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A STUDY OF SAYYID QUTB'S QUR'ĀN EXEGESIS IN EARLIER
AND LATER EDITIONS OF HIS *FĪ ZILĀL AL-QUR'ĀN*
WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO SELECTED THEMES

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A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Institute of Islamic Studies
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Montreal, Canada
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ABSTRACT

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Title : A Study of Sayyid Quṭb's Qur'ān Exegesis in Earlier and Later Editions
of His *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* With Specific Reference to Selected Themes
Department : Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University
Degree : Master of Arts

This thesis is an attempt to analyze Sayyid Quṭb's approach to Qur'ān exegesis in his *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. It compares the earlier with the later revised editions of the exegesis as it studies change in his thought and Weltanschauung. Quṭb believed that the sacred text was a book of guidance and inspiration with immediate relevance to contemporary issues and challenges, giving direction to practical affairs as though it had been revealed specifically for today's problems. It is suggested that social, political, economic, and psychological factors contributed to his interpretation and revision. The thesis explores the degree of the revision made as well as its significance, with special reference to the case of *zakāt* (alms) and *ribā* (usury)-related verses in particular. Although the fundamental stance is basically consistent, i.e. that Islam is a distinct, divinely-ordained system for all aspects of life, it shows that Quṭb tended to draw sharp distinctions between those who strove for the establishment of God's law in the world, and those who opposed them. Thus, in his exegetical endeavour, he became inevitably influenced by his socio-political background, and his exegesis was different from other contemporary ones, because it

expressed the views of an activist advocate of social, political and religious reform, even though his thought was at times vague and idealistic.

RÉSUMÉ

Auteur : Mhd. Syahnas

Titre : Une analyse de l'exégèse qur'ānique de Sayyid Quṭb portant sur des thèmes spécifiques dans les anciennes et les plus récentes éditions de son *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*.

Département : Institut des Études Islamiques, Université McGill.

Diplôme : Maîtrise ès Arts

Ce mémoire tentera d'analyser l'approche de Sayyid Quṭb en exégèse qur'ānique utilisé dans son livre, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. Il y sera comparé la première publication de l'ouvrage avec les éditions plus récentes de l'exégèse tout en tenant compte des changements dans la pensée ainsi que dans la vision du monde (Weltanschauung) de l'auteur. Quṭb croyait que le texte sacré était un guide de conduite et d'inspiration dont la pertinence s'étend aux questions et aux défis de l'époque contemporaine. Il y est d'ailleurs suggéré que les facteurs sociaux, politiques, économiques et psychologiques ont influencé l'interprétation et les révisions de l'auteur. Le mémoire explore le degré de révision effectué de même que sa signification, en se référant plus particulièrement aux versets relatifs à la *zakāt* (aumône) et au *ribā* (prêt usuraire). Malgré que la stance fondamentale demeure constante, c'est-à-dire

que l'islam est un système d'origine divine, distinct et applicable dans tout les aspects de la vie, cela démontre que Quṭb avait tendance à faire une distinction claire entre ceux qui luttent pour l'instauration de la loi de Dieu dans le monde et ceux qui s'y opposent. Ainsi, dans sa tentative d'exégèse, il fut influencé inévitablement par son expérience socio-politique et son exégèse fut différente des autres interprétations contemporaines puisqu'elle exprime la vision d'un militant favorisant une réforme sociale, politique et religieuse, même si sa pensée fut parfois vague et idéaliste.

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TRANSLITERATION

The system of transliteration of Arabic words and names applied in this thesis is that used by the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, with a slight modification.

ب = b	ذ = dh	ط = t	ل = l
ت = t	ر = r	ظ = z	م = m
ث = th	ز = z	ع = 'e	ن = n
ج = j	س = s	غ = gh	و = w
ح = h	ش = sh	ف = f	ء = 'a
خ = kh	ص = s	ق = q	ي = y
د = d	ض = d	ك = k	

Short : َ = a; ِ = i; ُ = u.

Long : َ = ā; ِ = ī; ُ = ū

Diphthongs: َ = ay; ُ = aw.

Long with *tashdīd*: ِ and ُ, instead of īya and ūwa, we employ iyya and uwwa respectively.

In the case of *tā' marbū'a* (ā) *h* is omitted, unless it occurs within an *idāfa* where it is written *at*.

The *hamza* (ء) occurring in the initial position is omitted.

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INTRODUCTION

Sayyid Quṭb Ibrāhīm Ḥusayn al-Shādhilī (1906-1966) was a popular Islamic spiritual and intellectual leader whose influence continues to make itself felt in the Muslim world, long after his death. This influence remains particularly strong in Egypt and other Arab countries.¹ Perhaps one reason for the continuing legacy of Sayyid Quṭb is the profound and masterful integration of the Qur'ān in his thought. Written for the most part during the author's imprisonment (between 1954-1964), Quṭb's *tafsīr* is a direct successor to that of Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā. In fact, it adopts 'Abduh's methods in both explicit and implicit interpretations. This stems from the fact that Quṭb's mentor, Ḥasan al-Bannā (d. 1949), was once a student of 'Abduh's disciple Rashīd Riḍā. Thus, akin to the mentor, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* may also be identified as a *tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*. However, Quṭb differed from his predecessors in the degree to which he was willing to accept compromise within a socio-cultural and anti-imperialist discourse, in his attempt to revive a Qur'anically based "Islamic system" (*al-niẓām al-Islāmī*).

Sayyid Quṭb's *tafsīr* exemplifies a certain type of modern *Qur'ān* commentary. Whether implicitly or explicitly, it addresses the situation of Islam in the modern world, taking as its point of departure the holy text itself and not the commentaries and

¹Shahrough Akhavi observes that due to Sayyid Quṭb's overall standing as an Islamic thinker and activist, he may be compared with Turkey's Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1873-1960), Pakistan's Abū al-A'lā Mawḍūdī (1903-1979), Iran's 'Alī Sharī'ātī (1933-1977) and even Ayatollah Ruhollah al-Musavi Khomeini. See Akhavi, "Sayyid Quṭb," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3: 400-404.

interpretations woven around it in the course of the previous centuries. Moreover, the sacred text is regarded, throughout his *tafsīr*, as having direct relevance to contemporary issues and challenges. Indeed, the Qur'ān is seen to bear immediate 'relevance' to the surrounding world, and is regarded as a book of guidance and inspiration, giving direction to practical affairs as though it had been revealed specifically for today's problems.

Sayyid Quṭb adopted a more radical approach relatively late in life, after having espoused moderate Islamic views at the beginning of his career. Hence, his later writings have been described as a manifesto for Islamic revolution and a major inspiration for extremist groups.² This is also true for the later editions of *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, in which Quṭb expressed some rather radical views. The first thirteen volumes of the first edition of *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* were in fact completely revised by him in order to conform with his new Weltanschauung. He died, however, before revising the remaining seventeen volumes. The changes made to the first thirteen volumes vary in length from a totally new addition, to changes affecting about half the contents of certain paragraphs, to revisions of individual phrases or even words, though often with interesting implications.³

In the revised edition of his commentary, Quṭb tended to draw sharp distinctions

²See Yvonne Y. Haddad, "Sayyid Quṭb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival" in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), chapter 4; idem, "The Qur'anic Justification for an Islamic Revolution: The View of Sayyid Quṭb," *Middle East Journal* 37 (1983), 14-29; Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), chapters 2 and 3. See also Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 57-62.

³For instance, his revision of his commentary on *ribā*-related verses in *sūrat al-Baqara* is extensive. See the first edition of the *Zilāl*, volume 3, pages 31-38 and compare it with the fourth edition, pages 63-86.

between those who strove for the establishment of God's law in the world, and those who opposed it. For instance, in his interpretation of the *ribā*-related verses he consolidated his earlier position by emphasizing that *ribā*, in its true sense, did not only refer to an historical phenomenon practised in the Arabian peninsula, but also to a characteristic found in what Quṭb identified as a *ribā* system (*nizām ribawī*), which he saw as being opposed to the Islamic system, regardless of the rate of interest involved in the transaction.⁴ There are also several changes reflecting Sayyid Quṭb's later awareness of earlier positions. Some of these have ideological import, such as a somewhat decreased 'socialist tone' at some points and the addition of the point that, while the ruler may impose taxes other than *zakāt*, he may not strip people of all their possessions. This presumably represents a reaction to the nationalization measures of 'Abd al-Nāṣir's government.

While several scholarly studies have examined Quṭb's writings in general,⁵ unfortunately, the difference between his earlier and later views has received relatively little attention. This thesis will seek to fill this gap. As such, it will examine the revisions made by him of earlier views, as well as their impact upon his thought in general.

⁴Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl*. 4th ed., vol. IV, 70-71.

⁵See Muhammad Awwal Abubakar, "Sayyid Kutb: A Study of His Critical Ideas," (M.A. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1978); Adnan Ayyub Musallam, "The Formative Stages of Sayyid Quṭb's Intellectual Career and His Emergence as an Islamic Dā'iyah" (Ph.D. dissertation University of Michigan, 1983); A.S. Moussalli, "Contemporary Islamic Political Thought: Sayyid Quṭb" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1985); A.S. Moussalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Quṭb* (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1992). See also John Calvert, "Discourse, Community and Power: Sayyid Quṭb and the Islamic Movement in Egypt," (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1993), and Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996) 92-219.

Moreover, the contemporary socio-cultural, political, economic, and psychological events shaping his life will be analysed in order to determine their impact on his thought. More precisely, the thesis will focus on the changes made to his *tafsīr*, as direct manifestations of his evolving thought.

In dealing with this issue, the thesis will consist of three chapters. The first of these will analyse the socio-political, economic and cultural environment in which Sayyid Quṭb lived, in order to provide the background for the discussion. As for the second chapter, it will discuss various aspects of his *tafsīr*, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, taking as its point of departure the contemporary background. In addition, Quṭb's basic ideas concerning the principles of Qur'anic interpretation will also be taken into account in order to demonstrate how his theoretical reflections gained new significance. The last chapter will focus on certain revisions made to *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. It will start with a general overview of the revisions and will analyse their relation to the current political, economic, and cultural situation in Egypt as well as Quṭb's psychological state as a prisoner of 'Abd al-Nāṣir's regime. In addition, reference will be made to those verses related to *zakāt* and *ribā* in the various *sūras*, the reason being the importance of these two concepts in Quṭb's vision of the true Islamic system. Quṭb believed that *zakāt* underlies the general method of Islamic social justice and that the concept of *ribā* is concerned with economic transactions which, in fact, involve common sense and socio-economic justice.⁶ Thus, these two themes are related to Quṭb's understanding of the Islamic political and economic systems, and serve as the

⁶Sayyid Quṭb, *Al-'Adāla al-Ijtima'īyya fī al-Islām* (Cairo: Lajnat al-Nashr lī al-Jāmi'īyyīn, 1949), 73-74; 118.

indispensable cornerstones of true religion in his view.

It is hoped that this exposition will provide a broad framework against which the development of Quṭb's thought, from his earlier moderate position to his later Islamist thinking can be measured. It is also hoped that by so doing, a proper understanding of Quṭb's political and religious objectives might be achieved.

Finally, the sources to be used for this study are primarily the first edition of *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* and the fourth edition, published posthumously.⁷ In addition, other materials written by Sayyid Quṭb himself, as well as secondary sources related to the subject under discussion, will also be consulted.

⁷The first edition was published in Cairo by Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, [1953-?] 30 vols. in 5 tomes, while the fourth was published by Dār al-'Arabiyya in Beirut: Lebanon, n.d. 30 vols. in 8 tomes.

CHAPTER ONE

SAYYID QUṬB: HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT

This chapter will attempt a brief delineation of the most significant events in Sayyid Quṭb's life. However, given the paucity of literature on Quṭb's life,¹ this section will only analyse those salient features that lend themselves to the concerns of this study and that demonstrate the factors shaping Quṭb's orientation and thought. Thus, we will trace the course of Quṭb's life through four distinct stages. The first stage involves his youth and early years, starting with his birth around 1906 and tracing his educational career. As for the second stage, it will deal with his career as a literary author. Third, his career as an activist in the *Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* movement, when he became increasingly committed to the cause of Islam will be carefully analysed. Finally, the post-*Ikhwān* period will receive similar attention given the importance of Quṭb's writings during this stage. These works, which appear to have been written during his first imprisonment, deal strictly with

¹Among others, Muhammad Awwal Abubakar, "Sayyid Kutb: A Study of Critical Ideas" (M.A. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1978); Adnan Ayyub Musallam, "The Formative Stages of Sayyid Quṭb's Intellectual Career and His Emergence as an Islamic Dā'iyah" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1983); Ahmad S. Moussalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Quṭb* (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1992). Also John Calvert, "Discourse, Community and Power: Sayyid Quṭb and the Islamic Movement in Egypt" (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1993); Yvonne Y. Haddad, "Sayyid Quṭb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival," in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 67-98; Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 57-85; Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 92-219.

Islamic topics and reflect his total commitment to the Muslim Brotherhood.

A. Sayyid Quṭb's Background

Sayyid Quṭb Ibrāhīm Ḥusayn al-Shādhilī was born on October 1906 in the village of Musha near the city of Asyut in upper Egypt. He was born to an influential family, his father, Quṭb Ibrāhīm, having been a member of one of the contemporary political parties, *al-Ḥizb al-Waṭānī*.² Quṭb Ibrāhīm was moreover a pious man who believed that modern knowledge and technology could be harnessed for the promotion of human welfare. And even though the family was financially in decline at the time of Sayyid Quṭb's birth, it remained prestigious due to his father's educated status. Quṭb's autobiographical work, *Ṭifl min al-Qarya*,³ provides us with an illuminating account of his life and family, as well as a critical description of rural and urban life in Egypt in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Quṭb began to devote himself to learning at an early age. However, we are unsure as to whether he started his education at a religious school (*kuttāb*) or a modern primary school (*madrasa*). What is certain, however, is that he graduated from a government school in 1918. By the age of ten, Quṭb is reported to have committed the entire text of the Qur'ān to memory. Then, two years after the 1919 revolution, Quṭb left his village for Ḥulwān where he lived with his journalist uncle in order to complete his education in Cairo. There,

²Sayyid Quṭb, *Ṭifl min al-Qarya* (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥikma, n.d.), 139.

³It was first published in Cairo in 1946 when Quṭb became firmly established as a literary critic in Cairo's leading literary reviews. See *al-Risāla* (Cairo), no. 670 (May 6, 1946), 510-11.

he prepared for the *Tajhīziyya* at a preparatory and secondary school. On passing this he was officially accepted in Dār al-‘Ulūm’s Teachers’ College in 1929 from which he graduated in 1933, obtaining a B.A. in Education. Upon completing his studies in Dār al-‘Ulūm, he was appointed as an instructor at the same college in recognition of his accomplishments.

Quṭb was not only a journalist but a critic as well. In the Egyptian capital, he became closely associated with and influenced by such modernists as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al- ‘Aqqād, and Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt. Moreover, al-‘Aqqād, who was an outspoken Wafdist journalist and leader of a new school of modern poetry, the *Dīwān*, introduced him to the editors of various newspapers. Indeed, so great was the influence of the latter on him at this stage that Quṭb admitted that al-‘Aqqād helped him “to focus on the thought rather than the utterance.”⁴ Furthermore, it appears that his acquaintance with these figures left a significant impression on Quṭb’s secular (modern) ideas, one of which was the notion of separation between religion and literature, which was expressed in his writings during the 1930s and 1940s. As a writer, he also became engaged in polemics concerning literature, religion and other current issues.⁵ Quṭb soon realized, however, that he needed to learn more in order not to be at a disadvantage with respect to ‘Aqqād and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, both of whom were known for their Western orientation and their high-calibre intellects.

