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Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Methodology in Interpreting the Qur'ān

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

of the Degree of Master of Arts

By

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Abstract

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Many studies have been done of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and his system of thought, taking into account his contributions from theology, philosophy, and exegesis. However, works specifically devoted to his exegetical thought have been few. In fact, none of these has dealt with al-Rāzī's exegetical methodology in the light of his basic assumptions regarding the Qur'ān. In view of this fact, the present thesis aims at elucidating Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's methodology in interpreting the Qur'ān in his *magnum opus*, known by the title *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* or *Mafātīh al-Ghayb*. In order to achieve this purpose, we will focus on his interpretation of the third chapter of the Qur'ān, printed in volumes 7, 8, and 9 of the standard edition of his work.

This thesis first considers Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's biography and scholarship. Seen from this angle, his rational approach to the interpretation of the Qur'ān can be regarded as a consequence of his enthusiasm for the philosophical traditions which had developed in his time. Thus, basing himself on the assumption that the main function of the Qur'ān is to give human beings guidance, al-Rāzī concludes that everything in it must be knowable. This basic assumption also explains why he introduced such a variety of subjects, in addition to the Qur'ānic sciences, into his exegesis, and why his use of reason outweighs his use of revelation. Basing himself on these assumptions, he takes a linguistic approach to justify his ideas on *muhkamat-mutashābihāt*, as well as other methodological principles.

In overall terms, al-Rāzī contributed greatly to the dissemination of a rational approach to the study of the Qur'ān. Yet, he could not avoid the debate over theological issues, which were common in his time. In many parts of his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, therefore, he defends Ash'arite thought against the views of Mu'tazilites, Zāhirites, and the Hashwiyyah, among others.

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Résumé

Auteur : Shalahudin Kafrawi
Titre   : La méthodologie d'interprétation du Qur'ān de Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī
Département : L'Institut des Études Islamiques, Université McGill
Diplôme : Maîtrise ès Arts

Plusieures études furent consacrées à l'oeuvre de Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī ainsi que son système de pensée, tout en tenant compte de ses contributions en matière de théologie, de philosophie et d'exégèse. Toutefois, rares sont les ouvrages consacrés à sa pensée exégète. En effet, considérant les hypothèses fondamentales de l'auteur relatives au Qur'ān, aucune de ces oeuvres porte sur la méthodologie exégète d'al-Rāzī. L'objectif de ce présent mémoire sera d'élucider la méthodologie d'interprétation du Qur'ān utilisée par Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī dans son *magnum opus*, mieux connu sous le titre de *al-Tafsir al-Kabīr* ou le *Mafātih al-Ghayb*. Afin d'atteindre ce but, nous nous concentrerons sur l'interprétation d'al-Rāzī du troisième chapitre du Qur'ān, publié dans les volumes 7, 8 et 9 de l'édition standard de son oeuvre.

En premier lieu, ce mémoire portera sur la biographie et la formation académique de Fakhr al-D n al-Rāzī. De ce point de vue, son approche rationelle de l'interprétation du Qur'ān peut être considérée comme une conséquence de son enthousiasme pour les traditions philosophiques de son temps. Ainsi, en se basant sur le postulat que la fonction principale du Qur'ān est de donner une conduite aux êtres humains, al-Rāzī conclut que tout ce qui est contenu dans le Qur'ān doit être connu. De plus, ce postulat de base explique pourquoi l'auteur a introduit dans son exégèse une telle variété de sujets en plus des sciences Qur'āniques et pourquoi son usage de la raison dépasse celle de la révélation. En se fondant sur ces postulats, al-Rāzī adopte une approche linguistique afin de justifier ses idées concernant la *muhkamāt-mutashābihāt*, de même que d'autres principes méthodologiques.

En bref, al-Rāzī a contribué énormément à la dissémination d'une approche rationelle de l'étude du Qur'ān. Cependant, il n'a pu éviter le débat des questions théologiques alors répandues durant son époque. Dans plusieures parties de son *al-Tafsir al-Kabīr*, il a ainsi défendu la pensée Ash'arite contre les points de vues des Mu'tazilites, les Ẓāhirites et des Hashwiyyah.

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Acknowledgment

I have received much support during my two years of study at McGill, and feel myself indebted to a great many individuals. First of all, to Professor Issa J. Boullata, I offer my sincere thanks for helping me complete this thesis. During my stay at the Institute, I have studied many subjects under his direction, including I'jāz al-Qur'ān, modern Arabic literature, and classical Qur'ānic interpretation. I also learned from him the value of a meticulous respect for detail and precision. I am, therefore, grateful for these lessons and for his corrections and valuable suggestions that have made this thesis a possibility.

I would like also to offer my thanks to Professor Üner Turgay (Director of the Institute of Islamic Studies), Professor Todd Lawson, with whom I studied Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's '*Ismat al-Anbiyā*', and Professor Eric Ormsby, who introduced me to the development of Islamic thought in its various disciplines. My thanks also go to the Institute's administrative staff, Ann Yaxley and Dawn Richard, and to the library staff, especially Salwa Ferahian and Wayne St. Thomas, for their invaluable assistance.

I am especially indebted to the Indonesia-Canada Islamic Higher Education Project (ICIHEP). I wish to thank the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia for granting me the opportunity and permission to study at the Institute of Islamic Studies of McGill University, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), whose financial support made it possible for me to study at this Institute, Mr. Murni Jamal (Director of Islamic Higher Learning of the Ministry of Religious Affairs), Prof. Drs. H. Endang Soetari Ad., M.Si. (Rector of IAIN Sunan Gunung Djati), Wendy Allen (Director of

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Notes

A. Reference

Dates referred to in this thesis are given in both the Muslim and Christian calendars, and in that order. The year in which an individual scholar died is usually given in brackets after his name, and only after its first appearance in our narrative: e.g. al-Bayḍāwī (d. 791/1389).

B. Transliteration

The Arabic transliteration in this thesis will follow the system used by the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University with only slight modifications. It is as follows:

ب	=	b	ذ	=	dh	ط	=	ṭ	ل	=	l
ت	=	t	ر	=	r	ظ	=	ẓ	م	=	m
ث	=	th	ز	=	z	ع	=	ʿ	ن	=	n
ج	=	j	س	=	s	غ	=	gh	ه	=	h
ح	=	ḥ	ش	=	sh	ف	=	f	و	=	w
خ	=	kh	ص	=	ṣ	ق	=	q	ي	=	y
د	=	d	ض	=	ḍ	ك	=	k	ء	=	ʾ

Short: ＝ a; ＝ i; ＝ u

Long: ＝ ā; ＝ ī; ＝ ū

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Dipthong: $\underset{\cdot}{\overset{\cdot\cdot}{=}}$ = ay ; $\overset{\bullet}{\underset{\cdot}{\jmath}}$ = aw

Extended Tashdīd $\overset{\prime}{\underset{\cdot\cdot}{=}}$ = ī ; $\overset{\prime}{\underset{\cdot}{\jmath}}$ = ū.

Ta Marbūṭah (ة) = h; in *idāfah*, it is written t.

Hamzah in the initial position is omitted.

C. Abbreviations

A.H.: Anno Hijrah.

C.A.: Common Era.

EI¹: M. Th. Houstama et al., eds. *Brills Encyclopaedia of Islam.* 1ˢᵗ Edition. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970.

EI²: Bosworth, C.E., E. Van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs and G. Lecomte, eds. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam.* New Edition. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985-...

ER: Eliade, Mircea, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion.* New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987.

Q.: The Qur'ān.

SEI: Gibb, H.A.R. and J.H. Kramers, eds. *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam.* Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995.

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Introduction

1. Background and Focus of this Study

The Qur'ān needed interpretation, even while it was being revealed. As recorded in many accounts, the genre of Qur'ān commentary is traceable as far back as the first generation of Muslims.[1] After the Prophet Muḥammad himself, Ibn 'Abbās was the most prominent Qur'ān interpreter among the Prophet's Companions;[2] his exegesis was marked by a close attention to certain expressions of the Qur'ān and the occasions on which the Qur'ān was revealed.[3] Developed hand-in-hand with prophetic traditions, this process continued until it developed into an independent genre with the appearance of the extensive *tafsīr* of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 224/838-9). Subsequently, a great number of works on the Qur'ān started to flourish in the classical period, such as those of al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), al-Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), al-Qāshānī (d. 729/1330), Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), and al-Bayḍāwī (d. 791/1389).

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[1] For a discussion on the early development of *tafsīr*, see Andrew Rippin, "Studying Early *Tafsīr* Texts," *Der Islam*, vol. 72 (1995), no. 2, 310-23.

[2] There are a number of narratives transmitted on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās. Many reports quoted in *tafsīr* books are attributed to him. Some *tafsīr* books written in the formative and classical periods are also attributed to this scholar. For further discussion on Ibn 'Abbās' *tafsīr*, see Andrew Rippin, "*Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās* and Criteria for Dating Early *Tafsīr* Texts," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, vol. 18 (1994), 38-83. See also 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalḥah al-Hāshimī (d. circa 94 /713), *Ṣaḥīfat 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalḥah 'an Ibn 'Abbās fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 2nd ed., ed. Rāshid 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Rajjāl (Beirut: Dār al-Jayl, 1994); and Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Fīrūzābādī (d. 817/1414), *Tanwīr al-Miqbās min Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1951).

[3] At first, the study of the Qur'ān involved the study of the the text itself, focusing on its readings and the traditions that explained it. Later, this was extended to commentary on the Qur'ān originally meant to give Muslims Qur'ānic answers to their daily problems. When Muslims encountered other civilizations, the status of the Qur'ān was included. Toward the end of the last second century *hijrī*, the study of the authenticity of the Qur'ān and of its miraculous nature (*i'jāz al-Qur'ān*) developed mainly to establish the validity of Muḥammad's prophethood. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was very sure of this, when interpreting the Qur'ān, 4:82. He held that "*annahū Ta'ālā 'ḥtajja bi 'l-Qur'āni 'alā ṣiḥḥati nubuwwati Muḥammad*" ("that God by the Qur'ān proves the validity of the prophethood of Muḥammad"). See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 10, 196. See also Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ijāz fī Dirāyat al-I'jāz*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrā'ī and Muḥammad Barakāt Abū 'Alī (Oman: Dār al-Fikr, 1985), 35.

Having their own characteristics, these *tafsir* works were a result of the genuine

efforts and creativity of their authors in trying to understand the Qur'ān and disseminate

their interpretations to others. In order to discover the meaning of the Qur'ān, the

exegetes referred to different sources, such as other Qur'ānic verses, prophetic traditions,

Biblical materials, poetry, and language. In terms of approach, some gave more weight to

traditions than reason, while others did the opposite. These methods influenced the results

of their interpretation. Therefore, even though exegetes dealt with the same verses their

conclusions were often quite different. This is to say that the different methodologies

which exegetes applied in their interpretation of the Qur'ān resulted usually in different

interpretations.

The following examples might illustrate these differences. Al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-*

Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān and Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* give more attention

to traditions than reason.[4] Al-Qāshānī's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* for its part focuses on

the esoteric aspects of the Qur'ān.[5] Al-Ṭabarsī's *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* is

tempered by Shī'ite tendencies.[6] Al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ*

al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl advocates the theology of the

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[4] Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. 12 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1986); Ismā'īl b. 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, 4 vols. (Cairo: 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad, 1937).

[5] Al-Qāshānī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Yaqẓah al-'Arabiyyah, 1968).

[6] Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr and Dār al-Kitāb al-Albānī, 1955).

Mu'tazilites,[7] while Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* and al-Bayḍāwī's *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta 'wīl* support that of the Ash'arites.[8]

As one of the great commentators and theologians of the classical period, one whose thought is still influential in our modern age,[9] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī[10] has long been an object of scholarly studies. Until recently, there has been a growing interest among scholars in the study of his exegetical and theological thought. This interest has led to biographies[11] and several preliminary studies of his system of thought, many of them in the form of introductions to editions of his works. Several articles and books have dealt with this subject,[12] as well as chapters in various collected works.[13] Some of those who have

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[7] Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā 'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwil fī Wujūh al-Ta 'wil* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, n.d.).

[8] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 32 vols. (Cairo: 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad, n.d.); al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta 'wil* (Cairo, Muṣṭafā Albānī al-Ḥalabi, n.d.).

[9] In the field of Qur'ānic studies, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī influenced many exegetes. His *tafsīr* book has been referred to by many Indonesian scholars, such as al-Nawawī, in their study of the Qur'ān. See Anthony Hearle Johns, "On Qur'ānic Exegetes and Exegesis: A Case Study in the Transmission of Islamic Learning," in *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society; A Festschrift in Honour of Anthony H. Johns* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 3-49.

[10] As will be discussed in chapter one below, our author is known by several names --Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Fakhr al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn, and al-Rāzī, Ibn al-Khaṭīb or Ibn Khaṭīb al-Rayy. In this thesis I will call him either Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī or al-Rāzī.

[11] Some modern studies on al-Rāzī's biography refer back to earlier sources, such as al-Subki's *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi 'iyyah al-Kubrā*, al-Ṣafadī's *Al-Ṣafadī's al-Wāfi bi al-Wafayāt*, and Dāwūd's *Tabaqāt al-Mufassirīn*. Some others are not supported by such accounts, but rather rely on speculations that may not give an accurate picture of this scholar's life.

[12] See, for instance, Effat al-Sharqawi, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," in *ER*, vol. 12, 221-2; H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, in *SEI*, 470-1; G.C. Anawati, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," in *EI²*, 751-5; Paul Kraus, "The 'Controversies' of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," *Islamic Culture*, vol. 12 (1938), 130-53; Murtada A. Muhibbu-Din, "Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: Philosophical Theology in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*," *Hamdard Islamicus*, vol 17 (1994), 55-84; Anthony H. Johns, "Al-Rāzī's Treatment of the Qur'ānic Episodes Telling of Abraham and His Guests: Qur'ānic Exegesis with A Human Face," *Mélanges (Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Cadre)*, vol. 17 (1986), 81-114; A. H. Johns, "Solomon and the Queen of Sheba: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Treatment of the Qur'ānic Telling of the Story," *Abr-Nahrain*, vol. 24 (1986), 58-82.

[13] See, for example, Mani' 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, *Manāhij al-Mufassirīn* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣriyy, 1978), 145-52; Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and its Interpreters*, Vol. 2, *The House of 'Imrān* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); and "John Burton, "The Interpretation of Q. 43,81 and the Techniques of the Exegetes," *The Arabist*, vol 13-14 (1995), 3-12.

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devoted extensive discussion to the subject in the form of books or dissertations are Michel Lagardé,[14] Ṭāhā Jābir al-'Alwānī,[15] Ṣāliḥ al-Zarkān,[16] Fathalla Kholeif,[17] Yasin Ceylan, 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Majdūb,[18] Aloysius Adiseputra,[19] and 'Effat Muhammad al-Sharqāwī.[20]

While these works are significant, none of them satisfactorily explicates al-Rāzī's exegetical methodology. To fill this lacuna, this thesis will focus on his methodology in his interpretation of the Qur'ān. Compared to other aspects of al-Rāzī's thought, this aspect is very important, because it underlies his perspective on the Qur'ān and his knowledge of Islam in general. Al-Rāzī's methodology in interpreting the Qur'ān has distinctive

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[14] Lagardé has prepared an index of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's 32-volume *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. Although this index is a very useful tool, it is unfortunately limited to only three editions of the work, namely, those published by Dār al-Fikr (Beirut 1981), by Dār al-Kutub (Tehran n.d.), and by al-Maṭba'ah al-Miṣriyyah (Cairo 1933).

[15] 'Alwānī has edited and annotated Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *al-Maḥṣūl fī 'Ilm al-Uṣūl*, which is on Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*).

[16] In addition to al-Rāzī's biography, al-Zarkān's *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uh al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyyah* includes theological and philosophical explanations on issues such as the existence of God and the way to know of it, God's attributes, the creation of the world and related issues, regarding place and time, human spirit and ways of knowing it, human actions, prophethood (*nubuwwah*), ethics (*akhlāq*), and *imāmah*. Basing himself on the assumption that philosophy is primarily based on reason and *kalām* on revelation, al-Zarkān conludes that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was a theologian, not a philosopher, one who successfully incorporated philosophy into his theological works. For further discussion, see Ṣāliḥ al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uh al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyyah* ([Cairo]: Dār al-Fikr, 1963), 606-16.

[17] In *Munāẓarāt Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī fī Bilād Mā Warā' al-Nahr*, Fathalla Kholeif began presenting Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's biography. He then offers an English translation of the text, begins by finally a commentary on it. See Fathalla Kholeif, *A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Controversies in Transoxiana* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1966).

[18] In his *al-Rāzī min Khilāl Tafsīrih*, 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Majdūb discusses the characteristics of al-Rāzī's exegesis in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. However, al-Majdūb does not speak of al-Rāzī's basic assumptions regarding the Qur'ān at all. This lack of attention to the latter's methodology, on which the book pretends to focuse, calls into question many many of Majdūb's conclusions. For more details, see, 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Majdūb, *al-Rāzī min Khilāl Tafsīrih* (Libya: al-Dār al-'Arabiyyah li al-Kuttāb, 1980).

[19] Aloysius Adiseputra, "The Doctrine of the Impeccability of the Prophet as Elucidated by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī" (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1984).

[20] 'Effat Muhammad al-Sharqāwī, "Religion and Philosophy in the Thought of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: The Problem of God's Existence" (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1970).

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characteristics, as he adopted a rational approach. From this standpoint, this study is timely and significant in that it demonstrates al-Rāzī's fundamental assumptions regarding the Qur'ān and the general principles he followed in interpreting it systematically.

2. Aims and Methodology of the Study

This thesis examines Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's methodology in interpreting the Qur'ān. In order to achieve its aims, it will first investigate al-Rāzī's biography, which sheds light on his exegetical thought. Subsequently, this thesis will analyze his basic assumptions regarding the Qur'ān and its exegesis. The knowledge of these basic assumptions should enable us to enunciate his methodological principles in more accurate fashion and to demonstrate his general rules of exegesis.

To achieve these goals, this study will rely on two kinds of sources, primary and secondary. Although al-Rāzī was a prolific and encyclopaedic writer with a great number of writings to his credit, this study will rely on a few of his his works as primary sources, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* being the most important of these for this study. Since a study of the entire 32-volume work would be the work of lifetime, this study will concentrate on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's interpretation of the third chapter of the Qur'ān (*Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* or the Chapter on the Household of 'Imrān),[21] as found in volumes 7, 8, and 9 of the standard edition of *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*.[22] Since a detailed analysis of his interpretation of Sūrat Āl

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[21] *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* is the third chapter in the *Muṣḥaf* of al-Imām. Consisting of 200 verses, it was revealed in Madina, and is, therefore, referred to as a Medinan *sūrah*. See Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr al-Ma'thūr*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990), 3.

[22] I have chosen his interpretation of this chapter as an example, because it gives sufficient data to support the claim that it was written by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī himself. For more discussion of this issue,

'Imrān verse-by-verse would also be a lengthy and repetitious exercise, we will take a thematic approach. Inevitably, certain materials not directly relevant to the themes will be excluded. In addition to our main source, this study will refer to other works of his like *Khalq al-Qur'ān bayn al-Ashā'irah wa al-Mu'tazilah, 'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā', Nihāyat al-Ijāz fī Dirāyat al-I'jāz*, and *Munāẓarāt Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī fī Bilād Mā Warā' al-Nahr*. For secondary sources, we will refer to works by both al-Rāzī himself and other scholars. Here, the writings of scholars before and after his time will be cited to assess the accuracy of al-Rāzī's references to the works of previous scholars.

There are different reasons for the use of these two kinds of sources. The primary sources will be used for two purposes: first, to obtain a picture of what al-Rāzī really says about his own intellectual development, the Qur'ān, the exegesis of the Qur'ān, and exegetical principles; and second, to examine his application of his exegetical principles in his works. The secondary sources will be used for assistance in analyzing his life and thought, and in clarifying his methodological principles in commonly used terms of our time.

3. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis will be divided into three chapters, plus an introduction and a conclusion. The first chapter will present al-Rāzī's background. The first part of this chapter will attempt to give a brief biographical sketch. The next part will discuss intellectual life in al-Rāzī's time, and how his own scholarship was disseminated. The next

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see the last part of chapter one in this thesis. We will come back to this point in a more detail in Part Five of Chapter One.

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two parts will elaborate on al-Rāzi's intellectual life and personality. Finally, and more importantly, this chapter will also discuss his works, with an emphasis on his *magnum opus* devoted to the study of the Qur'ān, known as *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* or *Mafāīih al-Ghayb*. As there are doubts regarding the authorship of some parts of this work, this chapter will investigate the authenticity of the section on Sūrat Āl 'Imrān.

The second chapter, divided into two parts, will demonstrate al-Rāzi's basic assumptions regarding the Qur'ān. The first part will elaborate on his ideas on the scriptural nature of the Qur'ān. In this part, we will discuss the functions and language of the Qur'ān, as well as its miraculous nature. The second part will be devoted to al-Rāzi's basic assumptions regarding the interpretation of the Qur'ān, and will consider his definition of exegesis, its sources, scope, and emphases.

The third chapter will elaborate on the methodological principles of al-Rāzi's interpretation of the Qur'ān. To make it easier for discussion these methodological principles, we will restrict ourselves to the following themes: the structure of his exegesis; clear and ambiguous verses; abrogation; occasions of revelation; openings of chapters; and variant readings in his interpretation of the Qur'ān. These are not the only themes that al-Rāzi applies in his exegesis, but they are the most frequently discussed in his interpretation of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*.

Chapter One:

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Life and Scholarship

1. A Short Biography

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, the more familiar name of Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b.

'Umar b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Taymī al-Bakrī al-Ṭabaristānī al-Rāzī,[1] was born in Rayy[2] in

544 A.H./1150 C.E.[3] Originally from Ṭabaristān, his parents had moved to Rayy (whence

the name al-Rāzī) before he was born. He was by no means the only famous author to

bear the nisbah al-Rāzī; there were Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā al-Rāzī (d.

323/935) the philosopher,[4] Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh (d. 460/1068) the Yemenite historian,[5]

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[1] Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Dāwūdī (d. 945), *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar, vol. 2 (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1972), 214. See also Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn*, ed. A. Meursinge (Teheran: M.H. Asadi, 1960), 39.

[2] This town is located to the east of Teheran. The author is then associated with Rayy, not his home province of Ṭabaristān. On the importance of this town, see V. Minorsky, "Al-Rayy," in *EI²*, vol. 8, 471-3.

[3] Scholars disagree over al-Rāzī's date of birth. Some suggest 25 Ramaḍān 544 A.H./26 January 1150 C.E., while others insist on 25 Ramaḍān 543 A.H./6 February 1149 C.E. However, the former date is the more probable, since it is stated in a manuscript of *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was fifty-seven years old on 7 Sha'bān 601 A.H./29 March 1205 C.E. See Abū Bakr Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 1978), 248-9; Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi al-Wafayāt*, vol. 4 (Istanbul: Maṭba'at al-Dawlah, 1931), 248; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn*, vol. 2, 214-7; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn*, 39. See also Muḥammad al-Mu'taṣim bi Allāh al-Baghdādī, "Taqdīm," in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah fī 'Ilm al-Ilāhiyyāt wa al-Ṭabī'iyyāt*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1990), 11. See also Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uh al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, [1963?]), 16; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Khalq al-Qur'ān bayn al-Mu'tazilah wa Ahl al-Sunnah*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā (Cairo: al-Maktab al-Thaqāfī, 1989), 398; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 18 (Teheran: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 145.

[4] In fact, the nisbah al-Rāzī is nowadays more commonly associated with Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā than with any other figure. See E. Berthels, "Al-Rāzī: Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā," in *EI²*, 474-7.

[5] See E. Berthels, "Al-Rāzī: Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh," in *EI²*, 477-8.

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Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 326/938) the theorist of *ḥadīth*,[6] Abū Bakr al-Rāzī al-Jaṣṣaṣ (d. 370/980) the legal theorist,[7] and Abū al-Fatḥ al-Rāzī (d. 447/1055).[8]

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's father, Ḍiyā' al-Dīn 'Umar, was renowned for his expertise in *fiqh* and *kalām*, and used to give Friday sermons *(khuṭbah*, pl. *khuṭab)* at the mosque of Rayy, so that people called him al-Khaṭīb or Khaṭīb al-Rayy. In *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) reports that Ḍiyā' al-Dīn 'Umar wrote a two-volume book on theology entitled *Ghāyat al-Marām*.[9]

Our author was known by various honorific titles *(alqāb*, pl. of *laqab)* and nicknames *(kunan*, pl. of *kunyah)*. Among his *alqāb* were Fakhr al-Dīn or al-Fakhr al-Rāzī or Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,[10] the latter being the most popular one; Ibn al-Khaṭīb (the son of al-Khaṭīb) or Ibn Khaṭīb al-Rayy (the son of the Khaṭīb of Rayy); al-Imām (the Imām); Shaykh al-Islām (the teacher of Islam); Sulṭān al-Mutakallimīn (the king of theologians);[11] and Imām or Shaykh al-Mushakkikīn (the Imām or teacher of the doubters). He was called Ibn al-Khaṭīb or Ibn Khaṭīb al-Rayy because of the personal merits of his father,

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[6] For his contribution to the development of the a branch of *ḥadīth* science, i.e. *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl*, see Rif'at Fawzī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, *Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī wa Atharuh fī 'Ilm al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1994). See also Ibn Abī al-Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Marāsil fī al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1977).

[7] This author wrote a book on *uṣūl al-fiqh*, entitled *Fuṣūl fī al-Uṣūl*. He also wrote a commentary on al-Khaṣṣāf's *Kitāb Adab al-Qāḍī*. For more details, see Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Jaṣṣaṣ (d. 261 A.H./847 C.E.), *Fuṣūl fī al-Uṣūl*, ed. 'Ajīl Jāsim al-Nashamī (Kuwait: Dawlat al-Kuwayt, 1985) and Aḥmad b. 'Amr al-Shaybānī al-Khaṣṣāf, *Kitāb Adab al-Qāḍī wa Sharḥ Abī Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Rāzī al-Jaṣṣaṣ*, ed. Farḥāt Ziyādah (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1978).

[8] Known as Abū al-Fatḥ al-Rāzī, Sulaym b. Ayyūb b. Sulaym composed a number of books, one of which is on *tafsīr*, *Ḍiyā' al-Qulūb*. See al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirin*, 196-7.

[9] See Tāj al-Dīn Abī Naṣr 'Abd al-Wahhāb b. 'Alī b. Abd al-Kāfī al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanaḥī and 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Halawī ([Cairo]: 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Halabī, [1970?]), vol. 3, 22 and 159; vol. 7, 242.

[10] Throughout his seven-volume book, al-Subkī calls our author either al-Imām Fakhr al-Dīn or al-Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, --for instance, al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, vol. 3, 22, 26, 159, 242, 372; vol. 5, 138, 140; and vol. 7, 29, 242.

[11] Al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirin*, vol. 2, 214.

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Khaṭīb al-Rayy.[12] The *laqab* al-Imām, often used with Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, can be found in both Shāfiʿite and Ashʿarite works, indicating the reverence he was held in by jurists and theologians of these two schools of thought. The *laqab* Shaykh al-Islām, which he received during his stay in Herāt,[13] was earned for his lucid expression of ideas, which won back a great number of the Karrāmiyyah to the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah.[14] The last *laqab* (Shaykh al-Mushakkikīn) was attributed to him because he often doubted the ideas he received, and subjected them to relentless scrutiny in order to arrive at certainty (*yaqīn*). Among his nicknames we find such epithets as Abū ʿAbd Allāh, Abū al-Maʿālī, Abū al-Faḍāʾil, and Abū al-Fatḥ.[15] These names and the fact that many scholars bore similar ones caused much confusion among later scholars. Thus it is sometimes difficult to differentiate our author's name from that of others. Since Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr b. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Rāzī, the author of *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, was also called by his *laqab* Fakhr al-Dīn, a book written by "Fakhr al-Rāzī" discussing Qurʾānic sciences (*ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*) has been attributed to both this scholar and our author.[16]

Al-Rāzī was very fortunate to have been born and raised in a family of scholars. His father, Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn ʿUmar, was a disciple of al-Baghawī, and was a leader in the Muslim community (*aʾimmat al-Islām*). He mastered the sciences of *kalām* and *fiqh*. Extolling the qualities of this scholar, al-Subkī says that he was "fluent of speech,

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[12] In the introduction to al-Rāzī's *al-Maṭālib*, Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā mentions two different lineages of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: one from Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, and the other from Khālid b. Al-Walīd. See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-ʿĀliyah min al-ʿIlm al-Ilāhī*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā, vol. 8 (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1987), 11.

