

Université de Montréal

**Towards a New Qur'anic Hermeneutics Based on Historico-Critical and  
Intertextual Approaches: The Case of the Crucifixion of Jesus in the  
*Tafâsîr* of Eight Muslim Exegetes**

par

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## Abstract

The Qur'ân, together with the *sunnah* (tradition) of the Prophet Muḥammad recounted in *aḥādīth* (oral traditions of the Prophet), form the eternal source of inspiration and knowledge upon which the Muslim communities have acted and reacted to, as well as interacted with. Externally, their relations with many others, including Christians, have followed the same dynamics, as seen in the mirror of the Qur'ân and its interpretations. The topics of the divine nature of Jesus, the trinity, and the crucifixion of Jesus and his death on the cross, have been commonly considered the three main theological points of disagreement between Muslims and Christians. The Qur'ân's clear position *vis-à-vis* the first two points do not leave any space for scholarly debates. However, despite Muslims' actual consensus on denying Jesus' crucifixion and death, the Qur'ânic ambiguous image of Jesus' last day on earth has caused many discussions among *mufasssîrûn* (exegetes of the Qur'ân). This thesis is a textual analysis of the two Qur'ânic passages on this debated point of difference. For this textual and intertextual study, the *tafâsîr* (interpretations of the Qur'ân) of eight *mufasssîrûn* belonging to different *madhâhib* (schools of interpretation) from various periods in the history of Muslim-Christian relations are used in combination with recent textual approaches and methods such as: historico-critical and redaction critical. In addition, three new theories developed within this dissertation complete the hermeneutical tools employed for this research: the "theory of five layers of meaning," the "theory of double messages of the Qur'ân," and the "theory of humans' tripartite nature." In the light of these theories and methods, it emerges that the Qur'ânic ambiguity on Jesus' crucifixion and death may well be the Qur'ân's own invitation to Muslims and Christians to live with that unresolvable ambiguity. This dissertation's conclusion thus contributes directly to better Muslim-Christian relations, reinforcing the Qur'ânic call to both Muslims and Christians (Qur'ân 3:64, 103) to focus on major common points, to embrace minor differences, and to spend their energy on what might have a positive impact on their harmonious co-habitation, abandoning the rest in the hands of God in whom both believe.

**Keywords:** Qur'ân 3:55 and 4:157; Jesus; Crucifixion; Death; *tafsîr*; *nabawî*; *nafs*; *rûh*; Hermeneutics; Intertextual and Historico-critical Approaches.

## Résumé

Le Coran et la *Sunna* (la tradition du prophète Muḥammad) relatée dans les *aḥādīth* (les traditions orales du Prophète) représentent la source éternelle d'inspiration et de savoir à laquelle les Musulmans se réfèrent pour agir, réagir et interagir. Par le fait même, tout au long de l'histoire musulmane, ces sources sacrées ont été à la base des relations des Musulmans avec autrui, incluant les Chrétiens. Les trois éléments majeurs de différenciation entre l'islam et le christianisme sont : la nature divine de Jésus, la trinité ainsi que la crucifixion et la mort de Jésus sur la croix. La position tranchée du Coran quant aux deux premiers points ne laisse place à aucun débat académique. Cependant, l'ambiguïté du texte coranique quant à la crucifixion de Jésus et sa mort a favorisé de nombreux débats entre *mufassirûn* (les exégètes du Coran). Cette thèse est une analyse textuelle des deux passages coraniques qui traitent de cette troisième différence. Pour cette étude textuelle et intertextuelle, les *tafsîr* (interprétations du Coran) de huit *mufassirûn* appartenant à différentes *madhâhib* (écoles d'interprétation) et périodes de l'histoire des relations musulmanes-chrétiennes sont utilisés en combinaison avec certaines approches et méthodes récentes telles que : historico-critique et critique rédactionnelle. De plus, trois nouvelles théories développées dans la thèse enrichissent les outils herméneutiques de la recherche : la « théorie des cinq couches de sens », la « théorie des messages coraniques doubles » et la « théorie de la nature humaine tripartite ». À la lumière de ces théories et méthodes, il apparaît que l'ambiguïté coranique au sujet de la crucifixion et de la mort de Jésus est une invitation claire de la part du Coran incitant les Musulmans et les Chrétiens à vivre avec cette ambiguïté insoluble. La conclusion de cette thèse contribue directement à de meilleures relations musulmanes-chrétiennes, renforçant l'appel coranique (Coran 3:64, 103) à ces deux communautés leurs demandant de se cramponner aux points communs majeurs, d'intégrer leurs différences mineures et de consacrer leurs énergies pour une vie harmonieuse entre eux et laisser le reste dans les mains du Dieu qu'ils ont en commun.

**Mots-clés** : Coran 3 :55 et 4:157; Jésus; Crucifixion; Mort; *tafsîr*; *nabawî*; *nafs*; *rûh*; Herméneutique; Approches Intertextuelle et Historico-critique.

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## Preface

In May 2005, while doing a second Master's degree at Wilfrid Laurier University (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada), I presented a paper entitled *Jesus' crucifixion in the Qur'ân* at the annual regional meeting of the American Academy of Religion's Eastern International Regional conference in Montreal, Canada. A few months later, I enrolled as a Ph.D. candidate at the Université de Montréal, focusing my research on the same topic and presenting its results in this doctoral dissertation. When I started the redaction of this thesis, its title was *The Crucifixion of Jesus in Qur'ânic Exegesis (tafsîr) and the Science of Tradition ('ilm al-ḥadîth): Towards a New Hermeneutics Based on Historico-Critical and Intertextual Approaches*. The more my research progressed, the more I was convinced that my simple theories and discoveries on Jesus' crucifixion in the Qur'ân can be applied to the rest of the Qur'ânic text as well, and used as hermeneutical tools for a better understanding of the Qur'ân's multilayered messages. In the middle of this long journey, I realized that I had consecrated most of my time on developing and presenting ideas that could help the devout reader of the Qur'ânic text grasp better what the text has to offer beyond its historical and contextual boundaries. For that matter, Jesus' crucifixion was only a *par excellence* example. Thus, during the redaction of my second chapter on different Qur'ânic subdivisions within which I present my theory of double messages of the Qur'ân, I reversed the title of my thesis to its present one: *Towards a New Qur'ânic Hermeneutics Based on Historico-Critical and Intertextual Approaches: The Case of the Crucifixion of Jesus in the Tafâsîr of Eight Muslim Exegetes*.

### Useful information before reading

In this thesis, the translation of Qur'ânic *âyahs* mainly comes from Marmaduk Pickthall's *The Glorious Qur'ân: An Explanatory Translation*. The edition I use was published in 2000 by Tahrike Tarsil Qur'ân Inc. An online version of it is also available at <http://www.quranexplorer.com/quran/>. In some cases, in order to compare translations, I

## PREFACE

use other versions in English, French or Persian, and they are clearly identified in the footnotes. Apart from those translations of the Qur'ân, all other sources utilized for this thesis are in their original language whether Arabic, English, French or Persian, and all passages translated into English are the result of my own translation except when the translated text is part of a direct citation from an English source.

In this thesis, the transliteration of Arabic into English follows the method of the U.S. Library of Congress with the six following exceptions:<sup>1</sup>

1. For long vowels, circumflex is used instead of macron. (i.e. Qur'ân instead of Qur'ān)
2. Circumflex is used for *alif maqsûrah*. (i.e. 'Isâ instead of 'Isā)
3. Common Arabic names formed of the composition of a noun with Allâh are written as one word. (i.e. 'Abdullâh instead of 'Abd-Allâh)
4. *Ibn* is transliterated as *b.*, except where it comes at the beginning of a name or if it is commonly recognized as a popular name to identify a person.
5. In compound nouns, the definite article of *al* is not conjugated except if it is a part of a cited sentence in Arabic. (i.e. always *ahl al-kitâb*)
6. When the definite article of *al* is attached to a letter of *hurûf al-shamsiyyah*, the transliteration does not follow the pronunciation but it respects the written form. (i.e. *al-nafs* instead of *an-nafs*)

In this thesis, for the plural form of some popular Arabic terms such as *âyah*, *sûrah* or *sunnah*, sometime a small *s* is added to the end of the term. For the less popular terms such as *tafsîr*, *mufasssir*, *mutakallim*, *muḥâddith* or *ḥadîth* the Arabic plural form is used. To facilitate the reading, for Arabic terms that have several plural forms such as *nabî* a small *s* is added to the end of the term.

In this thesis, the transliteration of an Arabic term and/or name reflects its phonetics in Arabic, and the transliteration of the same term and/or name in Persian reflects its phonetics in Persian. For example, the first name for Zam who is a Persian writing author is recorded as Mohammad Ali, and the same first name for Ibn Jazrî who is an Arabic writing author is recorded as Muḥammad 'Ali.

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<sup>1</sup> This method is available online at <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cps/romanization/arabic.pdf> (consulted on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2012).

## PREFACE

In this thesis, the birth year and/or the death year of Muslims who have lived before the twentieth century are marked using the *hijra* calendar. Also, the birth year and/or the death year of non-Muslims as well as those years for Muslims who have lived through the twentieth century are recorded using the Common Era calendar.

In this thesis, apart from direct citations from English sources, wherever a non-English term is mentioned, if a translation is judged necessary, it appears in parenthesis after the term. In a few cases this order is reversed for rhetorical purposes.

In this thesis, wherever there are numbers separated from each other by a colon, they represent one or some Qur'anic *âyahs*. The number before the colon represents the number of the *sûrah*, and the number or numbers after the colon represent(s) the number of *âyah* or *âyahs* in that *sûrah*.

# Introduction

## 0.1 Introduction

As Daniel A. Madigan mentions in his book *The Qur'ân's Self Image*, Islam is considered by many scholars as “the most fully developed example” of a religion formed by a scripture<sup>1</sup> and shaped around a sacred text.<sup>2</sup> Years before Madigan, his teacher William A. Graham wrote:

The major importance of the written text of scripture in Islam is apparent even to the casual observer in any Islamic society. The centrality of the sacred book in Islam represents ... in many respects the culmination of the long Near Eastern tradition of the divinely revealed, authoritative written book. The importance of the book of scripture in Muslim faith and practice is especially closely related to, and in significant part derived from, the emphasis on holy writ in Islam's older sibling traditions of Judaic and Christian piety. Because Islam is not just one of the three major “book religions”, but in many ways even the most radical of the three in the exalted place that it assigns to its book, both ritually and theologically, it is not amiss to speak of the Qur'ân as the prototypical “book of scripture”.<sup>3</sup>

Graham followed the tradition of his own teacher Wilfred Cantwell Smith who, from the very beginning of the emergence of the modern study of Islam in the West, had clarified that the scholarly path towards the understanding of Islam and Muslims necessarily passes through the study of the sacred text in Islam, the Qur'ân.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As a technical term, “scripture” is only recently used in scholarly works to refer to “sacred text” or “divine word” of faiths other than Christianity. For centuries this English term and its equivalents in other Western languages such as French, German, Spanish and Italian were exclusively used to refer to the Bible. For more details, see Jane D. McAuliffe, “The Introduction.” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ân*. Edited by Jane. D. McAuliffe, 1-20. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur'ân's Self Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001 (p. 4).

<sup>3</sup> William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987 (p. 79).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, William C. Smith, “Scripture as Form and Concept: Their Emergence for the Western World.” In *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective*. Edited by Miriam Levering, 29-57. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

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This emphasis on the centrality of the Qur'ân, and thus traditional Qur'ânic studies, passed down through this *silsilah* (chain) of Western scholars, has come in reaction to the growing importance of non-textual approaches in the academic study of Islam since the last quarter of the twentieth century, which has emerged from a variety of disciplines other than Religious Studies. For example, Clifford Geertz' ethnographical approach in anthropology reached a wide audience from the 1970s onwards, far beyond its initial discipline. More recently, the launch of "Muslim Studies" as an interdisciplinary "option" within the Religious Studies program at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, Canada, to give but one programmatic example, reflects this trend to study Islam without any emphasis on its sacred text.<sup>5</sup> In that program, students can concentrate their studies on Islam and/or Muslims without needing to do any textual studies or training in the Arabic language. This development in Islamic Studies comes from the growing number of multi-disciplinary approaches used to understand especially contemporary Muslims, and thereby Islam. These more recent scholarly efforts have born important intellectual fruits. In fact, this increase in the variety of approaches affecting Islamic Studies opens up more theoretical choices in how to go about studying the Qur'ân too. The resulting growth in interdisciplinarity brings new challenges and opportunities to the study of Muslims' sacred text, stimulating a renewed creativity in Qur'ânic Studies today, integrating both traditional and modern sciences. In his 1992 review of two major books on Jesus in the Qur'ân, Andrew Rippin writes:

In all the scholarly attention given to the Qur'ân no subject has drawn as much attention as Jesus and Christianity. The motives behind such studies are clear and the need to keep refreshing the views they express is apparent, given changing world situations, church policies and increased inter-faith activity. The most difficult part of the exercise in the contemporary context is finding a new approach to the material.<sup>6</sup>

This dissertation is my effort to respond to that "difficult part of the exercise," choosing

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<sup>5</sup> For Geertz' approach, see Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Basic Books, 2000. For the option of Muslim Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University, see their Official web site at [www.wlu.ca](http://www.wlu.ca) (consulted on Sep. 1<sup>st</sup> 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Rippin. "Review of Qur'ânic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis by Jane Dammen McAuliffe; Christ in Islam and Christianity; The Representation of Jesus in the Qur'ân and the Classical Muslim Commentaries by Neal Robinson." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, vol. 55, No. 2 (1992): 321-323 (p. 321).

one of the main points of disagreement between Muslims and Christians: the crucifixion of Jesus and his death in the Qur'ân.

## 0.2 Scope of the Thesis

“Jesus in the Qur'ân” is a subject matter that has enormously contributed to the formation of a Muslim generic system of “religious Others,”<sup>7</sup> which has had a direct impact on interfaith relations between Muslims and Christians throughout history. The quantity of existing literature on this subject is astounding. Most of it is focused on three key points of difference between Christian christology and Muslim perception of Jesus: 1) his nature being divine or fully human, 2) his being the son of God or the servant/prophet of God, and 3) his crucifixion and death being true or false. The first two issues are tightly interrelated, and the third one benefits from a more independent nature. Down the centuries, the best part of the above-mentioned literature, on both Christian and Muslim sides of this interreligious discussion, has focused on one of the two first issues and/or on a combination of both of them. The third issue, however, appears less in the above-mentioned literature, and the discussions around it seem to have been carried out with less analytical depth. This, in part, might be because of the ambiguity of Muslims' textual sacred sources of information, including the Qur'ân and the *hadîth*, on the subject of Jesus' end on earth. Consequently, despite the theological importance of Jesus' crucifixion and his resurrection from death for Christians, the theological significance of this belief by Christians has been unjustly underplayed by Muslim erudites over the centuries. Indeed, one can difficultly find Muslim scholarly writings (apologetic or not) on concepts such as “the original sin” or “salvation” directly related to the belief in Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection in Christianity. As a matter of fact, most Muslim writings on the topic of Jesus' crucifixion and death show interest only in discussing the question of its historicity, or not, rather than its theological implications and potential applications. The Christian writings, whether academic or apologetic, also focus before anything else on the same question of its historicity. In a way, most Christian and Muslim scholarly writings on this topic end up mirroring each other rhetorically, resulting in what

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<sup>7</sup> Patrice Brodeur, *From an Islamic Heresiography to an Islamic History of Religions: Modern Arab Muslim Literature on 'Religious Others'*. Ph.D. Diss. Harvard University, 1999 (pp. 27-9).

## INTRODUCTION

some call a dialogue of the deaf.

The vast literature on the topic of Jesus' crucifixion and death in Islam can be classified into three categories: 1) those works that aim to prove the Qur'ân's acceptance of Jesus' crucifixion and/or death; 2) those writings that try to prove the Qur'ânic denial of Jesus' crucifixion and/or death; and 3) those researches that put an emphasis on the ambiguity of the Qur'ân about the crucifixion and the death of Jesus. Some works belonging to this last category aim to demonstrate that the actual consensus on the denial of Jesus' crucifixion did not exist among early Muslims and/or *mufasssîrûn*; it was a historical phenomenon that gradually emerged out of different historical contexts including various socio-political contexts of Muslim-Christian relations through centuries of interactions.

The first category is probably the most apologetic one. In this category, Christian scholars and missionaries resort to almost anything to build their arguments, from false translations of the Qur'ân to the misuse of incomplete bits and pieces of *âyahs*. As an example of this category, in an article entitled *The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?* Gabriel Said Reynolds contends "that the Quran rather accepts that Jesus died, and indeed alludes to his role as a witness against his murderers in the apocalypse."<sup>8</sup> He builds his conviction on different arguments among which two are intertextual. His first intertextual argument reads as follows:

*Sûrat al-mâida* (5) 17 asks, "If God desired to take the life (*yuhlika*) of Jesus the Son of Mary, and his mother, and everyone on earth, who could resist Him?" Here the Quran implies that the death of Jesus –like all deaths– was the act of God. Elsewhere in this same *Sûra* the Quran notes: "Jesus, son of Mary, is only a Messenger. Messengers have passed away before him" (Q 5.75). Once again this is a formula, in this case a formula applied elsewhere to the Quran's own prophet: "Muḥammad is only a Messenger. Messengers have passed away before him" (Q 3.144).<sup>9</sup>

Here, to build his argument, Reynolds cuts 5:17 into two pieces and only mentions the second part of a conditional paragraph. The whole 5:17 reads:

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<sup>8</sup> Gabriel Said Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 72, Issue 02 (June 2009): 237-258 (p. 237).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ قُلْ فَمَنْ يَمْلِكُ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا إِنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُهْلِكَ الْمَسِيحَ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَأُمَّهُ وَ مَن فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

They indeed have disbelieved who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary. Say: Who then can do aught against Allah, if He had willed to destroy the Messiah son of Mary, and his mother and everyone on earth? Allah's is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them. He createth what He will. And Allah is Able to do all things.<sup>10</sup>

It is clear that 5:17 is therefore about the Christian belief in the divine nature of Jesus, and in order to deny it, the Qur'an argues that Allâh has the power of destroying everybody including Jesus and his mother, and no one can stop him from doing so if Allâh wills it. Besides this example of cutting an *âyah* into pieces, Reynolds juxtaposes two very different verbs of *yuhlika* (destroys) in 5:17 with *khalat* (passed away) in 5:75 and 3:144 to prove that according to the Qur'an Jesus has died. None of these two verbs refer to the clear Qur'anic term for death, which is *mawt* (the verbal noun of *mâta* meaning to die) or even to the debatable term of *tawaffâ* that some *mufasssirûn* have considered as a reference to a level of death.

Reynolds' second intertextual argument is built around this last Qur'anic term. He writes:

The clearest reference to Jesus' death may be later in *sûrat al-mâ'ida*. In a verse that is part of a larger dialogue (vv. 116-8) between God and Jesus, Jesus remarks "I was a witness to them as long as I remained among them. You became the watcher of them when you made me die (*tawaffaytanî*)". The verb *tawaffâ* (verbal noun: *tawaffî*) that appears here causes significant confusion among Muslim exegetes. Yet the Quran itself offers no cause for confusion. *Tawaffâ* appears in twenty-five passages in the Quran, and twice in relation to Jesus (here and Q 3.55). For twenty-three of those passages the Muslim commentators generally follow the standard

<sup>10</sup> Here and after, except where explicitly mentioned otherwise, all translations of the Qur'an in this dissertation are cited from: Marmaduke Pickthall, trans. *The Glorious Qur'an*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. New York: Tahrike Tarsil Qur'an Inc., 2000, available online at <http://www.quranexplorer.com/quran/>. Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936C.E.) is considered a western scholar of Islam. Although was a convert from Christianity to Islam, he was considered as a spiritual leader for many Muslims of his entourage. His translation of the Qur'an, first published in 1930, was immediately approved by al-Azhar authorities, and became very popular among English speaking Muslims. His literal translation is among the most accurate translations of the Qur'an in English, and is still a reliable reference for scholars.



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definition of this term, namely God's act of separating the soul from the body, or making someone die.<sup>11</sup>

Here, besides the fact that many *mufassirûn* have considered this *âyah* as an apocalyptic conversation between Allâh and Jesus after Jesus' return and his death at the end of time (Reynolds does mention this point later), Reynolds does not explain why, if the Qur'ân is supposedly so clear, and as he mentions above, "offers no cause for confusion," *mufassirûn* have debated about the meaning of *tawaffâ* for centuries. He purports to solve the problem by calling it a confusion and accusing *mufassirûn* of not seeing the clear meaning of the term in the Qur'ân. In fact, such an argument can be used to "solve" any problem in any sacred text written in any language by anyone. On this point, this dissertation is one scholarly work among many other writings that prove just the contrary, demonstrating the complexity of *tawaffâ* and its different usages in the Qur'ân. One last point, but not the least problematic in Reynolds' above argument, is that the term *tawaffâ* (the fifth form of *wafaya*) appears 24 times in the Qur'ân, and *mutawaffî*, which is the active participle of the fifth form of *wafaya*, appears only once. The only appearance of this exceptional term in 3:55 is what Reynolds includes as the 25 appearances of *tawaffâ*. Also a quick glance at a few *tafâsîr* shows to what extent Reynolds' above statement claiming that "For twenty-three of those passages the Muslim commentators generally follow the standard definition of this term" is far from the truth. In fact, some appearances of *tawaffâ* such as in 39:42 and 47:27 have caused serious debates among *mufassirûn* with more important implications in *kalâm* (Islamic theology) than its usages in terms of Jesus.

The second category of works tries to prove the Qur'ân's denial of Jesus' crucifixion and/or his death. They suffer, more or less, from the same problem of shallow argumentation and biased conclusions. In this category, instead of rational arguments and intellectual efforts, Muslim scholars and imams often refer to narratives and use preaching tones to convince their readers that Jesus was neither crucified, nor killed. An example of such a work in this category is Ahmad Beheshti's book entitled *Isâ, Payâm Âvar-e Eslâm* (Jesus, the Bearer of Good Tidings about Islam). To prove his conviction

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<sup>11</sup> Reynolds, "The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?," 239.

that Jesus was neither crucified nor killed, Beheshti offers several arguments. His final proof is the following intertextual argument:

When one thinks about the list of injustices attributed to Roman soldiers, and reads carefully some passages of the Old Testament, he concludes that the whole event [of Jesus' crucifixion] is absolutely fake and manipulated. One cannot find any historical record about what happened to Jesus [during and] after the crucifixion different from what has been narrated in the Qur'ân and in the Gospel of Barnaba. Both the Qur'ân and the Gospel of Barnaba report an event called by canonical Gospels as "ascension," and during this event Jesus is taken from people of this world. The Glory Qur'ân says about that: "But Allâh took him up unto Himself. Allâh was ever Mighty, Wise (Nisâ' 158).

Thus, there is no debate on Jesus' ascension. The debate is on if he was ascended after he was killed or he was never killed and was taken to the sky alive. It has been said from Imâm Şâdiq (peace be upon him) that God raised Jesus with a wool cloth woven and sowed by Mary, and when he arrived up to the sky, he was told: "O Jesus, leave the garments of the world." So according to this narrative, Jesus is not dead yet.<sup>12</sup>

Beheshtî does not mention where one can read "the list of injustices attributed to Roman soldiers." He does not mention what passages of the Old Testament must be compared to the list of those injustices. More importantly, he does not explain how by comparing these two, one can conclude that Jesus was neither crucified nor killed. His simplistic narrative is as shallow as his argument, and his cutting 4:158 into pieces mirrors, in this case for an opposite purpose, that of Reynolds' as shown above.

The third category of works contains researches and writings that put an emphasis on the ambiguity of the Qur'ân on Jesus' crucifixion and death. While some of these works lean towards one of the two sides of this argument, what makes them fall in this third category is that they remain cautious in their final conclusions, lacking the kind of staunch positioning on one side or the other of this argument found in the previous two categories. One of the best examples in this category is a book by Kenneth Cragg entitled *Jesus and the Muslims*.<sup>13</sup> On the reference to Jesus' crucifixion in 4:157, Cragg argues that this *âyah* is more than a report (ambiguous or not) of a historical event. To Cragg, the *âyah* tries to convey a deeper message to its readers, a message that can be

<sup>12</sup> Ahmad Beheshtî, *Isâ, Payâm Âvar-e Eslâm*. Tehran : Enteshârat-e Ettlâ'ât, 1379 Solar *hijra* (pp. 57-8).

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985.

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understood only in the light of “the historical geography of the Qur’ân,” and its different contexts, and must be re-interpreted again and again in new historical contexts. Cragg writes:

It is fair to say, however, that, for Muslims in this field, history was never just for historians. Perhaps it never is. Historians are always more than mere narrators, and events are never just bare facts. Islamic convictions about Jesus and the Cross have never simply been those of mere investigators dealing with evidence. They have been those of believers persuaded already by theology. It is these *à-priori* grounds of what is held as to history which must concern us now. Historicity is involved inextricably with the larger theme of what ought to be, what requires to be, and these are determined by how we think of God and how we perceive our humanity. This is only another way of relating “the nature of the symbol” to the “nature of the fact”.<sup>14</sup>

Cragg’s approach has influenced many contemporary scholars in the field of Qur’ânic Studies. This dissertation hopes to be considered within the spectrum of works belonging to this third category.

### 0.3 Limit of the Thesis

The two oldest extent narratives in Muslim literature about the topic of Jesus’ crucifixion and death in the Qur’ân are those of Wahb ibn Munabbih (34-114H). He seems to be one of the very few sources of information for early Muslim interpretations of Biblical stories in the Qur’ân. Wahb’s narratives are the first Muslim written material, so far known and preserved, to have shaped the development of the substitutionist theory that later became the consensus among ordinary Muslims on the question of Jesus’ crucifixion in the Qur’ân. This substitutionist version of the event of the crucifixion of Jesus, of course, is not foreign to Christianity either. Through the Nag Hammadi scrolls discovered in 1945, scholars now know that the denial of Jesus’ crucifixion and the belief in a miraculous substitution represented one of the existing streams of interpretation in early Christianity for at least the first two centuries C.E. In his book entitled *The Crucifixion of Jesus: History, Myth, Faith*, Gerard Stephen Sloyan writes:

The first recorded denial of the reality of the crucifixion by a Christian

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

occurs in the Gnostic Valentinus, writing about 140C.E. as quoted by Irenaeus:

So Jesus did not suffer [on the cross],<sup>15</sup> but a certain Simon of Cyrene was construed to bear his cross for him, and it was Simon who was crucified in ignorance and error, since he had been transformed by Jesus to look like himself, so that people thought he was Jesus, while Jesus took on the appearance of Simon and stood by and mocked them.

... one should not think that there was but one gnostic view of Jesus' crucifixion, namely that of Valentinus.... [for example] The version of the gnostic myth attributed to Ptolemy, a disciple of Valentinus, by Irenaeus held that when the impassible anointed (or Christ) was brought before Pilate, the spirit that had been deposited in him was taken away.

What suffered, therefore, was what they consider to be the animate anointed (Christ) [or lower Jesus, born of Mary], who was mysteriously constructed ... so that through him the mother might display a representation [symbol] of the superior anointed (Christ) [the savior or higher Jesus], who had stretched out along the cross ... For all things –they say– are representations of ones in that other (realm).<sup>16</sup>

So far, it is possible to say that while the Muslim narratives denying Jesus' crucifixion, including Wahb's narratives, do not follow word by word any of the gnostic Christian materials found to this day, one can easily argue that these two traditions of interpretation do share a common substitutionist trope. In fact, many crucial elements of Muslim sources, to a degree, are repetitions of what can be found in those gnostic Christian texts. In the existing manuscripts of these Muslim narratives, narrators such as Wahb do not identify their source(s) of information, and present their interpretations of the crucifixion in a preaching tone and with a story-telling style that frees them from mentioning their source(s), if any, at a time when orality was dominant.

As it has happened several times before in the field of Textual Studies, any day can be the day when a new hidden literary treasure is discovered and an unseen manuscript comes to shed new light on our understanding of certain beliefs and practices at a given place and time in human history. As for the crucifixion of Jesus in the Qur'ân and the existing Muslim consensus on its denial, it has not happened yet. But until that day, a higher critical textual analysis seems to be the only way to improve our common understanding of the links between Muslim narratives and Christian materials. Such an

<sup>15</sup> In this citation, all parenthesis and brackets are from the original text.

<sup>16</sup> Gerard Stephen Sloyan, *The Crucifixion of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995 (pp. 198-203).

analysis is beyond the more narrow scope of this dissertation. Nevertheless, it remains open to such possible discoveries in the future, adding in the meantime its own additional layer of results from its careful intertextual and historico-critical analysis.

#### 0.4 The Question of Approaches, Theories, and Methods

In 1947 Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalafallāh (1916-1998C.E.) submitted his doctoral thesis to the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at Fu'ad al-Awwal University (now Cairo University). The title of his thesis was: *Al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣî fi al-Qur'ân al-Karîm* (the Art of Narration in the Glorious Qur'ân). According to Nasr Abu Zayd, before the defence took place, “some information was leaked to the media, and a heated polemical debate took place questioning the university academic regulation in a Muslim society that allowed such a thesis.”<sup>17</sup> Abu Zayd summarises the line of argumentation against the method used by Khalafallāh as follow:

- (1) A literary text is a composition of human imagination while the Qur'ân represents the word of God that should not be compared to any human discourse.
- (2) To deal with the Qur'ân as a work of literary art, *fann*, is to suggest that it is written by Muḥammad.
- (3) Furthermore, claiming that the stories of the Qur'ân do not present actual historical facts, as the literary approach suggests, is committing the greatest blasphemy that amounts to apostasy. It places the Qur'ân in a lower position than a book of history.
- (4) More insulting to the Qur'ân from the point of view of the traditional dogma is to claim that its language and structure is historically determined and culturally formed. It could be easily interpreted to mean that the Qur'ân is a human text.<sup>18</sup>

Abu Zayd explains that:

The objection against the literary approach to the Qur'ân is still very strong in the ongoing debate in modern Islamic thought between the traditionalists and the modernists, on one hand, and between Muslim and Western non-Muslim scholars, on the other hand. It presents to a great extent a continuation of the debate about Khalafallah's thesis, in which

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<sup>17</sup> Nasr Abu-Zayd, “The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'ân.” *Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 23, Literature and the Sacred (2003): 8-47 (p. 8).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

classical Islamic thought always plays an undeniable role in justifying the position of all the participants.<sup>19</sup>

This thesis tries to continue the line of argumentation that Muslim scholars such as Khalafallah drew decades ago. Its main goal is to open new possibilities for the re-examination of the Qur'anic text leading to the possibility of new interpretations. To do so, the example of the narratives on the crucifixion of Jesus is used.<sup>20</sup> On the one side, these narratives are studied in the light of some theories and methods developed at the dawn of the twentieth century under the famous movement of the new criticism, and on the other side the *tafâsîr* of those *âyahs* are examined with historico-critical methods. This implies a controversial combination of two approaches that, by many scholars, are considered to be the opposites of each other. The new critical methods are well known for their abundance of elements such as "author's intention," "reader's response," and "reader's psychology," as well as their emphasis on elements internal to the text such as "paradox," "irony," and "ambiguity." On the contrary, the historico-critical methods pay special attention to different contexts within which the text has appeared. They try to discover potential direct or indirect links between the text and the world around it. So the more the Lower Criticism within New Criticism aims to isolate the text by separating it from all its external concerns (even its author and reader), the more the historico-critical approach tries to achieve the text's *sensus literalis historicus* through external elements such as the time, the place, the events, the people, and the other texts existing at the time of the formation of the text. By combining a lower critical study of the concerned *âyahs* with a higher critical study of the *tafâsîr* of those *âyahs*, this thesis tries to achieve a better understanding of two things: first, the image of the crucifixion reflected in the Qur'anic text, and second, the same image seen by some *mufassirûn*.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> At the beginning of her article entitled *Christianity as Described by Persian Muslims*, Isabel Stümpel-Hatami presents a very useful and up-to-date list of western scholars who have worked and/or written on "the image of Jesus and Christianity in Islam." To read details about those authors and their works, see Isabel Stümpel-Hatami, "Christianity as Described by Persian Muslims." In *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*. Edited by Jacques Waardenburg, 227-239. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> For detailed explanations about new criticism, its history, and the challenges that it has faced up to now, see Leroy Searle's article entitled *New Criticism* in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edited by Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth, and Imre Szeman. Baltimore: The Johns

#### 0.4.1 The New Critical Methods

The new critical methods used in this thesis are two: a close reading of the Qur'anic *âyahs* on the crucifixion of Jesus, and a comparative contextual study of terms and/or expressions used in those *âyahs*, particularly the term *tawaffâ* (death) throughout the Qur'ân. Having chosen the close reading as one of my methods, I am fully aware of critics made against this method since its appearance.<sup>22</sup> I am also aware that any "closeness" to the text requires a full mastery of the text's original language to the extent that one is able to perceive very small nuances in meaning, such as those that may emerge from comparing a word when used within different grammatical forms. In reply to those critics, I follow Cleanth Brooks' reasoning quoted below, which sheds light on my own reason for choosing close reading nevertheless, as well as how "close" I might be able to get to reading the Qur'ân:

Besides a preference for emphasizing the text rather than the writer's motives and the reader's reaction, does there exist any other possible common ground occupied by the so-called New Critics? If so, it is probably "close reading." But it might be more accurate to substitute "adequate reading." "Adequate" is, to be sure, a relative term; but so is "close." (How close is close enough?) The substitution of "adequate" might help relieve the New Critic of the jeweller's eyepiece with which he is equipped as he is commonly pictured when engaged in a microscopic study of a text. Some documents do require a more careful reading than

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Hopkins University Press, 2005 (pp. 691-8). An online PDF version of this article is e-published by the University of Washington, and is available online at

<http://uwch-4.humanities.washington.edu/Texts/SEARLE/NEW%20CRITICISM-rev.pdf> (consulted on Nov. 4<sup>th</sup> 2011). For some detailed explanations about historico-critical methods, see Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Revised and expanded edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> In his article entitled *Should College English Be Close Reading?*, Don Bialostosky lists a good number of books, articles, and scholars who have written against the close reading method. He concludes that:

Our problem [caused by teaching close reading to our students] is that students have learned to distrust their repertoires of discursive knowledge and expectations and have never been encouraged to reflect upon them and to deploy them in the distinctive and interesting tasks of reading that literary works invite. If you wanted, as I do not, to call reading grounded in these repertoires "close reading," it would be because they would bring literary works closer to students, to the discourse they know and use, instead of distancing, even alienating those works from the language students already know how to use and enjoy. In this sense we could polemically characterize New Critical reading not as close but, as it sometimes has been characterized, elitist, sacerdotal, allegorical.

See Don Bialostosky, "Should College English Be Close Reading?" *College English*, vol. 69, No. 2 (Nov. 2006): 111-116.

others; that again seems a reasonable surmise. “Twinkle, twinkle, little star” requires less careful reading than Words worth’s “The Solitary Reaper.” (I’m not forgetting, of course, that some modern theorists could turn even “Twinkle, twinkle” or “Mary had a little lamb” into a verbal labyrinth, “and [find] no end, in wandering mazes lost.” Consider, for example, the number of meanings of “lamb” and the number of analogues for “Mary.” To a richly stored literary mind these two words offer almost infinite possibilities. In fact only weariness of the flesh or the adoption of an arbitrary terminus need bring such a free-ranging process to an end.)<sup>23</sup>

#### 0.4.2 The Comparative Contextual Method and the Theory of Humans’ Tripartite Nature

The comparative contextual method examines the usages of individual as well as the combined terms and expressions that individually hold or collectively form meanings within the concerned *āyahs*. This method is a very popular method used by almost every *mufassir* throughout the history of *tafsīr*. This method, also used by both Todd Lawson and Neal Robinson in their works on the crucifixion of Jesus,<sup>24</sup> helps to achieve a more accurate image of the crucifixion of Jesus in the Qur’ān. Both Lawson and Robinson focus on the terms *shubbiha lahum* (it appeared so unto them), and build their arguments on the similar usages of this expression throughout the Qur’ān. This thesis will put an emphasis on the terms *inni mutawaffika* (being translated: “I will gather thee” or “I will cause you to die”), trying to understand the phenomenon of death in the Qur’ān, and its relationship with humans’ nature.

As a fruit of this approach, this thesis presents a theory that I call the theory of humans’ tripartite nature. This theory explains how, according to the Qur’ān, while all alive creatures are composed of *al-jasad* (the body) and *al-rūh* (the spirit), human being enjoys the exclusive privilege of having a third divine element in his or her composition, *al-nafs* (the soul). Although both terms of “the soul” and “the spirit” exist in Abrahamic religious traditions, the difference between them is often not clear. One can find examples of mixing these two terms/concepts with each other throughout the exegetical works of Abrahamic traditions. Since the Qur’ān puts an emphasis on the non-divine

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<sup>23</sup> Cleanth Brooks, “The State of Letters: The New Criticism.” *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 87, No. 4 (Fall 1979): 600-601.

<sup>24</sup> See Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur’an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought*. Oxford: One World Publications, 2009; also see Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.



human nature of Jesus, this theory helps to analyse better the information given in the Qur'ân about the last day of Jesus on earth.

#### 0.4.3 The Theory of Double Messages of the Qur'ân

The third method used in this thesis is called the theory of double messages of the Qur'ân. According to this theory, which I have developed myself, the Qur'ânic *âyahs* must be divided into two main categories. I call the first category the category of “the prophetic verses” and the second one the category of “the messengeric verses.”<sup>25</sup> According to this theory, the Qur'ânic *âyahs* must be studied and understood under two main archetypes: first, *âyât al-nabawiyyah* (the prophetic *âyahs*) or those *âyahs* revealed in direct link with their historical contexts (i.e. cultural, economic, socio-political, etc.), reflecting the Prophet's life, his local human individual or collective concerns such as events around him, and/or people in touch with him; and second, *âyât al-rasûliyyah* (the messengeric *âyahs*) or *âyahs* revealed with no particular attention to the contexts of the Prophet's life. Both types can have their *asbâb al-nuzûl* (occasions of revelation) but the prophetic *âyahs* are responses limited to their *asbâb al-nuzûl*, while the messengeric *âyahs* use their *asbâb al-nuzûl* as opportunities to transfer messages beyond their contexts. The prophetic *âyahs* reflect the prophecy of Muḥammad, and they have a limited time bound and space bound audience, so the messages that they transfer are also time bound and/or space bound. On the contrary, the messengeric *âyahs* are the results of the messengerhood of Muḥammad presenting messages for all humanity at all times. This thesis tries to offer a new textual tool to Qur'ânic researchers, so they can recognize these two types of *âyahs* from each other. It also helps us understand how the inability to make this distinction has contributed to the formation of supposedly unchanging doctrines and dogmas in the course of Islamic history. Finally, this thesis develops and uses this theory to examine the *âyahs* on the crucifixion of Jesus, and tries to reveal to which category belong those *âyahs*. It seeks to explain the potential implications of this categorization for interpreting those *âyahs*.

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<sup>25</sup> The reason I do not use the Qur'ânic term *âyah* for these nominations is because this theory is not exclusive to the Qur'ân, but might be applied to other sacred texts too.

#### 0.4.4 The Historico-critical Theory and the Redaction Critical Method<sup>26</sup>

The historico-critical methods are vastly used by both Christian theologians and scholars of the modern study of religion.<sup>27</sup> As a branch of literary criticism, these methods try to achieve a better understanding of the meaning(s) of the text and its functions by reconstructing the historical context in which the author(s) and the reader(s) are connected to each other through the text.<sup>28</sup> As a theory, the historico-critical approach believes that the world around the text is reflected in the text contributing not only to shape the text, but also to form its meanings. So in order to achieve a sharper perception of those meanings, the external elements must be carefully studied, and the interactions between the text and its surroundings (including other texts) must be analysed. Although historico-critical methods might be considered as “heretical” by faithful orthodox adherents when applied to their sacred text, this thesis does not aim to use them to study the credibility or the historicity of the Qur’ân. Instead some *tafâsîr* of the *âyahs* on the crucifixion, as earthly works of humans, are the subject of this method.

The redaction critical method will specifically be used to analyze how some *mufassirûn*, as redactors of their *tafâsîr*, have shaped their works of interpretation, seeing if those works are united in their theological goals or not. To do so, this thesis begins its redaction critical analysis with a reconstruction of the outlines of different narratives about the crucifixion in the concerned *tafâsîr*. Then it verifies the existence or the absence of “structural unity” and “thematic unity” among those outlines, as well as the degree of “rhetorical unity” among the prophetic *ahâdîth* that are used in them.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Some scholars use the term “historical-critical” to refer to the same approach. I could not find any legitimate reason to prefer one or the other. I asked my supervisor, Dr. Patrice Brodeur, and he suggested using “historico-critical” without mentioning a specific reason. I will follow his suggestion throughout this thesis. So, whenever we have the term historico-critical, it refers to the same approach as historical-critical. (Conversation with Dr. Patrice Brodeur on Sept. 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011, at his office at the Canada Research Chair on Islam, Pluralism, and Globalization at l’Université de Montréal, in Montreal.)

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed description of historico-critical methods, see Richard N. Soulen, *Handbook of biblical criticism*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Revised and expanded edition. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> When looked at from behind the glasses of postmodernism, we know that, at its best, the historical critical method helps us to understand better the “true” meaning of the text at the time of its appearance or its copying. This “true” meaning, of course, is subject to changes, modifications, and evolutions over time and each version of the meaning will be “true” and “authentic” for its own time and within its own context.

<sup>29</sup> For a scholarly work on redaction criticism as scientific method, see Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1969. See also Terence Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah: the Redaction Criticism of the Prophetical Books*. The Biblical Seminar. Sheffield: JSOT Press. 1993.

#### 0.4.5 Two Important Clarifications

While explaining approaches and methods used in this work, two clarifications seem necessary: first, the question of the historicity of the crucifixion, and second, my relationship, as the researcher, to the subject of this study.

On the historicity of the Jesus' crucifixion, as Abu Zayd explains, when the Qur'anic stories are read as literary narratives, the question of historical authenticity becomes irrelevant. He concludes:

Quoting some remarks from classical sources, such as al-Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar, al-Zamakhshari and al-Razi, as well as modern sources, especially 'Abduh, Khalafallah emphasizes the conclusion that the stories of the Qur'an are allegories, *amthal*, that do not intend to convey historical facts per se. As *amthal* they belong to the category of *mutashabihat* or ambiguous. Because the classical commentators try to explain the ambiguity, they fill their books with data borrowed from previous religious traditions, *isra'iliyyat*. The literary approach does not need such data, because it differentiates between the structure of the story, *jism al-qissa*, and its meaning. This differentiation is based on classical as well as modern explanation. The classical explanation, which is based on dealing with the stories as *amthal*, distinguishes in the structure of *mathal*, allegory, between the meaning, *al-ma'nâ*, and its implication, *luzum*; both are not necessarily identical. The modern explanation is taken from the literary narrative dealing with some historical characters or some historical incidents, such as the character of the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra, dealt with by Shakespeare, Bernard Shaw and Ahmad Shawqi, and Sir Walter Scott's novels. The body of such stories seems to be historical, but the meaning, or the message, does not necessarily reflect history. The writer is entitled to enjoy freedom in using history in his literary composition; such a freedom is by no means allowed to a historian.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, this thesis does not aim to either prove, or disprove, the historicity of Jesus' crucifixion. In other words, the crucifixion of Jesus is not the subject matter of the historico-critical approach used by this thesis. Neither a historico-critical text of the Qur'an, as an anthology, is the subject of this study. Instead, the example of some Qur'anic *âyahs* and their *tafâsîr* as the foundations of the existing consensus among Muslims on the negation of Jesus' crucifixion is used to verify the functionality and the efficiency of the elected methods, as well as other methods presented within this work.

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<sup>30</sup> Nasr Abu-Zayd, "The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'an." *Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 23, Literature and the Sacred (2003): 25-6.

For devout Muslims, the historicity of the Qur'anic narratives is undeniable and out of question. So, the human's earthly and limited historical knowledge cannot defeat the ultimate knowledge of God revealing the truth to humans.<sup>31</sup>

On the relationship between the researcher and the subject of the research, this thesis follows the model presented and explained by Northrop Frye (1912-1991C.E.). As Frye explains, there is a difference between "knowledge of things" and "knowledge about things." This difference comes exclusively from the relationship between the *knower* and the *known*. To him, "the knowledge about things" preserves the distance (split) between the knower and the known, but the "knowledge of things" implies what he calls "some kind of identification or essential unity" between the knower (as the subject of knowing) and the object of his knowledge. Systematic research, as a method of knowledge, is as old as Greek Philosophy, and researcher as a seeker of knowledge whose goal is to become a knower sharing that knowledge with others can only fall under the category of "knowledge about things." Frye writes: "knowledge about things is the limit of teaching. Knowledge of things cannot be taught: for one thing, the possibility that there is some principle of identity that can link the knower and the known in some essential relation is indemonstrable. It can only be accepted, whether unconsciously as an axiom or deliberately as an act of faith."<sup>32</sup> This thesis must not be, in any sense of the term, considered as a confessional effort or an act of faith. On the contrary, it tries to reveal how a set of different contexts can contribute to the understanding of literary aspects of a narrative, irrespective of its divine or human nature, and use a "lower" critical comprehension of the narrated event (knowledge about that event through the text) to bring its readers' mind towards a "higher" understanding of the narrated event (knowing

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<sup>31</sup> Christian theology is not far from this position. As Iain G. Nicole explains:

... the union of the historical-critical method with theology ... will not be a particularly balanced or harmonious one as long as the former is made to play footman to the master. And if this interpretation is correct, if the role of a historical-critical method is essentially to confirm an albeit hidden *a priori* assumption or assumptions, what critical function is it permitted to retain? Or is theology's *historisch kritische Methode* to be no longer allowed to exert any specifically critical function at all?

See Iain G. Nicol, "Facts and Meanings: Wolfhart Pannenberg's Theology as History and the Role of the Historical-Critical Method." *Religious Studies*, vol. 12, No. 2 (June 1976): 129-39 (p. 139).

<sup>32</sup> Northrop Frye, "Criticism, Visible and Invisible." *College English*, vol. 26, No. 1 (Oct. 1964): 3-12 (p. 3).

of the event) in a religious experience. To Frye, this is “the central activity” of literary criticism. He writes:

The central activity of criticism, which is the understanding of literature, is essentially one of establishing a context for the works of literature being studied. This means relating them to other things: to their context in the writer’s life, in the writer’s time, in the history of literature, and above all in the total structure of literature itself, or what I call the order of words. Relation to context accounts for nearly the whole of the factual basis of criticism, the aspect of it that can progress through being verified or refuted by later criticism.<sup>33</sup>

Of course, the model followed by this thesis cannot prevent any reader from becoming believer for or against its content, but this is true about any other research doing any kind of textual or contextual studies on sacred texts.

#### 0.4.6 The Historico-critical Method and New Criticism

Warner Berthoff starts his article entitled *The Study of Literature and the Recovery of the Historical*, with some very interesting questions: “What knowledge are we in search of when we ‘study’ literature? Or, ‘what would we really know the meaning of?’”<sup>34</sup> In order to answer these questions, he first makes a distinction between three kinds of written works: “literature,” “scripture,” and “legislation.” Then he answers: “The great function of literature is to open the heart and increase wisdom. Or it is, in Dr. Johnson’s plain phrase, ‘to bring realities to mind’-and incidentally to teach us something of how to deal with them, to remind us that knowledge of realities will not come at a whistle but must be labored after with much pain and disappointment.”<sup>35</sup> But one might say that Berthoff’s statement about literature is also true about scripture. As a matter of fact, scripture also tries to bring realities to our minds, teaching us how to deal with past, present or future facts. For a scripture such as the Qur’ân, the Day of Judgement is a real fact as true as the creation of Adam from dust. Berthoff answers this problem by saying that what distinguishes scripture and legislation from literature is not in the nature of the text, nor in

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Warner Berthoff, “The Study of Literature and the Recovery of the Historical.” *College English*, vol. 27, No. 7 (April 1967): 477-86 (p. 477).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

its content, but in the relationship between the reader and the text. He writes: “The confusion of literature with scripture and legislation (or merely with ‘school,’ as Robert Frost sourly called it): that is what we resist, without in the least denying the power of books to change our minds and lives. It is in fact the erosion of precisely this power that disheartens us.”<sup>36</sup> Here, Berthoff mentions a crucial function of scripture: “written to be believed without resistance.”<sup>37</sup> As we saw before, a relationship of the same nature has been mentioned by Northrop. The combination of Northrop’s model and Berthoff’s definition would be: scriptures are oral or written literatures presented with the purpose of giving their faithful readers/audiences a knowledge of things, so that knowledge, in its turn, can bring past, present or future realities to the believers’ mind. The certainty of the scripture’s content is in part rooted in the high appreciation of its faithful reader/audience and the non-resistance nature of his/her relationship to the scripture. One of the reasons I consider scripture as a literature, (or as explained in this page’s footnote, a “class” of literature), is that although Berthoff separates it from literature on the basis of its reader’s non-resistant submission to it, his later argument on the relation between literature and history includes scripture, and represents it as a piece of literature. He writes: “literature also exists in and belongs to history; and it is as phenomena of history that works of literature can be ‘studied.’”<sup>38</sup> This is also true about the scripture when read from behind non-faithful glasses. He continues: “The study of literature (as of art, of religion, of war, of commerce, of every form of the civil and communal) is the study of a special sector and type of historical existence and the knowledge proper to this study is historical knowledge.”<sup>39</sup> This also is true about scripture when studied by a non-believer. He concludes:

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Although Berthoff separates scripture from literature, I believe that we must define scripture within literature. However, scriptures are more than a simple genre. Indeed, as pieces of literature, scriptures use and combine freely a vast variety of literary genres offering various styles and techniques (there are some limits: for example, scoffing does not seem to be present in scriptures). Neither can they be considered as a “school” in the literature (because of the diversity in their forms and contents). I therefore suggest that scripture be considered as a “class” of literature, and the common characteristic for all members of this class is that, as Berthoff writes: they are written to be believed without resistance. **Quotations?**

<sup>38</sup> Berthoff, “The Study of Literature and the Recovery of the Historical,” 482.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

For what we are shown through works of literature is how a collective wisdom [a knowledge of things and not about things] ... can operate for the duration of a deliberated creative effort within a single intelligence-and can act thereafter as a new cause, an instrument of unpredictable change and transcendence. That is, we are shown the fundamental pattern of the historical, that indeterminate successional dimension of existence (and of the knowledge of existence) shared so far as we know by no other species but uniquely created by the collaborative will and life-enterprise of individual men. ... We live by an immense complicity-and we are not born knowing this but discover it only through being told and told and told of it in incessant stories, anecdotes, serial participations.<sup>40</sup>

A major part of these “told and told ... stories, anecdotes, [and] serial participations,” come from scriptures. The passage about Jesus’ crucifixion in the Qur’ân is an example of it *par excellence*. If looked at as a non-believer, it is a piece of literature, a story (or a part of a story) recited from generation to generation sharing a collective wisdom, and if looked at as a believer, it remains the same piece of literature, revealing a wisdom about a past reality through *âyahs* sent to the Prophet, so Muslims can have a non-debatable knowledge of it.<sup>41</sup>

The two case studies below support the idea of the quick historical formation of the collective identity called “Muslim”, which was born within the *tafâsîr* of the Qur’ân. The first case study focuses on the name of the sacred book in Islam revealing the challenges of the nomination of the “Book” as the first step of its legal identification. The second case study uses two *âyahs* on the disciples of Jesus for opening a line of discussion about the term Muslim as the final product of the afore-mentioned collective self-identification procedure.

## 0.5 Outline of the Thesis

This dissertation is organized into four chapters. The first chapter offers a detailed description as well as a brief history of key issues such as the Qur’ân, the *Ḥadîth*, and the *Tafsîr*.<sup>42</sup> This chapter is enriched with two case studies: the first one is a historico-textual study of the term

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 481. This paragraph comes before the two previous citations, but I consider it to be a sort of conclusion for what Berthoff writes after it.

<sup>41</sup> Later, we will see how, within the same Qur’ânic *âyahs* on the crucifixion of Jesus, the uncertainty of all knowledge of that event has been emphasized.

<sup>42</sup> By using a capital “h” at the beginning of *Ḥadîth*, I refer to the ensemble of collections of *aḥādîth* that together function as the second main source of knowledge for Muslims.

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*al-qur'ân* (the Qur'ân) as one of the most important concepts that have contributed to the formation of a common Muslim worldview over time. The second one is composed of two parts: first, an effort to desacralize two *mufasssîrûn*'s texts, using them as examples to study the possibility of a direct impact of *mufasssîr*'s socio-political context, and his relationship to power on his personal reflections and resulting intellectual works; and the second part is an intertextual study of two Qur'ânic terms, *muslim* (Muslim) and *naşârâ* (Christians), challenging the existing consensus among Muslims on the function of these terms as identifiers for clearly distinguished religious identities. Together, these two case studies aim to address in a straightforward manner the uncertainty and the relativism that one must understand and deal with when working with/on the *tafâsîr* of the Qur'ân.

The second chapter offers the theoretical backbone of this dissertation. Within this chapter different subdivisions of the Qur'ân are discussed and a new subdivision is presented under the form of the above-mentioned theory of double messages of the Qur'ân. This theory, at the heart of this dissertation, aims to help the readers of the Qur'ân get closer to the experience of what I call “the fifth layer of meaning” or “the soul of the text.” This fifth layer is the last of five layers that I present as another theory within this same chapter.

The third chapter is a detailed study of the concept of “self” found in their two Qur'ânic variants of *nafs* (soul) and *rûh* (spirit). This chapter aims to better distinguish soul from spirit in order to reduce the confusion that has often existed in the understanding of these two important terms/concepts in Islam. This clarification comes as a result of using a Qur'ânic theory that I call humans' tripartite nature. As explained in this chapter, this theory is only partially new, as earlier versions of it have been discussed by some Muslim erudites, albeit in an incomplete and deficient way. I invite my readers to correct and solidify it through their own critiques. In addition, this chapter analyzes two different levels of death in the Qur'ân, as related to the two terms *tawaffâ* and *mawt*. This analysis reveals their differences and finds how they are linked to the Qur'ânic concepts of *nafs* and *rûh*.

The fourth and final chapter is the *raison d'être* of this dissertation. This chapter focuses exclusively on the question of the crucifixion of Jesus aiming to discover the historical roots of the actual denial of Jesus' crucifixion among Muslims. To do so, eight *mufasssîrûn* are chosen, starting with Wahb Ibn Munabbih's narratives followed by the seven other's hermeneutical reactions to him. This chapter aims especially to demonstrate the role and the



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impact of different socio-political contexts on the hermeneutical choices of the concerned *mufassirûn*. This chapter ends with a re-reading of the Qur'ânic image of Jesus' crucifixion in the light of the theory of double messages of the Qur'ân, as well as a re-examination of Jesus' crucifixion through the lenses of the theory of humans' tripartite nature.

# Chapter 1

## The Qur'ân and its Hermeneutics: First Steps towards a New Interpretation of Muslims' Sacred Text

### 1.1 Introduction

Down the centuries, the Qur'ân has always been the cornerstone for a normative Islam, as well as the fundamental principle of its adherents' daily life all around the world. Despite its modest size compared to the Christian Bible, the Hindu Upanishads or the Buddhist Tripitaka, the Qur'ân has always functioned for its adherents as an all-time legal reference, a timeless carrier of knowledge, an eternally flowing river of wisdom, and a profound source of inspiration. In our modern contemporary world, and after 14 centuries since its first appearance, the Qur'ân continues to speak powerfully to more than a quarter of the world's population. Considered unanimously by devout Muslims to be a word by word and letter by letter transcript of Allâh's divine word to the Messenger Muḥammad by the intermediary of Jibrîl (the Archangel Gabriel), the Qur'ânic *âyahs* are proudly memorized in their Arabic original form by Muslims of all ethnicities and languages. These verses are recited in all kinds of religious contexts (prayers, rituals, ceremonies, etc.) as well as in various situations in Muslims' daily life. For so many Muslims around the world, not only the Qur'ân can teach believers the best reaction when faced with anything new and/or unknown, but it is also the ultimate arbiter, giving the final word in any discussion, debate or conflict.<sup>1</sup> According to Alexander Knysch:

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<sup>1</sup> To have a sense of this power of the Qur'ân, it is enough to read the preface of any *tafsîr*. See, for example, Ḥâfîz abu al-Fidâ' Ismâ'îl ibn Kathîr, *Tafsîr Ibn Kathîr*. 8 vols. Edited by Sâmî b. Muḥammad al-Salâmat. Riyadh: Dâr Taiba for Publishing and Distributions, 1999, available online at <http://rowea.blogspot.ca/2010/02/pdf-8.html> (consulted on Sep. 1<sup>st</sup> 2011).

“The overwhelming central role played by the Qur’ân in Muslim piety” is an axiom that is recognised by both Muslims and outside observers. The book’s profound and pervasive influence on all aspects of Islamic personal and communal life and its ubiquitous presence in Islamic sciences, arts, literature, craftsmanship, devotional practices and everyday speech are richly attested. Less obvious and more difficult to gauge is its impact on the social, familial and political behaviour and on the spiritual and intellectual life of the average Muslim, although this, too, is easy to imagine.<sup>2</sup>

In 1988, eighteen years before Knysh, Mustansir Mir had written:

... in 1987 Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, editors of *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, spoke with satisfaction of the proven effectiveness of the literary approach to the Bible, adding that there is “a need, felt by clerical and secular students alike, to achieve a new accommodation with the Bible as it is, which is to say, as literature of high importance and power”. The Qur’ân, like the Bible, is an acknowledged literary masterpiece. But, unfortunately, it has not yet received the kind of attention Moulton speaks of with reference to the Bible. And it will probably not be in the near future that one will be able to speak, as Alter and Kermode have in regard to the Bible, about significant gains on the literary front regarding the Qur’ân.<sup>3</sup>

Neither Mir, nor anyone else, could have predicted that in less than a decade and a half, the Qur’ân and all branches of Qur’ânic Studies would become the center of attention in most Western academic institutions with programs in Religious Studies, especially in North America. This “attention,” though, was not of the same nature than what Mir had been wishing for. In fact, after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 in the United States of America, and because of the frequent and proud usage of Qur’ânic *âyahs* in most activist-extremist Islamic discourses, the western scholarship of Islam rapidly became interested in adding the systematic scholarship on Muslims’ sacred texts in particular and Islamic hermeneutics in general to the popular domains of the humanities and social sciences, specially to the modern study of Islam itself. Since then, this growing interest has enabled

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander Knysh, “Multiple Areas of Influence.” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’ân*, 211-233.

<sup>3</sup> Mustansir Mir, “The Qur’ân as Literature.” *Religion & Literature*, vol. 20, No. 1, The Literature of Islam (Spring 1988): 49-64 (p. 49).

textual scholars of Islamic studies to collaborate more intensely than before with their fellow scholars from all academic disciplines, for example, from arts to forensic sciences.

This chapter continues this interdisciplinary trend in modern Islamic Studies. It has two objectives. The first objective is to analyze the formation of the Qur'ân, its early history and the historical context in which *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* have emerged as two non separable factors in the understanding of the Qur'ân. The main goal of this chapter is to analyze how the partly concomitant and partly sequential formative processes that lead to the Qur'ân, the *ḥadīth*, and the *tafsīr* have helped Muslims define and shape a collective identity for themselves within the particular political power dynamics of the early development of the Muslim community. This new identity enabled early Muslims to establish a powerful empire, and to protect it from the potential danger of identity dilution. The following two case studies on how the concepts of “al-Qur'ân” (The Book) and “Muslim” (Believer) emerged as central defining concepts of Muslim identity, will exemplify how this identity dynamic shaped early Islamic history. The second objective of this chapter is to present and explain the theories and methods used in this thesis as a whole, as first demonstrated in these two case studies.

## 1.2 The Qur'ân

In the West, since the very beginning of the appearance of what is called today “Islamic Studies,” and more specifically “Qur'ânic Studies,” the Qur'ân and its integrity as one text has been the subject of debate among western scholars of Islam.<sup>4</sup> The theories and methods of these scholars consist of a vast range of scientific approaches, for example, from “pure textual studies” within the stream of Lower Criticism to “contextual studies” within the schools of Higher Criticism, as well as to the highly developed ethnographic approaches focusing on social aspects of Arabs' cultural heritage as reflected in their sacred texts. All those efforts are dedicated to a better understanding of, and a clearer explanation about, the emergence, the evolution, and the coherence of Islam's sacred text, the Qur'ân. They also try to reveal the roles that this text, as Word of God, has played in

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<sup>4</sup> Coming from all around the world, most of these scholars are non-Muslims or non-believers, and few of them are faithful Muslims. The nomination of “western scholar” refers to the fact that they are all trained in Western academic institutions of higher learning and work with theories and methods developed in the West.

human history up to the present. The results of those various scientific efforts can be presented in the form of a spectrum having, at one end, the “rejection” of the Qur'ân even as an ethical scripture and, at the other end, the “conversion to Islam” through the Qur'ân.<sup>5</sup> All scholarly works on the Qur'ân as a whole or on different aspects of it fall somewhere in between these two extremes. Most of them are clustered in one group or another, all of whom tend to fall closer to one end or the other of this spectrum, rather than in the middle which is where this thesis aims to be.

A clear example of a work that belongs to the first group of scholars (falling close to the “rejection” end of this spectrum) is the book of the Swedish scholar Geo Widengren (1907-1996C.E.) entitled *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension*.<sup>6</sup> Despite the absence then and now of any historical and/or textual evidences that would lead contemporary scholars to believe that the Prophet Muhammad was able to read or write, Widengren claims that “Muhammad himself has both read and written

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<sup>5</sup> Two examples representing the two ends of this spectrum are Cristoph Luxenberg, a pseudonym, and Vincent Cornell. The person behind the pseudonym “Luxenberg” is well known for his efforts to prove that the Qur'ân is a reformulation of an earlier Christian Syriac lectionary. In a review on his book entitled *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*, François de Blois, professor of Iranian Studies at the University of Hamburg (2002-2003), concludes:

It is necessary, in conclusion to say a little about the authorship, or rather the non-authorship, the pseudonymity of this book. An article published in the *New York Times* on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2002 (and subsequently broadly disseminated in the internet) referred to this book as the work of ‘Christoph Luxenberg, a scholar of ancient Semitic languages in Germany’. It is, I think, sufficiently clear from this review that the person in question [Luxenberg] is not ‘a scholar of ancient Semitic languages’. He is someone who evidently speaks some Arabic dialect, has a passable, but not flawless command of classical Arabic, knows enough Syriac so as to be able to consult a dictionary, but is innocent of any real understanding of the methodology of comparative Semitic linguistics. His book is not a work of scholarship but of dilettantism.

See François de Blois, review of *Die syro-aramäische Lesart des Koran: Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache*, by Cristoph Luxenberg. *The Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, volume V, issue 1 (2003): 92-97 (p. 97). For a detailed study/critique of Luxenberg's work, see also Devin J. Stewart, “Notes on Medieval and Modern Emendations of the Qur'ân.” In *The Qur'ân in Its Historical Context*. Edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds, 225-281. London and New York: Routledge, 2008.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, for an example of Cornell's admiration for Islam and its sacred text, see his article: Vincent Cornell, “God: God in Islam.” In *Encyclopaedia of Religion*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 15 vols. Edited by Lindsay Jones (editor in chief), 5:3560-2. Detroit: Macmillan, 2005. Despite his openly faithful tone, his strong scientific methodology, as well as his thoroughly researched analysis, prevents other scholars from easily dismissing his scholarly writings.

<sup>6</sup> Geo Widengren, *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension*. King and Saviour series. Uppsala, Wiesbaden: Lundequistska bokhandeln, 1955.

the Divine Revelations.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, beside numerous *aḥādīth* on his analphabetic lifestyle, on a few occasions, the Qur'ân itself puts an emphasis on his illiteracy as a proof for the authenticity of the revelations. For example, 48:29 reads:

وَمَا كُنْتَ تَتْلُوا مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَلَا تَخُطُّهُ بِيَمِينِكَ إِذًا لِأَنَّكَ الْمَطْلُورُونَ

And thou (O Muḥammad) wast not a reader of any scripture before it, nor didst thou write it with thy right hand, for then might those have doubted who follow falsehood.

Surprisingly, Widengren uses this very *āyah* as one of his main proof for his own opposite conclusion: “That Muḥammad himself, by committing his revelations to paper, purposely aimed at creating a Holy Book in competition with the Tōrah and ‘Evangel’, is perfectly clear.”<sup>8</sup> Widengren seems to consider what is a debatable possibility as if it is a certain historical fact. He does not take into account the numerous discussions among early *mufasssīrūn*, as well as among western scholars, about the question of the time of the first compilation of the Qur'ân, as well as that of whether or not the Prophet Muḥammad had ordered Muslims to put together the scattered Qur'ānic *āyahs* in order to make a book out of them.<sup>9</sup> On this last point, Kenneth Cragg (a leading scholar close to the same

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>8</sup> Geo Widengren, *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension*, 150.

<sup>9</sup> To have a sense of the confusing diversity of opinions on the compilation of the Qur'ân in the Prophet's era, see Hossein Modarresi's article on the integrity of the Qur'ân. At one point (p. 6), Modarresi writes:

The evidence in the text of the Qur'ân itself as well as in *ḥadīth* indicates that the Prophet compiled a written scripture for Islam during his own life-time, most likely in his first years in Medina. He reportedly continued until the end of his life to personally instruct the scribes where to insert new passages of the revelation in the scripture.

See Hossein Modarresi, “Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qur'ân: A Brief Survey.” *Studia Islamica*, No. 77 (1993): 5-39. Two pages later, Modarresi states that the belief in the compilation of the Qur'ân during the Prophet's life is a Shi'î belief, and that “The Sunnite account of the collection of the Qur'ân is completely different from the above. It contends that the Qur'ân was not compiled in a single volume until after the Prophet died in the year 11H/632.” (p. 8). Modarresi does not directly cite any *mufasssīr*, but refers to a list of major books of *aḥādīth* and *tafāsīr* with complete references (including the page numbers). While not being exhaustive, I nevertheless checked the following three sources from his list: Jalâl al-Dîn ‘Abd al-Raḥmân al-Suyûtî, *Al-Itqân fi ‘Ulûm al-Qur'ân*. 4 vols. Cairo: al-Maṭba‘at al-Azhariyyah al-Miṣriyyah, 1974 (vol. 1, pp. 212-3, 216); Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imâm Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*. 6 vols. Cairo: Mu’assisat al-Qurṭaba, no date (vol. 1, p. 57), available online at <http://www.almeshkat.net/books/open.php?cat=8&book=58> (consulted on August 31<sup>st</sup> 2011); Muḥammad b. ‘Isâ al-Tirmidhî, *Jâmi‘ al-Tirmidhî*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 6 vols. Edited by Bashshâr ‘Awwâd Ma‘rûf. Dâr al-Gharb al-Islâmî, 1996 (vol. 4 pp. 336-7), available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=1765> (consulted on August 31<sup>st</sup> 2011)]. From these three sources, it is not clear whether or not the Prophet

group) affirms that, by the death of the Prophet Muḥammad in 632C.E., although the contents of the Qur'ân were finalised, they were not collected all together in any final shape.<sup>10</sup> As for the famous Islamic historian Muḥammad b. Sa'd Kâtib al-Wâqidî (168-230H), in his main work *Kitâb al-Ṭabaqât al-Kabîr*, he devotes a whole chapter to the history of the gathering of the Qur'ânic *âyahs* and those who committed to writing and compiling them into one book after the death of the Prophet.<sup>11</sup>

A clear example of a work that belongs to a second group of scholars (falling close to the other “conversion” end of the spectrum) is the book by Laura Veccia Vaglieri (1893-1989C.E.), an Italian professor at Naples Eastern University, entitled *Apologia dell'Islamismo*. In this book, whose title was wisely translated into English as *An Interpretation of Islam*, Vaglieri writes:

On the whole we find in it a collection of wisdom which can be adopted by the most intelligent of men, the greatest of philosophers and the most skilful of politicians... But there is another proof of the Divinity of the Qur'ân; it is the fact that it has been preserved intact through the ages since the time of its Revelation till the present day... Read and reread by the Muslim world, this book does not rouse in the faithful any weariness, it rather, through repetition, is more loved every day. It gives rise to a profound feeling of awe and respect in the one who reads it or listens to it... Therefore, above all, what caused the great and rapid diffusion of Islam was through the fact that this Book... was the book of Allâh.<sup>12</sup>

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ordered a few selected *kuttâb* (writers) to preserve Qur'ânic *âyahs* in written form, or whether he ordered them “to compile a scripture.” Modarresi does not explain why most of his references for this Shi'î belief are Sunnî sources. It might be because he wants to demonstrate that this particular Shi'î belief originated with Sunnî erudites.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *Readings in the Qur'ân*. London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1988 (p. 26).

<sup>11</sup> See Muḥammad b. Sa'd Kâtib al-Wâqidî, *Kitâb al-Ṭabaqât al-Kabîr*. 8 vols. Cairo: Dâr al-Taḥrîr, 1968, available online at <http://www.al-mostafa.info/data/arabic/depot3/gap.php?file=i001129.pdf> (consulted on Sep. 1<sup>st</sup> 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Laura Veccia Vaglieri, *An Interpretation of Islam*. Translated from Italian by Dr. Aldo Caselli. New Delhi: Good Word Books, 2004 (p. 52). The back cover of the book reads:

The Prophet Muḥammad at God's behest, called men to the worship of one God and proclaimed that, by responding to this call, mankind would achieve true dignity, honour, prosperity and happiness. Within an astonishingly brief period, and over vast areas which were in the grip of ignorance, darkness and confusion were finally dispelled, order was established and all manner of beneficent institutions sprang into life, a high moral order was set up and the blessings of knowledge, learning and science began to be widely diffused. The strength of this message was its crystal clear simplicity and marvelous easiness, for Islam reached out to the soul of the people without having recourse to long explanations and involved sermons. Thanks to this message, bringing the ideals of tawhid,

Beyond this academic debate where the positions vary from biased rejection to emotional admiration, the Qur'ân remains the central pillar of a Muslim's faith; it keeps unified under its own textual "banner" Muslim adherents of all colors, ethnicities and languages.<sup>13</sup> Down the centuries, this unification has been shaped and strengthened by Muslims' belief in three aspects of their sacred text: first, the undeniable divine nature of the Qur'ân;<sup>14</sup> second, the preserved coherence of the Qur'ânic text;<sup>15</sup> and third the finality of the text.<sup>16</sup> But this unification has not been the ultimate stage of the relationship between the text and its adherents. It has rapidly led to the next stage: the formation of an identity around that relationship. As soon as the concept of a divine-integral-final text had been shaped among adherents, a strong collective identity was rapidly built around it. This identity was established based on the concept of a new *al-kitâb* (Book). In fact, even before its compilation, passages of the Qur'ân had already prepared the theological framework and the social ground for such a relationship by glorifying certain previous receivers of the revelations as *ahl al-kitâb* (people of the Book). I will come back to this important issue later. What needs to be explained is that at the beginning of the formation of this collective identity, an existing aspect/element of the text led to two other elements

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resalat, peace and harmony, paganism in its various forms was defeated, and human dignity finally became a reality.

<sup>13</sup> The very symbolic gesture of Muslims in different rituals (such as the ritual of *laylat al-qadr* among Shi'îs) where everyone opens a Qur'ân and holds it above his or her head, as a sign for taking refuge in the Qur'ân, is a ritualized interpretation of this unity under the tent of the Qur'ân.

<sup>14</sup> As a consequence of believing in the Qur'ân's divine nature, in many Islamic traditions and cultures, the physical Qur'ân cannot be touched before making the ablutions. This prohibition expands to its letters and even its punctuation. The sacredness descends to the words and/or letters as soon as they are written down or printed down with the intention that they be part of the transcription of the Qur'ân. Once there is a word from the Qur'ân in any text, the only way for throwing that part of the text away would be to leave it under running water or buried in soil, so as to allow for the natural process of decomposition to take its course. There is a debate among *mufitîs* on a possible third option: burning (with good intention) as another method for decomposing a Qur'ânic word.

<sup>15</sup> Much has been written on the integrity of the Qur'ânic text. For one of the earliest examples, see Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans*. 2nd revised ed. vols. 1 and 2, revised by Freidrich Schwally; vol. 3 revised by G. Bergsträsser and O. Pretzel. Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1909-26. For one of the most recent examples, see Jane D. McAuliffe, "Reading the Qur'ân with Fidelity and Freedom." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 73, No. 3 (S 2005): 615-635.

<sup>16</sup> Although this finality has been challenged by the Qur'ân itself (i.e. 31:27 or 18:109), Muslims unanimously believe that the Qur'ân is not only the final scripture, but that all of it, down to its last word, has been sent down to the Prophet Muḥammad before his death. Moreover, they believe that the Qur'ân potentially contains the answer to all human questions until the end of time.



and all three together prepared the ground for creating a new identity called “the *umma* of the Qur’ân.”<sup>17</sup> That existing aspect, among others, was the extraordinary literary beauty of the text leading to believe in the sacredness of the Arabic language,<sup>18</sup> and the spiritual-magical power of the text.<sup>19</sup> Arabic poetry contemporary to the revelation of the Qur’ân reveals early Muslims’ fascination vis-à-vis the incomparable literary beauty of the Qur’ân.<sup>20</sup> The inimitability of the Qur’ân considered by ordinary Muslims as the *i’jâz* of the Qur’ân is, in part, based on this literary beauty of the text.<sup>21</sup> Although the very famous historical debate on the ontology of the Qur’ân being *qadîm* (uncreated) or *hadîth* (created) caused the second major schism in Islam, separating the Mu‘tazila (Mu‘tazilîs) from the Ash‘â‘ira (Ash‘arîs),<sup>22</sup> theological discussions of this kind were not –and still are not– followed by ordinary Muslims. Instead, the beauty of the Qur’ânic *âyahs* has always been a matter that every Muslim, with a decent degree of knowledge in Arabic, can perceive and enjoy it on a daily basis. So, those Qur’ânic *âyahs* inviting Muslims and non-Muslims to try to produce a *sûrah* like those revealed to the Prophet, followed by the announcement of the impossibility of such attempts were popularly interpreted by

<sup>17</sup> It is enough to google “the *umma* of the Qur’ân” (without accent on the “a”) to see thousands of Muslim web sites that use this very popular expression. On Sep. 19<sup>th</sup>, this term appeared 86,300 times on the internet, and its equivalent in Arabic *umma al-Qur’ân* appeared 20,200,000 times.

<sup>18</sup> For some recent works on the literary beauty of the Qur’ân in the eyes of early Muslim believers, see Asma Afsaruddin, “Excellences of the Qur’an: Textual Sacrality and the Organization of Early Islamic Society.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 122, No. 1 (Jan.-March 2002): 1-24. See also Nasr Abu-Zayd, “The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur’ân.” *Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 23, Literature and the Sacred (2003): 8-47.

<sup>19</sup> For an example of a scholarly work on the magical powers of the Qur’ân, see Constant Hames, “L’usage talismanique du Coran.” *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, vol. 218, Issue 1 (2001): 83-95.

<sup>20</sup> Much has been published in the Muslim world on the literary beauty of the Qur’ân. For an example of an academic work by a Muslim, see Miraj ul-Islam Zia, “Artistic Beauties of the Qur’ân: A Stylistic Analysis of *Sûrat al-Yûsuf* and *Sûrat al-Naml*.” *Research Journal RJIC* published by Sheikh Zayed Centre for Islamic and Arabic Studies at the University of Peshawar, vol. 1, No. 3 (1991): 1-37. For an example of a non-Muslim’s work on this subject matter, see Alan Jones, *Arabic through the Qur’ân*. Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Despite its popularity among ordinary Muslims, the literary beauty of the Qur’ân is not considered as a miracle by *mufasssirûn* and Muslim erudites. See, for example, many *tafâsîr* on 2:23 or 10:38.

<sup>22</sup> It is now generally believed that the first schism to take place among Muslims happened on the day of the Prophet’s death, over the question of his succession. The three major branches that later came to be known as Sunni, Shi’i, and Khariji Islam in the course of the first three centuries of Islamic history developed their own understanding of what took place on that special day in early Islamic history, in light of subsequent historical events, such as, in particular, the battle of Siffin (657C.E.).

ordinary Muslims as the Qur'ân's call to contest its divine literary beauty.<sup>23</sup> This ultimate divine beauty was perceived by early Muslims as a clear evidence for the sacredness of the Qur'ân's language. A language that irrespective of the adherent's ability to understand it or not, became a medium between the believer and the unreachable divinity through both oral and written practices. Leonard Librande discusses how the calligraphy of the Qur'ânic *âyahs* goes far beyond the transmission of the sacred text among humans, and becomes a vehicle for the presence of the divine, as well as a tool for the transmission of the sacredness from the physical Word of God to the calligraphy (or even the calligrapher).<sup>24</sup> This presence of the divine in written words presents itself through a multifunctional power with three dimensions: the power to bless, the power to heal, and the power to protect.<sup>25</sup> Each function of this power has given birth to its specific rituals.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> In fact, many possibilities have been discussed among *mufasssîrûn* about this Qur'ânic claim that no one can bring forth a *sûrah* like those found in the Qur'ân. Some have said that Arabs were very capable of composing something similar to the Qur'ân, but every time they tried God Himself intervened and disabled them. This theory called *şarfa* was initially discussed by some Mu'tazilîs. Others have said that the inimitable miracle of the text is in its content since it truly reveals about the unknown past and truly predicts about the future. Other possibilities have also been discussed. Yet, the stylistic beauty of the Qur'ân is the most popular reason given to explain the Qur'ân's inimitability. Surprisingly, this aspect has not been discussed in the many *tafsîr* that include comments on the *âyahs* in question. For an example of Muslim works on the inimitability (or miracle, *i'jâz*) of the Qur'ân, see Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabâṭabâ'î, *Al-Mizân fi Tafsîr al-Qur'ân*. 20 vols. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamî li al-Maṭbû'ât, 1974, under 10:38, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on Sep. 4<sup>th</sup> 2011). For an example of western scholarly works on the *i'jâz* of the Qur'ân, see Jaroslav Stetkevych, "Arabic Hermeneutical Terminology: Paradox and the Production of Meaning." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 48, No. 2 (April 1989): 81-96.

<sup>24</sup> Leonard Librande, "The calligraphy of the Qur'ân: How it functions for Muslims." *Religion*, vol. 9, Issue 1 (Spring 1979): 36-52.

<sup>25</sup> Fahmida Suleman categorizes these powers under four categories: "the power of the sacred text to sanctify, beautify, politicise, or bestow talismanic properties on spaces and objects." See Fahmida Suleman's introduction in *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur'ân and its Creative Expressions*. Edited by Fahmida Suleman. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007 (p. 14).

<sup>26</sup> An example for the blessing power of the Qur'ânic text is the tradition of starting a marriage certificate by a Qur'ânic *ayah* (mostly 16:72), or hanging Qur'ânic calligraphies on the walls at home. An example for the healing power of the written form of the Qur'ân is the ritual of writing Qur'ânic *âyahs* on a tissue, then putting the tissue on the painful part of the body; or reciting some Qur'ânic *âyahs* while blowing on *nabât* (crystallized sugar), then making a drink with that sugar and giving it to the ill person or writing some Qur'ânic *âyahs* with saffron, then dissolving them in water and asking the ill person to drink this water; or reciting some *âyahs* and blowing in the four directions to be protected from enemies; an example for the protecting power of the written form is the tradition of hanging Q 68:51 (in a box made of tissue, silver or gold) on a newborn's cloth to protect him/her from evil eye. See Sheikh 'Abbâs Qomî, *Mafâṭih al-Janân*. Beirut: Dâr al-Ta'âruf li al-Maṭbû'ât, 2009.

Yet, the spiritual-magical power of the oral practice supersedes the power of the written form.<sup>27</sup> The *sûrah* 113 of the Qur'ân represents Muslims' indisputable proof for this power. On the *asbâb al-nuzûl* of this *sûrah*, most *mufasssîrûn* have mentioned a *hadîth* according to which a Jew<sup>28</sup> asks some women<sup>29</sup> to cast a magic spell on the Prophet through their witchcraft powers. They recite their spells while knotting cords and blowing in them. Those spells make the Prophet sick (in some versions they make him lose his memory which makes more sense as a fighting technic against a Prophet), but two angels come to the Prophet and inform him of what happened. They give him the location of a well where those knots have been thrown in. The Prophet sends 'Ali, Zubayr and 'Ammar to find the well and to take out the knots and open them, then to fill the well with earth.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile Jibril descends and recites *sûrah* 113 to the Prophet, so he can undo the magical spell against him by reciting that *sûrah*.<sup>31</sup> Beside this *sûrah*, the *tafâsîr* of some other Qur'ânic *âyahs* attribute the same metaphysical power to the recitation of

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Some Qur'ânic *âyahs* with saffron, then dissolving it in water and asking the ill person to drink it; an example for the protecting power of the written form is the tradition of hanging Q 68:51 (in a box made of tissue, silver or gold) on a newborn's cloth to protect him/her from evil eye.

<sup>27</sup> Almost in each *madhhab*, one can find numerous books written by Muslims functioning as manuals for helping adherents benefiting from the magical power of the Qur'ânic words and/or prayers. As an example, a very popular book of this kind in Shi'î tradition is called *Mafâtîh al-Janân* (lit. keys to the gardens of paradise). This book can be found beside the Qur'ân in most Shi'î houses. It has been compiled by Sheikh 'Abbâs Qomî (1255-1310H) and it contains, among other things, detailed instructions for healing diseases, eliminating enemies' power, strengthening memory, etc., by using the power of the Qur'ânic words or *âyahs*. A variety of techniques are taught in this book. Some of them consist of reciting the *âyahs* and blowing in a tissue, then putting the tissue on the painful part of the body or reciting some Qur'ânic *âyahs* and blowing into *nabât* (crystallized sugar), then making a drink with that sugar and giving it to the ill person, or reciting some *âyahs* and blowing in the four directions to be protected from enemies. See Sheikh 'Abbâs Qomî, *Mafâtîh al-Janân*.

<sup>28</sup> Some have recorded his name as Lubayd b. A'sam (i.e. Ibn Kathîr), and some have recorded it as Lubay b. Mu'sam (i.e. Abu Bakr al-Jazâ'irî).

<sup>29</sup> Fakhr al-Dîn al-Râzî (544-606H) introduces them as Lubayd's daughters. See Muḥammad b. 'Umar Fakhr al-Dîn al-Râzî, *Mafâtîh al-Ghayb: al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 32 vols. Cairo: Dâr al-Fikr, 1982, under *Sûrah Al-Falaq* (Chapter 113), available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=1372> (consulted on Sep. 7<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Some *mufasssîrûn* (mostly Shi'î), such as Fayḍ al-Kâshânî (d. 1680C.E.), mention only 'Ali ibn abi Ṭâlib as the only one receiving this mission from the Prophet. See Mullâ Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kâshânî, *Al-Şâfi fi Tafsîr Kalâm Allâh al-Wâfi*. 5 vols. Edited by Ḥusayn al-A'lamî. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamî, 1979-82, under *sûrah* 113. In his version of the *hadîth*, 'Ali brings the cords to the Prophet, and the Prophet sees 11 open knots in them. Then the angel Jibril descends at the end of the *hadîth*.

<sup>31</sup> In some *tafâsîr*, at the end of the *hadîth*, Jibril recites both *sûrahs* 113 and 114. For example, see Fayḍ al-Kâshânî, *Al-Şâfi fi Tafsîr Kalâm Allâh al-Wâfi*, under *sûrah* 113.

the sacred text, and reconfirm the efficiency of the afore-mentioned power.<sup>32</sup> As all other rituals, the magical result stands on two pillars: the correct and meticulous execution of the recitation and the faithful belief in it.<sup>33</sup>

This ceremonial combination of act and belief creates a powerful link between the adherent and the text, in a way that no outsider will be able to achieve. In turn, this sense of belonging shapes an allegiance of identity shared by believers having the same sacred words in hand. In other words, “the *umma* of the Qur’ân” becomes an *umma* that recites the Book, believes in it, and is exclusively privileged to benefit from the metaphysical power of such recitations. In the triangle of “Believer,” “Book,” and “Divinity,” the book becomes the sign between the believer and the divinity. It reflects the divinity not only on paper, but also in the believer’s mouth.<sup>34</sup> In this sense, the Qur’ân as a whole becomes “The Sign” of God, and believing in this “Sign,” and building an individual relationship with it becomes a necessary key to enter the realm of Allâh on earth as His vicegerent. Jacques Waardenburg briefly explains this necessity by writing:

It is insignificant that hardly anyone who identifies him- or herself as a Muslim ever exchanges Muslim identity for another one. Although this is a social fact, there is something elusive about it, since it means different things at the same time. It implies basically a confession of faith and, though often indirectly, membership of a Muslim community and of the Muslim *umma* at large. Consequently, however “social” a Muslim may be, an appeal can always be made by fellow Muslims to the fideistic aspect of Muslim identity. Apparently a Muslim receives his or her identity less by mere adhering to the “religion” of Islam than by actually becoming aware of –and arriving at a reasonable insight into– the “signs” of God, reading and understanding them as such, taking an attitude of *Islam* towards God, and participating in communal life with other Muslims, with an adherence to its basic values and with mutual solidarity.<sup>35</sup>

In this “formula” suggested by Waardenburg, the Qur’ân, as a whole, becomes “The

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<sup>32</sup> For example, see the *tafâsîr* of 68:51.

<sup>33</sup> In this case, the correct execution is the pronunciation for the right number of times, at the right moment of the day, month or year, and in the right place.

<sup>34</sup> Under the influence of Christianity (i.e. 1 Cor. 3:17; Mat. 5:11), some Sufis consider the term *haramullâh* (the Harem of Allâh) to refer to a human’s mouth.

<sup>35</sup> Jacques Waardenburg, “Islamic Studies and the History of Religions: An Evaluation.” In *Mapping Islamic Studies: Genealogy, continuity and Change*. Edited by Azim Nanji, 181-219. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997 (p. 206).

Sign” over all other signs. In the adherent’s eyes, this relationship with “The Sign” not only opens the door to a connection between the heavens and earth, but also becomes a tool in the adherent’s hand to use the heavenly power of God on earth. In this situation, the miraculous beauty of the text functions as a backbone for believing in the supra-human nature of the “Book,” its sacredness. In turn, this sacredness is reflected in the extraordinary power of each and every “part” of the “Book,” its words, letters and sounds. So, the divine power of the Word of God, as well as a highly distinguishable and honourable degree of dignity are transferred to the faithful adherent by the means of recitation.<sup>36</sup>

### 1.2.1 The Compilation of the Qur’ân

There is an endless debate among scholars of the Qur’ân (both Muslims and non-Muslims) on who compiled the first Qur’ân in between two covers. Much has been written on that matter and it is not our intention here to focus on this debate.<sup>37</sup> Our interest has more to do with the socio-cultural implications of this fact that the Qur’ân took on a written form in between two covers from a very early time in the formation of what is called today the “Islamic Empire.” Informed by the Qur’ân, early Muslims were aware that some of those who had received God’s revelations before them were privileged to fall under the category of “people of the Book.” In order to become a member of that privileged “class” of people, early Muslims felt compelled also to have their own “Book,” so as to achieve the same status of belonging to a people with a divine scripture, and thus become a “people of the Book” too.<sup>38</sup> Muslims’ early conquests of

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<sup>36</sup> Even today, it is highly appreciated (and considered to be “chic”) if one can use some Qur’ânic expressions in his or her daily conversations.

<sup>37</sup> In his long article entitled *Shahrastâni on the Arcana of the Qur’an: A Preliminary Evaluation*, Toby Mayer studies al-Shahrastâni’s theory (479-548H) of the compilation and canonization of the Qur’ân. The article presents, among other things, valuable information on the diversity of Muslim erudites’ opinions on the compilation of the Qur’ân. See Toby Mayer, “Shahrastâni on the Arcana of the Qur’an: A Preliminary Evaluation.” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, vol. 7, No. 2 (2005): 61-100.

<sup>38</sup> In fact, the Qur’ân credits *ahl al-kitâb* on different occasions, and honours them by directly addressing them in some of its speeches. The third chapter of the Qur’ân contains most of these Qur’ânic admirations and lovingly blames on *ahl al-kitâb*. See, for example, 3:20, 23, 64, 65, 69, 70, 71, 72, 75, 78, 98, 99, 110, 113, 199.

Zoroastrian and Christian territories presented them with a new political situation that required ruling over nations of “peoples of the book,” which probably only augmented that need to become their own kind of “people of the Book.” Once a non-Muslim territory was conquered in the name of God, the inevitable challenge for the conqueror, as the new ruler, was to find a legitimate source for his superiority. In this matter, the Qur’ân was not a big help. In fact, the Qur’ânic message calling all people to equality and justice was against the traditional and well known superior-ruler-inferior-ruled-over power dynamic accepted in conquered territories within probably most of human history. The Qur’ânic new concept of *ummah* initially launched by the Prophet right after his migration to Medina was causing even a bigger problem.<sup>39</sup> That concept appeared frequently in the ordinance granted by the Prophet called *The Pact of Medina* (sometimes called *The Constitution of Medina*). The word *ummah* in that text clearly included Jews living in and around the city of Yathrib giving them the same rights, freedoms, and responsibilities as the Muslim followers of the new faith.<sup>40</sup> As a model, the pact of Medina granted an equal social status to the many Jewish and few Christian inhabitants of the conquered regions, both of whom were part of this concept of the “people of the Book”. Frederick M. Denny writes:

The *ummah* of the Constitution is made up of believers and Muslims, and quite possibly Jews as well (although they may constitute a separate *ummah* “alongside”). All the kinship groups mentioned are subsumed under this *ummah* idea, a very significant fact. But why are the believers distinguished from the Muslims? ... This preponderance of *mu’min(un)* [believer(s)] may indicate an early date for much of the Constitution, before *muslim* was used as the name for the followers of Muḥammad, or at least before it gained a clear technical sense limited to the followers of Muḥammad.<sup>41</sup>

We will come back to the term “Muslim” as the main allegiance of a collective identity

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<sup>39</sup> According to Noldeke’s chronology, the term *ummah* has first appeared sometime during the Meccan period, but Watt believes that the term first appeared after the Prophet had already formed his community at Medina. See William Montgomery Watt, *Muḥammad at Medina*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956 (p. 240).

<sup>40</sup> For a full text of the pact of Medina, see [http://www.constitution.org/cons/medina/con\\_medina.htm](http://www.constitution.org/cons/medina/con_medina.htm) (consulted on Sep. 4<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Frederick M. Denny, “*Ummah* in the Constitution of Medina.” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 36, No. 1 (Jan. 1977): 39-47 (p. 43).

shared by the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad. However, before that identity took shape, in an era of rapid expansion of Islam where the new rulers' supremacy, as well as the legitimacy of their power were under question by their own sacred text and/or the tradition of their own Prophet, the concept of "the *ummaḥ* of the Qur'ân" having this particular "Book" in its center with characteristics such as linguistically sacred, non-recitable and untouchable for non-believers, and offering supra-human strength to its adherents, enormously helped dividing the new Muslim rulers from the mostly non-Muslim peoples they ruled over, legitimizing in their view the ruler's acts of power. This addition to the existing concept of *ummaḥ* helped the conquerors to shift from the anthropocentric nature of the concept of *ummaḥ* to a more text-centric nature of the same concept putting the text, and human's relationship to God, before both the people and humans' relationship to other humans, resulting in the superiority of the bearer of the first relationship to those missing it.

As the first step to achieve this historically preferred superiority in order to secure stability of political power, and in order to establish this necessary dichotomy using the text as the divider of "us" from "them," some early Muslim conquerors needed, before anything, a uniform text between two covers, so that all those who share the identity of belonging to the *ummaḥ* of the text can refer to the same unchangeable sacred text, clinging to its verses and benefiting from its exclusively offered divine power.<sup>42</sup> In this process, the more independent the identity of this new sacred book did become in

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<sup>42</sup> The concept of *dhimmi* is among the most significant results of this early Muslim rulers' effort to establish a legal and social dichotomy in the societies living in the conquered non-Muslim regions. As Bat Ye'or mentions:

Controlling a huge empire, the invading Arab armies were a small minority among the mass of non-Muslims, mainly Christians and Zoroastrians. The Byzantine and Persian systems of administration were retained for practical reasons, but a special legislation regulated the relations between the Arabs and the indigenous people, between Muslims and non-Muslims. Basing themselves on the Koran and the Traditions, Muslim theologians elaborated the *dhimmi* status –that is, that of the non-Muslim indigenous populations now under Islamic Rule. This body of rules also known as the Covenant of 'Umar, is variably attributed to the government of 'Umar I who ruled over the Islamic Empire from 13H/634 to 23H/644, or to the governance of 'Umar II who ruled as caliph from 99H/717 to 101H/720. It is generally agreed by Western orientalist, however, that this legislation was inconsistent with the liberal policies of the first four caliphs and the ninety-year dynasty of the Umayyads (41H/661-132H/750). It appears to have evolved under the early Abbasid rule, at the time when the intolerant religious authorities were occupied in suppressing heresies and in brutally crushing local revolts.

See Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam*. Granbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1985 (p. 48).

contrast to that of other older sacred books, the stronger the collective identity of the adherents to this new book did become. Today, many Muslims consider the Qur'ân as “an angel of God,” “God’s witness on the day of judgment,” or “an eternally living creature of God.”<sup>43</sup> These attributes reveal to what extent, in some Muslims’ eyes, the Qur'ân has achieved its independent identity. It is obvious that none of these attributes/functions would make any sense if the revelations were scattered paragraphs not compiled under an independent and visible (i.e. material) format (i.e. book), taking on its own unique and proper identity.

Régis Blachère (1900-1964C.E.) believes that despite the illiteracy of the Prophet Muḥammad, and his non-intention of gathering the Qur'ânic *âyahs* together, from the very beginning of his prophetic mission, he carefully preserved those *âyahs* by choosing some of his followers as his secretaries, ordering them to write the oral revelations under his own supervision. The popular opinion among western scholars is that the Prophet did not go further and the compilation of those scattered scripts happened a couple of decades after his death. Much has been written on the reasons behind the first “canonical” compilation of the revelations in between two covers, sometime during the caliphate of ‘Uthmân ibn ‘Affân (47 before *hijra*-35H), the third caliph who ruled from 23H/644C.E. to 35H/656C.E. Ṭâhâ Ḥusayn (1889-1973C.E.) cites a letter from this third caliph to his governors in which he clearly voices his concerns about the mistaken recitations of the Qur'ânic *âyahs* by Arabs and Persians. In this letter, ‘Uthmân informs his governors about his worries, and the danger of a *bid‘a* (false or heretical innovation) as a result of those mistaken recitations.<sup>44</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalânî (773-852H) reports that by the time of the third Caliph ‘Uthmân, Muslims all around the Islamic Empire were divided into groups, each group believing in a different version of some Qur'ânic *âyahs*, and fighting over those versions. Everyone was trying to prove the authenticity and the trueness of his own version to the extent of *takdhîb* (denying) or sometime *takfîr* (excommunicating) others. In some mosques, there were two separate collective prayers at the same time

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<sup>43</sup> For more information, see Mohammad Mohammadî Reyshahrî, *Mizân al-Ḥikma*. 14 vols. Qum: Dâr al-Ḥadîth, 1996, under *al-qur‘ân*, available online at <http://www.tebyan.net/index.aspx?pid=18382> (consulted on June 19<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>44</sup> Ṭâhâ Ḥusayn, *Al-Fitnat al-Kubrâ*. 2 vols. 1<sup>st</sup> volume translated by Seyyed Ja‘far Shahîdî. Tehran: Ali Akbar Elmî, 1957 (1:75).



because each group had accepted a different version of the recited *âyahs*. According to ‘Asqalânî, ‘Uthmân was aware of those disputes and had already ruled over in few cases. That is why he decided to end those disputes and unify Muslims under the same “Book.”<sup>45</sup> The great *mufasssir* of the Qur’ân Abu Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarîr al-Ṭabarî (224-310H) believes that although this internal conflict was not a major issue in Abu Bakr’s caliphate (from 573 to 634C.E.), it had already started in the first caliph’s era.<sup>46</sup> He does not see any link between the geopolitics of the Islamic Empire in Abu Bakr’s era (with a geography that had not yet expanded outside the Arabian Peninsula) and the “non-importance” of the debates on the Qur’ânic *âyahs* among Muslims. Neither *mufasssirûn* nor Muslim historians mention anything about how the compilation of the first Qur’ân helped the stability and the legitimization of early Muslims’ power, and solidified their supremacy over non-Muslims in conquered regions. Instead, they present ‘Uthmân’s order as a vital decision to keep Muslims’ unity (as an internal affair) by putting an end to the divisive debates on the Qur’ân. Whatever the reasons were, both sets of which are not mutually exclusive in any case, the immediate result of ‘Uthmân’s decision to compile a “canonical” Qur’ân was the uniformity it brought to the Qur’ân both in terms of the body of the text and the order of the *âyahs* and *sûrahs*. What is interesting is that we know today about different versions of certain Qur’ânic terms, *âyahs*, and in some cases *sûrahs* because some of those debates have been carefully preserved, reported and discussed by certain *mufasssirûn* or Muslim historians.<sup>47</sup> Yet to Muslims, this knowledge causes no damage to the solid authenticity and the untouchable exactitude of the actual uniform Qur’ân. In other words, the Qur’ân is considered by devout Muslims to be letter by letter the true copy of what has been revealed to the Prophet. As a result of what was done during ‘Uthmân’s caliphate, today, all Muslims around the world recite the same text –accent by accent in the same sacred language–

<sup>45</sup> Shihâb al-Dîn Aḥmad b. ‘Ali b. Muḥammad ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalânî, *Fath al-Bâri bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥîḥ al-Bukhârî*. 13 vols. Cairo: Dâr Miṣr, 1969 (9:16).

<sup>46</sup> Abu Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarîr al-Ṭabarî, *Jâmi‘ al-Bayân fî Ta’wîl al-Qur’ân*. 12 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1997 (vol. 1, p. 7), available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net) (consulted on Sep. 20<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>47</sup> For a detailed report on the compilation of the Qur’ân, including a complete list of those differences, see ‘Abdullâh b. Sulaymân al-Sijistânî, *Kitâb al-Maṣâḥif*. Edited by Muḥib al-Dîn Wâ‘iz, 2 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-Bashâr al-Islâmiyyah, 1936.

even if they do not understand a word of what they pronounce. This uniform Qur'ânic text is at the center of the present research.<sup>48</sup>

### 1.3 The *ḥadīth*<sup>49</sup>

Although the term *ḥadīth* is popularly understood by the majority of Muslims as “a true saying of the Prophet,” there is a world of not only intellectual debates on the meaning of each *ḥadīth*, but also profound scholarly critiques about the degree of authenticity of each *ḥadīth*. According to the popular idea among western scholars of Islam, the concept of *ḥadīth*, as a divine message for Muslims with a lesser degree of sacredness compared to the Qur'ân appeared after the death of the Prophet.<sup>50</sup> This conviction is rooted in an

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<sup>48</sup> Some traditional Muslim scholars have considered the whole enterprise of scientific research and discoveries about the origins of the Qur'ân's compilation as an islamophobic conspiracy. For an example of such works, see the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Dr. Sayyid 'Abd al-Wadūd's online book called *Conspiracies Against the Quran*. This book is available online at

[http://www.parweztv.com/Mufhoom\\_1/by\\_G\\_A\\_parwez/Conspiracies%20Against%20the%20Quran.htm](http://www.parweztv.com/Mufhoom_1/by_G_A_parwez/Conspiracies%20Against%20the%20Quran.htm) (consulted on Sep. 19<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>49</sup> The term *ḥadīth* is a Qur'ânic term used several times in different contexts (i.e. 39:23; 52:34; 77:50; 68:44). In all of its Qur'ânic appearances, it means “saying” and/or “new saying.” On the reason of this nomination for the Prophet's sayings, 'Asqalânî writes that both the Qur'ân and the sayings of the Prophet explain God's *ahkâm* (orders), but since the Qur'ân is *qadîm* (uncreated), the Prophet's sayings are called *ḥadīth* (created and/or new). See Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalânî, *Fath al-Bâri bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhârî*. Murtaḍâ al-Zubaydî (d. 1205H) believes that the *khbar* (saying) of the Prophet is called *ḥadīth* because *khbar* bears in its meaning an evident possibility of being false or true, so to avoid this disrespect for the sayings of the Prophet, *muḥaddithûn* have used the term *ḥadīth*, a term that in this meaning does not directly refer to a possibility of falsehood. See Murtaḍâ al-Zubaydî. *Tâj al-'Arûs min Jawâhir al-Qâmûs*. 20 vols. Kuwait: Maṭba'at Ḥukûmat al-Kuwait, 1973, under *ḥadīth*, available online at <http://archive.org/details/alhelawy09> (consulted on Sep. 20<sup>th</sup> 2011). Ibn Kathîr goes further and claims that all sayings of the Prophet, even the simplest one in a daily human context, are revelations repeated by the Prophet. The only distinction between Qur'ânic *âyahs* and the Prophet's sayings is “in the way we recite them.” See the beginning of the first chapter of the first volume of Ibn Kathîr's *tafsîr*, available online at <http://rowea.blogspot.ca/2010/02/pdf-8.html> (consulted on Sep. 20<sup>th</sup> 2011). Finally, another famous linguist, Jamâl al-Dîn al-Qâsimî (d. 1332H), mentions another possibility for this nomination. He writes that the Prophet's sayings are called *ḥadīth* because they have the power of creating new meanings in their audiences' hearts. See Muḥammad Jamâl al-Dîn al-Qâsimî, *Qawâ'id al-Taḥdîth min Funûn Muṣṭalah al-Ḥadīth*. Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1979 (p. 61). Other possibilities have also been discussed, but there is no scientific evidence to prefer one over the other.

<sup>50</sup> William A. Graham is among those few who correctly understood the functions of *ḥadīth* for early Muslims while the Prophet was still alive. He writes:

Certainly the Qur'ân could never have stood alone as the bulwark of faith, even though it is the *mu'jizah*, the clear “miracle”, which confirms the divine authority of Muḥammad's mission. In Islamic terms, this is not so because of the limitations of the Qur'ân, but

opinion presented by a minority of *mufasssirûn* (most of them Ḥanbalî Sunnîs) who believed that during his life, the Prophet prohibited Muslims from recording and preserving his sayings. To support their opinion, they refer to a few *aḥâdîth* of the Prophet. In his recent book, *Tadwîn al-Sunnah al-Sharîfa*, Mohammad Reza Hosseinî Jalâlî studies those *aḥâdîth*, and criticises their authenticity.<sup>51</sup> His conviction is that *ḥadîth* as a concept with the afore-mentioned meaning existed in the Prophet's era, and the Prophet himself had encouraged Muslims to record his sayings and to follow them as instructions for a healthy spiritual life. In his work, Jalâlî presents 44 *aḥâdîth* all in which the Prophet Muḥammad whether encouraged Muslims to record and preserve his sayings or gave them permission to live and/or act upon them accordingly.<sup>52</sup>

Another popular opinion among western scholars of Islam is that the compendiums of *aḥâdîth* took shape throughout two centuries after the death of the Prophet. This might be the case for some Islamic *madhâhib* such as the Ḥanbalî school, but for some others such as the Ithnâ'ashari Shi'î, the formation of the first compendiums of *aḥâdîth* dates back to the Prophet's era. From a historico-critical perspective, there is no doubt that the first two caliphs rigorously prohibited Muslims from recording, preserving and narrating any *ḥadîth*. This anti-*ḥadîth* tradition continued till the caliphate of the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azîz (61-101H) who ruled over the Islamic Empire less than three years (99-101H). The only exception was the short caliphate of the fourth caliph 'Ali ibn abi Tâlib who gathered a collection of some prophetic *aḥâdîth* and confirmed their authenticity by narrating them in his speeches, letters or *khuṭbas*

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because of man's limitations. The Qur'ân, "being the Word of God, is too sublime to interpret and decipher without the aid of the Prophet."

See William A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*. Paris and The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1977 (p. 33).

<sup>51</sup> Seyyed Mohammad Reza Hosseinî Jalâlî, *Tadwîn al-Sunnah al-Sharîfa*. Qum: Maktab al-A'lâm al-Islâmî, 1413H (p. 261). Before him, a few other Muslim scholars had focused on the same subject, with the same conclusion: confirming the non-authenticity of those *aḥâdîth* according to which the Prophet forbids his companions from recording and preserving his sayings. For a list of those scholars and their works, see Hâshim Ma'rûf al-Hasanî, *Derâsât fi al-Ḥadîth wa al-Muḥâddithîn*. Beirut: Dâr al-Ta'âruf li al-Maṭbû'ât, 1978.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-99. Some early Muslim scholars (all of them Sunnîs) have affirmed the legitimacy of that strategic prohibition. They have presented 4 rational reasons behind it. In a very detailed and meticulous study, Seyyed Mohammad Kazem Tabâtâbâ'î analyses those reasons and tries to disapprove them. See Seyyed Kâzem Tabâtâbâ'î Yazdî, *Âshenâyee ba Târikh va Manâbe'-e Hadîs*. Qum: Hâjar, 1380 Solar *hijra*.

(preaches).<sup>53</sup> Many narratives about this prohibition have been recorded by both *muhâddithûn* and Muslim historians. For example, in his book “Tadhkira,” Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabî (673-748H) mentions a *ḥadīth* from Aīsha (the daughter of Abu Bakr (50 before *hijra*-13H) and the wife of the Prophet) who says:

My father [Abu Bakr] had recorded and preserved 500 *aḥādīth* from the Prophet. One night he had a bad and uncomfortable sleep. When he woke up, he was sad. I asked him about his sadness. When the sun rose, he told me: “my daughter, please bring to me all the *aḥādīth* that are with you.” I brought everything, and he burnt them all till the last one. I asked him: “why did you burn the Prophet’s *aḥādīth*?” He answered: “I am afraid to die while having in hand the *aḥādīth* that I have received from someone whom I have trusted in, and they might not be as being narrated to me.”<sup>54</sup>

Khaṭīb al-Baghdâdi (d. 463H) narrates an important historical event during the governance of the second caliph ‘Umar. He writes:

It was reported to ‘Umar ibn Khattâb [the second caliph] that some books and some *aḥādīth* have appeared in people’s hands.<sup>55</sup> This upset the caliph. He told to people: “It has been reported to me that some books have appeared among you. Know that the strong ones [good ones] are those loved by God.” Then he asked people to bring all those books to him, so he can judge them. People thought that he will help them sort those controversial *aḥādīth* using the right criteria, so they can recognize the good-authentic *aḥādīth* from the false ones. Everybody brought everything he had. Then when all writings were gathered, ‘Umar ordered to set fire on them and burnt them all.<sup>56</sup>

Muslim historians have reported that to prevent any diffusion of the *aḥādīth*, the second caliph called those companions of the Prophet who had narrated *ḥadīth* from the Prophet to come and live in Medina, not letting them leave the city. In some cases, ‘Umar walled in those few who resisted and kept narrating *ḥadīth*. Al-Dhahabî mentions the names of

<sup>53</sup> See Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Raḍī ed., *Nahj al-Balâghah*. 49<sup>th</sup> ed. Translated into Persian by Mohammad Dashtī. Qum, Iran: Amir al-Mo’menīn Publication, 2010.

<sup>54</sup> Abu ‘Abdullâh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Uthmân al-Dhahabî, *Tadhkirat ul Ḥifâz wa Zyoulihi*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1998 (1:5). ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Şâ’ib mentions this *ḥadīth* with a list of different sources where it can be found. See ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Şâ’ib, *Târīkh al-Islâm al-Thiqâfī wa al-Syâsī: Maşâr al-Islâm Ba’d al-Rasûl wa Nash’at al-Madhâhib*. Tehran: al-Ghadîr, 1417H (pp. 362-363).

<sup>55</sup> Baghdâdi does not mention if by “*kutub wa aḥādīth*” (books and *aḥādīth*), the first narrator of the *ḥadīth* means “books of *aḥādīth*,” or “books some of which were books of *aḥādīth*.”

<sup>56</sup> Aḥmad b. ‘Ali b. Thâbit Khaṭīb al-Baghdâdi, *Taqyīd al-‘Ilm*. Damascus: no publisher, 1949 (p. 52).

some of the most respectful companions of the Prophet such as Ibn Mas'ûd, Abu Dardâ', and Abu Mas'ûd al-Ansârî who, because of narrating *ḥadīth*, spent a period of their lives in 'Umar's jails.<sup>57</sup>

Despite this rigorous prohibition of the first three caliphs in particular, within a few decades after the death of the Prophet, thousands of *aḥādīth* were in circulation in nascent Muslim community. But many of those *aḥādīth* were contradicting each other, and some were even contradicting very clear Qur'ānic passages. While ordinary Muslims were memorizing and adopting anything that came to fall under the name of their Prophet, concerns and discussions among *muḥāddithūn* and *mufasssīrūn* (mostly *tabi'ūn*) began to emerge rapidly.

The emergence of *'ilm al- ḥadīth* (the science of *ḥadīth*), less than a century after the death of the Prophet, is the result of those discussions and debates. At its inception, the initial focus of *'ilm al- ḥadīth* was on two things: the chains of transmission (*isnāds*) of each *ḥadīth*, and the philological-morphological-exegetical effort to understand better the exact meaning of each particular saying of the Prophet (*fiqh al- ḥadīth*).<sup>58</sup> It is obvious that from the very beginning of *'ilm al- ḥadīth*, two sciences of history (*al-târikh*), and grammar and syntax (*al-ṣarf wa al-naḥw*) were involved.<sup>59</sup> Later, the political context of

<sup>57</sup> Al-Dhahabî, *Tadhkirat al Hifāz wa Dhyoulihî*, 1:75.

<sup>58</sup> *Fiqh al-ḥadīth* is also sometimes called *dirāyat al-ḥadīth*, *uṣūl al-ḥadīth*, *qawā'id al-ḥadīth* or *muṣṭalah al-ḥadīth*. There is a whole debate among Muslim scholars if all these terms refer to the same science or not. Some have believed that there are nuances between scientific methods used in *fiqh al-ḥadīth* and *dirāyat al-ḥadīth*, while some others have considered all of them to be different names for the same science.

