



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et  
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa (Ontario)  
K1A 0N4

*Your file - Votre référence*

*Our file - Notre référence*

## NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

## AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

**Canada**

**THE PRINCIPLES OF IBN TAYMIYYA'S QUR'ANIC  
INTERPRETATION**

**By**

**Didin Syafruddin**

**A Thesis submitted to  
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts**

**Institute of Islamic Studies  
McGill University  
Montreal**

**1994**

**© Didin Syafruddin**



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et  
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa (Ontario)  
K1A 0N4

*Your file - Votre référence*

*Our file - Notre référence*

THE AUTHOR HAS GRANTED AN  
IRREVOCABLE NON-EXCLUSIVE  
LICENCE ALLOWING THE NATIONAL  
LIBRARY OF CANADA TO  
REPRODUCE, LOAN, DISTRIBUTE OR  
SELL COPIES OF HIS/HER THESIS BY  
ANY MEANS AND IN ANY FORM OR  
FORMAT, MAKING THIS THESIS  
AVAILABLE TO INTERESTED  
PERSONS.

L'AUTEUR A ACCORDE UNE LICENCE  
IRREVOCABLE ET NON EXCLUSIVE  
PERMETTANT A LA BIBLIOTHEQUE  
NATIONALE DU CANADA DE  
REPRODUIRE, PRETER, DISTRIBUER  
OU VENDRE DES COPIES DE SA  
THESE DE QUELQUE MANIERE ET  
SOUS QUELQUE FORME QUE CE SOIT  
POUR METTRE DES EXEMPLAIRES DE  
CETTE THESE A LA DISPOSITION DES  
PERSONNE INTERESSEES.

THE AUTHOR RETAINS OWNERSHIP  
OF THE COPYRIGHT IN HIS/HER  
THESIS. NEITHER THE THESIS NOR  
SUBSTANTIAL EXTRACTS FROM IT  
MAY BE PRINTED OR OTHERWISE  
REPRODUCED WITHOUT HIS/HER  
PERMISSION.

L'AUTEUR CONSERVE LA PROPRIETE  
DU DROIT D'AUTEUR QUI PROTEGE  
SA THESE. NI LA THESE NI DES  
EXTRAITS SUBSTANTIELS DE CELLE-  
CI NE DOIVENT ETRE IMPRIMES OU  
AUTREMENT REPRODUITS SANS SON  
AUTORISATION.

ISBN 0-315-99937-3

Canada

## Abstract

Title : The Principles of Ibn Taymiyya's Qur'anic Interpretation  
Author : Didin Syafruddin  
Department : Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University  
Degree : MA

Convinced that "true" Islam had become distorted at the hand of the *ahl al-bida'* (the innovators) such as the philosophers, the *mutakallimūn*, the *ṣūfis* and the *Shī'ites*, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) not only refutes their fundamental views but also their Qur'anic hermeneutics, especially their *ta'wīl*, through which "un-Islamic" views were imposed on the words of the Qur'ān. This concern leads him to write his *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* (An Introduction to Principles of Qur'anic Interpretation) which this thesis focuses on. In his principles, Ibn Taymiyya lays strong emphasis on the *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* and the authority of the *salaf* (the Companions of the Prophet and their Followers), adducing many new arguments in support of this position. He believes that the Qur'ān had been explained in its entirety by the Prophet to his Companions, and the latter passed this understanding on to the *tābi'ūn*. This view leads him to rationalize claiming that the *salaf*'s sayings always can be explained, and to oppose the use of reason in determining the meaning of the scripture. Ibn Taymiyya did not leave behind a complete commentary on the Qur'ān. However, his principles of *tafsīr* not only show much originality, they have also been very influential. In fact, his influence in this respect is not limited to medieval thinkers like Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Ibn Kathīr, al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī but extends to modern writers as well.

## Résumé

Auteur : Didin Syafruddin  
Titre : Les principes d'interprétation coranique d'Ibn Taymiyya  
Département : L'Institut des études islamiques, Université McGill  
Diplôme : Maîtrise ès Arts

Convaincu que le "vrai" islam avait été déformé aux mains du *ahl al-bida'* tel que les philosophes, les *mutakallimūn*, les soufis, et les chiïtes, Ibn Taymiyya (m. 1328) réfute non seulement leurs opinions fondamentales mais également leur herméneutique coranique, surtout leur *ta'wīl* par lequel des opinions "non-islamiques" ont été imposées sur les mots du Coran. Cet intérêt l'amène à écrire sa *Muqaddima fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* (Introduction aux principes d'interprétation coranique), qui sera le sujet de cette thèse. Parmi ses principes, Ibn Taymiyya insiste sur le *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* et aussi sur l'autorité des *salaf* (les compagnons du prophète et ceux qui les suivent), en apportant de nouveaux arguments pour soutenir sa position. Il croit que le Coran a été clairement expliqué par le prophète à ses compagnons, qui ont fait passer cette explication aux *tābi'ūn*. Cette opinion l'amène à rationaliser, en déclarant que les maximes des *salaf* peuvent toujours être expliquées, et qu'il faut donc s'opposer à l'usage de la raison dans l'interprétation des écritures saintes. Ibn Taymiyya n'a pas laissé de commentaire coranique complet. Cependant, ses principes montre son originalité et ont eu beaucoup d'influence sur les penseurs médiévaux comme Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Ibn Kathīr, al-Zarkashī, et al-Suyūṭī, ainsi que sur certains écrivains modernes.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis is the product of a long journey during which I have incurred many debts. In Indonesia, I should first of all mention my father and mother who have endlessly prayed for my success. This work would not have been possible without their unending support. My gratitude to Kiayi Uyeh Baluqiya Shakir, my respected teacher at Pesantren Yamisa, Bandung, West Java, 1976-1979, is beyond expression. It is to him that I owe my knowledge of the Arabic language. The HMI (Islamic Student Association), Ciputat, of which I was an active member from 1979 to 1986 is also to be thanked for its stimulating intellectual atmosphere.

I am deeply appreciative of the encouragement and support I received from the senior staff of the *Civitas Academica*, IAIN (State Institute of Islamic Studies), Jakarta, the Department of Religious Affairs, Government of Indonesia, and CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency). The McGill-Indonesia IAIN Development Project gave me the opportunity to study at the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, for which I am grateful.

I should also like to mention Salwa Ferahian and her staff at the Islamic Studies Library, McGill University, for helping locate or obtain the books I needed. I wish to thank my Indonesian fellow students, especially Faisal Ismail, for their friendship and intellectual encouragement during my stay in the beautiful city of Montreal. It is impossible not to mention Muhammad Qasim Zaman, who helped edit my thesis despite being busy writing his own Ph. D. dissertation. He has contributed much in making this thesis more comprehensible. I appreciate, and will not easily forget, his assistance. Bruce Fudge

should be thanked as well for kindly translating the abstract into French. I am also grateful to Professor Wael B. Hallaq, who gave me some helpful suggestions when I began writing this thesis; he also lent me his recent book on Ibn Taymiyya and gave some other references as well. Finally, I have to thank Professor Issa J. Boullata, both as the Director of the McGill-Indonesia IAIN Development Project and as my thesis adviser. He has always encouraged me to work very hard and has himself been a very efficient and helpful supervisor. Although at the time of my finishing this thesis, he was very busy because of his administrative duties in the Project directorship, he was willing nevertheless to go over every sentence of this thesis and suggest corrections and improvements. This thesis is a tribute to his concern and, I hope, the beginning of my intellectual journey.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
RÉSUMÉ .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vi
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER ONE: IBN TAYMIYYA'S VIEWS ON <i>TA'WIL</i> .....	7
A. Historical development of Islamic schools of thought until the time of Ibn Taymiyya .....	7
B. The schools of Islamic thought in Damascus and Egypt in the second half of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th .....	14
C. Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of <i>ta'wil</i> of the Islamic schools of thought .....	17
1. The philosophers .....	17
2. The <i>mutakallimūn</i> .....	21
3. The speculative <i>ṣūfis</i> .....	26
4. The Shī'ites .....	29
5. Ibn Taymiyya's general criticism of <i>ta'wil</i> .....	37
CHAPTER TWO: THE PRINCIPLES OF IBN TAYMIYYA'S QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION .....	47
A. Ibn Taymiyya's method of Qur'anic interpretation .....	47
B. The Authority of the <i>salaf</i> in interpreting the Qur'ān .....	50
C. Ibn Taymiyya's view of the <i>salaf</i> 's disagreement .....	60
1. The reliability of tradition can be known .....	60
2. The <i>salaf</i> 's disagreement was not mutually contradictory .....	71
a. The <i>salaf</i> did not always use the first name of a thing .....	71
b. Instead of using a general name, the <i>salaf</i> used its varieties .....	73
c. The possibility that a word has two meanings .....	75
d. The <i>salaf</i> expressed a meaning with words close in meaning .....	76
D. Ibn Taymiyya's <i>tafsīr sūrat al-ikhhlās</i> .....	78
1. The place of <i>sūrat al-ikhhlās</i> .....	79
2. The purpose of Ibn Taymiyya's <i>sūrat al-ikhhlās</i> .....	81



3. Ibn Taymiyya's method in <i>tafsīr sūrat al-ikhhlāṣ</i> .....	84
4. Ibn Taymiyya's exegesis of <i>al-ṣamad</i> .....	88
5. Analysis of Ibn Taymiyya's <i>tafsīr sūrat al-ikhhlāṣ</i> .....	93
<b>CHAPTER THREE: THE ORIGINALITY OF THE PRINCIPLES OF IBN TAYMIYYA'S QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION</b> .....	98
A. The school of Ibn Taymiyya's <i>tafsīr</i> .....	98
B. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī .....	102
1. The question of the quantity of the Prophet's traditions .....	104
2. The response of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī .....	105
3. The advancement of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's thought .....	110
C. Ibn Taymiyya .....	113
1. The stronger emphasis of Ibn Taymiyya's arguments .....	114
2. The new argument of Ibn Taymiyya .....	116
3. Analysis of further advancement of Ibn Taymiyya's thought .....	118
a. <i>Hanbalite world-view</i> .....	119
b. <i>The struggle against bid'ā</i> .....	119
4. The influence of Ibn Taymiyya .....	121
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	124
<b>SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	129

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Previous Studies of Ibn Taymiyya

Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya, who was born at Ḥarrān in 1263 A.D. and died in the Citadel of Damascus in 1328 A.D., was one of the leading figures of the Ḥanbalite school. As a Muslim thinker, he always insisted on the superiority of the Qurʾān and of the *Sunna* (the Prophet's Tradition), and of the examples of the *ṣaḥāba* (the Companions of the Prophet) and the *tābi'ūn* (the immediate successors of the Companions) over other sources of guidance such as reason. In addition, he strove to maintain the pristine purity of Islamic teachings.

As a *salafī* theologian, loyal to the "men of old" Ibn Taymiyya criticized without hesitation the philosophers, rational theologians, (speculative) ṣūfis and Shī'ites whose convictions ( *'aqā'id* ) he considered to have strayed from true Islam. He wrote many books and issued many *fatwā*s, <sup>1</sup> showing the weaknesses of his opponents' arguments from the point of view of both reason and revelation and trying to have them accept what he regarded as true Islam. He seems to have defined himself as a guardian of Islamic thinking and behavior whose responsibility was to guide Muslims to the right path and to preserve and maintain the *salafī* convictions. This stance led him to be a polemical Muslim thinker, as is shown by the nature of almost all of his writings.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Al-Dhahabī has mentioned that his works include about 300 books. See *Tadhkirāt al-Ḥuffāz* ( Haydarabad : Maṭba'at Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Nizāmiyya, 1334 H.), 279.

<sup>2</sup> See for example *al-Radd 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn* ( Bombay: al-Maṭba'a al-Qayyima, 1949), his refutation of Greek logicians; *Minhāj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya* ( Būlāq: al-Maṭba'a al-Kubrā al-Amīriyya, 1321 H.), his criticism of the Shī'ites and the Qadarites; *Ma'ārij al-Wuṣūl* ( Medina: al-Maktaba al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.) refuting the philosophers' conviction that the Prophet did not explain the principles of Islam ( *uṣūl al-dīn* ).

However, Ibn Taymiyya was a man of action as well as ideas. He consistently put his ideas into practice. One example is his taking up arms against the Ittihadīyya, the supporters of Ibn ʿArabī (1240-1) and against the Rāfiḍites of Kasrawān.<sup>3</sup> Also, he did not hesitate to take part in fighting against the Mongols when they invaded Syria. He even gave a *fatwā* encouraging Muslims to get involved in that holy war against their enemies.<sup>4</sup> This activist personality led him into practical political affairs. Consequently, his thought went through a dialectical process with social reality.

There have been many studies of Ibn Taymiyya either in the form of biographies<sup>5</sup> or thematic studies of his thought in areas such as politics, *kalām* (theology), philosophy, ṣūfism, jurisprudence and Qurʾanic exegesis. Regarding politics, he has been seen as a Muslim theologian who insisted strongly on the unity of the *umma* and social justice.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, as regards *kalām* and philosophy, Ibn Taymiyya is considered to

---

<sup>3</sup> Henri Laoust, "Ibn Taymiyya", *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, New Edition, 1971, Ed. by B. Lewis et al., III, p. 952.

<sup>4</sup> ʿAbd al-Hādī, *al-ʿUqūd al-Durriyya* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿa Ḥijāzī, 1938), 120-131.