⁴Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Nadwī, *Mudhakkirāt Sā’ih fī al-Sharq al-‘Arabī*, second revised edition (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risāla, 1975), 96.

⁵For a close analysis of these issues see for e.g. Calvert, “Discourse,” 98-115; Musallam, *The Formative*, 67-108.

In 1948, at the age of 42, Quṭb left Egypt for the United States to study modern Western methods of education. He was sponsored in this endeavour by the government. However, due to the fact that he was rather old to be undertaking a mission such as this, it has been suggested that Quṭb's scholarship was granted by the government in order to get him out of the country for a while, thus weakening his attacks on the authorities. By placing him in direct contact with the West, the Ministry of Education believed that Quṭb would learn to appreciate the West and its educational models which the former was aiming to adopt.⁶ In other words, Quṭb's scholarship can be regarded as a political ploy designed to distance him from contemporary affairs.

Quṭb spent a period of two years in the United States studying at Wilson's Teachers' College, or what was then known as the University of the District of Columbia, and at the University of Northern Colorado's Teachers' College, where he earned an M.A. in education, as well as at Stanford University. On his return to Egypt, Quṭb visited England, Switzerland and Italy.⁷

Quṭb's sojourn in the United States (1949-1951), left him profoundly disillusioned with what he believed to be the moral decadence of Western civilization, its anti-Arab bias,

⁶Muḥammad Tawfīq Barakāt, *Sayyid Quṭb: Khulāṣat Ḥayātih wa Manhajuh fī al-Ḥaraka, al-Naqd al-Muwajjah ilayh* (Beirut: Dār al-Da'wa, 1977), 14-15; Khālidi, *Sayyid Quṭb al-Shahīd al-Ḥayy*, 125-6; cf. 'Abd al-Bāqī Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Sayyid Quṭb: Ḥayātuh wa Adabuh* (Cairo: Dār al-Wafā', 1986) 40-42.

⁷There is no mention in the sources of how long Quṭb stayed in each place, although it is certain that he visited them.

and its staunch support of Zionism.⁸ Moreover, this situation may have affected the future course of his thought, marking a transition from literary and educational pursuits to intense religious commitment. As such, one can argue that the trip intensified his political involvement instead of lessening it, as had been the original intention.

Quṭb's return to Egypt in 1951 coincided with the growing crisis in Egyptian politics which was to lead to the military coup of July 1952. At the time, Quṭb declined the government offer to become an adviser to the Ministry of Education, opting, instead, to devote himself to the national struggle for the realization of an Islamic alternative. Thus he began writing articles for various newspapers on social and political themes, as well as seeking to translate his ideas into action.⁹ He eventually left the ministry of education owing to disagreements with the government's educational policies as well as its submissiveness to the British.

⁸ Quṭb's opinion concerning the Jews is illustrated in his *Ma'rakatunā Ma'a al-Yahūd*. This seminal work, covering an early contemporary Islamic doctrine on the Jews, has also been posthumously published and analysed by Ronald L. Nettler in *Past Trials and Present Tribulations: A Muslim Fundamentalist's View of the Jews* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1987); see also John Calvert, "Radical Islamism and the Jews: The View of Sayyid Quṭb," in Leonard Jay Greenspoon and Bryan F. Le Beau (eds.), *Representations of the Jews Through the Ages* (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 1996), 213-229. For Quṭb's experience in the U.S. see his "Amrīka allatī Ra'ayt: Fī Mīzān al-Qiyam al-Insāniyyā," which appeared in *al-Risāla*, no. 827 (9 May 1949), 823-4.

⁹ Quṭb's eagerness to become more involved in practical matters and to extend his mission beyond penmanship, can be detected in the decreasing number of works he wrote during his stay in the U.S.A. Quṭb explained that "He desired to achieve something more worthy than mere writing". See Adnan Ayyub Musallam, *The Formative*, 210-211; cf. Ḥusayn, *Sayyid Quṭb*, 44.

At this juncture, it was the Muslim brotherhood's¹⁰ model of praxis/ activism that attracted Quṭb's attention. His contact with this organization appears to have been the result of his regular contributions to the Brothers' publications, such as *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*¹¹ and *al-Da'wah*, both of which were founded in 1951. In addition, the organization's involvement in both the Palestine war and the guerrilla war against the British military installations in the Suez canal zone, in late 1951, clearly impressed Sayyid Quṭb and led him to believe that the Muslim Brotherhood combined the virtues that he was to extol at length in his later writings. These virtues involved a true Islamic vision, combined with an intention and a capacity to make that vision a practical reality in the world.¹² Thus, an intense reciprocal relationship was forged between Quṭb and the Brothers at a time when the latter were gripped by a serious leadership crisis,¹³ and were rebuilding in accordance

¹⁰For a comprehensive account on the establishment, development and program of the *Ikhwān*, see Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1993), which is still the best study on the Brotherhood in Egypt; Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: the Prophet and Pharaoh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), compares the neo-Muslim Brotherhood with the original leadership of the *Ikhwān* and with leaders of other contemporary Islamic organizations in Egypt; Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*, enlarged edition, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) and Olivier Carré, *Les frères musulmans: Egypte et Syrie, 1928-1982* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1983), both of which provide a comparison between the Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brotherhoods.

¹¹This was a monthly Islamic review, the first issue of which appeared in November 1951. As a regular contributor, Quṭb wrote on such subjects as Islamic history, the Qur'ān and Islamic society, until the end of 1954 when he was arrested. In fact, Quṭb's most important Qur'anic commentary, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, originated in this review. See Musallam, *The Formative*, 228-232.

¹²Adnan Ayyub Musallam, *The Formative*, 224-33.

¹³For a detailed account of this see, *inter alia*, Calvert, "Discourse," 190-198.

with the vision of their new leader.

The beginning of Quṭb's affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood is uncertain, but Faḍl Allāh dates it to 1951, i.e. shortly after his return from America.¹⁴ Moreover, the great respect with which Quṭb was held by the Society, in addition to his expressed loyalty to the Supreme Guide of the Brotherhood, al-Huḍaybī, vis a vis Ṣāliḥ al-Ashmāwī and his supporters, led to his immediate elevation to the organization's prestigious Guidance Council.¹⁵ Interestingly, Quṭb was eventually to become the movement's ideologue, and was appointed editor of another of its journals, *al-Muslimūn*.¹⁶ Not long afterwards, he also became the director of the Muslim Brotherhood's Qiṣm Nashr al-Da'wa (Section for Propagation of the Call), one of the organization's most important organs. This department functioned as a controlling body for anything published in the name of the Brotherhood in order to preserve the movement's doctrinal purity and organizational harmony. Under his leadership, the Qiṣm Nashr al-Da'wa underwent major changes in its approach and became an active and professional organ.

It is alleged that Quṭb was a key liaison between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Free Officers, who overthrew the monarchy in 1952.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Quṭb's attitude towards this group of officers prior to the 23 July coup is a matter of conjecture. Moreover, it seems that the Brotherhood's mistrust of the Free Officers was transmitted to Quṭb, who

¹⁴Mahdī Faḍl Allāh, *Ma'a Sayyid Quṭb fī Fikrihī al-Siyāsī wa'l-Dīnī*, second ed. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1979), 41-56.

¹⁵Calvert, "Discourse," 194.

¹⁶Faḍl Allāh, *Ma'a Sayyid Quṭb*, 41-56.

¹⁷Gilles Kepel, *Muslim*, 41.

began to view the latter with increasing concern. Quṭb voiced this concern to the officers when he invited a number of them, including ‘Abd al-Nāṣir, to his home in Ḥulwān, a week prior to the revolution.¹⁸ This invitation, according to al-Khālidi, came as a result of the goodwill exhibited by the Free Officers towards the Muslim Brotherhood. A month later (August 1952), Quṭb delivered a lecture entitled “Intellectual and Spiritual Liberation in Islam” at the Officer’s Club, which was attended by many of the country’s most prominent intellectuals and politicians, such as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir.¹⁹ It appears that ‘Abd al-Nāṣir and his associates, at the time, shared many of the Muslim Brotherhood’s views on the need for greater social justice and reform, even if they did not ground them in a specifically Islamic context. In addition, the close relationship between the Brotherhood and the Officers prompted Nāṣir to persuade Quṭb to become the director of the Hay’at al-Taḥrīr (the Liberation Rally).²⁰ However, relations between the Free Officers and the Brotherhood soon deteriorated as it became increasingly clear that each side had a different agenda. Quṭb, for instance, was intent on propagating Islam and imposing Islamic principles on society, as opposed to ‘Abd al-Nāṣir who favoured a more secular approach.²¹

Nevertheless, it was not until October 1954, following the Manshiyya incident, that a tense standoff between the Brotherhood and the Free Officers ensued, culminating in the

¹⁸ Al-Khālidi, *Sayyid Quṭb*, 140.

¹⁹ Ibid., 140-3.

²⁰ Of the various posts offered to Quṭb, the directorship of the Liberation Rally was the only one he was inclined to accept. See *ibid.*

²¹ A.S. Moussalli, *Radical*, 32-33;

latter accusing the Brotherhood of an attempt on Nāṣir's life. Whether it was accidental or designed, such a pretext certainly enabled 'Abd al-Nāṣir to deal a coup de grace to the Muslim Brotherhood.²² Thus, Quṭb was arrested in November 1954,²³ inspite of his poor health. This subsequently worsened with the tough handling meted to him and the other detainees during the 1954 interrogations.²⁴ Then, in July 1955 Quṭb was sentenced to fifteen years of hard labour.²⁵ In prison, he witnessed the continued torture of his colleagues, with perhaps the worst episode occurring in 1957 when more than a score of the Muslim Brotherhood inmates were killed outright and dozens severely injured.

Basing himself on what he had seen, Quṭb set in motion his idea for the creation of a disciplined secret cadre of devoted followers whose task was originally limited to self-defence. Without declaring so publicly, Quṭb had come to believe in using violence against the government if it used force against his organization. Still later, he reached the conclusion that violence was justified even if the regime were merely deemed unjust and refused to alter its behaviour.²⁶

²²Upon hearing the regime's accusation, the Brotherhood denied it, declaring the attack to be a mere police provocation and a ploy designed to justify 'Abd al-Nāṣir's crackdown on the organization. See Gilles Kepel, *Muslim*, 41.

²³In fact, Quṭb became a witness in the trial of al-Huḍaybī who was connected to the secret service, with which organization Quṭb was proven not to be associated. See Calvert, "Discourse," 197.

²⁴For details on the treatment of Quṭb and his other colleagues and the prison conditions, see, *inter alia*, Gilles Kepel, *Muslim*, 28-9; Barakāt, *Turāth*, 7; Carré, "Le Combat," 681; Khālidī, *Quṭb*, 145-47.

²⁵Musallam, *The Formative*, 268-9.

²⁶Joel Beinin and Joe Stork (eds.), *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 6.

Quṭb was released from prison in 1964, but was still kept under police surveillance, in spite of the intervention of the Iraqi president ‘Abd al-Salām ‘Ārif, who issued Quṭb a formal invitation to live in Iraq which the latter declined, insisting on residing in Egypt. Eight months later, however, Quṭb, together with over a thousand members of the Muslim Brotherhood, his brother and two sisters, was rearrested on charges of sedition and terrorism.²⁷ Incontrovertible evidence against Quṭb was apparently not presented, particularly since his revolutionary tract, *Ma‘ālim fī al-Ṭarīq* - the chief document on which the prosecutors relied - did not explicitly call for the armed overthrow of the state.²⁸ Rather, this manifesto urged resistance in the form of turning away from existing society and creating a model *ummah* (community of believers) which would eventually establish true Islam. In the end, and despite great international pressure, the government executed Quṭb and two of his colleagues, Yūsuf Ḥawwāsh and ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā‘īl, on 29 December 1966. Ever since, Quṭb has been regarded as a martyr by his supporters.

B. The Principles of Quṭb’s Thought

Taking the aforementioned account of Quṭb’s life for our basis, an attempt will be made in the balance of this chapter to illustrate the main tenets of Quṭb’s thought, although it is in no way pretends to be an exhaustive treatment. In what follows we will seek to portray the socio-political milieu in which Quṭb lived as well as argue that Quṭb’s radical

²⁷Barakāt, *Khulāṣat*, 19; Khālīdī, in *Quṭb*, 147; also Ḥamūdah, *Sayyid Quṭb*, 129-131.

²⁸Joel Beinin and Joc Stork (eds.), *Political Islam*, 23. *Ma‘ālim fī al-Ṭarīq* was first published in 1964, and contains an explanation of the fundamental rules of activism.

ideas were the outcome of the political and economic unrest under ‘Abd al-Nāṣir’s regime. These radical ideas were subsequently expressed in his later works.²⁹

1) Quṭb’s Conception of Religion/ Islam

Islam, according to Quṭb, is a universal concept that is confined in his view neither to ritual, nor to social, economic, or political concepts. Rather, it transcends all these aspects to embrace the myriad facets of life.³⁰ Such a view of Islam and of its interconnectedness with the world permeates most of the works he wrote following the 1952 revolution. These works are less tentative in nature, and more articulate. They express in absolute terms the nature, essential characteristics and scope of his Islamic vision. They also take cognizance of such questions as the source, authenticity and function of such a world view. Moreover, in affirming the divine source of his Weltanschauung, its originality and application to the modern world, Quṭb appears to have been aware of the implications of the ideologies he was challenging.

According to Quṭb, the concept of Islam comprises seven characteristics, all of which are closely interconnected. They are: unity of God (*tawḥīd*), lordship, constancy, comprehensiveness, balance, positiveness, and realism. Given the breadth of discussion found on each of these topics, and the fact that they lie beyond the scope of this thesis, only

²⁹Tawfiq Barakāt, *Sayyid Quṭb*. Barakāt divides Quṭb’s intellectual life into three phases: 1) the early part of his career when he came under the influence of Western thought and ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād; 2) the second phase which started around 1948 when Quṭb became interested in Islamic topics; and 3) the third phase which marks his complete commitment to Islamic topics. In fact, later on Quṭb denounced some of his early writings as un-Islamic, such as *Al-Aṭyāf al-Arba‘a* and *Ashwāk*.

³⁰Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī al-Tārīkh: Fikra wa Minhāj* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1974), 22.

a brief outline of each will be proffered in the following.

As far as *Rabbāniyya* or lordship is concerned, Quṭb maintained that the main feature of the Islamic concept is its divine origin, as distinguished from human thought and its development. This is not to say, however, that Quṭb did not believe in the power of human intellect. On the contrary, Quṭb ardently believed in the supremacy of human reason, although limiting its scope and declaring it to be unable to provide the eternal basis for the human and religious quest. Revelation and reason constitute a secondary level of his investigation. Abu Rabi' maintains that "Quṭb's *rabbāniyya* shares the same basic qualities of Hegel's *geist*."³¹

The second essential quality of the Islamic conception is constancy (*thabāt*). Quṭb believed that human history revolves "around a constant axis" which is lordship, the essential core of which is neither subject to the contingency of change nor evolution.³² Concerning this matter, Yvonne Haddad has asserted that "the doctrine of constancy in the Islamic world view is proposed by Quṭb as a dam against Westernization and the appropriation of the European values, ideas, customs, and fashions. It also functions as a refutation of the basic intellectual premise of Darwin's theory of progressive evolution, as well as that of dialectical materialism."³³ This quality, according to Quṭb, not only guarantees the integration and harmony of Muslim life with that of the universe, but it also

³¹Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (Albany: SUNY, 1996), 148.

³²Quṭb, *Muqawwimāt*, 83.