<sup>59</sup> Despite the existence of what can be considered as traces of a pre-science of *ḥadīth* in the first century after the death of the Prophet, the first extent book written on this science dates back only to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century hegira. Some Muslim historians consider Abu 'Abdullāh al-Nayshābūrî (321-403H) to be the author of the first book ever written on the sciences of *ḥadīth*. His book *Al-Mustadrak 'alâ al-Ṣaḥīḥayn* is a collection of *aḥādīth* (8803 *aḥādīth*) that al-Nayshābūrî has selected from the two *Ṣiḥāḥs* of Bukhārî and Muslim. His other book, *Ma'rifat al-'Ulûm al-Ḥadīth*, is an elaborated work on the scientific methods that he has used in his selection of *aḥādīth*. However, Mohammad Hasan Rabbânî writes in his book that al-Qârî writes that 'Asqalânî believed that Qâdî Abu Muḥammad Râmhumuzî (d. 360H) is the first one who has ever written a book (*Al-Muḥāddith al-Fâsil Bayn al-Râwî wa al-Wa'î*) on the sciences of *ḥadīth*. Rabbânî mentions page 137 as his reference in Mullâ 'Ali al-Qârî's book called *Sharḥ Sharḥ Nukhbat al-Fikr fî Muṣṭalahât Ahl al-Athar*. This book has been e-published by Maktabat al-Mishkât al-Islâmiyyah, available online at [http://www.sfhatk.com/vb/uploaded/471\\_1218518168.zip](http://www.sfhatk.com/vb/uploaded/471_1218518168.zip). I consulted the book on October 12<sup>th</sup> 2011, and could not find what Rabbânî has read in the book. See Mohammad Hasan Rabbânî, *Dânesh-e Derâyat al- Hadîs Hamrâh bâ nemouneh hâ-ye Hadîsî va Feqhî*, Mashhad: Dâneshgâh-e Oloum-e Eslâmî-ye Razavî, 1389 Solar *hijra* (p. 6).

the big schism between Shi'îs and Sunnîs brought about the development of new sciences to help each party decide about the authenticity of *aḥādīth*. The first two newly involved sciences were *'ilm al-ansâb* (genealogy) and *'ilm al-rijâl* (the science of men). While *'ilm al-ansâb* was helping *muḥâddithûn* and *mufasssirûn* confirm the trueness of the existence of a narrator in the chains of transmission of a *ḥadīth*, *'ilm al-rijâl*'s main focus was on providing biographies for each narrator found in the *isnâd* of a *ḥadīth*. A narrator's lifestyle, personality, deeds, moods, and even rumours around him were the points of interest for scholars of *'ilm al-rijâl*. As a consequence, Sunnî scholars refused to accept the veracity of Shi'î *muḥâddithûn*, and wiped off many *aḥādīth* having a Shi'î narrator in their *isnâd*, and Shi'î scholars did the same to some *aḥādīth* having a Sunnî companion in their chain of narrators. By the beginning of the second century after the death of the Prophet, working on a *ḥadīth*, as the subject matter of a scholarly study, required knowledge in several sciences that all together formed, and still do today, what is called *'ulûm al-ḥadīth* (sciences of *hadīth*).<sup>60</sup>

These sciences gave birth to tons of meticulous categories of *ḥadīth*, hundreds of definitions, and thousands of technical terms. This thesis tries to respect as much as possible, the authenticity of *aḥādīth* that are used as they have been gathered by both Sunnîs and Shi'îs in mostly the second century of Islamic history. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the number of *aḥādīth* whose authenticity is unanimously accepted among *muḥâddithûn* is so little that if one decides only to keep those as an acceptable source for historical research, his/her research will not be able to go beyond some basic concepts such as the uniqueness of Allâh or the messengerhood of the Prophet Muḥammad. Conversely, if one carries out any research using *aḥādīth* found in the respective compilations eventually adopted by Sunnîs and Shi'îs, as is the case in the methodology used for this thesis, it will become inevitable that any reader will find a

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<sup>60</sup> To have a sense of how far those sciences have gone, it is enough to take a look at the scientific categorisation of *aḥādīth* according to their authenticity. In his book, *Al-Tadrīb al-Râwī fī Sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawâwī*, Suyûfî mentions 65 different categories. Hâzemi believes that there are 100 categories of *ḥadīth*. Kazem Modir Shanchi mentions 39 categories in his summary of the book *Kitâb 'Ilm al-Ḥadīth*. See Jalâl al-Dîn al-Suyûfî, *Tadrīb al-Râwī fī Sharḥ Taqrīb al-Nawâwī*. Beirut: Dâr Ṭibâ', 2009. See also Kâzem Modîr Shâncî, "Estelâhât-e Marbout beh Anvâ'-e Hadîs." E-published by Mo'assesseh-ye Farhangî va Ettelâ' Resânî-ye Tebyân, available online at <http://www.andisheqom.com/Files/hadith.php?idVeiw=29549&level=4&subid=29549> (consulted on Sep. 7<sup>th</sup> 2011).

*muḥâddith* who does not consider as authentic one *ḥadīth* or another used in this thesis. This reality is true for any scientific work that uses *aḥādīth* as its data, and the more the researcher is aware of this problem, the better he/she can understand the reason behind the incredible diversity of dogmas and rituals that emerged in the course of the last fourteen century of Islamic history.

Acknowledging the afore-mentioned limits that affect the reading of this thesis, I now explain the two kinds of *aḥādīth* used in this thesis: the *aḥādīth* on Jesus and the *aḥādīth* from Jesus recorded and narrated by Muslim *muḥâddithûn*. In this relatively narrow selection of *aḥādīth*, both Shi'î and Sunnî sources have been used. For the Shi'î collections, the four main Shi'î compendium of sources have been used. They are: *Kitâb al-Kâfi* collected by Muḥammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulaynî (258-328H)<sup>61</sup>, *Man Lâ Yahḍuruḥu al-Faqīh* collected by al-Shaykh al-Ṣadûq (306-381H)<sup>62</sup>, as well as *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkâm* and *al-Istibṣâr fimâ Ikhtulifa min al-Akhbâr* both collected by Abu Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭūsî (385-460H).<sup>63</sup> For the Sunnî collections, six have been used: *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhârî* collected by Muḥammad b. Ismâ'îl al-Bukhârî (194-256H),<sup>64</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, collected by Muslim b. al-Ḥajjâj (206-261H),<sup>65</sup> *Sunan ibn Mâjah* collected by Abu 'Abdullâh Muḥammad ibn Mâjah (c. 207-273H),<sup>66</sup> *Sunan Abu Dâwûd* collected by Abu Dâwûd al-Sijistânî (202-275H),<sup>67</sup> *Jâmi' al-Tirmidhî* collected by Muḥammad b. 'Isâ al-

<sup>61</sup> Muḥammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulaynî, *Kitâb al-Kâfi*. 8 vols. Tehran: Dâr al-Kutub al-Islâmiyyah, 1365 Solar *hijra*.

<sup>62</sup> Abu Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Ali Shaykh al-Ṣadûq, *Man Lâ Yahḍuruḥu al-Faqīh*, 4 vols. Qum: Mu'asseseh-ye-Enteshârât-e-Eslâmî, 1413H.

<sup>63</sup> Abu Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭūsî, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkâm*. 10 vols. Edited by Ali Akbar Ghaffârî. Tehran: Dâr al-kutub al-Islâmiyyah, 1390H. Also Abu Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭūsî, *Al-Istibṣâr fimâ Ikhtulifa min al-Akhbâr*. 4 vols. Tehran: Dâr al-kutub al-Islâmiyyah, 1390H.

<sup>64</sup> Muḥammad b. Ismâ'îl al-Bukhârî, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhârî*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Beirut: Dâr Ibn Kathîr, 1987. E-published by Maktabat al-Islâmiyyah al-Shâmila, available online at <http://sh.rewayat2.com/hadith2/> (consulted on Oct. 12<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>65</sup> Abu Ḥusayn Muslim al-Ḥajjâj, *Al-Jâmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-Turâth al-'Arabî. E-published by Maktabat al-Taqrîb, available online at <http://www.taghrib.org/library/book2.php?bi=820> (consulted on Oct. 12<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>66</sup> Abu 'Abdullâh Muḥammad b. Yazîd ibn Mâjah, *Sunan Ibn Mâjah*. 5 vols. Edited by Bashâr 'Awâd Ma'rûf. Beirut: Dâr al-Jîl, 1998. E-published by Multaqâ Ahl al-Ḥadīth, available online at <http://ahlalhadith.com/vb/showthread.php?t=87201> (consulted on Oct. 12<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>67</sup> Abu Dâwûd Sulaymân b. al-Ash'ath al-Sijistânî, *Sunan Abu Dâwûd*. 6 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-Risâlat al-'Âlamiyyah, 2009. E-published by Maktabat al-Waqfiyyah, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=6140> (consulted on Oct. 12<sup>th</sup> 2011).

Tirmidhî (209-279H)<sup>68</sup>, and *Sunan al-Şuġhrâ* (also called *Sunan al-Nisâ'î*) collected by Aĥmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nisâ'î (214-303H).<sup>69</sup>

#### 1.4 The *tafsîr*

It is not insignificant to start this section with mentioning that the term *tafsîr* appears only once in the Qur'ân. It reads:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً كَذَلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ وَرَتَّلْنَاهُ تَرْتِيلًا وَلَا يَأْتُونَكَ بِمَثَلٍ إِلَّا جِنَّاتِكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَأَحْسَنَ تَفْسِيرًا

And those who disbelieve say: Why is the Qur'ân not revealed unto him all at once? (It is revealed) thus that We may strengthen thy heart therewith; and We have arranged it in right order. And they bring thee no similitude but We bring thee the Truth (as against it), and better (than their similitude) as argument.<sup>70</sup> (25:32-3)

No other forms of the term have been used in the Qur'ân. Instead the term *ta'wil* appears seventeen times in the Qur'ân, meaning an intellectual reflection fortified by a gift of knowledge from God leading to the ability of revealing the meanings behind things. Here is an example for *ta'wil* in the Qur'ân:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ ءَأَمَّنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِّنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

He it is Who hath revealed unto thee (Muĥammad) the Scripture wherein are clear revelations - they are the substance of the Book - and others (which are) allegorical. But those in whose hearts is doubt pursue, forsooth, that which is allegorical seeking (to cause) dissension by seeking to explain it. None knoweth its explanation save Allah. And those who are of sound instruction say: We believe therein; the whole is from our Lord;

<sup>68</sup> Muĥammad b. 'Isâ al-Tirmidhî, *Jâmi' al-Tirmidhî*. A copy of the online version prepared by the Egyptian Ministry of Awqâf. E-published by Maktabat al-Islâmiyyah al-Shâmila, available online at <http://sh.rewayat2.com/hadith2/> (consulted on Oct. 12<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>69</sup> Aĥmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nisâ'î, *Sunan al-Nisâ'î*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Halab: maktabat al-Maţbû'ât al-Islâmiyyah, 1986. E-published by Maktabat al-Islâmiyyah al-Shâmila, available online at <http://sh.rewayat2.com/hadith2/> (consulted on Oct. 12<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>70</sup> Here Pickthall translates *tafsîr* as "argument." Muĥsin Khân, Shâkir, and Dr. Ghâlî translate it as "explanation," and Yusuf Ali translates it as "significance."



but only men of understanding really heed.<sup>71</sup> (3:7)

It seems that for the Qur'ân, *ta'wil* goes beyond the human philological-morphological efforts with the purpose of better understanding the meaning(s) of a text.<sup>72</sup> 7:52-53 reads:

وَلَقَدْ جِئْتَهُمْ بِكِتَابٍ فَصَّلْنَاهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا تَأْوِيلَهُ يَوْمَ يَأْتِي تَأْوِيلَهُ يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ نَسُوهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ قَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُ رَبِّنَا بِالْحَقِّ فَهَلْ لَنَا مِنْ شُفَعَاءَ فَيَشْفَعُوا لَنَا أَوْ نُرَدُّ فَنَعْمَلَ غَيْرَ الَّذِي كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ قَدْ خَسِرُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ وَضَلَّ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ

Verily We have brought them a Scripture which We expounded with knowledge, a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe. Await they aught save the fulfilment thereof? On the day when the fulfilment thereof cometh, those who were before forgetful thereof will say: The messengers of our Lord did bring the Truth! Have we any intercessors, that they may intercede for us? Or can we be returned (to life on earth), that we may act otherwise than we used to act? They have lost their souls, and that which they devised hath failed them. (7:52-53)

This rare usage of the term *tafsîr*, and the strong and frequent presence of the term *ta'wil*

<sup>71</sup> Although *ta'wil* is an infinitive derived from *a, w, l*, here it is not used as a verb. However, Pickthall translates it as “to explain.” Yusuf Ali and Mohsin Khân translate it as “hidden meaning,” and Dr. Ghâli and Shâkir translate it as “interpretation.” The other usages of the term in the Qur'ân clearly reveals that the term refers to the human capacity to decode hidden messages behind a dream, an event or a natural scene. In 12:6, 21, 44, 100, and 101, the term refers to Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. In 18:78 and 82, Moses is told by his mysterious unnamed companion that very soon Moses will be informed about the interpretations of some strange deeds of his companion. In 4:59, the *âyah* orders Muslims to refer all debates and conflicts to God and his Prophet, so they can interpret the truth and judge between them. 17:35 is probably the most complicated one. It reads: “Fill the measure when ye measure, and weigh with a right balance; that is meet, and better in the end.” Here the term has been translated as “in the end,” somewhat saying that the final determination will have a better (fairest) outcome if merchants are careful in their measurings. Here and after, Shâkir's translations are available online at <http://www.muslimaccess.com/quraan/translations/shakir/015.htm> (consulted on Sep. 10<sup>th</sup> 2011). Here and after, Dr. Ghâli's translations are available online at <http://www.quranexplorer.com/quran/> (consulted on Sep. 10<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>72</sup> Khorramshâhi believes that unlike *tafsîr*, *ta'wil* focuses on the inner meaning of the *âyahs*. He tries to answer if such a knowledge is reachable for humans or not. He writes:

Most scholars of the Ahl al-Sunnah believe that the *ta'wil* of the Qur'ân, that is, its inner and esoteric meanings and interpretation of ambiguous and difficult verses of the Qur'ân, known as the *mutashâbihat*, are known only to God. Most of Shi'î scholars and some belonging to the Ahl al-Sunnah and other sects believe that the *ta'wil* or true interpretation of Qur'ânic *mutashâbihât* is also known to those who have learned knowledge of the scripture and are, as referred to by a Qur'ânic phrase, *râsikhûna fî al-'ilm* (firmly grounded in knowledge).

See Bahâ al-Dîn Khorramshâhi, “Is the Ta'wil of the Qur'ân Known Only to God?” *The Message of Thaqaalayn*, vol. 3, No. 3 (Autumn 1997/1418H): no page number, available online at [http://www.quran.org.uk/articles/ieb\\_quran\\_tawil.htm](http://www.quran.org.uk/articles/ieb_quran_tawil.htm) (consulted on Oct. 14<sup>th</sup> 2011).

in the Qur'ân has attracted the attention of only a few western scholars of Qur'ânic Studies. As an example, although "Qur'ânic Christians" is a scholarly work mainly focused on the interpretation of the Qur'ân, its author Jane D. McAuliffe exclusively uses the term *tafsîr*. She does not to use *ta'wîl* in her analysis. Her book's index mentions only three times the word *ta'wîl*.<sup>73</sup> In a footnote, McAuliffe briefly mentions that *tafsîr* and *ta'wîl* were "apparently synonymous in the earliest period" and that their significations "began to diverge as the Qur'ânic sciences developed in the classical period."<sup>74</sup> She writes:

*Tafsîr* remained the term of more limited denotation, often restricted largely to philological exegesis, while *ta'wîl* connoted hermeneutical approaches that sought to uncover deeper meanings in the text or to align

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<sup>73</sup> On page 18, McAuliffe cites a Prophetic prayer in which the Prophet asks God to give to Ibn 'Abbâs a good understanding in religion and to teach him interpretation. The term used in the prayer and translated by McAuliffe as "interpretation" is *ta'wîl*. See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ânic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991 (p. 18, n. 15 and n. 19).

<sup>74</sup> In his article entitled *The Development of Theory on Qur'ânic Exegesis in Islamic Scholarship*, Yeshayahu Goldfeld cites the famous commentator of the Qur'ân, al-Kalbî (d. 763C.E.) reporting a discussion of Ibn 'Abbâs (3 before *hijra*-68H) discussing the difference between *ta'wîl* and *tafsîr*. This simply means that contrary to what McAuliffe believes, from the very beginning of the emergence of *tafsîr*, *mufasssîrûn* (at least some of them) were aware of this distinction. On page 15 of his article, Goldfeld writes:

The commentator al-Kalbî (d. 763) reports on the authority of the master of his exegetic school, 'Abdullâh b. 'Abbâs (d. 687), the founder of Islamic Qur'ân interpretation: 'The Qur'ân has four aspects (*'alâ arba'ati awjuhîn*): Explanation (*Tafsîr*) known to scholars, Arabic understood by the Arabs, lawful and prohibited of which people (*al-Nâs*) cannot be ignorant, and commentary (*Ta'wîl*) known only to God, mighty and exalted be He.' When asked what was meant by *Ta'wîl*, Ibn 'Abbâs replied: 'What is going to happen in the future (*mâ huwa kâ'inun*).' The first and fourth aspects of the theory of Ibn 'Abbâs mention two kinds of investigation necessary to understand Qur'ânic revelation- *Tafsîr* or simple exoteric explanation, presumably of legal matters, and *Ta'wîl* esoteric commentary, presumably on prophetic themes, the veracity of which commentary can be known to God only. Even if we presume that the explanation of *Ta'wîl* at the end of the text is a later emendation, we must admit that Ibn 'Abbâs employs two Qur'ânic technical terms for two kinds of interpretation, presumably literal and allegorical. The second aspect, Arabic linguistic investigation, seems to pertain to the third aspect, the lawful and prohibited by divine ordinance, by which Arabs or Arabs and Muslims or mankind, depending on the possible outlook of that time, must abide. *al-nâs* could refer to Arabs only, as old texts employ the word, or to Muslims or mankind, Ibn 'Abbâs having no doubt been aware of islamization which came in the wake of the conquests. On the other hand, *Tafsîr* and *Ta'wîl* of the Qur'ân deal, according to this theory, with language and law.

For the full article, see Yeshayahu Goldfeld, "The Development of Theory on Qur'ânic Exegesis in Islamic Scholarship." *Studia Islamica*, No. 67 (1988): 5-27.

the text with particular theological or philosophical orientations.<sup>75</sup>

For any further explanations, McAuliffe refers her readers to another scholar, Jaroslav Stetkevych. He is among those few western scholars who pay special attention to this differentiation.<sup>76</sup> In his article published a couple of years before McAuliffe's book, entitled *Arabic Hermeneutical Terminology: Paradox and the Production of Meaning*, he makes a clear distinction between *tafsîr* and *ta'wîl*, considering the first to mean an "explanatory exegesis" and the latter to mean an "interpretative exegesis." He mentions four exegetic terms of *tafsîr*, *sharḥ*, *tabyîn* and *ta'wîl* and states that *ta'wîl* "... [leans] pre-eminently towards what we have so far discussed as hermeneutics, while the other terms would in sense and method be closer to explanatory rather than interpretative exegesis, and to basic philological elucidation (*sharḥ*).” To him, while *sharḥ* and *tabyîn* must be classified under *tafsîr*, *ta'wîl* is of another nature. To Stetkevychm the Qur'ân is very aware of this difference, and purposely uses *ta'wîl* when it talks about “the “reading in” of figurative or metaphorical meaning” of the text. But like McAuliffe, he believes that to the devout readers of the Qur'ân, this distinction has been slowly developed within time having to face many accusations of heresy. He writes:

Quite understandably, therefore, *ta'wîl* as a hermeneutical term concerns itself primarily with “covert, or virtual meaning, or it reduces meaning to its ultimate intent” it makes it return. The assumption of the “ultimate intent” in *ta'wîl* as it stands in dialectical tension between first-as-last and last-as-first is then also the basis of the cognitive paradox. Especially as a scriptural/ Qur'ânic hermeneutical method, *tawîl* was a natural challenge to an orthodoxy that based itself on literal textuality. Its methodological embrace by the Mu'tazilah was an escape from the anthropomorphist entrapment of a literal reading of the qur'ânic text (“the hand of God”/“the power of God”). It might have been no more than an apology for an underlying, reasoned-out orthodoxy. Instead, it was rejected as heresy. Its further elaboration by the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwân al-Şafâ*), although interesting, was only a fleeting cultural-historical episode. In the hands of

<sup>75</sup> McAuliffe, *Qur'ânic Christians*, 18.

<sup>76</sup> Stetkevych mentions that this idea of a distinction between *ta'wîl* and *tafsîr* has been discussed before him by Suzanne P. Stetkevych on two occasions: in her work “Toward a Redefinition of ‘Badî’ Poetry.” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 12 (1981): 3-29, as well as in the first chapter of her book (according to Jaroslav Stetkevych at that time under publication) entitled *The Tragacanth's Fruit: Aba Tammâm and the Poetics of the Abbasid Age*. See Jaroslav Stetkevych, “Arabic Hermeneutical Terminology: Paradox and the Production of Meaning.” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 48, No. 2 (April 1989): 81-96 (p. 92).

the Shi'ah it remained an imaginative and searching tool of “covert and virtual meaning” only for as long as Shi'ism itself had not become the prisoner of its own sense of dogmatic textuality. It was mostly in mystical (sûfi) hermeneutics.<sup>77</sup>

Seven years before Stetkevych publishes his article, Ahmad Mohmed Ahmad Galli discusses the issue of *tafsîr* and *ta'wîl* in detail. In his article published in 1982, and entitled *Some Aspects of al-Mâturîdî's Commentary on the Qur'ân*, Galli studies the commentary of Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmûd Abu Mansûr al-Mâturîdî (250-333H), and his definitions of *tafsîr* and *ta'wîl*. Galli writes:

The title of al-Mâturîdî's commentary on the Qur'ân: *Ta'wîlât al-Qur'ân* or *Ta'wîlât ahl as-Sunna* indicates that he is among the first commentators to use the term *ta'wîl* instead of *tafsîr*, for the exposition of the Qur'ân, and this has some significance. Originally the terms *tafsîr* and *ta'wîl* were used interchangeably, for the exposition of the Qur'an; in the course of time, however, various differentiations between the two terms were introduced, and *tafsîr* was mainly used for the external philological exegesis, while *ta'wîl* was used for the exposition of the subject matter of the Qur'ân. Al-Mâturîdî's definition of the two terms is unique and to some extent discloses his method of interpretation. To al-Mâturîdî, *tafsîr* means the giving of a definite meaning to the verse, and the only people suited to such a task are the companions of the Prophet, because they were contemporaries of the Prophet and witnessed all the events and circumstances in which the Qur'ân was revealed. They also had knowledge of the Prophet's commentary and explanation of the verses and were well conversant with the occasions of the revelation (*asbâb annuzûl*). Those companions, however, did not give their opinions on the verses of the Qur'ân because *tafsîr* is not subject to various opinions, but they conveyed what they had witnessed and received from the Prophet. In the light of this concept of *tafsîr*, al-Mâturîdî said, the saying of the Prophet, “Whoever interprets the Qur'ân according to his personal opinion, will take his place in the fire”, becomes clear. The meaning of *ta'wîl*, however, is to give all the possible meanings implied in the verse, therefore it is not limited to the companions of the Prophet as *tafsîr*, but is open to all qualified scholars. There are no restrictions on *ta'wîl*, because unlike *tafsîr*, *ta'wîl* does not state that God meant a certain meaning by a certain verse, but it is simply an attempt to disclose or discover the

<sup>77</sup> Jaroslav Stetkevych, “Arabic Hermeneutical Terminology: Paradox and the Production of Meaning.” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 48, No. 2 (April 1989): 81-96 (p. 92).

meaning which might possibly be implied in the verse; its utmost achievement is to point out that the meaning of a verse might be so or so.<sup>78</sup>

It is not surprising to know that Mâturîdî's unusual definitions of *tafsîr* and *ta'wîl* do not succeed to survive by other *mufasssîrîn*'s acceptance, and the term *ta'wîl* does not find its merited place, as Mâturîdî wishes it, in the science of the Qur'ânic exegesis. However, it is disturbing to see that Galli's article does not receive any attention from scholars who, later, study the issue. As a matter of fact, Galli is probably the first western scholar who includes the question of *tafsîr* versus *ta'wîl* in his work, and he merits to be recognized for that.

In the world of Muslim scholars, probably the most detailed explanations about the difference between the two Qur'ânic concepts of *ta'wîl* and *tafsîr* can be read in the works of famous Shi'î *mufasssîr* 'Allâmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabâṭabâ'î (1892-1981C.E.). Unlike McAuliffe and Stetkevych, Ṭabâṭabâ'î believes that from the very beginning of the history of the Qur'ân, Muslim erudites knew the difference between these two Qur'ânic concepts. So, while focusing on *ta'wîl* throughout the history of the Qur'ân, he presents different opinions of Muslim erudites on the possible meanings of these two terms. To Ṭabâṭabâ'î, the importance of *ta'wîl* in the understanding of the Qur'ânic message is inevitable. He writes:

...*al-Ta'wîl* is not a peculiarity of the ambiguous verses; it is an attribute of the whole Qur'ân; decisive verses have their *al-Ta'wîl*, as do the ambiguous ones. [also] ...*al-Ta'wîl* is not the meaning of a word; it is some real fact found outside the imagination. When we say that this verse has an *al-Ta'wîl*, we mean that the verse describes a real fact (past or future) or a real happening, which in its turn points to another reality -- and that is its *al-Ta'wîl*, or final interpretation.<sup>79</sup>

Ṭabâṭabâ'î mentions 11 different opinions on the meaning of *ta'wîl*, and its differences with *tafsîr*. He then criticises all of them and concludes:

One defect is common to all: They presume that "interpretation" is the meaning of the verse, or that it is the happening or cause to which the

<sup>78</sup> Ahmad Mohmed Ahmad Galli, "Some Aspects of al-Mâturîdî's Commentary on the Qur'ân." *Islamic Studies*, vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring 1982): 3-21 (pp. 3-4).

<sup>79</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabâṭabâ'î, "The Concept of al-Ta'wîl in the Qur'ân." *The Message of Thaqaalayn*, vol. 2 (1995): 21-40.

verse refers. But it has been explained that “interpretation” is not the meaning of a verse -- it does not matter whether the meaning is the apparent one or is against it. Also, it has been clarified that although interpretation is a real event or fact, but not every event -- it is that fact with which the word has the same relation as a proverb has with its purpose; or as an exterior has with its interior.

Interpretation is that reality to which a verse refers; it is found in all verses, the decisive and the ambiguous alike; it is not a sort of a meaning of the word; it is a real fact that is too sublime for words; Allâh has dressed them with words so as to bring them a bit nearer to our minds; in this respect they are like proverbs that are used to create a picture in the mind and thus help the hearer to clearly grasp the intended idea. That is why Allâh has said: (I swear) by the Book that makes manifest (the truth); surely We have made it an Arabic Qur'ân, so that you may understand. And surely it is in the original of the Book with Us, truly elevated, full of wisdom (43:2-4). And this thing has been explicitly and implicitly mentioned in several Qur'ânic verses.<sup>80</sup>

Unlike *ta'wîl*, the only Qur'ânic usage of *tafsîr* refers to a triangular communication between God, the Prophet and pagans by the means of language. Having pagans in the triangle when they have frequently been blamed in the Qur'ân for their poor understanding of the truth points to the evident literary aspect of “the better *tafsîr*,” and makes it a morphological characteristic of that communication.<sup>81</sup> That explains why the first group of Muslim erudite who worked on the meanings of the Qur'ân were called *al-mufasssîrûn*, and not *al-mu'awwilûn*. In fact, they were considering themselves, at their best, to be linguistics and philologists trying to understand and to explain the Qur'ân's *ẓâhir* (outward) or *al-baṭn al-awwal* (first layer of the inward meanings) through uncovering its literal meaning. The *raison d'être* of the *tafsîr* explained by some *mufasssîrûn* confirms the dominance of this literary aspect of *tafsîr*. They mention three main reasons for the necessity of *tafsîr*: first, that the Qur'ân contains expressions with deeper meanings; second, that for a reason that *Allâhu a'lam* (God knows better), in many *âyahs* some points vital to the understanding of the subject matter of those *âyahs*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* Although Ṭabâṭabâ'î does not call it a theory, his conclusion possesses all the characteristics of a subtheory in hermeneutics. In the sense presented in Ṭabâṭabâ'î's conclusion, this thesis tries to reveal the *ta'wîl* of the concerned *âyahs* on the crucifixion more than their *tafsîr*.

<sup>81</sup> Knowing the grey borders between *tafsîr* and *ta'wîl*, another term that must necessarily be studied is *ta'bîr* (the interpretation of vision or dream). Many Muslim *muḥâddithûn* and *mufasssîrûn* have consecrated parts of their books to *ta' bîr* as a scientific method of interpretation beside *tafsîr* and *ta'wîl*, but this term and its methods remain beyond the scope of this thesis.

are omitted by God; and third, that some of Qur'ânic words bear more than one possible meaning.<sup>82</sup>

Despite this simple and clear starting point for the Qur'ânic use of the word *tafsîr* in its formative period, the rapid expansion of the Islamic community and the establishment of an empire, the emergence of the *sunnah al-nabawiyyah* (the Tradition of the Prophet) out of the compendiums of *ahâdîth* with their complexities and controversies, and the need for a reliable source for a governmental *fiqh* (jurisprudence) these three reasons combined prepared the ground for the growth of the seed of a simple-literary *tafsîr*, turning it into a huge tree of knowledge with hundreds of methodological branches shadowing over all aspects of human life. By the end of the third century *hijra*, *tafsîr* as a science and its applications in real life were so vast that any attempt to define it would inevitably suffer from a more or less high degree of reductionism and generalization. McAuliffe believes that “given the vast literature generated by centuries of Muslim exegetical effort, no topical study within that genre can aspire to comprehensive coverage.”<sup>83</sup> This turns *tafsîr* to a flowing river of written and non-written traditions around the Qur'ân where streams of inspirations, intuitions and emotions meet some high levels of human intellectual endeavours over centuries, all of which have combined to shape forms of meanings, all of those within different living cultures, and in various socio-political contexts. These lively and complex characteristics of *tafsîr* are well summarized in the concluding statement of McAuliffe's article on the tasks of interpretation. She writes:

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<sup>82</sup> Al-Suyûtî, *Al-Itqân fî 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, 2:174. It seems that early and classical *mufasssîrûn* were not interested in narrative aspects of the Qur'ân such as “the mood” of the narrator as an indicator of the meaning. They keep silent about the relationship of the Qur'ân with the world outside and around it, such as when a text can be understood differently in relation with its different contexts or when an idea/concept has been borrowed or inherited from another source. These “modern” hermeneutical aspects of the text seem to have been out of the question for early Muslim linguists for the simple reason that for them, the Qur'ân was a timeless, space free and context free truth in the form of human language. McAuliffe explains this lack of interest in “theories about cultural borrowing or extra-Islamic influence” among *mufasssîrûn* and blame them by writing:

Qur'ânic passages that appear to echo versions of biblical narratives are not examined [by *mufasssîrûn*] in order to discover their possible lines of transmission and the various shapings undergone along the way. In fact, most of the questions that fuel the historical-critical method of the Biblical scholar are, for his or her Qur'ânic counterpart, non-questions or even blasphemies.

We'll come back to this issue in further chapters. See McAuliffe, *Qur'ânic Christians*, 29-30.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

Nevertheless, the inherent dynamism of exegetical activity leaves it ever open-ended. Commentary begets commentary as each new generation of readers receives the text within its own frame of reference –and as that same community assimilates the multiple lines of interpretation that earlier readings have generated. But those lines of interpretation are not simply a series of parallel trajectories. There are instances of influence and points of confluence. There are also disjunctions or disruptions and even, as just mentioned, wholesale rejection of the accumulated consequences of centuries of exegetical activity. Yet the conversation continues, the tug of the text persists and the desire for intellectual engagement with the divine word remains irresistible.<sup>84</sup>

Despite this ontological complexity, at the beginning of his elaborated *tafsîr* on the Qur'ân, Ṭabâtabâ'î presents a strong definition for *tafsîr*. He states: “*Tafsîr* is explaining the meaning of the Qur'ânic *âyahs*, revealing their goals and clarifying their purposes.”<sup>85</sup> By his short definition, he points to a horizon further than the apparent meaning of an *âyah*. This goes beyond the philological-morphological-exegetical efforts of early *Mufasssîrûn*, and somewhat enters the realm of *ta'wîl*.<sup>86</sup> This definition points to a common belief saying that the Qur'ân has a *ẓâhir* (outward), and several *buṭûn* (inwards).<sup>87</sup> In the research methodology used in the present thesis, this definition will be used when working on and with *tafâsîr*, trying to reveal the goals of the concerned *âyahs* behind their meanings presented by *mufasssîrûn*.

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<sup>84</sup> Jane D. McAuliffe, “The Task and the Traditions of Interpretation.” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ân*, 202-203.

<sup>85</sup> Al-Ṭabâtabâ'î, *Al-Mizân fî Tafsîr al-Qur'ân*, under 1:4, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on Sep. 4<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>86</sup> In fact, according to the Qur'ân itself, the purposes behind the Qur'ânic *âyahs* are exclusively in God's knowledge, given to whoever God desires. As mentioned before, a part of 3:7 reads: “... None knoweth its explanation save Allah. And those who are of sound instruction say: We believe therein; the whole is from our Lord; but only men of understanding really heed.” Some interpreters have considered the “And” not to be the beginning of a new sentence. By believing so, the “men of understanding” will be included in the knowledge of the Qur'ân's *ta'wîl*. See Ṭabâtabâ'î's *tafsîr* on this *âyah*.

<sup>87</sup> Paul L. Heck compares this *ẓâhir* and *bâṭin* of the Qur'ân to the gnostic and the apostolic understandings of the New Testament in Christianity, and concludes that like early Christianity, early Islam went through a “contestation over the very nature of true religion, contestation that centered on the extent to which revealed material should be taken at face value, that is, exoterically (*ẓâhir*), or reformulated in light of what the intellect saw as true, that is, esoterically (*bâṭin*).” To him, this multilayered characteristic of the Qur'ân helped (or caused) the emergence of mystical schools within Islamic thought. See Paul L. Heck, “Crisis of Knowledge in Islam (I): The Case of al-'Amirî.” *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 56, No. 1 (Jan. 2006): 106-135 (p. 112).



### 1.5 First Case Study: the Qur'ân Between Proper Noun and Concept

In his presentation at a conference honouring Wilfred Cantwell Smith, held at Harvard University in 1979, William A. Graham says: “It is obvious that “al-Qur'ân” in the later, fixed meaning of God’s Word, as written down in the *maṣāḥif* is necessarily a post-‘Uthmânic or certainly a post-Muḥammadan, usage. Until the codification of what has since served as the *textus receptus* -or at least until active revelation ceased with Muḥammad’s death-there could have been no use of al- qur'ân to refer to the complete body of “collected revelations in written form”.<sup>88</sup> He mentions that this point has been discussed and revealed before him by Buhl and Nöldeke.<sup>89</sup>

To support the argument that the term *al-qur'ân* has been chosen within time to help Muslims form a collective identity around their sacred text, it is not insignificant to mention a historical event recorded and reported by some early Muslim scholars.<sup>90</sup> According to this report, the first Caliph Abu Bakr accomplishes the gathering of all Qur'ânic verses in a manuscript, and he presents it to other companions of the Prophet and asks them to find a name for it. Some suggest calling it “Evangel,” but others dislike this name. Some suggest calling it “sifr” (the term used to refer to the five books of Tôrah), but again it is refused by some others. Finally, the highly respected companion of the Prophet, ‘Abdullâh ibn Mas‘ûd says that in his trip to Ethiopia, he has seen papers between two covers, and people call it “Muṣḥaf.”<sup>91</sup> He suggests calling it *muṣḥaf* and this time everybody agrees. Ignoring the authenticity of this story, it matches very well with the historical fact that when the third caliph sent manuscripts of the Qur'ân to far-distant regions of the newly born Islamic Empire, they were commonly called ‘*Uthmân’s maṣāḥif* (the *muṣḥafs* of ‘Uthmân).

Two more examples that support the hypothesis that the name al-Qur'ân is a later nomination with an emphasis on the uniformity of the text and the sacredness of its

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<sup>88</sup> William A. Graham, “The Earliest Meaning of ‘Qur'ân’.” *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Bd. 23/24 (1984): 361-77 (p. 362).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Suyûtî narrates it from two different sources and Abu Shâmah (d. 665H) cites it from Mûsa b. ‘Aqaba (d. 141H). See Al-Suyûtî, *Al-Itqân fi ‘Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, 1:184.

<sup>91</sup> In Arabic, *muṣḥaf* means “scrolls or papers that have been put together.” This term is derived from the Qur'ânic term *ṣuḥuf* (the plural form of *ṣaḥifa*) meaning “papers” or “scrolls.” The term *ṣuḥuf* appears eight times in the Qur'ân, once to refer to the revelations to Abraham and Moses, once to refer to the revelations to Moses, and six times to refer to some divine letters or books, such as in 20:133; 53:36; 74:52; 87:19.

language can be found in Sijistânî and Suyûfî's works. Both these linguistics believe that neither at the time of the Prophet, nor a few decades after his death, al-Qur'ân was a common or popular name to refer to the revelations as an ensemble. Sijistânî narrates that when the second caliph 'Umar returned from Munâ to Madina, he gave a lecture to the crowd that had come to welcome him, and during his lecture, 'Umar used the term *muṣḥaf* to refer to the Book of God.<sup>92</sup> Jalâl al-Dîn al-Suyûfî (849-911H) writes that when Musallama b. Mukhallad al-Anṣârî (the governor of Egypt between 47H/667C.E. and 62H/681C.E.) asked his friends about two *âyahs* in the book, to refer to the Book of God he used the term *muṣḥaf*. He concludes that knowing that the term *muṣḥaf* does not appear in the Qur'ân, Egyptian people must have been familiar and comfortable with al-Anṣârî's usage of the term.<sup>93</sup>

The term *qur'ân* has been used 66 times in the Qur'ân.<sup>94</sup> The *mufasssîrûn*'s efforts to reveal the true meaning of any Qur'ânic term generally start by comparing that term to all other appearances of the same term in the Qur'ân.<sup>95</sup> Accepting this method, surprisingly, one cannot find an exact and clear meaning for what the Qur'ân refers to within the 64 afore-mentioned usages of the term *al-qur'ân*.<sup>96</sup> In fact, there has been a long and detailed debate among *mufasssîrûn* on the roots of this term, each root leading to a different meaning. The main debate is if there is a *hamza* between the letters "râ" and "nûn." Those who have believed that the term has a *hamza* in the middle, have concluded that it is a term derived from the verb *Qara'a* (*qâf*, *râ'* and *hamza* are the three root letters), and those who have considered it to be without *hamza* in the middle, have concluded that it is a proper noun not derived from any verb. The debate on the meaning

<sup>92</sup> Abu Dâwûd al-Sijistânî, *Nizhat al-Qulûb fi Gharîb al-Qur'ân*. Cairo: no publisher, 1921, under *maṣâḥif*.

<sup>93</sup> Al-Suyûfî, *Al-Itqân fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, 2:84.

<sup>94</sup> Twice out of 66 times, the term *qur'ân* has been used to refer to "the prayer." The other 64 times, whatever the meaning is, it seems to be consistent. This term has also been used in one of its grammatical derivative forms twice (75:17-18) to refer to "the recitation of the revelation."

<sup>95</sup> In her book, *Qur'ânic Christians*, McAuliffe writes about the possibility of accepting the Prophet "Muḥammad (d. 9/632) as the Qur'ân's first interpreter." (McAuliffe, p. 13). She does not mention any scholar's name as to support this possibility. According to a unanimous consensus among *mufasssîrûn*, the Qur'ân itself is its first interpreter. Also, she does not mention her source according to which the Prophet Muḥammad died in the year 9 *hijra*, a year before the Prophet's date of death (10H) on which all Muslim and other Western scholars agree.

<sup>96</sup> The term *al-qur'ân* has been repeated 50 times with the definite article *al*, and 16 times without it.

goes beyond this grammatical split. Several possibilities have been presented by the followers of both opinions, but discussions have not led to any consensus. For example Badr al-Dîn al-Zarkashî (745-794H) cites from Abu Ishâq al-Zadjjâj (241-311H) that *al-qur'ân* has *hamza* in between, and derives from *qara'a* meaning “to gather” or “to rally,” and the book is called *al-qur'ân* because it rallies and gathers together all the previous revelations.<sup>97</sup> Faḍl b. Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsî (468-548H) cites Laḥyânî (d. 215H) who believes that the term is derived from *qara'a* but the verb means “to recite,” and the term means “the recited.”<sup>98</sup> To him, the term does not refer to a specific book but to anything recited. Suyûṭî cites al-Shâfi'î (d. 204H) who believes that *al-qur'ân* is not derived from any verb but is a proper noun that refers to a part or the ensemble of the revelations to the Prophet Muḥammad as *Tôrah* is a proper noun referring to the similar revelations to Moses.<sup>99</sup> Abu Muḥammad al-Dârimî (181-255H) believes that this term simply means “invitation,” and it refers to God's invitation to humanity, so everybody is invited to come and enjoy God's mercy through revelations.<sup>100</sup> He clearly does not see any link between this term and the gathering of the revelations in between two covers.

If this lack of clarity can be complemented by the lack of Prophetic *aḥâdîth* referring to the book by the name of *al-Qur'ân*, one might suggest that the actual unanimous consensus on the name of the sacred text in Islam is a socio-political product developed within the history of Islam helping the emergence of a new collective identity around a living text.

Knowing the afore-mentioned uncertainty that any scholar will have to be aware of when working with *aḥâdîth*,<sup>101</sup> one will be surprised to see how little the name *al-*

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<sup>97</sup> Abu 'Abdullâh Badr al-Dîn al-Zarkashî, *Al-Burhân fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, 4 vol. Beirut: Dâr al-Ma'rifa, 1990, available online at <http://www.imanhearts.com/mobiles.php?action=show&id=2781> (consulted on Oct. 10<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>98</sup> Abu 'Ali faḍl b. Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsî, *Majma' al-Bayân li 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*. 10 vol. Tehran: 1373 Solar *hijra*.

<sup>99</sup> Al-Suyûṭî, *Al-Itqân fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, 1:51.

<sup>100</sup> Abu Muḥammad 'Abdullâh b. Bahrâm al-Dârimî, *Sunan al-Dârimî*. Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, 2005, available online at <http://www.downloadquransoftware.com/download-sunan-ad-darimi> (consulted on Oct. 11<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>101</sup> A very good example of what ignoring this uncertainty can do in scholarly works is found in Régis Blachère's introduction to his translation of the Qur'ân into French. He argues that during the Prophet's life, the Qur'ân was mostly preserved in memories of the Prophet and his companions, and those memories

Qur'ân appears in the Prophet Muḥammad's authentic *aḥādīth*. Instead the term *kitâb* (book) or *kitâb Allâh* (the Book of God) has been used more frequently. This Qur'ânic term has been used under its different forms hundreds of times in the Qur'ân. Here are two Qur'ânic examples followed by an example from the *aḥādīth*:

أَتْلُ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْنَعُونَ

Recite [O Muḥammad] that which hath been inspired in thee of the Scripture, and establish worship. Lo! worship preserveth from lewdness and iniquity, but verily remembrance of Allah is more important. And Allah knoweth what ye do. (29:45)

أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِهِمْ أَنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ يُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَرَحْمَةً وَذِكْرَىٰ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

Is it not enough for them that We have sent down unto thee the Scripture which is read unto them? Lo! herein verily is mercy, and a reminder for folk who believe. (29:51)<sup>102</sup>

The *ḥadīth* below is among rare *aḥādīth* that have been accepted by both Sunnî and Shi'î *muhâddithûn*. It has been unanimously considered to be a kind of last will or last statement of the Prophet. Its degree of authenticity in both Shi'â and Sunnî sources has been evaluated as *mutawâtir*. According to this *ḥadīth* called *Ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn*:

Zuhayr ibn Harb and Shuja' ibn Makhlad narrated to me from 'Ulayyah that he said: Zuhayr said: narrated to us Ismâ'il b. Ibrâhîm, from Abu

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(including the Prophet's memory) were subject to oblivion. To support his arguments, he narrates this *ḥadīth* from Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhârî:

One day the Prophet was passing by a place where someone was reciting some *âyahs* of the Qur'ân. The Prophet became excited and said: God bless him. Indeed, he reminded me of that and that *âyahs* that I had forgotten in that and that *sûrah*.

We do not know if, before citing this *ḥadīth*, Blachère had checked its authenticity in any '*ilm al-ḥadīth* or *tafsîr* sources, but if he had done so, he would certainly have become aware of the debate on the weak authenticity of this *ḥadīth* among *mufasssîrûn*, a debate that he neither mentions, nor takes into account when building his argument. See Régis Blachère, *Le Coran: Traduction selon un essai de reclassement des sourates*, 3 vols. Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve, 1947- 51 (pp. 31-32). For more information on the critics of this *ḥadīth*, see Al-Ṭabâṭabâ'î, *Al-Mizân fi Tafsîr al-Qur'ân* (vol. 20 p. 329), available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>102</sup> In both *âyahs*, as well as in so many others, Pickthall translates the term *kitâb* by "scripture." Meanwhile Yusuf Ali, Shâkir, Dr. Ghâlî, and Muḥsin Khân unanimously translate it as "book." Besides online references that have been mentioned before, all these translations are also available online at <http://quran.com/29> (consulted on Nov. 12<sup>th</sup> 2011).

Ḥayyân, from Yazid ibn Ḥayyân, who said: “I, Ḥusayn ibn Ṣabrah and ‘Umar ibn Muslim went to see Zayd ibn Arqam. When we sat down with him, Ḥusayn said to him, “O Zayd, you have been greatly fortunate. You have seen the Messenger of Allâh, upon whom be Allâh’s peace and benedictions, heard his speech, fought with him in battles and have prayed behind him. Indeed, O Zayd, you have been enormously fortunate. Narrate to us what you have heard from the Messenger of Allâh, may Allâh’s peace and benedictions be upon him.” Zayd said: “O brother, by God, I have become aged and old and I have forgotten some of what I used to remember from the Messenger of Allâh, upon whom be Allâh’s peace and benedictions. So accept what I narrate to you and as to what I don’t, trouble me not regarding it.” Then he said: “One day the Messenger of Allâh, upon whom be Allâh’s peace and benedictions, addressed us near a pond called Khumm between Makkah and Madinah. He praised God and extolled Him and preached and reminded (us). Then he said, “Lo, O people, I am only a human being and I am about to respond to the messenger of my Lord [i.e. the call of death]. I am leaving behind two precious things (*thaqalayn*) among you. The first of the two is the Book of Allâh. In it is guidance and light. So get hold of the Book of Allâh and adhere to it.” Then he urged and motivated (us) regarding the Book of Allâh. Then he said, “And my *ahl al-bayt* (People of the House). I urge you to remember God regarding my *ahl al-bayt*. I urge you to remember God regarding my *ahl al-Bayt*. I urge you to remember God regarding my *ahl al-bayt*.<sup>103</sup>

In this *ḥadīth* translated from Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim,<sup>104</sup> as in all other versions in other sources, the term *kitâballâh* (Book of Allâh) has been used. Although the revelations are in their final stage, no mention of the Qur’ân can be found even in the conversations of *ṣaḥâba* around the Prophet’s sayings.

One might say that the existence of the term *kitâb* in the Qur’ân and in the Prophet’s speeches is a clear evidence for the fact that the concept of a divine book composed from the revealed *âyahs* to the Prophet existed in his era. Such a conviction

<sup>103</sup> Abu Ḥusayn Muslim al-Ḥajjâj, *Al-Jâmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. 7 vols. Edited and expanded by Abu Zakariyyah Yaḥyâ b. Sharaf al-Nûwî. Cairo: Dâr al-Khayr, 1996, *ḥadīth* 2408, available online at [http://www.islamweb.net/newlibrary/display\\_book.php?bk\\_no=53&ID](http://www.islamweb.net/newlibrary/display_book.php?bk_no=53&ID) (consulted on Sep. 8<sup>th</sup> 2011). To read this *ḥadīth* in a Shi’î source, see Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭûsî, *Al-Tibyân*. 10 vols. Edited by Aḥmad Ḥabīb Qaṣîr al-‘Âmilî. Beirut: Dâr Ihyâ’ al-Turâth al-‘Arabî, 1409H (vol. 1, p. 3), available online at <http://www.yasoob.net/books/html/m016/20/no2011.html> (consulted on Sep. 8<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>104</sup> Abu Ḥusayn Muslim al-Ḥajjâj, *Al-Jâmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-Turâth al-‘Arabî, under *Kitâb Faḍâ’il al-Ṣaḥâbah*. E-published by Maktabat al-Taqrîb, available online at <http://www.taghrib.org/library/book2.php?bi=820> (consulted on Sep. 8<sup>th</sup> 2011).

can lead to assume that soon after the death of the Prophet, Muslims have renamed the anthology of the revelations with a new name, al-Qur'ân. Madigan dedicates a whole chapter of his book to the study of the Qur'ânic term *kitâb*. He meticulously does a contextual analysis on this term trying to show how in early history of Islam, this term was not referring to what today, we call al-Qur'ân. He concludes:

Based on these observations it appears that *kitâb* functions in the Qur'ân's discourse primarily as a symbol it is multivalent and able to operate on several levels at the same time –something that has always frustrated those who have sought to specify it. This multivalence will emerge with greater clarity as we examine the interaction of the term *kitâb* with other terms, but this much is already clear: it is the primary symbol of God's sovereignty and knowledge. The *kitâb* given to the Messenger, and through him to people, is not (pace Pedersen) the record of God's wisdom and judgment, but rather the point where that timeless authority and insight address the time-bound human condition. The umm *al-kitâb* 'the source (lit., mother) of the *kitâb*' is not just some larger, primordial book from which each of the scriptures derived; it is the very essence of God's universal knowledge and authoritative will. To have been given the *kitâb* is to have been given some access to that divine realm where everything is "written," that is, known and determined. To say that a people has been given the *kitâb* is not to say that they have been vouchsafed some great work of reference that contains all they need to know and act upon; rather it means that they have entered into a new mode of existence, where the community lives in the assurance and expectation (or perhaps even the fear) of being personally addressed by the divine authority and knowledge. For all the attempts to specify it and reduce it to manageable proportions, the Qur'ân's *kitâb* still insists on seeing itself as the potent symbol and authoritative locus of divine address to the world through the Arabian prophet in the language of the Arabs.<sup>105</sup>

If al-Qur'ân as a proper noun for the ensemble of the revelations in between two covers was not used in the early years of the formation of Islam, and the more popular term *al-kitâb* did not refer to a physical book, scroll or script, how and when the concept of a sacred book, as the central axis of Islamic theology, thoughts and rituals, as well as the major allegiance of Muslims' collective identity came into being? The traces of this quick formation might be found in the history.

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<sup>105</sup> Madigan, *The Qur'ân's Self Image*, 76-77.

### 1.6 Second Case Study: Muslim Disciples of Jesus

This Case study focuses on two *âyahs* on Jesus' disciples. As its main goal, it aims to reveal how different interpretations of the same *âyahs*, mostly coming from *ahâdîth* have not been limited to their scholarly debates between *mufasssîrîn*, but have contributed to the formation of a certain self-definition for Muslims as well as a certain definition for Christians — a definition that did not exist in the Prophet's era but emerged a few decades after his death and continues to distinguish Muslims from Christians to this day.<sup>106</sup>

This study is composed of two main parts: in the first part two *âyahs* on Jesus and two versions of their interpretations are carefully studied. To do so, two interpreters have been chosen. The first one is Ṭabarî, and the second is Ibn Kathîr (700-774H). Right after explaining the two versions of the selected *âyahs'* *tafâsîr*, the different socio-political contexts in which these versions were written is briefly presented. Then, a telegraphic style chart is used to compare the two versions with each other. In the second part, in an intertextual approach, the two terms *al-naṣârâ* (the common Qur'ânic term for Christians) and *muslimun* (Muslims) are reviewed. At the end, the consequent perspectives of the two versions on the definition of self-other among Muslims is presented.

#### 1.6.1 Part One: Two *âyahs* on the Disciples of Jesus

Much has been written about the representation of Jesus in the Qur'ân. Most of it, as one might expect, has come either from Christian missionaries and theologians, who have tried to show how and why Muslims are wrong about Jesus,<sup>107</sup> or from Muslim apologists, who have argued against Jesus' divine nature and crucifixion, claiming that the Qur'ân is the only trustworthy source of knowledge for studying the nature, the life,

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<sup>106</sup> For a recent detailed textual study on the disciples of Jesus in *Sûrah Al-Mâ'ida*, see chapter 11 of Michel Cuypers, *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an*. Edited by Rafael Luciani and translated from French by Patricia Kelly. Miami: Convivium Press, 2009.

<sup>107</sup> Here are two examples: "Christ in Islam" written by Rev. J. Robson (London: J. Murray, 1992), or "Jesus in the Qur'ân" written by Geoffrey Parrinder. New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1965 and Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1995.

and the death of Jesus.<sup>108</sup>

There are more than 70 *âyahs* in the Qur'ân directly or indirectly pointing to Jesus. His birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, and even dialogues between God and Jesus on the day of judgement have been narrated in the Qur'ân. *Âyahs* 3:52 and 5:11 are selected to be studied by this essay. They both fall under McAuliffe's second category of "Qur'ânic Christians."<sup>109</sup> They have been selected for three reasons. First, Jesus is present in both of them; in the first *âyah* his name is pronounced and in the second *âyah* his title is used. Second, these two *âyahs* are the only two Qur'ânic cases in which the disciples of Jesus call themselves Muslims. Third, the term *al-naşârâ*, the common term for Christians, is not used in either of them. The term *al-naşârâ* is a problematic term and its etymological problems are studied in the second part of this paper. As mentioned before, Ṭabarî's version and Ibn Kathîr's version of their interpretations are studied. The *âyahs* are as following:

فَلَمَّا أَحَسَّ عِيسَىٰ مِنْهُمُ الْكُفْرَ قَالَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ  
ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَأَشْهَدُ بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

But when Jesus became conscious of their disbelief, he cried: Who will be my helpers in the cause of Allah? The disciples said: We will be Allah's helpers. We believe in Allah, and bear thou witness that we have surrendered (unto Him). (3:52)

وَإِذْ أَوْحَيْتُ إِلَى الْحَوَارِيِّينَ أَنْ ءَامِنُوا بِي وَبِرَسُولِي قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا وَأَشْهَدُ بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

And when I inspired the disciples, (saying): Believe in Me and in My messenger, they said: We believe. Bear witness that we have surrendered (unto Thee). (5:111)<sup>110</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Here are some examples: "Jesus in the Qur'ân" by Fazal A. Farouqi (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University/M.S.A., 1964), or "Jesus in the Qur'ân" by Sulaiman Shahid Mufassir (Plainfield, Ind: Muslim Students Association of the United States & Canada, 1977). See also Chad Hillier, *Contemporary Western Representations of Jesus in Islam*. MA thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2001.

<sup>109</sup> To McAuliffe, Christians may be found in the Qur'ân under two general categories: first, where the Qur'ân refers to Christians as a "particular religious group" by the two terms of *al-naşârâ* or *ahl al-kitâb*, and second, wherever the Qur'ân speaks about Christian figures like Jesus and Mary. Her categorization is explained in more details on page 73 of this chapter.

<sup>110</sup> In 3:52, Pickthall translates *annâ muslimûn* as "we have surrendered," and he gives the same translation for *bi annanâ muslimûn* in 5:111. His translations have several weaknesses: first, he ignores the accusative particle *inna* in 5:111. This particle is absent in 3:52. Second, in both cases, he avoids using the plural noun *muslimûn* for the disciples, and translates it as if it is a verb. Third, he translates *awhaytu* (I revealed) as "I inspired." I will discuss in this chapter how some *mufassirûn*, such as Ibn Kathîr, refuse the



Before moving into their interpretations, it is necessary to mention two points: First, as McAuliffe explains it both Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr use the *musalsal* (chained) method in their *tafâsîr*. According to this method:

Each [commentary] begins with the first *sûrah* of the Qur'ân and comments verse by verse on that *sûrah* and all subsequent ones. ... Within the *sûrah* each verse is quoted separately and then broken into exegetical units, what medieval Biblical scholars would call *lemmata*. Each passage, or *lemma*, is then analyzed separately and relevant comments are made about the verse as a whole, such as its *sabab al-nuzûl* [occasion of revelation].<sup>111</sup>

On the one hand, using this exegetical method might put the *mufasssîr* at the risks of consciously ignoring the larger context and sacrificing the broader message of the *âyah*. But on the other hand, reading and understanding Qur'ânic *âyahs* as pieces of a big puzzle and segments of a larger text/message might increase the risk of the exploitation of Qur'ânic *âyahs* for pre-arranged purposes. As an example, Mohammad Ali Zam, the author of *Jomhûr-e Jahâni-ye Shi'e* (the global republic of shi'îs) sees Qur'ânic *âyahs* as “units of composition” for a divine global message that directly or indirectly repeats itself through each and every *âyah* of the Qur'ân: the Allâh's order to establish a Universal Islamic Republic of Shi'î Islam.<sup>112</sup> To him, any *âyah* must be understood and interpreted as a segment of this divine order. Since the length of this paper is strictly limited, and because a contextual study on any Qur'ânic subject matter requires considerable elaboration if it is to be valuable, this study accepts and respects the method preferred by Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr. Therefore, other *âyahs* are mentioned only if they are included in Ṭabarî's or Ibn Kathîr's *tafâsîr* on 3:52 and 5:111. Second: the pronominal identification

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possibility of any divine revelation to Jesus' disciples, and try to show how this conviction is rooted in their anti-Christian socio-political context. Many translators do not hesitate to use the term *muslim* in their translations of 3:52 and 5:111. For example in the case of 3:52, Yusuf Ali translates the ending part of the *âyah* as “do thou bear witness that we are Muslims,” and Dr. Mohsin translates it as “bear witness that we are Muslims.” In the case of 5:111, Yusuf Ali translates its ending part as “do thou bear witness that we bow to Allâh as Muslims,” and Dr. Mohsin translates it as “bear witness that we are Muslims.” Here and after, Dr. Mohsin's and Yusuf Ali's translations are available online at <http://www.quranexplorer.com/quran/> (consulted on Sep. 10<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>111</sup> McAuliffe, *Qur'ânic Christians*, 34.

<sup>112</sup> Mohammad Ali Zam, *Jomhour-e Jahani-ye Shi'e: Kolliyât-e Mohandesi-ye Farhangi*. Tehran: Ketab-e Jomhour, 2006.

has always been a major challenge in *tafsîr*. When it appears in a Qur'ânic *âyah*, the pronoun *hu* in both its singular (*hu*, him/it) and plural (*hum*, they) forms causes many debates among interpreters and translators of the Qur'ân. As an example, 4:159 speaks about a day when all people of the book will believe in Jesus. It reads: “And there is none of the people of the book, but will believe in him (Jesus) before his death ...” There is a debate among *mufasssîrûn* on whose death this *âyah* refers to. Some early interpreters affirm that this is an apocalyptic *âyah* speaking about the universal belief in Jesus before “his death” (the death of Jesus) at the end of time. Others argue that this *âyah* speaks about the death of the people of the book, so that when one of the people of the book dies, at the moment of his/her death, an angel informs him/her about the trueness of Jesus, but it is too late for him/her to inform others. Again, since the length of this paper is limited, this problem has been taken into consideration only when one of the two selected *mufasssîrûn* mentions it. Both selected *âyahs* are among the least problematic *âyahs* in terms of pronominal identification, as only one of them uses the pronoun *hum*, and then only once.

### 1.6.1.1 Ṭabarî's Version

Ṭabarî is a famous Iranian interpreter of the 10<sup>th</sup> century C.E. He has been considered by the vast majority of traditional Muslim scholars to be the most influential interpreter in the history of *tafsîr*. Ṭabarî is such an icon in *tafsîr* that the modern scholarship of Islam divides the history of *tafsîr* into two major periods: Pre-Ṭabarî and Post-Ṭabarî. McAuliffe uses this classification in her work.<sup>113</sup> One of the very important characteristics of Ṭabarî's approach is that he groups the early interpretations of *âyahs* and collects different ideas from the time of the Prophet to his own era, even if some of them are controversial to others. His book of interpretation has always been a reliable source of Qur'ânic knowledge for Muslims throughout the centuries.

In his very long *tafsîr* on 3:52, Ṭabarî begins with a definition for the verb *ahassa* (he felt). He mentions other *âyahs* (19:98; 3:152) where this verb is used to mean “to find

<sup>113</sup> Madigan uses Ṭabarî's *tafsîr* frequently. He focuses on the term *al-kitâb* in different *âyahs*, and in a careful intertextual study, tries to reveal what *al-kitâb* means to the Qur'ân. Without any classification, he studies Ṭabarî's *tafsîr* among “existing interpretations.”

out.” Ṭabarî concludes:

So the first sentence means when Jesus found out that *Banî-Îsrâ'îl* [Sons of Isrâ'îl or Jews], to whom he was sent, do all efforts against his prophecy, and they deny him, and they take all means to prevent his mission, then he said: “who are my helpers to Allâh” meaning who are my assistants to (face with) those who are denying His Sign, and those who are turning their faces from His *din* [religion, faith, justice], and those who are doing all efforts against His Messenger.”<sup>114</sup>

Ṭabarî immediately explains that here “to Allâh” means “with Allâh.” Hereby he argues in an indirect way that Allâh is Jesus’ first helper. To prove his conviction about “to” meaning “with,” he cites *jâhili* expressions where “to” has been used to say “with.” He adds two *ahâdîth*, one going back to Saddî, and the other one going back to Ibn Jurayh; according to both, “to” means “with” in the context of this *âyah*. To Ṭabarî, it is clear that the pronoun *hum* (them) in this *âyah* refers to Jews. He does not mention any debate on this issue. To him, there are two important questions to be asked about this *âyah*. First, why did Jesus ask for help? Again there is an indirect reference in Ṭabarî’s question. It is as though Ṭabarî asks: was not Allâh enough for Jesus to accomplish his mission? Second, to whom did Jesus ask this question? Was it a question addressed to a broad audience (his own people, *Banî-Isrâ'îl*) or to a few specific people (only the disciples)?

Ṭabarî reports a debate among *mufasssîrûn* (he calls them people of the knowledge) concerning the reason Jesus asked this question and to whom he addressed it. He divides them into two major groups. The first group believes in a very long story initially narrated by Saddî. According to this long story, as soon as Allâh gives Jesus the mission and asks him to call people to the straight path, *Banî-Isrâ'îl* deny Jesus and exile him from his native land. Jesus starts traveling with his mother from city to city. In each city Jesus stops at someone’s home and performs miracles. Yet performing miracles is not his purpose for traveling; rather, he is looking for his disciples. So, after performing a series of miracles such as turning water to food and to wine, bringing dead people back to life, and bringing a cow and sheep back to life after their meat had been eaten by people, he arrives at a port where he meets two fishermen and at this moment he asks: “Who are

<sup>114</sup> Al-Ṭabarî, *Jami' al-Bayân fi Ta'wîl al-Qur'ân*, under 3:52, available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net) (consulted on Sep. 8<sup>th</sup> 2011).

my helpers to Allâh?” They answer: “We are the helpers of Allâh. We believe in Allâh, and bear witness that we are Muslims.” To Saddi, as well as to interpreters who have followed Saddi, this is a code between Jesus and those who must continue his universal mission. So, the question is specifically addressed to the disciples who must work “with” Allâh as Jesus himself has worked with him. This version corresponds to 5:111 in which disciples receive revelations independently of Jesus.

The second group, as Ṭabarî mentions, are the followers of Ḥasan al-Baṣrî (21-110H) and Mujâhid b. Jabr (21-104H), two *ruwât* (narrators of *ḥadîth*) who unanimously believe that Jesus asks this question of his own people, *Banî-Îsrâ'îl* because he finds out that they are about to kill him. In their version, the disciples (Ḥasan and Mujâhid don't mention how many they are) answer Jesus' call for help and *zâhara 'alayhim* (stand up against Jews), and do not let their fellow citizens kill Jesus. So Jesus leaves the city. In this version it is not clear whether Jesus runs away or if the Jews exile him. Also, there is no mention of any miracles. Moreover, this version keeps silence about the disciples and does not clarify whether they stay in the city or follow Jesus.

Although Ṭabarî asks the two afore-mentioned questions, he himself does not state his preference between the two answers. After citing Mujâhid's version, he immediately moves to a definition for *al-ḥawâriyûn* (the disciples). He gives four possible definitions for this term. The first is the definition that goes back to Sa'id b. Jubayr. According to Ibn Jubayr, this name comes from the color of the disciples' clothes and means “men in white.” The second is the interpretation that goes back to Abi Artâ'a, who believes that this name comes from the profession of the disciples. They were laundry men, so they used to wash people's clothes and whiten them. The third possible definition for this term is presented by Qutâda b. Du'âma (61-118H) and Ḍaḥḥâk b. Muzâḥim al-Hilâlî (d. 100H). They define *al-ḥawâriyûn* as “chosen men,” “those who deserve to succeed,” or “close friends of messengers.” For this last meaning Ṭabarî cites a *ḥadîth* from the Prophet saying: “Every prophet had a *ḥawârî* and my *ḥawârî* is Zubayr.”<sup>115</sup> Ṭabarî concludes:

Probably all these meanings are correct. So, *ḥawârî* probably has come from the color of the clothes or the profession of one or a few of Jesus'

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

disciples. Then it has been used for all of them. Then throughout the years, since they were always accompanying Jesus, people kept using this name to address Jesus' close assistants (the 12 companions). Finally it has been taken as a name for whoever is close to a prophet.<sup>116</sup>

He ends his *tafsîr* on 3:52 by interpreting the term *muslim* used by the disciples. He says:

Allâh is informing us by this *âyah* that Islam is Allâh's *dîn*. This is what Jesus and all other prophets were missionaries for. They were missionaries neither for Christianity, nor for Judaism. By this *âyah* Allâh is exonerating Jesus from those who deviated from his path and established Christianity. This is Allâh's *ihtijâj* (reasoning) to Najrân's delegation through his Prophet Muḥammad.<sup>117</sup>

At the end of his commentary on 3:52 Ṭabarî cites a *ḥadîth* from Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. Zubayr saying that the ending part of this *âyah* is an answer to the delegation of Najrân when they argued and discussed with the Prophet about Islam being a new faith.

Ṭabarî's *tafsîr* on 5:111 is very short. Here Ṭabarî affirms that this *âyah* is a conversation between Allâh and Jesus. So when the beginning of the *âyah* says: *wa idh* ("and behold", or "and remember"), Allâh is speaking to Jesus. Then Ṭabarî interprets *awḥaytu* ("I revealed") as I "launched in their hearts." Although every time this verb is used for a prophet in the Qur'ân all interpreters (Ṭabarî among them) unanimously interpret it as "to reveal," or "the act of revelation," here Ṭabarî mentions two possibilities: first, his own preference, "to launch in the disciples' hearts," going back to Saddi as the first narrator, and second, "to inspire." Ṭabarî cites neither a Qur'ânic instance nor a *ḥadîth* to support this second interpretation. He simply states: "some have said that here this verb means to inspire."<sup>118</sup> He concludes: "The *âyah* means: 'Remember also O Jesus, when I launched in the hearts of the disciples: Confirm Me and My Messenger Jesus.'<sup>119</sup> Then he moves to the second sentence of the *âyah* and briefly states:

Since we have discussed before the roots and the definition of *ḥawâriyûn*, we do not repeat it here. When the disciples said we believe, they meant

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Al-Ṭabarî, *Jâmi' al-Bayân fi Ta'wîl al-Qur'ân*, under 5:111, available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net) (consulted on Sep. 9<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

“O our Lord, we confirm what You have ordered us to believe in. And bear witness that we are humble before You to the extent of abjection, we are good listeners, and we are obedient to Your Orders.”<sup>120</sup>

Unlike the previous *âyah*, here Ṭabarî interprets *muslim* as a concept, and does not offer any explanation about this pre-Christian Islam.

### 1.6.1.2 Ibn Kathîr's Version

Ibn Kathîr is one of the most respected *mufasssîrûn* of the fourteenth century C.E. His *tafsîr* is considered to be a summary of Ṭabarî's *tafsîr*. Over the centuries, Ibn Kathîr's *tafsîr* has always been highly respected among Sunnî Muslims, who form approximately eighty percent of the global Muslim community today.

Ibn Kathîr's interpretation on 3:52 is short and clear, and is written with an authoritative style and tone. He says: “When Jesus felt that they are determined to keep their disbelief, and they insist on their aberration, he said: who are my helpers to Allâh.”<sup>121</sup> Ibn Kathîr briefly mentions two possibilities for “to” and states: “Mujâhid says: ‘who follows me towards Allâh.’ Sufyân Surî and some others have said: ‘who follows me with Allâh,’ but Mujâhid's idea is closer to the truth.”<sup>122</sup> Then he adds:

It seems that here Jesus meant to ask who his helpers are to invite people to Allâh. So much like what the Prophet Muḥammad used to say every year at the beginning of the pilgrimage before his migration.<sup>123</sup>

Almost half of Ibn Kathîr's short *tafsîr* on 3:52 is dedicated to two *aḥâdîth* from the Prophet, followed by Ibn Kathîr's explanations about the history of Islam. He does not mention any *isnâd* or source for these *aḥâdîth*. He concludes:

So, Jesus the son of Mary peace be upon him had a story similar to the Prophet Muḥammad's story. A group of *Banî-Isrâ'îl* repented and believed in him, then they assisted and helped him, and they followed the light which was sent with him, and that's what Allâh informs us about by this

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Ibn Kathîr. *Tafsîr Ibn Kathîr*, under 3:52, available online at <http://rowea.blogspot.ca/2010/02/pdf-8.html> (consulted on Sep. 10<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

*âyah*.<sup>124</sup>

Without paying any attention to the term *muslimûn* at the end of the *âyah*, Ibn Kathîr moves into the meaning of *hawâriyûn*, and says:

It has been said that *hawâriyûn* were laundry men, it also has been said that they are called *hawâriyûn* because of the color of their clothes, but the correct sense is that *hawârî* means helper, as it has been used by the Prophet Muḥammad, and recorded in *Ṣaḥîḥayn*.<sup>125</sup>

Again he does not mention any reference to support this conviction. A final point about Ibn Kathîr's short *tafsîr* on 3:52 is that although the *âyah* is about Jesus, one might be surprised to see Ibn Kathîr's total silence about Jesus.

His *tafsîr* on 5:111 is even shorter than the one on 3:52. Here Ibn Kathîr's only concern is to define the verb *awḥaynâ* (we revealed [to the disciples of Jesus]). He says: "Allâh has graced Jesus by giving him some helpers. It has been said that *wahy* [revelation] here means 'inspiration.'"<sup>126</sup> He cites 28:7 (And We revealed to the mother of Moses, saying: Suckle him ...) and says: "*mufassirûn* are unanimous that in 28:7 *wahy* means inspiration."<sup>127</sup> Then he cites 16:68 (And your Lord revealed to the bee ...) and concludes:

The case of the disciples is like these above mentioned cases. Although al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrî has said that Allâh inspired them, and Saddî has said that Allâh launched to their hearts, it is possible that here the *âyah* means Allâh has revealed to Jesus, and Jesus has declared the revelations to his disciples, so the disciples have received the revelations through Jesus.<sup>128</sup>

What is surprising about Ibn Kathîr's *tafsîr* on 5:111 is neither his silence about the term *muslimûn* at the end of the *âyah*, nor his classification of the disciples and the mother of Moses in the same category with bees, but it is his conviction when he says that all *mufassirûn* are unanimous that in the case of the mother of Moses *wahy* means *ilhâm* (inspiration). A quick simple look at Ṭabarî's *tafsîr* reveals the opposite. In his *tafsîr* on

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Ibn Kathîr. *Tafsîr Ibn Kathîr*, under 5:111, available online at <http://rowea.blogspot.ca/2010/02/pdf-8.html> (consulted on Sep. 10<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

28:7 Ṭabarî never mentions *ilhâm*, but cites the idea of Saddi, who believes *awḥaynâ* here means “to launch in the heart of Moses’ mother.” Although Ṭabarî prefers Saddi’s interpretation, he also mentions the idea of Qutâda, according to whom *awḥaynâ* here means “we revealed to” just as in the cases of all other prophets.

### 1.6.1.3 Ṭabarî, Ibn Kathîr, and Their Socio-political Contexts

As mentioned before, the higher critical theory believes that external elements have a non-deniable impact on the forms and the meanings of every text. This study verifies the socio-political contexts in which Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr have produced their works of *tafsîr*. It also looks for the traces of some possible impacts of their social status and roles in the power dynamic of their societies on their *tafâsîr*. A short glance at their biographies might help to better analyse their different interpretations of the same *âyahs*, as an example of the results of a higher critical approach.

Ṭabarî: Abu Ja’far Muḥammad b. Jarîr al-Ṭabarî was born in 838 or 839C.E. in the city of Amol in the province of Tabarestan, a mountainous region in the north of Iran. Soon after his early education in Amol followed by some complementary studies in Rey, he moved to Baghdad, the centre of culture and education during the ninth century. The Islamic Empire was in its golden age under the Abbasid dynasty. Abbasid Caliphs were known for their thirst for science and knowledge, and for their hunger to build glorious buildings. A few years before Ṭabarî moved to Baghdad, al Ma’mun had founded *Bayt al-Ḥikmat* where many Christians were collaborating with Muslims to translate works from various languages, particularly Greek, into Arabic. Two and a half centuries before the first Crusade, Baghdad was a multicultural city where Muslims, Christians, and adherents of other faiths lived together in peace. The end of the ninth century is marked by the efforts of Muslim thinkers and scientists living under Abbasid rule to transmit Greek and Hindu knowledge to the Christian West, as well as the confrontation between the rationalist *Mu’tazilîs* and the traditionalist *Ahl al-Ḥadîth*.

Despite several harassments by zealous Ḥanbalîs, Ṭabarî stood for *Mu’tazila* and established his own school of thought, law, and interpretation based on a rational approach. Very soon he became an icon with “a degree of erudition shared by no one of



his era.”<sup>129</sup> It has been calculated that he wrote an average of fourteen pages per day over his entire life.<sup>130</sup> Most importantly, numerous governmental and judicial positions, honours, and rewards were offered to Ṭabarî, even though the Abbasid Caliph had transferred to Samarra by the time Ṭabarî moved to Baghdad. Ṭabarî never accepted any of those offers, rejecting all honours and rewards. His main sources of income were the money he accepted for teaching as well as an inheritance from his father.

Ibn Kathîr: Abu al-Fidâ’ ‘Imâd al-Dîn Ismâ‘îl b. ‘Umar ibn Kathîr al-Qurashî al-Busrâwî was born in 1300 or 1301C.E. in Busra, Syria under the Mamlûk dynasty in “the most disruptive period in the Middle East since the Muslim conquests six centuries earlier.”<sup>131</sup> Although his teachers rank among the most respected and famous intellectuals of his era, the influence of the great Ḥanbalî theologian Ibn Taymiyyah (661-728H), with whom Ibn Kathîr studied for more than a decade, is undeniable. He married the daughter of Jamâl al-Dîn al-Mizzî, the powerful director of Dâr al-Ḥadîth (the house of *ḥadîth*) also known as al-Ashrafiyyah, the most prestigious *madrassa* of Damascus. Soon, Ibn Kathîr’s reputation as a *faqîh* spread through the country, and he was offered various positions. Unlike Ṭabarî, Ibn Kathîr welcomed those offers. In 1341C.E. Ibn Kathîr obtained his first official appointment from the Mamlûk Sultan, al-Ashraf ‘Ala al-Dîn Qudjok, as the member of the highest inquisitorial commission that had been formed to study and determine certain questions of heresy. Ibn Kathîr obtained his first governmental position in a chaotic period which is marked by conflicts between Muslims and Christians. He started his official career fifty years after Sultan al-Manşûr Sayf al-Dîn Qalâwun declared *jihâd* against Christians. This *jihâd* had put an end to 200 years of Crusade by wiping the last Christian independent state in the Holy Land off the map. In 1300C.E. Christians had tried to help Mongols invade Syria. Mongols and their helpers had been defeated. Mongols had run away to their territories, but Syrian Christians had continued to live under the Mamlûk dynasty. This is why Christians were considered a potential threat in Ibn Kathîr’s era and were treated like traitors by Muslim authorities. Ibn Kathîr always held prestigious governmental and judicial positions. Throughout the years, he developed close connections with the Mamlûk sultans of his era and their

<sup>129</sup> McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians*, 40.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

Caliphs. While having a high position in the Great Mosque of Damascus, Ibn Kathîr wrote his famous *tafsîr* on the Qur'ân. At the time of his death, he was the professor of Qur'ânic *tafsîr* at *al-Jâmi' al-Umawî*, the most famous mosque after *al-Haramayn* in the Muslim world of his era.

#### 1.6.1.4 A Telegraphical Style Comparison between Two *tafsîr*

A basic comparative study between Ṭabarî's *tafsîr* and Ibn Kathîr's *tafsîr* on 3:52 and 5:111 reveals interesting information. The following telegraphic style chart helps to see how Ṭabarî's version presents a welcoming pluralistic viewpoint on Christians, suitable for Baghdad's golden era of cohabitation and scientific dialogue between Muslims and Christians, while Ibn Kathîr's version draws a thick line between Muslims and Christians, who were considered under the Mamlûk dynasty to be a threat to the Islamic Empire.

Ṭabarî's version	Ibn Kathîr's version
1- Has a humble researching tone.	1-Has an authoritative preaching tone.
2- Gives detailed <i>isnâd</i> for different meanings as well as for <i>aḥâdîth</i> .	2- Mostly uses passive tense (i.e., it has been said) for both meanings and <i>aḥâdîth</i> .
3- Mentions all the narrators of an <i>isnâd</i> .	3- Mentions only the first narrator, if mentioned at all.
4- Whether does not decide or presents decisions under "preference" category.	4- Often decides, three times under "preference" category, and the rest under "unequivocal" category.
5- Mostly uses <i>ḥadîth</i> to support his arguments.	5- Mostly uses other <i>âyahs</i> to support his arguments.
6- Despite the fact that 3:52 clearly speaks about the disciples, Jesus is the main character of his <i>tafsîr</i> .	6- Despite the fact that 3:52 clearly speaks about the disciples, the Prophet Muḥammad is the main character of the <i>tafsîr</i> . Jesus is only named as the subject of the first verb of 3:52.
7- Gives detailed information about Jesus.	7- Ignores Jesus.

<p>Uses the <i>âyah</i> to teach his readership about Jesus' story, his miracles, his trueness, and the universalism of his message.</p> <p>8- Mentions Jesus' name many times. Never adds any adjective or title to his name.</p> <p>9- Does not use the popular Islamic praise "peace be upon him" after the name of Jesus.</p> <p>10- Explains the etymology of <i>hawâriyûn</i>, then argues how the meaning might have been developed within time (from the nomination upon the color of disciples' clothes to helper)</p> <p>11- Does not deny the possibility of a revelation to the disciples of Jesus, but prefers "to launch in their hearts" rather than "to reveal."</p> <p>12- The <i>tafsîr</i> on 3:52 affirms that <i>muslimûn</i> is a designation for whoever believes in Islam. But Islam is not a new faith. It has always been Allâh's <i>din</i> revealed to all prophets. So the disciples were Muslims as the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad are.</p> <p>13- The <i>tafsîr</i> on 5:111 interprets the term <i>muslimûn</i> as a generic concept meaning "being humble, good listener, and</p>	<p>8- Mentions Jesus' name only once. Mentions it as "Jesus the son of Mary" to emphasize the denial of Jesus being the son of God.</p> <p>9- Uses the Islamic praise "peace be upon him" after the name of Jesus. This praise is popularly used after the name of a prophet.</p> <p>10- Briefly cites two etymological possibilities, but affirms that the only true meaning is what has been used in the Prophet's speech: <i>hawârî</i> is a prophet's helper.</p> <p>11- Denies any revelation to the disciples of Jesus. To support this conviction he even gives false information about the Ṭabarî's <i>tafsîr</i> of 28:7</p> <p>12- The <i>tafsîr</i> on 3:52 ignores the term <i>muslimûn</i> at the end of the <i>âyah</i>.</p> <p>13- The <i>tafsîr</i> on 5:111 totally ignores the term <i>muslimûn</i> at the end of the <i>âyah</i>.</p>
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<p>obedient.”</p> <p>14- The <i>tafsîr</i> on 3:52 is 115 lines. 109 lines are on Jesus and his stories. The last six lines are about the author’s inclusivist Islamic worldview.</p> <p>15- Promotes a pluralistic viewpoint in which whoever is “humble, good listener, and obedient” is a Muslim.</p> <p>16- The long length of the text, the high level rhetorical style, as well as the multitude chains of <i>isnâd</i>, make the text confusing and difficult-to-understand for ordinary Muslims.</p>	<p>14- The <i>tafsîr</i> on 3:52 is only eleven lines. Five of them are about the Prophet Muḥammad and the history of Islam.</p> <p>15- Supports a binary, black and white viewpoint in which Muslim is opposed to Christian.</p> <p>16- The text’s concision and clarity, combined with the author’s preaching and easy-to-understand tone, makes it interesting for ordinary Muslims.</p>
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### 1.6.2 Part Two: Does Christian, as an Identity, Exist in the Qur’ân?

Both Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr, in their *tafâsîr* on 3:52 and 5:111, use the term “Christian” in the same general sense that we understand it today: a proper nomination/noun for all those adherents who, despite their diversity of dogma and rituals, share the same religious identity coming from their faith in Jesus Christ and his divine nature. However, the question is if this usage of the term has its roots in the Qur’ân. In other words, does this identity exist in the Qur’ân? Another way of asking this question would be: what terms in the Qur’ân refer to Christians (in the actual popular sense of the term)? McAuliffe states that Christians may be found in the Qur’ân under two general categories: First, when the Qur’ân refers to Christians as a “particular religious group” by using one of the two terms of *al-naṣârâ* or *ahl al-kitâb*, and second, wherever the Qur’ân speaks about Christian figures like Jesus and his mother Mary. To McAuliffe, “Most obvious [designation for Christians] is, of course, the Arabic noun *al-naṣârâ*, the common Qur’ânic term for Christians.”<sup>132</sup> At the end of her book, she adds a third category, calling it “Christians as pre-Qur’ânic Muslims.”<sup>133</sup> McAuliffe does not consider this third designation of

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

Christians, presented as *muslimûn* in 28:52-55, to refer to what *al-naşârâ* or *ahl al-kitâb* are referring to. She cites many detailed interpretations of 28:52-53, and studies the possibility of this term being a reference to an elite group or to some individuals with a Christian background who had left *ahl al-kitâb* around the ruler (king) of Aksum Ashama b. Abjar al-Najâshî (d. 10H), waiting for the last prophet to come.<sup>134</sup>

Meanwhile Madigan's work is narrowly focused on the term *al-kitâb* and/or *kitâb*. In order to give a better sense of what "the book" means to "The Book" itself, Madigan carefully studies different uses of this term in its different compositions including *ahl al-kitâb*. At the end of his book he studies the composition of "people of the book" as a special case. Unlike McAuliffe, to Madigan this term does not refer to all Christians (or Jews) in the Prophet's era, but to a specific group of Syriac and/or Egyptian ascetics for whom literacy was highly prized and the written scripture was of primary importance. He states:

Both the Syriac and the Egyptian ascetical traditions encircled and penetrated the environment in which Islam grew up. In the life of the kind of Christian ascetic with whom the Arabs would have had the most contact, the *ktâbâ* was the most prized possession...it was indisputably divine, authoritative, immutable. It was memorized and recited in worship, internalized until the monk's own speech was almost indistinguishable from it –yet it is rarely seen. [He concludes:] Does this not sound rather like what the Qur'ân seems to have in mind when it speaks of the *kitâb*? In the thought world of the Prophet and his contemporaries, the monks would be nothing if not people of the *kitâb*.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> McAuliffe consecrates about twenty pages of her book to this issue (pp. 240-59). However, it is not insignificant to mention that, in the whole *Sûrah al-Qaşaş* (chapter 28), there is not a single mention of Christians. Instead the chapter starts with detailed narratives about Moses, continues with lamentations on Jews, and ends with the story of Qârûn (a rich man from the tribe of Moses). Theological issues and invitations to "the truth" are presented in between these sections. The fact that some *mufasssîrûn* include the Gospel when interpreting 28:52-5 is the consequence of their exclusivist viewpoint when interpreting the term *muslimîn* in 28:52. To them, this *âyah* proves that, in the history of humanity, there has only been two categories: Muslims (in its exclusivist sense meaning those who have accepted the messengerhood of the Prophet Muḥammad) and non-Muslims (those who have refused the messengerhood of the Prophet Muḥammad). As for the people of the book, according to this interpretation, all were supposed to be Muslims by accepting the foretellings about the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad in their sacred books, but only a few of them "were not blind to the truth," and submitted themselves to the will of God, by accepting Muḥammad as the seal of His prophets.

<sup>135</sup> Madigan, *The Qur'ân's Self Image*, 209.

These scholars' answers to the question of Christian being recognized as an identity in the Qur'ân is closer to Ibn Kathîr's interpretations of 3:52 and 5:111 than to Ṭabarî's inclusivist way of interpreting *muslimûn* at the end of those *âyahs*. Although what both McAuliffe and Madigan find in *tafâsîr* are accurate, it seems that the Qur'ân itself does not make a clear distinction between *ahl al-kitâb*, *al-naşârâ* and *muslim*. The Qur'ân does not mention the name of any ideology, faith or, what we call today, religion except Islam (if it means at all what we understand from it today). Terms such as Christianity, Judaism or Zoroastrianism are never used in the Qur'ân. So it will be surprising if their adjectives are used. When studying and/or interpreting the nomination of *al-naşârâ* in the Qur'ân, neither *mufasssîrûn*, nor westerner scholars of Islam give any importance to the fact that in all its 15 Qur'ânic usages, the term *al-naşârâ* (under three different forms), always appear in juxtaposition with another nomination *al-yahûd* (under three different forms).<sup>136</sup> For the meaning of *al-naşârâ*, Ṭabarî offers three possibilities: first, this lexeme comes from *nasara* (to help or to offer assistance), and the first followers of Jesus were called so, because at the beginning of their formation as a group of believers out of their Jewish context, they were faithfully helping each other and giving mutual assistance to each other, so people called them helpers (*naşârâ* coming from *naşîr*); second, it comes from the name of Jesus' homeland being Nâşîrah (Nazareth), and him being called *al-naşîrî* (of Nazareth), and third, it comes from an important public call of Jesus reported in the Qur'ân in 3:52 and 61:14, where he calls for *anşâr ilâ Allâh* (helpers to God), and his disciples answer positively. Most post-Ṭabarî *mufasssîrûn* follow him in their interpretation of the concerned *âyahs*, and give details about possible meanings of the term *al-naşârâ*. Surprisingly, no *mufasssîr* bothers to do the same level of effort to discuss

<sup>136</sup> The *âyahs* in question are: 2:62,111,113 (repeated twice), 120, 135, 140; 3:67; 5:14, 18, 51, 69, 82; 9:30; and 22:17. With no exception and in all fifteen cases, one of the terms *naşârâ*, *al-naşârâ* or *naşrâniyan* is in the same *âyah* with one of the terms *al-yahûd*, *hûda*, *hâdû* or *yahudiyan* (all referring to Jews). McAuliffe studies the term *al-naşârâ* independently from the term *al-yahûd*. At the beginning of her book's third chapter consecrated to the "Qur'ânic commendation of Christians", she briefly mentions that in some Qur'ânic instances, Christians are complimented "in a cluster, yoked with others in a common nod of approval." Then she moves to the three possibilities presented by some *mufasssîrûn* for the meaning of *al-naşârâ*. In her book, beside this brief explanation, there is no other mention of *al-yahûd*, as a Qur'ânic term always attached to *al-naşârâ*. The conclusion of the third chapter clearly shows that, in her careful intertextual approach, she is not interested in studying *al-naşârâ* in the textual context of its conjunction with other terms, such as *al-yahûd* and related terms.

etymological possibilities for the meaning(s) of the term *al-yahûd*.<sup>137</sup> But why the etymology of *al-yahûd* is important for the understanding of *al-naşârâ*? Because it might reflect the same “logic of nomination” used by the Qur’ân. In his *tafsîr* on 2:62, Ṭabarî presents two *jâhili* poems to discuss the singular and the dual forms of *naşârâ*. Then he presents a third poem in which the term has been used to refer to *al-naşârâ* as helpers. He takes it as a support for the possibility that the logic of the nomination must be found in the mutual helps among first Christians. He does not see the possibility of any poetical or rhetorical technic behind the poet’s choice of the words (like Hunter as a family name and hunter as an adjective in English).

Both Ṭabarî and Ibn Kathîr briefly mention that Jews are called *al-yahûd* after Moses’s prayer and repentance in public narrated in 7:156.<sup>138</sup> So the logic of the nomination in both cases comes from an important public event reported in the Qur’ân, one in Moses’s life and the other one in Jesus’ life. They both keep silence about the fact that these terms are not Qur’ânic innovations and their etymologies must be looked for somewhere else. They are not interested in what Hebrew scholars might have to say. They do not mention the Hebrew translation of the verb *hâda* (to repent or to return), and ignore the fact that Moses was not praying in Arabic, so an Arabic verb in his speech can become the name for his followers.

Ṭabâṭabâ’î, in his *tafsîr* on the same *âyah*, adds another possibility for the etymology of *al-yahûd*. He writes: “In a *riwâyah*, it has been said that Jews are called *al-yahûd* because they are descendants of Judah (Yehûdâ in Arabic) the son of Jacob.”<sup>139</sup> Although it is far from his meticulous style, he does not give any more details about this *riwâyah* and/or its transmitters. However, this possibility reflects the popular opinion about the etymology of the term in some Western sources. According to some scholars, the Hebrew term *yhudi* is the term originally used to refer to a member of the tribe of Judah, the fourth son of Jacob or “a Hebrew of the kingdom of Judah.”<sup>140</sup> This means that

<sup>137</sup> McAuliffe calls Ṭabarî’s “etymological analysis of *those who are Jews*” perfunctory. See McAuliffe, *Qur’ânic Christians*, 94.

<sup>138</sup> The term used in 7:156 is *hudnâ ilayka* meaning “we repented to you” or “we returned to you.”

<sup>139</sup> Al-Ṭabâṭabâ’î, *Al-Mizân fi Tafsîr al-Qur’ân*, under 7:156, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on Sep. 6<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>140</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, under *Jew*, available online at <http://www.oed.com> (consulted on Nov. 10<sup>th</sup> 2011).

the logic of the nomination is whether in a genealogy or in an attachment to a geographical aspect of adherents' life. This latter logic corresponds to what is believed to be the etymology of the term *Notzrim* (Christians) in Hebrew. As reported in the New Testament, at the early ages of Christianity, in a court against Paul, a Jewish lawyer named Tertullus points to him by the term "a member of the Nazarene sect" (Acts 24:6). Many scholars refer to this event as one of the first appearances of the term *Notzrim*<sup>141</sup>

By far, one of the best studies on the etymology of *al-naṣârâ* has been done by François de Blois. In his article entitled *Naṣrânî (Ναζωραῖος) and ḥanîf (ἕθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam*, de Blois looks for the etymological roots of *naṣârâ* in various pre-Islam foreign languages such as Aramaic, Malayalam, and Syriac. He mentions: "The possibility that the *naṣârâ* of the Quran were not catholic Christians, but Nazoraean 'Jewish Christians', is suggested not only by their Arabic name, but also by what the Quran has to say about Christians."<sup>142</sup> At the end of his meticulous study he concludes:

My proposal now is that the 'Jewish Christians' in the environment of primitive Islam were not those whom the Quran calls *ṣābi'ûn*, but those that it calls *naṣârâ*, ... [I attempt] to show that the quranic polemics precisely against the Nazoraean make use of motives that can be traced to the Pauline epistles, specifically the notion that Abraham had been elected 'in uncircumcision' and that he is consequently the paradigm of salvation for the gentiles. The realization that the *naṣârâ* of the Quran are not simply Christians, but 'Jewish Christians', who maintained, against Paul, the continued validity of the law of Moses, explains why the quranic notion of Abraham the *ḥanîf*, the gentile, stands in polemical juxtaposition not only to the Jews, but also to the Nazoraean. This suggests that the primitive Muslim community had contact with Nazoraean.<sup>143</sup>

Although in de Blois' research, the emphasis is on the specificity of that group of heretic Jews that the term *naṣârâ* refers to, he clearly accepts the logic of nomination being of geographical nature. Keeping that in mind, there is no doubt that both *al-yahûd* and *al-*

<sup>141</sup> For some detailed studies on this nomination, see *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 65, Issue 1, 2002, published by University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies.

<sup>142</sup> François de Blois, "Naṣrânî (Ναζωραῖος) and ḥanîf (ἕθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, vol. 65, No. 1 (2002): 1-30 (p. 13).

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.



*naṣârâ* were already familiar terms for the inhabitants of the Najd Peninsula when these latter first heard them within the Qur'ânic revelations. The question is if they were understood by those inhabitants as references to the global community of Jews and Christians or not. The Ṭabarî's and Ibn Kathîr's etymologies for *al-naṣârâ* support the possibility of this term referring to all Christians of the world (and by deduction, *al-yahûd* referring to all Jews) irrespective of their subdivisions and theological diversities at that time. This also is very close to how these terms are used today by Muslims. But if, as a way/culture of naming things, the initial logic of the nomination consisted of a reference to geographical places where a community of that faith was living, then the question will be: at a time when the expansion of Islam had not been started yet, how far early Muslims' mind could have gone when hearing those *âyahs* talking about *al-yahûd* or *al-naṣârâ*?<sup>144</sup> De Blois' answer is that "one should seriously consider the possibility that ... there was a community of Nazoraean Christians in central Arabia, in the seventh century, unnoticed by the outside world."<sup>145</sup>

Combining the geographical reference as the logic of nomination for the term *al-naṣârâ* with de Blois' hypothesis about the region where before and around the seventh century, that specific group of Christians were living, leads to another possibility: according to the Qur'ân, the singular form of *al-naṣârâ* is *al-naṣrânî*.<sup>146</sup> This singular form is very close to *al-najrânî* (someone from the city of Najrân) or the inhabitant of Najrân, the home city of the ascetic monks to whom Madigan refers. As a matter of fact, Najrânîs were the only Christians living in a community of faith close to Medina. They were the first Christians who discussed theological issues with the Prophet Muḥammad, and finally a treaty was signed between the two parties. So, as De Blois suggests *naṣârâ* will be a reference to a specific group of Christians living in Central Arabia for centuries, and the logic of nomination also remains faithful to its geographical nature.

<sup>144</sup> The usage of this geographical reference as a logic of nomination used by early Muslims can also be found in some other important instances: the same logic has been used to divide the Qur'ânic *âyahs* and *sûrahs* into *makkî* (revealed in Mecca) and *madanî* (revealed in Medina). As another example, when prescribing the rituals of *Hajj*, the Qur'ân makes a distinction between *muḥilli ḥaram* (those who live in the Harem), and *ghayra muḥilli ḥaram* (those who do not live in the Harem).

<sup>145</sup> De Blois, "Naṣrânî (Ναζωραῖος) and ḥanîf (ἑθνικός)," 16.

<sup>146</sup> The singular form has been used once in the Qur'ân (3:67). It reads: "Abraham was not a Jew, nor yet a Christian [*naṣrâniyyan*]; but he was an upright man who had surrendered (to Allâh), and he was not of the idolaters."

This is a raw suggestion, and it requires more in depth studies, but I briefly mention two supports for my suggestion: first, among different rhetorical styles of the Qur'ân, there is the technic of replacing a letter in a name by another phonetically similar letter or to slightly deform it by adding one or two letters. This technic is called *al-qalb wa al-ibdâl* (change and replacement).<sup>147</sup> For example in 3:96, the city of Makkah (Mecca) is called Bakkah,<sup>148</sup> or in 37:1 the prophet Ilyâs (Elijah) is called Ilyâsîn.<sup>149</sup> If *al-naşrânî* is the soft pronunciation of *al-najrânî*, then by the same logic that de Blois believes that *naşârâ* is a reference to Nazoraeans (and *al-yahûd* might mean people of Judah), *al-naşârâ* might be a reference to the people of Najrân. Second: there are other Qur'ânic nominative terms such as *ruhbân* (5:82; 9:31, 34) or *Qissîs* (5:82), both exclusively used in plural forms as references to Christians, and in some cases, after the expansion of Islam, they are used in legal documents, to refer to Christians in a region outside the Peninsula of Najd.<sup>150</sup>

### 1.6.3 Does Muslim, as an Identity, Exist in the Qur'ân?

In Ibn Kathîr's *tafsîr* on 3:52 and 5:111, *al-naşârâ*, as a common designation for Christians is presented as a *via negativa* for Muslims. This corresponds to the aforementioned socio-political context of his era, but does it also correspond to the Qur'ânic

<sup>147</sup> According to Şubhî al-Şâlih, the famous gramarian ibn al-Sikkit (d. 244H) mentions 300 examples of *qalb wa ibdâl*. For more information about this technique and to read some of its Qur'ânic examples, see Şubhî al-Şâlih, *Dirâsât fi Fiqh al-Lugha*. Beirut: Dâr al-'Ilm li al-Malâ'in, 1980 (pp. 213-15).

<sup>148</sup> There is a debate among *mufasssîrûn* on what exactly the term Bakkah refers to. Some, such as Ṭabarî, suggest that it refers to "the place of crowding." Some others, such as Suyûfî, suggest that it is a dialectical variant meaning Makkah. Other possibilities are also discussed. Kenneth Cragg suggests that Bakkah is the name of the sacred valley in which the city of Mecca is located. See Kenneth Cragg, "The Historical Geography of the Qur'ân: A Study in *asbâb al-nuzûl*." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 1, No. 1 (1999): 81-92 (p. 81).

<sup>149</sup> Some other possibilities for *ilyâsîn* have been discussed by *mufasssîrûn*, but many of them, including Ṭabarî, insist that *ilyâsîn* is simply a purposely deformed pronunciation of the name Ilyâs (Elijah).

<sup>150</sup> As an example, in a letter from the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azîz to his governor 'Uday ibn Artâ' cited by Ṭabarî in his *tafsîr* on 2:190, the Caliph points to Christian inhabitants of the city by the term *al-ruhbân*. The Caliph writes:

I have read an *âyah* in the Book of Allâh which says: 'And fight in the Way of Allâh those who fight you, but transgress not the limits. Truly, Allâh likes not the transgressors.' I believe that this *âyah* is ordering me not to fight those who do not initiate to fight me, and by this I mean women, children, and *ruhbân* [Christians].

See Al-Ṭabarî, *Jami' al-Bayân fi Ta'wîl al-Qur'ân*, under 2:190, available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net) (consulted on Dec. 8<sup>th</sup> 2011).

usage of the term?

Checking the term *muslim* in early Arab dictionaries reveals an interesting point. Al-Farâhidî (100-173H), the author of *Kitâb al-'Ayn*, probably the earliest Arabic dictionary ignores the term and does not mention it under *salama* (the roots of the term *muslim*).<sup>151</sup> He simply mentions that the *islâm* form of *salama* means submitting oneself to the will of Allâh.<sup>152</sup> Four centuries later, Ibn Manzûr, the author of *Lisân al-'Arab* cites al-Azharî (the author of *al-Tahdhib*, an older dictionary) and affirms that the term *muslim* has two meanings: first, someone who submits himself to the will of Allâh, and second, someone who purifies his prayers only for Allâh.<sup>153</sup> Two centuries later, Fakhr al-Dîn al-Ṭurayhî, the author of *Mu'jam Majma' al-Baḥrayn* cites a Qur'ânic *âyah* (84:3) and says: "Muslim means someone who accepts Allâh's judgement, and follows Allâh's orders, and purifies his prayers for Allâh, as interpreters of the Qur'ân have said."<sup>154</sup>

This quick look at some dictionaries help seeing the traces of a historical evolution of the term *muslim* from a general concept to the designation of an identity set over against infidels including Jews or Christians. A brief study of certain *âyahs* in which the term *muslim* is used reveals that the Qur'ânic use of this term as a general concept referring to whoever submits himself/herself to the will of God. In other words, the Qur'ân uses the term *muslim* to define a relationship between human being and God rather than an exclusive designation for the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad. According to the Qur'ân:

<sup>151</sup> Here and after in this thesis, some of the following seven major Arab classical dictionaries are used. They are: *Kitâb al-'Ayn* written by al-Farâhidî (100-173H), *Al-Ṣiḥâḥ fi al-Lughâ* written by al-Jawharî (d.393H), *Maqâyis al-Lughâ* written by Ibn Fâris (d. 395H), *Al-'Ibâb al-Zâkhir* written by al-Ṣaghânî (577-650H), *Lisân al-'Arab* written by Ibn Manzûr (630-711H), *Al-Qâmûs al-Muḥîṭ* written by al-Fayrûzâbâdî (729-818H), and *Mu'jam Majma' al-Baḥrayn* written by al-Ṭurayhî (d. 1085H). To read about the history of these dictionaries and their importance as references in Qur'ânic Studies, see chapters 3 to 5 of John A. Haywood, *Arabic Lexicography: Its History, and Its Place in the General History of Lexicography*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1965.

<sup>152</sup> 'Abd al-Rahmân Khalîl b. Aḥmad al-Farâhidî, *Kitâb al-'Ayn*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Damascus: Manzamat al-Awqâf wa al-Umûr al-Khayriyyah, 1414H (p. 265).

<sup>153</sup> Abu al-Faḍl Jamâl al-Dîn Muḥammad b. Mukram ibn Maḍḍur, *Lisân al-'Arab*. Qum: Adab al-Ḥawza, 1363 Solar *hijra*, under *salama*, available online at <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp> (consulted on Dec. 10<sup>th</sup> 2011).

<sup>154</sup> Fakhr al-Dîn al-Ṭurayhî, *Mu'jam Majma' al-Baḥrayn*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Tehran: Enteshârât-e Mortazavî, no date, under *salama*, available online at <http://www.ahlalhdeth.com/vb/showthread.php?t=275365> (consulted on June 19<sup>th</sup> 2012).

- Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac are Muslims: in 2:128 Abraham prays: “Our Lord! Make us Muslims, and of our offspring a Muslim nation, and show us our rituals.” A few *âyahs* further in 2:132 he addresses his two sons and informs them about his last will by saying: “The same did Abraham enjoin upon his sons, and also Jacob, (saying): O my sons! Lo! Allah hath chosen for you the (true) religion; therefore die not save as men who have surrendered (unto Him).”
- Jacob and all his 12 sons are Muslims: in 2:132 Jacob also asks his sons, as his last will, to “die not except as Muslims.”
- Solomon is a Muslim and orders others to be Muslims: in 27:30-32 the Queen of Sheba reads Solomon’s letter for her men. 27:30-32 reads: “Lo! it is from Solomon, and lo! it is: In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful; Exalt not yourselves against me, but come unto me as those who surrender. She said: ‘O chieftains! Pronounce for me in my case. I decide no case till ye are present with me.’”
- Joseph is a Muslim: Joseph’s prayer when his parents, as well as his eleven brothers fell down before him prostrate is narrated in 12:101: “[Joseph said:] O my Lord! Thou hast given me (something) of sovereignty and hast taught me (something) of the interpretation of events - Creator of the heavens and the earth! Thou art my Protecting Friend in the world and the Hereafter. Make me to die submissive (unto Thee), and join me to the righteous.”
- Moses is a Muslim: he also commands his people to be Muslims. 10:84 reads: “And Moses said: ‘O my people! If ye have believed in Allah then put trust in Him, if ye have indeed surrendered (unto Him)!’”
- The magicians who were invited to resist Moses become Muslims when they see Moses’ miracles: 7:126 is a conversation between Pharaoh and the magicians after they have fallen down prostrate to Moses’ God. Pharaoh angrily threatens them but they reply: “Thou takest vengeance on us only forasmuch as we believed the tokens of our Lord when they came unto us. Our Lord! Vouchsafe unto us steadfastness and make us die as men who have surrendered (unto Thee).”
- Even Pharaoh tries to be Muslim, but his Islam is perhaps not accepted: 10:90-91 is a short conversation between Pharaoh and an archangel (probably Gabriel) at the moment of Pharaoh’s death in the Red Sea. The *âyah* says: “And We brought the

Children of Israel across the sea, and Pharaoh with his hosts pursued them in rebellion and transgression, till, when the (fate of) drowning overtook him, he exclaimed: 'I believe that there is no God save Him in Whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am of those who surrender (unto Him)'. 'What! Now! When hitherto thou hast rebelled and been of the wrong-doers?'"

- The disciples of Jesus are all Muslims: As mentioned before, the disciples present themselves in 3:62 and 5:111 as Muslims.
- All Prophets are Muslims: 2:136 teaches the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad to say in their prayers: "Say (O Muslims): 'We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered.'"
- Even some djinns are Muslims: 72:14-15 cite a conversation between some djinns who, for the first time in their lives, have heard some revelations while the revelations descended from above. At the end of the conversation they say to each other: "And there are among us some who have surrendered (to Allah) and there are among us some who are unjust. And whoso hath surrendered to Allah, such have taken the right path purposefully. And as for those who are unjust, they are firewood for hell."

Surprisingly the term *muslim* is so often used in direct citations in the Qur'ân. All of the afore-mentioned *âyahs* are examples of this point. Moreover, the presence of "muslim" placed in the mouths of these non-Arabic speaking individuals implies that whatever language they were speaking, it would have had a concept equivalent to *muslim*.

Having Mircea Eliade's theory of *sui generis* in mind, one may suggest that to early Muslims this term did not mean what it means to scholars today. Two arguments support this hypothesis: first, the two Qur'ânic terms frequently used to refer to what we call early Muslims are: *al-anṣâr*, helpers or those who lived in Yathrib and welcomed the Prophet and his followers in their homes, and *al-muhâjirûn*, immigrants or those who migrated to Yathrib from Mecca before the migration of the Prophet. They have been admired by terms like *Mujâhidûn* (those who do *jihâd*) or *sâbeqûn* (those who accepted

the truth earlier). Today's scholarly and popular use of the term "early Muslims" as a reference to them is the result of a self-definition formed within the power dynamics of the Islamic Empire and supported by Muslim authorities over centuries of conflict, Crusade, *Jihâd*, and mutual misunderstanding. Second, the definition of the Qur'ânic *muslim*, *via negativa* is not similar to what is popularly understood today. Using Ibn Kathîr's own preferred method to discover the meaning of the term in the Qur'ân reveals to what extent his interpretation of the term has been shaped by the socio-political context of his life.<sup>155</sup>

There are four *âyahs* in the Qur'ân in which the term *muslim* is defined by its negative:

- *Muslim* versus *mushrik* (who believes in partner(s) for Allâh)<sup>156</sup>: In 3:67 *muslim* has been used over against *mushrik*. The *âyah* reads: "Abraham was neither a *yahûd* man, nor a *naşrânî* man, rather was he a *hanîf* (monotheist), a *muslim*, and not of *al-mushrikun*."
- *Muslim* versus *mufsid* (evil-doer, corrupter)<sup>157</sup>: As mentioned before, 10:90-92 narrates a conversation between Pharaoh and an archangel. In 10:91 the archangel uses *mufsidûn* as an opposite term for *muslim*.
- *Muslim* versus *mujrim* (sinner, guilty person)<sup>158</sup>: In 68:35 *muslim* has been clearly used over against *mujrim*. This *âyah* speaks about people of hell, and justifies God's

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<sup>155</sup> McAuliffe affirms that letting the Qur'ân interpret itself is highly recommended by Ibn Kathîr. She states:

Thus, [to Ibn Kathîr] the first step is to let the Qur'ân interpret itself, to let one part of the revelation clarify the obscurities of another part. If no such clarification can be found, recourse may be had to the *sunnah*, the normative remembrance of Muḥammad's words and deeds, at least to that part of it which contains the exegetical remarks of the Prophet. If such a search is greeted with prophetic silence, the next step –both hermeneutically and historically– is reference to the companions of the Prophet.

See McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 17.

<sup>156</sup> This is Ibn Manzûr's definition for *mushrik*. See Ibn Manzûr, *Lisân al-'Arab*, under *sharaka*, available online at <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp> (consulted on June 19<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, under *fasada*.

<sup>158</sup> This is Farâhidî's definition for *mujrimûn*. See Al-Farâhidî, *Kitâb al-'Ayn*, under *jarama*, available online at [http://archive.org/details/alaen\\_Farahidi](http://archive.org/details/alaen_Farahidi) (consulted on June 19<sup>th</sup> 2012).

decision to punish *mujrimûn* by saying: “Shall We then treat the Muslims like the *mujrimûn*?”<sup>159</sup>

- *Muslim* versus *qâsiṭ* (unjust, rebellious to God’s commandments)<sup>160</sup>: As mentioned before in 72:14 djinns present themselves as two groups of *muslimûn* versus *qâsiṭûn*.

