wa maʿnā al-dhabāʾiḥ maʿnan ghayr maʿnā al-jizyah).*[677] In this case, the legal status of the Christians of Banū Taghlib, and other Arab Christians in general, is similar to that of the Zoroastrians.[678] In his response to the interlocutors who brought forth a tradition from to Ibn ʿAbbās in which the latter was reported to have said that the Arab Christians' slaughtering, based on Q5:51, [679] is licit, al-Shāfiʿī argues that following the traditions from ʿUmar and ʿAlī is preferable in this respect.[680]

It is interesting, however, that while he narrows down the scope of the People of Scripture to include merely the Israelites, al-Shāfiʿī regards Sabians and Samaritans as members of the Israelites. He says that whosoever among Sabians and Samaritans *(min al-ṣābiʾīn waʾl sāmurrah),* embraces the Jewish or Christian religion, his slaughtered animals are consumable regardless of his religious denomination.[681] To vindicate his view, al-Shāfiʿī adduces a tradition from ʿUmar to that effect. The same does not apply, however, to Zoroastrians, whose slaughtered animals are not consumeable by Muslims, even if in the process of slaughtering they mention God's name.[682]

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[677] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 3/605.
[678] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 3/605.
[679] Q5:51, ["You who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as allies:"] *"they are allies only to each other. Anyone who takes them as an ally becomes one of them."*
[680] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 3/605. Al-Shāfiʿī's chosen views in this regard suggest that he based his legal decisions very heavily on the available traditions from early generation of Muslims which he had stratified hierarchically based on his understanding of the relative authority that these early Muslims had in setting legal precedent. In this respect, ʿUmar and ʿAlī based traditions are prioritized over that of Ibn ʿAbbās.
[681] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/670-671.
[682] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/671.

A broad discussion of food, including its edibility and with whom it is shared, by scholars suggests how it may serve as a powerful medium for expressing communal identity. Fredenreich argues "many of the choices individuals make regarding which food to eat and which food to avoid relate to their senses of identity."[683] Not only does the discourse about foreigners and their food does relate to issues of communal identity, but it also relates to proper ordering of human society in general: "how and why We differ from Them, how and where the lines between Us and Them are drawn, how members of Our group ought to interact with and, indeed, imagine Them."[684]

In terms of Qur'anic dietary laws, however, Fredenreich finds it interesting that the Qur'an permits food sharing with Jews and Christians, stated in Q5:5, something that is atypical in his study, *Foreigners and their Food.* Thus, while some of these foreigners' food was inconsumable for Muslims, thus marking the difference between them, the permission for food sharing suggests "We and They share crucial attributes in common."[685] In fact, with regard to People of Scripture, "Qur'an 5.5 does not use dietary law as a means of distinguishing Us from Them. Rather, this verse uses the permission for food sharing with the Jews and Christians to "articulate a fundamental similarity between those who accept the divine revelation that is the Qur'an and those who received earlier revelations."[686]

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[683] David M. Fredenreich, *Foreigners and Their Food: Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 4; also his "Five Questions about Non-Muslim Meat: Toward a New Appreciation of Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah's Contribution to Islamic Law" *Oriente Moderno* 90 (2010): 85-104.
[684] Fredenreich, *Foreigners,* 180.
[685] Fredenreich, *Foreigners,* 131.
[686] Fredenreich, *Foreigners,* 131.

From the standpoint of the Qur'an's worldview, "holiness is not exclusive to Us." Unlike the Jewish and Christian perspectives, which see other religious communities as diametrically "not Us" or "anti-Us", the Qur'an and thus the Muslim scholars define Islam and other people based on both commonality and difference they have in various degrees.[687] Their relative distinction between each other was not based on strict opposition, but on the idea of spectrum where difference and similarity are gained gradually. At one point, such a distinction is blurred.[688] "The permission of food exchange across the border between believers and People of the Book symbolically reflects this blurriness and the affinity that binds all those who have shared the metaphorical table that is God's revelation."[689]

As such, Q5:5 is central not only for the laws in terms of food exchange with the People of Scripture but also in relation to intermarriage with them. But these two aspects of the verse's message potentially lead to two opposing understandings.[690] Gordon Newby, for instance, has understood the verse as conveying "the desire to integrate Jews into the nascent Islamic community." Friedmann, however, offers a very different understanding of Q5:5, which is more undermining than reconciliatory to the People of

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[687] However, Sunnīs and Shī'is hold two different conceptions of the relationship between Muslims and People of Scripture: "the former, emphasizing likeness, locate Jews and Christians somewhere in the middle of a spectrum whose poles are marked by Muslims and idolaters, while the latter emphasize unlikeness so as to place Scripturists very close to the idolatrous end of the spectrum." These differences are result of different emphasis that each of the two in terms of the People of Scripture. The Sunnīs underline the fact that, despite their shortcomings, the Jews and Christians are fellow receivers of God revelation, and hence share a degree of common values with Muslims. On the contrary, Shī'is highlight more the fact that while the People of Scripture have received early revelation from God they have however failed to adhere to it, and hence excluding them from the community of true believers. See Fredenreich, *Foreigners*, 131, 182-3.
[688] Fredenreich, *Foreigners*, 142.
[689] Fredenreich, *Foreigners*, 142.
[690] Fredenreich, *Foreigners*, 140-141.

Scripture. Rejecting the understanding of some Muslim scholars that the "permission to wed *kitābī* women was a gesture honoring the people of the book," Friedmann argues that, according to the predominant view, the permission to wed *kitābī* women is a symbol of Islamic superiority.

This understanding, according to Friedmann, was vindicated by the traditional dating that the promulgation of Q5:5 came at a time when the dominance of Islam in the peninsula was assured and the relations with the Jews of Arabia were at their lowest possible point. Had it been meant to honoring the People of Scripture it would have been given during the first two years of the Prophet's sojourn in Medina when the Prophet was attempting to conciliate the People of Scripture by adopting certain rituals associated with the Jewish (and Christian) tradition.[691] Friedmann recognizes, however, that his explanation of the verse in light of lslamic superiority fails to account for the permission to consider Jewish and Christian food as equivalent to that of believers, a permission that expresses a measure of equality between these traditions rather than the subservience of Jews and Christians to the newly dominant Muslims.[692]

In light of these two opposing views with regard to Q5:5, Fredenreich maintains that both Newby's and Friedman's views are possible, for the verse accommodates these opposing views. On one hand, Q5:5 sugggests that the People of Scripture are part of the holy community of believers in a certain respect, and yet are inferior to the Qur'an's

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[691] Friedmann maintains that Q5:5 was revealed a very late of the Medinan period, if not the latest, part of the revelation. It was, according to some tradition, revealed during the Prophet's last pilgrimage *(ḥajjat al-wadā')* in the year 10 A.H./632 A.D. If this traditional dating is accepted, Friedmann argues that permission to wed Jewish and Christian women was granted after the "break with the Jews," that is, after the Prophet decreed their expulsion from Medina and after the conquest of Khaybar. Friedmann, *Tolerance,* 191.

[692] Fredenreich, *Foreigners,* 141.

believers in other respects. The People of Scripture were like the Muslims but were also unlike them.[693] The Jews and Christians were like the Muslims because they were all given scriptures, yet they were inferior because the Jews and the Christians were unfaithful to their scripture. The commonality of these three monotheistic religions has allowed their followers to share food and intermarry. Yet the inferiority of the People of Scripture has accrued them jizyah, and only partially permitted intermarriage, in which Muslim males may marry *kitābī* females, but *kitābī* males may not marry Muslim females. In the meantime, polytheists are totally out of the equation. "Idolaters … are inferior even to Muslim slaves and therefore are utterly unsuitable for marriage to a Muslim."[694]

The hypocrite-related laws

The tone of Muqātil's discussion of hyprocrites is generally theological and admonitionary rather than legal. His language is very close to the language of the Qur'an, which critically addresses the innerworking of hypocrisy as a moral and religious defiance. None of the topics within which Muqātil deals with the hypocrites is concerned with the legal status of the hypocrites within the larger Muslim community. This is in stark contrast to al-Shāfiʿī's discussion of the hyporctites that insists on the legal status of these people as fellow Muslims, nothwistanding their alledgedly religious insincerity. As such, al-Shāfiʿī seems to relegate the hypocrites' sinful acts as irrelevant to their legality as legitimate Muslims for, in his view, their religious defiance is up to God to judge in

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[693] Fredenreich, *Foreigners,* 141.
[694] Fredenreich, *Foreigners,* 141.

the hereafter. While Muqātil does not explicitly express his view of the legal status of the hypocrites as fellow Muslims in this legal commentary, he does indicate that while he has constantly been critical of the hypocrites, he finally acknowledges their legal status as Muslims, albeit reluctantly.

There are at least three headings in Muqātil's commentary that deal with hypocrtites, namely "interpretation of the command on hypocrites that their wealth and children are not to destract them from performing prayers" *(tafsīr mā umira al-munafiqūn an lā tulhīhim amwāluhum wa lā awlāduhum ʿan al-ṣalāh)*,[695] "interpretation of a person who is stingy in relation to *zakāh* and seeing it as unobligatory along with the awaiting punishment" *(tafsīr alladhī yabkhalu bi al-zakāh wa alladhī la yarāhu wājiban wa mā uʿidda lahū)*,[696] and "interpretation of God's prohibiting the Prophet from praying for the hypocrites when they die" *(tafsīr mā nahā Allāh ʿAzza wa Jalla al-Nabī Ṣalla Allāhu ʿalayh wa Sallam an yuṣalliya ʿalā al-munafiqīn idhā mātū)*.[697]

In "the interpretation of the command on hypocrites that their wealth and children are not to destract them from performing prayers," Muqātil adduces Q63:9,[698] which reminds those whom Muqātil calls "the hypocrites who have believed" *(al-munāfiqīn alladīna āmanū)* not to be distracted by their property and children from performing the obligatary prayers. Interpreting another verse he cites, namely Q4: 142,[699] Muqātil

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[695] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 43-4.
[696] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 49-52.
[697] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 277-8.
[698] Q63: 9, "Believers, do not let your wealth and your children distract you from remembering God: those who do so will be the ones who lose."
[699] Q4: 142, "…When they stand up to pray, they do so sluggishly, showing off in front of people, and remember God only a little…"

maintains that being overwhelmed by worldly affairs, the hypocrites neglect prayers, and if even they perform them, they do so only reluctantly, simply to show off to their fellow Muslims that they are part of the group. These are the reasons why God, as stated in yet another groups of verses that Muqātil invokes (Q107:4-7), condemns the hypocrites.[700]

In "the interpretation of a person who is stingy in relation to alms-giving and who sees it not as an obligation, and the awaiting punishment,"[701] Muqātil addresses other hypocrites' defiance in relation to the obligation of paying alms giving. In this respect, he mentions a number of verses, namely Q63:9-11,[702] 47:38,[703] 3:180,[704] and 9:34-35[705] which in general threaten those who withhold their wealth and avoid paying alms with the awaiting punishment in hell. Furthermore, Muqātil criticizes another aspect of hypocrisy upon which he has previously touched, namely *riyā'*—that is the hypocrites' propensity to perform religious obligation for the sake of showing off to their fellow Muslims in order to secure their membership within Muslim community. Apart from

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[700] Q107: 4-7, "So woe to those who pray; but are heedless of their prayer; those who are all show, and forbid common kindnesses."

[701] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 49-52.

[702] Q63: 9-11, "[9] Believers, do not let your wealth and your children distract you from remembering God: those who do so will be the ones who lose. [10] Give out of what We have provided for you, before death comes to one of you and he says, 'My Lord, if You would only reprieve me for a little while, I would give in charity and become one of the righteous.' [11] God does not reprieve a soul when its turn comes: God is fully aware of what you do."

[703] Q47: 38, "though now you are called upon to give [a little] for the sake of God, some of you are grudging. Whoever is grudging is so only towards himself: God is the source of wealth and you are the needy ones. He will substitute other people for you if you turn away, and they will not be like you."

[704] Q3: 180, "Those who are miserly with what God has granted them out of His grace should not think that it is good for them; on the contrary, it is bad for them. Whatever they meanly withhold will be hung around their necks on the Day of Resurrection. It is God who will inherit the heavens and earth: God is well aware of everything you do."

[705] Q9: 34-35, "[34] Believers, many rabbis and monks wrongfully consume people's possessions and turn people away from God's path. [Prophet], tell those who hoard gold and silver instead of giving in God's cause that they will have a grievous punishment: [35] on the Day it is heated up in Hell's Fire and used to brand their foreheads, sides, and backs, they will be told, 'This is what you hoarded up for yourselves! Now feel the pain of what you hoarded!'"

quoting Q18:110[706] that counsels the believers to adhere to their faith for the sake of God only, Muqātil also employs a tradition that equates *riyā'* with *shirk.* Since the hypocrites' performance of religious duties is intended to serve other than God, they are now accused of associating God with creation. Such is the tone of God's message in the *qudsī* prophetic tradition: [707] "I am the best company. Whosoever associates someone with me in anything he does, I abandon it altogether and will not accept it, except that it is done only for me."[708]

As a consequence of the hyporcrites' association with polytheism, God has prohibited the Prophet to pray for them upon their demise. Quoting Q9:84, [709] Muqātil mentions the reasons behind such prohibition in "the interpretation of God's prohibiting the Prophet to perform prayer over deceased hypocrites." In it, Muqātil argues that, being defiant in relation to religious obligations, the hypocrites have actually rejected *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq,* which relegates them somehow outside the pale of the believing community. Muqātil, however, soon qualifies this indictment by maintaining that God's prohibition to pray for the deceased hypocrites applies only to the Prophet. Fellow Muslims must pray for them upon their demise even if the hypocrites are grave sinners *(min ahl al-kabā'ir).*[710] To support his view, Muqātil quotes 'Aṭā' ibn Abī Rabāḥ, saying: "If you do not pray for the grave sinners of your coreligionists, do you consider them as following

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[706] Q18: 110, "…Anyone who fears to meet his Lord should do good deeds and give no one a share in the worship due to his Lord."

[707] A *qudsī* prophetic tradition is a report transmitted from the Prophet yet its redaction is deemed to be God's Himself rather than of the Prophet.

[708] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 260-1.

[709] Q9: 84, "Do not hold prayers for any of them if they die, and do not stand by their graves: they disbelieved in God and His Messenger and died rebellious."

[710] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 278.

other religion?" Moreover, Muqātil also mentions another reported view of ʿAṭāʾ that performing prayer over the deceased of the people of *qiblah (al-ṣalāt ʿalā kulli man māta min ahl al-qiblah)* is part of the *sunnah.*[711]

As such, Muqātil's discussion of hypocrites focused more on the traits of hipocrisy and the awaiting punishment in the hereafter. Assuming it in a spectrum of belief and disbelief, in whose two extreme ends stand the Muslims and the polytheists, Muqātil seems to put the hypocrites in the middle sharing some traits with the polytheists but yet remain within the realm of the believing community. Muqātil's criticism of the hypocrites, however, seems so ambiguous that he actually almost relegates them into the realm of polytheism. Muqātil appears to discredit the hypocrites as being worse than grave sinners *(ahl al-kabāʾir)* because of their rejection of the mandatory nature of religious obligations. In such a perspective, while grave sinners may not perform obligations incumbent upon them, they, however, still believe that such obligations are mandatory. The hypocrites, on the contrary, reject even that, by their disbelief in God and his messenger, stated in Q9:84.

Muqātil appears to be struggling to defining the place of hypocrites within the community of believers. His concern with the inner working of hypocrisy has led him to his ambiguous categorization of the hypocrites, which is neutralized only by his employing of ʿĀṭāʾ ibn Rabah's views that the hypocrites are also part of the community of believers. Muqātil's focused attention to the working of intention and secret of heart of

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[711] Muqātil, *Khams Miʾat,* 278. In this respect, "the people of *qiblah*" is used as an equivalent of the believers of Muslims.

the hypocrites is not shared by a legal scholar proper such as al-Shāfi'ī who considers it irrelevant in his discussion of the legal status of the hypocrites.[712] It is to al-Shāfi'ī's discussion of the hypocrites that we turn now.

In several places in *al-Umm,* al-Shāfi'ī keeps reiterating the difference between two types of polytheism, committed by some of the People of Scripture and that by the Arab pagans, along with their legal implications in relation to intermarriage, food, inheritance, and war. Thus, if he often discusses together the People of Scripture *(ahl al-kitāb)* and polytheists *(al-mushrikūn),* al-Shāfi'ī highly frequently intertwines his discussion of the hypocrites *(al-munāfiqūn)* with the believers *(al-muslimūn* or *al-mu'minūn).*

Citing Q63:1-3,[713] al-Shāfi'ī argues that whosoever admits belief, despite his hidden idolatry or his continued act of disbelief, he has to be treated as a believer, and his life is therefore protected.[714] In a such manner, any conduct of disbelief can only be categorized as mere rebellion or violation *(kufr jahd$_{in}$ wa ta'tīl$_{in}$),* yet insufficient to be categorized as apostasy. Al-Shāfi'ī argues that God and the Prophet actually know that the hypocrites are lying when they pronounce their belief and that they use their vow of belief merely to protect their lives, as indicated in Q63:3.[715] That is actually the point why they, according to al-Shāfi'ī, are called hypocrites *(al-nifāq)* in the Qur'an: they

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[712] This is parallel to al-Shāfi'ī's discussion of love for wives as irrelevant to *al-qism bayna al-zawjāt.*
[713] Q63: 1-3: "1 When the hypocrites come to you [Prophet], they say, 'We bear witness that you are the Messenger of God.' God knows that you truly are His Messenger and He bears witness that the hypocrites are liars—2 they use their oaths as a cover and so bar others from God's way: what they have been doing is truly evil—3 because they professed faith and then rejected it, so their hearts have been sealed and they do not understand."
[714] Al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Umm,* 7/395.
[715] Al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Umm,* 7/395.

proclaim belief but they commit acts of disbelief. This is precisely what Q9:74[716]

conveys. For this reason, the Qur'an threats them with the lowest level of hell in

Q4:145.[717]

In this world, al-Shāfiʿī argued, God commands the Prophet and Muslims to treat

hypocrites according to what they acknowledged and showed publicly, for only God

knows the secret of the hearts *(sarā'ir)* and only God knows their lies. The hypocrites'

admission of belief, albeit nominally and tendentiously, is sufficient to guarantee the

protection of their lives. God's punishment awaits them only in the hereafter. Likewise,

the Prophet states that external admission and showing of belief guarantees the protection

of life. Consequently, for the sake of their proclaimed belief, hypocrites must be treated

as any other Muslims, and all laws that apply to Muslims in general apply to them, such

as in marriage, inheritance and other laws.[718] Therefore, al-Shāfiʿī is of the view that the

Prophet rules according what is externally visible, since nobody can really know what is

hidden inside one's heart. Consequently, al-Shāfiʿī does not allow supposition *(ẓann,* pl.

ẓunūn) to be the basis law or legal rulings; every law based on supposition is

automatically annulled.[719]

When it comes to belief, al-Shāfiʿī maintains, only God knows what is in people's

hearts. This, according to al-Shāfiʿī, suggests that human beings cannot judge but on what

they can see and hear externally *(lam yuʿṭa aḥadun min banī Ādam an yaḥkuma ʿalā*

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[716] Q9: 74, "They swear by God that they did not, but they certainly did speak words of defiance and became defiant after having submitted…"

[717] Q4:145, "The hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of Hell, and you will find no one to help them."

[718] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 7/395.

[719] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 7/396.

ghayr ẓāhir).[720] Even when committing serious crimes, such as informing the enemy of the secret of Muslims, the hypocrites are not punishable by death for their embracing Islam has accorded them protection of their lives.[721] Death can be inflicted upon those who proclaim Islam but commit one of these three crimes: murder, fornicating while being married, and apostasy.[722]

Al-Shāfiʿī also argues that a person cannot be killed on an assumption that he is a disbeliever, except if there is an extreme fear of danger that such person may pose.[723] A person's admission of belief should be accepted as true, despite his showing of repeated signs of disbelief. If this is what happens, al-Shāfiʿī recommends that he is to be punished at the discretion of the judge (*yuʿazzar).*[724] To underscore the importance of respecting what is externally shown in terms of belief, al-Shāfiʿī suggests an extreme case: that as long as a person shows his Islam, although in reality he might have embraced other religions—Judaism, Christianity, or Zoroastrianism—or held some kind of disbelief, his

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[720] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 6/120.

[721] Al-Shāfiʿī mentions a tradition in which Ḥāṭib ibn Abī Baltaʿah was reported to have written and sent a letter to the Meccan polytheists through a female messenger who was later caught by ʿAlī, Miqdād and al-Zubayr. When brought before the Prophet, Ḥāṭib explained the reason why he commited such treason. It was neither because of his doubt about Islam nor aiming at disbelief, but more as a way to win support from some of the Meccans among whom he did not have relatives. The prophet accepted Ḥāṭib's excuses, primarily due to his good track record and contribution to early development of Islam by participating in the battle of Badr. When ʿUmar insisted to the Prophet that he would kill Ḥāṭib as a hypocrite, the Prophet told him that God has forgiven those who participated in the battle of Badr. Based on this tradition, al-Shāfiʿī argues that Islam protects a hypocrite based on his external acknowledgement of belief, not what is really in his heart *(sarāʾir)* for it is only God who knows the latter. When asked if such treason happens again in the future, whether the *imam* should punish the perpetrator *(al-amr bi ʿuqūbat man faʿalahū)* or just leave him like the Prophet did, al-Shāfiʿī distinguishes between *ʿuqūbāt* and *ḥudūd.* If *ḥudūd* are to be applied as they are, *ʿuqūbāt* may be left to the discretion of the *imām*'s ijtihād. See Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/605-611.

[722] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/609.

[723] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 7/398.

[724] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 7/398.

life should be spared.[725] If that person shows a clear affiliation with disbelief or with a
certain religion, he is then given a chance to repent *(ustutība)*. If he does show the signs
of repentance, the law of Islam applies to him. But if he insists on his disbelief, he is to be
killed at the time he is unwilling to proclaim belief.[726]

In relation to Q9:48, in which God prohibits the Prophet not to pray over deceased
hypocrites, al-Shāfiʿī does not tackle this question in *al-Umm*, but I found his view on the
same topic in *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, a work that compiles al-Shāfiʿī's exegetical views of the
Qurʾan.[727] This is dealt with in the heading "the reason of God's prohibiting His Prophet
from praying for deceased hypocrites and the absence of the Prophet's prohibition to [his
followers] to pray for the deceased hypocrites" *(Sabab nahy Allāh nabiyyahu ʿan ṣalātihi
ʿalā man māta min al-munāfiqīn, wa ʿadamu manʿi al-nabī ghayrahū min al-ṣalāh
ʿalayhim)*. In it, al-Shāfiʿī argues that God prohibits the Prophet from performing prayer
for a deceased hypocrite because the nature of the prophet's prayer is different from other
people's prayer. The Prophet's prayer is able to expiate one's sins. Thus, if the Prophet
prays for a deceased hypocrite, his sins would be all forgiven. This cannot happen
because God has promised hypocrites severe punishment in the hereafter. For that, God
prevents the Prophet from asking forgiveness for the hypocrites, as it would jeopardize

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[725] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 7/399.
[726] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 7/399.
[727] The work seems to have been a collection of what otherwise would be al-Shāfiʿī's scattered
interpretation of the Qurʾan, especially in relation to its legal aspect. The collection was undertaken by Abū
Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Mūsā al-Bayhaqī al-Nīsābūrī (d. 458), who was also an
author of a certain *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*. See *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, n. y.). However,
the title *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, as one of al-Shāfiʿī's work is mentioned in his *al-Risālah*, when he discusses
abrogation. See *al-Risālah,* ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n.y.), 145.

God's upcoming punishment for them.[728] However, the Prophet himself never prevented his followers from conducting prayers for the hypocrites. In fact, al-Shāfiʿī maintains, the Prophet had never fought against a hypocrite since the revelation of Q9:48.[729] As such, God's prohibition on the Prophet from praying for the deceased hypocrites applies only to him and not to Muslims in general. This reinforces the idea that hypocrisy is to be judged in the hereafter, while external admission of Islam to be accepted as a proper token of membership in the community of believers.

At this point, some contrast can be grasped from how Muqātil and al-Shāfiʿī deal with the question of hypocrisy. If Muqātil is focused more on inner working of hypocrisy related to the intention and what transpires in people's hearts, al-Shāfiʿī pays more attention to what people admit and show externally. If Muqātil deals with hypocrisy on a moral and theological level, al-Shāfiʿī approaches it from a noticeably legal perspective. Consequently, while Muqātil's categorization of the hypocrites in relation to the believers and polytheists is largely ambiguous, al-Shāfiʿī's view clearly states that the hypocrites stand within the communal boundaries between belief and disbelief. On the spectrum of belief and disbelief, within al-Shāfiʿī's perspective, the hyprocrites are perfectly within the realm of belief as legitimate Muslims. For al-Shāfiʿī, judging people's belief should be based on the outer manifestation of that belief in the forms of statements and practices *(al-ḥukm ʿalā al-ẓāhir min al-qawl wa al-fiʿl)*. It is only God who has knowledge of secrets of the heart *(sarāʾir)*.[730] Meanwhile, Muqātil is more concerned with the

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[728] Al-Shāfiʿī, *Aḥkām,* 1/297.
[729] Al-Shāfiʿī, *Aḥkām,* 1/297.
[730] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 2/573.

theological and moral aspect of belief rather than legal one. Thus, while in the end he finally acknowledges the hypocrites' legal status as Muslims, Muqātil is very clear to show that legality must be built on the strong foundation of correct theology, especially in relation to *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*.

Jihād related laws

Muqātil allots a relatively large space for discussing jihād. He in fact provides an independent chapter on jihād *(abwāb al-jihād)*, consisting of nine *tafsīr*s, namely of (1) the virtues of the *mujahidin,* (2) the heavenly rewards for those participating in jihad, martyrs or otherwise, (3) the conditions of the soul of martyrs in the path of God, (4) being steadfast in the path of God, (5) abrogation of God's tighter command in relation to the ratio of Muslim army and the polytheist enemy in a war by a more relaxed one, (6) division of battlegains, (7) dishonesty in taking a share of the battlegains, (8) fighting people of Scripture until they pay jizyah, and (9) fighting against the oppressive among the believers.

The cursory glance, only five of the nine *tafsīrs* on jihād seem to be properly legal, while the rest appear to be more a theological admonition. In the first four *tafsīrs,* Muqātil addresses more the theological aspect of jihād laying out the encouragement and rewards that God has promised for believers so that they are eager to participate in jihād. The last five *tafsīr*s reflect better the legal aspect of jihād, explaining technicalities of war, the newly prescribed ratio with regard to the number of combatants between the Muslim army and the enemy, the division of battlegain, and a set of different rules in fighting People of Scripture and polytheists.

In his general explanation of jihād obligation, Muqātil adduces eight verses of three Qur'anic chapters, namely: Q2:216,[731] Q22:39-40,[732] and Q61:4,[733] 10-13.[734] Muqātil provides an historical overview of how the command of jihād had developed. During the Meccan period, he says, God had commanded the Prophet and believers to uphold *tawḥīd,* perform prayers, and pay almsgiving, although, at the time, it was not yet well regulated. While the early Meccan believers suffered any kinds of oppression by Meccan polytheists, God forbade them to fight back *(qitāl).* After the Prophet and his followers migrated to Medina *(hijrah),* God commanded other religious obligations *(sā'ir al-farā'iḍ)* and *allowed* the believers to fight back if necessary *(udhina lahum fī al-qitāl),* as explained in Q22:39-40. When accordingly God made the fight an *obligation*, the believers felt some burden was being put on them (Q2:216). In this regard, according to Muqātil, God persuaded the believers that while they disliked the idea of fighting against polytheists, it was actually good for them, for it led them to victory, spoils, and martyrdom *(fatḥan wa ghanīmatan wa shahādatan).* Likewise, they might prefer the idea of sitting at home avoiding jihād, but it was actually bad for them, because they got

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[731] Q2: 216, "Fighting is ordained for you, though you dislike it. You may dislike something although it is good for you, or like something although it is bad for you: God knows and you do not.'"
[732] Q22: 39-40, "[39] Those who have been attacked are permitted to take up arms because they have been wronged– God has the power to help them– [40] those who have been driven unjustly from their homes only for saying, 'Our Lord is God.' If God did not repel some people by means of others, many monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, where God's name is much invoked, would have been destroyed. God is sure to help those who help His cause– God is strong and mighty."
[733] Q61: 4, "God truly loves those who fight in solid lines for His cause, like a well-compacted wall."
[734] Q61: 10-13, "[10] You who believe, shall I show you a bargain that will save you from painful torment? [11] Have faith in God and His Messenger and struggle for His cause with your possessions and your persons—that is better for you, if only you knew– [12] and He will forgive your sins, admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams, into pleasant dwellings in the Gardens of Eternity. That is the supreme triumph. [13] And He will give you something else that will really please you: His help and an imminent breakthrough. [Prophet], give the faithful the good news."

nothing: neither victory nor spoils. In Q61:4, God encouraged the believers to participate

in jihād against polytheists for the sake of obeying Him, and in Q61:10-13,[735] God put

jihād the third after the command of upholding *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq.* In other words, the

Qur'an suggests that the undertaking of jihād is meant to serve the realization of belief in

the oneness of God and the messengership of Muhammad. Likewise, in his commentary,

Muqātil relates the command of jihād immediately to *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*, in the sense that

its undertaking is meant to serving these two principles of belief. The trinity of *tawḥīd,*

taṣdīq and *jihād* bring with it divine promises both here in this world and in the

hereafter.[736]

  After this introduction, Muqātil then proceeds to the first—of nine—*tafsīr,*

namely "interpretation of God's favor of those participating in jihād over those who are

not" *(tafsīr mā faḍḍal Allāh al-mujāhidīn min al-mu'minīn 'alā l-qā'idīn).*[737] Citing

Q4:95-6,[738] Muqātil explains that believers who participate in jihād are higher in rank

before God than those who do not, unless they have legitimate reasons for not doing so.

In the second *tafsīr,* "interpretation of what the participants of jihād share, whether they

survive or fall as martyrs, in the hereafter" *(tafsīr mā ashraka al-qātil wa al-maqtūl min*

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[735] Q61: 10-13: "You who believe, shall I show you a bargain that will save you from painful torment? [10] Have faith in God and His Messenger and struggle for His cause with your possessions and your persons— that is better for you, if only you knew–[11] and He will forgive your sins, admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams, into pleasant dwellings in the Gardens of Eternity. That is the supreme triumph [12]. And He will give you something else that will really please you: His help and an imminent breakthrough. [Prophet], give the faithful the good news" [13].

[736] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 264-65.