³³Yvonne Haddad, "Sayyid Quṭb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival," in John L. Esposito, (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 75.

provides constancy in the order of society and an awareness of the permanence of the orbit within which one lives and moves.³⁴

Comprehensiveness (*shumūl*) is another distinguishing feature of his vision of Islam. Islam, he declared, is a comprehensive way of life far superior to any other systems. In fact, in his *Khaṣā'is al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī wa Muqawwimātuh*,³⁵ he speaks extensively on the oneness of Allāh, Allāh's divine nature, the permanence of Allāh's order, and its all-encompassing nature. He also explains there that the *Shari'ah* is related not only to government but also to belief, ethics, knowledge and art, all of which he firmly linked to the divine origin and independence of Islam.³⁶ Accordingly, he declared as theoretical the division of human activities in Islamic law into acts of worship (*ibādāt*) and social relations (*mu'āmalāt*). His dissatisfaction with this division stemmed from the fact that it might lead to inconsistency in the acceptance of Islam and an unnecessary polarization which might undermine the praxis. He was firmly against the notion that Muslims could perform their rituals in accordance with Islamic tenets, while having their social relations governed by regulations other than those emanating from Islam. Thus, Quṭb concluded that "Islam is an inseparable unity. Any division of which is contrary to this unity."³⁷ In other words,

³⁴Sayyid Quṭb, *Khaṣā'is al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī wa Muqawwimātuh* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1962), 98.

³⁵This book deals with the philosophical bases of Islam and provides the foundation for an understanding of the totality of Quṭb's thought.

³⁶Sayyid Quṭb, *Al-'Adāla al-Ijtimā'iyya fī al-Islām*, 7th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1980), p. 270; cf. William E. Shepard, *Sayyid Quṭb and Islamic Activism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 298.

³⁷Yvonne Haddad, "Sayyid Quṭb," 76.

Islam governs man's relations with his Lord, the universe, and his fellow human beings. More importantly however, Islam provides model solutions to all aspects of human existence.

Al-ijābiyya (positiveness) is another characteristic of the Islamic concept which operates among the multiple relationships that exist between God and the universe, life, and man. Obedience to God proceeds from the aspect of positiveness in the believer's life.³⁸ Quṭb's example of the first Muslim community, capable of revolutionizing society by applying the positive dimension of the oneness of God, makes this conclusion evident.³⁹ Accordingly, the Islamic concept is not merely a negative (inactive) concept in the realm of conscience, or a theoretical idea that exists only within the spiritual realm; rather, the Islamic concept is a design that creates a situation which preserves the oneness of God and the unity of mankind. Despite the fact that positiveness is dependant upon divine authority, it can, nonetheless, be verified, and its competence demonstrated by action and dynamism.

Balance (*tawāzun*) denotes what Quṭb perceived to be the norm between the absolute Divine will and the laws of the universe. This characteristic in particular has preserved the unique nature of Islam. It is evidenced in the harmony that exists between that which is revealed, which humans can grasp and apprehend, and that which is accepted by faith, since man has no capacity to comprehend it. Human nature feels comfortable with this vision since absolute knowledge rests with God in whom man places his total trust. "Any doctrine that is totally comprehensible to humans is no doctrine," he affirmed.

³⁸Sayyid Quṭb, *Khaṣā'is*, 146.

³⁹Ibid., 153.

Moreover, it is the balance between the known and the unknown, the revealed and the hidden that is in accordance with human nature.⁴⁰

Realism, another fundamental feature of the Islamic conception, pertains to two basic facts, namely, the divine and the human. This realism grounds Quṭb's vision in reality, and refutes the accusation of idealism levelled at it. Yet, to be fair, it must be stated that his vision is both idealistic and realistic in that it aims at establishing the highest and most perfect system to which humanity can ostensibly ascribe. The role of man, as perceived by this Islamic vision, is within the limits of his capacity. Man is taken as he is, "one who eats, marries, procreates, loves, hates, hopes and fears." Furthermore, his nature, capacities, virtues, evils, strengths, and weaknesses are all taken into consideration. In other words, this vision, does not elevate man to the level of divinity, nor does it regard him in angelic form. This perception is contrary to the Brahmanic vision of man which denies the body as unreal, and to the Christian which sees man as a composite of an evil body and a pure soul.

Divine oneness or *tawḥīd* is the core of the Islamic conception, and the foundation which bestows veracity and validity upon all similarly revealed religions. "The creed of Islam requires every Muslim to believe that God is the supreme ruler, legislator, and planner of people's lives, their relationships, and their connection to the universe and life in general."⁴¹ Hence, submission to God means that there is only one God to whom divinity can be ascribed, and from whom all guidance is received. Consequently, Quṭb calls for the

⁴⁰Ibid. 134.

⁴¹Sayyid Quṭb, *Khaṣā'is*, 22.

organization of man's life and society according to the divine will and revelation. He also alludes to the loss of the notion of man's servitude to God and its replacement by that of man's servitude to man. Accordingly, he calls for the restoration of the vertical relationship between God and man, which, he believed, would lead to the liberation of man and the end of his enslavement to other men. Lastly, it remains to be said that in commenting on Quṭb's vision, Moussalli describes it in the following terms: "The Islamic concept guarantees coherence in character and energy in the entity of the Muslim individual and society, and prevents destruction, split personality and dissipation that are caused by other creeds and concepts."⁴²

2) Islam vs. *Jāhiliyya*

Central to Quṭb's ideas is the concept of *jāhiliyya*, a term which originates in the Qur'ān, generically meaning "ignorance", but also used to refer to the cultural and intellectual state of the Arabs prior to the divine revelation of the Qur'ān. It was frequently used to describe the Arabs' willful ignorance and antagonism towards the Prophet and his message. Following Mawdūdī,⁴³ who developed this concept in his writings, Quṭb maintained that *jāhiliyya* was not limited to time and space but could be equally used to

⁴²Ahmad Moussalli, "Sayyid Quṭb: The Ideologist of Islamic Fundamentalism," *Al-Abḥāth*, 38 (1990): 49.

⁴³Although Quṭb was an admirer of Mawdūdī's thought and followed his lead in using the terms such as *al-jāhiliyya* and *al-ḥākimiyya* as political doctrines, he did not modify his views when Mawdūdī recapitulated many of his beliefs towards the end of his life. For a discussion of the influence of Mawdūdī on Sayyid Quṭb, see Muḥammad 'Imāra, *Abū al-A'la' al-Mawdūdī* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1987), 75ff; A.S. Moussalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Quṭb* (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1992), 36; Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*, enlarged ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 23.

denote anything at any time. In his own words:

Today we are in the midst of a *jāhiliyya* similar to or even worse than the *jāhiliyya* that was “squeezed out” by Islam. Everything about us is *jāhiliyya*: the ideas (*taṣawwurāt*) of mankind and their beliefs, their customs and traditions, the sources of their culture, their arts and literature, and their laws and regulations. [This is true] to such extent that much of what we consider to be Islamic culture and Islamic sources, and Islamic philosophy and Islamic thought ... is nevertheless the product of that *jāhiliyya*.⁴⁴

Based on this assertion, one can deduce that there are two cultures in the world, according to Quṭb, namely the Islamic and the *jāhili* culture. Thus, he not only criticized the West and its cultural influence, be it capitalist, socialist or communist, but also the leaders of Islamic societies who, in his view, accepted secular ideas and incorporated them into the Islamic world instead of submitting to God’s law, as prescribed by the Qur’ān and the Prophet’s teachings. Quṭb also incorporated into his *jāhili* concept the Asian and African polytheistic systems. Moreover, he accused the Christians and the Jews of *jāhili* behavior because of their willingness to accept the power of their religious leaders and for letting the latter decide for them, whether right or wrong. He also accused these religious leaders of ingratiating themselves with the political establishment and dabbling in politics, which is the exclusive prerogative of God.⁴⁵

It is very likely that, together with other factors, the massacre of the Brothers

⁴⁴Sayyid Quṭb, *Ma‘ālim fī al-Tarīq* (Beirut (?): Dār al-Shurūq, n.d.), 18-19 as quoted in Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of the Development of Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 179; Yvonne Y. Haddad, “Sayyid Quṭb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival.” in John L. Esposito, (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 85.

⁴⁵See Quṭb, *Ma‘ālim*, 119-121; Cf. Haddad, “Sayyid Quṭb,” 86-87; Boullata, *Trends*, 59.

witnessed by Quṭb at the Limān Tura prison in 1957 convinced Quṭb that the contemporary Egyptian regime was un-Islamic.⁴⁶ Hence, he drew an analogy between the strategy of the Prophet Muḥammad against the pagan Arab forces and the situation in Egypt during the cold war. He also declared Egypt to be in a state of pagan ignorance, thus justifying the use of force to bring about change. By the same token, he declared a *jihād* to restore the *Sharī‘a* to its rightful prominence in society, and described such a *jihād* as a holy duty incumbent upon every Muslim.

3. *Ḥākimiyya*

In order to eradicate *jāhiliyya*, Quṭb called for the absolute sovereignty and rulership (*ḥākimiyya*) of God. Some scholars have argued that the term *ḥākimiyya*, in contrast to *jāhiliyya*, is neither a Qur’anic nor a dogmatic term originating in the realm of political theory of classical Islam, but rather a modern one, which Quṭb appears to have adopted from Mawdūdī.⁴⁷ The key issue which this term refers to is the issue of state sovereignty and its legitimacy. This issue came to the fore in Quṭb’s time and appears to

⁴⁶Quṭb’s application of the term *jāhiliyya* initiated a novel departure in the dogma of the Brotherhood. Never before had any figure, even one as prominent as Ḥasan al-Bannā’, accused the Egyptian society of his day of being non-Islamic. See Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 46.

⁴⁷Haddad, “Sayyid Quṭb,” 89; cf. Binder, *Islamic Liberalism*, 175-177. For a comparative perspective of Mawdūdī’s and Quṭb’s view of Islam and state, see, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Nadwī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Siyāsī li al-Islām: Fī Mir’āt Kitābat al-Ustādh Abī al-‘Alā al-Mawdūdī wa al-Shahīd Sayyid Quṭb*, third edition (Sharja, United Arab Emirates: al-Markaz al-‘Arabī li al-Kitāb, 1991).

have been influenced by his confrontation with ‘Abd al-Nāṣir’s oppressive regime.⁴⁸

Quṭb, however, reinterpreted a number of verses that could be classified as “*ḥākimiyya*” verses in a manner completely different from his predecessors, and endowed them with a more radical interpretation,⁴⁹ changing the meaning of the verb *yahkumu* from “to judge” to “to rule,” thereby sanctioning collective action against any ruler who fails to abide by God’s law. This new interpretation was critical for Quṭb, who wanted to make it clear that Muslims must not only believe in the tenets of Islam but must govern themselves according to them. Interestingly, his viewpoint led to a vehement confrontation with Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood between 1948-1954, who denounced Quṭb’s interpretation of this verse as a heretical innovation (*bid‘a*).⁵⁰ Quṭb, however, argued that the Muslim creed transcends the human state system, and that *ḥākimiyya* is the exclusive prerogative of God who is the only one capable of fashioning appropriate principles for human and social guidance (*nizām*). Nevertheless, by declaring the total sovereignty and rulership of God, Quṭb implicitly sanctioned the wresting of political power from the hands of its human usurpers and restoring it to God. Such restoration, he believed, would be achieved when an Islamic-based state (polity) was

⁴⁸See e.g., Calvert, “Discourse,” 205; Haddad, “Sayyid Quṭb,” 89.

⁴⁹Cases in point are Qur’ān, 5: 44, 45 and 47.

⁵⁰Haddad, “The Qur’anic Justification,” 27. For criticism of Quṭb see, *inter alia*, Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī, *Du‘āt lā Quḍāt: Abḥāth fī al-‘aqīda al-Islāmiyya wa Manhaj al-Da‘wa ilā Allāh* (Kuwait: al-Ittiḥād al-Islāmī al-‘Ālamī li al-Munazzamāt al-Ṭullābiyya, 1985); S. Al-Jarshī, *al-Ḥaraka al-Islāmiyya fī Duwwāma: Ḥiwār ḥawla fikr Sayyid Quṭb* (Tunis: Dār al-Burāq, 1985); Abū Ibrāhīm ibn Sulṭān ‘Adrān, *al-Quṭbiyya: hiya al-Fitna Fa‘rifūhā*, (n.p., 1416 H).

established, guaranteeing the enforcement of the *sharīʿa* in its totality, and more importantly, guaranteeing justice and freedom to the believers.

This ideas, it has been argued, was propagated centuries ago by the Khārijites, as well as in the modern era by Mawdūdī. It calls for the formation of a pious *jamaʿa* that is willing to reform its ways in isolation from all polluting influences and according to a pristine Islamic method (*minhāj*).⁵¹ Moreover, this method should be devoid of any non-Islamic influences such as patriotism and nationalism.⁵²

Similarly, Sayyid Quṭb believed that since divine sovereignty is so comprehensive, any nondivine authority must be illegitimate, irreligious, and tyrannical (*ṭāghūt*). Hence, he declared the purpose of Islam to be the removal of such illegitimate *ṭāghūt* and its replacement by legitimate divine authority. Moreover, since all human beings are the servants and creatures of God, none of them has the authority to rule over the others. Such opinions, however, seem to have been influenced by those of earlier jurists such as Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) who reiterated them in connection with the Mongol ruler of the time. Quṭb and his supporters, however, believed that such opinions were valid for all times and that Islam sanctioned armed resistance to Muslim rulers who were anti-Islamic. They also believed that such resistance is not only permissible or laudatory but

⁵¹The use of term *minhāj* (system) is interchangeable throughout Quṭb's later works. Nonetheless, the implication is more than 'system' or 'program' which can also imply that something has been made open and manifest. For Quṭb, "it is not sufficient simply to 'be' Muslim and to follow Muslim practices. One must reflect upon Islam and articulate it." Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 42. For further discussion on this, see William E. Shepard, "Islam as a 'System' in the Later Writings of Sayyid Quṭb," *Middle Eastern Studies* 25 (1989): 31-50.

⁵²Cf. Diyāb, *Sayyid Quṭb*, 110-152; Haddad, "Sayyid Quṭb," 90-93.

mandatory.

4. Quṭb's Attitude Towards Philosophy

Quṭb is not an advocate of the majesty of human reason, even though the thought of Western philosophers was frequently alluded to in his early career. In fact towards the end of his life, Quṭb refused the employment of philosophy as a means of assessing religion on rational grounds in one's quest for the truth.⁵³ Quṭb maintained that the apprehension of knowledge is not a matter of intellectual activity but of the reception of truths that are absolutely divine in their origins. In his perspective, the workings of discursive logic or inductive analysis are not necessary for, and are actually inimical to, the triumph of mankind in Allāh's universe. That triumph is rather vouchsafed by the ability and the willingness of the human mind to absorb self-evident truths whose secrets are unlocked by divine text.

To support his view, Quṭb argued that the endeavour of Western thinkers who champion the use of philosophy has led to seriously adverse consequences for human beings. God, he asserted, bestows upon his servants the ability to distinguish themselves from and elevate themselves above animals, as well as to fulfill their tasks as God's vicegerents on earth.

Nonetheless, Quṭb sanctions the use of one's intellect in the pure sciences, such as chemistry, so long as such usage does not transgress the boundaries of experimentation and,

⁵³Quṭb's refusal of philosophy is reflected, *inter alia*, in his various writings, such as: *Khaṣā'is*, *Al-'Adāla*, *Ma'ālim*, and *Fī Zilāl*.

more importantly, so long as it does not involve some sort of philosophical interpretation.⁵⁴

In addition to rejecting Western philosophy, Quṭb also refuted the efforts of such Muslim philosophers as Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī, whom he regarded as mere imitators of their Greek predecessors.⁵⁵ His discontent centered upon their effort to reconcile revelation and reason, an endeavour grounded in Platonic and Aristotelian notions which are alien to Islam. This rejection of philosophy is expressed in his *Khaṣā'is al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī wa Muqawwimātuh*, wherein he criticizes two prominent modern thinkers in the Islamic world, namely, Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) and Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1937) for adopting "inappropriate and poorly comprehended Western philosophical frames of reference in developing their interpretations of Islam."⁵⁶ Moreover, he believed that 'Abduh erred in his attempt to reconcile reason and conscience, because reason, Quṭb argues, varies from one individual to another, and as such cannot serve as an independent basis of interpreting the Qur'ān.⁵⁷ Similarly, he deemed Iqbal erroneous in his borrowing of ideas from Hegel and Comte, because such an attempt would ultimately lead to the infiltration of idealist and positivist conceptions into Islam.