These Qur’ânic affirmations support the hypothesis that the term *muslim* as a designation for an identity over against Christian or Jew does not exist in the Qur’ân. Rather it is a generic concept that starts with Abraham, and whoever adheres to Abraham’s approach to God and worship is a Muslim. The 22<sup>nd</sup> *sûrah* of the Qur’ân ends with this *âyahs*:

وَجَاهِدُوا فِي اللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ مَلَّةً أُنَبِّئُكُمْ  
إِبْرَاهِيمَ هُوَ سَمَّاكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا لِيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى  
النَّاسِ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِاللَّهِ هُوَ مَوْلَاكُمْ فَنِعْمَ الْمَوْلَى وَنِعْمَ النَّصِيرُ

And (O humankind) strive for Allah with the endeavour which is His right. He has chosen you and has not laid upon you in *din* (religion, faith, justice) any hardship; the faith of your father Abraham (is yours). He has named you Muslims of old time and in this (Scripture) that the messenger may be a witness against you, and that ye may be witnesses against mankind. So establish worship, pay the poor-due, and hold fast to Allah. He is your Protecting friend. A blessed Patron and a blessed Helper! (22:78)

In the fifth chapter of his doctoral dissertation,<sup>161</sup> Patrice Brodeur focuses on the history of the comparative study of religion in Islam. He tries to analyze “what Islam is, or ought to be, and what being a Muslim (in terms of an identity) means.”<sup>162</sup> To do so, he studies Abu Zahra’s Islamic definition of the term *din*, aiming to show the ambiguity of the term within Islam. Then, he moves to a comparative analysis of three modern Egyptian Muslims (Abu Zahra, ‘Abdallâh Dirâz, and Aḥmad Shalabî) who have all worked and published on “religious others.”<sup>163</sup> Brodeur’s main goal is to demonstrate how Dirâz’s

<sup>159</sup> Ibn Manzûr believes that *mujrim* means pagan. See Ibn Manzûr, *Lisân al-‘Arab*, under *jarama*, available online at <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp> (consulted on June 19<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 378.

<sup>161</sup> Patrice Brodeur, *From an Islamic Heresiography to an Islamic History of Religions*.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>163</sup> All of them have put an emphasis on Christianity. In Abu Zahra’s case, his book entitled *comparative religions* is composed of 108 pages on six religions (Judaism is totally ignored), and 194 pages on Christianity.

more-or-less pluralistic viewpoint, in which *dîn* is broadly defined as a spiritual relationship between humankind and the transcendent, can coexist with Abu Zahra's more exclusivist viewpoint, in which the Qur'ân is the ultimate source of truth on all subject matters (including other religions), and Shalabî's extremist viewpoint, in which the only *dîn* is Islam. Shalabî writes: "It is indisputable that just and unjust researcher will soon hail Islam when he compares the Islamic thinking on the subject of 'Allâh', God, with the Christian or Buddhist thinking on the same subject."<sup>164</sup> At the end, Brodeur concludes that the Islamic literature on "religious others" has helped Muslims, over a thousand years, to not only reach a relatively high degree of interreligious sensitivity towards non-Muslims, especially people of the book, but also to improve their own self-understanding.<sup>165</sup> He concludes:

In the same way as it was useful then to define the boundaries of an Islamic identity, so it is today, although from a very different power position. Muslims are no more at the center of power in the way they were when the formative generic system of 'religious others' developed in central Islamic lands.<sup>166</sup>

This case study did not primarily aim to discover when, where, and how "Muslim" as a self-identification for the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad first emerged. Instead, it tried to open a line of discussion on the possibility of the contribution of the term *al-naṣârâ*, interpreted and defined by *mufasssîrûn* as *negativa* for *muslim*, to the followers of the Prophet Muḥammad's self-identification by the term *muslim*. Its other goal was to compare two different *tafâsîr* on two specific *âyahs* on the disciples of Jesus, as an example for a historical reality that is often ignored by devout Muslims: the ambiguity of some key Qur'ânic terms that are considered too often to be unequivocal. In addition, it pointed to how the socio-political realities of an interpreter's era might have influenced his interpretations. In other words, certain words in the Qur'ân do not intrinsically hold the meaning they have come to hold, and exegeses have always been at least partly linked to historical context. Studies like this present dissertation are humble efforts to challenge

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<sup>164</sup> Quoted in English translation from Patrice Brodeur, *From an Islamic Heresiography to an Islamic History of Religions*, 272.

<sup>165</sup> This literature begins with the Qur'ânic *âyahs* on Jews or Christians and continues with its *tafâsîr*.

<sup>166</sup> Patrice Brodeur, *From an Islamic Heresiography to an Islamic History of Religions*, 294.



the established understanding of basic terms like “Muslim” and “Christian,” trying to open new possibilities for interreligious dialogue. Given that all knowledge and all interpretation is linked to a specific time and culture, let me close by saying that, in today’s world, it is not easy for Muslim scholars to oppose and change what has been understood and fixed by a majority of Muslims over time as the only true meaning of the Qur’ân. This one-true-meaning mentality is mostly based not only on the sacredness of the Qur’ân, but also on the perceived sacredness of *tafâsîr* — a sacredness that prevents Muslims from studying them as human products composed within their respective historical, personal, socio-political, and cultural contexts.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Another reality is that, sometimes, inclusivist *tafâsîr* such as Ṭabarî’s or Ṭabâṭabâ’î’s are not easy-to-understand for ordinary Muslims. At times, selected paragraphs are highlighted as alleged confirmation for other interpreters’ exclusivist *tafâsîr*, resulting in the manipulation of earlier authors’ initial intentions.

## Chapter 2

### On Themes, Topics, and Divisions in the Qur'ân

#### 2.1 Introduction

As a book recited and read for more than fourteen centuries, the Qur'ân has been exposed to a diverse readership. Consequently, its understanding has been exposed to countless cultures and traditions. Since its appearance and down the centuries, its *sûrahs*, *âyahs*, words, letters, and even accents have been the subjects of uncountable meticulous studies and endless scholarly debates among Muslim erudite researchers, thinkers and scholars, generation after generation. As a result, a wide variety of approaches and methods have been developed within '*ulûm al-qur'âniyyah* (the Qur'ânic Sciences). This chapter begins with a quick review of those various sciences. It continues with subdivisions of the Qur'ân based on Qur'ânic themes and topics. It then studies the main approaches and methods of *tafsîr*. Finally, it presents a new theory for achieving a different understanding of the Qur'ânic messages being the theory of double messages of the Qur'ân. This theory divides the Qur'ânic messages and meanings into two main categories. The first category includes the time bound messages addressed to a varied local audience living at the time of the Prophet. The second category contains the timeless messages for all humanity beyond geographical boundaries. This theory is, to some degree, a complementary reaction to Wilfred Cantwell Smith's theory, which affirms that:

... the Qur'ân as scripture has meant whatever it has meant to those Muslims for whom it has been scripture. The real meaning of the Qur'ân is not any one meaning but is a dynamic process of meanings, in variegated

and unending flow. The true meaning of scripture is the solid historical reality of the continuum of actual meanings over the centuries to actual people. It is as transcendent, and/or as mundane, as have been those actual meanings in the lives and hearts of persons ... the study of religion is the study of persons. The meaning of the Qur'ân as scripture lies not in the text, but in the minds and hearts of Muslims.<sup>1</sup>

While interpreting Cantwell Smith's above theory, Madigan states:

[What Cantwell Smith says] is true in both an internal and an external sense. First, the Qur'ân reflects the history of its own development over the more than twenty years of its address to a varied audience. Second, since the time of its canonisation it has been read by a very diverse community of faith in widely different historical contexts.<sup>2</sup>

My own theory of double messages of the Qur'ân will therefore bring greater clarity to the distinction between the two categories of meaning pointed out by Madigan above. The final goal of this theory is to get closer to the experience of what I call "the fifth layer of meaning" or "the soul of the text." This fifth layer is the last of five layers that I present as another theory within this chapter.

## 2.2 The Sciences of the Qur'ân

There is no need to explain why with the rapid expansion of Islam, and the quick establishment of an empire from the Atlantic ocean to the Indus river in present day Pakistan within less than a hundred years after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad (632 CE), early Muslims had to deal with the world of sciences among the many challenges of becoming a new socio-political power. As Doris Behrens-Abouseif rightly mentioned, Muslims first inherited and applied the "ancient Greek classifications of the sciences" according to which the concept of being "religious" was considered in opposition to being "secular." Although this early Greek categorization was an imposition on a new Islamic reality that was initially more "conceived as *dunyâ wa dîn*, that is, an all-pervasive worldly and religious systems to deny a separation between the secular and the

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<sup>1</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The True Meaning of Scripture: An Empirical Historian's Non-reductionist Interpretation of the Qur'ân." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 11, No. 4 (July-Aug. 1980): 487-505 (pp. 504-5).

<sup>2</sup> Daniel A. Madigan, "Themes and Topics." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ân*, 79.

religious aspects of life,”<sup>3</sup> Muslim scholars soon followed the same duality in their “Islamic” categorization of sciences. They made a distinction between *‘ulûm shar‘iyyah* (Islamic sciences), dealing directly or indirectly with religious matters, and non-Islamic ones *‘ulûm ‘aqliyyah* (rational and natural sciences), including philosophy.”<sup>4</sup> As for the study of the Qur’ân, it found its place at the center of what was came to be known as “Islamic sciences,” gradually developing an ensemble of complementary sciences around it. The *‘ulûm al-qur’âniyyah* or *‘ulûm al-qur’ân* (sciences of the Qur’ân) emerged in a particular context of power where political and religious authority were combined, as mirrored in the concept of the caliphate. Due to this dual nature of power, the distinction between religious and non-religious matters in different aspects of life, including “science,” never resulted in a clear separation between Islamic and non-Islamic.<sup>5</sup> So, as long as it was useful for the newborn Islamic empire, any mundane or profane/secular matter was to a degree “Islamic” in the sense that political Islam was not indifferent about it, considering it as a potential tool to better govern or to expand political power.<sup>6</sup> For the same reason, Greek sciences such as medicine and astronomy were among the subject matters popularly taught in madrasas since the beginning of the second *hijra* century, and by the same logic, the sciences of the Qur’ân had a direct impact on the development of flourishing rational and natural sciences.

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<sup>3</sup> Doris Behrens-Abouseif, “Beyond the Secular and the Sacred: Qur’anic inscriptions in medieval Islamic Art and Material Culture.” In *Word of God, Art of Man: The Qur’ân and its Creative Expressions*. Edited by Fahmida Suleman, 41-9. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007 (p. 41).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Behrens-Abouseif gives the example of politics. She writes: “Muslim political thought distinguished between *siyâsa*, meaning statecraft or politics, and *dîn*, or religion, a distinction that was conditioned; however, by the imperative that *siyâsa* must not conflict with religion, but rather be in accordance with it.” See *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> A very good example of this perplex standpoint is Mohammad Ali Zam’s viewpoint on Islamic sciences. According to him, Islam did not come to establish Islamic versions of everything, but to mention few proscriptions while prescribing freedom of thought and act. He gives the example of “Islamic economics,” and says that such a thing, as a science, does not exist. To him, the Qur’ân forbids usury amongst human beings, so any economic system that avoids usury is by definition Islamic. He goes further and says that if two totally different economic systems work well in two different corners of the world, as long as they avoid usury, they both are Islamic for their own peoples. But as soon as an economic system fails to bring wealth and justice to people, even if there is no usury in it, it cannot be considered Islamic anymore. By this last statement, he presents a very large and non-religious sense of what “Islamic” means, close to the usage of the term in some pre-modern Muslim societies. For more information, see Mohammad Ali Zam, *Jomhour-e Jahani-ye Shi’è: Kolliyât-e Mohandesî-ye Farhangî*. Tehran: Ketab-e Jomhour, 2006.

In a broader sense, the *'ulûm al-qur'ân* study the revelation of the Qur'ân, its *tartîl* and *tajwîd* (arts of recitation), its collection and compilation, its internal order and arrangements, its writing down, the reasons and occasions of the revelation of its *âyahs*, and of course its *tafsîr* (meaning(s)). To do so, the *'ulûm al-qur'ân* use a collection of highly developed and varied sciences ranging from history and arabic linguistics to *ma'ânî bayân* (the science of rhetoric and eloquence).<sup>7</sup> In a more precise sense, *'ulûm al-qur'ân* also study the methods of study and explanation of the Qur'ân, as well as the life of *mufasssirûn* (exegetes of the Qur'ân) and their works. Issues such as *nâsikh* (abrogating *âyahs*) and *mansûkh* (abrogated *âyahs*) or *muḥkam* (clear *âyahs*) and *mutashâbih* (unclear or ambiguous *âyahs*) are of particular interest for the *'ulûm al-qur'ân*.

### 2.3 Different Subdivisions of the Qur'ânic Text

Today, an important characteristic of the Qur'ân is its uniformity in Arabic. Since its compilation two decades after the Prophet's death, this uniformity has been an undeniable aspect of the text. Although there is a long history of scholarly and/or confessional debates among different early Muslim groups, particularly between Shi'îs and Sunnîs, on the possibility of some human manipulations of the Qur'ânic text, the Arabic scripture of the Qur'ân, as we have it in hand today, is uniform letter by letter and accent by accent all around the world.<sup>8</sup> This uniformity unifies Muslims of different

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<sup>7</sup> Since a major part of *tafsîr* –as a science, founds its understanding of the text on *aḥādīth*, the *'ulûm al-ḥadīth* (the sciences of *ḥadīth* also called *'ilm al-ḥadīth* or the Science of *ḥadīth*) is directly involved in the methods used within the *'ulûm al-qur'ân*. This brings a wide variety of sciences from *'ilm al-ansâb* (geneology) and *'ilm al-rijâl* (the science of men's nobility) to *fiqh al-ḥadīth* (the understanding of *ḥadīth*) into the picture. Suyûtî cites al-Nayshâbûrî (d. 406H) who writes: “25 *'ulûm* are [hidden] in the Qur'ân and whoever does not master them all, does not merit to talk about the Book of God.” See Jalâl al-Dîn al-Suyûtî, *Bughyat al-Wu'ât fi Ṭabaqât al-Lughawiyîn wa al-Nuḥât*. Edited by Muḥammad Abu al-Faḍl Ibrâhîm. 2 vols. Cairo: Dâr al-Fikr, 1979 (vol. 1, p. 227).

<sup>8</sup> In almost every book of *tafsîr*, one can find traces of these debates. As an example, in the beginning of the *tafsîr* of chapter 9 of the Qur'ân (*Sûrah Al-Tawbah*), most *mufasssirûn* report a serious debate among the companions of the Prophet, some willing to include the *basmala* (the uniform opening verse at the beginning of all *sûrahs*) at the beginning of that *sûrah*, and some refusing it. Similar debates are reported in the *tafsîr* of many other *âyahs*. In some cases, as in 5:6, 26:6, and 94:6, the debate has been around a letter in a word of the verse, in some cases, as in 2:132, 5:54, and 6:63, the debate has been about the form of a verb in the verse, in some other cases, as in 23:17, the debate has been about two different verbs, each of them bearing a different meaning, and finally, the biggest debate between some early Shi'î scholars and their Sunnî fellow scholars has been about the existence of some Qur'ânic *âyahs* explicitly mentioning the *wilâya* of 'Ali ibn Abi Tâlib, purposely wiped off the first compiled Qur'ân under the third caliph. The

linguistic backgrounds around the same text in the same treated as sacred language. Any attempt to change the structure of the Qur'ân, or to alter the order of its *âyahs* and/or *sûrahs*, or to modify its words, or to break any of its letters is considered a blasphemy by the devout majority of Muslims.<sup>9</sup> This solid and untouchable “form” of the text has resulted in a series of characteristics all directly or indirectly related to this uniformity.

These characteristics have always been at the center of Western scholars' attention from the very beginning of the formation of Islamic Studies as an academic field in the nineteenth century. The first generation of “orientalists” interested in the study of the Qur'ân, such as Sir William Muir (1819-1905C.E.) and Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930C.E.) began their scholarly efforts with a special attention to the internal structure of the Qur'ân. They considered those classifications as a first step towards a better understanding of not only the text, but also the Muslims' worldview shaped by and around this sacred text. Maybe it was because of those early scholars' success at “deconstructing” the Qur'ân and to reveal some of its messages and functions for Muslims that a few decades later, almost every orientalist in Islamic Studies was, to a degree, interested in dismantling the Qur'ân and discovering its “true meaning.” That is how at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a large number of scholarly and non-scholarly essays on the Qur'ân were published, many of them focusing, at least in part, on different material aspects and elements of the text. Those works range from scholarly and skilful papers to biased and simplistic essays, naively using some structural elements of the Qur'ân as a wide open gate for understanding the Muslim World.<sup>10</sup> The influence of the

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Shi'î belief in the existence of those *âyahs* has gone as far as believing in a hidden and different Qur'ân called *Muṣḥaf al-Fâtimah* (the Book of Fâtimah) written by 'Ali ibn Abi Ṭâlib in more or less 6 months (between the death of the Prophet and the death of Fâtimah) to console his wife. Some Shi'î *muḥaddithûn* narrate a *ḥadîth* from Imâm Ja'far al-Şâdiq in which the Qur'ân of Fâtimah has been described as three times the length of the actual Qur'ânic text. According to some Shi'î sources, the Qur'ân of Fâtimah will be brought back to Muslims by the Mahdi at the end of time. For more details, see, for example, Muḥammad b. Ya'qûb al-Kulaynî, *Uṣûl al-Kâfi*, 8 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-Islâmiyyah, 1365H (vol. 1, p. 241). E-published by Markaz al-Ish'â'a al-Islâmî li al-Dirâsât wa al-Buḥûth al-Islâmiyyah, available online at [http://www.islam4u.com/maktabah\\_list.php?sid=3](http://www.islam4u.com/maktabah_list.php?sid=3) (consulted on January 20<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>9</sup> It is not insignificant to mention that, although the majority of Muslims consider any attempt to change and/or play with Qur'ânic accents as heretical, the first written Qur'âns did not have either accents or punctuations.

<sup>10</sup> More or less in the same era, another “movement” to study the Qur'ân started among missionaries and orthodox adherents of other faiths. That movement's main goal was to reveal the falsehood of the Qur'ânic revelation and the weakness of the text. For example Rev. Thomas Patrick Hughes consecrated his life to

scholarly stream was so strong that many journalistic essays followed their path and achieved interesting results.<sup>11</sup> An example for a biased work with remarkable conclusions is Charles Horswell's brief study entitled *The External Form of the Qur'ân*, published in 1890. In his seven page article with no footnote or reference, he gives a short, descriptive, and disorganized explanation of a few organizational elements in the Qur'ânic text, then comparing the Qur'ân to the New Testament. Despite his subjective approach, which suffers from different weaknesses<sup>12</sup>, he rightly concludes:

The text of the Quran has been preserved with the greatest care. To countenance a various reading is by a Muslim regarded as an offense against the state. "No other work" (says Muir) "has remained for twelve centuries with so pure a text... Aside from the parallel divisions of chapter and verse, the Quran and the Bible are divided for systematic reading in public service... The necessity of a careful study of the historic background is ever present in the Quran, ...in the scientific interpretation of the material... The absence of historical data ...is most worthy of notice. Muhammed's name occurs but five times in the Quran, and only two contemporaries are mentioned. If we put beside this the statement from the lips of Ali, "There is not a verse in the Quran of which I do not know the matter, the parties to whom it refers, and the place and time of its revelation, whether by night or by day, whether in the plains or upon the mountain," and keep in mind at the same time the immense activity and the many personal encounters of the prophet's life, we are led to wonder at the suppression of historic detail...<sup>13</sup>

I would argue that the preservation Horswell mentions has been possible, in part, with the

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discuss with Muslims in India trying to convert them to Christianity. As a part of his missionary duties, he published some interesting articles on the Qur'ân. Another example of an academician consecrating the last years of his life to the fight against the Qur'ân is Gustav Weil (1808-1889). Weil's six-part article is a clear example of the danger pertaining to the "academization" of confessional battles against the sacred text of another faith, in this case, Islam. See Gustav Weil, "An Introduction to the Qur'ân." *The Biblical World*, vol. 5, No. 3-6, and vol. 6, No. 1-2 (May-Aug. 1895).

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to know that, in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century, a reverse approach, such as the use of the word "fundamentalism," has sometimes taken place.

<sup>12</sup> One example of Horswell's weak work is when he indirectly promotes an Islamic trinity composed of Allâh, Archangel Gabriel and Muḥammad. He says that the Islamic numerology had predicted from the very beginning of the appearance of Islam, the number of years (71) in which Islam would expand all around the world. He reaches his conclusion by adding the numerical representations of those three names. He does not give any reference or source for this purported Islamic conviction. See Charles Horswell, "The External Form of the Qur'ân." *The Old and New Testament Student*, vol. 11, No. 6 (Dec. 1890): 341-348 (p. 343).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 346-8.

help of a series of systematic subdivisions of the text according to different criteria. Indeed these classifications have functioned as different identities for Qur'ânic passages whether single *âyahs* and/or a group of *âyahs* or *sûrahs*.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile the personal and historical contexts that he points to, as a hermeneutical tool for the understanding of the Qur'ânic messages, remain undiscovered by *mufasssirûn*. Despite the careful preservation and anxious study of *asbâb al-nuzûl* by both *mufasssirûn* and Muslim historians within '*ulûm al-qur'ân*, to many of them, the historical context of an *âyah* is nothing more than an earthly reason for the revelation of some other pieces of a divine puzzle picturing the "Truth." When it comes to the subdivisions of the Qur'ânic text by Muslims themselves, the only criterion that, to some degree, pays attention to the historical context of the revelation is the subdivision of *âyahs* and *sûrahs* into *makkî* (Meccan, that is, revealed in Mecca) and *madanî* (Medinan, that is, revealed in Medina).

### 2.3.1 The Subdivision of the Qur'ânic Text into *juz'*, *hizb*, and *rub'*

There are different opinions on who first initiated the subdivision of the Qur'ânic text into parts of *ajzâ'* (the plural form of *juz'*), *ahzâb* (the plural form of *hizb*), and *arbâ'* (the plural form of *rub'*), as currently present in the Qur'ânic text. Some *mufasssirûn* report the existence of different Qur'ânic subdivisions in the Prophet's era determined by the Prophet himself. For example, Sijistânî consecrates a whole *bâb* (chapter) to the Qur'ân's *tahzîb* (the subdivision of the Qur'ân into parts) by the Prophet, and narrates several *ahâdîth* with different degrees of authenticity, confirming it. According to some of those *ahâdîth*, the Prophet divided the Qur'ân into parts, so that each part can be read within a certain amount of time. At the end of a long *hadîth*, Aws b. Hudhayfa asked some

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<sup>14</sup> Although the description of each subdivision will come later in this chapter, to better understand this argument, it is important to give a couple of examples. The first example is the specific usage of the last *juz'* of the Qur'ân for the debutants in the learning of the Qur'ân. In all *maktabas*, primary students of the Qur'ân start their education with the last *juz'* of the Qur'ân called '*ammah juz'* (the *juz'* that starts with the term '*amma*). There is a common belief among Muslims that the last *juz'* of the Qur'ân is easier to learn, recite and memorize than any other *juz'*. Consequently, the memorization of the Qur'ân follows a specific path always starting with the last *juz'*. This gives '*amma juz'* the characteristic of being the easiest-to-be-memorised part of the Qur'ân. Another example is a common belief about the protective mystical power of the last four *sûrahs* of the Qur'ân starting with the term *qul* (say). This belief results the memorization of those *sûrahs* in the early childhood, their recitation throughout life, and their decorative usage in Muslim homes. Consequently, the "four *qul*" *sûrahs* find a specific function, as well as an independent identity within the Qur'ânic text.



companions of the Prophet about how he should subdivide and recite the Qur'ân. They answered:

Aws said: I asked the companions of the messenger of Allâh peace be upon him –about how they subdivide the Qur'ân. They said: three, and five, and seven, and nine, and eleven and thirteen, and the separating [final] *ḥizb* alone [*wa ḥizb al-mufaṣṣil waḥdah*].<sup>15</sup>

This specific *ḥadīth*, and many other similar ones, have been narrated by several *mufasssīrūn*, supporting the fact that the idea as well as some sort of factual Qur'ānic subdivisions existed in the Prophet's era.<sup>16</sup> But *mufasssīrūn* are unanimous about the fact that those subdivisions were different from the Qur'ānic subdivisions that have emerged with the canonisation of the Qur'ānic text shortly after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad. The Qur'ân that we have in hand today is divided into thirty equal *ajzâ'*, then each *juz'* is divided into two equal *aḥzâb* and each *ḥizb* is divided in its turn into four equal *arbâ'*.<sup>17</sup>

Although there is no consensus among *mufasssīrūn* on who first initiated the *i'râb* (vowel adding) and the *i'jâm* (dotting) of the Qur'ānic letters/words, when it comes to the subdivision of the Qur'ānic text into parts, most *mufasssīrūn* consider the Umayyad administrator and later ruler of Hijâz and Irak, al-Ḥajjâj ibn Yûsuf al-Thaqafî (41-95H)

<sup>15</sup> See *ḥadīth* number 1395 in Al-Sijistânî, *Sunan Abu Dâwûd*, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=6140> (consulted on January 25<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>16</sup> The appearance of the *ḥadīth* leads to believe that the Prophet had different subdivisions for different needs. Accepting this interpretation of *ḥadīth*, the logic behind some of those numbers such as three for reciting the Qur'ân within the three periods of ten days of a month, or seven for its recitation within the seven days of the week seem quite predictable, but to reveal the logic behind numbers such as five or nine, one must be familiar with the lifestyle of early Muslims and the rhythm of their monthly or yearly activities. However, Zarkashî and Suyûṭî understand it differently. In *Al-Burhân fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, Zarkashî explains this *ḥadīth* according to which the Qur'ân was subdivided into five parts: first, the first three *sûrahs* (excluding *Al-Fâtiḥa*), then the next five *sûrahs*, then the next seven *sûrahs*, then the next eleven *sûrahs*, then the next thirteen *sûrahs*, and finally the rest of the Qur'ân from *Sûrah Al-Qâf* (Chapter 50) to *Sûrah Al-Nâs* (Chapter 114) as a *ḥizb mufaṣṣal* (separated part). Suyûṭî agrees with him. See Al-Zarkashî, *Al-Burhân fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân* (vol. 1 p. 247), available online at <http://www.imanhearts.com/mobiles.php?action=show&id=2781> (consulted on January 25<sup>th</sup> 2012). See also Al-Suyûṭî, *Al-Itqân fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, 1:63.

<sup>17</sup> A few weeks ago, for the first time, I came across a Qur'ân published in Turkey that is subdivided differently from all other Qur'âns that I have seen so far. This Qur'ân has thirty *ajzâ'*, but each *juz'* is divided into four *ḥizb* and there is no mention of *rub'* in it. It might be one of the consequences of the laicization of Turkey by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), and the standardization of Islam under his governance. But this suggestion needs further research. Here is the bibliographical information: *Kur'an-i Kerim Ve Satir arasi Kelime Meali*. Ed. by Muammer Uysal. Istanbul: Kervan Yayin-Dagitim, 2009.

to be the first one who, despite the unhappiness and protests of most Muslims who considered him savage, obliged his contemporary *huffâz* (those who knew the Qur'ân by heart) and *Qurr'â'* (the professional reciters of the Qur'ân in public) to finalize the dotting of the Qur'ânic letters, and to number those letters, then to carefully subdivide the Qur'ân into *ajzâ'*, then subdivide every *juz'* into *aḥzâb*, and *arbâ'* the exact same way Muslims have inherited it today.<sup>18</sup> Some other *mufasssîrûn* mention that Ḥajjâj committed that imposition by the direct order of Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Mâlik b. Marwân (26-86H).<sup>19</sup> Sijistânî confirms it and reports twice that about 11 “corrections” were ordered by Ḥajjâj on the orthography of some Qur'ânic words while organizing the text.<sup>20</sup> *Mufasssîrûn* are unanimous on the fact that whoever commanded the organization, or the reorganization of the Qur'ân into the current subdivisions, did so in order to end some serious debates that had occurred among Muslims on the pronunciation of Qur'ânic words and their orthographies. It is obvious why the “standardization” of the text by adding vowels and dots probably helped to end the debates and to avoid future disagreements among Muslims on the pronunciation of the Qur'ânic words. Yet none of the *mufasssîrûn* explain why and in what way the subdivisions of the Qur'ân might have

<sup>18</sup> Beside the fact that, despite the absence of historical evidence, some Muslims scholars consider the Prophet himself to be the first one who ordered the dotting and the vowel adding of the Qur'ânic text, four people have been mentioned as the ones who first initiated that process. They are: Abu al-Aswad al-Du'alî, Yahyâ b. Ya'mar, Naṣr b. 'Âṣim al-Laythî, and Ḥasan al-Baṣrî. See Al-Suyûṭî, *Al-Itqân fî 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, 2:171.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn 'Aṭiyyah (d. 543H) is among those who sincerely believed that it was the Caliph who decided to reorganize the Qur'ân and Ḥajjâj was just an agent. See Ibn 'Aṭiyyah's introduction to his *tafsîr*: 'Abd al-Haq b. abi Bakr b. 'Abd al-Mâlik al-Gharnâṭî, Ibn 'Aṭiyyah, *Al-Jâmi' al-Muḥarrir al-Ṣaḥîḥ al-Wajîz fî Tafsîr al-Qur'ân al-'Azîz*, 6 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> See al-Sijistânî, *Kitâb al-Maṣâḥif*. It is not insignificant to mention that some “orientalists” have used this double report of Sijistânî as a proof for the falsification of the 'Uthmânic Qur'ân by al-Ḥajjâj. Arthur Jeffrey is among the first ones who discuss this issue. In his book, *The Qur'ân As Scripture*, published in 1952, Jeffrey presents the hypothesis of the manipulation of the Qur'ânic text as coming from Ḥajjâj's own hidden purpose behind his order. Gilchrist, an anti-Islam Christian missionary active on the Internet, quotes Jeffrey and others to build a whole argument concluding the undisputable falsification of the Muslim sacred text by al-Ḥajjâj. To read Jeffrey's argument, see Arthur Jeffrey, *The Qur'ân As Scripture*. New York: Russell F. Moore Company Inc., 1952. To read Gilchrist's analysis, see John Gilchrist, *Jâmi' al-Qur'ân: The Codification Of the Qur'ân Text*. Distributed by MERCSA, 1989. Right after Gilchrist distributed his book on the Internet, many Muslim groups reacted to both Jeffrey and Gilchrist, responding against their accusations. To read an example of a more or less academic response, see the article by M. S. M. Saifullah & Muḥammad Ghoniem entitled *Al-Ḥajjâj, Kitâb al-Maṣâḥif & Gilchrist*, published in *Islamic Awareness Web Site* at the following address:

<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Text/Gilchrist/GilHajjaj.html> (consulted on January 25<sup>th</sup> 2012).

helped to end those debates. For example, both Sijistânî and Ibn 'Atiyyah discuss in details the problem of different pronunciations of Qur'ânic words. They carefully mention some major cases of debate among early Muslims on those miswritings and/or mispronunciations. But when it comes to the mathematical subdivisions of the text, Sijistânî briefly writes: "... Ḥajjâj gathered the *ḥuffâz* and the *qurrâ'* and obliged them to number the Qur'ânic letters. Then he determined its half, its quarters, its sixths and its thirds."<sup>21</sup> Ibn 'Atiyyah's version is even shorter. He writes: "... and he [Ḥajjâj] committed it in the city/region of Wâsiṭ and added *tahzîb* (subdividing the Qur'ân into *ḥizbs*) to it."<sup>22</sup> They do not explain why this could have helped calming down those debates, and how Muslims reacted to that *bid'a*. Suyûṭî mentions the popularity of *takhmis* (making five of something), and *ta'shîr* (making ten of something) of the Qur'ân. According to those traditions, some early Muslims were putting each five or each ten Qur'ânic *âyahs* together and were reciting them as independent parts.<sup>23</sup> Again, Suyûṭî does not explain what happened to those traditions and how they disappeared from the Islamic tradition.

### 2.3.1.1 A Feminist Hypothesis

This thesis uses neither feminist approaches, nor is it, in any sense of the term, a feminist effort/essay. Nevertheless, while searching different sources and looking for an explanation by early Muslim scholars on the *tahzib* of the Qur'ân, I came across a few *aḥādīth* strongly encouraging Muslims to recite the Qur'ân on a daily basis. For example:

'Ali narrated from his father from Ḥammâd from Ḥarîz from Abi 'Abdillâh (peace be upon him) saying: "The Qur'ân is the alliance of God with his creatures. Therefore it is worthwhile that every man keeps his alliance with God by reciting fifty *âyahs* per day."<sup>24</sup>

Although the Qur'ânic term *mar'* (man) appearing in this *ḥadīth* can be considered a

<sup>21</sup> Abu Dâwûd al-Sijistânî, *Kitâb al-Maṣâḥif*, 119-20.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn 'Atiyyah, *Al-Jâmi' al-Muḥarrir al-Ṣaḥîḥ al-Wajîz fî Tafṣîr al-Qur'ân al-Azîz*.

<sup>23</sup> See Al-Suyûṭî, *Al-Itqân fî 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, 2:171.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Kulaynî, *Uṣûl al-Kâfi*, vol. 2, p. 609, available online at [http://www.islam4u.com/maktabah\\_list.php?sid=3](http://www.islam4u.com/maktabah_list.php?sid=3) (consulted on February 14<sup>th</sup> 2012).

reference to both men and women,<sup>25</sup> it reminded me that according to most juridical *madhâhib*, women are strongly discouraged to recite the Qur'ân while in their *ḥayḍ* (menstruation period).<sup>26</sup> Also, all *madhâhib* forbid women to touch the script of the Qur'ân when they are in their monthly period. In many Muslim cultures, people, both men and women, try to recite the Qur'ân at least once per year. In addition, many practicing Muslims recite the Qur'ân between the beginning and the end of the month of *Ramaḍân*. To facilitate this latter ritual, many Muslim radio stations broadcast a daily *tartîl* (careful and slow recitation) of a Qur'ânic *juz'* starting with the first *juz'* on the first day of the month of fast and going on till the last *juz'* recited on the thirtieth day. These radio programs are highly appreciated by non-arabophone Muslims in particular, because they cannot easily recite the Qur'ân by themselves.<sup>27</sup> On that basis, applicable so far to both men and women, except when the latter is in a period of menstruation, a question specific to women arose in my mind: if a woman decides to read the Qur'ân at least once per year, besides the highly recommended and popularly practiced recitation during *ramaḍân*, how much of the Qur'ân per day would she recite? Let us explore the answer to this question in order to develop a (re)new(ed) understanding of how a particular kind of subdivision of the Qur'ân, the *arbâ'*, came to appear in order to answer needs specific to Muslim women.

Although according to some *madhâhib* *ḥayḍ* can last as short as 3 days or as long as 10 days, most *madhâhib* agree on the fact that 7 days (one full week) is the “normal”

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<sup>25</sup> The term *mar'* appears four times in the Qur'ân (2:102; 8:24; 78:40; 80:34) and, in its last three appearances, it refers to both men and women. See the *tafâsîr* on the concerned *âyahs*.

<sup>26</sup> All schools of Shari'ah agree that a *hâ'id* (a woman in *ḥayḍ*) can neither pray the mandatory prayers nor fast while being in her *ḥayḍ*. However, there is no consensus among them on the recitation of the Qur'ân during that monthly period. While Salafî and Wahhabi schools forbid it, the Twever Shi'î school considers it as “extremely to be avoided” but not forbidden.

<sup>27</sup> This practice fascinates Jane. D. McAuliffe. In her article entitled *The Persistent Power of the Qur'ân*, she writes:

Have you ever jumped into a cab in Cairo or Kuala Lumpur and heard the melodious sounds of the recited Qur'ân emanate from the cab's radio or tape deck? Maybe you have turned on the television in your hotel room and found yourself with a station devoted to twenty-four-hour Qur'ân recitation. Especially might this be so during Ramadan, the Muslim month of fast.

For the full article, see Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “The Persistent Power of the Qur'ân.” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 147, No. 4 (Dec. 2003): 339-346 (p. 344).

length of a woman's *ḥayḍ*.<sup>28</sup> In addition, and in accordance with early Islamic medical sciences, these *madhâhib* consider 28 days to be the “normal” time between the beginnings of two consecutive menstruations. So it is assumed that women “normally” have 13 menstruations per year. According to the Islamic lunar calendar, the year is 11 days shorter than the Gregorian Solar year, so Muslims have 354 days in an Islamic year. If we exclude 30 days from the ordinary daily recitation of the Qur'ân, which is the maximum possible days the month of *ramadân* can last, there remains 324 days. Now, if we multiply 7 (the number of days a “normal” menstruation last) by 12, for each remaining months (one menstruation out of 13 will happen in the month of *ramadân*), it becomes necessary to delete 84 days from the previous number of 324. The final result is 240 days, which corresponds to the exact number of the Qur'ân's *arbâ'* subdivision. This particular kind of subdivision therefore exists to answer the particular context of a woman's traditionally needs to recite the Qur'ân every day of the year, minus during the month of *ramadân* (when she is expected, like men, to recite the whole Qur'ân) and the weeks during which she is in her menstruating period.

The above calculations can explain this one particular kind of subdivision of the Qur'ân, based on the “normality” of a woman's body, as well as the standardization of the month of *ramadân*'s number of days. What I am putting forward by these calculations is a feminist hypothesis of how early Muslims were so concerned with the memorization and the daily recitation of the Qur'ân by all Muslims that they developed a particular kind of subdivision to match the number of days in which a “normal” female body is “pure enough” to recite the Qur'ân (excluding the special recitation of *ramadân*).<sup>29</sup> Early scholars of Islamic sciences were therefore facilitating this duty for women and

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<sup>28</sup> Any extra days after the end of *ḥayḍ* is referred to by another technical term called *istihâḍa*. Although there are some obligatory ablutions during *istihâḍa*, it does not prevent a Muslim woman from praying, fasting or reciting the Qur'ân. For two examples of the afore-mentioned *fatwas*, see Sayyid Rûḥullâh al-Mûsawî al-Khumaynî, *Resâleh-ye Towzih ol-Masâel*. E-published by 4shared.com, available online at [http://search.4shared.com/postDownload/AjnVU8pa/resaleh\\_ayatollah\\_khomeini.html](http://search.4shared.com/postDownload/AjnVU8pa/resaleh_ayatollah_khomeini.html) (consulted on February 14<sup>th</sup> 2012); and Sayyid 'Ali al-Ḥusaynî al-Sîstânî, *Tawḍîḥ al-Masâ'il*. E-published by the official web site of the author at <http://www.sistani.org/index.php?p=251364&id=48> (consulted on February 14<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>29</sup> To consolidate this hypothesis, further studies with authentic historical-textual evidences is necessary.

regulating it based on a “normal” Muslim woman’s biological particularities.<sup>30</sup>

### 2.3.2 The Subdivision of Qur’ânic *âyahs* into *makkî* (Meccan) and *madanî* (Medinan)

One of the first and most popular subdivisions of Qur’ânic *âyahs* is dividing them into Meccan and Medinan. According to the history of Islam, the Prophet started his prophetic mission in Mecca at the age of forty (c 610C.E.). He lived and promoted the Muslim faith in Mecca for about 13 years. At the age of 52 or 53, in 622C.E., he migrated to Yathrib later called *Madinah al-Nabî* (the City of the Prophet) or *al-Medina* (the city). He lived there for 10 years and passed away at the age of 62 in 632C.E. To these two distinct geographical locations corresponds the clear subdivision into Meccan and Medinan periods of divine revelation for Muslims. Over time, three theories have been discussed by Muslim scholars to explain that kind of subdivision of the Qur’ân.

First: Meccan and Medinan are references to the place of the revelation. According to this theory, a Meccan *âyah* is an *âyah* revealed in Mecca even if its revelation has happened after the Prophet’s migration to Medina (as after the conquest of Mecca), and by the same logic, a Medinan *âyah* is an *âyah* revealed in Medina. Suyûtî considers the outskirts of both cities as included in the definition. So to him, *âyahs* revealed in Munâ or Hudaybiyya are Meccan, and *âyahs* revealed in Badr or Uhud are Medinans.<sup>31</sup> This definition seems to have a major problem. The problem is that by definition, *âyahs* revealed in Tabûk and in Jerusalem are neither Meccan nor Medinan, and no third categorization, or exception, has been mentioned by *mufasssirûn*.<sup>32</sup>

Second: Meccan and Medinan are references to the audiences of the revelation. According to this theory, a Meccan *âyah* is an *âyah* that talks to pagan inhabitants of Mecca, and a Medinan *âyah* is an *âyah* having the inhabitants of Medina as its audience. Abu ‘Ubayd al-Harawî (d. 401H), the author of *Faḍâ’il al-Qur’ân* cites other scholars

<sup>30</sup> Those who are familiar with shari’ah know the central role and the importance of *al-‘urf* (norms of behaviour in a society) in *al-fiqh*. The only thing that can turn a *ḥalâl* or even *mustaḥab* into *ḥarâm* (but not necessarily the opposite) is the *‘urf*. A simple example would be the forbidding of *al-kuḥul* for men where it is not a social norm.

<sup>31</sup> See Al-Suyûtî, *Al-Itqân fi ‘Ulûm al-Qur’ân*, 1:8-9.

<sup>32</sup> All *mufasssirûn* are unanimous that 9:42 was revealed in Tabûk, a village situated 1000 kilometers north of Mecca. They all believe also that 43:45 was revealed in Jerusalem during the first stage of the Prophet’s ascension.

and says that wherever an *âyah* starts with *yâ ayyuha al-ladhina âmanû* (O you who believe), the *âyah* is Medinan, and wherever an *âyah* starts with *yâ ayyuha al-nâs* (O humankind) or with *yâ banî-âdam* (O children of Adam) that *âyah* is Meccan. Although this definition helps classifying *âyahs* based on their messages and intended audiences rather than the geographical location of its revelation, it remains totally silent when it comes to *âyahs* not using any of the three above- opening expressions.<sup>33</sup>

Third: Meccan and Medinan are references to the time of the revelation. According to this theory, all *âyahs* revealed before the migration of the Prophet to Yathrib are Meccan even if they have been revealed as far as in Jerusalem or if they include expressions such as “O you who believe,” while *âyahs* revealed during or after the migration of the Prophet to Yathrib are Medinan. This theory solves the problems of the two previous theories.<sup>34</sup> However, the terms of “Meccan” and “Medinan” do not intuitively reflect the definitions behind them.

### 2.3.2.1 The Subdivision of Qur'ânic *sûrahs* into Meccan and Medinan

It is not insignificant to mention that the categorization of the Qur'ânic *sûrahs* into Meccan and Medinan is a relative nomination because many *sûrahs* of the Qur'ân are composed of both Meccan and Median *âyahs*. In fact, each of the two categories has its own subcategories. Muslim scholars divide the Meccan *sûrahs* into two subcategories: first, those *sûrahs* that are fully composed of Meccan *âyahs*; and second, those *sûrahs* with most of their *âyahs* being Meccan mixed with a few Medinan *âyahs*. Parallel to the previous case, the category of Medinan *sûrahs* has two subcategories: first, those *sûrahs* that are fully composed of Medinan *âyahs*; and second, those *sûrahs* with most of their *âyahs* being Medinan mixed with a few Meccan *âyahs*.<sup>35</sup> Zarkashî cites al-Ja'barî (d.

<sup>33</sup> According to this definition, 22:77 would be a Medinan *âyah* even though all *mufasssirûn* are unanimous that it was revealed in Mecca. Also *âyahs* such as 4:1 and 2:21, 168 would be classified under Meccan despite the fact that all *mufasssirûn* believe that they have been revealed in Medina.

<sup>34</sup> According to this theory, *âyahs* such as 4:58 revealed in the Ka'ba after the conquest of Mecca, or 5:3 revealed in the desert of 'Arafah near Mecca during the last *hajj* of the Prophet are all Medinan *âyahs*.

<sup>35</sup> For the *sûrahs* with mixed *âyahs*, some Muslim scholars have suggested to classify *sûrahs* according to the Meccan or the Medinan aspect of their first few *âyahs*. Others have suggested giving the priority to whatever kind of *âyahs* that may be in a majority. Suyûfî carefully discusses the subject matter of the categorization of Qur'ânic *sûrahs* into Meccan and Medinan, and presents detailed explanations about what early *mufasssirûn* have said. He concludes that according to most *mufasssirûn*, 82 *sûrahs* are Meccan, 20

732H) who says: “To recognize the Meccan from the Medinan there are only two ways: *al-samâ’î* (hearing) and *al-qiyâsî* (comparing). Whatever has been said to us [about the Qur’ânic *âyahs* or *sûrahs* by the Prophet or by his companions] is *al-samâ’î*, and for *al-qiyâsî*, we have signs [as tools to compare Qur’ânic *âyahs* or *sûrahs* with each other].”<sup>36</sup> These “signs” range from Qur’ânic terms specific to an era of the Prophet’s life to dominant themes in Qur’ânic *sûrahs*.<sup>37</sup> Down the centuries, Muslim scholars’ passionate search for “true and authentic signs” has given birth to a wide variety of different classifications of the Qur’ânic *âyahs* and/or *sûrahs*. Some of those classifications are, for example, *al-laylî* versus *al-nahâry* (*âyahs* revealed at night versus *âyahs* revealed during the day), *al-safarî* versus *al-ḥaḍarî* (*âyahs* revealed during a trip versus *âyahs* revealed while staying), *al-ṣayfî* versus *al-shitâ’î* (*âyahs* revealed in summer versus *âyahs* revealed in winter). Even *âyahs* revealed in hot weather versus *âyahs* revealed in cold have been meticulously studied and discussed among Muslim scholars.<sup>38</sup>

Although being confessional efforts, the above-mentioned studies provide valuable data for rational contextual studies of the Qur’ân, including researches using historico-critical methods. The German orientalist and the librarian of the University of Heidelberg, Gustav Weil is among the first Westerners who used Muslims’ Meccan versus Medinan categorization to reveal the chronology of the revelation and to study the Qur’ân in its historical contexts. In his own confessional efforts, while trying to disqualify the revelatory nature of the Qur’ân and to reduce it to “an illusory repetition” of some Bible stories done by “an epileptic so-called Prophet,” he categorized the

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*sûrahs* are Medinan, and 12 *sûrahs* are the subject of debate. The Medinan *sûrahs* are numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 24, 33, 47, 48, 49, 57, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63, 65, 66, and 110. The 12 *sûrahs* being the subject of debate are numbers 1, 13, 55, 61, 64, 83, 97, 98, 99, 112, 113, and 114. The rest of the Qur’ânic *sûrahs* are considered to be Meccan. See Al-Suyûtî, *Al-Itqân fi ‘Ulûm al-Qur’ân*, 1:11.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Zarkashî, *Al-Burhân fi ‘Ulûm al-Qur’ân* (vol. 1, p. 189), available online at <http://www.imanhearts.com/mobiles.php?action=show&id=2781> (consulted on January 25<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>37</sup> For terms specific to the Meccan revelations, Zarkashî gives the example of *kallâ* (Nay). This term showing God’s strong rejection has been repeated 33 times in 15 different *sûrahs*, all of them Meccan. For the themes, he mentions the stories of previous prophets and peoples. These stories are the sign of a Meccan revelation, except for what has been narrated in “al-Baqara” (*sûrah* number 2). Many other criteria, such as a *sûrah* that includes an *ayah* with *al-sajda al-wâjiba* (obligatory prostration), or a *sûrah* starting with some specific *al-ḥurûf al-muqatta’a* (disjointed letters such as *alif, lâ, mîm*, or *alif, lâ, râ*) have also been discussed in his book. See *ibid.*, 188-90.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Al-Suyûtî, *Al-Itqân fi ‘Ulûm al-Qur’ân*, 1:21.



Qur'anic *sûrahs* into four eras of the Prophet's life, three Meccans and one Medinan.<sup>39</sup> Nöldeke used Weil's classification and, with some minor changes, published it in his famous work: *Geschichte des Qorans*. As explained before, many scholars, such as Rodwell and Derenbourg, followed his method including the Meccan versus Medinan categorization. They were all unanimous about the fact that an exact knowledge on "the time and the place of the revelation" is key to the understanding of its formation as an historical human product.<sup>40</sup>

### 2.3.3 The Subdivision of Qur'anic *sûrahs* According to Their Length

The subdivision of the Qur'anic *sûrahs* according to their length goes back to the Prophet's era. Suyûfî and many other Muslim scholars record a *hadîth* in which the Prophet says: "I have been given *al-sab' al-ṭuwal* (the seven long ones) instead of Torah, and *al-ma'ûn* (the one hundred ones) instead of Psalms, and *al-mathânî* (the twins) instead of Gospel, and I have been granted superiority by *al-mufaṣṣal* (the separated ones)."<sup>41</sup> Based on this *hadîth* and some others, early Muslim scholars have divided the Qur'anic *sûrahs* into four main groups:

- 1- *al-sab' al-ṭuwal* or the first seven *sûrahs* of the Qur'ân after *Sûrah Al-Fâtiḥa*. These seven are the longest *sûrahs* of the Qur'ân.
- 2- *al-ma'ûn* or those *sûrahs* that are composed of more or less 100 *âyahs* such as *sûrahs* 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 26, 37, etc.
- 3- *al-mathânî*. There is no consensus among Muslim scholars on what *sûrahs* must

<sup>39</sup> See Gustav Weil, *Historisch-Kritische Einleitung in den Koran*. Bielefeld: Velhagen und Klasing, 1844, available online at <http://www.archive.org/details/historischkriti00weilgoog> (consulted on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>40</sup> It is important to mention that parallel to Nöldeke's and his followers' efforts, two other scholars, one Austrian and the other British, focused on the chronology of the Qur'anic revelations trying to understand better its messages through its historical context. Aloïs Sprenger (1813-1893C.E.) and William Muir tried to reclassify Qur'anic *âyahs* and *sûrahs* based on their time and place of revelation. To do so, their main tool was the Prophet's biography recorded by Muslims themselves. While paying special attention to the Prophet's battles, Sprenger and Muir divided the Qur'ân into six categories: five Meccans and one Medinan. Unlike Weil, their works do not suffer from an obvious bias, although there are some apparent subjectivities. Their conclusions and classification, however, were often based on *ahâdîth* with a very low degree of authenticity. In his famous book on the Qur'ân, Blachère briefly criticises this weak aspect of Spranger's and Muir's works; he hesitates about the credibility of their re-classification of Qur'anic *sûrahs*. See Régis Blachère, *Introduction au Coran*. 2<sup>e</sup> édition. Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1991 (p. 248, n. 359).

<sup>41</sup> Al-Suyûfî, *Al-Itqân fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, 1:26.

be considered under this category. Some believe that they are the second seven *sûrahs* after *al-sab' al-tuwal*, some have mentioned a list of *sûrahs* with no similarity in their lengths, and some others have said: "Whatever is not under the three other categories belong to this category."<sup>42</sup>

- 4- *al-mufaṣṣal* or those short *sûrahs* that are separated by *basmala* (the formula at the beginning of each Qur'ânic *sûrah*, except *sûrah* 9).<sup>43</sup>

Beside the fact that this categorisation does not contribute much to the understanding of the messages of the Qur'ânic *sûrahs*, the separation of *sûrahs* by *basmala* as a method of subdivision has a major problem. The problem is that there is no consensus among Muslim scholars on this sentence being a Qur'ânic *âyah* or not. While many *mufasssirûn* exclude it from the revelation, some consider it being revealed 114 times, 113 times of which as the separators at the beginning of Qur'ânic *sûrahs*. In his book entitled *Le Coran est-il authentique?* Mondher Sfar discusses this issue and concludes that:

... la Tradition musulmane a hésité à compter la *basmala* comme verset même si la vulgate actuelle ne la considère pas comme tel. D'après la Tradition, certains recueils de Coran auraient assimilé cette formule à un verset, faisant augmenter le nombre total des versets coraniques de 114. Dans son *Kitâb al-kashf*, al-Qaysî qui a rapporté ce fait, a rejeté cette pratique en tant que non conforme au consensus des Compagnons du Prophète et à celui de leurs successeurs immédiats. En fait, il a existé deux doctrines qui ont opposé deux importantes Écoles juridiques : celle des jurisconsultes de Médine, de Baṣra et de Syrie qui ont refusé d'accorder à la *basmala* le statut de verset, la réduisant à une simple technique éditoriale servant dans les codices coraniques de séparation entre les sourates, ou au mieux de formule de bénédiction. Quant aux Jurisconsultes shaf'îtes de la Mecque et de Kûfa, ils ont considéré la *basmala* comme un verset à part entière et l'ont prononcée à voix haute. Mais il existe une indication fort intéressante sur la place de la *basmala* aux origines de l'islam. En effet, la Tradition concernant la lecture du Coran nous informe que Muḥammad n'aurait pas récité la *basmala* quand il lisait les sourates les unes après les autres. De son côté, Ḥamza qui est un des Sept lecteurs canoniques n'aurait pas prononcé la formule de la *basmala* entre les sourates. Al-Qaysî qui l'a rapporté en donne cette explication : « Quand la

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>43</sup> This fourth category has been divided into three subcategories: *al-tiwâl* (longer short *sûrahs*) from *sûrah* 49 to *sûrah* 85; *al-awsât* (middle short *sûrahs*) from *sûrah* 86 to *sûrah* 98; and *al-qiṣâr* (shorter short *sûrahs*) from *sûrah* 99 to *sûrah* 114. However the first *sûrah* of the Qur'ân, *Al-Fâtiḥa*, despite its very short length, does not belong to any of these categories.

*basmla* n'était pas pour lui - et de l'avis des juristes - considérée comme un verset, il l'a omise lors du passage d'une sourate à une autre, afin que l'on ne suppose pas qu'elle constitue un verset situé au début de la [79] sourate. Ainsi, pour lui, le Coran est, dans sa totalité, pris pour une seule sourate ... Quant à sa présence dans le recueil coranique, ce n'est que comme moyen d'indiquer qu'une sourate est terminée et qu'une autre commence. » ... Ce n'est que tardivement, lors de la phase dite de collecte du texte coranique, que la *basmla* a fini par être rattachée à chacune des sourates.<sup>44</sup>

### 2.3.4 The Subdivision of Qur'ânic *âyahs* into *muḥkam* and *mutashâbih*

The subdivision of the Qur'ânic *âyahs* into *muḥkam* (being also translated as univocal or solid) and *mutashâbih* (ambiguous) is probably the most important kind of subdivisions of the revelation for Muslims. This classification comes from a Qur'ânic *âyah* clarifying that there exist in the Qur'ân some *âyât muḥkamât* (clear *âyahs*) versus *âyat mutashâbihât* (ambiguous *âyahs*).<sup>45</sup> 3:7 reads:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ ءَأَمْنًا بِئِهِنَّ كُلُّ مَنْ عِنْدَ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

He it is Who hath revealed unto thee (Muḥammad) the Scripture wherein are clear revelations - they are the substance of the Book - and others (which are) allegorical. But those in whose hearts is doubt pursue, forsooth, that which is allegorical seeking (to cause) dissension by seeking to explain it. None knoweth its explanation save Allah. And those who are of sound instruction say: We believe therein; the whole is from our Lord; but only men of understanding really heed.

Much has been written by Muslim scholars about this categorization and its theological implications. It is almost impossible to find a *mufasssir* who has not discussed this issue in

<sup>44</sup> Mondher Sfar, *Le Coran est-il authentique?* 3<sup>e</sup> édition. Paris: Édition Sfar, 2006 (pp. 64-65), available online at [http://classiques.uqac.ca/contemporains/sfar\\_mondher/coran\\_authentique/coran\\_authentique.pdf](http://classiques.uqac.ca/contemporains/sfar_mondher/coran_authentique/coran_authentique.pdf) (consulted on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>45</sup> The term *muḥkam* appears only twice in the Qur'ân. The first appearance in 3:7 is the foundation of the subdivision of the text into *muḥkam* and *mutashâbih*, and the second appearance in 47:20 supports the idea of such a subdivision. 47:20 reads: "And those who believe say: If only a *sûrah* were revealed! But when a decisive *sûrah* is revealed and war is mentioned therein, thou seest those in whose hearts is a disease looking at thee with the look of men fainting unto death. Therefor woe unto them!" In 3:7, Pickthall translates the term as "allegorical"; but here he translates it as "decisive." None of the translations relate the *âyahs* to the concept of *muḥkam*.

detail within at least one of his works.<sup>46</sup> A quick look at any *tafsîr* on 3:7 reveals the trueness of this assertion.<sup>47</sup> As many other Qur'ânic issues, the definitions of *muḥkam* and *mutashâbih* have been subjects to many scholarly debates. Many different possibilities have been presented by Muslim scholars. Here are some examples.

Imâm Fakhr al-Râzî's preferred explanation begins with first quoting a definition by Abu Bakr al-Aṣam (201-279H): *âyahs* talking about issues whose understanding does not require any argument, analysis or deep reflection, such as the uniqueness of God, his power or his wisdom, are *muḥkam*; then *âyahs* whose understanding requires human reflection and analysis are *mutashâbih*. Then al-Râzî explains his own theory in which he argues that words, according to the relationship between them and their meanings, can be categorized under four categories. First, *al-naṣṣ*, is a category in which the word holds a clear meaning with no room for any other possible meaning. Second, *al-zâhir*, is a category in which the word holds a clear meaning but although improbable, the possibility of another meaning also exists. Third, *al-mushtarak*, is a category in which the word holds two or more meanings with equal possibilities in the sentence. Fourth, *al-mu'awwal*, is a category in which the word holds two or several meanings and the true meaning is the one which is not apparent. To him an *âyah* is *muḥkam* when all its words are from the first two categories, and it is *mutashâbih* when there is at least one of its words coming from one of the two last categories. His theory, by nature, gives room to different degrees of being *muḥkam* or *mutashâbih*.<sup>48</sup>

Râghib al-Iṣfahânî's definitions of *muḥkam* and *mutashâbih* are not far from those of Râzî. Râghib (d. 502H) believes that the uncertainty and the difficulty in the interpretation of a *mutashâbih* can come from the word and its different pronunciations independently from the meaning, or can be rooted in the ambiguity of the meaning, although its relationship with the word is clear.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> For a scholarly work on the concepts of *muḥkam* and *mutashâbih* in some classical *mufasssîrûn*'s works, see Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Muḥkam and Mutashâbih: An Analytical Study of al-Ṭabarî's and al-Zamakhsharî's Interpretations of Q.3:7." *Journal of Qur'ânic Studies*, vol. 1, No. 1 (1999): 63-79.

<sup>47</sup> I verified the *tafsîr* of Ṭabarî, Zamakhsharî, Râzî, Ibn Kathîr, Qurtubî, Suyûtî, Baydâwî, Shûkânî, and Ṭabâtabâ'î.

<sup>48</sup> For more details, see Al-Râzî, *Mafâtîḥ al-Ghayb* (vol. 7, p. 72-80), available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=1372> (consulted on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>49</sup> For detailed explanations about Raghîb's preference, see Al-Suyûtî, *Al-Itqân fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, 2:5.

In his long and detailed *tafsîr* on 3:7, ‘Allâmah Ṭabâṭabâ’î tries to theorize the passages that are *muḥkam* and *mutashâbih* in the Qur’ân. He explains different definitions such as the definition of Ibn Taymiyyah, who believes that *muḥkam* is exclusively used for those *âyahs* that talk about the attributes of God or the attributes of the prophets. Ṭabâṭabâ’î also mentions Ibn ‘Abbâs’s definition according to which *muḥkam* is what both believed and acted upon, and *mutashâbih* is what is believed but is not acted upon. Ṭabâṭabâ’î criticises all those definitions and gives a short and simple yet practical and clear definition for this Qur’ânic categorization. He writes:

The definition of *muḥkam* and *mutashâbih* must be looked for in the *âyah* that initially presents this concept. What the *âyah* [3:7] presents here is that there are some *âyahs* that -while having all the credibility of being an *âyah*- lead to hesitation and doubt about their meaning. This doubt is neither in their words, nor in the meanings of their words, and not even in the relationship between those words and their meanings, but it dwells in the fact that some of those meanings, even being very clear, cannot cohabit with the clear meaning of another *âyah* that bears a certain and solid message.<sup>50</sup>

To Ṭabâṭabâ’î, *mutashâbih* is recognizable by the doubt and hesitation between two or more possible meanings that it causes to the listener who implicitly or explicitly compares with other Qur’ânic passages. To better explain his inter-textual definition, he writes: “*Mutashâbih* causes a hesitation to its listener once he tries to understand what has been recited. This hesitation must be challenged and examined by *muḥkamât*”<sup>51</sup> and not only by philological or morphological efforts. In other words, some Qur’ânic *âyahs* are *mutashâbih* in their relationship to those that are *muḥkam*. So, it is not a binary categorization such as cold and hot. Instead, there is an inter-dependency between Qur’ânic *âyahs* such as the inter-dependency between pieces of a puzzle where every piece presents a solid picture, but some pieces can present different pictures (like sea or sky), and their “true” picture must be found by putting them beside those that are clear

<sup>50</sup> Al-Ṭabâṭabâ’î, *Al-Mizân fî Tafsîr al-Qur’ân*, 3:40, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on March 10<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

enough.<sup>52</sup>

### 2.3.5 The Subdivision of Qur'ânic *âyahs* into *nâsikh* and *mansûkh*

Like the previous category, the concepts of *nâsikh* versus *mansûkh* have been initially presented in the Qur'ân itself. From the very beginning of the revelation, there is a reference that seems to refer to God's provision in case the revelation would be forgotten by the Prophet Muḥammad. *Sûrah* 87, which is among the first *sûrahs* revealed in Mecca, discusses this point.<sup>53</sup> Its *âyahs* 6 to 11 read:

سَنُقَرِّئُكَ فَلَا تَنْسَىٰ ۚ إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ وَمَا يَخْفَىٰ ۚ وَنُيَسِّرُكَ لِلْيُسْرَىٰ ۚ فَذَكَرْ ۚ إِنَّ  
نَفَعَتِ الذِّكْرَىٰ سَيَذَكِّرُ مَنْ يَخْتَىٰ وَيَتَجَنَّبُهَا الْأَشْقَىٰ

We shall make thee read (O Muḥammad) so that thou shalt not forget. Save that which Allah willeth. Lo! He knoweth the disclosed and that which still is hidden; And We shall ease thy way unto the state of ease. Therefore remind (men), for of use is the reminder. He will heed who feareth, But the most hapless will flout it.<sup>54</sup>

These *âyahs* announce, with an authoritative tone, the Prophet's "unforgetfulness" as a

<sup>52</sup> Goldfeld cites a doctoral dissertation in which a challenging theory is presented. The author, Muḥammad al-Sîd, tries to uphold "the existence of a clearly manifested hermeneutical system in the Qur'ân itself." Goldfeld writes:

[Sîd believes that] Three major themes, repeatedly emphasized in the Qur'ân, are the exegetical method thereof, namely: 'the understanding of God as He gives himself to be understood', 'the understanding that He sent Muḥammad as He [had] sent apostles before him', and 'the understanding that the Qur'ân is His verbatim Word and the embodiment of His Will revealed to Muḥammad as He had revealed scriptures before.' In other words "if the real understanding of God, veracity of the Qur'ân and the apostleship of Muḥammad is well established, the possibility of a hermeneutical problem on any lower level (i.e. when one understands what the language communicates but is unable to take it), is greatly diminished." The Qur'ân shows that faith renders scepticism irrational. It is the contention of al-Sîd that this threefold Qur'ânic hermeneutics is the *Muḥkam* or univocal constituent of the revelation through which the *Mutashâbih* or ambiguous constituent can be understood.

Consciously or unconsciously, Sîd's argument is somewhat a re-formulation of Ṭabâṭabâ'î's definition of *muḥkam* and *mutashâbih*. See Yeshayahu Goldfeld, "The Development of Theory on Qur'ânic Exegesis in Islamic Scholarship," 6-7.

<sup>53</sup> Most *mufasssîrûn* consider this *sûrah* to be one of the first *sûrahs* revealed in Mecca. There is a debate among them on the exact chronological place of this *sûrah*, but the debate is on the *sûrah* being the 7<sup>th</sup>, the 8<sup>th</sup>, or the 9<sup>th</sup>. Muir considers it as the 9<sup>th</sup> *surah*, but Nöldeke believes that it is the 15<sup>th</sup> *sûrah* in the chronology of the revelation.

<sup>54</sup> Dr. Mohsin's translation of this *âyah* renders more justice to its meaning. His translation of *sa nuqri'uka falâ tansâ illâ mâ shâ'a Allâh* is: "We shall make you to recite (the Qur'an), so you (O Muḥammad (SAW)) shall not forget (it), Except what Allah, may will."

supra-human strength given to him by God, but they also predict forgetfulness regarding the revelation pre-planned by God. It is only around the end of the revelation and in Medina that two Qur'ânic *âyahs* (2:106 and 22:52) directly discuss the subject matter of the abrogation, and give more information about God's reason(s) for abrogating some of his revelation.<sup>55</sup> 2:106 reads:

مَا نَنْسَخْ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنْهَا أَوْ مِثْلَهَا أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

Such of our revelation as We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but we bring (in place) one better or the like thereof. Knowest thou not that Allah is Able to do all things?

Here, two different ways of abrogating have been presented: first, abrogating by another *ayah* while keeping the first *ayah* in the corpus of the Qur'ân and, second, abrogating by forgetting an earlier *ayah*. The nature and the process of this kind of falling into oblivion is not clear here. The *ayah* might allegorically mean that God “forgets” some *âyahs* in the sense of “ignoring” them, ordering the Prophet to do the same. It might also mean that God makes the Prophet forget some *âyahs*. If this latter is true, then this unconscious forgetting needs to happen immediately after the revelation of those *âyahs*, because if this is not so, once recited by the Prophet, they would be recorded in Muslims' collective oral and later written memories. In both cases of abrogating or forgetting, God promises that the abrogated or forgotten *âyahs* will be replaced by similar or better *âyahs*.

The other *ayah* discussing the issue of the abrogation is 22.52. It reads:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ وَلَا نَبِيٍّ إِلَّا إِذَا تَمَنَّى أَلْفَى الشَّيْطَانَ فِي أُمَّتَيْهِ فَيَنسَخُ اللَّهُ مَا يُلْقِي الشَّيْطَانُ ثُمَّ يُحْكُمُ اللَّهُ ءَايَاتِهِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

Never sent We a messenger or a prophet before thee but when He recited (the message) Satan proposed (opposition) in respect of that which he recited thereof. But Allah abolisheth that which Satan proposeth. Then Allah establisheth His revelations. Allah is Knower, Wise.

This *ayah* is the source of the famous concept of “Satanic verses” in the Qur'ân. Many

<sup>55</sup> Most *mufasssîrûn* consider the *sûrah* 2 to be among the last *sûrahs* revealed in Medina. There is a debate among them on the exact chronological place of this *sûrah*, but the debate is on the *sûrah* being the 80<sup>th</sup>, 84<sup>th</sup>, 85<sup>th</sup>, 86<sup>th</sup>, 90<sup>th</sup> or 91<sup>th</sup>. Muir considers it as the 94<sup>th</sup> *sûrah* but Nöldeke believes that it is the 91<sup>st</sup> *sûrah* in the chronology of the revelation.

*mufassirûn* have reported an incident happening in the first Meccan period of the Prophet's mission. Although there are several accounts reporting that incident, most of them have Ibn Ka'b as the first narrator. After mentioning its *isnâd* in detail, Ṭabarî narrates the *asbâb al-nuzûl* of this *âyah* and writes:

The Messenger of Allâh, Allâh's salutation and peace be upon him was sitting in one of Quraysh's assemblies wishing that Allâh does not send to him something that makes his kinsmen and neighbours run away from him. Meanwhile Allâh descended on him "By the Star when it setteth" [the first *âyah* of the 53<sup>rd</sup> *sûrah*] until "Have ye thought upon Al-Lat and Al-'Uzza And Manat, the third, the other?" [the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> *âyahs* of the same *sûrah*]. At this moment, Satan tempted him to recite the following lines: "These are the exalted *gharâniq*, whose intercession is hoped for."<sup>56</sup> [The Prophet] recited them. Then he continued till he finished the recitation of the whole *sûrah*. Then he prostrated and everybody prostrated with him ... This revelation made the Qurayshites happy. They said: "Indeed, we learned that Allâh is the one who gives life and death. He is the one who creates and nourishes. But also these goddesses of ours are intercessors to Allâh. If you give them some credibility, we will be with you." The day was not ended yet that Gabriel, peace be upon him came to the Prophet. Then, the Prophet presented the *sûrah* to the Archangel. When he arrived to the two sentences thrown by Satan, Gabriel said: "I did not bring these two to you." So, the Prophet said: "I calumniated Allâh, and I said about him what was not said to me." So Gabriel brought him this *âyah*: "And they indeed strove hard to beguile thee (Muḥammad) away from that wherewith We have inspired thee, that thou shouldst invent other than it against Us; and then would they have accepted thee as a friend." [17:73] until "then hadst thou found no helper against Us." [The end of 17:75] This did not comfort the Prophet and he remained sad until the following *âyah* was revealed to him: "Never sent We a messenger or a prophet before thee but when He recited (the message) Satan proposed (opposition) in respect of that which he recited thereof. But Allah abolisheth that which Satan proposeth. Then Allah establisheth His revelations. Allah is Knower, Wise." Those Muslim immigrants who were in Habasha (Ethiopia today) heard that all people of Mecca embraced Islam. They came back to their tribes and said: "We love them more [than Christians in Habasha], then they found out that Meccan people have turned on their idolatry as soon as God has abrogated what Satan had threw."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Literally *gharâniq* means white swans with exalted necks. This was a *jâhili* expression for admiring the beauty and the nobleness of a woman.

<sup>57</sup> Ṭabarî does not mention how long it takes for the Satanic Verses to be abrogated. Also, although there are several narratives about this incident, none of them gives us more information about the chronology and



It is clear that in Ṭabarî's *tafsîr*, the Prophet cannot recognize the change neither in the voice, nor in the rhetoric style of the intermediary. Also some other critical ironies exist in the narrative. For example, the Archangel who is the mediator for the revelation does not react to the Prophet's first recitation in front of the crowd and waits for a second recitation in private. The Prophet remains sad until he is informed that this has happened before to other prophets. One might ask: From a psychological point of view, what kind of relief comes with knowing that others have committed the same terrible mistake?

Probably the best and the clearest explanation about the theory of *naskh* (abrogation) in the Qur'ân can be read in John Burton's article on 2:106. He gives a short yet valid abstract of highly developed theories of *naskh* within 14 centuries of *tafsîr*. He writes:

The greatest imaginable confusion reigns as to the definition of the term *naskh* and as to its supposed meaning(s). For that reason, it may be convenient first to set out the following formulae which represent the classical theories of *naskh*. There are, in fact, two such theories. 1. One theory acknowledges two modes of *naskh*: (i) *naskh al-ḥukm wal-tilâwa*: *naskh* of both wording and ruling. The formula can refer only to the Qur'ân. Material once allegedly revealed to the Prophet as to form part of the Qur'ân has been omitted from the texts collected into the *muṣḥaf*. This use of the term *naskh* may most conveniently be translated suppression. (ii) *naskh al-ḥukm dûna al-tilâwa*: the *naskh* of the ruling only. The form of words in which the ruling is couched remains, either in the texts of the Qur'ân or in those of the *Sunna*. Retaining the same translation of the term *naskh* used above, the present formula would allude to the suppression of the ruling of the earlier of two documents, the wording of the earlier text surviving in the sources alongside the wording of the later text whose ruling is "seen" to have replaced the earlier ruling. It might, however, be less confusing to use as our translation of *naskh* in this second formula the term "supersession". 2. Only a minority of scholars acknowledge a second theory of *naskh* which adds to the two above formulae a third: *naskh al-tilâwa dûna al-ḥukm*: the *naskh* of the wording only.<sup>58</sup>

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the length of events. To read the full version of Ṭabarî's narrative, see Al-Ṭabarî, *Jâmi' al-Bayân fî Ta'wîl al-Qur'ân*, under 22:52, available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net) (consulted on March 12<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>58</sup> John Burton, "The Exegesis of Q. 2:106 and the Islamic Theories of *Naskh*: *Mâ Nansakh Min Âya aw Nansâhâ Na'ti bi Khayrin Minhâ aw Mithlihâ*." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, vol. 48, No. 3 (1985): 452-469 (p. 452). Although very debatable, this third theory or formula has had important impacts on several aspects of Muslims' social life, including unsurprisingly man-woman relationship as well as the relationship between Muslims and *Ahl-al Kitâb*. For the first aspect, Burton gives the example of adultery. Right after briefly mentioning the above-mentioned citation, he adds:

Knowing that in many Qur'ânic instances of *nâsikh* and *mansûkh*, earthly circumstances and human contexts are probably behind the abrogation/change, one might conclude that the contextualisation of Qur'ânic *âyahs* is not only permissible, but also necessary for a re-understanding of the Qur'ân in the contemporary context of a fast changing world. An example of how and to what extent human context (in this case, the human sexual and physical tolerance) can intervene with the divine order and “abrogate” or “change” it can be found in 2:187. It reads:

أَجَلَ لَكُمْ لَيْلَةَ الصِّيَامِ الرَّفَثُ إِلَىٰ نِسَابِكُمْ هُنَّ لِيَابِسُ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِيَابِسُ لَهُنَّ عَلِمَ اللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ  
تُخْتَانُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَعَفَا عَنْكُمْ فَالآنَ بَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَأَبْتَغُوا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا  
حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ثُمَّ أَتُمُوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَىٰ اللَّيْلِ وَلَا تُنَاسِرُواهُنَّ  
وَأَنْتُمْ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الْمَسْجِدِ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَقْرِبُوهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لِنَاسٍ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ

It is made lawful for you to go in unto your wives on the night of the fast. They are raiment for you and ye are raiment for them. Allah is Aware that ye were deceiving yourselves in this respect and He hath turned in mercy toward you and relieved you. So hold intercourse with them and seek that which Allah hath ordained for you, and eat and drink until the white thread becometh distinct to you from the black thread of the dawn. Then strictly observe the fast till nightfall and touch them not, but be at your devotions in the mosques. These are the limits imposed by Allah, so approach them not. Thus Allah expoundeth His revelation to mankind that they may ward off (evil).

### 2.3.6 The Subdivision of Qur'ânic *âyahs* into ‘*aûm* and *khâṣṣ*

Despite its importance, this category has been ignored by most Western scholars.<sup>59</sup> One

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The “classic” instance of this mode of *naskh* relates to the Islamic penalty for adultery-death by stoning-derived, according to some, from a so-called stoning- “verse”. That no such “verse” is to be found in the *muṣḥaf* led to the rejection of the stoning penalty by a minority who insisted on the penalty that is to be found at Q. 24 2-one hundred strokes of the lash. The majority of the *fuqahâ*, however, including the founders of the four surviving *madhâhib*, acknowledged the stoning penalty, merely differing as to which had been its source, Qur'ân or Sunna. Malikis and Hanafis are content to attribute the stoning to the Sunna; Shafi'i and, following him, Aḥmad, traced it, for technical source-theory reasons, to the Qur'ân. The third formula, *naskh al-tilâwa dûna al-ḥukm*, thus serves as the hallmark of the minority spoken of above. (p.452)

An example for the relationship between Muslims and *ahl al-kitâb* can be found in the existence of a clear Qur'ânic permission, found in 5:5, that allows Muslims to eat from *ahl al-kitâb*'s food and to let them eat from Muslims' food, while a majority of *fuqahâ* have rejected the Christians' and Jews' slaughtering methods, thereby refusing to consider their food as *ḥalâl* or eatable for Muslims.

<sup>59</sup> One might think that compared to other categorizations of the Qur'ânic text, this one is unworthy to be mentioned. A quick glance at written works of some Muslim feminist scholars, such as Amina Wadud or

might find very little on this subject matter, and those little references are surprisingly filled with odd mistakes.<sup>60</sup> There is no consensus among *mufasssirûn* about the definition of this categorization of the Qur'ânic text, specifically the definition of *al-khâṣṣ*. Different *mufasssirûn* have mentioned different and numerous subcategories for both 'aâm (general or generic) and *khâṣṣ* (particular or specific).<sup>61</sup> A simplified definition would be as following: 'aâm is when a Qur'ânic *âyah* states a generic statement about all examples of its subject matter or issues, an order with a general applicability to all its subjects.

Ibn Quddâma (541-620H) mentions five subcategories for 'aâm. According to him, an *âyah* is 'aâm when one or more of the five following terms appear in it: 1) an *ism*

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Asma Barlas, reveals how to them, this categorization is at the basis of the "patriarchal readings of the Qur'ân," taking *khâṣṣ* for 'aâm. Asma Barlas writes:

Patriarchal readings of the Qur'ân can be faulted not only for distorting our idea of God - by displacing onto God the idea of sexual partisanship and thus of sexism and even misogyny - but also for other methodological and conceptual problems. Methodologically, such readings tend to decontextualise the Qur'ân's teachings by rendering words, phrases, and *âyât* in isolation from one another and without attention to language, grammar, and syntax, and/or by generalising specific Qur'ânic injunctions.

See Asma Barlas, "The Qur'ân and Hermeneutics: Reading the Qur'ân's Opposition to Patriarchy." *Journal of Qur'ânic Studies*, vol. 3, No. 2 (2001): 15-38.

<sup>60</sup> Goldfeld argues that this categorisation might have been inherited from the Jewish tradition of interpretation. By believing so, he narrows down the borders of "human wisdom" to the achievements of the Jewish tradition. It is not difficult to find a general statement in any text (sacred or not), followed by some exceptions or particularities. The Arabic nomination, in this case, is so far from the Hebrew terms used to refer to the same concept that it requires a stretch of the imagination to see a link between those terms in Hebrew and Arabic. Goldfeld writes:

*khâṣṣ wa 'Amm* or "particular" and "general" seems to have been shaped after *Perat u-Kelal* or "particular" and "general" of Hillel 5 and/or Rabbi Yishma 'el 4-11 (or Tyconius 4), unless these rules are a result of original investigation formulated in borrowed terms from the intercultural vocabulary of that period.

See Goldfeld, "The Development of Theory on Qur'ânic Exegesis in Islamic Scholarship," 24-5. McAuliffe's short explanation leads to confusion. She writes: "Some verses are deemed to be of general applicability while others are understood to apply only to specific circumstances ('aâm/khâṣṣ)." She mixes between 'aâm and *khâṣṣ* as categories of Qur'ânic *âyahs* and the same concepts/terms in *asbâb al-nuzûl*. In fact, "the general applicability" is the right definition for 'aâm in the Qur'ân, but "specific circumstances" is the right explanation for *khâṣṣ* in *asbâb al-nuzûl*. See McAuliffe, "The Persistent Power of the Qur'ân," 343.

<sup>61</sup> Some Muslim scholars have, at least in part, rejected this categorization. The most detailed refusal that I found can be read in *Madhkarat Uṣûl al-Fiqh 'alâ Rawḍat al-Nâzir li al-'Allâma ibn Quddâma* (pp. 310-16) written by Muḥammad al-Amîn al-Shanqîṭî (d. 1393H). See Muḥammad al-Amîn al-Shanqîṭî, *Madhkarat Uṣûl al-Fiqh 'alâ Rawḍat al-Nâzir li al-'Allâma ibn Quddâma*. Jaddah: Dâr 'Âlam al-Fawâ'id, 1426H, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=7007> (consulted on April 25<sup>th</sup> 2012). See also *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Munîr* written by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Futûḥî also known as Ibn Najjâr (898-728H). See Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Futûḥî, *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Munîr*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 4 vols. Riyadh: Maktabat 'Abikân, 1997 (vol. 3, p. 119).

*al-'urf* (common noun) having the prefix of *al* (the definite article in Arabic). This category has three subcategories: first, when the common noun is a *lafẓ al-jumû'* (plural noun) such as “the pagans” or “those who believe,” second, when the common noun is a *ism al-jins* (singular term referring to a kind or genus) such as “the water” or “the animal,” third, when the common noun is a *lafẓ wâhid* (individual noun referring to all examples of its meaning) such as “the thief” or “the guilty”; 2) a common verbal noun such as “him who believeth” or “whoso doeth an ill-deed”;<sup>62</sup> 3) a *lafẓ 'aâm mudâf ilâ ma'rifa* (common noun annexed to a definite noun) such as “the spouse of zayd”; 4) the two terms of *kull* (every) and *jamî'* (all or all together) such as “every soul”; 5) *al-nakara fî siyâq al-nafy* (the usage of an indefinite noun in a negative tense) such as the term “consort” in “there is for Him no consort.”<sup>63</sup> According to Ibn Quddâma, whenever at least one of the above-mentioned categories appears in an *âyah*, the announcement or the order includes all the examples and instances of the used common noun and/or the term.<sup>64</sup>

*khâṣṣ* is when a Qur'ânic *âyah* makes an exception or excludes some specific instances of an already announced generic statement and/or general order. As a textual phenomenon, *khâṣṣ* can happen in the same *âyah* with '*aâm* or by an *âyah revealed later*, the first kind called *al-khâṣṣ al-muttaṣil* (connected *khâṣṣ*), and the second called *al-khâṣṣ al-munfaṣil* (disconnected *khâṣṣ*). While examples of this categorization are numerous in the Qur'ân down the centuries, the concept of '*aâm* and *khâṣṣ* has caused many debates not only between those *mutikallimûn* who have accepted it and those who have, at least partly, rejected it, but also among the believers in this categorization. One of the main fronts of the debate among those who have accepted it is on the nature of this textual phenomenon. Muslim scholars have asked themselves if *khâṣṣ* reveals a second determination of God contrary to his first will ('*aâm*) or if '*aâm* and *khâṣṣ* must be considered, from the very beginning of '*aâm*, as one single will announced in two parts.

<sup>62</sup> Although Ibn Quddâma calls it *adawât al-shart* (literary conditional tools), I can neither understand the conditional aspect of this subcategory, nor find an explanation for this nomination. He himself does not present any reason for his choice of name.

<sup>63</sup> The Qur'ân 6:101.

<sup>64</sup> See Abu Muḥammad Abdullâh Muḥammad ibn Quddâma al-Muqaddasî, *Rawḍat al-Nâzir wa Jannat al-Manâzir*. Riyadh: Jâmi'at al-Imâm Muḥammad b. Su'ûd, 1399H, under chapter 5. E-published by maktabat al-Mishkât al-Islâmiyyah at <http://www.almeshkat.net/books/open.php?book=2120&cat=36> (consulted on April 25<sup>th</sup> 2012).

In other words, if the unchanging God “can” change his mind, relinquish a precedent statement, and abandon a part of his own order; or ‘*aâm* is a part of a more detailed order that would have been soon later completed with *khâṣṣ*. A Qur’ânic example helps to understand better the complexity of this concept, and its importance. 2:255 reads:

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ

Allah! There is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtaketh Him. Unto Him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who is he that intercedeth with Him save by His leave? He knoweth that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will. His throne includeth the heavens and the earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous.

In this *âyah*, the statement of “they [all his creatures including humankind] encompass nothing of His knowledge” has been excepted by “save what He will.” This *âyah* is among Qur’ânic *âyahs* that *al-ishrâqiyyûn* (the adherents of the school of *ishrâq* or illumination) have used to present and promote the idea of: to achieve “knowledge” (or wisdom) one must pray God and keep asking Him to “want” to illuminate him/her.

### 2.3.7 The Subdivision of Qur’ânic *âyahs* into *indhâr* and *tabshîr*

This category has been accepted by all *mufasssirûn*, and they are unanimous on the definitions of its terms. *indhâr*, the gerund of *andhara*, is when a Qur’ânic *âyah* warns its readership about a suffering (often presented as a punishment), and *tabshîr*, the present participle of *bashara* (giving glad tidings), is when an *âyah* brings glad tidings to its readership (mostly presented as a reward).<sup>65</sup> In his *tafsîr* on 2:119, Zamakhsharî (467-

<sup>65</sup> Despite the consensus on the definitions of *indhâr* and *tabshîr*, two Qur’ânic *âyahs* use the term *tabshîr* (both in imperative form) in the sense of *indhâr*. 4:138 reads: “Bear unto the hypocrites the tidings that for them there is a painful doom”; and 9:3 reads: “And a proclamation from Allah and His messenger to all men on the day of the Greater Pilgrimage that Allah is free from obligation to the idolaters, and (so is) His messenger. So, if ye repent, it will be better for you; but if ye are averse, then know that ye cannot escape Allah. Give tidings (O Muḥammad) of a painful doom to those who disbelieve.” I verified many *tafsîrs*, including the works of Ṭabarî, Ṭabâtabâ’î, Mâwardî, Râzî, Qurtubî, Suyûfî, Jazâ’irî, Zamakhsharî, Makkî ibn abi Ṭâlib, and Ibn Kathîr. To my surprise, none of them mentions anything about these two “exceptional” and “controversial” Qur’ânic usages of the term.

538H) explains that prophets cannot oblige people to believe or to accept their message. This is the reason why *indhâr* and *tabshîr* are the two most essential prophetic tools for the accomplishment of the prophetic mission.<sup>66</sup> The contemporary Muslim thinker Morteza Motahharî (1920-1979C.E.) mentions that *indhâr* “pushes away” from evil and ill-doing, and *tabshîr* “pulls towards” God and righteousness. These dual complementary acts of “pushing away” and “pulling towards” make a vertical line with God and heaven up at one end, and Satan and hell down at the other end. Human beings then move up and down that line towards one end or the other.<sup>67</sup>

## 2.4 Some Implications of Subdividing the Qur'ân<sup>68</sup>

Jane McAuliffe believes that Muslim scholars' effort to “create binary categories” has been their common strategy to stabilize the inherited *al-tafsîr* by the support of structural analysis. She writes:

From the earliest Islamic centuries, Muslim scholars have combined this production of multivolume commentaries with an effort to analyze and to classify the Qur'ânic text in multiple ways. They have used terminology drawn from within the text itself, and from beyond it, to create binary categories. For example, certain verses are labeled “clear” while others are consigned to the category of “ambiguous” (*muḥkam/mutashâbih*). Some verses are deemed to be of general applicability while others are

<sup>66</sup> See Abu al-Qâsim Maḥmûd b. 'Umar al-khawârizmi al-Zamakhsharî, *Tafsîr al-Kashshâf*. 6 vols. Riyadh: Maktabat 'Abikân, 1998 (vol. 1, p.182), available online at <http://www.emtiaz.net/vb/showthread.php?t=24194> (consulted on April 25<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>67</sup> Abbâs Ali Shâmelî, “Jâygâh va Naqsh-e Enzâr va Tabshir dar Nezâm-e Tarbyati-ye Payâambarân.” *Ma'rafat*, No. 33, no date, available online at <http://marifat.nashriyat.ir/node/1139> (consulted on April 25<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>68</sup> Before discussing the implications of subdividing the Qur'ân, it is important to mention that the subdivisions of the Qur'ân are not limited to what has been discussed in this thesis. As a matter of fact, beside all the above-mentioned “popular” categorizations, there are many other classifications that are also commonly accepted by most Islamic schools or traditions, but they are less useful to the arguments of this thesis. Some of them are: *al-mumtahinât* meaning examiners (*sûrahs* 32, 48, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 68, 71, 72); *alam* (seven *sûrahs* that start with the mysterious letters of *alif, lâm, mîm*); *musabbahât* meaning words to praise the God (*sûrahs* 17, 57, 59, 61, 62, 64, 87); *hawâmîm* (seven *sûrahs* that start with the mysterious letters of *hâ, mîm*); *alr* (six *sûrahs* that start with the mysterious letters of *alif, lâm, râ*); *ḥamd* (five *sûrahs* that start with the word *al-ḥamd*); *al-iṭâq* meaning old ones (*sûrahs* 17, 18, 19, 20, 21); *'azâyem* (four *sûrahs* that include an *âyah* or *âyahs* with obligatory prostration); *qul* (four *sûrahs* starting with the word *qul* meaning say); *ṭawâsîn* (three *sûrahs* that start with the mysterious letters of *ṭâ, sîn* or *ṭâ, sîn, mîm*); *al-zahrâwân* meaning two flowers (*sûrahs* 2 and 3); *qarinatayn* meaning two symmetrical (*sûrahs*) (*sûrahs* 8 and 9); *al-mu'awadhatayn* meaning two refuges (the last two *sûrahs* of the Qur'ân).

understood to apply only to specific circumstances (*'amm/khâṣṣ*). Yet another form of binary classification is based on the notion that there are later passages in the Qur'ân that abrogate verses revealed earlier. Building category upon category, these medieval Muslim minds developed a highly sophisticated form of structural analysis that stabilized the inherently amorphous activity of interpretation. Throwing this terminological grid over the Qur'ân has channelled exegetical energy toward an almost microscopic examination of the text, an effort and an attitude that further fortify the aura of unassailable textual authority that surrounds this scripture.<sup>69</sup>

While agreeing with her on some implications of those categorizations (binary or not), one cannot deny the fact that in some cases, such as in the case of *nâsikh* and *mansûkh*, the Qur'ânic message is so clear that the act of categorization happens in and by the original text itself before any “activity of interpretation” be inherited. In this regard, with the simplest lecture of the Qur'ân, any mind, whether “medieval Muslim” or “modern Western” will conclude that the text is calling to a meticulous examination of its *âyahs* in order to classify its messages according to the announced categories of *nâsikh* and *mansûkh*.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> McAuliffe, “The Persistent Power of the Qur'ân,” 343.

<sup>70</sup> McAuliffe gives the impression that before the medieval age, *al-tafsîr* was an amorphous phenomenon/activity. Knowing that, right after the death of the Prophet, we have reports about debates among different “schools” of *tafsîr*, one might conclude that from the very beginning of its emergence, *al-tafsîr* had a structure with clear implications leading to different degrees of textual authority. As an example, to most scholars, Ibn 'Abbâs followed the Jewish/Christian methods of exegesis and succeeded to establish his own “school” of *tafsîr* upon that inheritance. On this point, Goldfeld writes:

The oldest Jewish commentators ... who preceded the time of methodology in the implementation of certain rules, used to explain the text by parallels, in accordance with the rule that the Tora is to be explained by the Tora, as well as by reference to accepted speech and by comparison to foreign languages ... The oldest Jewish Bible explanations ... were initially having reference to legal matters only derived from the Bible (Halakha), literary-historical subjects (Haggada) being rather more resistant to the changes of time and therefore in less frequent need of updating. This too happened to Islamic precepts of interpretation: The first stage of development of Muslim theory on Qur'ânic exegesis, the four precepts of Ibn 'Abbas, seem to refer to the understanding of the legal aspects only of the Qur'ân. The world of Ibn 'Abbâs and his contemporaries was Arabia, Arabism and Arabic. The whole universe was viewed through this Arabocentric prism, a sense for history and introspective reasoning not having yet taken account of the world outside. The second and third stages of development of Muslim theory on exegesis, during the age of the Tabi'iun and their disciples, like Muqatil and his generation, refer also to the historical aspect of the Qur'ân.

See Goldfeld, “The Development of Theory on Qur'ânic Exegesis in Islamic Scholarship,” 8-9. Goldfeld's argument clearly shows that, contrary to what McAuliffe believes, *al-tafsîr* had already experienced an evolution of its theories before the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

From an internal interpretation viewpoint, one of the main and common goals of *mufassirûn* studying the above-mentioned categorizations and trying to master their technics has been to achieve a reliable certainty about the meaning of Qur'ânic *âyahs*. To *mufassirûn*, Qur'ânic *âyahs* do not simply hold their independent meanings presenting divine messages. They interact by explaining, interpreting, clarifying, and complementing each other. Those interactions range from confirming and centralizing to marginalizing and even abrogating.<sup>71</sup> Some of the above-mentioned categorizations, by nature, make connections between the “divine” and the “earthly.” Those connections, in turn, are important steps towards the contextualization of Qur'ânic themes, messages, and orders. In a way, they are powerful hermeneutical efforts to study the text through invisible threads of connection between its particles called *âyahs* with earthly matters such as weather, place, time, etc.

From an external interpretation perspective, the theorization of different Qur'ânic categories has undeniably helped *mufassirûn* and *fuqahâ* to collaborate with Muslim rulers, and to “handle the situation” in different conflicting socio-political contexts. In fact, such a collaboration has only become possible by maneuvering the *tafsîr* of concerned Qur'ânic *âyahs* and finding new meanings for the Words of God. In some cases, these hermeneutical tools have helped the legitimization of the Islamic authority or the stabilization of the power in conquered territories. In some other cases, and after losing the conquered territories, they have helped create different understandings of

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<sup>71</sup> A good example of the importance of these studies, and their implications in Muslims' everyday life, is the Qur'ânic order about alcohol. Five Qur'ânic *âyahs* discuss this issue. According to all *mufassirûn*, those *âyahs* must be read and understood in the following order, resulting in the strict banning of alcohol. It is enough to invert that order to find that the same *âyahs* will clearly mean that drinking alcohol is a joy of life permitted by God: A) “And of the fruits of the date-palm, and grapes, whence ye derive strong drink and (also) good nourishment. Lo! Therein is indeed a portent for people who have sense.” (16:67); B) “They question thee about strong drink and games of chance. Say: In both is great sin, and (some) utility for men; but the sin of them is greater than their usefulness. And they ask thee what they ought to spend. Say: that which is superfluous. Thus Allah maketh plain to you (His) revelations, that haply ye may reflect.” (2:219); C) “O ye who believe! Draw not near unto prayer when ye are drunken, till ye know that which ye utter, nor when ye are polluted, save when journeying upon the road, till ye have bathed. And if ye be ill, or on a journey, or one of you cometh from the closet, or ye have touched women, and ye find not water, then go to high clean soil and rub your faces and your hands (therewith). Lo! Allah is Benign, Forgiving.” (4:43); D) and E) “O ye who believe! Strong drink and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are only an infamy of Satan's handiwork. Leave it aside in order that ye may succeed. Satan seeketh only to cast among you enmity and hatred by means of strong drink and games of chance, and to turn you from remembrance of Allah and from (His) worship. Will ye then have done?” (5:90-1).



God's order asking Muslims to evacuate their homes, and offering a sense of "emigration" to what one might call "running away."

As an example for the first above-mentioned instances, Hussein Ali Agrama gives a very good example of *fatwas* contributing to the establishment of an ethical authority within Muslim societies. While analysing *fatwas* as "instrument[s] of Islamic doctrinal change and reform, as bridging the constant gap between a settled doctrinal past and a future of continual novelty,"<sup>72</sup> he writes:

To take just one example: Islamic scholars debated for several centuries (up until the 8th) the question of how, and whether, acts enacted before the arrival of Qur'ânic revelation could be categorized under the rubrics provided by it. Questions about retroactive application would certainly make sense after the initial founding and early expansion of Islam. Under the temporal assumptions commonly associated with a modern historicity, however, it is hard to see why such a debate would continue on for so many centuries afterward. It seems quite the reverse of today's Islamic debates, which arose only after the 18th century, about how and whether the revelation and its categories apply to acts, especially modern ones, enacted after it. Kevin Reinhart (1995), who discusses the ancient debate extensively, argues that it was a means for taking positions on controversial issues within Islamic tradition that could not be approached directly.<sup>73</sup>

As an example for the second above-mentioned instance, Jean-Pierre Molénat studies "*le problème de la permanence des musulmans dans les territoires conquis par les chrétiens*"<sup>74</sup> and reveals how a new understanding of the Qur'ânic *âyahs* helped *fuqahâ* to find a solution for the unhappy lives of Muslims living now under Christian rulers. He writes:

Le départ des musulmans des zones contrôlées par les chrétiens est conforme aux versets du Coran établissant l'obligation d'"émigrer" (hâgara), dans les Sourates IV, 97-100, et VIII, 72-75 ... Mais entre le précepte, formulé par la parole de Dieu lui-même, et en tant que tel intangible, et son application concrète, il existe nécessairement la médiation d'une casuistique (une "étude des cas"), qui ouvre la porte à

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<sup>72</sup> Hussein Ali Agrama, "Ethics, tradition, authority: Toward an anthropology of the fatwa." *American Ethnologist*, vol. 37, Issue 1 (2010): 2-18 (p. 2).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>74</sup> This is, in part, the title of his article cited further.

interprétations qui peuvent diverger.<sup>75</sup>

## 2.5 The Theory of Five Layers of Meaning or the Soul of the Text

Knowing different categories of the Qur'ân, and understanding the internal power dynamic of the Qur'ânic text can help us going towards an understanding of what I call “the soul of the text” or “the fifth layer of the meaning.” I believe that, at least for text-centric religions, this fifth layer, as I will explain it further, is the core foundation of religion as a *sui generis* phenomenon.<sup>76</sup> In other words, the *sui generis* nature of religion, if we accept such a claim about religion, comes, in part, from the *sui generis* nature of the relationship between its sacred oral and/or written text/revelation with its audience. Consequently, going from “understanding” the text, to “comprehending” the text or as Northrop Frye calls it from “the knowledge about” the text to “the knowledge of” the text means coming as close as possible to the “experience” of the text (in our case the Qur'ân) as it has first been experienced by its initial audience, and is experienced again and again in an immense variety of ways by its later adherents (in our case Muslims). These experiences are way beyond the literal meaning(s) of words or verses as found in a dictionary. To me, that “soul of the text” surpasses the vocabulary sense or the first layer of the meaning. It also exceeds those nuances in meaning coming from *al-ṣarf* or the grammatical aspect of the word as explained in grammar books. This latter forms what I call “the second layer of the meaning.” It surpasses the third layer of the meaning that comes from *al-naḥw* or the role and the place of the word in the sentence or the

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<sup>75</sup> Jean-Pierre Molénat, “Le problème de la permanence des musulmans dans les territoires conquis par les chrétiens, du point de vue de la loi islamique.” *Arabica*, T. 48, Fasc. 3 (2001): 393-4.

<sup>76</sup> Much has been written on the question of religion being or not a *sui generis* phenomenon. Daniel L. Pals argues that since the emergence of Religious Studies as a “formal academic discipline,” the question of religion being a *sui generis* phenomenon has caused debates among experts in this interdisciplinary field. At the beginning of his article, he cites Mircea Eliade’s famous theory, and writes:

In one way or another each [phenomenologist of religion] has been inclined to say, with Eliade, that “a religious phenomenon will only be recognized as such if it is grasped at its own level, that is to say, if it is studied as something religious. To try to grasp the essence of such a phenomenon by means of ... any other study is false; it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it.” ... On such a view the *sui generis* and irreducible character of religion is crucial to proper understanding.

Then he presents the arguments of opponents, criticises them and convincingly concludes: “Is religion then entitled to designation as a *sui generis* phenomenon? Absolutely, it would seem, if it is conceived in the same heuristic terms that apply to other disciplines and if it is employed as an axiomatic guide for research.” See Daniel L. Pals, “Is Religion a *Sui Generis* Phenomenon?” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 55, No. 2 (Summer 1987): 259-282 (pp. 260, 279).

syntactical aspect of the word. Finally, it goes farther than the nuances coming from the beauty of the word or its relationship with the literary genre of the text, which I call “the forth layer of meaning.” It rather mirrors the passion, the desire, the fear, the hope, the rational and/or emotional acceptance that words alone or together can create in their audience. I call this layer of the meaning, “the soul of the word,” or “the soul of the text.” This layer is what Elizabeth Struthers Malbon suggests as the ultimate purpose of hermeneutics. She puts an emphasis on the Gadamerian concept of “existential understanding” used in Richard Palmer’s work, and makes a distinction between exegetical meaning (Biblical exegesis in her case), and hermeneutical meaning. She writes:

The distinction I see between biblical exegesis and existential understanding is comparable to the distinction Palmer observes “between the moment of understanding an object in terms of itself and the moment of seeing the existential meaning of the object for one’s own life and future”. While the most traditional definition of hermeneutics is probably “the theory of interpretation,” the most traditional goal of hermeneuticists in the field of religion throughout the long history of hermeneutics is probably biblical exegesis. By the opening of the nineteenth century, as Achtemeier notes, the terms "hermeneutics" and "exegesis" were often used interchangeably (Achtemeier:14). However, in the twentieth century - to a certain extent with Bultmann and more fully with the new hermeneutic- the goal of biblical exegesis has been overwhelmed by the insistent emphasis on existential understanding, on biblical exegesis *pro nobis, pro me*. As John Cobb notes: “In the new hermeneutic what is interpreted is ultimately and decisively the existence of the hearer of the proclamation. The text, rather than being the object of interpretation, as with Bultmann, becomes an aid in the interpretation of present existence” (Cobb:229-80; cf. Robinson:52 and McKnight:77-78).<sup>77</sup>

This viewpoint is very close to how Ṭabâṭabâ’î sees *ta’wîl* and the distinction that he makes between *ta’wîl* and *tafsîr*. As mentioned before, he believes that the result of *ta’wîl* “is not [achieving] a sort of meaning of the word; it [rather] is a real fact that is too sublime for words.”<sup>78</sup> In other words, this fifth layer of meaning is not in the word and/or the text. It rather dwells in its reader/listener. What the word does is to trigger a capacity

<sup>77</sup> Struthers Malbon, Elizabeth. “Structuralism, Hermeneutics, and Contextual Meaning.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 51, No. 2 (June 1983): 207-230 (p. 215).

<sup>78</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabâṭabâ’î, “The Concept of al-Ta’wil in the Qur’an.” *The Message of Thaqaalayn*, vol. 2, (1995): 21-40.

in its audience to find desire, fear, hope, love, etc. in himself or herself.

I believe that as any other text, sacred or non-sacred, the Qur'ân and its *sûrahs*, *âyahs* and words possess these five layers of meaning. The first four layers are of interest for exegesis, in our case *tafsîr*, but the last one is what the new hermeneutics is seeking to find in the word/text. The reader reads it. The listener listens to it. By doing so, he/she creates a personal relationship with the word/text. This personal relationship (superficial or deep) immediately leads to a personal perception (clear or vague) of the meaning that already dwells in his/her thoughts and feelings (common with others or not), and which is rooted in his/her experiences, capacities, skills, and life.<sup>79</sup> This layer of the meaning is what I call “the soul of the word.” Let me give two examples. Dog is a three letter English word. The online Oxford dictionary has a long page on the meaning of this word. As the first meaning, one can read: “a domesticated carnivorous mammal that typically has a long snout, an acute sense of smell, non-retractile claws, and a barking, howling, or whining voice.”<sup>80</sup> This is what I call the first layer of the meaning. Then the grammar nuances the meaning. Dog is a noun. It can become the subject of a verb such as “the dog chased me.” Here the word “dog” does not only refer to “a domesticated carnivorous mammal ... [with] a long snout, [and] an acute sense of smell.” It refers to a moving animal. Here we have movement, and the movement is not only in the verb; it also is in the subject of the verb. Here, our three letter word is an animal that runs, moves, and chases. At the third level, we have the meaning coming from the syntactical aspect of the term. There is a big difference between the dog in “The dog chased me,” and the same dog in “I chased the dog.”<sup>81</sup> The image, the mood, the function, and maybe even the size of the dog in these two sentences might be understood differently. The fourth layer comes from the choice of words around dog, as well as the beauty or the literary genre that alone or together they represent. The same sentence could have been said differently: “The dog chased after me,” or “A big black dog chased me down the street,” or “My uncle’s f\* dog

<sup>79</sup> This “immediate” is so fast that it is almost perceived as simultaneous.

<sup>80</sup> *Online Oxford Dictionary*, available online at <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/dog?q=Dog> (consulted on February 21<sup>st</sup> 2012).

<sup>81</sup> This example reminds me of the famous journalism aphorism by Alfred Harmsworth: “When a dog bites a man, that is not news ... But if a man bites a dog, that is news.” So the syntactical place of dog in the sentence makes all the difference about its informational and commercial values. See Justin Kaplan, *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*. 16<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston, London, and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1992 (p. 554).

chased me away,” or even “A wild dog ran after me.” Each of these sentences more or less present the same scene (a dog chasing a human), but the role, and the meaning of the dog, as well as its relationship with “me” is not 100% the same. The following poem by Lee Crowell includes the same word (dog), the same move (chasing), and the same grammatical and syntactical role for the word dog (chasing me), but the meaning that it represents is quite different from “The dog (or my dog) chased me.” Part of her poem is:

I busted loose from my chain today  
busted loose  
from my chain  
my dog chased me up and down  
up and down around suppertime

I'm gonna show my dog  
I'm gonna lift my leg  
gonna show him I can do more than beg  
and he'll whisper that he understands  
I'm just a boy in a dog life world<sup>82</sup>

Here the meaning of the word “dog” in “my dog chased me up and down” is nuanced by its literary genre and the choice of other words of the text all together representing a child's world.

In order not to complicate things, let's go back to our simple sentence of “The dog chased me.” To me, the fifth layer of the meaning of the term *dog* is not in this sentence but in the personal experience of the reader. Someone who has ever chased a dog or has been chased by a dog will understand it differently (always referring to his/her experience) from someone who has never experienced such a thing (whether joyful or dangerous). Someone who comes from a culture where dog is an impure and polluting animal (like in most Muslim cultures) will understand *dog* in this sentence differently from someone who has grown up with a dog as a member of his/her family. Even if all readers of this sentence have had dogs and their dogs have chased them (once or more), they do not share the same meaning and perception about the term *dog* in this sentence. Some of them might see joy in the term *dog*, while others might find it saddening. After reading it, one reader might go and buy a dog while another reader might become more

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<sup>82</sup> The full poem is available online at <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-dog-whisperer/> (consulted on April 25<sup>th</sup> 2012).

careful when walking on the streets.<sup>83</sup>

In an interesting experimental study on the aspects of meaning, Gail McKoon and Roger Ratcliff do a series of six experiments to verify the “contextually relevant aspects of meaning.” Their conclusion reveals how the meaning may vary from one literary context to another, as well as to what extent the meaning can change according to the reader’s past. In their conclusion, they claim:

The typical encoding specificity procedure involves words studied as cue-target pairs, and testing of the targets for recognition and cued recall. The major finding is that a large proportion of targets can be recalled even though they cannot be recognized, so long as recall is in the context of the cue originally studied with a target. For example, suppose the pair *glue-chair* is studied: In the context of previously studied information (the cue *glue*), *chair* may be recalled. But without that context, *chair* alone may not be recognized as having been studied. Similarly, in our experiments, the relevant aspect of meaning of *tomatoes* is more available than the irrelevant aspect of meaning when the context is previously studied information, but not when the context is general knowledge.

Encoding specificity is sometimes interpreted to mean encoding of specific meanings (cf. Crowder, 1976). The meaning of *chair* presented alone is assumed to be slightly different from the meaning of *chair* presented in the context of the cue *glue*. The experiments reported here go beyond the usual encoding specificity result in showing explicitly that different aspects of meaning are encoded: the encoded meaning of *tomatoes* is shown to be different in the context of a paragraph about the color of tomatoes than in a context about the shape of tomatoes.<sup>84</sup>

Another very good example that everybody has experienced is the verb “to thank,” or simply “thanks.” All of us have experienced it in both extremes of using it to make a bothering person go away versus using it to present our deepest gratitude to someone. Where exactly do those opposite meanings lie? Are they in the vocabulary sense of the

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<sup>83</sup> A very concrete example of this power of words beyond their basic meanings is the rhetoric serving political objectives. For example, a glance at the emergence of the Nazi movement/ideology in the early 1930s under the leadership of Adolph Hitler (1889-1945) shows to what extent Hitler was capable of penetrating that fifth layer of the meaning and use it to his own advantage. In his different speeches, his rhetoric is filled with terms such as “glory,” “dignity,” “development,” and “hope.” These conceptual terms, and many other great ones, however, lead to cruelty, war and genocide. See Kristy Maddux, “Finding Comedy in Theology: A Hopeful Supplement to Kenneth Burke’s Logology.” *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, vol. 39, Issue 3 (2006): 208-232 (p. 225).

<sup>84</sup> Gail McKoon and Roger Ratcliff, “Contextually Relevant Aspects of Meaning.” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, vol. 14, No. 2 (1988): 331-343 (p. 342).

term, in its grammatical or syntactical aspects or in its literary form? (We might say it in an old fashioned or colloquial ways). Is the meaning the same in the oral form of the term and its written form?<sup>85</sup> Will the meaning be different if we use it in a speech-act versus using it in a prose? Martin C. Richard has an interesting discussion about the speech-act aspect of the Qur'ân and its impact on the hermeneutics of its messages. In his article entitled *Understanding the Qur'ân in Text and Context*, he writes:

... the Quranic text in both its literary and oral forms constitutes a speech-act situation which involves a speaker and addressee(s), and that what we must attempt to discover are the rules that govern the various cultural contexts in which such communication takes place. In most speech-act situations, the speaker (writer of literary speech or utterer of oral speech) and addressees are defined by historical circumstances that can be described and analyzed by literary, historical, or sociolinguistic methods. The case of sacred speech, however, poses certain problems that speech-act theorists have not considered. At the base of the symbolic world views of Muslims is a cosmology that sees Allâh (God) as the speaker and humankind as the addressee. Thus, the oral/literary text of the Qur'ân constitutes a *lingua sacra* that implies a symbolic, cosmological context of meaning. I hold that understanding cosmology and the world views it generates in different historical and cultural contexts is essential to understanding Quranic modes of communication.<sup>86</sup>

If the act of understanding simple terms such as “dog” or “thanks” is so dependent on their textual contexts, as well as on our diverse contexts (including history), and our relationship to them involving our feelings and our *états d'esprit*, how can we make sure that we can achieve a reliable and stable meaning for conceptual terms such as “right,” “wrong,” “love,” “justice,” and “truth,” that are so basic to the formation of “faith,” as well as generic figures (real, symbolic or illusive) such as “angels,” “Satan,” and of course “God” that are so essential to our perception of the metaphysical universe.

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<sup>85</sup> As Kate Zebiri rightly mentions: “The oral character of the Qur'ân is another element that reinforces the relevance of rhetorical criticism. Some Western scholars have recently drawn attention to this aspect of the Qur'ân, not just in its origins but as a relevant ongoing factor in observing the impact of the Qur'ân on Muslims' lives.” For some of those works, she gives the following examples in her footnote: “E. G. Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'ân*; W. Graham, ‘Qur'ân as Spoken Word: An Islamic Contribution to the Understanding of Scripture’ in R.C. Martin (ed.); *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985).” See Kate Zebiri, “Towards a Rhetorical Criticism of the Qur'ân.” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 5, No. 2 (2003): 95-120 (pp. 97, 116).

<sup>86</sup> Richard C. Martin, “Understanding the Qur'ân in Text and Context.” *History of Religions*, vol. 21, No. 4 (May 1982): 361-384 (p. 364).

Therefore, the main goal and challenge of hermeneutics seems to be how to penetrate the fifth layer of the meaning or the soul of the word/text, achieving the ability of “re-seeing” it in the constantly changing light of coming and going contexts, and finding the capacity of re-understanding the word/text over and over as it mirrors the same truth in different bodies of meanings each and all shaped by its readers throughout time and space. The Qur'ân calls this capacity *al-fiṭra* but does not limit it to the understanding of the word/text.