[13] Herāt is now in Afghanistan.

[14] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi al-Wafayāt*, vol. 4, 249.

[15] Al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārāʾuh al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyyah*, 13.

[16] See C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, Supplement 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1937), 922; al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārāʾuh al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyyah*, 118-9.

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possessed fortitude; he was a *faqih, uṣūlī,* theologian, *ṣūfī, khaṭib,* traditionist, and educated."[17] Thus it was from his father that al-Rāzī got his early religious education. The father taught the son the basic tenets of the Islamic sciences, especially of *kalām* and *fiqh.*

After his father died, al-Rāzī went to Simnān, where he studied under al-Kamāl al-Simnānī for some time. He then returned to his home town, Rayy, to study under al-Majd al-Jīlī, a companion of Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā and a teacher of Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl (d. 631/1234), with whom al-Rāzī pursued intensive study of *kalām* and *ḥikmah.* When al-Majd al-Jīlī went to Marāghah, al-Rāzī accompanied him there and continued to study under him. It is said that the former memorized Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī's (d. 478/1085) *al-Shāmil fī Uṣūl al-Dīn* during this period.[18] He also memorized al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) *al-Mustaṣfā* and Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī's *al-Muʿtamad,* both of which are devoted to Islamic jurisprudence.[19]

Having mastered a wide range of knowledge, especially of *kalām,* al-Rāzī began to indulge his thirst for intellectual stimulation by traveling to various cities in the Muslim East. During his travels, he often expressed his controversial ideas and sometimes challenged the scholars of those cities to participate in debates. He went first to Khwārizm, where Muʿtazilism was dominant. There he got involved in violent debates with the Muʿtazilites on theology and *fiqh* that eventually led to his expulsion from this

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[17] Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyyah al-Kubrā,* vol. 7, 242.

[18] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān wa Anbāʾ Abnāʾ al-Zamān,* vol. 4, 248-9; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn,* vol. 2, 250.

[19] Muḥammad al-Muʿtaṣim bi Allāh al-Baghdādī, "Taqdīm," in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah fī ʿIlm al-Ilāhiyyāt wa al-Ṭabīʿiyyāt,* vol. 1, 15-6.

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city.[20] It is very probable that he was thrown out because he defended Ash'arite *kalām* and Shāfi'ite *fiqh* in a city that favored Mu'tazilite *kalām* and Ḥanafite *fiqh*. As he mentions in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, al-Rāzī was also involved in a debate with a Christian, an incident which inspired him to write *al-Munāẓarah fī al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*.[21]

Al-Rāzī also traveled to Transoxiana *(Mā Warā' al-Nahr)*, and then later journeyed to India. While visiting some cities in Transoxiana, such as Bukhārā, Samarqand, Khujand, Banākit, and Ghaznah, he participated in further debates, some of which were recorded in his *Munāẓarāt*, on controversial issues *(al-masā'il al-khilāfiyyah)* in *kalām*, *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, philosophy, and logic.[22] Because of his involvement in disputation, he was also eventually expelled from this city. In Bukhārā, as he himself tells us in his *Munāẓarāt*, al-Rāzī discussed issues of *fiqh* with al-Riḍā al-Naysāburī,[23] logic and *kalām* with al-Nūr al-Ṣābūnī,[24] juridical issues with al-Rukn al-Qazwīnī,[25] and astronomy and

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[20] See W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1962), 128. See also al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uh al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyyah*, 19.

[21] Of all the works referred to here, this book is nowhere mentioned by or associated with al-Rāzī. There are two reasons, however, for ascribing this book to him. First, the mode of expression is similar to that of his other works. Second, there are allusions in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* to the effect that he was in Khwārizm, and involved with Christians, and it is a fact that the texts found in this *tafsīr* are the same as those of *Munāẓarah*. See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 78; Ibid., vol. 21, 214. See also 'Abd al-Majīd al-Najjār (ed.), "Muqaddimah," in *Munāẓarah fī al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1986), 8-9.

[22] See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī fī Bilād Mā Warā' al-Nahr*, ed. Fathalla Kholeif (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1966), 7. See also Fathalla Kholeif's translation of the book, *A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Controversies in Transoxiana* (Beirut: Dar el-Maschreq, 1966), 29.

[23] With this Ḥanafite scholar, al-Rāzī discussed a number of issues, one of which was about "the agent of a sale *(al-wakīl bi al-bay')*." See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī fī Bilād Mā Warā' al-Nahr*, 7; See also Kholeif's translation of the book, *A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Controversies in Transoxiana*, 29.

[24] See al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī fī Bilād Mā Warā' al-Nahr*, 14, and 22-4.

[25] A former pupil of al-Riḍā al-Naysāburī, al-Rukn al-Qazwīnī was originally a Ḥanafite, but then became a Shāfi'ite later in life. See Muḥammad b. Abī al-Wafā' al-Qurashī, *al-Jawāhir al-Muḍi'ah fī Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafiyyah*, vol. 2, 370. See also al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī fī Bilād Mā Warā' al-Nahr*, 24.

philosophy with Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas'ūdī.[26] In Samarqand, he discussed several subjects with Farīd al-Ghīlānī,[27] while in Ghaznah he debated the issue of the creation of the world with a jurist *(qāḍī)*.[28]

In his study of *Munāẓarāt Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī fī Bilād Mā Warā' al-Nahr*,[29] Fathalla Kholeif remarks that "in his sixteen debates, Rāzī raised the most important and controversial issues in theology between the Māturīdites and the Ash'arites, and *furū' al-fiqh* between the Ḥanafītes and the Shāfi'ites in *furū' al-fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*."[30] These differences, however, do not emerge very clearly from the debates. This is because even though al-Rāzī was known for his Ash'arite sympathies, and the people of Transoxiana for their affiliation with the Māturīdite cause, "al-Rāzī frequently opposes the views of Ash'arī and all his followers, inclining at times to Māturīdite doctrines, while his Māturīdite opponents inclined at times to Ash'arite views."[31] For instance, while agreeing with the common Ash'arite and Māturīdite position that, according to scripture, human beings may have a vision of God, al-Rāzī disagreed with al-Ash'arī's contention that this idea could be supported with rational proof, and agreed with al-Māturīdī, who maintained that the vision of God *(ru'yat Allāh)* is justified by scripture and needs no rational justification.[32] More

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[26] See al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī fī Bilād Mā Warā' al-Nahr*, 32-42. This debate, according to al-Rāzī, was held in 582 A.H./1186 C.E. in the presence of al-Riḍā al-Naysābūrī, who was al-Mas'ūdī's student in philosophy.

[27] Ibid., 59-63.

[28] Ibid., 21.

[29] This title was probably given by copyists. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī himself, Kraus speculates, entitled his work *"Ajwibat al-Masā'il al-Bukhāriyyah."* However, this cannot be accepted, unless an original manuscript says so. See Paul Kraus, "The 'Controversies' of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," *Islamic Culture*, vol. 12 (1938), 135.

[30] Kholeif, *A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Controversies in Transoxiana*, 3. See also Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī fī Bilād Mā Warā' al-Nahr*, 53.

[31] Kholeif, *A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Controversies in Transoxiana*, 3-4.

[32] Ibid., 122. See also Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Arba'īn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 198.

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interestingly, he sometimes clearly expressed his disagreement with the Ash'arites while agreeing with the Mu'tazilites.[33] We will discuss these points in more detail in the following chapter.

After a short residence in Transoxiana and Herāt, al-Rāzī went on to Ghaznah, "where he received the patronage of the Ghūrid ruler of Ghaznah Shihāb al-Dīn."[34] He did not stay long in this city, for with the help of Amīr al-Dīn, the cousin and son-in-law of Ghiyāth al-Dīn, the Karrāmites eventually succeeded in having him expelled. One reason for this was that al-Rāzī had successfully converted Ghiyāth al-Dīn, Shihāb al-Dīn's brother, back from the Karrāmiyyah to the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah. Another reason may have been that al-Rāzī had publicly attacked Ibn al-Quḍwah, a famous Karrāmite shaykh. After this expulsion, al-Rāzī moved to Khurāsān where he came under the patronage of 'Alā al-Dīn Tukush, and became a tutor to the latter's son, Muḥammad.[35]

After traveling for so many years, al-Rāzī eventually returned to Rayy.[36] At the start of this period of his life, met a wealthy doctor (ṭabīb)[37] who presented him with a book that al-Rāzī had asked for. When the doctor fell critically ill, he sent for al-Rāzī to obtain the latter's agreement that his two sons would marry the doctor's two daughters. After the doctor's death, al-Rāzī attended to his property, and the revenues from this property enabled him to continue his travels, including a journey to Khurāsān to see Sulṭān

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[33] Kholeif, *A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Controversies in Transoxiana*, 114-6.

[34] Ibid., 19.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān*, vol. 4, 248-9; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn*, vol. 2, 250.

[37] Without indicating his sources al-Zarkān states that the doctor was 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Sarakhsī. See al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uh al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyyah*, 19.

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Muḥammad b. Tukush, known as Khwārizm Shāh. After this meeting, al-Rāzī received an honorable position, one never before granted, from the sulṭān.[38] Al-Rāzī was then sent on an official mission to India.[39] Although there is a scholarly debate over whether this mission ever actually took place, it is likely that it did, since al-Rāzī himself mentions in his *Munāẓarāt* that he went to India.

As a client of Khawārizm Shāh, al-Rāzī decided to spend the rest of his days in Herāt[40] and to devote his life to teaching, sermons, and writing.[41] For these activities, Sulṭān Ghiyāth al-Dīn built him a school *(madrasah)* near the mosque of Herāt *(jāmi' Hirāt)*.[42] It is probable that he wrote most of his more extensive works in this period of his life. During this time, many people, including reputed scholars, came from far and wide to study under him.[43] To his teaching circle there gathered about three hundred people hoping to learn various disciplines under his directions.[44] He had a wide reputation,

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[38] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A 'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān*, vol. 4, 248-9; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirin*, vol. 2, 250-1.

[39] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi al-Wafayāt*, vol. 4, 249. Since this mission is only reported by al-Ṣafadī, Fathalla Kholeif questions if it really took place and what the purpose of the mission was. He is more hesitant in this respect than Watt and al-Zarkān. For further discussion, see Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 128; al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uh al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyyah*, 21; and Kholeif, *A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Controversies in Transoxiana*, 19.

[40] See Aḥmad b. Al-Qāsim b. Khalīfah b. Yūnus al-Sa'dī al-Khazrajī (Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah), *'Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'*, ed. Nizār Riḍā, vol. 2, 33. This account, however, differs from that of al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt*. See al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, vol. 5, 33-40; Madjid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 319.

[41] Since he now had the time to devote himself to these activities, most of his writings were probably composed at this time.

[42] M. Ṣaghīr Ḥasan Ma'ṣūmī, "Introduction," in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Imām Rāzī's 'Ilm al-Akhlāq*, trans. M. Ṣaghīr Ḥasan Ma'ṣūmī (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1969), 10 [a translation of al-Rāzī's *Kitāb al-Nafs wa al-Rūḥ wa Sharḥ Qiwāmihā*].

[43] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A 'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān*, vol. 4, 248-9; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirin*, vol. 2, 250-1.

[44] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi al-Wafayāt*, vol. 4, 248.

one that earned him the *laqab* Shaykh al-Islām.[45] When scholars of different schools of thought came to him and raised various issues with him, he answered them satisfactorily. His success, according to Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), led to more conversions from the Karrāmiyyah camp.[46] This, along with his bold criticism of a Karrāmite *shaykh* (among others), provoked Karrāmite anger against him. His own attacks took the form not only of spoken criticism but were written down as well in his *Faḍā'iḥ al-Karrāmiyyah*.[47] This uncompromising stance was to lead to his death, for the Karrāmiyyah conspired to poison him.[48] It was on his deathbed that he dictated his will to his disciple, Ibrāhīm b. Abī Bakr b. 'Alī al-Iṣfahānī, on 21 Muḥarram 606 A.H./25 July 1209 C.E.[49] It took him some time to succumb to the poison, finally passing away in Herāt on the day of *'Īd al-Fiṭr* (1 Shawwāl) of 606 A.H./28 March 1210 C.E. in a house called Dār al-Salṭanah;[50] his body was buried in Muzdakhān, a village near Herāt.[51] By the end of his life, he had not yet finished his *tafsīr*. Although he had two children --the elder named Ḍiya' al-Dīn, the

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[45] Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, *'Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'*, 465. See also Kholeif, *A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Controversies in Transoxiana*, 19.

[46] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi al-Wafayāt*, vol. 4, 249.

[47] See al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, vol. 5, 140.

[48] See al-Qifṭī, *Ta'rīkh al-Ḥukamā'*, 292. See also H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," in *SEI*, 470-1.

[49] Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, *'Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'*, 465.

[50] 'Alā' al-Dīn Khwārizm Shāh gave al-Rāzī this house, so that the latter could concentrate on teaching in the school that the former had given him as well. See Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, *'Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'*, 466; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi al-Wafayāt*, vol. 4, 251.

[51] Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān*, vol. 4, 248-9; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn*, vol. 2, 252. Basing themselves on the writings of Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, Ibn al-Qifṭī, Ibn Khallikān, al-Ṣafadī, al-Dhahabī, Yāqūt, al-Subkī, and Ibn al-Sā'ī, H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers believe that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī died in 606 A.H. However, the conversion of this Hijriyyah date should be 1210 C.E., not 1209 C.E. as they claim. See H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, "Al-Rāzī," in *SEI*, 470.

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younger Shams al-Dīn--[52] and despite his prediction that his younger son would complete the work given his great talent, neither of them finished it.

His schooling and travels enabled al-Rāzī to meet scholars of various intellectual interests and to discuss with them some issues critical to their respective fields. These experiences eventually motivated al-Rāzī to master and to write on these fields himself, with the result that "this great encylopedist surpassed his contemporary scholars as philosopher, historian, mathematician, astronomer, physician, theologian, and [exegete]."[53] In short, Nasr concludes, this background enabled al-Rāzī to "deal with every aspect of Muslim intellectual life and [to cover] all the science of his time."[54] This might help answer the question of why he was considered such a great Qur'ān exegete, blessed with "the richest mind of all the classical commentators on the Qur'ān,"[55] and why this "great exegete and religious philosopher"[56] was so creative as to be able to bring a broad range of knowledge to his writings.

2. Intellectual Life in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Time

In order to appreciate al-Rāzī's intellectual accomplishments, it is useful to survey briefly the intellectual life in his time. Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Zarkān considers this period

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[52] Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, *'Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'*, 465.

[53] Ma'ṣūmī, "Introduction," in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Imām Rāzī's *'Ilm al-Akhlāq*, 1.

[54] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*, ed. Mehdi Amin Razavi (London: Curzon Press, 1996), 108.

[55] A.H. John, "Solomon and the Queen of Sheba: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Treatment of the Qur'ānic Telling of the Story," *Abr-Nahrain*, vol. 24 (1986), 59.

[56] Ignas Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 65.

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similar to that of al-Ma'mūn, when intellectual activities began to flourish.[57] It was a time

when many great Muslim thinkers, such as Ibn Rushd (d. 594/1198), Ibn 'Arabī (d.

638/1240), and Shaykh al-Ishrāq al-Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl, lived and wrote in various

fields. Bausani declares that the Saljūq period was important for the development of

Islamic thought in Iran,[58] especially in view of Sunnite-Shī'ite polemics. It was in this

period also that "the entire theological system of Islam found its final systematization."[59]

Seyyed Hossein Nasr maintains that the Saljūqs "supported Islamic theology *(kalām)*

against the attacks of the philosophers and sought to strengthen Sunni orthodoxy through

the establishment of a school *(madrasah)* system, which is most closely associated with the

Saljūq prime minister, Khwājah Niẓām al-Mulk."[60] Religious intellectual currents were not

limited to the theological sphere, but extended to mystical and philosophical speculation.

In Islamic theology *(kalām)*, Abū Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 323/935) was a key figure in

the development of Islamic theology *(kalām)*. He was the founder of the Ash'arite school,

whose theological doctrines represented an attempt to reconcile the dilemma of human

freedom with God's sovereign power. Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 477/1085), a

great Shāfi'ite-Ash'arite theologian of Khurasān, produced a number of important works

in Islamic theology, such as *al-Irshād, Ghiyāth al-Umam,* and *al-Shāmil.* He had many

disciples, among them 'Imād al-Dīn Kiyā Harāsī (d. 503/1110) and Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī

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[57] Al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uh al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyyah,* 9.

[58] Bausani has researched intellectual development in the Saljūq period. Like Seyyed Hossein Nasr, he holds that Islamic thought in Iran came to fruition because it was based on a fertile combination of Persian and Islamic cultures. See A. Bausani, "Religion in the Saljuq Period," in *The Cambridge History of Iran,* vol. 5, *The Saljuq and Mongol Periods,* ed. J.A. Boyle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968). See also Nasr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia.*

[59] A. Bausani, "Religion in the Saljuq Period," 283.

[60] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam,* in Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Our Religions* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 488.

(d. 504/1111), who maintained al-Ash'ari's mainstream Sunni approach. Al-Shahrastani

(d. 548/1153), whose *al-Milal wa al-Nihal* is best appreciated for its empirical approach

to the study of the theological sects, was another Khurasani scholar well-known in this

field. The Mu'tazilite scholar al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144) was renowned for his

exegetical work *al-Kashshaf 'an Haqa'iq Ghawamid al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi*

Wujuh al-Ta'wil. In fact, scholars consider al-Razi's *al-Tafsir al-Kabir* or *Mafatih al-*

Ghayb to be an Ash'arite answer to Zamakhshari's *al-Kashshaf*, which is regarded as the

peak of the Mu'tazilite exegetical achievement.[61]

Like Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni before him, al-Razi

wrote a number of original theological works.[62] His fresh outlook is evident in his

inclusion of other sciences in his theological discussions.[63] In *al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, for

example, al-Razi "reaches out widely and brings into consideration philosophical thought,

along with material from all other possible areas."[64] Interestingly, W. Montgomery Watt

claims that the works of scholars after al-Razi, with the exception of some scholars like

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 673/1274) and Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328), were, although

considerable in number and in bulk, severely lacking in originality.[65]

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[61] See Kraus, "The 'Controversies' of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi," 133.

[62] Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 149.

[63] Nasr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*, 109. Al-Razi's inclusion of other sciences in his theological discussions invited many criticisms from later scholars. Ibn Taymiyyah, for example, strongly criticizes al-Razi because the latter introduced so many foreign elements --i.e., philosophy and other sciences-- into theology. See Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 161. Ibn Taymiyyah even goes so far as to state that al-Razi's *tafsir* includes everything but *tafsir*. See al-Safadi, *al-Wafi bi al-Wafayat*, vol. 4, 254.

[64] Helmut Gätje, *The Qur'an and Its Exegesis: Selected Texts with Classical and Modern Muslim Interpretations* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 37.

[65] Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 149.

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Another celebrated figure among the Persian Muslim thinkers of this time was Ibn

Sīnā (d. 980/1037).[66] His intellectual genius led to an original and creative understanding

of Islam, against which later scholars, such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī, argued.

Not only did he adopt Greek philosophy, he also adapted it to Islamic thought.[67]

Next to the influence that al-Rāzī's teacher Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī had on

him, it was Ibn Sīnā's deeply philosophical thought that had the greatest impact on al-Rāzī.

This is clear from al-Rāzī's commentaries on *al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt* and *'Uyūn al-*

Hikmah. However, in many passages in his writings he did not hesitate to express his

disagreement with Ibn Sīnā.[68] Some of his disagreements were on the issue of emanation

and God's knowledge of particulars. The themes in *al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah* had

already been discussed for the most part in Ibn Sīnā's *al-Shifā'*.[69]

Persia in al-Rāzī's time offered a fertile ground for a synthesis of the Islamic

sciences and the so-called "secular sciences." *Kalām*, as Marshall Hodgson claims, was

not purely religious discourse, but was "treated very much in the spirit of *falsafah*, with

great sophistication as to the intellectual presuppositions of abstract inquiry."[70] This

Persian heritage, with its wide-ranging approach to learning, enabled al-Rāzī to familiarize

himself with philosophy, the "Islamic sciences," and the "secular sciences." He made good

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[66] Known as Avicenna, and *al-Shaykh al-Ra'īs*, Ibn Sīnā's full name was Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn b. 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Sīnā. For a brief introduction, see A.-M. Goichon, "Ibn Sīnā," in *EI²*, vol. 2, 941-7.

[67] Ibid.

[68] In view of al-Rāzī's occasional disagreement with Ibn Sīnā, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī refers to the former's remarks as a diatribe, not a commentary (*jarḥ lā sharḥ*). See Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 320. See also Ibn Sīnā, *Al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt*, with a commentary by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, vol. 1, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1958), 162.

[69] Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 320-3.

[70] Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in A World Civilization*, vol. 2 (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1977), 323.

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use of these sources, for Nasr claims that there was no science available in al-Rāzī's time that he did not know. He mastered not only theology *(kalām)*, mysticism *(ṣūfism)*, jurisprudence *(fiqh)*, rhetoric *(balāghah)* and philosophy *(falsafah)*, but also "logic, mathematics, metaphysics, and the natural and the esoteric sciences."[71]

3. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Intellectual life

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was a well-known and influential figure in the history of Islamic studies. He influenced the thought of his contemporary and later thinkers, especially in the fields of Islamic theology *(kalām)* and Qur'ānic exegesis *(tafsīr)*. On the basis of the available accounts, Kholeif considers al-Rāzī to have been a controversial figure, especially while living in Transoxiana.[72] Some scholars knew him for his great reputation as a scholar of Islam, and as a great teacher and author. When referring to him, al-Shahrāzūrī cites the prophetic tradition *(ḥadīth)* attributed to the Prophet: "In every one hundred years, there will be a renovator for this community,"[73] and declares him to be the sixth renovator after 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (d. 101/719), Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/819), Aḥmad b. Surayj (d. 306/918), Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1012), and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī.[74] Others, however, considered him to be possessed of a bad character, accusing him of having turned away from the *Sunnah* and of having failed to

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[71] Nasr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*, 108. See also Musā'id Muslim 'Abd Allāh Āl Ja'far, *Athar al-Taṭawwur al-Fikrī fī al-Tafsīr fī al-'Aṣr al-'Abbāsī* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1984), 201.

[72] Kholeif, *A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Controversies in Transoxiana*, 9-15.

[73] This *ḥadīth* is reported on the authority of Abū Dāwūd and Ibn Ḥanbal.

[74] See Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Shahrāzūrī, *Rawḍat al-Afrāḥ wa Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ*.

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support orthodoxy --even to the point of committing heresy. It is not our purpose, however, to fall into such value judgments. This survey of conflicting opinions is intended to impress upon the reader how easy it was for those who lacked al-Rāzī's abilities and knowledge to fail to appreciate properly his significance.

As mentioned earlier, al-Rāzī was known not only for his expertise in theology and Qur'ānic studies, but also for his knowledge of philosophy, medicine, mathematics, Islamic jursiprudence, and linguistics. In addition to his prose, al-Rāzī wrote poetry, both to express his thought and, sometimes, to answer his opponents. In order to reach his audience, al-Rāzī spoke and wrote in both Arabic and Persian, although the bulk of his works were written in Arabic. One reason for this, I believe, was his strong belief in the superiority of Arabic, since the Qur'ān, the *Sunnah*, and most books on the Islamic sciences had been written in that language.

To understand how al-Rāzī achieved his scholarly reputation, it might be best to follow chronologically the development of his thought. In *al-Tafsīr wa Rijāluh*,[75] Ibn 'Ashūr maintains that al-Rāzī started his intellectual career by studying philosophy and the Greek sciences *('ulūm al-ḥikmah al-Yūnāniyyah)*.[76] This statement, however, contradicts al-Rāzī's own admission. In his autobiography, *Taḥṣīl al-Ḥaqq*, al-Rāzī mentions that he began his academic pursuits by studying theology *('ilm al-uṣūl)* and Islamic jurisprudence *(fiqh)* under his father's tutelage. Having learned all he could from the latter, a man

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[75] Although presented to an academic audience, this book was written in a less than academic form, for there is no bibliography attached. Rarely does the author give references; here the reference is incomplete. See, for example, Ibn 'Ashūr, *al-Tafsīr wa Rijāluh* (Tunis: Dār al-Kutub al-Sharqiyyah, 1966), 81, 85-6.

[76] Ibn 'Ashūr, *al-Tafsīr wa Rijāluh*, 72.

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theologically sympathetic to the Ash'arites[77] and whose juridical thought was firmly Shāfi'ite,[78] al-Rāzī went on to study *fiqh* under al-Kamāl al-Simnānī. Then he turned to the study of theology and philosophy under Majd al-Dīn al-Jīlī.

Al-Rāzī dealt primarily with philosophy, so that his discussions on theological themes were sometimes overwhelmed by philosophical notions. Watt points out that, like other theologians --such as al-Ghazālī, al-Ījī (d. 756/1355), and al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413)-- al-Rāzī devoted a considerable portion (perhaps half) of his main theological treatise *al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah* to philosophical preliminaries.[79] Muḥammad al-Baghdādī and Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā' commend al-Rāzī for his attempts to combine *kalām* with philosophy.[80] Al-Saqqā' even claims that he made no apparent distinction between *kalām* and philosophy.[81] Nasr observes that "the theology of Imam Rāzī is marked by the integration of theological themes with other sciences." To support this assertion, Nasr points out that Rāzī combines theology with ethics in his *Asrār al-Tanzīl*; theology with Ṣūfism in his *Lawāmi'*; and theology with philosophy in his *Muḥaṣṣal*.[82] In addition to declaring him a

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[77] His father studied theology through the following chain of authorities: Abū al-Qāsim Sulaymān b. Naṣr al-Anṣārī, Imām al-Ḥaramyn Abū al-Ma'ālī, Abū Isḥāq al-Firāyānī, Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Bāhili, and, ultimately, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ismā'īl al-Ash'ari. The latter studied theology from Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī, but was dissatisfied and founded his own school of theology, known as the Ash'arite school. See Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān*, vol. 4, 248-9; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirin*, vol. 2, 252.

[78] His father studied Islamic jurisprudence through the following chain of authorities: Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn b. Mas'ūd al-Farrā' al-Baghawi, al-Qāḍī Ḥusayn al-Marūzī, al-Qaffāl al-Marūzī, Abū Zayd al-Marūzī, Abu Isḥāq al-Marūzī, Abū al-'Abbās b. Surayj, Abū al-Qāsim al-Anmāṭi, Abū Ibrāhīm al-Mazini, and al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī. See Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān*, vol. 4, 248-9; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirin*, vol. 2, 252.

[79] William Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misconceptions* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 54-5. See also G.C. Anawati, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," in *EI²*, 751-5.

[80] See Muḥammad al-Mu'taṣim bi Allāh al-Baghdādī, "Taqdīm," in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah fī 'Ilm al-Ilāhiyyāt wa al-Ṭabi'iyyāt*, vol. 1, 71-82.

[81] Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā', ed., "Muqaddimah," in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-'Āliyah min al-'Ilm al-Ilāhī*, vol. 1, 8.

[82] Nasr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*, 109-10.