However, despite Quṭb's criticism, there appears to be an affinity between his

⁵⁴Quṭb, *Al-'Adāla al-Ijtimā'īyya fī al-Islām*, 9th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1983), 276; cf. William E. Shepard, *Sayyid Quṭb and Islamic Activism: A Translation and A Critical Analysis of Social Justice in Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 303.

⁵⁵Ibid., 20.

⁵⁶Sayyid Quṭb, *Khaṣā'is*, 15. Shahrough Akhavi, "Sayyid Quṭb: the Poverty of Philosophy and the Vindication of Islamic Tradition," in *Cultural Transitions in the Middle East*, ed., Şerif Mardin (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 136.

⁵⁷Quṭb, *Khaṣā'is*, 15.

conception of Islam and the philosophy of Iqbal. This affinity is most conspicuous in Quṭb's concept of movement or dynamism in Islam, and Iqbal's principle of movement.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Quṭb did assert that Iqbal's interpretation was constrained and distorted by its philosophical dependence upon either the materialistic or the dualistic systems. He also affirmed that the frames of reference Iqbal employed had an impact upon the formation of the ideas they were meant to convey, although denying that every idea must originate in some formal context.⁵⁹ Similarly, Quṭb lamented that both Iqbal's and 'Abduh's defence of Islam against the accusation of retrogression, lost sight of Islam's main focus, which is human existence in its entirety (*al-kaynūnah al-insāniyyah*) and ended up by "confining truth inside explanations."⁶⁰

Consequently, one finds a total rejection of rational exchange or argument as the chief means of disseminating the truth of Islam in Quṭb's works, especially the later ones. Indeed, it seems that when faced with the beauty and veracity of the Qur'ān and the vision of the ideal life espoused in it, Quṭb saw no need for any reasoned philosophical argument. Instead, one finds him declaring that faith is all that is required, and that the apprehension of the truth is more likely to be attained subjectively through a direct appreciation of the beauty and inevitability of the Islamic Weltanschauung, rather than through intellectual endeavours or philosophical speculations.⁶¹ Thus, knowledge that "deals with the mind and

⁵⁸See generally, Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1986).

⁵⁹Sayyid Quṭb, *Khaṣā'is*, 15.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 16.

⁶¹Binder, *Islamic Liberalism*, 194-5.

is reckoned to be a fund of culture” is not Quṭb’s central concern. His main concern in fact seems to be the marriage between *‘ilm* and praxis, or as he put it “we seek the movement (*al-ḥarakah*) behind knowledge.”⁶²

⁶²Quṭb, *Khaṣā’iṣ*, 8.

CHAPTER TWO
THE *TAFSĪR FĪ ZILĀL AL-QUR'ĀN*

The previous chapter considered Sayyid Quṭb's fascination with the Qur'ān, as a part of his writing career and in fact as the culmination of his whole life. This chapter, on the other hand, will be devoted to those numerous aspects of *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, which were not discussed in the previous chapter. Beginning with an analysis of Quṭb's renewed interest in the Qur'ān, and taking into account his basic principles of Qur'anic interpretation, an attempt will be made to demonstrate that Quṭb's theoretical reflections gained new significance with the passage of time. Moreover, this examination of Quṭb's work will attempt to integrate the contemporary historical context with the autonomy of the *tafsīr* itself.

A. Background to the Writing of *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*

1. Sayyid Quṭb's Rediscovery of the Qur'ān

Quṭb's interest in the Qur'ān started at an early stage of his life and grew throughout his intellectual career, which spanned a period of at least thirty four years. During this period, he lived in the shadow of two distinct political regimes, namely, the monarchy, and 'Abd al-Nāṣir's regime, each of which had a unique relationship with Western colonialism. However, before delving into Quṭb's career as a *mufasssīr*, it is necessary to examine the factors that inspired his interest in the Qur'ān and the orientation which this interest had followed. Calvert maintains that "Quṭb's literary studies of the

Qur'ān not only mark the high point of his career as a critic, they also presage his future commitment to the Islamic cause which by the time of his active involvement in the late 1940s, was in full and brilliant bloom."¹ Quṭb's early interest in Qur'anic imagery can be clearly seen in his "Al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," which appeared in the scholarly journal, *al-Muqtaṭaf* in 1939,² and in which he examines the literary and aesthetic aspects of the Qur'ān. The ideas in this article were later fully expanded in a book bearing the same title and published in 1944.³ This book has been regarded as the foundation of his Qur'anic studies, and as having had a significant impact on the *Zilāl*.⁴

This early interest in the Qur'ān may have been sparked by the Qur'anic recitals he had listened to as a child with his family during the month of Ramaḍān.⁵ Indeed, these recitals so moved the young Quṭb that despite his incomplete understanding of the Qur'anic text at this stage, certain parts of it left a deep impression on his imagination due to the richness of their imagery and the personal association. Later on, when he moved to Cairo to pursue his studies, the pleasant, simple and moving Qur'ān of his childhood was transformed into a difficult, complex and broken Qur'ān as a result of reading Qur'anic

¹Calvert, "Discourse," 117.

²See "Al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," *al-Muqtaṭaf* 94, no. 2 (February 1939): 206-222, and (March 1939): 313-318.

³The edition I use here is *Al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān* (n.p., 1966).

⁴Yūsuf al-'Azīm, *Rā'id al-Fikr al-Islāmī al-Mu'āṣir: al-Shahīd Sayyid Quṭb, Ḥayātuh wa Madrasatuh wa Athāruh* (Beirut: Dār al-Qalām, 1980), 246. This is reflected in numerous references to the *Taṣwīr*, as in his commentary on *sūrat* al-Baqara in the *Zilāl*, vol. 1 (Beirut, 1973), 28, 46, 55, 65, 71, 80, 286, 290, 293.

⁵The role that his family, particularly his mother played, in nurturing his deep interest in the Qur'ān may be gleaned from his "dedication" of the *Taṣwīr* to his mother.

commentaries. Therefore, in an effort to recapture or perhaps understand the magical effect of his earliest encounters with the Qur'ān, Quṭb decided to delve deeper into it and write his own commentary on it.⁶ In the introduction to his *Taṣwīr*, Quṭb explained his method and his hopes for his book. He hoped to become a competent *mufassir*, capable of expounding the aim and objective of the holy Qur'ān, as well as enabling others to appreciate the beauty of the Holy Book through his *ta'wīl*. What Quṭb did not know is that his work would later assume more importance than he had ever imagined and that he himself would come to symbolize “the new school of Qur'anic interpretation.”⁷

The concept of Qur'anic inimitability (*i'jāz*) looms large in the *Taṣwīr*. However, it was not the validity of *i'jāz* that Quṭb sought to prove and elaborate, but the aesthetic aspects of the Qur'ān that partake of artistic considerations regardless of their religious value.⁸ In addition, he attempted to keep his method of interpretation free from linguistic, syntactic, juristic, or historical connotations, as had previously been the custom. Moreover, he maintained that by delving into such issues, scholars have added little to the discussion of *i'jāz* and the proper analysis of the Qur'ān.⁹

⁶Musallam, *The Formative*, 133.

⁷Ṣalāh al-Khālīdī, *Madkhal ilā Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 221; cf. Muḥammad ibn Dulaym al-Qaḥṭānī, *Sayyid Quṭb* (Riyad: Dār Ṭība, 1993), 22.

⁸Quṭb's preoccupation with the purely artistic features of the Qur'ān was criticized by Ḥasan al-Bannā' (1906-1949) who accused him of ignoring the religious aspects of the text; see Yūsuf al-'Azm, *Rā'id al-Fikr al-Islāmī al-Mu'asir al-Shahīd Sayyid Quṭb* (Beirut: Dār al-Qalām, 1980), 247. Nonetheless, *Taṣwīr* is still considered the foundation of Quṭb's Qur'anic studies and the precursor to *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*.

⁹For a detailed account on how the Qur'ān should be approached, see generally *al-Taṣwīr*, 24-33.

Quṭb argued that the Qur'ān's charm (*sihr*) lies in its harmonious and integral thesis. The Qur'ān's cohesiveness comes neither from its historical narrations nor from the sequencing of its chapters, but rather from the sensitivity of the Qur'anic discourse, represented in its use of images and tones and its employment of psychological and spiritual shades to imprint the message and views that are integral to its 'artistic inimitability' (*al-i'jāz al-fannī*).¹⁰ To support this thesis, Quṭb cited the stories of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, both of whom were overwhelmed by the charm of the Qur'ān, although from contrasting perspectives.¹¹ However, he also conceded that the early converts accepted Islam for a variety of reasons besides the charm of the Qur'ān. These reasons included the charismatic personality of the Prophet, the patience and sacrifice undertaken by Muslims, and the tolerance of the *sharī'ah*, to mention but a few. Nonetheless, he argued that the Qur'ān itself was a decisive factor in bewitching the pagans and making them accept Islam.¹²

2. Quṭb's Artistic Expression of the Qur'ān

In his discussion of the Qur'ān's artistry, Quṭb asserted that the most prominent device of the Qur'anic style is portrayal: "It is an established method, a comprehensive

¹⁰Sayyid Quṭb, "al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," *al-Muqtaṭaf* 94, no. 2 (February 1939): 206, 207.

¹¹See Sayyid Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr*, 11-14.

¹²Sayyid Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr*, 18; Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 104-105.

characteristic, using variations in colour, movement, tone and sound, ...”¹³ This device is also aided by a plethora of expressions that help magnify the imagery and make it lively and humane. To support this claim, Quṭb offered extensive examples from the Qur’ān such as Q. 7: 40, in which the impossibility of a non-believer’s entering heaven is equated with the impossibility for a camel of passing through a needle’s eye (... “the gates of heaven shall not be opened to them, nor shall they enter Paradise until the camel passes through the eye of the needle. Even so We recompense the sinners”).¹⁴

Furthermore, Quṭb argued that sensual dramatization and corporeal representation (*al-takhyīl al-ḥissī wa al-tajsīm*) were two important methods forming the foundation of Qur’anic portrayal, for example, in Q. 81: 18, “*wa al-ṣubḥi idhā tanaffas*” (by the dawn sighing), where the human quality of breathing is ascribed to the morning, thus endowing it with the myriad meanings and states that are usually attributed to the morning.¹⁵ Similarly, Quṭb maintained that the anthropomorphic expressions of the Qur’ān like “He sat on the throne,” “His throne on the water,” and “The Hand of Allāh is above their hands,” are examples of dramatization and corporeal representation, designed to clarify abstract meanings.¹⁶

Quṭb believed that the repetitious parts of the Qur’anic narrative are subordinate to its religious message. Likewise, he explained that the tales in the Qur’ān are treated in

¹³Boullata, “The Rhetorical,” 151; Sayyid Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr*, 34-35.

¹⁴Ibid., 36.

¹⁵Sayyid Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr*, 63-64.

¹⁶Ibid., 73.

a variety of ways. Some, like those of Yūsuf, Ibrāhīm and Sulaymān are examined at length, while others such as those of Zakariyyā, Shu‘ayb and Ṣāliḥ are treated rather briefly. In addition, some tales are either presented in their entirety, such as the tale concerning the birth of Jesus, while others are initiated at a later stage, like the story of Yūsuf.¹⁷

Another aspect that constitutes representation in Quṭb’s scheme, is the artistic harmony (*al-tanāsuq al-fannī*) of the Qur’ān. He held that musical rhythms and harmonious patterns perform a fundamental harmonizing task in the rhetoric of the Qur’ān. A case in point is Qur’ān, *sūra* 53.¹⁸

Also, incorporated into Quṭb’s scheme of artistic harmony is the portrayal by the Qur’ān of the Day of Resurrection, in which he discovered a certain symmetry and affinity between expressions used in some scenes and the underlying rhythm and music of the words. The Qur’anic imagery and discourse in these scenes deal with death, resurrection, happiness and suffering, in breathlessly rapid portrayals which reflect the calamity of the day.¹⁹ Moreover, the Qur’anic representation of bodily resurrection at the end of time etches a deep and haunting impact on the mind. He proves this through an exploration of the thoroughness of the imagery and the purity of the conception of the Qur’ān.²⁰

The novelty of Quṭb’s literary Qur’anic study has been much debated amongst scholars. One such is ‘A’ishah ‘Abd Raḥmān (Bint al-Shāḥi’), who has argued that studies

¹⁷Sayyid Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr*, 134-139.

¹⁸This *sūra* reads: *wannajmi idhā hawā, mā ḍalla ṣāḥibukum wa mā ghawā, wa mā yanṭiqu ‘ani-l-hawā*, and so forth.

¹⁹Sayyid Quṭb, *Mashāhid*, 58.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 37, 39-42.

such as his had previously been undertaken at Cairo University.²¹ In addition, it has been claimed that the genesis of the idea of a “*taṣwīr fannī*” can be traced back to al-‘Aqqād.²² Regarding the first accusation, Quṭb responded by requesting the names, if any, of such works, and maintaining that the alleged presence of such works is erroneous and contrary to the facts.²³ As for the second allegation, it appears to have been baseless for ‘Aqqād had no idea concerning what was ascribed to him. Moreover, a closer examination of the latter’s *al-Wuḍūh wa al-Ghumūd fī al-Asālib al-Shi’riyya* shows no indication of such claims. Thus one may conclude that Quṭb was not a follower of anyone in this endeavor.²⁴

Quṭb employed the views articulated in *Taṣwīr* in his second major, literary-oriented Qur’anic work, *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma fī al-Qur’ān*, in 1947. This book deals specifically with the verses of the Qur’ān that relate to the scenes of the resurrection.

While it is conceivable that Quṭb’s rediscovery of the Qur’ān was closely related to the transformation of the Egyptian nationalist discourse during the 1930s and 1940s,²⁵ internal factors must have also contributed to his growing fascination and attachment to the Qur’ān. Musallam maintains that there are at least three reasons for Quṭb’s renewed

²¹‘Abd Allāh ‘Awaḍ ‘Abd al-Khabbās, *Sayyid Quṭb al-Adīb al-Nāqid* (Amman: Maktabat al-Manār, 1983), 307.

²²Sayyid Bashīr Aḥmad Kashmīrī, ‘*Abqarī al-Islām Sayyid Quṭb: al-Adīb al-‘Imlāq wa al-Mujaddid al-Mulham* (Cairo: Dār al-Faḍīla, 1994), 298.

²³Sayyid Quṭb, “Mabāḥith ‘an al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur’ān,” *al-Risāla* 620 (1945): 529; cf. al-Khabbās, *Sayyid Quṭb*, 307; see also Kashmīrī, ‘*Abqarī al-Islām*, 298-99.

²⁴See Ṣalāḥ ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Khālīdī, *Naẓariyyat al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī ‘ind Sayyid Quṭb*, 122, 126, 368. In the previous chapter I indicated why Quṭb, as an admirer of ‘Aqqād, later struck his own course; see *supra*, p. 8.

²⁵See, *inter alia*, Calvert, “Discourse,” 123.

interest, all of which appear to have arisen from personal reasons. They are the death of his mother, his shattered love affair and his failing health.²⁶ Accordingly, Quṭb's analysis and study of the Qur'ān was not a mere "intellectual and psychological luxury", as he declared, but was apparently a psychological and spiritual necessity.