<sup>5</sup> Among biographies of Ibn Taymiyya are ʿAbd al-Hādī, *al-ʿUqūd al-Durriyya*; Marʿī ibn Yūsuf al-Karmī, *al-Kawākib al-Durriyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1986); Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, Vol. 14, 134-140. The most important biography of Ibn Taymiyya is Abū Zahra's *Ibn Taymiyya, ḥayātuh, ārāʾuh wa fiqhuh*. In this book, the author describes the historical, social and political background of Ibn Taymiyya and discusses his *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *tafsīr*. Another useful biography is by Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā: *Ibn Taymiyya* (Beirut: al-ʿAṣr al-Ḥadīth, 1988). A concise biography can also be found in Laoust's article, "Ibn Taymiyya", *The Encyclopaedia Of Islam*, New Edition, 3, 951-955. For his personal characteristic, see Donald P. Little, "Did Ibn Taymiyya Have a Screw Loose?", *Studia Islamica*, 41, 93-111.

<sup>6</sup> The classic study of the social-political theory of Ibn Taymiyya is Henri Laoust's *Essai sur les Doctrines Sociales et Politiques de Takī-d-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taymīya* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'institut Français d'archéologie orientale, 1939). Unfortunately, I have no access to works in French. There is a useful study of Ibn Taymiyya's political thought by Qamaruddin Khan entitled, *The Political Thought of Ibn Taymiyya* (Delhi: Adams Publisher & Distributors, 1988). Also see Victor E. Makari's *Ibn Taymiyya's Ethics: the Social Factor* (California: Scholars Press, 1983), 113-173.

have been the strongest opponent to the idea of *ta'tīl* and of the idea that the Prophet did not explain the principles of Islam through syllogistic and demonstrative methods.<sup>7</sup> With respect to *ṣūfism*, he was one who resisted the idea of *tashbīh* and that of the union of man and God.<sup>8</sup> Again in his legal reasoning, Ibn Taymiyya was foremost in his strong emphasis on the authority of the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* over the other sources like *ijmā'* and *qiyās*.<sup>9</sup> And last but not least, in Qur'anic exegesis, this Hanbalite theologian was well known for his strong rejection of *ta'wīl* (metaphorical interpretation) and *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* (Qur'anic interpretation through personal opinion). Unfortunately, most modern studies on his method of Qur'anic interpretation such as by Abū Zahra,<sup>10</sup> Muḥammad

---

<sup>7</sup> On this issue there are several important studies: Thomas F. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity* (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1984), 40-55; Saḥih Aḥmad Kamālī: *The Types of Islamic Thought* (Aligarh: Institute of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, n.d), 53-111; Nurcholish Madjid, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalam and Falsafa (the conflict between reason and revelation)*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1985, 112-140; Muḥammad Khalīl Harās, *Ibn Taymiyya al-Salafī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1984); and the recent introduction by Wael B. Hallaq to his edition and translation of Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Radd 'alā al-Mantiqiyyīn* or *Ibn Taymiyya Against the Greek Logicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), xi-1viii; George Makdisi, "The Tanbīh of Ibn Taymiyya on Dialectic: The Pseudo-*ʿAqīlian Kitāb al-Farq*", *Medieval and Middle Eastern Studies in Honor of Aziz Suryal Atiya*, Ed. by Sami A. Hanna (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 285-294.

<sup>8</sup> See Michel, Ibn Taymiyya's "Sharḥ on the Futūḥ al-Ghayb of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jilānī", *Hamdard Islamicus*, IV, No. 2, 1981, 3-12 and his *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity*, 5-23. and the enlightening discussion of Ibn Taymiyya's thought and attitude regarding *ṣūfism* by Muhammad Umar Memon: *Ibn Taymiyya's Struggle against Popular Religion* (Paris: Mouton & Co, 1976), 35-72.

<sup>9</sup> Abū Zahra. *Ibn Taymiyya*, 460-478.; Mūsā, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 167-188; Victor E. Makari, *Ibn Taymiyyah's Ethics*, 178; Sirajul Haq, "Ibn Taymiyya's Conception of Analogy and Consensus", *Islamic Culture*, 17, 1943, 77-87.

<sup>10</sup> His study of Ibn Taymiyya's Qur'anic interpretation is only a part of his biography. However, it contains a very good discussion especially when the author makes a comparison between Ibn Taymiyya's principles of Qur'anic interpretation and those of al-Ghazālī. See Abū Zahra's *Ibn Taymiyya*: 220-235.

‘Adnān Zarzūr,<sup>11</sup> Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā,<sup>12</sup> and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Umayra<sup>13</sup> only give brief discussions of it. These writers merely summarize the *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, and do not go beyond observing that according to Ibn Taymiyya's principles of *tafsīr*, Qur’anic interpretation should be through the Qur’ān, the *Sunna*, the sayings of the *ṣaḥāba* and their successors. They do not consult his other writings or collections of his *fatwā*s, nor do they discuss why Ibn Taymiyya emphasized those principles of Qur’anic interpretation, or what tendencies in the Qur’anic interpretation of the time may have inspired him to write that book. There are certainly exceptions, such as Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Julaynid<sup>14</sup> and Ṣabrī al-Mutawallī,<sup>15</sup> whose works on the principles of Ibn Taymiyya's *tafsīr* have considered the lack of previous studies into account. However, they too do not analyze closely the problem of the extent to which Ibn Taymiyya was consistent with his principles when he himself interpreted the Qur’ān. Finally, no writer compares the principles of Ibn Taymiyya's Qur’anic interpretation with those of the previous thinkers of the same school of *tafsīr*.

---

<sup>11</sup> He edited and wrote an introduction to Ibn Taymiyya's *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* (Kuwait: Dār al-Qur’ān al-Karīm, 1971), 5-24.

<sup>12</sup> See his book: *Ibn Taymiyya*, 138-147.

<sup>13</sup> He edited and wrote an introduction to Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1988). Victor Makari and Thomas Michel note that Qur’anic interpretation is one of Ibn Taymiyya's concerns. But it has unfortunately received little attention. See Victor Makari, *Ibn Taymiyya's Ethics*, 2. and Thomas Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity*, 383.

<sup>14</sup> See his *Al-Imām ibn Taymiyya wa Mawqifuh min Qaḍīyyat al-Ta’wīl* (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-‘Āmma li Shū’ūn al-Maṭābi‘ al-Islāmiyya, 1973).

<sup>15</sup> See his *Manhaj ibn Taymiyya fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1981).

## B. The Focus of this Study

The aim of this thesis is basically to fill the gaps identified above. First of all, this study will analyze the historical background of the *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* in order to form a better understanding of the text. I will describe the fundamental theological convictions of the philosophers, the *mutakallimūn*, the *ṣūfis* and the *Shīʿites* and their *taʾwīl*, which led Ibn Taymiyya to criticize them vehemently. The second purpose of this work is to restate his basic ideas regarding the principles of Qurʾanic interpretation by considering his views which are scattered throughout many of his writings and to show the originality of his principles of *tafsīr*. The third purpose is to analyze how far Ibn Taymiyya implemented his own principles of Qurʾanic interpretation. The study will conclude with a critical discussion of his ideas.

The study proposed here would be significant for several reasons. One of them is that Ibn Taymiyya's thought was basically derived from his interpretation of the Qurʾān. To get a better understanding of his ideas and actions, we must deal with his principles of Qurʾanic interpretation. There are many studies of Ibn Taymiyya's thought, but they do not relate it to his principles of Qurʾanic interpretation. The second reason is that Ibn Taymiyya's refutation of the philosophers, the speculative theologians, the *ṣūfis* or the *Shīʿites* was mainly because of their distortion of Qurʾanic interpretations and their claim that their theological views too were derived from the Qurʾān. Finally, Ibn Taymiyya was the leading *salafī* thinker, who could be considered as a proponent of *tafsīr bi al-maʾthūr* (Qurʾanic interpretation through the *Sunna*, *ṣaḥāba* and *tābiʿūn*); he laid down the rational and the scriptural basis of this school of Qurʾanic exegesis, which greatly influenced such later exegetes as Ibn Kathīr, <sup>16</sup> al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī.<sup>17</sup> His

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibn Taymiyya's influence on Ibn Kathīr can be seen in the latter's discussion about his method of Qurʾanic interpretation. See Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Ṣābūnī, *Mukhtaṣar Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Qurʾān al-Karīm, 1981), 12; Jane Dammen

principles of Qur'anic interpretation have not been explored yet particularly in Western studies.

The sources which will be used for studying this subject can be divided into three categories: firstly, sources written by Ibn Taymiyya himself, particularly *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* ; secondly, writings by others on Ibn Taymiyya; and thirdly, general sources related to the subject under discussion.

In rendering the Qur'anic verses, Arberry's *Koran interpreted* <sup>18</sup> and M.H. Shakir's *Holy Qur'an* <sup>19</sup> are followed with some modifications. The system of the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University is used in Arabic transliteration.

---

McAuliffe, "Quranic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr " in Andrew Rippin's (ed.) *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 55. Also her *Qur'anic Christians, An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 72-3.

<sup>17</sup> See 'Adnān Zarzūr's introduction to Ibn Taymiyya's *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 20.

<sup>18</sup> Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran interpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> M.H. Shakir, *Holy Qur'an* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc., 1986).

## CHAPTER ONE

### IBN TAYMIYYA'S VIEWS ON *TA'WIL*

#### A. Historical development of Islamic schools of thought until the time of Ibn Taymiyya

The principles of Ibn Taymiyya's Qur'anic interpretation as presented in his *Muqaddima fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, cannot be separated from the political and theological challenges confronting him. Although the *Muqaddima* touches upon those political and theological issues only in passing, it clearly reflects and responds to the intellectual controversies of his time. These issues and controversies are, in fact, reflected in all his writings and his *fatāwā* (Islamic legal advices).<sup>1</sup>

Why did Ibn Taymiyya feel it necessary to write the *Muqaddima fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* (An Introduction to the principles of Qur'anic interpretation)? As he himself explains, some of his friends asked him to write an introduction containing general principles that could help them understand the Qur'ān, its interpretation and its meanings. Furthermore, the *Muqaddima fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* was also intended to help the reader differentiate the correct *tafsīr* (Qur'anic interpretation) from others and to serve as a criterion in identifying the correct opinions. Such a criterion is necessary, he states, because there are many *tafsīr*s in which strong opinions are mixed with weak ones, the true with the groundless. Some of these *tafsīr*s are based on valid reasoning, some are not. Ibn Taymiyya emphasizes that

---

<sup>1</sup> His views on the duty of the ruler and that of the ruled is expressed in *Al-Siyāsa al-Shar'iyya fi Iṣlāḥ al-Rā'ī wa al-Ra'iyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1988).



the *umma* is in need of an understanding of the Qur'ān which does not deviate from the truth.<sup>2</sup>

In his introduction of the *Muqaddima*, Ibn Taymiyya does not reject all *tafsīr*s of the time as groundless. He observes that some of them are true and some of them are not. Nor does he hold that all schools of Islamic thought have erred in their interpretation of the Qur'ān. He only suggests that some of the *tafsīr*s are based on correct understanding of the Qur'ān while others are unfounded. Later in the *Muqaddima*, as well as in other writings, Ibn Taymiyya, however, expresses his concerns on the growing number of Qur'anic interpretations which diverge from the beliefs of the *salaf* and points out the false opinions on which such interpretations are based. He attacks them from the point of view of reason or from that of Scripture. What disturbs him most are the people who, for him, have gone astray and claimed that their understanding of the Qur'ān was correct, though it contradicted the view of the *salaf*.

Ibn Taymiyya always claimed that his criticism of other deviant schools mainly derived from the *salaf*'s own understanding of the Qur'ān. His critique cannot simply be characterized as theological, however, for theology according to him is closely related to political concerns and developments. Ibn Taymiyya felt that the political fragility of the *umma* which had allowed the Mongols to invade the Muslims, was due to the latter's differences in their understanding of Islam or of the Qur'ān. Ibn Taymiyya accused the Shī'ites and the ṣūfis of having facilitated the Mongol invasion. So, when he called for a return to the *salaf*'s interpretation of the Qur'ān, it was not only because the latter was

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, Ed. by 'Adnān Zarzūr (Kuwait: Dār al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, 1971), 33-4.

theologically well-founded, but also because doing so would politically consolidate the unity of the Muslim community.<sup>3</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) lived when the Muslim community was divided along legal, theological and political lines. This diversity originated from the fact that for more than five centuries the Muslim community had experienced a remarkable change either due to its internal dynamics or its interaction with external intellectual and cultural influences. The difference within the Muslim community first began when the Muslims were faced with the problems of succession to the Prophet, and particularly when 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān came into power while facing a silent rivalry from 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his followers. The differences became more acute when 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib was accused of being part of the conspiracy to kill the third caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān.

This political clash within the Muslim community and its leaders is a turning point for later development in Muslim history because the effects of this tragedy went beyond the political sphere.<sup>4</sup> From this time onwards, differences among Muslims were not limited only to the political sphere, but also affected or shaped theological developments. This tragedy divided the Muslim community into the supporters of 'Alī and those of 'Uthmān.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Taymiyya repeatedly called for a return to the Islamic understanding of the *salaf* and for avoiding differences of opinions within the Muslim community. The Muslims were discouraged to talk about what they did not know. See, for example, his *Muwāfaqat Ṣaḥīḥ al-Manqūl li Ṣaḥīḥ al-Ma'qūl*, Vol. 1 (Medina : Maṭba'at al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1951), 26, 29. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya accused certain people of *bid'ā* such as *falāsifa*, Mu'tazilites, Shi'ites and ṣūfis, of creating doubt and confusion which led to disunity of the *umma* and the invasion of the Mongols. See, for instance, his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Ed. by 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Umayra, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1988). 290.

<sup>4</sup> According to W. Montgomery Watt, this period is a convenient starting point for the study of Islamic thought. See his *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 9.