The term *fiṭra*, from *faṭara* and meaning “to cleave” or to “knead,” appears several times in the Qur'ân.<sup>87</sup> Some Qur'ânic *sûrahs* start with an *âyah* having this term, and *sûrah* 82 of the Qur'ân is called *al-infiṭâr* (literally “bursting apart or cleaving asunder”).<sup>88</sup> To define *fiṭra* as a quality that human is gifted with, most *mufasssîrûn* refer to 30:30 in the Qur'ân. It reads:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَٰلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَٰكِنَّا أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

So set thy purpose (O Muḥammad) for religion as a man by nature upright - the nature (framed) of Allâh, in which He hath created man. There is no altering (the laws of) Allâh's creation. That is the right religion, but most men know not.<sup>89</sup>

The *âyah* here clearly talks about a divine quality or nature (Allâh's *fiṭra*) given to human beings in the process of their creation. In his short *tafsîr* on 30:30, Ṭabarî narrates two sources in which *fiṭra* simply means “Islam.” The first one, going back to Mujâhid, briefly says that to Mujâhid Allâh's *fiṭra* is Islam. The second one, narrated with two *isnâd*, is a *ḥadîth* in which the companion of the Prophet, Mu'âdh ibn Jabal, answers a question asked by the other companion of the Prophet, 'Umar ibn al-Khattâb, and within his answer, he interprets *fiṭra* as *ikhlâs* (lit. sincerity or truthfulness), and 'Umar confirms

<sup>87</sup> It appears under different verbal and none verbal forms in 6:14, 79 ; 11:51; 12:101; 14:10; 17:51; 19:90; 20:72; 21:56; 30:30 (twice); 35:1; 36:22; 39:46; 42:5, 11; 43:27; 82:1; 67:3; 73:18.

<sup>88</sup> One of Allâh's attributes mentioned and accepted by Ibn 'Arabî is *fâṭir al-samâwâti wa al-ard* (Creator of the heavens and the earth). However, although coming from the Qur'ân (i.e. 6:14; 12:101), most *mufasssîrûn* have refused to include it in Allâh's 99 attributes.

<sup>89</sup> In this *âyah*, Pickthall translates *fiṭra* as “nature,” Yusuf Ali translates it as “pattern,” Dr Mohsin keeps it in Arabic transliteration and adds in parenthesis “(i.e. Allâh's Islamic Monotheism).”



his answer.<sup>90</sup> In their *tafsîr* on 30:30, most *mufasssîrûn* follow Ṭabarî.<sup>91</sup> They claim that Allâh has given to all human beings the capacity of recognizing that Islam is the “right religion,” but “most men know not.” However, despite his inclusivist approach, Ṭabâṭabâ’î’s *tafsîr* on 30:30 neither cites, nor refers to any of what others have written. In his detailed and long *tafsîr* on 30:30, Ṭabâṭabâ’î presents a meticulous argument about how *fiṭra* means *al-ijâd* (creation or establishment) or *al-ibdâ’* (innovation). This is a human quality given to all human beings by God, so they can find (turn their faces towards) *al-dîn*, which is the path towards happiness in both the earthly and hereafter lives.<sup>92</sup> Ṭabâṭabâ’î argues that this common quality (*fiṭra*) does not contrast the existing diversity in different societies and cultures. He insists that “spirit” (*rûh*) and “body” (*badan*) are two possessions of each and every human, and they do not differ from one person to another throughout cultures and traditions. So human’s bodily and spiritual needs are also the same. Humans have always looked and keep looking for happiness, and although roads towards its examples are numerous, the happiness, as the ultimate conceptual goal of each and every human is always the same. In other words, *al-dîn* is God’s path towards earthly and eternal happiness, and *fiṭra* is the human beings’ common divine quality that enables them to see the horizon of happiness, so they can march together towards it in both the individual and the collective aspects of their life. He concludes:

<sup>90</sup> See al-Ṭabarî, *Jâmi‘ al-Bayân fi Ta’wîl al-Qur’ân*, under 30:30, available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net) (consulted on May 29<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>91</sup> Al-Râzî’s *tafsîr* about *fiṭra* is even shorter than Ṭabarî’s. It does not add to our information. See Al-Râzî, *Mafâtîh al-Ghayb*, under 30:30, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=1372> (consulted on June 12<sup>th</sup> 2012). Zamakhsharî narrates two *aḥādîth* without any *sanad*. The first one is a *ḥadîth qudsî* according to which all servants of God (human beings) are created as monotheists, but Satan leads them astray from the right path. The second *ḥadîth* is from the Prophet saying that every child is born Muslim, but his/her parents make him/her become Christian, Jewish, or Zoroastrian. See Al-Zamakhsharî, *Tafsîr al-Kashshâf*, under 30:30, available online at <http://www.emtiaz.net/vb/showthread.php?t=24194> (consulted on June 12<sup>th</sup> 2012). Ibn Kathîr narrates Zamakhsharî’s first *ḥadîth*, always without any *sanad*, then cites several *aḥādîth* according to which *fiṭra* means Islam. See Ibn Kathîr, *Tafsîr Ibn Kathîr*, under 30:30, available online at <http://rowea.blogspot.ca/2010/02/pdf-8.html> (consulted on June 12<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>92</sup> In his *tafsîr* on 18:51, Ṭabâṭabâ’î mentions that every creature has been created with a *fiṭra*, and every creature is guided by God and through its *fiṭra* towards its perfection. Ṭabâṭabâ’î calls this divine guidance as *al-hidâyat al-‘ammah* (the common or general guidance), and God’s guidance for human being as *al-hidâyat al-khâṣṣah* (the special or particular guidance). See Al-Ṭabâṭabâ’î, *Al-Mizân fi Tafsîr al-Qur’ân*, under 18:51, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on June 13<sup>th</sup> 2012).

If the meaning of human's happiness was different from person to person, any community with the goal of assuring its habitants' happiness would have not been established. If the meaning of happiness was diverse within different spaces in which different nations live, it would necessarily place the environment as the main basis of human's social tradition meaning religion, so human would necessarily become different kinds from place to place. If the meaning of happiness was different from time to time, meaning that eras and centuries were the main foundations of human's social tradition, each century would necessarily have a different nature disconnected from what was inherited from fathers and what would be passed to sons. In such a case, it was meaningless for the society to aim any development, and it was impossible for the humanity to go from deficiency towards perfection, because any collective move needs a steady and invariable common sense of the road.

This [argument] does not aim to deny the fact that people, places and eras have some impacts on the organisation [and the establishment] of religious tradition, but it tries to prove that the religious tradition is founded on a human's capacity [*fiṭra*]: a unique truth which is invariable and commonly shared by each and every individual throughout times and spaces.<sup>93</sup>

While studying the Qur'ânic term *ḥanîf*, Frederick Denny gives a short explanation about *fiṭra* in 30:30. His definition is very close to Ṭabâṭabâ'î's interpretation of *fiṭra* in the same *âyah*. Denny believes that despite the fact that the *homo religiosus* in the Qur'ân is an "intentional creature," "God has created [him with] a *fiṭra*, a natural tendency..."<sup>94</sup> He adds:

While in later Islamic theology much effort was expended to preserve God's sovereign will (*mâshi'a*) and guidance (*hidâya*), here in the Qur'ânic record it seems that man is indeed able to subvert and repudiate God's *fiṭra*. The religion of Allâh is "natural" and archetypal, partaking of his *ṣibghah*. God's religion is marked by His *ṣibghah*, His "baptism", and God's Baptism is best of all. The sense of purification in *ṣibghah* ... specifies some-thing of the quality of *fiṭra* in this connection.<sup>95</sup>

The quality of *fiṭra* enables human to "see" and "to hear" God's *âyahs* (lit. signs), to

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<sup>93</sup> Surprisingly, here Ṭabâṭabâ'î does not mention any source, reference or *ḥadîth* for his theological argument. See Al-Ṭabâṭabâ'î, *Al-Mizân fî Tafṣîr al-Qur'ân*, under 30:30, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on March 10<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>94</sup> Frederick Mathewson Denny, "Some Religio-Communal Terms and Concepts in the Qur'ân." *Numen*, vol. 24, Fasc. 1 (April 1977): 26-59 (p. 32).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 32-3. In a footnote to the first sentence of this paragraph, Denny writes: "For a lucid discussion of this term see D. B. MacDonald, "*Fiṭra*," Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition, s.v."

achieve their true meanings, and to use them as “guidance” towards *al-dîn* (whatever it means). The term *âyah* in both its singular and plural forms has been used hundreds of times in the Qur'ân. Beside the Qur'ânic verses being *âyât al-Allâh* (the signs of God), the list of other signs of God presented in the Qur'ân is long. It includes almost everything: the Moon, the Sun, the earth, clouds, winds, rain, the miracles of all prophets, Joseph and his brothers, Noah and those who survived with him, the survival of Moses and his followers as well as the ruin of Pharaoh and his followers, Jesus and his mother Mary, rivers, mountains, plants, fruits, life and death, the difference of day and night, the human's creation, and all creatures in the heavens and the earth.<sup>96</sup> In a way, the Qur'ân's hermeneutical approach is very close to the post-modern way of defining “the text.” Everything in this world can be considered as a text, and can be “seen,” “reflected upon” and “understood” as a sign pointing towards the same unique and ultimate truth. Meanwhile, to the Qur'ân, the Qur'ânic *âyahs* have an undeniable supremacy in their power of guidance compared to any other sign. That is why accessing the soul of the text by penetrating the fifth layer of meaning of Qur'ânic *âyahs* becomes so essential to any hermeneutical effort aiming to achieve a new rereading of the Qur'ân. The following category is a contribution to such an effort.

## 2.6 The Subdivision of Qur'ânic *âyahs* into *nabawî* and *rasûlî* or The Theory of Double Messages of the Qur'ân<sup>97</sup>

In 2006, while working on some Qur'ânic *âyahs* for a small project, the idea of an ignored but important subdivision of the Qur'ânic text classifying its *âyahs* under two

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<sup>96</sup> For some examples, see 3:190; 10:6; 12:7; 17:101; 45:5.

<sup>97</sup> From the very beginning of my thoughts on the Qur'ân's double messages in 2006, I invented the terms “prophetic *âyahs*” and “messengeric *âyahs*” to refer to my hypothesis about two different kinds of Qur'ânic *âyahs*, one being the fruit of the Prophet Muhammad's prophethood and the other, being the result of his messengerhood. However, as explained further below, while working on this chapter, I found out in 2010 that the Arabic terms *âyât nabawî* (prophethood verses) and *âyât rasûlî* (messengerhood verses) had been already invented and used by the Syrian thinker Muhammad Shahrur (1938- ) in a 1992 publication. The same nomination in English appear in his other book published in an English translation in 2009. For more details about Shahrur's analysis/nomination of the Qur'ânic text, see Muhammad Shahrur, *Al-Kitâb wa al-Qur'ân: Qirâ'a Mu'âşira*. Beirut: Shirkat al-Maţbû'ât li al-Tawzi' wa al-Nashr, 2011; see also Muhammad Shahrur, *The Qur'ân, Morality and Critical Reason: the Essential Muhammad Shahrur*. Translated and edited by Andreas Christman. Leiden: Brill, 2009. Both these references are available online at [www.shahrour.org](http://www.shahrour.org) (consulted on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2012).

categories of *nabawî* (prophetic) and *rasûlî* (messengeric) dawned on me. For a few months, besides my daily duties, I did some research to verify if I could find an article that directly or indirectly mentioned anything about it. To my surprise, I could not find anything.<sup>98</sup> After a few years, while working on this chapter, I spent again a couple of days combing through different scientific databases, reading recent publications, and hoping to find some works that can serve as the background literature to my theory. This time, I found two books and one article related to my theory. The two books were both written by the Syrian thinker Muhammad Shahrur (1938- ) in which he explains in detail the necessity of a subdivision of the Qur'ânic text into “messengerhood verses” and “prophethood verses.”<sup>99</sup> However, his explanations about the difference between those two categories make them very different from the ones I give to my subdivision of the Qur'ân using the same two names. I will now proceed to explain his convictions and the differences between his subdivision of the Qur'ânic text and my own theory of double messages of the Qur'ân in the section below dealing first with *Inzâl* (revealing the whole Qur'ân at once), and then with *tanzîl* (revealing Qur'ânic *âyahs* through the last twenty three years of the Prophet's life). As for the article, it was written by Arash Naraghi (1966- ) and published on his official website<sup>100</sup> and will also be discussed a little further below, after first introducing another contemporary scholar's important work: Abdolkarîm Soroush (1945- ).

In his controversial book entitled *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience: Essays on Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Religion*, for the first time in the history of *tafsîr*, Soroush argued that the revelation in the Arabic language and the tradition that grew around it, must be seen and studied as cases of historical '*araḍî* (contingencies) rather than *dhâtî* (essential features) of *al-dîn* (religion). He claimed that the reader of the Qur'ân must not integrate “truth of [Qur'ânic] propositions” with reasons or causes.

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<sup>98</sup> In 2007, I decided to publish an article and present my thoughts under the form of a hermeneutical theory for the understanding of the Qur'ânic text. I presented an abstract of my theory to my supervisor, Dr. Patrice C. Brodeur, and he encouraged me to preserve it for my doctoral dissertation.

<sup>99</sup> Shahrur, *Al-Kitâb wa al-Qur'ân*. Also, Shahrur, *The Qur'ân, Morality and Critical Reason*. Both books are available online at [www.shahrour.org](http://www.shahrour.org) (consulted on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>100</sup> Arash Naraghi, “Ghor'ân va Mas'aleh-ye Hermenotiki.” E-published by Jonbesh-e Râh-e Sabz (jaras), (Dec. 2011): no page number, available online at <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/46161/> (consulted on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012).

Instead that truth can be found in the meanings and interpretations, and those meanings and interpretations are always subject to their various historical contexts.<sup>101</sup> Since the publication of his book, Soroush's historico-critical hermeneutical approach has caused many debates and disputes between Shi'î scholars of Islam and him. Much has been written against his theory and most contemporary Shi'î *mufasssîrûn* have refused his viewpoints, sometime to the extent of accusing him of committing blasphemy. Moreover, despite his relative success in attracting the attention of scholars in Western academia, not much has been published to criticise or complement his theory.

About a decade after the publication of Soroush's book, Naraghi complements Soroush's theory in a Persian article where he presents the idea of "two worlds" existing side by side (or one behind the other) in the Qur'ân.<sup>102</sup> Before explaining those worlds, he first defines the difference between the "text" and the "sacred text." According to Naraghi:

For a Muslim, Qur'ân is not "text," but it is a "sacred text" or "God's Word." The difference between "text" and "sacred text" is not only in its content or in its hermeneutical structure, but in the reaction of its audience to it [and the relationship of its readers to it] as a linguistic phenomenon. For a reader who reads the Qur'ân from a distance [and not as an adherent], the Qur'ân is just a "text." But for those [adherents] who use the Qur'ân as a window through which they can look at themselves and the world around them, the Qur'ân is a world to dwell in.<sup>103</sup>

From this perspective, Naraghi explains that the Qur'ân provides two worlds for two different inhabitants. The first world is that of its original audience or the Arabs living in the Najd Peninsula at the time of the Prophet Muḥammad. The second world is that of all its adherents, whether Arabic speaking or not, throughout history.<sup>104</sup> He writes:

<sup>101</sup> Abdolkarîm Soroush, *Qabz va Bast-e Teorik-e Shari'at*. Tehran: Serât, 1999 (pp. 55, 116).

<sup>102</sup> In Naraghi's article in Persian, there is no reference to Soroush's theory. However, in another article written in English, he clearly mentions that the idea of "two worlds" comes from Soroush's theory on the Expansion of Prophetic Experience. For this second article, see Arash Naraghi, "Moderate Muslims' in Iran and the Challenge of Human Rights." E-published by the author's official web site, (Aug. 2007): 1-11 (pp. 6-7), available online at [www.arashnaraqi.org](http://www.arashnaraqi.org) (consulted on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012).

<sup>103</sup> Arash Naraghi, "Ghor'ân va Mas'aleh-ye Hermetotiki." E-published by Jonbesh-e Râh-e Sabz (jaras), (Dec. 2011): no page number, available online at <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/46161/> (consulted on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012).

<sup>104</sup> Surprisingly, in his article written in English Naraghi switches his explanations of the two worlds. He writes:

The world of sacred text, meaning the Qur'ân contains two distinct worlds: The first world (*jahân-e avval*) is the world of its [original] audience or the culture of Arabs at the time of its revelation. God had to use this world so the direct audience of revelation could understand the meanings that He intended to transfer [to human]. The second world (*jahân-e dovvom*) is [the world of] those meanings that [together] form God's main purpose of the revelation. The distinction between these two worlds plays a crucial role in [our] understanding of the text as well as in the *tafsîr* of its content.<sup>105</sup>

To Naraghi, the first world is a human and mundane world with no sacredness in its nature. Naraghi calls the first world “a bridge that leads readers from their own worlds [everybody's first world] to the world of the sacred text or the second world.”<sup>106</sup> He puts an emphasis on the fact that the first world is necessary for the transfer of God's message, but is not a necessary part of the divine message. He goes as far as saying that “If God had addressed another people instead of Arabs, the first world would be totally different [from what we have in hand today as the Qur'ân], but that would not necessarily cause any change in the second world of the text.”<sup>107</sup> He concludes:

The hermeneutical problem [of the Qur'ân] is that today a cut of knowledge [or a slit of knowledge] has happened between the world of the reader of the [sacred] text and the first world of the sacred text. In a pre-modern world, the world of the audience of the revelation was very close to the first world of the text. The readers of the sacred texts were living in the same world than that of Arabs at the time of revelation. Their world of knowledge and values did not differ from the first world of the sacred text ... so the adherents could easily go from their world to the first world of the text, and through it march towards the second world of the text ... but

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... the Qur'an consists of two worlds: The “first world” consists of what God essentially intends to convey to human beings. This message, which is the heart of the Book, is trans-historical and trans-cultural. But to convey this message to human beings, God had to (a) employ a system of codes which was known to the immediate recipients of the Revelation at the time (i.e., the Arabic language) as a medium of communication; and more importantly, (b) assume the Arab culture at the time of Revelation as the background of the communication. These two requirements created the “second world” of the Qur'an. The “second world” reflects the contingent sociohistorical features of Arab culture at the time the Book was revealed to the Prophet.

See Arash Naraghi, “Moderate Muslims' in Iran and the Challenge of Human Rights.” E-published by the author's official web site (Aug. 2007): 1-11 (pp. 6-7), available online at [www.arashnaraqi.org](http://www.arashnaraqi.org) (consulted on May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012).

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

today, the first world of the text cannot serve its audience anymore as a bridge connecting the two worlds with each other ... Today, the reader of the text does not [understand and] share many beliefs and values with those of Arabs at the time of revelation ... This [split] blocks the [modern] reader's access to the second world of the text ... The way to overcome this intricate difficulty is to make a distinction between the two worlds of the text.<sup>108</sup>

I believe that the Qur'ânic *âyahs* confirm the existence of these two worlds. In other words, the Qur'ân is composed of two different kind of *âyahs*: first, what I call, the *nabawî âyahs*, and second, what I call the *rasûlî âyahs*.<sup>109</sup> The prophetic *âyahs* are those that reflect the *nubuwwat* (prophethood) of Muḥammad as a *nabî* (prophet), and the messengeric *âyahs* are those that reflect the *risâlat* (Messangerness) of Muḥammad as a *rasûl* (messenger). As a Prophet, the Prophet lived and prophesized among his people, so his prophecies *aâdhû sibgha* (were colored) with their different contexts. In other words, besides the linguistic context that had a direct impact on both *rasûlî* and *nabawî âyahs*, the prophetic *âyahs* were directly affected by the geographical, social, cultural, economic, and political contexts of the Prophet's life and era. As a messenger, the Prophet Muḥammad had the mission of presenting a trans-cultural and trans-historical message to all humanity, both in his era as well as in the future, and that within the boundaries of the Arabic language. But as a prophet, his mission was to interpret those messengeric messages by acting upon them, transforming concepts into concrete examples taken from his own life and particular milieu. The prophetic *âyahs* present instances and examples of what the messengeric *âyahs* try to teach as eternally valid concepts and notions. This suggests that the messengeric messages form the conceptual backbone of the prophetic instances. Mixing these two kinds of *âyahs* results not only in a confusion in the understanding of the Qur'ân (i.e. *tafsîr*) and its messages, but also in the legal and jurisprudential actualization of those Qur'ânic messages. The prophetic *âyahs* must be

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> As explained before, at the time I was developing the theory of double messages of the Qur'ân, I was not aware of Shahrur's nomenclature. Although the expressions of prophetic *âyahs* versus messengeric *âyahs* were the result of my original thoughts, as terms and regardless of their definitions, they are coined by Shahrur in Arabic in his book *Al-Kitâb wa al-Qur'ân: Qirâ'a Mu'âşira*, first published in 1990. See Shahrur, *Al-Kitâb wa al-Qur'ân*, available online at [www.shahrour.org/](http://www.shahrour.org/) (consulted on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012).

understood in the light of history, but the messengetic *âyahs* must be read and understood in the light of reason and through rational effort beyond contextualization of any one historical period.

To support my theory, I study four terms in the Qur'ân: the term *nabî* and its relationship with *tanzîl* (the gradual revelation of *âyahs* through time), and then the term *rasûl* and its relationship with *inzâl* (the instantaneous revelation of the whole Qur'ân at once).

### 2.6.1 The Term *nabî* in the Qur'ân

The term *nabî* (prophet) as a singular generic noun appears 54 times in the Qur'ân.<sup>110</sup> The term in its two different plural forms including the *jam' sâlim* (regular plural) of *al-nabiyyin/al-nabiyyun* (prophets), as well as the *jam' mukassar* (broken plural) of *al-anbyâ'* (prophets) appears 21 times in the Qur'ân.<sup>111</sup> Out of this total of 73, the term directly and explicitly refers to the Prophet Muḥammad 34 times.<sup>112</sup> Ibn Manẓûr defines the term *nabî* as “the one who bears tidings from God the Almighty.” He states that this term is a Meccan term.<sup>113</sup> All other dictionaries and linguists follow him. Nothing in the vocabulary sense of *nabî* helps to categorize the kind of tidings brought by a *nabî*. The Qur'ân however gives more details about *nabî* and its functions. The term *naba'* (news or tidings), derived from the same roots of *n*, *b*, *hamzah* (*naba'a*) as *nabî*, has been frequently used in the Qur'ân to refer to what has happened in the past, being narrated as *qaṣaṣ* (stories).<sup>114</sup> To the Qur'ân, the tidings that *naba'* refers to are all historical facts true and real, although the knowledge of it comes to the Prophet from *al-ghayb* (the

<sup>110</sup> It appears twice (in 37:112 and 2:247) as *nabiyyuhum* (their prophet), plus 52 times as *nabî* without *al* (a prophet) or *al-nabî* (the prophet). Here is the list of those *âyahs*: 2:246; 3:39, 68, 146, 161; 5:81; 6:112; 7:94, 157-8; 8:64-5, 67, 70; 9:61, 73, 113, 117; 19:30, 41, 49, 51, 53-56; 22:52; 25:31; 33:1, 6, 13, 28, 30, 32, 38, 45, 50 (three times), 53 (two times), 56, 59; 37:112; 43:6-7; 49:2; 60:12; 65:1; 66:1, 3, 8-9.

<sup>111</sup> 2:61, 91, 177, 213; 3:21, 80-1, 84, 112, 181; 4:69, 155, 163; 5:20, 44; 17:55; 19:58; 33:7, 40; 39:69.

<sup>112</sup> 3:68; 5:81; 7:157; 8:64-5; 8:70; 9:61, 73, 113, 117; 33:1, 6-7, 13, 28, 30, 32, 38, 40, 45, 50 (three times), 53 (two times), 56, 59; 49:2; 60:12; 65:1; 66:1, 3, 8-9.

<sup>113</sup> Ibn Manẓûr, *Lisân al-'Arab*, under *naba'a*, available online at <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp> (consulted on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>114</sup> This term appears 29 times in the Qur'ân in both its singular form (*naba'*) and in its plural form (*anbâ'*). In all its usages, except in 38:67, it refers to an earthly event that happened in the past. On one occasion (38:88), it refers to the tidings that the Prophet or the Qur'ân will soon inform them about, but in this case it also refers to mundane events that will soon be narrated to them.



unseen world). So *nabî* is the one who brings *naba'*. Some Qur'ânic examples reveal the very historical and factual nature of *naba'*.

تَنلُّوْا عَلَیْكَ مِنْ نَبِیِّ مُوسَىٰ وَفِرْعَوْنَ بِالْحَقِّ لِقَوْمٍ یُّؤْمِنُونَ

We narrate unto thee (somewhat) of the story of Moses and Pharaoh with truth, for folk who believe. (28:3)

وَآتَلَ عَلَیْهِمْ نَبَأَ نُوحٍ إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ یَقَوْمِ إِن كَانَ كَبُرَ عَلَیْكُمْ مَقَامِی وَتَذْکِرِی بَآیَاتِ اللَّهِ فَعَلَى اللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ فَأَجْمِعُوا أَمْرَكُمْ وَشُرَكَاءَكُمْ ثُمَّ لَا یَكُنْ أَمْرُكُمْ عَلَیْكُمْ عُمَةً ثُمَّ اقْضُوا إِلَیَّ وَلَا تُنظِرُونَ

Recite unto them the story of Noah, when he told his people: O my people! If my sojourn here and my reminding you by Allâh's revelations are an offence unto you, in Allâh have I put my trust, so decide upon your course of action you and your partners. Let not your course of action be in doubt for you. Then have at me, give me no respite. (10 :71)

أَلَمْ یَأْتِكُمْ نَبَأُ الْاٰدِیْنَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَمْ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَعَادٍ وَثَمُوْدَ وَالَّذِیْنَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ لَا یَعْلَمُهُمْ اِلَّا اللَّهُ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَیِّنَاتِ فَرَدُّوا اَیْدِیَهُمْ فِیْ اَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَقَالُوا اِنَّا كَفَرْنَا بِمَا اُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهٖ وَاِنَّا لَفِیْ شَكٍّ مِّمَّا تَدْعُوْنَنا اِلَیْهِ مُرِیْبٍ

Hath not the history of those before you reached you: the folk of Noah, and (the tribes of) A'ad and Thamud, and those after them? None save Allâh knoweth them. Their messengers came unto them with clear proofs, but they thrust their hands into their mouths, and said: Lo! we disbelieve in that wherewith ye have been sent, and lo! we are in grave doubt concerning that to which ye call us. (14:9)

وَآتَلَ عَلَیْهِمْ نَبَأَ اِبْرٰهیمَ اِذْ قَالَ لِاٰبِیْهِ وَقَوْمِهِ مَا تَعْبُدُوْنَ قَالُوْا نَعْبُدُ اَصْنَامًا فَنظَّلْ لَهَا عٰلَفِیْنَ قَالَ هٰلَکَ یَسْمَعُوْنَكُمْ اِذْ تَدْعُوْنَ اَوْ یَنْفَعُوْنَكُمْ اَوْ یَضُرُّوْنَ قَالُوْا بَلْ وَجَدْنَا اٰبَاءَنَا کَذٰلِکَ یَفْعَلُوْنَ

Recite unto them the story of Abraham: When he said unto his father and his folk: What worship ye? They said: We worship idols, and are ever devoted unto them. He said: Do they hear you when ye cry? Or do they benefit or harm you? They said: Nay, but we found our fathers acting on this wise. (26:69-73)

Even in the story of Solomon and the *hudhud* (lapwing bird), the term used to refer to true events happening in the country of Sheba, is the term *naba'*. 27:20-4 read:

وَوَفَّقَهُ الطَّیْرَ فَقَالَ مَا لِیْ لَا اَرٰی اِلَّهَ هٰذِهِ اَمْ كَانَ مِنَ الْعٰبِیْنِ لِاَعْدَبْتَهُ عَذَابًا شَدِیْدًا اَوْ لَا اَدْبَحْتَهُ اَوْ لَیْسَ بِنَبِیٍّ مُّبِیْنٍ فَمَكَثَ غَیْرَ بَعِیْدٍ فَقَالَ اَحَطْتُ بِمَا لَمْ تُحِطْ بِهٖ وَجِئْتُكَ مِنْ سَبَآءٍ بِنَبِیٍّ یَقِیْنِ اِنِّیْ

وَجَدْتُ أَمْرًا تَعْلِكُهُمْ وَأُوتِيْتِ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَلَهَا عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ وَجَدْتُهَا وَقَوْمَهَا يَسْجُدُونَ لِلشَّمْسِ  
مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَزَيْنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَعْمَالَهُمْ فَصَدَّهُمْ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ فَهُمْ لَا يَهْتَدُونَ

And he [Solomon] sought among the birds and said: How is it that I see not the hoopoe, or is he among the absent? I verily will punish him with hard punishment or I verily will slay him, or he verily shall bring me a plain excuse. But he was not long in coming, and he said: I have found out (a thing) that thou apprehendest not, and I come unto thee from Sheba with sure tidings. Lo! I found a woman ruling over them, and she hath been given (abundance) of all things, and hers is a mighty throne. I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of Allâh; and Satan maketh their works fairseeming unto them, and debarreth them from the way (of Truth), so that they go not aright.

Beside the Qur'ânic usage of *naba'* in 38:88 referring to tidings and stories that will soon be recited to everybody, the only time that the term refers to something that has not happened yet is its unique usage at the beginning of *sûrah* 78 of the Qur'ân, also called *naba'*. In this passage, it refers to the day of judgment, but even here, the emphasis is on the undeniable and factual aspect of that day. The beginning of this *sûrah* is as following:

عَمَّ يَسْأَلُونَ عَنِ النَّبَأِ الْعَظِيمِ الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ

Whereof do they question one another? (It is) of the awful tidings, concerning which they are in disagreement. Nay, but they will come to know! Nay, again, but they will come to know! (78:1-5)

While interpreting the “awful tidings,” Ṭabarî mentions three possibilities: “the resurrection after death,” “the Day of Judgement,” and “the Qur'ân.”<sup>115</sup> Most *mufasssîrûn* follow Ṭabarî in this regard. However, Ṭabâṭabâ'î adds a fourth possibility for *naba'*: tidings about “God, His attributes, angels, jinns, paradise, hell, etc.” At the beginning of his *tafsîr* on these *âyahs*, and while mentioning the first possibility of the meaning being “the day of judgment,” Ṭabâṭabâ'î argues that the Qur'ân immediately mentions visible natural events as a proof for the fact that there will be another stable “state” of being (*nash'at*) as real as this changing world.<sup>116</sup> So to him, the factual aspect of what he calls

<sup>115</sup> Al-Ṭabarî, *Jâmi' al-Bayân fi Ta'wîl al-Qur'ân*, under 27:1-5, available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net) (consulted on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>116</sup> The *sûrah* 78 continues with these *âyahs*:

Have We not made the earth an expanse, And the high hills bulwarks? And We have created you in pairs, And have appointed your sleep for repose, And have appointed the night as a cloak, And have appointed the day for livelihood. And We have built above

“the divine threat” (*tahdîd*) has been proved and emphasised by giving the example of natural and terrestrial realities.<sup>117</sup>

What supports the hypothesis that all terms derived from the trilateral roots of *naba'a* refer to a factual event within the mundane life is the Qur'ân's usage of the verbal form of the term. All *mufasssirûn* are unanimous on *nabî* being a “name of the agent” or an *ism fâ'il* (present participial) derived from the verb *naba'a*.<sup>118</sup> A glance at different verbal forms of *naba'a* used in the Qur'ân reveals that all of them (including *naba'a* itself) have earthly events, mundane instances, or human acts as their objects. In other words, they all find their sense within a historical and social individual or collective framework.<sup>119</sup> Here are some examples:

21 times out of the 51 Qur'ânic appearances of *naba'a* under a verbal form pictures God “informing” humans (or giving them news) on the Day of Judgement about what they did in their earthly life. Following are three examples:

أَلَا إِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ قَدْ يَعْلَمُ مَا أَنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ وَيَوْمَ يُرْجَعُونَ إِلَيْهِ فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا  
عَمِلُوا وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

Lo! verily unto Allâh belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth. He knoweth your condition. And (He knoweth) the Day when they are returned unto Him so that He may inform them of what they did. Allâh is Knower of all things. (29:64)

يُنَبِّئُ الْإِنْسَانَ يَوْمَ قَدَمٍ وَأَخَّرَ بَلِ الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةٌ وَلَوْ أَلْفًا مَّعَادِيرَهُ

On that day [the day of judgment] man is told the tale of that which he hath sent before and left behind. Oh, but man is a telling witness against himself, Although he tender his excuses. (75:13-5)

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you seven strong (heavens), And have appointed a dazzling lamp, And have sent down from the rainy clouds abundant water, Thereby to produce grain and plant, And gardens of thick foliage. Lo! The Day of Decision is a fixed time. (78:6-16)

<sup>117</sup> See al-Ṭabâṭabâ'î, *Al-Mizân fi Tafsîr al-Qur'ân*, under 78:1-16, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on March 12<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>118</sup> Some *mufasssirûn* have mentioned that *nabî* is a *ṣigha mubâligha* or a present participle presenting an exaggeration in its meaning also called “noun of exaggeration.” So *nabî* is someone who “frequently” brings tidings to people and/or someone who brings “a lot” of tidings to people.

<sup>119</sup> Here is a list of all appearances of *naba'a* under different verbal forms in the Qur'ân: 2:31, 33 (two times); 3:15, 44, 49; 5:14, 48, 60, 105; 6:60, 108, 143, 159, 164; 9:64, 94 (two times), 105; 10:18, 23, 53; 12:15, 36-7, 45; 15:49, 51; 18:13, 33, 78, 103; 22:72; 24:64; 26:221; 29:8; 31:15, 23; 34:7; 35:14; 39:7; 41:50; 53:36; 54:28; 58:6-7; 62:8; 64:7; 66:3 (five times); 66:3; 75:13.

وَقُلْ أَعْمَلُوا فَسَيَرَى اللَّهُ عَمَلَكُمْ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَسَتُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

And say (unto them): Act! Allâh will behold your actions, and (so will) His messenger and the believers, and ye will be brought back to the Knower of the Invisible and the Visible, and He will tell you what ye used to do. (9:105)

Except in two cases, all the other 30 appearances of the concerned terms are about an event in daily life. Here are 3 examples:

وَإِذْ أَسْرَأَ النَّبِيُّ إِلَىٰ بَعْضِ أَزْوَاجِهِ حَدِيثًا فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَتْ بِهِ وَأَظْهَرَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ عَرَفَ بَعْضَهُ وَأَعْرَضَ عَنْ بَعْضٍ فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَهَا بِهِ قَالَتْ مَنْ أَنْبَأَكَ هَذَا قَالَ نَبَّأَنِيَ الْعَلِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ

When the Prophet confided a fact unto one of his wives and when she afterward divulged it and Allâh apprised him thereof, he made known (to her) part thereof and passed over part. And when he told it her she said: Who hath told thee? He said: The Knower, the Aware hath told me.<sup>120</sup> (66:3)

قَالَ هَذَا فِرَاقُ بَيْتِي وَبَيْتِكَ سَأُنَبِّئُكَ بِتَأْوِيلِ مَا لَمْ تَسْتَطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا

He said: This is the parting between thee and me! I will announce unto thee the interpretation of that thou couldst not bear with patience. (18:78)

<sup>120</sup> One of the very popular Qur'ânic techniques for starting a narration is to start it with *wa idh*, mostly translated as “when” or “and when” (not to be confused with *wa idhâ* meaning the same thing). I checked 70 different *tafâsîr*, including those of Sufis, Salafis, and Zaydis, and I could not find any explanation about *wa idh* more complete than that of Tabâtabâ'i's explanation when he explains that *wa idh* is a *zarf* (vessel) that reflects a *maqdar* (what is decided and passed). A few others, such as Shûkânî (1173-1255H), simply mention that *wa idh* means ‘and remember’ [O Prophet]. Many others ignore it. I believe that from a narrative critical viewpoint, this term puts an emphasis on the content of the narration as an undisputable event, and presents a certainty about the non-returnable time in the past within which the event, as a matter of fact, happened. I tried to find some textual support in *tafâsîr* for this hypothesis. To my surprise, they have not paid any special attention to this term and its probable technical usage. The only exception that I found was in Nasafi's *tafsîr* on 5:116. The same technique has been used at the beginning of 5:116 narrating a dialogue between Jesus and God in which God asks Jesus if he has said to people to take him and his mother as two gods beside Allâh. Like in other cases of narrations starting with *wa idh*, almost all *mufassiûn* have ignored the term, and have simply mentioned that this dialogue will happen between God and Jesus on the day of judgment. However, in his *tafsîr* on 5:116, al-Nasafi (600-684H) writes:

Most [have believed] that this question [will happen] on the Day of Judgment. The previous *âyahs* and the rhetoric of this *ayah* are enough proof for that. It has been [also] said that [God] has addressed him [Jesus] while ascending him to the skies [so it has happened in the past, and], and the reason is the existence of *idh*.

See Hâfiz al-Dîn ‘Abdullâh b. Ahmad al-Nasafi, *Madârik al-Tanzîl wa Haqâ'iq al-Ta'wîl: Tafsîr al-Nasafi*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-kalim al-Ṭayyib, 1998, under 5:116, available online at <http://www.almeshkat.net/books/open.php?cat=6&book=1526> (consulted on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012).

This last example is one of the most interesting usages of the term in a Qur'ânic story similar to (or may be rooted in) some Jewish myths.<sup>121</sup> The story begins with Moses and an anonymous companion being on a road where they find a “servant of God” unto whom God has given mercy. Moses requests to follow him, so he can teach Moses what God has taught him. In a series of unusual events (comparable to “crazy wisdom” in Buddhism), Moses cannot fathom the reasons of the servant of God's actions, and protests to him. At the end of their journey, the knowledgeable man tells Moses about the interpretations of his actions. Here, the reader has in hand a series of strange actions, happening in an unexplained time by unknown characters. Every element of the story calls to a metaphor, but the presence of the verb *naba'a* together with the usage of *wa idh* at the start point of the narration send a clear message to the Arab speaking readership of the text: this story is real, its events (although unusual) have really happened, and this is a matter of fact. In a way, while the knowledgeable man informs Moses about God's justice behind his actions, the narrator of the story *yunabbi'* (informs) us of the meaning behind those events, and by doing so, invites us to have the same “unconditional trust in God” as someone (Moses) who has witnessed those real events in person.

The only two Qur'ânic usages of any verbal form of *naba'a* that might sound like an exception to our hypothesis can be found in 2:31-3 and 15:49. The first set of *âyahs* (2:31-3) are part of the Qur'ânic story about the creation of Adam. They read:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰئِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلٰئِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَٰؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صٰدِقِينَ قَالُوا سُبْحٰنَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ قَالَ يَا آدَمُ أَنْبِئْهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ فَلَمَّا أَنْبَأَهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَأَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ

And when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth, they said: Wilt thou place therein one who will do harm therein and will shed blood, while we, we hymn Thy praise and sanctify Thee? He said: Surely I know that which ye know not. And He taught Adam all the names, then showed them to the angels, saying: Inform Me of the names of these, if ye are truthful. They said: Be glorified! We have no knowledge saving that which Thou hast taught us. Lo! Thou, only

<sup>121</sup> For an example of detailed studies on the Jewish origins of this Qur'ânic story, see Brannon M. Wheeler, “The Jewish Origins of Qur'ân 18:65-82? Re-examining Arent Jan Wensinck's Theory.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 118, No. 2 (April-June 1998): 153-171.

Thou, art the Knower, the Wise. He said: O Adam! Inform them of their names, and when he had informed them of their names, He said: Did I not tell you that I know the secret of the heavens and the earth? And I know that which ye disclose and which ye hide.<sup>122</sup> (2:30-3)

In the Sunnî world of *tafsîr*, Ṭabarî reports a debate among *mufasssirûn* as to what “names” (the object of *anbi'ûni* and *anbi'hum*) might refer to in 2:31 and 2:33. In his long *tafsîr* on 2:30-3, Ṭabarî narrates many *aḥâdîth* with different *isnâd* presenting different possibilities for the interpretation of “names.” Some *mufasssirûn* such as Ibn Kathîr and Qurṭubî follow him. The *aḥâdîth* narrated by Ṭabarî can be categorized under four main categories: 1) those that consider “names” referring to all beings and creatures in the world such as plants, animals, mountains, seas, etc.; 2) those that consider “names” referring to the names of all descendants of Adam; 3) those that consider “names” referring to the names of angels; and 4) those that present a combination of the three previous possibilities. At the end of his *tafsîr* on 2:30-3, Ṭabarî declares his preference for “the names of all descendants of Adam and those of angels.”<sup>123</sup> Although Ṭabarî, being one of the erudites of *Bayt al-Hikmah* (the House of Wisdom), had access to most *tafsîr* of his contemporary *mufasssirûn*, including Sufîs such as al-Tustarî (200-283H), he does not mention anything about how Sufî streams of *tafsîr* of his era interpret 2:31. Al-Tustarî briefly mentions that “names” in 2:31 is referring to the “knowledge” of things and not just to their names. Neither Tustarî, nor those Sufî *mufasssirûn* who followed him, support their *tafsîr* of the term with any *ḥadîth*.<sup>124</sup> Unlike Ṭabarî, Zamakhsharî's *tafsîr* on 2:30-3 is under the influence of the Sufî interpretation of the *âyah*. In his very brief *tafsîr* of 2:31, Zamakhsharî mentions only one possibility for the meaning of “names” being “whatever can be named,” then he explains that the term “names” in this *âyah* does not refer only to names of different kinds and species, but also to their natures, their specifications, their usages, and their profits for human in both the earthly and the hereafter lives.<sup>125</sup> Râzî presents the same idea under three different possibilities. His three

<sup>122</sup> Here also the narration starts with the same technique that uses *wa idh*.

<sup>123</sup> See al-Ṭabarî, *Jâmi' al-Bayân fi Ta'wîl al-Qur'ân*, under 2:30-33, available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net) (consulted on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2012).

<sup>124</sup> Al-Tustarî's *tafsîr* in English is available online at [http://www.altafsir.com/Books/Al\\_Jalalain\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.altafsir.com/Books/Al_Jalalain_Eng.pdf) (consulted on May 4<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>125</sup> See al-Zamakhsharî, *Tafsîr al-Kashshâf*, under 2:31, available online at

possibilities include: “different human languages,” “whatever can be named including objects, plants, animals, etc.,” and “the natures and attributes of things.”<sup>126</sup> He does not mention his choice, but explains the first possibility with such enthusiasm and details that one might conclude that that is his preference. Some *mufassirûn* such as Baydhâwi follow Râzî.<sup>127</sup>

In the Shi'î world of *tafsîr*, Ṭabarsî explains all the above mentioned possibilities, and adds a *ḥadîth* from Imâm al-Şâdiq to support the combination of all those possibilities being the reference of the term “names.”<sup>128</sup> Most other Shi'î *mufassirûn* follow Ṭabarsî, but Şadr al-Dîn Muḥammad Shirâzî, also called Mullâ Şadrâ (980-1050H), elaborates a detailed and philosophical article, and cast new lights on the meaning of “names.” He concludes that “names” include both “seen beings” and “unseen meanings.” He gives the example of “knowledge” and says: “The knowledge has a *ḥaqîqa dhâtiyyah* (intrinsic truth) than dwells in God, a *ḥaqîqa asmâ'iyyah* (idiomatic truth) that [human] mind can perceive as an abstract image of God's knowledge, and a *ḥaqîqa imkâniyyah* (accidental truth) that is the happening of knowledge in those

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<http://www.emtiaz.net/vb/showthread.php?t=24194> (consulted on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2012).

<sup>126</sup> Râzî explains that Adam learned all languages such as Arabic, Latin, Persian, etc. from God, but angels were living in different groups. Each group knew only one of those languages and could not understand other groups' languages. God gathered all angels together and ordered Adam to show them his multi-lingual abilities. By doing so, God proved to the angels that Adam deserved the vicegerency of God on earth. Then when he was exiled to live on earth, his sons scattered in different regions of the earth, and centuries after centuries their descendants preserved one language and forgot the other ones. That is how we came to have different languages on earth today. See al-Râzî, *Mafâtiḥ al-Ghayb*, under 2:30-3, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=1372> (Consulted on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012).

<sup>127</sup> Baydâwî's *tafsîr* on 2:31 is just one paragraph. He chooses Râzî's first option, so to Baydhâwi, “language” or “the knowledge of words” is what “names” refers to. He adds: “The knowledge of words leads to the knowledge of meanings, and through that, human finds the ability of understanding four worlds: rational world, perceptual world, imaginable world and fictitious world.” See Imâm 'Abdullâh b. 'Umar b. Muḥammad al-Shirâzî al-Baydâwî, *Anwâr al-Tanzîl wa Asrâr al-Ta'wîl*. 5 vols. E-published by Maktabat Mujaddidiyah, available online at <http://www.maktabah.org/quran/tafsir/970-tafsir-al-baydawi--html> (consulted on May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012).

<sup>128</sup> Ṭabarsî's approach often is to first explain the linguistical aspects of the concerned *âyah*, then to narrate what *mufassirûn* before him (Shi'î or Sunnî) have mentioned and finally to present his preference. In his *tafsîr* on 2:31-3, he narrates the above-mentioned *ḥadîth* at the end of his explanation on “names,” but he does not clearly declare his preference. See Abu 'Ali Faḍl b. Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsî, *Majma' al-Bayân li Tafsîr al-Qur'ân*. 10 vols. Beirut: Muassasat al-'Alamî li al-Maṭbû'ât, 1415H, under 2:31, available online at <http://www.alseraj.net/a-k/quran/mbtq/mb.htm> (consulted on May 4<sup>th</sup> 2012).

[humans] who know. So we call every one of them *'alîm* (knower or knowledgeable), and that comes from [reflects] God's attribute of *al-'alîm* (All-Knower)."<sup>129</sup> One of the most complete *tafsîr* on 2:31 can be read in Ṭabâṭabâ'î's work. With his inclusivist approach, he gathers what all *mufasssîrûn* prior to him have discussed, and adds his opinion to the debate believing:

[“names” refers to] some righteous and purified superior [human] beings hidden from angels under the *hijâb* of unseen. Because of their grace God descended all names, and whatever dwells on the earth and in the skies have been derived from their light. Although they are numerous, in their diversity, they are not separate from each other and they do not differ from each other as we see differences between people.”<sup>130</sup>

Although Ṭabâṭabâ'î does not precisely name them, his *tafsîr* undoubtedly talks about the twelve Imams (or fourteen infallibles) of twelver shi'ism.

Beside the fact that there is no consensus among *mufasssîrûn* on what the “names” as the object of *anbi'ûnî* and *anbi'hum* in 2:31-3 refers to, most possibilities presented by *mufasssîrûn* (such as languages, names of all creatures, or names of some purified righteous humans) confirm the hypothesis that all terms derived from *naba'a* (including *nabî*) refer to giving tidings about earthly, time and space bound matters. The only contradiction to the hypothesis might be in the one, among many as seen above, possible *tafsîr* of the “names” referring to attributes of God. But even in that case, Mullâ Ṣadra's detailed explanation reveals to what extent those attributes can only be perceived within their relationship with human's earthly needs, and understood by their reflection in human's time bound nature.

The second possible exception of a verb derived from *gnihemos* or *gnirrefer* ذبء unearthly might be found in 15:49. It reads:

نَبِّئْ عِبَادِي أَنِّي أَنَا الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ وَأَنَّ عَذَابِي هُوَ الْعَذَابُ الْأَلِيمُ

Announce, (O Muḥammad) unto My slaves that verily I am the Forgiving, the Merciful. And that My doom is the dolorous doom. (15:49-50)

<sup>129</sup> Ṣadr al-Dîn Muḥammad Shirâzî Mullâ Ṣadrâ, *Al-Tafsîr*. 8 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-Ta'âruf li al-Maṭbû'ât, 1998, under 2:31.

<sup>130</sup> Al-Ṭabâṭabâ'î, *Al-Mizân fi Tafsîr al-Qur'ân*, under 2:31, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2012).



Like the previous case, here the *âyah* forms a part of the Qur'ânic story of the creation of Adam. At the very end of the story, God shifts from a direct conversation with Satan to an imperative tone and says: "Announce unto My slaves that verily I am the Forgiving. And that My doom is the dolorous doom."<sup>131</sup> Almost all *tafâsîr* on 15:49-50 are short and brief.<sup>132</sup> In the Sunnî world of *tafsîr*, Ṭabarî mentions a *ḥadîth* according to which the Prophet passes by a group of Muslims who are laughing together. The Prophet blames them for laughing and turns his back and goes away. Later, he comes back and says to them: "When I went out [of your gathering], Jibrîl came to me and said: 'O Muḥammad, verily Allâh says: 'why do you disappoint my servants from my Mercy? Tell my servants that verily I am the Forgiving, the Merciful. And that My doom is the dolorous doom.'"<sup>133</sup> Some Sunnî *mufasssîrûn* such as Râzî, Qurṭubî, and Ibn Kathîr cite the same *ḥadîth*, but like Ṭabarî, none of them interprets it or goes into any detail. However, at the end of his *tafsîr* on 15:49-50, Râzî mentions four *laṭâ'if* (delicate techniques) in these *âyahs* and says that these techniques give "Allâh's Mercy" a "dominant status" *vis-à-vis* his punishment. To Râzî, the dominant presence of Allâh reflected in the three techniques of: 1) saying "My servants"; 2) using terms such as "Indeed, I," and the definite articles of "al," in 15:49; and 3) including the Prophet by choosing an imperative verb, is completed with 4) the fact that these tidings are brought to all faithful people with good or ill deeds, as if they hear it from a true witness (the Prophet) in their real life.<sup>134</sup>

Ṭabarî's *ḥadîth* is totally absent in Shi'î *tafâsîr*. Shi'î *mufasssîrûn* are unanimous on the fact that 15:49-50 announce God's forgiveness and mercy, as well as his

<sup>131</sup> Pickthall translates the verb *nabbi'* as "announce," Yusuf Ali translates it as "tell," Dr. Mohsin translates it as "declare," and Shâkir translates it as "inform." This shows to what extent the term represents one of its unusual usages.

<sup>132</sup> I checked more than 20 *tafâsîr* including, among others, the *tafâsîr* of Ṭabarî, Zamakhsharî, Râzî, Ibn Kathîr, Qurṭubî, Suyûtî, Bayḏâwî, Shûkânî, Jazâ'irî, Tabarasî, Ṭûsî, Qumî, Ṣadr al-Dîn al-Shirâzî, Fayḏ al-Kâshânî, Junâbadhî, and Ṭabâṭabâ'î.

<sup>133</sup> The first narrator in Ṭabarî's *isnâd* is an unknown person presented as "a man from the Prophet's companions." Other *mufasssîrûn* who include that *ḥadîth* in their *tafsîr* on 15:49-50 do not identify him and repeat Ṭabarî's *isnâd*. Those who do not mention that *ḥadîth* do not give any information more than a simple translation of the *âyahs*.

<sup>134</sup> See al-Râzî, *Mafâtîḥ al-Ghayb*, under 15:49-50, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=1372> (consulted on May 8<sup>th</sup> 2012).

punishment to all humanity beyond time and space. However, Ṭabâṭabâ'î adds an interesting explanation to the message of 15:49-50. He writes:

No forgiveness or Mercy [are imaginable] without the possibility of some impediments that might prevent them from happening, or some obstacles that might limit them. But, when Allâh (hallowed be He) orders [something], there is no superior judgment to his order, and no barrier can deflect it. So nothing can obstruct His Forgiveness or His Mercy, and nothing can limit them but His own Beneficent Majesty [if he changes His decision].<sup>135</sup>

To Ṭabâṭabâ'î, it is clear that the undeniable “feasibility” of God’s forgiveness and mercy, as well as his punishment, is what 15:49-50 talks about. Ṭabâṭabâ'î’s *tafsîr* somewhat confirms that although appearing as an exception, some narrative techniques such as the choice of an unusual verb that refers to earthly matters might have helped the message of the *âyah* being understood as the undisputable happening of God’s forgiveness and punishment as real events happening in an earthly life.

### 2.6.2 The Term *rasûl* in the Qur'ân

The trilateral root of *r, s, l* (*rasala*) has been used 513 times in the Qur'ân, under eight different derived verbal and non-verbal forms. With 332 appearances, *rasûl* (messenger) is the most frequent Qur'ânic nominal term derived from *rasala*.<sup>136</sup> One may add to it the 35 usages of *mursal* (the fourth form passive participle of *rasala*) that also means messenger. One of the most popular Qur'ânic usages of *rasûl* is when the Qur'ân refers to the Prophet Muḥammad as *al-rasûl* (the Messenger), *rasûlihî* (His messenger) or *rasûlallâh* (the Messenger of Allâh).

A basic textual study of this term in the Qur'ân reveals important information:

a) Unlike the term *nabî* that has been exclusively used to refer to a human being who receives the divine revelation, the term *rasûl* (in singular or plural forms) has been shared between humans and angels. This suggests a non-earthly (heavenly) element/aspect in the

<sup>135</sup> See al-Ṭabâṭabâ'î, *Al-Mizân fî Tafsîr al-Qur'ân*, under 15:49-50, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012).

<sup>136</sup> Other appearances of *rasala* are: 130 times under the fourth verbal form (*arsala*), six times as the noun *risâlat*, four times as the noun *risâlat*, four times as the fourth active participle *mursil*, once as the fourth form active participle *mursilat*, and once as the fourth form passive participle *mursalât*.

nature of *rasûl*'s mission versus the human and earthly nature of *nabî*'s mission. Here are three examples:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُولَىٰ أَجْنِحَةٍ مَّثْنَىٰ وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبْعًا يَزِيدُ فِي  
الْخَلْقِ مَا يَشَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

Praise be to Allâh, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, Who appointeth the angels messengers having wings two, three and four. He multiplieth in creation what He will. Lo! Allâh is Able to do all things. (35:1)

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانِ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ فَيُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ  
الْحَكِيمُ

And We never sent a messenger save with the language of his folk, that he might make (the message) clear for them. Then Allâh sendeth whom He will astray, and guideth whom He will. He is the Mighty, the Wise. (14:4)

اللَّهُ يَصْطَفِي مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا وَمِنَ النَّاسِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ

Allâh chooseth from the angels messengers, and (also) from mankind. Lo! Allâh is Hearer, Seer. (22:75)

b) On several occasions, the Qur'ân declares its "article of faith," in which it includes *rusulihî* (His messengers) among the fundamental basis of what distinguishes a believer from a non-believer. In other words, the Qur'ân considers the disbelief in *rasûls* as *kufr* (unbelief). The only Qur'ânic *âyah* that seems to offer this fundamental role or honor to the term *anbyâ'* presents it in the context of adherents' daily duties, and compares it to their useless long acts of prayer. In other words, despite numerous Qur'ânic blames on those who denied, hurt or even killed *anbyâ'*, disbelieving in *anbyâ'* has been presented only as equal to unfaithful acts, but denying *rasûls* has been considered as disbelieving in God.<sup>137</sup> All *mufasssirûn*, both Sunnî and Shi'î, are unanimous that the five founding

<sup>137</sup> The *âyah* in question is as following:

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the prophets; and giveth wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free; and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere. Such are the God-fearing. (2:177)

principles of Muslim faith –as believing in Allâh, His *malâ'ikat* (angels), His *kutub* (books), His *rusul*, and *al-yawm al-âkhar* (the day of judgment)– cannot be separated from each other, and that disbelieving in any of them equals *kufr*. This unity is reflected in the Qur'ânic rhetorical style presenting the three time bound elements of angels, books, and messengers in their relationship to God (his angels, his books, his messengers), and including the beyond-time-element of the day of judgment as an element existing in God. By the repetition of the exact same terms always in the same order, the Qur'ân seems to draw an unbreakable line between, at both ends, a beyond-time God at the beginning and end of time itself, with in between a time bound universe in which humanity is called to march towards God following what His angels have brought to His messengers from Him. This path is a beyond time and contextless path given to *rasûls* and shown to humanity by their intermediary. This suggests that for the Qur'ân, all *rasûls* share the same mission (clearly mentioned below in 2:285), and that their relationship to God gives them a status close to the realm of divine matters. This exceptional status, as we will see further, comes from the trans-historical nature of *rasûls*' mission versus the time bound function of *nabîs*. Here are three examples:

ءَامَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا  
فَرْقَ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْ رُّسُلِهِ وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

The messenger believeth in that which hath been revealed unto him from his Lord and (so do) believers. Each one believeth in Allâh and His angels and His scriptures and His messengers - We make no distinction between any of His messengers - and they say: We hear, and we obey. (Grant us) Thy forgiveness, our Lord. Unto Thee is the journeying. (2:285)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا ءَامِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ مِنْ  
قَبْلُ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا

O ye who believe! Believe in Allâh and His messenger and the Scripture which He hath revealed unto His messenger, and the Scripture which He revealed aforetime. Whoso disbelieveth in Allâh and His angels and His

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It is not surprising that here *al-anbiyâ'* has come after all other elements of faith, and has been immediately followed by righteous human acts. This clearly shows that the emphasis is on daily life and what humans can do to live a righteous life according to the guidance of the prophets.

scriptures and His messengers and the Last Day, he verily hath wandered far astray.<sup>138</sup> (4:136)

مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِلَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَجِبْرِيلَ وَمِيكَالَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَدُوٌّ لِلْكَافِرِينَ

Who is an enemy to Allâh, and His angels and His messengers, and Gabriel and Michael! Then, lo! Allâh (Himself) is an enemy to the disbelievers. (2:98)

c) The same superiority of *rasûl* to *nabî* might be seen in all the appearances of both terms together in a same *âyah*. On six different Qur'ânic occasions, these two terms are used together.<sup>139</sup> In all cases, the term *rasûl* appears before *nabî*. One of the popular rhetorical techniques of the Qur'ân is called *al-taqaddum wa al-ta'akhhur* (anteriority and posteriority, not to be confused with hyperbaton or *al-taqdîm wa al-ta'khîr*). According to this technique, in some Qur'ânic instances, the order of the elements presented in an *âyah* represents a spectrum of value judgment going from superior to inferior or vice versa (*taqaddum fi al-sharaf wa al-kamâl*).<sup>140</sup> This rhetorical technique and its Qur'ânic instances have been carefully discussed by many *mufasssîrûn* and *mutakallimûn*.<sup>141</sup> A quick look at some major *tafâsîr* reveals that classical *mufasssîrûn* did not pay attention to this repeatedly respected order of *rasûl* and *nabî*. Whatever the reason, it is surprizing to realize that some of them, such as Râzî, believed that the hierarchy of *taqaddum wa ta'akhhur* must be seen and respected in the undividable body of the above-mentioned five elements of Islam's article of faith, but do not see it in the unchangeable order that the Qur'ân uses to talk about messengers and prophets in the same *âyah*.<sup>142</sup> Here are three examples of this Qur'ânic arrangement of the concerned

<sup>138</sup> At the beginning of 4:136, the Qur'ân mixes them up and places the Prophet Muḥammad right after God, but it immediately repeats the list in the "right" order.

<sup>139</sup> The three cases not mentioned in this thesis are 7:157; 19:51, 54.

<sup>140</sup> For an example of the same hierarchy presented in two different directions, one from the highest to the lowest, and the other from the lowest to the highest, see 70:11-14 and 80:34-6.

<sup>141</sup> For some examples, see Şadr al-Dîn al-Shirâzî Mullâ Şadrâ, *Al-Hikma al-Muta'alyiah fi al-Asfâr al-'Aqliyyah al-Arba'a*. 9 vols. Beirut: Dâr Iḥyâ' al-Turâth al-'Arabî, 1410H (vol. 3, p. 257-70); or Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabâtabâ'î, *Nahâyat al-Hikma*. 16<sup>th</sup> ed. Qom: Nashr-e Eslâmî, 1422H (pp. 198-202).

<sup>142</sup> See al-Râzî, *Mafâtîḥ al-Ghayb*, under 2:285 and 4:136, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=1372> (consulted on May 10<sup>th</sup> 2012). For a detailed discussion on anteriority and posteriority as a philosophical technique, see also al-Ṭabâtabâ'î, *Nahâyat al-Hikma*, 279-281.

terms:

قُلْ يٰٓأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ لَا إِلٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ ۚ فَآمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ النَّبِيِّ الْأُمِّيِّ الَّذِي يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَكَلِمَاتِهِ وَأَتَّبِعُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

Say (O Muḥammad): O mankind! Lo! I am the messenger of Allāh to you all - (the messenger of) Him unto Whom belongeth the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. There is no God save Him. He quickeneth and He giveth death. So believe in Allāh and His messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write, who believeth in Allāh and in His Words, and follow him that haply ye may be led aright.<sup>143</sup> (7:158)

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ وَلَا نَبِيٍّ إِلَّا إِذَا تَمَنَّى أَلْفَى الشَّيْطٰنُ فِي أَمْنِيَّتِهِ فَيَنسَخُ اللَّهُ مَا يُلْقِي الشَّيْطٰنُ ثُمَّ يُحْكُمُ اللَّهُ ۗ أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

Never sent We a messenger or a prophet before thee but when He recited (the message) Satan proposed (opposition) in respect of that which he recited thereof. But Allāh abolisheth that which Satan proposeth. Then Allāh establisheth His revelations. Allāh is Knower, Wise. (22:52)

مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِّن رِّجَالِكُمْ وَلٰكِنْ رَّسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّنَّ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا

Muḥammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allāh and the Seal of the Prophets; and Allāh is ever Aware of all things. (33:40)

d) One of the common arguments that *rasūls* used to convince their audience about the trueness of their message is to put an emphasis on the fact that they do not ask any *ajr*

<sup>143</sup> For centuries, there has been a long debate around the term *al-nabī al-ummī* (the illiterate Prophet) among *mufasssīrūn*. There is no consensus on what this expression might mean exactly. Whatever the meaning is, it is obvious that the literary aspect of the Prophet's life has been presented in the context of his prophethood and not of his messengerhood. In his article on this Qur'ānic expression, Sebastian Günther studies its different possibilities of meaning and concludes:

These findings basically suggest that a more comprehensive appreciation of the Qur'ānic term *al-nabī al-ummī* can contribute essentially to the understanding of Muḥammad's prophethood and the history of Islam.

See Sebastian Günther, "Muḥammad, the Illiterate Prophet: An Islamic Creed in the Qur'ān and Qur'ānic Exegesis." *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies*, vol. 4, No. 1 (2002): 1-26 (p. 2). Also Madigan briefly mentions some of the above-mentioned possibilities when he writes:

*Al-nabī al-ummī*—variously understood as 'the prophet who can neither read nor write', 'the unlettered prophet', 'the prophet to those who have as yet no scripture'. The translation given here is more neutral—and quite justifiable if we take *umam* as equivalent to *gentes*. For a detailed survey of both Muslim and non-Muslim interpretations of the term, see Khalil 'Athamina, "'An-Nabiyy al-Ummiyy': An Inquiry into the Meaning of a Qur'ānic Verse," *Der Islam* 69 (1992): 61.80.

See Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self Image*, p. 116, n. 12.

(wage or reward) for what they do.<sup>144</sup> In all Qur'ânic cases of this argument, whenever it is a direct citation from a past prophet presenting this argument, except in 10:72 and 11:29, God's messenger starts his argument by saying that he is a *rasûlun amîn* (a faithful messenger).<sup>145</sup> But 10:72 and 11:29 do not make an exception to the non-earthly remuneration of *rasûl*'s mission because both *âyahs* are the repetition and the reformulation of 26:106-109 in which Noah brings this argument introducing himself as *rasûlun amîn*. All other Qur'ânic appearances of this argument are exclusively about the Prophet Muḥammad, and in most of them, God addresses the Prophet with *qul* (tell) without mentioning *rasûl* or *nabî*, and orders him to bring this argument to his people.<sup>146</sup> Here are three examples:

كَذَّبَتْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ الْمُرْسَلِينَ إِذْ قَالَ لَهُمْ أَخُوهُمْ نُوحٌ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا  
وَمَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا

Noah's folk denied the messengers (of Allâh), When their brother Noah said unto them: Will ye not ward off (evil)? Lo! I am a faithful messenger unto you, So keep your duty to Allâh, and obey me. And I ask of you no wage therefor; my wage is the concern only of the Lord of the Worlds. So keep your duty to Allâh, and obey me. (26:105-10)

قُلْ مَا سَأَلْتُكُمْ مِنْ أَجْرٍ فَهُوَ لَكُمْ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

Say: Whatever reward I might have asked of you is yours. My reward is the affair of Allâh only. He is Witness over all things.<sup>147</sup> (34:47)

قُلْ مَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُتَكَلِّفِينَ

Say (O Muḥammad, unto mankind): I ask of you no fee for this, and I am no impostor. (38:86)

<sup>144</sup> This argument has also been used in the Old (First) and the New (Second) Testaments. See, for example, the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, specifically chapter 9.

<sup>145</sup> Beside the fact that in all those cases, the speaker introduces himself as a faithful *rasûl*, every time the Qur'ân shifts to another prophet, the narration starts with the announcement of people denying *al-mursalin* (lit. the messengers).

<sup>146</sup> On two occasions (52:40 and 68:46) God blames non-believers for their denial of a truth that has been offered to them with no "material expense," and finally in 6:90 God announces to the Prophet that "And lo! thine verily will be a reward unfailing." Here is a complete list of the concerned *âyahs*: 6:90; 11:29; 25:57; 26:109, 127, 145, 164, 180; 34:47; 38:86; 42:23; 52:40; 68:5, 46.

<sup>147</sup> It is not clear why Pickthall switches between "wage" and "reward" as the translation of the same term (*ajr*) in the same context.

On the contrary, the only time that the idea of any wage or reward for a *nabî* has been mentioned in the Qur'ân is in 29:27. Here the Qur'ân states that putting *al-nubuwwa* (the prophethood) in Abraham's offspring was the *ajr* that God gave him in this world. The idea of prophethood as a worldly reward or wage corresponds very well with the time and space bound nature of prophetic mission. Also, it can be seen as a *via negativa* for the trans-historical and universalistic mission of *rasûl* with no worldly reward. It reads:

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَجَعَلْنَا فِي ذُرِّيَّتِهِ النُّبُوَّةَ وَالْكِتَابَ وَعَاطَيْنَاهُ أَجْرَهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَإِنَّهُ فِي  
الْآخِرَةِ لَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob, and We established the prophethood and the Scripture among his seed, and We gave him his reward in the world, and lo! in the Hereafter he verily is among the righteous.

e) The concept of *al-da'wa* (calling) is one of the major notions in the Qur'ân. Much has been written about it by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars.<sup>148</sup> To have a sense of its crucial role in Islamic theology and Muslims' perception of Allâh, it is enough to mention that in his *tafsîr* on 40:43, Ṭabâṭabâ'î discusses that the *al-rabubiyyah* (Lordness) of Allâh is "incomplete" without his worldly *da'wa* to the humanity inviting all humans to go towards him by following *al-ṣirâṭ al-mustaqîm* (the straight path). Ṭabâṭabâ'î explains that God has two *da'was*: one in this world and the other in the hereafter (mentioned in 17:52). He mentions that these two together complete the lordness of God *vis-à-vis* humanity.<sup>149</sup> Consequently, all messengers' calls are the echoes of the same *da'wa* repeated within the history of human being.<sup>150</sup> A good example of a non-Muslim scholar's work on the concept of *al-da'wa* is Egdunas Raciús' dissertation

<sup>148</sup> To see some examples of what Muslim scholars have discussed about the concept of *da'wa*, it is enough to read any *mufasssîr*'s work on 2:186. Most classical *mufasssîrûn* explain *al-da'wa* by way of a philological effort through its synonyms, as well as through contextual comparisons between various appearances of the term in the Qur'ân. The ideological aspect of the term/concept, as we see it today, is almost absent in their works. However, this thesis is not interested in the ideological application of *da'wa* as a missionary activity, but only in its relationship to the term/concept of *rasûl*.

<sup>149</sup> To avoid the colloquial connotation of "lordship" as an honor that can be offered to humans, I preferred to invent the term "lordness" which is a closer translation to *al-rabubiyyah* in Arabic, which is unique to God.

<sup>150</sup> See al-Ṭabâṭabâ'î, *Al-Mizân fi Tafsîr al-Qur'ân*, under 40:43, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on April 5<sup>th</sup> 2012).



entitled *The Multiple Nature of Islamic Da'wa*. Raciús meticulously studies this concept with an emphasis on its political applications throughout the Islamic History. In his textual analysis of the term *al-da'wa* in the Qur'ân and the *sunnah*, he presents three meanings for it. He writes:

Etymologically, word “*da'wa*” covers meanings ranging from addressing, calling, appealing, requesting, demanding, to worshipping ... In the Quran, the word “*da'wa*” has three primary meanings: 1) worshipping God or idols, 2) addressing, asking and calling (God, idols, people), 3) inviting to religion (Islam or other). All of these meanings have religious connotations. However, the third one, in addition to reflecting a direct relationship between humans and deities, or among humans, also implies an intermediary agent –an inviter, or *dâ'i* ...<sup>151</sup>

In his conclusion, Raciús states:

In the founding texts of Islam there abound sayings, where God urges Muḥammad to invite people to Him. In fact, the whole mission of Muḥammad was nothing else but *da'wa* –inviting people to submit to the only God (Allâh).<sup>152</sup>

This third meaning/category of *da'wa* in the Qur'ân has been presented as God's ultimate goal to send his messengers and his revelation to them. Here is an example:

أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ نَبُؤُا الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَعَادٍ وَثَمُودَ وَالَّذِينَ مِن بَعْدِهِمْ لَا يَعْلَمُهُمْ إِلَّا اللَّهُ جَاءَهُمْ رُسُلُهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَرَدُّوا أَيْدِيَهُمْ فِي أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَقَالُوا إِنَّا كَفَرْنَا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ وَإِنَّا لَفِي شَكٍّ مِّمَّا تَدْعُونَنَا إِلَيْهِ مُرِيبٍ قَالَتْ رُسُلُهُمْ أَفِى اللَّهِ شَكٌّ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يَدْعُوكُمْ لِيُبَدِّلَ لَكُمْ مِّن دُونِكُمْ وَيُؤَخِّرَكُمْ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى قَالُوا إِنْ أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُنَا تُرِيدُونَ أَن تَصُدُّونَا عَمَّا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا فَآتُونَا بِسُلْطٰنٍ مُّبِينٍ

Hath not the history of those before you reached you: the folk of Noah, and (the tribes of) A'ad and Thamud, and those after them? None save Allâh knoweth them. Their messengers came unto them with clear proofs, but they thrust their hands into their mouths, and said: Lo! we disbelieve in that wherewith ye have been sent, and lo! we are in grave doubt concerning that to which ye call us. Their messengers said: Can there be doubt concerning Allâh, the Creator of the heavens and the earth? He calleth you that He may forgive you your sins and reprove you unto an

<sup>151</sup> Egdunas Raciús, *The Multiple Nature of Islamic Da'wa*, Ph.D. Diss. University of Helsinki, 2004 (pp. 34-5), available online at <http://ethesis.helsinki.fi/julkaisut/hum/aasia/vk/raciús/themulti.pdf> (consulted on May 9<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

appointed term. They said: Ye are but mortals like us, who would fain turn us away from what our fathers used to worship. Then bring some clear warrant. (14:9-10)

In the above-mentioned example, as well as anywhere else in the Qur'ân, whenever there is a reference to the “intermediary agent” of *da'wa*, the term *rasûl* is used. So it seems that from a Qur'ânic point of view, *rasûls* are callers to God (33:46) having the divine mission of calling people to the “faith” (57:8) and to the “salvation” (40:41), as God himself calls the humanity by the intermediary of his *rasûls* to the paradise and forgiveness (2:222) and to the “abode of peace” (10:25). Here are two more examples of the explicit usage of the term *rasûl* with *da'wa*:

إِذْ تُصْعِدُونَ وَلَا تَلْوُونَ عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِكُمْ وَيَدْعُ إِلَىٰ الضَّلَالَةِ الَّذِينَ إِذَا نَادَوْا بِدَعْوَةِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ لَا يُجِيبُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَٰئِكَ يَكْفُرُونَ  
عَلَىٰ مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا مَا أَصَابَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

When ye climbed (the hill) and paid no heed to anyone, while the messenger, in your rear, was calling you (to fight). Therefor He rewarded you grief for (his) grief, that (He might teach) you not to sorrow either for that which ye missed or for that which befell you. Allâh is Informed of what ye do.<sup>153</sup> (3:153)

<sup>153</sup> This is a very interesting example. The *âyah* is about the battle of Uhud when some companions of the Prophet thought that he had been killed, so they ran away from the fronts of war. Pickthall translates *wa al-rasûlu yad'ûkum fî ukhrâkum* as “while the messenger, in your rear, was calling you (to fight).” But to show his confusion about the term *ukhrâkum*, he adds “to fight” in parenthesis. Yusuf Ali and Dr. Mohsin translate *ukhrâkum* as “back,” believing that it means: “and the Messenger in your rear was calling you back.” Shâkir ignores the term and translates it as: “and the Apostle was calling you from your rear.” I checked all *ummahât al-tafsîr*, as well as all major Shi'î *tafsîr*, and to my surprise, no *mufasssîr* has noted any resemblance or relation between *ukhrâ* and *al-âkhira*. *Lisân al-'Arab* defines *ukhrâ* as “one of the two things,” and *al-âkhira* from the same root meaning “the one that comes after.” *Al-Qâmûs al-Muḥîṭ* defines *al-âkhira* as “the enduring home” coming from the Qur'ânic *âyah* 40:39 that reads: “O my people! Lo! this life of the world is but a passing comfort, and lo! the Hereafter, that is the enduring home.” Based on the vocabulary definition of *al-ukhrâ*, a possible *tafsîr* of the *âyah* would be: “you climbed the hill [and ran away to save your worldly life] ... while the messenger was calling you to your eternal life in the hereafter.” This possibility not only confirms the contextless and timeless mission of *rasûl*, but also sounds more imaginable in a battle with deafening noises of hundreds of horses, loud yellings of warriors, and screechy songs of women on both sides of the fighting parties, who sometimes used to come to battles with their musical instruments to encourage their men. *Mufasssîrûn* do not explain how in such circumstances and while the climbing rocks of the Uhud mountain, Muslim warriors were supposed to recognize the Prophet's voice, and hear his physical call asking them to go back to the war front. For the definitions of *al-ukhrâ* and *al-âkhira* in *Lisân al-'Arab*, see Ibn Manẓûr, *Lisân al-'Arab*, under *akhara*, available online at <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp> (consulted on May 10<sup>th</sup> 2012). For the definitions of *al-âkhira* in *Al-Qâmûs al-Muḥîṭ*, see Muḥammad b. Ya'qûb al-Fayrûzâbâdî, *Al-Qâmûs al-Muḥîṭ*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Cairo: al-Hiy'at al-

وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ يَدْعُوكُمْ لِتُؤْمِنُوا بِرَبِّكُمْ وَقَدْ أَخَذَ مِيثَاقَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

What aileth you that ye believe not in Allâh, when the messenger calleth you to believe in your Lord, and He hath already made a covenant with you, if ye are believers?<sup>154</sup> (57:8)

f) The Qur'ân is crystal clear about the fact that Muḥammad as a *rasûl* does not have any duty more than transferring the divine message. While addressing him as *al-rasûl*, the Qur'ân orders him to abandon the result of his mission into God's hands.<sup>155</sup> On the contrary, while addressing Muḥammad as *al-nabî*, the Qur'ân orders him a variety of actions on a wide spectrum of human acts ranging from simple preaching to marrying, or leading battles. Here are three examples for the “no action” nature of his messengerhood followed by three different examples of the “action required” nature of his prophethood:

مَا عَلَى الرَّسُولِ إِلَّا الْبَلَّغُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا تَكْتُمُونَ

The duty of the messenger is only to convey (the message). Allâh knoweth what ye proclaim and what ye hide. (5:99)

فَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْهِ مَا حُمِّلَ وَعَلَيْكُمْ مَّا حُمِّلْتُمْ وَإِن تُطِيعُوهُ تَهْتَدُوا وَمَا عَلَى الرَّسُولِ إِلَّا الْبَلَّغُ الْمُبِينُ

Say: Obey Allâh and obey the messenger. But if ye turn away, then (it is) for him (to do) only that wherewith he hath been charged, and for you (to do) only that wherewith ye have been charged. If ye obey him, ye will go aright. But the messenger hath no other charge than to convey (the

Miṣriyyah al-‘Ammah li al-Kitâb, 1979, under *akhara*, available online at <http://archive.org/details/211208> (consulted on May 10<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>154</sup> This *âyah* confirms Ṭabâṭabâ’î’s theory about the twin aspect/nature of *da’wa*. Here the messenger calls people to believe in their lord, so the *da’wa* is to the lordness of God as Ṭabâṭabâ’î rightly raises the issue.

<sup>155</sup> This split between the necessities of action for *nabî* and those of no-action for *rasûl* can of course cause confusion when both roles are played by the same person. Every time the “no action” nature of the messengerhood of the Prophet seems to oppose the “action required” nature of his prophethood, the Qur'ân pulls him back and points out the distinction. For example 26:3-4 announces:

It may be that thou tormentest thyself (O Muḥammad) because they believe not. If We will, We can send down on them from the sky a portent so that their necks would remain bowed before it.

Or 10:99-100 says:

And if thy Lord willed, all who are in the earth would have believed together. Wouldst thou (Muḥammad) compel men until they are believers? It is not for any soul to believe save by the permission of Allah. He hath set uncleanness upon those who have no sense.

message) plainly. (24:54)

وَأِنْ تُكَذِّبُوا فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ أُمَمٌ مِّن قَبْلِكُمْ وَمَا عَلَى الرَّسُولِ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ

But if ye deny, then nations have denied before you. The messenger is only to convey (the message) plainly. (29:18)

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا التَّوْرَةَ فِيهَا هُدًى وَنُورٌ يَحْكُمُ بِهَا النَّبِيُّونَ الَّذِينَ أَسْلَمُوا لِلَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالرَّبَّانِيُّونَ وَالْأَحْبَارُ  
بِمَا اسْتَحْفَظُوا مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَكَانُوا عَلَيْهِ شُهَدَاءً

Lo! We did reveal the Torah, wherein is guidance and a light, by which the prophets who surrendered (unto Allâh) judged the Jews, and the rabbis and the priests (judged) by such of Allah's Scripture as they were bidden to observe, and thereunto were they witnesses...<sup>156</sup> (5:44)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ جَاهِدِ الْكُفَّارَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ وَاغْلُظْ عَلَيْهِمْ وَمَأْوَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ وَيَسَّ الْمَصِيرُ

O Prophet! Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites! Be harsh with them. Their ultimate abode is hell, a hapless journey's end. (9:73)

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَحَلَّلْنَا لَكَ أَزْوَاجَكَ الَّتِي ءَاتَيْتَ أَجُورَهُنَّ وَمَا مَلَكَتْ يَمِينُكَ مِمَّا آفَاءَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ

O Prophet! Lo! We have made lawful unto thee thy wives unto whom thou hast paid their dowries, and those whom thy right hand possesseth of those whom Allah hath given thee as spoils of war... (33:50)

While the Qur'ânic "leave-the-result-to-God" nature of messengerhood turns the *rasûl*'s mission into a "beyond-time-and-space-call," with no responsibility for the result, the

<sup>156</sup> This *âyah* talks about all prophets. The idea of *al-hukm* (judgement, decision or command) coming with *al-nabuwwah* (prophecy) and *al-kitâb* (the Book) has been presented in the Qur'ân several times. For some very clear instances, see 3:79; 6:89; 45:16. On the contrary, no Qur'ânic *âyah* offers *al-hukm* to *al-rasûl*. The only two exceptions might be found in 24:48, 51 where the Qur'ân says:

And they say: We believe in Allah and the messenger, and we obey; then after that a faction of them turn away. Such are not believers. And when they appeal unto Allah and His messenger to judge between them, lo! a faction of them are averse; But if right had been with them they would have come unto him willingly. Is there in their hearts a disease, or have they doubts, or fear they lest Allah and His messenger should wrong them in judgment? Nay, but such are evil-doers. The saying of (all true) believers when they are called unto Allah and His messenger to judge between them is only that they say: We hear and we obey. And such are the successful. He who obeyeth Allah and His messenger, and feareth Allah, and keepeth duty (unto Him): such indeed are the victorious. (24:47:52)

Here, 24:47 is the beginning of a new subject in the *sûrah* 24. It starts with a direct citation repeating a claim declared by the Prophet's entourage. The term *al-rasûl* (short version of *rasûl al-Allâh*) is the way new Muslims used to call the Prophet, and it appears in that direct citation. The Qur'ân reacts to them using the same term in the answer.

Qur'anic “action based” nature of prophethood puts an emphasis on the worldly nature of the *nabi*'s mission within the contexts of time and space, and considers him fully responsible for his deeds. This *nabi*'s responsibility for his actions is confirmed by the fact that on a few occasions, the Qur'ân blames some prophets for deeds they have done, and says that God forgives them. Here are two examples:

وَدَخَلَ الْمَدِينَةَ عَلَى حِينٍ غَفْلَةٍ مِّنْ أَهْلِهَا فَوَجَدَ فِيهَا رَجُلَيْنِ يَقْتَتِلَانِ هَذَا مِنْ شِيعَةِ وَهَذَا مِنْ عَدُوِّهِ فَاسْتَعَاذَهُ الَّذِي مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ عَلَى الَّذِي مِنْ عَدُوِّهِ فَوَكَرَهُ مُوسَى فَقَضَى عَلَيْهِ قَالَ هَذَا مِنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ عَدُوٌّ مُّضِلٌّ مُّبِينٌ قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي فَاغْفِرْ لِي فَغَفَرَ لَهُ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

And he [Moses] entered the city at a time of carelessness of its folk, and he found therein two men fighting, one of his own caste, and the other of his enemies; and he who was of his caste asked him for help against him who was of his enemies. So Moses struck him with his fist and killed him. He said: This is of the devil's doing. Lo! he is an enemy, a mere misleader. He said: My Lord! Lo! I have wronged my soul, so forgive me. Then He forgave him. Lo! He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. (28:15-6)

عَفَا اللَّهُ عَنْكَ لِمَ أَذْنَتْ لَهُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَبَيِّنَ لَكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَتَعْلَمَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

Allâh forgive thee (O Muḥammad)! Wherefor didst thou grant them leave [the battle] ere those who told the truth were manifest to thee and thou didst know the liars? (9:43)

g) One last argument to support the idea of *rasûl* being an intermediary who repeats God's unique and timeless message to humanity is the special relationship between the two concepts of *rasûl* and *hudâ* (guidance). The concept of *hudâ* is presented from the very beginning of the Qur'ân (2:2), and is repeated hundreds of time throughout its text. 2:2 reads:

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

This is the Scripture whereof there is no doubt, a guidance unto those who ward off (evil) [those who fear God].

In his *tafsîr* on 2:2, Ṭabâṭabâ'î mentions that since the *âyah* introduces the Qur'ân as a guidance for *al-muttaqîn* (those who fear God), it necessarily presents two guidances: a pre-revelation guidance and a post-revelation guidance. To Ṭabâṭabâ'î, the first guidance is rooted in human's *fiṭra* by which all humans are born with a need to look for the truth,

as well as a capacity to see God behind worldly matters. The good function of *fiṭra* enables human to become *muttaqî* by finding and fearing God with no need for any revelation. Then the second guidance is offered to those who have answered to their *fiṭra*'s call (regardless of their level of *taqwâ*). This second guidance covers humans' first guidance as clothes cover their bodies with shapes, colors and textures. Thus the revelation has two main consecutive goals, first it aims to wake up the *fiṭra* that dwells in human being between the mind and the heart, and second to guide an awoken *fiṭra* to *al-ṣirâṭ al-mustaqîm*.<sup>157</sup> Every time the Qur'ân mentions a "caller" to this *hudâ*, the term *rasûl* or a verb derivated from *rasala* is used exclusively. Here are three examples:

وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا إِذْ جَاءَهُمُ الْهُدَىٰ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا أَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ بَشَرًا رَسُولًا

And aught prevented mankind from believing when the guidance came unto them save that they said: Hath Allâh sent a mortal as (His) messenger? (17:94)

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانِ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ فَيُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

And We never sent a messenger save with the language of his folk, that he might make (the message) clear for them. Then Allâh sendeth whom He will astray, and guideth whom He will. He is the Mighty, the Wise. (14:4)

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظَاهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ

He it is Who hath sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of Truth, that He may make it conqueror of all religion however much idolaters may be averse. (9:33, also repeated in 48:28 and in 61:9)

As it is clear in 14:4, to the Qur'ân, this guidance has the same no-responsible-for-the-result nature than the *rasûl*'s *da'wa*. Many other Qur'ânic *âyahs* clarify that God guides whom he wills and leads astray whom he wills.<sup>158</sup> The Qur'ân goes further and tells the Prophet that as *rasûl*, he has neither power nor control over the result of his messengerhood mission. Here are three examples:

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ هُدَاهُمْ وَلَا كَيْفَ اللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ

<sup>157</sup> See al-Ṭabâṭabâ'î, *Al-Mizân fi Tafsîr al-Qur'ân*, under 2:2, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on May 6<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>158</sup> For some examples, see 2:26,142; 5:51; 6:88; 30:29; 35:8; 39:23; 42:13.

The guiding of them is not thy duty (O Muḥammad), but Allâh guideth whom He will... (2:272)

أَفَمَنْ زُيِّنَ لَهُ سُوءُ عَمَلِهِ فَرَآهُ حَسَنًا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُضِلُّ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ فَلَا تُدْرِكُ نَفْسُكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَسْرَاتٍ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ

Is he, the evil of whose deeds is made fairseeming unto him so that he deemeth it good, (other than Satan's dupe)? Allâh verily sendeth whom He will astray, and guideth whom He will; so let not thy soul expire in sighings for them. Lo! Allâh is Aware of what they do! (35:8)

إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

Lo! thou (O Muḥammad) guidest not whom thou lovest, but Allâh guideth whom He will. And He is best aware of those who walk aright.

It is not insignificant to mention that unlike *naba'a*, the different Qur'ânic usages of the verbal forms of *rasala* do not seem to present a meaningful point other than their common and clear vocabulary meaning "to send." In the Qur'ân, God sends down a variety of "things" including supra natural beings such as his spirit (19:17), angels (22:75), and satans (19:83); natural events such as rain (6:6) and winds (25:48); his wrath and punishment upon non-believers through flood (34:16), fire (55:35), attacking birds (105:3), mighty shout (54:31), and thunder-bolts (13:13); his peace and reassurance upon believers (48:26); and of course humans as his messengers (4:64). Also the Qur'ân uses the different verbal forms of *rasala* to narrate stories in which humans including prophets (12:12), kings (26:53), or groups of people (12:19) send one person (12:45) or some people (7:134) on a mission.

## 2.7 *inzâl* versus *tanzîl*

In the Qur'ân, the trilateral root of *n, z, l* (*nazala* literally meaning to descend or to reveal from above) appears 293 times in 12 different derived forms. Most of its appearances are under its second verbal form *inzâl* (appearing 90 times), and its fourth verbal form *tanzîl* (appearing 79 times).<sup>159</sup> Both *inzâl* and *tanzîl* refer to the "descent" of the Qur'ân from above by the process of revelation. The dictionary of *Lisân al-'Arab* defines *nuzûl* (the verbal noun of *nazala*) as "appearance." Its author Ibn Manẓûr first cites the great grammarian Sibawayh (140-180H) who says: "Abu 'Amru makes a distinction between

<sup>159</sup> The other Qur'ânic appearances of *nazala* are the following: six times as the first verbal form (*nazala*), seven times as the fifth verbal form (*tanazzalat*), twice as the noun *manâzil*, eight times as the noun *nuzûl*, and once as the noun *nazlat*.

*anzalat* and *nazzalat*, but does not mention the point of difference.”<sup>160</sup> Then he cites the famous Arab linguistic Abu al-Ḥasan (d. 240H) who says: “I do not see any difference between *anzalat* [the past tense of *inzâl*] and *nazzalat* [the past tense of *tanzîl*] except that *tanzîl* presents a more frequent act of appearance.”<sup>161</sup> Ibn Manẓûr also cites Suyûfî who mentions that Abu ‘Amru believed in the existence of a nuance between *inzâl* and *tanzîl* but did not explain what it is. In a short definition, Ibn Manẓûr says: “*tanzîl* is *tartîb* [to put in order].”<sup>162</sup> Al-Jawharî often does not define terms with a given definition. Instead he gives examples of their usages in *jâhili* poetry. In the case of *inzâl* and *tanzîl*, he gives several examples of the usages of different forms of *nazala* in *jâhili* poetry, but does not present any poems either for *inzâl* or for *tanzîl*. Instead he repeats after Ibn Manẓûr and briefly mentions: “*al-tanzîl* is also *al-tartîb*.” He defines *anzala* by bringing it under *al-nuzala*, which he translates as “man’s water [semen],” and by doing so, he politely and indirectly defines it as “ejaculation.”<sup>163</sup> Fayrûzâbâdî defines *nazala* as “appearance” and mentions *tanzîl* and *inzâl* one after the other as examples for “appearance.” He briefly writes: *munzal* [the objective noun form of *inzâl*] is like *mujmal* [the objective noun form of *jamala* meaning “abstract”].<sup>164</sup> However, the most elaborated definitions of *inzâl* and *tanzîl* can be found in Ibn Fâris’ work. He mentions that the meaning of *nazala* reveals an act of *hubûṭ* (the descent), and represents a certainty about the reality of its happening (*wuqû‘ ihî*). He also mentions that *tanzîl* holds the meaning of ordering things and putting them in their places.<sup>165</sup>

This last definition is what most *mufasssirûn* have considered as the meaning of *nazala* and the point of difference between *inzâl* and *tanzîl*. For example, in their *tafâsîr* on *Sûrah Al-Qadr*, most *mufasssirûn* have preferred the interpretation according to which

<sup>160</sup> Ibn Manẓûr, *Lisan al-‘Arab*, under *nazala*, available online at [www.baheth.info](http://www.baheth.info) (consulted on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Abu Naṣr Ismâ‘îl b. Ḥimâd al-Jawharî, *Al-Şihâh fi al-Lughâ*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. 6 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-‘Ilm li al-Malâ’în, under *nazala*, available online at <http://www.almeshkat.net/books/open.php?book=1140&cat=16> (consulted on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>164</sup> Muḥammad b. Ya‘qûb al-Fayrûzâbâdî, *Al-Qâmûs al-Muḥîṭ*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Cairo: al-Hiy’at al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Âmmah li al-Kitâb, 1979, under *nazala*, available online at <http://archive.org/details/211208> (consulted on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>165</sup> See Abu al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Fâris, *Mu‘jam Maqâyîs al-Lughâ*. 6 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-Fîkr, 1979, under *nazala*, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=3144> (consulted on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2012).



the Qur'ân, as a whole, descended instantaneously and revealed at once during one night called *laylat al-qadr* (the Night of Power).<sup>166</sup> Another possibility of understanding *inzâl* as a reference to the revelation of the first few *âyahs* of the Qur'ân during the Night of Power has also been mentioned by some *mufasssirûn*, but the majority of *mufasssirûn* from different *madhâhib* have, to a certain extent, preferred the first possibility. Many *mufasssirûn* such as Ibn Sulaymân, Ṭabarânî, Ṭabarî, Zamakhsharî, Qurṭubî, wâhidî, Mâwardî, Ibn Kathîr, Râzî, Makkî ibn abi Ṭâlib, Hawârî, Mâturîdî, A'qam, Fayrûzâbâdî, Ṭûsî, Suyûtî, Shûkânî, 'Aṭfîsh, and Jazâ'irî believe in the *inzâl* of the whole Qur'ân to *al-samâ' al-dunyâ* (the sky of this world) or to *al-bayt al-'izzah* (The House of Glory)<sup>167</sup>, and then its revelation through *tanzîl* to the Prophet over twenty-three years.<sup>168</sup> A minority of *mufasssirûn*, mostly belonging to, but not limited to, Sufî schools, such as Muḥyuddîn ibn 'Arabî (558-638H) and Sulṭân Muḥammad al-Janâbadhî (1251-1337H), have preferred a sudden descent of the actual Qur'ân that we have in hand to the heart of the Prophet over one night.<sup>169</sup> However, by far, the most detailed discussion is that of

<sup>166</sup> *Mufasssirûn* are not certain about the exact time of this night. The consensus is on the fact that it has been within the month of *ramadân*, and that every year, on the same night, the whole Qur'ân descended into the Prophet's heart. The 17<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of *ramadân* have all been proposed as possibilities for the exact day of Laylat- al-Qadr.

<sup>167</sup> Some *mufasssirûn*, such as al-Qumî, have used the term *al-bayt al-ma'mûr* (lit. the built house) to refer to the same concept as *al-bayt al-'izza*.

<sup>168</sup> Ṭabarî mentions a *ḥadîth* with full *isnâd* having al-Sha'bî as its first narrator in which al-Sha'bî says that the *Sûrah Al-Qadr* means that the beginning of the Qur'ân was revealed during the Night of Power. Besides mentioning it, Ṭabarî does not give any importance to this *ḥadîth* and keeps silent about its veracity or falsehood. While most *mufasssirûn* ignore it, a few of them, such as Zamakhsharî, Qurṭubî, Râzî, and Ṭûsî, follow Ṭabarî and briefly mention this *ḥadîth* from al-Sha'bî with no *isnâd*. None of them seems to be interested in discussing it. A few others, such as Ṭabâtabâ'î, downgrade this *ḥadîth* by mentioning its content in passive form and claryfing that this saying "is not worth any attention" (*lâ yu'ba bihi*). However, although Bayḍâwî does not mention this *ḥadîth*, he prefers the possibility of the descent to be at the beginning of the Qur'ân, and mentions it as "the meaning" of *inzâl*. Then he writes that the other interpretation, that is, that the descent of the Qur'ân from the sky into this world in one night, might also be correct (*yasîh an yaqûl*). Surprisingly, most modern *mufasssirûn* prefer the descent to be at the beginning of the Qur'ân, into the heart of the Prophet, as the meaning of *inzâl* in *sûrah* 97. Some others, such as Sayyid Qutb and Ibn 'Âshûr, consider it to be the only possible meaning of *inzâl*. They keep silent about any other possibilities. Others still, such as Shanqîṭî and Ṭantâwî (d. 1431H), prefer it, while also mentioning the other possibility discussed by classical *mufasssirûn*. None of the above-mentioned modern *mufasssirûn* cites the concerned *ḥadîth*.

<sup>169</sup> In his book translated from French and entitled: *The History of Islamic Philosophy*, the French philosopher and islamisit Henry Corbin explains this Sufî opinion according to which the whole Qur'ân has been sent down and revealed into the heart of the Prophet in the Night of Power. See Henry Corbin, *The*

Ṭabâṭabâ'î who subdivides the descent of the Qur'ân into two main stages and discusses the rational feasibility of *inzâl*.<sup>170</sup> In his *tafsîr* on 2:185, he briefly mentions the two above-mentioned possibilities being the *inzâl* of the first few *âyahs* of the Qur'ân, or the *inzâl* of the whole Qur'ân to the sky of this world, but criticises both possibilities and accuses them to have rational and textual weaknesses. Then he suggests his theory of *inzâl* according to which the Qur'ân has been revealed twice to the Prophet: once in “an unchangeable, concrete, and incumbent” form, and the second time as “scattered, detailed, and changeable” *âyahs* that were subject to change by abrogation or by other forms of modification. To Ṭabâṭabâ'î, what was revealed to the heart of the Prophet on the Night of Power is the *inzâl* of that concrete and unchangeable Qur'ân, and what was revealed to him throughout 23 years of his life is the detailed and changeable form of the Qur'ân.<sup>171</sup> I suggest that this meaning of *inzâl* is in direct link with the messengerhood meanings in the Qur'ân while *tanzîl* includes the prophethood messages.

Among the most recent works on the question of *inzâl* and *tanzîl* is the article of Abdollâh Javâdî Âmolî (1933C.E.- ) entitled *Nozûl-e daf'î va tadrîji-ye Qor'ân* (The Instantaneous and Gradual Descents of the Qur'ân). In this article, Javâdî Amolî expands Ṭabâṭabâ'î's theory and writes:

Although his research [Ṭabâṭabâ'î's interpretation of 2:158] corresponds well with some Qur'ânic proofs, and can be supported by some *aḥâdîth*, the descent of the whole Qur'ân over the Night of Power cannot have been

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*History of Islamic Philosophy*. London: Kegan Paul International, 1993 (pp.12-4). In his *tafsîr* on 97:1, Qurṭubî indirectly refers to this Sufî opinion. He writes:

Al-Mâwardî cites Ibn 'Abbâs who says that the Qur'ân was descended in the month of *ramadân*, during the Night of Power, a blessed night, as a whole [text] from Allâh, from *al-lawḥ al-maḥfûz* [the Preserved Scripturum] to *al-safarah al-kirâm* [the Glorified Messengers] in the sky of the world. Then, they recited it to Jibrîl in twenty years, and Jibrîl recited it to the Prophet, Allâh's Peace be upon him, in twenty years. Ibn 'Arabî Said: “This is false, there is no intermediary between Jibrîl and Allâh, and no intermediary between Jibrîl and the Prophet, God's salutation be on him.”

Given that neither this *ḥadîth* of Ibn 'Abbâs exists in Mâwardî's *tafsîr* on *sûrah* 97, nor can Ibn 'Arabî's reaction to it be found in his *tafsîr* on the same *sûrah*, one wonders what were Qurṭubî's sources. Qurṭubî does not mention any reference either. See Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Anṣârî al-Qurṭubî, *Al-Jâmi' li Aḥkâm al-Qur'ân*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 20 vols. Cairo: Dâr al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1964, under 97:1, available online at <http://shamela.ws/index.php/book/20855n> (consulted on May 16<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>170</sup> Usually Ṭabâṭabâ'î has an inclusivist approach, and includes different possibilities. In this case, he prefers a mere rational discussion, and does not give heed to other *tafâsîr*.

<sup>171</sup> See al-Ṭabâṭabâ'î, *Al-Mizân fi Tafîsîr al-Qur'ân*, under 2:185, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan> (consulted on Aug. 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012).

downright concrete, because the Qur'ân itself says [in 44:4] that during that night all divine commands are made clear ... So, the Night of Power is a night for measuring and detailing, and this cannot be in harmony with a mere concrete non detailed [form of the Qur'ân] ... It has been mentioned before that the Qur'ân has three different levels of high, middle and low. The higher level of the Qur'ân is *um al-kitâb* (Mother of the Book) which dwells with God and has been revealed to the Prophet during his ascension [to the throne of God, and] ... angels, even Jibrîl do not have access to this level ... The middle level of the Qur'ân is what is in angels hands ... and has been revealed to the heart of the Prophet on the Night of Power, and the lower level of the Qur'ân is what has been revealed through 23 years of the Prophet's life ... [This level] is limited to concepts and words.<sup>172</sup>

These *tafâsîr* of *inzâl* and *tanzîl* have been discussed and studied by many Western scholars.<sup>173</sup> An important aspect of *inzâl* that has particularly been of interest for some Western scholars is the conflict/controversy between the occasions of revelation, as historical time bound matters of fact, with the descent of the whole Qur'ân at the beginning of the Prophet Muḥammad's mission, as a text that includes references to those yet unhappened events. This controversy, of course, has been noticed by *mufasssîrûn* themselves, but their answer to this problem is no more than repeating their conviction on the sudden descent of the Qur'ân to the sky of the world (or to the House of Glory). Even those who have preferred the meaning of *inzâl* being the descent of the Qur'ân to the heart of the Prophet, do not throw any more argument to solve the controversy between their choice of meaning for *inzâl* with the question of *asbâb al-nuzûl*. Unfortunately, most Western scholars simply repeat what has been already said by *mufasssîrûn* and do not show any interest in surpassing the descriptive level. Those few who try to shed some light on the problem are not more successful than those who simply repeat after the *mufasssîrûn*. For example, while focusing on this problem, Madigan cites Ibn Kathîr's and Qurṭubî's *tafâsîr* about *inzâl*, and ignores all other possibilities discussed by other *mufasssîrûn*. He sums *tafâsîr* up by writing:

The commentators can, of course, maintain that it is not the verse itself that is occasioned or caused but the actual sending down of that verse,

<sup>172</sup> Abdollâh Javâdî Âmolî, "Nozûl-e daf'i va tadrîji-ye Qur'ân." *Tabnak e-newspaper* of Aug. 9<sup>th</sup> 2012: no page number, available online at <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/263859/> (consulted on Aug. 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012).

<sup>173</sup> Stefan Wild's scholarly works on *inzâl* and *tanzîl* are probably the most detailed Western scholarly studies on this subject matter. See Stefan Wild ed., *The Qur'ân as Text*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996 (pp. 137-53).

which itself is preexistent. Even so, they are still implicitly recognizing that the process of revelation is a divine response elicited by human word and action. Over against this, however, a community that has gradually come to see its recitations as a codified canonical text cannot help but also recognizing the legitimacy of the “*jumlatan wâhidatan* [the Qur’ân as a whole] challenge.” If the text of the Qur’ân is, as they have come to believe, the eternal and preexistent speech of God, then surely it should be able to be displayed all at once... Thus, to answer the *jumlatan wâhidatan* challenge, the tradition patches together in varying ways isolated parts of the text in an attempt to outline a coherent schema that could reconcile a pre-existent canon with what was clearly an *ad rem* mode of revelation. The Qur’ân is presented as already complete in the realm of eternity; the text is preserved on a heavenly tablet (Q 85:22) and transmitted to Gabriel, who in turn parcels it out to Muḥammad according to the situation in which he finds himself.<sup>174</sup>

Then Madigan uses Paul J. Griffiths’ hermeneutical theory on “the completeness of the text” according to which “One can distinguish four stages in the life of a text: composition, display, storage and redisplay”<sup>175</sup> trying to show how the piecemeal nature of the revelation to the Prophet does not, in any way, make the revealed *âyahs* particles of an incomplete text. He aims to solve the problem of the controversy between the two concepts of *inzâl* and *asbâb al-nuzûl* by wiping out what most *mufasssirûn* have mentioned as the meaning of *inzâl* reductively describing them as “guardians” of the Qur’ân as *a corpus*. He concludes:

Each unit of revelation is complete; what was taking place in Muḥammad’s ministry was not the gradual and piecemeal display of a previously composed text –though that is how the tradition would later come to see it– but rather the display of divine utterances composed by God to address particular occasions (*jawâban li-qawlihim*, as the commentators would say) ... When the Messenger died, however, the initial moments of this divine address ceased and it became clear that no one would succeed him in this prophetic role. The utterances were eventually collected and canonized; they became a corpus. The commentators, guardians of that corpus, sought to show that it was composed and had existed as *a corpus* from all eternity. They did this, as we have seen, by making a case for its having been eternally displayed and stored.<sup>176</sup>

<sup>174</sup> Madigan, *The Qur’ân’s Self Image*, 67-8.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

Somewhat, Madigan's solution oversimplifies the fact that the exponential growth in *tafâsîr* over the first few centuries of Islamic history includes a variety of perspectives among *mufasssîrûn*, some of whom fit his description and others not, as exemplified above. Greater sensitivity to the complex processes in the hermeneutics of reception of a sacred text, in this case the Qur'ân, is necessary.<sup>177</sup> At the end, despite his efforts, Madigan does not seem to solve the problem of controversy between *inzâl* and *asbâb al-nuzûl* while respecting what the greatest majority of *mufasssîrûn* have believed about the meaning of *inzâl*.

Another solution to the problem has been presented by Muhammad Shahrur.<sup>178</sup> On the one hand, as mentioned before, in his controversial book *Al-Kitâb wal-Qur'ân*, he presents a new subdivision of the Qur'ânic text into Messengeric and prophetic, and believes that any Qur'ânic issue must be re-studied and re-understood in the light of this subdivision. On the other hand, his approach is based on a rereading of the Qur'ân, as if the Prophet just died and left for us (as first readers in the dawn of the third millenium) what we have in hand as the result of the revelation. These two together, as Shahrur clarifies it, necessarily call for a re-interpretation of the Qur'ân as a two faceted text within the contexts of modernity and improvement of human's knowledge. Andreas Christman carefully studies Shahrur's revolutionary approach and explains how Shahrur sees the questions of *inzâl* and *tanzîl*. He writes:

As in many modernist attempts to reconceptualize the Qur'ânic text, the issue of its revelation is central to Shahrour's new model of the Qur'ân's nature, structure, and function ... The same three exegetical operations (discussed above) are again applied in challenging the traditional understanding of revelation.<sup>179</sup> First, Shahrour does not accept synonymity

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<sup>177</sup> See, for example, Jeffrey L. Sammons, "Problems of Heine Reception: Some Considerations." *Monatshefte*, vol. 73, No. 4 (Winter 1981): 383-391.

<sup>178</sup> In this thesis, I use the spelling of "Shahrur" because that is how his name appears on his books and on his website. See [http://www.shahrour.org/book\\_english.pdf](http://www.shahrour.org/book_english.pdf) (consulted on May 17<sup>th</sup> 2012). Anywhere cited in a direct citation, I have respected the spelling chosen by the author of the cited text.

<sup>179</sup> According to Christman, these three operations are:

First, Shahrour applies al-Jurjânî's principle of non-synonymity (*ghayr tarâduf*) in poetical expressions to the Qur'ânic text... Second, Shahrour rejects the idea of 'atomization' (*ta'diya*), but interprets individual verses of the Qur'ân on the assumption that they belong to organic single units within the overall larger unit of al-Kitâb ... Third, Shahrour applies another principle of al-Jurjânî's poetical analysis, which is that of 'composition' (*al-nazm*).

between the two terms *inzâl* and *tanzîl*, which are commonly used to describe the process of the Qur'ân's 'coming down' as revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad. Second, he asserts that the distinction between the two terms is based on the division of the text into many variant sections, which differ in theme and status, with its main division between verses of prophethood and verses of messengerhood. Third, he establishes this distinction by looking at linguistic composition, indexing all the references to both words in the Qur'ân, and comparing the semantical nature of the difference between the second form of the verb *nazala* (*tanzîl*) and the fourth form (*inzâl*). By analogy with other verbs which imply processes of communication, e.g. *ballagha* (2nd form)/ *ablagha* (4th form), Shahrour assigns to the fourth form *anzala* the delivery of a message by which its reception by all intended addressees is uncertain, while its reception is categorically implied with the usage of the second form *nazzala*.<sup>180</sup>

Again like Madigan, it seems that Shahrur reacts to the problem of *inzâl* by refusing the classical *tafâsîr* of *inzâl*. To justify his conviction he gives the example of media and presents the following model:

Phase 1: *al-Ja' l* (transformation)

Football match in Mexico between Argentina and Brazil.  
The live action is filmed by cameras and then sent out into the world;  
sound and pictures are transformed into waves.

Phase 2: *al-Tanzîl*

Waves that transport sound and pictures from Mexico into the world.  
It happens in the air and completely outside the human senses.

Phase 3: *al-Inzâl*

The process by which the TV/Aerial receives the waves and transforms them into sound and picture.

The result is a form of pictures and sounds that are perceivable by the human senses.

Phase 4: Perception

A viewer in Damascus can follow the football match in Mexico through his senses. The football match enters the viewer's knowledge.<sup>181</sup>

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See Andreas Christman, "The Form Is Permanent, but the Content Moves": The Qur'ânic Text and Its Interpretation(S) in Mohamad Shahrour's 'Al-Kitâb wal Qur'ân.'" *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, vol. 43, Issue 2 (2003): 143-172 (pp. 154-6).

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>181</sup> This model is a copy of what Shahrur draws in his recent book. See Shahrur, *The Qur'ân, Morality and Critical Reason*, 154, available online at [www.shahrour.org](http://www.shahrour.org) (consulted on May 17<sup>th</sup> 2012).

As Christman rightly mentions:

The point Shahrour wants to stress is that it is possible to distinguish between ways of communication which either happen objectively and beyond human perception (the transfer of sound and pictures via waves from Mexico to Syria), or occur explicitly for the sensory perception of human beings (the reconversion of the waves back into acoustic and optic signals for the reception of the TV viewers). The term *al-tanzîl* is assigned to the process of objective, other-human communication (reception by human beings is uncertain, impossible, or unintended), while the term *al-inzâl* reflects the ‘process of changing a matter outside the human mind from something unperceived to something perceived’.<sup>182</sup>

Shahrur relates his theory of *inzâl* and *tanzîl* to his subdivision of the Qur’ân into messengerhood and prophethood parts, and believes that the object of *inzâl* is *al-qur’ân*, which contains *al-mutashâbihât* or prophethood *âyahs*, and the object of *tanzîl* is *umm al-kitâb*, which contains *al-muḥkamât* or the messengerhood *âyahs*. By doing so, Shahrur denies any historicity to *al-qur’ân* and believes in the temporality of *umm al-kitâb*. In his most recent book, *The Qur’ân, Morality and Critical Reason*, he extends this dual nature of the revelation to the *sunnah* of the Prophet and states that the *sunnah* of the Prophet must also be divided into two *sunnahs*: first *al-sunnah al-rasûliyyah* (the messengerhood *sunnah*), which is a “culturally and historically conditioned”<sup>183</sup> phenomenon lacking “the universality of Allâh’s *Book*,”<sup>184</sup> and second, *al-sunnah al-nabawiyyah* (the prophethood *sunnah*), which contains “the themes of universal—and sometimes, historical—‘truth and falsehood.’”<sup>185</sup> In other words, to Shahrur, while the form of the *sunnah* of Muḥammad as a messenger must be perceived within its historical 7<sup>th</sup> century boundaries, the content of the *sunnah* of Muḥammad as a prophet goes beyond its contextual boundaries. Shahrur explains that messengeric part of the Qur’ân and the *sunnah* includes seven subcategories: 1) *al-ḥudûd bi mâ fihâ al-‘ibâdât* (juridic conducts including rituals); 2) *waṣâyâ* (advices); 3) *aḥkâm marḥaliyyah* (social or individual conducts that have been changed, modified or abrogated through the revelation); 4) *aḥkâm ḍarfiyyah* (social or

<sup>182</sup> Christman, “‘The Form Is Permanent, but the Content Moves,’” 160.