[737] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 266.

[738] Q4: 95-96: "Those believers who stay at home, apart from those with an incapacity, are not equal to those who commit themselves and their possessions to striving in God's way. God has raised such people to a rank above those who stay at home– although He has promised all believers a good reward, those who strive are favored with a tremendous reward above those who stay at home [95]---high ranks conferred by Him, as well as forgiveness, and mercy: God is most forgiving and merciful [96]."

al-mujāhidīn fi al-ākhirah), [739] Muqātil maintains that all of them will be rewarded with paradise, promised in Q9:111[740] and 4:74.[741] In the third *tafsīr,* "interpretation of the conditions of the souls of those falling as martyrs during their participation for "God's Cause" *(tafsīr arwāḥ al-shuhadā' min al mujāhidīn fī sabīl Allāh),*[742] Muqātil adduces Q2:154 and 3:169-170, explaining that they are actually alive and well-provisioned by God in heaven. In fact, these martyrs' souls asked God to bring them alive again so that they are able to participate in another battle and receive such a great reward. In the fourth *tafsīr*s, "interpretation of resilience in participating in God's Cause" *(tafsīr al-murābiṭ fī sabīl Allāh),*[743] Muqātil brings forth Q3:200 that conveys God's counsel for the participants of jihād to be steadfast and resilient in in their fighting against polytheists until the latter renounce *shirk* and embrace Islam, for the sake of Allah.

In the fifth *tafsīr,* "interpretation of God's more relaxing ruling for Muslims in fighting against polytheists" *(tafsīr mā kāna Allāh 'Azza wa Jalla shaddada 'alā l-muslimīn min qitāl al-mushrikīn thumma rakhkhaṣa),*[744] Muqātil explains how the old ratio in terms of the number of enemies that a Muslim fighter should face is replaced by the new and more relaxed one. Before this abrogation, the ratio stipulated between Muslim combatants and the enemy was one tenth; in the language of the Qur'an, twenty

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[739] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 266-7.
[740]Q9: 111: "God has purchased the persons and possessions of the believers in return for the Garden– they fight in God's way: they kill and are killed– this is a true promise given by Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an. Who could be more faithful to his promise than God? So be happy with the bargain you have made: that is the supreme triumph."
[741] Q4: 74: "Let those of you who are willing to trade the life of this world for the life to come, fight in God's way. To anyone who fights in God's way, whether killed or victorious, We shall give a great reward."
[742] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 267-8.
[743] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 269.
[744] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 269-70.

Muslims should face two hundred polytheists, or a hundred Muslims against a thousand polytheists (Q8:65). This ratio of combatants occurred during the battle of Badr, and the victory that the Muslims gained then has made this battle legendary. God knew that such a ratio was quite burdensome for Muslims, and may lead to their defeat in the future if such a number was maintained. The believers did suffer loss in the next battle of Uḥud, although the number of Muslim combatants might have contributed less to such defeat than the negligence of the Muslim army in following the plan. God then abrogated Q8:65, in which the one-tenth ratios of combatants were established, with Q8:66. In this later verse, the new ratio between Muslim combatants and the enemy is established at a half, that is, a hundred Muslims are against two hundred polytheists, or a thousand Muslims against two thousand polytheists. In this respect, Muqātil uses two exegetical tools in interpreting the Qur'an: the use of *asbāb al-nuzūl* report and abrogation *(naskh)* for deriving legal pronouncement of the Qur'an.

In the sixth *tafsīr,* "interpretation of the division of booty gained from fighting against polytheists that are at war with Muslims" *(tafsīr qismat al-qismah min fay' al-mushrikīn min ahl al-ḥarb)*,[745] Muqātil describes the legal change in terms of how battlegain should be divided during the Prophet's life and after his passing. During the Prophet's lifetime, the division was regulated in Q8:\41, by which the Muslims used to separate one fifth of the battlegain *(ghanīmah).* This one fith was accordingly divided into four portions: one portion was for God, the Prophet and his family, one portion for orphans, another for the poor, and the rest for travellers who became the guests of

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[745] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 271-2.

Muslims *(ibn al-sabīl).* With regard to the first portion, God's share was given to the Prophet and his relatives, in which everyone received the same amount. After the Prophet died, however, Abū Bakr took back the portion given to the Prophet's family, and made it God's portion *(sabīl Allāh).* Abū Bakr based his decision on what 'Ā'ishah, his daughter and one of the Prophet's wives, had heard from the Prophet: that a prophet did not leave inherititance. In this respect, Muqātil seems to suggest that the Qur'anic injunction of battlegain division was abrogated by a prophetic tradition, something that later became a matter of debate among the Muslim scholars as to whether the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition can abrogate each other.

The seventh *tafsīr* deals similarly with battlegain, but not with a legal aspect of it; rather it conveys the threat of punishment in the hereafter for those who dishonestly take something from it. Thus, in "interpretation on a person who dishonestly takes something from the battle gain *(tafsīr mā 'alā man yaghillu min al-ghanīmah),*[746] citing Q3:161-3, Muqātil warns that whosoever takes something illegally from the battlegain would bear the consequence in the Day of Judgment by carrying what he had stolen on his neck.

The eighth *tafsīr,* "interpretation of the command on Muslims to fight against People of Scripture until they acknowledge paying poll tax" *(tafsīr amr al-muslimīn min qitāl ahl al-kitab hatta yuqirru bi al-kharaj),*[747] deals with the rulings on fighting against

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[746] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 272-3.
[747] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 273. There is a typo in the printed commentary, in which what is supposed to be *jizyah* was written as *kharaj.*

People of Scripture. Citing Q: 29,[748] Muqātil explains that there are two options available to the People of Scripture, to be fought in war, or to submit and pay jizyah.

In the last *tafsīr*, Muqātil explains God's command in relation to fighting agains domestic rebellion. In "interpretation of the command given to Muslims to fight rebellion among the believers" *(tafsīr mā umira al-muslimūn min qitāl ahl al-baghy min al-mu'minīn),*[749] Muqātil adduces Q49:9-10,[750] verses which teach Muslims how to resolve internal conflict among Muslims. These verses were, according to Muqātil, related to the conflict between the ʿAws and Khazraj tribes among the Anṣār of Medina. These two tribes had been at war with each other in numerous places. God wanted the Prophet to make peace between the two and arbitrate them with justice. If one of the two insisted on the fight, the Prophet and the body of believers should take on that group until it submitted to peace arbitration. Social order has to be maintained collectively, and any potential disruption thus needs to be stopped immediately.

Based on the above discussion, there are two sets of rulings on jihād that Muqātil delineates based on the nature of the enemy. If the enemy is People of Scripture, they have two options available, paying jizyah or fighting. However, if the enemy is polytheist, Arab polytheists specifically, the choice is to embrace Islam or be killed.

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[748] Q.9: 29: "Fight those of the People of the Book who do not [truly] believe in God and the Last Day, who do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, who do not obey the rule of justice, until they pay the tax and agree to submit."

[749] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 273-4.

[750] Q.49: 9-10: "If two groups of the believers fight, you [believers] should try to reconcile them; if one of them is [clearly] oppressing the other, fight the oppressors until they submit to God's command, then make a just and even-handed reconciliation between the two of them: God loves those who are even-handed [9]. The believers are brothers, so make peace between your two brothers and be mindful of God, so that you may be given mercy [10]."

Internal conflict within the Muslim community must first be overcome with an offer of peace arbitration. If one of the two conflicting parties insists on the conflict, the Prophet and the Muslims are commanded to take on that party until they surrender. In this respect, Muqātil is consistent in stating that for the People of Scripture, conversion was not required as long as they were willing to live peacefully politically under the Muslim government by paying jizyah while they retained their own faiths. Conversely, the Arab polytheists had to convert if they did not want to fight.

Jihād is also one of the topics that al-Shāfiʿī spends a great, even extensive, space to discuss. Put alongside other headings in *al-Umm* within which al-Shāfiʿī also deals with jihād, the *kitāb al-jihād wa al-jizyah* alone, which specifically addresses the question of jihād, runs about one hundred and seventeen pages, and encompasses about forty three subheadings. The amount of space that al-Shāfiʿī provides for the discussion of jihād and other related matters suggests the relative importance of this topic to his conception of Islam and Muslim community, especially in relation to other religious communities. Much of al-Shāfiʿī's discussion of jihād is situating this obligation within the historical development of Islam and its relations with other religious communities.[751]

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[751] Al-Shāfiʿī was said to be the first who has offered a solution to the controversy among early Muslim scholars whether jihād was universal and on whom such obligation fell. Bonner argues that the classical doctrine of *fard ʿala l-kifaya* (collective obligation) first expressed by al-Shafiʿi, became widely (though not universally) accepted. This doctrine provided some resolution to tensions that had been breeding among various contending parties that included the imam/caliph and other representatives of the Islamic state, who needed to mobilize armies so as to defend and, where possible, expand the territory of Islam." Furthermore, Bonner argues that the discussion of jihād was found in the works of early Muslim scholars who lived in frontier provinces or places that had become sites of warfare against the external enemies of Islam, such as Syria, North Africa, Spain, and Central Asia (including Khurāsān from which Muqātil came). Meanwhile, scholars who came from places where encounters with enemy and warfare were rare, such as Arabia (including Mecca and Medina), and ʿIraq, they were generally silent about jihād. As a case in point, Bonner gives an example of two different recensions of Mālik's *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ*. The *Muwaṭṭaʾ* of Malik in the recension of Yahya al-Masmudi, who died in Cordova in 234/848 has a chapter on jihād *(kitāb al-jihād)*. In

Al-Shāfiʿī traces the general, historical development of jihād within early Muslim community, from when it was something permitted until when it became an obligation. During the Meccan period, when the nascent Muslim community was weak *(mustaḍʿafīn),* they were not yet permitted to launch jihād. Instead, the Muslims were given chances to migrate to a new place where they could practice their religious belief freely. The first emigration of Muslims was to Abyssinia. Following the conversion of some Medinan people, the Prophet and early Meccan Muslims were invited to Medina. Not long, the command for migration *(hijrah)* was given, by which the Prophet and his followers went to Medina. It was after this migration to Medina that the permission for jihād came. [752]

After God permitted jihād, the Prophet soon waged war against polytheists, which amounted to victory and attracted many more Meccans to embrace Islam. The Prophet gained more and more of a following. For that reason, jihād was made obligatory after it had previously only been permitted *(baʿd idh kāna ibāḥatan),*[753] as commanded in Q2:216; 9:111; 2:244; 22:78; 47:4; 9:39, 9:41, 9:42, 12, 121, 81; 61:4, and 4:75. At the same time, however, this command of jihād had made the life of the Muslims who remained in Mecca more difficult as they faced more oppression by the polytheists. In response, the Prophet sent to the Meccan Muslims a messenger telling them that God had

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another recension of the great Iraqi jurist al-Shaybanī, there is "a short chapter on siyar [the literary genre that outlines law or conduct of war] and otherwise nothing at all about jihad. Notable for its absence is the material that we find in Yahya's recension of Malik's *Muwatta',* on exhortation, reward, martyrdom, and so on." Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), especially 97-117.

[752] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/364

[753] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/367.

made migration a way out and made it obligatory for those capable of doing so. Those who, for different reasons, were unable to migrate, they did not have to do it. Thus, according to the Sunnah of the Prophet, hijrah was obligatory for those capable for doing so and especially those who were persecuted because of their religion.[754] However, if some of the Muslims feared nothing of such persecution and were able to protect their religion, hijrah was not obligatory to them. In this respect, the Prophet allowed some Muslims, including his uncle, al-ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, to remain in Mecca.[755]

Given the situation of Meccan Muslims who were prone to persecution, the obligation of jihād as an offensive war was, according to al-Shāfiʿī, then abrogated by another verse (Q2:193) forbidding war against polytheists unless they initiated it and Muslims were to defend themselves.[756] Since then jihād has become an obligation but more as defensive measure. Jihād was a collective obligation. Thus, if there were members of community who did it, the rest were freed from the obligation.[757] Nonetheless, those participating in jihād attained more virtues than those staying at home. For the sake of "division of labor," however, not all Muslims necessarily went to jihād, as there were domestic affairs to be taken care of. Al-Shāfiʿī's legally sober approach to jihād was able to create the need for such a division of labor, implying that not all citizens have to go to war. Since it is a collective obligation, choosing not participate in war is a legitimate option. Muqātil's theological and ethical approach to jihād creates an

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[754] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/365.
[755] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/365. Some said that the presence of some Muslims, such as al-ʿAbbās in Mecca had been used to monitor and spy the movement of the Meccan polytheists in their opposition against Muhammad and his followers in Medina. See Gabriel, *Muhammad.*
[756] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/365.
[757] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/384.

impression that avoiding jihād is condemnable and is allowed only with legitimate excuses. Consequently, Muqātil appears to have thought of jihād an individual, rather than collective, obligation in which each able adult must participate.[758]

Jihād, according to al-Shāfiʿī, was to be conducted against the nearest enemy whose threat to the Muslim community was imminent. Fighting against an enemy living in a rather far place was permitted if their threat was more alarming to the Muslim community. Once the Muslims were plunged in a war, they could not run away from the battlefield except for tactical reasons that empower the Muslim army.[759] Those who leave the battle ground commit sins, the only repentance for which is to asking God's forgiveness; there is no known expiator *(kaffārah)* for such a breach.[760]

Al-Shāfiʿī maintains that God has promised the Prophet that He will make His religion prevail. In the same manner, the Prophet had promised his followers that Persia and Rome would be conquered.[761] Therefore, Abū Bakr was confident when he received the mandate to lead the Muslim polity after the Prophet's passing. And under ʿUmar, ʿIrāq and Fāris were completely conquered.[762] God has made His religion the *ḥaqq,* and the rest that differs from it were *bāṭil.* God had also made it clear that the summation of *shirk* was two religions: the religion of People of Scripture and the religion of unlettered people. With regard to the People of Scripture, the Prophet gave them two options: to surrender—that is to embrace Islam—or pay jizyah. But for the unlettered people of the

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[758] As such, Muqātil's view of jihād as an individual obligation is similar to his Syrian counterparts such as Makḥūl. Bonner, *Jihad,* 105.

[759] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/392.

[760] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/393.

[761] Muqātil also mentions the same view using a prophetic tradition in his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr.*

[762] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/398.

Arabs, their choice was practically to embrace Islam, the rejection of which would lead to their being killed.[763] Thus, with regard to those whom he considered polytheists, regardlss of what type, and what to do with them, al-Shāfiʿī held similar views as Muqātil. Both consider People of Scripture and Arab polytheists and offer two different treatments of these two communities.

Before the advent of Muhammad, some of Arab tribes embraced the religion[s] of People of Scripture, and in Yemen they lived with each other. From such people, the Prophet accepted jizyah. This prophetic practice shows that jizyah was taken on the basis of religious considerations, not genealogical ones.[764] Al-Shāfiʿī maintains that the well-known *ahl al-kitāb* were Jews and Christians. Both communities were descendants of the Banū Isrāʾīl.[765] Zoroastrians, while they embraced a religion that was different from that of the polytheists and from those of the *ahl al-kitāb*, can be grouped with the latter as People of Scripture.[766] For even Jews and Christians of *ahl al-kitāb* also had religious differences. This was supported by the precedent set by three Rightly-guided Caliphs—Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and ʿĀlī—who took jizyah from the Zoroastrians.[767] Ālī was even reported to say that the Prophet, followed then by Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, also took jizyah from the Zoroastrians.[768] Based on this, al-Shāfiʿī concludes that Zoroastrians were *ahl al-kitāb*, and jizyah was taken only from *ahl al-kitāb*, primarily for religious reasons.[769]

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[763] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/398-399.
[764] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/405.
[765] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/405.
[766] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/405-406.
[767] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/407.
[768] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/407.
[769] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/407.

It was said that ʿUmar initially did not take jizyah from Zoroastrians until he heard from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf that the Prophet took jizyah from Zoroastrians of Hajar,[770] and that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān once heard the Prophet saying that Zoroatrians were to be treated as *ahl al-kitāb* in relation to jizyah.[771] Al-Shāfiʿī also mentions a report that ʿUthmān also took jizyah from the Berbers.[772]

Any polytheists, Arab or non-Arab, who did not embrace the religion of *ahl- al-kitāb* prior to the coming of Islam should be fought against until they became a Muslim, and no jizyah was to be taken from them.[773] Likewise, polytheists who embraced the religion of the *ahl al-kitāb* after the revelation of the *Furqān*, their affiliation with the *ahl al-kitāb* did not prevent them from being fought against until they became Muslims.[774] As such, al-Shāfiʿī holds the view that jizyah is accepted only from those embracing *kitābī* religions and whose parents were also of those religions prior to the revelation of the Qurʾan.[775] Thus, Arab polytheists who embraced either Judaism or Christianity or Zoroastrianism after the coming of Muhammad would remained "polytheists" and were treated as such.[776] Thus, jizyah was taken from those who had heard the calling of Islam,

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[770] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/408.

[771] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/408-9.

[772] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/409. It has become one of al-Shāfiʿī's methods that when he found different views on certain subjects he would choose to follow the views of senior companions of the Prophet, especially the four rightly-guided Caliphs (Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, and ʿAlī). In short, he stratified hierarchically the views of early Muslim generations based on his understanding of their relative authority over one another.

[773] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/410.

[774] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/410-411.

[775] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/436.

[776] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/436.

yet insisted on their parents' religions of *ahl al-kitāb* and ignored the true religion.[777] The amount of jizyah to be taken annually was one dinar in average.[778]

Bilād al-Islām, according al-Shāfiʿī, could be a home only for Muslims or non-Muslims having an agreement with the Muslims.[779] In terms of an agreement made between Muslims and polytheists, it has to be maintained for the sake of obeying God *(ṭāʿatan li Allāh).*[780] No vows were made for disobeying God, and therefore any agreement made in violation of God's law was regarded annulled.[781] Thus, it is only vows made and agreement concluded to obey God and not to disobey Him that was to be maintained and fulfilled.[782]

God's command to fight against polytheists until they embrace Islam, and to fight against the *kitābī* until they embraced Islam or paid jizyah, was mandated only if Muslims were capable for doing so. If the Muslims did not have the capability, they were allowed to make a peace treaty with non-Muslims,[783] even if Muslims received nothing from such agreement.[784] However, such an agreement should only be temporary. Once Muslims were capable of fighting against polytheists, they must do so. For fighting against polytheists, until they embraced Islam or against *ahl al-kitāb* until they paid jizyah, was an obligation.[785]

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[777] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/412.
[778] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/423-424.
[779] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/436.
[780] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/438.
[781] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/441.
[782] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/441.
[783] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/450.
[784] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/451.
[785] Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Umm,* 5/453.

Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong

The doctrine "commanding right and forbidding wrong" is often closely related to the question of jihād. In particular, scholars frequently linked "forbidding wrong" to holy war. "Others invert the relationship, considering holy war to be a part of forbidding wrong." [786] Not only among scholars, the same perception is shared by common Muslims who view commanding right and, especially, forbidding wrong as tied to violence, such as that invoked by the idea of jihād. While Muqātil's view of jihād is clear, in which he espouses the idea of jihād as an individual obligation, Muqātil's highly ethical approach toward the doctrine of "commanding right and forbidding wrong," however, seems to evoke more careful moral considerations than advocacy for violence or war. In Muqātil's view, the undertaking of "commanding right and forbidding wrong" must be executed with the ethically best possible ways.

Muqātil discusses commanding right and forbidding wrong in only one heading in the *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah,* namely "interpretation of the command in terms commanding right and forbidding wrong and of being patient over any trouble in its undertaking" *(tafsīr mā umira min al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar wa al-ṣabr ʿalā al-adhā fī amrihimā).*[787] It is intriguing that Muqātil links this doctrine, fair and square, to his exegetical thrust with regard to the Qur'an manifested in the opposition of *tawḥīd* and *shirk.* Commanding right and forbidding wrong, to Muqātil, is another way to

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[786] Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 490.
[787] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 278-80.

say commanding *tawḥīd* and forbidding *shirk.* Muqātil's understanding of the doctrine is based on his interpretation of Q31:13, 17-18 that read,

> ''My son, do not attribute any partners to God: attributing partners to Him is a terrible wrong [13].' ''Keep up the prayer, my son; command what is right; forbid what is wrong; bear anything that happens to you steadfastly: these are things to be aspired to [17]. Do not turn your nose up at people, nor walk about the place arrogantly, for God does not love arrogant or boastful people [18].''

Muqātil interprets the term *al-maʿrūf* and *al-munkar* in Q31:17 as *tawḥīd* and *al-shirk,* respectively. If the message of the other part of these verses is taken into consideration, the undertaking of the doctrine should be done in the best ethical ways (Q31:18). Muqātil's citing of other verses—namely Q17:37[788] and 31:19[789]—furthermore suggests that ethics or morality is fundamentally important in commanding right and forbidding wrong. The noted emphasis on the necessity of joining commanding right and forbidding wrong with ethics is manifested in Muqātil's invocation of another verse in his discussion of the doctrine, namely Q5:2, which reads, '…help one another to do what is right and good; do not help one another towards sin and hostility. Be mindful of God, for His punishment is severe.'

Afterward, Muqātil paraphrases a famous prophetic tradition, which lays out three acts a believer must perform in the face of witnessing an abominable action *(munkar),* namely—in descending order of strength—by an act, verbal statement, or rejection in heart. The redaction of the tradition suggests that the sequence of the threefold acts of

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[788]Q17: 37, 'Do not strut arrogantly about the earth: you cannot break it open, nor match the mountains in height.''

[789] Q31: 19, 'Go at a moderate pace and lower your voice, for the ugliest of all voices is the braying of asses.'

rejecting the *munkar* indicates the relative quality of a believer's faith in a descending order. A believer's ability to act when witnessing an act of *munkar* is better than when he merely offers a verbal statement, and even much better than when he merely rejects such an act of *munkar* in his heart without doing anything to stop it. Therefore, the rejection of a *munkar* in one's heart is considered the weakest manifestation of belief.[790]

Since the threefold attitudes—acts, verbal statement, and rejection in heart— reflect the quality of one's belief, Muslims generally feel encouraged to do their best in performing such an obligation. In this regard, acting to stop an act of *munkar* is preferable over the other two lesser options. In reality, this reason has been used as justification by some Muslims to do whatever they can, including the use of violence, to stop any wrongdoing they find in society. [791]

Muqātil, however, offers a different perspective in this respect, which potentially mitigates the possibly counterproductive effect of rejecting *munkar*, especially when violent ways are resorted to or prioritized. Propagating the undertaking of "commanding right and forbidding wrong" in the best ethical ways, Muqātil advocates a non-violent approach. In this regard, he seems to adopt Ibn Masʿūd's views that he quotes. Muqātil mentions that when asked by a group of people whether a person who does not command right and forbid wrong is perished, Ibn Masʿūd's response was negative. Instead, Ibn Masʿūd told them that perished is someone who does not know what commanding right

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[790] "Muqātil says: 'Reject *munkar* by doing [something] if you are able, or say [something]. If you are unable [to reject it by doing or saying something], then reject it with your heart, and that is the weakest [manifestation of] belief'" *(qāla Muqātil: ankir al-munkar, immā tafʿal in qadarta wa imam taqūlu. Fa in lam taqdir ʿalayhi, fa ankir bi qalbikawa dhālika aḍʿaf al-īmān)*. Muqātil, *Khams Miʾat,* 279.
[791] Cook provides a great amount of instances in his *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong,* in which some Muslims had resorted to violence in their effots to forbid wrong throughout history.

and forbidding wrong are; that is, a person who does not know what the wrong is and thus does not reject it in his heart.[792] What is striking in Muqātil's citation of Ibn Mas‘ūd's view is that contrary to the well-accepted notion of threefold act tradition in terms of rejecting *munkar,* which prioritizes act over speech and silent response by heart, it instead promotes what is considered the weakest manifestation of belief—namely, the rejection of *munkar* in one's heart—as the most meaningful and important response in facing any abominable acts. Rejecting *munkar* by heart requires the necessary knowledge of right and wrong by every individual believer. It is, in other words, an educated and responsible response, potentially in contrast to that poorly informed and destructive response that ignite violence, expressed either through speech or act.

While Muqātil's chosen preference might seem indifferent to what is transpiring in real life, it can be well understood by looking at what such a passive attitude prerequisites. That is, in order for every individual believer to reject an act of *munkar* in his heart, he must possess knowledge of right and wrong. Such knowledge requires education. If every individual believer has been well educated in terms of right and wrong, he is well expected to act according to that knowledge. If the knowledge of right and wrong is translated into reality by every individual believer, it means that there is no need for people to stop an act of *munkar* for there is no one commits it. In other words, Muqātil's vision of commanding right and forbidding wrong aims at a preventive rather than a curative measure.

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[792] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 279-80.

Muqātil's use of Ibn Masʿūd's view following the 'threefold act' tradition could be his smart way to neutralize the possible zealotry that a believer may show in order to demonstrate the best quality of his faith when witnessing an act of *munkar*, including using violence to stop it. By stating—with Ibn Masʿūd—that what is more important—than an act or verbal statement to engage in an event of *munkar*—is the possession of knowledge of right and wrong by a believer, Muqātil is indirectly arguing against the notion that rejecting an act of *munkar* in heart is the weakest manifestation of belief. On the contrary, he appears to argue, such rejection of *munkar* in heart might well be the noblest act that a believer may take when witnessing a wrongdoing, reflecting his knowledge of right and wrong. Just as theology or correct belief leads anything else in one's life, Muqātil's preferred way to combat wrongdoings is individual knowledge of right and wrong. And similar to his view of jihād as an individual obligation, Muqātil also sees commanding right and forbidding wrong as an individual obligation as well.

As idealist, if not utopist, as Muqātil's vision of commanding right and forbidding wrong may be, there at least three lessons that we can learn from the way Muqātil perceives the doctrine. First, he argues for the importance of creating an environment in which every individual has a good chance to possess a solid knowledge of right and wrong, so that he is able to act on that knowledge and live a virtous life accordingly. This reminds us of how he underlines the importance of education for qur'anic literacy in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. Second, since the obligation is individual knowing of right and wrong, every person is responsible for attaining the required knowledge. If a person has to participate in commanding right and forbidding wrong he must do so in the best ethical

ways. Third, the focus of commanding right and forbidding wrong is primarily commanding *tawḥīd* and forbidding *shirk*, arguably the most fundamental tenets of Islam. If the most important aspect of commanding right and forbidding wrong—that is, commanding *tawḥīd* and forbidding *shirk*—must be undertaken with utmost ethical ways, any other matters must be carried out in the same manner.

Another possible explanation as to why Muqātil chooses to adopt a non-violent approach with regard to commanding right and forbidding wrong is his possible discontent with the adversity that a violent approach to commanding right and forbidding wrong has produced. Cook provides a number of examples where individuals or groups of people chose upfront approaches to undertake this command, from verbal to physical, which ended up with their being punished by the existing rulers or even killed. In Muqātil's own time, Jahm Ibn Ṣafwān, who was often mentioned in the sources as Muqātil's opponent in theological debate, was rebelling against the government for the sake of commanding right and forbidding wrong, and was killed.[793]

In the early Islamic period, it was not uncommon, as shown by biographical dictionary literature, for the state and rulers to be the targets of 'commanding right and forbidding wrong.'[794] However, some scholars, such as Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/998), went as far to minimize the interaction with the rulers despite one's knowledge of the latter's depravity. In fact, Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767), Muqātil's contemporary, held a similar opinion to that of Muqātil. Despite his view that the duty of commanding right and

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[793] Cook, *Commanding,* 477.
[794] Cook, *Commanding,* 476.

forbidding wrong "might in principle make rebellion mandatory," Abū Ḥanīfah seeks to override this alarming implication by invoking the likely costs of such action."[795] Furthermore, Ibn Masʿūd who happened to be the authority from whom Muqātil derives his civilian and non-violent approach is also mentioned by Cook as someone who was very careful and cautious in dealing with forbidding wrong that may lead to mistake and violence.[796] This shows that while theologically uncompromising with regard to the upholding of *tawḥīd* and condemnation of *shirk*, the very essence of commanding right and forbidding wrong in his view, Muqātil does not condone the use of violence in its promotion. While theologically uncompromising, Muqātil opts to realize his theological visions in ethically pacifist way, as reflected in his understanding of the doctrine "commanding right and forbidding wrong" that realizes the very theological concern of his, namely "commanding *tawḥīd* and forbidding *shirk*.

It may appear that there is some contradiction in Muqātil's attitude toward jihād, closely associated with violence and war, on one hand, and his attitude toward commanding right and forbidding wrong, which advocates a pacifist method, on the other, as both are, to Muqātil, individual obligations. Possible explanations might be derived from the fact that Muqātil has perceived jihād as a defensive measure against hostile enemy that initiated any violent attacks toward Muslim community.[797] Jihād is, in

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[795] Cook, *Commanding,* 477-8.
[796] Cook, *Commanding,* 481.
[797] However, Muqātil also offers the alternative meanings of jihād as primarily civilized acts, other than merely physical fighting, as long as they are performed for the sake of God's cause. In this sense, Muqātil's pacifism began as a ctiticism, or at least an avoidance, of war. Duane Cady argues that "[c]ontemporary versions of pacifism often begin as criticisms of war. Such is also the case in the history of pacifist thought. And just as contemporary pacifism arises within a pervasively warist context, so the idea of pacifism emerges within the broad and deep warism of ancient cultures." Furthermore, Cady also maintained that

other words, a Qur'anic response for the early believers to defend themselves in practicing their faith against any violence that their enemy had inflicted upon them. As such, jihād is situated in war situation, which must involve some sorts of violence. On the other hand, commanding right and forbidding wrong, especially in Muqātil's preventive understanding, is to be carried out in a normal situation where all efforts to be made that every individual has access to knowledge of right and wrong, *tawḥīd* and *shirk*, and posses an ability to live accordingly. Or, Muqātil's alleged contradictory visions with regard to jihād and commanding right and forbidding wrong is the result of disparity between the idea and reality, the envisioned or imagined and the fact. In general, however, Muqātil's aspiration is the establishment of order and peaceful coexistence between different communities. This he has demonstrated through his approval for devising agreement with non-Muslims, his argument that the imposition of Islam is limited only to the Arab polytheists of Muhammad's contemporary, his inclusive definition of the People of Scripture that the political concession of jizyah can be applied to as broadly people as possible, his minimum requirement for *kitābi* non-Muslims to uphold *tawḥīd* and acknowledge Muhammad's prophethood *(taṣdīq)* without their conversion, his vision in commanding right and forbidding wrong, and, finally, his

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pacifism is a continuum "pointing to the *range* of legitimately pacifist views united by the common convictions" in rejecting war and in its commitment to non-violence. See *From Warism to Pacifism: A Moral Continuum* (Philadelphia: Tempe University Press, 2010), 1-2, xix, xviii. If Cady did not subscribe to the notions of just-war theory and argued that "war is by its nature morally wrong," Andrew Fiala offered what he called "practical pacifism," which "is not absolute pacifism; it does not reject violence in all cases. Rather, it develops out of the idea that sometimes war may be justified, even as it questions whether any given war is in fact a just one." But while Fiala claimed that the pragmatist approach to peace he adopted is "uniquely American," his views are largely similar to those Muqātil endorsed, especially with regard to the importance of education for values inculcation, individual responsibility, and non-violent approaches. See *Practical Pacifism* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2004), 1, 10. Cady, *Warism,* xvi, xix.

conception of *muḥkamāt al-Qur'ān* that offers a very valuable common ground, at least, for the three monotheistic traditions: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic communities, by invoking fundamental teachings that God has revealed to all of these people in their scriptures. It is to this topic of *muḥkamāt al-Qur'ān* that I will now turn.