This political clash soon created the third group, the Khārijites <sup>5</sup> who condemned supporters of both ʿUthmān and ʿAlī as sinful and claimed to be the only righteous people. After Muʿāwiyā ibn Abī Sufyān, a nephew of ʿUthmān, turned out to be victorious in his struggle against ʿAlī, he established the Umayyad dynasty. These political rulers tried to eliminate all political opposition from the loyal supporters of ʿAlī and the Khārijites. The opposition to the rulers did not remain merely political for it, later, also became theological. ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib came to be seen by his supporters as not merely a political leader, but also a religious figure. The Khārijites also developed the theological doctrine of the grave sin, stressing that a Muslim who committed it was to be killed. In the light of the tension between political groups, this doctrine was easily understood to suggest that the rulers had committed grave sins, so that shedding their blood was lawful. The radical theology of the Khārijites led to the rise of the accommodative theology of the Jabrites suggesting that the criterion of faith was not action, but affirmation, in one's heart, of God's existence. According to this group, the affirmation of the heart of the believer was sufficient even though it was not proved by action. They, also asserted that the action of man was created by God. The human being, in their opinion, had no freedom to choose or to act. This doctrine implied that the existing rulers could not be judged as sinful because they acted according to God's will rather than their own. This theology clearly emphasized submission to the rulers. As a reaction to this theology of political harmony, there arose the Qadarites emphasizing the notion that it was man, not God, who created human actions. In political terms, this idea suggested that the faults of the caliphs were their responsibility, not God's will.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Taymiyya regards Khārijites as the first innovators (*ahl al-bidʿa*) in Islam. See his *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13 (Rabat: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, n.d.), 31, 38.

<sup>6</sup> The interrelation of theology and politics presented here is not deterministic or reductionist.

In this atmosphere of political and theological clash, there also were Muslims who consciously tried to devote their life only to serving God by practicing the commands of God and of His Messenger and by purifying the soul from the temptations of worldly life. This ṣūfistic phenomenon was represented by the life of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d.728). In addition there were other pious Muslims who tried to emulate what the Prophet and his companions taught and practiced by collecting their sayings and recording their behavior. Such pious Muslims, represented by al-Awzā'ī (d.744) and Mālik ibn Anas (d.791), later became the orthodox school of the Sunnites. Their political affiliation was more accommodative to the existing rulers. The interrelation of theology and politics in the first centuries of Islam was obviously more complicated than has been depicted here. The point emphasized here is not only that the internal dynamics of the Muslim community manifested themselves in political fragmentation but also in theological conflicts within the Muslim community and that these two are interconnected. Historically, such differences led to different ways of understanding and interpreting the Qur'ān, not only different but contradictory and mutually exclusive.

Apart from the Muslim community's internal dynamics, Muslim intellectual elites of the late Umayyad and particularly the 'Abbāsīd period came into contact with Persian and Greek thought.<sup>7</sup> Many works of Greek science and philosophy were translated. Those who translated these works themselves came from different cultural and religious backgrounds and were patronized by the rulers. As a result of exposure to the "foreign" sciences, intellectual currents within the Muslim community became more sophisticated.<sup>8</sup> At this time, the Mu'tazilites took over the Qadarite argument regarding the place of man

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibn Taymiyya's remark on this event is that from the third century, Greek thought had covered the Sun of guidance of Muḥammadan teachings among the Muslim community. See his *al-Risāla al-Tadmuriyya* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Islām, 1949), 3.

<sup>8</sup> H.R. Gibb discusses the influence of Greek thought on the internal dynamics of the Muslim community. *Mohammedanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

in relation to God. They also came up with doctrines of other fundamental issues like the unity of God, the justice of God, etc. The Muʿtazilites were clearly different from their predecessors, for instance in presenting their theological arguments in rational terms. Many of their theological doctrines, no less than rational methods, were unacceptable to other scholars of the time. It would not be more peculiar than their strong emphasis on the authority of reason. The Muʿtazilites believed that reason was sufficient to form moral choices and that the position of revelation was supplementary rather than primary. Therefore, they were in favor of *taʾwīl* (metaphorical interpretation) of the Qurʾān if they felt that the apparent meaning of the Qurʾān contradicted rational judgment. In case of conflict between reason and revelation, they held the latter should be interpreted according to the former. Regarding the hand of God, for example, the Muʿtazilites rejected the apparent meaning contained in the Qurʾān for the "hand" implied that God had a physical form. If that were so, God needed space and time which meant that He was like man and other creatures, and that was of course impossible. Therefore, they rejected the apparent meaning of the Qurʾān for this rational argument. According to them, such apparent but questionable meanings of the text should be interpreted metaphorically (*taʾwīl*).

Muʿtazilite teachings were opposed, among others, by Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d.855) (and his followers later known as the Ḥanbalites) who called upon Muslims to believe whatever God has said. He believed that reason could not determine good or bad. Moreover, his followers emphasized the limits of reason, and maintained that it could not determine the meaning of the Scripture. As a dialectical process, the thesis of the Muʿtazilites resulted in the antithesis of the Ḥanbalite and this led to the synthesis of the Ashʿarites. This Ashʿarite school founded by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d.935) tried to reconcile the authority of revelation with that of reason by using rational arguments

borrowed from the Greek heritage.<sup>9</sup> With the passage of time, the Muslim exposure to Greek thought and culture made them more diverse.

In fact, Muslim contact with Greek thought went beyond intensifying the inner diversity of the community; it also created a new group within it, namely, the philosophers. These thinkers inherited Greek thought not merely in terms of methods, as the theologians mentioned above did but also in their world views. They brought new ideas to the Muslim community and had their own ways and methods of understanding God, Man, Universe, Prophethood mentioned in the Qurʾān. Among themselves too, the philosophers differed widely: some of them were far from orthodoxy, others were near and still others were considered to be within orthodoxy. Although they claimed to be true Muslims, they were in certain respects much more different than the other groups, particularly in their convictions regarding the ability of human reason. Therefore, their views were very often to provoke strong reactions and refutations from Muslim theologians.

It is very difficult to determine whether internal dynamics or external influences were more important in shaping the course of Muslim history, for both are closely related to each other. The Shīʿites and the Muʿtazilites, for example, historically originated from an internal political dialectic of the Muslim community, but in later times, they were influenced by Greek thought especially in their way of presenting their theological

---

<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī emphasized the authority of the Qurʾān, the *Sunna* and the *salaf* over reason. On the other hand, however, he emphasized the importance of reason for supporting religious argument. Therefore, he criticized the anti-rational tendency of the Ḥanbalites of his time. See Ḥamūda Gharāba, *Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī* (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Maktaba al-ʿArabiyya, 1973), 81.

arguments.<sup>10</sup> The Ḥanbalites may be considered as a product of the internal historical process, but their theological consolidation cannot be separated from their conflict with the Muʿtazilites or the Ashʿarites. Almost each of them is thus a product of the other. What is more certain is that the interrelations of internal dynamics and external influences contributed to the growth and development of all theological schools. By intensifying the elaboration of doctrines and the expansion of schools, subdivisions within them were created. The history of the Shīʿites is a case in point. Due to internal and external influences, their doctrines regarding the place of ʿAlī continued to become more sophisticated. At the same time, they also came to be divided into Rāfiʿites, Zaydites, Ismāʿīlites ( Bāṭinīs), Nuṣayrites, Qarmāṭians, etc. each school with its distinct nature. Subdivisions also occurred among the ṣūfis, some of whom had a sharʿī, others a more speculative orientation. In short, the Muslim community has exhibited increasing diversity with the passage of time.

### **B. The Schools of Islamic Thought in Damascus and Egypt in the Second Half of the 13th Century and the First Half of the 14th**

Most Islamic schools of thought discussed above continued to exist in the time of Ibn Taymiyya both as a social and an intellectual reality, though some had declined. Ibn Taymiyya spent his life in what can be characterized as the centers of Islamic thought at that time. Ḥarrān, the place where he was born, was the center of the Ḥanbalite school.<sup>11</sup> It was a former Hellenized territory. In addition, Ibn Taymiyya had the advantage of living in Cairo at a time when, as capital of the relatively stable Mamlūk state, it was becoming

---

<sup>10</sup> Like the Muʿtazilites, the Shīʿites, for instance, denied the attributes of God. See Nurcholish Madjid, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa (the conflict between Reason and Revelation)*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Chicago University, 1985, 125.

<sup>11</sup> L. Veccia Vaglieri, "Ḥarrān", *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, 1971, Ed. by B. Lewis et al., III, 228.

one of the cultural foci of Islam replacing Baghdad; Damascus, as the second Mamlūk capital, was also rising in importance at this time.<sup>12</sup> Egypt in his time was the living center of various Islamic legal schools: the Ḥanafites, the Mālikites, the Shāfi'ites and the Ḥanbalites, all of whom were supported by the rulers.<sup>13</sup> It also was the main center of a growing ṣūfī order.<sup>14</sup> In his time, the Shī'ites, though far from where he lived, clearly challenged the theology and the politics of the Sunnites.<sup>15</sup> The doctrines of many other theological schools, like the Mu'tazilites, Jahmites, Khārijites, Jabrites, etc. were still alive in his time, challenging the *salaf*'s understanding of Islam.<sup>16</sup>

As regards the Islamic legal schools, Ibn Taymiyya was certainly in agreement with their understanding of Islam for they followed the Qur'ān, the *Sunna*, the *ṣaḥāba* and the *tābi'ūn*. Nevertheless, he felt it was necessary to emphasize the superiority of the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* over other Islamic legal sources. Therefore, he dwells at length on the supremacy of the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* over *ijmā'*, *qiyās*, *al-maṣāliḥ al-mursalah*, *istiḥsān* and *istiḥāb* which had become established as Islamic legal sources by that time.

---

<sup>12</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1987), 145.

<sup>13</sup> Donald P. Little argues that the Mamlūks' support of the legal schools can be traced to the interrelations of their religious and political interests. See his, "Religion under the Mamlūks", *The Muslim World*, 73, 1983, 165-81.

<sup>14</sup> Victor Danner and Wheeler M. Thackston, *Ibn 'Aṭa' Illah (The Book of Wisdom) Kwaja Abdullah Ansari (intimate Conversations)*, New York: Paulist Press, 1978, 14. See also Muhammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taymiyya's Struggle Against Popular Religion* (Paris: Mouton, 1976), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Victor E. Makari, *Ibn Taymiyyah's Ethics, the Social Factor* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Almost all his polemical *fatwā*s in theology were delivered to what he called "the people who had gone astray" (*ahl al-dalāl*) or "the innovators" (*ahl al-bida'*): Ittihadites, Mu'tazilites, Ash'arites, Jahmites, Qadarites, Jabrites, Ithna'asharites, Ismā'ilites, Qarmāṭians, Khurramites, Nuṣayrites. See, for instance, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Tauḥīd al-Rubūbiyya*, Vol. 2 (Rabat: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, n.d.).



In his view, recourse to the latter is justified after the two fundamental sources have been scrutinized.<sup>17</sup> It seems that in his time there was a tendency to favor *qiyās* or other secondary legal sources over the primary sources, which is why he had to emphasize the latter's importance. In line with this position, he severely criticized blind agreement (*taqlīd*) or imitation of the imāms of the legal schools before determining the scriptural basis of their views. He claimed that his shared opinion with Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was not because he was a Ḥanbalite, but because Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal had stronger arguments than others. He often proposed new opinions or arguments which contradicted the established opinion of the imāms of the schools. A remarkable instance of his independent stance may be seen with reference to the question of divorce: he affirms the invalidity of uniting three repudiations into a single one considering the three oaths of repudiation as a single oath if the person who uttered them did not intend to proceed to an actual divorce. Another interesting example is his *fatwā* concerning the lawfulness of bribing someone if the briber's intention was to regain his right, though he did not define the meaning of right and wrong here. His opinion clearly opposed the clear and the well-known tradition which stated: "the briber and the bribed are in Hell."<sup>18</sup>

Although in some respects Ibn Taymiyya's views differ from those of the established Islamic legal schools and their followers, he shared the fundamental conviction

---

<sup>17</sup> As regards *qiyās*, for example, Ibn Taymiyya only accepted what he termed *al-qiyās al-ṣaḥīḥ* meaning analogy of two things which are exactly similar, for he was very suspicious of rational inference. See *al-Qiyās fī Sharʿ al-Islāmī*, a work of Ibn Taymiyya and his pupil, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Salafiyya, 1375 H.), 6-7. His attitude towards other legal sources particularly *istiṣḥāb* and *maṣāliḥ mursalah* was similar for he felt that they degenerate into rational speculation. For a discussion of his opinions, see Abū Zahra, *Ibn Taymiyya, ḥayātuh wa ʿaṣruh, ārāʾuh wa fiqhuh* (Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, n.d.), 463-65, 472-75, 494, 495; Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā, *Ibn Taymiyya* (Beirut: al-ʿAṣr al-Ḥadīth, 1988), 163-216.

<sup>18</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Mukhtaṣar al-Fatāwā al-Miṣriyya* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1949), 458-59.

regarding the authority of the revelation and the Prophet's tradition as well as the virtues of the *ṣaḥāba* and the *tābi'ūn*. As a result, Ibn Taymiyya recognized these legal schools and was far from accusing them of having gone astray or being innovators. His attitude towards the various Islamic legal schools was of course different from that towards the *falāsifa*, *mutakallimūn*, *ṣūfis* and *Shī'ites*. The latter he considered dangerous and, in the eyes of Ibn Taymiyya, they were not Islamic at all. The following is a discussion of Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of the fundamental convictions of philosophers, *mutakallimūn*, *ṣūfis* and *Shī'ites* with special reference to their *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān.

### C. Ibn Taymiyya's Criticism of the *Ta'wīl* of the Islamic Schools of Thought

#### 1. The Philosophers

Although great philosophers such as al-Kindī, al-Fārabī, Ibn Sīna and Ibn Rushd were no longer alive, and noted institutions such as the Dār al-Ḥikma no longer existed, the works and ideas of the philosophers still circulated among the learned Muslims. Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Radd 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn* was inspired by his meeting someone who seemed to blindly glorify the philosophers (*al-mutafalsifa*).<sup>19</sup> In the opinion of Ibn Taymiyya, such glorification could not be tolerated at all, for the philosophers disseminated very dangerous ideas which contradicted the Qur'ān, the *Sunna* and the Islamic understanding of the *salaf*. Therefore, he was very critical of most of the philosophers'

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Manṭiq*, Vol. 9 (Rabat: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, n.d), 82.

convictions.<sup>20</sup> His most fundamental criticism of their convictions related to *ta'wīl* centered on the problem of the creation of the universe.