<sup>183</sup> Shahrur, *The Qur’ân, Morality and Critical Reason*, 72, available online at [www.shahrour.org](http://www.shahrour.org) (consulted on May 17<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

individual conducts that are as fixed vessels); 5) *ta'limât 'aâmmah* (general instructions for all Muslims);<sup>186</sup> 6) *ta'limât khâṣṣah* (specific instructions for Muḥammad);<sup>187</sup> and 7) *al-mamnû'ât* (prohibitions )<sup>188</sup> that require *ijtihâd*.<sup>189</sup> Then he explains that the prophetic part of the Qur'ân and the *sunnah* answers “the essential questions of human existence: about life and death, about the beginning and the end of the world, hell and paradise, and such.”<sup>190</sup> He writes:

The book of prophethood deals with the reality of our objective existence; it distinguishes between true and false, real and illusory; it possess the quality of being ‘ambiguous’ (*mutashâbih*), and it is located in the textual (or existential) subcategories of *al-qur'ân* and *sab' al-mathânî*. The book of messengerhood, that is, the book of conduct, possesses the quality of being unambiguous or ‘definite’ (*muḥkam*) and is located in the *umm al-kitâb*, the ‘mother of the book’.<sup>191</sup>

Although Shahrur’s rational efforts to bring coherency into a complex inherited tradition is admirable in many ways, his theory of messengerhood versus prophethood suffers from several problems.

First, in order to understand Shahrur, one must know his personal terminology, and accept the definitions that he gives to many existing popular terms. Most of these definitions have their roots neither in the classical Arabic dictionaries, nor in the corpus

<sup>186</sup> For this category he gives the example of women’s *hijâb*.

<sup>187</sup> For this category he gives the example of the exclusive divine permission about the Prophet’s number of wives.

<sup>188</sup> He gives the example of alcohol, gambling, and fortune telling.

<sup>189</sup> Shahrur, *Al-Kitâb wa al-Qur'ân*, The beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter, available online at [www.shahrour.org/](http://www.shahrour.org/) (consulted on May 17<sup>th</sup> 2012). In his other book, *The Qur'ân, Morality and Critical Reason*, he mentions these seven categories in a different order and with a couple of major differences. He writes:

We have established seven subcategories of definite verses [belonging to Muḥammad’s messengerhood]: 1. Rituals; 2. The limits of God (*al-ḥudûd*), defining ways of non-ritual worship (*al-'ibâdât*); 3. General ethics (*al-furqân*), moral codes given as commandments, and absolute taboos (*al-muḥarramât*); 4. Temporary rules (only valid for Muḥammad’s time); 5. Circumstantial rules (e.g., prohibition), only enforceable if a specific historical situation emerges that is similar to the one prescribed in *the Book*; 6. General notifications, nonbinding instructions in *the Book* introduced by the phrase ‘O you Prophet!’ (e.g., instructions for the dress code of women); 7. Specific notifications, likewise nonbinding as they were specifically and exclusively revealed for Muhammad’s time (e.g., rules of behaviour for the Prophet’s wives).

See Shahrur, *The Qur'ân, Morality and Critical Reason*, 125-6, available online at [www.shahrour.org](http://www.shahrour.org) (consulted on May 17<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*



of *al-tafsîr*. Thus, Shahrur's innovative definitions are neither discussed, nor accepted by any *mufasssîr*. It is not for nothing that at the end of his book, *The Qur'ân, Morality and Critical Reason*, the editor Andreas Christman presents a glossary of terms with Shahrur's definitions for them. A glance at that glossary reveals to what extent Shahrur's world of *tafsîr* is directly opposed to the universe of *al-Tafsîr*. Here are a few examples:

*al-qur'ân*: *The prophetic revelation*. This is one part of *the Book*; it belongs to Muḥammad's prophethood.

*al-qur'ân al-majîd*: *The glorious qur'ân*. This is the fixed part of *al-qur'ân*; it originated in the *Tablet Preserved*; it contains the general and universal laws of all existence, e.g., of the creation (first explosion), the laws of development, change, alteration, and destruction, including the eschatological teachings of life after death, Hell and Paradise, etc.; these laws are universal and unchangeable.

*al-sab' al-mathânî*: *The seven of the recited* that introduce chapters of *the Book*. These are part of *the Book*, and part of the prophethood; they are in quantity and quality on the same level as the *qur'ân* and as equally abstract in information but not expressed in clear Arabic, rather in the form of incomprehensible utterances, e.g., in the form of the seven openings of some *sûras* (such as *alif-lâm-mîm*, etc.).

*al-sunna*: *Muḥammad's law*. This contains Muḥammad's application of *al-risâla* and, hence, the *umm al-kitâb* during the seventh century on the Arabian Peninsula; his interpretations are only applicable for the period in which he lived, with the exception of the rituals that form the (trans-historical) foundation of the 'pillars of faith' (*arkân al-îmân*).

*al-tanzîl wa'l-inzâl wa'l-ja'l*: *Objective revelation, transfer to the human mind, and transformation*. *Al-tanzîl* refers to the process of an objective transport (of revelation) outside human consciousness; *al-inzâl* refers to the transport (of the revelation) which enters human consciousness and knowledge; *al-ja'l* refers to the process of change in "Progressing" (*ṣayrûra*): this could be a transformation from a nonperceptible format into another nonperceptible format, or from a nonperceptible format into a perceptible format (*al-ja'l + al-inzâl*); *the Book* inseparably combines both *al-ja'l* and *al-inzâl*, whereas with the *aḥkâm* (legal rules) there is only a combination of *al-tanzîl* and *al-inzâl*, but no transformation.

*al-nisâ'*: *Women or those who come later*. The term *al-nisâ'* carries two meanings: a) the partners of men, i.e., women (in this case it is the plural of *imra'a*); and b) those who or that which come later (in this case it is the plural of *nasî'*). In the latter meaning it may refer to what is most recent of

the delights of this world (i.e., the latest fashion); a desire for this is only natural for all human beings.<sup>192</sup>

Second, as an engineer, Shahrur invents and manufactures formulaic expressions in Arabic and gives them hermeneutical functions. Although charging terms with the Qur'anic concepts, and then making them in charge of the interpretation of the same text has always had its undeniable place in the realm of *tafsîr*, this practice must happen within the contexts of existing philological and exegetical activities. In other words, what distinguishes the non-acceptable *tafsîr bi al-ra'y* or as McAuliffe calls it “the free play of (arbitrary) personal opinion”<sup>193</sup> from *tafsîr bi al-ma'thûr*, or as McAuliffe translates it, “the interpretation by the received tradition”<sup>194</sup> is that this latter 1) takes its authenticity from a rational effort of mind, 2) linguistically follows a logical pattern within the commonly used and accepted meanings of terms, 3) finds itself on the already existing (popular or rare) activities of *tafsîr*, 4) builds and justifies its arguments and results, in part, by a contextual Qur'anic approach, and through a careful usage of *ḥadîth*. McAuliffe presents Ṭabarî's explanations about the problem of *tafsîr bi al-ra'y* by writing: “In addition to linguistic and lexical considerations (such as the commonly accepted “readings [*qirâ'ât*]” of the Qur'ân), al-Ṭabarî discusses the problematic status of *al-tafsîr bi al-ra'y*, the objections of those who oppose all exegetical activity, and the reputations of previous commentators, whether revered or denigrated in the passage of time.”<sup>195</sup>

There is no doubt that Shahrur's work reflects a high rational effort, but in the process of his *tafsîr*, he does not seem to respect some of the above mentioned steps. Thus, one might accuse him of committing *tafsîr bi al-ra'y* and imposing his personal opinions on the Qur'anic meanings and messages. It is as if Shahrur finds himself in front of a complex divine image and/or message with hundreds of pieces (terms and expressions). To Shahrur, as well as to many others, this image/message does not fit the needs and necessities of today's modern life with its fast growing changes. To Shahrur,

<sup>192</sup> Shahrur, *The Qur'ân, Morality and Critical Reason*, 538, 542, 550, available online at [www.shahrour.org](http://www.shahrour.org) (consulted on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>193</sup> McAuliffe explains the conceptual background of *tafsîr bi al-ra'y* starting from the Prophet's era and going throughout the history of *tafsîr*. McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 20.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

traditional *mufassirûn* cannot (or do not want to) help to solve this problem. So, he decides to cover the existing pictures on some pieces of the puzzle by drawing new pictures on them (throwing new meanings into them), adding some pieces (inventing expressions), and re-arranging the puzzle presenting, this time, an image and/or message that can better fit the modern life and its necessities. To have a sense of how far Shahrur goes in inventing formulaic expressions, I give two examples from the above-mentioned glossary. In the first example, Shahrur invents the new philosophical expression of *judal halâk al-shay'* (the dialectic of destruction) as an explanation for the Qur'ânic concept of *tasbîh* (glorification of Allâh). In the second example, Shahrur composes a new expression by adding the transliteration of the English term "friend" to the Arabic Qur'ânic term *zawâj* (marriage), and gives birth to the new concept of *zawâj al-frind* (the marriage by friendship) as a subcategory for the Qur'ânic concept of *mulk yamîn* (slave). By doing so, he aims to cover the controversial image of slavery in the Qur'ân with an acceptable image of friendship in modern societies:

*al-tasbîh "judal halâk al-shay'": Glorification and 'the dialectics of negation/destruction'* This is an internal dialectical movement that contains a battle between two antagonistic elements in everything which create constant change and development, as one thing may be destroyed and reappear in another thing; such dialectics of a constant battle between antagonistic elements guarantees progress; while we say 'Glory be to God' we acknowledge that He is beyond negation and change while everyone else in existence changes and, thus, praises God. In other words: this is the dialectics of the interpenetration of opposites and the negation of the negation.<sup>196</sup>

*'ilâqat mulk al-yamîn: Partnership.* This pertains to a voluntary relationship between a man and woman who are both adults and *compos mentis*, but who are not married and whose relationship is short-term but of a sexual nature; there are several types of partnerships, e.g., *zawâj al-mut'a* (temporary partnership) where the male partner provides for the female partner; *zawâj al-misyâr* (controlled or guided partnership) where the female partner has no right to demand such provision; and *zawâj al-frind* (friendship) where there is mutual provision and care; all these types, are not absolutely forbidden though they do not constitute marriage.<sup>197</sup>

<sup>196</sup> Shahrur, *The Qur'ân, Morality and Critical Reason*, 545, available online at [www.shahrour.org](http://www.shahrour.org) (consulted on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 557.

Third, in Shahrur's thoughts, the boundaries between terms are sometime fade. Consequently, the meanings that those terms refer to, become also ambiguous. A *par excellence* example would be his usage of the very term of *al-qur'ân*. While in different parts of his writings, Shahrur puts an emphasis on the fact that *al-qur'ân* is just one part of *the Book* that Muḥammad received within his prophetic mission, and *umm al-kitâb* is the other part that Muḥammad received within his messengeric mission, he shifts between using the term *al-qur'ân* (with small "q") as a reference to the result of the Prophet's prophetic mission, and the same term (always with small "q") to refer to the ensemble of the two prophetic and messengeric parts of *the Book*. On pages 127-28 of his book in English, he states:

The *qur'ân* [the prophetic part of the revelation] consists, primarily, of narratives about the truth and its laws in reality. But it also weaves these together ... with narratives (*ḥadīth*) about events that occurred in human history ... It thus links (*qarana*) the laws and events of objective reality together with the laws and events of human history. In its capacity as the source of both the cosmic *and* historical truth it confirms 'what went with it' (*alladhi baina yadaihi*), that is, the *umm al-kit'âb* [or the messengeric part of the revelation], and functions as the latter's ultimate protector and guardian.<sup>198</sup>

A few pages further he writes:

The *qur'ân* [the ensemble of both *al-qur'ân* and *umm al-kitâb*] was revealed orally. It would have been possible to reveal it in written form (as was done with Moses' 'tablets'), but its *dhikr*, its format of remembrance, was in oral format which did not allow the unbelievers to touch Allâh's revelation 'with their hands' and deride its true identity ... This implies that today when we touch a copy of the *qur'ân* [the ensemble], we do not actually touch the *qur'ân* [the ensemble] itself (the latter was revealed in one impulse during the night of power and transformed into oral Arabic). Instead, we have in front of us a copy of the *qur'ân* [the ensemble], a parchment (*qirṭâs*) which we can 'touch with our hands'. Thus, what we touch is ink on paper, not the *qur'ân* [the ensemble] itself ... after the original *qur'ân* [the ensemble] had been hidden, it was first translated into Arabic and then transferred by Jibrīl—orally, not in writing—to Muḥammad. Those 'who are clean to touch it' (*al-muṭahharûn*) are in fact angels processing *al-tanzīl*, since no human, ritually pure or impure, could

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<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-8.

ever touch the *original qur'ân* [always the ensemble].<sup>199</sup>

The last but not least of the problems in Shahrur' thought is his frequent shifts between post-modernism and literalism. While one might consider some of his arguments as post-modern approaches to the understanding of the Qur'ân, some other of his arguments can only have sense within traditionalist-literalist approaches of *tafsîr*. Without adding any comment, the following is one example of this strict literalist approach. He writes:

Since revelation cannot contradict reason we have to suspend criticism if we come across a passage that apparently contradicts the laws of nature. Verse 45 of *Sûrah al-Furqân*, for example, seems to suggest that there are shadows that exist without light. According to what we currently know about shadows' dependency on light, such claims seem inaccurate. Since we cannot say that the text is wrong (it never is!), we need to intensify the study of light and eventually discover a type of shadow that is yet unknown to us.<sup>200</sup>

The theory of double messages of the Qur'ân, as I explained it before, might offer a better solution for the problems that Madigan and Shahrur try to solve with their respective theories. Besides the seven textual above-mentioned Qur'ânic arguments (under sections "a" to "g" of this chapter), the coexistence of *inzâl* and *tanzîl*, as two methods of revelation mentioned in the Qur'ân, with respect to their definitions in *ma'âjim* and *tafâsîr*, support this theory of double messages of the Qur'ân. According to this theory, *inzâl* refers to the act of revelation and/or procedure by which the messengeric part of the Qur'ân (as a whole) has been revealed to the Prophet, and *tanzîl* refers to the revelation of the prophetic *âyahs* throughout the last 23 years of the Prophet Muḥammad's life. *Inzâl* is about concepts, and *tanzîl* is about instances for those concepts before or during the prophet's era. In opposition to Shahrur, I believe that *inzâl* transfers that universal trans-historical message that has been repeatedly revealed to humans by the intermediary of messengers throughout human history. The content of *inzâl* aims to shake and wake up humans' *fiṭra*, calling all of humanity to *al-îmân*, and encouraging its audience to individually and collectively submit themselves to the Will of God. On the contrary, *tanzîl* refers to "the process of revelation ... [as] a divine response elicited by human

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<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

word and action,<sup>201</sup> as Madigan describes it and rightly mentions the problem between this reality of *tanzîl* and the challenge of *jumlatañ wâhidatan* in *inzâl*. Therefore, contrary to what Shahrur believes, the object of *tanzîl* is *al-islâm* including *shari'ah* (including 'ibâdât or rituals, *mu'âmilât*, *aḥkâm* and *ḥudûd* or jurisprudence and *fiqh*), and *târikh* (the History). Consequently, the object of *inzâl* is *al-îmân* including *tawḥîd* (pure monotheism), *nubuwwah* (the truness of prophecy), and *mu'âd* (resurrection). In both cases, each category has its own subcategories, and some subcategories might overlap with each other.<sup>202</sup> For example, in *tanzîl*, the category of history includes *khalq* (cosmogony and anthropogony), as well as *qaṣaṣ al-anbyâ'* (the narratives on other prophets), and in *inzâl*, the category of monotheism includes the attributes of God, or the category of resurrection includes *âkhar al-zamân* (eschatology), *qyâmat* (the day of judgment), *janna* (heaven), and *jaḥîm* (hell).

It is not insignificant to mention that these intertwined two parts of the revelation complete each other and give birth to *akhlâq* (ethics) as the main objective of their existence. Thus, while *inzâl* offers the conceptual sources of ethics, *tanzîl* reveals concrete instances and examples for those ethical concepts. This means that contrary to what Christman says, the content (coming from *inzâl*) is permanent and the form (coming from *tanzîl*) is temporary.

The Qur'ân uses the verb *nazala* (under one of the two forms of *inzâl* or *tanzîl*) with twenty-five different objects. Here is a list of them: 1) *mâ'* (water from the sky),<sup>203</sup> 2) *al-ghayth* (rain),<sup>204</sup> 3) *qur'ân*,<sup>205</sup> 4) *al-furqân*,<sup>206</sup> 5) *kitâb*,<sup>207</sup> 6) *dhikr* (remembrance),<sup>208</sup>

<sup>201</sup> Madigan, *The Qur'ân's Self Image*, 8.

<sup>202</sup> For example, while talking about the day of judgment in 5:116, the Qur'ân narrates future conversations between God and Jesus with references to historical facts that belong to the subcategory of *târikh*.

<sup>203</sup> i.e. 8:11.

<sup>204</sup> i.e. 31:34.

<sup>205</sup> As object of *nazala*, the term *qur'ân* has been used in the Qur'ân in both definite (i.e. 3:3) and indefinite (i.e. 17:106) forms.

<sup>206</sup> As object of *nazala*, the term *al-furqân* always appears in its definite form (i.e. 25:1).

<sup>207</sup> As object of *nazala*, the term *kitâb* has been used in the Qur'ân in both definite (i.e. 16:89) and indefinite (i.e. 39:23) forms.

<sup>208</sup> As object of *nazala*, the term *dhikr* appears in the Qur'ân in both definite (16:44) and indefinite (i.e. 65:10) forms.

7) *al-tawrât* (Torah),<sup>209</sup> 8) *al-injîl* (Gospel), 9) *malak* (angel),<sup>210</sup> 10) *âyât* (signs, proofs or verses),<sup>211</sup> 11) *sûratan* (a chapter),<sup>212</sup> 12) *al-ḥikmah* (wisdom),<sup>213</sup> 13) *amanatan* (a security),<sup>214</sup> 14) *al-sakinah* (calm or certitude),<sup>215</sup> 15) *junûdan* (an army [from God]),<sup>216</sup> 16) *min rizqin* (from subsistence),<sup>217</sup> 17) *min al-an'âm thamâniya* (of cattle eight kinds),<sup>218</sup> 18) *khayr* (blessing),<sup>219</sup> 19) *rijzan min al-samâ'* (a humiliation from the sky),<sup>220</sup> 20) *al-bayyinât wa al-hudâ* (the proofs and the guidance),<sup>221</sup> 21) *nûr* (light),<sup>222</sup> 22) *libâsâ* (a cloth),<sup>223</sup> 23) *al-manna wa al-salwâ* (manna and salwa),<sup>224</sup> 24) *al-ḥadîd* (the iron),<sup>225</sup> and 25) *amrullâh* (Allâh's order).<sup>226</sup> Also, in many cases the object of the verb is a pronoun that refers to one of the above-mentioned twenty-five terms.<sup>227</sup> Meanwhile, all six terms possibly referring to the result of the revelation including *al-qur'ân*, *al-furqân*, *al-kitâb*, *al-dhikr*, *âyah* (or *âyât*), and *sûrah* (or *suwar*) appear in the Qur'ân as objects of both *inzâl* and *tanzîl*.<sup>228</sup> Thus, as opposed to Shahrur's oversimplified categorization of Qur'ânic terms and expressions leading to hasty innovative definitions for terms such as *umm al-kitâb*, *al-qur'ân*, *al-kitâb*, and *al-furqân*, a glance at the frequent Qur'ânic usages of these terms under both verbs related to *inzâl* and *tanzîl*, plus their numerous

<sup>209</sup> i.e. 3:93.

<sup>210</sup> As object of *nazala*, the term *malak* appears in the Qur'ân in both singular (6:8) and plural (i.e. 16:2) forms.

<sup>211</sup> i.e. 57:9.

<sup>212</sup> i.e. 24:1.

<sup>213</sup> i.e. 4:113.

<sup>214</sup> i.e. 3:154.

<sup>215</sup> As object of *nazala*, this term appears in two forms: *al-sakina* (the calm, i.e. 48:4), and *sakinatihi* (His calm, i.e. 9:26).

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> i.e. 10:59.

<sup>218</sup> i.e. 39:6.

<sup>219</sup> i.e. 28:24.

<sup>220</sup> i.e. 2:59.

<sup>221</sup> i.e. 2:159.

<sup>222</sup> i.e. 4:174.

<sup>223</sup> In 7:26.

<sup>224</sup> i.e. 7:160.

<sup>225</sup> In 57:25.

<sup>226</sup> In 65:5.

<sup>227</sup> In those cases, two pronouns have been used: one *mâ* (what) as in 36:28, and the other *hu* (it) as in 17:105.

<sup>228</sup> Among these terms, by far the two terms *al-kitâb* and *al-qur'ân* have been of interest to scholars in Qur'ânic Studies. As an example, Madigan's book, *The Qur'ân's Self-Image* is the author's dedication to the study of different forms of the term *al-kitâb* and its probable meanings.

appearances as objects of other verbs, suggest that by mere textual analysis of these terms, one cannot allocate each of them to one of the two categories of *inzâl* and *tanzîl*.<sup>229</sup> Instead, the usages of the same terms (especially *al-kitâb* and *al-qur'ân*) as products of both phenomena of *inzâl* and *tanzîl*, as noted already by Madigan:

... reflects a belief ... in the plurality of the manifestations of the one *kitâb*, that is, the successive interventions made by God in history [*tanzîl*] in order to guide humanity [*inzâl*] ... The Qur'ân's very claim to authority rests on there being a single, univocal, and integral *kitâb* [containing concepts revealed through *inzâl*], manifested in the past and now manifest once more through the mission of the Prophet [revealed through *tanzîl*].<sup>230</sup>

In other words, the Qur'ân is the result of *inzâl*, and at the same time, it is the result of *tanzîl*. This leads to my conclusion that while the emphasis that *mufasssîrûn* have put on *asbâb al-nuzûl*, reflecting *tanzîl* of the Qur'ân, and the importance that Western scholars have given to the historico-critical study of the Qur'ân have both been enormously helpful for the understanding of the prophetic part of the Qur'ân, they could not do justice to the exposition and clarification of the Qur'ân's trans-historical messengeric part.<sup>231</sup>

In order to distinguish more clearly these two parts of the Qur'ân from each other, besides the *tafâsîr*, the researcher's two main tools are: first, textual analysis with an emphasis on the content analysis, looking for relationships between possibilities of the message of the *âyah* with textual evidences and/or signs of prophecy presented within instances and/or messengerhood presented through concepts;<sup>232</sup> and second, historico-critical analysis that enables the researcher to find the level of interdependence between

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<sup>229</sup> Here are some examples of the term *al-kitâb* as object of verbs other than *inzâl* or *tanzîl*: it appears as the object of *ataya* (to give as in 4:51), *alama* (to teach as in 3:164) or *talâ* (to recite as in 2:113), *kataba* (to write as in 2:79) or *âmana* (to believe in as in 2:85).

<sup>230</sup> Madigan, *The Qur'ân's Self Image*, 177.

<sup>231</sup> As Fikret Karcic mentions:

The basic question is: can historical records corroborate the truth of a textual account? The branch of scholarship which deals with these issues is known as historical criticism. However, while this is relevant only for the study of factual textual accounts, it is not relevant for normative and theological/metaphysical statements ... theological/metaphysical statements are ... beyond the scope of human experience and thus their veracity cannot be corroborated by extra-textual evidence. Their veracity is a matter of belief.

See Fikret Karcic, "Textual Analysis in Islamic Studies: A Short Historical and Comparative Survey." *Islamic Studies*, vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer 2006): 191-220 (p. 193).

<sup>232</sup> Here, the authorship and the authenticity of the text are out of question.



historical realities as contexts of units of revelation (*âyahs*) and the message that each given unit presents.

A *par excellence* example for the first method is the Qur'ânic usages of *yâ ayyuha al-nabî* (being translated “O Prophet”) versus *yâ ayyuha al-rasûl* (being translated “O Messenger”). A very explicit textual sign to recognize prophetic *âyahs* from messengeric *âyahs* is if an *âyah* starts with one of the two expressions of “O Prophet” or “O Messenger.”<sup>233</sup> In fact, while the expression of “O Prophet” is used 13 times in the Qur'ân, the expression of “O Messenger” appears only twice. This might be an indirect reference to the proportion of prophetic *âyahs vis-à-vis* messengeric *âyahs* in the Qur'ân.<sup>234</sup> While all *âyahs* starting with one of these two expressions continue with an imperative verb, those starting with *yâ ayyuha al-nabî*, on the one hand, order a terrestrial action such as marrying, divorcing or fighting, and the two *âyahs* starting with *yâ ayyuha al-rasûl*, on the other hand, order him to “make known what has been revealed” to him from his Lord, and “not let those who vie one with another in the race to disbelief” sadden him. In a way, as mentioned before, the messengeric *âyahs* ask the Prophet to accomplish his mission, and to abandon the result in the hands of God.

For example, the concept of *hijâb* as understood today to mean a particular clothing that covers the head of woman in such a way as not to see any hair but leaving the face visible, is found in only two Qur'ânic *âyahs*. One can not find any other *âyah* directly or indirectly ordering women to wear *hijâb*.<sup>235</sup> Surprisingly one of the two *âyahs* start with the expression “O Prophet,” and the other one does not include it. They are as following:

يَأَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لِّأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلْبَابِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ آدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ

<sup>233</sup> On several occasions, the Qur'ân directly addresses the Prophet by starting the *âyah* with “Say [O Muḥammad].” Classifying these *âyahs* under one of the two main categories of Messengeric or prophetic requires help from content analysis and historico-critical approaches. For some examples of these *âyahs*, see 109:1; 112:1; 113:1; and 114:1.

<sup>234</sup> “O Prophet” appears in 8:64, 65, 70; 9:73; 33:1, 28, 45, 50, 59; 60:12; 65:1; 66:1, 9. “O Messenger” appears in 5:41, 67.

<sup>235</sup> A third *âyah* that completes the order of *hijâb* in 24:31 is 24:60 that abrogates the order for women who have passed their menopause, and are not attractive anymore. It reads:

As for women past child-bearing, who have no hope of marriage, it is no sin for them if they discard their (outer) clothing in such a way as not to show adornment. But to refrain is better for them. Allâh is Hearer, Knower.

وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them (when they go abroad). That will be better, so that they may be recognised and not annoyed. Allâh is ever Forgiving, Merciful. (33:59)

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ بَعْضُوا مِنْ أَبْسِرِهِمْ وَبِحَفْظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَلِكَ أَرْحَىٰ لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ  
خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ بَعْضُنَّ مِنْ أَبْسِرِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ  
زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ  
أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ  
بَنِي أَخَوَاتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَابِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوِ التَّالِعِينَ غَيْرَ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوْ  
الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَىٰ عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنَ  
زِينَتِهِنَّ وَتَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest. That is purer for them. Lo! Allah is aware of what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands or fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who lack vigour, or children who know naught of women's nakedness. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And turn unto Allah together, O believers, in order that ye may succeed. (24:30-1)

Despite the unanimous consensus of all *mufasssirûn* on the obligation of wearing *hijâb* as ordered in these two *âyahs*, accepting the subdivision of the Qur'ân into messengeric and prophetic parts, and doing a carefull content analysis study of these two *âyahs* can reveal interesting information about the differences between the instance of *hijâb* when referring implicitly to the Prophet's era, as ordered in the first prophetic *âyah*, and the concept of *hijâb* at all times, as ordered to both men and women in the second messengeric *âyah*.

Examples for the crucial necessity of a historico-critical study of the Qur'ânic text aiming to distinguish between its timebound messages from its timeless messages are numerous. In fact, the consequences of taking *âyahs* that belong to the timebound prophetic mission of the Prophet for the timeless messengeric part of his mission can be deadly. Here is an example:

فَاتَّبِعُوا الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَا بِالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلَا يُحَرِّمُونَ مَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَلَا يَدِينُونَ دِينَ  
الْحَقِّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَتَّىٰ يُعْطُوا الْجِزْيَةَ عَن يَدٍ وَهُمْ صَاغِرُونَ

Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the Religion of Truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low. (9:26)

وَأَنْزَلَ الَّذِينَ ظَاهَرُوهُمْ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مِنْ صَيَاصِيهِمْ وَقَذَفَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الرُّعْبَ فَرَبِيعًا تَقْتُلُونَ  
وَتَأْسِرُونَ فَرِيقًا وَأَوْرَثَكُم أَرْضَهُمْ وَدِيَارَهُمْ وَأَمْوَالَهُمْ وَأَرْضًا لَمْ تَطَّوْهَا وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرًا

And He brought those of the People of the Scripture who supported them down from their strongholds, and cast panic into their hearts. Some ye slew, and ye made captive some. And He caused you to inherit their land and their houses and their wealth, and land ye have not trodden. Allah is ever Able to do all things. (33:26-7)

These three *âyahs* are about a historical event in the last years of the Prophet's life. From the very beginning of the establishment of the Prophet's governance in Yathrib, the Prophet proposed a pact called *al-half al-madîna* or *sahîfat at-madîna* (the pact of Medina) according to which different tribes of Yathrib (now called Medina) and its surroundings were allied under the concept of one *umma*. The pact was initially proposed to put an end to the historical conflicts between the two main tribes of Yathrib, the Aws and the Khazrajs, but later, the Jewish community inhabiting the region joined the pact and became allied with Muslims. According to this pact, security was everyone's right; non-Muslim members of the pact had equal political and cultural rights as Muslims; everybody could enjoy the freedom of religion and rituals; and, in case of a war, non-Muslims had to share the costs of war with Muslims, and by doing so, they were not obliged to take part in the battle. Also non-Muslim members had to promise not to betray Muslims by coniving with their enemies. The three main non-Muslim group members of this pact were three Jewish tribes. The largest was the tribe of Banû-Qurayza. The two smaller Jewish tribes were the Banû-Nadhîr and the Banû-Qaynuqâ'. In 624C.E.<sup>236</sup>,

<sup>236</sup> Ziauddin Ahmad writes:

This suggestion seems to be irrelevant in view of the spirit of subsequent events of Jewish conspiracies against the Prophet provide us with ample proof that the Jews were never reconciled to the new polity and were never faithful to the terms of the Charter; they opposed the Prophet to tooth and nail, sometimes openly and sometimes by embracing Islam hypocritically, and in collusion with the enemies. It is, then, actually the treachery of the Jews, not the strength of Islam, that deprived them of the rights and privileges accorded to them under the Charter and ultimately they were exiled from Medina.

See Ziauddin Ahmad, "The Concept of Jizya in Early Islam." *Islamic Studies*, vol. 14, No. 4 (Winter 1975): 293-305 (p. 295).

without going into the historical details, the Banû-Qaynuqâ' tribe was exiled from Yathrib/Medina. In 627 C.E., after the Banû-Nadhîr had joined force with the Quraysh tribe from Mecca against the Muslims in Yathrib/Medina, thereby breaking their initial commitment to the pact of Medina, the Banû-Qurayza remained in a difficult position. There are conflicting reports as to their role during the Battle of the Trenches during which the Quraysh had besieged Medina, with the help of the Banû-Nadhîr. Again, without going into historical details, after the victory of Muslims against the Meccans at that battle, the Muslim army turned around and attacked the Banû-Qurayza. After a siege of their neighborhood that, according to Ibn Ishâq (85-151H),<sup>237</sup> lasted 25 days,<sup>238</sup> they surrendered and an agreement to choose an arbitrator was reached. Jews selected Sa'd b. Mu'âdh (d. 5H), a chief of the Aws tribe and a former ally of the Banû-Qurayza, who judged that, as described by the Torah's law, the betrayers' properties must be taken over by Muslims, their women and children must be enslaved, and all their adult males must be executed. This harsh decision was, at least according to many Muslim historians, to avoid any further treason.<sup>239</sup>

These events are much more complex and the historical reconstruction of the reasons behind them even more so. What is useful for our argument here is that the order to attack Banû-Qurayza was revealed in 9:26, and Muslims' victory over the planners of the Battle of *al-Ahzâb* (Banû-Nadhîr) has been announced in 33:26-7. This battle and its following events are mainly reported in *sûrahs* 9 and 33 of the Qur'ân. In fact, *sûrah* 33 is named after that battle: *al-Ahzâb* (the confederates).

Without entering the numerous *tafâsîr* on these various Qur'ânic passages, the important question to raise for the present argument about the double messages of the Qur'ân is if we must consider 9:26 and the divine order of fighting against Banû-Qurayza

<sup>237</sup> He is Muḥammad b. Ishâq b. Yasâr (85-151H), the author of *Sîra Rasûl-Allâh*.

<sup>238</sup> Al-Wâqidî (130-206 or 207H) (not to be confused with Muḥammad b. Sa'd Kâtib al-Wâqidî) reports it as 15 days. See Abu 'Abdullâh Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Wâqidî, *Kitâb al-Maghâzi li al-Wâqidî*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 3 vols. Edited by M. Jones. No place of publication: 'Âlam al-Kutub, 1984 (vol 2, p. 440), available online at <http://archive.org/details/magwaq> (consulted on Dec. 9<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>239</sup> For a scholarly study of this battle, see W. N. Arafat, "New Light on the Story of Banû Qurayza and the Jews of Medina." *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 2 (1976): 100-7. To understand better the differences between two main Muslim sources of information on this battle, see Rizwi S. Faisar, "Muhammad and the Median Jews: A Comparison of the Texts of Ibn Ishaq's Kitâb Sîrat Rasûl Allâh with al-Waqidi's Kitâb al-Maghâzi." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 28, No. 4 (Nov. 1996): 463-489.

as part of the Prophet Muḥammad's timebound prophetic revelation/message or not? The answer to this question will put us in front of two opposite worldviews. If the answer is "yes," then the *âyah* must exclusively be understood and interpreted in its historical context. But if the answer, as the majority of Muslims believe, is "no," then the *âyah* holds a timeless order for the followers of the Prophet, and *tafsîr* has the responsibility of clarifying its application(s) throughout times and in all situations. Islamic history has witnessed numerous cases of conflict and war, at first legitimized by divine orders in Qur'ânic *âyahs* during the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, and later on justified by taking some of these *âyahs* out of their historico-socio-political contexts, on the basis that they are timeless orders applicable to "similar" situations.

To give one contemporary vivid example, this decontextualization of the battle of the Trench and the besieging of Banû-Qurayza has contributed enormously to the contemporary logic used to justify the massacres surrounding the event of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 in the United States. Muhammad Atta, the main organiser of the suicide terrorist attacks left behind a four page document entitled *The Last Night*. This document seems to be a sort of manual for the spiritual preparation of the "*jihâdi* warriors." The recitation of some specific Qur'ânic *âyahs* and prayers are among the suggested spiritual self-preparation techniques.<sup>240</sup> The author puts an emphasis on the recitation of *sûrah* 33 and the *âyahs* related to the story of Banû-Qurayza. This means that Muhammad Atta strongly believed that these *âyahs* held a timeless divine order for all Muslims at all time and for all circumstances.<sup>241</sup> David Cook writes:

The document left behind by the suicide attackers of 11 September 2001 entitled "The Last Night" is an interesting and important window into the

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<sup>240</sup> For a recent scholarly work on *dhabiha* (sacrificed), another important Qur'ânic term used in this document, see Yvonne Sherwood, "Binding-Unbinding: Divided Responses of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to the "Sacrifice" of Abraham's Beloved Son." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 72, No. 4 (2004): 821-861.

<sup>241</sup> The emergence of the concept of *jizya* (a poll tax imposed to non-Muslims living under Islamic governance) has been another consequence of the decontextualization of this *âyah*. Knowing that this is the only Qur'ânic *âyah* where the term/concept of *jizya* appears, one can see the crucial role of the decontextualization of its message for the establishment of what later became an important aspect of Muslims' perception of otherness and their interactions with non-Muslims. To read more details about it, see Ziauddin Ahmad, "The Concept of Jizya in Early Islam." *Islamic Studies*, vol. 14, No. 4 (Winter 1975): 293-305.

mind of a person preparing attacks of this type ... [in the document] individual *sûras* are mentioned for preferred reading material and verses are cited to elucidate specific points—as well as prayers and devotions. ... One of the most interesting prayers cited is the ritual prayer against the *ahzab*, the Confederates (from page 3) ... It is clear that the writer of “The Last Night”—following Faraj, Usama b. Ladin and many other previous leaders of radical Islam—chooses to refer to the enemy as *al-ahzab*, the Confederates. ... The authors of “The Last Night” apparently went to great lengths to recreate the situation of the original *ahzab*, who gathered together to fight the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims in 626 during the Battle of the Khandaq. These Confederates included ... both enemies from without ... and within (the Jewish tribes of Banu Nadir and Banu Qurayza ...). ... Contemporary radical Muslims note that there is an alliance between what they refer to as “Muslim” rulers ... and the non-Muslim West, similar to the situation during the time of the earliest Muslims. The Prophet ... cursed these *ahzab* using the prayer cited in “The Last Night,” and a number of the Qur’ânic verses cited in the document were revealed at this time. This strategy shows that the place of the true Muslims will be on the front lines fighting the *ahzab*; only traitors and apostates will remain behind. After the *ahzab* retreated (their supplies were exhausted), the Prophet Muhammad proceeded to deal with the Jewish tribes and the Muslim hypocrites, exiling some and executing others. Clearly this is part of the overall strategy of this manner of waging *jihad*: to fight the unbelievers and to use the war process as a time during which true Muslims will be separated from false Muslim.<sup>242</sup>

As a final word, it is important to mention that while presenting the theory of double messages of the Qur’ân, I strongly believe that the Qur’anic text cannot be divided into prophetic and messengeric parts as a black and white dichotomy. The overlaps between these two subdivisions are frequent, and it takes years of study, analysis, and debate to distinguish them from each other. In some cases an *âyah* might include aspects of both kinds, and the question is if this distinction must be expanded to units smaller than single *âyahs* or not. Also, there are verses that are fully messengeric and fully prophetic, sending simultaneously two parallel messages one for the original audience of the Qur’anic text, and the other for later audiences. My theory is a first step in opening up a new way of interpreting the Qur’an. The road is slippery and long, and an efficient use of this hermeneutical tool requires collaborations of many scholars who, by their constructive criticism and their further use of the tool, will hopefully perfect it. My thesis

<sup>242</sup> David Cook, “Suicide Attacks or ‘Martyrdom Operations’ in Contemporary *Jihad* Literature.” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, vol. 6, No. 1 (Oct. 2002): 7-44 (pp. 21-3).

develops and uses this theory to examine one single *âyah* on the question of crucifixion of Jesus. It aims to reveal to which category, prophetic or messengeric, belongs this *âyah*. It also tries to explain the potential implications of this dual categorization for the interpretation of this particular yet very important *âyah*, especially for Muslim-Christian relations.

## Chapter 3

### On *nafs*, *rûh*, and the Question of *tawaffâ* and *mawt* in the Qur'ân

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter is a hermeneutical essay on the two Qur'ânic concepts of *al-nafs* (translated as self, soul, nature, life, mind, etc.) and *al-rûh* (sometime translated as spirit and sometime translated as soul), and their relationship with the two concepts of *al-mawt* (death) and *al-tawaffâ* (also translated as death). These two pairs of concepts are directly connected with the Qur'ânic narrative about the last day of Jesus on earth and his true or false crucifixion. At the end of this chapter, I will present my theory of humans' tripartite nature as an ontological tool for the understanding of human's nature, with important hermeneutical consequences that might shed new light on the Qur'ânic image of human beings, thereby helping us to rethink the question of human's rights and limits in the Qur'ân.

To study the above-mentioned concepts, I make a selection of *tafâsîr* based on principles that warrant a reliable coverage of fourteen centuries of Muslim exegetical effort that has generated a vast literature. A secondary goal of this chapter is to select and introduce those selected works through a brief history of their authors. This same selection will also be used in the same order when it will come to study the Crucifixion of Jesus in the next chapter.

#### 3.2 The Self

The concept of self has been the subject of many academic works and intellectual



discussions in philosophies and theologies of probably all religions and cultures.<sup>1</sup> Since the emergence of Greek philosophy, this concept has always been in the centre of philosophers' attention as a criterion for understanding the universe. It is also essential to human's understanding of history. As Isaac Miller mentions, "Philosophers interested in the status of narrative [history] more frequently begin with the intimate domain of the self, and from there work out to the world."<sup>2</sup>

Over centuries, the knowledge of the self or self-knowledge has been considered by thinkers as an inevitable factor for human's wellbeing. In his "Description of Greece," Pausanias, the ancient Greek travelogue, reports that the aphorism of "know thyself" was inscribed in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi.<sup>3</sup> Plato clarifies that "know thyself" is "a piece of advice, and not the god's salutation of those who were entering; and so, in order that their dedications too might equally give pieces of useful advice, they wrote these words and dedicated them."<sup>4</sup> The character of Socrates in Plato's works frequently refers to this maxim and builds his worldview around it. In *Gorgias*, Plato narrates a discussion between the character of Socrates and Callicles. There, arguments given by Socrates against Callicles clearly reveal the vast philosophical implications of this self-knowledge in Plato's thought. As Avnon explains:

Socrates explicitly states that self-knowledge is the primary goal of the

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<sup>1</sup> While theologians of some religions such as Abrahamic traditions have tried to understand the self, its nature, and its functions, the "theologians" of some other religions such as Buddhism have tried to prove the illusory nature of the self, and the misconducts founded on this particular form of human illusion.

<sup>2</sup> Isaac Miller, "St. Augustine, the Narrative Self, and the Invention of Fiction." *Qui Parle*, vol. 8, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 1995): 54-82, (p. 54).

<sup>3</sup> Pausanias 10,24 reads:

Such was the course of the war. In the fore-temple at Delphi are written maxims useful for the life of men, inscribed by those whom the Greeks say were sages. These were: from Ionia, Thales of Miletus and Bias of Priene; of the Aeolians in Lesbos, Pittacus of Mitylene; of the Dorians in Asia, Cleobulus of Lindus; Solon of Athens and Chilon of Sparta; the seventh sage, according to the list of Plato, the son of Ariston, is not Periander, the son of Cypselus, but Myson of Chenae, a village on Mount Oeta. These sages, then, came to Delphi and dedicated to Apollo the celebrated maxims, "Know thyself," and "Nothing in excess."

For more details, see W.H.S. Jones and H.A. Ormerod, Trans., *Pausanias Description of Greece*. 4 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd. 1918. E-published by Tufts University in Perseus Digital Library Collection, pausanias 10,24, available online at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/> (consulted on May 31<sup>st</sup> 2012).

<sup>4</sup> W.R.M. Lamb, Trans., *Plato in Twelve Volumes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd. 1955. *Charmides*, 165a, e-published in *Perseus Digital Library Collection* by Tufts University, available online at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/> (consulted on May 31<sup>st</sup> 2012).

conversation with Callicles. When Callicles is drawn to contradict himself on the question of the relation between the pleasant and the good, Socrates asserts that “when he comes to know himself”..., he will not agree with this... when Callicles summarizes his argument about the nature of the powerful, Socrates leads the refutation of his reasoning to the point where he asks, “Tell me, my friend, what is their relation to themselves?” to which Callicles responds, “What do you mean?”.... Socrates presses home his attempt to stop Callicles’ inner momentum: “[Is everyman] his own master, or is there no need for him to govern himself but only to govern others?” .... Callicles is again startled: “What do you mean by governing himself?” .... Callicles is truly perplexed. With this indirect level of communication in mind, we see that when referring to the danger of pandering to the “mob of spectators”..., Socrates also has in mind Callicles’ disordered soul, most apparent in his tendency to pander to the Athenian deme, presented at the very beginning of the conversation ... as the most obvious indication of the disordered state of his soul.<sup>5</sup>

Centuries later, based on a Neoplatonic worldview emphasizing the soul over the body, Augustine of Hippo (354-430C.E.) founded a “theology of the self” in which the self was defined in relation to God. The last books of his major work *Confessions* (books XI to XIII) are filled with the concept of the self and its crucial role in the spiritual path. As the publisher of *Confessions* mentions:

[By re-examining the Neoplatonist concept of the soul, and exploring its functions,] as he constructs a view of God that would come to dominate Western thinking, he also creates a new concept of individual identity: the idea of the self. This identity is achieved through a twofold process: self-presentation, which leads to self-realization. Augustine creates a literary character out of the self and places it in a narrative text so that it becomes part of the grand allegory of redemption ... Augustine says he was flooded with peace and a great calm. He had finally learned to make his own life an allegory, where the lessons taught by the Neoplatonists, of emphasizing the soul over the body, became an actual reality.<sup>6</sup>

Since the time of Augustine up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while some philosophers such as Nietzsche and Descartes pay special attention to the Neoplatonic Augustinian concept of the self, trying to use it as a cornerstone for the building of their respective

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<sup>5</sup> Dan Avnon, “‘Know Thyself’: Socratic Companionship and Platonic Community.” *Political Theory*, vol. 3, No. 2 (May 1995): 304-329 (p. 316).

<sup>6</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*. E-book in the series of *Spark Notes Philosophy Guide*. The summary e-published by Barnes and Noble. New York: Spark Publishing, 2005, available online at <http://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/augustine/section1.rhtml> (consulted on May 31<sup>st</sup> 2012).

worldviews, almost every Western philosopher writes at least a few sentences on the question of the self and its definition. In their efforts to achieve a reliable definition for the self, and a solid understanding of its nature and functions, many use Augustine's metaphysical approach.<sup>7</sup> However, by the turn of the twentieth century, the quick modernization and materialization of human conditions in the West lead to calls for a more 'realistic' definition of the self. In his article on this subject, Norris Clarke sums up those challenges and criticizes metaphysicians for their "isolated Cartesian [idea of the] self, locked in the self-contemplation of pure thought."<sup>8</sup> Instead, Clarke is more interested in discovering the "human self as it actually exists in the concrete, in constant intersubjective openness to other selves in the human community."<sup>9</sup> To Clarke, this self not only is the source of meanings, but also is the source of intentions and actions. He believes that the self is the active source for three categories of human activities: 1) interaction with the world including other selves; 2) interaction with its own self by reflection, reasoning, etc.; and 3) interaction with "the higher self of God."<sup>10</sup> Surprisingly, in his rather colonialist conclusion, Clarke compares the Western (Christian?) "self-forgetting union of the self with God in the order of knowledge and love" with the Eastern (Buddhist and Hindu?) "loss of self," and suggests that this highest level of the experience of the self through God's love must be used (by the West or by everybody?) as a model for the two other categories/levels. So, it is only by putting an emphasis on this third level that the West and the East will be able to come closer to each other, and reconcile their differences.<sup>11</sup> He writes:

Perhaps it is only along these lines, by further exploration of and reflection on these new models of the experience of the self in depth, that we can infuse new blood into our at present somewhat stagnant Western metaphysical thought and break through some of the impasses of our

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<sup>7</sup> It is not insignificant to mention that for metaphysicians, the self is the vessel of meanings. In other words, meanings dwell in the self.

<sup>8</sup> Norris Clarke, "Self as Source of Meaning in Metaphysics." *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 21, No. 4 (June 1968): 597-614 (p. 599).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> To explain the three categories of the self's interactions, Clarke uses the term "dialogue." I believe that "interaction" is a better choice in the sense that unlike dialogue, it does not put an emphasis on the verbal nature of the action. See *ibid.*, 612.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 613.

traditional conceptual oppositions of one and many, self and other, transcendence and immanence... One thing, at least, is certain. It is only along this path of the self, explored and reflected on at all its levels of experience, that any significant bridge can be built between Eastern and Western thought. And surely how we meet this urgent challenge and opportunity will form the content of the next great chapter in the intellectual and spiritual history of mankind, one that our own Metaphysical Society of America is now taking the initiative of fostering by promoting the formation of an International Society of Metaphysics, including both East and West, at the next International Congress of Philosophy in Vienna.

While rightly pointing to the necessity of achieving a common/global understanding of the self, and the crucial role that this understanding can play in bridging the so-called 'East' and 'West,' Clarke's solution is reminiscent of a return to some Christian theological traditional values that, at least in North America and with indigenous nations in particular, have been proven not to lead to any brotherhood among different nations.

A few decades later, a much better perspective on the self has been presented by the contemporary Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor who sheds new light on our understanding of the problem. In his book entitled *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Taylor carefully studies the genealogy of the concept of the self, bringing his readers on a journey from ancient Greek's views on this concept, to its modern perceptions. Allen W. Wood, in an excellent summary of Taylor's masterpiece, writes:

Taylor understands frameworks themselves as the legacy of a history; his principal aim is its retrieval, focusing on the modern, post-Cartesian conception of the human self. Taylor traces its prehistory back to Plato (chapter 5), where there emerged the notion of human reason as awareness of a meaningful cosmic order, and to St. Augustine (chapter 6), who gains access to this order through the self's "inwardness" in its intimate relation to God. Descartes (chapter 7) takes the decisively modern turn by detaching the self from its embodiment, treating "disengaged reason" as the creator of rational order. This leads in one direction to the "punctual" self of Locke, the disengaged power to objectify itself and its world (chapter 9). Like Weber, Heidegger, and the Frankfurt School before him, Taylor sees the disengaged Cartesian self as leading directly to the "disenchanted" world of modernity and its corresponding Enlightenment conception of instrumental reason. Taylor realizes, however, that the triumph of disengaged reason is only one side of the early history of

modernity. Taylor also follows other strands, such as Montaigne's quest to "decipher" one's individual self (chapter 10), and internalizing the natural part of ourselves (chapter 11).<sup>12</sup>

### 3.2.1 *al-nafs*

No one can claim with certainty if there exists a Qur'ānic term that exclusively refers to the Western concept of the self. However, despite all its ambiguity and complexity, the term *nafs* (self, soul, life, mind, etc.) is unanimously considered by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars as the closest Qur'ānic concept to the metaphysical notion of the self as developed in the Western philosophical tradition. The Qur'ānic concept of *nafs* has been studied and discussed in detail by many *mutakallimûn* and *mufasssirûn*. Some modern scholars of Qur'ānic Studies have also shown interest in defining it and discovering its characteristics.<sup>13</sup> The famous "orientalist" Duncan B. MacDonald (1863-1943C.E.) is among the first Western scholars to study *nafs* in Islamic philosophy and its theological implications. In an article published in 1922, MacDonald focuses on *wahm* (imagination or illusion) as one of the main powers of the *nafs*. At the very beginning of his article, he translates *nafs* as "human's animal psyche,"<sup>14</sup> and insists that "the *nafs* of man, that is his animal *nafs* [psyche], is very directly under the influence of sense and *wahm* and to such an extent that his *nafs* often does not distinguish between the *wahmiyât* [lit. imaginary or illusory] and the *awwaliyât* [lit. initial]. So the reason must enter and judge."<sup>15</sup> MacDonald examines the opinions of five great Muslim thinkers on different powers of the *nafs*, and concludes that *nafs* is not only a vessel where imagination, pleasure and disgust are produced, but also a vessel where perception, rational reflection, and understanding happen.<sup>16</sup> His analysis does not explain how animal psyche can judge itself by rational reflection to enable human to "distinguish between the *wahmiyât* and the

<sup>12</sup> Allen W. Wood, "Review of Sources of the Self by Charles Taylor." *Philosophical Review*, vol. 101, No. 3 (July 1992): 621-626 (pp. 623-4).

<sup>13</sup> All these scholars focus on what already has been written by *mufasssirûn*, *mutakallimûn* or *falâsifa* (philosophers). I could not find any modern scholar and/or hermeneuticists of the Qur'ân who has tried to study the concept of the self in the Qur'ân regardless of the definitions presented by Muslim erudites themselves.

<sup>14</sup> D. B. Macdonald, "Wahm in Arabic and Its Cognates." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 4 (Oct. 1922): 505-521 (p. 509).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 510. It is not clear what MacDonald refers to by the transliteration of *awwaliyât*. He probably has misread 'aqliyyah meaning "rational" or "intellectual."

<sup>16</sup> Macdonald's list includes: Ibn Sinâ, al-Ghazâlî, al-Ghazwînî, al-Ijî, and Ibn Khaldûn.

*awwaliyât.*” More importantly, a closer examination of his writing reveals that he shifts between different definitions of *nafs*. As mentioned before, he first defines *nafs* as “the animal psyche of human” (p. 509), but later follows some Muslim thinkers by repeating that the *nafs* is composed of *nafs ḥaywāniya* (animal *nafs*) and *nafs insāniya* (human *nafs*) (p. 515). He does not bother to clarify the contradiction between his initial definition of *nafs* as the human’s animal psyche and this later subdivision that gives some supra animal powers to *nafs*.<sup>17</sup> A bigger problem is that, while explaining some Sufi opinions –and he does not mention which school of Sufism– he uses the term *rūḥ* without explaining the borders between *nafs* and *rūḥ*, nor mentioning where exactly *nafs* fits into the picture of human being as a creature composed of *al-jasad* (the body) and *rūḥ*. In his above-mentioned article, MacDonald sometimes translates *rūḥ* as “spirit” (i.e. on page 519) and sometimes prefers “soul” as its English equivalent (i.e. on page 520).<sup>18</sup> Years later, he is still shifting between various definitions for *nafs* while translating philosophical Arabic texts, sometimes using “soul” and sometimes using “spirit.”<sup>19</sup> His ambiguity reflects, among other things, the lack of clarity that has existed also in Muslims’ diverse definitions of the concept of *nafs*. A few years before his death, MacDonald confesses:

The nature of the psyche (*nafs*) is in dispute. The dominant position [in Islam] is that it is an accident, existing in one of the atoms of which the possessor of the psyche is composed. Others hold that the psyche is a body (*jism*), compounded of certain fine atoms possessing a distinctive accident peculiar to them by which they become a psyche, and these atoms are

<sup>17</sup> Macdonald explains Ibn Sīnā’s theory according to which the *nafs* possesses five main powers:

i) the *ḥiss musharak* [common sense]; (ii) the *muṣawwira*, called also *al-khayāl* [picturing power]; (iii) the *mutakhayyila* or *mufakkira* [reflection power]; (iv) the *wahmiyya* [imaginary power]; (v) the *ḥāfiẓa* (*dhākira*) [memory].

He does not seem to see any contradiction between his definition of the *nafs* and the fact that this animal psyche has the power of deep reflection and reasoning.

<sup>18</sup> This problem of unreliable translations and shifting between different translations of the same Arabic term is a common weakness in Macdonald’s work. For example, see his translations of the term *nāṭiq*.

<sup>19</sup> For an example, see Duncan B. MacDonald, “The Meanings of the Philosophers by al-Ghazzālī.” *Isis*, vol. 25, No. 1 (May 1936): 9-15. On page 12 of this article, MacDonald chooses “soul” as the definition/translation of *nafs*, but on page 339 while explaining Ibn Ḥazm’s disproof of material atoms, MacDonald writes:

[To Ibn Ḥazm,] the psyche [*nafs*] is a substance (*jism*) but is different from the human body (*jasad*); it is an entity and comes out from the body at death (pp. 66, 74). It is the same as the spirit [*rūḥ* I suppose].

mingled with the atoms of the body. Apparently, then, even in this view, the psyche is a kind of accident. This cannot but remind us of the hypothesis of William Clifford, the mathematician, and of some other thorough-going materialists that there is a mind-stuff.<sup>20</sup>

MacDonald's conclusion reveals only two of the several possibilities for the definition of *nafs* discussed by Muslim thinkers.<sup>21</sup> Because of his limited access to the original texts in Arabic –a limitation that he is well aware of– he does not seem to know about other possibilities discussed by Muslim scholars. Half a century after him, the British historian and scholar of Islam Arthur Stanley Tritton (1881-1973C.E.) insists that the problem is still unsolved. He writes:

*Nafs* and *rūḥ* were used loosely to mean almost anything connected with life, but acquired new meanings as the years went by. Men differed about the nature and activity of all three constituents of man. 'Soul' is almost the equivalent of *nafs* in its precise sense though it may be hard at times to decide if 'self' is not more appropriate. It is easier to admit the existence of soul than to define it for it has neither *genus* nor *proprium*; any definition is imperfect and any description inadequate.<sup>22</sup>

This citation comes from a brief five pages article entitled *Man, nafs, rūḥ, 'aql* in which Tritton aims to define –or at least show the complexity of finding some adequate definitions for these four key terms of 'man,' '*nafs*,' '*rūḥ*' and "'*aql*' (reason or

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>21</sup> For example, MacDonald seems to be totally ignorant about the fact that al-Râzî sees the *nafs* and the *rūḥ* as being together the main source of human's identity. As a physician, Râzî tries to define and understand the *nafs* by studying its worldly implications rather than by pure philosophical thinking. Roger Arnaldez focuses on this viewpoint of Râzî and writes:

Râzî [conclut] ... : 'Cela étant, nous disons que lorsque l'Instituteur de la langue dit : Je pose le nom d'Usâma pour exprimer l'essence en elle-même ... de chacun des individus lions en tant que cette essence est une identité, ... et cela à la façon d'un nom commun, on a là un nom propre de genre' ... Sans parler de la valeur magique attribuée à ce nom dans certaines civilisations, ... il est certain qu'il existe dans la pensée humaine une corrélation étroite entre le nom propre et le principe intérieur caché, esprit ou âme (*rūḥ, nafs*), de l'identité personnelle, que ce nom révèle pour le meilleur et pour le pire, en découvrant à l'ami ou en livrant à l'ennemi le secret unique (*sirr*) d'une vie.

To present Râzî's thoughts, Arnaldez translates *nafs* as *l'âme* (soul) but does not give any explanation about his choice of the word. He concludes that to Râzî the *nafs*, more than anything else, is the "Moi" (I or me) of everybody that dwells in the "perfect consciousness" of the possessor of the *nafs*. See Roger Arnaldez, "Le Moi divin et le Moi humain d'après le commentaire coranique de Faḥr Al-Dîn Al-Râzî." *Studia Islamica*, No. 36 (1972): 71-97 (pp. 75 and 77).

<sup>22</sup> Arthur S. Tritton, "Man, *Nafs, Rūḥ, 'Aql*." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, vol. 34, No. 3 (1971): 491-495 (p. 491).

intelligence) in Islam. In its encyclopedic tone, the article gives many references to some classical Muslim thinkers such as Tawḥîdî, Fârâbî, Jawzîyyah, Ghazâlî, Bayḏâwî, Râzî and Ibn al-Nadîm, but does not offer to its readers anything but a clear picture of the ontological confusion that any modern scholar of Islam must accept and deal with when working on the Muslim erudites' perception of the key Qur'ânic concepts of *nafs* and *rûh*.

This ambiguity of the Qur'ânic concept of self is reflected in the translations of the Qur'ân into other languages. To have an idea about the vast borders of the self in the Qur'ân, and reveal the severity of the problem, I examine examples of different English equivalents that Marmaduke Pickthall chooses for *nafs* in his translation of the Qur'ân.<sup>23</sup> To complete my analysis, I select two other popular yet reliable translations of the Qur'ân and show how their authors often agree neither with Pickthall nor with each other on the meaning of *nafs* in the same *âyah*. None of them is either able to find a precise equivalent for the term *nafs*, or capable of retaining their respective choices of English words to translate all instances of the word *nafs* in the Qur'ân. The two other translators are Yusuf Ali<sup>24</sup> and Ahmed Ali.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Sells believes that Pickthall belongs to the interpretive tradition of the former Shaykh of al-Azhar University, Muḥammad Mustafâ al-Marâghî (d. 1945C.E.) who was known for his open mindedness and his liberal choices. He does not mention any source for his conviction. See Michael Sells, "Sound, Spirit, and Gender in Sûrat Al-Qadr." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 111, No. 2 (April-June 1991): 239-259 (p. 244, f. 15). For a recent and detailed study of Pickthall' approaches and methodologies, see Daoud Mohammad Nasimi, *A Thematic Comparative Review of Some English Translations of the Qur'an*. Ph.D. Diss. University of Birmingham, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1872-1953C.E.) was an Indian Muslim and a scholar of Islam who first published his translation of the Qur'ân into English in 1934. His translation includes an explanatory annotation with more than 6000 notes. So, in a way, he deserves to be placed somewhere between a translator and an interpreter of the Qur'ân. His translation of the Qur'ân is among the most well-known and accepted works of its kind among both ordinary Muslims and academicians. It has been published over 30 times by different publication houses. The edition used in this thesis is: Abdullâh Yusuf Ali, trans. *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ân*. Seattle: Pacific Publishing Studio, 2010, available online at <http://www.quranexplorer.com/quran/> (consulted on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2012). In his Ph.D. dissertation, Nasimi focuses also, among others, on Yusuf Ali's translation of the Qur'ân. See *ibid*.

<sup>25</sup> Ahmed Ali (1908-1994C.E.) was an Indian poet, novelist and politician whose translation of the Qur'ân into English was first published by Princeton University Press in 1984. His translation is widely used in different academic circles and is considered by scholars of Islam as one of the most reliable ones. The edition used in this thesis is: Orooj Ahmed Ali, trans. *Al-Qur'ân: a Contemporary Translation*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993, available online at <http://www.deenresearchcenter.com> (consulted on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2012).



The term *nafs* appears hundreds of time in the Qur’ân in both its singular and plural forms, with or without different possessive pronouns.<sup>26</sup> My selections below of instances of *nafs* include Qur’ânic appearances in both singular and plural forms, with and/or without possessive pronouns.

***nafs* translated by Pickthall as “human being”**

مِنْ أَجْلِ ذَلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَن قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا

Pickthall’s translation: “For that cause We decreed for the Children of Israel that whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whoso saveth the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind...” (5:32)

Yusuf Ali’s translation: “On that account: We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone slew a person ... it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if anyone saved a life it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people...”

Ahmed Ali’s translation: “That is why We decreed for the children of Israel that whosoever kills a human being ... it shall be like killing all humanity; and whosoever saves a life, saves the entire human race ...”

<sup>26</sup> According to Gavin Picken “The term *nafs* and its derivatives occur in the Qur’ân 398 times.” See Gavin Picken, “*Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur’anic Paradigm.*” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, vol. 7, No. 2 (2005): 101-127 (p. 106). Throughout the Qur’ân, the plural form of *nafs* is always *anfus*, except in 81:7 and 17:25 where the unusual plural form of *nufûs* has been used. I checked Ṭabarî, Râzî, Zamakhsharî, Ṭabâtabâ’î, and none of them mentions anything about this usage of an unusual plural form of *nafs*. Even Suyûtî who, before anything, is a linguist does not mention anything about this exceptional plural form of *nafs* in his work *Al-Durr al-Manthûr fî al-Tafsîr al-Ma’thûr*. All above-mentioned *mufasssîrûn* avoid repeating *nufûs* when interpreting the *âyah*. Those who include the plural form of *nafs* in their text of *tafsîr* on this *âyah* use the term *anfus* to refer to *nufûs*. I also verified five Arab dictionaries: *Lisân al-‘Arab*, *Maqâyis al-Lugha*, *Al-Şihâh fî al-Lugha*, *Al-Qâmûs al-Muḥîṭ*, and *Al-‘Ibâb al-Zâkhîr*. Ibn Manzûr (*Lisân al-‘Arab*) is the only one who mentions *nufûs* as a plural form for *nafs*. He briefly writes: “*nafs: ... wal-jam‘u min kulli dhâlik anfus wa nufûs*” (... and the plural form for all [what has been said is] *anfus* and *nufûs*.)” He does not give more information on the difference(s) between these two plural forms for the same term. All other authors totally ignore *nufûs* in their definitions of *nafs*, and exclusively mention *anfus* as its plural form. In his article entitled *Translating the Qur’ân*, Fazlur Rahman focuses on the translation of 81:7, and compares a few translations of the term with each other. He does not mention anything about the *shadh* (odd) nature of this unusual plural form. See Fazlur Rahman, “Translating the Qur’ân.” *Religion & Literature*, vol. 20, No. 1, The Literature of Islam (Spring 1988): 23-30 (pp. 28-9).

In this *āyah* the term *nafs* has been repeated three times: twice as an indefinite noun, and once in the object pronoun of “*hā*” (in *ahyāhā* or saved it). All three translators ignore the second appearance of the term (in *bi ghayri nafs*).<sup>27</sup> Surprisingly, when translating the same Qur’ānic expression repeated word by word in 18:74, all three of them translate this second *nafs*. In the case of the first and the third *nafs* appearing in this *āyah*, none of the three translators respects his choice of English equivalent for the first *nafs*, and translates the object pronoun of “*hā*” referring to the same *nafs* as “a life.” A bit further in 5:45 all three of them translate *nafs* as “life.” Every time *nafs* is the object of the verb *qatala* (to kill) most translators of the Qur’ān unanimously translate it as “life.” This definition of *nafs* is studied more in depth on page 13 of this chapter.<sup>28</sup>

### ***nafs* translated by Pickthall as “being”**

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَنْشَأَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ

Pickthall’s translation: “And He it is Who hath produced you from a single being ...” (6:98)

Yusuf Ali’s translation: “It is He who hath produced you from a single person ...”

Ahmed Ali’s translation: “It is He who produced you from a single cell ...”<sup>29</sup>

This translated passage provides the best example of how these three translators do not agree on an English equivalent for *nafs*.<sup>30</sup> Checking other translations of the Qur’ān in

<sup>27</sup> Pickthall indirectly mentions it in his choice of word “manslaughter” with an indirect reference to “man.”

<sup>28</sup> For other examples, see their translations of 6:151; 7:189; 17:33; and 25:68.

<sup>29</sup> The same sentence has been repeated in 7:189 and 17:33, and all three translators have repeated their choice of English equivalent for *nafs*. In his review on Ahmed Ali’s translation of the Qur’ān, Lawrence I. Conrad writes:

Hence, “*nafs* means more than one hundred things, including essence, substance, vital principle, blood etc.”; it therefore has “enough amplitude to include ‘cell’ among its meanings ...,” even though the concept of cell, as he explicitly concedes, was unknown to ancient etymologists to be identified by them.

See Lawrence I. Conrad, “Review of Al-Qur’an: A Contemporary Translation by Ahmed Ali.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, vol. 13, No. 2 (July 2003): 250-253, (p. 252).

<sup>30</sup> A very similar expression appears in 39:6, and our three translators are faithful to their choice of words used here in 6:98.

English reveals to what extent translators are split over the challenge of finding an equivalent for the term *nafs* in 6:98: While Arberry, Ahmed Reza Khân, Sarwar, Shakir, Wahîd ul-Dîn Khân, Qarîbullâh and Darwîsh all translate it as “soul,”<sup>31</sup> Asad translates it as “living entity,” Daryâbâdî, Hilâlî and Khân translate it as “person,” and Mawdûdî translates it as “being.”<sup>32</sup>

The split among French translations of *nafs* is even deeper.<sup>33</sup> One can difficultly find two well-known translators of the Qur’ân in French who agree on a French equivalent for the term *nafs* in 6:98. Jacques Berque and Hamza Boubakeur translate it as *âme* (soul),<sup>34</sup> Mohammed Chiadmi translates it as *souffle vital* (breath of life),<sup>35</sup> André Chouraqui translates it as *être* (being),<sup>36</sup> André Du Rayer and Denise Masson translate it as *personne* (person),<sup>37</sup> Muhammad Hamidullah follows them, adding *Adam* (Adam) in parenthesis,<sup>38</sup> and to complete this diversity Kasimirski translates it as *individu* (individual).<sup>39</sup>

#### ***nafs* translated by Pickthall as “self”**

وَلَا تُجَادِلْ عَنِ الَّذِينَ يَخْتَانُونَ أَنفُسَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ مَن كَانَ خَوَّانًا أَثِيمًا

Pickthall’s translation: “And plead not [O Prophet] on behalf of (people) who deceive themselves. Lo! Allah loveth not one who is treacherous and

<sup>31</sup> Arberry adds the adjective “living” to it.

<sup>32</sup> All these translations are available online at <http://www.qurandislam.com/coran/trans/> (consulted on June 8<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>33</sup> I also verified 11 translations of 6:98 in Persian, and to my surprise, 10 out of them were unanimous on *tan* (lit. body or person) being the Persian equivalent for *nafs* in this *âyah*. It might be worthy of attention for scholars of comparative Persian literature to research these translations further. They are available online at <http://www.qurandislam.com/coran/trans/> (consulted on June 8<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>34</sup> See Hamza Boubakeur, trans. *Le Coran: Traduction nouvelle*. 5 vols. Algeria: ENAG, 1989 (vol. 2, p. 63). See Jacques Berque, trans. *Le Coran: Essai de traduction*. 2 vols. Paris : Albin Michel, 1995 (vol. 1, p. 152).

<sup>35</sup> See Mohammed Chiadmi, trans. *Le Noble Coran: Nouvelle traduction française du sens de ses versets*. Lyon: Tawhid, 2007 (p. 161).

<sup>36</sup> See André Chouraqui, trans. *Le Coran, l’appel*. Paris: Robert Lafont, 1990.

<sup>37</sup> See André Du Rye, trans. *Le Coran de Mahomet*. Paris: Antoine de Sommerville, 1647. See also Denise Masson, trans. *Le Coran*. 2 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1967.

<sup>38</sup> See Muhammad Hamidullah, trans. *Le Coran*. Paris: no publisher, 1963, available online at <http://www.qurancomplex.com/Quran/Targama/Targama.asp?l=arb&t=frn&nSora=1&nAya=1> (consulted on June 8<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>39</sup> See Kasimirski, trans. *Le Coran*. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1970 (p. 125).

sinful.” (4:107)

Yusuf Ali’s translation: “Contend not on behalf of such as betray their own souls: for Allah loveth not one given to perfidy and crime.”

Ahmed Ali’s translation: “Do not argue for those who harbour deceit in their hearts, for God does not love the treacherous and the iniquitous.”

This is an example of when Pickthall is among the minority of translators preferring “self” as the meaning of *nafs* in English. There are other instances where most translators agree on “self” being the translation of *nafs*, but Pickthall avoids using it.<sup>40</sup> However, the Qur’ānic instances where most translators including Pickthall choose “self” as the best English equivalent for *nafs* are rare.<sup>41</sup> Finally, and most importantly for this research, one cannot find a single Qur’ānic appearance of *nafs* where all translators unanimously translate it as self.

#### ***nafs* translated by Pickthall as “soul”**

فَانطَلَقَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا لَقِيَا غُلَامًا فَقَتَلَهُ قَالَ أَقْتَلْتَنِي نَفْسًا زَكِيَّةً بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا نُكْرًا

Pickthall’s translation: “So they twain journeyed on till, when they met a lad, he slew him. (Moses) said: What! Hast thou slain an innocent soul who hath slain no man? Verily thou hast done a horrid thing.” (18 :74)

Yusuf Ali’s translation: “Then they proceeded: until, when they met a young man, he slew him. Moses said: ‘Hast thou slain an innocent person who had slain none? Truly a foul (unheard-of) thing hast thou done!’”

Ahmed Ali’s translation: “The two went on till they came to a boy, whom he killed. Moses exclaimed: “You have killed an innocent soul who had taken no life. You have done a most abominable thing!”

“Soul” is probably the most dominant equivalent for *nafs* chosen by English translators of the Qur’ān.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, most of the time as one can see here, when the term *nafs*

<sup>40</sup> For example, in 3:164 most translators have translated *rasūlan min anfusihim* as “a Messenger from among themselves,” but Pickthall translates it “a messenger of their own.”

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, 7:172 or 6:54. It is not surprising to know that in most of those rare cases, the *āyah* talks about the *nafs* of God, which for theological reasons is not easily translatable.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, their translations of 3:144, 161, 185; 4:1; 6:70, 164; 10:30, 54, 100, 105; 12:68; 20:15; 21:35, 47; 39:70; 74:38; 79:40.

appears more than once in an *āyah*, those translators who translate it as “soul,” often translate the other occurrence(s) differently.<sup>43</sup> In this *āyah*, Pickthall translates the first *nafs* as “soul,” and the second *nafs* as “man.” Although Ahmed Ali agrees with Pickthall on his choice of translation for the first *nafs*, he does not follow Pickthall in his translation of the second *nafs*.

### ***nafs* translated by Pickthall as “heart”**

لَهُ مُعَقَّبَاتٌ مِّنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا  
بِأَنفُسِهِمْ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ سُوءًا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ ۗ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِّنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَالٍ

Pickthall’s translation: “For him are angels ranged before him and behind him, who guard him by Allah’s command. Lo! Allah changeth not the condition of a folk until they (first) change that which is in their hearts; and if Allah willeth misfortune for a folk there is none that can repel it, nor have they a defender beside Him.” (13:11)

Yûuf ‘Ali’s translation: “... Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls) ...”

Ahmed Ali’s translation: “... Verily God does not change the state of a people till they change themselves ...”

Pickthall translates *nafs* in 13:11 as “heart.” In Pickthall’s translation of the Qur’ân, all Qur’ânic appearances of the terms *qalb* and *fu’âd* have also been translated as “heart.”<sup>44</sup> It is not clear if here, Pickthall understands *nafs* as *qalb* or *fu’âd*, or if by choosing “heart” he tries giving to his readers a sense of “internality” reflected in the Qur’ân’s emphasis that “any change for a human society must come from within its members.”<sup>45</sup> In all three translations, the prefix of *mâbi* (what exists in or what is in) attached to *nafs* has been ignored. A literary translation would be: “until they change what is in their *anfus*.”

<sup>43</sup> Many times, one of the two *nafs* is translated as “self.” Sometimes it is the second *nafs* that is translated as “self” (i.e. their translations of 12:53 or 16:111), and sometimes it is the first *nafs* that is translated as “self” (i.e. their translations of 17:7 or 30:28).

<sup>44</sup> For *qalb*, see, for example, his translations of 2:204, 260, 283; 8:24; 16:106; 28:10; 33:4. For *fu’âd*, see, for example, his translations of 11:20; 17:36; 25:32; 28:10; 53:11.

<sup>45</sup> The same expression first appears in 8:53. Pickthall and Yusuf Ali’s translation of 13:11 is the repetition of their translation in 8:53. Ahmed Ali chooses “heart” as the definition of *nafs* in 8:53, but changes his choice of word to “self” (in themselves) here in 13:11.

***nafs* translated by Pickthall as “mind”**

وَإِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يٰعِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ ءَأَنْتَ قُلْتَ لِلنَّاسِ اتَّخِذُونِي وَأُمِّيَ إِلَهَيْنِ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ قَالِ  
سُبْحٰنَكَ مَا يَكُونُ لِيٓ أَنۢ أَقُولَ مَا لَيْسَ لِيۢ بِحَقِّۙ إِن كُنْتُ قُلْتُهُۥ فَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُۥ تَعَلَّمَ مَا فِي نَفْسِيۙ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ  
مَا فِي نَفْسِكَ إِنَّا كُنَّا نَعْلَمُ الْغُيُوبَ

Pickthall’s translation: “And when Allah saith: ‘O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods beside Allah?’ he saith: ‘Be glorified! It was not mine to utter that to which I had no right. If I had ever said it, then Thou wouldst have known it. Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I know not what is in Thy Mind. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Knower of Things Hidden?’” (5:116)

Yusuf Ali’s translation: “And behold! Allah will say ‘O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men ... He will say: ... Thou knowest what is in my heart, though I know not what is in Thine...”

Ahmed Ali’s translation: “And when God will ask: ‘O Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to mankind ... (Jesus) will answer: ... You know what is in my heart though I know not what You have. You alone know the secrets unknown.”<sup>46</sup>

It is important to mention that, while the Qur’ân emphasizes repeatedly the importance of thinking and reflection (*tafakkur*),<sup>47</sup> reasoning and intellection (*ta’aqul*),<sup>48</sup> pondering and wise administration (*tadabbur*),<sup>49</sup> as well as understanding and right comprehension (*tafaqquh*),<sup>50</sup> all of which reflect a healthy mind, no Qur’ânic term explicitly mentions what, in English, is referred to as “mind.” Its closest Qur’ânic equivalent is probably *qalb* when used as a subject of the verb *faqaha* (to understand), but in all appearances of this Qur’ânic combination, Pickthall persists on translating it as heart.<sup>51</sup> Instead, on some occasions, such as here in 5:116, he translates *nafs* as “mind,” a translation that others do not necessarily agree with.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>46</sup> For another example, see their translations of 20:67.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, 2:219, 266; 3:191; 6:50; 7:176; 10:24; 13:3; 16:11, 44, 69; 30:8, 21.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, 2:73, 76, 242; 3:65, 118; 6:32, 151; 7:169; 12:2, 109; 21:10, 67; 23:80.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, 4:82; 47:24; 23:68; 38:29.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, 6:65, 98; 7:179; 8:65; 9:81, 87, 122, 127.

<sup>51</sup> In a few cases, Yusuf Ali translates *qalb* as “mind” or “understanding.” See, for example, his translation of 2:60.

<sup>52</sup> For another example, see Pickthall’s translation of 12:18, 83; 33:37.

***nafs* translated by Pickthall as “kind”**

وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ بَنِينَ وَحَفَدَةً وَرَزَقَكُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ  
أَفَبِالْبَاطِلِ يُؤْمِنُونَ وَبِنِعْمَتِ اللَّهِ هُمْ يَكْفُرُونَ

Pickthall’s translation: “And Allah hath given you wives of your own kind, and hath given you, from your wives, sons and grandsons, and hath made provision of good things for you. Is it then in vanity that they believe and in the grace of Allah that they disbelieve?” (16:72)

Yusuf Ali’s translation: “And Allah has made for you mates (and companions) of your own nature...”

Ahmed Ali’s translation: “God has provided mates for you of your own kind ...”

It is not clear here if the meaning is more linked to “own” or if it is in the term that comes after it. Also, it is not clear how the same “kind” in Pickthall’s translation can generate a different gender. As a matter of fact, “*nafs*” is a feminine term in Arabic and while presenting the concept of matrimony, the Qur’ân respects the gender of the term and uses the masculine term of *zawj* (in plural form) to refer to the *nafs*’ mate.<sup>53</sup>

***nafs* translated as “life”**

<sup>53</sup> This idea has been presented six times in the Qur’ân: three times with *zawj* in plural form (in 16:72; 30:21; and 42:11), and three times with *zawj* as a singular noun (in 4:1; 7:189; and 39:6). While the three repetitions of this statement with *zawj* in plural form talk about matrimony among humans in general, the three instances having *zawj* in singular form are references to the Qur’ânic anthropogenic myth. In 30:21 Pickthall translates the expression as “He created for you helpmeets from yourselves...” Although there, Pickthall abandons the equivalent of “kind” for *self*, by his choice of “helpmeet” for the masculine term of *zawj*, he still insists that God created “wives” for “men.” In terms of gender, his translation of 42:11 is by far, his best. It reads: “He hath made for you pairs of yourselves...” When Pickthall translates the Qur’ânic anthropogenic statement in 4:1; 7:189; and 39:6, he shifts from a more or less neutral translation of 4:1 and 39:6 to a sexist and patriarchal translation of the same statement in 7:189. His translation of 4:1 reads:

O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate ...” his translation of 39:6 reads: “He created you from one being, then from that (being) He made its mate ...

Then for an unknown reason, he changes his approach and translates 7:186 as: “He it is Who did create you from a single soul, and therefrom did make his mate that he might take rest in her...” A more respectful translation of the genders associated with these terms could be:

He it is Who created you from a single *nafs*, and therefrom that (*nafs*) He made her *zawj*, that the *zawj* might take rest in her.” This, of course, needs to be studied more in depth by feminist scholars of the Qur’ân.

وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَدْعُونَ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ وَلَا يَقْتُلُونَ النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا يَزْنُونَ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ  
ذَٰلِكَ يَلْقَ أَثَامًا

Pickthall's translation: "And those who cry not unto any other god along with Allah, nor take the life which Allah hath forbidden save in (course of) justice, nor commit adultery - and whoso doeth this shall pay the penalty;" (25:68)

Yusuf Ali's translation: "Those who invoke not, with Allah, any other god, nor slay such life as Allah has made sacred ... and any that does this (not only) meets punishment"

Ahmed Ali's translation: "Who do not invoke any god apart from God, who do not take a life which God has forbidden ... and any one who does so will be punished for the crime,"<sup>54</sup>

Here the confusion is between *nafs* and the Qur'anic term *ḥayât* (life). *ḥayât* appears numerous times in the Qur'ân in its different verbal and non-verbal forms. In fact, one of Allâh's attributes presented in the Qur'ân is *al-ḥayy* from the same roots as *ḥayât*, meaning "alive."<sup>55</sup> In all appearances of *ḥayât*, all translators of the Qur'ân into English are unanimous on translating it as "life." The Qur'ân consistently and exclusively uses the common and concrete noun of *nafs* as a reference to human being when the *âyah* is about murdering a human. Translators reflect this exclusive usage in their translations by not changing their choice of the equivalent word for *nafs* in all instances of this specific case.<sup>56</sup>

### ***nafs* being ignored in the translation<sup>57</sup>**

وَقَالَ نِسْوَةٌ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ امْرَأَتُ الْعَزِيزِ تُرَاوِدُ فَتْلَهَا عَنِ نَفْسِهَا قَدْ شَغَفَهَا حُبُّ إِنَّا لَنَرُلَهَا فِي  
ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ فَلَمَّا سَمِعَتْ بِمَكْرِهِنَّ أَرْسَلَتْ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَعْتَدَتْ لَهُنَّ مُتَكًا وَعَآتَتْ كُلَّ وَاحِدَةٍ مِّنْهُنَّ سِكِّينًا  
وَقَالَتِ آخْرَجَ عَلَيْنَّ فَلَمَّا رَأَيْتَهُ أَكْبَرْتُهُ وَقَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ وَقُلْنَ حَاشَ لِلَّهِ مَا هَٰذَا بَشَرًا إِنْ هَٰذَا إِلَّا مَلَكٌ

<sup>54</sup> For another example, see their translations of 9:120.

<sup>55</sup> The definite article of *al* gives the term an indirect sense of being "the only alive," or "the unique source of life."

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, 6:151; 17:33; 25:68.

<sup>57</sup> In his article entitled *Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm*, Gavin Picken classifies the Qur'anic appearances of *nafs* into five categories/senses: 1) the soul; 2) the human being; 3) human's "power of understanding;" 4) the heart; and 5) "an inclination to Good and Evil." I believe that his 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> categories are faculties of *nafs* rather than its definition. See Gavin Picken, "Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm." *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 7, No. 2 (2005): 101-127 (pp. 106-7).



كريمٌ قالتَ فذالكُنَّ الَّذِي لَمْتُنَّنِي فِيهِ وَلَقَدْ رَأَوْنَهُ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ فَأَسْتَعْصِمَ وَلَئِن لَّمْ يَفْعَلْ مَا ءَامُرُهُ لَيَسْجَنَنَّ  
وَلَيَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الصَّاعِرِينَ

Pickthall’s translation: “And women in the city said: ‘The ruler’s wife is asking of her slave-boy an ill-deed. Indeed he has smitten her to the heart with love. We behold her in plain aberration.’ And when she heard of their sly talk, she sent to them and prepared for them a cushioned couch (to lie on at the feast) and gave to every one of them a knife and said (to Joseph): ‘Come out unto them!’ And when they saw him they exalted him and cut their hands, exclaiming: ‘Allah Blameless! This is no a human being. This is not other than some gracious angel.’ She said: ‘This is he on whose account ye blamed me. I asked of him an evil act, but he proved continent, but if he do not my behest he verily shall be imprisoned, and verily shall be of those brought low.’” (12:30-32)

Yusuf Ali’s translation: “Ladies said in the City: ‘The wife of the (great) Aziz is seeking to seduce her slave from his (true) self’ ... She said: ‘There before you is the man about whom ye did blame me! I did seek to seduce him from his (true) self but he did firmly save himself guiltless!...’”

Ahmed Ali’s translation: “In the city the women gossiped: ‘The minister’s wife longs after her page. He has captured her heart’ ... She said: ‘This is the one you blamed me for. I did desire his person, but he preserved himself from sin...’”

Here the term *nafs* has been repeated twice, and in both cases it is in the expression of *murâwîda ‘an nafsihî* (lit. to seduce of/from his *nafs*) referring to the *nafs* of Yûsuf (Prophet Joseph). Pickthall decides to totally ignore both appearances of *nafs* in the *âyah*,<sup>58</sup> Yusuf Ali translates both of them; and Ahmed Ali ignores the first one and translates the second one. What makes this case interesting is that Yusuf Ali’s decision to keep the equivalent of *nafs* (the two “selves” in his text) turns his translation into a nonsense statement. Indeed, “to seduce someone from his true self” is a word by word translation of an expression which is ambiguous even in its original language. Same problem occurs when Ahmed Ali decides to keep the second *nafs* in his translation. In order to keep it, he seems to be obliged to change his acceptable first translation of the same expression (to long after somebody), and turn it into an unclear sentence (to desire somebody’s person). Further, the same expression appears twice in the 51<sup>st</sup> *âyah*. This time, Ahmed Ali joins Pickthall in ignoring both appearances of the term, and Yusuf Ali

<sup>58</sup> In this *âyah* “of her slave-boy” appears separately and independently before “of his *nafs*.” A word by word translation would be: “The wife of ‘Aziz is asking of her slave-boy from his *nafs*.”

keeps presenting his word by word unclear translation.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.2.2 *nafs* versus *rūḥ*

Although from the very beginning of Islamic Philosophy, the Qur'ānic concept of *nafs* was at the centre of attention of many Muslim thinkers, one cannot deny the fact that this attention was in part due to their acquaintance with the concept of the self in Greek philosophy. On the one hand, once Muslim philosophers learned about these Greek discussions, they became interested in making links between Greek wisdom and their sacred text, the Holy Qur'ān. On the other hand, not only early philosophical and theological Muslim works followed Greek models, but Greek knowledge also contributed greatly in the advancement of other fields of Islamic Sciences such as medicine and astronomy.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, the question of the self was not exclusively a concern for Muslim *falāsifa* (philosophers) and/or *mutikallimūn* (theologians); it was also of serious interest to early Muslim medical doctors<sup>61</sup> and –to a lesser extent– to early Muslim

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<sup>59</sup> In 12:77, again there is a reference to Joseph's *nafs*. This time, Pickthall translates it as "his soul" (Joseph's soul), Yusuf Ali translates it as "his heart," and Ahmed Ali ignores it.

<sup>60</sup> There is no need to mention that many of these "scientists" were working simultaneously in different scientific fields. Some such as Ibn Sinā, al-Khārazmī, and Khājah Naṣīr al-Ṭūsī were known as medical doctors, philosophers, mathematicians, theologians, etc.

<sup>61</sup> In most major early Islamic medical works, one can find an independent chapter on *nafs*, and very often, that chapter includes references to Greek philosophical discussions on the self. For example, in an old but still useful-to-read article, Max Meyerhof translates the beginning of the chapter on *nafs* in the work of 'Ubaydullāh b. Jibrā'il b. Bakhtīshū (d. 1058H), who served some Abbasid caliphs as a physician. This short translation reveals to what extent the young Islamic scientific medical tradition was building its foundations on its knowledge of inherited Greek schools of thought. Meyerhof cites Ibn Bakhtīshū who writes:

The soul is according to the school of ARISTOTLE the production (*namd*) of a natural body endowed with vital energy (19) [parentheses and numbers are from the original text]. This is the definition in the didactic sense; its definition in the physical sense is that it is the origin of all sensation and motion. According to PLATO'S school the soul is a simple intellectual substance which possesses its own motion following a harmonious numeric proportion (20). According to the school of PYTHAGORAS it is a luminous substance (21). According to the school of THALES it is a physical substance in perpetual motion (22). According to the school of DICEARCHUS it originated from the four elements (23). Very many of the Ancients follow this school, as GALEN points out in his book 'That the Soul follows the Complexion of the Body'. According to the school of ANAXAGORAS the soul is a hot spirit (*rūḥ ḥārā*). (24). The school of HERACLITUS, prominent in the medical profession, is of the opinion that it springs from the vapours of the humours". Meyerhof briefly mentions: "'UBAID-ALLAH concludes that the soul is a substance, since it is the bearer of qualities and *accidentia* and is self-sustaining.

astrologists.<sup>62</sup> The common point among early Muslim philosophers, *mutikallimūn*, and medical doctors was that they unanimously believed that a human being is composed of *jasad* and *nafs*.<sup>63</sup> While they all accepted the existence of *rūḥ* as another element of this composition, there was no consensus among them on the relationship between *nafs* and *rūḥ*. In this regard, Muslim thinkers were, and still are, divided into three streams of thought.

The first group, such as Râzî, considers *nafs* to be a third element in the creation of human beings.<sup>64</sup> In his book *ʿIlm al-Akhlâq*, Râzî includes an independent *risâlah*

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Max Meyerhof, "An Arabic Compendium of Medico-Philosophical Definitions." *Isis*, vol. 10, No. 2 (June 1928): 340-349 (pp. 344-5). Also, to read a scientific analysis on how the Greek knowledge helped Muslims to develop their own "hellenized theories" including some Islamic medical theories see Marcia K. Hermansen, "Shâh Walî Allâh's Theory of the Subtle Spiritual Centers (*Latâ'if*): A Sufî Model of Personhood and Self-Transformation." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 47, No. 1 (Jan. 1988): 1-25.

<sup>62</sup> The relationship between *nafs* and the universe has been discussed by Muslim astrologists from the very beginning of the emergence of Islamic astrology. Inherited from some streams of early Sufism, many Muslim astrologists believed that the universe functions according to the human being's model of creation. For example, according to Bernd Radtke, al-Tirmidhî believed:

[The] Knowledge of the external (*ʿilm al-zâhir*), the objects of which are the external world and its rules ... is extended to embrace knowledge of the inner cosmos and its laws which does not replace but includes external knowledge. The objects of inner knowledge are the world of the soul, then the inner cosmic world that reveals itself in the soul and in the external world, and finally God Himself.

Radtke also mentions:

... in the teachings of Ismâ'îl al-Walî we find that man is an image of the cosmos. He is a part of the earthly world through his body which enters into contact with the earth with its seven limbs or organs, i.e. the eye, ear, tongue, hand, belly, genitals and the foot. The *nafs* also belongs to the world of the earth.

See Bernd Radtke, "Sufism in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century: An Attempt at a Provisional Appraisal." *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, vol. 36, Issue 3, Islamic Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century? (Nov. 1996): 326-364 (pp. 339, 349).

<sup>63</sup> Fazlur Rahman writes:

It should be kept in mind, however, that the Qur'an hardly ever conceives of a human being as being composed of two different and separate - let alone disparate - elements: a soul and a body. In fact, in agreement with the Old Testament, the Qur'an regards a human being as a unitary organism, one with both physical functions and inner, mental functions which the Qur'an sometimes calls "the inner personality (6:93).

To support his argument, he gives the example of the *âyah* 6:93. A glance at *nafs* used in 6:93 reveals that it is not different in any sense of the term from its similar usages in other *âyahs*. I could not find any *tafsîr* on 6:93 explaining this "inner personality" mentioned by Rahman. He himself does not give more information about his conviction. See Fazlur Rahman, "Translating the Qur'ân." *Religion & Literature*, vol. 20, No. 1, The Literature of Islam (Spring 1988): 23-30 (p. 29).

<sup>64</sup> In fact Râzî believes in three "levels" of the *nafs*. In his article entitled *Notes on the 'Spiritual Physic' of Al-Râzî* Mehdi Mohaghegh focuses on Râzî's famous book, *Al-Ṭibb al-Rūḥânî* (Spiritual Physic), and writes:

(long article) entitled *Kitāb al-Nafs wa al- Rūḥ wa Sharḥ Quwāhumā* (The Book of *nafs* and *rūḥ* and explanations about their powers) where he explains *nafs* and *rūḥ* as two intertwined yet independently existent components of human being.<sup>65</sup>

The second group is composed of those, such as Imām abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (450-505H), who consider *rūḥ* as a subcategory of *nafs*. Ghazālī calls *rūḥ* as *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah* or “the serene soul,” and clarifies that *rūḥ* is a “state” of *nafs* that every human being is born naturally gifted with.<sup>66</sup> An interesting classification of *rūḥ* under *nafs* can be read in the work of contemporary Muslim thinker Morteza Motahharī. In his book entitled *Training and Education in Islam*, he subdivides *nafs* into “personal and individual ‘self’ ... [which is] related to physical and corporeal dimensions” and “a true ‘self’ ... that is ... an essence which is not that of matter or nature; rather, it is celestial and majestic in origins; it is of another World.” Motahharī considers this latter “true self” to be the *rūḥ*, and writes:

This true “self” is the same thing which is mentioned by the Qur’ān in this manner: *So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit [rūḥī]*. To pay attention to this “self” means finding out and discerning the essence of one’s humanity... It is of knowledge; it is contrary to ignorance. It is of light; it is in contrast to darkness.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, the third group, such as Shāh Walī Allāh (1114-1176H), presents a complicated and confusing model in which *rūḥ* and *nafs* are “floating” concepts. Sometimes they become one, and sometimes they take so much distance from each other that one might

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Al-Rāzī [in his book, *Spiritual Physic*] ... mentions the three kinds of Platonic soul: first the rational and divine, second the irascible and animal, and third the vegetative, incremental and appetitive. Al-Rāzī considers that all things belonging to passion make the first soul, that is the rational and the divine, weak, and add to the strength of the two others. Man must therefore with the help of both spiritual and bodily medicine harmonize the action of the three kinds of soul so that they do not fail nor overdo what is expected of them.

This opinion of Rāzī, as Mohaghegh briefly mentions it, has been criticized and refused by Aristotelian Muslim philosopher of his era. See Mehdi Mohaghegh, “Notes on the ‘Spiritual Physic’ of Al-Rāzī.” *Studia Islamica*, No. 26 (1967): 5-22 (pp. 10-11).

<sup>65</sup> See M. Ṣaghīr Ḥasan Ma’sūmī, trans. Imām Rāzī’s *‘Ilm al-Akhlāq: Kitāb al-Nafs wa al-Rūḥ wa Sharḥ Quwāhumā*. Islāmābād: Islamic Research Institute (1970). Distributed by Oxford University Press.

<sup>66</sup> See Kojiro Nakamura, “Imām Ghazālī’s Cosmology Reconsidered with Special Reference to the Concept of ‘Jabarūt’.” *Studia Islamica*, No. 80 (1994): 29-46 (p. 35).

<sup>67</sup> Morteza Motahharī, *Training & Education in Islam*. Translated by Mansoor Limba. London: ICAS Press, 2011 (p. 198).

consider them as opposites, a kind of *via negativa* for each other.<sup>68</sup>

Western scholars of Islam reflect Muslim erudites in that they too can be divided into the same three branches of opinions when it comes to the difference between *nafs* and *rūḥ*.<sup>69</sup> Some prefer *nafs* and *rūḥ* to be two independent concepts with an interdependent relationship, and –often to the extent of trying to define one by the other– include them in their works one after the other. To this group of scholars, the human being is composed of *jasad*, *nafs* and *rūḥ*. Jane Idleman Smith is among the scholars who follow this understanding, as reflected in her study of *tafâsîr* on the relationship between *nafs* and *rūḥ*. Her article entitled *The Understanding of Nafs and Rūḥ in Contemporary Muslim Considerations of the Nature of Sleep and Death*, published in 1979, was soon followed in 1981 by a book co-authored with Yvonne Haddad, entitled *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*.<sup>70</sup> Although this book’s main focus is on death, it studies, among other things, the diversity of Muslim erudites’ opinions on the question of *nafs* and *rūḥ*. While in her writings, Smith uses *nafs* and *rūḥ* in the multiple ways that Muslim authors have used both, she criticises them for their careless use of these two terms and their constant shifts of meaning between *nafs* and *rūḥ*.<sup>71</sup> Later, in another

<sup>68</sup> In her article entitled *Shâh Walî Allâh’s Theory of the Subtle Spiritual Centers (Laṭâ’if)*, Marcia K. Hermansen tries to explain Shâh Walî Allâh’s theory of human being. To deal with the confusing nature of Shâh Walî’s theory, Hermansen asks her readership not to be confused with Shâh Walî’s different usages of the term *rūḥ* with different significations. See Marcia K. Hermansen, “Shâh Walî Allâh’s Theory of the Subtle Spiritual Centers (*Laṭâ’if*): A Sufî Model of Personhood and Self-Transformation.” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 47, No. 1 (Jan. 1988): 1-25 (p. 7). For an example of this latter works see Saeid Nazari Tavakkoli, “A Comparison between Brain Death and Unstable Life: “Shi’ite” Perspective.” *Journal of Law and Religion*, vol. 23, No. 2 (2007/2008): 605-627.

<sup>69</sup> While working with the concept of the *nafs* in Islam, some Western scholars in ethnographic studies focus on a Muslim tribal pattern according to which the *nafs* (being the dominant aspect of female’s life), is an opposite of the ‘*aql*’ (being the dominant aspect of male’s life). This, of course is not confirmed by the Qur’ân, and is out of context for this thesis. For some examples see Lawrence Rosen, *Bargaining for Reality: The Construction of Social Relations in a Muslim Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. Also see Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society. Updated with a New Preface*. Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999.

<sup>70</sup> Jane Idleman Smith, “The Understanding of *Nafs* and *Rūḥ* in Contemporary Muslim Considerations of the Nature of Sleep and Death.” *Muslim World* vol. 49, No. 3 (July 1979): 151-62. Also Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>71</sup> For some more examples of Western scholars who do the same choice as Smith about the dichotomy of *nafs* and *rūḥ* See Angelika Hartman, “Cosmogonie et doctrine de l’âme dans l’oeuvre tardive de ‘Umar as-Suhrawardî (M. 632/1234).” *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, vol. 11 (1993): 163-178. Also see Amber Haque,

article, she concludes:

The matter of soul (*nafs*) and spirit (*rūḥ*) is somewhat more complex. It is not the task of this essay to analyze the distinction drawn by the commentators between these terms (or the lack thereof). We may simply observe here that sometimes the exegetes use *nafs* exclusively, sometimes translate the Qur'ānic use of soul immediately to spirit, sometimes interchange the terms, and occasionally attempt to define the relationship between them.<sup>72</sup>

A second group of Western scholars accepts *rūḥ* as a subcategory of *nafs*. For example, Sufia Uddin has an article on the story of Joseph in the Qur'ān and the interpretation of the Sufi *mufasssir* al-Qushayrī (986-1072H) on this Qur'ānic narrative. On the one hand, at the beginning of her article, Uddin mentions that: “According to the Sufis, there are three human principles. They are the *nafs* (self), the *qalb* (heart) and the *rūḥ* (soul). The lowest principle is the *nafs*.”<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, throughout her article, Uddin shows how, for Qushayrī, both *qalb* and *rūḥ* are higher stages for *nafs*, and that *nafs* must try to “climb” them one after the other.

A third group of Western scholars follows the floating concept of *nafs*.<sup>74</sup> This confusing classification of *nafs* can be mostly found in the works of those scholars who study Sufi perceptions of *nafs*. For example, on the very first page of his article entitled *The Perfect Man as the Prototype of the Self in the Sufism of Jāmī*, published in 1979, William C. Chittick writes:

In the context of Jāmī's technical terminology it [*nafs*] can probably best

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“Psychology from Islamic Perspective: Contributions of Early Muslim Scholars and Challenges to Contemporary Muslim Psychologists.” *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 43, No. 4 (Winter 2004): 357-377. Also see Soumaya Pernilla Ouis, “Islamic Ecotheology Based on the Qur'ān.” *Islamic Studies*, vol. 37, No. 2 (Summer 1998): 151-181. This list will be incomplete without mentioning the classical yet important book of Father O'shaughnessy on *rūḥ*. See Tomas O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*. Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1953.

<sup>72</sup> Smith, Jane Idleman. “Concourse between the Living and the Dead in Islamic Eschatological Literature.” *History of Religions*, vol. 19, No. 3 (Feb. 1980): 224-236 (p. 225).

<sup>73</sup> Sufia Uddin, “Mystical Journey or Mysogynist Assault? Al-Qushayrī's Interpretation of Sulaikhā's Attempted Seduction of Yusuf,” 9, available online at <http://www.ajol.info/index.php/jis/article/viewFile/39957/54920> (consulted on Aug. 7<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Chad Kia who belongs to this group believes that Muslims inherited this perception of the self from medieval Christianity. See Chad Kia, “Is the Bearded Man Drowning? Picturing the Figurative in a Late-Fifteenth-Century Painting from Herat.” *Muqarnas*, vol. 23 (2006): 85-105 (p. 96).

be rendered as “soul”. It usually refers to the animating principle of the body, the intermediary between the bodily constitution and the spirit, or to the immortal aspect of man’s being which can be perfected through the spiritual life.<sup>75</sup>

Chittick’s explanation of Jāmī’s perception of *nafs* as “soul” shows to what extent the distinction between *nafs* and *rūḥ* in some Sufī works is vague.<sup>76</sup> On the one hand, *nafs* is the intermediary between *jasad* and *rūḥ*; on the other, the immortal *rūḥ* “can be perfected through the spiritual life,” a capacity that the Qur’ān exclusively attributes to the *nafs* and not to the *rūḥ*. Many years later, in his book entitled *Sufism: A Short Introduction*, Chittick unhappily claims:

The only way we can pretend to know our selves in order to help our selves is to bury our selves in false knowledge, pretending to know what we do not and cannot know. People do this by defining the self in limited terms –biological terms, anthropological terms, psychological terms, historical terms, economic terms, social terms, ideological terms, theological terms, Islamist terms. These failed attempts to understand the self go a long way toward explaining the historically unprecedented blood-letting of the twentieth century.<sup>77</sup>

It is not insignificant to mention that a few Western scholars solve the problem of the relationship between *nafs* and *rūḥ* by erasing the question, thereby wiping the problem out. These scholars feel free to shift between *nafs* and *rūḥ* as if they are two terms that equally refer to the exact same meaning.<sup>78</sup>

### 3.2.3 *rūḥ* versus *nafs*

Unlike numerous appearances of *nafs*, the noun *rūḥ* appears only twenty-one times in the

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<sup>75</sup> William C. Chittick, “The Perfect Man as the Prototype of the Self in the Sufism of Jāmī.” *Studia Islamica*, No. 49 (1979): 135-157 (p. 135).

<sup>76</sup> As Chittick explains it, Sufis are not interested in drawing lines between mystical concepts. In fact, this ambiguity is not exclusively between *nafs* and *rūḥ*. *nafs* has also vague and faded borders with other important concepts such as *dil* (heart), *sirr* (secret), and *khafī* (hidden).

<sup>77</sup> William C. Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000 (p. 50).

<sup>78</sup> For an example see Saeid Nazari Tavakkoli, “A Comparison between Brain Death and Unstable Life: “Shi’ite” Perspective.” *Journal of Law and Religion*, vol. 23, No. 2 (2007/2008): 605-627.

Qur'ân: four times in the composition of *rûḥ al-quḍus* (the holy spirit),<sup>79</sup> once in the composition of *al-rûḥ al-amîn* (the truthful spirit or the Archangel Jibrîl),<sup>80</sup> six times with the three possessive pronouns of *nâ* (in *rûḥanâ* meaning Our Spirit),<sup>81</sup> or *î* (in *rûḥî* meaning My Spirit),<sup>82</sup> or *hî* (in *rûḥihî* meaning His Spirit),<sup>83</sup> once with *min amrinâ* (in *rûḥan min amrinâ* (lit. a spirit from our command),<sup>84</sup> and twice with *minh* (in *rûḥin/ rûḥun minh* meaning a spirit from Him).<sup>85</sup> Finally, the definite noun of *al-rûḥ* (The Spirit) appears seven times.<sup>86</sup>

This thesis aims to clarify the definitions of *nafs* and *rûḥ*, and their relationship to one another.<sup>87</sup> The reason this thesis is interested in these two concepts is that these two terms are used in relation to Jesus as a fully human prophet, as well as for the key roles

<sup>79</sup> In 2:87, 253; 5:110; 16:102.

<sup>80</sup> In 26:193.

<sup>81</sup> In 19:17; 21:91; 66:12.

<sup>82</sup> In 15:29; 38:72. Together, 15:29; 32:9 and 38:72 present an anthropogenic image in which God breathes into Adam and/or human of His *rûḥ*. *Mufasssîrûn* are unanimous that this suggests that *rûḥ* is a substantial element of the human's nature.

<sup>83</sup> In 32:9.

<sup>84</sup> In 42:52.

<sup>85</sup> In 4:171; 58:22.

<sup>86</sup> In 16:2; 17:85 (twice); 40:15; 70:4; 78:38; 97:4.

<sup>87</sup> In the footnote 15 of his article entitled *Sound, Spirit, and Gender in Sûrat Al-Qadr*, Michael Sells lists some scholarly works focusing on *rûḥ* in the Qur'ân. His list is up to the date of his publication, but does not include works in languages other than English. He writes:

For a discussion of *rûḥ* in the Qur'ân see Thomas O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*. Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1953. O'Shaughnessy provides a commentary on each Qur'ânic proof text, a commentary concerned primarily with the possible extra-Qur'ânic sources for the differing Qur'ânic treatments of *rûḥ*. Earlier treatments include D. B. MacDonald, "The Development of the Idea of Spirit in Islam." *Acta Orientalia* 9 (1931): 307-51; and E. E. Calverley, "Doctrines of the Soul (*Nafs* and *Rûḥ*) in Islam." *Moslem World* 33 (1943): 254-65; also a revision of Wensinck's article *Nafs* in EII, 3:827-30. For Calverley and Wensinck, *rûḥ* is a "special angel messenger and a special divine gift" (Calverley, 254). MacDonald makes a four-set division: passages in which the *rûḥ* is identified with Jibrîl; with a "personality apart from the angels" (70:4, 78:38, 97:4); with the "Angel of Revelation" (2:87, 253; 5:110; 16:102) -and here he cites various opinions on 2:87 (Jibrîl, the spirit of 'Isâ, the *injîl*, the "Most Great Name of Allâh by which 'Isâ raised the dead," the "*kalâm* by which the *dîn* or the *nafs* are vivified to eternal life and purified from sins"; and four passages (16:2; 17:85; 40:15; 42:52) where *rûḥ* is combined with *amr*, where it can mean *wahî*, the Qur'an, a spiritual influence rather than a person (pp. 308-14, with verse numbers adjusted to the Egyptian standard). For *tafsîr* treatments of the word *rûḥ* in 2:87 see Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, vol. 1. Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1984. (pp. 124-25).

See Michael Sells, "Sound, Spirit, and Gender in Sûrat Al-Qadr." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 111, No. 2 (April-June 1991): 239-259 (p. 244).



they play in the Qur'ānic narrative on Jesus' last day on earth. To define them, I use a contextual lower critical approach to find differences between their characteristics as presented in their various occurrences in the Qur'ān. To do so, I therefore follow Rāzi's model according to which *nafs* and *rūḥ* are two independent substantial elements of human being's composition that function interdependently.

### 3.2.4 *nafs, rūḥ, and the Qur'ānic Theory of nafs*

A quick glance at the various Qur'ānic appearances of *nafs* reveals that this term almost never appears in a verbal form.<sup>88</sup> The only appearance is in 83:25 and, despite this one occurrence in the Qur'ān, this exceptional verbal form is so rare that it is not even mentioned in many Arabic dictionaries.<sup>89</sup>

Despite this nonexistence of *nafs* mirroring a specific human action in the Qur'ān's model for human life, *nafs*, except in its one time verbal form, is dominantly present as a concept behind all human deeds. While the Qur'ān considers *nafs* as an independent powerful entity given to human beings, no Qur'ānic *āyah* leads to believe that humans can use their *rūḥ* to do anything but being physically alive (not to be confused with being conscious).<sup>90</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Although *rūḥ* appears three times as the gerund of its first verbal form (*rawḥ* being the gerund of *rāḥa yarūḥu*) twice in 12:8 and once in 56:89, both *rūḥ* and *nafs* appear only once under a verbal form. The only verbal appearance of *rūḥ* in the Qur'ān can be read in 16:6 (under its fourth verbal form being *turiḥu*), and it reads: "And wherein [in your cattle] is beauty for you, when ye bring them home [in the evening], and when ye take them out to pasture [in the morning]." The only Qur'ānic appearance of a verbal form of *nafs* is in 83:26 where the Qur'ān says: "... and their thirst [The inhabitants of paradise's thirst] will be slaked with Pure Wine sealed: The seal thereof will be musk: and for this let those aspire, who have aspirations." (83:25-6). This is the ending sentence of a Qur'ānic long description of life in paradise, and it suggests that the comparison (positive or negative) comes from and dwells in the *nafs*. I checked several *mufasssīrūn* such as Ṭabarī, Zamakhsharī, Rāzī, and Ṭabāṭabā'ī, and they do not seem to pay attention to this unique usage of *nafs* under a verbal form, so none of them goes further than the literary definition of the verb.

<sup>89</sup> I checked *Lisān al-'Arab*, *Maqāyīs al-Lughā*, *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ fi al-Lughā*, *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, and *Al-'Ibāb al-Zākhir*. Only the two first dictionaries mention *tanafūs* under *nafs*. Instead, all five discuss in detail that the gerund of the first verbal form of trilateral root of *nafasa* (*n, f, s*) is *nafas* (breath) which is different from *nafs*.

<sup>90</sup> This reception of God's *Rūḥ* by Adam is the last stage of his formation mentioned in 15:29 and 38:72. Then in 32:9, the Qur'ān mentions the same procedure for the creation of *al-insān* (the human). *Mufasssīrūn* are unanimous that *insān* in 32:9 refers to the genus of human, so each and every human is born with the same *rūḥ* breathed into Adam. 32:8-11 read:

The Qur'ānic theory of *nafs* pictures human beings as creatures 1) who are exclusively gifted with the “divine quality” of a *nafs*. 2) This *nafs* has a changing quality, either elevating or pulling down the human being. So, 3) a human being remains constantly challenged, pushed, and pulled by it over his or her lifetime. 4) A human being can enter into interaction with his/her soul, taming it first, and then training it to the extent of taking control over it, and 5) using its faculties/capacities so as to be driven in the direction of *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*. Gender is not an issue in that picture, and 6) both men and women are equally challenged, 7) some *nafs* are more powerful than others, and are able to bear more.<sup>91</sup> More importantly 8) everyone's *nafs* has been individually preplanned by God, and all changes in any *nafs* reflects the will of God. Finally, 9) *nafs* is responsible for what human accomplishes or fail to do, and it will be eternally resurrected, judged, punished, forgiven, or rewarded in the afterlife. 10) None of these descriptive statements about *nafs* is true about *rūḥ*.<sup>92</sup>

The following is some examples and explanations for the first nine statements of my theory. Together with the tenth one, they form the Qur'ānic image of human beings *vis-à-vis nafs* and *rūḥ*.