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great philosopher and theologian, Majid Fakhry states that he was the only equal of al-Ghazālī in philosophical and theological erudition in the twelfth century. In some respects, al-Rāzī was even greater, for "he combines philosophy and theology so completely that the separation between their respective spheres is hardly discernible."[83]

Regarded as a prominent philosophical theologian, then, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī greatly influenced later Muslim thinkers such as Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 729/1328), al-Taftāzānī (d. 791/1389), and al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), especially in the fields of theology and philosophy.[84] His explanation and critique of Ibn Sīnā's philosophy were useful, allowing later philosophers like Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) to encounter Ibn Sīnā's system of thought.[85]

Having studied several disciplines and experienced various ways of attaining the truth, in the last period of his life al-Rāzī devoted himself to the study of the Qur'ān. This field, he admitted, sustained his relentless and ongoing doubts, for as he said: *"Laqad ikhtabartu 'ṭ-ṭuruqa 'l-kalāmiyyah wa 'l-manāhija 'l-falsafiyyah, falam ajidhā tarwī ghalīlan wa lā tashfī 'alīlan. Wa ra'aytu aṣahḥa 'ṭ-ṭuruqi ṭarīqata 'l-Qur'ān."*[86] Jane Dammen McAuliffe translates this as: "I have diligently explored the paths of *kalām* and the ways of philosophy but have not found what quenches thirst or heals the sick; but now

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[83] Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 319-22.

[84] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī and the Intellectual Climate of His Times," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossen Nasr and Oliver Leaman, part 1 (New York: Routledge, 1996), 381. Al-Ṭūsī studied the *Qānūn* of Ibn Sīna through Quṭb al-Dīn al-Miṣrī, a student of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. See Hamid Dabashi, "Khwājah Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī: The Philosopher/Vizier and the Intellectual Climate of His Times," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, part 1, 530.

[85] Abderrahmane Lakhshassi, "Ibn Khaldūn," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, part 1, 360.

[86] Al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn*, vol. 2, 215.

I see that the soundest way is the way of the Qur'ān read deanthrophomorphically."[87] In

his *waṣiyyah* (will), al-Rāzī also stated: *"Wa laqad ikhtabartu 'ṭ-ṭuruqa 'l-kalāmiyyah wa

'l-manāhija 'l-falsafiyyah, famā ra'aytu fīhā fā'idatan tusāwī 'l-fā'idata 'l-latī

wajadtuhā fī 'l-Qur'āni 'l-'Aẓīm,"* meaning "I have experienced the paths of *kalām* and

the ways of philosophy. However, I found in them no benefit that equates the benefits

found in the Great Qur'ān."[88] Based on these statements, and the fact that he devoted his

later life to scholarship at a school in Herāt, it might be true that his monumental *al-Tafsīr

al-Kabīr* or *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* was written in this period of his life.[89]

4. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Personality

Al-Rāzī was described as having a bad temper, and unable to control his emotions.

His bad temper also made him criticize others strenuously, not only at an intellectual but

also at a personal level.[90] This claim is not without basis, for he once got very upset

simply because of a small and unintentional slight suffered at the hands of another

scholar.[91] However, he was at the same time honest about himself, and remorseful about

his behavior.[92]

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[87] Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 67.

[88] Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, *'Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā',* 467.

[89] Modern scholarship considers these statements of al-Rāzī as equivalent to repentance for having used *kalām*. After a careful study of a full version of the will, however, Tony Street proves that such a view needs reassessment. For more discussion, see, Tony Street, "Concerning the Life and Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," in *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society; A Fetschrift in Honour of Anthony H. Johns* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 135-46.

[90] For example, his verse which reads: *al-mar'u mā dāma ḥayyan yustahānu bihi // wa ya'ẓumu 'r-ruz'u fīhi ḥīna yuftaqadu.* See Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa Anbā' Abnā' al-Zamān,* vol. 4, 252.

[91] Visiting al-Farīd al-Ghīlānī's house in Samarqand, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was upset because he had to wait for the host a long time. When the latter came out, he swore at him for such bad treatment. The former justified the swearing of the scholar by quoting a Qur'ānic verse 42:40 which reads: *"wa-*

Al-Rāzī had a deep love of knowledge and pursued the study of every branch of science. After the death of his father, he traveled from one place to another in search of all kinds of knowledge. He even blamed himself for not being diligent enough, saying: "By God I regret the time I have spent eating instead of being in pursuit of learning, for time is precious."[93]

A conducive environment combined with his enthusiasm for study contributed to the development of his talents, until he excelled in what he did. Both Ibn Khallikān and al-Ṣafadī state that he combined five gifts as no one else could: "he had an ability to express himself, a sound mind, boundless knowledge, prodigious memory, and had all his proofs and examples at his command."[94] These virtues underscore the excellence of his writings ("wa jamī 'u taṣānifihī bālighatun fī 'l-ḥusni aqṣa 'l-ghāyāt").[95]

His companions and opponents all agreed that al-Rāzī had "great power of argument and reasoning."[96] Nasr states that "Imam Fakhr's particular genius for analysis and criticism is evident in whatever field he turns his attention to."[97] Yet, he tempers this judgment with the statement "that in the annals of Muslim thought he has quite justly

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jazā'u sayyiatin sayyiatun mithluhā." See al-Rāzī's Munāẓarāt Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī fī Bilād Mā Warā' al-Nahr, 59.

[92] Fathalla Kholeif shows this attitude in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's verse, quoted from al-Shahrāzūrī's Rawḍat al-Afrāḥ wa Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ, which reads: "Ashkū ilā 'llāhi min khuluqin yughayyirunī // wa yamḥaqu 'n-nūru min 'aqlī wa min dīnī // Ḥarāratun min mazāji 'l-qalbi muḥkamatun // tubdī fa tanmū fa tughwinī fa turḍinī." Fathalla Kholeif translates this verse as follows: "I complain to God of a changeful temper // which extinguishes the light from my reason and faith // A spark embedded in the composition of my heart // which appears, grows, takes control of me and satisfies me." See Kholeif, A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Controversies in Transoxiana, 20.

[93] Ibid., 22.

[94] Al-Ṣafadī, al-Wāfī bi al-Wafayāt, vol. 4, 248.

[95] Al-Subkī, Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā, vol. 5, 140.

[96] Ma'ṣūmī, "Introduction," in al-Rāzī, Kitāb al-Nafs wa al-Rūḥ wa Sharḥ Qiwāmihā, 20.

[97] Nasr, The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia, 108.

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become famous as one who is a master in posing a problem but not in solving it, in entering into a debate but not in concluding it."[98]

5. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Works

During his life, al-Rāzī wrote a great number of works in many disciplines.[99] Al-Baghdādī points out that his works covered: (1) exegesis *(al-tafsīr)*; (2) theology *('ilm al-kalām)*; (3) logic, philosophy, and ethics *(al-manṭiq, al-falsafah,* and *al-akhlāq)*; (4) a combination of theology and philosophy *(fī 'ilm al-kalām wa al-falsafah ma'an)*; (5) Islamic jurisprudence *(al-fiqh wa al-uṣūl)*; (6) history and biographies *(al-tārīkh wa al-tarājim)*; (7) mathematics and astronomy *(al-riyāḍah wa al-falak)*; (8) medicine and physiognomy *(al-ṭibb wa al-firāsah)*; (9) magic and astrology *(al-siḥr wa al-raml wa al-tanjīm)*; and (10) general works and encyclopedias *(kutub 'āmmah wa dawā'ir ma'ārif)*.[100]

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[98] Ibid.

[99] The following are some examples of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's works, a number of which are extant. On Qur'ānic studies, he wrote *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* or *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb, Asrār al-Tanzīl wa Anwār al-Ta'wīl* or *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Ṣaghīr, Tafsīr Sūrat al-Fātiḥah, Tafsīr Sūrat al-Baqarah, Tafsīr Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ,* and *(Risālah fī) al-Tanbīh 'alā ba'ḍ al-Asrār al-Mūdi'ah fī ba'ḍ Āyāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm;* theology *(kalām): al-Arba'īn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn, al-Khamsīn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn, Asās al-Taqdīs, Taḥṣīl al-Ḥaqq, al-Jabr wa al-Qadr* or *al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar, Sharḥ Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusnā, 'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā', al-Maḥṣūl (fī 'Ilm al-Kalām), al-Ma'ālim fī Uṣūl al-Dīn, Nihāyat al-'Uqūl fī Dirāyat al-Uṣūl,* and *Ajwibat al-Masā'il al-Najjāriyyah;* logic *(manṭiq),* philosophy and *akhlāq: al-Āyāt al-Bayyināt fī al-Manṭiq, al-Manṭiq al-Kabīr, Ta'jīz al-Falāsifah, Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt (li Ibn Sīnā), Sharḥ 'Uyūn al-Ḥikmah (li Ibn Sīnā), al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah, Muḥaṣṣal Afkār al-Mutaqaddimīn wa al-Muta'akhkhirīn min al-'Ulamā' wa al-Ḥukamā' wa al-Mutakallimīn, al-Maṭālib al-'Āliyah,* and *al-Akhlāq;* legal issues *(al-fiqh wa al-uṣūl): Ibṭāl al-Qiyās, Iḥkām al-Aḥkām, Sharḥ al-Wajīz li al-Ghazālī fī al-Fiqh, al-Maḥṣūl fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh, al-Ma'ālim fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh, Muntakhab al-Maḥṣūl fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh, al-Barāhin al-Bahā'iyyah,* and *al-Nihāyah al-Bahā'iyyah fī al-Mabāḥith al-Qiyāsiyyah;* Arabic and its sciences: *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah,* and *al-Muḥarrir fī Ḥaqā'iq* (or *Daqā'iq) al-Naḥw;* history *(tārīkh): Faḍā'il al-Aṣḥāb* or *Faḍā'il al-Ṣaḥābah al-Rāshidīn,* and *Manāqib al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī;* mathematics and astronomy: *al-Handasah,* and *Risālah fī 'Ilm al-Hay'ah;* medicine: *al-Ṭibb al-Kabīr, al-Ashribah, al-Tashrīḥ, Sharḥ al-Qānūn li Ibn Sīna,* and *Masā'il fī al-Ṭibb;* magic and astrology: *al-Aḥkām al-'Alā'iyyah fī al-A'lām al-Samāwiyyah, Kitāb fī al-Raml,* and *al-Sirr al-Maktūm;* and on general knowledge: *I'tiqād Firaq al-Muslimīn wa al-Mushrikīn.* See al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uh al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyyah,* 56-164.

[100] See Muḥammad al-Mu'taṣim bi Allāh al-Baghdādī, "Taqdīm," in al-Rāzī, *al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah fī 'Ilm al-Ilāhiyyāt wa al-Ṭabī'iyyāt,* vol. 1, 17-52. Murtada A. Muhibbu-Din's preliminary

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Modern scholars have written extensively on al-Rāzī. In almost every published version of al-Rāzī's works there is an introduction which identifies his writings in varying detail. A more complete list and analytical description of his writings may be found in *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uh al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyyah* by Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Zarkān.[101] This book includes not only an alphabetical list of the titles of al-Rāzī's works found in early sources, but also recent editions of his works. Al-Zarkān has shown that of the 235 titles usually attributed to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, 71 are of a doubtful nature and 28 are spurious.[102] In his examination of al-Rāzī's *tafsīr*, Murtada A. Muhibbu-Din arranges his list according to theme and discipline. He divides all the sciences into "traditional or religious sciences" *(al-'ulūm al-naqliyyah aw al-shar'iyyah)*, which are sciences connected directly with the Qur'ān, and the so-called "intellectual or philosophical sciences" *(al-'ulūm al-'aqliyyah aw al-ḥikmiyyah)*, which are sciences that do not have a direct connection with the Qur'ān and are commonly said to be inherited from Greek tradition. Under the first category, al-Rāzī's writings include *tafsīr*, theology, *fiqh*, history, grammar and rhetoric, ṣūfism and general knowledge, while his contributions to the second category include philosophy and science.[103]

In relation to these works, it is worth noting that *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* or *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, on which our discussion in this thesis will be based, is considered his most important exegetical work. Although scholars have different ideas as to the original length

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research shows that they cover Qur'ānic studies, *kalām*, and Islamic jurisprudence. See Murtada A. Muhibbu-Din, "Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: Philosophical Theology in al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr," *Hamdard Islamicus*, vol. 18, no. 3 (1994), 55-84

[101] Al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uh al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyyah*, 56-164.

[102] Ibid., 154-64.

[103] Muhibbu-Din, "Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: Philosophical Theology in al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr," 55-84.

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of the work, certain early sources, such as Ibn Abī ‘Uṣaybi‘ah, al-Baghdādī, al-Qifṭī, al-Dhahabī, and al-Ṣafadī seem to agree that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī did not finish the book himself.[104] After his death, his pupils, Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Khalīl al-Khū’ī (d. 637/1239)[105] and Najm al-Dīn Qāmūlī (d. 728/1327), completed the work, so that this book eventually came to consist of 32 volumes.[106] These sources lead us to conclude that not all parts of the *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* were written by al-Rāzī, and that other scholars later completed the almost-final version of this work bequeathed to them by al-Rāzī.

The difficulty is deciding which parts of the book were written by al-Rāzī and which by other authors. There are two possibilities: first that he composed the *tafsīr* in the order of the Qur’ān, and second that he composed the *tafsīr* randomly in accordance with his mood and the needs of his students. If the first possibility is correct, it might be true that at least the first ten volumes belong to al-Rāzī and the remainder to others. If the second possibility is correct, the problem is rendered more difficult. Since there are many reports stating that al-Rāzī wrote the *tafsīr* in chapters (al-Fātiḥah, al-Baqarah, al-Ikhlāṣ, etc.), he may have written the *tafsīr* in random fashion. This is more evident in his interpretation of the Qur’ān 3:40. In addressing the question of why Yaḥyā was named Yaḥyā, al-Rāzī states that the reason has been explained in the interpretation of Sūrat

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[104] They maintain that *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* did not exceed 30 volumes. According to Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘ah the book consisted of only 8 volumes; according to al-Baghdādī, ten volumes.

[105] In his *Nash’at al-Tafsīr wa Manāhijuh*, Maḥmūd Baysūnī Fawdah asserts that the *laqab* of Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad was al-Khūbī. However, he does not mention the source of this assertion. See Maḥmūd Baysūnī Fawdah, *Nash’at al-Tafsīr wa Manāhijuh fī Ḍaw’ al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Amānah, 1986), 189.

[106] See, for instance, H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, “Al-Rāzī,” in *SEI*, 470; al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā’uh al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyyah*, 65-6; J. Jomier, “Les mafatih al-ghayb de l’imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi: quelques dates, lieux, manuscripts,” *MIDEO* 13 (1977), 253-90; and J. Jomier, “Qui a commenté l’ensemble des sourates al-‘Ankabūt à Yāsīn (29-36) dans ‘le Tafsīr al-Kabir’ de l’imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī?” *IJMES* 11 (1980), 467-85.

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Maryam, which is the nineteenth chapter.[107] It is, therefore, not easy to determine which part was written by al-Rāzī and which by others.

Some scholars' use of al-Rāzī's works as sources may help us determine this. Another way is to compare the style of writing and the content of the *tafsīr*. This opens up three avenues: first, researchers may identify which passages suit his mode of expression; second, they may be able to detect which ideas are close to his theological and juridical affiliations; and third, they may find clues as to whether the master or his pupils wrote the passages.

Bearing these difficulties in mind, I believe that the commentary on the the third chapter (*Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* or *The Household of 'Imrān*) was written by al-Rāzī himself. This assertion is based on several reasons, one of which is that he states at the end of his interpretation of the chapter that "with God's grace and kindness, the exegesis of this chapter was completed on Thursday at the beginning of Rabī' al-Ākhir of 595/1199."[108] Another reason is that the organization of the passage is similar in fashion to his other writings. Furthermore, al-Rāzī mentions in the passage that "there was an ongoing debate between 'me' [al-Rāzī] and some Christians"[109] on the issue of the relation between proof (*dalīl*) and consequence (*madlūl*). This assertion tallies with al-Rāzī's journey to Transoxiana, where he debated not only with Muslims of other schools of thought but also with scholars of other religions. The last reason is that he mentions in the passage that "the writer of this volume" (*muṣannif hādhā al-kitāb*), al-Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, says

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[107] See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 37.

[108] See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 9, 156.

[109] Compare al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 78, with al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarah fī al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 9.

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so and so. These reasons will be elaborated in greater detail in Chapter Three, where we discuss al-Rāzī's mode of expression.

Chapter Two

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Basic Assumptions

Regarding the Qur'ān and Its Exegesis

This chapter will focus on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's basic assumptions regarding the Qur'ān and its exegesis, which are crucial to understanding his exegetical method. The first part examines his notions on the scriptural nature of the Qur'ān. It covers the function and language of the Qur'ān, and its miraculous nature. The second part is devoted to al-Rāzī's efforts to explore the various meanings of Qur'ānic verses. We shall consider his definition of exegesis, the sources and scope of his interpretive approach, and the emphases encountered in his writing.

1. The Scriptural Nature of the Qur'ān

An enormous number of classical works deal with the Qur'ān, which constitutes the basic source of Islam. These works have been written from various motives. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, for instance, maintains that seen from the motives of the writings, scholarships in religious studies may roughly speaking be classified as being either devotional or scholarly.[1] The main difference between these two classes lies in their basic assumptions: the former starts from the assumption that the Qur'ān is God's word, the

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[1] Wilfred Cantwell Smith discussed the question of "Is the Qur'ān the word of God?" at length in his *Questions of Religious Truth*. This crucial issue has long preoccupied scholars, both in the Muslim and the Western worlds. It is of great importance to Islamic civilization. Using a comparative approach, Smith took up this crucial question with devoted Muslims and Christians as well as scholars for a more objective treatment, without any presupposition. For more details, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Questions of Religious Truth* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1967), 37-62.

truth of which is absolute;[2] the latter has no such presupposition, but carries out its work for expositional purposes. Writers who belong to the first group study the Qur'ān to justify their beliefs, which sometimes makes it difficult for them to study it critically. Writers in the second group, who study the Qur'ān for the sake of scholarship, on the other hand, tend to be critical. However, this division is not clear-cut or it is even a poor juxtoposition, for both the believers and the non-believers can write on this field from scholarly perspective. This is evident in Anthony Johns' writing, where he points out that there are scholars, whose motives for writing are not always uniformly religious, have also followed scholarly conventions in their writings on the Qur'ān.[3] In short, the point in consideration is whether or not the writers can adopt a scholarly approach in their writings.

It is not our purpose to elaborate on the historical and practical aspects of this division.[4] Rather, we shall try to explain the nature of the Qur'ān in al-Rāzī's exegetical writings and determine whether al-Rāzī considers the Qur'ān a religious or a scholarly text. This question is deceptively simple. However, since the Qur'ān is regarded by every Muslim to cover all aspects of life,[5] the choice is far from simple.

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[2] For more discussion on the consequence of holding the idea that the Qur'ān is a scripture, see, for example, Caesar E. Farah, *Islam: Beliefs and Observances*, 5th ed. (New York: Barrons, 1994), 91-4.

[3] Anthony Hearle Johns, "On Qur'ānic Exegetes and Exegesis: A Case Study in the Transmission of Islamic Learning," *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society; A Festschrift in Honour of Anthony H. Johns* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 16.

[4] For discussion on the development of Qur'ānic studies from a devotional to scholarly approach, see Fred Leemhuis, "The Koran and Its Exegesis: From Memorizing to Learning," in Jan Willem Drijvers and A.A. MacDonald, eds., *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 91-102.

[5] Edward Sell, *The Faith of Islam*, 2nd ed. (London: Kegan Paul, 1896), 1.

1.1. The Functions of the Qur'ān

The function of the Qur'ān is a crucial issue in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's exegesis. In many instances, he stresses that the Qur'ān is a guidance (*hudā*) and an explanation (*bayān*). He supports his view by quoting verse 2:185 -- which with other verses declares that the Qur'ān was revealed to explain various issues and that humankind may receive guidance from it. In *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, al-Rāzī thus holds that everything in the Qur'ān must be understandable.[6] His theological position is that there is not a word in the Qur'ān which human beings cannot understand -- even those known as the *fawātiḥ al-suwar*. Here, he might have been thinking of certain philosophical difficulties encountered in the Qur'ān. In his exegetical writings, he invokes certain philosophical notions and explains some verses in a philosophical spirit.[7]

Al-Rāzī's emphasis on the function of the Qur'ān as a guidance and explanation for mankind does not negate its other functions --for example, as a warning to people (*nadhīr*) (Q. 42:7). Another function is to give good news (*bashīr*) to those who believe and practice its teachings. These two functions are closely tied to the notion that the Qur'ān is a religious text, for which belief is essential.

Al-Rāzī seems to be saying that the Qur'ān is above all else a scripture,[8] basic to which are two qualities: sacredness and authority. He maintains that the Qur'ān is God's

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[6] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 2 (Cairo: 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad, n.d.), 8.

[7] In another instance, al-Rāzī also used a humanistic approach when explaining the human aspects of certain figures, such as Solomon and Abraham, in the Qur'ān. See Anthony Hearle Johns, "Al-Rāzī's Treatment of the Qur'ānic Episodes Telling of Abraham and His Guests: Qur'ānic Exegesis with Human Face," *Mélanges (Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Cadre)*, vol. 17 (1986), 81-133.

[8] For the development of the concept of scripture, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Scripture as Form and Concept," in *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective*, ed. Miriam Levering (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

word (*kalām Allāh*)[9] revealed (*tanzīl*) to Muḥammad piecemeal (*najman najman*)[10] by way

of what is known as *waḥy*.[11] Because the Qur'ān is the word of God, and cannot contain

error, al-Rāzī bases all his arguments on the assumption that whatever the Qur'ān says is

truth. He argues, for example, that the "problematic verses" only seem to contradict

themselves, when in fact they agree with each other. It is our task to understand how the

"problematic verses" agree with each other.[12] He further asserts that there is no

contradiction in the Qur'ān, basing himself on verse 4:82, which says that "if the Qur'ān

were not from God, you would find much contradiction in it."

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[9] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Khalq al-Qur'ān bayn al-Mu'tazilah wa Ahl al-Sunnah*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā (Cairo: al-Maktab al-Thaqāfī, 1989). Western scholars such as Jeffery and Macdonald question the claim that the Qur'ān is God's word, insisting instead that it is only Muḥammad's. For more discussion, see Arthur Jeffery, *Islam: Muḥammad and His Religion* (New York: The Liberal Art Press, 1958), 47-57; Duncan Black Macdonald, *Aspects of Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 77-114.

[10] See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, 169-70.

[11] As far as his interpretation of the Qur'ān is concerned, al-Rāzī does not say much about the mechanism of revelation. In his study of the thought of al-Rāzī, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Zarkān maintains that he viewed how the revelation took place in similar fashion to Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī. The latter two maintained that prophethood is based on emanation theory, and that the spirit of the Prophet ascended (*ṣu'ūd*) to a higher reality (*al-'ālam al-'ulwī*) to receive the message from God, either in a state of inspiration, wakefulness, or dream. Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa Ārā'uh al-Kalāmiyyah wa al-Falsafiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, [1963?]), 551. Compare with Ibn Sīnā's "On the Proof of Prophecies and the Interpretation of the Prophets' Symbols and Metaphors," trans. Michael E. Marmura, in *Medievel Political Philosophy*, ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (New York: Cornel University Press, 1991), 113-21.

[12] Al-Rāzī divided these problematic verses into two categories. First, Qur'ānic verses that seem to contradict themselves: (1) *Allāhu nūru 's-samāwāti wa 'l-arḍ, mathalu nūrihi ka miskhkāt*, which at the same time affirms and negates that God is *nūr* (light); (2) *Laysa ka mithlihi shay'*, which indicates that God has a similarity, and affirms and negates the oneness of God at the same time. Second, Qur'ānic verses that seem to contradict other verses: (1) *wa man yuḍlili 'llāhu fa mā lahū miw waliyyim mim ba'dih* contradicts *zayyana lahumu 'sh-shayṭānu a'mālahum fa huwa waliyyuhumu 'l-yawm*; (2) *inna kayda 'sh-shayṭāni kāna ḍa'ifa* contradicts *istaḥwadhdha 'alayhimu 'sh-shayṭānu fa ansāhum dhikra 'llāh* and *fa zayyana lahumu 'sh-shayṭānu a'mālahum fa ṣaddahum 'ani 's-sabil*. Al-Rāzī gives solutions for the first category of problems, as follows: (1) as the *siyāq* (context) implies, the word *nūr* (light) in the first should mean *munawwir* (the One who gives light); (2) the use of *kāf tashbīh* is meant to emphasize the state that nothing resembles God. For the second category, his solution is based on a quotation from Ibn al-Rāwandī: (1) *walī* in the former means the one who gives benefits and harm, while in the latter, *shayṭān* is their *walī* who does not give them benefits nor harm; (2) Satan can only seduce and call people to follow him, so that if they do not follow his call, they will not be subjected to harm. That is why Satan is regarded as weak. See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ijāz fī Dirāyat al-I'jāz*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Sammarā'ī and Muḥammad Barakāt Ḥamdī Abū 'Alī (Oman: Dār al-Fikr, 1985), 193-5.

It is worth noting in this connection that the Qur'ān, in al-Rāzī's conception, shares this trait with most other revealed scriptures.[13] Being absolutely true, scriptural assertions must have no flaws. While certain historical events mentioned in the scriptures are inaccessible to us, they must be regarded as true on the authority of the scriptures. If one issue fails to make philosophical sense, this should be taken into account when studying any given scripture. The development of allegorical interpretation in exegetical works helps to alleviate this difficulty, particularly when interpreting the "problematic verses."

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's point of departure is that the Qur'ān has a unique nature -- which basically lies in the belief that the Qur'ān is God's word[14] revealed through His messenger, Muḥammad, as a guidance to human beings.[15] Some typical doctrines in al-Rāzī's belief system are the Prophet's impeccability ('iṣmah), the Qur'ān's miraculous nature (i'jāz), the Qur'ān's relevance to every epoch, and the consistency of its verses. These doctrines are unquestionably accepted by Muslims, although their application may differ in some of the details. For example, while they maintain that the idea that the Qur'ān is a miracle (mu'jizah), Muslim scholars disagree on what makes it miraculous. We will return to this point later.

Although al-Rāzī considers the Qur'ān a religious text, he applies his critical faculties in an effort to understand it. This is evident in his mode of expression, which will

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[13] For more discussion on the nature of the scripture, see William A. Graham, "Scripture," in *ER*, 133-45; F.E. Peters, *A Reader on Classical Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 214-19; Duncan Black Macdonald, *Aspects of Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 210-49.

[14] Al-Rāzī, *Khalq al-Qur'ān bayn al-Mu'tazilah wa Ahl al-Sunnah*, 41.

[15] Al-Rāzī has two different views concerning whether the Qur'ān is guidance for all human beings or for Muslims only. Interpreting the Qur'ān 3:4, he maintains that it provides guidance for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. By referring back to the Qur'ān 2:2, he maintains that the Qur'ān is guidance for Muslims only, which suits the occasions of revelation of these verses, for these verses were revealed to the Christians of Medina. For more discussion, see al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, 171-2.

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be discussed in next chapter; he raises an issue relating to certain verses in order to compare its treatment in other verses. He also boldly maintains that there are some verses that need to be explained rationally or by reference to other verses. For instance, al-Rāzī explains that the persons and households referred to in verse 3:33 -- "God has chosen Ādam, Nūḥ, the household of Ibrāhīm, and the household of 'Imrān among the universe" -- were chosen because of all people in their respective times they were the best. But if they were better than the entire universe, regardless of time, he says, this would lead to contradiction (addā ila 't-tanāquḍ), for each of them cannot be regarded as the best.[16]

This approach illustrates that al-Rāzī regards the Qur'ān as a religious text, and at the same time scrutinizes it as an object of scholarly study. One might still ask: What is his primary goal when he studies the Qur'ān in a scholarly fashion? In order to answer this question, I would like to refer to some relevant aspects of his biography. As we mentioned earlier, al-Rāzī had a religious upbringing, and it is probable that his scholarly efforts were motivated by his Islamic system of belief. Towards the end of his life, he stated that only the Qur'ān could satisfy his intellectual thirst. His scholarly works thus helped sustain his religious sense and were employed to demonstrate the truth of the Qur'ān, which contained information that he thought had to be taken for granted. In other words, al-Rāzī emphasized the truth of the Qur'ān above the truth of intellectual contemplation.