According to the philosophers, the creation of the universe is the result of an evolutionary process. They believed that one does not come except from one ( *al-wāḥid lā yaṣdur illā 'an al-wāḥid* ). In their opinion, creation takes place through the process of emanation from the first intellect ( *al-ʿaql al-awwal* ) as a simple being and not a composite being, to the second, the third and so on till the tenth intellect. From the tenth intellect, the celestial soul was created.<sup>21</sup> After that, the tenth celestial soul created the celestial bodies. Moreover, the ninth celestial body created the terrestrial bodies of which man is the supreme being. This process of creation takes place according to this scheme. Therefore, in their view, direct creation of the world cannot be accepted for they also think that the process of creation must not contradict the *sunna* (the natural law).<sup>22</sup>

The philosophers' understanding of the creation of the world calls forth sharp criticism from Ibn Taymiyya for, according to him, the philosophers have deprived God of His will. God, to him, is Omnipotent. Although Ibn Taymiyya rejects *creatio ex nihilo*, he does not accept the creation of the world through emanation; in his view, God created the world from material beings which already existed. What he tries to emphasize is that God Himself created this world, and he rejects the philosophers' evolutionary theory of

---

<sup>20</sup> His refutation of philosophy centered on the problems of "definition", "syllogism", "demonstration", "the eternity of the world", "the impersonality of God", "the Necessary Being." See Sabih Ahmad Kamālī, *Types of Islamic Thought* (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, n.d.), 59-102; M.M. Sharif, *History of Muslim Philosophy*, Vol. 2 (Karachi: Royal Book Company, n.d.), 805; Nurcholish Madjid, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa*, 158.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17 (Rabat: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, n.d.), 286-88.

<sup>22</sup> Nurcholish Madjid, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa*, 161.

creation. The *salaf* and the imāms of the *umma* as well as the peoples of the Book all agree that this world is created by God <sup>23</sup> and it is God too who created the entire universe. If God is limited by His *sunna* then He is no longer an Omnipotent God. Therefore, Ibn Taymiyya criticizes the philosophers severely, stating that their notions are merely a product of rational speculation. According to him, the philosophers' God, distant, transcendental, impersonal, a Being who has no connection with the world and with human life is absolutely unacceptable. God is close to human life. He knows, hears, sees and takes care of human beings in this world. He makes us live and die, and provides means of subsistence. Therefore, Ibn Taymiyya affirms God exists in our life.<sup>24</sup>

His objections to the philosophers' concept are based on what the Qur'ān and other religious sources have to say. God Himself says in the Qur'ān that He created the earth and the sky, the day and the night, male and female, jinn, angels, animals and everything else. So, from the point of view of the Qur'ān, God is involved in the direct creation of all existing beings. God is not as transcendent as the philosophers suppose. According to Ibn Taymiyya, the philosophers, try to interpret the revealed text according to their own convictions viewing all processes of creation as emanative and evolutionary and claiming that theirs was the true understanding of Islam. These thinkers, though knowledgeable in metaphysics, know nothing about God's existence. <sup>25</sup> According to Ibn Taymiyya, they should be considered as the most dangerous of people. They are more dangerous than the Jews and the Christians, for in his opinion, though the people of the Book do not believe in the prophethood of Muḥammad, they do believe in God's creation of the world. The Jews

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muwāfaqa*, Vol. 1, 70. Also his *Majmū'at al-Rasā'il wa al-Masā'il*, Vol. 4-5 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1992), 354-55.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatawā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 293-94.

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Radd 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn* (Bombay: al-Maṭba'a al-Fatiyya, 1949), 394.

and the Christians believe that this universe is created directly by God. The philosophers' concept of creation contradicts the teachings of revealed books as well as the Qurʾān's.

One of Ibn Taymiyya's major objections to the philosophers is that when their notions are not in harmony with the religious texts, they interpret the latter rationally, emphasizing the rhetoric and the metaphorical nature of the words of the Prophet and the language of the Qurʾān. According to philosophers, he says, all Prophets use ambiguous language, the reason being that it is suited to the people ( *li maṣlaḥat al-jumhūr* ). Therefore, the philosophers interpret the Qurʾān metaphorically and insist that their understanding of the Qurʾān must not be the same as that of the common people ( *ʿawāmm* ).<sup>26</sup> Consequently, they introduce new meanings for several words of the Qurʾān: *Jibrīl*, to the philosopher, is the active intellect, the Demiurge; the *malāʾika* are intelligences, celestial souls and the power of good; *al-ʿarsh* is the ninth celestial sphere; *al-kursī* is the eighth celestial sphere;<sup>27</sup> *al-shaiṭān* is the power of evil<sup>28</sup>; *al-qidam* is the essence ( *al-jawhar* ) and so forth.

In the opinion of Ibn Taymiyya, the philosophers come to the Qurʾān with preconceived notions. Consequently, it is not surprising that their understanding of the Qurʾān does not agree with the *salaf*. The *salaf* would not be familiar with the idea of the

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muwāfaqā*, Vol. 1, 56-8. Such attitude can be seen in Ibn Rushd's *Faṣl al-Maqāl fīmā bayn al-Ḥikma wa al-Sharīʿa min al-Ittiṣāl*. Ed. by Muḥammad ʿImāra (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, n.d), 58. This short work was translated by George F. Hourani entitled "The Decisive Treatise, Determining What the Connection is between Religion and Philosophy", in Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi, eds., *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook* ( New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 163-85.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 336-37. Also Thomas F. Michel. *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity* ( Delmar: Caravan Books, 1984), 21.

<sup>28</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 293.

first intellect, the essence, the accident ( *al-ʿaraḍ* ), celestial bodies etc., because these philosophical terms and concepts did not appear until the ʿAbbāsid period, when rulers like al-Maʿmūn patronized the dissemination of Greek culture and thought. That the philosophers can, without hesitation, dare to interpret the Qurʾān metaphorically is, Ibn Taymiyya thinks, because they believe in the superiority of reason over revelation. Their belief in the authority of reason causes them to neglect the true meaning of the Scriptures as understood by the Prophet, the *ṣaḥāba* and the *tābiʿūn* and to develop their own interpretations. In fact, they even believe that they are superior to the Prophet himself<sup>29</sup> for they believe they can discover and develop demonstrative proofs for belief in God and His absolute unity in a very convincing manner. According to Ibn Taymiyya, such claims are not true at all. First of all, the Qurʾān contains all kinds of methods: rhetorical, syllogistic, demonstrative as well as analogical.<sup>30</sup> More importantly, conclusions reached on the basis of reason alone are never convincing; in fact, they are inherently contradictory. Therefore, many philosophers finally come to realize the weakness of their methods and begin to follow the *salaf*'s understanding of the Qurʾān.

## 2. The *Mutakallimūn*

Other groups whose convictions Ibn Taymiyya regards as dangerous comprise the speculative theologians ( *mutakallimūn* ). By *mutakallimūn* he means the Muʿtazilites, the Ashʿarites, the Jahmites, the Qadarites and the Jabrites. All of these groups have gone astray; they are people of *bidʿa* (innovation). Ibn Taymiyya's refutation of the first two of these groups is found in several of his works or *fatwā*s, perhaps because in terms of their supporters and of their intellectual influences, the Muʿtazilites and the Ashʿarites were still

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 356.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Maʿārij al-Wuṣūl ilā Maʿrifat ann Uṣūl al-Dīn wa Furūʿah qad Bayyanahā al-Rasūl* (Medina: al-Maktaba al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d.), 8.

very significant. In many respects, Ibn Taymiyya concedes the Ash'arites are close to the *salaf*'s understanding of Islam.<sup>31</sup> The following discussion may therefore be limited to the Mu'tazilites. His major criticism of this theological school concerns its concept of the unity of God and *ta'ṭīl*, and to *ta'wīl* and the authority of reason. It should be noted that in some respects, Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of this school has many affinities with his refutation of the *falāsifa* or the *mutafalsifa*.

The Mu'tazilites claimed to be the people of God's unity (*ahl al-tauḥīd*). They defined the unity of God as absolute unity, without any internal plurality or composition. To them, that which was eternal had to be God. Therefore, they rejected the notion of divine attributes, for attributes existing from all eternity must compromise the divine unity: whoever posits God and His attribute posits two gods, they said.<sup>32</sup> To the Mu'tazilites, therefore, the attributes of God mentioned in the Qur'ān were to be seen only as names of the same essence, that is God. They strongly denied any separation between God and His knowledge, God and His Power and so on.

In addition, the Mu'tazilites denied a corporeal existence to God for they defined God in the same way as philosophers did. God, according to the Mu'tazilites, is a simple being; attributing a corporeal existence to God is making Him a composite being, which is unacceptable. They accused their opponents of being anthropomorphists who depict God as human, with hands, etc. The Mu'tazilites could not accept descriptions of God sitting on the throne, or descending from the sky.<sup>33</sup> Such corporeal descriptions imply that God needs space and time. Like the philosophers, they believed that being subject to space and

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muwāfaqa*, Vol. 2, 166.

<sup>32</sup> Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Kalam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 132-33.

<sup>33</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muwāfaqa*, Vol. 2, 19-23.

time is being subject to change, that change ushers in the new, so, God would have to be thought of as new, which is impossible.

At the level of its apparent meaning, the Qurʾān does speak of God's attributes and His corporeal existence. God describes Himself in the Qurʾān as Omnipotent, Omniscient, the Forgiver, the Freewiller, the All-hearing, etc. Again, God says that His hand is above the hand of the peoples,<sup>34</sup> or that everything perishes but the Face of God.<sup>35</sup> The eyes of God are sometimes mentioned: for example, "Sailing, before Our eyes."<sup>36</sup> The Muʿtazilites did not accept the apparent meaning of such verses. They interpreted them metaphorically, for to acknowledge their literal meaning would negate the absolute unity of God: to affirm the corporeality of God was to affirm the plurality of the eternal being.

Ibn Taymiyya criticizes the Muʿtazilites for rejecting the attributes of God. In his opinion, the Qurʾanic statement, there is "nothing like Him" does not negate the attributes of God.<sup>37</sup> Rather, the attributes and the corporeality of God should be affirmed because He describes Himself by those descriptions. At the same time, the affirmation of the attributes and the corporeality of God do not necessarily result in anthropomorphism. The problem with the Muʿtazilites, according to Ibn Taymiyya, is that they affirm the unity of God while rejecting God's description. In so doing, they basically equate the attributes and the corporeality of God with those of human beings. Such an analogy is absolutely unacceptable. When the Muʿtazilites assert that the attributes of God make a composite, it is

---

<sup>34</sup> Qurʾān, XLVIII: 10.

<sup>35</sup> Qurʾān, XXVIII: 88.

<sup>36</sup> Qurʾān, LIV: 14.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muwāfaqā*, Vol. 1, 66.



their view which is essentially anthropomorphic; otherwise they would not have perceived God in the human image. Ibn Taymiyya affirms, God's description of His hand, face or eyes must not be understood anthropomorphically, for God is a unique being; however, we must accept the descriptions of God in the Qur'ān because God describes Himself by those descriptions. Ibn Taymiyya emphasizes his fundamental conviction that the believer has to affirm God's attributes and corporeality without positing an analogy between God and man, and he has to affirm God's unity without denying the attributes and corporeality of God as revealed in the sacred text.<sup>38</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya also criticizes the Mu'tazilites for their *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān. At issue is not *ta'wīl* as such, for *ta'wīl* is lawful as long as it is in accordance with the understanding of the *salaf*. What the Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites did, Ibn Taymiyya says, is that they interpreted the Qur'ān in the light of convictions which are theirs rather than those of the *salaf*. Through their reasoning, the Mu'tazilites sought what was to be considered the true meaning of the Qur'ān. According to them, many words of the text need to be reinterpreted metaphorically. For example, the word "sit" ( *istawā* ) as in " the Beneficent sits on the throne,"<sup>39</sup> should be understood to mean to " dominate", "lead" or "direct" ( *malaka* , *istawlā* and *qahara* ); the word " hand", in the verse " the Hand of God is above their hands", was to be understood as "power" ; the word "seeing" in the verse " Seeing their Lord" <sup>40</sup> was to be interpreted as " hoping " ( *rajā* ) in God. <sup>41</sup> The reason for such metaphorical interpretations is that the words "sitting", " hand" and "seeing", etc., are anthropomorphic and corporeal. To the Mu'tazilites, those descriptions, taken literally,

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Risāla al-Tadmuriyya* , 5.

<sup>39</sup> Qur'ān, XX:5.

<sup>40</sup> Qur'ān, LXXV: 23.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* , 87.

would make God a corporeal being acting in space and time. Consequently, they had to be rejected.

The Muʿtazilites claimed that the verses of the *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* (the Unity of God) <sup>42</sup> provide a basis for denying the attributes of God. According to Ibn Taymiyya, they also claimed that the word "*aḥad* " ( the one ) in the Qurʾān has never been used as an attribute. Ibn Taymiyya says that this claim is completely wrong. He observes that several verses of the Qurʾān use the word as an attribute. For example, in the verse, " if one (*aḥad* ) of the idolaters seeks protection from you," <sup>43</sup> "*aḥad* " refers to an idolater. He also notes that the word "*al-ṣamad* " ( the eternally Besought of all ) which occurs in *al-Ikhlāṣ* itself, is the best of God's attributes . There is, in fact, nothing in the verses of this *sūra* which points to the denial of God's attributes.<sup>44</sup>

The Muʿtazilites believed reason to be capable of determining right and wrong. They also applied reason to the holy scripture. For them, the scripture should be rationally acceptable. Therefore, whenever the apparent meaning of the verses seemed to them to be corporeal or anthropomorphic or contradictory to the dictates of reason, they interpreted it rationally. Ibn Taymiyya, however, questions their total reliance on reason and rationality, for reason, and the conclusions drawn from it, can never be fully trusted.