By analyzing Sayyid Quṭb's long intellectual career, one witnesses a systematic transformation in his literary interests, philosophical arguments, and religious objectives. It is clear, however, that his main objective in writing the *Zilāl* was not to elevate Arabic literary criticism to the status of a discipline, or to relegate Qur'anic studies to a mere hermeneutical field, but to utilize the religious text in the fulfillment of certain objectives. "In general, what one witnesses is an overall shift in emphasis from the literary and aesthetic forms of expression to the social and ideological dimension of Islam in his writing."²⁷ Moreover, in accordance with the basic arguments of modernist Muslim exegetes like Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā, Sayyid Quṭb pursued the double intention of interpreting the Qur'ān as the sacred text par excellence, as well as advancing his religious claims and views which conflicted with those of his contemporaries to a large extent.²⁸ It must also be remembered that Quṭb, during the 1950s and 60s, was the main ideologue of the *Ikhwān* and that the Qur'ān was used, to some extent, to supply an affirmation and an impetus to Quṭb's ideology.

²⁶For further details see Adnan Ayyub Musallam, "The Formative Stages of Sayyid Quṭb's Intellectual Career and His Emergence as an Islamic Dā'iyah" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1983), 147-154.

²⁷Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi', *Intellectual Origins*, 169.

²⁸Ibid.

3. The Origin of the *Zilāl*

The *Zilāl* first appeared in the scientific journal *al-Risāla*, in the form of serial articles. These articles were all entitled *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, and started to appear in February 1952 when Quṭb published his first article in the third issue of that month. He continued producing writing articles for the next seven issues until the termination of the magazine's publication was announced. *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* was then published separately in 30 consecutive volumes, each of which was issued at the beginning of the month by Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya li 'Ī sā al-Ḥalabī wa Shurakāh.²⁹ The publication of all 30 volumes spanned a period of more than two years. Indeed, the first volume appeared in October 1952 and the last by the end of 1954. From January to March of 1953, Quṭb was in detention but nevertheless managed to write volumes 17 and 18 during that period.

The prison authorities allowed Quṭb to continue his work on the commentary in order to fulfill his contractual obligation to the publishing house. This concession was the direct result of the publisher's successful challenge to the government in the courts for the losses he had incurred during Quṭb's imprisonment in 1954. Nevertheless, the government formed a censorship committee to screen Quṭb's writings. Moreover, upon completion of his oeuvre in 1959, Quṭb began major revisions of the earlier sections of his commentary so as to make it reflect his new Islamic conception in light of the 1954 disaster which befell the Muslim Brothers as well as his own experience in 'Abd al-Nāṣir's prisons. After completing the revision of the first thirteen parts, they were reprinted in the third edition

²⁹ *Al-Muslimūn* 9 (1952): 15.

of his commentary in 1961.³⁰

B. Quṭb's Method of Qur'anic Interpretation

Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān, is not a commentary in the traditional sense. Instead, it is a free expression of the author's feelings while reading the Qur'anic verses. Quṭb's earlier subjective spiritual experiences, and especially his quest for an infinite, which could never be expressed in finite and objective mediums, became entrenched in his literary philosophy. In analysing Quṭb's method of Qur'anic exegesis, an effort will be made to take into account both the purely historical context contemporaneous with the writing of this work as well as the autonomy of the *Zilāl*.³¹ The historical context, however, has been partially alluded to in the previous chapter. The following factors will also be taken into account, namely, the semantics of Quṭb's exegesis and the relationship of semantics to the cultural and political environment.

³⁰Al-‘Az̄m, 251; al-Khālīdī, 241-244; al-Shaṭṭī, 18; and also Barakāt, 15, 19. Further examination of the revision of the *Zilāl* will be discussed in Chapter Three, below.

³¹The question of method in the *Zilāl*, within its historical context, has been discussed by Abu Rabi‘ in his *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 167-208; see also Olivier Carré, *Mystique et politique: lecture révolutionnaire du Coran par Sayyid Quṭb, frère musulman radical* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1984), 31-73. On the subject of Quṭb's approach to the Qur'ān in the wider context of *i'jāz*, see Issa J. Boullata, "The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'ān: *I'jāz* and Related Topics," in Andrew Rippin, *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 139-157, which provides a comprehensive analysis of the study of *i'jāz* from classical to modern times.

In explaining his method of Qur'anic interpretation,³² Quṭb declares the first step to be an active search within the Qur'ān for its meanings. In this respect, his view is akin to that of other *mufasssirs* who maintain that the Qur'ān explains itself by itself (*yufassiru ba'duhā ba'da*).³³ Accordingly, he believed that the Qur'ān is the primary reference point for every single matter, and that it should not be twisted in order to conform to contemporary principles or explanations. Rather, our understanding of the Qur'ān should conform to the Qur'ān's statements, not vice versa. Moreover, Quṭb contends that it is God's prerogative to determine and interpret the religion of Islam as He wishes. This stand goes along way towards explaining the nature of his straightforward method in *tafsīr*, and its lack of dependence on *ta'wīl* and *talfīq*.³⁴

In addition, Quṭb utilizes Prophetic traditions but only in a secondary, subservient manner. Prophetic traditions, he argues, embody elements of orientation and magnificent

³²Since Quṭb did not write a special book on the methodology of Qur'anic exegesis, this study is based on observation of his *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, as well as his other works.

³³All prominent Muslim exegetes are in agreement with this principle. Later, modern Muslim scholars such as 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥmān and Fazlur Rahman were to argue that this method is the only valid way of interpreting the Qur'ān. See the former's *Tafsīr al-Bayānī*, Vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1962), 9-10. See also Issa J. Boullata, "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi's Method, *Muslim World* 64 (1974): 103-113. For the views of Rahman, see his *Islam and Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 2-11 and his *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), xi-ii.

³⁴Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, Dār al-Shurūq edition, vol. 3, 1518-9; cf. Sayyid Bashīr Aḥmad Kashmīrī, *Abqarī al-Islām*, 341. Quṭb's commitment to the Qur'anic text resulted in allegations of his radicalism. The radicalism of *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, however, implies interpreting the Qur'ān according to the language and the style of that text and none other. 'Abd Allāh Shaḥātah also argued that Quṭb's offense was that he provoked Islamic thought from within the Qur'ān. See Aḥmad Shubūl, "Ṭarīqa Jadīda li Tafsīr al-Qur'ān wa Dirāsah Safara Sayyid Quṭb," *al-Ahrām* 20 (1984): 15.

methodological refinement. However, he refrains from using weak traditions except on very limited occasions,³⁵ and only when the nature of the issue at hand requires it. Examples of his reluctance to use such traditions can be illustrated in his attitude towards the story of the two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt, who were sent to Bābil. This story and others like it, he says, were known to both Arabs and Jews when the Qur’ān appeared. Hence, the Qur’ān speaks of them in general terms (*ijmāl*) and briefly mentions them in order to convey a certain message or fulfill a certain objective. They are not elaborated in great detail because the Prophet’s contemporaries already knew them. Accordingly, Quṭb refrained from incorporating ancient legends like this one into his interpretation since no single tradition confirmed their reliability or authenticity.³⁶

Quṭb is also critical of sound narratives in which the *matn* (content) contradicts reason. An example in this regard is his interpretation of Qur’ān, 72: 1, which mentions stories about the *jinn*. Despite the plethora of traditions circulating around this verse, Quṭb avoids them and uses the traditions ascribed to Ibn ‘Abbās instead, arguing that they fit better the Qur’anic text “*Qul uḥīya ilayya annahu stama‘a nafarun mina l-jinni ...*” (Say: It has been revealed to me that a company of the jinn gave ear, ...). Hence, based on these traditions, Quṭb concluded that the Prophet was informed of the occurrence through

³⁵This is clearly stated in his *Zilāl*, Dār al-Shurūq edition, vol. 3, 1598. The *Zilāl*’s use of Prophetic traditions appears to gain more and more attention from researchers. The most recent ones to do so are Abū ‘A’ish ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Ibrāhīm and Abū Ḥudhaifa Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, *Fath Dhī al-Jalāl Fī Takhrīj Aḥādīth al-Zilāl* (Riyad: Maktabat Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 1995) in two volumes, not only gathers the prophetic traditions used in the *Zilāl* but also analyses them as well as assesses their reliability.

³⁶Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, vol. 1, 97.

revelation; and that he neither saw the *jinn* nor communicated with them. In addition, this tradition is the most reliable in terms of its chain of transmission and deduction.³⁷ Although Quṭb acknowledged that these traditions had been accepted since the very beginning by a number of classical scholars,³⁸ they were still doubtful because they emphasized the infallibility of prophecy and safeguarded discussions of mockery and distortion, which the context of the *sūra* totally negated. At the same time they weakened the faith of the unbelievers in the gods and the fables surrounding them. Thus, Quṭb concluded that it was advisable not to incorporate these two stories into the commentary on the *sūra*.

Quṭb also frequently discusses the phenomena surrounding given instances of revelation, or the *asbāb al-nuzūl*, explicitly stating that it is necessary to take into account the situation, including the context, circumstances and factual exigencies, in which each verse was revealed. This feature is even more clear in Quṭb's introduction to the *sūras* which begin with *asbāb al-nuzūl*, particularly in the revised editions.³⁹ In addition to stressing the importance of the circumstances of revelation, Quṭb also adheres closely to the text, offering his complete consent to its literal meanings.

When dealing with the legal verses of the Qur'ān, Quṭb is not very much interested in analysing their juridical function. In fact, Quṭb often directs the reader to consult books

³⁷Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, Dār al-Shurūq edition, vol. 6, 3273. It was also used in the *Tabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd and *Tārīkh* of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī under the name *ḥadīth al-gharānīq* (the exalted maidens), albeit with minor lexical differences.

³⁸For instance, see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 17 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1987), 131-3.

³⁹Khālīdī, *Zilāl al-Qur'ān fī al-Mizān*, 332-338.

on *fiqh* for these.⁴⁰

The ambiguous verses (*āyāt mutashābihāt*) also proved to be a controversial issue among the *mufasssirs*. This issue has its roots in the Qur'anic passage stating that God revealed to Muḥammad verses which were either perspicuous (*muḥkamāt*) and therefore of a fundamental nature, or ambiguous (*mutashābihāt*). In approaching the ambiguous verses, Quṭb, in contrast to most exegetes, did not plunge into philosophical or logical discussions but restricted himself to the central narrative of the Qur'ān. Nor did he seek the aid of explanatory *ḥadīths*, unless a *ḥadīth* sound in both its transmission and content was available. He believed that the literal meaning of the text was sufficient for an adequate understanding of the text. Similarly, he believed that all efforts to fully explain the *mutashābihāt* verses and unlock their mystery would prove futile and would constitute a violation of the *naṣṣ*, which purposely gave no detailed explanation of them.⁴¹ The best example of his use of this method can be seen in his interpretation of Q. 2: 29 “then He lifted Himself to heaven.” Interpolating the interpretation with theological dialectic, Quṭb argues, is a distortion of both the beauty of faith and the Qur'ān.⁴²

⁴⁰See, *inter alia*, Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, Dār al-Shurūq edition, vol. 3, 1518-9; cf. Kashmīrī, *‘Abqarī al-Islām*, 341. For a detailed account of Quṭb's view pertaining to *sharī‘a* and *fiqh* see, *inter alia*, Olivier Carré, *Mystique*, 191-212; and idem, “Le Combat pour Dieu et l'Etat islamique chez Sayyid Quṭb, l'inspirateur du radicalisme actuel” *Revue française de science politique* 33, 4 (1983): 696-8; Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi', *Intellectual Origins*, 196-8.

⁴¹Quṭb's position in this regard is similar to that of his predecessor, ‘Abduh. See al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, vol. 3, 226.

⁴²Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, vol. 1, 53-4; for a fair treatment of Quṭb's view on the ambiguous verses, especially concerning the attributes of God, see Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Maghrawī, *Al-Mufasssīrūn: Bayn al-Ta’wīl wa al-Ithbāt Fī Ayāt al-Ṣifāt*, vol.

Quṭb's attitude towards *Isrā'īliyyāt*, in contrast to that of most previous *mufassirs*,⁴³ resembles his view on the ambiguous verses (*mutashābihāt*). Indeed, he maintains that the literal meaning of the text suffices to convey the message. He also held that these fables and ancient stories lead to deviation in Muslim thought because there is no sound tradition or Qur'anic reference that supports their validity. Therefore, it is inconceivable that the *Isrā'īliyyāt* should be taken into account. In addition, he argued that many commentators, including al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, erred in placing their faith in these tales.⁴⁴

C. Sayyid Quṭb's Qur'anic Hermeneutics

Although Quṭb wrote a Qur'anic exegesis, and several short works on Qur'anic topics, he never devoted an entire work to Qur'anic hermeneutics per se. What follows is therefore an extrapolation of the ideas included in a chapter of his *Ma'ālim fī al-Ṭarīq*, entitled *Jilun Qur'āniyyun Farīd* (A Unique Qur'anic Generation), which presents the most important tenets of Quṭb's approach to Qur'anic exegesis.

The Prophet's message, Quṭb observes, produced a generation of people unique in

2 (Riyad: Dār Ṭība, 1985), 319-332.

⁴³For instance, Ibn Taymiyya distinguished between three types of Judaeo-Christian tales, namely, those which confirm the truth, those contrary to the tenets of Islam, and those whose soundness or unsoundness are doubtful. He affirmed that the *Isrā'īliyyāt* traditions of the first and third categories may be used in *tafsīr* as a means of assisting the *mufassir* in making a point. See his *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* (Kuwait: Dār al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, 1971), 55-7, 98-101; see also Ṣabrī ā-Mutawallī, *Manhaj Ibn Taymiyya fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1981), 68.

⁴⁴Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, Dār al-Shurūq edition, vol. 1, 299; vol. 2, 875; vol. 3, 1358, 1359; vol. 4, 1881.

the history of humanity. Accordingly, it is the *mufassir*'s task to find the "secret" of this committed generation of people and their exemplary Islamic way of life, and this in order to mobilize a similar generation of youth capable of upholding Islamic ideas in the modern world. Such a quest, however, inevitably faced the question of why contemporary Muslims, possessing both the Qur'ān and the teachings of Muḥammad, do not demonstrate the same piety and religious fervor as the Prophet's Companions. Quṭb points out that the reason for such failure cannot have been the death of Muḥammad, as Islam is a universal religion valid for all time, not not dependant on a mortal human being, whatever his status for its survival.

Quṭb believed that the inspiration behind the exceptional generation of Muslims lies in the nature of the source or font (*nab* ') that inspired them: the pristine and undiluted Qur'ān of yore; not the Qur'ān as Muslims now know it, but rather the Qur'ān unencumbered by centuries of interpreters. This Qur'ān was so magnificent and powerful, he claims, that even Muḥammad's life was simply a trace of it.

D. The System Employed in the *Zilāl*

It has been stated that the *Zilāl* is not a *tafsīr* in the traditional sense,⁴⁵ even though it loosely adheres to the traditional medieval format. Moreover, a close study of the work reveals that it provides for every verse or group of verses a commentary divided into at

⁴⁵The style and content of Quṭb's *Zilāl* may be likened to those of al-Marāghī's and Maḥmūd Shaltūt's *tafsīrs*, in which each author delivers a sermon-like exegesis. It has furthermore been argued that the *Zilāl* is "an enormous collection of sermons." See, J.J.G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 79.

least three main sections, namely, an introduction, revelation, and an expansion of the text.