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[16] Ibid., vol. 8, 21.

1.2. The Language of the Qur'ān

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzi believed that the Qur'ān was expressed in such eloquence that no Arab was able to imitate it.[17] It was revealed in the Arabic language, and one phrase the Qur'ān uses for this is *"Qur'ānan 'arabiyyan."*[18] Other expressions are *"lisānun 'Arabiyyun mubīn"* or *"bi lisānin 'Arabiyyin mubīn,"*[19] *"ḥukman 'Arabiyyan,"*[20] and *"lisānan 'Arabiyyan."*[21] It is perfectly logical that the Qur'ān should be in Arabic, since it was revealed amongst the Arab people.[22] If it were not in Arabic, it would have been difficult for Muḥammad and the Arabs of his time to understand it, let alone take it as a guidance for living. Kenneth Cragg simplifies this concept:

> The scripture was given in Arabic in order that Muḥammad might "warn the mother of the village," that is the Meccan metropolis, "and its environs," altering them to the coming day of humanity's gathering for the final judgment. Meccans were Arabic-speaking: the vital message would have been intelligible to them in no other tongue.[23]

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[17] The language of the Qur'ān is said to be identical with standard Arabic, "which in Muḥammad's time had already been developed." For more discussion on the language and style of the Qur'ān in relation to its *i'jāz*, see Rudi Paret, "The Qur'ān-I," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period,* ed. A.F.L. Beeston, T.M. Johnstone, R.B. Serjeant, and G.R. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 196-205.

[18] Q. 12:2, 20:113, 39:28, 41:3, 42:7, and 43:3. Another verse, Q. 41:44, expresses the same idea.

[19] Q. 16:103, 26:195.

[20] Q. 13:37.

[21] Q. 46:12.

[22] Since the first people who listened to the Qur'ān were Arabs, Kenneth Cragg asserts, the Qur'ān was a supreme sacrament of Arabness and Arabicity. However, "the 'Arabness' of the Qur'ān is no essential conflict with its universalim." For more discussion on the meaning of the scripture for the Arabs, see Kenneth Cragg, *The Event of the Qur'ān: Islam in Its Scripture* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971), 54-72.

[23] Ibid., 40.

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One related issue[24] is whether or not Muḥammad and the Arabs of early Islam were able to understand everything in the Qur'ān. No problems would have arisen if they had understood its every word. Many reports, however, tell us that the Companions sometimes questioned the Prophet about certain terms used in the Qur'ān, as did later generations (*tābi'ūn* and *tābi'u al-tābi'īn*). Two possibilities might be understood from these reports: first, that Muslims of later generations may have had a somewhat different Arabic vocabulary from the one used in Muḥammad's time; and second, that there were non-Arab expressions used in the scripture which were strange to them. This second possibility leads us to the issue of the foreign vocabulary of the Qur'ān.

There are various consequences of the non-Arabic terminology of the Qur'ān. One of these is that the presence of such terms in the Qur'ān indicates that its claim about being in the Arabic language is fundamentally untrue. Another is that it may represent one aspect of the *i'jāz* of the Qur'ān, and an explanation of why Arabs could not rise to the challenge of imitating the Qur'ān, since it contained words of unknown or foreign origin. However, according to al-Jurjānī, this does not make the Qur'ān miraculous.[25]

Scholars have sought answers to this difficult question. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, in *al-Muhadhdhab fī Mā Waqa' fī al-Qur'ān min al-Mu'arrab* points out that some scholars

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[24] This does not exclude the fact that the Qur'ān was revealed in seven dialects. Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d. 224/839), for example, maintained that some expressions found in the Qur'ān were used in one clan (*qabīlah*, pl. *qabā'il*), but not in others. Some examples from chapter three of the Qur'ān: *da'b* (Q. 3:11) originally taken from Jurhum means *ashbāḥ*; *sayyid* (Q. 3:34) from Ḥimyār (*ḥalīm*); *iṣrī* (Q. 3:81) from Nabṭiyyah ('*ahdī*); *tahinū* (Q. 3:139) from Quraysh and Kinānah (*tad'ufū*). See Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, *Lughāt al-Qabā'il al-Wāridah fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, transmitted from Ibn 'Abbās, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥāmid al-Sayyid Ṭalab (Kuwait: Jāmi'at al-Kuwayt, 1984), 64-75. It is not our purpose, however, to discuss this issue here.

[25] 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, "Dalā'il al-I'jāz," in *Thalāth Rasā'il fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān li al-Rummānī, wa al-Khaṭṭābī wa 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī fī al-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyyah wa al-Naqd al-Adabī*, ed. Muḥammad Khalaf Allāh and Muḥammad Zaghlūl Salām (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), 181-188.

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admitted the presence of foreign expressions in the Qur'ān, while others, basing themselves on Qur'ānic verses[26] -- Imām al-Shāfi'ī, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, Abū 'Ubaydah, al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr 'Abd al-Jabbār, and Ibn Fāris -- held otherwise.

Al-Rāzī, for his part, noted the presence of some foreign terms in the Qur'ān – e.g., *mishkāt* and *sijjīl*. This did not necessarily mean that the Qur'ān was not in Arabic; he firmly declared that "the Qur'ān is indeed in Arabic."[27] He suggested two solutions to this problem. First, some terms found in the Qur'ān were cognates of words found in other languages;[28] second, they were originally from other languages but had been Arabized before the Qur'ān was revealed; so while they were not Arabic in origin, the Arabs of Muḥammad's time understood and used these expressions before the revelation of the Qur'ān.[29] By providing these solutions, al-Rāzī successfully defended his belief that the Qur'ān is in Arabic and proved his scholarly approach to it.

1.3. The Qur'ān's Miraculous Nature (*I'jāz al-Qur'ān*)

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī also maintained that the Qur'ān is miraculous, such that the Arabs were unable to take up the challenge (*taḥaddī*) to produce a text like it. For had they been able, they would have done so.[30] On three different occasions,[31] the Qur'ān

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[26] For instance, the Qur'ān 12:2, 20:113, 39:28, 41:3,44; 42:7, and 43:3.

[27] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 2, 10.

[28] Al-Rāzī's first solution is in fact the same as Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's. See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, third ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995), 288.

[29] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 2, 10.

[30] Al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ijāz fī Dirāyat al-I'jāz*, 33.

[31] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 2, 6.

challenges its readers to produce either something like itself,[32] only ten chapters similar to those of the Qur'ān,[33] or even a single chapter similar to those of the Qur'ān.[34] Al-Rāzī maintained that the essential challenge was the production of one chapter of the same quality as others in the Qur'ān, no matter even if it were as short as *Sūrat al-Kawthar*, one would be able to meet the challenge. For al-Rāzī, without this challenge the *i'jāz* of the Qur'ān cannot be proven.

However, his concept is quite different from that of al-Bāqillānī, for the latter maintained that the *i'jāz* of the Qur'ān does not necessarily depend on the fact of this challenge. The *i'jāz* of the Qur'ān corresponds to the *i'jāz* of Moses' stick. Though unaccompanied by a challenge, the transformation of Moses' stick into a snake was still a miracle (*mu'jizah*).[35] Whether or not human beings can understand its *i'jāz*, the Qur'ān is a *mu'jizah*. In other words, it is in itself miraculous and is in no need of a special condition for it to be miraculous. Al-Rāzī, however, considered challenge a condition of the Qur'ān's *i'jāz*, being more suitable for demonstrating the Qur'ān's miraculous nature in both its doctrinal and its practical dimensions. Therefore, al-Rāzī does not distinguish between the reasons for the people's inability to meet the challenge of the Qur'ān and the reasons why the Qur'ān is miraculous.

Since early times, many opinions concerning the miraculousness of the Qur'ān have been expressed. Al-Naẓẓām believed in the *i'jāz* of the Qur'ān not because people were

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[32] Q. 52:34.

[33] Q. 11:13.

[34] Q. 2:23 and 10:38.

[35] Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī, *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Mun'im Khafājī (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1991), 258-9.

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unable to take up the challenge but because God confounded their knowledge and ability, causing them to despair of producing a book like the Qur'ān.[36] Known as *ṣarfah*, this idea is based on the fact that the Arabs of Muḥammad's time spoke Arabic fluently, and so could have imitated the Qur'ān, had they wanted.[37] Another opinion is that the Qur'ān leaves a psychological effect (*al-athar al-nafsī al-'amīq*) on its readers and listeners. It does so either because of its fine arrangement and rhymes, which however differ from those of poetry (*shi'r*), oratory (*khiṭāb*), and composition (*rasā'il*),[38] or because of its extraordinary contents.[39] Under this category too, there is the idea that the Qur'ān's *i'jāz* refers to its inclusion of hidden things (*ghaybiyyāt*), for in many instances the Qur'ān speaks of past and future events, none of which was known by Muḥammad's contemporaries. There is also the opinion that the Qur'ān's *i'jāz* lies in the idea that there is no contradiction in the Qur'ān (*laysa fīhi 'khtilāfun wa-tanāquḍun*)[40] and in scientific *i'jāz* (*i'jāz 'ilmī*).[41] This may be simplified into one position -- namely, that the Qur'ān's eloquence lies in its contents and its arrangement.[42]

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[36] Al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ijāz fī Dirāyat al-I'jāz*, 33. See also 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, "al-Risālah al-Shāfi'iyyah," in *Thalāth Rasā'il fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān li al-Rummānī, wa al-Khaṭṭābī wa 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī fī al-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyyah wa al-Naqd al-Adabī*, 143-4.

[37] Yusuf Rahman asserts that al-Naẓẓām's opinions on *i'jāz*, which primarily rest on the idea of *ṣarfah*, "were repeatedly mentioned but were, in most cases, also refuted." However, he does not support this assertion with sufficient evidence. Yusuf Rahman, "The Miraculous Nature of Muslim Scripture: A study of 'Abd al-Jabbār's *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*" (M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1995), 46.

[38] Al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ijāz fī Dirāyat al-I'jāz*, 33-4.

[39] Muṣṭafā al-Ṣāwī al-Juwaynī, *Manhaj al-Zamakhsharī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān wa Bayān I'jāzih*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1984), 200-2.

[40] Al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ijāz fī Dirāyat al-I'jāz*, 34.

[41] See Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Tafsīr wa Rijāluh* (Tunis: Dār al-Kutub al-Sharqiyyah, 1966), 80-1.

[42] Many scholars such as al-Rummānī, al-Khaṭṭābī, and al-Jurjānī argue that the Qur'ān's miraculous nature lies in the combination of these two. See Muḥammad Khalaf Allāh and Muḥammad Zaghlūl Salām, eds., *Thalāth Rasā'il fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān li al-Rummānī, wa al-Khaṭṭābī wa 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī fī al-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyyah wa al-Naqd al-Adabī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.).

Al-Rāzī considered these schools of thought irrational. First, he asserted that the doctrine of ṣarfah is historically untrue, since Arabs took up the challenge but were unsuccessful.[43] Second, he criticized the idea that the styles of the Qur'ān make it miraculous; if they did, poetic style would then be equally miraculous. Third, basing the Qur'ān's i'jāz on its inclusion of "hidden things" is no better supported, since neither do all the verses nor all the sūrahs of the Qur'ān speak of ghaybiyyāt.[44] This, of course, does not constitute a denial that the Qur'ān as a whole contains ghaybiyyāt, or that the idea of i'jāz is based on them. Al-Rāzī himself admits that some Qur'ānic verses speak of ghaybiyyāt as an element of the Qur'ān's miraculous nature.[45] When interpreting the verse 3:111, he mentions information about unseen things -- such as Christians who have not harmed Muslims and Christians who have run away in defeat after encountering Muslims. He says that "all these are pieces of information about the unseen (ikhbār 'an al-ghayb) and therefore the Qur'ān is miraculous."[46]

Al-Rāzī concludes that the Qur'ān's i'jāz lies mainly in its faṣāḥah. The reason behind this assertion, I believe, is that it was in keeping with his theological tendency to explain religious beliefs rationally and his idea that everything in the Qur'ān must be understandable. Since the Qur'ān is in itself miraculous, its miraculous nature should also be understandable. This is evident when he says that faṣāḥah is the only rational way to prove the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān.[47]

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[43] Unfortunately, he does not give any example of their efforts to imitate the Qur'ān. Al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ijāz fī Dirāyat al-I'jāz*, 33.

[44] Ibid.

[45] See, for instance, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's interpretation of the Qur'ān 3:12 and 30:1-3.

[46] See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 194.

[47] Al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-Ijāz fī Dirāyat al-I'jāz*, 34.

It would be useful to explain what al-Rāzī meant by *faṣāḥah*, the study of which is a most important aspect of religious duties.[48] Like many other scholars, al-Rāzī distinguished *faṣāḥah* from *balāghah*. *Faṣāḥah* refers to *kalām*'s lack of difficulties (*ta'qīd*), which are associated with semantic denotation (*al-dalālah al-ma'nawiyyah*),[49] while *balāghah* refers to *kalām*'s ability to arrive at the meaning the speaker wants to deliver.[50] Like 'Abd al-Qāhir b. Abd. Al-Rahmān al-Jurjānī (d. 470 A.H./1078 A.D.), al-Rāzī saw *naẓm* in connection with *i'jāz* as nothing but grammatical arrangement allowing a particular meaning to be conveyed.[51] Although he differentiated *balāgah* from *faṣāḥah*, in the end he concluded that what made the Qur'ān miraculous was the fine structural combination which enables it to convey a specific meaning. In his *Asās al-Taqdīs*, he stated that the Qur'ān was distinct from any other literary product in both form (*lafẓ*) and content (*ma'nā*).[52] Because of this distinct character, he goes on to say, no one can duplicate the form and the content of the Qur'ān.[53]

It is interesting in this relation to note that al-Rāzī was aware of the importance of *faṣāḥah* for seeking the interpretation of the Qur'ān, so that he further says that it is obligatory to study the sciences that unveil the basic nature and essence of *faṣāḥah*.[54] This

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[48] Ibid., 35.

[49] Ibid., 51.

[50] Ibid., 40.

[51] Margaret Larkin, *The Theology of Meaning: 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjāni's Theory of Discourse* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1995), 50-53.

[52] See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Asās al-Taqdīs*, ed. Ahmad Hijāzī al-Saqqā (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyyāt al-Azhariyyah, 1986), 230.

[53] Ibid., 230. On the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān, see Sell, *The Faith of Islam,* 6-9.

[54] Abdel Haleem notices that due to the importance of rhetoric *(balāghah)* for exegesis, al-Zamakhsharī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī paid special attention to the subject in their interpretation of the Qur'ān. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, "Context and Internal Relationships: Keys to Quranic Exegesis; A Study of Sūrat al-Rahmān (the Qur'ān chapter 55)," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 72.

discipline, according to him, enables scholars in turn to understand that the Qur'ān has so excellent an expression that Arabs could never hope to answer its challenge.[55] With it, according to him, one might eventually come to prove the truth of Muḥammad's prophetic mission.

2. In search of the Meaning of the Qur'ān

Muslims from all eras have tried to understand the Qur'ān, which they believe to be a guidance. They have developed certain criteria and theories to help them discern the meaning intended by God. Since the Qur'ān is in fact a text, Muslims have applied textual theories to this task, relying above all else on linguistic analysis. The linguistic approach was adopted by exegetes not only in the formative period, but also in our own time. By convention, they attempt to explain the meaning of a given verse by referring to the sciences of the Arabic language as their chief source.

In his efforts to understand the sense of the Qur'ānic message, al-Rāzī studied the literal meanings of words. He used linguistic analysis to uncover their meanings[56] in Arabic usage that might have been intended by God. To reach this level of meaning, al-Rāzī held that God's speech (ḥaqīqat kalām Allāh) had two dimensions: namely, its

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[55] See al-Rāzī, Nihāyat al-Ijāz fī Dirāyat al-I'jāz, 34-5.

[56] To depict the various meanings of certain words, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī uses Arabic poetry. For a discussion on the use of poetry in Qur'ānic exegesis since its earliest appearance, see Issa J. Boullata, "Poetry Citation as Interpretive Illustration in Qur'ān Exegesis: Masā'il Nāfi' ibn al-Azraq, in Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams, ed. Wael B. Hallaq and Donald P. Little (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 27-40.

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essence (*māhiyyah*) and its expression (*lafẓ*).[57] The first dimension was purely metaphysical, while the second occurred on a human scale.

To clarify these two categories, al-Rāzī compared God's mode of expression with that of human beings. He reasons that the speech of human beings and God must have two different layers, namely, essence and appearance. When someone says "Give me some water," according to al-Rāzī's example, this utterance (*lafẓ*) expresses 'a need' (*ṭalab*) of his. The state of being thirsty is the essence of his spoken words, while the utterance is a tool through which he can express his need. Thus, to express one's being thirsty, one may employ either an imperative sentence like "Give me some water," a positive sentence like "I am thirsty," or an interrogative sentence like "Do you have some water?" In addition to expressing the state of being thirsty, however, these also may designate other meanings in accordance with the context in which they are stated. The utterance "Do you have some water?" for instance, may indicate, when the circumstances allow, that the speaker is wondering if he could give any water to the person addressed. In al-Rāzī's view, that utterance is a variable of the state of thirst. For this, he states that "the essence of 'that need' is a changing variable of that utterance" (*wa-māhiyyat dhālika 'ṭ-ṭalabi mughāyiratun li-dhālika 'l-lafẓ*).[58] If the essence changes, in other words, the utterance must also change.

By means of this logic, al-Rāzī concluded that the Qur'ān was God's expression of His divine will. Since the Qur'ān was revealed to human beings, it is expressed in human language. Unlike human language, however, God's will, the essence of His spoken words

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[57] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Khalq al-Qur'ān bayn al-Mu'tazilah wa Ahl al-Sunnah*, 43.
[58] Ibid.

in the human language of the Qur'an, is not bound by time or place. In other words, one state of mind may be expressed in many different ways depending on the time and the place in which the statement is uttered. Since a statement is spoken in accordance with different times and places, it may signify various shades of meaning. In this fashion, al-Rāzī paved the way to a hermeneutical approach to the Qur'an.[59] Thus, rather than stick to one absolute interpretation, his exegesis of the Qur'an is open to various possibilities. But while his exegetical works are generally characterized by tolerance, he was sometimes intolerant of other opinions.

2.1. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Definition of Exegesis

Throughout history, Muslim scholars have employed the terms *ta'wīl* and *tafsīr* to refer to the interpretation of the Qur'an. In the Qur'an itself, *ta'wīl* is mentioned fifteen times and *tafsīr* only once.[60] There has been no agreement among scholars on whether *ta'wīl* means the same thing as *tafsīr*. When Qur'ānic exegesis was first established as a tradition, both terms were used interchangeably, and only later did scholars disagree on their relationship. Some, like al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamaksharī, used *ta'wīl* to describe their manner of elucidating the meaning of Qur'ānic verses.[61] In his *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr*

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[59] For a discussion of hermeneutics, see Farid Esack, "Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: Problems and Prospects," *The Muslim World*, vol. 83, no. 2 (1993), 118-41.

[60] The term *ta'wīl* is mentioned twice each Q. 3:7, 7:53, and once in each of the following verses: 4:59, 10:39, 12:6, 21, 36, 37, 44, 45, 100, 101, 17:35, 18:78, and 82. The term *tafsīr* is mentioned only once in Q. 25:33.

[61] Al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* is considered the first written work of *tafsīr* on the entire Qur'an. His *tafsīr* relies basically on the reports of his contemporaries who had a connection with previous generations and eventually to Muḥammad himself or his Companions. However, he also sometimes uses rational considerations in choosing which of the reports is more probable. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1986/1987). McAuliffe feels that this *tafsīr*

al-Qur'ān, al-Ṭabarī stated that such-and-such is an "interpretation" [*ta'wīl*] of certain

verses. Al-Zamaksharī entitled his monumental work on Qur'ānic exegesis *al-Kashshāf*

'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwil fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl. Although he entitled his

work with that name, this book is devoted to study *tafsīr.* Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī too

described as *ta'wīl* his discussion of certain verses which seemed to contradict each

other.[62] This is to say that these scholars did not distinguish *ta'wīl* from *tafsīr*.[63] Others

certainly maintained that the two terms meant different things. Ibn 'Arabī, for example,

held that *ta'wīl* signified the uncovering of esoteric meanings, and *tafsīr* the exoteric

meanings of the text.[64]

In *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, al-Rāzī took both terms to refer to exegesis. He explained

that *ta'wīl* and *tafsīr* are equivalent terms in the Qur'ān -- that "*ta'wīl* is, in fact, *tafsīr.*"[65]

He further stated, "[*Ta'wīl* and *tafsīr*] give the meaning of a statement."[66] One may

construe this statement as saying that *tafsīr* or *ta'wīl* is an effort to understand the meaning

of a statement by referring back to the text. To arrive at this definition, he considered the

etymology of the term *ta'wīl*, which according to him is rooted in the verb *āl* ("to

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marks the beginning of the classical period in the history of Qur'ānic interpretation. There had been, in fact, a commentary by Muqātil b. Sulaymān. Yet, studies of his *tafsīr* has not been done thoroughly. For more information on this periodization, see Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 13-36.

[62] Iysa A. Bello, *The Medieval Islamic Controversy between Philosophy and Ortodoxy: Ijmā' and Ta'wīl in the Conflict between al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 52-4.

[63] See Musā'id Muslim 'Abd Allāh Āl Ja'far, *Athar al-Taṭawwur al-Fikrī fī al-Tafsīr fī al-'Aṣr al-'Abbāsī* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1984), 51.

[64] See, for example, Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1978); 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī, *Ta'wilāt al-Qur'ān: Tafsīr al-Shaykh Muḥyi al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Yaqẓah al-'Arabiyyah, 1968); Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Falsafat al-Ta'wīl: Dirāsah fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān 'ind Muḥyi al-Dīn b. 'Arabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr, 1983), 361-416.

[65] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, 176.

[66] Ibid.

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return").[67] Therefore, *ta'wil* is both the source and the destiny of something (*wa al-ta'wil marja' al-shay' wa masiruh*).[68]

Al-Rāzī employed certain tools to determine the reference of a text, through which its meanings might be grasped. These tools were essentially linguistics, the "traditional sciences," and philosophy. Linguistic theory was useful whenever he needed to consider the literal meaning of certain expressions in his explanation.[69] This allowed him to differentiate literal from figurative senses, and their concrete from their abstract senses. In doing so, he often referred to the works of previous scholars in this field. In addition to this process, he also relied on the traditional sciences, which include all the fields that directly relate to the Qur'ān -- abrogation (*al-naskh*), occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), firm and ambiguous verses (*al-muhkamāt wa al-mutashābihāt*), and interconnectedness among verses (*irtibāt al-āyāt*). We will come back to this point in Chapter Three. Last but not least, he also had recourse to his philosophical notions, as well. In fact, many scholars have characterized his *tafsir* as being typical of philosophical *tafsir*. He compared the literal meanings of certain verses with his general understanding of Islamic doctrines taught in the traditional sciences, and in doing so had to rely on logic and philosophical notions.

Clearly, al-Rāzī used *tafsir* and *ta'wil* to mean exegesis in general. In his interpretation of verse 3:34, he described his exegesis as *ta'wil*.[70] For him, any effort -- including linguistic, philosophical, theological and logical argumentation-- to interpret the

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid., vol. 14, 95.

[69] Ibid., vol. 8, 24.

[70] Ibid., 24.

meaning of a text is exegesis. Such an understanding may be seen in his *al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, which deals with many subjects besides exegesis of the Qur'ān. This is true of all his exegetical works, which for this very reason drew criticism from such figures as Ibn Taymiyyah, who remarked that al-Rāzi's *al-Tafsir al-Kabir* contained everything but *tafsir*.[71] Although this is hardly true, al-Rāzi does acknowledge that *tafsir* formed only part of its contents. In *al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, he says, "Since we have been familiarized with these [functions of *mutashābihāt*], let us turn back to *tafsir*." This implied that his previous explanation about the function of *mutashābihāt* did not constitute *tafsir*. Similar statements are found in his interpretation of the verse 3:103 -- where he says, "Let us turn back to *tafsir*," having explained the organization of this verses.[72]

In addition, al-Rāzi uses the term *ta'wil* to mean an explanation that is slightly different from the general reference of a statement. To simplify, it may be said that *ta'wil* explains a statement, whose *zāhir* meaning does not make sense. This is observable in his interpretation of the verse 3:106. Having divided people in the Hereafter into "those with white faces" and "those with black faces," this verse begins with an explanation of the second group, which asks, "Did ye reject Faith after accepting it?" Al-Rāzi expresses two views on this. First, he considers the literal sense: since everyone is born believing in God, the question implies "Did you disbelieve after you believed [in Me]?" Second, he considers the figurative sense: "Did you disbelieve after evidence had required you to believe [in Me]?"[73] He cites two Qur'ānic verses to support the shift from the literal to the figurative

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[71] See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 68; al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, 4:254; al-Rāzi, *al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, vol. 7, 172; Ibid., vol. 8, 171.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 183-4.

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sense of verses 3:70 and 105. In short, in some instances he uses the term *ta'wil* to refer

to the figurative meaning of a statement.

2.2. The Sources of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Exegesis

This section focuses on the materials which Rāzī used in his interpretation of the

Qur'ān. We shall anticipate the possibility of a conflict between some sources and others.

In other terms, this section will seek an answer to the following questions: What materials

are used in al-Rāzī's interpretation of the Qur'ān? And what sources does he prefer in his

exegesis?

2.2.1. Revelation and Reason

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī based his interpretation of the Qur'ān on revealed sources,

frequently quoting other verses to explain the texts he was interpreting. This method,

known by the expression *al-Qur'ānu yufassiru ba'duhu ba'da* ("the Qur'ān explains itself

by itself" or "some parts of the Qur'ān can be used to interpret the other parts"), had in

fact been used by previous exegetes,[74] such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Ṭabarsī.

Two reasons, at least, seem to have motivated al-Rāzī to use this method. First, he

regarded the Qur'ān as an integral text, where one part cannot be understood in isolation

from another. Ibn Taymiyyah says that "what is given in a general way in one place is

explained in detail in another place. What is given briefly in one instance is expanded in

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[74] Issa J. Boullata, "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi'"s Method," *The Muslim World*, 64 (1974), 103-13. See also Abdel Haleem, "Context and Internal Relationships: Keys to Quranic Exegesis; A Study of Sūrat al-Raḥmān (the Qur'ān chapter 55)," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, 71.

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another."[75] By this method, he supposed, God's intention could come to be thoroughly known. Secondly, the Qur'ān, as Muslims see it, is a text,[76] so that its study is tantamount to studying a text, and interconnectedness or intertextuality is considered the best way to pursue such a study.[77]

Al-Rāzī quoted Qur'ānic verses not only for the purpose of clarification, but also to advance his argument. Overall, his use of other Qur'ānic verses had three objectives: first, to identify the general sense of a given text, the parts of which he then explained; second, to give a more objective interpretation; and third, to suggest solutions for difficulties associated with the verse at hand.

Al-Rāzī considered the prophetic traditions[78] he employed when interpreting the Qur'ān a valid source. Because the Prophet Muḥammad was protected from committing any wrongdoing (ma'ṣūm),[79] his sunnah or ḥadīth could legitimately be used to interpret the Qur'ān.[80] As a source, ḥadīths may be consulted not only in order to determine the

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[75] Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, ed. Fawwāz Aḥmad Zamarlī (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1994), 84.

[76] See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Khalq al-Qur'ān bayn al-Mu'tazilah wa Ahl al-Sunnah*, 19.