---

<sup>42</sup> Qurʾān, CXII: 1-5. This *sūra* has been a subject of a very extensive elaboration by Ibn Taymiyya regarding his doctrine of God's unity. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr* , Vol. 17 , 214-504.

<sup>43</sup> Qurʾān, IX: 6.

<sup>44</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muwāfaqā* , Vol. 1, 63-66.

### 3. The Speculative Šūfis

The speculative šūfis too come in for harsh criticism from Ibn Taymiyya. His criticism is mainly devoted to their concept of union of God and man (*waḥdat al-wujūd*)<sup>45</sup> and to their interpretation of Qur'anic verses. He himself, Ibn Taymiyya says, was once an adherent of the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, but, later, realized its dangers and abandoned it. For the šūfis, there is no distinction or separation between God and human beings or other creatures. They acknowledge that the appearances of things are different, but that such difference is superficial; the difference is one of form, not essence. Like the philosophers, the šūfis regard the creation of this world as a process of emanation. Their difference consists in the latter's belief that the essence continues to emanate from the One to the other forms of existence. Therefore, their view is pantheistic: God is everything and everything is God.

Ibn Taymiyya stands against this view and shows its dangerous effects. According to Ibn Taymiyya, when we believe that everything is God we logically accept that God changes according to the change of beings. But God is an eternal being; there is no element of change in Him. Pantheism also implies that obeying the infidel is the same as obeying the Prophet: revelation and prophecy become irrelevant and religious guidance (*sharī'a*) is no longer required. Human beings do not need religious guidance (*sharī'a*) any longer. If everything is the image of God, what we do is also the deed of God. Understandably, therefore, the šūfi master regards himself as superior to the Prophet.

---

<sup>45</sup> See his *Majmū'at al-Rasā'il wa al-Masā'il*, Vol. 1 to 3, 75-84 and his *al-Taṣawwuf wa al-Fuqarā'*, Ed. by Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh al-Samān (Cairo: al-Maktab al-Fannī li al-Nashr, 1960), 43-4.

In Ibn Taymiyya's view, the concept of God is based on a total dissimilarity between Him and the human being.<sup>46</sup> He is a Unique Being, far from any similarity with other beings. Any other view is acceptable neither from the point of view of scripture nor that of reason.

Ibn Taymiyya observes that although the speculative *ṣūfis* deviate from the true Qur'ān, the *Sunna*, the *ṣaḥāba* and the *tābi'ūn*, they claim that theirs is the true Islam. He is particularly critical of their Qur'anic interpretation. One of its examples is the verse: "You have nothing in the affair" ( *laysa laka fi -l-amri shay'un* ).<sup>47</sup> According to the proponents of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, that verse purports to state that your action is the action of God. So, in their eyes, this verse negates not only the action but the actor's existence. To Ibn Taymiyya, the verse does not negate human actions and affirm the action of God. Nor does it assert that the action of human beings is the action of God. This verse, he observes, follows another one which states it is God's business to punish unbelief.<sup>48</sup> According to Ibn Taymiyya, "You have nothing in the affair" is to emphasize that such matters are God's affair only ( *ifrād al-rabb* ). Ibn Taymiyya also refers to the occasion of revelation. It is said that this verse is related to the Prophet's praying to God asking Him to punish the people who disbelieved. God then revealed this verse, after which the Prophet no longer prayed for the unbelievers.

---

<sup>46</sup> Thomas F. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Qur'ān, III: 128.

<sup>48</sup> The complete verse is "That he may cut off a portion from among those who disbelieve, or abase them so that they should return disappointed of attaining what they desired. You have nothing in the affair whether He turns to them (mercifully) or chastizes them, for surely they are unjust." Qur'ān, III: 128-9.

Another example relates to the verse " You did not throw when you threw, but God threw ." <sup>49</sup> Ibn Taymiyya observes that the ṣūfī understanding of the verse is that the action of the servant is the action of God. But if that is the case, he argues, then if you walk it is God not you who is walking ; if you speak, it is God not you who is speaking; if you lie, it is not you who are lying; if you disbelieve, it is not you but God who is the disbeliever. Rationally and scripturally, this belief is questionable. According to Ibn Taymiyya, this verse was revealed in connection with the battle of Badr. In this battle, the Prophet had thrown dust ( *turāb* ) at his enemies but the dust reached them all, and gave victory to the Muslims. According to Ibn Taymiyya the verse does not affirm that the human action is God's action but is intended to show God's power ( *qudra* ).

The supporters of *waḥdat al-wujūd* also invoke the verse: "To pay homage to you (the Prophet ) is to pay homage to God". <sup>50</sup> By this verse they mean that Muḥammad is essentially God. This , Ibn Taymiyya emphasizes, was not the true meaning of the verse at all. For him, the true meaning is that Muḥammad is the messenger of God, so to pay homage to him is to pay homage to God; the verse does not mean that the messenger of God is God. Those who so interpret the verse believe that God dwells in you (Muḥammad) ( *ḥāll fīk* ) and in everybody. This pantheistic belief suggests in turn that there is no difference between the Prophet and the rest of the people. It would be no different to follow the Prophet or Abū Jahl or Musaylima because to follow any of them is basically to follow God.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Qurʾān, VIII: 17.

<sup>50</sup> Qurʾān, XLVIII: 10.

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Taymiyya states when those who believed in such views were asked to fight against enemies, they thought that to fight them is essentially to fight God. Ibn Taymiyya. *Majmūʿat al-Rasāʾil wa al-Masāʾil* , Vol. 1 to 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992), 110-11.

Ibn Taymiyya insists that such Qur'anic interpretations cannot be justified for they are contradictory to reason as well as to the *salaf*'s understanding of Islam which emphasized God's unity. According to Ibn Taymiyya, the speculative *ṣūfis* merely follow their whims.

#### 4. The Shī'ites

Another group against whom Ibn Taymiyya's refutations are directed are the Shī'ites. In his view, they have deviated too far from true Islam. Beside contradicting the Qur'ān, the *Sunna*, the *ṣaḥāba* and the *tābi'ūn*, the Shī'ites erred in inventing spurious traditions as well as in rejecting (*rafḍ*) the first three caliphs, Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān and the early Muslims. Above all, however, Ibn Taymiyya's refutation of the Shī'ites centers on their belief in the infallibility of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his descendants. To support this fundamental tenet of their faith, the Shī'ites, Ibn Taymiyya says, made their own interpretation of the Qur'ān believing that the Qur'ān consists of outer (*ẓāhir*) and inner (*bāṭin*) levels of meaning.

The Shī'ites regarded the infallibility of the imāms (*ʿiṣmat al-a'imma*) as a basis of their right to the caliphate after Prophet Muḥammad. To them, 'Alī and his family were the most deserving people for succession to the Prophet. 'Alī was the most virtuous man among the Companions of the Prophet. He was one of the first Muslims and excelled in his bravery and generosity. He was a close relative of the Prophet, married the Prophet's daughter and was designated by him as his successor. On many occasions, the Shī'ites believe, the Prophet had both explicitly and implicitly designated 'Alī as his successor. But this designation was violated by the other Companions for their mundane interest.

The Shī'ites believed their imāms to be infallible. The imāms did not have any new revelation, but they were appointed by God to protect this religion and the world. The infallible imām, according to the Shī'ites, is to guide the community because revelation has been discontinued, and the Book and the *Sunna* are limited in their ability to solve the growing particular problems. Human beings have, moreover, never been able to control their desires, bad intentions, and mutual hatred. Because they keep falling in error, infallible imāms are needed to provide constant guidance. The Shī'ites argue from history: when fallible or ordinary people become leaders, they run the affairs of the state and society according to their whims, making people suffer.<sup>52</sup>

The Shī'ite doctrine of the infallibility of the imāms provoked a sharp criticism from Ibn Taymiyya. First of all, he declared, the place of 'Alī is the same as that of the three previous caliphs. 'Alī, like the others, is among the most virtuous of the Companions. There is no reason to affirm that 'Alī was superior to the others. Abū Bakr, for example, was the first member of the Quraysh to embrace Islam and suffered from the persecution of Quraysh. Later, in Medina, he served as imām in prayer when the Prophet was absent. There are many traditions of the Prophet attesting to his virtues. In terms of knowledge of *sharī'a*, Abū Bakr and 'Umar were in fact more knowledgeable than 'Alī. According to Ibn Taymiyya, Abū Bakr also gave much more of his property to the cause of God than 'Alī did. In terms of the political expansion of Islam, the caliphate of Abū Bakr and 'Umar excelled that of 'Alī. If 'Alī had blood ties to the Prophet, Ibn Taymiyya argues, Abū Bakr and 'Umar had them as well: the Prophet married 'Ā'isha bint Abī Bakr and Ḥafṣa bint 'Umar. Nor did the Prophet ever designate 'Alī as his successor. If that were the case, the election of Abū Bakr would not have occurred.

---

<sup>52</sup> Thomas F. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 61-2.

In attacking the Shī'ite belief in the infallibility of the imāms, Ibn Taymiyya argues that God has guaranteed to protect the religion, therefore, we do not need an infallible imām. If we still think that we need a protector of religion, according to Ibn Taymiyya, the *umma* itself can be such a protector. Ibn Taymiyya's view is that the more people there are to protect religion, the better it is. He questions why 'Alī and not Abū Bakr or 'Umar or any other knowledgeable Companions of the Prophet should be regarded as protectors of religion. Why should not the protectors of religion be determined in terms of their expertise considering, for example, the reciters of the Qur'ān ( *qurrā'* ) responsible for protecting the Qur'ān and its teachings, and the Islamic jurists ( *fuqahā'* ) responsible for protecting religion from speculative theology and demonstration ( *istidlāl* ), etc. If 'Alī was the only companion who deserved to be the protector of Islam, the transmission of knowledge of Islam by anyone else would be unjustified. However, our knowledge about the Qur'ān and the Prophet, he points out, is, in fact, not transmitted from 'Alī alone.<sup>53</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya is very critical of the Qur'anic basis claimed for the doctrine of infallible imāms. One of the verses the Shī'ites invoke is: "Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, O people of the House." <sup>54</sup> In the claim of the Shī'ites, the use of "*innamā*" ( only ) in this verse is the Qur'anic basis for the infallibility of the imāms. However, Ibn Taymiyya notes, the verse asserts neither the infallibility nor the imāmate of the people of the House. According to him, the statement here is not an information ( *ikhbār* ) concerning uncleanness being removed and the purity of the people of the House, but an order ( *amr* ) or instruction obligating the people of the House to remain in a state of purity. As in another verse, *irāda* here implies an order, desire and satisfaction. It means

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, 3 volumes (Cairo: Maṭba'a al-Kubrā al-Amīriyya, 1322 H). References are to the abridgment by Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Dhahabī in *al-Muntaqā min Minhāj al-I'tidāl* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Salafiyya, 1373 H.), 415-418

<sup>54</sup> Qur'ān, XXXIII: 33.



that God desires that the people of the House be freed from uncleanness. The verse does not state a fact but the desire of God concerning the people of the House.<sup>55</sup> This understanding is confirmed by the context of the previous sentence which urges the wives of the Prophet to do good deeds.<sup>56</sup>

Another Qur'anic basis for the imāmate of 'Alī, according to the Shī'ites, is the verse "This day have I perfected for you your religion."<sup>57</sup> The Shī'ites claimed that this verse referred to 'Alī. According to Abū Nu'aim, the Prophet called the people to Ghadīr Khumm; he raised the hands of 'Alī so that people knew what he was doing. On this occasion, the Prophet delegated his authority (*walāya*) to 'Alī. The people did not return home until the verse was revealed. To Ibn Taymiyya, this story was a great lie; the knowledgeable people knew that the Shī'ites' claim was a fiction. According to him, the verse was revealed to the Messenger of God when he was at 'Arafa, seven days before the day of Ghadīr; there is nothing in this verse to indicate the infallibility or the imāmate of 'Alī.<sup>58</sup>

The Shī'ites also justified the infallibility of the people of House (the Prophet's Family) through the verse "In houses which Allah has permitted to be exalted and that His name may be remembered in them; there glorify Him therein in the mornings and in the evenings; men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of

---

<sup>55</sup> Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Dhahabī, *al-Muntaqā*, 168.

<sup>56</sup> The verse in full is "And stay in your houses and do not display your finery like the displaying of the ignorance of you; and keep up prayer, and pay the poor-rate, and obey Allah and His Apostle. Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you. O people of the House! and to purify you a (thorough) purifying. Qur'ān, XXXIII: 33.

<sup>57</sup> Qur'ān, V: 3.

<sup>58</sup> Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Dhahabī, *al-Muntaqā*, 425.