1) *nafs* is an exclusive gift that God shares with humans. Many *āyahs* clarify that God has *nafs*. For example part of 6:12 reads: “Say [O Prophet]: ‘Unto whom belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth? Say: Unto Allah. He hath prescribed for

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...He began the creation of man with (nothing more than) clay; And made his progeny from a quintessence of the nature of a fluid despised[;] But He fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him something of His spirit. And He gave you (the faculties of) hearing and sight and feeling (and understanding): little thanks do ye give!

<sup>91</sup> One might consider 33:50 as an example for a more gender oriented *nafs*. The *āyah* uses the patriarchal expression of “offering herself to the Prophet” to talk about a woman who wills to marry the Prophet. Nothing in the *āyah* prevents its readership from expanding the expression to men and generalising it by saying: “a man offering himself to a woman” meaning “a man wanting to marry a woman.” Of course, the cultural context of the Prophet's era might have not preferred such a usage, but the Qur'ān leaves the door open to cultural changes and evolutions.

<sup>92</sup> It is important to mention that this subdivision of human's nature into three elements of body, soul and spirit is not new at all. For example, the early Christian philosopher Origen Adamantius (185-254 C.E.) is among the first Christian theologians who discussed the human being's trichotomy of body, soul and spirit. In his major work *De Principiis* (book 4, section 11), Origen presents the conviction that a human being is composed of body, soul and spirit. He also believes in three layers of meaning for the Christian Scriptures, those being literal, moral and mystical. He correlates those three layers of meaning to the humans' trichotomy of body, soul and spirit. See Paul Koetschau, trans. *On First Principles*. New York: Harper and Row. 1996. E-published by New Advent website, available online at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04124.htm> (consulted on May 31<sup>st</sup> 2012).

Himself [His *nafs*] mercy, that He may bring you all together to the Day of Resurrection whereof there is no doubt. Those who ruin their souls will not believe.” The Qur’ānic examples of human *nafs* are numerous. One of the best examples can be found in 14:22 where once Adam and Eve have gone astray, Satan blames them and says: “... I had no authority over you except to call you, but ye listened not to me: then reproach not me, but reproach your own souls.” Another good example is in 24:66. Part of it reads: “But when ye enter houses, salute one another [salute each other’s *nafs*] with a greeting from Allah, blessed and sweet.” The Qur’ān talks about the human *nafs* hundreds of times. Yet, one cannot find a single Qur’ānic *āyah* where *nafs* would be used for other creatures such as animals.<sup>93</sup> Unlike *nafs*, however, *rūḥ* seems to be common among all living creatures. 3:49 presents a narrative about one of Jesus’ miracles where he says: “... I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird, by Allah’s leave ...” Knowing that according to the Qur’ān, Jesus himself is created by God’s breath of His *rūḥ* into Mary’s womb,<sup>94</sup> one might conclude that he is passing the same *rūḥ* into the likeness of the bird, giving it “life” by doing so. This might mean that *rūḥ* is the substance that makes and/or keeps animals and human beings alive.<sup>95</sup>

2) *nafs* has a steady changing nature. While dwelling on earth, it elevates or retrogrades on a challenging path. The hierarchy of *nafs* has been discussed by so many

<sup>93</sup> As far as I could search, I did not find any Muslim or Western scholarly work on the question of djinns being included or excluded with the gift of *nafs*. However *āyah* 18:51 might suggest that like humans, djinns are also gifted with *nafs*. This possibility matches the fact that according to the Qur’ān humans and djinns are the only creatures who can disobey God, and *nafs* seems to be the blameworthy source of this power. 18:51 reads: “I made them not to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor their own creation [nor the creation of their *anfus*]; nor choose I misleaders for (My) helpers.” Some *mufasssīrūn* such as Ṭabarī believe that “them” at the beginning of the *āyah* refers to “Iblis who was of the djinns and his seed,” thus “their *anfus*” will mean “the *anfus* of Satan and his helpers.” Some others such as Rāzī refuse this interpretation and believe that here “them” refers to “those *kuffār* [pagans] who told the Prophet: if you do not expulse these poor people from around yourself, we will not believe in you,” thus “their *anfus*” means “the *anfus* of those pagans.” From a literalist viewpoint, the first interpretation confirms that the quality of *nafs* is shared with djinns, but the second one does not suggest it. See Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān fi Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān*, under 18:51, available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net); also see Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, under 18:51, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=1372> (both sources consulted on Aug. 1<sup>st</sup> 2012).

<sup>94</sup> In 21:91 and 66:12.

<sup>95</sup> *Sūrah* 81 of the Qur’ān gives images of the resurrection. While in *āyahs* 7 and 14 *nafs* is the key term for the humans’ resurrection, it is absent and replaced by *wuhūsh* (beasts) in *āyah* 5 talking about the animals’ resurrection. 81:5-14 read: “And when the wild beasts are herded together, ... And when souls are reunited, ... (Then) every soul will know what it hath made ready.”

Muslim erudites in different fields of Islamic Sciences. The Qur’ân presents a five stages hierarchy according to which human *nafs* can climb up or fall back between the following five stages, presented here from the lowest to the highest stage: *nafs al-‘ammârah* (the *nafs* inclined to Evil),<sup>96</sup> *nafs al-lawwâmah* (the self-reproaching *nafs*),<sup>97</sup> *nafs al-muṭma’innah* (the tranquil *nafs*),<sup>98</sup> *nafs al-râḍiyah* (the well pleased *nafs*),<sup>99</sup> *nafs al-marḍiyyah* (the *nafs* well pleasing unto God).<sup>100</sup> One cannot find such a Qur’ânic categorization for *rûḥ*. This suggests that unlike *nafs*, *rûḥ* has one nature, the unchangeable divine nature that can not be elevated or fallen from.

3) According to the Qur’ân, human’s perceptive faculties such as need, desire, emotion, and appetite dwell in *nafs*.<sup>101</sup> This capacity enables *nafs* to embrace good through the experience of positive states such as hope, love, patience, or to adopt evil through the experience of negative attitudes such as jealousy, miserliness, pride, and fear.<sup>102</sup> Also reflection happens in *nafs*.<sup>103</sup> The best example for this *nafs*’ dual power is the human power of speech.<sup>104</sup> The Qur’ân mentions that *nafs* is where the knowledge and the memory dwell.<sup>105</sup> Also it is in *nafs* that the rational usage of words takes shape and speech is born. So *nafs* is the source of both right and wrong speech. Part of 11:105 reads: “On the day when it cometh no soul will speak except by His permission ...” Also *nafs* pushes and pulls, tempts and blames, and human must strengthen and stabilize it in the highest possible stage. 2:265 reads: “And the likeness of those who spend their wealth in search of Allah’s pleasure, and for the strengthening of their souls, is as the likeness of

<sup>96</sup> In 12:53.

<sup>97</sup> In 75:2.

<sup>98</sup> In 89:27.

<sup>99</sup> In 89:28.

<sup>100</sup> Some Sufi streams believe in a seven stages scale for *nafs* putting *nafs al-mulhama* (the inspiring *nafs*) after the self-reproaching *nafs*, and adding a seventh final stage called *nafs al-kâmila* (the perfect or perfected *nafs*). See Bernd Radtke, “Sufism in the 18th Century: An Attempt at a Provisional Appraisal.” *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, vol. 36, Issue 3, Islamic Enlightenment in the 18th Century? (Nov. 1996): 326-364 (pp. 330-1, 348).

<sup>101</sup> For need see 4:65. For desire see 79:41. For emotion see 35:8. For appetite see 43:71.

<sup>102</sup> For hope see 2:87. For love see 33:37. For patience see 18:28. For jealousy see 2:109. For miserliness see 4:128. For pride see 25:21. For fear see 20:67.

<sup>103</sup> See 59:18. Although the verb in this *âyah* is “to look to,” it is an allegory to say: “to think about.”

<sup>104</sup> The Qur’ânic image of the day of judgment includes *nafs*’ talking to itself (39:56), and struggling and discussing for its salvation. 16:111 reads: “On the Day when every soul will come pleading for itself, ...”

<sup>105</sup> For the knowledge see 3:30; 13:42; 31:34; 81:14 or 82:5. For the memory see 7:205.

a garden on a height. The rainstorm smiteth it and it bringeth forth its fruit twofold. And if the rainstorm smite it not, then the shower. Allah is Seer of what ye do.”

4) Although as a substantial element of human’s existence, *nafs* contributes to the “being” of the human, the Qur’ân suggests a strong interaction between human and this part of his or her own “being.” On the one hand, *nafs* tempts, orders, or even judges its owner.<sup>106</sup> On the other, humans must initiate interactions with his or her *nafs* until it is under control. 79:40-1 reads: “But as for him who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his soul from lust, Lo! the Garden will be his home.”<sup>107</sup> In fact, the Qur’ân introduces *nafs* as one of God’s *âyahs*, and invites its audience to interact with it also collectively by pondering upon their own *anfus*, knowing them and finally taking control over them.<sup>108</sup> 30:8 reads: “Have they not pondered upon themselves? Allah created not the heavens and the earth, and that which is between them, save with truth and for a destined end. But truly many of mankind are disbelievers in the meeting with their Lord.”<sup>109</sup> The Qur’ân is clear that whatever humans do, they do it for or against their own *nafs*. With an indifferent tone, 17:7 announces: “... If ye do good, ye do good for your own souls, and if ye do evil, it is for them (in like manner).” The Qur’ân repeatedly suggests to believers to take control of their *nafs* to the extent of “selling it to God.” In fact, this allegorical commerce of the *nafs* (selling one’s *nafs* to God or selling it to Evil) stands at the two ultimate ends of the Qur’ânic spectrum of what one can do with his/her

<sup>106</sup> For an example of *nafs* tempting its owner see 50:16. For an example of *nafs* ordering its owner see 12:53. For an example of *nafs* judging its owner see 17:14.

<sup>107</sup> Nothing in the *ayah* is gender biased or oriented, but Pickthall translates it as “As for him who ...,” and Ahmed Ali follows him. To avoid this problem, Yusuf Ali translates it in plural form and writes: “As for those who ...”

<sup>108</sup> In an individual level, there are numerous *ahâdîth* encouraging a Muslim to aim to know his or her own *nafs*. Many *muḥâdithûn* have narrated and discussed those *ahâdîth* in detail. For example Ibn abi al-Ḥadîd (586-656H) narrates a long *ḥadîth* from ‘Ali ibn abi Ṭâlib in which, among others he says: “... whoever does not have a preacher in his/her *nafs*, does not have a refuge/protect in God, indeed whoever renders justice to his/her *nafs*, Allâh adds to his/her glory and honor...” See Abu Bakr ‘Abdullâh b. Muḥammad ibn abi al-Ḥadîd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balâgha*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 20 vols. Edited by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Karîm al-Namrî. Beirut: Dâr Iḥyâ’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyyah, 1418H (vol 4, *ḥadîth* 109 and 110). E-published by al-Maktaba al-Shâmila, available online at <http://shamela.ws/rep.php/book/4355> (consulted on July 4<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>109</sup> See also 41:53 or 51:21.

life.<sup>110</sup> The best examples for the two extremes of this spectrum can be read in 9:111 and 2:89-90. 9:111 reads: “Lo! Allah hath bought from the believers their lives and their wealth because the Garden will be theirs ...”<sup>111</sup> and 2:89-90 reads:

...The curse of Allah is on disbelievers. Evil is that for which they sell their souls: that they should disbelieve in that which Allah hath revealed, grudging that Allah should reveal of His bounty unto whom He will of His bondmen. They have incurred anger upon anger. For disbelievers is a shameful doom.

5) From the very beginning of its opening by *Sūrah Al-Fātiḥa* (1:6), the Qur’ān is crystal clear that the ultimate goal of the revelation is to guide humanity towards *al-ṣīrāt al-mustaqīm*. Practicing Muslims recite this *sūrah* at least five times in their daily prayers, asking Allāh to guide them to (or show them) the straight path. Any Muslim would agree with Mawdūdī who believes that “this is the straight path, *al-ṣīrāt al-mustaqīm* of the daily prayers, which human history would have taken had the guidance of Muḥammad

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<sup>110</sup> To Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī (748-857), the founder of Muḥāsaba school of Sufism, *nafs* must be defined by and understood through its double dichotomous nature. S. Filiz studies Muḥāsibī’s definition of the *nafs* and writes:

... al-Muḥāsibī defines the soul as “an agent which leads one to sin and evil.” The soul, he goes on to say, is stained by such diseases as arrogance, hypocrisy, excessive pride and egotism, self-admiration, malice, greed, the desire to lead an immortal life in the world, and extravagance. However, the human soul is quite different from a “submissive slave.” The former is aware of all these diseases but cannot discern the good in what he or she is ordered. In contrast to the slave, the soul cannot perceive the present or long-term good in what he or she is ordered. One can infer from al-Muḥāsibī’s exposition that (1) the soul has a double nature and leans both to good and evil; (2) the soul is neither matter nor part of matter nor accident; rather, it is substance.

See Sahin Filiz, “The Founder of the Muḥāsibī School of Sufism: Al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī.” *Islamic Studies*, vol. 45, No. 1 (Spring 2006): 59-81 (pp. 70-1).

<sup>111</sup> While writing this page, it dawned on me that the organizers of the tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 in New York City (popularly known as 9/11) might have used this *āyah* as a clue for making a decision about the date of their mission. Not only a literalist interpretation of its content can perfectly legitimize their *jihadi* attack, but also the number of the *āyah* can represent the date on which the attack took place (9:111 or the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of the year 01). Of course, this is a raw hypothesis, and it requires careful studies by experts of the field. But if proven, it will be another example of to what extent different interpretations of the Qur’ān can have different impacts on the peace on earth. The *āyah* in full reads:

Lo! Allah hath bought from the believers their lives and their wealth because the Garden will be theirs: they shall fight in the way of Allah and shall slay and be slain. It is a promise which is binding on Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur’ān. Who fulfillleth His covenant better than Allah? Rejoice then in your bargain that ye have made, for that is the supreme triumph.

been truly followed.”<sup>112</sup> This *hidāyah* (divine guidance), as well as *ḍilālah* (going astray) has been repeatedly attributed to the *nafs*. 39:41 reads: “Then whosoever goeth right it is for his soul, and whosoever strayeth, strayeth only to its hurt. And thou [O Prophet] art not a warder over them.”<sup>113</sup>

6) In all of the 398 Qur’ānic appearances of the term *nafs*, one cannot find a single instance where the Qur’ān makes a distinction between men’s *nafs* and women’s *nafs*.<sup>114</sup> Besides the countless times that the masculine possessive pronoun includes both men and women in Qur’ānic Arabic, the few instances in which there are references to humans as the owner of the *nafs*, the choice of masculine is a matter of grammatical perfection. For example, Pickthall respects the gender of the masculine possessive pronoun of *nafs* in 75:14, and translates it as “Oh, but man is a telling witness against himself,” but gender wise, a better translation would be: “Oh, but human is a telling witness against his *nafs*.” In this latter translation “his” reflects the gender of the term *insān* (human) and nothing more.<sup>115</sup> It is disturbing to know that in other instances where the same grammatical reason favors a translation of *nafs*’ feminine possessive pronoun, Pickthall chooses a neutral position and ignores the genders of the concerned terms. For example, he translates 16:111 as: “On the Day when every soul will come pleading for itself, and every soul will be repaid what it did, and they will not be wronged.” If one follows Pickthall’s own approach in 75:14, the result would be: “On the Day when every soul will come pleading for herself, and every soul will be repaid what she did, and they [masculine plural pronoun] will not be wronged.”<sup>116</sup>

7) The Qur’ān makes it clear that different *nafs* have different “capacities,” a limited “scope” that God has given to every *nafs* at different levels. This difference is

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<sup>112</sup> Eran Lerman, “Mawduḍi’s Concept of Islam.” *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 17, No. 4 (Oct. 1981): 492-509 (p. 505).

<sup>113</sup> Also see 10:108; 17:15; and 27:92.

<sup>114</sup> The only exceptions of course, are when *nafs* in a Qur’ānic narrative refers to a specific person’s *nafs*. An example for a woman’s *nafs* (the *nafs* of a woman interested in marrying the Prophet) can be read in 33:50, and an example for a man’s *nafs* (the Caen’s *nafs*) can be read in 5:30.

<sup>115</sup> Although in his translation of 75:14, Ahmed Ali does not use his gender neutral approach of 79:40-1, such an attempt would result a better free translation of the *āyah*. The *āyah* would then mean: “Oh, but [on the day of judgment] humans are telling witnesses against themselves.”

<sup>116</sup> The fact that the *āyah* finishes with a masculine plural third person subjective pronoun is the best proof for the fact that all female genders of terms must be ignored in the comprehension of the *āyah*. Same reality must be applied to *āyahs* where masculine terms are dominant.

reflected in all aspects of human life from bodily competences to intellectual capabilities or even spiritual capacities.<sup>117</sup> The ending *āyah* of the longest Qur’ānic *sūrah* (*Sūrah Al-Baqara*) clarifies that: “Allah tasketh not a soul beyond its scope. For it (is only) that which it hath earned, and against it (only) that which it hath deserved ... Our Lord! Impose not on us that which we have not the strength to bear! Pardon us, absolve us and have mercy on us, Thou, our Protector, and give us victory over the disbelieving folk.” (2:286).<sup>118</sup> In 65:7, the Qur’ān reformulates this statement in passive tense and proclaims Allāh as the donator of *nafs*’ capacities. It reads: “... Allah asketh naught of any soul save that which He hath given it. Allah will vouchsafe, after hardship, ease.”<sup>119</sup>

8) As mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, the Qur’ān puts an emphasis on the fact that God is the one who guides towards himself (or towards the Truth and/or the straight path) if He wills, and he is the one who leads astray if human’s own deeds command and compel it.<sup>120</sup> All this happens in the *nafs*. The two following *āyahs* give a picture of how *nafs* is God’s tool to propel humans to His throne or to expel them from His Mercy. This Qur’ānic picture, abandoning the human guidance or misguidance in the hands of God, gives the impression of a preplanned destiny for each human mapped by God in the *nafs*.<sup>121</sup> The first *āyah* is 32:13. It reads: “And if We had so willed, We could have given every soul its guidance ...” The second *āyah* is 10:100. It reads: “It is not for any soul to believe save by the permission of Allah. He hath set uncleanness upon those

<sup>117</sup> For both bodily power and intellectual capability see 2:247. For spiritual capacities see 8:2 and compare it to 7:188.

<sup>118</sup> Many *mufasssirūn* including Ṭabarī, Rāzi, and Ṭabātabā’ī mention the possibility of this *āyah* being abrogated by 2:286. They narrate various *aḥādīth* according to which once the Prophet recites this *āyah* for Muslims, some companions of the Prophet (their names are different in different *tafāsīr*) go to him and complain about this imposition being beyond their tolerance. They argue that they (read humans) have no control over their sinful thoughts. The Prophet blames them and says: “Say: ‘we heard and we obeyed!’” They do so, and soon after 2:286 is revealed abrogating it and bringing the good tiding that “Allah tasketh not a soul beyond its scope ...”

<sup>119</sup> Also see 6:152 and 23:62.

<sup>120</sup> See 33:37 and 35:8.

<sup>121</sup> This concept of a predestined *nafs* is more clearly explained in 57:22. It reads: “Naught of disaster befalleth in the earth or in yourselves but it is in a Book before we bring it into being - Lo! that is easy for Allah.” Ṭabātabā’ī believes that here “book” is an allegory referring to “the knowledge of God,” and not to a physical book somewhere in the skies. But even accepting it as God’s knowledge does not change a lot the concept of a predestined *nafs*.



who have no sense.”<sup>122</sup>

9) Finally, the *nafs* is responsible for human’s both thoughts and deeds, and will be judged, punished, forgiven or rewarded eternally.<sup>123</sup> This means that according to the Qur’ân, *nafs* is an eternal being and lives for an eternity. In other words, the Qur’ânic concept of salvation is exclusively the salvation of the *nafs*. Here, *rûḥ* is totally out of the picture, and body is not emphasized on.<sup>124</sup> 14:48-51 are among numerous *âyahs* that mention the judgment of the *nafs*. They read:

On the day when the earth will be changed to other than the earth, and the heavens (also will be changed) and they will come forth unto Allah, the One, the Almighty, ... That Allah may repay each soul what it hath earned. Lo! Allah is swift at reckoning.<sup>125</sup>

10:54 completes this picture and announces:

And if each soul that doeth wrong had all that is in the earth it would seek to ransom itself therewith; and they will feel remorse within them, when they see the doom. But it hath been judged between them fairly and they are not wronged.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Even the most powerful *nafs* which is the *nafs* of the Prophet is not an exception. 7:188 reads: “Say: For myself I have no power to benefit, nor power to hurt, save that which Allah willeth. Had I knowledge of the Unseen, I should have abundance of wealth, and adversity would not touch me. I am but a warner, and a bearer of good tidings unto folk who believe.”

<sup>123</sup> Most *mutikallimûn* and *falâsifa* agree on the fact that the *nafs* is what will receive the reward or the punishment in the afterlife. As Mehdi Mohaghegh explains it, last chapter of Râzî’s book entitled *Al-Tibb al-Rûḥânî*, focuses on the fear of death. According to Mohaghegh, in order to explain this fear, Râzî makes a distinction between the religions believing that at death the *nafs* perishes with the body and nothing remains to be harmed afterward (Eastern Religions), and those believing that the *nafs* does not perish at death, and there will be a life after death (Western Religions). To Mohaghegh, this centrality of *nafs* in Râzî’s thoughts about the afterlife has been accepted and copied by many Muslim thinkers such as Ibn Sînâ and Ibn Ḥazm. See Mohaghegh, “Notes on the ‘Spiritual Physic’ of Al-Râzî,” 20-1.

<sup>124</sup> In fact, despite the Qur’ân’s emphasis on the bodily resurrection of humans on the day of judgment, the presence of human body (its members) in the Qur’ânic image of the heavens is much lower than its presence in the image of the hell. While just in one occasion eyes are mentioned in the context of the heavenly rewarded life (43:71), many human organs are mentioned in the context of the punishment and life in the hell (i.e. hand in 24:40, skin in 4:56, stomach in 22:20; face in 25:34; leg in 6:65; tongue in 24:24; mouth in 36:65; etc.).

<sup>125</sup> Also see 10:30; 20:15; 21:47; 36:54; 40:17; 50:21; 82:5.

<sup>126</sup> Also see 2:48 and 3:30, 161. Some other *âyahs* talk about the possibility of an intercession by God’s permission (i.e. 19:87; 34:23; 43:86; 53:26). For example 20:109 says: “On that Day shall no intercession avail except for those for whom permission has been granted by (Allah) Most Gracious and whose word is acceptable to Him.” The combination of these two images (*nafs* being anxious to ransom itself, and the

The punishment of the *nafs* appears in few *āyahs*. For example 6:93 reads:

... If thou couldst but see how the wicked (do fare) in the flood of confusion at death!— the angels stretch forth their hands, (saying) ‘Yield up your souls. This day shall ye receive your reward a penalty of shame, for that ye used to tell lies against Allah, and scornfully to reject of His Signs!’

Also, the *nafs* enjoys the eternal rewards in the heavens. 43:71 reads: “Therein are brought round for them [inhabitants of the heavens] trays of gold and goblets, and therein is all that souls desire and eyes find sweet. And ye are immortal therein.” The last sentence of the *āyah* is enough to believe in an eternal life of *nafs* in the Qur’ānic presentation of the afterlife.

The eternal punishment and/or reward of *nafs* explained in this last point raises a simple yet important question: what happens to the *nafs* of deceased people? In other words, does *nafs* die? What about *rūḥ*? Does *rūḥ* die or its nature is beyond life and death?<sup>127</sup> While these questions have been discussed by many Muslim erudites, one cannot find a definitive consensus among them in trying to answer these questions. However, the main common point among different opinions elaborated within different schools of Islamic thought is that despite some differences in *aḥādīth* used as references, in order to find answers to these questions, they all refer to the same final source, the Qur’ān. So any rethinking or reconsideration about death and resurrection in Islam, at

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acceptance of some intercessions on the day of judgment) opens the door to the forgiveness as a third possible end (besides punishment and reward) for the *nafs*.

<sup>127</sup> A major problem that occurs from the very beginning of any effort to find an answer to these questions is the “non-standardized” and confusing use of *nafs* and *rūḥ* as technical terms in Muslim scriptures. A recent example is an official statement of al-Makhlûf, the Mufti of Egypt issued in 1947. As explained by Jane I. Smith:

Among the points Makhlûf articulated in that statement was the affirmation that the spirit is alive, comprehending, hearing, and seeing during its life in the *barzakh*, and that in such state it communicates with other spirits of the dead and of the living.

The Arabic term used by Makhlûf is *rūḥ* and not *nafs*. Considering that Makhlûf is very familiar with technical terms, and knows that in Islamic spiritualist manuals these capacities have been often mentioned for *nafs*, it is not clear if since he is speaking to a general public, he is purposely using the “popular” term of *rūḥ* instead of the “technical” term of *nafs*, or he makes this choice because although being rare, in a few scholarly Muslim texts, these capacities have been referred to *rūḥ*. To avoid this confusion, in many occasions Smith wisely uses the combination of “soul/spirit” as a translation for any of the terms *rūḥ* and *nafs*. See Smith, “Concourse between the Living and the Dead in Islamic Eschatological Literature,” 226, 235.

some point, will have to argue its credibility based on the Qur'ân.

### 3.3 Death in the Qur'ân and the Question of *mawt* and *tawaffâ*

Death is an important Qur'ânic concept and, as mentioned before, it has been carefully discussed by both Muslim and Western scholars of the Qur'ân.<sup>128</sup> Many Muslim scholars have written a whole chapter and/or book on this subject.<sup>129</sup> While *mufasssîrûn* have discussed its linguistic and exegetical aspects, *mutakallimûn* have shown interest in its theological applications and, last but not least, *fuqahâ* have tried to define death, so they can decide about its undeniable implications in Muslims' everyday life.<sup>130</sup> Based on their

<sup>128</sup> In her article entitled *Interaction between This World and the Afterworld in Early Islamic Tradition*, Lea Kinberg lists some major classical Muslim works on death. She writes:

From among these books [books on death] we should mention *at-Tadhkirah fî ahwâl al-mawtâ wa-umûr al-âkhirah*, by al-Qurtûbî (d. 671/1273); *K. ar-Rûḥ*, by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350); *Sharḥ as-ṣudûr fî Sharḥ ḥâl al-mawtâ wa-l-qubûr*, and its abridged version, *Bushrâ l-kâ'b bi-liqâ' al-ḥabîb*, both by Jalâl ad-Dîn as-Suyûtî (d. 911/1505), *ad-Durar al-ḥisân fî l-ba'th wa-na'im al-jinân*, attributed to as-Suyûtî, and a similar version by the name *Daqâ'iq al-akḥbâr fî dhikr al-jannah wa-n-nâr*, attributed to 'Abd ar-Raḥîm b. Aḥmad al-Qâḍî. (For a similar version of the text, see John Macdonald, *Islamic Studies* 3 [1964], pp. 285-308, 485-519; 4[1965], pp. 53-102, 137-179; 5[1966], pp. 129-197, 331-383). *ad-Durrah al-fâkhirah fî kashf 'ulûm al-âkhirah*, and the relevant chapters in *Ihyâ' 'ulûm ad-dîn*, both by Abû Hâmid al-Ghazzâlî (d. 505/1111) and the equivalent chapters to *Ihyâ'* in *Ithâf as-sâddah al-muttaqîn bi-Sharḥ asrâr ihyâ' 'ulûm ad-dîn*, by Murtaḍâ az-Zabîdî (d. 1205/1791)...

See Lea Kinberg, "Interaction between This World and the Afterworld in Early Islamic Tradition." *Oriens*, vol. 29/30 (1986): 285-308 (p. 286, n5).

<sup>129</sup> For example al-Ghazâlî ends his major work *Ihyâ' 'Ulûm al-Dîn* with a chapter entitled *Kitâb Dhikr al-Mawt wa mâ Ba'duhû* (the book on remembrance of death and what comes after it) or Ibn abi al-Dunyâ (823-894H) has a whole book on death entitled *Kitâb al-Mawt wa-Kitâb al-Qubûr* (the book of death and the book of graves." See Abu Hâmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazâlî, *Ihyâ' 'Ulûm al-Dîn*. Cairo: al-Maktabat al-Tijâriyyah al-Kubrâ. No date, available online at <http://www.ghazali.org/site/ihya.htm> (consulted on Aug. 6<sup>th</sup> 2012). Also see Ibn abi al-Dunyâ, *Kitâb al-Mawt wa-Kitâb al-Qubûr*. Edited by Leah Kinberg. Haifa: University of Haifa, 1983. Kinberg believes:

[Ibn abi al-Dunyâ's] works actually paved the road in the development of eschatological literature in Islam ... To the best of our knowledge knowledge, Ibn Abi ad-Dunya is one of the earliest authors in Islamic literature, if not the first one, to dedicate entire treatises to different subjects of death, life after death and the Resurrection Day... Ibn Abi ad-Dunya was one of those who preserved the early material about the Afterworld, material which was used later on as a basis for further development of the subject.

See Lea Kinberg, "Interaction between This World and the Afterworld in Early Islamic Tradition." *Oriens*, vol. 29/30 (1986): 285-308 (pp. 288-9).

<sup>130</sup> It is not insignificant to mention that among *mufasssîrûn*, Qurtûbî shows a particular interest in the question of death. His book entitled *Tadhkira fî Ahwâl al-Mawt wa Umûr al-Âkhira* (a reminder of the circumstances of death and the affairs of the afterlife) is an important reference for many classical Sunnî scholars. See Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Anṣârî al-Qurtûbî, *Tadhkira fî Ahwâl al-Mawt wa Umûr al-Âkhira*. Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Halabî, 1400H.

interest in one or some of the above-mentioned areas, Western scholars have carefully followed and studied these discussions.<sup>131</sup> Although Jane Idleman Smith has done, by far, the most meticulous study on death in Islam, the first Western scholar who worked on this subject is Thomas O’Shaughnessy in a book first published in 1969 entitled *Muhammad’s Thoughts on Death: A Thematic Study of the Qur’anic Data*. O’Shaughnessy divides the Qur’anic perception/image of death into four main categories: 1) death as a state of being for the land; 2) death as a mortal aspect of disbelief; 3) death as an end for human’s life in this world; and 4) death as an evildoers’ punishment in the afterlife.<sup>132</sup> In all four categories, he exclusively studies the Qur’anic term *mawt*. Considering that the Qur’ân refers to death with two different terms, *mawt* and *tawaffâ*, O’Shaughnessy’s categorization of death remains incomplete and requires further exploration.<sup>133</sup> Unlike O’Shaughnessy, Smith makes a clear distinction between *mawt* and *tawaffâ*. She goes even further and suggests something that has not been discussed by *mufasssirûn*. She argues that *mawt* and *tawaffâ* reveal two different stages of death, the first being experienced by *rûḥ*, and the second being experienced by *nafs*. She writes:

According to this verse [39:42] God takes the souls at death, and those that do not die he takes during their sleep. The Arabic here says *yatawaffa al-anfus*, literally, “He takes to Himself the souls,” which suggests specifically (1) that the Arabic *tuwaffiya*, which is normally understood as synonymous with *mâta*, to die, in this case refers to the act by which God takes unto himself both the living and the dead for a period of time; and

<sup>131</sup> For an example of a Western scholar who has been interested in the question of death in *tafâsîr* see the book of Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad mentioned in footnote number 71 of this chapter. For an example of a Western scholar who has been interested in theological aspects of death in the Qur’ân see Jose Carlos Castaneda Reyes, “De la Muerte y las Muertes en el Mundo Islamico: Algunas Reflexiones Sobre la Muerte de Muḥammad, el Profeta.” *Estudios de Asia y Africa*, vol. 44, No. 3 (140) (Sep.-Dec. 2009): 491-525. For an example of a Western scholar who has studied the legal aspects of death in the Qur’ân see Ebrahim Moosa, “Languages of Change in Islamic Law: Redefining Death in Modernity.” *Islamic Studies*, vol. 38, No. 3 (Autumn 1999): 305-342.

<sup>132</sup> See Thomas O’Shaughnessy, *Muhammad’s Thoughts on Death: A Thematic Study of the Qur’anic Data*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1969.

<sup>133</sup> A popular Arabic term to refer to death is *wafât*. Although derived from the same roots as *tawaffâ*, the term *wafât* cannot be found either in the Qur’ân, or in the *ḥadîth*. But the popularity of the term is so much that sometime even both Muslim and Western scholars use it in their articles as a reference to death. For example, in his article on *muwâfât*, Etan Kohlberg ignores *tawaffâ* and instead uses *wafât* as the technical term referring to “death.” Later, Kohlberg shifts between his earlier choice and *al-mawt* as the technical reference to death. See Etan Kohlberg, “Muwâfât Doctrines in Muslim Theology.” *Studia Islamica*, No. 57 (1983): 47-66 (pp. 48 and 63).

(2) that it is the souls (*anfus*) and not the spirits (*arwāḥ*) that are taken. The first point needs only to be noted here; seldom in the commentaries on this verse does one find a specific discussion of the distinction between the two terms generally used to refer to the death process.<sup>134</sup>

Through a content analysis approach, another objective of this thesis is to explore Smith's argument further through more analysis of the links between these two Qur'ānic references to death and the two concepts of *rūḥ* and *nafs*.<sup>135</sup>

### 3.3.1 *mawt* and Its Definitions

*mawt* is the gerund of the first verbal form derived from *m, w, t*.<sup>136</sup> It appears 165 times in the Qur'ān under its different verbal and non-verbal forms.<sup>137</sup> Jawharī (the author of *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ fī al-Lughā*) defines *al-mawt* as *ḍid al-ḥayāt* (the opposite of life).<sup>138</sup> Ibn Fāris (the author of *Maqāyīs al-Lughā*) follows Jawharī, and does not add any more explanations.<sup>139</sup> Before defining the term *mawt*, Ibn Manẓūr cites al-Azhari (the author of *al-Taḥdhīb*) who cites Layth b. Sa'd al-Fahmī (d. 94H) who says: “*al-mawt* [the death] is a creature among God's creatures.”<sup>140</sup> Ibn Manẓūr does not add any explanation to this statement. He then follows Jawharī and defines *mawt* as the opposite of life. His short definition is interspersed with many *jāhili* and Qur'ānic examples of other forms of the term. Later, he

<sup>134</sup> Jane I. Smith, “Concourse between the Living and the Dead in Islamic Eschatological Literature,” 225.

<sup>135</sup> Muslim thinkers' attitude of considering the two terms of *tawaffā* and *mawt* as references to the same phenomenon of death is so strong that right after suggesting her interpretation of 39:42, Smith immediately mentions in the footnote:

This is not to suggest that *māta* and *tuwuffīya* are never equated in the exegesis of this verse. Al-Zamakhshari, for example, parallels *tawfīyah* with *imāta* as meaning deprivation of the perceptive, sensory life ... This underlines the commonality of the situation of the soul during sleep and death, the distinction apparently lying in the question of duration.

See *ibid*.

<sup>136</sup> *Māta* is a “weak verb” (*fi'l al-mu'tal*) having the vowel of *w* (*wāw*) as the middle letter of its three lettered root radical. So it is a “hallow verb” (*fi'l al-mujawwaf*).

<sup>137</sup> It appears 39 times under its first form (verb *māta*); 21 times under its fourth form (verb *amāta*); three times as the noun *mamāt*; 50 times as the noun *mawt*; three times as the noun *mawtat*; five times as the nominal *mayt*; 38 times as the nominal *mayyit*; and six times as the nominal *maytat*.

<sup>138</sup> See Al-Jawharī, *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ fī al-Lughā*, under *māta*, available online at <http://www.almeshkat.net/books/open.php?book=1140&cat=16> (consulted on June 20<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>139</sup> See Abu al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad ibn Fāris, *Mu'jam Maqāyīs al-Lughā*, under *māta*, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=3144> (consulted on June 20<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>140</sup> See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, under *māta*, available online at <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp> (consulted on June 20<sup>th</sup> 2012).

comes back to the term *mawt* and defines it as “quiescence” (*al-sukûn*). This time, he gives plenty of examples for how *mawt* presents a sense of calm and quiescence for whatever moves. To Ibn Manẓûr, *al-mawât* (deads) refers to “whatever does not have *rûḥ*,”<sup>141</sup> and *al-mawtân* (with no *rûḥ*) is the opposite of *al-ḥaywân* (lit. animal) that he defines as *dhî rûḥ* (possessing *rûḥ*).<sup>142</sup> Ibn Manẓûr considers that there are two conditions for the happening of *mawt*: first, the decline of movement (*zawâl al-harakat*), and second, “the decadence of the faculty of intellect” (*zawâl al-quwwa al-‘aqîla*).<sup>143</sup> He states that it has been said that “*nawm* [sleep] is the light *mawt*, and *mawt* is the heavy *nawm*,”<sup>144</sup> but he does not agree with it and clarifies that because human temporarily experiences the two above-mentioned conditions of *mawt*, the term can be allegorically used to refer to sleep.<sup>145</sup> This suggests that for Ibn Manẓûr, the separation between the body and the *rûḥ* is the main distinctive element in the definition of *mawt*.<sup>146</sup> Within his short definitions of *mawt*, Fayrûzâbâdî presents a confusing combination of Ibn Manẓûr’s detailed definitions. Fayrûzâbâdî writes: “dead is the opposite of alive, and to die means to calm (*sakana*), to sleep (*nâma*), or to be tested by a misfortune (*baliya*).”<sup>147</sup> While not giving any explanation about his choice of this strange latter meaning, he subdivides “dead” into three categories and writes: “dead is what [is not alive] such as a [dead] crow,

<sup>141</sup> He mentions that *al-mawât* can also be allegorically used to refer to “an [abandoned] peace of earth [or land].” See *ibid*.

<sup>142</sup> He supports this latter choice of definition by giving five allegorical examples of fire, temperature, wind, water, and wine. To him, this sense of quiescence is so dominant that the term *mawt* can be allegorically used for whatever moves, alive or non-alive (fire’s flames move, temperature changes, wind blows, water flows, and wine boils). See *ibid*.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>145</sup> Unlike Ibn Manẓûr some erudites put an emphasis on this categorization of death into light and heavy, and use it to build an argument on the trueness of the day of judgment. For example Ibn Qayyim considers *nawm* as the best proof for the existence of the hereafter where souls will meet their creator. To read a brief analysis of Ibn Qayyim’s argument see Jane I. Smith, “Concourse between the Living and the Dead in Islamic Eschatological Literature,” 224-236.

<sup>146</sup> See Ibn Manẓûr, *Lisân al-‘Arab*, under *mâta*, available online at <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp> (consulted on June 20<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>147</sup> Muḥammad b. Ya‘qûb al-Fayrûzâbâdî, *Al-Qâmûs al-Muḥîṭ*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Cairo: al-Hiy’at al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Âmmah li al-Kitâb, 1979, under *mâta*, available online at <http://archive.org/details/211208> (consulted on June 20<sup>th</sup> 2012).

or what does not have *rūḥ* [in its nature] such as a cloud or what does not have a proprietor such as [an abandoned piece of] earth [or land].”<sup>148</sup>

### 3.3.2 *tawaffā* and Its Definitions

*Tawaffā* is the gerund of the fifth verbal form derived from *w, f, y* (*wifā*’ is the gerund of its first verbal form).<sup>149</sup> Unlike *mawt*, it appears only 25 times in the Qur’ān.<sup>150</sup> Other verbal and non-verbal forms of *wafaya* are found 41 times in the Qur’ān. Arab linguists and *mufassirūn* unanimously define them as “to render” or “to pay in full.”<sup>151</sup> But this fifth verbal form of *wafaya* has a meaning different from all other forms of the verb. Jawharī defines *al-wafāt* as *al-mawt*, and briefly mentions: “*tawaffāhu Allāh* [means God] captured his *rūḥ*.”<sup>152</sup> Ibn Fāris defines *tawaffā* as “to capture something in full, in a way that nothing remains.”<sup>153</sup> Then he writes: “That is why it has been said for the dead, *tawaffāhu Allāh*.”<sup>154</sup> Fayrūzābādī follows Jawharī’s short definition and explanation word by word, and does not add anything to it. Unlike the three of them, Ibn Manẓūr’s definition of *tawaffā* is detailed and long, supported by many examples from both the *jāhili* poetry and the Qur’ān. Ibn Manẓūr first mentions that *al-wafāt* means *al-mawt*. Then he writes:

<sup>148</sup> In this sentence, Fayrūzābādī uses the plural form of dead (*al-mawāt*), but a word by word translation will not make sense. That is why I translate it as singular. See Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Fayrūzābādī, *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Cairo: al-Hiy’at al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1979, under *māta*, available online at <http://archive.org/details/211208> (consulted on June 20<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>149</sup> This is a rare case where the verb is a “weak verb” having the of vowel of *wāw* (*w*) as the first letter, and the vowel of *yā*’ (*y*) as the last letter of its three lettered root radical, so it is both an assimilated verb (*fi’l al-mithāl*) and a defective verb (*fi’l al-nāqis*).

<sup>150</sup> It appears 24 times under the fifth form (verb *tawaffā*), and once as the fifth form active participle (*mutawaffī*). These appearances are in the following *āyahs*: 2:234, 240; 3:55, 193; 4:15, 97; 5:117; 6:60, 61; 7:37, 126; 8:50; 10:46, 104; 12:101; 13:40; 16:11, 28, 32, 70; 22:5; 39:42; 40:67, 77; 47:27.

<sup>151</sup> It appears 18 times under its second form (verb *waffā*); 18 times under its fourth form (verb *awfā*); once under its tenth form (verb *yastawfu*); twice as the nominal *awfā*); once under the second form of its active participle (*muwaffū*); and once under the fourth form of its active participle (*mūfūn*). For the meaning of *wafaya* in some of these forms see, for example, the translations or the *tafāsīr* of 2:181; 3:25; 16:111; or 39:70.

<sup>152</sup> See Al-Jawharī, *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ fi al-Lughā*, under *wafaya*, available online at <http://www.almeshkat.net/books/open.php?book=1140&cat=16> (consulted on June 20<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>153</sup> Ibn Fāris, *Mu‘jam maqāyīs al-Lughā*, under *wafaya*, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=3144> (consulted on June 20<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

*Tuwuffiya* [the passive tense of *tawaffā*] someone and *tawaffāhu* *Allāh* maens [God] captured his *nafs*, [although] in *Ṣiḥāḥ* [al-Jawharī says] when [God] captured his *rūḥ*. Some have said that *tawaffā* is [used for] the dead because one [dies] when the time that [God has decided] for him is fully paid to him, and he receives all [his] days, months and years in this life... but [also] *tawaffī* of the sleeper means the time that one has to use his intellect and [the power of] distinction is fully paid [to him] until the moment that he falls asleep.<sup>155</sup>

Ibn Manzūr's definition of *tawaffā* suggests that somewhat this fifth verbal form of *wafaya* shares the same sense of "to pay in full" with all other verbal forms of its radical root. More importantly, although Ibn Manzūr does not clarify why he does not agree with other linguists on considering *rūḥ* as the object of *tawaffā*, the juxtaposition of his earlier definition of *mawt* as the nonexistence (or the separation) of *rūḥ* with his definition of *tawaffā* as the capture of *nafs* suggests that to him, although both *mawt* and *tawaffā* mean "to die," the first one exclusively deals with *rūḥ*, and the latter solely takes care of *nafs*. This conviction is what Smith briefly explains, and this thesis seeks to explore some of its implications in the Qur'ānic image of death.

### 3.3.3 The Qur'ānic Image of Death through *mawt*

As mentioned before, *mawt* is the Qur'ān's usual term for death. Its verbal and non-verbal appearances can be mostly found in the *sūrahs* 2 to 10 of the Qur'ān (69 times) with the exception of *sūrah* 8 (al-Tawbah) in which *mawt* appears only once.<sup>156</sup> Adding to those appearances the following other occurrences in *sūrah* 23 (6 times), *sūrah* 30 (8 times), and *sūrah* 39 (5 times), one can conclude that more than half of its appearances are in eleven precise *sūrahs*. The rest are scattered mostly over the first fifty *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān.<sup>157</sup> Knowing that fourteen out of twenty-five appearances of *tawaffā* are also in *sūrahs* 2 to 10, one might suggest that the issue of death is more of a Medinan topic than

<sup>155</sup> See Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, under *wafaya*, available online at <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp> (consulted on June 20th 2012).

<sup>156</sup> It appears 21 times in *sūrah* 2, 16 times in *sūrah* 3, 6 times in *sūrah* 4, 4 times in *sūrah* 5, 10 times in *sūrah* 6, 4 times in *sūrah* 7, once in *sūrah* 8, 4 times in *sūrah* 9, and 3 times in *sūrah* 10.

<sup>157</sup> Under one of its forms, *Mawt* appears only 13 times in the sixty four last *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān. Here is a list of these appearances: twice in *sūrah* 53, twice in *sūrah* 56, twice in *sūrah* 57, twice in *sūrah* 62, once in *sūrah* 63, once in *sūrah* 67, once in *sūrah* 75, once in *sūrah* 77, once in *sūrah* 80, and once in *sūrah* 87.



a Meccan one.<sup>158</sup> This suggests that within the Meccan period of the Prophet Muḥammad's mission, the Qur'ân rarely discusses the concept of death. But once the Prophet establishes his power in Medina, with the many subsequent battles against pagans, the Qur'ân starts to define and explain the concept of death for Muslim warriors in particular. The Qur'ânic juxtapositions of *mawt* with *qatl* (killing/murder) in the same *âyahs* support the above-mentioned hypothesis. In fact, one of the major points of distinction between *mawt* and *tawaffâ* is a kind of nature that killing/murder exclusively shares with *mawt* and not with *tawaffâ*.

### 3.3.3.1 *mawt* and *qatl*

On five occasions, the Qur'ân presents *mawt* and *qatl* as alternatives to each other, four of which are in *sûrah* 3 (Âl 'Imrân).<sup>159</sup> *Mufasssirûn* are unanimous that these *âyahs* are revealed immediately after the second military encounter between Muslims and Quraysh pagans in a valley named Uhud. One year after Quraysh pagans had been defeated by Muslims in the battle of Badr (17<sup>th</sup> Ramadan 2H/March 13<sup>th</sup> 624C.E.), they prepared a bigger army and marched towards Medina to avenge their shameful losses at Badr. According to *al-'aşabiyyah* (the *jâhili* tribal law), any conflict/battle should be followed by either a conflict resolution council where the elders of the allied tribes decide about ransoms and/or punishments for the guilty tribe, or a battle in which all allied clans and tribes take part and participate.<sup>160</sup> In the case of the battle of Badr, accepting the arbitration of any conflict resolution council would have naturally meant that pagans recognize the Muslims as a new power and/or tribe in the Najd Peninsula. To avoid this situation, they chose the second option and prepared themselves for a follow-up battle that eventually took place on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of March 625. This battle of the Quraysh pagans with their allied tribes against Muslims was fought in the mountainous outskirts of Medina called Uhud. As the battle unfolded and started to look like a second victory for Muslims, a group of Muslim fighters left their assigned posts, rushing to spoil the

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<sup>158</sup> As a matter of fact, with five exceptions being in *sûrahs* 67, 75, 77, 80, and 87, the concept of death under any of its two terms is almost absent in the fifty last *sûrahs* of the Qur'ân.

<sup>159</sup> In 3:144, 156-8; 22:58.

<sup>160</sup> For a study of *al-'aşabiyyah* laws see I. M. Khalifa, *An Analytical Study of 'Aşabiyyah: Ibn Khaldun's Theory of Social Conflict*. Doc. Thesis. Washington, Catholic University of America. 1972.

pagans' camp. This hole in the Muslims' defence system allowed a wing of the Quraysh army to attack Muslims from behind. Many Muslims were killed and the battle ended with the victory of the Quraysh army. Among those who were killed was the uncle of the Prophet, Ḥamzah b. 'Abd al-Muṭallib, a great supporter of the Prophet and a pillar of the Muslim army. Quraysh pagans victoriously marched back to Mecca, and Muslims returned to Medina in shock and grief.<sup>161</sup> In this context, the following *āyahs* 3:156-8 were revealed:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَقَالُوا لَإِخْوَانِهِمْ إِذَا ضَرَبُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَوْ كَانُوا غُرَى  
لَوْ كَانُوا عِنْدَنَا مَا مَاتُوا وَمَا قُتِلُوا لِيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ ذَلِكَ حَسْرَةً فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا  
تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ وَلَئِن قُتِلْتُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَوْ مُتُّمْ لَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرَحْمَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّمَّا يَجْمَعُونَ وَلَئِن مُّتُّمْ أَوْ  
قُتِلْتُمْ لَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُحْشَرُونَ

O ye who believe! Be not as those who disbelieved and said of their brethren who went abroad in the land or were fighting in the field: If they had been (here) with us they would not have died or been killed ... And what though ye be slain in Allah's way or die therein? Surely pardon from Allah and mercy are better than all that they amass. What though ye be slain or die, when unto Allah ye are gathered?

The primary goal of these *āyahs* is neither to define, nor to explain death, but to comfort Muslims and re-solidify their trust in God's rewards in the afterlife. The Qur'ân preaches them to see death as the beginning of a better life rather than the end of life on earth, teaching them an important point: being killed and dying share the same nature: in both cases, as soon as it happens, there will not be any return. The only possible return will be on the day of judgment. The emphasis on this impossibility of returning from *mawt* and *qatl* is emphasized in the juxtaposition of *darabu fil-ard* (went far into the land) with *kānu ghuzzâ* (were fighting). It also is reflected in the conditional blaming sentence towards pagans who see "no death" (*mâ mâṭû*) in the passage "If they had been (here) with us." In other words, according to the text, pagans see life in "staying" and no return/death in going to fight. Although believing in the eternal life in the afterlife, this "no return" aspect of *mawt* can also be found in different other Qur'ânic contexts. For

<sup>161</sup> Despite debates on its authenticity, one of the most popular works on the Prophet's battles is *Al-maghâzî* of al-Wâqidî. For a study of his work see Rizwi S. Faizer, "The Issue of Authenticity regarding the Traditions of al-Wâqidî as Established in His *Kitâb al-Maghâzî*." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 58, No. 2 (1999): 97-106.

example, in 2:132 both prophets Abraham and Jacob, while being at the point of death, anxiously warn their sons not to die but to surrender to the will of God (as muslims). One can find the reason of their concern in *āyah* 217 of the same *sūrah*. Part of it reads: “...And whoso becometh a renegade and dieth in his disbelief: such are they whose works have fallen both in the world and the Hereafter. Such are rightful owners of the Fire: they will abide therein.” So both Abraham and Jacob voice their concern about this no return aspect of *mawt* asking their sons to be careful with their one chance of living on earth. According to the Qur’ān, the *jāhilī* rejection of human’s resurrection is exclusively about the resurrection of the body. This no return bodily aspect of *mawt* in *jāhilī* thought is precisely addressed in many *āyahs* where the Qur’ān, in direct citations from Jāhilīs, narrates their hesitation and/or rejection of any possible bodily return after a dead body is turned to dust.<sup>162</sup> For example, 50:3 reads:

بَلْ عَجِبُوا أَنْ جَاءَهُمْ مُنْذِرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَقَالَ الْكٰفِرُونَ هٰذَا شَيْءٌ عَجِيبٌ اءَدَا مِثْنًا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا ذٰلِكَ رَجْعٌ  
بَعِيدٌ

Nay, but they marvel that a warner of their own hath come unto them; and the disbelievers say: This is a strange thing: When we are dead and have become dust (shall we be brought back again)? That would be a far return!

This point reveals a second aspect of *mawt* in the Qur’ān: its natural consequence or the decomposition of the body to the point of turning to dust.

### 3.3.3.2 *mawt* and the Question of Decomposition

In most Qur’ānic direct citations from Jāhilīs on death, the idea of *mawt* has been immediately followed by the natural decomposition of the human body and its transformation into “dust and bones”<sup>163</sup> Dust is the element at both ends of human life being there before birth and after death. The only difference is that at the first end (birth),

<sup>162</sup> For example in 11:7; 23:35, 37, 82; 37:16, 53; 45:24; 50:3; 56:47.

<sup>163</sup> The Qur’ān cites Jāhilīs who say: “When we are dead and have become (mere) dust and bones, shall we then, forsooth, be raised again?” With some minor changes, this formula appears 5 times in 23:35, 82; 37:16, 53; 56:47. In 17:49, 98 the Qur’ān cites the same sentence from Jāhilīs with a different term for dust (*rufāt* instead of *turāb*). While Pickthall translates *rufāt* as “fragments,” Yusuf Ali translates it as “dust,” and Ahmed Ali translates it as “bits.” A more accurate translation for *rufāt* would be “scattered dust.”

it is presented under its wet form, *salsâl* or *tîn* (clay), and at the other end (death), it is presented under its dry form, dust.<sup>164</sup>

Another important common element in both creation and death is “bones.” In almost every Qur’ânic direct citation from Jâhilîs on *mawt*, bones are present right after dust. On a few occasions, death is even presented as “to become bones,” without any mention of dust.<sup>165</sup> This dominant presence of bones in the *jâhili* image of death has been approved by the Qur’ânic arguments regarding the creation and resurrection of human beings.<sup>166</sup> The only example of “bones” being a phase in the process of creation can be found in 23:14. 23:12-4 read:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِّنْ طِينٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُطْفَةً فِي قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً  
فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْمُضْغَةَ عِظْمًا فَكَسَوْنَا الْعِظْمَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ  
أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ

Verily We created man from a product of wet earth; Then placed him as a drop (of seed) in a safe lodging; Then fashioned We the drop a clot, then fashioned We the clot a little lump, then fashioned We the little lump bones, then clothed the bones with flesh, and then produced it as another creation. So blessed be Allah, the Best of creators!

But the examples of “bones” in the Qur’ânic process of resurrection are more numerous. For example, at the end of *sûrah* 2 (al-Baqarah), within the story of prophet Ezra, the Qur’ân gives an example of the resurrection of the bones. According to the Qur’ân, Ezra passes by the ruins of a village, and asks God how He will resurrect all those scattered dust and bones. He then miraculously falls asleep for one hundred years and when he

<sup>164</sup> For human’s creation from “*salsâl*” (potter’s clay) see 15:26, 8, 33; 55:14; and for human’s creation from “*tîn*” (clay) see 6:2; 7:12; 17:61; 23:12; 32:7; 37:11; 38:71, 6.

<sup>165</sup> For example 79:10-11 read: “(Now) they [pagans] are saying: Shall we really be restored to our first state even after we are crumbled bones?” Or 36:78 reads: “And he [man] hath coined for Us a similitude, and hath forgotten the fact of his creation, saying: Who will revive these bones when they have rotted away?”

<sup>166</sup> A par excellence example can be read in the beginning *âyahs* of *sûrah* 75 (al-Qyâmah) where with an authoritative tone, the Qur’ân reacts to the above-mentioned *jâhili* doubt about the resurrection of bones. 75:1-4 read:

Nay, I swear by the Day of Resurrection; Nay, I swear by the accusing soul (that this Scripture is true). Thinketh man that We shall not assemble his bones? Yea, verily Yea. We are Able to restore his very fingers!

A more accurate translation for what Pickthall translates as “fingers” (*banânah*) would be “the thin bones of [all] his fingers.”

wakes up, he sees the bones of his dead donkey and witnesses their resurrection from death. 2:259 reads:

أَوْ كَالَّذِي مَرَّ عَلَى قَرْبَةٍ وَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَى عُرُوشِهَا قَالَ أَنَّى يُحْيِي هَذِهِ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا فَأَمَاتَهُ اللَّهُ مِائَةَ  
عَامٍ ثُمَّ بَعَثَهُ قَالَ كَمْ لَبِثْتَ قَالَ لَبِثْتُ يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ قَالَ بَلْ لَبِثْتَ مِائَةَ عَامٍ فَانظُرْ إِلَى طَعَامِكَ  
وَشَرَابِكَ لَمْ يَتَسَنَّهْ وَانظُرْ إِلَى جَمْرِكَ وَلَجَّعَلْنَا لِكُلِّ نَفْسٍ لَبِثَ لَهَا فِي غُحُوبِنَا رَبِّهَا ثُمَّ نَسِيتُهَا  
فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ قَالَ أَعْلَمُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

Or (bethink thee of) the like of him who, passing by a township which had fallen into utter ruin, exclaimed: How shall Allah give this township life after its death? And Allah made him die a hundred years, then brought him back to life. He said: How long hast thou tarried? (The man) said: I have tarried a day or part of a day. (He) said: Nay, but thou hast tarried for a hundred years. Just look at thy food and drink which have not rotted! Look at thine ass! And, that We may make thee a token unto mankind, look at the bones, how We adjust them and then cover them with flesh! And when (the matter) became clear unto him, he said: I know now that Allah is Able to do all things.<sup>167</sup>

This image of *mawt* as “to become bones,” and that of the resurrection as “bones recovered by flesh” is vividly present in the Qur’ānic frequent and allegorical use of the term *mawt* for the earth. On several occasions, the Qur’ān talks about the “revival” of the earth after its death by sending water from the sky, and asks believers to think about this natural phenomenon and see it as a “sign” for the trueness of their own resurrection from death.<sup>168</sup> In this allegorical comparison, one can easily see some major similarities between bones and dead earth such as dryness, hardness, and immobility, as well as some common characteristics between the flesh and live nature (plants, trees, flowers, etc.), such as moisture, softness, and mobility. Also in both cases the live part gives life to the dead part by covering it.

All the above-mentioned explanations support the hypothesis that, to the Qur’ān, there is a direct link between *mawt* and the human body. In other words, *mawt* is and/or causes the death and the decomposition of the body. This bodily aspect of *mawt* and its connection to earth can be abundantly seen in different other Qur’ānic contexts. Here are three examples: first, part of 31:34 reads “... no soul knoweth in what land [earth] it will die.” Here the Qur’ān makes a connection between “the earth” (*ard*) on which humans

<sup>167</sup> More examples can be read in 36:78 and 79:11.

<sup>168</sup> In 2:164; 16:65; 29:63; 30:19, 24, 50; 35:9; 39:42; 45:5; 57:17.

live and “the death” (*mawt*) that happens to those who live and move on earth. The second example is in 7:25: “He [God] said: There shall ye [humans] live, and there shall ye die, and thence [from the earth] shall ye be brought forth.” What Pickthall translates as “there” is in fact “therein” (*fiḥā*), and by using “in earth” as opposed to “on eath,” the Qur’ān makes a clear statement about the fact that in order to survive, human needs the resources of the earth whether mineral, vegetal or animal. This “in” before anything reflects the human’s bodily composition as made out of the elements of the earth, and its needs being dependant on the earth’s resources. Thus *mawt* represents the transformation of body into the earth and its unification with its original source. The third example is in 80:21: Then [God] causeth him [human] to die, and burieth him [in earth by ordering others to do so to him].” Here, it seems that, to the Qur’ān, the burial of the body in the earth is an inevitable consequence of *mawt*. So, as soon as *mawt* happens, the body needs to go back to earth.

### 3.3.3.3 *mawt* and the Question of Subject

Since *māta* (the first verbal form of *mawt*) is an intransitive verb, its passive form does not exist in Arabic. Despite this intransitive character of *māta*, the Qur’ān conjugates it in a way that the verb accepts a direct object. In all those cases, the object of the verb is human (i.e. in 2:28; 22:66; 30:40; 45:26). Also, in all those instances of a transitive object after the use of *māta*, the subject of the verb is Allāh. In the Qur’ān, Allāh does not share with anyone this power of taking human life. This aspect, on the one hand, confirms the sanctity of human life as one of the most basic concepts in Islam;<sup>169</sup> on the other hand, it demonstrates a special relationship between God and human beings: a relationship where life is exclusively given and taken by God. The fact that Allāh (the noun or its subjective pronoun) is the only subject mentioned in the Qur’ān for the verb *ahyā* (the fourth form of *hayaya* meaning “to give life”) confirms the above-mentioned conviction.<sup>170</sup> So *hayāt*

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<sup>169</sup> A quick glance at any book of *kalām* or *fiqh* reveals that the most precious thing in God’s creation is the human’s life. Also see among others, the *tafāsīr* of 4:29 and 6:151.

<sup>170</sup> This transitive form of *hayaya* appears 51 times in the Qur’ān. In 47 times of its appearances Allāh (noun or pronoun) is the subject of the verb. The exceptions can be found once in 2:258, once in 3:49, and twice in 5:32. In 2:258 the Qur’ān cites Abraham’s argument with a king who claims to give life by freeing a person who is sentenced to death. So the king is the false subject of the verb. In 3:49 the Qur’ān cites Jesus who announces: “I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by Allah’s

(life) is the exclusive property of God, and in this regard the death of *mawt* is honoured by the same divine exclusiveness.

### 3.3.4 The Qur’ānic Image of Death through *tawaffā*

The Qur’ānic image of death through *tawaffā* is quite different from that of *mawt*. In this image, *qatl* is totally absent. Instead, one can find the juxtaposition of *tawaffā* with *nawm* (sleep). On two occasions (6:60 and 39:42), the Qur’ān describes sleep as a repeated *tawaffā bil layl* (nightly death). In 6:60, this fatal nature of nightly sleep has been emphasized by describing the awakening of every morning as a repeated *yab’athukum fih* (daily resurrection). It reads:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي يَتَوَفَّاكُم بِاللَّيْلِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا جَرَحْتُم بِالنَّهَارِ ثُمَّ يَبْعَثُكُمْ فِيهِ لِيُقْضَىٰ أَجَلٌ مُّسَمًّى ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

He it is Who gathereth you at night and knoweth that which ye commit by day. Then He raiseth you again to life therein, that the term appointed (for you) may be accomplished. And afterward unto Him is your return. Then He will proclaim unto you what ye used to do.<sup>171</sup>

Being allegorical or not, this comparison necessarily rejects any damage to or decomposition of the body through *tawaffā*. On the contrary, here *tawaffā* pictures the human body entering a state of rest and regain of its energy.<sup>172</sup> In 39:42, while the Qur’ān

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leave.” Here Jesus presents Allāh as the real power behind the act of giving life, so He is the real subject of the verb. 5:32 talks about the value of saving human’s life, and *mufasssirūn* are unanimous on the allegorical nature of the *āyah*. Part of it reads:

For that cause We decreed for the Children of Israel that whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whoso saveth the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind ...

<sup>171</sup> In this *āyah*, Pickthall translates *yatawaffākum* as “gathereth you.” He is not persistent in his translation of the same Qur’ānic expression in other *āyahs*. In 4:15, he translates *yatawaffāhunna* as “take them,” in 8:50 he translates *yatawaffāhum* as “receive themn” and in 10:104 and 16:70 he translates *yatawaffākum yatawaffākum* as “causeth you to die.” However, in 6:60, while Yusuf Ali translates *yatawaffākum bil layl* as “takes your souls by night,” Ahmed Ali’s translation of this expression is probably the clearest one: he translates it as “sends you to death at night.”

<sup>172</sup> This characteristic of sleep has been emphasized in several *āyahs*. For example 10:67 reads: “He it is Who hath appointed for you the night that ye should rest therein and the day giving sight. Lo! herein verily are portents for a folk that heed.” Also see 6:96; 27:86; 28:72-3; 40:61.

repeats its description of sleep as death, it makes a clear distinction between death through *tawaffā* and death through *mawt*. It reads:

اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنْفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا فَيُمْسِكُ الَّتِي قَضَىٰ عَلَيْهَا الْمَوْتَ وَيُرْسِلُ  
الْآخَرَىٰ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

Allah receiveth [*tawaffā*] (men's) souls at the time of their death [*mawt*], and that (soul) which dieth [*mawt*] not (yet) in its sleep. He keepeth that (soul) for which He hath ordained death [*mawt*] and dismisseth the rest till an appointed term. Lo! herein verily are portents for people who take thought.<sup>173</sup>

This *āyah*'s juxtaposition of images of death through *mawt* and *tawaffā* provides a certain chronological and hierarchical order.<sup>174</sup> According to this *āyah*, *tawaffā* reveals a primary stage of death with the possibility of a return, and *mawt* is a final stage of death that, as explained before, has no possibility of return. Also, if the two stages of death happen together (dying while sleeping), *tawaffā* comes first and *mawt* comes after it. The *āyah* stresses the “round trip” nature of *tawaffā* by the statement *yursil al-ukhrā* (lit. sends others back). Again, among our three translators of the Qur'ān, Pickthall's translation is the least clear. While translating *yursilu al-ukhrā* in this *āyah* as “[He] dismisseth the rest,” Pickthall does not respect his own choice of the English equivalent for *yursilu* in some other Qur'ānic appearances of the same term such as in 7:57 (He sendeth), 11:52 (He will cause), and in 13:13 (He launcheth). Yusuf Ali translates *yursilu al-ukhrā* in 39:42 as “the rest He sends (to their bodies).” Finally Ahmed Ali has the closest translation to the meaning of the term as discussed by *mufassirūn*. He translates it as “[He] sends the others back.”<sup>175</sup> 39:42 is clear in its purpose to say that those who are kept in their sleep will enter the final stage of death, and those who are sent back will live until *ajalin musammā* (an appointed term). This latter term has been used in both a general sense (i.e. in 2:235 for the time that a widow has to wait before she can remarry; in 2:282 for loans; in 35:13 for the cycles of the sun and the moon; or in 65:4 for the length of women's pregnancy), and in a particular sense for one's time of living in this

<sup>173</sup> In this *āyah*, Pickthall's translation of *yatawaffā al-anfus* suffers from the same inconsistency explained in previous footnote.

<sup>174</sup> As mentioned before, Smith studies *mufassirūn*'s discussions on this *āyah* and suggests a distinction between *mawt* and *tawaffā*. See Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*.

<sup>175</sup> For *mufassirūn* the emphasis is on “back.”



life. In all its appearances as a predestined time for living, if the *āyah* includes a reference to death, the term used is exclusively *mawt*.<sup>176</sup> This suggests that according to the Qur’ān, when one reaches his/her “appointed time,” what he/she experiences is not *tawaffā* but *mawt* with no more chance to return to life. For example 3:145 reads:

وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَنْ تَمُوتَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ كِتَابًا مُّوجَّلاً وَمَنْ يُرِدْ ثَوَابَ الدُّنْيَا نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَمَنْ يُرِدْ ثَوَابَ  
الْآخِرَةِ نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَسَنَجْزِي الشَّاكِرِينَ

No soul can ever die [*mawt*] except by Allah’s leave and at a term appointed. Whoso desireth the reward of the world, We bestow on him thereof; and whoso desireth the reward of the Hereafter, We bestow on him thereof. We shall reward the thankful.

Here also the ending sentence of the *āyah* talking about “the reward of the Hereafter” announces to believers that any possible return from *mawt* will only happen in the afterlife.<sup>177</sup>

### 3.3.4.1 *tawaffā* and the Question of Subject

Unlike *mawt* and its verbal forms, *tawaffā* is a transitive verb. Thus, from the very beginning, translating it as “to die” is problematic. To respect this transitive nature of the verb, some translators have sometimes translated it as “to cause to die.” But as shown before, they are not consistent in their choice of an English equivalent for it. *Tawaffā* appears in the Qur’ān in both its active and passive forms, and in all cases a human being is the object of the verb (subject in the passive tense).<sup>178</sup> What distinguishes *tawaffā* from

<sup>176</sup> In 4:77 the term used is *qatl*.

<sup>177</sup> *Mufasssirūn* are unanimous that this *āyah* has been revealed in the context of the battle of Uhud. When a wing of the Quraysh army attacked Muslims from behind, someone shouted loudly *qutila Muḥammad* (Muḥammad got killed). Some *mufasssirūn* narrate a *ḥadīth* according to which it was the voice of Satan. However, being scared of losing their head of army, some Muslims lost their courage and interest in the battle. But some others resisted and turned the close decisive victory of the enemy into a relative one. *Mufasssirūn* are also unanimous that with an inclusivist approach, the *āyah* gives the example of the death (*mawt*) of the Prophet to stress the no exceptional nature of “the appointed term.” To them, “Whoso desireth the reward of the world” refers to those Muslim warriors who participate in the battles for their plunders, and “whoso desireth the reward of the Hereafter” refers to those warriors who participate in the battles to obey God’s orderbelievers’ choice of reward after *mawt*. Al-Râzî is among those who discuss this subject matter in detail. See Al-Râzî, *Mafâtiḥ al-Ghayb*, under 3:145, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=1372> (consulted on Aug. 21<sup>st</sup> 2012).

<sup>178</sup> For example in 4:97, 5:117, and 6:61 it appears in one of its verbal active forms and in 2:234, 240, and 2:5 it appears in one of its verbal passive forms.

*mawt* is that, unlike *mawt*, the readers of the Qur’ân find a variety of subjects for the active forms of *tawaffâ*, and Allâh is not the exclusive doer of the act of causing death. The following quotes provide examples of different subjects of *tawaffâ* in the Qur’ân:

#### Allâh as the subject of *tawaffâ*

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنْتُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِّن دِينِي فَلَا أَعْبُدُ الَّذِينَ تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِن أَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ الَّذِي يَتَوَفَّاكُمْ وَأُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Say (O Muḥammad): O mankind! If ye are in doubt of my religion, then (know that) I worship not those whom ye worship instead of Allah, but I worship Allah Who causeth you to die, and I have been commanded to be of the believers. (10:104)

#### Angels as the subject of *tawaffâ*

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَوَفَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ ظَالِمِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ قَالُوا فِيمَ كُنْتُمْ قَالُوا كُنَّا مُسْتَضْعَفِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ قَالُوا أَلَمْ تَكُنْ أَرْضَ اللَّهِ وَأَسِعَتْ فِتْهَاجِرُوا فِيهَا قَالُوا لَلَّهِ مَا وَلَّيْتُمْ جَهَنَّمَ وَسَاءَتْ مَصِيرًا

Lo! as for those whom the angels take (in death) while they wrong themselves, (the angels) will ask: In what were ye engaged? They will say: We were oppressed in the land. (The angels) will say: Was not Allah’s earth spacious that ye could have migrated therein? As for such, their habitation will be hell, an evil journey’s end. (4:97)

#### God’s messengers as the subject of *tawaffâ*

فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ كَذَّبَ بِآيَاتِهِ أُولَٰئِكَ يَنَالُهُمْ نَصِيبُهُم مِّنَ الْكِتَابِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُنَا يَتَوَفَّوهُمْ قَالُوا أَإِينَ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ قَالُوا ضَلُّوا عَنَّا وَشَهِدُوا عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا كَافِرِينَ

Who doeth greater wrong than he who inventeth a lie concerning Allah or denieth Our tokens. (For such) their appointed portion of the Book (of destiny) reacheth them till, when Our messengers come to gather them, they say: Where (now) is that to which ye cried beside Allah? They say: They have departed from us. And they testify against themselves that they were disbelievers. (7:37)

Here some *mufasssirûn* such as Ibn Kathîr and al-Ṭûsî mention that “Our messengers” refers to angels, so it must be categorized under the previous category, but some others such as Ṭabarî and Ṭabâṭabâ’î believe that it refers to a specific angel: the Angel of death

(*malak al-mawt*), so it must be categorized under the next category.<sup>179</sup> The options of all other *mufasssirūn* fall under either one of these two categories.

### The Angel of death as the subject of *tawaffā*

قُلْ يَتُوفَّكُم مَّلَكُ الْمَوْتِ الَّذِي وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ

Say: The angel of death, who hath charge concerning you, will gather you, and afterward unto your Lord ye will be returned. (32:11)

What is interesting here is that the term used for “death” in “the angel of death” is *mawt* and not *tawaffā*. In other words the angel of *mawt* has the mission of performing the act of *tawaffā*. The act of *mawt* as mentioned before is exclusively in the hands of God. One might say that this *āyah* was also complete without the extra explanation of *alladhī wukkila bikum* (lit. who has been put in charge of you), but its appearance after the subject suggests that, like in the case of Jesus giving life with God’s leave, here the angel of death is in charge of taking life with God’s permission, so the real subject remains God himself.

### *mawt* as the Subject of *tawaffā*

وَالَّذِي يَأْتِيَنَّ الْفَاحِشَةَ مِن نِّسَابِكُمْ فَاسْتَشْهِدُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةً مِّنكُمْ فَإِن شَهِدُوا فَأَمْسِكُوهُنَّ فِي الْبُيُوتِ حَتَّىٰ يَتُوفَّيَهُنَّ الْمَوْتُ أَوْ يَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ لَهُنَّ سَبِيلًا

If any of your women are guilty of lewdness, take the evidence of four (reliable) witnesses from amongst you against them; and if they testify, confine them to houses until death do claim them, or Allah ordain for them some (other) way. (4:15)<sup>180</sup>

This passage marks probably the most confusing appearance of *tawaffā* in the Qur’ān. Here *mawt* itself is the subject of *tawaffā*. This is the only Qur’ānic case where the object of *tawaffā* is limited to a gender as well as to a specific group (adulterer women). I

<sup>179</sup> Ṭabarî interprets “Our messengers” as *malak al-mawt wa junûduhu* (the Angel of death and his army), and Ṭabâtabâ’î considers it to be *malak al-mawt wa a’wânuhu* (the Angel of death and his helpers). See Al-Ṭabarî, *Jâmi’ al-Bayân fi Ta’wîl al-Qur’ân*, under 7:37, available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net) (consulted on Aug. 21<sup>st</sup> 2012). Also see Al-Ṭabâtabâ’î, *Al-Mizân fi Tafsîr al-Qur’ân*, under 7:37, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on Aug. 21<sup>st</sup> 2012).

<sup>180</sup> It is not surprising to see that in the five *āyahs* presented in this small section, Pickthall uses 5 different equivalents for the term *tawaffā*. In this regard, other translations are not much different.

checked several classical *tafâsîr*, and most *mufasssîrûn* do not seem to be preoccupied with the fact that here *mawt* is the subject of *tawaffâ*. Most of them feel that it is sufficient to say: “*yatawaffahunna al-mawt* means they die.”<sup>181</sup> Even Suyûtî who is before anything, a great grammarian of the Arabic language does not pay attention to this unusual usage of the term. Among the many that I checked, Zamakhsharî is the first *mufasssîr* who rightly notices the confusing usage of *mawt* in 4:15, but he simplifies the situation and writes:

So if you ask: Knowing that *al-mawt* and *al-tawaffâ* mean the same thing, what does it mean [to say] *yatawaffahunna al-mawt*? Is it like being said: the death [*al-mawt*] makes them die [*yamituhunna*]? I [will] say: it is possible that it [*al-mawt* here] means the angels of *mawt* as His saying: those who are caused to death by angels, in al-Nahl 38 [16:38], or [His saying:] Say, the angel of death causes you to death, in al-Sajda 11 [32:11]. Or [it might mean] until *al-mawt* captures them and receives [*yastawfi*] their souls.<sup>182</sup>

Only a few *mufasssîrûn* pay attention to this explanation by Zamakhsharî and most others totally ignore it. Râzî expands on Zamakhsharî’s explanation and writes:

[One might ask] the question [of]: Knowing that *al-mawt* and *al-tawaffâ* mean same thing, what does it mean [to say] *yatawaffahunna al-mawt*? Is it an allegorical way of saying that the death [*al-mawt*] makes them die [*yamituhunna*]? The answer is that it is possible that it [*al-mawt* here] means the angels of *mawt* as His saying: those who are caused to death by angels, in al-Nahl 38 [16:38], or [His saying:] Say, the angel of death causes you to death, in al-Sajda 11 [32:11]. Or [it means] until *al-mawt* captures them and receives their souls.<sup>183</sup>

Those few *mufasssîrûn* who follow Râzî commonly ignore the question and mention either the first part of the answer (i.e. Khâzin (d. 741H)) or the whole answer (i.e. Nasafî) as the definitive interpretation of *mawt* in 4:15.

<sup>181</sup> I checked the *tafâsîr* of Ibn Sulaymân, Ṭabarânî, Ṭabarî, Zamakhsharî, Qurṭubî, Ibn Jawzî, Baghawî, wâhidî, Mâwardî, Ibn Kathîr, Râzî, Makkî ibn abi Ṭâlib, Hawârî, Mâturîdî, Nasafî, Gharnâṭî, Samarqandî, Makhzûmî, Qushayrî, Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah, Khâzin, A‘qam, Fayrûzâbâdî, Ṭabâṭabâ’î, Ṭûsî, Fayḍ al-Kâshânî, Suyûtî, Shûkânî, ‘Aṭfîsh, and Jazâ’irî.

<sup>182</sup> Al-Zamakhsharî, *Tafsîr al-Kashshâf*, under 4:15, available online at <http://www.emtiaz.net/vb/showthread.php?t=24194> (consulted on Aug. 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012).

<sup>183</sup> Al-Râzî, *Mafâṭih al-Ghayb*, under 4:15, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=1372> (consulted on Aug. 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012).

Going back to Zamakhsharī's explanation, he clearly states that the question comes from the fact that *mawt* and *tawaffā* mean the same thing, so to him, it does not sound logical to attach them together in a sentence. However, as discussed before, considering that *mawt* and *tawaffā* are not the same human experience, and that despite sharing some common elements in their respective natures, they have some major differences, the question remains: How *mawt*, as a no return and final stage of death, can cause someone to experience *tawaffā* in which a return is always possible? As mentioned before, classical *tafāsīr* are not preoccupied with this problem, but some recent *mufasssīrūn* see a grammatical problem in the usage of *mawt* here. While trying to solve this intriguing problem, they unintentionally suggest an answer to our hermeneutical question. Shahāb al-Dīn al-Alūsī (1217-1270H) is probably the first one who sees the grammatical problem when he writes:

[Here] *tawaffā* has been used in its original meaning which is to pay back and it [necessarily] is the reception [of what has been paid]. [For example] it can be said: I paid my money to someone and I [can only say: I] made him pay back after I have received it [from him]. [Here] the reference [of the *āyah*] to *mawt* is because of its comparison to someone who does such an act [the act of receiving]. So here, there is an allegorical allusion and the saying [has been formed] by the deletion of the added term [in the construct state]. [So] the meaning [of the sentence] is: until *mawt* receives their *arwāḥ* [*rūḥ* in plural], and it is not permissible to believe that [here] *tawaffā* has been used in its popular sense [of death], and that the sentence runs like: until *mawt* makes them die, and it [the sentence] does not make any sense except if [we accept that] the added term is hidden but the verb refers to it [which is] the angels of *mawt*, or [we accept that] the reference is allegorical and [*mawt*] is the real subject of an act [hidden here but] referred to by the mention of the result of the act [which is receiving].<sup>184</sup>

In simple words, Alūsī tries to say that interpreting the subject of the verb to mean here “the angel(s) of *mawt*” might be an option. But, a better option would be to interpret the verb and understand it in the original meaning of its roots. So to Alūsī, here *tawaffā* does not mean “death” or “to make die,” but it replaces its fifth verbal form (used once in the Qur’ān in 83:2) that allegorically means “to receive.” If this interpretation is correct, the

<sup>184</sup> Maḥmūd Shahāb al-Dīn al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma’ānī fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm wa al-Sab‘ al-Mathānī*. 16 vols. Edited by ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Bārī ‘Aṭīyyah. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, no date, under 4:15, available online at [www.altafsir.com](http://www.altafsir.com) (consulted on Aug. 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012).

sentence would thus mean: “until *mawt* receives their *arwâh*, and it does not talk about death through *tawaffâ*.”<sup>185</sup> Although this possibility has been mentioned by Zamakhsharî in his *tafsîr* on the concerned *âyah*, and some other *mufassirûn* have followed him by including it in their *tafsîr*, none of them presents Alûsî’s argument and/or side with Alûsî’s preference to the options of “*mawt* makes them die,” or “the angel(s) of death cause(s) them to die.” This point, of course, is based on the fact that to them *mawt* and *tawaffâ* reveal the same experience, and the whole sentence talks about that same experience of death. No one can claim with certainty if this issue has been ignored for fourteen centuries and that Alûsî is the first *mufassir* who presents this argument, but even if he is not the first one, the argument has been ignored by the vast majority of *mufassirûn* before him. Alûsî’s suggestion for the interpretation of *tawaffâ* solves also the hermeneutical problem that this thesis is concerned about. In other words, with Alûsî’s suggestion, *mawt* remains in the hands of God, and more importantly, the experience of the final death through *mawt* remains distinguishable from the experience of the returnable death through *tawaffâ*.

### 3.3.4.2 *tawaffâ* and the Question of Body

In the Qur’ân, the no return nature of *mawt* as well as its direct and immediate physical consequence as the decomposition of the human body present a clear picture of a total separation between a human being and all his/her faculties in the course of experiencing *mawt*. So any “post-*mawt*” life must be understood and/or believed in a non-bodily and non-material form until the Day of Resurrection. This however is not the case for *tawaffâ*. On different occasions, the Qur’ân narrates conversations between human and angels, and in one case mentions the physical punishment of wrong doers by angels during the process of *tawaffâ*. 16:32 is an example of a pleasant conversation between angels and those who are passing through *tawaffâ*:

الَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ طَيِّبِينَ يَقُولُونَ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ ادْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

<sup>185</sup> I checked Sayyid Qutb (d. 1387H), Ibn ‘Âshûr (d. 1393H), Shanqîṭî, Sha‘râwî (d. 1418H), Ṭanṭâwî, and Ṭabâṭabâ’î. Surprisingly Ibn ‘Âshûr is the only one who mentions Alûsî’s explanations. Ibn ‘Âshûr goes further and to support Alûsî’s interpretation, provides some *jâhili* poetries.

Those whom the angels cause to die (when they are) good. They say:  
Peace be unto you! Enter the Garden because of what ye used to do.

Although the *āyah* does not mention the reaction of good doers, it stands to reason that they hear angels and react to their invitation. But believing in this conversation, and accepting the Qur’ān’s definition of *nawm* as the repeated experience of *tawaffā*, one might wonder why Muslims do not have in hand tons of collections of reports from pious people who have experienced some of these conversations while being asleep. For the same reason, we may ask why there is no report from nonbelievers who, after going through one of these experiences of *tawaffā*, have repented or at least reported such conversations. 7:37-9 clearly show the severity of the experience:

فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ كَذَّبَ بِآيَاتِهِ أُولَٰئِكَ يَنَالُهُمْ نَصِيبُهُم مِّنَ الْكِتَابِ حَتَّىٰ  
إِذَا جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُنَا يَتَوَفَّوْنَهُمْ قَالُوا أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ قَالُوا ضَلُّوا عَنَّا وَشَهِدُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ  
أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا كَافِرِينَ قَالَ أَدْخِلُوا فِي أَمْنٍ قَدْ خَلَتِ مِن قِبَلِكُم مِّنَ الْجِنِّ وَالإِنسِ فِي النَّارِ كُلَّمَا دَخَلَتْ أُمَّةٌ  
لَّعْنَتْ أُخْتَهَا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا آذَرَكُوا فِيهَا جَمِيعًا قَالَتْ أُخْرِلْتُمْ لَأَوْلِيَهُمْ رَبَّنَا هَؤُلَاءِ ضَلُّوا عَنَّا فَآتِهِمْ عَذَابًا  
ضِعْفًا مِّنَ النَّارِ قَال لِكُلِّ ضِعْفٌ وَلَكِن لَّا نَعْلَمُونَ وَقَالَتْ أُولِيَهُمْ لَأَخْرِلَهُمْ فَمَا كَانَ لَكُمْ عَلَيْنَا مِن فَضْلٍ  
فَتَوَفَّوْا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْسِبُونَ

Who doeth greater wrong than he who inventeth a lie concerning Allah or denieth Our tokens. (For such) their appointed portion of the Book (of destiny) reacheth them till, when Our messengers come to gather them, they say: Where (now) is that to which ye cried beside Allah? They say: They have departed from us. And they testify against themselves that they were disbelievers. He saith: Enter into the Fire among nations of the jinn and humankind who passed away before you. Every time a nation entereth, it curseth its sister (nation) till, when they have all been made to follow one another thither, the last of them saith unto the first of them: Our Lord! These led us astray, so give them double torment of the Fire. He saith: For each one there is double (torment), but ye know not. (38) And the first of them saith unto the last of them: Ye were no whit better than us, so taste the doom for what ye used to earn.” (7:38-9).

The *āyahs* 8:50-1 go further and, as mentioned before, reveal physical punishment of wrong doers through *tawaffā*:

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ يَتَوَفَّى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبُرَهُمْ وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ ذَٰلِكَ  
بِمَا قَدَّمْتُم لِأَيْدِيكُمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلَمٍ لِلْعَبِيدِ

If thou couldst see how the angels receive those who disbelieve, smiting their faces and their backs and (saying): Taste the punishment of burning!

This is for that which your own hands have sent before (to the Judgment), and (know) that Allah is not a tyrant to His slaves.

If this is the same *tawaffā* that the Qurʾān mentions for *nawm*, how can we interpret the absence of physical evidences/scars on the body of at least some wrong doers after they wake up from sleep? Also while sleep has a very individual nature, why in all Qurʾānic citations of conversations happening during *tawaffā*, angels always talk to a group of people and not to individuals? Lastly, why all negative conversations start with *qālū* (angels said) in the past tense and the positive conversation starts with *yaqūlūn* (angels will say) in present/future tense?<sup>186</sup>

One wonders how come none of these questions has been asked or answered by either classical or modern *mufasssīrūn*. This silence is surprising, and can only be explained by what remains an unsatisfactory answer: *mufasssīrūn* are unanimous that all these conversations happen at everyone's moment of death, but the deceasing person, whether right doer or wrong doer, is not capable of returning and informing others about this now-unveiled-truth. In a few cases, *mufasssīrūn* mention the *āyah*'s occasion of revelation (*asbab al-nuzūl*), and by doing so, they refer this experience of interaction with angels to a precise group of people. For example, most of them mention that 8:50 has been revealed about pagans who were killed in the battle of Badr. But this does not change their conviction about this mystical interaction with angels that every human being has to experience at the moment of death.

I suggest that from the very beginning, we must avoid understanding and translating *tawaffā* as "death," "to die," or "to cause to die." An equivalent such as "to expire" might be closer to the Qurʾānic experience of *tawaffā*. This repeated expiration is a different experience than death. It happens every night, as well as one last time right before the moment of *mawt*. What makes this last experience of *tawaffā* non-returnable is not in its own nature, but in its combination with *mawt*. To me, all the above-mentioned *āyahs* and all other *āyahs* where we have a conversation and/or interaction between humans and angels in the context of *tawaffā* reveal an experience of *tawaffā* on the day of judgment and not at the moment of death in this life. This would explain why neither right nor wrong doers experience it in their nightly *tawaffā*. Consequently, any memory

<sup>186</sup> For negative conversations see 4:97; 7:37; 8:50; 16:28 and for positive conversation see 16:32.



about it or any physical scar caused by it, would be out of question. This suggestion solves the problem of why in all of its instances, angels talk to and/or hit people in groups and not individually. The presence of heaven or hell in all instances of those interactions, and the mention of the result of people's deeds, always in the past tense, which is the Qur'ân's rhetorical style to cite conversations in the afterlife, support my suggestion.<sup>187</sup> Accepting that this last *tawaffâ* will happen in the afterlife helps better understanding 40:11. In fact, because 40:11 explicitly reveals the possibility of a second death, it has been the subject of much confusion and debates among *mufasssirûn*. It reads:

قَالُوا رَبَّنَا أَمَتْنَا اثْنَتَيْنِ وَأَحْيَيْتَنَا اثْنَتَيْنِ فَاعْتَرَفْنَا بِذُنُوبِنَا فَهَلْ إِلَى خُرُوجٍ مِّن سَبِيلٍ

They [wrong doers, on the day of judgment] say: Our Lord! Twice hast Thou made us die, and twice hast Thou made us live. Now we confess our sins. Is there any way to go out?<sup>188</sup>

Here many *mufasssirûn* discuss four possibilities:<sup>189</sup> 1) the *âyah* talks about life in this world, then death in this world, then resurrection and life in the tomb, the death in the tomb, then a final resurrection on the day of judgment; 2) the *âyah* talks about life in the ethereal world (*‘âlam al-dhar*), then death in that world, then life in this world, then death in this world, then resurrection on the day of judgment; 3) the *âyah* talks about life coming from Adam's backside, when God made all humans testify to themselves that God is their Lord (mentioned in 7:172), then death, then life in this world, then death in this world, then resurrection on the day of judgment; 4) the *âyah* talks about a state of death in the womb before *rûḥ* is blown to the fetus' body, the life in the womb after *rûḥ* is blown to the fetus until the end of one's life in this world, then death in this world, then resurrection on the day of judgment.<sup>190</sup> Ṭabarî mentions all these four possibilities,

<sup>187</sup> For some examples of past tense being the Qur'ân's rhetorical style when citing conversations in the afterlife see 7:44-50; 39:72-4; 41:20-3. In this last example, the Qur'ân talks about the Day of Judgment in present tense (41:19), but as soon as it starts citing a conversation between wrong doers and their own body members on the same day, it makes a sudden shift to the past tense. However, most translators translate verbs in 41:20-3 as if they were in future tense.

<sup>188</sup> This is another example for a conversation in the day of judgment in past tense. Pickthall does not respect the past tense nature of the verb *qâlû* (they said), and translates it as: "they say."

<sup>189</sup> Some such as Ibn 'Arabî and Sayyid Qutb keep silence about it and present only the literal meaning.

<sup>190</sup> Zamakhsharî strongly refuses any of these possibilities and argues that this *âyah* is an example of a Qur'ânic rhetorical style according to which two times repetition of an act is a way of showing its importance. Ṭabâtâbâ'î mentions this as a possibility but does not prefer it. See Al-Zamakhsharî, *Tafsîr al-*

without choosing between them. While a few *mufassirūn* such as Ṭabarānī and Qurtubī follow Ṭabarī in not mentioning their preference, many others such as Rāzī, Fayrūzābādī, Ibn Kathīr, Qushayrī, Ṭūsī, Kāshānī, and Ṭabātabā'ī prefer the first possibility.<sup>191</sup> Rāzī goes further and carefully answers those who have criticized the first possibility.<sup>192</sup> He mentions that some have said that this possibility necessarily requires believing in three lives, the third one being the eternal life after the resurrection on the day of judgment.<sup>193</sup> He argues that here wrong doers do not count their life on earth, because compared to the length and the sufferings of their two lives in the tomb and on the day of judgment, their earthly life is not worthy of mention.<sup>194</sup> To him, that is why the direct citation in the *āyah* starts with the mention of two deaths and not two lives, because the chronology of events begins with the first death at the end of the earthly life. He concludes that accepting the fact that the death in the tomb is the first event will necessarily mean that the first life worthy of being mentioned is the one in the tomb. Then, there must be a second death in the tomb followed by the second life which is the resurrection on the day of judgment.<sup>195</sup> None of those who prefer the first possibility discuss the bodily aspects of this second death, or clarify how it happens if a deceased person is not buried and/or does not have a body.<sup>196</sup> However, this second death is another argument that supports my suggested interpretation of the final *tawaffā* on the day of judgment. The possibility of the above-

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*Kashshāf*, under 40:11, available online at <http://www.emtiaz.net/vb/showthread.php?t=24194> (consulted on Sep. 7<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>191</sup> This possibility has been first mentioned by the great *muḥāddith* Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. abi Karīma al-Suddī (d. 129H).

<sup>192</sup> Despite Rāzī's efforts, some later *mufassirūn* such as al-Tha'labī (d. 875H) mention those critics and refuse the concerned possibility.

<sup>193</sup> Ṭabātabā'ī follows Rāzī in this argument, but most others do not mention it. See Al-Ṭabātabā'ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, under 40:11, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on Sep. 7<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>194</sup> He also refuses the fourth possibility arguing that starting by death in the womb necessarily requires a life before that state of death, because death is the end of life, and takes its meaning from life, but not vice versa. He also mentions that some have said that in this *āyah*, wrong doers are lying, but he rejects this interpretation and argues that God would have reacted to their lie as He does so in 6:23-4.

<sup>195</sup> See Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, under 40:11, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=1372> (consulted on Sep. 7<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>196</sup> In fact, Qurtubī briefly mentions that life and death in the tomb make sense only if they can have implications on the deceased body dwelling in the tomb. While mentioning this important problem, he neither refuses nor accepts the first possibility. See Al-Qurtubī, *Al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, under 40:11, available online at <http://shamela.ws/index.php/book/20855n> (consulted on Sep. 10<sup>th</sup> 2012).

mentioned second death being on the day of judgment, and not in the tomb, has been discussed within the *tafāsīr* of 40:16 (5 *āyahs* after 40:11). Those who have preferred the second death being in the tomb refuse it, and those who have refused the death in the tomb consider it as a possible interpretation of the concerned *āyah*.<sup>197</sup>

### 3.4 *mawt, tawaffā, and the Theory of Humans' Tripartite Nature*

As suggested by Jane I. Smith, *tawaffā*, at least in sleep, refers to a separation between body and *nafs*, and *rūḥ* is not involved in its process. As Smith mentions it, this theory has been briefly suggested and discussed by a few *mufassirūn*, as an attempt to interpret 39:42 through a distinction between *nafs* and *rūḥ*.<sup>198</sup> To complete this theory, I suggest that according to the Qur'ān, a human being is composed of three distinctive elements: *jasad* (body), *nafs* (soul) and *rūḥ* (spirit).<sup>199</sup> Spirit gives life to body and keeps it alive. It also enables *nafs* to join the body and makes them together a live entity. As soon as spirit is blown into the fetus' body, it becomes a livable vehicle for *nafs*, so *nafs* comes and dwells in the body, and uses it to produce thoughts, feelings and actions. The Qur'ān is neither clear about the source of *nafs*, nor gives information about where it comes from.

<sup>197</sup> For example, while Rāzī refuses to mention the source of this interpretation and simply mentions “some have said” that there will be a common death for all beings and creatures on the day of judgment; he dedicates pages to disprove it. He concludes that this conversation is between God and all human beings after everybody has been resurrected, so the question is asked by God, and the answer is given by the humanity. On the contrary, Qurtūbī briefly mentions this latter possibility, but prefers the possibility of the common death of all creatures on the day of judgment. While he considers it to be *al-zāhir* (more evident), he mentions its source as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. *Mufassirūn* do not seem to agree on the source of this interpretation. For example while Qurtūbī and Tha‘labī mention Ḥasan, Ibn Kathīr considers him to be Ibn ‘Umar (d. 73H), and Māwardī mentions Muḥammad b. Ka‘b al-Qaraḍī (40-120H). Also, there is an explicit mention of a common death in ‘Ali ibn abi Ṭālib’s sermon number 186, but it is not clear if that death will happen at the end of time and before the resurrection or after it. See Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Raḍī ed., *Nahj al-Balāghah*. 49<sup>th</sup> ed. Translated into Persian by Mohammad Dashtī. Qum: Amir al-Mo‘menīn Publication, 2010 (p. 260).

<sup>198</sup> Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, 19.

<sup>199</sup> In her article entitled *Spirits and Selves in Northern Sudan*, J. Boddy studies the cultural therapeutics in Hofriati, a village in Northern Sudan. She mentions that those “Villagers stipulate that all humans are composed of three vital essences: *rūḥ*, or breath, identified as the soul; *nafs*, or animal life-force, including lusts, desires, and emotions; and *'aqel*, or reason, rationality, the ability to control one’s emotions and behave in socially appropriate ways.” This *tripartite* composition of human being can be found under different forms in many other Muslim cultures and subcultures around the world, but they often are “popular ideas” rather than anthropological theories with theological or philosophical backbones. See Janice Boddy, “Spirits and Selves in Northern Sudan: The Cultural Therapeutics of Possession and Trance.” *American Ethnologist*, vol. 15, No. 1, Medical Anthropology (Feb. 1988): 4-27 (p. 5).

Also our understanding of the Qur’ân do not clarify if in a certain moment of human creation, *nafs* descends and meets the body or if *nafs* is developed throughout the process of creation within the formation and growth of the body.

Down the centuries, *fuqahâ* have discussed the approximate time when a fetus becomes a human being. They have mostly paid attention to the legal aspects of this issue such as its implications on abortion, heritage, and blood money. In their discussions, the process through which the fetus becomes human is referred to with the technical term of “*al-wulûj*” (the entering). They unanimously describe *wulûj* as the entering of the *rûḥ* into the fetus’ body. They are silent about the question of whether or not the *nafs* is also engaged in this process. Knowing that *fuqahâ*’s first source of information is the Qur’ân and its *tafâsîr*, a quick glance at *tafâsîr* reveals that the above-mentioned silence comes from *mufasssîrûn* who totally ignore *nafs* and its potential role in the process of making a human being out of a fetus. After examining several *tafâsîr*, I could not find any mention of *nafs* as an element of *wulûj*.<sup>200</sup> Even those who discuss in detail the distinctions between *nafs* and *rûḥ*, and consider them as two different elements, are not concerned with when *nafs* joins *rûḥ* or *jasad*.

What I therefore suggest is that, according to the Qur’ân, *rûḥ* gives life to the body and constantly fuels its vital subconscious and involuntary processes. Ṭabâṭabâ’î considers this “life giving” function of the *rûḥ* as the common point between all different interpretations and contradictory definitions of the term presented by *mufasssîrûn*. In his *tafsîr* on 16:2, he writes:

despite people’s intense disagreements in the past and in the present on the truth about *rûḥ*, they do not disagree on the fact that they all understand one meaning from *rûḥ*, which is what life comes from, [the life] which is the source of intelligence and determination, and that is what this glorious *âyah* refers to.<sup>201</sup>

<sup>200</sup> The Qur’ânic *âyah* that most explicitly addresses and discusses this issue is 23:14. I checked the *tafâsîr* of Ibn Sulaymân, Ṭabarânî, Ṭabarî, Zamakhsharî, Qurtubî, Ibn Jawzî, Baghawî, wâhidî, Mâwardî, Ibn Kathîr, Râzî, Makkî ibn abi Ṭâlib, Hawârî, Mâturîdî, Nasafî, Gharnâṭî, Samarqandî, Makhzûmî, Qushayrî, Ibn ‘Aṭṭiyah, Khâzin, A‘qam, Fayrûzâbâdî, Ṭabâṭabâ’î, Ṭûsî, Fayḍ al-Kâshânî, Suyûtî, Shûkânî, ‘Aṭṭîsh, and Jazâ’irî.

<sup>201</sup> Al-Ṭabâṭabâ’î, *Al-Mizân fi Tafâsîr al-Qur’ân*, under 16:2, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on Sep. 11<sup>th</sup> 2012).

I conclude that the first part of Ṭabâṭabâ'î's definition of *rûḥ* comes from the Qur'ân, but the second part of his definition - considering *rûḥ* as the source of intelligence and determination - comes from several *mufasssîrûn*'s historical and existing confusion between *rûḥ* and *nafs*. In other words, I suggest that *rûḥ* is the divine and unique source of life shared with every creature.<sup>202</sup> It gives life to the body and keeps it alive by constantly stimulating its physical subconscious and involuntary processes. The natural consequences of the presence of *rûḥ* in the body are physical growth as well as bodily feelings such as pain and carnal needs such as hunger. In this regard, human beings are not that different from any other living creature, including animals. If everything stops at this stage, humans will only have the capacity of behaving instinctively based on their inherent inclinations. But somewhere along the road, which is not clear to me when, *nafs* enters the scene, takes control over the live body, and uses it to produce reflections, emotions and actions. These unique products of *nafs* are what makes a human being distinguishable from any animal. Jane I Smith states that this separating function of *nafs* has been mentioned by a *mufasssîr* called al-Khaṭîb, who in his *tafsîr* on 39:42 concludes:

(1) *rûḥ* gives life; man and animals have spirits and the difference between them, as between the spirits of men, is in rank and not in kind; (2) the *nafs* distinguishes man from animal, the human essence [*al-dhât al-insânîya*] being created by the meeting of the *rûḥ* and the body.<sup>203</sup>

From Smith's indirect citation, it emerges that this *mufasssîr* is confusing interchange between the terms *nafs* and *rûḥ*. In fact, while "(1)" presents the *nafs* as the distinctive element between human and animal, "(2)" clearly suggest that "the human essence" comes from "the meeting of the *rûḥ* and the body." After carrying out a prosopographical research to verify the works of several *mufasssîrûn* who had "al-Khaṭîb" in their names or *kunya*, I found the classification that Smith mentions in the above page of her book as belonging to the *tafsîr* of Shams al-Dîn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Khaṭîb al-Sharbînî (d.

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<sup>202</sup> To help my readership better understand my suggestion, I compare *rûḥ* with a small cloud coming out of a big cloud at the moment of one's creation, and rejoining the big cloud later at the moment of that person's death. Giving or receiving, the big cloud remains always one cloud.

<sup>203</sup> Smith, "The Understanding of *Nafs* and *Rûḥ* in Contemporary Muslim Considerations of the Nature of Sleep and Death," 201-2.

977H).<sup>204</sup> As Smith rightly mentions it, he is among those *mufasssirûn* who believe in a distinction between *nafs al-‘aql wal-tamyîz* (Smith’s translates it as: “the soul possessing the rational faculties of intelligence and discrimination”) and *nafs al-ḥayât wal-ḥaraka* (Smith translates it as: “the soul possessing life and movement”), but this latter attribute of “life and movement” to *nafs* clearly reveals that to them, despite being distinguishable from *nafs*, *rûḥ* is a subcategory of *nafs*, and not an independent element of human nature.<sup>205</sup>

Going back to the initial problem of the emergence of *nafs* in human beings, I did not find enough evidence to suggest, one way or another, whether, according to the Qur’ân, the *nafs* is developed/created throughout the development of the fetus from within, or if it descends and joins the already existing composition of *rûḥ* and *jasad* at a certain moment. Also, if the latter is the case, existing *tafsîr* do not help us understand when exactly *nafs* meets the live body of the fetus for the first time.

What seems clear to me is that the Qur’ânic concept of *nafs* benefits from two major characteristics that *rûḥ* is deprived of. First, like the human body, *nafs* is on a constant path of growth, evolution, and change. But *rûḥ* is fix and unchangeable. Many *mufasssirûn* consider *rûḥ* as a *ḥaqîqah wâhidah* (single truth) with different levels. Those *mufasssirûn* who consider *nafs* as a subcategory of *rûḥ* use the concept of *marâtib al-rûḥ* (levels of *rûḥ*) to solve the contradiction of a changeable entity (*nafs*) as a part of an unchangeable entity (*rûḥ*). The confusion between *nafs* and *rûḥ* among *mufasssirûn* is widespread to the extent that even those who believe in an independent existence of *nafs* also attribute the improvement of human faculties to *rûḥ*. For example, in his *tafsîr* on 16:2, Râzî mentions four levels for *rûḥ*: the level of five senses, the level of reasoning and intelligence, the level of knowledge including “the knowledge about God, His acts and attributes, the knowledge of things in the world[s] of spirits [*arwâḥ*] and bodies

<sup>204</sup> Smith mentions her reference as “al-Khaṭīb (Tafsîr [1967-70], XII, 1160-67). Neither Sharbînî nor any other al-Khaṭīb is mentioned in her bibliography.

<sup>205</sup> I carefully read Sharbînî’s *tafsîr* on 39:42, but I could not find any mention of *nafs* as a distinctive element between human and animal. Smith does not give more information about the source of her statement. There are two possibilities: whether the *mufasssir* in question is not Sharbînî or it is him, but Smith cites him from his *tafsîr* on an *âyah* other than 39:42 ignored in Smith’s reference. See Shams al-Dîn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Khaṭīb al-Sharbînî, *Sirâj al-Munîr fî al-I‘ânât ‘alâ Ba‘ḍ al-Ma‘ânî Kalâm Rabbanâ al-Ḥakîm al-Khabîr*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2004, under 39:42, available online at <http://www.tafsir.net/vb/tafsir4864/> (consulted on Sep. 17<sup>th</sup> 2012).

[*ajsād*], [and the knowledge of] this world and the afterlife, and finally the level of revelation exclusively belonging to spirits of the prophets.”<sup>206</sup> This categorization explicitly suggests that, to Râzî, *rûḥ* is the vessel of human faculties, and that any stable and lasting positive or negative change in those faculties is the result of *rûḥ*’s fall or ascension between its levels. This categorization can be found in the works of those who mention it in either a summarized or an extended version.<sup>207</sup> But I believe that this categorization of *rûḥ* is based on two mistakes: first, the non-recognition of an independent existence for *nafs* and, second, the understanding of *rûḥ* with its unfunctional life giving nature as the vessel of changes in human’s capacities and faculties.

Second, unlike *rûḥ*, *nafs* seems to join the live body in stages. Although *fuqahâ* have suggested different times for *wulûj*, they all agree on the fact that *wulûj* happens at a precise moment within the pregnancy. Some have suggested the 120<sup>th</sup> day of the fetus’ life, some others have considered it to be the 50<sup>th</sup> day of pregnancy, and there are other suggestions too.<sup>208</sup> All suggestions consider it to be a sudden event, and not the development of *rûḥ* within time. This matches the Qur’ânic image of death through *mawt* which is a sudden and non-returnable moment. On different occasions, the Qur’ân puts an emphasis on the sudden nature of *mawt*. The followings are two examples. 31:34 reads:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ وَيُنزِلُ الْغَيْثَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْأَرْحَامِ وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ مَّاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ بِأَيِّ أَرْضٍ تَمُوتُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

Lo! Allah! With Him is knowledge of the Hour. He sendeth down the rain, and knoweth that which is in the wombs. No soul knoweth what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knoweth in what land it will die. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware.

<sup>206</sup> Al-Râzî, *Mafâtîḥ al-Ghayb*, under 16:2, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=1372> (consulted on Sep. 12<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>207</sup> For an expanded version see Ṭabâṭabâ’î’s *tafsîr*, and for a resumed version see Alûsî’s *tafsîr* on the same *âyah*.

<sup>208</sup> For an example of a *madhhab* that suggests 120<sup>th</sup> day see K. M. Hedayat, P. Shooshtarizadeh and M. Raza, “Therapeutic Abortion in Islam: Contemporary Views of Muslim Shiite Scholars and Effect of Recent Iranian Legislation.” *Journal of Medical Ethics*, vol. 32, No. 11 (Nov. 2006): 652-657 (p. 653). For an example of a *madhhab* that considers it to happen on the 50<sup>th</sup> day see S. Aksoy, “Making Regulations and Drawing up Legislation in Islamic Countries under Conditions of Uncertainty, with Special Reference to Embryonic Stem Cell Research.” *Journal of Medical Ethics*, vol. 31, No. 7 (July 2005): 399-403 (p. 401).

In an indirect but unmistakable way, the *āyah* warns that *mawt* happens faster than one can run away from it or can choose his/her place of death. The mention of “which is in the womb” might also suggest that the starting point of life as quick as its end.

A second example is the death of Solomon. *Mufasssirūn* have narrated different stories about Solomon’s supernatural powers and abilities including his power of controlling winds and his ability of talking to animals and plants. But when *mawt* comes to him, it does not give him enough time to seat or lay down. So Solomon dies while standing and leaning on his cane, and djinns who work for him do not notice his death until termites eat his cane and he falls. 34:14 reads:

فَلَمَّا قَضَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمَوْتَ مَا دَلَّهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَوْتِهِ إِلَّا دَابَّةُ الْأَرْضِ تَأْكُلُ مِنسَأَتَهُ فَلَمَّا خَرَّ تَبَيَّنَتِ الْجِنَّ أَن لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ الْعَيْبَ مَا لَبِثُوا فِي الْعَذَابِ الْمُؤَبِنِ

And when We decreed death for him [Solomon], nothing showed his death to them save a creeping creature of the earth which gnawed away his staff. And when he fell the jinn saw clearly how, if they had known the Unseen, they would not have continued in despised toil.

In their *tafâsîr* on this *āyah*, some *mufasssirūn* such as Tha’labî, Zamakhsharî, Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah, and Qumî al-Nayshâbûrî (d. 728H) cite a conversation between Solomon and the Angel of death in which the Angel of death comes to Solomon and informs him: “Indeed I have been ordered about you, and indeed it remains of your life [not more than] an hour.”<sup>209</sup> Then, at the appointed moment, the Angel takes Solomon’s *rûḥ*.<sup>210</sup> Again, this image of *mawt* suggests a sudden and quick one step phenomenon. There are plenty of *aḥādīth* that support this image. Most of them warn believers about the sudden coming of death, and encourage them to take action and do something for their salvation before it is too late. In all the many *aḥādīth* that I verified, the term *mawt* is used rather than

<sup>209</sup> In Tha’labî’s version the Angel ends with: “and Indeed, it remains of your life a small part of an hour.” See Abu Muḥammad b. ‘Āshûr al-Tha’labî, *Al-Kashf wa al-Bayân*. 10 vols. Beirut: Dâr Iḥyâ’ al-Turâth al-‘Arabî, 2002, under 34:14, available online at <http://www.waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=3548> (consulted on Sep. 13<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>210</sup> For example see Al-Zamakhsharî, *Tafsîr al-Kashshâf*, under 34:14, available online at <http://www.emtiaz.net/vb/showthread.php?t=24194> (consulted on Sep. 14<sup>th</sup> 2012).