[77] Abdel Haleem, "Context and Internal Relationships: Keys to Quranic Exegesis; A Study of Sūrat al-Raḥmān (the Qur'ān chapter 55)," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, 73. For these reasons, this method is still operative today. Andrew Rippin, "Tafsīr," in *ER*, vol. 14, 238-9, and 242-3. 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥmān, a Muslim woman exegete of this century, known by the epithet Bint al-Shāṭi', considers this method the utmost methodological principle in interpreting the Qur'ān. Her exegetical methods are, in fact, derived from her husband's work. For more detail, see Amīn al-Khūlī, *Manāhij al-Tajdīd fī al-Naḥw wa al-Balāghah wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab* ([Cairo]: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1961), 302-14.

[78] Scholars use the terms *sunnah* and *ḥadīth* interchangeably to refer to prophetic traditions, which include the Prophet's sayings and behavior. However, the nature of these terms have long been debated.

[79] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā'* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Madanī, 1987), 40. See also Aloysius Adiseputra, "The Doctrine of the Impeccability of the Prophet as Elucidated by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1984).

[80] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Fī 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, ed. Ṭāhā Jābir al-'Alwānī, vol. 3 (Riyadh: Lajnat al-Buḥūth wa al-Ta'līf wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashr, 1979), 519-30; Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 84.

meanings of certain terms in the Qur'ān, but also to discover the *ahadīth* which contain specific regulations that differ from those of the Qur'ān.[81] On the latter point, he believed that prophetic traditions accepted on the authority of many Companions (*mutawātir*) could abrogate the Qur'ān,[82] for the Prophet's tradition is based on God's revelation, and is thus protected from all error.[83] On abrogation, however, al-Rāzī does not say much; the problems arising from it, such as whether it is the texts themselves or their meanings that are abrogated, remain unsolved.

In addition to other Qur'ānic verses and prophetic traditions, al-Rāzī depended heavily on rational considerations. Some examples serve to confirm this. First of all, the structure of his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* shows that al-Rāzī was concerned to investigate some difficulties surrounding our understanding of the Qur'ān. Not only does he explore these difficulties, but he suggests possible solutions.

Second, whenever he found verses that did not seem to accord with each other, he proposed a set of variables. He established the theoretical proposition that truth may be reached only through solid argumentation. He argued in favor of the literal aspect of the Qur'ān on linguistic grounds. The text, according to him, can be *naṣṣ, ẓāhir, mu'awwal, mushtarak*, or *mujmal*.[84] He defines *naṣṣ* as a statement (*lafẓ*) having a single connotation.

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[81] R. Marston Speight claims that *hadīth* constitutes a primary element in Qur'ān commentary, especially in connection with *asbāb al-nuzūl*. See R. Marston Speight, "The Function of *hadīth* as Commentary on the Qur'ān, as Seen in the Six Authoritative Collections," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 63-81. This claim, however, seems to disregard the fact that in their interpretation of the Qur'ān, exegetes paid considerable attention to intertextual reference.

[82] Al-Rāzī, *Fī 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, 519-30.

[83] For more discussion on the *'iṣmah* of the Prophet Muḥammad, see al-Rāzī, *'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā'*, 37-56 and 137-58. See also al-Rāzī, "al-Mas'alat al-Thāniyah wa al-Thalāthūn," in *Arba'īn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqā, vol. 2 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyyāt al-Azhariyyah, 1987), 115-76.

[84] See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, 168.

Ẓāhir, on the other hand, is similar to *mu'awwal,* which is a statement with more than one connotation, but with a single preferred meaning. Nevertheless *ẓāhir* is a statement with the preferred meaning, while *mu'awwal* is a statement with a less preferred meaning. When a statement has more than one meaning and there are no grounds for preferring one over the others, it is called either *mushtarak* or *mujmal.* It is called *mushtarak* if the text stands alone, and *mujmal,* if it is accompanied by other texts, themselves definable as *mujmal.* According to al-Rāzi, *ẓāhir* is similar to *naṣṣ* in the sense that a text so described offers certainty (*qaṭ'i*), while *mu'awwal, mushtarak,* and *mujmal* cannot. These latter categories (*mutashābihāt*) are, therefore, unreliable. In the case of a *ẓāhir* text, however, it remains difficult to determine which one is *muḥkam* and which one is *mutashābih.*[85]

Concerning this difficulty, al-Rāzi established the rule that "to change a statement from *ẓāhir* to *mu'awwal,* there should be an independent argument, either textual or rational."[86] In the first place, changing *ẓāhir* to *mu'awwal* involves textual argument, which is considered valid only if the *ẓāhir* is replaced by a certain text (*naṣṣ qaṭ'i*). For example, the verse 17:16 says, "If God wants to destroy a village, He asks the people of the village [to commit sins], so that they commit sins." This verse, which linguistically speaking seems clear enough, is renderred less so by a certain text (*naṣṣ qaṭ'i*) which reads: "Indeed, God does not ask to commit sins [*faḥshā'*]." By contrast, it is considered invalid to replace one *ẓāhir* with another *ẓāhir.* This is because, according to al-Rāzi, textual argumentation does not always yield certainty.

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[85] Ibid., 169. Compare with al-Rāzi, *Asās al-Taqdis,* 232.
[86] Ibid.

2.2.2. The Priority of Reason Over Revelation

Al-Rāzī was not the first scholar to discuss the conflict between revelation and reason.[87] The split between Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites developed primarily over this matter. An endless debate between them ensued over the issue of human freedom. Basing their arguments essentially on a rational understanding of the Qur'ān, the Mu'tazilites alleged that human beings had complete freedom of will and of action. The Ash'arites held, on the other hand, that although human beings could distinguish good from evil, God retained His power over them; if He wished their will to be other than what it was, they were powerless to prevent it.

Al-Rāzī was the first to discuss the conflict between revelation and reason in a hypothetical demonstration.[88] In his view, both revelation and reason were sources of knowledge; neither one invalidated the other.[89] However, in the event of conflict between them, reason had to be given priority. This is because "the validation of the scriptural evidence depends on the validity of rational demonstration."[90] Rational evidence, which

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[87] Arberry discusses at quite some length the development of the conflict between revelation and reason. For a discussion of the origin and early development of this conflict, see A.J. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam* (London: George Allen, 1957).

[88] Nicholas Heer discusses al-Rāzī's treatment of verses which are in conflict either with other verses or with reason. He also discusses al-Rāzī's influence on the later Muslim theologians (*mutakallimūn*), such as al-Taftāzānī (d. 791/1389), and al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413). Nicholas Heer, "The Priority of Reason in the Interpretation of Scripture: Ibn Taymiyah and the Mutakallimūn," in *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of James A. Bellamy*, ed. Mustansir Mir (Princeton, New Jersey: Darwin Press, 1993), 181-95.

[89] Al-Rāzī was very much influenced by al-Māturīdī, in the sense that the latter had made a synthesis between tradition (*naql*) and reason ('*aql*). Not only was he able to balance revelation with reason, he showed the validity of reason within the context of Islamic tradition. One of the most profound findings of this Ash'arite scholar is his theory of knowledge. On al-Māturīdī's religious ideas, Mustafa Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī* (d. 333/944) (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995).

[90] Al-Rāzī, *al-Masā'il al-Khamsūn* (Cairo: al-Maktab al-Thaqāfī, 1989), 329-87.

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yielded certain knowledge (*yaqīn*), had to be given priority over probable knowledge (*zannī*).

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī asserted that if decisive rational evidence (*al-dalā'il al-qaṭ'iyyah al-'aqliyyah*) established something to be true, and we then found that the literal interpretation of scriptural evidence (*al-adillah al-naqliyyah*) indicated the contrary, there were four possible ways out of this contradiction. Of these, the first three were as follows. First, "the implications of both reason and scripture may be affirmed;" second, "the implications of both reason and scripture may be rejected;" third, "the scriptural evidence may be affirmed and the rational evidence denied."[91] The first and second options, in al-Rāzī's view, are impossible, because they require either the affirmation or denial of two contradictory propositions. He sees the third alternative as impossible too, because Muslims cannot know the validity of the scriptural evidence unless they know it through rational proof (*al-dalā'il al-'aqliyyah*). In short, therefore, "it is clear that impugning reason [*al-qadh fī al-'aql*] in order to validate the scripture leads one to impugn both reason and scripture, and that is absurd [*al-bāṭil*]."[92] Since these three options are all impossible, there remains only one, that "on the basis of what is entailed by the decisive rational evidence, either that the scriptural evidence cannot be said to be sound [*ṣaḥīḥ*], or it can be said to be sound but what was intended by it is not its literal meaning [*ghayr zawāhirihā*]."[93] For this contradiction between rational and scriptural evidence, al-Rāzī suggested two solutions: first, to interpret the scriptural text allegorically and in agreement

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[91] Al-Rāzī, *Asās al-Taqdīs*, 220-1.
[92] Ibid., 210.
[93] Ibid.

with rational evidence;[94] second, to entrust its meaning to God.[95] Clearly, allegorical interpretation essentially amounts to an interpretation which is not based on the preferable meaning (*ẓāhir*), but on a secondary meaning (*mu'awwal*).

Al-Rāzī provided a set of conditions for judging whether or not a text yielded certain knowledge. He says that the language of the text -- i.e., its vocabulary, syntax (*naḥw*), accidence (*ṣarf*), must be known for certain. The intent (*irādah*) of the speaker, he asserts, must likewise be beyond doubt. Only if there is no chance of alternate meanings can the intention of the speaker be known for certain.[96] Another condition that he has set is that there should be no decisive scriptural counter-argument (*'adam al-mu'ārid al-naqlī al-qaṭ'ī*). If there is such an argument, then, as he mentioned earlier, "the verbatim text would have to be interpreted allegorically" (*yajibu ṣarfu 'ẓ-ẓāhiri 's-sam'iyyi ila 't-ta'wīl*).[97]

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[94] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Arba'īn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyyāt al-Azhariyyah, 1987), 427.

[95] Ibid., 427. See also Nicholas Heer, "The Priority of Reason in the Interpretation of Scripture: Ibn Taymiyah and the Mutakallimūn," 185. Concerning the second solution, he suggests, that it is obvious that it is Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's theological alliance (Ash'arite) that speaks.

[96] Compare with Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 155-65. He maintains that in the field of hermeneutics, there are three basic principles to be considered: first, understanding the text; second, judging the correctness of the understanding; and third, stating the correct understanding of the text. In order to understand the text, one needs to pay attention to the object mentioned in the text, to the words, to the author of the text, and to the process of understanding.

[97] Al-Rāzī, *al-Masā'il al-Khamsūn*, 329-87. Nicholas Heer, "The Priority of Reason in the Interpretation of Scripture: Ibn Taymiyah and the Mutakallimūn," in *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of James A. Bellamy*, 183.

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2.3. The Scope of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Exegesis

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's exegesis is best known for its wide range. *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* is considered encyclopedic,[98] and al-Rāzī said to be "the greatest figure in the history of exegesis."[99] His creative understanding of the Qur'ān, the reasons for which are discussed in chapter one, is reflected in his inclusion of many "secular sciences" into his *tafsīr*. In his interpretation of Qur'ānic verses, he used not only other Qur'ānic verses, prophetic traditions, and linguistics, but also "secular sciences." In his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, as Johns observes, one finds "theology, philosophy, evidence of marvelous spirituality, extraordinary dialectic skill, Shāfi'ite *fiqh*, and a love of stories and story-telling."[100] Lammens states that al-Rāzī "has inserted in his rambling commentary literary, philosophic, juridic, and other dissertations, veritable monographs having nothing in common with exegesis."[101]

This richness may be illustrated by the following examples. In the introduction to his interpretation of verses 3:102-3, al-Rāzī asserts that human action is motivated by either punishment or reward (*fi 'lu 'l-'abdi lā budda wa-an-yakūna mu 'allalan immā bi 'r-rahbah wa-immā bi-'r-raghbah*). Punishment should precede reward, because "*daf' al-darar muqaddamun 'alā jalbi 'n-naf'*."[102] For this reason, the verses ask believers to

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[98] See Maḥmūd Basyūnī Fūdah, *Nash'at al-Tafsīr wa Manāhijuh fī Ḍaw' al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Amānah, 1986), 194.

[99] Anthony Hearle Johns, "On Qur'ānic Exegetes and Exegesis: A Case Study in the Transmission of Islamic Learning," in *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society; A Festschrift in Honour of Anthony H. Johns*, 10-1.

[100] Ibid.

[101] H. Lammens, *Islam: Beliefs and Institutions*, trans. Sir. E. Denison Ross (Frank Cass: London, 1968), 45. Lammens' statement, however, is not based on a proper examination of al-Rāzī's work, but possibly on Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism, stated in many biographical works, of al-Rāzī's position. See, for example, al-Ṣafadī, *Wāfī*, 4:254.

[102] See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 171.

practice *taqwā*, to adopt Islām, to hold fast to the rope of God,[103] and then to remember

His grace, in that order.[104] Al-Rāzī also says that the mention of the rewards in this world

should go before that of the hereafter.[105] These statements inform us that in addition to

exegesis he brings in arguments from at least three disciplines -- namely, psychology (*'ilm*

al-nafs), Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), and rhetoric (*balāghah*).

Al-Rāzī clearly takes this attitude when interpreting the Qur'ān's opening chapter

(*Sūrat al-Fātiḥah*). He claims that there are about one million points of discussion in the

phrase *al-ḥamdu li 'llāh* of the second verse: "*al-ḥamdu li-'llāhi mushtamilun 'alā alfi*

alfi mas'alatin, aw-akthara aw-aqall."[106] To support this position, he relates the

interpretation of this phrase to all kinds of benefits which God grants to human beings.[107]

For an example, he explaines that a human being consists of spirit (*nafs*) and body

(*badan*). Body, which is the less advantageous, is created for more than five thousand

benefits. Thus, at least ten thousand benefits (*ḥikmah*) are linked to the creation of a

human being; all of which should be covered in any interpretation of *al-ḥamdu li 'llāh*.[108]

It seems that al-Rāzī's inclusion of themes from various disciplines into his *tafsīr*

book was derived from his basic assumption that the truth of the Qur'ān can be examined

through every discipline. This is due to the fact that the Qur'ān speaks about a wide range

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[103] After describing many opinions concerning the meaning of the rope of God, al-Rāzī concludes that it means everything that leads to the truth. It seems to me that this signifies that everything, including science, might be considered the rope of God if it leads to the truth. Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 173.

[104] Ibid., 171.

[105] Ibid., 175.

[106] Ibid., vol. 1, 6.

[107] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī cites Q. 31:20 and 45:13, which reads: *wa sakhkhara lakum mā fī 's-samāwāti wa mā fī 'l-arḍ*.

[108] See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 1, 6.

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of subjects.[109] This assumption does not negate his basic idea that the Qur'ān is a religious document, the essence of which is the belief that what God says therein constitutes the truth. Rather, al-Rāzī held that religious truth could be reached by employing several disciplines, including the "non-religious sciences."

2.4. The Emphases in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Exegesis

One may see from the previous discussion that al-Rāzī based his interpretation of the Qur'ān on the belief that everything in the Qur'ān was truthful. Given this fact, it would be interesting to see whether or not his interpretations aimed at rationally proving the truth of the of the Qur'ān.

In many instances, al-Rāzī availed himself of theological support. This is evident in his interpretations of verses 3:31, 33, 40, 122, and 159 -- which he interpreted in such a way as to support the notion of the impeccability of the prophets ('Iṣmat al-anbiyā').[110] Al-Rāzī maintained that the prophets were protected from every wrongdoing (maḥfūẓūn min jamī' al-maʿāṣī).[111] Obviously, he stated in his 'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā' that the prophets were protected (maʿṣūmūn) from intentionally committing either minor or major sins

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[109] Dividing the contents of the Qur'ān into doctrine and conduct, Mustansir Mir summarizes the vast scope of the Qur'ān as follows: "The Qur'ān deals with a vast number of subjects --creed, ethical, philosophical, metaphysical, social, political, and economic." See Mustansir Mir, Dictionary of Qur'ānic Terms and Concepts (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1987), 174.

[110] The term 'iṣmah in the Arabic lexicon means "preventing." In Islamic discourse, this term stands for a doctrine which holds that the prophets were told they would be prevented by God from committing sin. Therefore, this doctrine does not mean that the prophets were of their own nature infallible, but only by the will and the power of God. See al-Rāzī, al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, vol. 8, 170. See also Ibn Manẓūr, Lisān al-'Arab al-Muḥīṭ, ed. 'Abd Allāh al-'Alāyilī and Yūsuf Khayyāṭ, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl and Dār al-Lisān al-'Arab, 1988), 798. There are many English translation of this term such as impeccable, infallible, and sinless. In this thesis, these terms are used interchangeably.

[111] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Masā'il al-Khamsūn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn (Cairo: al-Maktab al-Thaqāfī, 1989), 66.

("*inna 'l-Anbiyā'a 'alayhimu 's-salātu wa-'s-salāmu ma'ṣūmūna fī zamāni 'n-nubuwwati 'ani-'l-kabā'ir wa-'ṣ-ṣaghā'iri bi-'l-'amd''*).[112] To support this doctrine, al-Rāzī relied on certain Qur'ānic verses, best described by Sabine Schmidtke as follows:

> On the basis of reason, al-Rāzī argued that if [a prophet] were to commit a sin man would either have to follow him or not. Both possibilities, however, are unacceptable. He argued further that since the prophets occupy a higher rank in relation to God and receive greater bounty (ni'ma) from Him than others, the punishment they would deserve for a sin would be more severe than that of ordinary men. Al-Rāzī argued further that if the prophets were to commit sins, their testimony (shahāda) would no longer be acceptable to god. This would be in conflict with Qur'ān [49:6] where men are warned not to accept the witness of a liar. He also argued that if the prophets were to commit sins, men would be obliged to rebuke them on the basis of the Qur'ānic obligation of "commanding what is proper and prohibiting what is reprehensible" (al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar). This would disagree with Qur'ān [33:57] where men are warned not to hurt the prophets.[113]

In order to support the doctrine of *iṣmah*, al-Rāzī prescribes some steps, all of which are deduced from his understanding of certain verses in the Qur'ān. First of all, he asserts that there are four kinds of creatures: angels, jinn, Satan, and human beings. Of these four, human beings are the most excellent, even compared to angels. This higher degree is inferred from God's command to the angels to bow down to Adam, who was human. Secondly, al-Rāzī argues that there are different levels of human beings, depending on their mortal and spiritual strengths. Since the prophets, for instance, had extraordinary characters, they were better than ordinary people. This classification applies to the prophets too, in the sense that some prophets occupied higher positions than others, as indicated by the Qur'ān 3:33. The next point of his argument is that God asks people to

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[112] Al-Rāzī, *'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā'*, 40.

[113] Sabine Schmidtke, *The Theology of al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī* (d. 726/1325) (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1991), 147.

follow the prophets; this is a precondition for God's guidance. It would be impossible for the prophets to accept this duty, had they not had exceptional characters. The command to follow the prophets, in al-Rāzī's view, would not make any sense if the prophets had the potential to corrupt the messages revealed to them. This argument implies that everything the prophets said and did accorded with God's messages, without any personal intervention. In what follows, we shall see how al-Rāzī interpreted the Qur'ān in keeping with his views on the prophets' *ismah*.

Al-Rāzī interprets verse 3:31 as a command to follow Muḥammad. This command is not an explicit part of the Prophet's teachings, but a logical consequence of admitting the prophethood of Muḥammad. In a wider context, it is a consequence of one's love of God.[114] Human beings' love for God is perfect only if they follow the prophets.[115]

Concerning verse 3:33, al-Rāzī says that God has chosen some people -- namely, Ādam, Nūḥ, the household of Ibrāhīm, and the household of 'Imrān - as His best creatures. He maintaines that these people were better (*afḍal*) than angels or any other creature.[116] God chose them because their characters were free of defects and because of their refined manners. These prophets, according to him, excelled in their moral and spiritual strengths.[117] Since they were the chosen people, they must have been impeccable (*ma'ṣūmūn*).[118]

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[114] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 18.

[115] Ibid., 20.

[116] Ibid., 21.

[117] Explaining their exceptional strengths, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī quoted al-Halīmī's *Kitāb al-Minhāj*, in which the latter emphasizes the distinction between the mortal and spiritual strengths of ordinary people and those of the prophets. Unlike ordinary people, the prophets had perfect and pure souls, called *al-nafs al-qudsiyyah al-nabawiyyah*. This, according to him, is because they emanate from God's soul. Ibid., 22-3.

[118] Al-Rāzī, *'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā'*, 44.

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In the case of verse 3:159, al-Rāzī advocates the idea that the Prophet Muḥammad was the best human being, and so the best creature.[119] Citing many other verses in support, he asserts that Muḥammad's tender attitude towards all Muslims, including those who did not follow his orders during the Battle of Uḥud, was evidence of his good character (*kāna akmala 'l-khalqi fī ḥusni 'l-khuluq*).[120] Al-Rāzī held that Muḥammad's soul was like that of an angel, having no desire to pursue either personal or material ambitions. In other words, his was the most exalted and perfect soul (*wa kānat nafsuhū 'l-muqaddasatu fī ghāyati 'l-jalālati wa 'l-kamāl*).[121]

This theological emphasis in al-Rāzī's exegesis is evidence that he favored *'ilm al-uṣūl* (theology), and indeed he says so in his interpretation of verse 3:18. In that interpretation he affirms that God, His angels, and those possessed of knowledge (*ulū 'l-'ilm*) all bear witness to the unity of God (*waḥdāniyyatah*). Stating that *ulū 'l-'ilm* means those who know His unity through indubitable evidence (*al-ladhīna 'arafū waḥdāniyyatahū bi-'d-dalā'ili 'l-qāṭi'ah*), al-Rāzī affirmed that this verse indicates the high position of theologians (*'ulamā' al-uṣūl*).[122]

In *Asrār al-Tanzīl*, he adopted a similar stance. First of all, he divided all knowledge into the religious and the non-religious sciences. Examples of the first category are theology, exegesis, prophetic tradition, and Islamic jurisprudence; those of the second category are physics, mathematics, and medicine.[123] Using several Qur'ānic verses, he

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[119] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 61; Ibid., 62.

[120] Ibid., 61.

[121] Ibid., 62.

[122] Ibid., vol. 7, 220.

[123] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Asrār al-Tanzīl wa Anwār al-Ta'wīl*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992), 30-1.

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concluded that the declaration of God's oneness (*tawḥīd*) was advanced before a code of conduct (*sharī'ah*) had been established, and considered *'ilm al-uṣul* the most honorable science, on which depended the validity of every other religious science. An exegete, according to him, cannot produce a true and reliable interpretation if he does not master *'ilm al-uṣul*. He based this argument on the idea that the "root" (*aṣl*, pl. *uṣul*) is more important than the branch (*far'*, pl. *furū'*). He presents other arguments in support of this idea -- (1) the idea that *'ilm al-uṣul* deals with Almighty God and related issues,[124] while other religious sciences are a consequence of the acceptance of *tawḥīd*, and (2) the idea that unlike other religious sciences, *'ilm al-uṣul* does not allow abrogation and change through time and place.[125]

In his interpretation of verse 3:101, al-Rāzī discussed two opinions concerning human freedom of will and of act.[126] He first presents the idea of the *Ahl al-Sunnah*, whom he calls our friends (*aṣḥābunā*). The *Ahl al-Sunnah* held that God created human actions (*anna fī'la 'l-'abdi makhlūqun*).[127] God's creation, however, does not take place directly, but by way of a motive within the heart. Since human actions materialize through a motive (*dā'iyah*) and since God creates this motive, it follows that God creates the

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[124] Although he raised the status of reason, al-Rāzī was aware of its limitations. In his *Asrār al-Tanzīl*, he declares that there was no way for reason to know the essence of God. See al-Rāzī, *Asrār al-Tanzīl wa Anwār al-Ta'wīl*, 131.

[125] Ibid., 31-2.

[126] In his examination of al-Rāzī's discussion of controversial issues, Murtada A. Muhibbu-Din concludes that the issue of freewill and predestination is considered controversial from many perspectives, such as "the standpoint of the basic and speculative sciences," "the exaltation of God Almighty," and "the principle of Divine Unity." Muhibbu-Din, "Imām Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī: Philosophical Theology in al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr," *Hamdard Islamicus*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1994), 80-1. See also Murtada A. Muhibbu-Din, "The Philosophical Theology in the Tafsir of Imām Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī" (M.Phil. dissertation, University of Ibadan, 1983), 116-42.

[127] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 170.

actions.[128] Al-Rāzī next presents the four Mu'tazilite views on this matter. The first is al-Qaffāl's idea of an additional tendency to perform ṭā'āt (obedience); the second, that men are guided to the straight path; the third, that whoever upholds God is guided on the way towards Paradise; and the fourth, Zamakhsharī's belief is that whoever upholds God has already gained guidance.[129] Unlike the Mu'tazilites, however, al-Rāzī seemed to advocate the idea that human beings were not free either to will or to act.

In his interpretation of verses 3:106-7, al-Rāzī considers the doctrine of the intermediate position (al-manzilah bayn al-manzilatayn), one of the five Mu'tazilite principles.[130] Basing himself on these and related verses, he argues for the Ash'arite position, which is that mukallafs are divided into believers (who will enter paradise) and unbelievers (who will enter hell). There is no mention of an "in-between position" anywhere in the Qur'ān. In this connection, he cites al-Qāḍi 'Abd al-Jabbār's answer to this objection, saying that the mention of two kinds of faces in the hereafter is stated in uncertain terms (nakirah), which cannot be generalized.[131]

Concerning verse 3:103, al-Rāzī argues that there is only one truth in Islām, in accordance with which God commands Muslims to unite and forbids them to divide.[132] Referring to this truth, he quotes a prophetic tradition which reads: "My people will be

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[128] Ibid., 175.

[129] Ibid., 170.

[130] Initiated by Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728), the Mu'tazilah was an Islamic movement that supported the superiority of reason. There are basically five principles which every Mu'tazilite holds, namely, al-tawḥīd, al-'adl, al-manzilah bayn al-manzilatayn, al-wa'd wa al-wa'īd, and al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar. For more discussion on these principles, see the translation of al-Qāḍi 'Abd al-Jabbār's Kitāb al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah in Richard C. Martin, Mark R. Woodward, and Dwi S. Atmaja, Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 90-115.

[131] Al-Rāzī, al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, vol. 8, 182.

[132] Ibid., 174.

divided into seventy two groups; one group will be saved and the others will be in hell."

The one group that will be saved is the *jamā'ah*, i.e., that of the Prophet, his Companions,

and all who follow them.[133] It is clear to him that there is only one absolute truth, though,

he seems to say that such an assertion would work only on the level of theology, not on

that of "reality."

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[133] Here, he seems to point to the truth of the Ash'arite version of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, or the Sunnite branch of Islam. Ibid., 174.

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Chapter Three:

Methodological Principles

of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Interpretation of the Qur'ān

Having studied Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's basic assumptions regarding the Qur'ān, I will now discuss several principles[1] of his Qur'ān interpretation covered by the following themes: structure of *tafsīr*, clear and ambiguous verses, abrogation, occasions of revelation, openings of chapters, and variant readings. The purpose of this discussion is to gain an understanding of the type and methodological orientation of his exegesis.

1. The Structure of the *Tafsīr*

A quick glance at Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's writings reveals that there is something distinct about how he expresses his ideas. Scholars of his generation, such as al-Subkī and al-Safadī, had noticed this distinct mode of expression throughout his writings.[2] Al-Safadī claimed that the method of presentation was original, that no one before him had used such

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[1] In analyzing the principles behind al-Rāzī's analysis, this chapter will concentrate only on the terms and characteristics mentioned or applied by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī himself. Wansbrough's twelve procedural devices which are *variae lectiones*, poetic *loci probantes*, lexical explanation, grammatical explanation, rhetorical explanation, periphrasis, analogy, abrogation, circumstances of revelation, identification, prophetical tradition, and anecdotes, --are only referred to for a clearer picture. For more discussion on his division of the types of exegesis into haggadic, halakhic, masoretic, rhetorical, or allegorical, see John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 119-246.