Allah." <sup>59</sup> According to Tha'labī, when the Prophet recited this verse, a man asked: Which house do you mean? He replied: the Houses of the Prophets. Then Abū Bakr asked: Oh! Messenger of God : is this house (the house of 'Alī and Fāṭima) included. He answered: Yes. It is one of them. Accusing al-Tha'labī undoubtedly of lying, Ibn Taymiyya refers to the consensus of the people (*ittifāq al-nās*), that the houses mentioned in the verse are mosques (*masājid*). If, he contends, 'Alī is the one who was not diverted by trade he must have been the best Companion after the Prophet. In addition, the word "men" (*rijāl*) indicates that what is meant by the verse is not the House of 'Alī and Fāṭima because there was only one man, that is 'Alī there, while the Qur'ān does not say "a man" but "men." <sup>60</sup>

Another verse the Shī'ites invoked, according to Ibn Taymiyya, is "I do not ask of you any reward for it but love of near relatives" <sup>61</sup>. This verse, it was asserted by Shī'ites, refers to Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. <sup>62</sup> According to al-Tha'labī, quoting the *Musnad* of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, when the verse was revealed, the Companions asked: "Who from your kinship deserve our love?" The Prophet said: "'Alī, Fāṭima and their sons." According to al-Tha'labī, this verse affirms that none beside 'Alī need be praised. <sup>63</sup> According to Ibn Taymiyya, there is no such statement in the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal; in fact, that book speaks of the virtues of all four caliphs. According to the consensus (*bi l-ittifāq*), the verse is considered part of a Meccan *sūra*, when 'Alī had not yet married Fāṭima and did not have sons. If 'Alī had not yet had a family, the verse could scarcely have referred to his

---

<sup>59</sup> Qur'ān, XXIV: 36-7.

<sup>60</sup> Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Dhahabī, *al-Muntaqā*, 431.

<sup>61</sup> Qur'ān, XLII: 23.

<sup>62</sup> Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Dhahabī, *al-Muntaqā*, 289.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 431.

family. <sup>64</sup> In the opinion of Ibn Taymiyya, "*fi l-qurbā* " in the verse does not mean "near relatives" ( 'Alī, Fāṭima and their sons); if that were the case, the Qur'ān would use "*li l-qurbā* " or "*li dhawī l-qurbā* " as it does elsewhere. What it means by "*fi l-qurbā* " in this verse, according to Ibn Taymiyya, is "relationship", namely, the relationship between Muḥammad and the Quraysh.<sup>65</sup> So, according to Ibn Taymiyya, the verse is related to the Quraysh, not to 'Alī, Fāṭima and their sons. Ibn Taymiyya agrees that to love the people of the House is obligatory, but it is not confirmed by this verse.<sup>66</sup> Even if the verse requires that, we should love (*mawadda*) the people of the House, it still does not mean to affirm their imāmate and infallibility (*'iṣma* ).

Ibn Taymiyya's refutation of the "extremist" Shī'ites such as the Bāṭinīs <sup>67</sup>, is even harsher. He points out that Shī'ites have invented their own Qur'anic understanding, disregarding the understanding of the Companions of the Prophet, their following generations and the imāms of Islamic jurisprudence (*a'immat al-fuqahā*). The Twelvers, in his eyes, are better than the Bāṭinīs for although they have deviated from the *sharī'a* they glorify the descendants of the Prophet, while the Bāṭinīs even glorify people who have committed sins. According to the Bāṭinīs, Ibn Taymiyya says, the Qur'ān consists of outer (*ẓāhir*) and inner (*bāṭin*) meaning; the former, they asserted, is not sufficient, so the reader should go beyond the apparent meaning. To them, the language of the Qur'ān is

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 433.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 432

<sup>67</sup> Ibn Taymiyya is not consistent in using technical terms. For example, he uses the term 'Bāṭinīs' for Ismā'ilites in general and the Qarmāṭians, whom he sometimes distinguishes from the Ismā'ilites. He also speaks of Bāṭini ṣūfis and Bāṭini Falāsifa. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatawā Ibn Taymiyya : Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13. ( Rabat : Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), 235-238.

symbolic, which means that we should discover the inner meaning of it. Thus, they arrived at Qur'anic interpretations which, Ibn Taymiyya maintains, are not known by the *salaf*.

Among examples of Bāṭinī *ta'wīl* adduced by Ibn Taymiyya is the interpretation of the verse: "Both hands of Abū Lahab perished."<sup>68</sup> The Bāṭinīs understood "both hands of Abū Lahab" neither as his actual hands nor as his power, but as Abū Bakr and ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, for they considered both of them as the usurpers of ʿAlī's right to the caliphate after the death of Prophet Muḥammad. They also interpreted "*imām mubīn*" which literally means "clear leader" in the verse "*wa kullu shayʾin aḥṣaynāhu fī imāmin mubīn*"<sup>69</sup> as reference to ʿAlī. The majority of the Qur'anic exegetes, Ibn Taymiyya notes, have never interpreted the expression in such a way. They understood it to mean "writing" or "registering", so the translation of the verse is "We have recorded everything in clear writing.", not "in a clear leader." Another verse which has been interpreted differently by the Bāṭinīs is the verse: "Then fight the leaders of unbelief."<sup>70</sup> In their interpretation, it means "to fight Ṭalḥa and Zubayr."<sup>71</sup> These two Companions of the Prophet were on the side of ʿĀʾisha when they fought against ʿAlī, in the battle of Camel. Ibn Taymiyya does not point out, however, what to him is the true meaning of the verse. He may have regarded its reference to unbelieving leaders of the Quraysh as self-evident. Ibn Taymiyya also refers to the Bāṭinī interpretation of "*ash-shajarata l-malʿūnata*" (the cursed tree).<sup>72</sup> In their interpretation, that expression has nothing to do with a real tree but refers, rather to

---

<sup>68</sup> Qurʾān, CXI: 1.

<sup>69</sup> Qurʾān, XXXVI: 12.

<sup>70</sup> Qurʾān, IX: 12.

<sup>71</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 237.

<sup>72</sup> Qurʾān, XVII: 60.

the accursed Banū Umayya.<sup>73</sup> However, the Umayyads came to power twenty-nine years after the Prophet Muḥammad's death; to state that this verse refers to them is, therefore, *post-factum*.

Another group of Shī'ite "extremists" mentioned by Ibn Taymiyya are the Qarmāṭians. According to these people, the enjoined *ṣalāt* means essentially knowledge of our secret. The same understanding is also applied to fasting and *ḥajj*. Fasting is essentially the hiding of our secret and *ḥajj* signifies the command to visit our holy teachers.<sup>74</sup> Heaven, they said, means to enjoy life in this world while hell means practicing *sharī'a* beyond its burdens. About "*al-dābba*" (the animal) that God will bring forth, they said, that it actually means "*al-ʿālim al-nāṭiq*" or the speaking teacher sent to every generation. They believed that Isrāfīl, who is to blow the bugle (*al-ṣūr*) is none other than the teacher who by his knowledge will make the heart of the people alive. Regarding Gabriel, they said, like the philosophers, that he is the active intellect, from which being has emanated. They regarded "*al-qalam*" (the pen) as the first intellect, understood by the philosophers as the first creator as well. The Qarmāṭians interpreted "the stars", "the moon" and "the sun" seen by Abraham according to the Qur'anic story as "the soul" (*al-nafs*), reason and "the necessary existence." Ibn Taymiyya accuses the Qarmāṭians of having basically rejected the Qur'ān and considers their inner *ta'wīl* as sheer infidelity (*al-kufr al-mahd*).<sup>75</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya also refers to another "extremist" group, the Nuṣayrites. This group believed, he states, that the apparent meaning of the Qur'ān has been abrogated. In their

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 238.

<sup>74</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Risāla al-Tadmuriyya*, 31.

<sup>75</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 236. Also his *Muwāfaqa*, Vol. 1, 197.

conviction, such prophets as Abraham, Noah, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad are the bearers of the exoteric meaning, while imāms like ʿAlī and Seth are the bearers of esoteric meanings. They asserted that the five daily prayers had been abrogated and replaced by *dhikr*, or remembering five names: ʿAlī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, Muḥsin and Fāṭima.<sup>76</sup> In the opinion of Ibn Taymiyya, their teachings are not derived from the *salaf* at all. In fact, they clearly contradict the teachings of the *salaf*.

### 5. Ibn Taymiyya's General Criticism of *Taʿwīl*

Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of various schools of thought and their *taʿwīl* has been reviewed in the foregoing pages. We should not forget, however, that besides refutation of specific cases of *taʿwīl*, he also had strong words of criticism for *taʿwīl* in general. He points out that, through *taʿwīl*, innovations (*bidʿa*) were introduced to Islam.

The early generations of Muslims did not know ideas such as active intellect, occupation (*taḥayyuz*), essence, of which the *falāsifa* spoke.<sup>77</sup> The Muʿtazilite denial of God's attributes, the mystical notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the Shīʿite doctrine of the infallibility of the imāms, are all foreign to the *salaf*. All these ideas were innovations of later Muslim generations. The reason for such innovations, according to Ibn Taymiyya, is that different schools and sects had their own beliefs (*ʿaqīda*) and interests which they tried to justify in terms of the Qurʾān through *taʿwīl*. Such a procedure enabled every school to have its own understanding of the Qurʾān and allowed it to claim a Qurʾānic basis for its beliefs. Given its significance, therefore, *taʿwīl* became the main topic of Ibn Taymiyya's criticism.

---

<sup>76</sup> Thomas F. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 59.

<sup>77</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muwāfaqa*, Vol. 1, 54; his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. 1, 255 and his *Majmūʿat al-Rasāʾil wa al-Masāʾil*, Vol. 1 to 3, 518.

In the opinion of Ibn Taymiyya, there are three meanings of *ta'wīl*. One of them is "that to which the matter returns" ( *mā ya'ūl ilāh al-amr* ). By this definition, *ta'wīl* is to return any explanation to the first or to the original meaning. So, it is still considered *ta'wīl* if someone's interpretation of the Qur'ān is in conformity with the connotation of the literal word ( *madlūl al-lafz* ) and its meaning ( *wa mafhūmuh* ). *Ta'wīl*, by that definition, does not mean to change the original meaning of the text. Another meaning of *ta'wīl* is "the interpretation of a statement ( *tafsīr al-kalām* ) and the explanation of its purpose. According to the second meaning, *ta'wīl* is solely to elaborate and to clarify the apparent expression of the text. The reader should not go beyond the text. The third meaning of *ta'wīl* is "a turning away of an expression from the preponderant or the most likely meaning to a justified meaning for a certain reason." Ibn Taymiyya observes that the last meaning of *ta'wīl* is the one most widely understood by later generations ( *muta'akhkhirūn* ) in particular, while the Companions of the Prophet, their later followers and the imāms of the *umma* , particularly the four imāms of the Islamic legal schools, did not use it. What they used were the first and the second meanings of *ta'wīl*.<sup>78</sup>

To Ibn Taymiyya, the true meaning of *ta'wīl* is to explain the expression of the text.<sup>79</sup> He accuses the *muta'akhkhirūn* of having misunderstood the meaning of *ta'wīl* . The latter thought that the true meaning of *ta'wīl* was to turn away the apparent meaning of the text for another meaning. He strongly objects to this understanding, which, he

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muwāfaqa* , Vol. 1 , 5; *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddima al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 288-94; *Majmū'at al-Rasā'il al-Kubrā* Vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-ʿĀmira al-Sharafiyya, 1323 H.) 407-8.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 118.

asserts, appeared only with the later generations who studied *al-fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal reasoning) and with *mutakallimūn*.<sup>80</sup>

Following Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Taymiyya describes the people of *bidʿa* and *shubuhāt*, as the people who always disagreed about the Book, contradicted it, and agreed in contradicting it. The people of *bidʿa* argued from the Qurʾān and the Tradition if those sources fitted their convictions, but if they did not, they changed the meaning of the text and interpreted it in ways which were not admissible. Thus, they made the clear (*muḥkam*) texts unclear (*mutashābih*) and the unclear clear.<sup>81</sup>

As regards the attitudes towards the Qurʾanic verses (and Traditions) which speak of God's attributes, there were, according to Ibn Taymiyya, three groups. The first were the people who acknowledged the attributes of God as they are literally stated in the sources. For this group, God's attributes are understood in human images. Ibn Taymiyya accuses such people of being anthropomorphists. The second group comprised those people who denied the attributes of God. They interpreted the text metaphorically and determined the meaning of it. In the opinion of Ibn Taymiyya, they were the *muʿaṭṭila* (the deniers of God's attributes). The third group comprised those who thought that the attributes of God in the Qurʾān might be true as they are described or they might not. This group, which refrained from giving any opinion was, according to Ibn Taymiyya, surely on the right track. They rejected the denial of God's attributes because they are affirmed in the Qurʾān. They did not accept *tamthīl* (analogy) for God is characterized in the Qurʾān as the

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Risāla al-Tadmuriyya*, 58 and his *Muwāfaqa*, Vol. 1, 122.

<sup>81</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. 1, 251. Also his *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddima al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 58.



Unique Being. Finally , they also rejected *takyīf* (determining the manner ), for the *salaf* has taught that way. <sup>82</sup>

The middle position, Ibn Taymiyya states, is not only the stance of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, it is also the position of the *salaf*. He himself was certainly among the followers of the same position. Ibn Taymiyya cannot be characterized as an anthropomorphist because in many of his writings he criticizes the anthropomorphic understanding of the Qur'anic verses: "Anyone who says that God has knowledge as mine and that he sits as my sitting is an anthropomorphist (*mushabbih* ) who analogizes God to animal beings."<sup>83</sup> He strongly urges the affirmation of God's attributes without analogy and to deanthropomorphize without denying them.

Describing the attitude of the *salaf* when faced with some difficult verses of the Qur'ān, Ibn Taymiyya notes that they did not interpret them metaphorically; they also refrained from interpreting the Qur'ān through *ra'y* (personal opinion). The *salaf* always tried to avoid talking about what they did not know. Ibn Taymiyya notes that there are many traditions forbidding Muslims to explain the Qur'ān through personal opinion. Though he does not explain what he means by personal opinion, it is likely that what he might mean is any explanation or interpretation of the Qur'ān which lacks a basis in the text of the Qur'ān, the *Sunna* and the *salaf*. It is his principle that if someone is faced with a certain opinion which he does not know whether the Scripture validates or invalidates,

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'at al-Rasā'il al-Kubrā* , 387; Mar'ī ibn Yūsuf al-Karmī, *al-Kawākib al-Durriyya* , Ed. by Najm 'Abd al-Raḥmān Khalaf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī), 118-19. The third group's attitude, to him, is that of *ahl al-sunna* . See his '*Aqīdat Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Firqa al-Nājiyya* , Ed. 'Abd al-Razzāq 'Afīfī (Cairo: Maṭba'a Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1358 H.), 13.