Muḥkamāt al-Qur'ān: fundamental techings of the Qur'an

Muqātil's conception of *muḥkamāt al-Qur'ān* is the summation of his theological views, of his exegetical endeavor, and of his vision for interreligious relations. The *muḥkamāt* delineates Muqātil's theology, which centers on the upholding of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* and the total submission to divine command. It also reflects the priorities that he sets in his exegetical project by first underscoring the importance of having a correct theology before anything else, a theology that insists on the upholding of divine unity and the acknowledgement of Muhammad's prophethood. If this theology has been upheld, it is only then possible to discuss the rest, especially in terms of human relations. And fittingly, the *muḥkamāt* provides such a hierarchical arrangement for Muqātil to set out the theology that has led his exegetical project and to lay out the framework within which the believing communities—Muhammad's followers and the People of Scripture—with their different traditions may coexist under the aegist of the one God according to the teachings of the prophets and scriptures that God has sent.

Furthermore, Muqātil's conception of *muḥkamāt* is unlike what has been widely accepted among Muslim scholars, both in content and method. Substantively, there are some reports in later works that attribute similar views to older generation of Muslims among the companions of the Prophet, but Muqātil is certainly the first whose extant

works mention these views. Methodologically, Muqātil's conception of *muḥkamāt* is the first that offers a clear definition of what it is, while the mainstream scholarship on this subject has been open ended at best, and confusing at worst. Muqātil's clear formulation of *muḥkamāt* has a fundamental impact on opening more exegetical possibilities. It also contributes to determining which fundamentals of *islām* as the primordial "religion" *(dīn)* are nonnegotiable and which variables are subject to particularities. In order to understand the dynamic and complexity of scholarship on *muḥkamāt*, discussion must start by tracing how the term is used in the Qur'an.

Scholarly discussion of *muḥkamāt* starts with Q3:7: "It is He who has sent this Scripture down to you [Prophet]. Some of its verses are definite in meaning *(muḥkamāt)*– these are the cornerstones of the Scripture–and others are ambiguous *(mutashābihāt)*. The perverse at heart eagerly pursue the ambiguities in their attempt to make trouble and to pin down a specific meaning of their own: only God knows the true meaning. Those firmly grounded in knowledge say, 'We believe in it: it is all from our Lord'–only those with real perception will take heed."

Based on this verse, Muslim scholars are of the view that the Qur'an consists of two major types of verses: *muḥkamāt* (sing. *muḥkam)* and *mutashābihāt* (sing. *mutashābih)*. They have, however, differed from each other not only in identifying which verses in the Qur'an are *muḥkamāt* and which are *mutashābihāt*, but also, and more importantly, in defining the two.[798] Especially for the *mutashābihāt,* scholars have more

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[798] Al-Daḥḥāk, *Tafsīr al-Ḍaḥḥāk,* ed. Muḥammad Shukrī Aḥmad al-Zāwītī (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 1999), 104. Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* (Beirūt: Dār al-ʿIlm li al-Malāyīn, 1977), 282; see also Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Munʿim al-Qayʿī, *al-Aṣlānī fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, pp. 48-59 (al-Maktabah al-Shāmilah).

points on which they differ, depending on how they recited parts of the verse. The first

mode of recitation is this: *wa mā yaʿlamu taʾwīlahū illā Allāhu wa al-rāsikhūna fī al-*

ʿilm; yaqūlūna āmannā bihī kullun min ʿindi rabbinā ("nobody knows its meaning but

God and those firmly grounded in knowledge; they [who are firmly grounded in

knowledge] say, 'We believe in it: it is all from our Lord'"). The second mode of

recitation is this: *wa mā yaʿlamu taʾwīlahū illā Allāhu; wa al-rāsikhūna fī al-ʿilm*

yaqūlūna āmannā bihī kullun min ʿindi rabbinā ("Only God knows the true meaning.

Those firmly grounded in knowledge say, 'We believe in it: it is all from our Lord'"). If

the first mode of recitation is chosen, it means that not only God but scholars are able to

know the meaning of such *mutashābihāt* verses; but if the second mode of recitation is

chosen, it suggests that only God knows the meaning of the *mutashābihāt* verses, while

the scholars simply believe in them as revelation from God regardless of their true

meanings. [799] In addition, these different modes of recitation have an implication in

defining the two terms—*muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*—and in identifying which qur'anic

verses belong to either of the two. In the following I will mention a number of views

representative of the scholarly differences in this respect.

Qur'an commentators of the second/eighth century. Mujāhid (d. 102/720)

viewed the *muḥkamāt* as those verses in which God rules with regard to the lawful,

unlawful, and others, and the *mutashābihāt* as those verses that vindicate one another.[800]

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[799] Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abū Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* (Saudi Arabia: Markaz al-Dirāsat al-Qurʾāniyyah, n.y.), 4/1335.

[800] Mujāhid Ibn Jabr, *Tafsīr al-Imām Mujāhid ibn Jabr,* ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Salām Abū al-Nīl (Naṣr City: Dār al-Fikr al-Islāmī al-Ḥadīthah, 1989), 248.

It appears that Mujāhid was of the view that scholars are able to know the meanings of *mutashābihāt.* Al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 105/723) understood *muḥkam* as those verses that abrogate other verses *(nāsikh),* and *mutashābih* as those verses that are abrogated by other verses *(mansūkh).* Since the knowledge of abrogation—that is, which verses are abrogating and which ones are abrogated—is so important, al-Ḍaḥḥāk saw that, apart from God, scholars must be able to know the meaning of the *mutashābih,* which accordingly leads them to knowing events of abrogation.[801] Sufyān al-Thawrī (161/777) held a similar view as that of al-Ḍaḥḥāk that the *muḥkamāt* are *al-nāsikh* and the *mutashābihāt* are *al-mansūkh.*[802] Consequently, al-Thawrī viewed that scholars are able to know the meaning of the *mutashābihāt,* for such knowledge is required for their understanding of the abrogation cases.

Qur'an commentators of the third/ninth century. Al-Farrā' (d. 207/822) understood *muḥkamāt* as those which explained the lawful and unlawful, and which were not abrogated; they were three verses of the al-Anʿām [Q6: 151-153]. The *mutashābihāt* are *alif-lām-mīm-ṣād, alif-lām-rā, alif-lām-mīm-rā;* these letters had been obscured to the Jews who sought to find out the fate of Muhammad's community based on numerical interpretation *(hisāb al-jummal).* When they could not get what they wanted, they rejected Muhammad.[803] Al-Farrā's definition and identification of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* are closely similar to that of Muqātil that I will discuss later. According to

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[801] al-Ḍaḥḥāk, *Tafsīr,* 105-6.
[802] Sufyān al-Thawrī, *Tafsīr Suyān al-Thawrī,* ed. Abū ʿAbd Allāh Sufyāb ibn Saʿīd ibn Masrūq al-Thawrī al-Kūfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1983), 75.
[803] Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn Ziyād al-Farrā', *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1983), 1/190.

al-Farrā's understanding, only God knows the meaning of the *mutashābihāt*.[804] ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 211/826) only defined *al-muḥkam* as those verses which are acted upon, such as verses on inheritance and on war *(qitāl)*,[805] and *mutashābihāt* as those verses which resemble each other in terms of the lawful and unlawful and they are similar to each other.[806] ʿAbd al-Razzāq's definition is very general and it will likely lead to an open ended identification of which verses belong to which. But his definition suggests that he chooses the first mode of recitation implying that scholars are able to know the meanings of the *mutashābihāt*.

Qur'an commentators of the fourth/tenth century. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 320/932) saw *muḥkamāt* as those verses whose rulings are clear and detailed, and which offer convincing evidence with regard to the lawful and unlawful, promise and threat, reward and punishment, command and prohibition, narrative and metaphor, exhortation and lesson, and others.[807] *Mutashābihāt,* on the other hand, are those verses whose recitation is similar to each other but whose meanings are different.[808] Al-Tabarī stressed that God had deliberately explained some of qur'anic verses clearly and they become the fundamentals of the scripture, the pillar of the community and of the religion, a sanctuary for everything obligated with regard to Islamic teachings; other groups of verses were *similar* in recitation but different in their meanings.[809] Afterward, al-Ṭabarī mentioned

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[804] Al-Farrā', *Maʿānī,* 1/191.
[805] ʿAbd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ṣanʿānī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* ed. Muṣṭafā Muslim Muḥammad (Riyāḍ: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1989), 1/115 [1/382], [1/438, 3/207].
[806] ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* 3/129.
[807] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ,* 6/170.
[808] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ,* 6/173.
[809] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ,* 6/174.

different scholarly views with regard to *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt.* Some scholar said that *al-muḥkamāt* were those that were acted upon, abrogating, and whose rulings are operational; *al-mutashābihāt,* on the contrary, were those verses that are not acted upon and are abrograted. Al-Ṭabarī also mentioned a reported view of Ibn ʿAbbās that the *āyāt mūḥkamāt* are three verses of the al-Anʿām (Q6:151-153) and those of the al-Isrā' (Q17:23-39).[810] He also referred to another reported view of Ibn ʿAbbās that *al-muḥkamāt* are those verses that were abrogating, the lawful and the unlawful, *ḥudūd and farā'iḍ,* what are believed in and acted upon; *al-mutashabihāt* are those who are abrogated, whose construction is inverted *(muqaddamuhu wa mu'akhkharuhu),* metaphors and oaths *(amthāluhū wa aqsāmuhū),* and those verses which are believed in but not acted upon.[811] The remaining views that al-Ṭabarī mentioned, either from the reported views of the Companions or Followers, stated that *al-muḥkamāt* are those abrogating, believed in and acted upon, and the *al-mustashābihāt* are those abrogated, belived in but not acted upon.[812]

Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/938) referred to the reported view Ibn ʿAbbās in his definition of *al-muḥkamāt* as the abrogating verses which also deal with the lawful and unlawful, *ḥudūd* and *farā'iḍ,* which are believed in and acted upon. He also mentioned the reported view of Ibn ʿAbbās that *al-muḥkamāt* were the last three verses of the al-Anʿām (Q6:151-3), or that they are the three verses of the al-Anʿām and some verses of

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[810] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ,* 6/174.
[811] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ,* 6/175.
[812] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ,* 6/175-76.

the al-Isrā' (Q17:23-39).[813] But he also mentioned the reported views of ʿIkrimah, Mujāhid, Qatādah, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān, al-Rabīʿ ibn Anas, and al-Suddī who all said that *al-muḥkam* is the one that is acted upon.[814] Ibn Abī Ḥātim offered an explanation as to why the *muḥkamāt* is called the "mother of the scrtipture." Two of the three views he mentioned maintained that it is called so because they are written in all scriptures and accepted by the followers of all religions.[815] In terms of *al-mutashābihāt*, Ibn Abī Ḥātim mentioned four views. The first is the reported view of Ibn ʿAbbās that they are the abrogated, whose construction is inverted *(muqaddamuhu wa mu'akhkharuhu),* metaphors and oaths *(amthāluhu wa aqsāmuhu),* and the ones to be believed in but not acted upon.[816] The second view is of Mujāhid who said that *mutashābihāt* are verses that are similar to one another.[817] The third was Muqātil's view that they are four sets of the mysterious letters: *alif-lām-mīm, alif-lām-mīm-ṣād, alif-lām-mīm-rā,* and *alif-lām-rā.*[818] The last view is of Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq who said that *mutashābihāt* are the verses in which God did not explain His words in detail as He did in the *muḥkamāt*, and thus are obscure in people's mind.[819]

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[813] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm,* ed. Asʿad Muḥammad Ṭayyib (Riyāḍ: Maktabah Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 1997), 592.

[814] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr,* 592.

[815] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr,* 593.

[816] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr,* 593.

[817] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr,* 593.

[818] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr,* 594. It is interesting here to note that it is unclear which Muqātil Ibn Abī Ḥātim was referring to. Ibn Abī Ḥātim was very critical of Muqātil in the biographical dictionaries. But the view of *al-mutashābihāt* he mentioned belonged only to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. However, Ibn Abī Ḥātim seemed to obscure which Muqātil he actually meant. Before, when he mentioned Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān, he did so with the latter's full name. But when referring to the view of *mutashābihāt* as the four sets of the mysterious letters, he simply mentioned Muqātil, which could be Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān or ibn Sulaymān. However, the view that *mutashābihāt* consists of these four sets of mysterious letters belonged to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān.

[819] Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr,* 594.

Based on these representative exegetes, some remarks can be made as follows: (1) some of the second/eight century exegetes, in this case Mujāhid and al-Ḍaḥḥāk, were of the view that scholars are able to know the meanings of *mutashābihāt,* and their definition of *muḥkamāt* stressed its relation with the question of legal matters such as lawful-/unlawfulness and abrogation. Their definition of both terms is straightforward but also general. Muqātil who came from the same period would offer an entirely different set of views in this regard. (2) Some of the third/ninth century exegetes, in this case al-Farrā' and al-Ṣanʿānī, showed some partial similarity in defining more clearly the *muḥkamāt* but also partial, but stark, difference in terms of the definition of the *mutashābihāt* and the possibility of scholars for knowing the latter's meanings. Of the two, al-Farrā''s is the closest to Muqātil's definition of the two terms and in his identification of which verses belong to which. In general, their discussion of the subject matter is quite straightforward. (3) The fourth/tenth century exegetes, in this case al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Abī Ḥātim, showed a new tendency of being encyclopaedic in their discussion of the subject matter. Not only did they express their own views in terms of *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*, they also mentioned the views of other scholars. Consequently, it is not entirely clear which of those views that best represent their own. While al-Ṭabarī offered his own definitions of the two terms, they are very general and open-ended. But he mentioned Ibn ʿAbbāṣ' view of the *muḥkamāt* which is close to that of Muqātil. Ibn Abī Ḥātim, who did not offer his own definition, referred to Ibn ʿAbbās' view of the *muḥkamāt* similar to that of Muqātil, and cited Muqātil's view, among other, with regard to the *mutashābihāt.*

Muqātil's muḥkamāt

Muqātil's straightforward and simple concept of *al-muḥkamāt* has a significant implication for his exegetical endeavor and for envisioning a common ground for interreligious relations. Since his view of *al-muḥkamāt* depends in part on the definition of its paired opposite, I will briefly discuss muqātil's view of *al-mutashābihāt*.

Muqātil does not mention his conception of the *mutashābihāt* in his legal commentary. Rather, he discussed it in his major commentary, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. Muqātil is of the view that the *mutashābihāt* consist only of four sets of the mysterious letters, namely *alif-lām-mīm, alif-lām-mīm-ṣād, alif-lām-mīm-rā,* and *alif-lām-rā.* [820] Of twenty-nine chapters in which the mysterious letters take place, there are only thirteen chapters in which one of these four sets become their openings.[821] Muqātil's decision to take only these four sets of mysterious letters as the *mutashābihāt* in the Qur'an was based on a tradition in which the Prophet recited these four sets of the mysterious letters to the Jews about whose meanings they admitted to be confused, although they hinted at the fact that these letters represented the numerical account with regard to the length of period in which Muhammad's community would last.[822]

Muqātil suggests that only God knows the meanings of these four sets of letters, and every attempt to pursue them through interpretation would prove futile. Furthermore,

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[820] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/264.
[821] *Alif-lam-mim* occurs 6 times in 6 different chapters: Q2, 3, 29, 30, 31, 32; *alif-lam-mim-sad* occurs once in Q7; *alif-lam-ra* occurs 5 times in Q10, 11, 12, 14, 15, and *alif-lam-mim-ra* occurs once in Q13.
[822] *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān,* 1/87. Al-Farrā' offered a similar narrative background in relation to *mutashābihāt* in which a group of Jews attempted to predict the fate of Muhammad's community, but his identified *mutashābihāt* consist only of three sets of the mysterious letters--*alif-lām-mīm-ṣād, alif-lām-rā, alif-lām-mīm-rā*—lacking *alif-lām-mīm,* the fourth in Muqātil's view.

any attempts at interpretation might instead lead to excuses for disbelief, just like what the Jews did. Therefore, in his commentary, Muqātil never interpreted these four sets of letters. In the meantime, Muqātil does not consider the other ten sets of mysterious letters, which open other sixteen qur'anic chapters, *mutashābihāt.* Since these ten sets of letters are accessible to interpretation, we therefore expect Muqātil to interpret them in his commentary. Nonetheless, Muqātil has an inconsistent attitude toward these ten set of mysterious letters in the sixteen chapters of the Qur'an. Sometimes he offers interpretation on some of them; sometimes he just passes them over without explanation.[823]

Similar to his conception of the *mutashābihāt,* Muqātil is quite straightforward in offering his conception of the *muḥkamāt.* In "interpretation of *muḥkamāt* verses and interpretation of what is revealed at the end of the "Cow" Chapter" *(tafsir al-āyāt al-muḥkamāt wa tafsīr mā unzila fī ākhir al-Baqarah)*,[824] Muqātil argues that the *muḥkāmāt* are Q6:151-3, namely:

> "Say, 'Come! I will tell you what your Lord has really forbidden you. Do not
> ascribe anything as a partner to Him; be good to your parents; do not kill your
> children in fear of poverty'— We will provide for you and for them—' stay well
> away from committing obscenities, whether openly or in secret; do not take the

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[823] For instance, Muqatil provides an interpretation for *kāf-hā-yā-'ain-ṣād* that opens the beginning of Q.19 as standing for God's attributes: *Kāfin-Hādin-'Ālim-Ṣādiq.* Muqātil also interprets *hā-mīm* in Q41 as *mā hamma fī al-lawh al-maḥfūẓ ya'nī mā quḍiya fī al-amr,* "something that is decided in the "Protected Tablet"; the same set of letters (hā-mīm) also occurs in five other chapters—Q40, 43, 44, 45, 46—and is understood to have the same meaning. Muqātil also comments on *qāf,* a single letter that opens Q50 as "the green emerald mountain that permeates the earth and serves as the mother of all mountains out of which they emerged". Likewise, he offers an explanation for *nūn,* another single letter opening Q68 as "the whale that lives in the sea under the lowest earth". However, Muqatil just passes over *ṭā-hā (Q20), ṭā-sīn (Q27), ṭā-sīn-mīm (Q26, 28), yā-sīn (Q36), ḥa-mīm-'ain-sīn-qāf (Q42),* and *ṣād (Q38).* The fact that Muqātil sometimes offers interpretation to some of these letters suggests that they are indeed not part of what he considers mutashābihat, which he consistently passes over without any comments. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/620, 4/109, 403.

[824] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 275-77.

life God has made sacred, except by right. This is what He commands you to do:
perhaps you will use your reason [151]. Stay well away from the property of
orphans, except with the best [intentions], until they come of age; give full
measure and weight, according to justice'– We do not burden any soul with more
than it can bear–' when you speak, be just, even if it concerns a relative; keep any
promises you make in God's name. This is what He commands you to do, so that
you may take heed' [152] [T]his is My path, leading straight, so follow it, and do
not follow other ways: they will lead you away from it–'This is what He
commands you to do, so that you may refrain from wrongdoing' [153].

These are the *muḥkamāt* verses according to Muqātil. They are *muḥkamāt* because

they have never been and will never be abrogated, thus remaining always applicable.

Furthermore, they exist in all scriptures that God had sent to different people through

their prophets. All forbidden—and for that matter commanded—acts mentioned in them

apply to all children of Adam, all human beings. These verses and the message they

contain are the mother or root of all scriptures *(hunna umm al-kitāb yaʿnī aṣl al-kitāb)*.[825]

The reason that they are called "the mother of all revelation" is because they are written

in the Protected Tablet *(al-lauḥ al-maḥfūẓ)* and in all scriptures.[826]

Thus, for Muqātil, these verses are *muḥkamāt* not because their meanings are

clear, but because the message they bring forth is perenennially valid and applicable at all

times and places. This is demonstrated by the fact that the same tenets that exist in these

verses can also be found in early scriptures that God had revealed to previous prophets.

As such, the principles contained in Q6:151-153 have been carried out in the line of

prophetic mission up to Muhammad, written in different scriptures, including the Qur'an.

They have never been abrogated by anything. If anything, they may abrogate anything

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[825] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 275. Wansbrough translated *umm al-kitāb* as divine archetype of scripture, and
aṣl al-kitāb as nucleus of scripture. See his *Quranic Studies,* 153.
[826] Muqātil, *Khams Mi'at,* 275.

else that contradicts their fundamental message, although nowhere does Muqātil state explicitly that these verses are potentially abrogating other verses. Muqātil only states that the *muḥkamāt* (Q6: 151-153) are never abrogated and exist in all scriptures. In an indirect way, Muqātil's concept of the *muḥkamāt* possesses an abrogating power as Muslim scholars have suggested when they offered their definition of this term, although this abrogation does not override the *mutashābihāt,* at least the *mutashābihāt* according to Muqātil's understanding. These *muḥkamāt* verses constitute the fundamental messages that God sent to humanity. They are unchanging elements of God's revelation and a thread that ties all (valid) religions together.

In a closer look, Muqātil's version of the *muḥkamāt* echoes the very famous biblical Ten Commandments, thus offering the so-called "Qur'anic Decalogue".[827] In fact, the close association of these qur'anic passages to those of the Torah had been pointed to by Ka'b Ibn al-Aḥbār who said that these were the very first revelation in the Torah.[828] Also of paramount importance with regard to Muqātil's exegetical concern is that the very first point offered in these *muḥkamāt* is the prohibition of *shirk*, that is, associating any partner to God. These two facts underline the predominant elements in Muqātil's commentary, not only in relation to his exegetical thread which persistently propagating *tawḥīd,* but also his emphasized attention to interreligious relations, with both polytheists and especially People of Scripture. This shows how Muqātil has persistently attempted to locate Muhammad and Islam within a larger, religious

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[827] See Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies.*
[828] Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa al-Bayān*, ed. Abū Muḥammad Ibn ʿAshūr (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2002), 4/205.

environment of the seventh century Arabia. In a way, Muqātil's approach suggests that Islam, and the Qur'an for that matter, did not come in vacuum but in a onstantly active dialogue with existing traditions. In fact, it is only within these sociocultural and religious contexts that the values of Islam can be better discerned. It is therefore understandable why Muqātil has used a lot materials related to the past narratives that belong mostly to the *ahl al-kitāb,* and he in fact puts these past narratives *(khabar al-awwalīn)* as one of five aspects of the Qur'an that his exegetical project is constantly aiming and addressing.

Muqātil's conception of the *muḥkamāt* is perhaps not new. There are reports, mentioned above, that attributed the same view to Ibn ʿAbbās. Some of other resports added parallel passages to the al-Isrāʾ chapter of the Qur'an (Q17:23-39), which is also attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās.[829] But Muqātil's presentation of the view is certainly new. The fact that Muslim scholars have been indecisive in determining their views of both *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* among the plethora of opinions is telling something about Muqātil's ingenuity in his independent mind. Muqātil's conception of the *mutashābihāt* has opened the widest possibility for interpreting the Qur'an as he limits the unattainable to only four sets of the mysterious letters, whose knowledge belongs only to God. The rest of the Qur'an therefore is subject to interpretation. His conception of the *muḥkamāt* is largely informed by his vision for finding a common ground that would facilitate the

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[829] Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf,* 4/205: "Ibn ʿAbbās said, 'These [Q.6: 151-2] are the *āyāt muḥkamāt* that are not abrogated by anything in all books and they are all prohibited for all children of Adam, and they are the mother of books; whoever acts on them would enter paradise, but whoever neglects them would enter hell.'" See also Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah*, ed. Majdī Basallum (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2005), 4/318. In his commentary, al-Baghawī mentions another group of verse as *muḥkamāt*, that is, Q17: 23-39, whose content is indeed relatively identical. al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr,* 2/8.

interreligious relations between different traditions, especially the followers of Muhammad and the People of Scripture, Jews and Christians. Muqātil's reverence toward their scriptures overrode his fierce criticism toward the followers of non-Islamic religions. This led subsequently to his legal pragmatism to find some justification for peaceful coexistence.

Concluding Remarks

Muqātil's exegetical thrust, which is highly theological, proves to be the guiding principle in his legal decisions. His opposition between *īmān* (belief) and *kufr* (disbelief), along with their two supporting principles *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* as opposed to *shirk* and *takdhīb,* constitutes the yardstick by which he derives laws from the Qur'an. Muqātil appears to argue that a correct theology is fundamental, coming before anything else, including the criterion for legal decisions. So paramount is theology in his framework that sometimes Muqātil's judgment, as in the case of the hypocrites, was more theological than legal when he is supposed to talk about law. Muqātil's theological preoccupation in doing law is can be more clearly grasped when he is compared to how al-Shāfi'ī, a great jurist, devised his legal decisions, despite the similarly theological inclinations of the two.

However, Muqātil is also legally pragmatist. His strong vision for interreligious relations, for instance, has led him to allowing a peace agreement to be made between the believers and disbelievers, and he counsels the Muslims to be loyal to such an agreement once it is made in good intention. Furthermore, Muqātil's definition of the People of Scripture is most inclusive, which applies to as broad groups of people as possible as long

as they have some sort of religious affiliation with the People of Scripture. Muqātil upholds the principle that there is no compulsion in religion, for the only people who could be forced into Islam was the Arab polytheists of Muhammad's time. Following their surrender to Muhammad, no other people can be forced to embrace Islam. His quest for a common ground for interreligious encounters is best fulfilled through his conception of the *muḥkamāt* as the perennially permanent message that all scriptures shared.

While theologically uncompromising, Muqātil's legal pragmatism has shaped him to be ethically pacifist, or the other way around, his ethical pacifism had led him to be legally a pragmatist. This is demonstrated in his conception of commanding good and forbidding wrong *(al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar)* whose very essence is commanding *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* and forbidding *shirk* and *takdhīb*. The doctrine of commanding good and forbidding wrong consists of the very theology that has concerned Muqātil and has become his exegetical thrust throughout his commentary. Yet in its performance, Muqātil does not condone any violence. Instead, his view of how to execute the commanding good and forbidding wrong is very idealist, if not utopist, in that it envisions an environment in which every individual would have access to a good education to know what is good and wrong so that everyone may perform only good deeds and refrain from doing the contrary. There might be an impression of contradiction between Muqātil's advocacy of pacifist undertaking of commanding right and forbidding wrong, on one hand, and his views with regard to jihād. But such a contradiction fades once it is understood that Muqātil considers jihād as a defensive measure against a hostile enemy that has used different kinds of means, including violence, to stop the early

believers from practicing their faith. Thus, jihād is a qur'anic response in war or conflict situations that allows the believers to take a defensive measure against all opressions, while the doctrine commanding right and forbidding wrong is envisioned to be carried out in a normal situation and more as a preventive than curative measure. As such, while theologically uncompromising, Muqātil is legally pragmatist and ethically pacifist. It is, indeed, a very rare combination in one person.

CHAPTER THREE

Al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm: One Qur'an, Different Faces

> "One does not really understand the Qur'an,
> until he sees different meanings in it."
> Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (by eleveating it to the Prophet)[830]

Al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir is a genre of commentary on the Qur'an that registers polysemic words in the Qur'an, provides meanings that these words possess, and shows the qur'anic verses, as a matter of exemplification, in which these words point to particular meanings. Generally, the examples given are not exhaustive, but merely provide a hint as to the context, linguistic or otherwise, that would lead to signifying a qur'anic word with a certain meaning among other meanings it may suggest. It is unclear, however, whether these words' meanings are part of a traditional pool, in the sense that a particular word has been and will be understood in the same way.[831] Generally, authors of *wujūh* work did not mention why certain qur'anic words are polysemic or where they learned that such words have such meanings. Nonetheless, there is a noticeable pattern that later scholars of *wujūh* built on their predecessors, both in terms of their selection of entries and in the meanings attached to them. It appears, however, that modification

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[830] Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān*, 11: *Lā yakūn al-rajūl faqīhan kull al-fiqh ḥattā yarā li al-Qur'ān wujūhan kathīrah.*
[831] al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah: Majmaʿ al-Malik Fahd li Ṭibāʿat al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 1426 H), 3/976-7.

abounds, not only in terms of the arrangement of such entries in their own works but also in the range of meanings that they give to these words.

There is good evidence to suggest that *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir* is a cumulative result of diverse exegetical endeavors to understand the Qur'an by the prophet, his companions, their sucessors, and possibly also later gerneration of scholars. In other words, *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir* is an area in which an interpreter plays a major role in determining the context and accordingly the meaning of a word in the Qur'an. In his *Taḥṣīl,* al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī states that the multiplicity of a word's meaning is the result of interpretive endeavor by the commentators of the Qur'an.[832] The same view is expressed by Ibn al-Jawzī.[833]

If an interpreter's authority is highly respected, it is possible that his assigned meanings of words will become a precedent that other scholars embrace. Yet it is equally possible that the same signification will be contested by other scholars, if they think they have better alternatives to offer. As such, *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir* is interpretive in nature. It is not uncommon, therefore, to find scholars criticizing other scholars in terms of their selection of words or the meanings given to them. For instance, one scholar might consider a particular qur'anic word polysemic, while another scholar argues that that particular word only has one meaning.

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[832] Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Taḥṣīl Naẓā'ir al-Qur'ān,* ed. Ḥusnī Naṣr Zaydān (Cairo: Maktabah ʿImād, 1969)*,* 19.

[833] Ibn al-Jawzī shows the interpretive nature of *wujūh* works by constantly stating a formulaic utterance when he is about to introduce an entry and its assigned, multiple meanings: *wa dhakara ahl al-tafsīr anna x fī al-Qur'ān ʿalā wajh/awjuh,* "the specialist of *tafsīr* mentioned that x in the Qur'an has x senses". See Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faraj 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Jawzī, *Nuzhat al-Aʿyun al-Nawāẓir fī ʿIlm al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir,* ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Karīm Kāẓim al-Rāḍī (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1987), 85, 87, 88, 90, etc.