*tawaffā*.<sup>211</sup> This sudden aspect of death cannot be found in the Qur’ân when the Qur’ânic reference to death is *tawaffā*. Another evidence for the stage by stage aspect of *tawaffā* and the sudden aspect of *mawt* can be read in ‘Ali ibn abi Tâlib’s detailed explanation of what happens to *nafs* at the moment of death. Part of his *khutba* (sermon) number 108 is a detailed report on what happens to wrong doers at their moment of death.<sup>212</sup> At the beginning of his description of death, he uses two different terms of *sakrat al-mawt* (the drunkenness of *mawt*) and *ḥasrat- al-fawt* (the regret of *fawt*). His presentation of death includes consecutive stages through which death enters into human beings. He writes:

[Look] how descended upon them what they were ignoring, and came to them the separation from this world in which they were feeling themselves so safe, and they stepped into the afterlife as they had been promised. Ah, it is indescribable what descended upon them.

The drunkenness of *mawt* and the regret of *fawt* came together and rushed to them, so their hands and legs weakened for it [death], and their skin colors changed upon it. Then death increased in them through *wulûj*, and sat between one of them and his speech power [he is not able to talk anymore]. Indeed, he is among his family members. He looks with his eyes, listen with his ears and his mind is still working ... he thinks about in what he passed his life and in what he wasted his time. He remembers the wealth that he gathered ... others enjoy it now, and its weight is on his shoulders ... then death penetrates more in his *jasad* [body], and like his mouth, his ears stop working... He is among his beloved ones ... looking at their faces and seeing their lips moving, but he does not hear them anymore. Then death goes further in penetrating [his body], and takes his eyes [his power of vision], as it has taken his hearing and [at this point,] his *rûḥ* has gone out of his *jasad*, and he has become a cadaver among his own people, [a cadaver] from whom they were scared wanting to keep distance.<sup>213</sup>

<sup>211</sup> In his major work “Riyâdh al-Salihîn,” the Shâfi’î erudite Abu Zakariyya Muḥyuddîn Yaḥyâ b. Sharaf al-Nawawî (631-676H) gathers many of those *ahâdîth* under a chapter called *bâb al-mawt* (the chapter of death). His book is among the most published *ḥadîth* sources, and has been translated to more than 16 languages. For the Arabic version see Abu Zakariyya Muḥyuddîn Yaḥyâ b. Sharaf al-Nawawî, *Riyâḍ al-Ṣâlihîn min Ḥadîth Sayyid al-Mursalîn*. Beirut: Dâr al-Riyân li al-Turâth, 1987. For the English version see Imâm Muḥyuddîn Yaḥyâ al-Nawawî, *Gardens of the Virtuous in the Speech of Prophet Muḥammad*. Translated into English by Muḥammad Bîḍawî. Lebanon and Kuwait: al-Maktabat al-‘Asriyyah, 2007. All versions in different languages are available online at <http://www.islamhouse.com/p/111275> (consulted on Sep. 12<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>212</sup> In some editions, this sermon is numbered 108.

<sup>213</sup> Sayyid al-Sharîf al-Raḍî ed., *Nahj al-Balâghah*. 49<sup>th</sup> ed. Translated into Persian by Mohammad Dashfî. Qom, Iran: Amir al-Mo’menîn Publication, 2010 (p. 146).

In ‘Ali ibn abi Ṭâlib ’s description, the usage of the term *wulûj* is not only surprising, but also important. On the one hand, it is surprising because, as mentioned before, it is the technical term for the arrival of *rûḥ* into the fetus’ body and not its departure.<sup>214</sup> On the other hand, it is important because: first, as soon as *wulûj* of death appears in the text, the text switches from third person plural to third person singular; and second, as soon as *wulûj* starts, the author temporarily shifts from his dominant past tense rhetorical style to the present tense, and shifts back again to the past tense only after the procedure of death is complete, and he can announce: “*rûḥ* has gone out of his *jasad* and he has become a cadaver.” This clearly suggests that, to ‘Ali ibn abi Ṭâlib , death is a phenomenon experienced individually. Also the rhetorical shift might suggest that the subject of those verbs that describe the stages of death is something other than *rûḥ*.

‘Ali ibn abi Ṭâlib ’s description of death informs its reader about two different yet intertwined phenomena happening together during the final moment of death. If this is true, then I suggest that one of them is the stage by stage death of the bearer of human faculties (*nafs*) through *tawaffâ*, and the other one is the separation between *rûḥ* and *jasad* through *mawt*.

As explained before, the Qur’ân introduces the human being as the only creature to whom God imparts the quality of *nafs*.<sup>215</sup> Also, as explained before, the Qur’ân does not seem to consider *rûḥ* as responsible for its owner’s thoughts and actions. In fact, the term “owner” might be a wrong term to use here, because *rûḥ* comes from God, stays in touch with that source of life, and once it returns to God, it rejoins its source and reunifies with its first and only owner. A pictorial interpretation of this statement would be streams and brooks branching out from a river. In this picture, the river is not only the initial source of life for the brooks, but also the existence of streams and brooks depend on their constant attachment to the river.<sup>216</sup> Some *aḥâdîth* picture this attachment as the Sun and

<sup>214</sup> A quick glance at major Arabic dictionaries probably reveals that unlike the case of birth, no linguist is familiar with the usage of *wulûj* for death. I checked *Lisân al-‘Arab*, *Maqâyîs al-Lughâ*, *Al-Şihâh fi al-Lughâ*, *Al-Qâmûs al-Muḥîṭ*, and *Al-‘Ibâb al-Zâkhir*.

<sup>215</sup> For the question of djinns having *nafs* or not, see footnote number 92 on page 25.

<sup>216</sup> In Islamic Philosophy, this process of constant descent of “being” to a creature is called *ifâdha al-wujûd* (the impartation of being). Ibn Sînâ (Avicenna) (980-1037C.E.) discusses in detail the concept of *ifâdha* and develops a theory that explains the process of becoming a being. To read more about *ifâdha* see

the rays of sunlight. In a *ḥadīth* narrated in different sources, Imâm Ja‘far al-Şâdiq (83-148H) says:

The believer is the brother of [other] believer[s, and they are] like one single body, if one part [of the body] is hurt, this will cause pain to all parts of the body. Indeed the *rûḥ* of believer is more attached to the *Rûḥ* of Allâh than the rays of Sun are to the Sun.<sup>217</sup>

Some similar *aḥādīth* from the Prophet or various Shi‘î Imams have been recorded in different Shi‘î or Sunnî sources.<sup>218</sup> On the contrary, *nafs* by nature is not divine. As shown before, according to the Qur’ân, *nafs* is responsible for its owner’s actions and thoughts. Consequently *nafs* will be judged, rewarded or punished. This means that not only reflections, comprehensions and emotions dwell in and happen by *nafs*, but also above-mentioned bodily feelings and needs are perceived and controlled by *nafs*.<sup>219</sup> More importantly the perception of time is *nafs*’ exclusive capacity. The Qur’ân puts an emphasis on *al-khulûd* or the eternal aspect of final reward and/or punishment.<sup>220</sup> At the same time, on different occasions, the Qur’ân informs its readers that on the day of judgment those resurrected from the tombs will loose their sense of time, and will not know how long they have been in their tombs.<sup>221</sup> This image reminds us of what many of us have experienced after a deep sleep or a coma when our senses of time and space are confused. According to the Qur’ân, *nafs* leaves the body during sleep. Therefore, the faculty of the perception of time must be in *nafs*.

I therefore suggest that every time the Qur’ân talks about *mawt*, it refers to the non-returnable separation between *rûḥ* and *jasad*, and every time it mentions *tawaffâ*, regardless of its time of happening in this world or in the afterlife, it talks about a

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Abu ‘Ali al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Abdullâh ibn Sînâ, *Kitâb al-Ishârât wa al-Tanbihât*. Translated and edited by Hasan Malekshâhî. Tehran: Soroush, 1368 Solar *hijra* (pp. 320-1)

<sup>217</sup> Hâdî al-Najafî, *Mawsû‘at Aḥādīth Ahl al-Bayt*. 40 vols. Beirut: Dâr Ihyâ’ Turâth al-‘Arabî, 2002 (vol. 1, p. 163).

<sup>218</sup> According to some of those *aḥādīth*, God created *arwâḥ* (spirits) before He created *abdân* (bodies). See, for example, al-Kulaynî, *Uşûl al-Kâfî* (vol. 1, p. 438), available online at [http://www.islam4u.com/maktabah\\_list.php?sid=3](http://www.islam4u.com/maktabah_list.php?sid=3) (consulted on Sep. 11<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>219</sup> Questions such as anaesthesia are not concerns of this thesis, but they need to be addressed and discussed by scholars and *mufasssîrîn*.

<sup>220</sup> For some examples see 5:70, 85, 119; 6 :128; 7:20, 36, 42; 9:17, 22, 68, 72, 89, 100; 10:26-7; 11:23, 107-8; 13:5; 14:23.

<sup>221</sup> See, for example, 2:259; 18:19; 20:104; 23:113.

separation between *nafs* and *jasad*. In this latter phenomenon, *rūḥ* plays the role of the entrance gate for *nafs*. In other words, *nafs* can only dwell in the body if the body is kept alive by the presence of *rūḥ*. As soon as *rūḥ* leaves the body, the gate is close and *nafs* can neither return, nor dwell any more in the body.

If this theory is accepted, it will have direct impact on three major domains. First, it might change our understanding of some theological issues such as the Qur'ân's anthropological theory, the concept of resurrection, and the notion of salvation in the Qur'ân. Second, it will have implications on legal issues such as apostasy, euthanasia, and abortion. Finally, it will help us better understand and interpret some Qur'ânic narratives such as the story of 'Uzayr, the report of the Sleepers of the Cave, and the Qur'ânic presentation of Jesus' last day on earth.

## Chapter 4

# The Crucifixion of Jesus in *tafsîr* and *'ilm al- ḥadîth*: An Example for a New Hermeneutics of the Qur'ân

### 4.1 Introduction

The Qur'ânic narratives on Jesus' birth, life, miracles, and death, as well as his coming at the End of Time have been meticulously studied and carefully investigated by numerous Muslim erudites, as well as many Western scholars. These studies range from biased works done by Christians or Muslims converted into Christianity at one end to apologetic works done by Muslims within the frameworks of Islamic heresiology at the other end.<sup>1</sup> In both cases, these texts suffer from different degrees of proselytism. In between these two opposite extremes, there are a few scholarly works done by both Muslim and Western scholars who try to shed light on the Qur'ânic image of Jesus through careful analysis and much more objective research.

This chapter is a humble effort in this latter direction in order to advance our understanding of the Qur'ânic image of Jesus' crucifixion, as an example of how some new hermeneutical tools defined within historico-critical and intertextual approaches can give a clearer picture of the Qur'ânic text. To do so, the chapter begins with the

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<sup>1</sup> For two examples of biased works on "Jesus in the Qur'ân," both inviting to Christian beliefs but the first one done by a Muslim converted into Christianity and the second one written by a Christian missionary, see Akbar Abdiyah Abdul Haqq, *Christologies in Early Christian Thought and in the Qur'ân: Being a Critical Analysis and Comparison of Selected Christological Views in Christian Writings to 785 A.D. and Those of the Qur'ân*. Ph.D. Diss. Northwestern University, 1953. Then, see Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'ân*. For two examples of an apologetic work on Jesus' life disproving Christian beliefs see Nasir al-Moghmis, *Christianity & Islam According to The Bible & The Quran*. Riyadh: Dâr al-Salâm, 2002. Then, see Sulaiman Shahid Mufassir, *Jesus, a Prophet of Islam*. Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1980.

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justification of my choice of eight *tafâsîr* followed by a brief biography of their respective authors as *mufassirûn*. It then quickly reviews a few narratives about Jesus' life and his importance in Islam. This part is followed by an in-depth discussion about the crucifixion of Jesus in the Qur'ân, and the historical implications of the popular consensus on the denial of his crucifixion. Finally, the central question of the crucifixion is re-examined in light of two theories: first, the theory of humans' tripartite nature and, second, the theory of double messages of the Qur'ân.

### 4.2 The Selection of *tafâsîr*

The *tafsîr* sphere is an incredibly diverse world. In the world of *tafsîr*, one can find hundreds of works, providing a wide range of scientific approaches and methods developed within different branches of knowledge from grammar and theology to physics and astronomy. A first glance at a few works of *tafsîr* shows this genre of Muslim literature to be a fascinating combination of grammatical explanations, theological reflections, and philosophical deliberations mixed with narrative embellishments, historical reports, and literary critics and commentaries, occasionally topped with scientific arguments and mathematical analysis. One must add to this diverse nature of *tafsîr*, the complexity and the difficult-to-understand niceties of the Arabic language that *mufassirûn* usually use in the redaction of their *tafâsîr*. This concern of *mufassirûn* about the articulation of their works of *tafsîr* reflects, among other things, the characteristics of the raw material on which they work. In other words, not only most *mufassirûn* follow the Qur'ânic text *âyah* by *âyah* from the beginning to its end, but they also try to imitate and mirror in their *tafâsîr* the eloquence and literary beauty of the Qur'ânic text. As a consequence, while each *tafsîr* might have its own quantitative and qualitative characteristics, most of them share the same high level of sumptuous style and abstruse rhetoric, and modern *tafâsîr* are no exception. So, it is not surprising to know that despite the honest efforts of scholars and translators, no translation of *tafâsîr* is able to come to grips fully with the text in its original language. This is why the eight *tafâsîr* that this thesis focuses on are exclusively studied in their original language.

While I sometimes briefly mention what various *mufassirûn* outside the eight selected ones have mentioned about an element in the Qur'ânic narratives on Jesus, my

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work mainly focuses on the interpretation of the early *mufassir* Wahb ibn Munabbih cited by the iconic *mufassir* of all time al-Ṭabarî, and six others who, in their *tafâsîr* of the crucifixion of Jesus react to Ṭabarî's choice by fully or partially citing Wahb's narrative through Ṭabarî or ignoring it. They are: Makkî ibn abi Ṭâlib, Qurṭubî, Ibn Kathîr, Suyûṭî, Ṭabâṭabâ'î, and Jazâ'irî. These *mufassirûn* can be classified into two main groups: those who lived and produced their works of *tafsîr* in times and places where Muslims and Christians cohabited in peace and enjoyed a relatively friendly relationship, and those who lived and produced their *tafâsîr* in times and places where because of tensions, conflicts or battles between Muslims and Christians, they were suffering from a tortuous relationship. This criterion of selection reflects, among others, Alister E. McGrath's theory according to which one of the four interactive functions of a doctrine, as a general phenomenon, is to work as a social demarcator for the adherents.<sup>2</sup> McGrath's focus is on Christianity, but his following statement can be perfectly applied to Islam:

There is an obvious need for a religious group to define itself in relation to other religious groups, and to the world in general. The general phenomenon of 'doctrine' –although not specific *doctrines*– is linked with the perceived need for social definition, especially when other factors do not adequately define a group. An ideology which legitimates its existence is required. Thus ... doctrine arises in response to threats to religious identity which may be occasioned socially ... and temporally... Doctrine is thus linked with the affirmation of the need for certain identity-giving parameters for the community, providing ideological justification for its continued existence.<sup>3</sup>

While agreeing with McGrath in general, I aim also to verify another element that might play a role in McGrath's theory when applied to Islam, namely, that the theologian's (in our case *mufassir*'s) link(s) to the political power and his attachment to the ruler plays an influencing role in the construction of his *tafsîr*. My hypothesis is that the work of a *mufassir* as a “doctrine maker,” when he is linked to the political power, might reflect the

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<sup>2</sup> McGrath is a Christian historian, and he discusses some Christian doctrines, but his theory is, to a great extent, usable for other Abrahamic religions. In his theory, the three other functions of doctrine are: doctrine as a generator and an interpreter of narrative; doctrine as an interpreter of experience; and doctrine as a source of and/or a maker of true claims for its adherents. See Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990 (p. 37).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

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political needs of the “rule makers” more than anything else.

So, for my first category of *mufassirûn* who lived in an era of conflict and “official hatred” against Christians when rulers needed theological support for their violence against Christians, I chose two exegetes with direct connections to the political power of their time, having accepted high governmental positions. For my second opposite category, I selected two other exegetes that were detached from such political connections, having chosen a simple life.

In the category of those who lived to a certain degree in an era of peaceful relationship with Christians, there are Makkî ibn abi ʿĀlib and ʿĀbâṭabâʿî.<sup>4</sup> In the category of those who lived in an era of chaotic relationship between Muslims and Christians, there are two subcategories: those *mufassirûn* who were attached to power, having governmental positions and benefitting from various privileges of being a mouthpiece of political power, and those *mufassirûn* who were not attached to the political power of their time. In the first subcategory, I selected Ibn Kathîr and Jazâʿirî. In the second subcategory, I selected Qurṭubî and Suyûṭî.

It is important to mention that all translations into English of concerned passages of these *tafâsîr* come from me, except if a *tafsîr* is mentioned within a direct citation from a work in English or French. Another important issue is that as for the eight selected *tafâsîr* texts, I had the choice of using either e-published versions that are freely accessible on the Internet, or paper print versions. Instead, I ended up using both, going back and forth between the two. Despite the exciting and astounding recent access to online *tafâsîr*, I began my research studying hardbound prints of *tafâsîr*, as can be noticed in several of my first chapter references. But while doing so, I found myself constantly comparing the online versions with hardbound ones. To my surprise, I could not trace any major differences between them, except for a few minor orthographical mistakes in the online versions. Andrew Rippin’s overall criticism of the online *tafâsîr* because of such mistakes is not a sufficient reason, in my opinion, to deny their usefulness, as scholars working with different manuscript versions of the same *tafsîr* have also often had to deal

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<sup>4</sup> As mentioned before, ʿĀbâṭabâʿî lived in the summit of what is considered by many as the Golden Era of Islam. His philanthropist and inclusivist approach, as discussed in the first chapter, reflects his peaceful socio-political context.



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with such small discrepancies.<sup>5</sup> Around the end of the first chapter, and once I was convinced that online *tafâsîr* were reliable enough, while still randomly checking the online versions with the hardbound ones, for those *tafâsîr* that I had found an online accessible edition for, I decided to combine, in my footnotes, the name of the concerned *tafsîr* followed by the number of the concerned *ayah*, with the online address of its e-published version. One last but not least precision is that accepting an online *tafsîr* as a reference in my work does not necessarily mean that I confirm the credibility of all other online versions of the same *tafsîr* or that I affirm the validity of the online versions of all other *tafâsîr* not used as references in my work.

I also tried to include in my selection of the eight *tafâsîr* a diversity of *madhâhib*: Ṭabarî is jarîrî, a school that he himself founded in opposition to Ḥanbalî school. Makkî and Qurṭubî are Mâlikî; Ibn Kathîr is Shâfi'î; Ṭabâṭabâ'î is a Twelver Shi'î; and Jazâ'irî is Wahhâbî-Salafî, thus somewhat representative of the Ḥanbalî school.<sup>6</sup> As for the *madhhab* of Suyûṭî, it is a subject of debate: some consider him a Shâfi'î and others believe that he was a Shi'î who lived a life of *taqiyyah* (hiding his true faith to save his life). Despite their limited number, one can see that these eight selected *mufasssîrûn* represent about fourteen centuries of *tafsîr*, starting with Wahb ibn Munabbih, who lived a few decades after the Prophet's death, all the way down to Jazâ'irî, who is still alive (as of this date: October 2012).

### 4.3 Short Biographies of the Eight *mufasssîrûn* within Their Respective Historical Contexts

#### 4.3.1 Wahb Ibn Munabbih

Wahb b. Munabbih b. Kâmil b. Sîj abu 'Abdullâh al-Ṣan'ânî was a Jew born in Yemen

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<sup>5</sup> In fact, as Rippin himself mentions it, he suspects that “some of these texts have been transformed into their electronic versions through Optical Character Recognition processes (rather than being inputted through simple keying).” The easiest way would be to communicate with those e-publishers and ask them about their technics of the reproduction of the texts. Scanned or keyed, the few orthographical mistakes that I occasionally found in some online *tafâsîr* were minor and could not lead to confusion. See Andrew Rippin, “The Study of *Tafsîr* in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: E-texts and their Scholarly Use.” *MELA Notes*, No. 69/70 (Fall 1999-Spring 2000): 1-13.

<sup>6</sup> Although Jazâ'irî was born and trained as a mâlikî, his conversion to salafism makes him a representative of Salafî *tafsîr* rooted in Ḥanbalî school.

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twenty-four years after the death of the Prophet.<sup>7</sup> Some historians believe that his father, Munabbih, was originally from northern parts of Khorâsân or Fârs (both in today's Iran), and that he had migrated to Yemen a few decades before the beginning of the prophetic mission of the Prophet Muḥammad in Najd. It has been said that Munabbih had converted to Islam before Wahb was born, so some scholars suggest that Wahb was born a Muslim. But because of Wahb's profound knowledge of Jewish texts, others have argued that he was a faithful Jewish scholar until a certain age, when he would have decided to convert into Islam after having already studied Jewish texts for many years.<sup>8</sup>

Wahb is one the most controversial early *mufasssirûn*. While some *muḥâddithûn* and *mufasssirûn* such as Bukhârî, Ibn Mâjah, and Jazâ'irî consider him among the strongest authorities in *tafsîr*, some others such as Ṭûsî, Ibn Khaldûn, and Ibn Kathîr accuse him of being a manipulator of *aḥâdîth* and a confounder of *tafâsîr*. Ibn Kathîr, at the end of his *tafsîr* on *âyahs* 27:20-44 in which the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba is narrated, concludes:

The closest to truth [*al-aqrab*] about stories such as this one [that I cited] is that these [stories] come from the People of the Book, from what can be found in their texts, such as narratives of Ka'b [al-Aḥbâr] and Wahb [ibn Munabbih], may God the Glorious forgive them for the impossible and the far-from-truth, and the strange things that they narrated to people of this *umma* about the news of the *Banû-Isrâ'îl* [Jews], things that happened and did not happen, and things that altered, changed, and abrogated [the Truth]. And indeed, Allâh the Almighty has made us free from these [none sense narratives] by what is more correct, more useful, more clear, and more articulated, and praise and gratitude be to Allâh.<sup>9</sup>

Knowing Wahb's controversial reputation, it is difficult to find a work of *tafsîr* that ignores his name and do not refer to some or all of his commentaries. As Todd Lawson mentions:

Wahb, highly regarded in many traditions circles, is the source of many

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<sup>7</sup> In some Muslim sources, his name comes with Ka'b al-Aḥbâr and 'Abdullâh b. Salâm as three Jewish rabbis or sages who converted into Islam.

<sup>8</sup> Tod Lawson is among those who prefer the possibility of Wahb being born a Muslim. To support his conviction, he gives two references: the works of Raif Georges Khoury and Joseph Horovitz. See Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an*, p. 52, n. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Kathîr, *Tafsîr Ibn Kathîr*, under 27:44, available online at <http://rowea.blogspot.ca/2010/02/pdf-8.html> (consulted on Sep. 21<sup>st</sup> 2012).

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traditions dealing with other biblical subjects and, in modern times especially (but not exclusively), much of his exegetical and biblical tradition has been anathematized as *Isrâ'iliyât*. In light of this, it is somewhat ironic that the most influential traditions denying that Jesus was crucified are traced to his authority.<sup>10</sup>

Ṭabarî is not the first *mufasssir* who cites Wahb on Jesus' crucifixion.<sup>11</sup> As he himself mentions it, his source for Wahb's narratives is 'Abd b. Ḥamîd (d. 249H) who heard them from Ya'qûb al-Qumî<sup>12</sup> (d. 174H) who, in his turn, narrated them from Hârûn b. 'Antarah (d. 142H).<sup>13</sup> Knowing that Ya'qûb al-Qumî and Hârûn b. 'Antarah were both *muḥâddith* and not *mufasssir*, it would mean that Ibn Ḥamîd was the first *mufasssir* to include Wahb's narratives in his *tafsîr* on 4:157. But since his *tafsîr* has not been preserved (except for a few pages), until an authentic manuscript of his work is discovered, Ṭabarî remains the first *mufasssir* who cites completely Wahb's narratives on Jesus' crucifixion, and to whose original text of *tafsîr* scholars have access.<sup>14</sup> Many *mufasssirûn*, including most of those studied in this thesis, follow Ṭabarî in partially or fully narrating Wahb's commentaries on the crucifixion.<sup>15</sup>

Despite Wahb's importance in *tafsîr*, the numerous reports about his life and personality remain between myth and reality. What can be said with certainty is that he was born and lived in an era when outside Yemen, Islam was in full expansion. As Hugh Goddard explains:

By 642/21 [a decade before Wahb's birth] the Muslim state had conquered and established its control over the majority of the Sassanian Persian Empire, ... [as well as] a large part of the Byzantine Empire. ... The Sassanian Empire was destroyed ... and the Byzantine Empire lost roughly

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<sup>10</sup> Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an*, 49-50.

<sup>11</sup> Lawson states: "By far the most popular versions of the substitution legend are related on the authority of Wahb." See *ibid*. In fact, although Ṭabarî is not the first *mufasssir* who cites them, the popularity of Wahb's narratives is due to Ṭabarî's choice of not only including them in his *tafsîr*, but also preferring them to other versions of the crucifixion's story.

<sup>12</sup> His full name is Abu al-Ḥasan Ya'qûb b. 'Abdullâh b. Sa'd b. Mâlik al-Ash'arî al-Qumî.

<sup>13</sup> His full name is Abu 'Abd al-Raḥmân Hârûn b. 'Antarah b. 'Abd al-Raḥmân al-Shaybânî. He is also known as Ibn abi Wakî'.

<sup>14</sup> Ṭabarî's rhetoric when presenting his sources clearly shows that he had access only to 'Abd ibn Ḥamîd's work.

<sup>15</sup> In this regard, Qurṭubî is an exception, but the absence of Wahb's narratives in his *tafsîr* is as meaningful as their presence in other *tafsîr*. This issue is discussed in pages 258-60 of this thesis.

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one half of its territory. Within the next century, the Islamic state continued its expansion, so that by 750/133 [two decades after Wahb's death] it had become the largest state seen up until that point in human history, having incorporated north Africa, Spain, the most fertile parts of central Asia, and much of what is now Afghanistan and Pakistan. After 750/133 the process of expansion, it is true, came to a halt for several centuries, and a process of, on the other hand, consolidation, and, on the other, fragmentation began...<sup>16</sup>

Because of what Goddard calls “fragmentation,” in Yemen as in many other regions, every few years, political power shifted from one authority to another, often as a result of a rebellion. In the middle of this unstable situation, and because of his erudition and his powerful rhetoric, Wahb was appointed, at a young age, as the official *khaṭīb* (preacher) of the Mosque of Sana'a, and soon became the *qāḍī* of Sana'a. He was able to keep successfully his different positions throughout these shifts in political power, and collaborated with different authorities who often were enemies to each other.

One of the best biographies of Wahb, by far, is the one written by Alfred-Louis de Prémare.<sup>17</sup> He briefly explains the chaotic political context in which Wahb transmitted his *aḥādīth*, and preached his Qur'ānic exegeses. He writes:

Wahb était encore enfant lors de la guerre civile qui suivit le meurtre du troisième successeur de Muḥammad, 'Uṭmān, en 656, et qui avait mis aux

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<sup>16</sup> Hugh Goddard, *A Story of Christian-Muslim Relations*. Chicago: New Amsterdam Books, 2001 (p. 34).

<sup>17</sup> While being careful about the sources of Wahb's biography, de Prémare mistakenly do not see the very pejorative aspect of *isrā'īliyyāt*, and considers it as “Israeli traditions” that explain the Qur'ānic narratives on other prophets. He writes:

Il [Wahb] doit surtout sa fortune au fait qu'il a été considéré comme le représentant type du genre appelé les *Isrā'īliyyāt*, ces « Traditions israélites » auxquelles recouraient les commentateurs musulmans pour expliquer les narrations ou les allusions coraniques autour des prophètes et des personnages bibliques anciens.

See Alfred-Louis de Prémare, “Wahb B. Munabbih, une figure singulière du premier islam.” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 60e année, No. 3 (May-June 2005): 531-549 (p. 531). In a long article, Roberto Tottoli studies the early usages of the term *isrā'īliyyāt* trying to prove that it was not initially used by some early Muslim scholars as a pejorative term. He mentions that the first appearance of the term is in Mas'ūdī's famous work *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādīn al-Jawhar*. In fact, in Mas'ūdī's passage partially cited by Tottoli, the term *isrā'īliyyāt* is used in juxtaposition with '*ajā'ib al-bihār* (the wonders of the seas) in a long sentence presenting both as the extremes of what its veracity is uncertain. Tottoli does not bother to explain what the common point is between *isrā'īliyyāt* and '*ajā'ib al-bihār*. Also, he does not pay attention to the important expression of *hia lāhiqa* (a downgrading way of saying: “that [uncertain thing] joins”) used instead of *hia muta'alliqa bi* (that belongs to) at the beginning of the sentence. Tottoli's further translations of other Muslim sources suffer from the same weakness. See Roberto Tottoli, “Origin and Use of the term *isrā'īliyyāt* in Muslim Literature.” *Arabica*, T. 46, Fasc. 2 (1999): 193-210 (pp. 194-5).

prises ‘Alī, gendre de Muḥammad, ancêtre du chiisme, et son rival Mu‘āwiya, cousin de ‘Uṭmān et gouverneur de Damas. Il était âgé d’une trentaine d’années lors de la deuxième guerre civile, qui opposa les souverains omeyyades de Damas et le clan qurayshite d’Ibn Zubayr, lequel avait été proclamé calife à La Mecque et avait réuni sous son obédience le Hedjâz et le Yémen. Par la suite, prédicateur à la mosquée de Sanaa, il eut à composer avec l’un ou l’autre des gouverneurs omeyyades de la famille ou de la tribu de Ḥaḡḡāḡ b. Yūsuf, homme lige du calife ‘Abd al-Malik, qui avait mis fin à la sécession d’Ibn al-Zubayr. Il exerça les fonctions de cadī à Sanaa sous le règne de ‘Umar II b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (717- 720). Enfin, il mourut, victime de la bastonnade, vers 730, pendant le règne du calife Ḥiṣām b. ‘Abd al-Malik (724-743), une vingtaine d’années avant la chute de la dynastie (750).<sup>18</sup>

So, Wahb was born in an era when, on the one hand, the two powerful pillars of theological stability in Islam, *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*, were at their early stages of formation, and, on the other, the young Muslim Empire (and the Muslim identity), now facing a much wider geographical context than the initial Najd region within the Arabian peninsula, needed more precise elements/lines to define itself *vis-à-vis* the defeated inhabitants of the newly conquered territories. To my knowledge, the influence of Wahb’s accounts of the Qur’ānic biblical stories on the Muslim conqueror rulers of his era is not studied yet, but it seems undeniable that his narratives affected those rulers’ perception of conquered Christians, and by doing so, contributed to the formation of an interreligious context and a general atmosphere in which *shurūṭ* (the treaties between Muslim conquerors and Non-Muslim conquered) were written and imposed.<sup>19</sup> However, his life was long enough to transmit what he believed to be the truth about the Qur’ān and its biblical stories, and at a very old age, while his *aḥādīth* and commentaries had reached the farthest corners of the vast Islamic Empire, he was imprisoned because of his opinions on *qadar* (predestination). There, he was beaten to death.

#### 4.3.2 Ṭabarī

Ṭabarī’s brief biography is mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis. A decent explanation about the legacy of this brilliant mind would require numerous pages, but the

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 532-3.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed study of those treaties see Milka Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire : From Surrender to Coexistence*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2011.

following paragraph from McAuliffe is very relevant to the focus of this thesis:

By the use of a number of formulaic expressions, al-Ṭabarî has organized the various sorts of exegetical material that may be applied to a particular verse. While he clearly aimed at comprehensiveness and was careful to include interpretations with which ultimately he did not agree, this commentator had very little patience with those who strayed too far from the literal sense. He was quick to discount such hypotheses as simply unsupported by the text. In similar fashion did he shy away from useless speculation about matters on which the text was silent. An example of the commonsensical approach that has won him such a central position in the history of Qur'anic exegesis may be found in his treatment of *sûrat al-mâ'idah* 5:114, the verse from which that *sûrat* derives its name "The Table." The verse is a prayer from Jesus the son of Mary, asking God "to send down on us a table from heaven which would be for us a feast...." After citing numerous *ahâdîth* that sought to discern the various delicacies the table might have held, al-Ṭabarî matter-of-factly states: "As for the correct view about what was on the table, it is said to be something to eat. Maybe it was fish or bread; maybe it was fruit from Paradise. There is no benefit in knowing and no harm in not knowing." Such reasoned insight has made al-Ṭabarî's work an indispensable reference for all subsequent exegetical endeavor. Not only has it been the source of various condensations and extracts, it has served as a major authority for more than a thousand years of Qur'anic exegesis.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4.3.3 Makkî Ibn Abi Ṭâlib<sup>21</sup>

Abu Muḥammad Makkî ibn abi Ṭâlib Hammûsh b. Muḥammad b. Mukhtâr al-Qaysî al-Qayrawânî (355-437H) was born in Qairawan (in today's Tunisia) at a time when Qairawân was an educational center attracting Qur'anic students and scholars from neighboring regions such as Andalusia, Sudan and Morocco. Very soon, his talent and thirst for Qur'anic knowledge was bigger than what his hometown had to offer, so from the age of 13, he started to travel frequently to Egypt where he was able to participate in the highest academic circles, learning advanced Qur'anic sciences from some most reputed scholars of his era such as Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muṭarrif al-Kanânî (d. 54H), 'Abd al-Mun'im b. 'Abdullâh b. Ghalyûn (d. 389H), and his son Ṭâhir.<sup>22</sup> At the age of 19, he was a *ḥâfiẓ* and a great reciter of the Qur'ân, as well as a linguist and an articulated

<sup>20</sup> McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 43-4.

<sup>21</sup> Not to be confused with Abu Ṭâlib al-Makkî (d. 386H), the Shi'î jurist and Sufî mystic.

<sup>22</sup> Some report Ibn Sulaymân al-Lakhmî as one of Makkî's teachers in Egypt. Knowing that al-Lakhmî lived between 260 and 360H, it seems so unlikely that Makkî could have met him before his death.

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letterman in Arabic. Between that ages until he migrated to Cordoba in 393H, he traveled several times to different Islamic centers of science, including Mecca where he stayed about four years benefiting from the seasonal and temporary presence of the greatest *'ulamâ* of different *madhâhib* in that “carrefour of science.”<sup>23</sup> Although Makkî was raised in a Mâlikî tradition, his open mind and immense modesty enabled him to examine and study the best of each *madhhab*, turning him into a great scholar of the Qur'ân with a vast and deep knowledge on various debated Qur'ânic issues. His numerous and important writings in different fields of Islamic Sciences, such as Qur'ânic sciences, Arabic grammar and language, jurisprudence, biographies and more importantly *tafsîr*, have made him an unavoidable reference in the Sunnî Muslim world.<sup>24</sup> When he migrated to Cordoba, the major waves of conversion to Islam had already passed and Cordoba was among the most populated and diverse cities in the Muslim World. Makkî wrote his 70 volumes *tafsîr* during his 44 years of residence in that city where despite the conflicts and shifts of power between the central caliphal authority and the local independent Umayyad caliphate of Cordoba, the city had kept its glorious place at the zenith of cultural and intellectual activities in the Muslim world. Makkî wrote his *tafsîr* in a place and at a time marked by the constructive and peaceful relationship between adherents of different faiths. Cordoba had inherited not only the inclusivist spirit of 'Abd al-Raḥmân III, but also the marvelous library of al-Ḥakam II housing close to half a million volumes of human wisdom from around the world in different languages. The last decade of Makkî's life was under the Jahwarid Dynasty:

Years of civil war following the breakdown of central caliphal authority in 1008 [C.E.] prompted the Cordoban council of notables, led by a prominent aristocrat, Abu al-Ḥazm Jahwar ibn Jahwar, to abolish the

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<sup>23</sup> Al-Jazrî (751-833H) reports some of those scholars to be Abu al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad ibn Farâs (d. 395H) and Abu al-Qâsim 'Ubaydullâh al-Saqatî (d. 406H). See Shams al-Dîn abu al-Khayr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad 'Ali ibn al-Jazrî, *Ghâyat al-Nihâyat fi Ṭabaqât al-Qurrâ'*. 2 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2006 (vol. 2, pp. 309-10).

<sup>24</sup> In fact, in the science of the recitation of the Qur'ân, Makkî is a reliable source for both Shi'is and Sunnîs. His important contribution to the canonization of the actual commonly accepted seven *qirâ'at* of the Qur'ân has been studied and discussed by many Muslim scholars. However, it is surprizing to know that despite his undeniable importance, he is commonly ignored by western scholars of the concerned fields. For his major work on the recitation of the Qur'ân, see Makkî ibn abi Ṭâlib, *Kitâb al-Kashf 'an Wujûh al-qirâ'ât al-sab'*. 2 vols. Edited by M. Ramadan. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risâlat, 1987.

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institution of the caliphate and proclaim Cordoba a republic. Jahwar was elected head and, as virtually an absolute sovereign ostensibly assisted by a council, restored peace and economic prosperity in his 12-year-reign (1031-43).<sup>25</sup>

It was during that peaceful period that Makkî finished his *tafsîr* as well as his many other works in different fields of Islamic Sciences. Although Makkî carefully kept his distance from political power and lived a very simple life till his death, his erudition attracted many scholars and students, and his lectures at the Great Mosque of Cordoba placed him as an exceptional *khaṭīb* among those preaching at that Mosque.<sup>26</sup> Nuha Khoury's description of the Great Mosque of Cordoba at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century fairly reflects the ambiance in which Makkî wrote his *tafsîr*. She writes:

This identity [of the Mosque of Cordoba in the 10<sup>th</sup> century] is defined partly through the Andalusian capital's own association with 'ilm and with Maliki principles of ittibâ', thereby providing a primary link with Medinese practices and underlining the Andalusian Umayyads' preservation of established Islamic ideals. Later compilations of the merits (*faḍâ'il*) of al-Andalus make it a desirable location for the acquisition of knowledge (*dâr hijra li-al-'ilm*) and a land whose Islamization was prophesied by the Prophet. Throughout its various stages, the mosque is presented as the physical embodiment of these qualities and a fulfillment of the prophetic message.<sup>27</sup>

### 4.3.4 Qurṭubî

Abu 'Abdullâh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. abi Bakr al-Anṣârî al-Qurṭubî was born in Cordoba around 610H, two years after "the combined armies of Leon, Castile, Portugal and Aragon, reinforced by Crusaders from France and Germany, had won a decisive victory over the al-Muḥâddith at the Battle of Las Novas de Tolosa." Thus, it is not surprising that from a very young age, his life was affected by conflicts between

<sup>25</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, Academic Edition, under *Jahwarid Dynasty*, available online at <http://www.britannica.com> (consulted on Sep. 25<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Some report that after the Yûnus b. 'Abdullâh al-Qâḍî, the official preacher of the Great Mosque of Cordoba passed away in 429H, Abu al-Ḥazm Jahwar (d. 435H) appointed Makkî as the official preacher and the qâḍî al-quḍât (the main judge) of Cordoba. There is no record of Makkî having officially judged in Cordoba, but there are some undocumented stories telling that he accepted the job of official *khaṭīb* of the Great Mosque of Cordoba with the condition that he does not receive any salary for it.

<sup>27</sup> Nuha N. N. Khoury, "The Meaning of the Great Mosque of Cordoba in the Tenth Century." *Muqarnas*, vol. 13 (1996): 80-98 (p. 83).



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Christians and Muslims. In fact, Qurṭubî's father, a simple farmer, was assassinated by Spanish Christian soldiers during an invasion in 627H/1229C.E. So at the age of 17, he became the bread bearer for his poor family, and parallel to his Qur'ânic studies at school, he had to work in a clay workshop. But even this feeble stability did not last long, and six years later, Cordoba fell in the hands of Christians. In 633, Qurṭubî fled to Alexandria and then to Cairo where he could participate in the circles of some of the most well-reputed erudites of his era, such as Abu al-'Abbâs Aḥmad al-Anṣârî (d. 686H). Being a pacifist by nature, very soon Qurṭubî decided to leave Cairo and isolate himself in Minyat Banî Khaṣîb (the capital of the *minya* governorate in Upper Egypt) where far from all disturbances and disorders, including the shift of power from Ayyubids to Mamlûks, people were living in relative peace.<sup>28</sup> Qurṭubî wrote his *tafsîr* in an era marked by the end of the Fatimid Golden Age for Jews and Christians and the beginning of internal conflicts and external wars in almost every corner of the vast Islamic Empire. Nazeer Ahmed gives a brief but clear description of that historical context:

[While al-Muḥâddith lost to Christian crusaders in Tolosa,] Genghiz Khan devastated Central Asia and Persia region (1219-1222) and Baghdad itself was threatened.... Sensing an historic opportunity, the Christian powers openly sought an alliance with the Mongols against the Muslims. ... While Genghiz Khan was devastating Samarqand and Bukhara, a German army invaded Egypt (1218-1221). The Muslim world was thus faced with a two-pronged invasion from a Mongol-Crusader axis. The onslaught was total, with the avowed intent of capturing Muslim lands and extirpating Islam. After the Battle of Las Novas de Tolosa, Muslim political power in Andalus declined rapidly. By 1230, Mongol horsemen were riding into

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<sup>28</sup> As Donald P. Little mentions it, the conflicts between Muslims and Christians began much later in Minyat Banî Khaṣîb. In fact, it was decades after Qurṭubî's death that a new wave of mandatory conversion to Islam arrived to that region. Little writes:

... a period of relative calm lasting almost 35 years set in which was broken only by occasional, isolated incidents of unrest. In 724/1324, for example, the Mamlûks destroyed five churches in Minyat Banî Khaṣîb when they discovered that the Christians had rebuilt the churches that had been destroyed there." Even that event, as Little cites it from al-Maqrîzî, was not a preplanned decision of Muslim rulers. It started simply because "Mamlûk detachment sent to Minya was stoned by a crowd protesting against the functionaries (*mubâshirîn*) of the town. After the Mamlûks had dispersed the crowd by charging it, they found that 360 blue (Christian) turbans had been left behind in the melée ! It was then that they decided to destroy the churches.

See Donald P. Little, "Coptic Conversion to Islam under the Baḥrî Mamlûks, 692-755/1293-1354." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, vol. 39, No. 3 (1976): 552-569 (p. 565).

eastern Anatolia and knocking at the gates of Delhi. In Spain, political disintegration led to a free-for-all with local emirs seeking alliances with Christian powers against each other. The Crusaders were only too willing to provide military help in return for military cooperation against other Muslim princes. ... Valencia was taken in 1200. The Balearic Islands in the western Mediterranean fell in 1230. Southern Portugal was lost in 1231. Cordoba, the seat of the Umayyad Caliphate fell in 1236. The conquest was complete with the fall of Seville in 1248.... Between 1219 and 1260, the Muslims lost more than half of their dominions. ...The Crusaders had formed a geopolitical alliance with the Mongols with the avowed intent of eliminating Islam. ...The loss of the Andalusian Peninsula was much more than a local military event. Until the expulsion of the Muslims in 1492, Europe was bottled up from the southwest. The conquest of Spain and Portugal freed up the energies of Europe and it was now poised to venture out into the Atlantic. Beyond the blue waters of the vast ocean lay the gold coast of Africa, the route to the Americas and the riches of the Indian Ocean. The loss of Andalus was to reverberate through the centuries in the European discovery of America, the slave trade from West Africa and the colonization of Asia.<sup>29</sup>

It was in this era of anarchy that Qurṭubî became one of the most famous exegetes of the Muslim world. Although he had the opportunity of taking advantage of that chaotic situation, offering his “pen” in return for positions that were hastily offered to whoever could help the stabilization of power, and later to the Islamization of Christians under the Mamlûks, Qurṭubî kept very distant from all authorities and lived a very simple life, like his contemporary thinker Ibn ‘Arabî. However, unlike Ibn ‘Arabî who travelled all around the Islamic Empire, Qurṭubî did not show any interest in travelling, and stayed in Minyat Banî Khaṣîb all the rest of his productive life.<sup>30</sup> When he passed away in 671H, his fame had reached the farthest cities of the Islamic Empire although he himself had never left his little village once he had settled in it.

#### 4.3.5 Ibn Kathîr

Ibn Kathîr’s short biography can be read in the first chapter of this thesis. The following

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<sup>29</sup> Nazeer Ahmed, “The Fall of Cordoba.” In *An Encyclopaedia of Islamic History*. No page number. Concord, CA: e-published by history of Islam Web Site, available online at <http://historyofislam.com/contents/the-classical-period/cordoba-the-fall-of/> (consulted on Sep. 27<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>30</sup> I could not find any trace of Qurṭubî even going to the *Ḥajj*. This, of course, corresponds very well to his simple life not reaching the level of *istitâ’at* (the financial basic level that makes *hajj* an obligation for the adherent).

paragraph from McAuliffe completes it in a relevant way for our own present purposes:

Ibn Kathîr's commentary is distinguished by the incorporation of significant historical material from non-Muslim sources. A good example of this may be found in his discussion of *sûrat Âl 'Imrân* (3):55, where he reviews the first three and a half centuries of Christian history, including the reign of Constantine the Great. ... The Iraqi scholar, Qâsim al-Qaysî ... remarks on Ibn Kathîr's assessment procedures by saying: "When Imâm Ibn Kathîr quoted a statement from someone like Ibn Jarîr [al-Ṭabarî] or [Fakhr al-Dîn] al-Râzî, he did not accept it on blind faith [*bi-mujarrad al-taqlîd*]. Rather he formed his opinion of it. When he thought it correct, he confirmed it. When he thought it incorrect, he rejected and criticized it."<sup>31</sup>

#### 4.3.6 Suyûṭî

Abu al-Faḍl 'Abd al-Raḥmân b. abi Bakr Jalâl al-Dîn al-Suyûṭî (849-911H) also known as *ibn al-kutub* (son of books) was born in Cairo in a family well known for the erudition and the wealth of its men. Despite the loss of his father at the age of five, as a tradition in his family, he continued his education under the supervision of the great Ḥanafî jurist, Kamâl al-Dîn b. al-Humâm (790-861H) to whom Suyûṭî's father had entrusted him. At the age of eight Suyûṭî was a *ḥâfîz*, and continued to memorize a collection of books including *Alfiyyah ibn Mâlik*, a rhymed book explaining the Arabic grammar in one thousand poetic verses. At the age of 15, Suyûṭî was better known and more respected than most erudites of his era including some of his own teachers, and at the age of 17 his classes were among the most crowded circles of education in Cairo. His fame at such a young age did not stop him from participating in the lectures of some of the most reputed teachers of his era, such as Sirâj al-Dîn al-Balqînî (d. 805H), his son 'Ilm-al-Dîn al-Balqînî (d. 868H), and Sharaf al-Dîn al-Manâwî (d. 857H) with whom he learned *tafsîr*. Suyûṭî had an insatiable thirst for knowledge. The number of teachers from whom he received *ijâzah* (the authorization of teaching or issuing *fatwas*) or under whom he studied reaches more than 150.<sup>32</sup>

Suyûṭî's profound erudition in various fields and sciences, from Arabic grammar and mathematics to history and jurisprudence, made him incomparable to his

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>32</sup> Suyûṭî's pupil, the famous historian Muḥammad 'Ali Shams al-Dîn al-Dâwûdî (d. 945) the author of *Tabaqât al-Mufasssîrîn* mentions more than 150 teachers of Suyûṭî, and lists them in alphabetical order.

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contemporary scholars. Being one of the most trusted and respected grammarians of all time, his opinion on any linguistic dispute has always been considered by many scholars as the final answer to the problem. When Suyûtî achieved his first *ijâza* for both teaching and issuing *fatwâs* at the age of 27 (from ‘Ilm al-Dîn al-Balqînî), it was clear that a brilliant future filled with high governmental positions lay in front of him. But Suyûtî was not interested in getting involved in politics. He lived under the rule of 13 different Mamlûk Sultans. He decisively kept distance from all of them, refusing their honors and gifts.<sup>33</sup> Instead, in order to meet some great scholars of his era, he organized a series of trips to some major academic centers of the Islamic Empire in Syria, Yemen, Maghreb, and even India. He also traveled to the Hġjâz where after doing his *hajj*, he stayed a whole year discussing scientific issues with many well-known erudites of his time.

When Suyûtî returned from his trips, Muslims in Cairo were living under the Burji Mamlûk Sultan, Sayf al-Dġn Qa’it Bay, who ruled from 872H/1467C.E. to his death in 901H/1495C.E., at a time considered as the culmination of Mamlûk’s glory. But even in that period relations between Muslims and Christians were uncertain.<sup>34</sup> Hugh Goddard states:

The Byzantine Empire by this time [the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century] had become a shadow of its former self. Decimated, as we have seen, by the Fourth Crusade, it had at least managed to throw off Latin rule in 1262/659, but since then it had become, sandwiched as it was between Ottoman territories in Europe and Ottoman territories in Asia, virtually a vassal-state of the Ottoman Sultans; and in 1453/857 Constantinople itself was finally taken by Sultan Mehmed (Muġammad) II (1451/855-1481/886).<sup>35</sup>

As Goddard explains, the conquest of Constantinople was not the end of Ottoman invasions of Christian territories. It was continued all the way towards central Europe, culminating in the siege of Vienna in 1529C.E., which marked the end of Sulayman the

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<sup>33</sup> There are even some reports on conflicts between Suyûtî and some of his contemporary Mamlûk Sultans. He himself mentions his hidden life during the 100 days of the governance of Tuman Bay I (d. 1515H).

<sup>34</sup> In fact, only two decades before Suyûtî was born, Mamlûks had invaded the Christian-held island of Cyprus, adding it to their vast kingdom, so Suyûtî grew up in a social context still filled with anti-Christian feelings.

<sup>35</sup> Hugh Goddard, *A Story of Christian-Muslim Relations*. Chicago: New Amsterdam Books, 2001 (p. 111).

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Magnificent, and subsequent Ottoman rulers' hopes to expand even further their European territories. With a few exceptions, after centuries of crusades and scattered battles between Muslims and Christians mostly in different regions of Europe, the anti-Christian tendency of any well-known Muslim erudite was highly appreciated and generously rewarded by both Mamlûk and Ottoman rulers. Although, unlike the Ottomans, Mamlûks were not at war against Christian kingdoms, they had not forgotten the betrayal of Christians during the Mogul invasions in Damascus. So, aside from any question of right or wrong theological reasoning, Mamlûk Sultans understood the imposition of restrictions on Christians as a useful means to eliminate or reduce a major threat from within. In that context, issuing anti-Christian *fatwâs* was sometimes part of the job for an erudite who was craving for a governmental position. Instances of such *fatwâs* under Mamlûks are numerous. For example, in 1417/819H Mamlûks imposed a dress code to non-Muslims, and prohibited them from riding swift asses. A few years later, official jobs were restricted for non-Muslims and those who had already been appointed were fired. In 829H/1426C.E. Malik al-Ashraf Barsbay (825-841H) ordered Jews and Christians to shorten their turbans and to put an iron ring around their necks when going to public baths. This last rule was based on a *fatwâ* that considered non-Muslims as "impure" human beings. This concept of "non-Muslims' impurity" enabled Sultan Jaqmâq (841-856H) to forbid non-Muslim physicians from touching/treating Muslims in 851H/1448C.E. Even Sayf al-Dîn Qa'it Bay, who was the most tolerant Mamlûk Sultan *vis-à-vis* non-Muslims, twice imposed a heavy tribute on *dhimmi*s, once in 893H/1488C.E. and another time in 896H/1491C.E.<sup>36</sup>

Under this latter Sultan, and upon his arrival from his last trip in 890H/1485C.E., Suyûfî accepted a chair in the famous mosque of al-Zâhir Baybars.<sup>37</sup> But very soon, following a series of useless harsh verbal and written disputes between him and some scholars such as Shams al-Dîn al-Jawjarî (821-889H) and Shams al-Dîn al-Sakhâwî (831-902H), Suyûfî stopped teaching, cut himself off from the world, isolated himself in his

<sup>36</sup> See D. P. Little, "Communal Strife in Late Mamlûk Jerusalem." *Islamic Law and Society*, 6 (1999): 69-96.

<sup>37</sup> For more information about the role and the importance of Baybars mosque for Mamlûk Sultans see Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Cairo of the Mamluks: A History of the Architecture and Its Culture." London: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., 2007.

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house on Rawḍa Island, and far from the hassles of the educational circles focused on frequent praying and restless writing. As a result, when he passed away about two decades later in 911H, he left behind him a treasure of more than 500 books and *risâlât* (long articles) in different Islamic Sciences. Among his writings, one can find not one, but two *tafsîr* of the Qur'ân: *Al-Itqân fi 'Ulûm al-Qur'ân*, which is considered by many as the first work ever written on Qur'ânic Sciences, and his famous *al-Durr al-Manthûr fi Tafsîr al-Ma'thûr*, which is one of the most detailed and elaborated *tafsîr* of the Qur'ân.<sup>38</sup>

### 4.3.7 Ṭabâṭabâ'î

'Allâmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabâṭabâ'î is one of the most prominent *mufasssîrûn* in the history of Twelver Shi'î *tafsîr*. He was born in a small farmer family on March 17<sup>th</sup> 1904 in a village near Tabrîz called Shâd Aâbâd. At the age of five, he lost his mother, which was followed by the loss of his father four years later. At the age of nine, his guardian sent him to school where for the next six years he learned to recite the Qur'ân, and studied the Persian literature and rhetoric. After finishing primary school, he consecrated the next seven years of his life to the learning of a wide range of arts and sciences from advanced Arabic grammar, *fiqh*, and philosophy to pure mathematics, astronomy, painting and calligraphy. At the age of 25, he moved to Najaf where he found the opportunity of participating in the lectures and classes of the most prominent Twelver Shi'î erudites of his era such as Sheykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Nâ'inî al-Gharawî (1277-1355H) and Sheykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Işfahânî (1296-1361H).<sup>39</sup>

In 1946, because of the financial crisis caused by World War II, he decided to return to his native village where for ten years he consecrated his life to agriculture and

<sup>38</sup> Before Suyûtî isolates himself, he had co-authored a *tafsîr* with his teacher Jalâl al-Dîn al-Muḥillî (d. 864H) entitled *Tafsîr al-Jalâlayn* (*tafsîr* composed by two Jalâls). This augments the number of *tafsîr* written by Suyûtî to three.

<sup>39</sup> These two, together with Ḍiyâ' al-Dîn al-'Irâqî (1278-1361H) are among the most prominent Shi'î scholars of their era. In fact, each of them established his own school of thought within Shi'ism. Besides his many other teachers, Ṭabâṭabâ'î was the student of all three of them. Işfahânî was a philosopher, and some believe that he planted the seeds of a passion for philosophy in Ṭabâṭabâ'î's heart. Besides his elaborated *tafsîr* of the Qur'ân, Ṭabâṭabâ'î is the author of some of the greatest books ever written on Islamic Philosophy.

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farm activities. Ten years later, in 1956, Ṭabâṭabâ'î decided to leave the farm life and migrated with his family to the city of Qom, the main center of *ḥawza* (Twelver Shi'î traditional schools), where he soon amazed all students and teachers with the depth of his knowledge and the brilliance of his thought. A couple of years after his arrival, he had become an icon in almost every Islamic science, and hundreds of advanced level students were sitting on their knees in his classes.

To many, the year 1956 marks the beginning of Iran's flourishing economy under the Pahlavi dynasty. It reached its culmination during what some call "the decade of Iran's Golden Economy" (1965-1975C.E.). Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919-1980C.E.), the last Shah of Iran who had spent his childhood and the best part of his teenage years in Switzerland, had an insatiable thirst for the westernization of Iran and the importation of modernity, understood in its American sense and style. Under his kingship, religious non-Muslim minorities such as Zoroastrians, Jews, Assyrians, Armenians, and other Christians were living with religious freedom.<sup>40</sup> It was in that socio-cultural and political context that Ṭabâṭabâ'î wrote his *tafsîr*. In fact, the Shah's main concerns were with communism coming from the north and the new political forms of Shi'î Islam stemming from within Iran.<sup>41</sup> He tried to create connection and good relationship with the apolitical erudites in *ḥawza*, but Ṭabâṭabâ'î was not interested in any honor or privilege offered by the government, and did not accept to meet with any authorities. In 1979, the Islamic Revolution in Iran ended three millennia of monarchy, and replaced it with the first Islamic Republic. Within less than a few months, many of Ṭabâṭabâ'î's students became authorities, and some of his fellow colleagues became men of political power. But Ṭabâṭabâ'î's short life after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran demonstrates

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<sup>40</sup> A quick look at churches and Christian temples built in Pahlavi's era shows the religious freedom provided for Christians by Muḥammad Reza Pahlavi. Here is a short list of some of them built in Tehran, the capital of Iran with the year of construction in between parenthesis (all in Common Era calendar): Armenian churches: Surp Sarkis Mother Cathedral (1970), Surp Asdvadzadzin Church (1945), Surp Tarkmantchatz Church (1968), Surp Hovhanness Chapel (1936), Surp Stepanos Chapel (1974), Surp Grigor Lusavoritch Armenian Catholic Church (1955); Assyrian churches: St. George Church (1962), Holy Mary Church (1978), St. Joseph Church (1950), Chaldean Catholic Chapel (1967), St. Thomas Church (1967).

<sup>41</sup> Although the apolitical and anti-political Shi'î groups could have enjoyed the same freedom, the line between political and non-political Shi'ism, if ever existing, was not clear to Pahlavi. Consequently, all religious Shi'î groups were supervised and limited by the government. Non-Shi'î groups such as Sufis and Isma'îlis were excepted.

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that he had no interest in having the least share in this newly conquered power in the name of religious ideals. Instead, he isolated himself in his little office at home, and his close educational circle was the only place people, including new politicians and men in power, could meet with him. When he died on November 7<sup>th</sup> 1981, his only wealth was his collection of books, his crowning achievement being his brilliant *tafsîr* of the Qur'ân. It is not an exaggeration to claim that his *tafsîr* is by far the most elaborate rational *tafsîr* of the Qur'ân ever written by any *mufasssîr*, whether Sunnî or Shi'î. For example, as mentioned before in this thesis, in some cases, despite his extraordinary inclusivist approach, Ṭabâtabâ'î prefers an intellectual discussion to the citation of some *aḥâdîth* even if at the end they lead to the same conclusion.

### 4.3.8 Jazâ'irî

Abu Bakr Jâbir b. Mûsâ b. 'Abd al-Qâdir b. Jâbir al-Jazâ'irî is the only one of the eight selected *mufasssîrûn* for this thesis who, as mentioned before, is still alive (as of October 2012). Jazâ'irî was born in 1921C.E. in a village called Lioua situated on the outskirts of Biskra, the capital of the Biskra Province in Algeria. It was an era marked by the cruelty of French colonialists who were ruling over most of North Africa, including all of Algeria. Becoming an orphan at the first year of his life, Jazâ'irî was raised by his mother, and under the supervision of his uncles. From an early age, besides studying at the *madrassa* of his village, he worked as a shepherd and helped his uncles in various agricultural activities. At the age of nine, he became a *ḥâfiẓ*, and soon thereafter left the village for the closest town, Biskra, where he dedicated his life to the lectures of Shaykh Na'îm b. Aḥmad b. 'Ali b. Şâliḥ al-Na'îmî (1909-1973C.E.), a *mufasssîr* well-known in that region. As a teenager, he migrated to the capital Algiers where he met Ṭayyib al-'Uqbî (1889-1960C.E.), the zealous Algerian Islamist-reformist who had recently returned from the Ḥijâz with revolutionary ideas about the "salafization" of the Muslim World. Until then, Jazâ'irî had been trained as a Malikî scholar, but al-'Uqbî introduced him to Salafism, and very soon Jazâ'irî became a disciple of al-'Uqbî and an adherent of Salafism. Al-'Uqbî was an activist and had founded "Cercle du Progrès," (the Circle of Progress), an Islamist movement of liberation from French colonialism. Jazâ'irî followed him and became an active member of many movements such as "L'Association d'Appel



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à l’Islam” (the Call to Islam Association) and the movement of “Des Jeunes Croyants” (Young believers). He even published, for a while, a journal called *al-Dâ’i* (the Caller) and invited his fellow citizens to Salafism. The journal did not survive, and al-‘Uqbî offered him the editorial of “*Liwâ*” (flag), the *porte-parole* of “Des jeunes Croyants.” Jazâ’irî grew up and worked in an era when Algerian Muslims suffered discriminations and were severely controlled by the French colonial rulers. He witnessed the sufferings and humiliations of World War II in which Algerian Muslims had to fight for France. Much can be written about the Algerians’ anti-Christian and/or anti-foreigner feelings in which Jazâ’irî grew up and worked as a result of these injustices, but it will not add much to his xenophobic fundamentalist approach linked to his Salafist worldview. In fact, he did not stay long enough in Algeria to witness his fellow citizens’ efforts and feelings during the war of Independence (1954-1962C.E.), or their joy on the day of Algeria’s independence from France. He had a more important concern. His project of salafization of the Muslim World brought him to Medina where he received and accepted a high official position upon his arrival in 1951C.E. It is probably safe to assume that, in such a context, he developed a negative position vis-à-vis de creation of the State of Israel in 1948. However, nothing in his website mentions anything about Israel. Yet, from his *tafsir*, it is clear that he demonstrates a strong anti-Jewish perspective.

According to Jazâ’irî’s official web site, he completed his knowledge of the Qur’ân in Medina, and soon obtained the licence of teaching and preaching at the Mosque of the Prophet.<sup>42</sup> It is in that important mosque that, for the past four decades, he has preached and has taught his *tafsîr*. From the very first day, Jazâ’irî has always been a highly respected friend of Saudi authorities and very close to various members of the Saudi royal family. However, none of the numerous official positions and honors he has received in his long life can be compared to his unofficial reputation as “The *Mufassîr*” of Salafism. Finally, it is important to mention that despite Jazâ’irî’s eminent stature in the Saudi-Salafî world, his *tafsîr* has not been the object of much attention among Western scholars. The inclusion of this contemporary *tafsîr* among the eight selected *tafsîr* for this thesis reflects my effort to be as widely inclusive as possible, within the

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<sup>42</sup> Neither his web site, nor other sources mention the name and the reputation of erudites/teachers from whom Jazâ’irî learned Qur’ânic sciences including the science of *tafsîr*. See <http://alqzaeri.com> (consulted on Sep. 28<sup>th</sup> 2012).

limits imposed on any doctoral research. It also allows me to create an important analytical bridge between old and new *tafâsîr*, demonstrating that the same theoretical framework of identity and power dynamics can be applied to an analysis and interpretation of a topic that continues to foster debates among the believers of the two most numerous religious traditions in the contemporary world.

#### 4.4 Jesus and the Story Tellers in the Islamic Tradition

A comprehensive presentation of books and articles written on “Jesus in Islam” or “Islam and Jesus” is beyond the scope of this thesis. In terms of their form, those works range from thin-few-pages booklets to thick-encyclopaedic-size books. In terms of their content, as mentioned before, they line up on a wide spectrum including proselytizing pro-Christian and anti-Muslim writings at one end, and apologetic pro-Muslim anti-Christian writings at the other end. In between these two extremes, one can find hundreds of works using various approaches and uncountable methods trying to find a definitive answer to some simple yet crucial questions, such as: Who is Jesus in the Qur’ân? What is the truth about his nature and his mission? And what happened to him at the end of his life on earth? What all those works have in common is that, regardless of the convictions they are promoting and the nature of their respective approaches, whether rational or confessional, their two indispensable sources of information are the Qur’ân and the *Hadîth*.

In this thesis, while I also go back to the fountainhead of the Qur’ân and the *Hadîth*, I do not aim to find a definitive answer to any of the above-mentioned questions. Neither do I try to choose or prove any of the existing rational or confessional answers offered by scholars or by adherents of one of the two concerned faiths. On the contrary, my main goal is to study how *mufasssîrûn*’s efforts to reveal the truth *vis-à-vis* the crucifixion of Jesus on the last day of his life on earth reflects their relationship to the power dynamics at play within their respective socio-political contexts. In this last chapter of my thesis, I therefore try to show how the Qur’ân’s definitive answer to the question of the crucifixion is “you do not know, and your efforts will not help you to know,” and how this Qur’ânic emphasis on the unknowable aspect of the crucifixion is

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the Qur'ân's unique and challenging starting point for a constructive relationship/dialogue between Muslims and Christians.

The story about Jesus in the Qur'ân has been discussed within *qashaş al-anbyâ'* (stories of the prophets). This part is a subcategory of the thematic division of *qashaş al-qur'ân* (stories of the Qur'ân).<sup>43</sup> In fact, *qashaş al-qur'ân* together with *âyât al-tawhîd* (theological *âyahs* on the unicity of God) and *âyât al-aḥkâm* (*âyahs* revealing orders of jurisprudence) form the three major thematic subdivisions of the Qur'ânic text. The stories of the prophets are so important that their study is considered independently as one of the 14 sciences/arts that compose *'ulûm al-qur'ân* (Sciences of the Qur'ân).<sup>44</sup> Thus, it is not surprising to know that besides their work of *tafsîr*, some *mufasssîrûn* have consecrated complete works to the particular subject matter of Qur'ânic stories of the prophets. Although Wahb ibn Munabbih seems to be the first *mufasssir* who has ever written on the stories of the prophets, his original work is lost, and our only access to his work is through later *mufasssîrûn* who have cited him. According to some Western scholars such as Roberto Tottoli and Camilla Adang, the first original Muslim works on

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<sup>43</sup> To refer to the stories of the prophets or the narratives of the Qur'ân, some scholars use the expressions of *qîṣaṣ al-anbyâ'* or *qîṣaṣ al-qur'ân*. Although the meaning of *qashaş* (narratives) is close to *qîṣaṣ* (preachings), this latter is considered as a *bid'a* of first Umayyad caliphs who broadcasted narratives recited by their official *qâṣṣ* (preachers/story tellers) in public (especially during battles) to convince Muslims about the divine roots of caliphs' power. For a study on the practice of *qîṣaṣ* in early Muslim societies see Khalil 'Athamina, "Al-Qashaş: Its Emergence, Religious Origin and Its Socio-Political Impact on Early Muslim Society." *Studia Islamica*, No. 76 (1992): 53-74. Since 1992, few scholars seem to have paid attention to this article in order to distinguish between *qâṣṣ* (the official story tellers/preachers in Umayyad era) and erudites who interpreted the Qur'ânic stories of the prophets. For an example of a recent work in which the term *qashaş al-anbyâ'* is used as a reference to stories of the prophets in the Qur'ân see Ayaz Afsar, "A Comparative Study of the Art of Jonah/Yûnus Narrative in the Bible and the Qur'ân." *Islamic Studies*, vol. 48, No. 3 (Autumn 2009): 319-339. For a work on *qîṣaṣ* showing that the job of official *qâṣṣ* was to narrate *qîṣaṣ al-qur'ân* (and not *qashaş*) see Bradley J. Cook, "The Book of Abraham and the Islamic *Qîṣaṣ al-Anbyâ'* (Tales of the Prophets) Extant Literature." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (no date): 127-146. E-published by dialoguejournal.com, available online at [http://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue\\_V33N04\\_137.pdf](http://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V33N04_137.pdf) (consulted on Oct. 11<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>44</sup> The other 13 are *târikh al-qur'ân* (the history of the Qur'ân), *'ilm al-rasm* (the Science of calligraphy), *'ilm makkî wa madanî* (the knowledge about *makkî* or *madanî*), *'ilm asbâb al-nuzûl* (the knowledge about the occasions of the revelation), *'ilm al-nâsikh wa al-mansûkh* (the Science of abrogator and abrogated), *'ilm al-muḥkam wa al-mutashâbih* (the Science of *muḥkam* and *mutashâbih*), *taḥaddî wa al-i'jâz* (the knowledge of the miraculous and inimitable aspect of the Qur'ân), *'ilm al-tafsîr* (the Science of *tafsîr*), *'ilm al-qirâ'at wa al-tajwîd wa al-tartîl* (the Science of the recitation of the Qur'ân), *al-ṣarf wa al-naḥw* (the Science of the Qur'ân's grammar and syntax), *'ilm gharîb al-qur'ân* (the terminology of Qur'ânic words), and finally *fann al-tarjumat al-qur'ân* (the Art of translating the Qur'ân).

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the stories of the prophets that are partly accessible today are the books of Abu Ḥudhayfa Ishâq ibn Bishr al-Kâhilî (d. 206 or 218 or 228H)<sup>45</sup> entitled *Kitâb al-Mubtada' al-Dunyâ wa Qaṣaṣ al-Anbyâ'* (the book of the beginning of the world and the stories of the prophets)<sup>46</sup>, and that of Ibn Wathîma al-Fârsî (d.289H) entitled *Kitâb Bad' al-Khalq wa Qaṣaṣ al-Anbyâ'*<sup>47</sup> (the book of the beginning of the creation and the stories of the prophets).<sup>48</sup> Tottoli writes:

Because of the wealth of material cited and the accurate disposition of the material, the stories of the prophets of Ibn Bishr gained an enormous diffusion and became one of the most important sources for the literary genre. Some medieval works made significant use of it, as for example the Qur'ânic commentary of al-Suyûtî (d. 1505), the universal history of Ibn Kathîr (d. 1373) and the monumental biographical dictionary of Ibn 'Asâkir (d. 1176). At the same time, the material passed on was subjected to criticism, the same that involved some of the sources most often used such as Muqâtil and Muḥammad ibn Ishâq: use of legends taken from storytellers and converts and of accounts of dubious Islamic origin. This view of the sources which deemed them suspect was also shared in by al-Ṭabarî who avoided the use of the work by Ishâq ibn Bishr for the compilation of his commentary. The same considerations are called forth by another collection of the stories of the prophets from a few decades after ibn Bishr. This is *Kitâb al-mubtada' wa qīṣaṣ al-anbyâ'* ... attributed to 'Umâra ibn Wathîma.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Camilla Adang mentions Ibn Bishr's death date as 206H, but Ibn Ḥajar mentions two different dates: 218H narrated from Mûsâ b. Hârûn, and 228H narrated from al-Khaṭîb in his book *Târîkh al-Baghdâd*. See Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996 (p. 13); also see Shihâb al-Dîn Aḥmad b. 'Ali b. Muḥammad ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalânî, *Lisân al-Mizân*. 7 vols. Beirut: Mu'assissat al-A'lamî li al-Maṭbû'ât, 1986 (vol. 1, pp. 147-9), available online at <http://www.alwaraq.net/Core/waraq/coverpage?bookid=258> (consulted on Oct. 11<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>46</sup> Tottoli presents the book's title as *Kitâb al-mubtada' wa qīṣaṣ al-anbyâ'*. A few pages earlier in his book, he has considered this title to be that of Wabh ibn Munabbih's lost book. He does not explain if this is a general title used by both authors or not. See Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ân and the Muslim Literature*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon. 2002 (pp. 139, 144).

<sup>47</sup> Adang believes that Ibn Wathîma's book was written by his father Wathîma b. Mûsâ and revised by his son Ibn Wathîma. Tottoli mentions both possibilities of authorship but does not prefer one to the other. A French translation of the rediscovered part of Ibn Wathîma's book has been published in 1978. See Abu Rifâ'a 'Umâra b. Wathîma al-Fârsî, *Kitâb Bad' al-Khalq wa Qaṣaṣ al-Anbyâ'*. Translated in French as *Les légendes prophétiques dans l'Islam*. Translated and edited by Raif Georges Khoury. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz. 1978.

<sup>48</sup> Surprisingly, all references of Tottoli and Adang are other Western scholars who have worked on these two documents before them such as Khoury and Nagel.

<sup>49</sup> Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ân and the Muslim Literature*, 144.

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In fact, the Ibn Bishr to whom Suyûtî and some other *mufasssirûn* refer is Abu Ḥudhayfa Ishâq ibn Bishr b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abdullâh b. Sâlim al-Bukhârî, the author of numerous books including *Kitâb al-Mubtada’* and *Kitâb al-Jamal*, and not Ishâq ibn Bishr b. Muqâtil al-Kâhilî al-Kûfî, the story teller of the prophets’ story to whom Tottoli refers. Also, in Ibn Kathîr’s *tafsîr*, there is no mention of Ibn Bishr’s *kunya* (see Ibn Kathîr’s *tafsîr* on 18:83). Thus, it seems that the first part of Tottoli’s conviction about the importance and the influence of Ibn Bishr is about an Ibn Bishr whose book on the stories of the prophets is lost but has been cited by some *mufasssirûn*, and his reputation encouraged a preacher with the same name and *kunya* to write a similar book immediately rejected and classified under *isrâ’iliyyât* by the vast majority of *mufasssirûn*. However, there is no doubt that the second part of Tottoli’s argument is valid about Ibn Bishr al-Kâhilî, the *qâṣṣ* (preacher). This prosopographical challenge has been discussed in detail by Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalânî, the author of *Lisân al-Mizân* in *‘ilm al-rijâl* (the Science of men). Ibn Ḥajar mentions that some Muslim scholars such as Ibn Hibbân (270-354H)<sup>50</sup> and Ibn al-Jawzî (d. 510-592H)<sup>51</sup> have made the same mistake and have taken Ishâq ibn Bishr al-Kâhilî for Ishâq ibn Bishr al-Bukhârî.<sup>52</sup> He reports that Ibn Bishr al-Kâhilî has been blamed by the strong majority of scholars of *‘ilm al-rijâl* as *al-kadhdhâb* (the liar) and *al-tâlif* (the waster of [time for those who seek the truth]).<sup>53</sup>

As Tottoli rightly mentions, to *mufasssirûn*, the credibility of Ibn Wathîma or his father is not higher than their contemporary story teller Ibn Bishr al-Kâhilî. The only difference is that Ibn Wathîma’s work has been more ignored than rejected. Despite all the debates on the credibility of Wahb ibn Munabbih, the failure of later narrators such as Ibn Bishr al-Kâhilî and Ibn Wathîma helps Wahb to remain the first and relatively most credible source of information about the stories of prophets among *mufasssirûn*.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> He is Abu Ḥâtam Muḥammad b. Hibbân b. Aḥmad b. Hibbân al-Tamîmî al-Bustî, the author of several books including a major book in *‘ilm al-rijâl* entitled *Al-Thiqât wa al-Majrûḥîn min al-Muḥâddithîn*.

<sup>51</sup> He is Abu al-Faraj ‘Abd al-Raḥmân b. ‘Ali Jamâl al-Dîn al-Baghdâdî, the author of more than 380 books and *risâlat* including *Al-Lubâb fi Qaṣaṣ al-Anbyâ’* (the hearts in/about the stories of the prophets).

<sup>52</sup> Ibn Nadîm distinguishes between these two by calling the second one Ibn Bashîr.

<sup>53</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalânî, *Lisân al-Mizân* (vol. 1, pp.147-9), available online at <http://www.alwaraq.net/Core/waraq/coverpage?bookid=258> (consulted on Oct. 11<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Lambden has e-published a relatively good list of books/articles on *qaṣaṣ al-anbyâ’* written in both Western and Muslim worlds. See Stephen Lambden, *A Bibliographical List of Works on the Stories of the Prophets*. Online document, e-published by the author’s personal web site, 2007-8, available online at

#### 4.5 Wahb Ibn Munabbih's Narratives of the Crucifixion of Jesus

Ṭabarî's *tafsîr* is the first preserved text where Wahb ibn Munabbih's narratives of the crucifixion of Jesus can be read. Before reading what Ṭabarî has recorded, it is important to mention two points: first, before translating Ṭabarî's text, I compared three different publications of his *tafsîr*,<sup>55</sup> and I could not find major differences between them.<sup>56</sup> Second, in my translations, I carefully respect the punctuation and the order of words, sentences, and paragraphs in my selected *tafâsîr*, including Ṭabarî's *tafsîr*. Thus, sometimes my translations might come across as "strange" in English. To help my reader, I occasionally add a free translation of a word and/or a free re-translation of a confusing sentence in between brackets, but most of the time, I follow the format/linguistic structure of the original text.

Following is the concerned *âyah* (4:157) in its textual context (4:150-62):

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُفَرِّقُوا بَيْنَ اللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَيَقُولُونَ نُؤْمِنُ بِبَعْضٍ وَنَكْضُرُ  
بِبَعْضٍ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يَتَّخِذُوا بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ سَبِيلًا أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ حَقًّا وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابًا مُهِيبًا  
وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَلَمْ يُفَرِّقُوا بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ أُولَئِكَ سَوْفَ يُؤْتِيهِمْ أَجْرُهُمْ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا  
رَّحِيمًا يَسْأَلُ أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ أَنْ تُنَزِّلَ عَلَيْهِمْ كِتَابًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فَقَدْ سَأَلُوا مُوسَىٰ أَكْبَرَ مِنْ ذَلِكَ فَقَالُوا أَرَنَا  
اللَّهُ جَهْرَةً فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الصَّاعِقَةُ بِظُلْمِهِمْ ثُمَّ اتَّخَذُوا الْعِجْلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ فَعَفَوْنَا عَنْ ذَلِكَ  
وَءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَىٰ سُلْطَانًا مُّبِينًا وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَهُمُ الطُّورَ بِمِثْقَاهُمْ وَقَالْنَا لَهُمْ ادْخُلُوا الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا وَقَالْنَا لَهُمْ لَا  
تَعْدُوا فِي السَّبْتِ وَأَخَذْنَا مِنْهُمْ مِيثَاقًا غَلِيظًا فِيمَا تَقْضِيهِمْ مِثْقَاهُمْ وَكَفَرُوهُمْ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَقَتْلِهِمُ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ  
بِعَدْوٍ حَقِّ وَقَوْلِهِمْ فُلُونَا غُلْفًا بَلْ طَبَعَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهَا بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا وَيَكْفُرُهُمْ وَقَوْلِهِمْ عَلَى  
مَرْيَمَ بُهْتَنًا عَظِيمًا وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَكِنْ  
شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِّمَّا مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا بَلْ رَفَعَهُ  
اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا وَإِنَّ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا لِيُؤْمِنَنَّ بِهِ قَبْلَ مَوْتِهِ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَكُونُ  
عَلَيْهِمْ شَهِدًا فَيُظْلَمُ مِّنَ الَّذِينَ هَادُوا حَرَمْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْبَاتٍ أُحِلَّتْ لَهُمْ وَبِصَدْقِهِمْ عَنِ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا  
وَأَخَذَهُمُ الرَّبُّوا وَقَدْ نُهِوا عَنْهُ وَأَكْلِهِمْ أَمْوَالِ النَّاسِ بِالْبِطْلِ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ مِنْهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا لَكِن  
الرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ مِنْهُمْ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ لَكَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ مِن قَبْلِكَ وَالْمُقِيمِينَ الصَّلَاةَ  
وَالْمُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ أُولَئِكَ سَنُؤْتِيهِمْ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

Lo! those who disbelieve in Allâh and His messengers, and seek to make distinction between Allâh and His messengers, and say: We believe in

<http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/>, under "Arabic and Islamic Studies, Notes and Bibliography" then under *Qaṣaṣ al-anbyâ'* (consulted on Oct. 12<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>55</sup> My three references were the editions of *Jâmi' al-Bayân fi Ta'wil al-Qur'ân*. 12 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997, available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net); *Jâmi' al-Bayân 'an Ta'wil Ây al-Qur'ân*. 16 vols. Edited by Maḥmûd Muḥammad Shâkir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shâkir. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, no date; and *Jâmi' al-Bayân fi Ta'wil al-Qur'ân*. 24 vols. Edited by Aḥmad Muḥammad Shâkir. Riyadh: Mu'assisat al-Risâlat, 2000.

<sup>56</sup> The very few minor differences do not change the meaning. For example in one edition the chain of narration starts with *qâla* (he said) and in another edition it starts with *ḥadatha* (he narrated).

some and disbelieve in others, and seek to choose a way in between; Such are disbelievers in truth; and for disbelievers We prepare a shameful doom. But those who believe in Allâh and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them, unto them Allâh will give their wages; and Allâh was ever Forgiving, Merciful. The People of the Scripture ask of thee that thou shouldst cause an (actual) Book to descend upon them from heaven. They asked a greater thing of Moses aforetime, for they said: Show us Allâh plainly. The storm of lightning seized them for their wickedness. Then (even) after that) they chose the calf (for worship) after clear proofs (of Allâh's Sovereignty) had come unto them. And We forgave them that! And We bestowed on Moses evident authority. And We caused the Mount to tower above them at (the taking of) their covenant: and We bade them: Enter the gate, prostrate! and We bade them: Transgress not the Sabbath! and We took from them a firm covenant. Then because of their breaking of their covenant, and their disbelieving in the revelations of Allâh, and their slaying of the prophets wrongfully, and their saying: Our hearts are hardened - Nay, but Allâh set a seal upon them for their disbelief, so that they believe not save a few - And because of their disbelief and of their speaking against Mary a tremendous calumny; And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allâh's messenger - they slew him not nor crucified him [and they crucified him not], but it appeared so unto them; and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain. But Allâh took him up unto Himself. Allâh was ever Mighty, Wise. There is not one of the People of the Scripture but will believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them - Because of the wrongdoing of the Jews We forbade them good things which were (before) made lawful unto them, and because of their much hindering from Allâh's way, And of their taking usury when they were forbidden it, and of their devouring people's wealth by false pretences, We have prepared for those of them who disbelieve a painful doom. But those of them who are firm in knowledge and the believers believe in that which is revealed unto thee, and that which was revealed before thee, especially the diligent in prayer and those who pay the poor-due, the believers in Allâh and the Last Day. Upon these We shall bestow immense reward.

#### 4.5.1 Wahb Ibn Munabbih's Narratives of the Crucifixion of Jesus in Ṭabarî's *tafsîr*

Ṭabarî's *tafsîr* on 4:157 is long and detailed. It reads:

What can be said in *ta'wil* of His saying: "And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allâh's messenger –and they slew him not, and they crucified him not, but it appeared so unto them"

Abu Ja'far said: [Allâh] glory be to his admiration means: And because of their saying We slew the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary. Then

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Allâh denies them in their saying, and said: “and they slew him, and they crucified him not, but it appeared so unto them,” meaning: they did not slay Jesus and [they] did not crucify him but it appeared so unto them.

The experts of *ta'wil* have disagreed on the nature of what appeared unto Jews about the event of Jesus. So, some have said: When the Jews surrounded him [Jesus] and his disciples, they surrounded them while not having any knowledge about the [physical characteristics of the] person of Jesus [not knowing him], and that they all [all disciples of Jesus] were made [turned or changed into] *ṣûrat* [the likeness] of Jesus, so it became difficult for those who wanted to kill Jesus, Jesus from others among them, and some [one] of those who were in the house with Jesus came out to them, so they killed him and considered him to be Jesus.

Here is a record of those who have said so: Narrated to us Ibn Ḥamîd who said: *thanâ* [narrated to us from] Ya'qûb al-Qumî, [narrated] from Hârûn ibn 'Antarah [narrated] from Wahb ibn Munabbih: Jesus came and with him were seventeen of *al-ḥawâriyîn* [the disciples] in a house, and they surrounded them.<sup>57</sup> When they entered to them Allâh made them all the likeness of Jesus, so they said: you bewitched us! Indeed whether you verily make it clear for us who is Jesus [point out Jesus to us] or verily we kill you all [together]! So Jesus said to *aṣḥâbihi* [his companions]: who among you trades his *nafs* today with paradise? So a man among them said: me! So he [the man] went out to them and said: I am Jesus, and Allâh had made him the likeness of Jesus, so they took him and killed him and crucified him. So because of that it appeared so unto them, and they supposed that indeed they slew Jesus, and *al-naṣârâ* [Christians] supposed like that [that] indeed he [was] Jesus, and Allâh raised Jesus from that day [of his life] on.<sup>58</sup>

A few points need to be raised before I start my analysis. First, in Ṭabarî's *tafsîr*, on a few occasions, the sentence is not complete and serious grammatical problems occur. For example, at the seventh line of the third paragraph (in English), the sentence is incomplete. It reads in Arabic: '*Isâ min ḡhayrihi minhum* (Jesus from others among them). Knowing Ṭabarî's level of erudition in Arabic grammar and syntax, this suggests three possibilities: 1) the original text had been damaged and one of the first *mustansikhûn* (certified copy makers of manuscripts who were editors too) decided to leave the sentence as is, and his copy has become popular; 2) that *mustansikh* has forgotten to copy a word and/or has misread the text; 3) that *mustansikh* has decided to

<sup>57</sup> In Tod Lawson's translation of this narrative the number of Jesus' disciples is mentioned as seven. It is not clear to me if Lawson mistranslates it or the Ṭabarî's text that he has used is different from the editions to which I had access. See Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an*, 50.

<sup>58</sup> Al-Ṭabarî, *Jâmi' al-Bayân fî Ta'wil al-Qur'ân*, under 4:157, available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net) (consulted on Oct. 18<sup>th</sup> 2012).



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wipe out some words and by doing so has tried to slightly manipulate the meaning.

Second, there are several serious critical ironies in this narrative of Wahb. Here are three examples: 1) the narrative clearly announces that the Jews entered the house by saying *dakhalû ilayhim* (They [Jews] entered to them [Jesus and his disciples]). But immediately, there is a scene in which Jesus talks to his disciples and asks them about the sacrifice trade. Here the Jewish characters of the narrative do not seem to be as clever as the reader, so they could recognize who the speaker is.<sup>59</sup> 2) At the end of the narrative, the man (the crucified) *kharaja ilayhim* (goes out to the them [the Jews]), and the reader wonders when the Jews left the house. 3) At one point of the narrative, all entourage of Jesus are changed into Jesus' likeness and at another moment of the story, the man who answers Jesus' call changes to the likeness of Jesus. It is not clear if he is there from the beginning or once everybody else refuses to be sacrificed he enters the scene.

Third, Wahb makes a clear distinction between *al-ḥawâriyîn* (the disciples) and *al-aşḥâb* (the companions). His narrative suggests that the disciples of Jesus were numerous, and 17 of them were present on that last day, but when it comes to the sacrifice trade, Munabbih explicitly states that Jesus talked exclusively to his *aşḥâb*, a term also used for the disciples of the Prophet Muḥammad.<sup>60</sup> In the narrative, *rajulun minhum* (a man among them) answers to Jesus' call. The narrative does not help to understand if that man is one of Jesus' *ḥawâriyîn* or one of his *aşḥâb*.

Fourth, Wahb is the first narrator in the chain of narration on Jesus' crucifixion. Neither Wahb himself, nor Ṭabarî, bother to mention the source(s) from which Wahb has received this information. Although this none-mention of credible sources is the habitual characteristic of Wahb's rhetoric, it is very far from Ṭabarî's style. In fact, as mentioned in the first chapter, as a text, Ṭabarî's *tafsîr* is long and difficult-to-understand in part due to his obsession with the full information about the narrators/sources of his citations. In the case of Wahb's narrative, Ṭabarî's silence again suggests his hesitation about the authenticity of Wahb's narratives. Ṭabarî continues:

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<sup>59</sup> This irony is the only one that has been noticed and discussed by Ṭabarî. But he uses it as a proof for the miraculous nature of what happened to Jesus on his last day on earth.

<sup>60</sup> In Lawson's translation of the narrative both terms of *aşḥâb* and *ḥawâriyîn* are translated as "disciples." See Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an*, 50.

And in fact, it has been narrated from Wahb a saying different from this [the above-translated narrative], and that is: al-Muthanna has narrated from him [Wahb] and has said: narrated to us Ishâq [who] said, narrated to us Ismâ'îl b. 'Abd al-Karîm [who] said, narrated to me 'Abd al-Şamad b. Mu'qal: he heard Wahb saying: When Allâh informed Jesus the son of Mary peace be upon him that he [will] be out of the [material] world [*al-dunyâ*], he [Jesus] went on weep for *al-mawt* [the death] and it [accepting his own death] became difficult to him, so he called the disciples and made them a meal, then said: be at my presence the night [stay with me tonight], indeed I need you for something. Then when they gathered around him at night, [Jesus] fed them and stood up and served them. Then when they finished their meals [Jesus] started to wash their hands and did their ablutions with his [own] hands, and dried their hands with his [own] garment, [but] this became too big to them and they recoiled at it [they felt reluctant], so [Jesus] said: Verily whoever denies any of what I made [*asna'u*] tonight, so [he] is not from me and I [am] not from him! So they all ratified him, until he got rest of that [and] said: But what I made to you [did to you] tonight, from [what] I served you food and washed your hands with my hand, I did it so there [can] be a good example in me for you, indeed you know that I am the best among you, so some of you must not vaunt themselves over some others, and [you must] sacrifice your selves [*nafs*] for each other [serve others] as I sacrificed myself for you [offered my soul (*nafs*) to you]. But my request for which I asked your help, [is] to pray [call] Allâh for me and to fervently pray all night [*tajtahidûn*]: So [Allâh] may postpone my term [*ajalî*]. Then when they forced their souls [*anfusahum*] to prayer and tried to stay awake, sleep captured them [they fell asleep] and they could not [make] any prayer. [Jesus] began to wake them up saying: Glory be to Allâh! You could not resist for me one night helping me within! They said: We swear to Allâh we do not know what was wrong with us! We used to have many sleepless nights, and we [have constantly] increased [the number of] those sleepless nights, but tonight we are not able to endure [a bit of] it, and every time we tried to pray it [the sleep] blocked the way between us and the prayer! So [Jesus] said: the shepherd is brought away and the flock is scattered! And he [Jesus] kept saying things like that giving to himself the news of his death [*yan'â bihi nafsihî*]. Then [Jesus] said: The truth, [is that] one of you will deny me before the cock crows three times, and one of you will sell me for a paltry money [*darâhim*], and he will for sure eat [will benefit from] my price! So they went out and dispersed, and the Jews were looking for him [Jesus], so they took Sham'ûn (Simon) [who was] one of the disciples [*hawâriyîn*], and said: This is one of his companions [*aşhâbihî*]! He tried [to save his life] and said: I am not his companion! So they left him alone, then another group [of Jews] took him [Simon], then he [Simon] tried like that [again]. Then he [Simon] heard the voice of a cock crowing so he cried and it [that crow or that remembrance] saddened him, when the day came, one of the disciples [*hawâriyîn*] came to Jews and said: What would you put [aside]

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for me [give me] if I lead you to the Christ? They put [aside] for him thirteen dirhams, so he took it and led them to him. And it has been appeared so unto them before that [someone had been changed to the likeness of Jesus before the disciple leads them to Jesus], so they took him [that likeness of Jesus] and asked him [the betraying disciple] to [verify and] insure them [if that person is Jesus], and they bound him [the likeness of Jesus] with ropes, and kept leading him around and telling him: You used to raise from death, and [you used to] torment the Satan [*âl-shaytân*], [and you used to] cure the insane, don't you save [free] yourself from this rope? They spat upon him, and placed thorn on him [on his head], until they brought him to the [piece of] wood on which they wanted to crucify him, so Allâh raised him to Himself, and they crucified what appeared so unto them, and he stayed [on the cross] seven [hours or days].

Then indeed his mother [Jesus' mother] and the woman whom Jesus had treated and whom Allâh had freed from madness came while weeping before the crucified one, so Jesus came to them and said: For whom [*'alâma*] are you weeping? They said: For you! He said: Verily Allâh raised me to Himself, and nothing but good befell me, and verily this is something that has been appeared so unto them, so [go and] order the disciples to meet me at such-and-such place. So eleven [disciples] met him at that place. And the one who had sold him and had led [Jews] to him was missing, so he [Jesus] asked his disciples about him [the betrayer disciple], and they said: He regretted about what he [had] made, so he hanged and killed himself. So [Jesus] said: If he had repented, Allâh would have forgiven him<sup>61</sup> Then he [Jesus] asked the [the disciples] about a young man who was following them who was called Yuḥannâ [John] so he [Jesus] said: He is with you [he will be one of you], so be dispersed, verily each human among you will be able to speak the language of a [different] people, so [go] preach to them [those people] and summon them.<sup>62</sup>

Unlike Wahb's short narrative, Ṭabarî's long narrative does not suffer from incomplete sentences or grammatical mistakes, but it is full of unusual terms, ambiguous sentences, uncertain pronouns, and some serious critical ironies. An example for an unusual term is *fastawthaqû minhu* (asked him [the betrayer] to ensure them). A glance at any Arabic dictionary reveals that this is a rare form of *wathaqa* (ensuring) meaning: "to take security deposit," but Ṭabarî uses it to mean: "to ensure them." An example of an ambiguous sentence is *law tâba latâballâhu 'alayhi* (if he had repented, Allâh would

<sup>61</sup> Another possible translation is: "If he repented, then Allâh has forgiven him." This possibility is weak because the verb used to refer to the betrayer's feelings before hanging himself is *nadima* (he regretted) and not *tâba* (he repented). Lawson's translation is between the two above-mentioned possibilities. He translates it as: "If he repents, may God forgive him." See *ibid.*, 51.

<sup>62</sup> Al-Ṭabarî, *Jâmi' al-Bayân fi Ta'wîl al-Qur'ân*, under 4:157, available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net) (consulted on Oct. 18<sup>th</sup> 2012).

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have forgiven him). This sentence can also be understood as: “if he has repented, for sure, Allâh has forgiven him.”<sup>63</sup> An example for an uncertain pronoun is *farafa ‘ahullâhi ‘alayhi* (God raised him to Himself). Here the narrative makes a sudden shift with no textual sign between “him” as a reference to the betrayer and “him” as a reference to Jesus.<sup>64</sup> An example of critical irony in the narrative is when Jesus asks the two women for whom they are weeping, and they innocently reply: “For you!” Those women do not seem to be surprized by seeing Jesus talking while the crucified one for whom they are weeping is already dead on the cross. A bigger irony in the narrative is that, according to this narrative, the Jews first kill Jesus and then crucify him. The narrative does not explain the method of murder. I suggest that here Wahb copies the order of the two verbs of “to slay” and “to crucify” in 4:157. Although in a highly articulated text such as the Qur’ân, this order of the verbs can be interpreted and played with, in a vulgar narrative, it can only suggest an order of events which is contradictory to all *tafsîr* of 4:157.

After this second narrative of Wahb, Ṭabarî reports two short narratives from Qutâdah, another short narrative from Suddî, as well as two short narratives and one long narrative from Ibn Ishâq.<sup>65</sup> The two narratives of Qutâda are more or less short copies of Wahb’s long narrative. The short narrative of Suddî is also a copy of Wahb’s short narrative with some minor differences such as the number of disciples being nineteen instead of seventeen. But the two short stories and the one long and detailed narrative of Ibn Ishâq are, in many ways, different from Wahb’s stories. Within his narratives, Ibn Ishâq mentions the number of the disciples as twelve, provides their names one by one, and gives details that cannot be found in Wahb’s narratives. In his second short narrative, Ibn Ishâq introduces to his reader a thirteen person/disciple who appears from nowhere and accepts to be crucified instead of Jesus. Then he gives details about him in his long narrative. Ibn Ishâq mentions the name of this “last minute disciple” as Sarqis (Sarkis). Neither Ṭabarî, nor those *mufasssirûn* who used his *tafsîr* as a source, seem to be aware of the fact that, in Greek, *sarkis* means “flesh.” An important aspect of Ibn Ishâq’s long

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<sup>63</sup> Lawson has a short discussion about the ambiguity of this sentence. For his discussion, see Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur’an*, 51.

<sup>64</sup> This also has been mentioned by Lawson. See *ibid*.

<sup>65</sup> Besides these six, all other numerous citations in Ṭabarî’s *tafsîr* on 4:157 are the repetition of and/or the clarification about some parts of Wahb’s narratives.

## CONCLUSION

narrative is that at both ends of his story, he presents his sources and tries to authenticate his narrative by referring it to Christians themselves. So, at the very beginning, he states that this is what he has heard from a Christian who converted to Islam, and at the end, he discusses the opinion according to which the betrayer is the one who was mistakenly crucified, and he explains that this is what some *naṣârâ* believe and that Allâh knows better which version of the story reveals the truth!

Regardless of who this Ibn Ishâq is,<sup>66</sup> Ṭabarî does not pay attention to him, and concludes that the two possibilities that are closer to the truth are those both narrated by Wahb. Not only Ṭabarî does not seem to see the numerous ironies in Wahb's narratives, but he also considers one of those ironies (the irony of Jews witnessing the conversation between Jesus and the crucified one not seeing in it a clear sign of who Jesus is) as an undeniable fact about Jesus' resurrection and concludes that such a controversial event must have happened according to one of the two narratives of Wahb:

- 1) By Allâh's Will, as narrated from Wahb, what happened on the day of the crucifixion is that everyone around Jesus [including his disciples] was changed to his likeness, and when Jews witnessed the conversation between Jesus and the crucified one, they, who knew very well Jesus in person, could neither recognize the two speakers from each other nor see any visible difference between those two and others, so being perplexed, they killed who they killed, and they saw Jesus in that person. The disciples also saw Jesus in the crucified one, so they were convinced that Jesus was crucified, and that is how Jews and Christians today believe that Jesus was crucified.<sup>67</sup>
- 2) As 'Abd al-Ṣamad al-Mu'qal narrated it from Wahb, what happened is that disciples scattered before the arrival of the Jews, then the likeness of Jesus was cast on one of those who had stayed with him, then Jesus was raised to the sky and Jews entered when the likeness was waiting for them. So, not only Jews, but also disciples who had already been absent when Jesus had been raised to Allâh were convinced that Jesus was crucified.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Most probably, he is Muḥammad b. Ishâq b. Yasâr, the great historian and the author of *Sîrat Rasûl-Allâh* who lived from 85 to 151H.

<sup>67</sup> Although Ṭabarî does not explain it, it is clear that in Wahb's first narrative when everybody turns back to his own image, the fact that the crucified one does not turn back to his true image convinces the disciples that he is Jesus. Wahb ends his first narrative with: *rafa'allâhu 'Isâ min yawmihî dhâlik* (Allâh raised Jesus on that day). This short and ambiguous statement suggests that the disciples did not witness the ascension of true Jesus to the sky, so they were convinced that the only one who did not turn back to his true image is the real Jesus, in this case, the crucified one.

<sup>68</sup> Al-Ṭabarî, *Jâmi' al-Bayân fi Ta'wîl al-Qur'ân*, under 4:157, available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net) (consulted on Oct. 18<sup>th</sup> 2012).

## CONCLUSION

The most important part of Ṭabarî's *tafsîr* of 4:157 is his short prescription. He states:

His disciples [the disciples of Jesus] and the Jews believed that the one who had been killed and crucified was Jesus [not only] because of what they saw [happening to] his likeness, [but] also [because] what happened to Jesus [his ascension] was hidden from them. Because his ascension and the transformation of the murdered one into Jesus' likeness happened after his disciples had scattered from [around] him, and indeed they [the disciples] had heard Jesus weeping over his own death on the night, and [they had seen him] being saddened by his thought that *mawt* [death] will soon descend upon him, so they narrated [to others] what they believed to be the truth, and the event as [only] Allâh truly knows was different from what they narrated. Thus, those disciples who narrated it [the story of Jesus' crucifixion] do not deserve to be [considered as] liars, since they narrated what was the outward truth to them although the event as [only] Allâh truly knows was different from what they narrated.<sup>69</sup>

Ṭabarî's repetition of "they narrated what they believed to be the truth" and "the event as [only] Allâh truly knows was different from what they narrated," on the one hand, shows his commitment to what he himself believes to be the truth, and on the other hand, it reflects his eagerness to reconcile Muslims with Christians. In some handwritten manuscripts, the seventh volume of his *tafsîr* ends with 4:158 which, to a great extent, is the repetition of 4:157, thus giving Ṭabarî an opportunity to emphasize his pacifist conclusion.<sup>70</sup> In other words, in Ṭabarî's *tafsîr*, the story of Jesus' crucifixion and his death is broken down into two parts: the first part discussed at the end of volume seven, and the second part discussed at the beginning of volume eight. Whatever the reason is, Ṭabarî begins the eighth volume with his *tafsîr* on 4:159 writing:<sup>71</sup>

Abu Ja'far said: "There is not one of the People of the Scripture but will believe in him before his death", means: [believe] in Jesus "before his death", meaning: before the death of Jesus ... so the nations will become one [nation], and that [nation] will be the nation of *al-islâm al-hanîfiyyah* [monotheistic Islam], the religion of Abraham may the salutations of Allâh be upon him.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> 4:158 reads: "But Allah took him [Jesus] up unto Himself. Allah was ever Mighty, Wise."

<sup>71</sup> 4:159 reads: "There is not one of the People of the Scripture but will believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them."

<sup>72</sup> Al-Ṭabarî, *Jâmi' al-Bayân fî Ta'wîl al-Qur'ân*, under 4:159, available online at [www.almeshkat.net](http://www.almeshkat.net) (consulted on Oct. 18<sup>th</sup> 2012).

Ṭabarî discusses many other possibilities, but at the end of his *tafsîr* on 4:159, he comes back to this first statement and announces it as the right meaning of the *âyah*.<sup>73</sup> This again reveals his anxious and passionate desire for the harmony of Muslims with *ahl al-kitâb* under the same banner of Abrahamic monotheism.

#### 4.5.2 Wahb Ibn Munabbih's Narratives of the Crucifixion of Jesus in Makkî Ibn Abi Ṭâlib's *tafsîr*

Makkî's *tafsîr* is not as voluminous as most other *tafsîr* (920 pages for the whole Qur'ân). Also, throughout his *tafsîr*, Makkî keeps a humble tone and a simple rhetoric. He usually ignores the chains of narrations, and exclusively mentions the first narrator. These characteristics make his *tafsîr* an understandable piece of literature for ordinary Muslims, who have turned it into a usable reference for people's daily needs.

Makkî's *tafsîr* on 4:157 is an extreme case of the above-mentioned characteristics. Compared to some other *âyahs* about Jesus, his *tafsîr* on 4:157 is surprisingly short. It is composed of three short narratives, and in two of them, he does not provide any narrator (even the first narrator), and begins with "It has been said." So, while mentioning only Wahb's name, Makkî puts Wahb's first narrative in between two it-has-been-said sayings. He writes:

"And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah" or because of their claiming that, so Allâh has denied them in that matter, and has said: "they slew him not, and they crucified him not, but it appeared so unto them."

It has been said: Verily, the Jews surrounded Jesus and those who were with him, and they do not know [compare, *yashbahûna*] Jesus in person, so they [people with Jesus] all turned into the likeness of Jesus, so it became difficult for them the matter of Jesus, so some of those who were with Jesus in the house went out to them [to the Jews], so they [the Jews] killed one of them, and thought that he was Jesus.

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<sup>73</sup> Although it is far from Ṭabarî's usual mood and/or style to strongly refuse something, when he discusses the conviction of those who believed that 4:159 means: "There is not one of the People of the Scripture but will believe in Muḥammad before his own death," Ṭabarî angrily refuses it and gives a long argument on why this *tafsîr* of 4:159 is impossible. Among his arguments, he uses a contextual approach and writes:

besides all what we discussed about the falsehood of ... such a meaning, the name of Muḥammad peace be upon him does not appear in any of the previous *âyahs*, so it is only permissible to refer "him" ... to what it [the same him] refers to [in previous *âyahs*].

See *ibid*.

## CONCLUSION

Wahb ibn Munabbih said: Jesus came and with him were seventeen of *al-hawâriyîn* [the disciples] in a house, and the Jews surrounded them.<sup>74</sup> When they [the Jews] entered to them Allâh made them all the likeness of Jesus, so they [the Jews] said: you bewitched us! Indeed whether you verily make it clear for us who is Jesus [point out Jesus to us] or verily we kill you all [together]! So Jesus said to his *aṣḥâbihî* [companions]: who among you trades his *naḥs* today with paradise? So a man among them said: me! So he [the man] went out to them and said: I am Jesus, and Allâh had made him the likeness of Jesus, so they took him and killed him and crucified him. So because of that it appeared so unto them, and they supposed that indeed they slew Jesus, and *al-naṣârâ* [Christians] supposed like that [that] indeed he [was] Jesus, and Allâh raised Jesus from that day [of his life] on.

And it has been said: Verily he [Jesus] was imprisoned in the palace of the Cesar's *khalifa* [governor], then the Jews gathered and went to him [the governor], he [the governor] thought that they are there to ask his freedom [Jesus' freedom], so he said: I am going to free him for you, they [the Jews] said: But we want his murder, so Allâh raised him [Jesus] to Himself, so the governor of the Cesar took a man and killed him, and told the Jews: Indeed I killed him [Jesus], because he was afraid of them, and that person [the murdered one] is the one who appeared to them [as Jesus].<sup>75</sup>

In Makkî's *tafsîr*, his use of Wahb's narrative functions as a more detailed explanation of Makkî's first narrative. Nothing in Wahb's narrative denies or changes the first it-has-been-said's version of the story. On the contrary it expands it and clarifies its contexts. But one might ask why Makkî ignores all discussions provided in earlier sources, to which he, for sure, had access, and ends his *tafsîr* with the second it-has-been-said version of the story? I believe that, to a great extent, this last narrative has been cited to weaken the role of Jews and to remove the guilt of Jesus' crucifixion from all characters in the story. Here, on the one hand, Jews do not kill Jesus. They just ask for it. They neither surround nor attack the house where Jesus is. They neither threaten the disciples nor force them to point to Jesus for them. On the other hand, the governor has no enmity with Jesus. He is even ready to free him if asked. In this narrative, the governor is the

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<sup>74</sup> In Tod Lawson's translation of this narrative the number of Jesus' disciples is mentioned as seven. It is not clear to me if he mistranslates it or the Ṭabarî's text that he has used is different from the editions to which I had access. See Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an*, 50.

<sup>75</sup> Abu Muḥammad Makkî ibn abi Tâlib, *Al-Hidâyat ilâ Bulûgh al-Nihâyat fî 'Ilm Ma'âni al-Qur'ân*. 13 vols. Sharjah, U.A.E.: Jâmi'ah al-Shârijah, 2008, under 14:57, available online at <http://www.almeshkat.net/books/open.php?cat=6&book=3962> (consulted on Oct. 19<sup>th</sup> 2012).



## CONCLUSION

only one who knows that he has not killed the real Jesus, and that Jesus, somewhat, has been freed. All insults and tortures mentioned in other narratives are out of context here. More importantly, the problem of the likeness of Jesus and the miracles attached to him are out of question here. The narrative suggests that the Jews see the crucified one, once he is dead on the cross. This presents a more humanly possible way of taking someone for someone else.

Although in Makkî's *tafsîr* on 4:157, no argument supports any of the three narratives, his *tafsîr* on 4:158 shows his tendency towards part of Wahb's narrative. He writes:

His saying [Allâh's saying]: "and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof" means that those Jews who surrounded Jesus and those who were with him, and wanted his murder, they knew the number of people in the house before they [the Jews] enter the house, and some experts of ta'wîl have mentioned: When they [the Jews] entered [the house] they missed one person in their counting, and they found the likeness [of Jesus], so by this miscounting Jesus' affair was hidden from them, so they doubtfully killed the one on whom the likeness [of Jesus] was casted.<sup>76</sup>

But even here, while copying the architectural aspect of Wahb's screenplay, the story follows its own smooth rhythm. There is no mention of betrayal, torture, or insult. More importantly, not only taking someone for Jesus is again a human mistake, but also they themselves are aware of it. Makkî ends with: "and it has been said: Indeed their doubt came from [the fact that] some of them thought that he [Jesus] is God and [therefore] he was not [cannot be] killed."<sup>77</sup>

By ending so, Makkî hastily opens a large window to some historical origins of Christianity, as existed in his time, emerging out of Judaism. His *tafsîr* is, on the one hand, a reductionist effort to reduce the subject of Jesus' crucifixion to a matter of secondary importance, and on the other hand, a generalizing struggle to gather both the crucifixion and the divine nature of Jesus under the same simple category of human mistake. Despite its scientific weaknesses, this approach has the value of bringing down the serious theological differences/debates from their metaphysical sphere, and putting

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, under 4:158.

them in a comprehensible human context. By doing so, regardless of its credibility, Makkî's approach helps Muslims build a better relationship with their Christian neighbours.

#### 4.5.3 Wahb Ibn Munabbih's Narratives of the Crucifixion of Jesus in Qurṭubî's *tafsîr*<sup>78</sup>

Qurṭubî's *tafsîr* on 4:157 is probably the most confusing text among the eight *tafsîr* that this chapter deals with. On the one hand, Qurṭubî juxtaposes 4:157 with 4:158, and interprets them together. On the other, he surprisingly changes his usual style, and keeps complete silence about Ṭabarî's opinion on the issue. The three main characteristics of Qurṭubî's 20 volumes *tafsîr* are: 1) his explanations are usually long and detailed, 2) he normally mentions the chains of narrations, and 3) throughout his *tafsîr* of the Qur'ân, he repeatedly mentions Ṭabarî's preference, and refers to him.

Surprisingly, in the case of 4:157, 1) his *tafsîr* is extremely short - even shorter than Makkî's *tafsîr* on the same *âyah*- and besides a few grammatical aspects of the *âyah*, his short sentences do not go further than the literary meaning of the *âyah*; 2) with a few exceptions where he mentions the first narrator, he does not provide any chain of narration, and repeatedly uses the passive style of "it has been said" (*qîla*); and 3) he ignores Ṭabarî, to the extent of not even mentioning his name. Knowing that just one *âyah* before and one *âyah* after that (4:156 and 4:159), he follows his usual style and discusses different possibilities in detail, including Ṭabarî's preferences, one might ask why his hasty *tafsîr* on 4:157 and 4:158 is so different. But before finding an answer to this question, here is Qurṭubî's *tafsîr* on 4:157:<sup>79</sup>

His saying, the Almighty: "And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary" ... "Allâh's messenger" ... "And they slew him not, and they crucified him not" [presents] a denial to their saying. "but it appeared so unto them" or his likeness [Jesus' likeness] was casted

<sup>78</sup> Since I was surprised by the short length of Qurṭubî's *tafsîr* on 4:157, I compared my source with a recent edited edition of his *tafsîr*. The second source that I consulted is: Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Anṣârî al-Qurṭubî, *Al-Jâmi' li Aḥkâm al-Qur'ân*. 20 vols. Edited by Hushâm Samîr al-Bukhârî. Riyadh: Dâr 'Âlam al-Kutub, 2003.