<sup>83</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Risāla al-Tadmuriyya* , 5; his *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya : Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr* , Vol. 13, 379 and his *Majmū'at al-Rasā'il al-Kubrā* , Vol. 1, 395.

he should refrain from giving any opinion unless he has knowledge of the scriptural position on it.<sup>84</sup> One of the traditions which warn against the use of personal opinion is the tradition of Ibn 'Abbās saying: "Whoever speaks in the Qur'ān without knowledge should take his place in the Fire."<sup>85</sup> Another Tradition quoted by Ibn Taymiyya is from Jundub who quoted the Prophet as sayings : "Anyone who speaks about something in the Qur'ān with his personal opinion, then corrects what he said , is still wrong."<sup>86</sup> This is confirmed by another tradition which states, " Whoever says anything regarding the Qur'ān, according to his personal opinion, means he has forced himself to do what he does not know and he has practiced what was not ordered. In case he arrives at the true meaning of the matter he has still erred.for he did not get in from the proper door."<sup>87</sup> In the opinion of Ibn Taymiyya, Mālik ibn Anas is one of the imāms who put that tradition into practice. Asked about the meaning of "*istawā* " ( literally "sit" ) in the verse "*al-Raḥmānu 'alā l-'arshi istawā* " ( God sat on the Throne), Mālik answered: "The meaning of '*istawā* ' (to sit ) is clear , the manner is unknown and belief in it is obligatory."<sup>88</sup> Mālik did not himself interpret the word "*istawā*" metaphorically, nor did he describe the manner; he merely emphasized the obligation of believing in it. By citing the saying of Mālik ibn Anas, Ibn Taymiyya seeks to criticize the practice of *ta'wīl* in his time. In his eyes, Mālik ibn Anas is the example of the Medinan piety which should be followed.

---

<sup>84</sup> Muḥammad Khalīl Harās, *Ibn Taymiyya al-Salafī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1984), 53.

<sup>85</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima Fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* , 105.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>88</sup> Muḥammad Khalīl Harās, *Ibn Taymiyya al-Salafī* , 46-9.

The question, however, arises why in later generations, the philosophers, the *mutakallimūn*, the *ṣūfīs* and the *Shī'ites* began *ta'wīl* of the *Qur'ān*. Ibn Taymiyya's answer is that, they believed in the capacity of reason to form moral choices and consequently to determine the meaning of the text. They believed that the apparent meaning of the text brought by the Prophet is not the intended meaning of the Scripture. They claimed that the true meaning of the text is what their reason understood. The people of reason even believed that if there is contradiction between the apparent meaning of the *Qur'ān* and reason (in fact, Ibn Taymiyya maintains, rational knowledge), the former should be interpreted according to the latter; they argued that since both reason and the *Qur'ān* are from God, they cannot be mutually contradictory.

Ibn Taymiyya vehemently rejects the authority of reason to determine the meaning of the *Qur'ān*. In his opinion, conclusions based solely on reason are inherently contradictory and merely create doubt and confusion. Those who claimed the authority of reason were in disagreement, for example, on whether the *Qur'ān* as *kalām Allāh* is sound, word or meaning. Similarly, regarding the verse "God speaks to Mūsā", some of them said that "to speak" is the attribute of action, while to others, it was the attribute of essence. This discussion did not result in any conclusive opinion until the deniers finally affirmed that the *Qur'ān* is *kalām Allāh* without determining whether it is sound, word or meaning.<sup>89</sup> According to Ibn Taymiyya, the farther one went from the *Sunna* the more inconsistent his position became. The *Mu'tazilite* doctrines, he argues, contradict each other. For example, the school of Basra strongly denied God's attributes, but the school of Baghdad affirmed several of His attributes (like *al-samī'*, *al-baṣīr*, *al-ḥayy*, *al-'alīm*). The *Shī'ites* have greater contradictions, but the most contradictory positions were certainly those of the philosophers. Their contradictions were greater than those of all the

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 278-80.

peoples of *qibla* -- Muslims, Jews and Christians taken together. The philosophers, for example, disagreed on whether *jism* (body) is composed of matter and form, or of undivided particulars or of none of them. Their learned representatives like Abū Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, Abū al-Maʿālī al-Juwaynī and Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Khaṭīb themselves were confused even though, ironically, they often claimed that the rational argument is definite (*qaṭʿī*) and free of any contradiction.<sup>90</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya is equally critical of the terms introduced by the philosophers and the *mutakallimūn*. Regarding *ʿaql* (reason), which is perhaps the most important term in philosophy and *kalām*, the conclusions of Ibn Taymiyya's careful scrutiny are interesting. He claims that the people of *taʿwīl* have misunderstood the meaning of *ʿaql*. This term was used in two senses. It is, firstly, an instinct (*gharīza*) which is part of our existence. The second sense is that of the knowledge acquired through that instinct. The first meaning of *ʿaql* would never contradict *naql* (transmitted religious proof), for it is posited, like life itself, as a condition of every knowledge, be it rational or revelational (*samʿī*). The first meaning is very different from the second, however, for it is clear that what is known through *ʿaql* is not necessarily known through *naql*. Ibn Taymiyya believes that the meaning of *ʿaql* in the Qurʾān is in the sense of *al-gharīza*, not as rational knowledge (*al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyya*)<sup>91</sup> as it was understood by the people of *taʿwīl*.

*ʿAql*, in Ibn Taymiyya's view, is attached (*yataʿallaq*) to *qalb* (heart). His view is based on the following verse of the Qurʾān: "Have they not travelled in the land so that they should have hearts with which to understand (*qulūbun yaʿqilūna bihā*)."<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muwāfaqa*, Vol. 1, 90-2.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>92</sup> Qurʾān, XXII: 46.

Again, when Ibn ʿAbbās was asked: " How do you obtain knowledge? " He replied: "Through a curious tongue (*bi lisān saʿūl* ) and through an intelligent heart (*bi qalb ʿaqūl* )." Ibn Taymiyya considers *ʿaql* as something which is not separate from *qalb* . To him, the direction of *ʿaql* is controlled by the will of *qalb* .<sup>93</sup> Therefore, his analogy regarding the relation of *qalb* to *ʿilm* is that of a vessel to water or of a river to a flood implying that *ʿilm* is controlled by *qalb* as water and the flood are controlled by the limits of a vessel and a river. Ibn Taymiyya emphasizes that the *qalb* , by its very nature (*fiṭra* ), inclines to the truth. It can accept nothing but the truth.<sup>94</sup> Given this nature, the *qalb* and the *ʿaql* have never contradicted God. In fact, the *qalb* seeks to know God, for He is the Real Truth.<sup>95</sup> Given that the Qurʾān is the truth, and the Messengers are the most knowledgeable people regarding the truth, *ʿaql* will never contradict the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. Sound reason (*ṣarīḥ al-maʿqūl* ) must be in accordance with the sound religious text (*ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl* ). Anything which contradicts sound reason can be known through *ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl* .<sup>96</sup>

The foregoing argument enables Ibn Taymiyya to criticize *taʿwīl* . According to him, *taʿwīl* originated from the basic assumption that there was contradiction between *ʿaql* and *naql*. What the *falāsifa* and the *mutakallimūn* called contradiction (*tanāquḍ* ), he maintains, is not between *ʿaql* and *naql* , but between rational knowledge (*al-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyya* ) and *naql* .<sup>97</sup> Ibn Taymiyya argues that *ʿaql* as "an instinct within us" (*al-*

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Manṭiq* , Vol. 9, 303-304.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 312

<sup>96</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Darʾ Taʿāruf al-ʿAql wa al-Naql* , Ed. by Muḥammad Rashād Sālīm. Vol. 1 ( Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub, 1971), 194.

<sup>97</sup> The distinction between *ʿaql* and *ʿaqliyyāt* also can be seen in his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. 6, 446.

*gharīza al-latī finā* ) must necessarily be in agreement with *naql* since both *‘aql* as *gharīza* and *naql* make the human being inclined to the truth. And the truth does not contradict itself. <sup>98</sup> He proposes the formula "Sound *reason* must be in accordance with sound *naql* and unsound reason can be known by sound *naql*." <sup>99</sup>

Rational knowledge cannot therefore be a basis (*aṣl* ) for determining *shar‘* . The knowledge of God and the affirmation of His Messenger do not, according to Ibn Taymiyya, require rational argument ( *al-adilla al-‘aqliyya* ) for such knowledge is natural and necessary (*fīṭrī ḍarūrī* ).<sup>100</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya strongly rejects the philosophical connotations of the word *‘aql* . According to him, *‘aql* in the Qur’ān is in fact sometimes equated with *sam‘* as in the verse: " If we listen to or *na‘qil* we would not be the people of Fire." <sup>101</sup> In his opinion, *‘aql* in the Qur’ān is not necessarily related to rational argumentation in philosophy. <sup>102</sup> To equate *‘aql* with its philosophical understanding is unjustified. Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of the misuse of that word seems to come from his realization that many philosophers always asserted the necessity of philosophy in studying Islamic fundamentals: they referred to the verses of the Qur’ān which uses the word *‘aql* , from which they

---

<sup>98</sup> Muḥammad Khalīl Harās, *Ibn Taymiyya al-Salafī* , 52.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. , 47.

<sup>100</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* , 280 and Muḥammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taymiyya' s Struggle Against Popular Religion* , 6.

<sup>101</sup> Qur’ān, LXVII: 10.

<sup>102</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muwāfaqā* , Vol. 1, 50.

argued for the legitimacy, even obligation, of interpreting the Qur'ān through rational or philosophical methods.<sup>103</sup>

Another reason for Ibn Taymiyya's rejection of the understanding of *‘aql* stems from his belief that the reasoning of philosophers and theologians is responsible for schisms and the disunity of the Muslim community.<sup>104</sup> It is reason which has created contradictory opinions. In his view, *ta’wīl* is not the cause but the effect. Those people already held certain convictions and brought them to bear on the Qur'ān through *ta’wīl*. *Ta’wīl* is thus merely a justification of their convictions, an instrument in the service of their ideology. It is clear that Ibn Taymiyya was not merely concerned with theology or the understanding of Islam, but also with politics. In his days, Muslims were not only divided into various schools of Islamic thought, but along political, regional or ethnic lines. The unity of the *umma* was very fragile and the Mongols could invade the Muslim states without having to face any strong resistance. In discouraging differences of opinion, Ibn Taymiyya was thus also concerned to lessen the disunity of the Muslim community.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> See, for example, Ibn Rushd's emphasis on *‘aql* in his *Faṣl al-Maqāl fīmā bayn al-Ḥikma wa al-Sharī‘a min al-Ittiṣāl*, 22.

<sup>104</sup> According to Abū Zahra, it is very probable that his *salafī* orientation is emphasized to avoid *sadd dhari‘at al-fasād*. Abū Zahra, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 226.

<sup>105</sup> Ibn Taymiyya's convictions were confirmed by the conduct of the Shī‘ites and the ṣūfis in his own lifetime. They were not united against the Mongols, and even facilitated their invasion. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 311-12, 401; Thomas F. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 13; M.M. Sharif, *History of Muslim Philosophy*, 796; Victor E. Makari, *Ibn Taymiyyah's Ethics*, 12, 14.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PRINCIPLES OF IBN TAYMIYYA'S QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION

It has been discussed earlier that Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of the innovators (*ahl al-bida'*) in relation to *ta'wil* was based on three central reasons. First of all, the innovators were deemed to have contradicted the *salaf*'s understanding of the Qur'ān. They were also seen to have erred because of their belief in the superiority of reason over revelation. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya accused them of having contributed through their beliefs to the disunity of the *umma*. While the previous chapter is concerned with Ibn Taymiyya's refutation of the innovators' interpretation of the Qur'ān, this chapter will discuss his principles of Qur'anic interpretation, as presented in his *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* in particular, and analyze his exegesis of *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*. This chapter will primarily focus on his exegetical method and on his arguments for the authority of the *salaf* in interpreting the Qur'ān.

#### A. Ibn Taymiyya's Method of Qur'anic Interpretation

The best method of *tafsīr*, according to Ibn Taymiyya, is to refer, in descending order, to the Qur'ān itself, the *Sunna* (the Prophet traditions), the sayings (*aqwāl*) of the *ṣaḥāba* (the Companions of the Prophet)<sup>1</sup> or to those of the *tābi'ūn* (the Followers of the Companions of the Prophet).<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> According to Ibn Taymiyya, the *ṣaḥāba* comprise all those who witnessed the Prophet and believed in him even though they may have had the opportunity to witness him only once. He bases himself on, among others, the saying of Mālik: "Whoever accompanies the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, one year, or one month, or one day or saw him and believed in him, he is one of his Companions." See Ibn Taymiyya.



One verse of the Qurʾān is often explained in another verse (*yufassiru baʿḍuhū baʿḍā*). This, to Ibn Taymiyya, is the ideal method of *tafsīr*.<sup>3</sup> However, if the explanation of a certain verse is not found in another part of the Qurʾān itself, the interpretation of the Qurʾānic text should then be based on the *Sunna*. The *Sunna* basically functions, according to Ibn Taymiyya, as an elaborator (*shāriḥa*) of the Qurʾān. Ibn Taymiyya follows Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, according to whom whatever the Prophet Muḥammad said and did was based on an understanding of the Qurʾān.<sup>4</sup> No one

---

*Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, Vol. 20 (Rabat: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, n.d.), 289 and his *Ṣiḥḥat Uṣūl Madhhab Ahl al-Madīna* (Beirut: Dār al-Nadwa al-Jadīda, n.d.), 21.