In his analysis of the verses, he starts by highlighting the important features of the *sūras*, as well as determining the foremost lines and principles, *nukāt*, of the verses. *Sūra* by *sūra* and verse by verse, covering several thousand pages, Quṭb outlines his understanding of the Qur'ān in order to build a theory of, and a practical program for, modern Islam. He next explains the correlation and the application of the verses to real life. In addition, he often resorts to evidence furnished by transmitters of *ḥadīth* and exegetes regarding the circumstances and history of the revelation in order to explain further the narratives. Nevertheless, his handling of reports and statements from prominent books of *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr* and *tārīkh* is rather inconsistent, and perhaps not analytical enough in discriminating between sound and forged reports. However, Quṭb utilized diverse sources in the belief that these reports would undoubtedly support and explain each other, thus throwing more light on the context and meaning of the verses. By placing the verses in the context they were revealed in, Quṭb argues, the reader would obtain a greater sense of their reality and their applicability to real life.⁴⁶

Quṭb affirmed the unity of the different components of each *sūra* of the Qur'ān. He criticized especially scholars who claimed that individual sections of each *sūra* of the Qur'ān could stand on their own, and who cited the example of how on one occasion the Qur'ān speaks about the Prophet and his Companions, on another it provides stories and

⁴⁶See Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, Dār al-Shurūq edition, *inter alia*, vol. 1, 457-467; vol. 2, 831-2, 985-8; vol. 3, 1429-1431.

ancient tales, and on yet other occasion it discusses specific legal matters.⁴⁷ Quṭb's exposition of *sūrat al-Isrā'* is perhaps the best example of this unity. This Meccan *sūra* starts with a glorification of God (*subḥāna llāh*) and ends with praise to God (*al-ḥamdu li llāh*). Although comprising manifold topics, it focuses on doctrine (*'aqīda*). It also deals with etiquette appropriate to both individual and community life, a description of the children of Israel and a discussion of their connection to the Aqṣa mosque as the destination of the Night Journey. Moreover, it briefly presents the story of Adam and Iblīs and the honour which God bestowed upon man.

It has to be borne in mind that *Zilāl* may be seen as having one general theme, an overriding monolithic message, which runs counter to the classical and medieval *tafsīr* genres where the messages of the Qur'ān were usually taken to be more indirect. Thus, following his introduction, Quṭb groups together verses in logical unities which are then analyzed in several pages of commentary. The verses are repeated throughout the commentary of the passage under consideration, which is frequently interrupted by long digressions on various social and religious problems. Quṭb also subjects the verses to grammatical analysis to some extent, but it is clear from the text that he is not much interested in this aspect of exegesis, and therefore has little to offer that is new.

With regards to the expansion of the text, Quṭb followed closely the writings of the *salaf*, since they sometimes offer new shades of meaning to our understanding of the Qur'ān, thus helping define the orientation of the proper Islamic life. Despite their merits, however, Quṭb was wary of these reports, since they were not of divine origin, and hence

⁴⁷ Al-'Azm, *Rā'id*, 269.

should not be regarded as conclusive. Indeed, he believed that recourse to these reports should be complementary to the exercise of reason, and that *ijtihād* should not obstruct them in any way. Thus, Quṭb advocates a re-evaluation of those reports in order to distinguish between the sound and forged elements to be found in them. He also maintains that the statements of the *salaf* concerning the abrogation of verses by others should be considered as mere hypotheses.⁴⁸

Sayyid Quṭb further maintained that it was of the utmost importance to a *mufassir* to free himself from his own opinion, and to hold the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* as the sole defining factors in the interpretation of the Qur'ān. He states: "It [the interpretation of the Qur'ān] is too grave for one to interpret it according to one's opinion... It weighs so much in God's scales that a Muslim cannot resort to his own opinion in it. It is the word of God (the Most graceful) and that of his Prophet (Peace be Upon Him) that he must take into consideration in this matter, and that he must refer to, just as true believers always resort to God and the Prophet in their disputes."⁴⁹

In another place he also says: "I never found myself, not even once, in need of anything outside of this Qur'ān, except for the words of the Prophet (Peace be Upon Him) which are considered part of the *āthār* of this Qur'ān. Indeed, anything else besides them appears weak to the researcher, even if it is correct."⁵⁰ Thus, it is clear that Quṭb was

⁴⁸See Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, Dār al-Shurūq edition, for example, vol. 1, 457, 467, 242-5; vol. 3, 1431-43.

⁴⁹Sayyid Quṭb, *Ma'ālim fī al-Ṭarīq*, 131-2.

⁵⁰Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, Dār al-Shurūq edition, vol. 3, 1423.

meticulously careful, to the point of dismissal, of the supplementary material often used by other exegetes. And even though he still described this material as ‘authentic,’ he still felt that it might reflect adversely on the Prophet’s character or practice.

At this juncture, it appears that there is a certain affinity between his opinion and that of Muḥammad ‘Abduh, who demanded of the experts on *tafsīr* only that they contemplate the Holy Book and extract from it its meaning. It was his belief that “on the last Day, God will not question us on the opinion of the commentators and on how they understood the Koran, but He will question us on his Book which he sent down to guide and instruct us.”⁵¹ However, this stand was in direct opposition to that of ‘Abduh and Riḍā who favoured the use of reason in the interpretation of the Qur’ān. They did so because they wanted to engage the Muslim masses in thinking about and contemplating the Qur’ān, thus taking the interpretation of the Holy Book out of the purview of a select scholarly circle and offering it to a wider audience. Nevertheless, some argued that such an approach would subject the Qur’ān to changeable human whims, thus detracting from its value and belittling it. One such critic was Quṭb himself, who said, “There is no brain that does not suffer from weakness, bias, whim or ignorance. Therefore, if we subject the Qur’ān to it... we will end up with chaos.”⁵²

⁵¹Muḥammad ‘Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Ḥakīm*, vol. 1, 25-26; as quoted in Jansen, *The Interpretation*, 19.

⁵²Sayyid Quṭb, *Khaṣā’is*, 22.

E. The Significance of Sayyid Quṭb's Qur'anic Interpretation

One of the distinguishing features of *Zilāl* is that it is not confined to any sectarian interpretation. The author also avoids the grammatical, dialectical and legal discourse which characterizes traditional commentaries and which, he says, “conceals the Qur’ān from my soul and my soul from the Qur’ān.”⁵³ In his eyes, God’s Shari‘a is the best way (*manhaj*) and is a pure model that can never be corrupted. This is evident from the fact that, according to Quṭb, there is no need to delve into the complexities of *fiqh* so long as the Islamic state has not been founded. It will only be when Islam is effectively instituted that we can delve into *fiqh* questions in order to find solutions for the needs of the emerging Muslim community, he declares. As such, the *Zilāl* was fashioned as a work of *tafsīr* that could be adopted by the Muslim community in years to come. He hoped that it would become a guide in demolishing the zealous polarization of Muslims so that Islam would be devoted to God and His messenger.⁵⁴

Much as Quṭb disapproved of the employment of philosophical concepts in Qur’ān exegesis, he was similarly wary of the use of scientific reasoning in uncovering the message of the Qur’ān, as some *mufasssīs* have in fact done. The primary justification for their stand lay in Q. 6: 38 “We have neglected nothing in the Book,” which they interpreted to the effect that the Qur’ān contains all knowledge and philosophy. Accordingly, as a result of this interference by the intellect in Qur’anic exegesis, strange interpretations and

⁵³Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, vol. 1, 2nd edition, Cairo, 1953, 5.

⁵⁴Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, Dār al-Shurūq edition, among others, vol 1, 168-9, 206, 211-6, 229, 240, 418, 589, 596; vol. 2, 623, 668-9, vol. 4, 1948, 2005; See also Olivier Carré, *Mystique et Politique*, 191-219.

presuppositions without any affinity to the Qur'ān were deduced and imposed on the Qur'ān. Quṭb, on the other hand, maintained a more balanced position between the use of reasoning and the understanding of the Qur'anic message. He is quick to point out in his *Zilāl* that scientific reasoning is variable and evolves in time, and that the human intellect is limited and different from one individual to another. In addition, the object of the Qur'ān is *'aqīda* not knowledge, and its main subject was man. Thus, because scientific argumentation is unnecessary in contemplating God's Book, the Qur'ān must be the parameter for everything and not vice versa.⁵⁵

⁵⁵Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, Dār al-Shurūq edition, for example, vol. 1, 167, 181-4, 278-82, 510-1, 545, 577-85; vol. 2, 806-8, vol. 3, 1531-4, 1588-9; cf. Yūsuf al- 'Azm, *Rā'id al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, 262-268; also see Kashmīrī, *'Abqarī al-Islām Sayyid Quṭb*, 348-52.

CHAPTER THREE
EXAMINATION OF THE REVISION OF *FĪ ZILĀL AL-QUR'ĀN*

A. Analysis of the Revision

This chapter will seek to analyse the main characteristics of the revised edition of *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. However, since the scope of such an oeuvre is quite extensive, our investigation will offer a general view of these revisions, stopping at the most conspicuous of them. In so doing, the following questions will be advanced: what are the changes made, how different are these changes from his earlier statements, i.e. are the changes merely linguistic and lexical or are they doctrinal as well, and how far do they reflect the development of Quṭb's thought during 1960 as compared to his earlier thought ? In answering these questions, special attention will be paid to the sections pertaining to the alms-tax (*zakāt*) and interest (*ribā*)-related verses. These two sections have been chosen because they were deemed, by Quṭb, to be the very foundation of social justice, a notion critical to the agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood, as voiced by him.¹

The analysis of the changes made to the *Zilāl* will be based on a comparison of the first edition with the revised fourth edition, although I am aware of Musallam's assertion that the first publication of the revised edition of the first thirteen volumes appeared in the third edition published by Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī in 1961. However, there are various

¹In addition to the sources cited in Chapter One, note no. 10, see also Abdel Aziz Ramadan, "Fundamentalist Influence in Egypt: The Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Takfir Groups," in *Fundamentalism and the State*, Ed. Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993); John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse, New York, 1991).

statements made by Quṭb in the fourth edition which refer to the second edition indicating some sort of revision.² Nonetheless, this point will not affect the main theme of our discussion. In addition, the other seventeen volumes of the *Zilāl* were modified and published by Dār al-Shurūq in 1980.³ Moreover, further changes were made in 1982 in the tenth edition by the same publisher to keep it in pace with the development of Quṭb's ideas during the latter part of his life.⁴

In our analysis, the extent and nature of the changes made by Quṭb will be taken into account. These changes range in length from a paragraph, to a number pages, to entirely new sections. Moreover, sentences and phrases are sometimes altered and made to bear interesting new implications. Moreover, since the quantity of such changes is so extensive, it is deemed appropriate to approach the issue in a very general manner. After all, Quṭb's Islamist thought⁵ has already been expressed in the unrevised editions (one and

²To indicate that some changes were made, the phrase "*al-ṭab'a al-thāniya al-munaqqaha*" is used. See, for instance, the fourth Dār al-'Arabiyya li al-Ṭibā'a wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī' edition, volumes: 4, 70; 6, 71, 79; 8, 13; 9, 90; 10, 62.

³This is implied from the letter of Quṭb's brother, Muḥammad Quṭb, urging the publishing house that it take the occasion of republication to review Quṭb's books and make necessary correction. See Dār al-Shurūq edition of *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 1982/ 1402.

⁴The fact that Quṭb revised the *Zilāl* himself, can be gleaned in Muḥammad Quṭb, *al-Shahīd al-Ḥayy*, 242-3; Haddad Y.Y., "The Islamic Justification for An Islamic Revolution: The View of Sayyid Quṭb," *The Middle East Journal* 37 (1) (1983): 17,18; A.A., Musallam, "The Formative Stages," 228, 231-2, 248, 284-5; al-Wahībī, *al-Ṣila Bayn al-'Aqīda wa al-Ḥākimiyya* (Riyad: Dār al-Muslim, 1995), 63; al-'Azm, *Ra'id al-Fikr*, 247-251; Robert D. Lee, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity: The Search for Islamic Authenticity* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 84.

⁵I prefer to use the terms Islamism/ Islamist here to refer to the phenomenon widely known in the West as "Islamic Fundamentalism." The term "fundamentalism" was invented and self-applied by a party of American evangelical Protestants in 1920 which referred specifically to a theological position of biblical inerrancy developed between 1910 and

two), and most of the changes made in the revised edition do not offer radically new ideas but simply emphasize the earlier (radical) trend of his thought.

With regards to the organization of the *tafsīr*, it is observed that the earlier editions start with the analysis of the Qur'anic verses per se, and do not offer a general introduction to each *sūra* as it was dealt with. Nonetheless, this weakness is remedied in the revised edition when introductions are added to all *surās*. These introductions are often extensive and seek to provide a general synopsis of each *sūra*, as well as its relation to the rest of the Qur'ān.⁶ Quṭb's belief in the unity of the verses of each *sūra*, is emphasized in each introduction. For example, in the introduction to *sūrat al-Baqara* he maintains that there is a strong connection between the first and the last verses of the *sūra*, which collectively illustrate the characteristics of *īmān*, the Islamic belief in all prophets, revealed Books, and the unseen, as well as the qualities of listening and obedience. Consequently, he believes that there is a certain symmetry and affinity between the beginning and the end of the *sūra*

1915. See James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 2. In more recent times, the terms have been loosely applied to a wide variety of religious groups or movements which seek the authority of scripture as a basis for socio-political mobilization. However, the complexity and disparaging connotations of such terms often resulted in polemics. See, *inter alia*, J. Paul Rajashekar, "Islamic Fundamentalism," *The Ecumenical Review* 41, i (1989): 64-284; William Shepard, "Fundamentalism" Christian and Islamic,' *Religion* 17, iv (1987): 355-78. However, Shepard's attempt never clarified what the categories imply, in terms of enhancing an understanding of what are culturally, geographically and historically, distinct phenomena. Hence, it was criticised by Bruce Lawrence and Azim Nanji, in *Religion* 19 (1989): 275-80, 281-4, respectively. See also the response of Shepard to these critiques in the same journal pages 285-92. The debates continued, however, in Shepard's comment on Lawrence's 1989 *Defenders of God*, which appeared, together with his reply, in 1992 in *Religion* 22, 279-85; 284-5.

⁶See *inter alia*, introductions to *sūras al-Nisā'*, vol 4, 189-215; al-An'ām, vol. 7, 69-103; al-Anfāl, vol. 9, 151-209, and al-Tauba, vol. 10, 71-98.

as well as its subject matter which evolves around the characteristics of believers and the quality of *īmān*.⁷

An introduction at the beginning of the volume is also added when the exegesis of a given *sūra* appears in separate volumes. In the first edition, however, a very concise preview is provided following the direct quotation of the verses of each *sūra*.⁸ The objective and layout of these introductions is the same throughout the *Zilāl* in the sense that they provide general overviews of *sūras*, emphasizing their unity and the perfect symmetry between the beginning and the end of each *sūra*.

Footnotes are also supplied in the text. These footnotes often go beyond listing the books Quṭb used and they contain comments supporting his views. Thus, reference is made not only to his own works such as *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān*, *Khaṣā'iṣ al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī wa Muqawimātuh*, *Mashāhid al-Qiyāma* and others, but also to the works of such exegetes and scholars as Ibn Kathīr, Ibn 'Abbās, Muḥammad Abū Zahrah and Mawdūdī. Quṭb made frequent recourse to Mawdūdī in particular, a fact suggesting his infatuation with the latter's thought.⁹

Attention should be focused first specifically on the introduction to the *Zilāl*, since this part is the core which lay the foundation for the whole exegesis. In fact, the

⁷See for example, the fourth edition, vol. 1, 34.

⁸Cases in point are: the first edition, vol. 3, 6-7 vis a vis the fourth edition, vol. 3, 5-8.