[2] See Tāj al-Dīn Abī Naṣr 'Abd al-Wahhāb b. 'Alī b. Abd al-Kāfī al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāhī and 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥalāwī (?), vol. 1 ([Cairo]: 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964), 344. See also Khalīl b. Aybak al-Safadī, *al-Wāfī bi al-Wafayāt*, vol. 4 (Istanbul: Maṭba'at al-Dawlah, 1931), 249.

a method.[3] This part will discuss two major aspects relating to the structure of al-Rāzī's exegesis. One aspect concerns how he organizes his interpretation of Qur'ānic verses. The other concerns the conceptual organization of his treatment of the Qur'ānic verses he is interpreting. The combination of these two aspects may account for the distinct character of his writings on this topic.

1.1. Organizational Characteristics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*

Al-Rāzī's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* differs in some respects from other scholars' works. First of all, he discusses ideas using a dialectical method, inviting his readers to take part in the discussion of the themes addressed. He takes up some problems that spring from the main theme he explained in advance. Secondly, the organization of his narrative is quite unique. In many instances, he states the main theme of discussion from the outset, then divides that theme, and subdivides each part further into subdivisions. Wherever necessary he continues this process to arrive at sub-subdivisions, and so on until there is no need for further thematic division.

Al-Rāzī takes a similar approach in his interpretation of individual verses. Sometimes he analyzes verses without subdividing them. Sometimes he interprets verses after first dividing them into sections. In his interpretation of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān, he follows two approaches. First, he sometimes takes one verse[4] or several verses[5] and interprets

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[3] See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 69. See also Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi al-Wafayāt*, vol. 4, 249.

[4] Verses 32, 65, 69, 85, 139, 177, and 198.

[5] Verses 100-1, 126-7, and 199-200.

them together. Second, he more often takes one verse[6] or several verses[7] and interprets them after dividing them into sections.[8] In the first approach, there is neither extensive explanation nor any deep analysis. In the second approach, by contrast, an extended discussion ensues, which is sometimes far removed from the main focus of his interpretation. In this category, he usually deals with topics such as linguistic connotations, variant readings, or ideas. In doing so, he usually elucidates the central ideas behind these verses, and subsequently goes into detail,[9] dividing them into parts, interpreting them in order, and raising points or problems discussed by his contemporaries or previous scholars.

He usually subdivides his exposition by using terms such as *mas'alah*, *bahth*, *qawl*, *wajh*, *su'āl*, *ihtimāl*, *muqaddimah*, and *riwāyah*. Although he is not completely consistent in his use of these terms, each indicates a point or problem, theme of discussion, idea or thought, question, possibility or probability, principle, and report. The term *mas'alah* is the most frequently used term, and is usually employed to initiate discussion of certain

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[6] Verses 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 28, 29, 30, 31, 38, 44, 49, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 64, 70, 71, 72, 77, 78, 83, 84, 90, 91, 92, 112, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121-2, 123, 124, 125, 128, 129, 133, 134, 135-6, 137-8, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 168, 171, 172, 175, 176, 178, 179, 180, 183, 186, 187, 190, 193, 194, and 195.

[7] Verses 1-2, 5-6, 21-2, 23-5, 26-7, 33-4, 35-7, 39-40, 41-3, 45-6, 47-8, 50-1, 52-4, 62-3, 66-68, 73-4, 75-6, 79-80, 81-2, 86-9, 93-5, 96-7, 98-9, 102-3, 104-9, 110-11, 113-5, 130-2, 140-1, 142-3, 149-50, 156-8, 166-7, 169-70, 173-4, 181-2, 184-5, 188-9, 191-2, and 196-7.

[8] Most of the verses he interprets are divided into sections. In his interpretation of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān, only 13 out of 200 verses are interpreted without any division.

[9] Al-Rāzī makes this claim implicit when he interprets verses 1-2, saying: "After we summarized the inclusive point of the statement [*al-maqsūd al-kullī min al-kalām*], let us return to the interpretation of every one of the statements." See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7 (Cairo: al-Matba'ah al-Bahiyyah al-Miṣriyyah, 1357), 168.

issues[10] or of previous scholars' opinions. In what follows, we will consider some examples of how he organizes his exposition of a topic.

In his interpretation of the first two verses of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān, for instance, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī divides his exposition into three parts, each of which is called a *mas'alah*. The first *mas'alah* deals with the variant readings (*qirā'āt*) of the first verse "alif lām mīm," which falls into the category of verses known as the openings (*fawātiḥ*). This *mas'alah* is further divided into two parts, each of which is called *qawl* (pl. *aqwāl*). The first part explains two opinions concerning the readings of the *fawātiḥ* and treats of the letters' vowellessness (*sukūn*) or pause forms (*mawqūfah*). The second part treats of the vowelled letters (*mutaḥarrikah*) and is itself divided into two parts, each called a *baḥth*. In its discussion of the origin of *ḥarakah*, the first *baḥth* makes three presuppositions (*muqaddimah*). The second *baḥth* discusses the kinds of vowels (*ḥarakāt*), which can be either *fatḥah* or *sukūn*. The second *mas'alah* discusses the background of the revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*). In this *mas'alah*, he considers two opinions, those of Muqātil b. Sulaymān and Muḥammad b. Isḥāq. The last *mas'alah* discusses the organization of the arguments establishing the divinity (*ilāhiyyah*) of Allāh and the prophethood (*nubuwwah*) of Muḥammad. This *mas'alah* is divided into two *baḥths*, the first *baḥth* speaking about *ilāhiyyah*, the second about prophethood.[11]

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī treats verse 32 in a different manner from that of the first two verses, in the sense that he interprets this on its own. Although some problems might arise

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[10] See his interpretation of verses 18, 19, 20.

[11] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, 163-8. For the scholastic organization of al-Rāzī's *tafsīr*, see George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 116-8.

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in the mind of one reading this verse, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī does not detect any difficulty in his interpretation of this verse.[12] In many other instances, he deals with problems such as whether or not the degree of obedience accorded to the Prophet is the same as that accorded to God; and why the structure of the sentences changes from the second person (*mukhāṭab*, which is the phrase *"aṭīʿū,"* or "Be obedient...!") to the third person (*ghāʾib*, which is the phrase *"in tawallaw,"* or "if they leave off...").

Following his interpretation of verse 33 --which begins by mentioning the glory of the prophets, and ends by referring to their people, who rejected their teachings-- al-Rāzī construes verses 35-7 as forming one story that explains verse 36. These three verses, therefore, stand together as one part. To explain them, he splits them into two divisions, comprised of verses 35-6 and verse 37. The first group is dealt with five problems under headings (*masʾalah*, pl. *masāʾil*). The second division is divided into three parts: in the first, he discusses two problems; in the second, three; and in the third, two.[13]

In his interpretation of verses 110-1, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī discusses a number of points. For the first point, which concerns about the status and meaning of the word *kāna* (*kuntum*), he discusses four possible meanings, each of which he assigns the heading *iḥtimāl.* For the second point, he introduces two opinions, each called a *wajh* (pl. *wujūh*). With respect to the *khiṭāb* of the sentence, he discusses only briefly whether the audience was the Companions only or all Muslims, and he does not further divide this point. Nor does he divide the last point.

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[12] Ibid., vol. 8, 20.

[13] Ibid., 25-34.

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Having discussed these points (*masā'il*), he undertakes a deeper interpretation of these verses by discussing them phrase by phrase. Regarding the phrase *ta'murūna bi 'l-ma'rūfi wa tanhawna 'ani 'l-munkari wa tu'minūna bi 'llāh*, for example, he suggests three problems (*su'āl*), whereas for the phrase *minhumu 'l-mu'minūna wa aktharuhumu 'l-fāsiqūn*, he introduces two problems (*su'āl*) for discussion. For the last part of verse 111, which starts with the phrase *wa-in yuqātilūkum*, he suggests that three problems (*su'ālāt*) pertain to it.[14]

It is clear, therefore, that al-Rāzī attempted to systematize the arrangement of his exegesis. Not only does he limit his explanation of the verse(s) that he wants to discuss, he also breaks them up into parts, which he divides and sub-divides as necessary. Wherever warranted, he introduces as many divisions as seem necessary. Needless to say, he bases this mode of expression on rational considerations. It would have been difficult to develop this arrangement without a wide knowledge and rational understanding of the topics discussed. However, al-Rāzī was inconsistent and obscure in his use of these terms.

This inconsistency may cause confusion. In subdividing the term *mas'alah*, he sometimes uses the term *wajh*, and at other times, *qawl* or *iḥtimāl*. The difficulty lies in the fine distinctions between these terms. *Mas'alah* is used sometimes to mean "problem," sometimes to mean "heading," "point," or "issue." A similar obscurity plagues other terms, --e.g. *baḥth*, *qawl*, *wajh*, *su'āl*, and *iḥtimāl*. With the exception of *su'āl*, which indicates "problems," and *iḥtimāl*, which indicates "possibility," these terms may mean

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[14] Ibid., 188-95.

"discussion," "point," "idea," and "opinion." Although al-Rāzī's use of them is unclear, they nonetheless allow him to arrange his argument systematically.

1.2. Procedure of the Writing

In terms of procedure, there are at least two methods that have developed in the history of Qur'ānic interpretation. One method treats the Qur'ān one verse at a time and in accordance with its canonical order, from the first verse of *Sūrat al-Fātihah*, through the second chapter (*Sūrat al-Baqarah*), and so on to the last verse of the chapter entitled *Sūrat al-Nās*.[15] Known as *al-tafsīr al-taḥlīlī* ("analytical interpretation") or *al-tafsīr al-tasalsulī* ("sequential interpretation"), this method of interpretation has introduced quite in the early development of the genre and therefore is considered traditional.

The other method involves a subject-based approach to the Qur'ān. Known as *al-tafsīr al-mawdū'ī* ("thematic interpretation"), this method approaches the Qur'ān topic by topic.[16] In practical terms, Qur'ānic verses relating to free will and action, for example, are collected and analyzed together, so that one verse further clarifies the others with a view to arriving at an "objective" understanding of it.[17] The reasoning behind this method

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[15] See, for example, Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 H.), *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 12 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1986); 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb al-Māwardī (364-450 H.), *al-Nukat wa al-'Uyūn: Tafsīr al-Māwardī*, edited by 'Abd al-Maqṣūd b. 'Abd al-Raḥīm, 6 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1992); and Maḥmūd b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ālūsī (d. 1280 H.), *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm wa al-Sab' al-Mathānī*, 30 vols. in 15 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, [1980]).

[16] 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *Muqaddimah fī al-Manhaj* ([Cairo]: Ma'had al-Buḥūth wa al-Dirāsāt al-'Arabiyyah, 1971), 137.

[17] This method in fact has been common since classical times. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīyyah (751/ 1350), whose writings inspired Bint al-Shāṭi' to develop her theory about *qasam*, dealt with the interpretation of *qasam* ("oath") in the Qur'ān. See Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr b. Ayyūb Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *al-Tibyān fī Aqsām al-Qur'ān*, edited by Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqī (Cairo: Maṭba'at Ḥijāzī, 1933); Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Jaṣṣāṣ al-Rāzī (305-370 H.) wrote on the interpretation of the legal aspects of the Qur'ān. (*Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 3 vols. [Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, n.d.]); and Muḥammad

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is that the Qur'ān contains a single system of revelation, so that no Qur'ānic verse can be fully understood independently. Rather, every verse has to be compared with others in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the Qur'ān. This method developed in modern times as a result of the many weaknesses inherent in the traditional method.[18]

With this division in mind, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī combines these two models of interpretation in his *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. He basically interprets the Qur'ān according to its proper order, but whenever necessary he also refers to other verses. This approach enables him to raise some problems relating to the interpretation of one verse in light of the interpretation of other verses, and to evaluate them simultaneously, in order to reach a more objective interpretation of all of them.[19]

In his exegesis, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī pays close attention to the structure of the verse (*wajh al-naẓm*), either on its own or in connection with other verses.[20] Known as *al-munāsabah*, this method links the verse he interprets with other verses.[21] Exegetes, including both those who rely principally on traditions and those who avail themselves

al-Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn: Baḥth Tafṣīlī 'an Nash'at al-Tafsīr wa Taṭawwurih wa Alwānih wa Madhāhibih ma' 'arḍ Shāmil li Ashhar al-Mufassirīn wa Taḥlīl Kāmil li Ahamm Kutub al-Tafsīr min 'Aṣr al-Nabī s.a.w. ilā 'Aṣrinā al-Ḥāḍir*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, 1961), 148-9.

[18] Aḥmad Jamāl al-'Umarī, *Dirāsāt fī al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī li al-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ānī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1986), 38-46. In his terms, there are *al-tafsīr al-taḥlīlī, al-tafsīr al-ijmālī* which is similar to *al-tarjamah al-ma'nawiyyah*, and *al-tafsīr al-mawḍū'ī*. They successively represent the modes of interpretation word by word, interpretation based on general meaning, and interpretation based on specific topics.

[19] Maḥmūd Fūdah, *Nash'at al-Tafsīr wa Manāhijuh fī Ḍaw' al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Amānah, 1986), 190.

[20] In his *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī includes al-Rāzī among those scholars who paid much attention to structure of verses. See Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī. *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995), 234.

[21] In his study of the structure of al-Rāzī's *tafsīr*, Maḥmūd proves how in his interpretation of Q. 2:34 al-Rāzī deals with the problem of whether Iblīs is a sort of *jinn* or *malak*. Relating this verse with others such as 18:50 and 34:41, al-Rāzī concludes that Iblīs is a sort of *jinn*, not a *malak*. Maḥmūd Fūdah, *Nash'at al-Tafsīr wa Manāhijuh fī Ḍaw' al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah*, 190-2.

mostly of reason, apply this method in their interpretation of the Qur'ān.[22] Ibn Kathīr, whose *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* is very much based on traditions, proposes the axiom *al-Qur'ānu yufassiru ba'ḍuhū ba'ḍā* ("the Qur'ān explains itself by itself"),[23] and considers it the best method for interpreting the Qur'ān.[24] Ibn Taymiyyah too declares that this method is considered the best method of interpretation.[25]

Al-Rāzī likewise chooses not to look at each verse in isolation, but extends his investigation to other verses as well.[26] He adopts two approaches in his examination of this linkage: first, by relating the passages or verses he interprets to those that precede it; and second, by relating the interpretation of certain passages or verses to some other passages or verses which do not follow successively. Unlike verse-by-verse interpretation, such holistic interpretation allows exegetes to arrive at a more objective and thorough interpretation of the Qur'ān.

In the following, I will offer examples of how al-Rāzī applies this method. When interpreting the first passage of verse 3:15, which reads *"Qul a'unabbi'ukum bi khayrim*

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[22] Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Burhān fī Munāsabat Tartīb Suwar al-Qur'ān*.

[23] Issa J. Boullata. "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi'"s Method," *The Muslim World*, vol. 64 (1971), 105. In *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, edited by Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā', vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1988), 62, Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Zarkashī points out that despite the importance of the application of this concept, many *mufassirs* ignore it.

[24] See Ismā'īl b. 'Umar b. Kathīr b. Ḍaw' b. Kathīr (Ibn kathīr), *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1398), 7. See also Hudā Jāsim Muḥammad Abū Ṭabrah, *al-Manhaj al-Atharī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karim: Ḥaqīqatuh wa Maṣādiruh wa Taṭbīqātuh* (Qumm: Maktab al-I'lām al-Islāmī, 1994), 191-2.

[25] Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, ed. Fawwāz Aḥmad Zamarlī (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1994), 84. In addition to other Qur'ānic verses, which in some instances speak about certain issues in brief (*ijmāl*) and other instances in detail (*basṭ*), he further says, prophetic traditions are a source of exegesis, for they explain the Qur'ān (*shārihatun li 'l-Qur'āni wa mūḍiḥatun lah*).

[26] These two methods are designated by William Montgomery Watt as atomistic and contextual interpretations, respectively. For further discussion, see William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Revelation in the Modern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969), 76-9.

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min dhālikum," he takes into consideration the last passage of the previous verse (Q. 3:14), which reads, *"wa li 'llāhi 'indahū 'ḥusnu 'l-ma'āb.''*[27] He also links this verse with other related verses, such as 2:3 with 87:17; just as he links verse 3:16 with 3:193.[28] He relates verses 3:104-9 to a set of earlier verses, 3:98-103. This enables him to detect a system *(naẓm)*[29] behind the revealed text, which in his view makes rational sense. As he explains it, God first blames the People of the Book for disbelieving and for calling other people non-believers. When speaking to Muslims in the following verses, God then commands them to believe in Him, and to exercise *taqwā.* He finally commands them to call other people to do good.[30] Al-Rāzī compares the white and the black faces referred to in verse 3:106 with reference white and black in other verses, such as 39: 60, 10:26, 80:41, 75:25, 83:24, and 55:41. From this comparison, he concludes that *bayāḍ* ("whiteness") stands for happiness in paradise, attributed to believers; while *sawād* ("blackness") stands for sorrow in hell, attributed to unbelievers.[31]

Al-Rāzī asserts that Sūrat Āl 'Imrān has an excellent structure which is smooth and unique. He detects in it indications that the Christian delegation of Najrān have debated with the Prophet on two issues introduced in this chapter. The first issue was a matter of theology, in particular, the Christians claims that God had a son; the second revolved

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[27] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* vol. 7, 213.

[28] Ibid., 215.

[29] For more discussion on Qur'ānic *naẓm,* see M. Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān* (Indianapolis, 1986).

[30] Ibid., vol. 8, 177.

[31] In reference to this subject, he discusses the question of whether the terms black and white are used in a figurative or real sense. Here, al-Rāzī does not hesitate to accept the idea of Mu'tazilite Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī, who uses white and black figuratively to mean happiness and sorrow respectively. See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* vol. 8, 181-2.

around the prophethood of Muḥammad, which the Christians called into question. According to al-Rāzī, the concept of *Ḥayyun Qayyūm* ("the Ever-Living," "Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being") atributed to God is an argument against the concept of the Trinity in which the Christians of Muḥammad's time believed. The same concept also opposed the idea that God, whose existence is necessary of itself (*Wājib al-Wujūd*),[32] could have a son. He says that it is impossible for any being to be a son and at the same time God, for God must have no need for anything else to establish His existence. Al-Rāzī further says that if God were in need of anything else, He would then not be self-sufficient, and that this is impossible for God.[33] In arguing on behalf of the prophethood of Muḥammad, the Qur'ān describes itself as having been revealed by God just as were the Torah (*Tawrāt*) and the Bible (*Injīl*). Since these scriptures were consecutively revealed as signs of the prophethood of Muḥammad, Moses, and Jesus, any denial of the Qur'ān --and with this the denial of the prophethood of Muḥammad-- would mean the denial of the Torah and the Bible, and at the same time the denial of the prophets, to whom the scriptures were revealed.[34]

For this declaration of infidelity, al-Rāzī declares, Christian will receive punishment in the Hereafter[35] and be overshadowed by ignominy and humiliation.[36] However, this

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[32] For more discussion on Ibn Sinā's ontological arguments, see, for instance, L.E. Goodman, *Avicenna* (London: Routledge, 1992), 49-122;

[33] Ibid., vol. 7, 167. See also al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarah fī al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, ed. 'Abd al-Majīd al-Najjār (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1986), 22-7.

[34] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, 167-8. Compare with al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarah fī al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, 21-2. Al-Rāzī says that Moses', Jesus', and Muḥammad's ability to perform *mu'jizāt* (miracles) was a sign of the truth of their mission. If one said that miracles do not necessarily prove the true mission of Muḥammad, this would deny the true missions of the remaining prophets, including Moses and Jesus.

[35] Q. 3:106.

[36] Q. 3:112.

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does not pertain to all Christians, al-Rāzī states, basing himself on interpretation of verses

113-5 and 199. With respect to verses 113-5, the first part of which reads, "They are not

all alike: among the people of the Book, there are upright people," Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī

admits that among the Christians of Najrān there were believers as well as infidels. He

quotes a report from Ibn 'Abbās, Jābir and Qatādah saying that the Prophet Muḥammad

prayed for the soul of a dead Christian from Najjāsh. This report, confirmed by verse 113,

indicates that the dead Christian was a believer, and therefore prayer for him was

obligatory for Muslims.

In verse 3:106, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī notes that "the people with white faces" are

placed ahead of "the people with black faces," while their respective fruits in the Hereafter

are inverted. The consequences for "those with black faces" are, therefore, mentioned

before the consequence for "those with white faces." On this issue, one might doubt that

such an arrangement should not logically happen. Al-Rāzī suggests two solutions: first,

that the *waw* is used for the purpose of conjunction in a general sense, not a sequential

one; second, as in the former verse, the mention of mercy (*raḥmat*) for "those with white

faces," precedes that of punishment (*'adhāb*) for "those with black faces," in order to

stress that God wishes that His creatures receive His blessings. In the latter verse, the

mention of "those with white faces" is placed after "those with black faces" in order to

emphasize this purpose.[37]

Al-Rāzī suggests a very interesting interpretation of verse 3:17, which reads: "*aṣ-*

ṣābirīna wa 'ṣ-ṣādiqīna wa 'l-qānitīna wa 'l-munfiqīna wa 'l-mustaghfirīna bi 'l-ashār."

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[37] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 183.

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This verse explains the two verses before it. The five character traits mentioned in verse 17 (*ṣābir, ṣādiq, qānit, munfiq,* and *mustaghfir bi 'l-asḥār*) are the characteristics of "those who fear God," as mentioned in verse 15, and "those who will enter Paradise," as mentioned in verse 16. Since verse 3:17 uses a conjunction (*wāw al-'aṭf*) instead of an adjective (*ṣifah*), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī argues that "those who fear God" and "those who will enter Paradise" are furthermore those who have one or more of the characteristics it mentions. This may indicate that in order to enter Paradise one need not necessarily have all five characteristics. As long as they have faith (*īmān*) in God, as mentioned in verse 16, they will enter it even if they have only one of the five.[38] This interpretation is in line with Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Ash'arite theological belief that whoever has faith in God, --in the manner of *Lā ilāha illā 'llāh* ("there is no god but God")-- will enter heaven, regardless of his faults.[39]

To determine the meaning of the Qur'ān, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī avails himself of poetry as well as of other Qur'ānic verses. This is evident in his interpretation of verse 113. Interpreting the phrase "among the People of the Book there are upright people,"[40] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī asserts that even though the phrase mentions only one group, it refers to two groups from the People of the Book, namely, the upright (*ummah qā'imah*), and the blameworthy (*ummah dhamīmah*). This is because mentioning one thing implies the other too; there is no need at all to mention both. One example of this is the expression

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[38] Ibid., vol. 7, 212-8.

[39] See Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā, "al-Taqdīm li al-Kitāb," in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Asrār al-Tanzīl wa Anwār al-Ta'wīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992), 7.

[40] Q. 3:113. Based on this verse, al-Rāzī asserts that one of the characteristics of upright people is that they believe in God and all the prophets that God sent, including the Prophet Muḥammad; otherwise they do not believe in God. Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 200-3.

"Do good!" Athough the order is to do good, it is also an order to avoid doing what is bad. In support of this interpretation, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī quotes a poem, composed by Abū Dhu'ayb, where one category of items is mentioned when in fact its opposite is equally intended.[41]

2. The Clear and the Ambiguous Verses (al-Muḥkamāt wa al-Mutashābihāt)

Among scholars, there have been many approaches to the interpretation of the clear (muḥkamāt) and the ambiguous (mutashābihāt) verses. Some scholars simply suggest that muḥkam describes any Qur'ānic verse whose meaning is intelligible, while mutashābih applies to any Qur'ānic verse whose meaning can be understood after explanation and interpretation.[42] This group starts from the assumption that only God knows the absolute meaning (ta'wīl) of the mutashābihāt, and that all that scholars can do is to derive some lessons from them.[43] Another approach pays much closer attention to discovering the deeper meanings of the Qur'ān, including the verses that have clear and ambiguous connotations. To do so, they inquire into the issue of muḥkamāt-mutashābihāt. Not only were Islamic legal theorists interested in studying this issue, but so were mystics and theologians.[44]

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[41] For more discussion, see al-Rāzī, al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, vol. 8, 198-204.

[42] Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ḥillī, al-Mutashābih min al-Qur'ān, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1965), 13.

[43] Ibid., 15.

[44] Good summaries of the interpretation of muḥkamāt and mutashābihāt in the classical period, see M. Lagarde, "De l'ambiguïté (mutashābih) dans le Coran: tentatives d'explication des exégètes musulmans," Quaderni de Studi Arabi 3 (1985), 45-62; L. Kinberg, "Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihāt (Koran 3/7): Implication of a Koranic pair of terms in medieval exegesis," Arabica 35 (1988), 143-72.

There were many opinions on the difficulties to be encountered and their solutions. Mu'tazilite theologians, for instance, suggested that ambiguous verses should be understood in their figurative sense (*majāz*). This principle, according to Abū Zayd, was the instrument by which they resolved the contradictions suggested by their apparent meaning (*ẓāhir al-lafẓ*).[45] Al-Rāzī applies this same principle. In his *Asās al-Taqdīs*, he maintains that some exoteric meanings (*ẓawāhir*, pl. of *ẓāhir*) of the Qur'ān should be understood figuratively.[46] There are statements, for example, to the effect that God has a face, eyes, a back, hands, and a trunk. If these statements are taken in their exoteric sense, he reasons, there should be a Being who has a face, back, trunk, eyes and hands.[47] However, one can argue against such an understanding. Since God is described as the Creator, reason tells us that He must be different from His own creation; otherwise He would Himself be one type of creation. On this point, al-Rāzī says that God is *"munazzahun 'ani 'l-jihah wa 'l-jismiyyah."*[48] Besides, there is also a clear verse (*muhkam*) that declares the opposite of these ambiguous statements (*mutashābihāt*). The Qur'ān states: "There is none like unto Him" (*"Laysa ka-mithlihi shay'un"*). This indicates that God must be different from His creatures.

To understand more clearly Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's notion of *muhkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*, it is worth investigating his interpretation of verse 3:7, where a reference to

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[45] Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Falsafat al-Ta'wīl: Dirāsah fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān 'ind Muhyi al-Dīn b. 'Arabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Waḥdah, 1983), 5.

[46] In this treatise, al-Rāzī does not limit his exposition to the exoteric meanings of the Qur'ān, but includes the exoteric meanings of some prophetic traditions in his discussion. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Asās al-Taqdīs*, ed. Ahmad Hijāzī al-Saqqā' (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyyāt al-Azhariyyah, 1986), 103-9.

[47] Ibid., 105.

[48] Ibid., 109.

the *muḥkamāt-mutashābihāt* division is found.[49] This verse, whose interpretation is

"unanimously agreed to represent the point of departure for all scriptural exegesis,"[50] reads

as follows:

> It is He who sent down upon thee the Book, wherein are clear verses
> *[muḥkamāt]* that are the essence of the Book, and others which are
> ambiguous *[mutashābihāt]*. As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they
> follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension and desiring its
> interpretation; and none knows its interpretation, but God. And those who
> are firmly rooted in knowledge say: "We believe in it; all is from our Lord";
> yet none remembers but men possessed of mind. (Qur'ān 3:7)

In his interpretation of the term *muḥkamāt*, al-Rāzī quotes other Qur'ānic verses to

demonstrate two possible meanings of the term: that in its totality, the Qur'ān is *muḥkam*

in the sense that it is a valid and reliable scripture; and that in its individual parts, the

Qur'ān consists of *muḥkamāt*, which are verses that have a clear indication, and of

mutashābihāt, which are verses that have no such qualification.[51] Moreover, he uses other

Qur'ānic verses to confirm the meaning of the text. In support of the first possible

definition of *muḥkam* as it applies to the meaning of the Qur'ān, he explains that the Holy

Book is *"faṣīḥu 'l-alfāẓi ṣaḥīḥu 'l-ma'ānī."*[52] To support this assertion, he quotes verse

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[49] Jane Dammen McAuliffe considers this verse "fundamental to the development of exegetical methodology." Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 51.

[50] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, 149. Compare with McAuliffe, "Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, 51.

[51] See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, 172-3. See also al-Rāzī, *Asās al-Taqdīs*, 230.