Muqātil's *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir* suggests his endless imaginative and interpretive power.[834] For instance, Muqātil is able to enumerate seventeen meanings for the term *al-hudā* (guidance) in the Qur'an, depending on the particular context in which it arises. Such a multiplicity in terms of a word's meaning is almost unimaginable without recognition that interpretation is necessary in order to understand the Qur'an properly. In this case, the context of language use plays a pivotal role in constructing meaning. In other words, meanings are largely a function of context.[835]

I have argued in the previous chapters that Muqātil's two other commentaries are highly theological, revolving around the opposition of *īmān,* manifested in *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq,* and *kufr,* materialized in *shirk* and *takdhīb.* Such an opposition also serves as Muqātil's exegetical thrust in these two commentaries. It is noteworthy that Muqātil's *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir* is also highly theological, positing the same opposition between the propagation of belief by acknowledging the unity of God and the legitimacy of

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[834] Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, ed. Ḥatim Ṣāliḥ al-Ḍāmin (Dubai: Markaz Jum'at al-Majid li al-Thaqafah wa al-Turath: 2006). In the introduction of this book, the editor, al-Ḍāmin, argues that another work, entitled *al-Asbāh wa al-Naẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm,* which ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Shiḥātah ascribed to Muqātil, is more likely the work of another scholar, Hārūn ibn Mūsā. Al-Ḍāmin provides four arguments for this view. First, the manuscripts upon which Shiḥātah prepared his edition resembled more the work of Hārūn ibn Mūsa (d. 170 H). Second, the correct version of Muqātil's *Wujūh* was transmitted by Abū Ṣāliḥ al-Hudhayl ibn Ḥabīb who transmitted two other Muqātil commentaries, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* and *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah min al-Qur'ān,* which I have studied in the previous chapters. Meanwhile, Hārūn ibn Mūsā's *Wujūh* was transmitted by Abū Naṣr Maṭrūḥ ibn Muḥammad ibn Shākir al-Qaḍā'ī al-Miṣrī (d. 271 H). Third, al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī mentioned that in in the beginning of Muqātil's *Wujūh* there is a tradition that is present in the correct version of Muqātil's work but is absent Hārūn ibn Mūsā's. Fourth, the organization of the content of the correct version of Muqātil's *Wujūh* is different from that published as *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nāẓā'ir.* Besides, al-Ḍāmin himself edited Hārūn ibn Mūṣā's *Wujūh* in 1988 before he prepared the edition of Muqātil's *Wujūh.* See Hārūn ibn Mūsā, *al-Wujūh wa al-Nāẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm,* ed. Ḥātim al-Ṣāliḥ al-Ḍāmin (Baghdād: Dā'irat al-Āthār wa al-Turāth, 1988), and also Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nāẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm,* ed. ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Shiḥātah (Cairo: al-Ḥay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li al-Kitāb, 1975).

[835] For debates between literalism and contextualism with regard to meanings, see Vyvyan Evans, *What Words Mean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Muhammad's prophethood and the condemnation of disbelief, especially in associating God with creation and rejecting Muhammad's claim of prophethood. Muqatil's highly theological focus has informed not only his chosen entries but also his organization of those entries in the commentary. More than just a commentary on polysemic words in the Qur'an, *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir* is thus an extension of Muqātil's exegetical thrust that addresses the non-negotiable elements of Islam, namely *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*, as he did earlier in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* and *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah.* Nonetheless, there are a number of entries that Muqātil lists in the work that appear to be less theological or even neutral, but he has included them primarily because they are, in his view, polysemic.

In this chapter, I will briefly investigate the development of *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir* as a distinct genre of qur'anic exegesis, elaborate on Muqātil's *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm,* and, finally, scrutinize theologically loaded words that Muqātil enumerates in the commentary by explicating their closely interrelated meanings. I hope that I will thus be able to demonstrate Muqātil's contribution and pioneering undertaking in this genre of qur'anic exegesis as well as show how his commentary serves as yet another channel through which he conveys his theological concerns within the entirety of his exegetical enterprise.

Al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir as a genre of qur'anic commentary

The study of polysemic words and the multiplicity of words' meanings in the Muslim scholarship has been undertaken in the field of both linguistics *('ilm al-lughah)* and the commentary on the Qur'an *(al-tafsīr).* While in *'ilm al-lughah* the phenomenon of words' multiple meanings is studied within the framework of the use of Arabic

language in general, in *al-tafsīr* the same phenomenon is studied exclusively within the

qur'anic use of those words, known as *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir*.[836] Of the two, *al-wujūh*

wa al-naẓā'ir emerged earlier.[837]

Although the earliest extant work on *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir* came from the

second/eighth century, namely Muqātil's *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir,* sources mention that

the early ideas and activities pertaining to *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir* had emerged during the

period of the Companions of the Prophet. One oft-mentioned anecdote pertaining to the

presence of polysemic words in the Qur'an is a dialogue between ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalib and

Ibn ʿAbbās, when the former was about to send the latter to meet with the Khawārij, the

early Muslim extremists, argue with them, and rebuke their views. To do so, ʿAlī was

advising Ibn ʿAbbās to use the Sunnah (prophetic tradition) rather than the Qur'an

because the latter bore multiple meanings *(fa innahū ḥammāl dhū wujūh).*[838] In terms of

works on *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir,* the are a number of names that frequently show up to

which such works are attributed, such as ʿIkrimah (d. 105/723) *mawlā* Ibn ʿAbbās and

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah (d. 143/760), who lived during the period of the successors. These

two works allegedly contained the transmitted knowledge from Ibn ʿAbbās, but neither

has survived.[839] This anecdote and the allusion to early *wujūh* works show that the seed

of activities or, at least, ideas pertaining to *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir* had began very early

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[836] Musṭafā Afandī Ḥājj Khalīfah (d. 1067), *Kashf al-Zunūn 'an Asāmī al-Kutub wa al-Funūn* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, ny.), 2001. Muhammad Abdus Sattar, "Wujuh al-Qur'an: A Branch of Tafsir Literature," in *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Summer 1978), 137-152.

[837] Salwā Muḥammad al-ʿAwwā, *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1998), 18. See also Hindun Shalabī, *al-Taṣārīf: Tafsīr al-Qur'ān fīmā Ishtabahat Asmā'uhu wa Taṣarrafat Maʿānīhi* (Tunisia: al-Sharikat al-Tūnisiyyah li al-Tawzīʿ, 1979), 10, and also al-Radi, *Nuzhat,* 35.

[838] Al-ʿAwwā, *al-Wujūh,*19.

[839] Al-ʿAwwā, *al-Wujūh,*19; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nuzhat,* 82.

in the Muslim scholarship, or at least that how later Muslim scholars projected such activity back.

Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) mentions a number of scholars who authored works on *wujūh*, including Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767), Muhammad ibn al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī (d. 146/763), Hārūn ibn Mūsā (d. 170/786), Abū al-Faḍl al-ʿAbbāṣ ibn al-Faḍl al-Anṣārī (d. 186/802), Abū Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Naqqāsh (d. 351/962), Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Dāmighānī (d. 478/1085), Abū ʿAlī al-Bannā' (d. 471/1078), and Ibn al-Jawzī's own teacher, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn ʿUbayd Allāh al-Zāghūnī (d. 527/1132). Following the mentioning of these eight scholars, Ibn al-Jawzī asserts that he knows of nobody else who has authored a book on the subject *(wa lā aʿlamu aḥadan jamaʿa al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir siwā hā'ulā').*[840] Of those scholars mentioned, only the works of Muqātil, Hārūn ibn Mūsā,[841] and al-Dāmighānī[842] survive to the present.[843]

The first formal definition of *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir* was given by Ibn al-Jawzī, and it since then has become the standard definition for this discipline. Ibn al-Jawzī defined *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir* as,

[840] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nuzhat,* 82-3. It seems however that Ibn al-Jawzī did not have access to the work of Yaḥyā ibn Sallām (d. 200 H/815), *al-Taṣārīf.* Like Hārūn ibn Mūsā's work, Ibn Sallām's *al-Taṣārīf* is almost identical with Muqātil's *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir.* It is possible that, due to their contemporaneity, Ibn Sallām might have actually transmitted Muqātil's *wujūh,* as in the case of Ibn Mūsā. In Ibn Sallām's *Taṣārīf,* however, nowhere is Muqātil mentioned. Shalābī suggested that the similarity between Muqātil's and Ibn Sallām's *wujūh* was because they might have studied with the same teacher in Baṣrah. See *al-Taṣārīf,* 48.
[841] Hārūn ibn Mūsā, *al-Wujūh wa al-Nāẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm,* ed. Ḥātim al-Ṣaliḥ al-Ḍamin (Baghdād: Dā'irat al-Āthār wa al-Turāth, 1988).
[842] Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Dāmighānī, *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir li Alfāẓ Kitāb Allāh al-ʿAzīz,* ed. ʿArabī ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ʿAlī (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n. y.).
[843] ʿAbd al-ʿĀl Sālim Mukrim, *al-Mushtarak al-Lafẓī fī Ḍaw' Gharīb al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Ālam al-Kutub, 2009), 36-7.

an takun al-kalimat wāḥidah, dukirat fī mawāḍiʿ min al-Qurʾān ʿalā lafẓ wāḥid, wa ḥarakat wāḥidah, wa urīda bi kulli makān maʿnā ghayr al-ākhar, fa lafẓu kulli kalimatin dhukirat fī mawḍʿin naẓīrun li lafẓ al-kalimat al-madhkūrah fī al-mawḍiʿ al-ākhar, wa tafsīr kulli kalimatin bi maʿnan ghayr maʿnā al-ākhar huwa al-wujūh. Fa idhan al-naẓāʾir: ism li al-alfāẓ, wa al-wujūh: ism li al-maʿānī... "the same word, mentioned in different places in the Qurʾan in the same form, and the same vocalization, but each with different meaning from one another; thus, a word mentioned in one place is an equivalent for another mentioned in another place, and the interpretation of each word that results in a different senses. As such, *al-naẓāʾir:* is a name for the words, and *al-wujūh*: is a name for the meanings." [844]

Ibn al-Jawzī's definition, however, suffers a defect in that it required that the polysemic words, to be part of *al-wujūh wa al-naẓāʾir,* should have the same vocalizations *(ʿalā ḥarakah wāhidah).* This requirement has made Ibn al-Jawzī's definition of *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓāʾir* unreflective of what really happened in the field. Be that as it may, it is intriguing that scholars critical of Ibn al-Jawzī's definition have not addressed this innacuracy, but have mistakenly dwelt instead on discussing the accuracy of using the terms *wujūh* and *naẓāʾir* for the purpose of studying the multiplicity of words' meanings.[845]

Most scholars agree with Ibn al-Jawzī that the terms *wujūh* and *naẓāʾir* to point to meanings and words respectively, but they disagree with him that the polysemic words should possess the same vocalization *(ʿala ḥarakat wāḥidah).*[846] Such a requirement, with regard to the vocalization, has never been entirely fulfilled in the majority of entries

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[844] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nuzhat,* 83.
[845] See Shalabī, *al-Taṣārīf,* 17-23.
[846] Shalabī is partially correct when she maintains that in the *wujūh* work a term whose meaning is multiple does not always have the same vocalizations, since the same term might be used in a variety of its derivative forms. However, I slightly disagree with Shalabī when she regards a word and its derivatives as different words. I argue that a word and its derivatives remain the same word *(ʿalā lafẓ wāḥid)* but whose vocalizations are different due to the derivational process. See her introduction to *Taṣārīf,* 24.

registered in all *wujūh* works, especially in that of Muqātil and even in Ibn al-Jawzī's own work. What really happens is that some words may experience a derivational transformation, which affects their vocalizations. Take for instance the word *al-hudā*. In its use in the Qur'an, the word *al-hudā* may transform into *yahdī, hadaynā, muhtadūn, hād, uhdū, yahtadūn, ihtadā, tahtadī, ihdi,* and *hudnā.* As seen, the vocalizations of these derivatives are different due to that derivational process, yet all of them share the same triadic root that forms the peculiar mark of all Arabic words, namely *h-d-y.* For this reason, Ibn al-Jawzī's requirement of *ḥarakat wāḥidah* cannot apply indiscriminately to all cases. It is true that there are words that remain the same in all of their appearances in the Qur'an, such as *ummah, imam,* etc. but their number is much smaller than those that experience a derivational transformation. The requirement of *ḥarakah wāḥidah* in Ibn al-Jawzī's definition is therefore unapplicable and should be omitted so that Ibn al-Jawzī's definition applies to all cases of *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir*. At the same time, a word and its derivatives should be regarded as the same *(lafẓ wāḥid)* because they share the same root, despite their different derivative forms.

From a number of existing *wujūh* works, it is known that there was no fixed number of entries that a work on *wujūh* should incorporate. The interpretive nature of *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir* perhaps plays a major role in causing the fluctuating number of entries in different *wujūh* works. Muqātil's work contains 170 entries; Hārūn ibn Mūsā's 208 entries; Yaḥyā ibn Sallām's 115 entries, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 320/932) 81 entries; al-Dāmighānī's 534 entries, and Ibn al-Jawzī's 324 entries. In terms of the organization principles of entries, early *wujūh* works seemed to arrange them randomly.

This is true in the case of the works of Muqātil, Ibn Mūsā, Ibn Sallām, and al-Tirmidhī, although in Muqātil's work his theological concerns appear to have played some role in his arrangement of the entries. From the fifth/eleventh century onward, however, the *wujūh* works have organized their entries alphabetically by their roots. This applies to the work of al-Dāmighānī and Ibn al-Jawzī, among others.

Most of early *wujūh* authors—such as Muqātil, Ibn Mūsā, Ibn Sallām, and al-Tirmidhī—did not provide any introductory remarks that explain the reasons why they felt the need to compose such works and why they organized their entries the way they did. These early authors simply enumerated their entries, assigning a range of meanings to each and showing where in the Qur'an such meanings appear. It was only from the fifth/eleventh century on that the authors of *wujūh* began to provide introductions, albeit very short ones, to their works. The earliest to do this were al-Dāmighānī and Ibn al-Jawzī. Al-Dāmighānī explained that what had motivated him to write his *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir li Alfāẓ Kitāb Allāh al-'Azīz* was the need for a comprehensive work in qur'anic polysemy after he noticed that the earlier and existing *wujūh* works, especially that of Muqātil, had neglected a lot of entries with multiple meanings that they should have incorporated. Al-Dāmighānī arranged his entries alphabetically in order to make them easier for his readers to study and to help the students memorize them. [847]

Ibn al-Jawzī also mentioned the need to revise the existing *wujūh* works from their alleged inaccuracies and mistakes as what had motivated him to write his own

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[847] Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Dāmighānī, *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir li Alfāẓ Kitāb Allāh al-ʿAzīz,* ed. ʿArabī ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ʿAlī (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n. y.), 37.

wujūh, namely *Nuzhat al-A'yun al-Nawāẓir fī 'Ilm al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir.* Ibn al-Jawzī was amazed by the fact that later scholars followed uncritically what their predecessors had done, and simply transfered what their predecessors had written into their own works. The first important step that Ibn al-Jawzī took toward such revision was providing the definition of *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir* as he understood it. He stated that *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir* was concerned with the multiplicity of meanings that a word bears as a consequence of its use in a number of different places in the Qur'an. The qur'anic use of a word in one place offers a meaning different from the one offered by its equivalent *(naẓīr)* in another place. The authors of *wujūh* wanted to inform their audience that certain words in the Qur'an and their equivalents have a range of different meanings. Some of these scholars had, however, made a mistake, according to Ibn al-Jawzī, when they incorporated certain words in their works that actually offered one and the same meaning throughout the Qur'an. The examples of such words are *al-balad* (a country), *al-qaryah* (a village), *al-madīnah* (a city), *al-rajul* (a person), and *al-insān* (a human being). These words, according to Ibn al-Jawzī, are not polysemic. Furthermore, some of these scholars of *wujūh* also made a mistake in grouping some words that, at first glance, seemed similar, but they are actually different and unrelated to one another. For instance, in *bāb al-dhurriyyah*, they grouped entries such as *dharnī, tadhrūḥ al-riyāḥ,* and *mithqāl dharrah,* and in *bāb al-ribā,* they listed entries such as *akhdhah rābiyah, ribbiyyūn,*

rabā'ibukum, and *jannat birabwah.*[848] For this reason, Ibn al-Jawzī organized his entries alphabetically by the same root that a word and its equivalent shared.[849]

Muqātil's *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*

Despite its title, in which the term *tafsīr* is lacking, Muqātil's *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir* suggests very strongly the unavoidability of interpretation when it comes to understanding the Qur'an. For in its core, this work deals with how the same words or phrases, used in different places in the Qur'an, yield a number of different meanings. The fluidity of meaning is such that the idea of conventional meaning is almost obsolete; instead, commentarial or contextual meaning—or, perhaps more aptly, contextually commentarial meaning—takes center stage. Knowledge of this aspect of the Qur'an is indispensable for those intending to understand the Qur'an. Hence Muqatil's opening statement in the commentary, allegedly quoting a tradition, says, "A person is not really understanding the Qur'an until he sees in it different senses," *Lā yakūn al-rajul faqīhan kulla al-fiqh ḥattā yarā li al-Qur'ān wujūhan kathīrah.*[850]

The majority of Muqātil's entries are single words. There are, however, some entries that consist of a pair of words, often opposional, such as *al-mustawdaʿ wa al-*

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[848] The words—*dharnī* (leave me alone)*, tadhrūḥ* (flows)*,* and *dharrah* (atom)—that put under *bāb al-dhurriyyah* (offspring chapter) have been thought of as having the same root, namely *dh-r-r,* while they are actually unrelated to one another. Their different meanings are not the result of the different contexts of usage, but rather because they, from the very beginning, are different words. The same applies to the words--*rābiyah, ribbiyyūn, rabā'ibukum,* and *birabwah*—put under *bāb al-ribā;* they are not the same word that share the same root *(r-b-w),* but they are really different words with different meanings, despite their having a similar constituting root. One condition of polysemy is that one and the same word, as well as their derivatives, will have different meanings depending on its contexts of use.

[849] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nuzhat,* 81-84.

[850] Muqātil, *al-Wujūh,* 19. Sources mentioned that this tradition was transmitted from Abū al-Dardā'. This tradition was not found in *kutub al-ṣiḥāḥ,* but mention in Ibn Saʿd's *al-Ṭabaqāt.* As such, it is treated more as Abū al-Dardā''s saying rather than a prophetic tradition. Shalabī, *Taṣārīf,* 26-27.

mustaqar, al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah, etc.; some others are phrases, such as *al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar, mā bayna aydīhim wa ma khalfahum,* etc.[851] The work begins with the entry *al-hudā,* followed by *al-kufr, al-shirk, sawā',* until it finally ends with *fawqā.* At first sight, Muqātil's arrangement of the entries seems random.[852] Further observation suggests that his arrangement of those entries may have been partly governed

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[851] According to Shalabi's counting, there are 185 words in Muqātil's *Wujūh*. See *Taṣārīf,* 29.

[852] I disagree with al-ʿAwwā who posited that Muqātil organizes his entries on the basis of their chronological occurrence in the standard ʿUthmānī Muṣḥaf. While al-ʿAwwā's claim may be correct in some cases, there are a great number of anomalies that do not conform to her scheme. To take as an example, the term *al-hudā,* which is put as the first entry in the commentary is not the first word, of all entries, that occurs in the Qur'an. If the Opening chapter *(al-Fātiḥah)* is the first chapter of the Qur'an, some of the terms that occur in it should be mentioned in the beginning of the commentary had Muqātil arranged his entries on the chronology of their occurrence in the ʿUthmānī Muṣḥaf. Instead, the terms such as *al-ʿālamīn* (no. 158), *yawm* (no. 83), *al-ṣirāṭ* (no. 73), *al-ḍalāl* (no. 81), which are parts of this opening chapter, do not occupy the first places in the *Wujūh*. A similar case happens with how Muqātil presents the verses in which his entries take place. While most places he mentions these verses based on their chronology of the chapters in which they take place in the qur'anic muṣḥaf, he does not consistently do that. For example, for the second meaning of *al-hudā,* namely *dīn al-islām,* Muqātil mentions the following verses: Q22:67, 2:120, 3:73, 6:71, consecutively. Or, for the seventh meaning of *al-ẓālimīn,* namely *al-sāriqīn,* he mentions Q12:75 and then Q5:38-9. Likewise, Shalabī had attempted to identify Ibn Sallām's organization method for his entries in *al-Taṣārīf.* Ibn Sallām's *al-Taṣārīf* is highly similar to Muqātil's *Wujūh* to the extent that, according to Shalabī, one appears to be a copy of the other. Since an alphabetical ordering seemed unlikely, Shalabī first tried to trace Ibn Sallām's ordering to the chronological appearance of his entries in the standard Muṣḥaf of the Qur'ān. While she was able to show, defectively I would argue, that the ordering of some early entries—*hudā, al-kufr, al-maraḍ, al-fasād,* and *al-mashy*—is based on their chronological occurrence in the Qur'an, that is, Q2: 2, 6, 10, 11, and 20 respectively, she soon realized that she could not go further with the same method to explain the next entries. Even for these early entries, Shalabī had already skipped *al-shirk,* which took third place, after *al-hudā* and *al-kufr,* and perhaps unknowingly skipped *al-īmān* and *sawā',* which took fourth and fifth place before *al-maraḍ.* In short, she gave up the method as inapplicable. Afterward, she attempted another method based on the family resemblance *(miḥwar)* between the entries, such as *sū', al-ḥasanah, al-sayyi'ah,* and *al-ḥusnā.* But this too did not stand, and she had to give it up. Finally, she assumed that there might have been some tampering to the original ordering of the work's entries. For, she argued, it is only logical to imagine that the author would work out his entries based on the chronological order of the Muṣḥaf, starting from early words taking places in early chapters to be confronted with their equivalents in later chapters. However, Shalabī finally acknowledged that it was all a conjecture. See *al-Taṣārīf,* p. 61-2. See al-ʿAwwā, *al-Wujūh,* 24. Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 20, 81. Shalabī, *Taṣārīf,* 61-2.

by his theological preoccupation, although it is far from being systematic.[853] The same

theological reason, however, has largely governed Muqātil's choice of entries.[854]

Every entry *(naẓīr,* pl. *naẓā'ir)* has multiple meanings *(wujūh)*, ranging from 2 to

17.[855] For every meaning assigned, Muqātil provides the evidence of qur'anic verses in

which the words and their derivatives appear, although on a number of occasions he does

not mention all of the relevant verses, only indicating their existence by stating *wa*

naḥwuhū kathīr (and there are many other similar cases in the Qur'an). Very often,

Muqātil provides clarifying commentaries following any verses he mentions.

Consider, for example, the entry *al-shirk*.[856] Muqātil assigns three meanings or

senses *(wujūh)* to this term as it is used in the Qur'an. First, *al-shirk* means associating

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[853] One of the more systematic ways of organizing entries is alphabetical method, known in Arabic as *muʻjam*. At Muqātil's time, however, the activity of creating a dictionary *(muʻjam)* had not started yet. Before it became the technical terms for dictionary in the fourth/tenth century, the first use of the term *muʻjam* to suggest that the content of a book was organized alphabetically was known in the third/ninth century. Scholars of ḥadith, for instance, used the term *muʻjam* as the title of their biographical dictionaries of the companions of the Prophet, such as *Muʻjam al-Ṣaḥābah* and *Muʻjam al-Suyūkh*. See Muḥammad Ḥusayn Āl Yāsīn, *al-Dirāsāt al-Lughawiyyah ʻinda al-ʻArab ilā Nihāyat al-Qarn al-Thālith* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāh, 1980), 220-21.

[854] Muqātil's theological priorities seem to have played a more major role in his selection of the entries rather than in his organization of them in the *Wujūh*. It is tempting sometimes to call Muqātil's organization of the entries as random, for he has been more haphazard than consistent in following, say, his theological priorities, in ordering his entries. For example, Muqātil puts three of arguably the most theologically loaded terms—namely, *al-hudā, al-kufr,* and *al-shirk*—in the top of of his list. But he then put theologically less significant words such as *sawā', al-maraḍ, al-fasād, al-mashy,* and *al-libās.* Afterward, theologically central terms follow, including *al-sūʼ, al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah,* and *a-jannah*, only to be followed by *al-khizy* and *bāʼū,* which are theologically less prominent. But then, once again, theologically loaded terms come, such as *al-raḥmah* and *al-furqān*, only, once again, to be followed by neutral terms, such as particles *falawlā* and *lqmmā*. The inconsistency in his ordering of these entries makes it difficult to say with certainty as to whether it is a random organization or an organization with a certain logic behind it. But whatever the answer is has litlle bearing whatsoever in understanding Muqātil's *Wujūh.* Moreover, given his highly selected words that focus on theology and also the relatively small size of his work, it does not matter how Muqātil arranges his entries in his commentary, for they all carry a relatively equal weight in relation to his fundamentally theological message. See Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 20-44.

[855] Of 170 entries, 39 have 2 meanings, 40 have 3 meanings, 33 have 4 meanings, 23 have 5 meanings, 11 have 6 meanings, 5 have 7 meanings, 4 have 8 meanings, 3 have 9 meanings, 3 have 10 meanings, 5 have 11 meanings, and the last four has 13, 14, 16, and 17 meanings, respectively.

[856] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 26-7.

God with another as if they were equals. To support the assigned meaning, Muqātil mentions Q4:36, *"join nothing with Him,"* meaning 'do not put other as equal with Him.' He also adduces Q4:84 and 116, *"God does not forgive the joining of partners with Him,"* that is that who treats other as equal with Him. In addition, Muqātil also cites Q5:72, *"If anyone associates others with God, God will forbid him from the Garden,"* that is those who put others as equals to God, He will forbid them from the Garden when they die. Finally, he points to Q9: 3, *"God and His Messenger are released from [treaty] obligations to the idolaters,"* that is those who put others as equal to God. Yet, indicating that, he does not exhaust the all of the verses in which *al-shirk* takes place and offers the same meaning, Muqātil states that there are many more similar cases in the Qur'an *(wa naḥwuhū kathīr)*.

Second, *al-shirk* means a specified act of obedience to something other than God, which is not categorized as a form of worship. To justify this meaning, Muqātil resorts to Q7:190, *"and yet when He gives them a good child they ascribe some of what He has granted them to others,"* that is they [the parents, in this case Adam and Eve] have made Iblīs an associate for God by obeying the latter's suggestion in naming their child, which is not a form of worship. Likewise, Muqātil mentions Q14:22, which relays Iblīs' own statement, *"I reject the way you associated me before,"* with God in obedience. Third, *al-shirk* means insincere performance of deeds *(shirk al-riyā')*. In this respect, Muqātil cites Q18:110, *"Anyone who fears to meet his Lord should do good deeds and give no one a share in the worship due to his Lord,"* among his creation, [meaning] they will not dedicate their deeds to other than God.

Muqātil's commentary is quite straightforward and simple. In fact, his presentation of the entries is formulaic: "the word x has x senses: first… second… etc." This mode of interpretation and presentation runs formulaically throughout the commentary. The work is entirely an explanation of what a word or a pair of words or a phrase means in those different qur'anic uses. There is nothing peculiar methodologically that we can learn from this commentary, and not much can be said about it, except that it advocates the idea that a word's meaning is, in most part, not inherent in the lexicon itself but rather is shaped by the context within which it takes place. Lexical meaning is thus contextual and hence is flexible as well as expansive. What would prove so fundamental, however, is the hermeneutical consequence of this *wujuh wa naẓā'ir* genre for understanding the qur'anic discourse which, despite its status as scripture, allows and uses flexibility as its discursive power. The idea that the same words or phrases can have different meanings in the Qur'an is almost unthinkable for some who tend to seek certainty and follow some sort of literalist approach in their understanding of this scripture.

Yet, while the *wujūh* offers such flexibility of words' meanings, Muqātil's commentary seems to suggest that once such a range of meanings have been discovered it is exhaustive. Put it differently, hypothetically, the qur'anic word's meanings are flexible and contextual, but practically, when such possibilities of meaning have been uncovered, no new meanings could be invented. This inventory of meanings should then be preserved, or memorized if necessary, for one to understand what this and other words mean in the Qur'an. As such, the *Wujuh* posits that flexibility of meaning that it offers

applies only to certain period of time, following which such a flexibility stops and everything that is produced during this flexible moment would become *riwāyah*, semantic legacy to be passed down through generations. New meanings of the same words may be invented in the future only if the structural use of language in general and the words in particular have experienced some changes. In a way, the working of this *wujuh* genre is similar to that of a dictionary, which provides a repertoire of how lexicons can be used; changes are possible if the language community demands it. Similarly, Muqātil's *Wujuh* could be used as a dictionary or a manual to know how certain qur'anic words are used and the meanings that come with those uses. Playing with such a tension is not new to Muqātil, for his general attitude in his whole hermeneutical project has been dealing with tension.[857] It appears that Muqātil uses binary oppositions to see how far two extremes can stand against each other only to lead him toward a certain measure of pragmatism that makes relation between the two ends of the spectrum possible in some degree. In a way, Muqātil is inclined toward making an ideal type that will help him analyzing the reality and seek possibilities or breakthroughs in between. The very example of Muqātil's binary opposition is his exegetical thrust, which contrasts belief and disbelief, along with

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[857] The perpetuation of tension is not uncommon in Muqatil's overall exegetical enterprise. This is apparent in his treatment of the People of Scripture, for instance. While theologically Muqatil had been fiercely critical of their committing *shirk* and dismissive of their religions as satanic, yet he still allowed some social, political, and economic relationship with them, such as intermarriage, food consumption, etc. Similarly, tension also takes place between Muqatil's theologically fierce criticism of the disbelievers and his recommendation to the Muslims to keep any agreement or covenant that are agreed upon by the two parties, the believers and the disbelievers, unless the latter violated them. Such a tension was also shown in a number of terms that Muqatil used, such as *mushrik min ahl al-kitab* (the polytheist among the People of the Book), *al-munafiqun alladhina amanu* (the believing hypocrites), etc. Despite his fierce criticism to the People of Scripture as committing *shirk,* Muqatil was still seeking to build a common ground *(kalimat sawa')* between the believers and the People of Scripture so that these three religious communities can agree with each other and thus are able to coexist.

their oppositional constitutents--*tawḥīd* versus *shirk* and *taṣdīq* versus *takdhīb*. While he

has been fiercely critical of the People of Scripture as committing not only *shirk*

(associating God with creation in worship) but also *takdhīb* (refusal to belief in

Muhammad's prophethood), to the extent that it is almost irreconcilable with the strict

monotheism of Islam that he envisions, Muqātil has made concerted efforts to find areas

within which these religious communities can interact with other. One prominent

example of these efforts is how he attempts to offer the Qur'anic Decalogue as the

common ground for interreligious relations in his conception of the *muḥkamāt al-Qur'ān*,

as I discussed in the previous chapter.