⁹Quṭb sometimes called Mawdūdī “the great Muslim” and “the leader of the *jamā'a* in Pakistan.” See *Zilāl*, for instance, the fourth edition, vols. 3, 33, 70, 72, 77, 84; 4, 126; 5, 29, 33, 38, 50, 59, 72; 6, 29, 199; 7, 253, 287, 293, 297; 8, 111; 9, 42.

introduction has undergone considerable change in terms of contents and length, if it is not a total revision.¹⁰

B. The significance of the Change

The significance of the changes made to the *Zilāl* varies to a lesser or greater extent, depending on one's outlook. On the one hand, the changes seem unimportant, since Quṭb's Islamist stance had been clearly stated in the earlier editions, which demonstrate a great degree of religiosity and piety. Consequently, one can argue that the later changes simply reinforce and clarify his earlier ideas without introducing a drastically new position. On the other hand, one can argue that the militant and political implications of his later thought, as well as his call for action, constitute a somewhat new position. For the purpose of our discussion, the nature and classification of these changes could be discussed according to the classification of topics which Quṭb elaborates in his *Khaṣā'is al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī wa Muqawwimātuh*.¹¹ Thus, the first feature will be Quṭb's increasing sense of theocentrism.

The assertion that Islamic ideology, in contrast to secular ideology, is based on divine sources,¹² has been made in the earlier edition, a point which, to a certain extent,

¹⁰Compare the introduction to the second edition by Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 5-7 with that in the fourth edition by Dār al-'Arabiyya, 3-12. It worth noting that the introduction to the second edition is exactly the same as that preceding the first edition, as Quṭb acknowledges. This fact indicates that by the time the second edition appeared, Quṭb was satisfied with what he had said earlier and did not wish to change or add anything to it.

¹¹On this, see Chapter One, 7-9.

¹²See the discussion of this point in Chapter One; cf. Sayyid Quṭb, *Khaṣā'is*, 43-71.

appears to be a presumption more than a proclamation. However, in the revised edition, Quṭb emphasizes this point, in order to render it more self-consciously theocentric. A marked manifestation of this tendency is the use of several key-terms related to God, such as *ulūhiyya*, *rubūbiyya*, *ḥākimiyya*, *rabbānī* and *‘ubūdiyya*, that appear only occasionally in the earlier editions but are very frequent in the revised edition.¹³ Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to elaborate each point; however, suffice it to say that on the whole, these terms were designed to convey the ultimate authority of God over all human affairs. Moreover, God’s sole *ulūhiyya* and *rubūbiyya* were believed to necessarily entail His sole *ḥākimiyya*. Another manifestation of Quṭb’s increased theocentrism, is his replacement of such terms as “the Islamic idea,” “Islamic legislation,” and law (*qānūn*), with “*Sharī‘ah*,” and the “*Sharī‘ah* of God.” Such replacement portrays Quṭb’s new desire to replace words carrying secular connotations with others, bearing religious relevance and divine provenance. In addition, emphasis is placed on the authority and position of the Prophet. Nevertheless, this emphasis is not as significant as the emphasis placed on the position of God vis a vis His creatures. That the Prophet is the fullest manifestation of the Islamic spirit, is a notion that appears in both editions, together with the assertion of the authoritative nature of his *sunna*. The latter notion takes for granted the authenticity of the *sunna* and raises no doubts concerning its veracity.¹⁴ However, in the revised edition, there is an effort to give fuller references and to quote *ḥadīths* more precisely.

¹³See, *inter alia*, *Zilāl*, the fourth ed., vols. 7, 130-142; 8, 74-81;

¹⁴Extensive scholarly research has been done on the *ḥadīths* used in the *Zilāl*, see *supra*, Chapter Two, note no. 31.

The changes elaborated so far represent a continuation and development of ideas already introduced in the first edition. Nevertheless, there is one major change in the revised edition which points to a break from Sayyid Quṭb's earlier stance. This break is suggested by the elimination of statements declaring that Islam extends certain rights to non-Muslims "on a purely human basis" and that it "transcends religious partisanship" in many points. Thus, Quṭb seems to have eliminated the last traces of a humanistic and secular bases for society, which, in turn, is a clear example of the way in which the radical Islamist position can be carried rigorously through to its logical extremes.

Similarly, an effort was made to eliminate secular notions appearing in the earlier editions. Thus, when discussing the basis of private property, the term "law giver," (*shāriʿ*), which had been used to refer to the human ruler, was later used to denote God.

Connected to the theocentric emphasis is the sharp contrast later drawn between Islam and *jāhiliyya*. This contrast emphasizes the difference between the religious and the secular/ profane, and can be clearly detected in the last edition through such statements as "...the Islamic system of government differs fundamentally from all systems of government and all social systems invented by mankind."¹⁵

C. Alms - Tax and the (*Zakāt*)-Related Verses

According to Quṭb, the introduction of *zakāt* together with the proscription of *ribā* in the Meccan period should be understood as the outcomes of the conscious effort of the Prophet to demolish the Meccan system of interests. Moreover, it was only after the

¹⁵For example, see *Zilāl*, the fourth edition, vol. 7, 76-79.

migration to Medina (*hijra*) that the Prophet officially institutionalized this earlier Meccan poor-tax as a welfare-tax incumbent upon all Muslims, a fact necessitating the designation of tax-collectors. Furthermore, the fact that the Qur'ān sometimes does not mention *zakāt* together with *ṣalāt*, indicates that *zakāt* started to gain prominence after the migration to Medina, when it became greatly needed for the well-being of the nascent *umma*.¹⁶

Unfortunately, the real purpose of the Qur'anic doctrine of *zakāt* has never been truly understood throughout the course of Islamic history, Quṭb laments. It became a form of private charity instead of a public tax as it had originally been intended. Doctrinally, he says, both *zakāt* and the prohibition of *ribā* were intimately connected from the beginning of the revelation to its end. The former was designed as a means of ameliorating the economic life of the 'have-nots,' while the latter was designed to suppress the very enemy of this amelioration. In addition, he believes that the Qur'anic portrayal of *zakāt* and *ribā* as two opposing elements implies that for *zakāt* to exist, *ribā* has to be abolished. If these two elements do not take place at the same time, the intent of the Qur'ān will never be fulfilled and Muslim economy will remain forever weak and unbalanced, he warns.¹⁷

Zakāt has a dual function, in the sense that it is an act of worship as well as a social duty. Moreover, taking into account the Islamic theory on acts of worship and social duties, we will conclude that it is a devotional social duty; hence it is called *zakāt*. *Zakāt* means purification and growth; it is purification of the heart and the soul from natural avarice and instinctive love of self, particularly since people cherish wealth and possessions; therefore

¹⁶Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, fourth edition, vol. 3, 55.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 45.

when they are generous to others, their soul becomes pure, elevated and radiant. *Zakāt* is also the purification of wealth since it gives the poor their rightful share of it, thus making the use of the remainder of one's wealth permissible. *Zakāt* is the foundation of a society characterized by social solidarity and mutual responsibility, and one which does not need to rely on the system of usury in any aspect of its life.¹⁸

Thus, Quṭb calls upon the leaders of the Islamic community to exercise their power in the achievement of social justice in all its forms. In the financial area, for example, the ruler may go beyond the imposition of *zakāt* as a public welfare tax and impose other taxes in order to achieve a proper balance and equilibrium, eliminate ill-feeling and resentment between the haves and the have-nots, relieve the community of the evils of extreme luxury and poverty, and the accumulation of money in the hands of a few, provided that he does not go against an authoritative text or a basic principle of Islam.¹⁹

Interestingly, Sayyid Quṭb broadens the scope of *zakāt* and does not limit it to such items as gold, silver, crops, etc., which were known to and regularized by the Prophet. Indeed, he believes that *zakāt* could be imposed on a myriad other forms of wealth, even if these had not originally been considered as forms of wealth or revenue.²⁰ The question then is how do people impose *zakāt* on these new elements, and what are the criteria for deeming elements eligible for *zakāt*? Another problem that also arises out of his premise pertains to the collectors and administrators of *zakāt*. How should they be selected? Who

¹⁸Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, first edition, vol. 3, 23.

¹⁹Ibid., 4th ed., vol. 10, 215.

²⁰Ibid., vol. 3, 54-55.

should select them ? How are they to fulfill their duties ? What are the parameters of their duties and who are they answerable to ? All these questions are not only left unanswered but made more complicated by the fact that Quṭb believes that a true Islamic state and leader do not exist at present and hence the faithful must work on their own.²¹

In commenting upon Qur'ān, 2: 273, Quṭb emphasizes the need for the elaboration of the context of *zakāt* in order for the community to establish an equitable economic system, regulating the life of Muslims on the basis of mutual cooperation involving *zakāt* and *ṣadaqa* (charity) and not on the basis of *ribā* system prevalent in *jāhili* society.²² These points are not mentioned in the unrevised edition which, in general, is more religiously than socially oriented, as Smith states that “not all Quṭb’s writings are revolutionary, of course, and many of them are widely accepted as thoughtful and appropriate statements of the principles of Islam.”²³

Ṣadaqa should not be performed as a necessary religious obligation, Quṭb argued, but must be seen as a form of purification on the part of the giver. Moreover, its significance as a social bond tying the rich and the poor together in a communion with God must be emphasized.²⁴

²¹Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, 4th ed., vol. 10, 215.

²²Ibid., vol. 3, 45.

²³Jane I. Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term ‘Islām’ as Seen in a Sequence of Qur’ān Commentaries* (Missoula: University of Montana, 1975), 205.

²⁴Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, 1st ed., vol. 3, 23.

D. Usury and the (*Ribā*)-Related Verses

Faced with rapid economic developments and the need to deal with bank interest, Muslim scholars find it necessary to rationally formulate and analyse the Qur'anic ban on *ribā*, because the concept of *ribā* is concerned with economic transactions which, in fact, involve common good sense and socio-economic justice. This apparent problem stems from the fact that the Qur'anic and Prophetic unequivocal pronouncements against *ribā*, provide neither a clear definition of it, nor explain the rationale behind its prohibition. Thus, Sayyid Quṭb's *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, as an example of a modern Qur'ān commentary, attempts to address this situation by emphasizing that pronouncements of the sacred text are still relevant to contemporary issues and challenges.

The severe criticism of the institution of interest by Muslim scholars, in the context of modern economic theories, is rooted in the explicit prohibition by the Qur'ān of *ribā* and *ribā*-based commercial transactions. Literally, *ribā* means 'increase, increment, addition,' and in its narrowest concept, usury. Moreover, its wider definition encompasses interest and risk-related financial contracts. In fact, there are eight Qur'anic verses which explicitly mention the term *ribā*. These references occur in *sūras* 2; 3; 4; and 30.²⁵

Basing himself on these texts, Sayyid Quṭb maintains that there is a fundamental difference between selling (*bay'*) and *ribā*. Although the former, like *ribā*, creates an increase in the value of one's original amount, it is lawful because the transaction takes

²⁵One verse, for example states "Allah has permitted trade and forbidden *ribā*." Another verse, "in stern warning tells that the menace awaiting those who devour *ribā* is greater than that awaiting those who commit other sins." See Hanna Kassis, *The Concordance of the Qur'ān* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1983), 990-1.

place on the spot, hand to hand, and is mutually agreed upon. *Ribā*, however, is forbidden because the loan entails a pre-determined interest, the doubling and redoubling of the principal amount (*ad'āfan muḍā'afa*), and all effort is absent on the part of the creditor (*bilā 'iwad*).²⁶ Thus the usurer acquires benefit by putting the debtor in a hard position, a situation that could easily lead to enmity and strife vis a vis the Islamic promotion of peace and fraternity.

The vast majority of the Muslim scholars understand Qur'ān 2: 275 as a condemnation and prohibition of *ribā* in the strongest possible terms. Yet the Islamic tradition has recorded that 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was not in total agreement with the literal prohibition of *ribā* in the Qur'ān because the Prophet left behind no specific details on this issue. Moreover, a *ḥadīth* mentions the existence of two kinds of *ribā*: *al-faḍl*, which occurs in a contract of sale in which an increase may take place by itself, and *al-nasī'a*, which entails a fixed increase in the amount of money over a period of time. In addition, Ibn 'Abbās is said to have acknowledged that only *ribā al-nasī'a* was prohibited by the Prophet, despite some later Muslim explanations that Ibn 'Abbās eventually recanted that view.

Thus, in order to understand the prohibited *ribā*, it is important to analyse the content of the verses in *Al 'Imrān*: 130 and *al-Baqarah*: 278, and more precisely, understand the key words in those verses. These words are: *ad'āfan muḍā'afa*, *mā baqiya min al-ribā*, and *falakum ru'ūsū amwālikum, lā tazlimūna wa lā tuzlamūn*.

The multiplication mentioned in the first verse is a multiplication of two, whereas

²⁶Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, vol. 1, 327.

in the second and third verses there is no mention of the quantity of the increased amount. Rather an unspecified increase to the capital is mentioned. Thus, these positions lead to either one of the following two possibilities: (1) If we are to understand each verse independently we will realize that the prohibited *ribā* is an increase to the original amount, in certain conditions, regardless of whether the increase occurred through doubling or not. (2) But if we were to take all these verses into account, we will learn that the increase or addition intended by them, in which multiplying was not mentioned, is a multiple addition. The second opinion is supported by the text of the Qur'ān.

To solve this problem, it is axiomatic to analyse the last verse revealed concerning the issue of *ribā*, especially its key words. The phrase *aḍ'āfan muḍā'afa* has previously been mentioned as an element in the prohibition of *ribā*, however, in order to determine its nature and the essence of the unlawful kind of *ribā*, we have to turn to the verses revealed in the third phase. The key words in this verse are *wa dharū mā baqiya min al-ribā*, which raise the question as to whether the word *al-ribā*, in such definite form (*ma'rifā*), refers to *ribā aḍ'āfan muḍā'afa* or not.

Quṭb's approach to the Qur'ān is very distinct from the accepted procedures of traditional exegesis. To begin with, Quṭb appears not to be interested in drawing distinctions between the lexical and technical meanings of terms but prefers to go beyond the boundaries of the Qur'anic text. Hence, his interpretation of *ribā* goes beyond the verses of the Qur'ān and is tied to the Islamic concept of social justice.²⁷

²⁷This is also reflected in his *al- 'Adāla al-Ijtimā'iyya fī al-Islām*, 7th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1980).

According to Quṭb, there is no absolute freedom in Islam such that one can go about increasing one's property without constraint. Here Quṭb is very critical of capitalism, especially as practised in his society: 'Capital only reaches the disgracefully swollen proportions which we see today when it is amassed by usury, by oppression of the workers, by monopolies or exploitation of the needs of the community and by all the other semi-criminal methods of contemporary exploitation.'²⁸

Quṭb argues that to lend money on the basis of being repaid in a fixed pre-determined monetary sum with an agreed interest, amounts, to *zulm*, which is injustice and exploitation. Moreover, usury is considered more shameful than adultery. Furthermore, in the case of consumption loans, *ribā* violates the basic purpose for which God created wealth, namely, mutual social support of the needy. Thus, he believed that Islam forbids dishonesty in business because it defiles the conscience, injures others, and represents a gain without effort, which is perforce an un-Islamic act. Furthermore, Islam does not recognize monopolies, because they inflict hardship, distress people and lessen the flow of supplies to the public.²⁹

Commenting on the phrase *aḍ'āfan muḍā'afa*, Sayyid Quṭb maintains that doubling is not a requisite for prohibition but rather a description of the *ribā* practised when the Qur'ān was first revealed.³⁰ Moreover, by taking the various chapters of the Qur'ān into

²⁸Sayyid Quṭb, *Tafsīr Āyāt al-Ribā* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982), 6-46; Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, vol. 1, 329-321; Quṭb, *Social Justice in Islam*, trans. John B. Hardie (New York: Octagon Books, 1980), 118.

²⁹Sayyid Quṭb, *Social Justice*. 111-115.

³⁰Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*. vol. 1, 473.

consideration, he holds that verse 278 of *sūrat* al-Baqara, offers the determinant argument (*naṣṣ*) for the prohibition of the original *ribā* on the basis of the phrase: *wa dharū ma baqiya mina r-ribā*.