[52] "The Qur'ān is eloquent in its text and meaning." Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, 176. Muslim scholars consider eloquence as evidence of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān. On the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān, see al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Bayān 'an al-Farq bayn al-Mu'jizah wa al-Karāmah wa al-Khayāl wa al-Kahānah wa al-Siḥr wa al-Nārinjāt* (Beirut: al-Maktabat al-Sharqiyyah, 1958); al-Rummānī, *Thalāth Rasā'il fī I'jāz al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, [1950]); Issa J. Boullata, "The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'ān: *I'jāz* and Related Topics," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 142; and Issa J. Boullata, "I'jāz," in *ER*, vol. 7, 87-8.

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10:1: "alif lām rā'. These are verses of the Book of wisdom;" and verse 11:1: "alif lām rā.

[This is] a book, whose verses are perfected [uḥkimat āyātuh]." As a consequence, in the

Qur'ān no verse contradicts another.[53] This is further asserted in the Qur'ānic verse, "If it

had been from other than God, they would have found therein much incongruity."[54]

Finally, he uses other Qur'ānic verses for the purpose of stimulating further discussion.

For example, he contradicts one verse with another, suggesting a possible meaning for one

verse in addition to another. By this method, he brings out some problems which he

discusses in greater depth. For example, verse 39:23 states that "God has sent down the

best statement, a Book [whose parts] resemble each other [and] are oft-repeated (kitāban

mutashābihan mathāniya)." This verse may signify that in its totality the Qur'ān is

ambiguous (mutashābih), and therefore cannot be relied on. According to al-Rāzī,

however, this is not the case. What is meant by mutashābih in this verse is that its parts

are similar to each other in terms of their excellent structure and style, and fit the meaning

intended.[55]

Interpreting the portion of verse 3:7[56] which reads, "those in whose hearts is

swerving, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension and desiring its

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[53] Al-Rāzī, Asās al-Taqdīs, 230. There is a consensus among Muslim scholars that there is no contradiction in the Qur'ān. Mustansir Mir states that "the Qur'ān is marked by a remarkable coherence that is both hermeneutically significant and aesthetically pleasing." See Mustansir Mir, Dictionary of Qur'ānic Terms and Concepts, (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1987), 174-5. Nevertheless Mir does not acknowledge the fact that there are verses which, at least outwardly, do not appear to be in harmony.

[54] Q. 4:82.

[55] Al-Rāzī, al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, vol. 7, 167.

[56] There are different opinions concerning the translation and interpretation of the waw in this verse. Some interpret it as an initiation of another sentence (isti'nāf), while some others conjunction ('aṭaf). This eventually leads to different opinions on whether or not human beings can understand the meaning of the Qur'ān.

interpretation," al-Rāzī states that swerving (*zaygh*) is "a tendency to depart from the truth."[57] What this means is that those in whose hearts is a tendency to depart from the truth will follow the ambiguous parts of the Qur'ān. There are two reasons for trying to discover the meaning of these ambiguous parts: the desire to sow dissension and the desire to interpret them." The first reason entails looking for the meaning in order to cause a dispute (*fitnah*) when interpreting the *mutashābihāt*. In other words, such people will pay more attention to the ambiguous verses (*mutashābihāt*) than to clear verses (*muḥkamāt*). Al-Rāzī gives an example of this kind of person by quoting a *ḥadīth*, in which the People of Najrān asked the Prophet: "Is not [Jesus] God's word and spirit?" [*alaysa huwa kalimatu 'llāhi wa-rūḥun minhu*]. These people, al-Rāzī suspects, did not question the Prophet in order to arrive at the truth, but wanted to foment *fitnah* based on the Prophet's anticipated answer.[58] Knowing this, God then revealed verse 3:59: "Verily, the likeness of ʿĪsā [Jesus] before Allah is the likeness of Ādam. He created him from dust, then He said to him: 'Be!' and he was." The second reason is that people look for the meaning of *mutashābihāt* simply in order to discover their meanings, where the Qur'ān offers no such interpretation.[59]

As mentioned earlier, from a linguistic perpective the *muḥkamāt* statements include those which have but one meaning (*naṣṣ*), and those with several connotations but among which there is one preferable meaning (*ẓāhir*). The *mutashābihāt*, on the other hand, include those that have several meanings, none of which is to be preferred (*mu'awwal*),

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[57] Ibid., 173.

[58] For more discussion, see Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muḥammad*, trans. A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 270-7.

[59] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, 176.

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and those that have two or more different meanings *(mushtarak* or *mujmal).*[60] Thus, unlike *muḥkamāt* statements, *mutashābihāt* have no textual certainty. Therefore, they are not considered a valid source for argumentation, for which reason al-Rāzi says that "to depend on *mutashābihāt* is not allowed."[61] Due to the strength of the *muḥkamāt*, in one way or another he supports the idea that *muḥkamāt* abrogate *mutashābihāt*, in the sense that one is allowed to depend on the former, but not on the latter. In other words, as many scholars beleive, *muḥkamāt* constitute abrogating verses *(nāsikh)*, while *mutashābihāt* constitute abrogated verses *(mansūkh).*[62]

It is interesting in this regard to note that al-Rāzi considers that *muḥkamāt* and *mutashbihāt* instruments can be used in support of one's personal opinion. He was well aware that Muslim scholars tended to consider Qur'ānic verses which conformed to their school of thought as *muḥkamāt*, and those that did not as *mutashābihāt*. According to him, they recognized the literal meaning of verses *(ijrā' 'ala al-ẓāhir)* when it suited them, and saw the figurative meaning *(ṣarf 'an al-ẓāhir)* when it did not.[63] He disputes al-Jubbā'i's and Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahāni's claim that the Jabriyyah focused exclusively on *mutashābihāt.*[64] As we saw above in Chapter Two, this was a trap that Fakhr al-Dīn al-

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[60] Ibid., 179-81.

[61] Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr,* vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990), 172.

[62] Ibid., 6-8. Also al-Ṭabari, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān,* vol. 6, 170; McAuliffe, "Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabari and Ibn Kathīr," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān,* 51-2.

[63] Al-Rāzi, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* vol. 7, 187.

[64] Opposing the arguments of the Jabriyyah, who based themselves partly on Q. 17:16, 27:4, and 4:26, al-Jubbā'i and al-Iṣfahāni quoted some Qur'ānic verses (verses 8:53, 28:59, 41:17, and 10:108) to support the idea of free will and action. Al-Rāzi, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* vol. 7, 187.

Rāzī sometimes fell into whenever he declared Qur'ānic verses that did not accord with his rational understanding of them as *mutashābihāt*.

3. Abrogation (*Naskh*) in the Qur'ān

The discussion on abrogation in Qur'ānic studies has attracted the attention of many scholars. From the earliest period of Islam, Muslim thinkers have paid great attention to this genre.[65] It cannot be denied that this discussion took place among the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad, although in less detail than among the generation of the *tābi'ūn*. The growing number of books on abrogation between 130 A.H./747 A.D. and 790 A.H./1308 A.D. has led Powers to affirm that this genre gained importance not only in the field of *tafsīr*, but more importantly in legal discourse.[66] From the perspective of the application of *Sharī'ah* (*tashrī'*), one principle applied to the issue of abrogation is that the abrogating verses have to have been revealed after the abrogated ones.[67] For these reasons, the discussion of *nāsikh* and *mansūkh* unavoidably developed hand-in-hand with the *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*.

From the first century Hijrah, the discussion on abrogation in the Qur'ān has been both positive and negative. It has revolved basically around the idea that "[some] verses are abrogated by others, and [that] some deny the existence of any abrogation in this

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[65] David S. Powers, "The Exegetical Genre *Nāsikh al-Qur'ān wa Mansūkhuhu*," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 119-20.

[66] Ibid., 119.

[67] Scholars disagree over the application of such a principle. Ibn al-'Arabī, for instance, states that there are two abrogated (the first and the last) and one abrogating (in the middle) phrases in the verse which reads "*khudhi 'l-'afwa wa-'mur bi-'l-'urfi wa-a'riḍ 'ani-'l-mushrikin.*" Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* ([Cairo]: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kuttāb, 1990), 135-6.

sense."[68] This dispute does not rest on a doctrine to be found in the Qur'ān, but on an influence, one that "poses a difficult theological problem."[69] The proponents of this doctrine argue that there is a reference in the Qur'ān affirming the doctrine they hold. The Qur'ān contains at least two technical terms which seem to justify this doctrine --namely *"naskh,"* a *maṣdar* form of *"nasakha-yansakhu."* The other term is *"tabdīl,"* a *maṣdar* form of *"baddala-yubaddilu."* The first term, *naskh*, may mean "to replace," as signified by verse 2:106: "For every verse [*āyah*] we replace [*nansakh*] or cause to be forgotten, We bring a better one or one like it." This term may also mean "to cancel," "to annul," or "to suppress," as understood in verse 22:52, which reads: "Never did we send a messenger or a prophet before thee, but, when he framed a desire, Satan Threw some (vanity) into his desire: but Allah will cancel [*yansakh*] anything (vain) that Satan throws in, and Allah will confirm (and establish) His Signs: For Allah is full of Knowledge and Wisdom." The second term, *tabdīl*, may mean "to replace" or "to exchange," as signified by verse 16:101: "And when We exchange [*baddalnā*] a verse [*āyah*] in place of another." In addition to this juridical argument (*shar'an*), supporters of *naskh* maintain this doctrine by rational justification (*'aqlan*) as well. A charge (*taklīf*) depends on the will of the charger (*mashī'at al-mukallif*), which allows the possibility that the charger may freight or not freight people, and on the good of the subject of charge (*maṣlaḥat al-mukallaf*), which allows for an obligation at one moment but not at another.[70] The opponents of this doctrine, on the other hand, argue that these verses do not refer to the abrogation in the

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[68] Muhammad 'Atā al-Sīd, "The Hermeneutical Problem of the Qur'ān in Islamic History" (Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1975), 170.

[69] David S. Powers, "On the Abrogation of the Bequest Verses," *Arabica*, vol. 29 (1982), 246.

[70] Abū al-Farrāj 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nawāsikh al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1980?), 15.

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Qur'ān but rather to the *sharī'ahs* before Islam.[71] Consequently, these verses refer to the

replacement of Jewish and Christian *sharī'ahs* with the Islamic one.[72] They argue further

that if the Qur'ān were subject to change, it would call into question the wisdom of God

by attributing a change of mind to the theoretically unchallengeable, eternal Divine Will.

The Mu'tazilites challenged the Ash'arites, who believed in the uncreatedness of the

Qur'ān and at the same time in the doctrine of abrogation, and contended that if the

Qur'ān were subject to abrogation, it could not be eternal.[73]

The dispute over abrogation persisted not only between those who rejected it and

those who accepted it, but also among different supporters of the latter position. They

disagreed on what is really abrogated: the text itself (*tilāwah*), the meaning (*ḥukm*), or

both text and meaning.[74] Abū Zayd,[75] on the one hand, basing himself on the principle of

the application of *Sharī'ah*, which advocates *taysīr* and *tadarruj*, argued that abrogation

means *tabdīl al-aḥkām*, not *taghyīr al-nuṣūṣ*.[76] Ibn Salāmah al-Naṣr (d. 410/1019), on the

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[71] Al-Sīd, "The Hermeneutical Problem of the Qur'ān in Islamic History," 173.

[72] Powers, "On the Abrogation of the Bequest Verses," 247.

[73] Ibid., 246.

[74] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, 46-55.

[75] Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd is still alive and well. He is a very creative and productive writer in the field of Qur'ānic literature. See, for instance, Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Falsafat al-Ta'wīl: Dirāsah fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān 'ind Muhyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī* (Beirut, Lubnan: Dār al-Tanwīr and Dār al-Waḥdah, 1983); Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Ishkāliyyāt al-Qirā'ah wa-Āliyyāt al-Ta'wīl* (Beirut: al-Dar al-Bayḍā' and al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1994); Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Ittijāh al-'Aqlī fī al-Tafsīr: Dirāsah fī Qadiyyāt al-Majāz fī al-Qur'ān 'ind al-Mu'tazilah* (Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr li al-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr, 1982); Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1990); and Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīni* (Cairo: Sīnā li al-Nashr, 1992).

[76] Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 138.

other hand, maintained that one type of abrogation is abrogation in the text (*khaṭṭ*) and another is with respect to meaning (*ḥukm*).[77]

The development of this doctrine may be traced back to the time of Muḥammad, when revelation first took place. Whenever a question arose regarding the content of the Qur'ān or daily life, Muḥammad answered it through revelation, so that there is practically no difficulty in understanding the Qur'ān and applying it in everyday life. When the Qur'ānic revelation ended with the death of the Prophet, Muslims encountered various difficulties in their understanding of the holy text. One difficulty was how to deal with those Qur'ānic verses which do not seem to accord with each other.[78] Although this issue was mainly rooted in the existence of "problematic" Qur'ānic verses with regard to certain themes, the discourse in various disciplines had led to the development of the abrogation doctrine.

In the annals of Muslim intellectual history, most discussions on the existence of "problematic" Qur'ānic verses have been of a legal and theological nature, due to the idea that the Scripture is "the prime source in law and theology."[79] Legally, these verses present some difficulties. Scholars have to determine which verses are operative and on which of these legal rulings they can be based. To respond to this challenge, scholars have

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[77] He holds the idea that there are three types of abrogation: (1) *mā nusikha khaṭṭuhu wa-ḥukmuh* (those whose text and meaning are abrogated), (2) *mā nusikha khaṭṭuhu wa-baqiya ḥukmuh* (those whose text is abrogated, but whose meaning remains), and (3) *mā nusikha ḥukmuhū wa-baqiya khaṭṭuh* (those whose meaning is abrogated, but whose text remains). For more discussion, see Ibn Salāmah al-Naṣr, "al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh," 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Hindiyyah, [1897]), 9-10.

[78] Referring to this difficulty in the field of Qur'ānic studies, Andrew Rippin states that "the text of the Qur'ān presents many ambiguities, difficult words whose precise readings are unsure, problems of textual division and apparently incompatible statements." Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices (Volume 1: The Formative Period)* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 27

[79] Ibid., 25.

developed a set of rules known as *uṣūl al-fiqh*. In exegetical discourse, it is thought that the Qur'ān was revealed in time and space, so that one may argue that the Qur'ān was revealed in accordance with its historical context. As the history of revelation tells us, certain verses were revealed in response to either the questions posed by Muḥammad's contemporaries or the problems that occurred in Muḥammad's lifetime. As the situation changed, Qur'ānic teachings revealed in the early years could be different from those of later times. There is no problem where there is no discrepancy between earlier and later verses. However, since there seems to be disagreement in some cases, scholars have tried to solve the problem by offering solutions based on exegetical principles.

Scholars offer two methods to resolve the problem. One method is to apply abrogation, which they claimed to be found in the Qur'ān. This doctrine primarily offers a choice between one of a number of problematic verses. The one considered operative is called the abrogating verse (*nāsikh*). Its opposite is called the abrogated verse (*mansūkh*). Scholars have different thoughts on the rules which apply in this doctrine. However, the abrogating verses were usually revealed before the abrogated verses.[80] The other method is by reconciliation, which is to apply specialization (*takhṣīṣ*) to certain verses that seem to contradict each other. In a practical sense, this principle distinguishes verses with general connotations from those with specific meanings. Unlike in abrogation, this method takes into account these problematic verses, with a special treatment for those which have the more specific emphasis.

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[80] For example, Abū al-Farrāj 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nawāsikh al-Qur'ān*; 'Umar b. Aḥmad b.'Uthmān (Ibn Shāhīn) (d. 380/991), *al-Nāsikh wa al-Mansūkh min al-Ḥadīth*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad Mu'awwiḍ and 'Ādil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1992).

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The discussion of this doctrine also occupied the mind of our author, a great

exegete and legal theorist. Although he did not write any specific treatise on Qur'ānic

abrogation, its importance for him forces us to discuss it in this chapter. Lagardé points

out that with respect to the theoretical framework of his interpretation, Fakhr al-Dīn al-

Rāzī made thirteen assertions concerning abrogation in his *Mafātīḥ*.[81] In *al-Maḥṣūl*, he

discusses this issue in connection with Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) at some length.[82]

In comparison to the previous discussions on this issue, his remarks include some

important points relating to the theory of Qur'ānic abrogation. Based on his research on

classical texts, Powers offers the following outline of the theoretical discussion on

abrogation:

> A typical introduction includes the following six chapters: (i) exciting
> interest in the study of the abrogated and abrogating verses; (ii)
> disagreement among scholars regarding that which the Qur'ān and the
> sunna may abrogate; the meaning of naskh, and its derivation; (iii) the
> various modes of *naskh;* (iv) the difference between *naskh* and *badā';* (v)
> mention of some relevant *ḥadīth;* (vi) the *sūrahs* in which both abrogating
> and abrogated verses are mentioned.[83]

As far as our discussion is concerned, abrogation in the Qur'ān has two meanings.

First, the *sharī'ah* of the Qur'ān abrogates the *sharī'ahs* of previous revelations. Second,

some verses of the Qur'ān are abrogated by one or more later verses. As for the first

meaning, al-Rāzī was very much in favor of the idea that the *sharī'ah* of the Qur'ān

abrogates the *sharī'ahs* of previous revelations. This idea, however, is challenged by verse

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[81] Michel Lagardé, *Index du Grand Commentaire de Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996). 47.

[82] For instance, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, ed. Ṭāhā Jābir al-'Alwānī, vol. 3 (Riyadh: Lajnat al-Buḥūth wa al-Ta'līf wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashr, 1979), 519-30.

[83] Powers, "The Exegetical Genre *Nāsikh al-Qur'ān wa Mansūkhuhu,*" in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, 121.

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3:3, which declares that the Qur'ān is *"muṣaddiqa 'l-limā bayna yadayh."* This statement

posed a difficulty: "How can the Qur'ān abrogate the previous *sharī'ahs,* while the Qur'ān

justifies *(muṣaddiq)* them, as this verse implies?" Al-Rāzī suggests that the Qur'ān

validates the *sharī'ahs* of previous Books in terms of theological issues, while invalidating

those of previous Books in legal issues.[84] Here, al-Rāzī does not state clearly whether or

not there is abrogation in the Qur'ān. In one instance, he presents the arguments of the

proponents of this doctrine, in another the arguments of its opponents. This ambiguity has

forced later scholars to speculate on his real position. On the issue of the bequest verses,

Powers, for instance, asserts that al-Rāzī stands against abrogation, which had gained wide

support among the majority of Muslim scholars. This assertion is based on three

considerations:

> First, the doctrine of abrogation is to be avoided whenever possible.
> Second, the fact that Q. 2:234 is recited before Q. 2:240 suggests that it did
> not abrogate the verse. Finally, the policy of avoiding abrogation suggests
> that the arguments of Mujāhid and Abū Muslim [al-Iṣfahānī], which require
> specification, are [*ipso facto*] superior to those of the proponents of
> abrogation.[85]

In fact, as Powers has noted, al-Rāzī rejects the idea that verse 2:240 was abrogated by

4:12.[86] Generally speaking, al-Rāzī recommends avoiding abrogation whenever possible,

such as when there is a specification *(takhṣīṣ)* in one or more of the "problematic" verses.

Nevertheless, al-Rāzī's rejection of the applicability of abrogation to certain verses does

not mean that he rejected the doctrine of abrogation in its entirety.

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[84] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* vol. 7, 169-70.

[85] Powers, "On the Abrogation of the Bequest Verses," 289-90.

[86] See al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr,* vol. 6, 169-70. See also Powers, "On the Abrogation of the Bequest Verses," 289.

Presenting the arguments of the proponents of abrogation, in his *al-Maḥṣūl*, al-Rāzī nevertheless fails to state clearly his position. First he says that Muslim scholars have agreed (*ajmaʿa*) that there is abrogation in the Qur'ān.[87] Then after citing the arguments, based chiefly on verses 2:106; 16:101; and 22:52, he exposes al-Iṣfahānī's arguments against abrogation. Against this leading Muʿtazilite scholar's contention, al-Rāzī does two things. First, he avoids making any statement which might indicate his agreement with al-Iṣfahānī; second, he offers some counter-arguments to the latter's position. Overall, it would seem that al-Rāzī rejected al-Iṣfahānī's extreme stance on abrogation in the Qur'ān.[88]

Although Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī does not state clearly his position within the debate over abrogation,[89] Muhammad Atā al-Sīd's thesis on this matter is reasonable. Al-Sīd says that like al-Suyūṭī, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī [was] reluctant to take the abrogation principle for granted."[90] In other words, it is more probable that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī himself preferred to say that there is no abrogation in the Qur'ān. In addition to previous arguments, his reluctance to apply *naskh* can be seen in his apparently straight forward statement that in principle there is no abrogation in the Qur'ān (*inna 'l-aṣla ʿadamu 'n-naskhi*).[91]

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[87] Al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, vol. 3, 460. For this agreement, see Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nawāsikh al-Qur'ān*, 14.

[88] For al-Rāzī's discussion on al-Iṣfahānī's disagreement on abrogation, see al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, vol. 3, 460-8.

[89] One might argue that his vague position was because he did not want to oppose the majority of scholars or because he was proud of previous scholars from the Ashʿarite and Shāfiʿite schools. However, his bold criticism of whomever he disagreed with makes this speculation rather unlikely.

[90] Al-Sīd, "The Hermeneutical Problem of the Qur'ān in Islamic History," 170.

[91] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 13, 141 and 233. See also Lagardé, *Index du Grand Commentaire de Fahr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, 47.

As al-Sīd suggests, this preference may have been due to a difference of opinion among the Companions of the Prophet concerning the issue and the difficult theological problems arising from it.[92] According to many scholars, there has been disagreement on the existence of abrogation in the Qur'ān ever since the first generation of Muslims. While the majority of scholars agreed that verse 2:62 is abrogated by verses 3:85, some Companions such as Mujāhid b. Jābir and al-Daḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim held otherwise.[93] Secondly, as Muslim theologians had noticed, there are theological difficulties[94] in the application of this doctrine. Such a difficulty led scholars to limit the growing number of *nāsikh-mansūkh* verses. Like other theologians, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī probably "drastically reduced the instances which are frequently enumerated as cases of naskh."[95]

Some scholars suggested that there are some abrogated verses in *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*. In his *Nawāsikh al-Qur'ān*, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), who is better known for his exegetical work *Zād al-Masīr*,[96] discussed ten verses which are supposed to be abrogated. However, he argued that none of these verses was really abrogated. Instead of considering them abrogated, he applied another method of resolving the "problematic verses," i.e. by the method of specification (*takhṣīṣ*). In Arabic grammar, specification may be indicated by exception (*istithnā '*), replacement (*badal*), or elaboration (*bayān*).[97]

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[92] Al-Sīd, "The Hermeneutical Problem of the Qur'ān in Islamic History," 170.

[93] Powers, "The Exegetical Genre *Nāsikh al-Qur'ān wa Mansūkhuhu,"* in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, 119.

[94] In his *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, Abū Zayd brought two issues in his discussion of the phenomenon of abrogation. The first issue concerns the pre-existence of the Qur'ān in the *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ*. The other issue concerns the collection of the Qur'ān in 'Uthmān's time. For further discussion, see Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 131.

[95] Al-Sīd, "The Hermeneutical Problem of the Qur'ān in Islamic History," 170.

[96] For a short discussion on his career in the field of Qur'ānic interpretation, see Manī' 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, *Manāhij al-Mufassirīn* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī, 1978), 117-24.

[97] Al-Baghdādī, *Nawāsikh al-Qur'ān*, 104-10.

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In considering Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's ideas on abrogation, there seems to be inconsistency in his reasoning. On the one hand, he seems reluctant to apply the doctrine of abrogation, since rationally there are theological obstacles to applying abrogation to the Qur'ān, given its status as the very words of God. On the other hand, he acknowledges that some Qur'ānic verses were abrogated by others, or even by prophetic traditions[98] transmitted on the authority of several Companions (mutawātir).[99] Musā'id Muslim 'Abd Allāh Āl Ja'far maintains that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī supports the idea that the Qur'ān might be abrogated by prophetic tradition (sunnah), whether mutawātir or not, an idea held by Shāfi'ite scholars.[100] In support of this assertion, 'Abd Allāh gives two examples of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's argument, namely, the abrogation of the Qur'ān[101] by a hadith which reads: "la waṣiyyata li-wārithin" --meaning "there is no will for an inheritor"-- and the abrogation of the Qur'ān on jald by a hadith about rajam.[102]

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī does not only speak of the notion of abrogation within a theoretical framework, but also in its application. According to him, nāsikh verses can be recognized in either of two ways: one is bi-'l-lafẓ and the other bi-ghayri 'l-lafẓ.[103] As for the first, one may find the word naskh or its derivatives in various Qur'ānic verses. One may also find one or more prophetic traditions which say that this verse abrogates that

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[98] Compared with Ibn al-Jawzī, who maintains "anna 'l-Qur'āna lā yansakhu illa 'l-Qur'ān" ("none abrogates the Qur'ān but the Qur'ān"). Al-Rāzī went too far in supporting the doctrine of abrogation. Ibid., 74.

[99] Al-Rāzī, al-Mahsūl fī 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh, vol. 3, 519-30.

[100] Musā'id Muslim 'Abd Allāh Āl Ja'far, Athar al-Taṭawwur al-Fikrī fī al-Tafsīr fī al-'Aṣr al-'Abbāsī (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1984), 201.

[101] See, for example, Q. 2:240 and 4:11-2.

[102] Ibid., 202. Also al-Rāzī, Mafātih al-Ghayb, vol. 1, 660 and 663.

[103] Al-Rāzī, al-Mahsūl fī 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh, vol. 3, 561.

verse, and so on. The second way of recognizing the *nāsikh* is by understanding the legal

connotation of the text within the particular historical consciousness in which the Qur'ān

was revealed, or as al-Rāzī hismself says: *"an ya'tiya bi-naqiḍi 'l-ḥukmi 'l-awwali aw bi-*

ḍiddihī ma'a 'l-'ilmi bi-'t-tārīkh."[104] To extract this historical information, he suggests

that the same means of recognizing apply as above, i.e. *bi-'l-lafẓ* and *bi-ghayri 'l-lafẓ.*[105]

It is *bi-'l-lafẓ* when there is a report indicating that one *ḥadīth* was narrated before the

other. To explain his notion of *bi-ghayri 'l-lafẓ,* on the other hand, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī

cites three instances. If there is a report saying that one *ḥadīth* refers to an event in one

year and another in a later year, or if one report or Qur'ānic verse was revealed at the

battle of Badr and another at the battle of Uḥud, or if two Companions report two

different *ḥadīths* on the same issue, and yet it is known that one of the two accompanied

the Prophet earlier than the other, then, it would mean that the first Companion reported

earlier *ḥadīth* than the other.

In his interpretation of the third chapter of the Qur'ān, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī does

not confirm any abrogation. In his interpretation of verse 3:102, for instance, he differs

from previous scholars in saying that this verse contains no abrogation. He criticizes Ibn

'Abbās, for having stated that the phrase *ittaqu 'llāha ḥaqqa tuqātih* is abrogated by *fa*

'ttaqu 'llāha ma 'staṭa'tum (Q. 64:16).[106] Ibn 'Abbās assumed that the *ḥaqqa tuqātih*

means that Muslims should be obedient, thankful, and remember God, without any chance

of disobedience, of striking, or of forgetting --all of which are impossible for any human

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[104] Ibid., 561.

[105] Al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh,* vol. 3, 562-7.

[106] Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī also refers to the idea that Q. 3:102 is abrogated by 64:16. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān,* vol. 2, 49.