Since Muqātil does not mention the reason for the composition of his work and

for his arrangement of the entries, we may derive some insights from other similar works

in order to understand Muqātil and his work. Some scholars of *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir*

have mentioned that the *wujūh* works were designed to educate people about the presence

of polysemic words in the Qur'an. The same view might have served as a motivation for

Muqātil. All materials with which Muqātil works in his *Wujūh* are also present in his

major commentary. His readers, however, will not be able to easily identify his ideas in

terms of qur'anic polysemic words in his major commentary if Muqātil does not

specifically draw their attention to this matter by composing an independent work just for

that purpose. Muqātil's major commentary addresses the whole Qur'an, and it will

therefore be a great task for his readers to grasp everthing that he offers in it. As such, not

all ideas that Muqātil advocates can be effectively communicated through his major

commentary alone. Some of them will be lost in the shuffle. In fact, it is rather difficult to

ascertain whether Muqātil consistently advocates the idea of polysemy in the Qur'an if we only read his major commentary, regardless of the fact that he frequently signifies different words to mean, for instance, *tawḥīd* or *shirk,* in addition to their conventional meanings. Furthermore, it is still not an easy matter to trace back Muqātil's views on qur'anic polysemy in his major commentary even after we know of his *Wujūh.* Thus, by composing his *Wujūh,* not only does Muqātil state more boldly his view in relation to polysemic words in the Qur'an, but he also makes it easier for his readers to study those words in an independent work written just for that purpose. Regardless, the readers of Muqātil's *Wujūh* may still be in need for seeking further clarification in his major commentary of what he has considered polysemic words in the Qur'an in order to situate them within the totality of qur'anic discourse.

The majority of Muqātil's entries in the *Wujūh* are theologically charged. An entry is categorized as theologically charged when it, in one way or another, offers a meaning related to the central concepts of *īmān* and *kufr,* including their supporting principles such as *tawḥīd, taṣdīq, shirk,* and *takdhīb.* Otherwise, it is treated as a neutral word, whose relation to these central concepts in Muqātil's exegetical endeavor is indirect at best. Of 170, 111 entries are theological (65.29%), and 59 words are neutral (34.71%), and 11 are particles. Muqātil may have included these neutral entries primarily because they, in his view, are polysemic. This does not mean to suggest, however, that such neutral terms are not important. They are parts and make up the totality of qur'anic discourse. Furthermore, it is partly due to the stark contrast between these neutral words and the other entries that a conclusion is drawn that Muqātil's *Wujūh* is highly

theological, serving yet as another extension of his theological concerns communicated through his narrative and legal commentaries.

Of 111 prime words that are related to belief and disbelief, 54 radiate positive connotations (48.65%), 38 send negative connotations (34.23%), and 19 bring forth a mixed message (17.12%). Among those words with a positive radiance are *al-hudā*,[858] *al-raḥmah*,[859] *al-dhikr*,[860] *al-ṭahūr*,[861] *al-khayr*,[862] *al-nūr*,[863] and *al-ḥaqq*.[864] Those with a negative connotations, among other, are *al-kufr*,[865] *al-shirk*,[866] *al-sū'*,[867] *al-fitnah*,[868] *al-ẓālimīn*,[869] *al-ithm*,[870] and *al-fisq*.[871] The terms which send mixed connotations include *al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah*,[872] *al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar*,[873] *al-*

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[858] *Al-hudā*'s meanings of this category are: *al-bayān, dīn al-Islām, al-īmān, rusulan wa kutuban, al-rashād, amr Muḥammad SAW, al-Qur'ān, al-Tawrāh, al-ḥujjah, al-tawḥīd,* and *al-ilhām.*

[859] *Al-Raḥmah*'s meanings are: *dīn al-Islām, al-jannah, al-nubuwwah, al-Qur'ān,* and *al-īmān.*

[860] *Al-dhikr*'s meanings are: *al-ṭāʿah wa al-ʿamal, al-dhikr bi al-lisān, al-dhikr bi al-qulūb, al-waʿẓ, al-waḥy, al-Qur'ān, al-Tawrāh, al-Lauḥ al-Maḥfūẓ, al-bayān, al-ṣalawāt al-khams,* and *ṣalāt al-ʿaṣr.*

[861] *Al-ṭahūr*'s meanings are: *al-ṭahūr min al-dhunūb, al-ṭahūr min al-shirk, ṭahūr al-qalb min al-raybah, al-ṭahūr min al-fāhishah wa al-ithm,* and *aḥallu.*

[862] *Al-khayr*'s meanings are: *al-īmān and al-islām.*

[863] *Al-nūr*'s meanings are: *dīn al-Islām, al-īmān, al-hudā, al-ḍaw' alladī yuʿṭī Allāh ʿAzza wa Jalla al-mu'minīn ʿalā sl-ṣirāṭ yawm al-qiyāmah, bayān al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥarām wa al-aḥkām wa al-mawāʿiẓ allatī fī al-Tawrāh, bayān al-ḥalāl wa al-ḥarām wa al-aḥkām wa al-mawāʿiẓ allatī fī al-Qur'ān, ḍaw' al-rabb ʿAzza wa Jalla.*

[864] *Al-ḥaqq*'s meanings are: *huwa Allāh Taʿālā, a-Qur'ān, al-Islām, al-ʿadl, al-tawḥīd, al-ṣidq, al-ḥaqq biʿaynihi alladhī laysa bi bāṭil.*

[865] *Al-kufr*'s meanings are: *al-kufr bi tawḥīd Allāh ʿAzza wa Jalla wa al-inkār lahu, kufr al-juḥūd, al-kufr bi al-niʿmah.*

[866] *Al-shirk*'s meanings are: *al-ishrāk bi Allāh ʿAzza wa Jalla yaʿdilu bihi ghayrahu, al-shirk bi al-ṭāʿah min ghayr ʿibādah, al-shirk fī al-aʿmāl shirk al-riyā'.*

[867] *Al-sū'*'s meanings are: *al-ʿadhāb, al-shirk, al-dhanb min al-mu'min.*

[868] *Al-fitnah*'s meanings are: *al-shirk, al-kufr, al-ʿadhāb fī al-dunyā, al-ḍalālah.*

[869] *Al-ẓālimīn*'s meanings are: *al-mushrikīn, al-muslim alladhī yaẓlimu nafsahu bi dhanbin yuṣībuhu min ghayr shirk, yaḍurrūn wa yanquṣūn anfusahum min ghayr shirk, yaẓlimūn anfusahum bi al-shirk wa al-takdhīb, yajḥadūn.*

[870] *Al-ithm*'s meanings are: *al-shirk, al-maʿṣīyah, al-dhanb.*

[871] *Al-fisq*'s meanings are: *al-maʿṣiyah wa huwa al-kufr bi al-nabī wa lima jā'a bihi, al-maʿṣiyah fī tark al-tawḥīd wa huwa al-shirk, al-maʿṣiyah wa dhālika fī ghayr shirk wa lā kufr.*

[872] The meanings of *al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah* are: *al-tawḥīd wa al-shirk, al-ʿāfiyah wa al-ʿadhāb fī al-dunyā.*

[873] The meanings of *al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar* are: *al-tawḥīd wa al-shirk, ittibāʿ al-nabī SAW wa al-taṣdīq bihi wa al-takdhīb bihi.*

ẓulumāt wa al-nūr,[874] *awwal,*[875] *al-akh,*[876] *al-sabīl,*[877] and *ummah.*[878] More specifically, 27 words (about one fourth of the total theologically-charged words) possess meanings that explicitly mention keywords related to theological concepts, such as *tawḥīd, shirk, kufr, īmān,* and *islām;* 11 entries mention scripture and prophecy, 15 terms point to eschatological matter in relatively pessimistic and dark ways, 8 terms address religious communities critically, and 6 terms deal with conflict and polemic.

It is suprising, however, to find out that some theologically central terms, such as *al-islām* and *al-īmān,* are missing in Muqātil's *Wujūh,* while they are frequently mentioned in his major commentary as meanings assigned to other terms. Other authors of *wujūh* who wrote their work after Muqātil always mentioned these two terms. The terms *al-islām* and *al-īmān* are mentioned as two separate entries, for example, in Hārūn ibn Mūsā's *Wujūh.* In it, *al-islām* is assigned two meanings, namely *al-ikhlāṣ* and *al-iqrār;* while *al-īmān* is assigned four meanings, including *al-iqrār bi al-lisān min ghayr taṣdīq, al-taṣdīq, al-tawḥīd,* and *īmānān fī shirk.*[879] By scrutinizing the verses that Ibn Mūsā uses as evidence in which the terms *al-islām* and *al-īmān,* along with their derivatives, take place, we can find those meanings similarly assigned to these two terms

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[874] The meanings of *al-ẓulumāt wa al-nūr* are: *al-shirk wa al-īmān.*
[875] The meanings of *awwal* are: *awwalu man kafara bi al-nabī SAW min al-yahūd ʿalā ʿahdihi, awwalu man āmana bi Allāh min ahli Makkah, awwal al-muʾminīn bi anna Allāh Ázza wa Jalla lā yurā fī al-dunyā, awwalu man āmana min Banī Isrāʾīl li Mūsā wa Hārūn.*
[876] The meanings of *al-akh* are: *al-akh fī al-dīn wa al-walāyah fī al-shirk, al-akh fī dīn al-Islām wa al-walāyah.*
[877] The meanings of *al-sabīl* are: *al-ṭāʿah li Allāh Taʿālā, al-balāgh, al-dīn, al-hudā, ḥujjah, ṭarīq al-hudā, ʿudwān, sabīlan yaʿnī bi ṭāʿatihi, ithm, millah.*
[878] The meanings of *ummah* are: *millah, imāman fī al-khayr, al-umam al-khāliyah wa ghayruhum, ummat Muḥammad SAW wa al-muslimīn khāṣṣah, ummat Muḥammad al-kuffār minhum khāṣṣah.*
[879] Hārūn ibn Mūsā, *Wujūh,* 123, 125-6.

in Muqātil's major commentary.[880] The question, then, is why these theologically loaded

terms are not mentioned in Muqātil's *Wujūh* given the theological nature of his work. We

probably will never know the answer, whether Muqātil himself overlooked those entries,

or his extant extant work does not include everything that he wrote, or he does not

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[880] We can compare how the terms *al-islām* and *al-īmān* discussed by Hārūn ibn Mūsā in his *Wujūh* and how Muqātil dealt with them in his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, but not in his *Wujūh*. Ibn Mūsā assigned two meanings to *al-islām*, namely *al-ikhlāṣ* and *al-iqrār*. For the verse meaning *(al-ikhlāṣ)*, he provided Q2: 131,112; 3:20, and 31:22, and for the second meaning of *al-islām* he adduced Q3: 83, 49: 14, and 9: 74. Let us see how Muqātil comments on the verses that Ibn Mūsā mentioned and in which the word *islām* occurs. In Q2: 112 *(aslama wajhahū li Allāh yaʿnī akhlaṣa dīnahū li Allāh)*, 2:131 *(aslim = akhliṣ, aslamtu yaʿnī akhlaṣtu)*, Q3:20 *(aslamtu wajhī li Allāh = akhlaṣtu dīnī li Allāh)*, and 31:22 *(wa man yuslim wajhahū ilā Allāh = man yukhliṣ dīnahū li Allāh)* Thus, like Ibn Mūsā who interprets *al-islām* as *al-ikhlāṣ* in all four verses he adduced, Muqātil did the same. Now, let us see how Muqātil comments on the three verses in which *al-islām,* in Ibn Mūsā's *Wujūh,* means *al-iqrār*: Q3: 83 (in this case, Muqātil passed the the word *aslama* in the verse uncommented; but his comments on Q3: 82 and 84 suggests that he interprets *al-islām* as *al-iqrār*), 49: 14 *(aslamā: aqarrnā bi al-lisān)*, 9:74 *(baʿda islāmihim = baʿda iqrārihim bi al-īmān)*. So, if Ibn Mūsā assigned *al-iqrār* as the second meaning of *al-islām*, Muqātil did the same in the verses that Ibn Mūsā used to justify the meaning. This shows that while the entry *al-islām* is missing from Muqātil's *Wujūh,* he actually has dealt with it in his major commentary, and assigned the same meanings to the word as other authors of *wujūh*, especially Ibn Mūsā, did. The same applies to the term *al-īmān,* which is also missing from Muqātil's *Wujūh,* but whose multiple meanings can be found in his major commentary. See Ibn Mūsā, *Wujūh,* 122. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/1131-2, 140, 267-8; 2/437; 1/287-8; 4/98; 2/183. In terms of the term *al-īmān*, Ibn Mūsā assigned four meanings to it, including *al-iqrār bi al-lisān min ghayr taṣdīq, al-taṣdīq, al-tawḥīd,* and *īmānan fī shirk.* For the first meaning of *al-īmān,* namely *al-iqrār bi al-lisān min ghayr taṣdīq,* Ibn Mūsā justified it by mentioning Q63:3, 9; 57:16; 60:13. In his comment on Q63: 3, Muqātil mentions *nifāq,* that is acknowledging something without really believing it *(aqarrū thumma kafarū);* in terms of Q63: 9, Muqātil interprets *āmānū* as *aqarrū,* that is an acknowledgment made by the hypocrites, which means without real belief; likewise, when commenting on 57:16, Muqātil interprets *alladhīna amanū* as *aqarrū bi al-lisān*, an acknowledgement made by the hypocrites. In terms of Q60:13, Muqātil does not mention any acknowledgment without belief literally, but he indicates, through the narrative that he unfolds, that there were some poor Muslims that, for the sake of gaining food from the Jews, told them the "secrets" of the Muslims so that they might become friends. As a result, the Jews persuaded them to abandon Islam. For the second meaning, al-*taṣdīq*, Ibn Mūsā adduced Q98: 7 and 48: 5. In his comment on 98: 7, Muqātil interprets *alladhīna āmanū* as people who really believed because they performed good deeds and will be rewarded by God; on 48:5 Muqātil comments that *al-muʾminīn wa al-muʾmināt* as those believed in Islam *(bi al-islām)*, meaning that they really believed *(taṣdīq)*. Suffice it to say that while Muqātil's commentary on the verses that Ibn Mūsā used as justification for the meanings he assigned to the both *al-islām* and *al-īmān* suggest that he also advocates that the two terms are polysemic, it is not always easy to detect that. This vindicates my point that Muqātil's *Wujūh* is of great help to the students of the Qur'an's interpretation because they can now recognize polysemy in the Qur'an with great ease, rather than if they have to scrutinize it through Muqātil's major commentary. See Ibn Mūsā, *Wujūh*, 125-6. Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/337, 341, 242-3, 307; 4/781.

consider the terms *al-islām* and *al-īmān* polysemic.[881] What is certain, however, is that Muqātil's *Wujūh*, as it survives today, does not exhaust all the polysemic words in the Qur'an, regardless of the fact that he may have dealt with them in his major commentary.[882]

Theologically Loaded Words: Muqātil, Exegesis, and Theology

Since I have argued for the theological orientation of Muqātil' *Wujūh,* my next step is to discuss more thoroughly Muqātil's theological preoccupation in this commentary by studying some of his entries that I see as representative for picturing his exegetical thrust as well as his theological concerns. In so doing, I will not discuss those terms that I consider neutral or non-theological. Left to work only with the theologically charged entries, I will scale them hierarchically based on whether they offer meanings that explicitly mention keywords such as *tawḥīd, īmān, kufr, tawḥīd, shirk, taṣdīq, takdhīb, islām, Qur'ān,* and so forth. In addition, to be consistent with my topical discussion of Muqātil's two other commentaries in the previous chapters, I will select theologically charged entries related to Muqātil's opposition between *īmān* and *kufr*, along with their principal elements—that is, the opposition between *tawḥīd* and *shirk* and

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[881] However, I would argue that neglect on the part of Muqātil to include the term *al-islām* and *al-īmān* is unlikely given the significance of the the two terms in his theological framework. Likewise, the possibility that he does not consider the two terms polysemic, and hence excluding them from his *Wujūh* is also less likely since he treats them as polysemic in his major commentary. The alternative left is that these two central terms are missing from his *Wujūh* probably because Muqātil's extant *Wujūh* does not include everything that he once wrote.

[882] Another possibility why the terms *al-islām* and *al-īmān* are missing from the *Wujūh* is because Muqātil may have intentionally excluded them from it, for the primary reason that he fears his readers woud not take the idea of *īmān* and *islām* seriously by thinking that it is acceptable to admit *īmān* or *islām* without really believing in it. This is a possible misunderstanding of the polysemic *īmān* and *islām* that could happen, and if it does, it will run counter to his exegetical task to propagate *īmān* and *islām* against *kufr*.

between *taṣdīq* and *takdhīb*—entries with interreligious bearings, entries related to commanding right and forbidding wrong, and, finally, jihād. Because Muqātil's *Wujūh* is generally very brief and straightforward, I will have to refer to his other commentaries in order to bring forth Muqātil's full understanding of the entries with which he, in one way or another, has dealt in a more elaborate way. Moreover, such cross-referencing is to show whether Muqātil is consistent in his views of some of the subject matters that he espouses in his exegetical endeavor.

Three Primary Entries: al-hudā, al-kufr, and al-shirk.

In his less systematic ordering of entries in the *Wujūh*, Muqātil put three entries that are arguably the most theologically charged in his top list, namely *al-hudā* (guidance)*, al-kufr* (disbelief)*,* and *shirk* (associating God with creation)*.* Each of these terms comprises meanings that are directly related to Muqātil's theological concerns in his exegetical project, that is, the propagation of belief and condemnation of disbelief. Together, these three terms thus best represent Muqātil's exegetical thrust, and this may explain why they take place in the beginning of the commentary, apart from the fact that the term *al-islām* and *īmān*, which would potentially be other central terms in his exegetical framework, are missing from the *Wujūh.*

There is a good reason for Muqātil to put *al-hudā* in the first place.[883] It is arguably the most comprehensive term in the *Wujūh* that best explain God's revelation, by sending prophets and scriptures, in order to guide human beings. As such, the term *al-*

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[883] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 20-25.

hudā represents well Muqātil's exegetical mission in explaining the Qur'an as guidance for believers to fully submit to God, by obeying His commands and prohibitions, communicated through His prophets and scriptures—especially Muhammad and the Qur'an.

Muqātil assigns seventeen meanings to *al-hudā,* the most of all entries that he includes in the *Wujūh.* Of seventeen, eleven of those meanings are most relevant to Muqātil's theological concerns, namely *al-bayān, dīn al-islām, al-īmān, rusulan wa kutuban, al-rashād, amr Muḥammad SAW, al-Qur'ān, al-Tawrāh, al-ḥujjah, al-tawḥīd,* and *sunnah.*[884] The multiple meanings assigned to *al-hudā* explain almost every necessary element of the fundamental teachings of the Qur'an. *Al-hudā* is described as a "clear statement" *(bayān)* from God for the true religion *(dīn al-islām)* in order for human beings to believe *(al-īmān)*. Such a clear statement is sent by God through his messengers and written in scriptures *(rusulan wa kutuban)* providing a straight path *(al-rashād)*. Among those messengers of God is Muhammad, to whom the Qur'an was sent. The Qur'an validates the truth of other scriptures before it *(Tawrāh)*. These messengers and scriptures are evidence *(ḥujjah)* on the Oneness of God *(tawḥīd)* who has sent them all. Since *tawḥīd* has been the trodden path of all prophets *(sunnah)*, people should follow them in that path.

To the second term, *al-kufr,* Muqātil assigns four meanings, but only three concern us here, namely *al-kufr bi tawḥīd Allāh 'Azza wa Jalla wa al-inkār bihi* (disbelief in and rejection of the Oneness of God)*, kufr al-juḥūd* (rebellious disbelief)*,* and *al-kufr*

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[884] The other meanings of *al-hudā* are *dā'iyan, ma'rifah, al-istirjā', lā yaṣluḥ, al-ilhām,* and *hudnā = tubnā.*

bi al-niʿmah (ungratefulness).[885] With these meanings, Muqātil differentiates three types of disbelief *(kufr)*. The most serious offence is failure to acknowledge *tawḥīd*. According to Muqātil's interpretation of Q2:6, which he uses to support this meaning of *al-kufr,* it was the Meccan polytheists who rejected *tawḥīd,* for this verse was revealed to address them.[886] In the second verse (Q47:32) that Muqātil mentions, however, the same accusation of rejecting *tawḥīd* was also leveled against the Jews. In this verse, not only were the Jews depicted as rejecting *tawḥīd* but they were also presented as preventing people from following God's way, in addition to opposing the Prophet Muḥammad after it was explained in the Torah that he was a prophet and messenger.[887] Together, the Arab polytheists and the Jews were accused of committing *shirk* and *takdhīb*.

The second type of *kufr* is disbelief out of defiance *(kufr al-juḥūd)*. Such a disbelief manifested in the denial of Muḥammad's prophethood and of the Kaʿbah as the *qiblah* (direction for prayers). In all cases that Muqātil adduces, the perpetrators of *kufr al-juḥūd* were the Jews. The Jews' denial of Muḥammad's prophethood is mentioned in Q2:89 and 6:20. In relation to Q2:89, Muqātil states that prior to Muhammad's messengership, the Jews used to implore God for victory by mentioning Muhammad in their prayers—that is, by praying in the name of the coming prophet—when they faced their enemy—that is, the Arab pagans including Juhaynah, Mazīnah, Banī ʿAdhrah, Asad, and Ghaṭafān—in war, chanting: "O God, we ask you, in the name of the Prophet whom

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[885] The last meaning of *al-kufr* is *al-barāʾah* (free of association, free of responsibility). Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 25-6.
[886] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/88.
[887] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/50.

we found in our Scripture and whom you will send in the end of time, to make us victorious over them." When Muhammad was sent and he was not of the Israelites, the Jews rejected him.[888] In this respect, the accusation of *kufr* against the Jews is more as a rebellious disbelief with regard to accepting Muhammad's prophethood *(taṣdīq)*, but of disbelief in terms of *tawḥīd*. It is only because the Jews refuted to believe in Muhammad as the promised prophet *(takdhīb)*.

In his commentary on Q6:20, in the major commentary, Muqātil maintains that the verse was revealed following an exchange between the *kuffār Quraysh* and Muḥammad, in which they told him that they had asked the People of Scripture about him. The People of Scripture told the Qurayshī *kuffār* that there was no mention of Muḥammad in their scripture. Muqātil however argues that the Qur'an asserts that they knew Muḥammad as well as they knew their children.[889] The Jews' denial of the Kaʿbah as *qiblah* is mentioned in Q2:146 and 3:97. Commenting on the former of the two, Muqātil mentions a conversation between some Jews and Muhammad, in which the former asked him why he circumambulated a built stone. As a response, the Prophet said that they should have known that circumambulation around Kaʿbah is *ḥaqq* and it was written in both Torah and Gospel; but the Jews hid the truth of what is written in scripture and they became defiant.[890] In his commentary on Q3:97, Muqātil exhorts that whosoever among the people of religions *(ahl al-adyān)* denies *(kafara)* the Kaʿbah and therefore

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[888] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/122.
[889] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/553-54.
[890] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/147-48.

does not perform the pilgrimage obligation, he has disbelieved *(faqad kafara)*.[891] In this respect, Muqātil seems to accuse the Jews of having been unfaithful to both Ibrāhim, their patriarch, who had built the Kaʿbah and performed pilgrimage, and to their scripture, which had prophesized the coming of Muhammad in the end of time.

The last type of *kufr* is being ungrateful for the grace that a person has received from God or from fellow human beings *(al-kufr bi al-niʿmah)*. To support this meaning, Muqātil adduces several verses: Q2:152, 26:19, 27:40, and 31:12. In his commentary on Q2:152 in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Muqātil maintains that the grace that God has bestowed upon human beings was mentioned in Q2:151, that is, the prophethood of Muhammad, reciting to and teaching them the Qur'an, cleansing them from committing *shirk* and *kufr*, teaching them what is allowed and prohibited *(ḥikmah)*, and teaching everything that they did not know.[892] Commenting on Q26:19, Muqātil relates the term *kufr* to the ungratefulness that the Pharaoh leveled against Mūsā after the former had taken care of him.[893] Muqātil relates Q27:40 to the story of Sulaymān who was attempting to transfer Queen Sheba's throne to his kingdom, assisted by a Jew who had the ability to do so in a blink of eye. The instant transfer of the throne was a divine trial testing whether Sulaymān would be thankful because he now had the throne, or would be unthankful, simply because the person who transferred it was lower than he was as a king and prophet.[894] In terms of Q31:12, Muqātil relates it to the story of Luqmān, whom God had

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[891] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/297.
[892] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/150.
[893] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/260.
[894] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/308.

given knowledge and understanding one level below prophethood *(al-'ilm wa al-fahm min ghayr nubuwwah)* so that he was thankful to God by worshipping Him alone *(fa yuwaḥḥidahū).*[895] Thus, disbelief *(kufr),* according to Muqātil, is of three kinds: rejection of *tawḥīd,* denial of the truth of prophethood and other religious teachings *(takdhīb)*, and being ungrateful.

The last of the top three entries in Muqātil's *Wujūh* is *al-shirk.* Muqātil assigns 3 meanings to it, namely *al-ishrāk bi Allāh 'Azza wa Jalla yu'dalu bihi ghayruhu* (associating God with creations as if they are equals)*, al-shirk fī al-ṭā'ah min ghayr 'ibādah* (obeying that other than God but not as worship)*,* and *al-shirk fī al-a'māl shirk al-riyā'* (performing deeds by expecting the appreciation of those other than God)*.*[896] Muqātil's threefold *shirk* is parallel to his threefold *kufr,* I just discussed above. The first manifestation of *shirk* is associating God by posing an equal to Him *(al-ishrāk bi Allāh yu'dalu bihi ghayruhu).* In support of his claim, Muqātil cites Q4:36, 48, 116; 5:72, and 9:3. Explaining Q4:36, Muqātil says that the verse was addressing People of Scripture who did not worship God alone *(ya'budūn Allāh fī ghayr ikhlāṣ).* In this respect, God forbade them from associating God with His creation.[897] Q5:72, according to Muqātil, was addressing the Najrānī Christians who professed that "God is the Messiah, son of Maryam;" whosoever professed this and died with such belief, he argues, was forbidden from paradise.[898] In his commentary on Q9:3, Muqātil relates the verse to the Meccan

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[895] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/434.
[896] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 26-27.
[897] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/371-2.
[898] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/494.

polytheists who, following the cancelation of the Ḥudaybiyyah treaty, had no peace agreement with the Prophet. First, the Qur'an told Muhammad to ask them to repent and worship God alone. The Meccan polytheists were given 50 days to do that; otherwise they would be fought against. If, however, they asked protection from the Prophet, he must grant them that so that they might hear the Qur'an. If after hearing the Qur'an they refused to accept its teaching, that protection should be cancelled and they had to be fought against because they did not uphold *tawḥīd*.[899] In this respect, Muqātil accuses the People of Scripture of committing *shirk* by associating Him with creation, such as the divinization of 'Īsā. The Meccan polytheists did the same, but they were given chance to repent and uphold *tawḥīd* before they were fought against if they refused to do it. This is consistent with Muqātil's view in other commentaries that the Arab pagans were the only people upon whom the Prophet imposed Islam. The People of Scripture, while they had been fiercely criticized for their alleged *shirk*, were given a different treatment, a political one, by paying jizyah while retaining their faith.

The second type of *shirk* is being obedient to something or someone other than God without worshipping it *(al-shirk fī al-ṭā'ah min ghayr 'ibādah)*. For this meaning, Muqātil cites Q7:190 and 14:22. With regard to Q14:22, Muqātil interprets *ashraktumūni* as something associated with God in terms of obedience.[900] Q7:90 is related to the story of when Ādam's wife, Ḥawwā', was pregnant with their first child. An Iblīs, called al-Ḥārith, who had changed his appearance, approached and told her that what was in her

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[899] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/156-8.
[900] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 27.

stomach could be a beast. When her pregnancy got even bigger and much heavier, the
same Iblīs approached her again asking about her condition. Ḥawwāʾ told him that she
was afraid if his prediction was correct that she was carrying a beast, for it was so
difficult for her to stand up after she sat down. Iblīs then told her to pray to God so that
their child became a human like their parents. But Iblīs also asked that if the prayer did
work, she would name her child after his name. She agreed. Ādam and Ḥawwāʾ prayed to
God and promised Him if their child was born sound and perfect they would be so
grateful to Him. When the baby was born, sound and perfect, Iblīs approached Ādam to
tell her to name the baby after him, namely ʿAbd al-Ḥārith. Ādam agreed. But not long
after, the baby died. It is the obedience to Iblīs' advice, without necessarily worshipping
him, which the verse was actually addressing.[901] Thus, this type of obedience-based *shirk*
points specifically to following the Satan's temptation while the perpetrator continues to
worship God.

The last kind of *shirk* is the performance of deeds expecting not only God's
reward but also praise from fellow human beings *(al-shirk fī al-aʿmāl shirk al-riyāʾ)*. To
vindicate this meaning, Muqātil uses Q18:110 as a support. In his major commentary,
Muqātil unfolds the narrative that illuminates the revelation of this verse. He says that it
was revealed in relation to Jundub ibn Zuhayr al-Azdī al-ʿĀmirī who told the Prophet that
he did everything for the sake of Allāh; however, when someone praised him for what he
had done, he liked it, too. In response, the Prophet told him that God would not receive

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[901] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/79-80.

any deeds performed insincerely for Him by expecting appreciation from others.[902] Thus, *shirk al-riyā'* is a religious offence that happens when someone still expects reward and praise from that other tha God in doing anything in his life.