Based on this verse, he furthered his original position that the characterization of doubling and multiplication did not only refer to an historical act, namely, the practice of *ribā* in the Arabian peninsula, but also to a characteristic of the *ribā* system (*al-nizām al-ribawī*)³¹ regardless of the amount of its interest rate. Hence, he illustrates that the occurrences of *ribā* are not isolated and simple but continuous, emerging at various times and places on the face of the Earth.

Interestingly, reflection and juxtaposition of Qur'anic concepts with modern concepts and practices are two tools used by Quṭb in analysing the Qur'ān. Thus, his total rejection of any form of usury appears to have stemmed from his rejection of the contemporary situation. Moreover, utilizing various narratives he concludes that socially, *ribā* is diametrically opposed to Islam's idea of social justice. He also argues that establishing an economic system based on *ribā* will provide those with capital with the means of exploiting those in need of it, thus introducing strained relations and unnecessary friction within society.³²

Economically, Quṭb insists that *ribā* provides an "unearned gain" to the lender who earns a return without exerting any effort, while imposing an "unfair obligation" on the

³¹The phrase *al-nizām al-ribawī* is a Quṭbian concept, meaning a financial system basing all its transactions on *ribā*. This concept is used throughout his discussion on *ribā*. See generally Quṭb, *Zilāl*, vol. 1, 317-333; also his *al-'Adāla*, 134-140.

³²Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, vol. 1, 321.

borrower, who must repay the loan plus a financial charge even in the event of misfortune. Hence, *ribā* is morally reprehensible because it is a device used by the wealthy to unjustly and inequitably accumulate wealth by siphoning it from those most in need of it. Consequently, it is un-Islamic because Islam makes it the religious and moral duty of every individual to help the poorer and less fortunate members of society.³³

At this juncture, it is worth mentioning that, unlike some Muslim modernist scholars, such as Rashīd Riḍā, who admits some types of *ribā*,³⁴ Sayyid Quṭb adopts a more extreme view. Indeed, any increase, even without doubling, is prohibited in his view. Thus, he allows no room for argument on the types of *ribā* and the distinction between the forbidden and the unforbidden kinds. Commenting on *sūra* 2: 279, *falakum ru'ūsu amwālikum, lā tazlimūna wa lā tuzlamūn*, he holds that taking only the capital back is the just way because it is not being disadvantageous to either the creditor or the debtor.³⁵ He also suggests that as an alternative to *ribā*, one can increase one's property by way of partnership (*al-mushāraka*) thus sharing in the losses and gains involved. Consequently, he suggests that the national economy must be set on the basis of mutual help (*al-takāful al-ijtimā'ī*) rather than the *ribā* system (*al-nizām al-ribawī*).³⁶

³³Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, vol. 1, 322-323.

³⁴Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, 4th ed., vol. 3, 73-4. See also the debate in Rashīd Riḍā's *al-Manār* between the Khedive of Egypt and Muḥammad 'Abduh in the early twentieth century over the Egyptian *Ṣundūq al-Tawfīr* affair, *al-Manār*, vol. VII (1904), 28-29.

³⁵Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, vol. 1, 331-332.

³⁶Sayyid Quṭb, *Zilāl*, vol. 1, 332. For a detailed account of this, see *inter alia* Nabil A. Saleh, *Unlawful Gain and Legitimate Profit in Islamic Law: Riba, Gharar and Islamic Banking* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Perhaps the most significant changes made to the revised edition of Quṭb's exegesis concerning *ribā* can be detected in, at least, eight points. First, Quṭb denounces those states allowing the *ribā* system as non-Islamic. Second, he argues that the *ribā* system is a test for humanity designed not only to test people's faith and morality, but their economic and practical life as well. Third, that the ethical/ moral system of Islam is closely connected to the practical system espoused by it.³⁷ Thus, there is no separation between the religious moral system and the practical aspects of people's lives. And, by extension, there is no separation between religion and politics. Moreover, he believed that the Islamic economic system can never be achieved unless the Islamic moral code is adhered to.

Fourth, that the practice of *ribā* will entail the destruction of the inner soul and ethics of the individual, which in turn would destroy the wider structure of the community. Fifth, as in his other works, Quṭb emphasizes the superiority of Islam, and its distinct system which opposes *ribā*. However, he does not mention what the system is and how it works. Sixth, he mentions that the eradication of the *ribā* system, does not necessarily imply that Islam is against the development economic growth. At this point, he again refers to what he called the interest-free economic system. Seventh, Quṭb touches upon some theological issues when approaching the issue. He argues that to be a true Muslim, one should avoid what God has forbidden, and that it is unthinkable for a person not to apply what God has ordered. Eighth, Quṭb vehemently criticizes those who assume the impossibility of establishing a *ribā*-free global economic system. Their stand, he stresses, is misleading and is specifically designed to serve the interests of those who stand to gain

³⁷In fact, this idea is clearly described in his *Khaṣā'is*, see *supra*, Chapter One, 18.

the most from *ribā*.³⁸

From the discussion above, certain general and loose trends become evident. First, the task of providing an explanation and condemnation of *ribā* was an inevitable challenge to Sayyid Quṭb in his exegesis of the Qur'ān. He met this challenge by introducing a socio-economic interpretation to the prohibition of *ribā*. This controversy over the issues of *ribā* and gain can be explained, in part, by the absence of an "Islamic theory" of economics, in general, or, monetary gain, in particular.

Second, his exegesis is rational and pragmatic in character. Moreover, his approach lays emphasis on the Qur'ān's general principles, even though he is aware of the philological nuances that they evoke, and the social factors involved in the circumstances of revelation. In addition, far from restricting himself to philology and past meanings, he becomes concerned with the relevance of the Qur'anic text to the present. Indeed, he tried to adapt the principles of the Qur'ān to the contemporary situations and problems, and tried hard to solve these problems.

Thus in his endeavour, he becomes inevitably influenced by his socio-political background. Such deep interaction with both the Qur'ān and contemporary social problems have elevated his *tafsīr* beyond the stature of its many contemporary rivals, thus carving

³⁸Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl*, 4th ed., vol. 3, 70-2. For further discussion on the complexity of *ribā*, see *inter alia*, Timur Kuran, "The Economic Impact of Islamic Fundamentalism," *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies, and Militance*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 302-341; Chībli Mallat, "The Debate on Riba and Interest in Twentieth Century Jurisprudence," *Islamic Law and Finance*, ed. C.Mallat (London: Graham & Trotman Ltd., 1988), 29-32; Maxim Rodinson, *Islam and Capitalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), which is probably the best source on the history of the controversy over interest.

a place for him as an advocate of social, political and religious reform.

CONCLUSION

Sayyid Quṭb's intellectual career developed against the backdrop of a particular social, political, economic and psychological environment. Accordingly, his total commitment to Islam and his attempt to search for refuge in the scripture, which culminated in the writing of his Qur'anic commentary *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, were the outcome of all those forces. His concerns and outlook were for the most part derived from his own experience as well as his position as the main ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood. Being both modern and subjective in character, the method of the commentary appears to advocate, by example as much as by direct exhortation, a similar individual 'rediscovery' of Islam for all those who wished to reform themselves and become the new 'generation of the Qur'ān.'

We have mentioned that Quṭb's Qur'anic interpretation is motivated by his belief and concern for what he saw as the failure of previous *mufasssīr*s to understand the true essence of the Qur'ān. In his *tafsīr*, he insists on the literal interpretation of scripture and relates the sacred text to contemporary ideas and challenges, the result of which is often to bypass and disregard the work of centuries of theological-legal expertise. Adverse both to diversity in local customs and the acculturationist encrustation of the past, he seeks to formulate the Qur'anic message in, and for, the modern world. Accordingly, such an endeavor involves questioning past and present customary adaptations, and centers his paradigm on the Qur'anic text by means of *ijtihād* (individual scripturalist interpretation) and the rejection of the conservative, '*ulamā*'-formulated, community consensus. In doing

so, he inevitably comes to oppose the political and legal establishments, thus incurring the wrath of ‘Abd al-Nāṣir’s regime. His scripture-based platform for the socio-moral reconstruction of Islam centers on issues of social equality, economic justice, and political legitimacy.

Since the *Zilāl* was not produced in a vacuum, it is of the utmost importance to keep in mind the events that shaped Quṭb’s thought, particularly his imprisonment. Indeed, during and after his lengthy prison term, Quṭb felt the need to review the ideas he elaborated in the earlier editions of the *tafsīr*. And, although the fundamental philosophy of the *Zilāl* remains basically the same, i.e. that Islam is a distinct, divinely-ordained system encompassing all aspects of life, any compromises or expressions of a moderate position are eliminated in the revision he made. In addition, the revisions reflect Quṭb’s endeavor to draw a clear-cut distinction between the divinely based Islamic system and all others, which should be forthwith discarded. However, a measure of flexibility and human initiative is still allowed, though more emphasis is placed on the need for firm guidance by the basic sources. Interestingly, Quṭb feels at liberty to hurl declarations of unbelief at all those Muslims who oppose his basic position, whether in the realm of worship (*‘ibādāt*), social relations (*mu‘āmalāt*), or personal status (*aḥwāl shakḥiyya*).¹ Similarly, Quṭb is of the opinion that the establishment of an Islamic state is a necessity which would lay down the foundations for the application of the *sharī‘ah*. At the level of the individual, however, he argues that faith in the basics of Islam is more important, or at least more urgent, than its practical application. Needless to say, any hint that Islam might not be applicable in

¹Cf. Chapter One.

practice is more firmly excluded.²

Thus, as an active member and the main ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood, he seeks to disseminate what he believed to be the correct understanding of Islam and to purify the religion of alien elements accruing to it through centuries of false interpretations. Nevertheless, his own *tafsīr*, is not free of subjectivity and idealism stemming from his own personal and political experiences. And, although it lies beyond the scope of this thesis to delineate the myriad factors that compelled Quṭb to make the revisions, one may venture to suggest that these revisions were inspired by the thought of Mawdūdī.³ However, it can be equally argued that Quṭb's revisions were solely inspired by his milieu, which was not similar to that of Mawdūdī's, and hence any estimation of the source of the revisions becomes a matter of pure conjecture.⁴ In addition, the prison term he endured and his isolation from the real world might have also contributed to his idealistic outlook and his later radical position.

Sayyid Quṭb's approach lays emphasis on the Qur'ān's general principles, even though he is aware of the philological nuances that they evoke, and the social factors involved in the circumstances of revelation. In addition, far from restricting himself to philology and past meanings, he became concerned with the relevance of the Qur'anic text for the present. Indeed, he tried to adapt the principles of the Qur'ān to contemporary

²Cf. Chapter Three.

³This can be discerned from the frequent references he made, in the revised editions, to Mawdūdī's works.

⁴I tend to agree with Abu Rabi' who argues that such an assertion would not help in understanding Quṭb's thought. See His *Intellectual Origins*, 210.

situations and problems, and tried hard to solve these problems. Accordingly, he became increasingly influenced by his socio-political background and could not keep his radical ideas at bay while interpreting the Qur'ān. Nevertheless, it is due to this deep interaction with both the Qur'ān and contemporary social problems that his *tafsīr* was elevated to a position beyond the stature of many other contemporary ones, thus etching a place for him as an activist advocate of social, political and religious reform, even though his thought is at times vague and idealistic.

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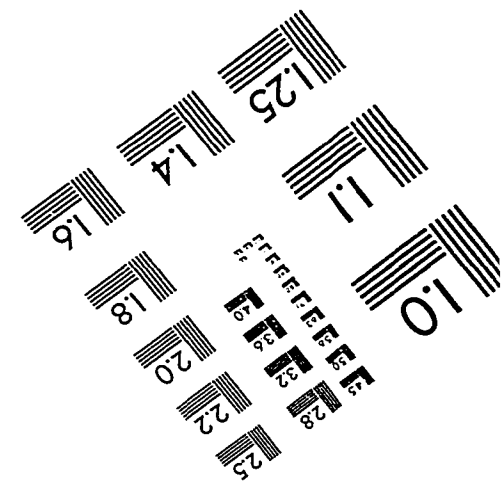
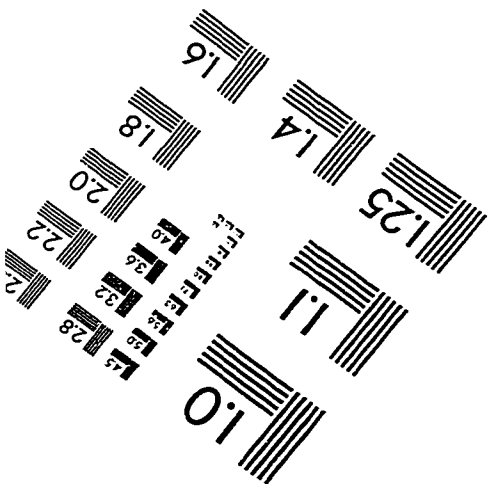
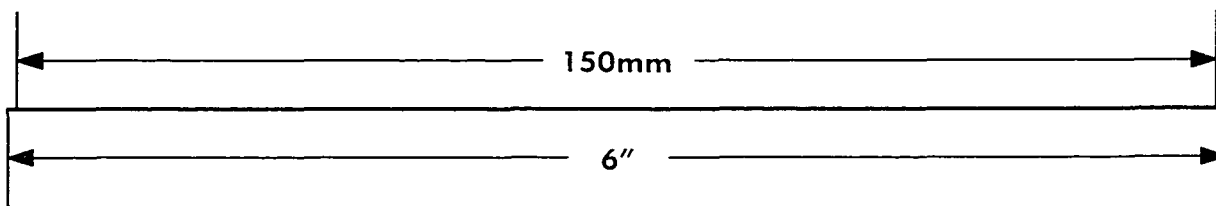
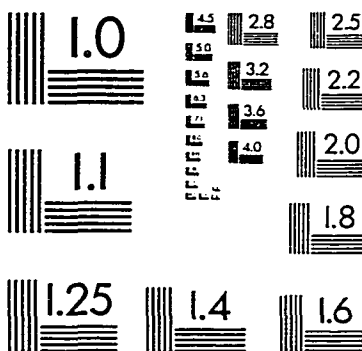
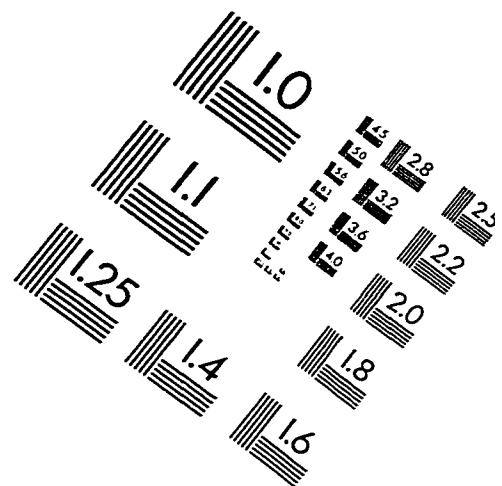
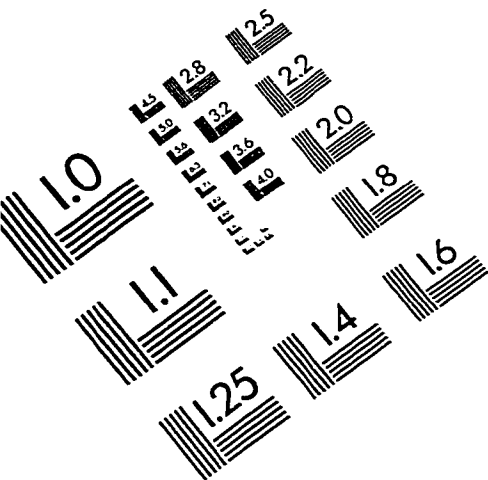
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