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being. Because of this difficulty, Ibn 'Abbās says, the verse *ittaqu 'llāha ḥaqqa tuqātih* was revealed to abrogate *ittaqu 'llāha ma 'staṭa'tum*. Al-Rāzī on the contrary suggests that *ittaqu 'llāha ḥaqqa tuqātih* means "to avoid every disobedience," so that the meaning of both verses is the same, which is to perform *taqwā* as long as Muslims are able to do it. In the case that a Muslim disobeys God because of forgetfulness, he argues, this disobedience does not count, for there is no *taklīf* when one forgets.[107]

4. The Occasions of Revelation (*Asbāb al-Nuzūl*)

The most familiar way of inferring the context of revelation is to study the reports related to revelation, a science known as *'ilm asbāb al-nuzūl* ("the science of the occasions of revelation"). Many exegetical works, mostly those of the variety known as *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*, include reference to the occasions on which certain verses were revealed. Each of the seven *ḥadīth* collections contains reports relating to the interpretation of certain verses or the circumstances surrounding them. This science is considered one of the most important in all of Qur'ān interpretation, since if the Qur'ān is to be understood comprehensively, the context in which it was revealed needs to be known. Without such an understanding, one might misread certain issues.[108] Due to the importance of the science of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, Qur'ān exegetes regularly refer to it. This is not limited to exegetes who base their interpretation on the Qur'ān and prophetic traditions, but extends to those whose exegesis is considered rational like al-Rāzī.

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[107] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 171-2.

[108] Muḥammad al-Khuḍarī, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), 209-11. For those who consider that there is abrogation in the Qur'ān, the *asbāb al-nuzūl* are very important for determining which verses came first, so that the verse that was revealed at a later time might abrogate one that was revealed earlier. See Abū Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 135.

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Many terms are used to refer to the circumstances of revelation. Some of the most common terms are *annahā nuzzilat fī...* ("this verse was revealed in such and such"); *annahā nuzzilat bi-sababi* ... ("this verse was revealed because of such and such"); *fanuzzilat...* ("then, the verse was revealed").[109] The first two terms are normally used to initiate an explanation of the context of the revelation, while the other one is used after explaining the events or circumstances preceding the revelation.

At this point in our discussion, let us examine al-Rāzī's view of the functions of the *sabab* reports in his interpretation of the Qur'ān. In his treatment of the third chapter of the Qur'ān, these reports are generally meant to explain the context of the verses. Without considerang their *sabab* or *asbāb*, the meanings of texts remain vague. In Andrew Rippin's words, the functions of *asbāb* reports are "interrelated in their basic haggadic nature."[110] In al-Rāzī's exegesis, this function serves only to arrive at the meaning. Similarly, *sabab* or *asbāb* reports do not imply a causal relationship with the events.[111]

As seen in al-Rāzī's interpretation of the first two verses, the *sabab* reports serve to give the context of revelation. In what follows, we will see that there is a great deal of evidence of this. Al-Rāzī, fo instance, cites two accounts of *asbāb al-nuzūl* in his commentary on the third chapter.[112] The first account, which is accepted on the authority of Muqātil b. Sulaymān, relates to the *sabab* of the first verse only, which is the same as

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[109] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 231-2.

[110] This conclusion is drawn from his examination of the second chapter of the Qur'ān. Andrew L. Rippin, "The Qur'ānic Asbāb al-Nuzūl Material: An Analysis of Its Use and Development in Exegesis" (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1981), 443.

[111] 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Rahmān, *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 7th ed., vol. 2 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1990), 10-1.

[112] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, 165-7.

the *sabab* of the first verse of the second chapter. The account reports that this verse was revealed concerning the Jews of Medina. The second account applies to the occasion of revelation of the first eighty-odd (*biḍ' wa thamānīn*) verses, which have to do basically with the Christian delegation of Najrān.[113] Based on Muḥammad b. Isḥāq's *Sīrah*, which contains the same account as that found in al-Wāḥidī's *Asbāb Nuzūl al-Qur'ān* and most other exegetical writings, al-Rāzī says that sixty envoys of the Najrān tribe[114] came to the Prophet. The leaders of the envoys carried on a theological debate with the Prophet concerning the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muḥammad. In the first place, they argued that Jesus was either himself God, His son, or one of a trinity. They based their first claim on the ideas that Jesus resuscitated the dead, made a live bird out of a clay one, healed the blind and the lepers, and spoke about the unseen. The second claim they based on the idea that Jesus had no father. The third and last claim was derived from the passages in scripture where God speaks of Himself while referring to others as well, saying such things as "We did (*fa'alnā*)," and "We created (*ja'alnā*)." In response to their allegations, the Prophet asked them to surrender themselves (*aslimū*). However, he did not respond when they repeated their second claim and asked him who the father of Jesus was. Subsequently, the first eighty-odd verses were revealed, and the Prophet answered their questions based on these verses.[115]

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[113] Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and Its interpreters*, vol. 2, *The House of 'Imrān* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 1.

[114] Among them there were seventeen important people: one leader called 'Abd al-Masīḥ, one guide called al-Ayham, one expert on the Midrāshi school called Abū Ḥārithah b. 'Alqamah, and fourteen noble men. On their way to the Prophet, Abū Ḥārithah b. 'Alqamah talked with his brother Karz. In this conversation, 'Alqamah admitted that Muḥammad was the promised Prophet as mentioned in their scripture. While 'Alqamah hesitated to admit the prophethood of Muḥammad because of the rewards his people gave him, Karz later on admitted Muḥammad's prophecy and embraced Islam.

[115] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, 165-6.

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When speaking of the interpretation of verse 3:12, which reads "Say to those who disbelieve: 'You will be defeated and collected in Jahannam, the worst place,'" al-Rāzī also uses the *sabab* reports to discover the sense of the text from its context. In so doing, he affirms that there are three versions of the occasion that led to the revelation of this verse. The first version holds that this verse was revealed in accordance with the Medinan Jews' rejection of Muḥammad's call to Islam after the Battle of Badr. A similar notion is suggested by the second version, i.e., that this verse was revealed after the Battle of Badr, and relates to a debate among Medinan Jews concerning the truth of Muḥammad's prophethood. A third version establishes a more general picture of the *sabab*. It states that this verse was addressed to all unbelievers.[116] This last version, according to him, corresponds to the principle "*al-'ibratu bi-'umūmi 'l-lafẓi lā bi-khuṣūṣi 's-sabab*," or as stated in another place: "*wa khuṣūṣu 's-sababi lā yamna'u 'umūma 'l-lafẓ.*"[117] He applies this principle in his interpretation of 3:197, where he affirms that the pronoun "ka" (you) in "*lā yaghurrannaka*" ("let it not deceive you") indicates "every listener" of the Qur'ān, not the Prophet Muḥammad only.[118] Al-Rāzī does not state at once his opinion as to which *sabab* he based the interpretation of this verse, but waits until the following verse, he states that verse 3:12 was revealed in answer to the Medinan Jews who rejected Muḥammad's call to Islam.[119]

Another function of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* is to support al-Rāzī's theological stance. He asserts that rational conviction has a high place in the pursuit of religious truth. Basing

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[116] Ibid., 201.
[117] Ibid., 186.
[118] Ibid., vol. 9, 152.
[119] Ibid., vol. 7, 202.

himself on the second report of the *asbāb*, al-Rāzī argues that it was in order to prove religious truth that the Prophet did not reject the call of the Christian delegation of Najrān for a debate. It is evident from this, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī affirms, that rational understanding is not forbidden, but is in fact necessary to prove the truth of religion. In his words, "this account proves that establishing the truth of religion and eschewing obscure thoughts (*shubuhāt*) through debate [*munāzarah*] was in the tradition [*ḥirfah*] of the prophets, and that the Ḥashwiyyah's position in rejecting research and discussion is absolutely false [*bāṭilun qaṭ'an*]."[120]

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī provides three different *asbāb* for verse 3:31. One account affirms that the verse was revealed to the Jews, who claimed they were the sons of and the lovers of God (*naḥnu abnā'u 'llāhi wa aḥibbā'uh*). Another account states that this verse was revealed to the Qurasyh, who said that they worshipped idols for the sake of their love for God. The third one confirms that it was revealed to the Christians, who said they exalted Jesus because of their love of God. Although the groups to whom it was said to have been revealed differed widely, the message of the narratives is the same —namely, their worshipping of what is other than God for the sake of their love of God. This verse was, therefore, an answer to their pretension to love God.[121]

The Qur'ān 3:100 was revealed in connection with the efoorts of a Jewish man called Shās b. Qays, who reminded the Khazraj and Aws of their past fights in Jāhiliyyah times. He not only recalled their past, but also raised tensions by reciting poetry which was customarily recited in battles. He was so successfull in raising tensions that the

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[120] Ibid., 167.
[121] Ibid., vol. 8, 19.

Medinan Muslims almost resumed fighting among themselves. The Prophet was informed of this event, and went out to the people to remind them of the peace they enjoyed because of Islām. This verse, which warns them against a return to infidelity, was therefore revealed at that time. According to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Muslims would never revert to being infidels as long as the Prophet Muḥammad was alive or they held to the Qur'ān.[122]

In his interpretation of verse 128, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī quotes two opinions concerning its *asbāb al-nuzūl*. One opinion suggests that this verse was revealed at the time of the Battle of Uḥud, while the other suggests it was meant for the people of Bi'r Ma'ūnah. There are different variants of the first opinion --that the Prophet condemned the infidels in his prayer, that he cursed Muslims who violated his command, and that he desired to forgive Muslims who break the rules of the Prophet. Concerning the second opinion, reported by Muqātil, al-Rāzī says that the verse in question was revealed when the Prophet sent some of his Companions to teach the people of Bi'r Ma'ūnah the Qur'ān. Unfortunately, the infidels killed them all, angering the Prophet and inducing him to call down a curse on the infidels. With regard to these issues, al-Rāzī supports the majority opinion which holds that this verse was revealed at the Battle of Uḥud, for the reason that the context of the verse is in line with the first opinion.[123] Here, al-Rāzī seems to say that a *sabab* is to be accepted when it suits the narrative of the verses.

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[122] Aws and Khazraj were brothers of the same father and mother. Before Islām, the two tribes had fought against each other for about 104 years. Ibid., 169-174.

[123] Ibid., 231-2.

5. The Openings of Chapters (*Fawātiḥ al-Suwar*)

Of the 114 chapters in the Qur'ān, 29 chapters begins with the so-called "mysterious letters," known as the *fawātiḥ al-suwar* ("the openings of chapters") because they are found at the beginning of certain chapters. These letters are also known as the *ḥurūf al-hijā'* or *ḥurūf al-tahajjī*. Some *fawātiḥ* consist of one letter, and others of a combination. The letters are: alif, ḥā', rā', sīn, ṣād, ṭā', 'ayn, qāf, kāf, lām, mīm, nūn, hā', and yā'. The following are the *fawātiḥ* and the chapters in which they occur: with the one letter "ṣād" (38), "qāf" (50), and "nūn" (68); with two letters "ṭā' hā'" (20), "ṭā' sīn" (27); "yā sīn" (36), and "ḥā' mīm" (40, 41, 43, 44, 45, and 46); with the three letters "alif lām mīm" (2, 3, 29, 30, 31, and 32), "alif lām rā'" (10, 11, 12, 14, and 15)," and ṭā' sīn mīm" (26 and 28); with the four letters "alif lām mīm ṣād" (7), and "alif lām mīm rā'" (13); and with five letters "kāf hā' yā' 'ayn ṣād" (19), and "ḥā' mīm 'ayn sīn qāf" (42). With the exception of four chapters, the *fawātiḥ* are followed by a mention of revelation in the form of general reference, or mention of Muḥammad himself. In the remaining four chapters there is a reference to knowledge, which is symbolized by the word *qalam* (pen), after the *fawātiḥ* of chapter 68; to God's promise to make the Byzantines victorious over the Persians after those of chapter 30; to God's testing of the believers after those of chapter 29; and to the story of Zakariyyā' after those of chapter 19.

Scholars disagree on the interpretation of these *fawātiḥ*. They mostly maintain that they should be considered *mutashābihāt* and that, therefore, only God knows their meanings, for "the *fawātiḥ* are among the secrets of God."[124] However, many studies have

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[124] Ibid., vol. 2, 3.

sought to discover the secret meaning of these *fawātiḥ*. In *Kitāb al-Khawāṭir al-Sawāniḥ fī Kashf Asrār al-Fawātiḥ*, Ibn Abī al-Iṣbaʿ al-Miṣrī (d. 654) discusses this issue at some length.[125] Bint al-Shāṭiʾ too has done research on the *fawātiḥ al-suwar*. In her *al-Iʿjāz al-Bayānī*, she comes to the conclusion that every *sūrah* starting with the *fawātiḥ al-suwar* must talk about the triumph of the Qurʾān and provide an explanation of its miraculous nature.[126]

Based on Qurʾānic verses, prophetic traditions, and reason, al-Rāzī concludes, "Theologians negate this idea, and they say that there should not be anything in the Qurʾān that cannot be known to creatures."[127] Like other theologians, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī asserts that the meanings of the *fawātiḥ* should be known. He suggests that these *fawātiḥ* are also names of chapters.[128] In addition to this, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī affirms that the *fawātiḥ* have several purposes, the most important of which is to stimulate people to "think about the Qurʾān, so that they may solve its difficulty."[129]

6. Variant Readings (*al-Qirāʾāt*)

In his interpretation of the Qurʾān, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī refers to variant readings (*qirāʾāt*). He considers the Seven Systems, the most popular readings, but he also refers to the Ten Systems, and the Fourteen Systems. Yet he does not limit himself to these

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[125] Ibn Abī al-Iṣbaʿ al-Miṣrī, *Min Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān: al-Khawāṭir al-Sawāniḥ fī Asrār al-Fawātiḥ*, ed. Hafnī Muḥammad Sharaf (n.d. and n.p., 1960).

[126] ʿĀʾishah ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, *al-Iʿjāz al-Bayānī li al-Qurʾān wa Masāʾil Ibn al-Azraq: Dirāsah Qurʾāniyyah Lughawiyyah wa Bayāniyyah*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1987), 155.

[127] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 2, 3.

[128] Ibid., 8.

[129] Ibid., 11.

readings, for on many occasions he quotes the variant readings of other scholars like Ibn 'Abbās and al-Farrā.[130]

Al-Rāzī's discussion is marginally grammar-based. The different readings are judged according to whether certain words are read as *fathah*, *kasrah*, *dammah*, and with or without *tashdīd.* To some degree, these differences influence the interpretation of words and verses. For his interpretation of verses 3:1-2, for instance, al-Rāzī elucidates variant readings. He quotes the readings of 'Āṣim, al-Farrā (d. 207/822), and the scholars of Baṣrah. They all held the idea that the ends of the *hurūf al-tahajjī* should be read with a full stop (*anna asmā' al-hurūf mawqūfatu 'l-awākhir*), to read *alif lām mīm*.[131] In relation to verse 2, which reads *Allāhu lā ilāha illā huwa 'l-hayyu 'l-qayyūm*, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī suggest two possible approaches. The first, based on 'Āṣim's reading, is that the mīm of "alif lām mīm" should be read with a *sukūn*, as this verse is read with a full stop (*waqf*); and that the *hamzah* of *lafz al-jalālah* (*Allāh*) should be read *fathah*, for one of two reasons: (1) the vowel of the *hamzah* is *fathah* because this is at the beginning (*ibtidā'*); or (2) the *hamzah* of *lafz al-jalālah* (*Allāh*) should be read with a *fathah* for the purpose of *tafkhīm* and *ta'zīm* (glorification). The second approach, based on the reading of al-Farrā'

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[130] The Seven Systems, which Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/935) believed to be canonical, are those of Nafi' of Medina (d. 169/785), Ibn Kathīr of Mecca (d. 120/738), Ibn 'Amir of Damascus (d. 120/738), Abū 'Amr of Baṣrah (d. 154/771), 'Āṣim of Kūfah (d. 128/745), Hamzah of Kūfah (d. 158/774), and al-Kisā'ī of Kūfah (d. 189/805); the Ten Systems include the Seven Systems along with those of Abū Ja'far of Medina (d. 130/747), Khalaf of Kūfah (d. 229/843), and Ya'qūb of Baṣrah (d. 205/820); and the Fourteen Systems consist of the Ten Systems plus those of Ibn Muhayṣin of Mecca (d. 123/740), al-Yazīdī of Baṣrah (d. 202/817), al-Hasan of Baṣrah (d. 110/728), and al-A'mash of Kūfah (d. 148/765). Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān: The Old Codices* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1937), 1-2.

[131] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 7, 163.

and most Baṣran scholars, the *mīm* of *"alif lām mīm"* should be read with a *fatḥah*,[132] as the result of the transmission of the vowel of *hamzat al-waṣl* of *lafẓ al-jalālah* (*Allāh*) to the *mīm*. In short, one can choose either to read *"alif lām mīm"* with a full stop (*mawqūfah*) or to read them as a continuing into the following verse, in which case the *mīm* should accept the *fatḥah* of the *waṣl* (continuous reading) with the *hamzah* of the *lafẓ al-jalālah*.

Another instance of grammatical emphasis is Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's discussion of the readings of the phrase *fanādathu 'l-malā'ikah* in verse 3:40. Supported by Ḥamzah and al-Kisā'ī, one reading suggests that this phrase should read *fanādāhu 'l-malā'ikah*, without *tā' al-ta'nīth*, thus retaining the masculine form of the verb. Another reading, supported by the majority of authorities, suggests *fanādathu 'l-malā'ikah* with *tā' al-ta'nīth* on the consideration that the word *malā'ikah* is feminine. The reading of Ibn Mas'ūd suggests that it should read *fanādāhu Jibrīl*. In this respect, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī seems to support the reading of the majority. However, he also tries to reconcile this majority stance with that of Ibn Mas'ūd. He seems to accept the idea that "the angel who calls" is Jibrīl, if there is independent evidence for this assertion. Linguistically, he says, such an understanding is possible, if one considers Jibrīl the chief of the angels. He gives an analogy with the statement "somebody ate excellent food and wore excellent clothing." This statement does not mean that this person ate every single variety of excellent food and wore every single excellent garment, but only a small selection of them. By this logic, "the angel who calls" could be one of the angels, who would most likely be their chief, i.e.

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[132] Abū Ḥayyān's *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* includes this reading among the seven accepted readings (*al-qirā'āt al-sab'ah*). Muḥammad Aḥmad Khāṭir, ed., *al-Qirā'āt al-Qur'āniyyah fī al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, vol. 1 (Mecca: Maktabat Azzār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 1995, 94.

Jibril.[133] When interpreting the following phrase, which is *"anna 'llāha yubashshiruka bi yahyā,"* he reconciles the readings of Ibn 'Āmir and Ḥamzah, who suggest that the *anna* should be read with a *kasrah* (*inna*), on the one hand, and that of the majority, who suggest a *fatḥah* (*anna*), on the other. For those who read it with a *kasrah*, the following phrase is considered the content of a speech (*qawl*), so that this verse should be understood as *fanādathu 'l-malā'ikatu ... inna 'llāha yubashshiruka bi yaḥyā*. But for those who read the text with a *fatḥah*, the phrase is considered an indirect object, so that it should be understood as *fanādathu 'l-malā'ikatu ... bi anna 'llāha yubashshiruka bi yaḥyā.*[134]

A similar type of discussion takes place in al-Rāzī's interpretation of verses 124-5. For the former he quotes two readings: one is the reading of Ibn 'Āmir, who reads *munazzalīn* ("to be sent down for many times"); and for the other he quotes that of other scholars, who read *munzalīn* ("to be sent down"). For the latter, he quotes the readings of Ibn Kathīr, Abū 'Amr, and 'Āsim, who read *musawwimīn* ("send down"), and that of others, who read *musawwamīn* ("to be sent down").[135]

Interpreting verse 3:15, al-Rāzī raises two points for discussion, namely, *a'unabbi'ukum* and *riḍwān*. He gives two different readings for the word *a'unabbi'ukum*, referring to the seven readings with the exception of Ibn Kathīr's. The first reading, which is reported under the authority of Ibn 'Āmir, 'Āsim, Ḥamzah, and al-Kisā'ī, reads *a'unabbi'ukum* with two hamzahs. The other, narrated on the authority of Nāfi' and Abū

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[133] Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 8, 36-7.
[134] Ibid., 37.
[135] Ibid., 228-9.

'Amr, reads it *'unabbiukum* with one hamzah.[136] For this verse, al-Rāzī prefers the reading of 'Āṣim without giving any explanation for this preference. In this case, I do not see any point in explaining these different readings, except to restate reports on the readings. For the second word, he quotes the reading of 'Āṣim as *ruḍwan*, and that of others as *riḍwān*. In this instance, al-Rāzī seems to accept both, basing himself on al-Farrā''s explanation, which gives linguistic proof of the two possibilities.[137]

In explaining the meaning of verse 3:18, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī presents the narration of Ibn 'Abbās. Unlike most readings, the former reads this verse as *"shahida 'llāhu innahū lā ilāha illā huwa wa-'l-malā'ikatu wa-'ulū 'l-'ilmi qā'imam bi-'l-qisṭi lā ilāha illā huwa 'l-'azīzu 'l-ḥakīm."*[138] By raising a difficult theological consequence from accepting this reading, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī states that this reading is not accepted by the *'ulamā'* and is therefore unreliable.

Following Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's exposition of the variant readings in his exegesis, one might ask about the function of these readings. As far as his exegesis of the Qur'ān is concerned, there is no mention of why variant readings of the Qur'ān are explained. By looking at his exposition of these readings, one may speculate that he meant to say that the Qur'ān we have is, in one way or another, different from the one which was revealed to Muḥammad and disseminated among the early Companions. In fact, he does not state clearly whether or not he recognizes the current Qur'ānic text (*muṣḥaf*) as the authentic

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[136] Ibid., vol. 7, 212-3.

[137] Ibid., 214.

[138] Ibid., 219-20.

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one revealed to Muḥammad.[139] However, in view of the departure point of Fakhr al-Dīn

al-Rāzī's exegesis, it is highly unlikely that he questioned the authenticity of the Qur'ān.

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[139] Based on the presence of many variant readings of the Qur'ān, which sometimes differ widely from the 'Uthmānī text, Arthur Jeffery feels doubtful that the present Qur'ān is the same as the one revealed to Muḥammad. Jeffery shows three books, namely, *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif* of Ibn Abī Dāwūd, Ibn al-Anbārī, and Ibn al-Ashta, in which the details of variant readings were set down at an early date. For more discussion, see Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān: The Old Codices.*

Conclusion

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's magnum opus, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, offers a distinctive interpretation of the Qur'ān. Its unique perspective is the result of his exposure to a wide range of subjects, such as *kalām*, philosophy, logic, *fiqh*, and astronomy, on all of which topics he wrote independent studies or which he pursued as themes of discussion in his exegesis of the Qur'ān. There is also evidence of the influence exercised on him by scholars, especially those in the fields of philosophy and *kalām*, of both the previous and the contemporary generations. This contributed greatly to the way he perceived the Qur'ān, and lent a unique character to the methodological principles behind his interpretation of the text.

In his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, al-Rāzī approaches the Qur'ān rationally. This results in an exegesis that tends to be philosophical, in the sense that he tries to demonstrate rationally the Qur'ānic verses he interprets. This rational demonstration is not philosophical in the precise sense of the word but it does employ reason in explaining a variety of Islamic teachings as well as the meaning of the Qur'ān. His rational approach to scripture can be seen in his basic assumptions regarding the Qur'ān, such as when he reconciles Qur'ānic teachings with his rational argumentation, or in the way he interprets it, and defines the sources of exegesis.

On the issue of reconciling Qur'ānic doctrines and rational argumentation, al-Rāzī maintains first of all that everything in the Qur'ān should be understandable. This is because, as the Qur'ān itself declares, it is a guidance for human beings. In order for the Qur'ān to give such guidance, everything in it must be understandable. Al-Rāzī supported

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this idea with the fact that the Qur'ān was revealed in Arabic in order that the people to whom Muḥammad was sent could understand its message. He also holds the idea that the *i'jāz* of the Qur'ān lies in its *faṣāḥah*. In maintaining this, he gives a rational explanation of the Qur'ān's miraculous nature. However, it is sometimes difficult for him to apply this rational approach. When he discusses "problematic verses" he often falls into a circular argument. Faced with difficulties posed by certain verses, he does not provide a satisfactory solution to them but instead argues on the basis of the belief that "if the Qur'ān were from other than God, they would have found in it a lot of discrepancy." Here, al-Rāzī justifies the truth of one Qur'ānic belief by invoking another, which in this case does not provide a satisfying answer.

With regard to the way al-Rāzī interprets the Qur'ān, he systematizes his exegesis by setting aside certain verses for interpretation. Subsequently, he divides his interpretation of these verses into divisions, subdivisions, and sub-subdivisions, labeling each of them with certain terms, such as *mas'alah, su'āl, baḥth, qawl, iḥtimāl,* and *riwāyah,* depending on the nature of their content. This enables him to discuss some problems and offer solutions to them in greater detail. This process, however, does not prevent him from considering other verses, for he links a given verse with others, which enables him to reach a more comprehensive interpretation.

Similarly, al-Rāzī's definition and sources of exegesis rely very much on the use of reason. He believes that anything that can explain the meaning of the text constitutes exegesis, whether it is found in the tradition or not. Thus in his *tafsīr* he draws on several branches of knowledge, such as philosophy and psychology, in addition to the sciences

which are directly related to the Qur'ān. In order to interpret a verse, al-Rāzī refers to both revelation and reason. He places revelation, consisting in his reference to other Qur'ānic verses and prophetic traditions, on the same level as other rational disciplines, such as linguistics and logic. He maintains that neither revelation nor reason can invalidate the other. Whenever he encounters a verse which seems to contradict rational considerations he sets up a rational framework by way of linguistic justification to explain it.

Like other exegetes of the Qur'ān, al-Rāzī had to address certain themes and follow certain standard principles in discussing them. His lengthy discussion of the *muhkamāt-mutashābihāt* controversy, and his proposition of a linguistic framework for this discussion is a case in point. He maintains that a *muhkam* (clear) statement is one that may have any number of connotations, but of these one preferred, obvious meaning (*zāhir*) stands out. On the other hand a *mutashābih* (ambiguous) statement is one whose connotations are more than one, yet none is to be more preferred to another (*mu'awwal*, *mushtarak*, and *mujmal*). In spite of having carefully established this framework, he was as much a reductionist as other exegetes who tended to consider the interpretation that suited their school of thought as *muhkam*, and that which did not as *mutashābih*.

Another instance is al-Rāzī's position on the doctrine of abrogation, which he seems disinclined to accept. In view of theological difficulties arising from abrogating God's divine word, he appears unwilling to accept that abrogation should mean "to nullify/replace some verses by other verses or traditions." Rather, he sees it as "the replacement of the previous *sharī'ahs* of other religions with Muhammad's *sharī'ah.*" As

in his *al-Mahsūl*, he discusses in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* the pros and the cons of abrogation without stating to which group he belongs. It is obvious, though, that in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* he disagrees with scholars who support this doctrine in its traditional sense.

Al-Rāzī also pays close attention to the occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). He uses *asbāb* reports to arrive at a sense of the meaning, indicating as they do the context in which the text was revealed. His use of these reports, however, does not imply that he saw the meaning of a text as depending on its context. Rather, he supports the idea that the meaning of a text depends on its general reference, not on the special occasion on which it was revealed.

Last but not least, al-Rāzī quotes variant readings, not only from the three canonical reading systems --namely, the Reading of the Seven, the Reading of the Ten, and the Reading of the Fourteen-- but also from other authorities known in the fields of *tafsīr* and linguistics. His quotations from these readings serve primarily to show the various possible interpretations which previous exegetes had attempted. Al-Rāzī avoids any discussion of the implications of these variant readings, which Jeffery held showed that the text of the Qur'ān in Muhammad's time was different from that of later generations.

All things considered, al-Rāzī's rational approach comes across quite clearly in his methodology in interpreting the Qur'ān. In fact, this rational approach is even more apparent in his manipulation of the sources of exegesis, and on the issue of *muhkamāt-mutashābihāt*, for there al-Rāzī's use of reason outweighs his reliance on revelation. In the first instance, whenever there is a verse that does not accord with other verses or reason, he relies on linguistic evidence. In the second instance, the categories of

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muḥkamāt and *mutashābihāt* are determined by his rational evaluation of certain Qur'ānic verses.

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