Thus, the thread that links the three terms *al-hudā, al-kufr,* and *al-shirk* is the propagation of pure motnotheism *(tawḥīd),* and the condemnation of rejecting it *(kufr)*, by bringing a partner to God *(shirk)*. The term *al-hudā* offers a range of meanings that together lay out the fundamental elements of God's guidance to human beings. It points to clear statement *(al-bayān)* in the form prophethood and scripture that provides human beings with a straight path *(al-rashād)*, namely *dīn al-Islām*, whose ultimate goal is *tawḥīd.* Rejecting this ultimate goal *(tawḥīd)* outright is the most serious offence of *kufr,* as is rejecting the medium through which *tawḥīd* is communicated, namely prophets and scriptures. For human beings to be ungrateful to God, who has provided guidance is also an act of *kufr,* although of a lesser degree. Worshiping God, but at the same time also worshiping another deity is an act of *shirk,* comparable in its offense with an act of *kufr,* since the two are basically a rejection of *tawḥīd.*

Likewise, obeying that other than God, which in Muqātil's example is obeying Iblīs' advice, leads to violating God's rules and is also an act of *shirk.* The same applies to expecting appreciation from other than God in doing deeds; it is also an act of *shirk,* albeit of lower degree. These typologies of *kufr* and *shirk,* in addition to elaborate meanings of *al-hudā,* suggest that Muqātil advocates a strictest form of monotheism. As strict as his vision of monotheism *(tawḥīd)* is*,* it is prone to violation. Muqātil has

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[902] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/605.

therefore set up layers of potential violations against such an idealistic monotheism, from the most minor to the most serious. Graded hierarchically, an act of *kufr* encompasses rejection of *tawḥīd,* rejection of prophecy and scripture, and ungratefulness. Similarly, an act of *shirk* manifests in associating God with His creation, unlawful obedience to other than Him, and insincerity in performing deeds. Thus, if in other commentaries Muqātil has expressed more clearly the two more serious violations of *kufr* and *shirk*, namely rejecting *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq,* in the *Wujūh* he clearly points to his threefold typology for both *kufr* and *shirk*, the third of each being ungratefulness *(al-kufr bi al-niʿmah)* and expectation of reward or praise from others *(shirk al-riyāʾ).*

Secondary Entries: Semantic Web

Muqātil's entries in the *Wujūh* are interrelated with each other semantically. Not only do these entries serve as meanings of the other, but their meanings are also entangled with each other. This suggests that these words form some sort of semantic web that vindicate one another as unity. The interconnection between the primary and the secondary entries as well as their meanings show not only the semantic density of those words but also the theological load that Muqātil imposes on them to support the highly theological orientation of his exegetical endeavors.

Thus, each of the three key entries—*al-hudā, al-kufr, al-shirk*—and some of their meanings also appear as one of the meanings assigned to other words, which I call secondary entries.[903] *Al-hudā*, for instance, is one of the meanings of terms such as *al-*

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[903] The primary words here are *al-hudā, al-kufr,* and *al-shirk*, which occupied the first three places of the commentary. They are considered primary primarily because their assigned meanings are the most

mashy,[904] *al-sabīl,*[905] and *al-nūr.*[906] *Al-kufr* is also communicated through terms such as *al-fitnah,*[907] *al-ḥarb,*[908] *al-fisq,*[909] and *ḍalāl.*[910] There are even more words, the meaning of which entails *al-shirk,* than those pointing to *al-hudā* and *al-kufr,* including *al-sū',*[911] *al-sayyi'ah,*[912] *al-sayyi'āt,*[913] *al-ẓulm,*[914] *al-ẓālimīn,*[915] *al-ẓulumāt,*[916] *al-ithm,*[917] *al-fitnah,*[918] *al-munkar,*[919] and *al-fisq.*[920] *Tawḥīd* itself, while it is not an entry in the commentary, becomes one of the meanings of entries such as *u'budū,*[921] *ittaqū,*[922] *al-ḥaqq,*[923] and *ma'rūf.*[924]

Among the meanings of the key entries that are also conveyed through secondary entries are, for instance, those of *al-hudā,* such as *dīn al-islām, al-īmān,* and *al-Qur'ān.* Four entries in the commentary have *dīn al-islām* as one of their meanings;[925] four entries have *al-īmān* as one of their meanings,[926] and seven entries mean, among others, *al-*

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encompassing of what constitutes Muqātil's exegetical thrust. Other entries are secondary words whose meanings include one of these primary words or the assigned meanings of these primary words.

[904] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 31.
[905] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 193.
[906] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 132.
[907] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 63.
[908] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 150.
[909] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 208.
[910] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 126.
[911] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 34.
[912] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 35.
[913] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 143.
[914] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 81.
[915] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 79, 80.
[916] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 78.
[917] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 139.
[918] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 63.
[919] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 75.
[920] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 208.
[921] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 117.
[922] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 175.
[923] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 184.
[924] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 75.
[925] These entries are: *al-ḥaqq, al-nūr, al-khayr,* and *al-raḥmah.*
[926] They are *al-khayr, al-ṣalāḥ, al-raḥmah,* and *al-nūr.*

Qur'ān.[927] Similar cases occur with the meanings of the other two key entries, namely *al-kufr* and *al-shirk*, although in a much lower rate.

Tawḥīd-Shirk Opposition: Word's Families

A number of entries in the *Wujūh* consist not of single words, but of a pair of (sometimes opposing) words and phrases. The examples of entries with a pair of words are *al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah, al-ẓulumāt wa al-nūr,* and *mustaqarr wa mustawdaʿ.* The entries in the form of phrases are of two kinds: verbal, such as *faraḍa, uʿbudū, yamudduhum,* and so forth; and nominal, such as *al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar* and *mā bayna aydīhim wa mā khalfahum.* Of these "compound" entries, there are three whose words are in a binary opposition and one of whose meanings contrast *tawḥīd* and *shirk,* or *taṣdīq* and *takdhīb,* which have served as Muqātil's exegetical thrust and his major theological concern. These entries are *al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah, al-ẓulumāt wa al-nūr,* and *al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar.* Such a binary opposition helps Muqātil not only underline the weight of message that he wants to communicate but also leads him to seek further alternatives if such opposition ends with deadlock that may paralyze normal life order.

In general, the opposition of these two pairs of terms can be summed up as an opposition between *īmān* and *kufr.* While there is an entry for *al-kufr* in the commentary, the opposing entry *al-īmān* is missing. Consequently, the opposition of *imān* and *kufr* is

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[927] Other entries one of whose meanings is *al-Qur'an* are: *al-ḥaqq, al-furqān, al-raḥmah, al-nūr, al-najm, al-dhikr,* and *al-mā'.*

now represented by their supporting principles, namely *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* against *shirk* and *takdhīb*, respectively.

As a general rule, as long as Muqātil's commentaries are concerned, the concept of *īmān* (belief), with its two supporting principles *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq,* refers to only one kind of belief: acknowledgement of the oneness of God and acceptance of Muhammad's prophetic mandate. The concept of *īmān* (belief) suggests a totality of mental and performative acts. This is despite the fact that Muqātil considers the term *al-īmān* polysemic, which includes the meaning "admission without belief" *(al-iqrār bi lā taṣdīq)*—held by hypocrites—and "belief amidst disbelief" *(īmānān fī kufr)*—held by polytheists who believed not only in God, but also in other gods.[928] These two of four possible meanings of *al-īmān* in the Qur'an do not conform to Muqātil's vision of belief. In other words, admission without belief and belief amidst disbelief are two incorrect manifestations of belief. The same happens with the term *al-islām*, which is also polysemic, including sincere submission, but also nominal submission for certain interests, political or otherwise. It is possible that one of the main reasons why Muqātil does not mention *al-īmān* and *al-islām* as entries in the *Wujūh* is because he does not want his readers to take the correct understanding and performance of these two concepts lightly. Perhaps he fears that if he lists these two terms with its polysemic and contradictory meanings in the *Wujūh* they will be counterproductive to his own theological mission in advocating pure monotheism against the slightest inclination of

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[928] See footnote no. 50 above.

disbelief and associanism. To put it differently, he wants to appear uncompromising with regard to correct theology.[929]

On the contrary, with regard to the concept of *kufr* (disbelief), with its two supporting principles *shirk* and *takdhīb*, Muqātil suggests that it is of different degrees, which gives a way to possibilities of a total or partial enactment. The concept of *kufr*, for instance, is described as being of three types: *al-kufr bi tawḥīd Allāh, kufr al-juḥūd,* and *al-kufr bi al-ni'mah*.[930] Likewise, the concept of *shirk* is distinguished into three kinds: *al-ishrāk bi Allāh 'Azza wa Jalla yu'dalu bihi ghayruhu, al-shirk fī al-ṭā'ah min ghayr 'ibādah,* and *al-shirk fī al-a'māl shirk al-riyā'*.[931] This may suggest that while he disapproves any of these violations, he wants to show some leniency by showing that not all violations are of the same degree, and that they are above all rectifiable if the perpetrators are willing to learn from Islamic teachings.

The rejection of *tawḥīd* (*al-kufr bi tawḥīd Allāh)*, arguably the most serious religious offense of all, is equal with the first type of *shirk,* namely *al-ishrāk bi Allāh 'Azza wa Jalla yu'dalu bihi ghayruhu,* that is worshiping another deity as an equal to God. Only a pure polytheist may commit such an offense. Rebellious disbelief *(kufr al-juḥūd)* is more likely equated with association without worship *(al-shirk fī al-ṭā'ah min ghayr 'ibādah)*. Muqātil's explanation of *kufr al-juḥūd,* on one hand, suggests that it is the rejection of Muhammad's prophethood either as a whole or by rejecting part of his

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[929] I consider this speculation another possibility why the terms of *al-īmān* and *al-islām* are missing from the *Wujūh,* in addition to the possibility that the extant manuscripts of Muqātil's *Wujūh,* as argued earlier, do not exhaust everything that he once wrote.
[930] Muqātil, *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir,* p. 25.
[931] Muqātil, *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir,* p. 26-27.

teachings or decisions. His explanation of *al-shirk fī al-ṭāʿah min ghayr ʿibādah,* which refers to the event where Ādam and Ḥawwāʾ named their newly born after Iblīs, on the other, suggests that while worshiping the one and only God is maintained, some obedience may be given to those other than him. In this case, Muqātil's condemnation of the Christians who treated their religious leadership as "lords," which implies obedience to things different from what God has actually stipulated, for instance, may be set as an example. A monotheist, a polytheist, or even a Muslim who is called a hypocrite *(munāfiq)* may all commit such a religious crime. Being ungrateful *(al-kufr bi al-niʿmah),* the third kind of *kufr,* is more or less on a par with insincerity of acts *(al-shirk fī al-aʿmāl shirk al-riyāʾ),* and is the third kind of *shirk.* Such a violation may be perpetrated by a polytheist, obviously, a monotheist, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, including hypocrites within the Muslim community.

Thus, it is important to follow Muqātil's detailed distinction of a range of religious offenses when we attempt to apply those concepts. The Jews of Muhammad's contemporaries, for instance, may have worshiped the one and only God, as the accusation of their divinizing of ʿUzayr[932] seems to point to their ancestors,[933] but their

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[932] Muqātil mentions ʿUzayr (ibn Sharḥiyā) as a citizen of Babel among those whom Bukhtanaṣar (Nebukadnezar) captured. He lived after the elevation of ʿĪsā, and was one of the learned among the Israelites. On the story of ʿUzayr who was given a chance to witness, like Ibrāhīm, how God would resurrect creation from death, see Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/216-8.

[933] In his commentary on Q3:65, which addresses the dispute between Jews and Christians each claiming to be more worthy as Ibrāhīm's successors, Muqātil mentions that some of the Jewish and Christian leaders of Najrān accused Muhammad, with his prophetic calling, of being someone whom wanted to be treated as a "lord" just like the Jews treated ʿUzayr, or Christians treated ʿĪsā. Muhammad's response was, according to Muqātil, that he did not invite them to anything except to worship God alone without associating him with anything. Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/282-3, 581. Muqātil suggests more clearly that the divinization occurred in the past when he is commenting Q7:163, in which God told Muhammad to ask the people of a village, called Aylah, two day travel through sea from from Medina to Syria. In the past, during the time of Dāwūd, the people of this village were transfigured *(musikhū)* into monkeys *(qiradah).* Muhammad was to ask, whether

rejection of Muhammad's prophethood and the obedience of some of the Jews to their leadership in their rejection have made them commit *kufr al-juḥūd* and *al-shirk fī al-ṭāʿah min ghayr ʿibādah.* They did not, however, commit *al-kufr bi tawḥīd Allāh.* A different understanding may apply to the Christians of Muhammad's time who, according to Muqātil, worshiped ʿIsā as an equal to God, and thus were categorized as committing *al-kufr bi al-tawḥīd,* and also *kufr al-juḥūd* for their rejection of Muhammad's prophethood. The Arab appeared to have committed all three kinds of disbelief, *al-kufr bi al-tawḥīd, kufr al-juḥūd,* and *al-shirk fī al-ṭāʿah min ghayr ʿibādah.* In the meantime, *al-kufr bi al-niʿmah* and *al-shirk fī al-aʿmāl shirk al-riyāʾ* appear to be permeating the whole spectrum of religious communities, from polytheist to monotheist, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. As such, the *Wujūh* emphasizes, if not adds, more important points that otherwise would be unrecognizeable in Muqātil's major commentary. The detailed distinction between different kinds of *kufr* and *shirk* is not easily detected if we read Muqātil's commentary in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr.* Instead, we will gain the impression that Muqātil generalized any violation of *īmān* as either *kufr* or *shirk.* Thus, like Muqātil's legal commentary, the *Wujūh* contributes more nuances to the general views that Muqātil has expressed throughout his commentary on the Qur'an in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr.*

In order to understand well how these oppositional entries communicate Muqātil's exegetical thrust with regard to belief and disbelief, I will not only deal with them but

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God had transfigured them into monkeys and pigs, because they said, "We are God's children and His beloved; God would not punish us in ths world nor in the hereafter because we are the offspring of His best friend Ibrāhīm and of Isrāʾīl and of God's Speech Mūsā and of His Son ʿUzayr; thus, We are God's children." Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/70.

also with more entries which are their derivatives. With regard to the oppositional entry *al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah,* there are two entries that share the same root *ḥ-s-n* with the former, namely *al-ḥusnā* and *ḥasanan,* and there are two derivative entries for the latter, namely *al-sū'* and *al-sayyi'āt.* In relation to the oppositional entry *al-ẓulumāt wa al-nūr,* there are three other entries sharing the same root *ẓ-l-m* with the first, namely *al-ẓulumāt, al-ẓālimīn,* and *al-ẓulm,* and there is one derivative entry for the second, namely *al-nār.* Finally, for the oppositional entry *al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar,* there are two entries that may support its meanings, namely *al-amr* and *al-maʿrūf.*

In general, all oppositional entries and their derivatives here mentioned support, in some of their meanings, Muqātil's exegetical and theological thrusts in terms propagating *īmān*, especially with regard to upholding *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*, and condemning *shirk*, especially the abandoning of *shirk* and *takdhīb*. Moreover, this binary opposition strengthens even further the message that Muqātil intends to communicate by contrasting two extreme positions: *īmān* versus *kufr, tawḥīd* versus *shirk,* and *taṣdīq* versus *takdhīb*. At some points, Muqātil relates *īmān*, with its two constituting elements, with the good reward that God had promised for its upholders, especially in the hereafter, and *kufr,* also with its two constituting elements, with the punishment that awaits its perpetrators in hellfire.

Al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah and their derivatives

Muqātil assigns five meanings to a pair of opposional *al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah* ("good" and "bad"), all of which are a series of oppositions.[934] These five meanings refer to five different domains, namely (1) warfare: *al-naṣr wa al-ghanīmah* (victory and spoil) for *al-ḥasanah*, and *al-qatl wa al-hazīmah* (murder and defeat) for *al-sayyi'ah;* (2) theology: *al-tawḥīd* and *al-shirk;* (3) nature: *kathrat al-maṭar wa al-khisb* (plenty of rain and fertility) and *qillat al-maṭar* (lack of rain); (4) living condition: *al-ʿāfiyah* (prosperous life) and *al-ʿadhāb fī al-dunyā* (excruating life), and (5) interpersonal relation: *al-ʿafw wa qawl al-maʿrūf* (forgiveness and good word) and *al-qawl al-qabīḥ wa al-adhā* (inappropriate and harassing words). Of five, only one that concerns us here, namely the meaning of *al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah* in the domain of theology, that is, *al-tawḥīd* and *al-shirk*, which serves as the thrust of Muqātil's exegetical endeavors.

According to Muqātil, *al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah* means *al-tawḥīd* and *al-shirk* in Q6:160, 27:89-90, and 28:84. Q6:160 maintains that the reward of all deeds, good and bad, will be given in the hereafter. Whoever comes into the hereafter with *al-ḥasanah,* that is, *tawḥīd* and good deeds *(al-ʿamal al-ṣāliḥ)* will receive ten times as much, and whowever comes in the hereafter with *al-sayyi'ah, yaʿnī al-shirk* will be repaid only with its equivalent. The reward for *shirk* as the most serious religious offense is hellfire, which is the gravest punishment.[935] Q27:89-90 convey a similar message: whoever comes in the hereafter with *al-ḥasanah, yaʿnī lā ilāha illa Allāh* ("there is no god but God"), the

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[934] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* p. 35-36.
[935] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/599.

verbal pronouncement of *tawḥīd,* will receive a better recompense and be secure from the terrors of that Day; but whoever comes with *al-sayyi'ah,* that is, *shirk* will be cast face downwards into the Fire.[936] Q28:84 similarly states that whoever comes into the hereafter with *al-ḥasanah,* that is, *kalimat al-ikhlāṣ* (statement of true devotion to God, namely *tawḥīd*), which is *lā ilāha illa Allāh waḥdahū lā sharīka lahu*, will receive a better reward; but whoever comes in with *shirk* will not be recompesed but for what he used to do. The reward for *shirk* is hellfire; there is no more serious offense than *shirk,* as there is no greater punishment than hellfire.[937] Together, the qur'anic verses that Muqātil mentions to support his assigned meaning to *al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah* as pointing to *tawḥīd* and *shirk* suggest that those who uphold *tawḥīd* will be receiving a multiplied reward in the hereafter, while those who committed *shirk* on earth will be punished only with an equal weight of punishment, although it happens to be the gravest one, hellfire.

What stands out of Muqātil's interpretation of *al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah* as *tawḥīd wa al-shirk* is that he always is able to find a way to assign the theological significance that he is advocating to a pair of words that stand directly in opposition to each other to the extent that such an opposition emboldens the weight of message he is attempting to communicate. Furthermore, the meaning *al-tawḥīd wa al-shirk* given to *al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah* is the most consequential of all meanings Muqātil assigns to the pair as it is related to the ultimate fate of human beings in the hereafter, while the other four meanings pertain solely to the worldly affairs: warfare, nature, living conditions, and

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[936] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/318.
[937] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/358.

interpersonal relations. Furthermore, while *al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah* have multiple meanings, Muqātil has strongly assigned the pair their theological meaning throughout his major commentary to vindicate his larger exegetical task in propagating *īmān* and condemning *kufr,* including propagation of *tawḥīd* and condemnation of *shirk.*

Derivatives of al-ḥasanah: al-ḥusnā and ḥasanan

Muqātil's *Wujūh* provides two entries that are derivatives of *al-ḥasanah,* namely *al-ḥusnā* and *ḥasanan*, as it also mentions two other entries derivative of *al-sayyi'ah,* namely *al-sū'* and *al-sayyi'āt.* It is curious whether these derivatives support the meanings of the principal entries (*al-ḥasanah* and *al-sayyi'ah*), especially with regard to their theological meanings related to the opposition of *tawḥīd* and *shirk.*

Al-ḥusnā is assigned three meanings, including *al-jannah* (paradise)*, al-banīn* (children)*,* and *al-khayr* (goodness).[938] Of the three, *al-jannah* seems to be the relevant meaning of *al-ḥusnā* to our discussion. Muqātil maintains that *al-ḥusnā* means paradise in five verses, namely Q10: 26, 21: 101, 53: 31, 55: 60, and 92: 6. Q10: 26 promises those who uphold *tawḥīd (li alladhīna aḥsanū)* paradise (*al-ḥusnā*).[939] Q21: 101 states that those for whom God have decreed Paradise (*al-ḥusnā*)—namely ʿĪsā, ʿUzayr, Maryam, and angels[940]—will be kept far from Hell. This verse, according to Muqātil, was intended to counter the argument of some Meccan polytheists of Banū Sahm, especially

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[938] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 36-37.
[939] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/236.
[940] It is interesting that the names Muqātil mentions here are those figures who, he believes, had been divinized and worshipped by different groups of people. Muqātil's mentioning of these names is to argue for their being parts of God's creation who have worshipped him as servants *(muqirrun lahū bi al-ʿubūdiyyah).* In fact, these figures had been so celebrated in the Qur'an and in previous scriptures because of their total devotion to God. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/463, 581; 2/640, 3/75, 4/926, etc.

Ibn al-Zaʿbarā, who confronted the Prophet when he told them that they and the idols they worshipped would become the fuel of Jahannam. Ibn al-Zaʿbarā questioned the Prophet whether that punishment applied only to them or to other people who worshipped similar deities. The Prophet told them that all of them would be in Jahannam. In response, Ibn al-Zaʿbarā argued that they were fine with that as long as ʿĪsā and his mother Maryam, whom the Prophet respected and were worshipped by the Christians, as well as ʿUzayr and angels who were similarly worshiped by people [the Jews], would be with them in Jahannam. It was to deny their claim that Q21:101 was revealed, arguing instead that ʿĪsā, ʿUzayr, Maryam, and angels have been promised paradise.[941] God's promising them paradise suggests that they are God's creation, just like any other creation that deserves to be entering it. Q53:31 threatens those who have committed *shirk (asāʾū bimā ʿamilū)*, in this case by worshipping angels and expecting their intercession, with punishment, and it promises those who uphold *tawḥīd (aḥsanū)* paradise.[942] Q55:60 similarly emphasizes that the reward for the people of *tawḥīd (jazāʾ al-iḥsān yaʿnī jazāʾ ahl al-tawḥīd)* is nothing but paradise *(illā al-iḥsān)* in the hereafter.[943] Thus, in all of these verses, Muqātil interprets *al-ḥusnā* as paradise, the promised reward for *aḥsanū,* that is, those who upheld *tawḥīd* during their lives in the world. There is a close connection between the meaning of *al-ḥasanah* as *tawḥīd* and the meaning of *al-ḥusnā* as *jannah* as the reward for upholding *tawḥīd.* Furthermore, Muqātil appears to create an irony, especially for other religious communities, by putting ʿĪsā, ʿUzayr, Maryam, and

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[941] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/93-94.
[942] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/163-64.
[943] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/204.

angels as parts of those promised with paradise because of their total devotion to God by upholding *tawḥīd*, while people worshipped them as divinities in addition to God, who urged them to worship Him alone.

Another derivative of *al-ḥasanah, ḥasanan* has three meanings, namely *haqqan* (truth), *muḥtasiban* (expecting God's reward), and *al-jannah* (paradise).[944] *Ḥasanan* means truth in two verses, Q2:83 and 20:86; Muqātil interprets the term *ḥasanan* in Q2:83, revealed in relation the Jews of Mūsā's contemporaries, as telling people the truth about Muhammad [with regard to his legitimacy for prophethood], and *ḥasanan* in 20:86 as mere truth, God's true promise. [945] Here, Muqātil associates the meaning of *ḥasanan* with truth in general, and especially the truth of Muhammad's prophethood *(taṣdīq)* which constitute another element of *īmān*, in addition to *tawḥīd*. As such, the root *ḥ-s-n* incorporates both meanings of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* that Muqātil has consistently advocating throughout his major commentaries against two constituting elements of *kufr,* namely *shirk* and *takdhīb*.

Ḥasanan means expecting God's reward *(muḥtasiban)* in Q2:245, 57:11, and 64:17. Q2:245 was revealed, according to Muqātil, in relation to Abū al-Daḥdāḥ, who gave the better garden of the two that he had hoping for the better reward in paradise.[946] Q57: 11 communicates a similar message that, according to Muqātil, was revealed in relation to the same Abū al-Daḥdāḥ.[947] Q64:17 states that besides multiplying the reward

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[944] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 45-46.
[945] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/37.
[946] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/204.
[947] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/239.

of charity, God will also forgive the giver's sin, for God is grateful *(shakūr)* for what they did.[948] Thus, the meaning *muḥtasiban* seems to go against the tendency among some people who believed in Muhammad's teachings. But they sometimes expected rewards, such as praise, from ther fellow human beings when they performed good deeds, as I discussed in relation to *shirk al-riyā'* above. The last meaning of *ḥasanan*, namely paradise *(al-jannah)*, appears in Q28:61. The verse, which according to Muqātil addressed the Meccan disbelievers, mentions paradise as eternal and a better reward to be pursued than the temporary nature of the this world.[949] This meaning is similar to one of the meanings of *al-ḥusnā:* paradise. As such, much of the meanings derived from *al-ḥasanah* is closely associated with *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* as well as the reward for their performance, namely paradise. This further vindicates Muqātil's signification of term *al-ḥasanah* as the opposition to *al-sayyi'ah.* As a whole, Muqātil's interpretation of *al-ḥasanah* and its derivatives lines up between the upholding of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* (constituting *īmān*), as the truth, and the reward that awaits in the hereafter, the paradise. In short, *tawḥīd* leads to goodness *(al-khayr).*

Derivatives of al-sayyi'ah: al-sū' and al-sayyi'āt

Al-sū' ("bad") has eleven meanings, namely *shiddah* (distress), *'aqran* (slaughter), *al-zinā* (adultery), *al-baraṣ* (leprosy), *al-'adhāb* (punishment), *al-shirk* (associating God with creation), *al-shatm* (cursing), *bi'sa* (the worst), *al-dhanb min al-mu'min* (the believer's sin), *al-ḍurr* (hardship), *al-qatl wa al-hazīmah* (murder and

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948 Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/354.
949 Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/352.

defeat).[950] All of these meanings send negative connotations. For the purpose of our study, one is most relevant—that is, *al-shirk*—and three others which are closely related to *al-shirk,* namely *al-shiddah, al-ʿadhāb,* and *biʾsa.*

  Al-sū' means *al-shirk* in Q16:28 and 30:10. The two verses assert that disbelievers who committed *shirk* would be punished in the Jahannam*,* despite their denial of both offense and its punishment.[951] The three supporting meanings of *al-sū',* namely *al-shiddah* (distress), *al-ʿadhāb* (punishment), and *biʾsa* (the worst reward), in general refer to the severity of such punishment *(al-ʿadhāb)* that those who committed *shirk* would receive in the worst *(biʾsa)* abode, that is, the Jahannam *(sū' al-dār, yaʿnī sharr al-dār jahannam).*[952] As such, *al-sū'* offers meanings that tie together *shirk* and the grievous punishment that awaits its perpetrators in the hereafter. This is in a stark contrast to *al-ḥasanah* and its derivatives, which refer to the upholding of *tawḥīd* and the reward that awaits believers in paradise. In short, *shirk* only brings evil in all its manifestations.

  The last derivative of *al-sayyi'ah* is *al-sayyi'āt.* It has five meanings, namely *al-shirk* (associating God with creation)*, al-ʿadhāb* (punishment)*, al-ḍurr* (hardship)*, al-sharr* (evil)*,* and *ityān al-fāḥishah fi adbār al-rijāl* (anal sex between men). Some of the meanings of *al-sayyi'āt* are similar to those of *al-sū'* discussed above, especially *al-shirk, al-ʿadhāb, al-ḍurr,* and *al-sharr.* These meanings equally suggest the close association of *shirk* and the severe punishment that it entails in the hereafter. As such, the meanings of *al-sayyi'ah* and its derivatives offer a stark contrast to those Muqātil assigns to *al-*

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[950] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 32-34.
[951] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/466, 408.
[952] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/376.

ḥasanah and its derivatives. The general significance that we may gain from from *al-ḥasanah wa al-sayyi'ah* along with their derivatives is the opposition of *tawḥīd* and *shirk* along with reward and punishment that each leads to. In short, these two opposing terms communicate well Muqātil's theological concerns that have undergirded his exegetical endeavors.

Al-ẓulumāt wa al-nūr and their derivatives

Another pair of oppositions that points to *tawḥīd* and *shirk,* or rather *shirk* and *tawḥīd,* is *al-ẓulumāt wa al-nūr.* This entry has two meanings; first is *al-shirk* (associating God with creation) and *al-īmān* (belief or faith)*,* and, second is *al-layl* (night) and *al-nahār* (noon).[953] It appears that of the two meanings only one is relevant to our current discussion, namely *al-shirk* and *al-īmān,* although the second meaning may well imply that *shirk* is dark—expressed by the idea of night *(layl)*—and *īmān* is bright—suggested by the idea of noon *(nahār).*

Muqātil mentions three verses where *al-ẓulumāt wa al-nūr* takes place and whose meaning is *al-shirk* and *al-īmān*; that is, Q2:257, 33:43, and 14:5. Q2:257 states that God is the ally of those who believe: He brings them out of the depths of darkness and into the light, *ya'nī* from *al-shirk* to *al-īmān,* by sending Muhammad as a messenger. But those who disbelieved—the Jews—their ally was *al-ṭāghūt,* or Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf, who brought people in the light of believing in Muhammad prior to his mission, to the darkness that is rejecting him *(kufr bihī)* after he was sent. Consequently, they would be the inhibitants of

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[953] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 78.

the Fire and there they will remain.[954] Q33: 43, revealed to the Medinan Anṣār (Helpers),
states that God forgives them and He also orders the angels to ask forgiveness for them in
order for Him to bring them out from *al-shirk* to *al-īmān*.[955] Q14: 5 retells the story of
Mūsā whom God sent with His signs or miracles in order to lead his people from *al-shirk*
to *al-īmān* by reminding them of the punishment inflicted upon past nations, but also of
God's grace which had saved them from the grievous torment that Firʿaun inflicted upon
them.[956]

Thus, *al-ẓulumāt wa al-nūr* refers to *al-shirk* to *al-īmān*. The movement from *al-shirk* to *al-īmān* is possible only through God's will, undertaken through the sending of
prophets who would provide human beings with guidance. On the contrary, the
disbelievers whose ally was *al-ṭāghūt* led people from *al-īmān* to *shirk* or *kufr*. Here, the
opposition is between *al-īmān* and either *shirk* or *kufr*. As I explained before, belief *(al-īmān)* is always presented as one totality, while its opposite, disbelief, is always
distinguished, whether it is in the form of *al-shirk* and *al-kufr*.[957] Furthermore, Muqātil
distinguishes each of *al-shirk* and *al-kufr* into three different kinds from the most serious,
religious offense to the lesser one; for *kufr* (disbelief), the threefold distinction is: total
disbelief, rebellious disbelief, and ungratefulness; for *shirk* (associanism), the threefold

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[954] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/214-15.
[955] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/499.
[956] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/398.
[957] I have argued above that the exclusion or absence of the terms *al-īmān* and *al-islām* from the *Wujūh*
may either be due to the defect of the manuscripts of Muqātil's commentary, or may be due to the fact that
Muqātil has intentionally left them out to avoid the possibility that his readers would take the idea of *al-īmān* and *al-islām* lightly thus contradicting his very mission in propagating them, in opposition to *al-kufr*.
This is in spite of the fact that, in his major commentary, he actually treats the two terms as polysemic. See
footnote no. 50, 51, and 52.

distinction is: total associonism, obeying creation without worship, and expecting reward from fellow human beings. On the contrary, when presenting the idea of belief *(īmān)* and *islām* (submission to God), Muqātil appears to be insisting that there is only one correct way of belief and submission, and that is by upholding *tawḥīd* (strict monotheism) and *taṣdīq* (accepting Muhammad's prophethood). That is why, apart from a possibility that the extant manuscripts of Muqātil's *Wujūh* did not include everything that he had actually written, I also posit that Muqātil might have intentionally excluded the two terms *al-īmān* and *al-islām* to anticipate misunderstanding of the polysemicity of the two terms, which also suggests insincere belief and submission, in addition to sincere belief and submission.