<sup>79</sup> In my translation of Qurṭubî's *tafsîr* on 4:157, three dots "... " are replacements exclusively for Qurṭubî's grammatical explanations.

on someone else as it has been mentioned before in ‘Âl Imrân [3:55]. And it has been said: They [Jews] did not know him [Jesus] in person, and they killed whom they killed, and they were in doubt about him [the true identity of the murdered one], as God the Almighty said: “and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof.” And [about] this announcement, it has been said: Indeed this [disagreement] is among all of them [all Jews]. And it has been said: Indeed they did not disagree about it [the crucifixion] except their ordinary people, and their disagreement means some [of them] said he [Jesus] was [or is] a god, and some [others said] he was [or is] the son of Allâh. Al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrî] said: and it has been said that their disagreement [comes from the fact that] their ordinary people said we killed Jesus. And one who had seen his raise [Jesus’ raise] to the sky: we did not kill him. And it has been said: their disagreement [comes from the fact that] the Nestorians among Christians said: the human side of Jesus was crucified and not his divine side. And Melkites [al-malkâniyyah] said: the crucifixion and the murder happened to both the human nature and the divine nature of the Christ. And it has been said: And if this [crucified one] was our friend [one of the companions], so where is Jesus?! And if this was Jesus where is our friend?! And it has been said: Their disagreement [comes from the fact that] the Jews said: We killed him, because Judas who tried to kill Jesus was a leader of Jews. And a group of Christians said: But we [are the ones who] killed him. And a group of them [Christians] said: But Allâh raised him to the sky and we look at him. “They have no knowledge thereof” ... and [here] the speech ends. Then [God] the Almighty and the Exalted said: “save pursuit of a conjecture” ... or they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture. ... And His blessed saying: “they slew him not for certain.” Ibn ‘Abbâs and Suddî said: it means they slew not *ẓannahum* [their doubt] for certain, as you [can] say: I killed him with knowledge only if you had a full knowledge about him [the murdered], so here [also] *al-hâ’* [him/it] refers to their doubt. ... Abu ‘Ubayd said: If the meaning was they slew not Jesus for certain, [God] would have said: And they slew not him *faqat* [for sure]. It has been said: They slew not the one who appeared to them as Jesus with certainty. ... And it has been said: they slew not Jesus. ... So there are two possibilities: one of them is that they [the Jews] said we did not slay him and Allâh informs us that certainly they said so [to themselves], and the other one is that the meaning is that they [the Jews] did not know Jesus in person with certainty. ... “But Allâh took him up unto Himself” ... or to the sky, [because] Allâh the Almighty is beyond space and has no place ... “And Allâh was ever Mighty” or He is Powerful to take revenge from Jews, so He gave Petrus ibn Stisânus the Roman [I could not find this person] power over them, so he [Petrus] killed a lot of them. “Wise” [means] He [Allâh] has judged them with execration and wrath.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Al-Qurṭubî, *Al-Jâmi‘ li Ahkâm al-Qur’ân*, under 4:157, available online at

## CONCLUSION

Qurtubî's *tafsîr* on 4:157 suffers from various problems such as the use of many pronouns without clear references, snatched sentences, unnecessary repetitions, and sudden shifts between Jews and Christians. More importantly, his *tafsîr* does not really discuss the question of the crucifixion. In fact, his *tafsîr* of "it appeared so unto them" is only two sentences. He focuses only on the internal debate among Jews on who Jesus was (human or God?), as well as on a similar debate among Christians as to whether the crucifixion happened to Jesus' human nature or to his divine nature. It is impossible to believe that Qurtubî was not aware of Wahb's narratives and had not read Ṭabarî's preference in 4:157. In fact, Qurtubî's denial of Wahb's authority as a narrator seems to be the possible reason why he then had to keep complete silence about Ṭabarî's point of view in his short explanation about the crucifixion. The ending part of Qurtubî's text reveals his personal position *vis-à-vis* Jews. Knowing Wahb's Jewish background, it is not surprising to see that Qurtubî decided to keep distance from him. One might think that the short explanation about the likeness of Jesus being casted on someone else is an indirect reference to Wahb's narrative. In reality Qurtubî's *tafsîr* on 3:55, which he himself refers to as his standpoint about the crucifixion, rather confirms another source for his choice of story. In his *tafsîr* on 3:55, he cites two narratives, one from Ḍaḥḥâk and the other from Ibn 'Abbâs. In both of them, the likeness of Jesus is casted on an unknown young man who appears in the story at the very last minute.

In his *tafsîr* on 3:55, Ṭabarî cites Wahb three times. In one of them, he does not prefer Wahb's explanation. In contrast, Qurtubî cites Wahb only once, and it is not surprising to know that it is that only time that Ṭabarî disagrees with Wahb. So, Qurtubî first mentions Ṭabarî's preference, then cites Wahb and completes it with: "*hâdhâ* (this [what Wahb says]) *bu'd jiddan* (is really far [from the truth])."<sup>81</sup> Right after denying the authority of Wahb, Qurtubî writes:

Ḍaḥḥâk said: The story was that when they [the Jews] decided to slay Jesus, *al-ḥawâriyyûn* [the disciples] gathered together in a romm, and they

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<http://shamela.ws/index.php/book/20855n> (consulted on Oct. 20<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>81</sup> This sentence has a grammatical problem. Most probably, the original sentence has been *hâdhâ ba'id jiddan* (it is really very far), or *hâdhâ bâ'id jiddan* (it is really far), so in the first case, the dots of "yâ'," and in the second case "*alif*" must have been erased in the handwritten manuscript, and the editor has decided to leave it the way it is.

were twelve men, so Jesus entered from the window [a hole in the wall]. Then Iblīs [Satan] informed a group of Jews, so four thousands of their men rode [their horses] and blocked the door of the room. So Jesus said to the disciples: which one of you goes out, and accepts to be killed and will be with me in the paradise? A man said: me, o the prophet of Allâh, so Jesus put on him a blanket made of wool, and a [put around his head] a turban made of wool, and gave to him his own cane, and Jesus' likeness was casted on him, so he went out to the Jews, then they killed him and crucified him. But Jesus, Allâh covered him with wings and put on him a cloth made of light, and cut from him the pleasure of food and beverage, so he [Jesus] flew with angels.<sup>82</sup>

Then Qurṭubî cites a longer version of the story from Ibn 'Abbâs and writes:

When Allâh decided to raise Jesus to the sky, Jesus who was in a house where a fountain was running went out to his disciples who were twelve men. Water was dropping from his hair [Jesus' hair], so he [Jesus] told them: Beware one of you will deny me twelve times after that he has believed in me. Then he said: Which one of you accepts that my likeness be casted on him, so he will be killed instead of me, and he will be with me in the same level? A young man among the most recent ones of them stood up and said: Me, so Jesus said: Sit down, then he [Jesus] repeated [his question] to them, [but again] the young man stood up and said: Me. Jesus said: Sit down. Then he [Jesus] repeated [his question] to them [again, and] the young man stood up and said: Me. Then Jesus said: You are that one. So Allâh casted on him the likeness of Jesus peace be upon him. [Ibn 'Abbâs] said: And Allâh the Almighty raised Jesus from a whole in the roof to the sky. [Ibn 'Abbâs] said: And those Jews who were looking for Jesus came and took the likeness, so they killed him, and then crucified him. And some of them [disciples] denied Jesus twelve times after they had believed in him, so [Once the Jews crucified the likeness of Jesus] they [the disciples] divided into three groups, one group said: Allâh was among us until He wanted, then He rose to the sky. These are Jacobites (al-Ya'qûbiyyah), and another group said: The son of Allâh was among us until he wanted, then he rose to the sky. These are Nestorians (al-Nastûriyyah), and another group [the third group] said: The servant of Allâh and his messenger was among us until he wanted, then Allâh raised him to Himself. These are *al-muslimûn* [Muslims], so the two pagan groups rebelled against the Muslim group, and killed them all. From that time, Islam became *ṭâmisan* [extinct] until Allâh sent Muḥammad the salutations of Allâh be upon him, so they [the Jews] were killed [by Muslims under the leadership of the Prophet Muḥammad]. So Allâh the Almighty revealed [to the Prophet Muḥammad]: "O ye who believe! Be Allâh's helpers, even as Jesus son of Mary said unto the disciples: Who are

<sup>82</sup> Al-Qurṭubî, *Al-Jâmi' li Ahkâm al-Qur'ân*, under 3:55, available online at <http://shamela.ws/index.php/book/20855n> (consulted on Oct. 20<sup>th</sup> 2012).

my helpers for Allâh? They said: We are Allâh's helpers. And a party of the Children of Israel believed, while a party disbelieved. Then We strengthened those who believed against their foe, and they became the uppermost." [61:14]<sup>83</sup>

In Qurṭubî's *tafsîr* on 4:157, it is evident that he purposely ignores Ṭabarî's preference to free his text from the citation of Wahb's narratives. Instead, he presents his choice of the story of the crucifixion in an *âyah* where Ṭabarî is silent about those narratives and happens to disagree with Wahb on a minor issue of the crucifixion.<sup>84</sup> As a general aspect of his *tafsîr*, Qurṭubî is obviously more concerned with Jews than with Christians. For example, although in his explanations about different subdivisions of Christianity he copies Râzî (or the source that Râzî has used for his *tafsîr* on 4:157), unlike Râzî who uses the opportunity to carefully discuss Christian Christology presenting eight arguments against the crucifixion of Jesus, Qurṭubî does not go further than citing it, hastily adding to its end: "so they [the Jews] were killed [by Muslims]" and concluding that 61:14 was revealed about those Jews who were killed.

A glance at the short lengths of Qurṭubî's *tafsîr* on other Qur'ânic *âyahs* that are directly about Christians or deal with Christian theological issues, such as 3:49-52; 5:15; 9:30-1; etc.), and comparing them with the long lengths of his *tafsîr* on *âyahs* that are about Jews or deal with Jewish doctrines (such as 4:46; 5:41; 6:146; etc.) shows Qurṭubî's high level of concern/aversion for Jews, and his relative indifference regarding Christians.<sup>85</sup>

#### 4.5.4 Wahb Ibn Munabbih's Narratives of the Crucifixion of Jesus in Ibn Kathîr's *tafsîr*

Ibn Kathîr combines 4:157 with the two previous *âyahs* (4:155-6). His *tafsîr* on 4:155

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> This aspect is that according to Wahb, Jesus was in a state of *tawaffâ* (close to sleep) for three hours and then he was raised to the sky, but Ṭabarî prefers the idea that Jesus was raised to the sky fully aware and with complete consciousness.

<sup>85</sup> While trying to find Qur'ânic *âyahs* on Jews, I checked *Al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras* for *yahûd* under *hawada*. To my big surprise, all forms of *hawada* are mentioned in *Mu'jam* except *yahûd* and *Yuahûdiyyan*. This is beyond the scopes of this thesis, but it is worth a study to discover why in such an incredibly complete reference on Qur'ânic terms, those terms are absent. See Muḥammad Fu'âd 'Abd al-Bâqî, *Al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfâdh al-Qur'ân*. Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, 1981 (p 739, under *hawada*).

## CONCLUSION

and on 4:157 start with some loathing against Jews, as his *tafsîr* on 4:156 ends with curse words against them. He starts his *tafsîr* on 4:155 with: “This [breaking their covenant with God] is one of the sins that they [Jews] committed, and it resulted their damnation and their expel and their distance from the guidance ...”<sup>86</sup> In his *tafsîr* on 4:157, before insulting Jews, he clarifies from the very beginning that Jews know better than anyone else that they did not kill Jesus. They say so to ridicule Christians and show off their superiority. He writes:

And their saying: “We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allâh’s messenger” or this is a position [an honor] they claim for themselves. And they say so because of [their] vanity and [their] derision [for Christians], as [the Qur’ân’s citation of] pagans saying: “O thou unto whom the Reminder is revealed, lo! thou art indeed a madman!” “al-Hijr: 6” [part of 15:6].<sup>87</sup>

Then Ibn Kathîr begins his own version of the story mentioning his sources as: “It has been reported about Jews” (*kâna min khabar il-yahûd*). He writes:

And it has been reported about Jews –May Allâh’s Execrations be on them, as well as His Rage and His Wrath and His Punishment– that when Allâh sent Jesus the son of Mary with the signs and the guidance, they [Jews] felt jealous for what Allâh had given him from the prophecy and powerful miracles by which he could heal the blind and the leper, and [by which] he could raise dead by Allâh’s leave, ... and despite all that, they denied him and called him a liar, ... and persecuted him to the extent that [Jesus] the prophet of Allâh could not live in their houses, and he had to travel all the time with his mother, may peace be upon both of them, and [the Jews] went as far as asking the king of Damascus in that time, who was a polytheist man among worshipers of stars, and whose nation was called al-Yûnân [Greece] and they [the Jews] warned him that in Jerusalem there is a man who is deluding people and leading them astray, and [that person] encourages people to rebel against the king, so the king became angry because of that, and wrote to his governor in Jerusalem to rule over that person and to crucify him, and to put thorn on his head, and to save people from his harm. So when the written order reached [the governor], the governor of Jerusalem obeyed that [order], and he went with a group of Jews to the house where Jesus was, peace be upon him. And he [Jesus] was with his companions, twelve or thirteen, and it has been said: seventeen, and it was a Friday evening, the night of Shabbat, so

<sup>86</sup> Ibn Kathîr, *Tafsîr Ibn Kathîr*, under 4:155, available online at <http://rowea.blogspot.ca/2010/02/pdf-8.html> (consulted on Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, under 4:157.

they [the Jews] surrounded him there. So when Jesus felt that, and [understood that] there is no choice but whether they come in to him or he goes out to them, he [Jesus] told to his companions: Which one of you accept that my likeness be casted on him, and he will be *rafiqî* [my close friend or my roommate] in the paradise? So a young man *intadaba* [begged] for it, but it was like he is too young to do so, so Jesus repeated [his request] for a second and a third time, and each time, no one answered but that young man, so he [Jesus] said [to him]: You are him, and the likeness of Jesus was casted on him to the extent that it was like he [the young man] was him [Jesus], and a loophole opened in the roof of the house, and Jesus peace be upon him was taken by a short sleep [a nap], and he was raised to the sky , and that is what happened as Allâh the Almighty has said [has described it as following]: “(And remember) when Allâh said: O Jesus! Lo! I am gathering thee and causing thee to ascend unto Me, and am cleansing thee.” So when he [Jesus] raised, that person [the young man] went out, when they saw that young man, they thought he is Jesus, so they took him at night, and they crucified him, and they put thorn on his head, and the Jews [proudly] announced that they tried for his crucifixion, and they rejoiced because of that, and some tribes of Christians, because of their ignorance and their small intelligence, believed in them, except those who were in the house with Jesus, because they had witnessed his raise [to the sky]. But others, they thought what Jews thought, that the crucified one was Christ the son of Mary, and they went as far as saying that Mary sat down underneath [the cross] of that crucified [person], and wept, and it is said: He talked to her, and Allâh knows better, and all this is Allâh’s test for his servants, in what there is in that of the effective wisdom.<sup>88</sup>

There are similarities between Ibn Kathîr’s choice of story and that of Makkî, but unlike Makkî’s story in which no one is guilty, Ibn Kathîr puts an emphasis on Jews’ guilt and lie. This suggests that, to him, Jesus’ crucifixion must be studied and understood as part of Jewish history, and not as a major event in Christian history. Ibn Kathîr’s conviction that first Christians were ignorant and of small intelligence reveals an intentional underestimation and/or a downgrading of Christian history. His version of the story is a “royal historiography” in the sense that it provides details about rulers and governors, their names, their faiths, and even their moods. Although Ibn Kathîr does not mention his source, his narrative is a hasty copy of Ibn Ishâq’s version of the story intertwined with some preaching and prayers. For example, in the middle of his *tafsîr*, and before moving to other narratives, Ibn Kathîr pauses to announce:

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*



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All this is Allâh’s test for his servants ... and here Allâh has clarified [the truth] about it [Jesus’ crucifixion] and has polished it and has defined it and has made it evident in the Glorious Qur’ân, [the Qur’ân] that he has descended upon his noble Messenger, [the Qur’ân which is] confirmed [and proven] by miracles and by evident signs and by clear reasons, so Allâh the almighty has said [it] –and he is the most truthful of [all] speakers, and [He is] the Lord of the two worlds, [and He is] the knower of all secrets and hidden [thoughts], He is the one who knows the secret in the heavens and on earth, [He is] the knower of what was and what will be, [as well as the knower] of if what what is existed how it would have been.<sup>89</sup>

In some parts of Ibn Kathîr’s *tafsîr*, beside some insults to Christians and Jews, the preaching tone and the oral style of his rhetoric are so dominant that one might suggest that his *tafsîr* is, at least in part, composed of some of his preaching and prayers in front of his zealous Muslim audience. Once Ibn Kathîr makes sure that his reader has learned the meaning of the concerned *âyah*, he cites a short version of the story from Ibn ‘Abbâs (cited in Qurṭubî’s *tafsîr* on 3:55) in which Jesus asks his disciples three times who accepts to be crucified instead of him, but every time an unknown young man is the only one who answers him positively. So, Jesus accepts him and announces to his disciples that some of them will deny him twelve times. Then Jews kill the likeness of Jesus and some of his disciples deny him twelve times. Like Qurṭubî, Ibn Kathîr includes in Ibn ‘Abbâs’ narrative some teachings about the afore-mentioned three subdivisions within Christianity, and ends it with: “From that time [the crucifixion], Islam became *ṭâmisân* [extinct] until Allâh sent Muḥammad the salutations of Allâh be upon him.”<sup>90</sup> And he immediately informs his reader: “The chain of narration of this [narrative] is intact and it rightly goes back to Ibn ‘Abbâs, and also Nisâ’î has narrated it from Abi Karîb [who narrated it] from Abi Mu‘âwiyah.”<sup>91</sup>

From this point on, Ibn Kathîr’s *tafsîr* on 4:157 is a copy of Ṭabarî’s *tafsîr* with three differences: 1) Ibn Kathîr makes sure that his reader will recognize that these parts

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* Unlike Qurṭubî’s version of Ibn ‘Abbâs’ narrative, Ibn Kathîr’s citation of Ibn ‘Abbâs does not end with the mention of the murder of Jews by first Muslims as God’s punishment for what they did to Jesus. Knowing Ibn Kathîr’s zealous efforts to punish Jews as much as possible, in his text, this might suggest that Qurṭubî added that ending part as his *tafsîr* on Ibn ‘Abbâs’ last sentence.

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are coming from Ṭabarî's *tafsîr*. So, at the beginning of every major section, he adds: "Ibn Jarîr (Ṭabarî) said." 2) He decisively dismisses both narratives of Wahb by mentioning at the end of Wahb's first narrative: *hâdhâ siyâq gharîb jiddan* (This is really a peculiar [strange] story), and declaring at the end of Wahb's second narrative: *siyâq gharîb jiddan* (really a peculiar [strange] story).<sup>92</sup> 3) While he copies all secondary citations in Ṭabarî's work, he omits all important discussions argued by Ṭabarî, including his inclusivist conclusion.

At the end, Ibn Kathîr replaces Ṭabarî's long and detailed arguments within which Ṭabarî mentions Abu Ja'far's preference coming from Wahb, as well as his own two equal preferences both coming from Wahb, by a very short announcement saying: "Ibn Jarîr has chosen that the likeness of Jesus was casted on all his companions."<sup>93</sup> Regardless of the fact that Ibn Kathîr's statement is only partially true, this manipulation removes Ṭabarî's emphasis on the good intention of the disciples leading to believe in the theological/intellectual innocence of Christians, and puts it on a physical aspect of the event which, practically, is of secondary importance for Muslims' relationship to Christians. One last word about the surprisingly short ending of Ibn Kathîr's *tafsîr* on 4:157 is to note that, compared to the preaching and powerfully loud tone he used at the beginning and throughout the text, Ibn Kathîr's ending sounds like a short whisper that raises doubt as to its truthfulness.

### 4.5.5 Wahb Ibn Munabbih's Narratives of the Crucifixion of Jesus in Suyûṭî's *tafsîr*

Suyûṭî's *tafsîr* on 4:157 is detailed, elaborated and well-articulated. He starts his *tafsîr* with Ibn 'Abbâs's long narrative, and introduces his first source as Ibn Ḥamîd. In his citation, the ending part includes the reference to 61:14, but excludes Qurṭubî's statement about Jews being killed by Muslims under the leadership of the Prophet Muḥammad. Suyûṭî then cites Wahb's long narrative, and presents Ibn Ḥamîd and Ṭabarî as his sources. This clearly shows that Suyûṭî had access to Ibn Ḥamîd's work.<sup>94</sup> Once the

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> The fact that Suyûṭî juxtaposes Ibn Ḥamîd with Ṭabarî as his sources together with the fact that Suyûṭî's version of Wahb's long narrative has no difference from Ṭabarî's version suggest that Ibn Ḥamîd's version was also identical to what we have in hand from Ṭabarî.

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narrative ends, Suyûṭî leaves it, and shifts to a few short explanations about some terms and expressions in 4:157. Then he mentions a short narrative from ‘Abd al-Jabbâr b. ‘Abdlullâh b. Sulaymân<sup>95</sup> in which, at the “night of raising,” Jesus advises his companions to abstain from accepting any wage in the way of God’s book (revelation), and promises them that, if they do so, God will sit them on pulpits made of stone better than this world and all precious things in it. He finishes this part by citing Ibn Jabbâr who believes that those pulpits are what 54:55 refers to when it announces: “Lo! the righteous will ... [be in paradise] in a seat of truth in the presence of an Omnipotent King [God].”

At this point, Suyûṭî cites the longest and the most detailed narrative that one can find in all *tafsîr* on Jesus’ crucifixion. Having Wahn as its first narrator, this narrative is composed of four episodes. The first three episodes are interdependent and the fourth one is a follow-up on the adventures of one of Jesus’ disciples establishing the first Christian state in the world. The second of the four episodes is the short narrative of Wahn (first narrative) cited in Ṭabarî’s work.<sup>96</sup> Suyûṭî does not mention its chain of narration, and gives Ibn Mandhar (241-318H) as his source.<sup>97</sup> Knowing that Ṭabarî’s *tafsîr* precedes Ibn Mandhar’s work by more than a decade, it is not surprising to see that Ṭabarî does not quote Ibn Mandhar, but it is not clear if Ṭabarî had access to Ibn Mandhar’s source or sources, and decided to exclude marginal episodes of Wahn’s short narrative, or he did not have access to that source or those sources, because his own source did not include them. Suyûṭî’s silence about the narrative’s chain of narration does not help us find an answer to this question. Suyûṭî writes:

And Ibn Mandhar *akhraja* [has chosen to narrate] from Wahn ibn

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<sup>95</sup>His full name is ‘Abd al-Jabbâr b. ‘Abdlullâh b. Sulaymân b. Sayyid .b Abi Quḥâfa al-Anṣârî al-Baṭliûsî. He was from the city of Almeria in Spain today. I could not find any biography of him.

<sup>96</sup> Although Suyûṭî mentions another source for this narrative, his choice of narrative is an indirect follow of part of Ṭabarî’s *tafsîr*.

<sup>97</sup> His full name is Abu Bakr Muḥammad b. Ibrâhîm b. Mandhar b. al-Jârûd al-Nayshâbûrî. Dhahabî considers Ibn Mandhar as one of the leaders in the science of *ta’wîl*, and mentions that Ibn Mandhar has a great *tafsîr* (*tafsîr kabîr*) composed of tons of volumes. There is no mention about the title of this book either in other works of Ibn Mandhar, or in the works of those who have mentioned its existence. Ibn Mandhar himself calls it as “the book of *tafsîr*.” However, what we have in hand today is a short part of that *tafsîr* covering only from 2:227 to 4:92. This short part has been published a few years ago, and is accessible to scholars now. See Muḥammad b. Ibrâhîm ibn Mandhar, *Tafsîr Ibn Mandhar*. Edited by ‘Abdullâh b. ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkî. Medina: Dâr al-Ma’âthir, 1423H.

Munabbih who said: Indeed Jesus peace be upon him was taking a walk when he crossed a woman who was drawing water, so he [Jesus] said: [Do you want to] give me from your water, [a water] that whoever drinks from it dies [drinking it does not save from death], and [instead] I give you from my water, a water that gives life to whoever drinks it? [Wahb] said: And it happened that she was a wise woman, so she told him: How come that your water that whoever drinks from it gets life does not satiate you [free you] from my water that whoever drinks from it dies [drinking it does not save from death]. [Jesus] said: Indeed your water is temporary and my water is eternal [my water does not satiate worldly thirst, but gives life in the afterlife]. She said: Maybe you are the man who is called Jesus the son of Mary? [Jesus] said: Indeed I am him, and I invite you to the worship of Allâh and [I call you] to abandon whatever you worship besides Allâh the Almighty. She told him: Give me a proof [show me a sign that what you are saying is true]. [Jesus] said: The proof is that as soon as you go back to your husband, he will divorce you. She said: Indeed [if such a thing happens] there will be an evident sign in it, since no woman among the [women of] *Banî-Îsrâ'îl* is as dear as I am to her husband, and if what you say happens then I will know that you are truthful. [Wahb] said: Then she returned to her husband, and her husband was a young zealous man [intolerant of rivalry]. [The husband] asked her: What happened to you? She said: A man passed by me, and she wanted to inform him about Jesus, but the zeal filled him and he divorced her, so she said: Verily my master told me the truth.

So she went out following Jesus and believing in him. Then [one day] Jesus came to a house and with him was seventeen of his disciples, and they surrounded them, so they entered to them [Jesus and his disciples], and Allâh made them all the likeness of Jesus, so they said: you bewitched us! Indeed whether you verily make it clear for us who is Jesus [point out Jesus to us] or verily we kill you all [together]! So Jesus said to *aşhâbihî* [his companions]: who among you trades his *nafs* today with paradise? So a man among them said: me! So they took him and killed him and crucified him. So because of that it appeared so unto them, and they supposed that indeed they slew Jesus, and *al-naşârâ* [Christians] supposed like that, and Allâh raised Jesus from that day [of his life] on.

So the woman was convinced that Jesus was killed and crucified, so she went and built a shrine around the roots of Jesus' tree [cross?] and she started to pray and mourn for Jesus, but she heard a voice from above, the voice of Jesus undeniable for her [impossible for her to take it for someone else's voice]: O you such woman [calling her name] I swear to Allâh that indeed they did neither kill me, nor crucify me, but it appeared so unto them, and the sign for that [for my truthfulness] is that the disciples will gather together in your house tonight, and they scatter twelve groups, each group of them will call a nation to the religion of Allâh, then when the night came, [the disciples] gathered in her house, so she told them: Verily tonight I heard something that I am going to tell you, and

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maybe you deny me but it is the truth, I heard the voice of Jesus and he was saying: O you such woman [calling her name] I swear to Allâh that indeed they did neither kill me, nor crucify me, but it appeared so unto them, and the sign for that is that you [the disciples] will gather together in my house tonight, and you scatter twelve groups. They said: Indeed what you heard [happened] as you heard, verily Jesus was not slew and was not crucified. Indeed such person was killed and crucified, and we did not gather in your house but for what [Jesus] said [to you]. We want to reach out to the [corners of the] earth as callers. So Nestor headed towards *al-Rûm* [Rome], and there were two companions with him...<sup>98</sup>

From this point onwards, the narrative changes its scenes and characters, and continues with the adventures of Nestor and his two companions. According to the narrative, the two companions are so eager to call people to the truth that they rush and bluntly tell their message about Allâh to a king who is a worshiper of idols. The king puts them in prison to kill them later, but he forgets, and his oblivion gives Nestor the opportunity of attracting his attention with wisdom and brilliant advices, and slowly building a close relationship with him. Very soon, Nestor becomes the king's high advisor, and, as a man of authority, goes to the prison and visits his companions. In their meeting, Nestor blames them, and says: "your example is the example of a woman who did not have a child until she became old, but in old age she gave birth to a child. She wanted that her baby grows up quickly and being in such a rush, she fed the baby with the kind of food that his stomach could not digest, so [by feeding him with what he was not ready for] she killed him."<sup>99</sup> Then Nestor asks them to wait. Later, at the right time, Nestor reminds the king of the two prisoners and suggests to him to examine the veracity of their message by two tests. First, asking them to raise a dead person from death, and if they succeed, preparing a battle between them and the idols to see which one of the two parties can annihilate the other. The two companions win the first test and, by their prayers to Allâh, raise a dead man from death. Then Nestor and the king accompanied by all people go to the sanctuary and prostrate in front of the idols begging of them to destroy the two men who want to lead people astray. Nestor prostrates too but while prostrating in front of idols, he prays

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<sup>98</sup> Jalâl al-Dîn 'Abd al-Raḥmân al-Suyûtî, *Al-Durr al-Manthûr fî Tafîsîr bi al-Ma'thûr*. 8 vols. Beirut: Dâr al-Fîkr, 1993, under 4:157, available online at <http://www.almeshkat.net/books/open.php?cat=6&book=466> (consulted on Oct. 25<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

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and whispers that he is prostrating to Allâh, and that he is playing a trick to achieve a bigger goal. Nothing bad happens to the two men. Nestor asks the king to now let the two men harm the idols. Nestor's secret companions break all idols in front of people's eyes and Nestor publicly announces: "But me, I believe in the Lord of these two!"<sup>100</sup> The king says: "But me, I believe in the Lord of these two!"<sup>101</sup> and all people say together: "We believe in the Lord of these two!"<sup>102</sup> The narrative ends with Nestor's victorious speech to his two companions saying: *hâkadhâ al-rifq*<sup>103</sup> (Friendship is like this).<sup>104</sup>

Suyûtî ends his *tafsîr* on 4:157 with two short clarifications about the ending part of the *âyah* and writes:

And Ibn Jarîr [Ṭabarî] narrated from Ibn 'Abbâs who said about His saying [Allâh's saying]: "Allâh was ever Mighty, Wise": The meaning of this is that he [Allâh] is like that.

And Ibn abi Hâtam narrated from Ibn 'Abbâs that a Jew told him [Ibn 'Abbâs]: Verily you [Muslims] think that [on that day] Allâh was Wise [and] Mighty. How is He today? Ibn 'Abbâs said: Indeed He was Wise [and] Mighty *min nafsihî* [by his nature].

There are several important issues about Wahb's third narrative cited by Suyûtî: 1) The episode of the crucifixion is identical to the first narrative of Wahb in Ṭabarî's work. Although the narrative itself does not explain who the enemies of Jesus are, and uses the ambiguous pronoun of "they" before citing it, in a short introduction, Ṭabarî explains that the event talks about a group of Jews.<sup>105</sup> Unlike him, Suyûtî keeps it as ambiguous as it sounds. 2) Suyûtî's *tafsîr* on 4:157 is an ensemble of narratives without providing any argument, discussion, or preference. Knowing his level of erudition in Arabic grammar, he does not bother to mention some grammatical ambiguities of the *âyah*, let alone discussing them. Ṭabarî announces his preference at the end. Ibn Kathîr announces it at

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Probably he means: "This is what friendship can do."

<sup>105</sup> Makkî in his turn replaces the first "they" in the narrative with "the Jews" and solves the problem of its ambiguity. Qurṭubî uses another narrative, but as translated before, his choice of narrative reports a conversation between Satan and a group of Jews, clear evidence that Jews are involved in the event of the crucifixion. Finally, Ibn Kathîr's *tafsîr* does not give room to the smallest amount of doubt about the role of Jews in Jesus' crucifixion.

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the beginning, but here Suyûtî keeps complete silence about it. His arrangement of the text ending with the most complete version of the story might suggest that he prefers the last narrative which is in part Ṭabarî's preference, but Suyûtî omits altogether Ṭabarî's opinion. Knowing that in his *tafsîr* on 4:157 Suyûtî refers to Ṭabarî four times, all of them on minor issues, it is evident that Suyûtî neither wants to take position on the question of Jesus' crucifixion, nor does he want to mention other *mufassirûn*'s opinions. In his *tafsîr* on 4:157, Suyûtî chooses to become more of a story teller than a *mufassir*. This reduces the veracity of all narratives cited by him to the level of popular myths. 3) The narrative places the crucifixion in the center of a very Christian context. In fact, not only the narrative can be considered as part of Christian history, but it also suggests a plan to divide it into two parts: pre-crucifixion and post-crucifixion.

Probably the most important aspect of Wahb's narrative in Suyûtî's *tafsîr* on 4:157 is the moral lessons that it offers to its readership. Those lessons function as the spirit of the narrative. They are absent in all other narratives including the same narrative in Ṭabarî's *tafsîr*. The three most important lessons can be found in 1) the example of the old woman who finally gives birth to a child, 2) the scene of Nestor's prostration in front of the idols, and 3) Nestor's final statement at the very last sentence of the narrative.

Together with his arrangement of the text, Suyûtî's persistent silence throughout the cited narratives tries to send a message to Muslims: first, Christians are wrong, but Muslims have to be patient with them to the extent of affirming some of their wrong doctrines/rituals if need be. The combination of human patience and divine wisdom can make miracles changing people's heart. Physical conflict over theological issues is a loss of energy, and it rather be replaced by humbleness and wisdom. Second, people follow their rulers, so Christian rulers must be the target of Muslims' good tidings. Convincing a Christian ruler to convert to the true faith (Islam), will consequently result the conversion of his subjects to the truth. Third, for inviting people to the truth, manliness and friendship are more efficient tools than swords and weapons.

Suyûtî's peaceful *tafsîr* on 4:157 not only reflects his eagerness for peace, but also it mirrors the socio-political needs in which his *tafsîr* was written and read. Here, Suyûtî follows a dual strategy: On the one hand, he does not show flexibility *vis-à-vis* the possibility of a true crucifixion of Jesus, but on the other hand, in his denial of the

crucifixion, his silence throughout the text wipes out the highly articulated theological language –that he masters so well– and replaces it with the popular vulgar rhetoric of the narratives. His short final conclusion/prescription says the last word: “Let’s be friend.”

#### 4.5.6 Wahb Ibn Munabbih’s Narratives of the Crucifixion of Jesus in Ṭabâṭabâ’î’s *tafsîr*

Ṭabâṭabâ’î’s *tafsîr* on 4:157 is a part of his exegetical effort to explain 4:153-69. His *tafsîr* on 4:157 is the shortest one among the eight *tafsîr* this chapter deals with. Like Qurṭubî, to explain the meaning of 4:157, Ṭabâṭabâ’î refers to his *tafsîr* on 3:55. But unlike Qurṭubî, his short text is filled with rational arguments and intellectual discussions. He writes:

His saying: “And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allâh’s messenger –and they slew him not, and they crucified him not, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain.” In fact, it has been explained within the stories of Jesus, peace be upon him [mentioned] in *Sûrah Âli-‘Imrân* that they [the Jews] disputed over the circumstances of Jesus’ murder, if he was killed by crucifixion or by another way, so maybe here the intention of Allâh the Almighty is first [to reveal] about the claim of his murder [Jesus’ murder], and then [second] mentioning the murder and the crucifixion together in order to deny and negate a total negation in a way that gives no room to the least of doubt. Indeed, the crucifixion being a specific kind of punishment for criminals [in Jesus’ era] does not always require [result] murder. Also, the mind does not necessarily remind of it [the crucifixion] when there is a [statement about a] murder. Knowing that the circumstances of his murder [Jesus’ murder] has [always] been the subject of debate [among Jews or among Christians], if [the *âyah* had] only denied the murder [of Jesus], it could have been interpreted as they [the Jews] did not slay him [Jesus] a normal way of murder, and this would not have contradicted [the reality] if they had slew him [Jesus] by crucifixion. That is why Allâh the Almighty has followed his saying: “they slew him not” by His saying: “nor they crucified him” so the statement can become very clear saying that he [Jesus], peace be upon him did not die by their hands, either by crucifixion, or by a method other than crucifixion, but it appeared so unto them, and they took someone other than the Christ, peace be upon him for the Christ, and killed that person or crucified him [that person]. And this is not far [from the reality] in some cases. Indeed, in such chaotic, noisy, and aggressive circumstances, it is probable that someone else was taken as the guilty person, so the Roman soldiers killed



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him [the wrong person], and they did not know him [Jesus] very well in person, and besides that, different narratives have been mentioned according to which Allâh the Almighty casted the likeness of Jesus on someone else, and that person was taken and killed instead of him [Jesus]. And maybe it has been said by some scholars of History that the two sets of stories, the first one being the recorded stories about him [Jesus], peace be upon him, and the events about his call, and the second being stories recorded by his contemporary [Jesus' contemporary] rulers and callers are about two different men both called the Christ –and between them there was more than five hundred years–: the first one [of those two christs] being the true one who was not killed, and the latter being the wrong [Christ] who was crucified, and [if that is the case, then] what the Qur'ân mentions about *tashbîh* [the appearance] is the *tashbîh* of Jesus Christ the son of Mary, the messenger of Allâh to the crucified Christ. And Allâh knows better.<sup>106</sup>

Ṭabâṭabâ'î's *tafsîr* on 3:55 is as short as his *tafsîr* on 4:157, but it gives additional details about his opinion on the crucifixion. There, he writes:

His Saying, the Almighty: “(And remember) when Allâh said: O Jesus! Lo! I am gathering thee and causing thee to ascend unto Me” *al-tawaffâ* is to take [or to receive] something in full, and that is why it [*tawaffâ*] has been used as a reference to death [*al-mawt*], because Allâh takes [receives] human's *nafs* out of the body at the moment of death.<sup>107</sup>

Then Ṭabâṭabâ'î gives three Qur'ânic examples for *tawaffâ* and four Qur'ânic examples for *mawt* trying to show how *tawaffâ* is not death (*al-mawt*) but it rather is the reception and the preservation of *nafs* with God. He concludes:

The Jews used to claim that they slew Jesus Christ the son of Mary, peace be upon him, and Christians used to think that the Jews slew Jesus Christ the son of Mary, peace be upon him, by the crucifixion. The difference [between them] is that they [Christians] also think that Allah glory be to Him raised him [Jesus] after his death from his tomb to the sky as reported by the Gospels, and the âyahs as you can see clearly deny the story of the murder and the crucifixion.<sup>108</sup>

Three factors distinguish Ṭabâṭabâ'î's *tafsîr* on 4:157 and 3:55 from not only all other

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<sup>106</sup> Al-Ṭabâṭabâ'î, *Al-Mizân fi Tafsîr al-Qur'ân*, under 4:157, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on Oct. 30<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, under 3:55, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on Oct. 30<sup>th</sup> 2012).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

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*tafâsîr* discussed in this chapter, but also most other *tafâsîr* in the treasury of *tafsîr* literature:

First, despite his full knowledge about other *tafâsîr*, Ṭabâṭabâ'î refuses to cite any narrative about the story of the crucifixion. He briefly mentions that some narratives want that the likeness of Jesus be casted on someone else, but he does not take those narratives seriously. Like Makkî, Ṭabâṭabâ'î discusses the possibility of a human mistake. What distinguishes Ṭabâṭabâ'î's *tafsîr* from Makkî's, however, is that Makkî tries to reconcile the narratives with his theory of the human mistake, while Ṭabâṭabâ'î does not seem to need, from the very beginning, any narrative. He is clearly against the possibility of any miracle. Using a realistic and rational approach, he states that these mistakes happen all the time in a crowded chaotic context, and there is nothing suprahuman about it. Consequently, in his *tafsîr* on 4:157, Jews are not bewitched; they are rather ignorant.

Second, this ignorance is not exclusive to those who wanted to slay Jesus. In Ṭabâṭabâ'î's *tafsîr*, we all are also ignorant, and there is no way for us to definitely know the truth. Ṭabâṭabâ'î states:

This *âyah* denies what they claimed about slaying Jesus, so he [Jesus] was saved from the murder and the crucifixion ... Indeed, Jesus was raised with his body and his spirit, and it was not that he first experienced *tawaffâ*, and then his spirit went up to Him the Almighty. ... In fact, the emphasis in His saying: "But took him up unto Himself" does not make sense [*lâ yatimmu*] by the simple raise of spirit after death that is true for both murder and natural death [for everybody]. So this [phenomenon of] raising points to a method of saving by which Allâh saved him [Jesus] and freed him from their hands, whether [Jesus'] *tawaffâ* happened through a natural *mawt* [death] or it happened beyond natural death or murder or crucifixion, in a way that we do not know, or he remained preserved and alive by Allâh's preservation in a way that we do not [cannot] know, so all these [possibilities] are possible.<sup>109</sup>

Third, Ṭabâṭabâ'î's conclusion about our ignorance and the impossibility of knowing the truth about the crucifixion enables him to dispense with the crucifixion and focus on a more important issue. So, unlike other *mufassirûn*, Ṭabâṭabâ'î switches his main focus from the crucifixion and what happened on that day to a discussion on *tawaffâ* and its

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, under 4:157, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on Oct. 30<sup>th</sup> 2012).

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distinction from *mawt*. In his *tafsîr* on 3:55, he gives many Qur'anic examples of *tawaffâ* and *mawt*, and concludes:

A reflection in these two past [examples of] *âyahs* [32:11 and 39:42] reveals that *al-tawaffâ* is not used in the Qur'ân as a reference to death [*al-mawt*], but to put an emphasis on the reception and the preservation. In other words, *al-tawaffâ* has been used [in the Qur'ân] to refer to a [phenomenon of] reception that happens during the death [and by doing so, the Qur'ân tries] to show that the *nafs* of human is neither annihilated, nor destroyed by death, [a death] that the ignorant considers as the destruction and the annihilation. But Allâh the Almighty preserves it [*nafs*] until He resurrects it [on the day of judgment] for the return [of human being] to Him.<sup>110</sup>

Ṭabâṭabâ'î stops here, gives a few examples for his conviction (including 4:157), and moves to the next sentence of 3:55. While he does not draw a clear image of the crucifixion and what happened to Jesus, his brief explanation offers some raw material for the development of a theory that can, among others, shed light on the phenomenology of death in the Qur'ân: the theory of humans' tripartite nature presented and discussed in the third chapter of this thesis.

### 4.5.7 Wahb Ibn Munabbih's Narratives of the Crucifixion of Jesus in Jazâ'irî's *tafsîr*

Jazâ'irî's *tafsîr* on each *âyah* follows a uniform pattern. He arranges his *tafsîr* on each *âyah* into three consecutive sections: first, *sharḥ al-kalimât* (explanation of the terms); second, *ma'nâ al-âyât* (meaning of the *âyahs*); and third, *hidâyat al-âyât* (guidance of the *âyahs* or what the concerned *âyahs* guide Muslims towards). This latter part is always presented in a numbered and short-sentence style. Jazâ'irî always keeps silence about his source(s) of information. Throughout his *tafsîr*, the names of other *mufassirûn* are as absent as the chains of narrations of *aḥâdîth* or narratives he uses. Although he does not deny that his knowledge comes from the erudition of scholars and *mufassirûn* before him, his silence about his references places his *tafsîr* as "The" source of information for his audience. His authoritative tone, his easy-to-understand and vulgar rhetoric, together with

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, under 3:55, available online at <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> (consulted on Oct. 30<sup>th</sup> 2012).

his preaching style, all justify this position for him. His *tafsîr* on 4:157 is not an exception. Jazâ'irî interprets 4:157 in the context of 4:155-59. As usual, he starts with “the explanation of terms.” In this part, he presents the meaning of a few terms including *al-taşlîb* (the crucifixion) defined as: “nailing [someone] to a piece of wood, and killing him on it.”<sup>111</sup> Then he explains the meaning of the *âyât* in a numbered style text, and writes:

The subject of these sayings [*âyahs*] is Jews and [it] reveals the crimes that [they committed and] caused their damnation and their abjection, and brought the Wrath of Allâh the Almighty to them ... [those crimes are:]

1- Their breaking of [all] treaties and promises specially their covenant [with God] to act upon what is in the Torah.

2- Their denial of Allâh's *âyahs* revealed to His servant and His messenger Jesus, as well as those revealed to Muḥammad, may the salutations and the peace of Allâh be upon him.

3- Their murdering of prophets such as Zachariah and John [the Baptist], and they killed many of them *fî 'uhûd al-mutabâyina* [in different times and places].

4- Their saying our hearts are hardened, to deny the [Prophet Muḥammad's] call to Islam... Because of their sins, Allâh the Almighty has stamped on that [their hearts], and *rân 'alayhâ al-rân* [has hardened that (their hearts) such a hardening], and [Allâh] has prevented them from accepting the truth in their beliefs and sayings and deeds ...

5- Their blasphemy or [their denial] of Jesus and Muḥammad may the salutations and the peace of Allâh be upon him.

6- Their saying against Mary a tremendous calumny since they accused her of prostitution and said Jesus is the son of an adulteress may Allâh damn them [Jews].

7- Their saying out of happiness and pride that they slew the Christ, Jesus the son of Mary, peace be upon him, [not caring that] he is the messenger of Allâh. And Allâh the Almighty has denied them in that by His saying: “... and they slew him not, and they crucified him not, but it appeared so unto them” or [they slew] another man thinking that he is him [Jesus], so they killed him and crucified him, but Allâh the Almighty raised him [Jesus] to Himself, and he [Jesus] is with Him in the sky ...

But His saying: “and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain” is Allâh the Almighty's tidings about another truth which is: in fact, those who surrounded the Christ's home [*manzil al-masîh*] and attacked him so they can arrest him in order to kill him, those [attackers] disagreed with each other on if the man on

<sup>111</sup> Abu Bakr Jâbir b. Mûsâ al-Jazâ'irî, *Aysar al-Tafâsîr li Kalâm al-'Alî al-Kabîr*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 5 vols. Madinah al-Munawwarah: Maktabat al-'Ulûm wa al-Ḥukm, 1997, under 4:157, available online at <http://archive.org/details/ayzar-attfaseer> (consulted on Nov. 5<sup>th</sup> 2012).

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whom the likeness of Jesus was casted is Jesus or he is someone else. They did not achieve any certainty if the person that they arrested and brought out [of Christ' home], and crucified and killed is the Christ peace be upon him [or not]. And this is why the Almighty said: "But Allâh took him up unto Himself. Allâh was ever Mighty, Wise."<sup>112</sup>

Like Ibn Kathîr's work, Jazâ'irî's *tafsîr* on 4:157 focuses on Jews and not on Christians. Also, as does Ibn Kathîr, Jazâ'irî uses the opportunity to personally curse Jews. Jazâ'irî's above-mentioned explanations in number two and four clearly expand Allâh's damnation to all Jews contemporary to the Prophet Muḥammad and/or after him. In Jazâ'irî's *tafsîr* on 4:157, his choice of narrative is not obvious. It is not possible to know if Jazâ'irî's short mention of the likeness of Jesus being casted on someone else comes from Wahb's second narrative or if it comes from one of Ibn 'Abbâs' narratives, or if it comes from another source. In his *tafsîr* on 3:55, Jazâ'irî identifies the crucified person and clarifies that the likeness of Jesus was casted on the head of those officers who attacked Jesus' house. Although, as in Ibn Ishâq's narrative in which Judas is mistakenly taken for Jesus, here the miracle is not God's blessing for one of Jesus' companions, but God's curse and revenge for the crucified one; the narrative clearly is not a summary of Ibn Ishâq's narrative, because the focal point of revenge is shifted from the betrayer to the executer.

Beside this major change in the elements of the story, many small signs in Jazâ'irî's narratives point to his having given birth to his own distorted version of the crucifixion, having used the existing narratives on the crucifixion as his sources of inspiration. Some of those points are: 1) in both Jazâ'irî's narratives (in 4:157 and 3:55), to refer to Jesus, he uses the term "Christ," which is a popular way of referring to Jesus in contemporary Arabic language. Despite the Qur'ânic use of "Christ" in 4:157, this title is absent in the rhetoric of all concerned narratives of earlier Muslims. 2) In their staging of the events before the crucifixion, all narratives talk about *al-bayt* (the house). In both narratives of Jazâ'irî, this term is changed to *manzil al-masîḥ* (Christ's home). 3) "To kill and to crucify," which is the Qur'ânic order of the terms/events respected by all narratives, is switched to "to crucify and to kill" in Jazâ'irî's narrative in 4:157. 4) Expressions such as *ṭawwâqû manzil al-masîḥ* (surrounded Christ's home) or *yulqû*

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

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'*alayhi al-qabḍ* (arrested him) are recent Arabic expressions, and cannot be found in any of the early narratives on the crucifixion.

Jazâ'irî's "guidance of the *âyah*" on 4:157 has an authoritative tone. It includes Jazâ'irî's convictions presented in short and definitive sentences under four numbers. Like the previous two parts, no argument, analysis or critic is presented. Each and every sentence sounds like an item of a legal declaration. His generalising and reductionist approach uses the story of the crucifixion to draw a clear line putting "believers" on one side, and "all Jews and all Christians of all times" together on the other side.<sup>113</sup> In his "guidance of the *âyah*," he concludes:

Some of what this *âyah* guides to:

- 1- Explanation about Jews' crimes.
- 2- Falsehood of the belief of Christians according to which Jesus was crucified and killed, but [when it comes to] Jews, indeed although they did not slay Jesus, they will be punished for their intention since they crucified and killed whom they thought is Jesus peace be upon him.
- 3- Announcement of Jesus' raise peace be upon him to the sky and his descent at the end of time.
- 4- Like good faith, the repentance is neither beneficial, nor acceptable at the meeting with the Angel of Death, and its existence is [not different from] its inexistence.<sup>114</sup>

### 4.6 A New *tafsîr* of the Crucifixion of Jesus Based on the Theory of Double Messages of the Qur'ân

When used as a hermeneutical tool to understand the meaning of an *âyah*, the theory of double messages of the Qur'ân aims to find answers to three major questions: 1) under what category the *âyah* must be read and understood: prophetic or messengeric?<sup>115</sup> 2) In

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* This reductionist generalization about Christians and Jews can be abundantly found throughout his *tafsîr*. From the very beginning of his *tafsîr* on first *sûrah* of the Qur'ân (*Al-Fâtiḥa*), Jazâ'irî interprets "those who earn Thine anger" as Jews and "those who go astray" as Christians. Just a few *âyahs* before 4:157, he ends his *tafsîr* on 4:150-2 with:

[This *âyah* guides to] the trueness of Islamic religion and the falseness of Judaism and Christianity, since [Allâh] the Almighty has promised Jews and Christians with the despising torture [in the afterlife], and He has promised believers [in Islam] the full reception of their rewards, as well as [Allâh's] forgiveness and [His] blessings to them.

See *ibid.*, under 1:7 and 4:150-2.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, under 4:157.

<sup>115</sup> As explained in the second chapter of this thesis, the subdivision of the Qur'ânic *âyahs* into prophetic and messengeric, is not a pure dichotomic concept giving us a black and white picture of the text. Some

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each case, what are the hermeneutical consequences? 3) In its fifth layer of meaning, what message or messages does the *âyah* try to send to its audiences, whether local or global?

Finding answers to these three questions requires careful scholarly work and meticulous study of the *âyah* in its different textual and historical contexts. As mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, in order to recognize prophetic *âyahs* from messengeric ones, the scholar's main tool remains twofold: 1) the textual analysis with an emphasis on content analysis, looking for relationships between possibilities of the message of the *âyah* with textual evidences and/or signs of either prophecy presented within instances or messengerhood presented through concepts; and 2) the historico-critical analysis that enables the researcher to find the level of interdependence between historical realities as contexts of units of revelation (*âyahs*) and the message that each given unit presents.

A quick review of 4:157 in the context of its *sûrah* reveals that 4:153-62 is a piece of literature framed by 4:150-2 at one end, and 4:163-6 at the other end. *âyahs* before 4:150 are about hypocrites in Medina (4:138-49). They are filled with many imperative verbs such as *bashshir* (bear unto [the hypocrites]), *lâ taq'udû* (sit not [with the hypocrites]), and *lâ tattakhidhû* (choose not [disbelievers]). They present a direct conversation between Allâh and Muslims in "O you who believe" style. 4:149 is the last *âyah* of this direct conversation. It reads: "If ye do good openly or keep it secret, or forgive evil, lo! Allâh is ever Forgiving, Powerful." 4:150-2 not only make a sudden shift from direct conversation to the third person plural style, but also broaden the topic of the conversation, and turn it into a declaration of faith announced to all humanity. 4:150-2 inform the humanity that the deniers of the messengers' message will certainly be punished, and the believers in that message will certainly be rewarded. They read:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُفَرِّقُوا بَيْنَ اللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَيَقُولُونَ نُؤْمِنُ بِبَعْضٍ وَنَكْفُرُ  
بِبَعْضٍ وَيُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يَتَّخِذُوا بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ سَبِيلًا أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ حَقًّا وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابًا مُّهِينًا  
وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَلَمْ يُفَرِّقُوا بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ أُولَٰئِكَ سَوْفَ يُؤْتِيهِمْ أَجْرَهُمُ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا  
رَّحِيمًا

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Qur'anic *âyahs* might have elements of both categories. In those cases, the question is what aspect of the *âyah* is dominant: its prophetic aspect or its messengeric aspect? Then, what are the hermeneutical consequences of that dominance?

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Lo! those who disbelieve in Allâh and His messengers, and seek to make distinction between Allâh and His messengers, and say: We believe in some and disbelieve in others, and seek to choose a way in between; Such are disbelievers in truth; and for disbelievers We prepare a shameful doom. But those who believe in Allâh and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them, unto them Allâh will give their wages; and Allâh was ever Forgiving, Merciful.

Here, the term *rusul* (messengers) appears four times.<sup>116</sup> The topic also is about the non-distinctive nature of messengers' mission. These three *âyahs* put an emphasis on the timeless, contextless, and spaceless aspect of messengerhood. They seem to prepare their audience for the next part, which will hold a messengeric message. At the other end, 4:163-6 clarify that what preceded must be read as part of the *qashaş* of the messengers, and understood as an example of stories that all point to the same unique truth. They read:

إِنَّا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ كَمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَى نُوحٍ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَعِيسَى وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُونُسَ وَهَارُونَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ وَآتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ زَبُورًا وَرُسُلًا قَدْ قَصَصْنَاهُمْ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَرُسُلًا لَمْ نَقْصِبْهُمْ عَلَيْكَ وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهُ مُوسَى تَكْوِيمًا رُسُلًا مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ لِئَلَّا يَكُونَ لِلنَّاسِ عَلَى اللَّهِ حُجَّةٌ بَعْدَ الرُّسُلِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا لَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَشْهَدُ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَيْكَ أَنْزَلَهُ بِعِلْمِهِ وَالْمَلَكُ يَشْهَدُونَ وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا

Lo! We inspire thee as We inspired Noah and the prophets after him, as We inspired Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and as We imparted unto David the Psalms; And messengers We have mentioned unto thee before and messengers We have not mentioned unto thee; and Allâh spake directly unto Moses; Messengers of good cheer and of warning, in order that mankind might have no argument against Allâh after the messengers. Allâh was ever Mighty, Wise. But Allâh (Himself) testifieth concerning that which He hath revealed unto thee; in His knowledge hath He revealed it; and the Angels also testify. And Allâh is sufficient Witness.

Again, here the term *rusul* (messengers) appears four times.<sup>117</sup> By juxtaposing narrated stories with non-narrated stories of the messengers, all having the same *raison d'être* as

<sup>116</sup> One of those four times is in the pronoun of *hum* in *minhum* in 4:152.

<sup>117</sup> To name some of those men who received Allâh's revelation, 4:163 uses the term *nabiyyîn* (the prophets), but when no name is mentioned, the term *rusul* is used. This might support the theory of double messages of the Qur'ân, suggesting that names represent human contexts and historical circumstances, so *nabi* is someone who receives a timebound and contextbound message, but the message of *rasûl* is beyond human contexts, and cannot and/or must not be presented by names, since these names point to precise men lived at specific times and in specific places.



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the “no argument” and submission aspect of human’s relationship to Allâh, 4:163-6 emphasize the function of those *qaṣaṣ* all leading to the same truth. The repetition of *anzala* in the last *âyah* as a reference to Allâh’s revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad also supports the hypothesis that, like the stories of all other messengers, the story of the messenger Jesus narrated (*qaṣṣaṣa*)<sup>118</sup> right before, was part of the *inzâl* side of the Qur’ân; so it offers a messengeric message for all humanity. This dominant messengeric atmosphere fills the rest of the *sûrah*. It is only at the very last *âyah* that the text switches back to the prophetic mood, changes its rhetorical style, and terminates some legal issues started in 4:127-30.

A comparison between Jesus’ *tawaffâ* in 4:157 and its previous appearance in 3:55 reveals the same messengeric frame. Again, here 3:55 is part of a piece of literature presented in 3:33-57. It is not surprizing to know that like in 4:163-6, the *âyah* before 3:33 orders Muslims to submit themselves to Allâh and his messenger, and some *âyahs* after 3:57 emphasize the *qaṣaṣ* nature of what preceeds. In fact, here the two last *âyahs* of Jesus’ story are, in their contents, the repetitions of 4:150-2. The frame is the same messengeric frame. The only differences are that, here, the places of the two ends are switched in the text, and the ending frame overlaps with part of the story itself. In other words, the emphasis on the obedience to Allâh comes before Jesus’ story, and the consequences of believing or denying the universal message of the *qaṣaṣ* comes at the end of the story. 3:32 reads:

قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْكٰفِرِينَ

Say: Obey Allâh and the messenger. But if they turn away, lo! Allâh loveth not the disbelievers (in His guidance).

3:56-7 that provide the ending part of Allâh’s conversation to Jesus read:

فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَأَعَذُّهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِّن نَّاصِرِينَ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّٰلِحٰتِ فَيُوَفِّيهِمْ أُجُورَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّٰلِمِينَ

As for those who disbelieve I shall chastise them with a heavy chastisement in the world and the Hereafter; and they will have no helpers.

<sup>118</sup> Pickthall translates *qaṣṣaṣa* as “mentioned,” but since *qaṣaṣ* (narratives) derives from the same roots, “narrated” seems to be a better translation for it.

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And as for those who believe and do good works, He will pay them their wages in full. Allâh loveth not wrong-doers.

Then, 3:62 completes the frame. It states:

إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْقَصَصُ الْحَقُّ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

Lo! This verily is the true narrative[s] [qashaṣ]. There is no God save Allâh, and lo! Allâh he verily, is the Mighty, the Wise.

Another important similarity between these two versions of Jesus' *tawaffâ* is that although many *mufassirûn* have read and interpreted 4:157 in an exclusive Jewish context, the share of Christians in 4:157 is undeniable, and both versions of the story are in fact narrated in a Christian context. In 3:55, Jesus' end on earth is part of a narrative on his miraculous conception, his life, his miracles, his preachings, and finally his end on earth. In 4:157, Jesus' *tawaffâ* and crucifixion are explained as examples for the crimes that Jews committed, crimes that caused Allâh's wrath against them. But a quick look at the broader textual context of the narrative reveals that 4:153-62 are part of Allâh's argument to Christians warning them not to make the same mistakes that Jews did, and bringing into question the historical evidences of their belief in the crucifixion. The narrative starts with:

يَسْأَلُكَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ أَنْ تُنزِلَ عَلَيْهِمْ كِتَابًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فَقَدْ سَأَلُوا مُوسَىٰ أَكْبَرَ مِنْ ذَلِكَ فَقَالُوا أَرِنَا اللَّهَ جَهْرَةً فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الصَّلْغَةُ بِظُلْمِهِمْ ثُمَّ اتَّخَذُوا الْعِجْلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْبَيِّنَاتُ فَعَفَوْنَا عَن ذَلِكَ وَءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَىٰ سُلْطٰنًا مُّبِينًا

The People of the Scripture ask of thee that thou shouldst cause an (actual) Book to descend upon them from heaven. They asked a greater thing of Moses aforetime, for they said: Show us Allâh plainly. The storm of lightning seized them for their wickedness. Then (even) after that) they chose the calf (for worship) after clear proofs (of Allâh's Sovereignty) had come unto them. And We forgave them that! And We bestowed on Moses evident authority.

This mistake of *ahl al-kitâb* requesting the Prophet to show them a miracle seems to motivate the Qur'ân to mention some other mistakes that Jews made before. It is not clear if those *ahl al-kitâb* who asked such a request were Jews, Christians, or some groups of both. Ṭabarî mentions two possibilities: one considering only Jews as the interrogators and the other considering both Jews and Christians as the interrogators. He supports each

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possibility by citing *aḥādīth*. At the end, he agrees with Abu Ja‘far and concludes that maybe only Jews asked this request, but since they asked “a Book” and not “books,” they might have asked it as a miracle that will be convincing not only for themselves, but also for Christians. Qurṭubî, Suyûfî and Ibn Kathîr keep silence about Christians having any share, and state that those who made that request were Jews. They support their choice by some *aḥādīth*. Makkî mentions both possibilities and does not prefer one to the other. Ṭabâṭabâ’î strongly refuses that Jews be the only interrogators. Instead of supporting his preference by *aḥādīth*, he supports it by a rational intratextual argument and writes: “[Here] *ahl al-kitâb* are [both] Jews and Christians because this is the Qur’ân’s habitual norm [and usage of the term] in [all other] similar instances. So [here] the interrogators are the two groups of Jews and Christians and not only Jews.”

Another argument against the dominance of a Jewish context for 4:157 is that according to all scholars both the third and the fourth *sûrahs* of the Qur’ân are Medinan *sûrahs*, so 3:33-57 and 4:153-62 are both revealed in Medina. Also most scholars of the Qur’ân, wether Muslim or not, are unanimous that the third *sûrah* is revealed before the fourth one.<sup>119</sup> According to most Muslim scholars, *Sûrah Al-Aḥzâb* is revealed between these two *sûrahs*.<sup>120</sup> This, on the one hand, increases the possibility of a timeless message presented in 4:153-62 and, on the other, reduces the Jewish dominance of the *âyahs*. If the *âyahs* on Jews’ crimes including their claim about Jesus’ crucifixion are revealed after Muslims’ victory against Medinan Jews, knowing that no other conflict between Jews and Muslims –not even a minor one– followed the battle of Aḥzâb, one can conclude that 4:153-62 does not aim to excite or provoke Muslims against Jews, but it is a post-war declaration targeting the adherents of Abrahamic faiths, inviting them to a more peaceful and stable future. Following *âyahs* after both narratives confirm this function. As a matter of fact, both narratives are followed by many *âyahs* that each can be

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<sup>119</sup> There are debates among scholars on the exact place of these two *sûrahs* in the chronological order of the Qur’ânic revelation, but there is almost a consensus on the fact that *Sûrah Âli-‘Imrân* is revealed before *Sûrah Al-Nisâ’*. William Muir is among those few who claim that the third *sûrah* was revealed after the fourth one. He calls his classification as “Approximate chronological order of the Suras,” and does not give any explanation for his non-scientific personal choice. See William Muir, *The Corân, Its Composition and Teaching; and the Testimony It Bears to the Holy Scriptures*. London: Wayman and Sons, 1858 (pp. 43-5).

<sup>120</sup> Beside *tafâsîr*, see, for example, Mehdi Bâzargân, *Bâzgasht beh Ghor’ân*. 2 vols. Tehran: Sherkat-e Sahâmy-e Enteshâr, 1389 Solar *hijra* (vol. 1, pp. 320-1; vol. 2, p. 510).

considered as an independent treaty of peace. Here are three examples for the first narrative in *Sûrah Âli-‘Imrân*:

فَأْتِ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allâh, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allâh. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him). (3:64)

فَأْتِ ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ مِن رَّبِّهِمْ لَا نَفَرِقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِّنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ

Say (O Muḥammad): We believe in Allâh and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and that which was vouchsafed unto Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered. (3:84)

لَيْسُوا سَوَاءً مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَائِمَةٌ يَتَّبِعُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ ءَانَاءَ اللَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ  
الْآخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُسْرِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ وَمَا  
يَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَن يُكْفَرُوهُ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُتَّقِينَ

They [the People of the Book] believe in Allâh and the Last Day, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency, and vie one with another in good works. These are of the righteous. And whatever good they do, they will not be denied the meed thereof. Allâh is Aware of those who ward off (evil). (3:113-4)

The same invitation to a peaceful cohabitation between Muslims and the people of the Book follows the second narrative. In fact, the last *âyah* of the narrative states:

لَكِن الرَّاْسُخُوْنَ فِي الْعِلْمِ مِنْهُمْ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَالْمُقِيمِينَ  
الصَّلَاةَ وَالْمُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ أُولَٰئِكَ سَنُؤْتِيهِمْ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

But those of them [the People of the Book] who are firm in knowledge and the believers believe in that which is revealed unto thee, and that which was revealed before thee, especially the diligent in prayer and those who pay the poor-due, the believers in Allâh and the Last Day. Upon these We shall bestow immense reward. (4:162)

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A few *âyahs* later, in 4:170, the Qur'ân broadens its audience beyond adherents of Abrahamic faiths, addresses all humanity, and encourages its audience to believe in the message of the Messenger Muḥammad. It states:

يَأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ الرَّسُولُ بِالْحَقِّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَآمِنُوا خَيْرًا لَكُمْ وَإِنْ تَكْفُرُوا فَإِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ  
وَالْأَرْضِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

O mankind! The messenger hath come unto you with the Truth from your Lord. Therefor believe; (it is) better for you. But if ye disbelieve, still, lo! unto Allâh belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth. Allâh is ever Knower, Wise.

This universal messengeric aspect has been emphasized in the last *âyah* of the concerned post-war declaration. Before switching back to a legal issue in the last *âyah* of *Sûrah Âli-Imrân*, the Qur'ân ends its declaration with an emphasis on the *inzâl* nature of preceding *âyahs*, inviting everyone once more to hold fast unto Allâh's guidance through His messengers. 4:175 reads:

يَأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بُرْهَانٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ نُورًا مُبِينًا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَأَعْتَصَمُوا بِهِ  
فَسَيُدْخِلُهُمْ فِي رَحْمَةٍ مِّنْهُ وَفَضْلٍ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمًا

O mankind! Now hath a proof from your Lord come unto you, and We have sent down [*anzalnâ* derived from *inzâl*] unto you a clear light; As for those who believe in Allâh, and hold fast unto Him, them He will cause to enter into His mercy and grace, and will guide them unto Him by a straight road.

But if these messengeric *âyahs* in both 3:33-57 and 4:153-62 are, before anything, parts of Allâh's call to mutual respect and peaceful cohabitation between the adherents of Abrahamic faiths, then why do these narratives discuss points of disagreement and conflict between Jews, Christians and Muslims? A careful reading of concerned *âyahs* suggests that the Qur'ân presents three levels of reaction to the above-mentioned conflictual issues:

First, issues that the Qur'ân denies at a human level. At this level, the Qur'ân reacts angrily without providing theological arguments. For this level, the Qur'ân mentions punishments in earthly life, as well as in the hereafter. Examples of this level are numerous, and they are scattered throughout the Qur'ân, but in 4:153-62, they are all

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mistakes/crimes committed by Jews. Some of them are: “breaking the covenant [treaties],” “slaying the prophets [innocent people] wrongfully,” “speaking against Mary [innocent people] a tremendous calumny,” “taking usury,” and “devouring people’s wealth by false pretences.”

Second, issues that the Qur’ân denies at a theological level. At this level, the Qur’ân’s tone is softer, and its rhetoric is less blaming. Here, the Qur’ân denies the issue, and tries to provide theological arguments and intellectual discussions. The most important example of this level is the question of the trinity. In both narratives, the Qur’ân strongly denies the trinity, and supports its denial with explanations and arguments. But to do so, it uses a more inviting tone than blaming or accusing. 4:171-2 ask:

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا تَغْلُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ وَلَا تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْحَقَّ إِنَّمَا الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَكَلَّمْنَاهُ بِالْقَوْلِ الْغَالِبِ إِلَىٰ مَرْيَمَ وَرُوحٌ مِّنْهُ فَآمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَلَا تَقُولُوا ثَلَاثَةٌ انْتَهُوا خَيْرًا لَّكُمْ إِنَّمَا اللَّهُ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ سُبْحَانَهُ أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُ وَلَدٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ وَكِيلًا لَّن يَسْتَنْكِفَ الْمَسِيحُ أَنْ يَكُونَ عَبْدًا لِلَّهِ وَلَا الْمَلَائِكَةُ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ وَمَنْ يَسْتَنْكِفْ عَن عِبَادَتِي وَيَسْتَكْبِرْ فَسَيَحْشُرُهُمْ إِلَيَّ جَمِيعًا

O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning Allâh save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allâh, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allâh and His messengers, and say not “Three” - Cease! (it is) better for you! - Allâh is only One God. Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allâh is sufficient as Defender. The Messiah will never scorn to be a slave [servant] unto Allâh, nor will the favoured angels. Whoso scorneth His service and is proud, all such will He assemble unto Him.

Also 3:59-60 read:

إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُن فَيَكُونُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُن مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ

Lo! the likeness of Jesus with Allâh is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: Be! and he is. (This is) the truth from thy Lord (O Muḥammad), so be not thou of those who waver.

Third, issues that the Qur’ân denies at a historical level. The crucifixion belongs to this category. As a matter of fact, the Qur’ân does not seem to discuss or deny the crucifixion

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as a theological issue. As Lawson mentions it at the very beginning of his book, Jesus' crucifixion appears only once in the Qur'ân.<sup>121</sup> But issues related to his divine nature and/or his relationship to God are discussed several times throughout the Qur'ân. In all those instances, the Qur'ân keeps a blaming, but reconciling and soft tone. In the *âyahs* on Jesus' *tawaffâ* and his crucifixion, that blaming tone is absent. Instead, the Qur'ân uses a neutral authoritative tone. The Qur'ân's position *vis-à-vis* the crucifixion and its opinion on what exactly happened to Jesus on his last day on earth can be compared to another event belonging to the same historical category: the Seven Sleepers. In the case of the Seven Sleepers, the Qur'ân puts its finger on the debate over their number. 18:22 is the Qur'ân's final answer to that debate. It treads:

سَيَقُولُونَ ثَلَاثَةٌ رَّابِعُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ خَمْسَةٌ سَادِسُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ رَجْمًا بِالْغَيْبِ وَيَقُولُونَ سَبْعَةً وَنَامَتِهِمْ  
كَلْبُهُمْ قُل رَّبِّي أَعْلَمُ بِعَدَّتِهِمْ مَّا يَعْلَمُهُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ فَلَا تُمَارِ فِيهِمْ إِلَّا مِرَاءً ظَهْرًا وَلَا تَسْتَفْتِ فِيهِمْ مِنْهُمْ  
أَحَدًا

(Some) will say: They [the Sleepers] were three, their dog the fourth, and (some) say: Five, their dog the sixth, guessing at random; and (some) say: Seven, and their dog the eighth. Say (O Muhammad): My Lord is best aware of their number. None knoweth them save a few. So contend not concerning them except with an outward contending, and ask not any of them to pronounce concerning them.

It is clear that here the Qur'ân does not want to give a definitive answer to the question. On the contrary, it seems that by keeping it ambiguous, the Qur'ân tries to reroute the attention of its audience from the subject of debate to the all-knowing aspect of Allâh.

The Qur'ân's reaction to the event of the crucifixion is similar. It is like it tries to say: "Allâh knows and you do not know! So do not try to know something that Allâh will only reveal on the day of judgment!" It is therefore sad to realize that *mufasssirûn* were

<sup>121</sup> Another direct Qur'ânic reference to Jesus' *tawaffâ*, with no mention of a crucifixion, can be read in 3:55, and both Lawson and Robinson study it their works. However, any research on Jesus' possible death presented in 4:157 or in 3:55 will be incomplete without at least mentioning the two important articles of Heribert Busse on these two *âyahs*. In his most recent article published in 2001, Busse focuses on 4:157, and in his older article published in 1998, he studies some Muslim exegetical works on 3:55. I do not use Busse's articles in this thesis, since I found them (thanks to Professor Christian Raschle) once I had already submitted and defended my dissertation, but they are worthy of consideration especially for someone using German references on Jesus' death in the Qur'ân. See Heribert Busse, "Jesu Errettung vom Kreuz in der islamischen Koranexegese von Sure 4:157." *Oriens*, vol. 36 (2001): 160-95. Then, See Heribert Busse, "Der Tod Jesu in der Darstellung des Korans, Sure 3:55, und die islamische Koranexegese." *Studia Orientalia Christiana – Collectanea*, vol. 31 (1998): 35-76.

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not able to see this clear and simple message in the *âyahs* on Jesus' *tawaffâ* and crucifixion. It is also sad to see how these experts of the Qur'ânic text naively copied, one from the other, stories that in most cases sound like tales of the Thousand and One Nights. With a few rare exceptions, they could not see any irony in those tales. Indeed, Ṭabâṭabâ'î is one such exception; he cleverly avoids those stories, and tries to replace them by rational and textual arguments. Throughout his *tafsîr* on 4:157, he wisely uses every opportunity to repeat: "Allâh knows better."

My textual supports for this hypothesis of "no one knows but Allâh" as the Qur'ân's final answer to the question of the crucifixion can be classified under two categories: 1) textual supports external to the concerned narratives and 2) those internal to the narratives. The external textual supports are numerous. Above, I gave the example of the Seven Sleepers. Followings are more examples, all of them exclusively about debates between Jews and Christians or among the adherents of all three Abrahamic faiths:

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ لَيْسَتِ النَّصَارَىٰ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ وَقَالَتِ النَّصَارَىٰ لَيْسَتِ الْيَهُودُ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ وَهُمْ يَتَّبِعُونَ  
الْكِتَابَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ مِثْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ فَاللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ

And the Jews say the Christians follow nothing (true), and the Christians say the Jews follow nothing (true); yet both are readers of the Scripture. Even thus speak those who know not. Allâh will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they differ. (2:113)

وَلِيَحْكُمَ أَهْلَ الْإِنجِيلِ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفٰسِقُونَ وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ  
الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيِّمًا عَلَيْهِ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ  
أَهْوَاءَهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَاجًا وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً  
وَلٰكِنْ لِّيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتٰكُمْ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

[Lo! We did reveal the Torah, wherein is guidance and a light ... And We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps ...] Let the People of the Gospel judge by that which Allâh hath revealed therein. Whoso judgeth not by that which Allâh hath revealed: such are evil-livers. And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and a watcher over it. So judge between them by that which Allâh hath revealed, and follow not their desires away from the truth which hath come unto thee. For each We have appointed a divine law and a traced-out way. Had Allâh willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given



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you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works. Unto Allâh ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ. (5:47-8)

إِنَّمَا جُعِلَ السَّبْتُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اٰخْتَلَفُوا فِيهَا وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَيَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيٰمَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ

The Sabbath was appointed only for those who differed concerning it, and lo! thy Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they used to differ. (16:124)

An important piece that completes the puzzle of these unresolved debates, and gives some information about their ontological aspect can be read in 16:92-3. They state:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّتِي نَقَضَتْ غَزْلَهَا مِنْ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ أَنْكَا تَتَّخِذُونَ اٰيْمَانَكُمْ دَخْلًا بَيْنَكُمْ اَنْ تَكُونَ اُمَّةٌ هِيَ اَرْبٰى مِنْ اُمَّةٍ اِنَّمَا يَتْلُوَكُمْ اَللّٰهُ بِحَقِّ وَّلِيْبِيْنَ لَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيٰمَةِ مَا كُنْتُمْ فِيْهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ وَّلَوْ شَاءَ اَللّٰهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ اُمَّةً وَّاحِدَةً وَّلٰكِنْ يُّضِلُّ مَنْ يَّشَاءُ وَيَهْدِيْ مَنْ يَّشَاءُ وَّلَنَسْئَلَنَّ عَمَّا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُوْنَ

And be not like unto her who unravelleth the thread, after she hath made it strong, to thin filaments, making your oaths a deceit between you because of a nation being more numerous than (another) nation. Allâh only trieth you thereby, and He verily will explain to you on the Day of Resurrection that wherein ye differed. Had Allâh willed He could have made you (all) one nation, but He sendeth whom He will astray and guideth whom He will, and ye will indeed be asked of what ye used to do. (16:92-3)

The Qur'ân is crystal clear about the fact that, from the very beginning, Allâh had the plan of causing some differences and disagreements among humans. He had also decided from the very beginning that those disagreements would be solved only by Himself on the day of judgment. This latter *âyah* and 5:48 (mentioned among my external textual examples) are the only two Qur'ânic instances where Allâh's judgment on the day of judgment about disagreements among humans is absent. In these two cases, the expression of "He will judge between you/them" is replaced by "He will explain to you." On the one hand, this suggests that the Qur'ân believes in a level of disagreement that must not necessarily lead to conflicts and inhuman actions among humans, and encourages its readers to live accordingly. On the other, the only other Qur'ânic usage of this expression (being about Jews, Christians, and Muslims in 5:48) supports that, to the Qur'ân, part of the disagreements between these three faiths/nations must not lead to inhuman actions and conflicts. I believe that the crucifixion belongs to this category. In other words, the Qur'ân wants and insists that the truth about the crucifixion should

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remain unrevealed, and that Muslims should not try to find a definitive image of what happened on the cross.

3:55 narrates a conversation between Allâh and Jesus during which Allâh informs Jesus of His plan causing Jesus to *tawaffâ* and raising him up to Himself. The *âyah* continues: “I ... am setting those who follow thee [Jesus] above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me ye will (all) return, and I shall judge between you as to that wherein ye used to differ.” This means that to the Qur’ân, whether before or right at the moment of Jesus’ *tawaffâ*, some unjust actions between Jews and Jesus/Christians happened. Also, the Qur’ân does not deny the happening of a crucifixion in the name of Jesus. There are enough textual internal evidences to accept that the Qur’ân does not want to go further and explain more. Right after this conversation between Allâh and Jesus, the text cuts the narrative, and without mentioning a word about Jesus’ reaction, moves on to saying: “This (which) We recite unto thee is a revelation and a wise reminder.”(3:58). The same kind of cut happens in the middle of the conversation between Mary and the Angels within the story of Mary’s annunciation. Here the Qur’ân cuts the conversation to announce:

ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يَقُولُونَ أَقْلَمُهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ يَكْفُلُ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يَخْتَصِمُونَ

This is of the tidings of things hidden. We reveal it unto thee (Muḥammad). Thou wast not present with them when they threw their pens (to know) which of them should be the guardian of Mary, nor wast thou present with them when they quarrelled (thereupon).

This emphasis on “you were not there, and you do not know” is also true about the crucifixion. Part of 4:157 reads: “and lo! those who disagree concerning it [the crucifixion] are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture.” This sentence makes a cut between “And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allâh’s messenger –and they slew him not, and they crucified him not, but it appeared so unto them” and “They slew him not for certain.”<sup>122</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Ṭabarî interprets this last sentence as: “They did not slay Jesus with certainty.” Some *mufassirûn* such as Qurṭubî and Bayḍâwî follow him, and some others such as Zamakhsharî, Râzî, and Ṭabâtabâ’î discuss other possibilities including the certain negation of Jesus’ murder by Allâh. Pickthall’s translation reflects only this last possibility.

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As shown in this chapter, the main concern of most *mufassirûn* has been to find a story –with or without miraculous nature – to interpret the parts before and after this key sentence. Most of them have interpreted this sentence as a proof for either a miracle or a human mistake made by those who crucified Jesus. But if this is a messengeric *âyah* addressed to all humanity, on a disagreement among members of a continuing humanity till the end of time, then “those who disagree concerning it” and “are in doubt thereof” are not only the crucifiers of Jesus, but all humans thereafter. So, from this perspective, this *âyah* is addressed primarily to all Jews, Christians, and Muslims who, throughout their history, have disagreed on the crucifixion of Jesus. In other words, this *âyah* is also addressed to us today, as well as to our children and generations to come. The misinterpretation of this key sentence has led *mufassirûn* to put all their efforts on the interpretation of “not” and “nor” in a sentence where these two elements do not exist in Arabic. A more accurate translation for the concerned part of 4:157 is: “and they slew him not, and they crucified him not” (my literal translation). Accepting the spirit of the speech, or its fifth layer of meaning as being hidden behind the intention of the speaker to keep his story as ambiguous as it sounds, enables the hermeneute to see alternative possibilities for the meaning of this *âyah* in the two pronouns of *hu* (him) of the sentence.

The question then becomes: what exactly these two *hu* refer to? An effort to find an answer to this question leads to further questions. Some of them are: Who was not killed? Who was not crucified? Does the two *hu* refer to the same thing/person? If so, do they refer to Jesus, to his body, to Allâh’s Word (a reference to Jesus in 3:45 and 4:171), or to something that must be found outside the narratives such as “a spirit from Allâh” which is a Qur’ânic reference to Jesus in 21:91 and 66:12? Why the Qur’ân plants the seed of doubt in the minds of its readers, and does not solve the problem once and for ever as it comfortably does it about the divine nature of Jesus? Why in the Qur’ân’s report of a crucifixion, the act of murder (to kill) comes before the act of crucifixion? Also, are there any *ahâdîth* in which the Prophet clearly denies Jesus’ crucifixion? If so, why is there no mention of them in the *tafâsîr*? If not so, why the Prophet did not clearly deny Jesus’ crucifixion, as he did so about the divine nature of Jesus?

Submitting oneself to the will of the Qur’ân, and accepting that its intention is to keep the above-mentioned questions about the crucifixion unanswered leads to some

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more important philosophical questions: What is harmful in having different beliefs and practices, and living together not knowing the truth about something, in this case Jesus' crucifixion? In a human society, where are the borders between, on the one hand, vexing differences and intolerable disagreements and, on the other hand, acceptable differences and admissible disagreements?

The Qur'ân's classification of issues under three levels of human, theological and historical can be applied to the question of disagreements among humans. Consequently, according to the Qur'ân, any inhuman belief and opinion such as racism, chauvinism, or hedonism will be intolerable and condemned both to earthly and eternal punishments. At the theological level, the Qur'ân keeps silence about most theological debates and differences of its era. Many faiths such as Buddhism and Hinduism are not mentioned at all. Some religious groups considered by the Qur'ân as rooted in God, such as Zoroastrians and Sabians, are just mentioned by name with no further explanation (2:62; 5:69; 22:17). Besides polytheist Bedouins, and a few *hanîf* people, Jews and Christians are the only groups of "religious" people whose beliefs are discussed and challenged by the Qur'ân. But even here, the Qur'ân does not show any awareness about and/or interest in discussing important theological debates and differences within Judaism or Christianity. For example, the Qur'ân is completely silent about important Christian theological debates that split early Christianity into the monophysites and the diophysites. At this level, the Qur'ân challenges a few beliefs and practices of the above-mentioned groups, but exclusively considers one belief as "absolutely unforgivable," which is believing in partners for Allâh. 4:116 clearly states:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا

Lo! Allâh pardoneth not that partners should be ascribed unto Him. He pardoneth all save that to whom He will. Whoso ascribeth partners unto Allâh hath wandered far astray.

In all theological cases other than *shirk* (believing in partner(s) for Allâh), the Qur'ân uses a soft tone and invites its audience to submit themselves to the truth. At the historical level, the Qur'ân's tone and rhetoric are always authoritative and convincing. In

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most cases, the Qur'ân gives a clear image of the event with incredible details.<sup>123</sup> Most Qur'ânic narratives include direct citations of conversations among the characters of the narrative. Those direct citations solidify the Qur'ân's authoritative rhetoric. However, there are some exceptions. The two most ambiguous Qur'ânic narratives are those of Adam and Jesus. In both cases, the chronology of events is not clear. In both cases, the duration of many scenes and events are also left untold. Considering the Qur'ân's articulated and detailed narrative style, one must admit that in the case of Adam and Jesus, the Qur'ân purposely leaves the story incomplete. In the case of Jesus, the ambiguity starts from the very beginning with Jesus' conception. In the annunciation scene, the Angel's answer to the terrified Mary who asks: "My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal hath touched me?" is only one word: *kadhâlik* ("so it is" or "like this"). Throughout the narrative, readers find themselves in front of similar ambiguous situations several times, and Jesus' *tawaffâ* and his crucifixion are two of many examples. There is no way for curious readers to discover answers to many questions: What is the length of time between when God informs Jesus about God's decision to raise Jesus to Himself and the time that this ascension happens? What is Jesus' reaction to this news? How long the act of ascension lasts? Is it a bodily ascension or a spiritual one? Is it visible for those who are around or not? If so, what are their reactions? These questions and many others of the same kind motivated story tellers such as Wahb to fill the gaps in the Qur'ân's narrative on the crucifixion. These narratives fly in the face of the Qur'ân's own intention, announced within the same narrative, that "Why then argue ye concerning that whereof ye have no knowledge? Allâh knoweth. Ye know not."<sup>124</sup>

We do not know Wahb's sources of information, but one thing is certain: his story and other stories on the crucifixion greatly contributed to Muslims' perception of Christianity, and enormously helped invading Muslims shape their relationship with conquered Christians. One might not be able to find what is harmful in not knowing the truth about Jesus' crucifixion, but it is easy to find what was useful about the decisive denial of Jesus' crucifixion. Asma Afsaruddin writes:

Textual hermeneutics is contingent to a certain extent on the reader's

<sup>123</sup> To read a *par excellence* example of those detailed narratives, see *Sûrah Yûsuf* (Chapter 12).

<sup>124</sup> Part of 3:66.

individual circumstances, including personal, intellectual, and ideological proclivities, as well as the specific social and political circumstances in which the reader is located. These two strains reveal to us the complex ways in which Muslims related to non-Muslims in changing historical and sociopolitical circumstances, the details of which we cannot fully explore at this time. In view of our survey, it is safe to conclude, however, that such trends reveal that sometime after the second/eighth century, the religio-communal consciousness of Muslims *qua* Muslims became more entrenched, and confessional boundaries became more sharply demarcated, particularly in times of sociopolitical turmoil. Early inclusive views of Jews and Christians as recorded in early exegetical works began to be undermined and eroded to a certain extent (but never completely eliminated) in such changing circumstances. Exclusivist readings of the Qur'an appear to have become predominant particularly during the height of the Mamluk period, as exemplified by Ibn Kathir and al-Baydawi, for example, which allows us to speculate that the fraught sociopolitical conditions in the Islamic world at this time—in the aftermath of the Crusades and the Mongol onslaught—facilitated such illiberal views. The rise of a more trenchant religio-communal consciousness in the face of threats, perceived or otherwise, to a community's well-being often leads to a greater emphasis on distinctive doctrines which set one apart from others, with a corresponding diminished focus on praxis or ethics which may reveal commonalities... One may mention in this context the principle of *naskh* or supersession/abrogation that became invoked by jurists and theologians as a legal and hermeneutic stratagem to frequently privilege less-tolerant interpretations of the Qur'an *vis-à-vis* the People of the Book from after the second century of Islam—an important manifestation of shifting sociological and ideological currents which need to be better studied but are currently beyond the purview of this article.<sup>125</sup>

The crucifixion of Jesus is among the main subjects that contributed to the formation of “the religio-communal consciousness of Muslims” to which Afsaruddin refers. In fact, as Sidney H. Griffith explains in his article entitled *Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century*, the crucifixion was not only one of the main subjects of theological debates between Muslim scholars and Christian erudites, but also a bone in the injured relationship of ordinary Muslims and Christians, and a major point of conflict in their practices and rituals all inherited from Judaism.<sup>126</sup> Griffith writes:

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<sup>125</sup> Asma Afsaruddin, “The Hermeneutics of Inter-Faith Relations: Retrieving Moderation and Pluralism as Universal Principles in Qur'anic Exegeses.” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 37, issue 2 (May 2009): 331-54 (p. 351).

<sup>126</sup> Down the centuries and on the high scholarly level, many discussions and debates have happened between Muslim erudites and Christian theologians. Most of these discussions were in written form, and

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The cross as a topic of controversy between Christians and Jews, as distinct from the event of the crucifixion itself, appeared only in the seventh century, and then was bracketed with the icons. ... It became a standard topic of controversy in the second major period of the Christian production of tracts, *Adversus Judaeos*, after the Persian conquests of the early seventh century. The debate was still going on when the Muslims arrived on the scene, and continued thereafter as both the Christians and the Jews adjusted themselves to their new status as protected "Scripture people," in return for their payment of a poll tax and their agreement to adopt a low social profile, as required by the Qur'ân in *at-Tawbah* 9:29.<sup>127</sup>

We do not know to what extent the Qur'ân is aware of that conflict between Jews and Christians, but it cleverly intends to turn the debate on the crucifixion to an example of a tolerable difference aiming to teach Muslims how to cohabite with others, and not being engaged in endless and unuseful discussions. Meanwhile, it seems that a few converts from Judaism to Islam, including Wahb ibn Munabbih, Ka'b al-Aḥbâr, and 'Abdullâh ibn Salâm, brought with themselves their cultural baggage and continued their unresolved dispute with their old Christian enemy, this time using a new sharp weapon: *tafsîr*.<sup>128</sup> Because of the socio-political circumstances, the result was almost immediate. The efforts of Wahb and other story tellers bear their bitter fruits throughout the history of Muslim-Christian interfaith relations. In every era of Islamic history, and parallel to the socio-political circumstances of the time, mostly in conquered Christian territories, beside all other disagreements, the issues surrounding the question of Jesus' crucifixion and death on the cross added to the tension and fed the conflict between Muslims and Christians.<sup>129</sup> Examples of such function of the crucifixion are numerous, and what

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many of them survived to our days. However on both sides, most often these discussions were an ensemble of theological debates, popular beliefs, unproven convictions, and rational arguments. For an example of these debates see Rifaat Ebeid and David Thomas eds., *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades: The Letter from the People of Cyprus and Ibn Abî Ṭâlib al-Dimashqî's Response*. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2005.

<sup>127</sup> Sidney H. Griffith, "Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century." *Jewish History*, vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring 1988): 65-94 (pp. 77-8).

<sup>128</sup> Ibn 'Abbâs is the only first narrator of one of the narratives on the crucifixion who is a Muslim non-convert from Judaism, but he starts his narrative with *kâna min al-khabar al-yahûd* (It was among the news on Jews), so his source must clearly be an unknown Jewish source.

<sup>129</sup> Some Muslim erudites went even further than the narratives, and tried to support the denial of Jesus' crucifixion by rational arguments. For example in his letter to the people of Cyprus, Ibn abi Ṭâlib al-Dimashqî argues:

Yehoshua Frenkel reports is just one of them. He writes:

The Muslim writers who recounted the story of the war between Islam and the Franks told of the crucifix in the enemy's camp and noted its importance to Christian believers, though stressing to their audience the meaninglessness of this relic. Such is the case in the narratives depicting the siege of the summer of 1148. Outside the city walls, and in contrast to the Islamic ritual, a Christian ceremony took place in the Franks' camp, with the crucifix prominently displayed. The Crusaders gathered round the holy standard they so adored. However, this picture is found only in the Arabic sources, not the Christian ones. Two verses by contemporary poets illuminate the symbolic role of the Cross. Al-QaysaranI declares in a poem (qasida): "You (Nur al-Dîn) have beaten their leader in his forehead, the dead hardened heart was taken away from the battleground and with this the cross was lowered". Ibn Munîr sang in one of his verses: "In its most hardened stick the cross was beaten". By depicting this picture it seems that the Muslim writers intended to generate antagonism between the two sides. By delineating a scene of combat between the Qur'ân and the Cross they constructed a confrontation between two symbols. The Qur'ân stands as the sign of monotheism while the Cross is represented as the emblem of polytheism, of the Trinity. This narration can be coined "a rhetoric of otherness"<sup>130</sup>

#### 4.7 Re-understanding Jesus' *tawaffâ* Through the Theory of Humans' Tripartite Nature

Accepting that the ambiguity of Jesus' crucifixion in 4:157 is one of the pedagogical tools of the Qur'ân for the promotion of tolerance and respect between Muslims and the People of the Book, one might ask how far a hermeneute can go in understanding the Qur'ân's revelation of what happened to Jesus on his last day on earth. As confirmed by all *mufasssîrûn*, the answer to this question must be found in *innî mutawaffika wa râfi 'ûka ilayya* (I am gathering thee [causing you to *tawaffâ*] and causing thee to ascend unto Me) whithin 3:55. I suggest that what relates the two Qur'ânîc versions of Jesus' last day to

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Jesus was the greatest erudite of his era in Torah ..., and the best speaker among his people ..., and he had the most charismatic personality. ... [Knowing that he had all these powers] how come that the crucified one was so silent? Indeed if Jesus was crucified, he would have used the opportunity of being on the cross to talk to the Jews, to teach them the truth, and to defend himself...

See Rifaat Ebeid and David Thomas eds., *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades: The Letter from the People of Cyprus and Ibn Abî Tâlib al-Dimashqî's Response*. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2005 (p. 208).

<sup>130</sup> Yehoshua Frenkel, "The Qur'ân Versus the Cross in the Wake of the Crusade: The Social Function of Dreams and Symbols in Encounter and Conflict (Damascus, July 1148)." *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, vol. 20/21 (2002-2003): 105-132 (pp. 115-6).



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each other is the literal technique of pun between 3:55 and 4:157. In other words, *mutawaffika* (causing you to *tawaffâ*) is the Qur'ân's alternative for *mâ qatalûhu* (they slew him not), and *râfi'uka ilayya* (raising you to myself) is the Qur'ân's alternative for *mâ salabûhu* (they crucified him not). The Qur'ânic image of Jesus' last day on earth is as miraculous and unusual as his conception, his birth, and his speaking to Jews while still being in the cradle.

Having the theory of humans' tripartite nature in hand, it is certain that to the Qur'ân, sometime within the last day of Jesus' life, his *nafs* is separated from his *jasad* and *rûh*. The Qur'ân does not mention if later his *nafs* joins his *jasad* and *rûh* or not.<sup>131</sup> Those narratives that mention that Allâh caused Jesus to sleep for three or seven hours and raised him to the sky in that state of sleep indirectly confirm the fast reunion of Jesus' components in the sky, but the Qur'ân keeps silence about it. This silence suggests that instead of the physical characteristics of Jesus' crucifixion/death, the Qur'ân is more interested in the spiritual aspect of what happened to Jesus. This spiritual aspect is emphasized by *wa muṭahhiruka min al-ladhîna kafarû* (and am cleansing thee of those who disbelieve), a purification that follows Jesus' ascension to Allâh.

The Qur'ân clearly denies any death in the past for Jesus, but his death in the future is part of the Qur'ânic apocalypse, and is discussed in 4:159. It reads:

وَأَنَّ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا لِيُؤْمِنُوا بِهِ قَبْلَ مَوْتِهِ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَكُونُ عَلَيْهِمْ شَهِيدًا

There is not one of the People of the Scripture but will believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them.

As all other *âyahs* about Jesus, this one also has been the subject of many debates among *mufasssirûn*. Again, like in 4:157, the question here is what the two *hu* (him) in the *âyah*

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<sup>131</sup> This non-mortal aspect of *tawaffâ* is not a new suggestion. In fact, some *mufasssirûn* prior to Ṭabarî put an emphasis on the non-mortal nature of *tawaffâ*, but they do not explain why and how *tawaffâ* is different from death. For example, Abu Muḥammad 'Abdullâh b. Muslim al-Dinwarî (213-276H) in his *tafsîr* on 3:55 defines *mutawaffika* as: *qâbiḍuka min al-arḍi bi ghayri mawt* (taking you from earth in a way other than death). It seems that Ṭabarî's incomparable authority in *tafsîr*, and his indifference about such definitions convinces those *mufasssirûn* who come after him not to include these definitions in their possibilities of meaning for *tawaffâ*. See Abu Muḥammad 'Abdullâh b. Muslim al-Dinwarî, *Ta'wil Gharîb al-Qur'ân*. Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1978, under 3:55, available online at <http://sh.rewayat2.com/olomquran/Web/23621/001.htm> (consulted on Nov. 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012).

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refer to. For the meaning of the *âyah*, four possibilities have been discussed: first, the *âyah* means: “There is not one of the People of the Book but will believe in Jesus before Jesus’ death ....” Second, it means: “There is not one of the People of the Book but will believe in Jesus before his own death ....”<sup>132</sup> Third, it means: “There is not one of the People of the Book but will believe in the Prophet Muḥammad before Jesus’ death ....” Fourth, it means: “There is not one of the People of the Book but will believe in the Prophet Muḥammad before his own death ....” A few *mufassirûn*, such as Jazâ’irî, consider this last possibility to be the meaning of the *âyah*.<sup>133</sup> However, Ṭabarî strongly criticizes it and warns about the unacceptable legal consequences of such meaning. He argues that accepting this meaning opens the door for recognizing deceased *dhimmîs* as Muslims, and seizing their wealth and preventing their children from inheriting from them because at the very last second of his life, the deceased has become a Muslim and does not belong anymore to his previous *millah* (nation).<sup>134</sup> Like Ṭabarî, Ṭabâṭabâ’î refuses this last possibility with a rational argument and says that, as all other Qur’ânic instances, 4:159 must be read and understood in its textual context. Since 4:159 is part of a narrative on Jesus, nothing in it, including the first *hu*, can refer to the Prophet Muḥammad who is out of context here. In addition, from a Qur’ânic perspective, believing in Jesus is believing in Muḥammad and vice versa, so here there is no need to bring the Prophet Muḥammad into the picture to emphasize the trueness of people’ faith. Both Ṭabarî and Ṭabâṭabâ’î believe that in 4:159 both *hu* refer to Jesus himself, and that this *âyah* is a statement about the return of Jesus on earth at the end of time.

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<sup>132</sup> Ṭabarî cites some early exegetes who have claimed that the first *hu* refers to the Prophet Muḥammad, so the *âyah* means one of the two followings: “There is not one of the People of the Book but will believe in the Prophet Muḥammad before Jesus’ death ....” Or “There is not one of the People of the Book but will believe in the Prophet Muḥammad before his own death ....”

<sup>133</sup> Ibn ‘Abbâs seems to be the first early *mufassir* who suggests that the second *hu* refers to every person among the People of the Book. Mujâhid b. Jabr al-Makhzûmî (d. 104H) cites him explaining that every one of the People of the Book will believe in Jesus before the death of that person even if his death happens as fast as *turdâ* (being fallen from a high place) or *tughraq* (being sank in the water). A few *mufassirûn* such as Muqâtil ibn Sulaymân (d. 150H) follow Mujâhid, but most others such as Zamakhsharî, Tha‘labî, Suyûṭî, and Qurṭubî mention all possibilities without clearly preferring one to the others. Also a fifth possibility considering the first *hu* as a reference to Allâh is mentioned by some *mufassirûn* such as Qurṭubî.

<sup>134</sup> Ibn Kathîr criticizes this argument and says since the *imân* (faith) of the deceased person is not accepted, he cannot be considered as a Muslim. Ibn Kathîr prefers the third possibility and writes 15 pages, and includes many *ahâdîth* to support his preference.

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Accepting the preference of Ṭabarî and Ṭabâṭabâ'î necessarily means that 4:159 informs Muslims about the future *mawt* of Jesus sometime at the end of time. The Qur'ân clearly states that righteous people do not experience *mawt* more than once. 44:56 states: "They [the righteous or pious people] taste not death therein [in the heavens], save the first death [on earth]. And He [Allâh] hath saved them from the doom of hell." So if 4:159 reveals Jesus' *mawt* at the end of time, then his *tawaffâ*, as some have translated and interpreted it, does not refer to his death, but to a state of separation between his soul and his body, a state that could have appeared to those who witnessed it as *qatl* which, as explained in chapter three of this thesis, is an alternative for *mawt*. It seems that by using *tawaffâ* for Jesus, the Qur'ân purposely makes a strong statement about the return of Jesus at the end of time. To the Qur'ân, the most important distinctive aspect of what happened to Jesus in 4:157 is the possible-return aspect of his *tawaffâ* versus the no-return aspect of *qatl* claimed by the Jews. Once read through the lenses of the theory of humans' tripartite nature, 4:157 can mean that the crucifiers could not cause Jesus to have a no-return death, and were not able to separate his *rûh* from his *jasad* by crucifying him. So Allâh took his *nafs* and, despite the non-alive appearance of his *jasad*, He preserved it from decomposition by keeping his *rûh* in it. He then raised him unto Himself, and He will send him back to earth at the end of time.

As discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, *tawaffâ* has all the characteristics and appearances of death, except that it therefore leaves a possibility for a return. Knowing that, a simple question that no *mufassir* seems to have asked remains: If we think of *shubbiha lahum* (it appeared so unto them) as referring to the *qatl* of Jesus instead of to his crucifixion, is not then the use of *tawaffâ* meaning a death-like state with the possibility of a return, together with the mention of Jesus' final and definitive *mawt* at the end of time, a logical possibility?

This interpretation opens a new understanding of the Qur'ân's image about what happened to Jesus on his last day of life on earth. This particular interpretation has been ignored for centuries because of the powerful influences of dominant narratives that, despite all criticism around their narrators, have played an undeniable role in shaping the limits of *mufassirûn*'s understanding of the Qur'ân, even for those exceptional *mufassirûn* who did not consider those narratives as credible sources.

## Conclusion

The nature of Jesus has always been a sensitive and important issue in the history of Muslim-Christian relations in general, and dialogue in particular. This issue becomes more challenging when one discovers that, on both sides of the dialogue, there is a long history of internal debates and disagreements about Jesus' nature, life, and death. On the Muslim side, since the Qur'ân is very clear in its denial of any divinity shared between God and his creatures, including Jesus, most debates simply focus on the questions surrounding Jesus' life and death. Among those debates, the crucifixion of Jesus is probably the hardest bone to pick. Despite the ambiguity of Muslim sources (both the Qur'ân and the *Hadîth*) about Jesus' crucifixion, and the considerable amount of recorded discussions among Muslim erudites on the subject matter down the centuries, the common position of devout Muslims has almost always been the strong denial of Jesus' crucifixion and death. As a proof for their conviction, Muslims have often challenged the reliability of Christian sources, accusing Christians of believing in "manipulated Gospels" written under the influence of Greco-Roman religions. This unfriendly approach has gone both ways. As Oddbjorn Leirvick mentions:

On the Christian side, it has always been hard to recognize the prophethood of Muḥammad, and even to discuss Islam as something other than a Christian heresy.... Christian contributions to the issue have often implied that Islam is but a poor copy of Christianity, suggesting that Islam has transferred central features of Christ to Muḥammad, and distorted the real image of Jesus Christ to conform to another religious setting.<sup>135</sup>

It stands to reason that these accusations and prejudices have never helped the implementation of a constructive dialogue. Fortunately, besides them, some deeper exchanges and dialogues have happened, at both academic and popular levels, between those Muslims and Christians who have tried to understand each other with mutual

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<sup>135</sup> Oddbjorn Leirvick, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010 (p. 1).

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respect for the diversity of beliefs and practices. To consolidate these rare instances of dialogue between Muslims and Christians, Oddbjorn suggests a rethinking of five major points of divergence, the third one being “rethinking the Cross.” On this point he states:

Exegetically, the question of what the Qur’ân actually says about the cross and crucifixion remains unsolved, and the Qur’ân has been interpreted differently at this point by its exegetes. Theologically, the question of the crucifixion is inseparable from what Muslims have perceived as non-acceptable implications of the cross as a religious symbol .... Historically, the question may be raised of whether the rejection of the Cross should primarily be read in the context of political confrontation ... rather than as an expression of theological strictures.<sup>136</sup>

Oddbjorn concludes by citing Ida Glaser and suggests: “...‘thinking about the Cross in the context of Islam leads us [Christians] to seeing ourselves anew’ –being called to self-critically embody a theology of the Cross rather than imposing it on others.”<sup>137</sup>

This thesis is a response to Oddbjorn’s call, by rethink the cross in Islam through re-studying the exegetical aspects of the crucifixion from within Muslim texts using Islam’s own terms on the issue. To do so, this thesis had to develop three Qur’ânic theories, including the theory of five layers of meaning, the theory of double messages of the Qur’ân, and the theory of humans’ tripartite nature. The first two theories can be used for a re-study of any subject matter in the Qur’ân. Together, these first two theories try to open new windows and shed new light on scholarly textual efforts within the field of Qur’ânic Studies. The third theory, however, aims specifically to blow a new breath of understanding onto the Qur’ân’s presentation of human nature. In particular, one of the specific usages of this last theory can be the re-studying of the Qur’ânic image of Jesus’ crucifixion and death. The combination of these three theories with some modern approaches and methods such as historico-critical and redaction critical approaches enables us to see how in its fifth layer of meaning, the Qur’ân’s own answer to the question of Jesus’ crucifixion is neither a rejection nor an acceptance of it. In fact, this thesis demonstrates that the Qur’ân is very clear in its refusal to take position *vis-à-vis* the crucifixion, one way or another. The Qur’ân’s answer of “no one knows the truth but God” seems, in a final analysis, to be definitive in not taking position one way or another.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 240. The brackets are from the original text.

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This answer may prove to be a unique Qur'anic dialogical approach that can be used for many other points of debate between adherents of different faiths, especially Muslims and Christians in this case.

As explained in chapter four, the Qur'ân categorizes human disagreements and debates in three different levels/categories: human, theological, and historical. The Qur'ân suggests that, for achieving agreement on issues belonging to the first level, humans are born gifted with a natural capacity to recognize good from evil. The Qur'ân calls this capacity *fiṭra*, and clarifies that humans are the only creatures with whom God has shared this power. As discussed in chapter two, to the Qur'ân, *fiṭra* is rooted in both human's rational and emotional powers. The Qur'ân announces that *fiṭra* functions as a compass that guides towards a harmonious life with oneself and others, with no need for the revelation of any "extra-guidance" called religion. The second level, however, refers to the main focus of revelation/religion and its teachings. Not only does the Qur'ân invite Muslims to get seriously involved in theological debates and discussions with "others," but the Qur'ân itself also takes part in those debates and discussions, by presenting arguments directly addressed to adherents of other faiths, notably Jews and Christians. The third level, or the historical level, is where the Qur'anic explanations sometimes become ambiguous. Some examples of those ambiguous instances are given within this thesis, and many others can be discovered by re-reading the Qur'ân through this tripartite categorization.<sup>138</sup>

Jesus' crucifixion is an example *par excellence* of a disagreement about a historical event that the Qur'ân purposely leaves unsolved. While the Qur'ân shows interest in narrating in detail and with extraordinary clarity some stories about Jesus, when it comes to his end on earth, the Qur'ân keeps silent about the details of the crucifixion. Even the important theological implications of the crucifixion, such as the concept of original sin so central to Christian theology, cannot convince the Qur'ân to break its silence. As a matter of fact, one cannot find a single direct or indirect Qur'anic

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<sup>138</sup> Another example for this ambiguity *vis-à-vis* a historical event can be found in *Sûrah Al-Fil* (chapter 105). There, the Qur'ân does not clearly reveal if the Prophet Muḥammad witnessed the historical event of Abraha' unsuccessful attack on the Ka'ba or not, and keeps it ambiguous. The first *âyah* of this *Sûrah* has caused many debates among *mufasssirin* on the date of the event and its relationship to the birth year of the Prophet. To read more, see *tafâsir* of 1:105.

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reference to the notion of original sin (not to be confused with Adam's sin), developed by Augustine of Hippo more than two centuries before the Qur'an came into existence.

This standpoint of the Qur'an takes the earthly "local event" of the crucifixion and turns it into a "universal phenomenon" calling Muslims and Christians to reconcile. This "event" versus "phenomenon" aspect of the Qur'anic message, a conceptual difference I borrow from Yedullah Kazmi (1973- ), is what distinguishes the *nabawî* (prophetic) dimension of the Qur'an from its *rasûlî* (messengeric) dimension. Kazmi writes:

By the Qur'an as event is meant any single understanding of the Qur'an which, because it is specific to a time and place, is unrepeatable and hence unique. The Qur'an as phenomenon refers to the Qur'an's universal character. If the Qur'an as event is specific to a time and place and hence unrepeatable and unique, the Qur'an as phenomenon is analogous to a narrative unfolding in time in which each event of the Qur'an is an episode.... It is to highlight the importance of reflecting on the universal nature of the Qur'an that a sharp distinction between event and phenomenon is made.<sup>139</sup>

Efforts of story tellers such as Wahb Ibn Munabbih and subsequent *mufasssîrûn* who cited him, such as Ṭabarî, reduce the universal phenomenon of Jesus' crucifixion to an earthly time bound event, and change its functions from reconciler and peacebuilder to differentiator and conflict maker.<sup>140</sup> To my knowledge, Ṭabâṭabâ'î is the only *mufasssîr* who noticed that any effort to achieve a definitive answer to the question of the crucifixion of Jesus in the Qur'an is impossible. Yet, like his colleagues, he was not able to see "the possibly deeper lesson" that can emerge from understanding the Qur'an's purpose in keeping uncertain and ambiguous certain passages, as in the case of the one touching on the question of Jesus' crucifixion. As shown several times within this dissertation, this inability to see the larger than life message of the Qur'an in its universal context comes, in part, from the difficulty to transcend the historical context through which any *mufasssîr* interpretes the Qur'an and comes to write a *tafsîr* of his own. This

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<sup>139</sup> Yedullah Kazmi, "The Qur'an as Event and as Phenomenon." *Islamic Studies*, vol. 41, No. 2 (Summer 2002): 193-214 (pp. 193-4).

<sup>140</sup> It is bothering to know that Râzî rightly notices some unacceptable logical weaknesses of Wahb's narratives, but at the end considers the miracle nature of the event, or the very little group of witnesses of the crucifixion as "acceptable answers" for his rational critics, and follows other *mufasssîrûn* in confirming the substitutionist theory.

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criticism, of course, is true about any other work of hermeneutics, including the present dissertation. But the barriers and limits of the human mind bound by space and time do not prevent passionate souls from marching towards an ever increasing appreciation of the plurality of human readings of truth, where tolerance and respect can be a common basis for interpreting every sacred text, in any place, and at any time. As Robert Detweiler rightly states:

Not only do literature and art continue to be creatively produced and to stand witness within this crucial transition, but the processes of interpretation also flourish, and it is imperative that we continue to *read*. Our religio-moral responsibilities to translate the implications of the texts before us remain challenged by the paradoxes, aporias, and urgencies of these texts. And if contemporary hermeneutics have shifted from the ancient hermeneutics of the community to the anxious readings of the individual, at the same time they have moved from a hermeneutics of trust to what Ricoeur calls a hermeneutics of suspicion. Perhaps this is always a necessary move for the postmodern, serving both to alert us to those traits of deceit and irony which surround us in the very fabric of what we perceive as order and to allow the release of our collective, repressive denials. For there will come many who will lead us astray.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Robert Detweiler and David Jasper (eds.), *Religion and Literature: A Reader*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000 (p. 175).



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