Derivatives of al-ẓulumāt: al-ẓulumāt, al-ẓālimīn, al-ẓulm

There are three entries in Muqātil's *Wujūh* that are derivatives of *al-ẓulumāt*, namely *al-ẓulumāt, al-ẓālimīn,* and *al-ẓulm*, based on the order of their appearance in the commentary. *Al-ẓulumāt* has two meanings: *al-ahwāl* (terror or horror) and threefold property *(thalath khiṣāl).*[958] The two meanings of *al-ẓulumāt,* however, appear to be not too relevant to our discussion of Muqātil's exegetical and theological concerns. But if we may understand something from the two meanings of *al-ẓulumāt* here and their relation to the metaphoric use of *al-zulumāt* to refer to *al-shirk* or *al-kufr,* it is perhaps the connotation of deep darkness and terror or horror that such an offense entails that the Qur'an intends to communicate to its audience. The obscurity and danger of *al-shirk* and

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[958] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 78-9.

al-kufr are then contrasted with the pleasant and clear quality of light *al-nūr* not only in itself but also in its effect to other entities that surround it. Thus, true belief is depicted not only as having a clear foundation but also as bringing advantages to its holder.

The next derivative of *al-ẓulumāt* is *al-ẓālimīn*. It has seven meanings: polytheists *(al-mushrikīn),* a Muslim who wrongs himself with a sin other than *shirk (al-muslim alladhī yaẓlimu nafsahū bi dhanbin yuṣībuhū min ghayr shirk),* those who wrong other people *(alladhīna yaẓlimūn al-nās),* those who commit a wrongdoing other than *shirk (yaḍurrūna wa yanquṣūna anfusahum min ghayr shirk),* those who commit a wrongdoing in the form of *shirk* and *takdhīb (yaẓlimūna anfusahum bi al-shirk wa al-takdhīb),* those who reject/rebel *(yajḥadūn),* and thieves *(al-sāriqīn).*[959] In general, these meanings can be categorized into *shirk* and non-*shirk.* Our focus of discussion is on the meanings related to *shirk* and *kufr,* namely *al-mushrikīn, yaẓlimūna anfusahum bi al-shirk wa al-takdhīb* and *yajhadūn.*

Al-ẓālimīn means *al-mushrikīn* in Q7:44, 11:18, 76:31, and many other verses. Q7:44 describes a dialogue between the inhibitants of paradise and of hell in which the former tell the latter that they are receiving what God has promised them when they lived in the world, and ask the latter whether God's promise to them is equally true. The inhibitants of hell confirm that it is indeed true. In the midst of it, an angel announces that God's curse is upon the polytheists.[960] Likewise, Q11:18 also states that God's curse is upon those polytheists who made up a lie that Allāh has an associate *(bi anna maʿahū*

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[959] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 79-81.
[960] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/38.

sharīkan).[961] Q76:31 asserts that God admits whomsoever He wills into paradise, but as for polytheists He has prepared for them a painful punishment.[962] These verses show that in these sense of polytheists, *al-ẓālimīn* generates the idea that polytheism is cursed and finally is leading to punishment in hell. This reminds us of the meanings of *al-sayy'ah* and its derivatives that associate closely between polytheism or disbelief with punishment in hell.

Al-ẓālimīn means *yaẓlimūna anfusahum bi al-shirk wa al-takdhīb* (those who commit a wrongdoing in the form of *shirk* and *takdhīb*) in Q43: 76. The verse argues that God never wronged all disbelievers, in the sense that His punishment is well founded, that is, due to their refusal to believe *(li kufrihim wa takdhībihim)*.[963] This meaning of *al-ẓālimīn* is also reminiscent of the meanings of *al-sayyi'ah* and its derivatives, which point to shirk, and *takdhīb*, the two constituting elements of *kufr* (disbelief) that Muqātil has persistently attempted to condemn.

The last derivative of *al-ẓulumāt* in Muqātil's *Wujūh* is *al-ẓulm*. It has four meanings, namely polytheism *(al-shirk)*, a person's wrongdoing other than *shirk (ẓulm al-ʿabd nafsahū bi dhanbin yuṣībuhū min ghayr shirk)*, that which wrongs other people *(alladhī yaẓlim al-nās)*, and reduction *(al-naqṣ)*. Of four, only one concerns us here, that is, *al-shirk. Al-ẓulm* means *al-shirk* in Q6:82 and 31:13. Q6:82 was in a context Ibrāhīm told his people that only those who worshipped the one and only God and did not mix

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961 Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/277.
962 Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/536.
963 Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/802; Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 80-81.

their faith with idolatry would be secure, because they are rightly guided.[964] In Q31:13, while he passes the term *al-ẓulm* without any comment, Muqātil does suggest that it is related to the prohibition of associating God with others.[965] This meaning of *al-ẓālimīn* indicates that polytheism is a misguided act that leads to further wrongdoings and finally to punishment. That is why Ibrāhīm told his people that, unlike monotheism, polytheism does not confer security *(al-amn)*. On the contrary, as the meanings of other derivatives of *al-ẓulumāt* demonstrate, polytheism is cursed and is finally rewarded with punishment in hell.

Derivatives of al-nūr: al-nār

There is only one entry in Muqātil's *Wujūh* that is derivative of *al-nūr,* namely *al-nār.* It has three meanings, namely light *(al-nūr), mathalun ḍarabahū Allāh ʿAzza wa Jalla li ijtimāʾ al-Yahūd ʿalā ʿadāwat al-nabī SAW* (a metaphor that God made with regard to the Jewish conspiracy against the Prophet Muhammad), and burning fire *(al-nār allatī taḥriqu)*.[966] In all cases to which Muqātil refers, the term *al-nār* in the Qur'an offers more negative connotations than the term *al-nūr* that is always positive in its meanings.

Al-nār means light *(al-nūr)* in three places in the Qur'an: 20:10, 27:7, and 28:29. In Q20:10, Muqātil interprets the fire *(al-nār)* that Mūsā saw in the Sacred Land as the light of God *(nūr rabb al-ʿālamīn)*.[967] Likewise, in Q27:7, which also tells the same story of Mūsā seeing fire *(al-nār)*, Muqātil interprets it as the light of God *(nūr rabb al-*

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[964] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/572-73.
[965] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/434.
[966] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 215-16.
[967] Muqātl, *Tafsīr,* 3/22.

'izzah).[968] In Q28:29, which also deals with the same event that Mūsā saw fire, Muqātil interprets it as the light in the Sacred Land *(al-nūr bi arḍ al-muqaddasah).*[969] In all three verses, the fire *(al-nār)* is the one that Mūsā saw, and Muqātil has interpreted it as the light of God in the Sacred Land. As such, the fire represents the light of God, a metaphor of God's guidance closely associated with Him, which eventually will lead Mūsā to a series of great events up to the freedom that the Israelites gained from slavery of the Pharaoh until they reclaimed the Sacred Land. In short, *al-nār* in the sense of *nūr al-rabb* is a liberating light of guidance.

Al-nār means the Jewish conspiracy against the Prophet, appearing in Q5:64. The verse denies the statement of the Jews, such as Ibn Ṣūriyā and Finḥāṣ, that God is tight-fisted by not giving them ample provision. Instead, the Qur'an argues that God's hands are open wide: He gives as He pleases. But God, indeed, held up their provision after they made lawful what God had made unlawful, that is when they commited *shirk* and bribery to inclor legal decisions, upon which their pious and scholars were silent. Furthermore, Muqātil maintains that the revelation of the Qur'an—especially those pertaining to the matter of *rajm* (stoning), *al-dimā'* (blood feud), and *na't Muḥammad* (the description of Muhammad in the Torah) would increase defiance and insolence in many of them, especially the Jews of Banū al-Naḍīr. Consequently, God planted hatred among the Jews and Christians until the Day of Resurrection by which they hated one another. As a result, when they set up a conspiracy against the Prophet, God would put it

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[968] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/296.
[969] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/343.

out.[970] Thus, this meaning suggests the idea of *takdhīb*, that is, rejection of Muhammad's prophethood. In this regard, unlike in the case of Mūsā that is guiding and liberating, *al-nār* means something that is flaming and dangerous. It is a burning light in the breasts of the Jews (and the Christians) to stop Muhammad's mission, in part because they objected some of the teachings, which were written in their own scripture, that Muhammad wanted to reestablish, including stoning and blood feud money. Accordingly, they denied that Muhammad was ever mentioned in their scripture. Thus, pointing to a negative meaning, the fire in this case is a conspiracy against Muhammad's prophetical mission, which is another way to say *takdhīb*, that is, refusal to believe in Muhammad. When related to a protagonist, fire means guiding light; but when it is associated with antagonists, it is a burning rage and rejection, including that of Muhammad's prophethood.

Al-nār means burning fire in Q2:24, 66:10, and 85:5. In Q2:24 it is stated that this fire is hellfire prepared for the disebelivers who rejected *tawḥīd (u'iddat li al-kāfirīn)*.[971] In 66:10, Muqātil maintains, the disbelievers for whom the fire was prepared were the wives of the Prophets Nūḥ and Lūṭ who betrayed their husbands in terms of faith. Consequently, they too would be thrown into the hellfire, despite their being the wives of prophets. This verse, Muqātil argues, was to remind ʿĀ'ishah and Ḥafṣah, two of the Prophet Muhammad's wives, of the consequences that they might face if they protested against the Prophet's decisions *(bi taẓahurihimā ʿalā al-nabī)*. If they kept doing so, they might well be thrown into hellfire despite the fact that they are the Prophet's wives.[972] In

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[970] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/490.
[971] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/94.
[972] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/379.

this respect, fire offers a literal meaning pointing to the hellfire, in contrast to the fire in the case of Mūsā and Jewish conspiracy, which is metaphorical of guidance and rejection, respectively. But in all cases, fire is associated with the prophets as protagonists—Mūsā and Muhammad—in relation their prophetical task, both in public and domestic domain. But both protagonists, i.e., the prophets, and the antagonists, namely the Jews and the rebellious wives of the prophets, shape the intended meanings of fire. In general, the meanings of *al-nār* in this case suggest a more negative meaning than a positive one, and, as such, it is rather counterproductive to the meanings of *al-nūr* that is always positive, as the opposition of *al-ẓulumāt*.

Al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar

The last oppositional entry, related to the opposition of *tawḥīd* and *shirk* and of *taṣdīq* and *takdhīb*, is *al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar* (commanding right and forbidding wrong). Muqātil assigns this phrase two meanings: first, *al-amr bi al-tawḥīd wa al-nahy ʿan al-shirk* (commanding *tawḥīd* and forbidding *shirk*), and second, *al-amr bi ittibāʿ al-nabī SAW wa al-taṣdīq bihī wa al-nahy ʿan al-takdhīb bihī* (commanding the following and acceptance of the Prophet and forbidding the rejection of him).[973]

The first meaning, *al-amr bi al-tawḥīd wa al-nahy ʿan al-shirk* (commanding *tawḥīd* and forbidding *shirk*) occurs, according to Muqātil, in Q3:110, 9:112, 31:13 and 17. Q3:110 was revealed in relation to the Medinan Jews who told some of the Muslims,

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[973] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 74-75.

including ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd, Muʿādh ibn Jabal, and Sālim *mawlā* Abū Ḥudhayfah, that their religion (Judaism) was better than that of the Muslims. In response, the verse argues that the Muslim community is the best community singled out for humanity commanding the people to *al-īmān* and forbidding them from *shirk,* in addition to its upholding *tawḥīd.* The verse also advises the Jews to believe in Muhammad and the truth that he brought. Still, only a few Jews believed, and the majority remained sinners.[974] Q9:112 mentions those who are promised paradise, namely those who repent from their sins, those who uphold *tawḥīd,* those who fast, those who perform the obligatory prayers, those who command belief in *tawḥīd* and forbid *shirk,* and those who maintain God's limits. These are the recipients of the good news of paradise.[975] Curiously, Muqātil mentions Q31:13 as an evidence for the meaning of the phrase *al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar* although the verse does not contain any terms from this phrase. Q31:13, however, conveys the message that is at the core of *al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar*, that is, Luqmān's advice to his son not to commit *shirk.* Q31:17 conveys Luqmān's advise to his son to perform prayers, command *tawḥīd* and forbid *shirk*, and to be patient in enduring any hardship in doing so.[976] Muqātil seems to suggest that Islam is the religion in which the performance of commanding right and forbidding wrong is actively carried out. Furthermore, he suggests that this doctrine distinguishes Muslim community and, at least, the other two religious communities of the Jews and Christians who, in his view, do not cherish this doctrine as much as the Muslim

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[974] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/295.
[975] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/198-99.
[976] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/435.

community. In his legal commentary, as I discussed earlier in the previous chapter, Muqātil advocates the pacifist approach in carrying out this doctrine primarily because it is easily misunderstood as condoning the use of violence and thus abused and abusive. Muqātil's non-violent approach in this respect is very important since, despite the content of the doctrine is of the ultimate significance to him, that is, the propagation of *tawḥīḍ* and the condemnation of *shirk,* he is not tempted to justify everything to achieve that end. Instead, he reverses the priority that the tradition-based, threefold attitude toward facing wrongdoings espouses, and recommends the bottom up approach, from the allegedly weakest manifestation of *īmān*, namely denial in one's heart to speech and finally act. As long as his legal commentary is concerned, Muqātil's starts the application of the doctrine commanding right and forbidding wrong from individuals before it is applied in society at large. What is fundamental in Muqātil's framework is that every individual has access to good education so that he or she has a qualified knowledge of what is right and wrong and then lives accordingly. As such, Muqātil's approach is more preventive than curative.

The second meaning, *al-amr bi ittibāʿ al-nabī SAW wa al-taṣdīq bihī wa al-nahy ʿan al-takdhīb bihī* (commanding the following and acceptance of the Prophet and forbidding the rejection of him) appears in Q3:113-114 and 9:71. Q3:113-114 describe two different groups of Jews, one which rejected Muhammad's prophethood, and another which believed in Muhammad and followed him. The believers among the Jews were upright, and they recited God's revelations during the night, bowed down in worship, believed in *tawḥīd* and the Last Day, commanded belief in Muhammad *(īmānan bi Muḥammad SAW)* forbade the rejection of him *(takdhīb bi Muḥammad SAW),* and were

quick to do good deeds. These people are among the righteous.[977] Likewise, Q9:71 states that those who uphold *tawḥīd*, men and women, support each other, command belief in Muhammad and forbid the rejection of him, keep up their prayers, pay the prescribed alms, and obey God and His Messenger.[978] The believers who commanded *taṣdīq Muḥammad* and forbade *takdhīb Muḥammad* are contrasted with the hypocrites *(munāfiqūn)* in Q9:67, whose identity Muqātil does not mention, who commanded *takdhīb Muḥammad* and forbade *taṣdīq Muḥammad.*[979]

Thus, if the first meaning of *al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar* is commanding *tawḥīd* and forbidding *shirk,* the second meaning is commanding *taṣdīq Muḥammad* and forbidding *takdhīb Muḥammad.* The two meanings of *al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar* are the best representatation of Muqātil exegetical thrust and his tehological concerns that have undergirded his exegetical endeavors. Muqātil has oriented the whole interpretive enterprise that he carries out toward propagating *īmān* and condemnation of *kufr,* the two constituting elements of each of which have been well summarized by the two meanings of this doctrine which contrast *tawḥīd* and *shirk,* as well as *taṣdīq* and *takdhīb.* Once more, the oppositional entry very much vindicates Muqātil's exegetical thrust and theological concerns in a way that is not achieved at through other entries. These oppositional entries best represents Muqātil's much embraced binary opposition that tends to exhaust the two extreme positions to seek further possibilities that will overcome the stalemate that such opposition will likely face.

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[977] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/296.
[978] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/181.
[979] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/180.

In other words, this binary opposition approach represents Muqātil's uncompromising theological views with regard to the teachings that Muhammad and the Qur'an brought, as well as previous prophets and scriptures, against the alleged deviations perpetrated by the followers of the earlier prophets, such as Jews and Christians. His search for alternatives that go beyond such a binary opposition reflects Muqātil's pragmatism with regard to legal decisions that will enable these different religious communities to coexist and build relationship.

Derivative of al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar: al-amr and al-maʿrūf

There are two other entries in Muqātil's *wujūh* which share the same roots with some terms in the phrasal entry *al-amr bi al-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar,* namely *al-amr* and *al-maʿrūf. Al-amr* has thirteen meanings, some of which are indeed relevant to our discussion of Muqātil's exegetical and theological concerns. On the other hand, *al-maʿrūf*, which has four meanings, offers no relevance at all.[980] I will therefore deal only with the relevant meanings of *al-amr* in the following.

The meanings of *al-amr* include: *dīn al-islām* ("the religion of Islam")*, al-qawl* (saying/speech)*, al-ʿadhāb* (punishment)*, ʿĪsā ʿalayhi al-salām* (Jesus)*, al-qatl bi Badr*

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[980] The four meanings that Muqātil assigns to *al-maʿrūf* are as follows: necessity *(al-farḍ)*, that divorced women are allowed to wear make-up after the expiricy of her wating period to be married again *(an tuzayyin al-marʾah nafsahā baʿd inqiḍāʾ al-ʿiddah),* good promise/word *(al-ʿidah al-ḥasanah),* and what is affordable *(mā tayassara ʿalā al-insān).* The first meaning is related to the poor guardian of orphans' property who is allowed to take from that property only out of necessity *(farḍ)*. The second to the fourth meanings of *al-maʿrūf* are related to the divorce process between a man and a woman; the second meaning points to the time when a divorcee is allowed to beautify herself again, after her waiting period expires, in order to be married again; the third meaning is related to the divorcing husband who is commanded to treat his divorced wife with kindness and offer some material gifts affordable to him. See Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 75-6.

(the battle of Badr), *fatḥ Makkah* (the conquest of Mecca), *qatl Banī Qurayẓah wa jalā' ahl al-Naḍīr* (the murder of (Jewish) Banū Qurayẓah and expulsion of (Jewish) people of al-Naḍīr [fromMedina]), *al-qiyāmah* (The End Day), *al-qaḍā'* (God's decision), *al-waḥy* (revelation), *al-amr bi'aynihī* (matter), and *al-dhanb* (sin).[981] Of these, the ones that are relevant to our discussion of Muqātil's theology are: *dīn al-islām, al-qatl bi Badr,* and *qatl Banī Qurayẓah wa jalā' ahl al-Naḍīr.* In general, the meanings of *al-amr*, especially exemplified here, provide an assertion of the imminent victory of Islam over its opponents, be they Meccan disbelievers, the Jews, or the hypocrites who refused to believe in Muhammad's mission. *Al-amr* offers meanings that set up an argument for the truth of Islam against other religious traditions, which are basically the defiance of this primordial religion after people split it up into different sects.

    Dīn al-islām is implied as the meaning of *al-amr* in Q9:48, 23:53, and 21:93. Q9:48 discusses the attitude of the hypocrites who, in addition to their reluctance to participate in war with the Prophet, always attempted to stir up *kufr (al-fitnah),* especially when the mission of the Prophet and the Muslims did not work well, as in the case of the battle of Tābūk. The Qur'an asserts that these hypocrites, who are described in 9:44 as disbelieving in God and *tawḥīd* as well as the Day of Resurrection, will keep doing so until Islam is victorious.[982] Q23:53 describes the people's defiance of the true religion (*islām*), by splitting their community into sects, namely Judaism, Christianity, Sabean, Zoroastrianism, and many others.[983] Q21:93 conveys a similar message as 22:53 in which

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[981] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 198-200.
[982] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/172-73.
[983] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/159.

people split their true religion *(farraqū dīnahum al-islām alladī umirū bihī)* into sects.[984] In this case, *dīn al-islām* is described as the primordial religion of total submission to God, taught to the all prophets and written in all scriptures, including Muhammad and the Qur'an. The reluctance of the hypocrites to trust and join the Prophetic cause suggests that they did not totally submit to God by following His prophet. The invention of sectarian religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, Sabeanism, Zoroastrianism, and others is a proof of people's deviation from the teachings of early prophets and scriptures that commanded full submission to God. They have departed from the true, primordial religion God had sent them: *dīn al-islām*.[985] In much of his criticism toward non-Muslims, Muqātil has made it clear that these religious communities have been unfaithful to their own scriptures and to the teachings of their prophets, not only in terms of their committing *shirk*—such as divinizing 'Uzayr and 'Īsā—but also in their refusal to accept Muhammad's prophethood *(takdhīb),* as well as their abandoning the some legal stipulations written in their scriptures, such as stoning *(rajm)* and blood feud money *(diyah)*.

Al-amr means *al-qatl bi Badr* (the battle of Badr) in Q40:78 and 8:44. Q40:78 maintains that any prophets God had sent would not be able to provide evidence for their prophetic claims unless with God's permission. Likewise, when the Meccan disbelievers asked Muhammad to perform a miracle, God told them the same thing. But God also told

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[984] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/92.
[985] I have discussed, in the second chapter on *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* Muqātil's reprimand toward the Jews and Christians, as well as other religious communities, for inventing Judaism and Christianity and other religions, which he actually considers to be satanic. The only true religion in Muqātil's view is *islām,* propagated by all prophets and written in all scriptures.

them that the punishment for the Meccan disbelievers would soon be realized in the battle of Badr to invalidate their claim that there would be no such punishment for them in this world.[986] Q8:44 maintains that God had preordained the small number of the armies in the two warring parties in the battle of Badr to raise the morale of the believers in their combat to facilitate the victory of Islam.[987] The battle of Badr, unlike any other battles during Muhammad's lifetime, occupies a very significant place in Muqātil's theological framework. It is the worldly punishment that God had promised Muhammad's opponents, when they believed that no such punishment would be inflicted upon them although they had frequently challenged Muhammad to send it. In Muqātil's view, the battle of Badr is similar to the punishment inflicted upon the people of previous prophets after they rejected their prophetical mission. The battle of Badr, like other punishments meted out to bygone communities, is part of *sunnat Allāh* ("God's custom") in which divine punishment was sent to the prophet's community because of their refusal to believe in their prophetical teachings, usually after the prophet left them and moved to a new place. In the case of Muhammad, the Meccan disbelievers were punished in the battle of Badr, in which they suffered a great loss, occurring after Muhammad's migration to Medina. Muqātil's belief that the battle of Badr was a divine punishment for disbelievers is because the conditions of the two armies were not balanced, with the enemy having more combatants as well as weaponry. The victory that Muhammad and his followers gained was a sort of miracle, and their enemy's defeat was thus a punishment.

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[986] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/722.
[987] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/117.

Al-amr means *qatl Banī Qurayẓah wa jalā' ahl al-Naḍīr* (the killing of Banū Qurayẓah and the expulsion of people of Naḍīr) in Q2:109 and 5:52. Q2:109 was revealed in relation to the invitation of some of the Medinan Jews, following Muslim loss in the battle of Uḥud—to Ḥudhayfah and ʿAmmār to embrace Judaism back, claiming that it was better than the religion Muhammad brought. But Ḥudhayfah and ʿAmmār refused their invitation, and they instead reaffirmed their belief in Muhammad and his teachings. Q2:109 then advises the believers to avoid the Jews when they ask them to join their religion because God willl deal with them due to their rejection of Muhammad and Islam. The form of punishment that God would inflict upon the Jews, according to Muqātil, was the killing and capture of Banū Qurayẓāh, and the extradition of Banū al-Naḍīr from Medina to Adhraʿāt and Arīḥā in Syria.[988] Like the battle of Badr in relation the Meccan disbelievers, the killing of Banū Qurayẓāh and expulsion of Banū al-Naḍīr, for Muqātil, are forms of divine punishment to the Jews for their refusal to acknowledge Muhammad's prophethood, in addition to their enmity to and conspiracy against him. Such punishment on opponents is an indication of the truth that Muhammad's prophetical mission entailed.

Interrreligious Words: Shiyaʿan, al-aḥzāb, al-jihād, al-ḥarb

In this part, I will analyse Muqātil's *Wujūh* based on a shared theme rather than its linguistic form and the interconnected meanings of the entries, as I have done prior to this. Since the major themes that I have decided to tackle in Muqātil's other

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[988] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/130-31.

commentaries are largely interreligious, I will do exactly the same here. There are four entries in Muqātil's *wujūh* whose meanings are related directly to interreligious affairs, namely *shiya'an, al-aḥzāb, al-jihād,* and *al-ḥarb.*

The first two entries—namely *shiya'an* and *al-aḥzāb*—are related to the fragmented socio-religious groups that Muqatil mentioned in his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* and with which I have dealt in my discussion of the commentary, especially when I was discussing Islam as the primordial religion. There, Muqatil argued that while humanity initially shared the same religion—namely *islām*—people had now fragmented into different religious groups: Jews, Christians, Ṣābi'īn, Majūs, and many others.[989] The main characteristic that these groups shared with each other was the fact that they worshipped creations, without or along with their worshiping of God. They were proud of who they were and were in competition with one another. In his further explanation of the existence of six religious communities, Muqatil mentions that five of them—Jewish, Christian, Sabian, Magian, and Polytheist—are "satanic" and only one of them—Islam— is the religion for God.[990] Of the last two entries, *al-jihād* and *al-ḥarb,* I have dealt with the first in my discussion of Muqātil's *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah.* In that legal commentary, Muqātil offers two sets of rulings on jihad based on the identity of the enemy among non-Muslims. If the enemy is People of Scripture, they have two options available, paying jizyah or fighting. However, if the enemy is polytheist, Arab polytheists specifically, the choice is to embrace Islam or be killed. In this respect, Muqātil is

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[989] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/159.
[990] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/119.

consistent in stating that for the People of Scripture conversion was not required as long as they were willing to live peacefully politically under the Muslim government by paying jizyah, while they retained their own faiths. Conversely, the Arab polytheists had to convert if they did not want to fight.

Shiya'an and al-Aḥzāb

There is a great similarity between the meanings of the term *shiya'an* and those of the term *al-ahzab;* they all bring forth negative images of groups that rejected Muhammad's prophethood and fought against him. If the meanings of *shiya'an* point to the fact that these fragmented groups went astray and were therefore punished by God due to their acts, the meanings of *al-aḥzāb* further this negative image, arguing that these groups were not only led astray but also hostile to the prophets and their missions. But underlying the negative portrayal of these fragmented groups is their rejection of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*.

Shiya'an

The term *shiya'an* is assigned five meanings, namely *firaqan aḥzāban* (fragmented groups), *al-jins* (race or stock), and *al-millah* (sect or denomination), *tashayyuʿ* or *tafashshaw* (spreading or circulating), and *al-ahwā' al-mukhtalifah* (varied inclinations).[991] *Shiya'an* means fragmented groups *(firaqan ahzaban)* in Q6:159, 30:32, 28:4, and 15:10.[992] Q6:159, according to Muqātil, describes those who dissected the

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[991] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 163-64.
[992] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 164.

primordial religion, *al-islām,* into different sects, such as Judaism and Christianity, that they later embraced, prior to the prophetic mission of Muhammad. Consequently, these people were fragmented—into Jewish, Christian, Sabian, and many other groups—and the Qur'an excludes Muhammad from either or all of them together.[993] Q30:32, according to Muqātil, invited the Meccan disbelievers to uphold *tawḥīd* and not to be part of those who had split the primordial religion and become fragmented groups.[994] Q28:4 provides a different picture of the fragmented groups created by Fir'aun in Egypt in which the Egyptians harassed the Jews by killing the latter's male babies.[995] Q15:10 tells Muhammad that the prophets before him were also sent to similar fragmented people of past nations.[996]

The second meaning of *shiya'an* is race or stock *(al-jins),* and it can be encountered in Q28:15.[997] The verse describes how Mūsā found two people, who came from different ethnic backgrounds, fighting. One of the two belonged to Mūsā's own race, that is, of the Israelite descent, and the other was of the Coptic race.[998] The third meaning is sect or denomination *(al-millah).*[999] Such can be found in four different places in the Qur'an: Q54:51, 34:54, 19:69, and 37:83. Q54:51 reminds the people of Mecca that God had punished people like them in the past *('adhdhabnā ikhwānakum ahla millatikum)* because they rejected their prophets.[1000] Q34:54 conveys a similar message

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[993] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/599.
[994] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/414.
[995] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/335.
[996] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/425.
[997] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 164.
[998] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/339.
[999] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 164.
[1000] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/184.

that the past nations had been punished due their disbelief.[1001] 19:69 predicts that the

fragmented groups will be punished due to their disobedience.[1002] Q37:83 offers a

different kind of a group *(shīʿah)*, in a more positive tone, for Ibrāhīm was said to be of

the same *shīʿah* as Nūḥ, in the sense that Ibrāhīm embraced the same religion as did Nūḥ

(Ibrāhīm ʿala millat Nūḥ).[1003] Thus, *shiyaʿan* means *al-millah* in both positive and

negative tones, pointing to the fact that these people were of the same religious faith.

The fourth meaning of *shiyaʿan* is spreading or circulating *(tafasshaw).[1004]* Such

is expressed in Q24:19. The verse, according to Muqātil, describes those who liked to

spread indecency among the believers, especially in relation to their accusation of

adultery between ʿĀ'ishah and Ṣafwān.[1005] The fifth and last meaning is varied

inclinations *(al-ahwā' al-mukhtalifah).[1006]* This can be found in Q6:65, which states that

such varied inclinations are a symptom of discordant factions which accordingly lead to a

violent conflict with one another. In a way, the discordant factions that lead to conlict is

a form of punishment from God.[1007]

Thus, as mentioned above, the term *shiyaʿan* (sing. *shīʿah*) points to five

meanings: fragmented groups, human race/stock, sect/denomination,

circulation/spreading, and varied inclinations. These senses in general, as far as the

examples of Qur'anic uses that Muqātil mentioned are concerned, sustain a rather

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[1001] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/539.
[1002] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/634.
[1003] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/611.
[1004] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 164.
[1005] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/391.
[1006] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 164.
[1007] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/565.

negative connotation, not just difference or plurality of being. The entry *shiyaʿan* points to competing religious factions, fighting human races, punished religious groups, and circulating indecency. There is a consistently negative tone in Muqatil's explanations of the fragmented religious groups other than Islam in this entry.

Al-Aḥzāb

The term *al-aḥzāb* has four meanings.[1008] First, it means the disbelievers of Banū Umayyah, Banū al-Mughīrah, Āl Abī Ṭalḥah, all of who were from the Quraysh tribe.[1009] Examples can be encountered in Q13:36, 11:17, and 38:11. Q13:36 describes two groups of people; the first was the believers of People of Scripture, such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām and his companions, who rejoiced for the revelation of the Qur'an; second, was the so-called *al-ahzāb*, consisting of Ibn Umayyah, Ibn al-Mughīrah, Āl ibn Abī Ṭalḥah ibn al-ʿUzzā ibn Quṣay, who rejected *al-Raḥmān,* the Day of Resurrection, and Muhammad's prophethood. It was to the second group that Muhammad was commanded to announce his mission for upholding *tawḥīd* and condemning *shirk*.[1010] Q11:17 also mentions the same two groups of people, the believers among *ahl al-Tawrāh* who believed in the Qur'an, and the members of *al-ahzāb* who disbelieved in it. These disbelievers of the Quraish said that the Qur'an was not from God, but from Satan, called *al-ray*.[1011] Q38:11 states that the *ahzāb* is a weak alliance and will be crushed. Indeed, they were later defeated in the battle of Badr.[1012] In this respect, *al-ahzāb* points to the Quraishī

[1008] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 171-74.
[1009] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 172.
[1010] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/382.
[1011] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/276.
[1012] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/637-38.

disebelievers.

The second meaning of *al-aḥzāb* points to Christian sects *(al-Naṣārā min al-aḥzāb)*: Nestorian, Jacobite, and Melkite.[1013] Instances can be found in Q19:37, and 43:65. Q19:37 describes how the Christians formed factions around ʿĪsā *(tahazzabū fī ʿĪsā)* and, in doing so, they disobeyed ʿĪsā's command to uphold *tawḥīd*. The Nestorians said: ʿIsā is son of God *(ʿĪsā ibn Allāh)*. The Mar-Jacobites said: ʿIsa is God *(ʿĪsā huwa Allāh)*. The Melkites said: God is one of the three *(inna Allāh thālith thalāthah)*.[1014] Q43:65 conveys a similar message in relation to these three factions of Christianity, but with a statement slightly different from that of the Mar-Jacobites. In his commentary on 19:37, Muqātil describes the Mar-Jacobites as saying: ʿIsā is God *(ʿĪsā huwa Allāh)*, but in his commentary on 43:65, he describes them as saying: God is ʿIsā son of Maryam *(inna Allāh ʿĪsā ibn Maryam)*.[1015] In this regard, *al-aḥzāb* means that the Christian sects that had divinized ʿĪsā and deviated from his own teaching of *tawḥīd*.

The third meaning of *al-aḥzāb* signifies the disbelievers of the people of Nūḥ, of ʿĀ, of Thamūd, up to the people of Shuʿayb.[1016] This can found in Q38:12-13 and 40:30-31. Q38:12-13 explained that of these past nations rejected their prophets, and therefore deserved punishment. This verse, according to Muqātil, was meant as a consolation for Muhammad who was facing the rejection of his own people so that he might be patient knowing that all prophets before him faced the same challenge *(yuʿazī al-nabī li yaṣbira*

[1013] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 172.
[1014] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/628.
[1015] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/800-801.
[1016] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 173.

'ala takdhīb kuffār Makkah).[1017] Q40:30-31 tell the story of a Coptic believer who, having hidden his belief for a century, told the Egyptians that he feared their rejection of Mūsā would lead to punishment inflicted upon the past nations *(yawm al-aḥzāb).*[1018] In this respect, *al-aḥzāb* refers to bygone people who rejected their prophets, told in the Qur'an to offer solace for Muhammad that he was not alone in facing that rejection.

Finally, the meaning of *al-aḥzāb* points to Abū Sufyān in relation to Arab and Jewish tribes, who teamed up against the Prophet in the Battle of Trench, in which they fought in three places.[1019] This can be found in Q33:10 and 20. Q33:10 describes how the *aḥzāb* attacked the Prophet and believers during the Battle of Trench: a group attacked from the top of the valley in the east, under the command of Mālik ibn ʿAwf al-Naḍarī, ʿUyaynah ibn Ḥisn al-Fazārī (who brought a thousand people from Ġaṭafān), Ṭulayḥah ibn Khuwaylid al-Asadī, Ḥuyay ibn Akhṭab from the Jewish Banū Qurayẓah, and ʿĀmir ibn al-Ṭufayl who led people from Hawāzin. Another group attacked from the bottom of the valley on the west, led by Abū Sufyān who coordinated the Meccan people and Yazīd ibn Khulays who led the Quraish tribe, and another group, under the leadership of al-Aʿwar al-Sulamī, attacked from the trench itself. This massive attack created some doubts among the believers.[1020] Q33:20, however, describes how, due to God's help by implanting fear in the hearts of the enemy and His sending of strong wind and an invisible troop of angels, the army of *aḥzāb* went back to Mecca, leaving the trench.[1021]

[1017] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/638.
[1018] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/711-12.
[1019] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 173.
[1020] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/476.
[1021] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/482-83.

In this regard, *al-aḥzāb* means the joint forces of the Arab and Jewish tribes in fighting Muhammad and the believers during the Battle of Trench in Medina.

Based on Muqatil's explanation of the four senses of the term *al-aḥzāb,* as it is used in the Qur'an, the fragmented groups mentioned can be categorized into four kinds: the first is the Arab Quraishī disebelievers who rejected Muhammad's teachings; the second is the Christian sects that had divinized 'Īsā and deviated from his own teaching of *tawḥīd;* the third is bygone people who rejected their prophets and were punished for their rejection, and fourth is the joint forces of the Arab and Jewish tribes in fighting Muhammad and the believers during the battle of Trench in Medina, in which they suffered loss and the Jewish tribes received further consequences of their conspiracy.

Al-Jihād and al-Ḥarb

At first glance, despite its compactness, Muqatil's discussion of jihād in this commentary appears to be more nuanced than that in *Tafsīr al-Khams Mi'at Āyah.* While in his legal commentary Muqātil seemed to subscribe to the physical jihād as warfare, albeit as a defensive measure, in this lexical commentary Muqātil suggests a varied interpretation of jihād as not merely physical warfare, but also as both a communicative and performative act. With regard to *al-ḥarb,* Muqatil interprets the term as either physical warfare or disbelief *(kufr).* As such, the term *al-jihād* and *al-ḥarb* coincides in the sense of physical warfare. Yet the two are different in that while the term *al-jihād* sustains a positive tone that underlies all of its three senses, the term *al-ḥarb,* on the contrary, points to a negative tone for, apart from pointing to violence, it is signifying denial of truth.

Al-Jihād

The term *al-jihād* has three meanings. The first meaning is undertaking jihād through speech or communication *(al-jihād bi al-qawl)*. This can be found in three places in the Qur'an: Q25:52, 9:73, and 66:9.[1022] Q25:52 describes Muhammad as a messenger whom God told not to heed the Meccan disbelievers in their call for their ancestors' religion; instead, Muhammad was commanded to undertake *jihādan kabīran* (great jihād) against them using the Qur'an.[1023] Q9:73 orders the Prophet to launch jihād against both disbelievers and hypocrites. But if jihād against the Arab disbelievers *(kuffār al-ʿArab)* was undertaken with swords, that against the hypocrites was done with the tongue. This is irrespective of the fact that the two had been equally threatened in the Qur'an with the same punishment in Jahannam.[1024] Q66:9 communicates a similar message as does Q9:73.[1025]

The second meaning of *al-jihād* is waging war with weapons *(al-qitāl bi al-silāḥ)*. This can be found in three different qur'anic passages, namely Q4:95, 9:73, and 66:9.[1026] Q4:94 explains that those who commit themselves and their possessions to striving in God's way *(al-mujāhidūn fī sabīl Allāh bi amwālihim wa anfusihim)* are not equal to those who stay at home without a justifiable excuse *(al-qāʿidūn ʿan al-ghazw bi lā ʿudhrin)*. Altough the believers may stay at home with a justifiable excuse, God has ranked *al-mujāhidūn fī sabīl Allāh* higher, and even much higher—at about seventy

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[1022] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 119.
[1023] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/237.
[1024] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/182.
[1025] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 4/379.
[1026] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 119.

levels higher—than those who stay at home without an acceptable reason.[1027] Those who strive in God's way and those who stay at home with an acceptable reason, however, are equally promised paradise.[1028] Q9:73 and 66:9, discussed earlier in the first meaning of *al-jihād,* order the war against the disbelievers with sword.[1029]

The third meaning of *al-jihād* is action *(al-ʿamal).* This can be found in three Qur'anic passages: Q29:6 and 69, and 22:78.[1030] Q29:6 explains that those who do good deed do so for their own benefit *(man yaʿmal al-khayra fa innamā yaʿmalu linafsihī);*[1031] Q29:69 states that those who do good deeds merely to serve God, He would surely guide them to His ways.[1032]

Thus, according to Muqātil, jihād is not necessarily undertaken through warfare; it can also be done through normal life activities, such as through acts of communication and performing good deeds. Physical jihad as warfare, according to Muqātil, was to be waged only against the Arab disbelievers *(kuffār al-ʿArab).* Muqātil's nuanced interpretation of jihād denies a tendency to generalize this concept as always pointing to war. If anything, in Muqātil's perspective, underlying the idea of jihād is everything that one does in life for the sake of God's cause. Muqātil has expressed this general view of jihād more explicitly in his major commentary and the *Wujūh*. He did not do so in his legal commentary because he put more attention to explaining the legal rulings on some aspects of historical jihād during the lifetime of the Prophet, including the rulings on

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[1027] Muqātil, *Tafsīr ,* 1/400-401.
[1028] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/401.
[1029] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/182, 4/379.
[1030] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 119.
[1031] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/373.
[1032] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 3/390-91.

battlegain division, ratio of the combatants in warfare, etc. But since Muqātil primarily sees jihād as a defensive measure, not as offesinsive medium for expansion, what he underlines is not the physical warfare in the idea or practice of jihād, but its spirit as doing one's best in God's cause. In this last sense, jihād is not exclusively the property of war, but also that of normal life. As such, Muqātil is of the view that jihād can be undertaken *bi al-qawl* and *bi al-'amal.* Consequently, jihād may permeates one's whole life as long as it is intended for the sake of supporting God's cause. Muqātil's partially pacifist outlook on jihād vindicates even further his vision for peaceful coexistence with other people even in propagating what what he considers the fundamental teachings of Islam, namely *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq.*

Al-Ḥarb

In Muqātil's *wujūh, al-ḥarb* is assigned two meanings.[1033] The first meaning is disbelief *(kufr).*[1034] Examples can be found in Q2:278-9 and Q5:33. Q2:278-9 stresses that disobedience to the Prophet's instruction is an act of disbelief against God and His Messenger.[1035] In Q5:33, Muqātil understands the term *muḥārabah* as *al-shirk* or *al-kufr ba'd al-islām,* that is, associating God with creation or disbelief after embracing Islam.[1036]

The second meaning of *al-ḥarb* is physical warfare *(al-qital).* This can be found in two Qur'anic passages: Q8:57 and 5:64.[1037] In both, the term *ḥarb* is interpreted as

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[1033] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 150.
[1034] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 150.
[1035] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/226-27.
[1036] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 1/472.
[1037] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 150.

warfare.[1038] 'If you meet them in battle,' *ya'ni in warfare,* 'make a fearsome example of them to those who come after them.'[1039] 'Whenever they kindle the fire of war, God will put it out,' *ya'ni warfare to the Prophet.[1040]*

Thus, based on Muqatil's exegesis, even the term *al-ḥarb,* which usually means fighting, warfare, or battle, offers another sense, depending upon the context within which it is used. In this respect, the term *al-ḥarb* means either physical warfare or disbelief *(kufr),* the latter of which suggests a general denial or rejection of the truth that God and His Prophet have invited people to embrace. In relation to the term jihād, the term *al-ḥarb* coincides with it in the sense of physical warfare. Yet the two are different in that while the term jihād sustains a positive tone that underlies all three senses, the term *al-ḥarb,* on the contrary, points to a negative tone, for apart from pointing to violence, it signifies denial of truth. But what is significant in Muqātil's interpretation of the term *al-ḥarb* is the fact that he relates it to his theological concern, the propagation of *īmān* and the condemnation of *kufr.* Fighting against the prophet is not necessarily physical fighting, but may well be denying his teachings that centered around the upholding of *īmān,* especially in relation to *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq,* and the abandoning of *kufr,* especially in relation to *shirk* and *takdhīb.* And in Muqātil's exegetical and theological framework, facing such *ḥarb* must be undertaken peacefully using the best ethical ways; believers may resort to physical warfare only when they are attacked and hence have to defend themselves.

[1038] Muqātil, *Tafsīr,* 2/122, 1/490.
[1039] Q8: 57.
[1040] Muqātil, *Wujūh,* 150.

Concluding Remarks

Muqātil's entries in *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir* communicate his exegetical thrust and theological concerns that revolve around the propagation of *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* and the condemnation of *shirk* and *takdhīb.* This is consistent with Muqātil's other commentaries in which the opposition of this pair of principles loomed large. These exegetical and theological concerns have partly motivated his composition of the *Wujūh*—apart from educating his readers the presence of polysemy in the Qur'an—his selection of the entries, as well as his organization of those entries although it is very far from being systematic. Muqātil's clever strategy in putting three of the most theologically loaded terms—*al-hudā, al-kufr,* and *al-shirk*—in the beginning of his *Wujūh* has provided his readers with an appropriate clue to his preoccupation with theology in this commentary. Furthermore, the absence of the two potentially most important terms from the commentary--namely *al-islām* and *al-īmān*, with their contradictory meanings as true and nominal submission, and true belief and insincere belief, respectively—may have been intentionally motivated by Muqātil's theological concern that people would misunderstand them, by taking the idea of *islām* and *īmān* less seriously since they might think that any interpretation of the terms would be equally justified and applicable in life simply because of their status as polysemic terms.

Particularly important in this commentary is the role that a context plays in determining word's meanings.[1041] In a way, meaning is the function of a context. Such a context may be verbal or linguistic, but it may also be non-linguistic. Linguistic or verbal

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[1041] Mukrim, *al-Mushtarak,* 23.

context is provided in the very utterances that are used to communicate messages. Non-linguistic context includes the larger socio-cultural background whithin which the Qur'anic statements must be located. In Muqātil's commentary, such a non-linguistic context is represented by *asbān al-nuzūl* reports that he uses to illuminate the understanding of Qur'anic verses. Since a lot of meanings that Muqātil's entries bear are related to non-linguistic context, it is therefore insufficient, in order to understand polysemic words in the Qur'an, for his readers to rely solely on his *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir* alone. Instead, they would need to refer back to Muqātil's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* in which he uses a great amount of *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports that help his readers understand better how these words came to be interpreted within the larger qur'anic discourse.

CONCLUSION

In the following I will highlight some of the major findings of my study and offer some recommendations for further research, especially in relation to Muqātil and his commentaries.

Summary of Findings

In his commentary on the whole Qur'an, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* Muqātil has made a great effort to clarify almost everything by paraphrasing qur'anic verses and providing clarifying statements (paraphrasing method), presenting narratives (narrative method), and also connecting relevant qur'anic verses with one another (crossreferencing method). Muqātil views the Qur'an as a complex text. Not only does the Qur'an contain a variety of themes with a diversity of conceptual classifications, but its utterances are also of different types, and some of its vocabularies bear multiple meanings depending on the context of their use. So complex are qur'anic utterances are that it is impossible to understand the Qur'an without interpretation *(ta'wīl* or *tafsīr)*. To push even further, Muqātil argues that interpretation is an endless and ongoing process because every interpretation is subject to another *(wa li al-tafsīr tafsīr)*.

In his exegetical endeavor, Muqātil develops the hermeneutics by which he identifies the building blocks of the Qur'an, sets out the typology of qur'anic utterances, promotes qur'anic literacy, and advocates education that can sustain and disseminate such literacy. Understanding the meaning of the Qur'an is an individual obligation of all

believers, although the interpretive task is mandated only to those who possess the required abilities. That is why Muqātil envisions a system of education through which the attained meanings of the Qur'an, through various exegetical processes, can be disseminated from those who are able to directly participate in the pursuit of meaning to those who are merely consumers of the products of such an enterprise. The goal is to achieve the so-called qur'anic literacy that will lead believers to submit fully to divine dictate by understanding God's commands, prohibitions, promises, threats, and the examples of past generations on which the believers must reflect.

Throughout the commentaries, Muqātil's exegetical thrust revolves around the propagation of belief *(īmān)*, primarily by upholding the belief in one God *(tawḥīd)* and in Muhammad's prophethood *(taṣdīq)*. He has persistently opposed this to the condemnation of disbelief *(kufr)*, primarily in its manifestation of polytheism *(shirk)* and of rejection of Muhammad's prophethood *(takdhīb)*. Furthermore, Muqātil understands Islam, the religion that Muhammad preached, to actually be the same religion that all prophets before him had preached. Therefore, the Qur'an calls all prophets as *muslimūn*. As such, Islam is the primordial religion. The thread that has united this primordial religion throughout history of prophetic lines and scriptural revelations is its core teaching of *īmān* manifested in *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*. The challenges that the prophets through whom this primordial religion is taught to human beings have faced are similar: the performance of *kufr* in the form of *shirk* and *takdhīb*. This perspective has accordingly shaped Muqātil's attitudes in measuring people's responses to Muhammad's prophetic mission.

Since, in his understanding, Islam, the religion of submission to God, is the only true religion, Muqātil considers other religions to be human invention and hence, satanic. Interestingly, however, the Qur'an itself never mentions the religions it criticized as institutionalized entities. Rather, it mentioned Judaism or Christianity through their followers, namely *yahūd* or *nasārā,* respectively. Likewise, the Qur'an calls *majūs* and *ṣābi'ūn* as religious communities. Like the Qur'an, Muqātil only rarely mentioned religions other than Islam by proper names when he criticized the followers of these religions. Sometimes, when mentioning them on a positive note, Muqātil called the Jews "the People of the Torah" *(ahl al-Tawrāh)*, and Christians "the People of the Gospel" *(ahl al-Injīl),* based on their affiliation with their scriptures. This suggests that Muqātil acknowledged the validity of their scriptures and that, as long as they followed the teaching of these scriptures, the Jews and Christians might remain in the true teachings of their prophets. If sometimes Muqātil makes a critical assessment of these religious communities by mentioning their affiliation with their scripture, for instance, by using the phrase *al-munafiqūn min ahl al-Tawrāh* (the hypocrites of the People of Scripture), he does this to distinguish between the pious among the people of the Bible and those who are not. But above all, Muqātil's fierce criticism of non-Muslims, especially Jews and Christians, is due to their alleged disloyalty to the teaching of their own scriptures, primarily in their tainted monotheism and their rejection of Muhammad whom he believed had been prophezised in the Bible, but also in regard to some legal matters, such as stoning *(rajm),* blood money *(diyah)*, and *lex taliones (qiṣāṣ).* Muqātil thus challenges non-Muslims to back to their scriptural basis and argues with them on this basis. It is as if

he saying that while belief is subjective, it can be made objective by confronting such belief with the very scripture upon which it is built. The interreligious relations that he envisions, and, for that matter, dialogue between religious communities, also appear to be largely scripture-based. The place of scripture is so important for Muqātil because it is the only way to validate whether a religious community is loyal to their scripture. Otherwise belief will be entirely subjective, if not whimsical.

To Muqātil, and the Qur'an alike, God sends all these scriptures. Any tampering *(taḥrīf)* allegedly committed by the followers was committed in relation to their understanding or interpretation, and it therefore did not change the nature of these scriptures. This suggests that Muqātil acknowledges the validity of the Bible. Consequently, as long as the Jews and Christians upheld *tawḥīd* and acknowledged Muhammad's prophethood, Muqātil did not see any necessity for them to convert to Islam. They could practice their religions and follow the teachings of their own scriptures, including practicing their own laws. If they decided to accept Islam, however, they would have to leave their old religions altogether and fully practice Islam. Conversion renders the teachings of their old religions outdated *(sunnah māḍiyah),* and they must therefore follow the updated version of them in the newly revealed scripture. In this respect, unlike the widely held view by both Muslims and non-Muslims, Muqātil is of the view that the Qur'an does not abrogate earlier scriptures outright. On the contrary, the Qur'an is to vindicate these previous scriptures, especially in fundamentals of the primordial religion, especially with regard to *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq*. In fact, those early scriptures will forever divine and applicable if there are people who would follow their

teachings. It is only when one decides to be Muhammad's follower that the teaching of his earlier scripture is rendered outdated, without changing his perception of the sacredness of that scripture as divinely sanctioned, if inapplicable.

In terms of the Arab polytheists, Muqātil sees an entirely different treatment that the Qur'an offers. They were the only community upon whom Muhammad was allowed to impose Islam. The Arabs who had embraced the religions of People of Scripture, be they Jews or Christians, could remain so, such as in the case of the Christian of Najrān. After the submission of the polytheists, regardless of their sincerity, Muqātil argues that the principle "there is no compulsion in religion" must be upheld. Sociopolitical arrangement with regard to the People of Scripture living under the Muslim government is to be made separately, such as in the case of the duty to pay *jizyah*.

In relation to the hypocrites, Muqātil addresses them with highly moralistic language, similar to how the Qur'an itself treats them. While admitting them as part of the believers, if reluctantly, Muqātil always treats them with harsh criticism as a result of their constant rebellious acts against the Prophet and the believers. So harsh is Muqātil's view of the hypocrites that he often positions them on a par with disbelievers or even polytheists. Subsequently, however, Muqātil differentiates between how to treat disbelievers *(kuffār)* and hypocrites *(munāfiqūn)*: the first is with the sword, and the second is with words. A disbeliever *(kuffār)* in Muqātil's perspective is one who had initiated oppressive and violent measures against the early believers for practicing their belief, be they Arab or otherwise.

Muqātil's exegetical thrust, which is highly theological, proves to be the guiding principle in his legal decisions as well. The opposition between *īmān* (belief) and *kufr* (disbelief), along with their two supporting principles *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* as opposed to *shirk* and *takdhīb,* constitutes the yardstick by which he derives laws from the Qur'an. Muqātil appears to argue that a correct theology is fundamental before anything else, including in making legal decisions. So paramount is theology in his framework that sometimes Muqātil's judgment, as in the case of the hypocrites, was more theological than legal when he is supposed to talk about law. Muqātil's theological preoccupation in doing law is more noticeable when his process of legal derivation is compared to the process by which the great jurist al-Shāfiʿī, devised his legal decisions, despite the similarly theological inclinations of the two, such as in the case of defining the hypocrites. If Muqātil looks at the hypocrites in a largely moral or ethical way as sinners and rebels, al-Shāfiʿī is more sober legally in that while he acknowledges that the hypocrites are insincere in their belief—and hence their hypocrisy—he considers them to be Muslims if they publicly announce themselves to be Muslims. Their religious sincerity is subject only to God's judgement in the hereafter. In this world, the hypocrites are judged according to how they present themselves to be judged.

While theologically uncompromising, Muqātil is, however, legally pragmatist. His strong vision for interreligious relations, for instance, has led him to allow a peace agreement to be made between the believers and disbelievers, and he counsels the Muslims to be loyal to such an agreement once it has been made with good intention. Furthermore, unlike al-Shāfiʿī who limited the definition of People of Scripture ethnically

to the Israelites, Muqātil's definition of the People of Scripture is much more inclusive, apply to as broad a group of people as possible so long as they have some sort of religious affiliation with the People of Scripture, regardless of their ethnicity, Arab or otherwise. Muqātil upholds the principle that there is no compulsion in religion after the forced submission of the Arab disbelievers or polytheists of Muhammad's time, the only group of people upon whom Muhammad was allowed to impose Islam. Consequently, after their surrender to Muhammad, no other people, according to Muqātil, can be forced to embrace Islam. Furthermore, in his quest for a common ground for interreligious encounters, Muqātil pursues another effort that is fresh and inspiring by conceptualizing the *muḥkamāt al-Qur'ān* as the "Islamic Decalogue" which lays out not only perennial fundamentals with regard to divine-human relations but also interpersonal relations. The *muḥkamāt al-Qur'ān,* which refers to Q6 (al-Anʿām):151-3, is the perennially permanent message that all scriptures, especially that of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, shared. The permanent message that the *mūhkamāt* communicates is also written in the Protected Tablet *(lauḥ maḥfūẓ)* in heaven, as it is written in the scriptures of these three religious traditions.

Interestingly, Muqātil has an unlikely combination of three properties in a person, namely being theologically uncompromising, legally pragmatist, and ethically pacifist. It is possible that his pacifism is the result of his legal pragmatism as much as the fruit of his theology. His theologically unwavering stance is a matter of principle in upholding what he considers correct and wrong. Theology is not to be compromised, but it also is subject only to God's judgment in in the hereafter, and it therefore is not supposed to

hinder any pragmatical needs of this world, such as the need for coexistence amidst differences or the need to live a good and peaceful life. In this case, Muqātil seems to advocate for the idea that while conceptually uncompromising, his theology must be realized in a legally pragmatist and ethically pacifist way. This is demonstrated, for example, in his conception of commanding good and forbidding wrong *(al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar)* whose very essence is commanding *tawḥīd* and *taṣdīq* and forbidding *shirk* and *takdhīb*. The doctrine "commanding good and forbidding wrong" consists of the very theology that occupied Muqātil and became his exegetical thrust throughout his commentary. Yet in its performance, Muqātil does not condone any violence. Instead, his view of how to execute the doctrine is very idealist, if not utopist, by envisioning an environment in which every individual would have access to a good education to know what good and wrong are so that everyone may perform only good deeds and refrain from doing the contrary. There might be an impression of contradiction between Muqātil's advocacy of peaceful undertaking of commanding right and forbidding wrong, on one hand, and his views with regard to jihād. But such a contradiction fades once it is understood that Muqātil considers jihād to be a defensive measure against the hostile enemy that has used different kinds of means, including violence, to prevent the early Muslims from practicing their faith. In other words, jihād is a qur'anic response in war or conflict situations that allows the believers to take a defensive measure against all kinds of oppression targeting their religious belief. On the other hand, Muqātil envisions the doctrine commanding right and forbidding wrong to be carried out in a normal situation and more as a preventive than curative measure. Thus, as

long as he can find scriptural justifications, Muqātil would likely attempt to find ways to create a normal life and peaceful coexistence, as he demonstrated in his views on interreligious relations and in his vision for a common ground with his *Muḥkamāt* as Islamic Decalogue.

Likewise, Muqātil's entries in *al-Wujūh wa al-Naẓā'ir* communicate further his exegetical thrust and theological concerns. In fact, these exegetical and theological concerns—apart from educating his readers the presence of polysemy in the Qur'an—may have partly motivated his composition of the *Wujūh,* his selection of the entries, as well as his organization of those entries, although it remains very far from being systematic. Muqātil's clever strategy in putting three of the most theologically loaded terms—*al-hudā, al-kufr,* and *al-shirk*—in the beginning of his *Wujūh* has provided his readers with an appropriate clue to his preoccupation with theology in this commentary. Furthermore, the absence of the two potentially most important terms from the commentary--namely *al-islām* and *al-īmān,* with their contradictory meanings as true and nominal submission, and true belief and insincere belief, respectively—may have been intentional, motivated by Muqātil's theological concern that people would misunderstand them, taking the idea of *islām* and *īmān* less seriously because they might believe that any meaning of the term can be equally justified and applicable in life simply because of their status as polysemic terms. His legal pragmatism and ethical pacifism are also maintained, for instance, in arguing for the "domestification" of the meaning of jihād, by suggesting that it does not merely point to physical fight, but also other civilized acts undertaken to support God's cause.

Particularly important in Muqātil *Wujūh* is the role that a context plays in determining qur'anic word's meanings. In a way, meaning is the function of a context. Such a context may be verbal or linguistic, but it may also be non-linguistic. Linguistic or verbal context is provided in the very utterances that are used to communicate messages. Non-linguistic context includes the larger socio-cultural background within which the Qur'anic statements must be located. In Muqātil's commentary, such a non-linguistic context is represented by *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports that he uses to illuminate the understanding of qur'anic verses. Once more, the *Wujūh* reminds us of the necessity of interpretation in pursuing the intended meanings of qur'anic utterances. Muqātil teaches us that scripture is polyphonic.

Recommendations

After studying Muqātil and his commentaries on the Qur'an, I shall recommend some venues for further research, including the working of discursive community in orthodoxy making. In the case of Muqātil, it is still a mystery how it could have been possible for Muqātil to have been marginalized severely in the traditional Muslim scholarship by a number of accusations that are not entirely founded, at least on the basis of Muqātil's extant works. What has led the majority of Muslim scholars throughout history to simply take anything other people said about Muqātil for granted without feeling the need to cross-check it, at least in Muqātil's works?

Another venue that I shall recommend is to look more closely at the quality of traditions or ḥadīths that he uses in all of his commentaries relative to the well-accepted collections of sound traditions, such as the Bukhārī and Muslim collections. This will

enable not only the classification of traditions that he uses but also the distinction between ḥadīths proper and those later considered isrā'iliyyāt.

Another venue is related to the extensive narratives that Muqātil employs in the commentaries. Reading Muqātil's commentaries, especially his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* and, to a lesser extent, his *Khams Mi'at*, the impression that it reads like story-book often emerges. This suggests that there is a combination of *tafsīr* and *sīrah* in his works that needs to be studied on its own, or perhaps to be compared to other independent *sīrah* works, such as that of Ibn Isḥāq. In fact, some scholars, such as Wansbrough, have noticed the similarity between Muqātil's commentary and Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīrah*.

Another venue is to trace the socio-political and cultural background within which Muqātil had lived his life and produced his commentaries and to identify its influence on them. This invitation is justified because the circumstances that surrounds a person often makes indelible mark on his or her works. For instance, not all early scholars discussed jihād in their works or their expressed views. A scholar of Hijāz, for example, seems to be less knowledgeable about this subject matter when compared to other scholars who lived in frontier zone closer to encounter with Roman Empire, such as Syria, Spain, and Khūrāsān. Even Iraq is known as a place where its scholars were not fond of discussing jihād. Al-Shāfi'ī, who began his legal career in 'Irāq, however, devoted a great space for addressing jihād in his *Umm.* Is it because of his birth in Palestine, because of genealogy of learning, or because of something else entirely?

Last but not least, practically I would like to see if Muqātil's approach can be used in interreligious dialogue. It is a model pattered on honest theological discussion,

which is based on scripture and its interpretative tradition, legal pragmatism, and ethical pacifism. *Wallāhu a'lam*

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