<sup>2</sup> His method is repeatedly mentioned by many scholars of Qurʾānic studies when they come to a discussion of Qurʾānic interpretation by tradition (*tafsīr bi al-maʾthūr*). Ibn Taymiyya is deemed to be the thinker who laid the scriptural and rational foundation of this school. See Abū Zahra, *Ibn Taymiyya, ḥayātuh wa ʿarāʾuh wa fiqhuh* (Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, n.d.), 220-36; Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, Vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1961), 48-50; Muḥammad Basyūnī Fawra, *Nashʾat al-Tafsīr wa Manāhijuh fī Dawʾ al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyya* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Amāna, 1986), 13; Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā, *Ibn Taymiyya* (Beirut: al-ʿAṣr al-Ḥadītha, 1988), 167-88; Fahd ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Sulaymān al-Rūmī, *Manhaj al-Madrasa al-ʿAqliyya al-Ḥadītha fī al-Tafsīr* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1407 H.), 16-20.

<sup>3</sup> All great Muslim exegetes agree that the interpretation of the Qurʾānic verses in the first place be based on the other verses of the Book itself. In fact, later modern Muslim scholars like Fazlur Rahman and ʿĀʾisha bint al-Shāfi see such method as the only valid way of interpreting the Qurʾān. Fazlur Rahman maintains that the Qurʾān should be understood in the context of its unity, avoiding any approach dealing with Qurʾān atomistically or partially. The only context that is needed, according to him, in (re)interpreting the Qurʾān is the historical setting of the life of the Prophet Muḥammad and the people of his time. See his *Islam and Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 2-11 and *Major Themes of the Qurʾān* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), xi-ii. Bint al-Shāfi maintains, however, that every verse of the Qurʾān can be sufficiently interpreted through others and there is no need to have recourse to anything else, she considers the occasions of revelation as merely supplementary. See her *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī*, Vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1962), 9-10. Also Issa J. Boullata, "Modern Qurʾān Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shāfi's Method," *Muslim World*, LXIV (1974), 103-113.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*. Ed. by ʿAdnān Zarzūr (Kuwait: Dār al-Qurʾān al-Karīm, 1971), 93.

knew God and His teachings better than the Prophet and he was commanded by God to convey His message to the people.<sup>5</sup>

According to Ibn Taymiyya, there are many verses which instruct the Prophet to judge or make a decision in accordance with the Qur'ān. One of them is the verse, "Surely we have revealed the Book to you with the truth that you may judge between people by means of that which God has taught you; and be not an advocate on behalf of the treacherous." <sup>6</sup> Therefore, Ibn Taymiyya believes that what the Prophet did is exactly the truth as inspired by or derived from the Qur'ān. Ibn Taymiyya quotes the Prophet as saying: "Remember I was given the Qur'ān and its example ." In the opinion of Ibn Taymiyya, the example mentioned is the *Sunna* . <sup>7</sup> He maintains that the *Sunna* itself is also revelation. In his view, the difference is that the Qur'ān is recited (*yutlā* ), while the *Sunna* is not. The argument for the necessity of making reference to the *Sunna* in interpreting the Qur'ān is also based on the tradition of Mu'ādh ibn Jabal when being sent to the Yaman, the Prophet asked him: " By what will you judge?". He replied: "By the Book of God." The Messenger asked: "If you do not find the solution there." Mu'ādh said: " By the traditions of the Messenger." The Prophet asked: "If you do not find the solution even there?" He said: " I will judge by my personal opinion." It is reported that the Prophet was very pleased with this answer. <sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqddimat al-Tafsīr* , Vol. 13 (Rabat: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), 136.

<sup>6</sup> Qur'ān, IV: 105.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'at al-Rasā'il wa al-Masā'il* , Vol. 1-3 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992), 200.

<sup>8</sup> It is unfortunate that Ibn Taymiyya does not discuss the final answer of Mu'ādh "I will judge by my personal opinion." (*ajtahid ra'yī* ). But what is certain is that Mu'ādh's preference for personal opinion as a basis of his decision would be interpreted by Ibn Taymiyya not as mere personal opinion but as itself based on the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* . On another occasion, Ibn Taymiyya vehemently criticizes " mere personal opinion" in

In Ibn Taymiyya's view, however, the bases of Qur'anic interpretation was not only limited to other parts of the Qur'ān itself and to the *Sunna*. For him if the explanation of the Qur'ān is not found in either sources, the interpreter should refer to the sayings of the *ṣaḥāba* and those of the *tābi'ūn* or what he calls the *salaf*. Ibn Taymiyya sometimes even mentions the followers of the *tābi'ūn* as the source of guidance in interpreting the Qur'ān.<sup>9</sup>

### B. The Authority of the *Salaf* in interpreting the Qur'ān

It is Ibn Taymiyya's strong belief that the Prophet had explained all words of the Qur'ān and their meanings to his Companions.<sup>10</sup> This belief is clearly based on many verses of the Book which tell the Messenger to explain the holy scripture to the peoples and urge the people themselves to think and to reflect on the Qur'ān. One such verse is the following: "We have revealed to you the Qur'ān (*al-dhikr*) that you may make clear to

---

interpreting the Qur'ān. In fact, such an interpretation is forbidden. See his *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 93-4, 105.

<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, I am unable to find Ibn Taymiyya's exact definition of the term *salaf* which literally means "ancestors". Those who are certainly considered *salaf* by Ibn Taymiyya are the *ṣaḥāba* and the *tābi'ūn*. See his *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 87. However, he also very often mentions the authority of *tābi'ū al-tābi'īn* (the Followers of the *tābi'ūn*) and he often uses terms like *al-a'imma*, or *a'immat al-umma*, or *a'immat al-muslimīn* such as al-Shāfi'ī and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, or *a'immat al-muslimīn al-mashhūrīn bi al-ilm wa al-dīn*, or *al-a'imma al-arba'a*. See his *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 79, 85; *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. 6 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1988), 448; *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 68, 87, 102, 150, 205; *Dar' Ta'arūḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, Vol. 1 (Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub, 1971), 45; *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, Vol. 19, 9 and Muḥammad Khalīl Harās, *Ibn Taymiyya al-Salafī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1984), 183. Abū Zahra says that Ibn Taymiyya limits the authority of the *salaf* to the third generation of Muslims. See his *Ibn Taymiyya*, 224. See also Muhammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taymiyya's Struggle Against Popular Religion* (Paris: Mouton, 1976), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 402-3.

men (the Companions) what has been revealed to them, and that haply they may reflect."<sup>11</sup> Another verse states: "And we have revealed to you the Book only so that you may make clear to them that about which they differ, and (as) a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe."<sup>12</sup> In another verse, the Qur'ān affirms: " (It is) the Book we have revealed to you abounding in good, that they may ponder over its verses, and that those endowed with understanding may be mindful."<sup>13</sup> The same emphasis is also affirmed in another verse: " Do they not meditate on the Qur'ān?"<sup>14</sup> or " Is it then that they do not ponder over what is said?"<sup>15</sup> Ibn Taymiyya takes these verses as proof that the Prophet was told to explain the Book to his people. Also, his people were urged to think, to ponder and to meditate. According to Ibn Taymiyya, it is very unlikely that people would be urged to ponder the Qur'ān ( *al-tadabbur* ) without understanding its meaning. Ibn Taymiyya maintains that the main goal of every discourse (*kalām* ) is to understand its meaning, not merely to know the words comprising it. In fact, the understanding of the meaning of the Qur'ān is even more important than any discourse. If the study of medicine and mathematics (*ḥisāb* ), for instance, is hardly possible without asking a question, it is even more unlikely that an understanding of the Qur'ān can be achieved without

---

<sup>11</sup> Qur'ān, XVI: 44. According to Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, this verse does not mean that the Prophet explained all verses of the Qur'ān for he was asked merely to explain the difficult verses. See his *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn* , Vol. 1 , 51-2. He maintains that the transmission of *tafsīr* from the Prophet was limited, the reason being that his audience at that time was pure Arabs and the Qur'anic verses which were unclear to them were only few . See Fred Leemhuis' "Origins and Early Development of the *tafsīr* Tradition " in Andrew Rippin, ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Qur'ān, XVI: 64.

<sup>13</sup> Qur'ān, XXXVIII: 29.

<sup>14</sup> Qur'ān, IV: 82.

<sup>15</sup> Qur'ān, XXIII: 68.

explanation, for the Qurʾān is the word of God (*kalām Allāh* ) on which the protection, salvation and happiness, here as well as in the hereafter, depend.<sup>16</sup>

In addition there are many traditions which convincingly prove that the Companions of the Prophet studied the Qurʾān attentively and carefully. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, one of the great *tābiʿūn* , said: the people who taught us the Qurʾān, like ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd and others stated that when they learnt ten verses from the Prophet, they did not continue further unless they had acquired full understanding of those verses and of the practices they enjoined. They said: we studied the Qurʾān, both in terms of knowledge as well as practice. <sup>17</sup> Al-Aʿmash reported on the same authority that ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd said: " They (the *ṣaḥāba* ) did not continue further unless they had learnt the meaning of those verses.<sup>18</sup> According to Ibn Taymiyya, they also spent time (*yabqūn mudda* ) memorizing the *sūra* s of the Qurʾān. Anas ibn Mālik reported that Ibn ʿUmar spent about eight years memorizing the *sūrat al-Baqara* .<sup>19</sup>

It seems crucial to Ibn Taymiyya's view of the authority of the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* to hold that the Prophet explained the meaning of the Qurʾān. Otherwise, both religious sources would be exposed to doubt. Ibn Taymiyya insists in fact that the Prophet explained everything about the religion of Islam: its foundations and derivations, its outer as well as its inner meaning. <sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr* , Vol, 17, 390 and his *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* , 30-1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 35-6.

<sup>20</sup> See " *Maʿārij al-Wuṣūl* " in Ibn Taymiyya's *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh* , Vol. 19 (Rabat: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, n.d.), 155. This short treatise is also

However, all the *ṣaḥāba* are, according to Ibn Taymiyya, not authorities in understanding the Qurʾān. Those who are include the four rightly guided-caliphs and such learned people as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd and Ibn ʿAbbās. According to Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī stated on the authority of Masrūq that ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd used to say: "I swear there is no god except Him. With regard to every single verse that was revealed, I know about what and where it was revealed. If I knew there was someone more knowledgeable about the Book of God than me ... I would surely visit him." According to Ibn Taymiyya, al-Aʿmash stated that Mujāhid, one of the great *tābiʿūn*, also said: "If I read the reading of Ibn Masʿūd, I do not need to ask much from Ibn ʿAbbās." <sup>21</sup> Referring to this tradition, Ibn Taymiyya obviously wants to stress that among the Companions there were some who were actively engaged in the study of the Qurʾān and were able to master its intricacies, so that their authority in explaining the Qurʾān could not be doubted.

In particular, Ibn Taymiyya emphasizes the authority of ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās in interpreting the Qurʾān. According to him, the Messenger himself prayed for him: "O, God teach him good understanding in religion and instruct him in *taʾwīl*." <sup>22</sup> Ibn Taymiyya quotes ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd as saying: "What an excellent interpreter of the

---

published separately. See *Maʿārij al-Wuṣūl ilā Maʿrifat ann Uṣūl al-Dīn wa Furūʿah qad Bayyanahā al-Rasūl* (al-Madīna al-Munawwara: al-Maktaba al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d.). Also his *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 400-3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 103.

<sup>22</sup> In Ibn Taymiyya's understanding, the word "*taʾwīl*" in this tradition has nothing to do with metaphorical interpretation as it is understood by the *mutakallimūn* or *fuqahāʾ*, for in his opinion *taʾwīl* is explanatory rather than interpretative of the apparent expression of the text. This is different from al-Ghazālī, for example, who argued that this tradition is a basis for allowing the reader to interpret the Qurʾān metaphorically or to go beyond the apparent meaning of the text as long as that such understanding is not contradictory to the primary sources, the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*.

Qurʾān Ibn ʿAbbās is." <sup>23</sup> Al-Aʿmash, on the authority of Abū Wāʿil, said : "At the time of the pilgrimage , ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās was asked by ʿAlī to act as the leader of pilgrimage. Ibn ʿAbbās then gave a sermon, in which he interpreted *sūrat al-Baqara* or , according to another version, *sūrat al-Nūr* in so admirable a fashion that if the Romans, the Turks and the Daylamīs had heard it, they would have converted to Islam." In the view of Ibn Taymiyya, such traditions prove that the Companions of the Prophet were truly authoritative in interpreting the Qurʾān.<sup>24</sup>

The authority of the *ṣaḥāba* was not merely based on the fact that they had been taught the Qurʾān by the Prophet and had themselves studied it; they had also witnessed the "occasions of revelation" with their own eyes. According to Ibn Taymiyya, they knew what circumstance a certain revelation was revealed in or about. So, they had a perfect knowledge of the revelation. In addition, they knew Qurʾanic Arabic better than did later generations. <sup>25</sup>

The authority of Qurʾanic interpretation does not, however, end with the Companions of the Prophet, for their knowledge of the Qurʾān was subsequently transmitted to their Followers (*tābiʿūn* ). Ibn Taymiyya believes that the Companions taught some of their Followers and insists that there is no verse of the Qurʾān which is not known by the *ṣaḥāba* and the *tābiʿūn* . <sup>26</sup> In fact, according to him, a "Follower" such as Mujāhid received Qurʾanic interpretation in its entirety from the *ṣaḥāba* . Mujāhid

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Naqd al-Manṭiq* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1951), 80. He points out that Ibn ʿAbbās was "the scholar of the *umma* " (*ḥabir al-umma* ). See his *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 282.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 97.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 397, 415.

said: "I studied (*ʿaraḍtu* ) the Qurʾān with Ibn ʿAbbās. I stopped at every verse of it to ask for his explanation." In another tradition from Muḥammad ibn Ishāq on the authority of Abān ibn Ṣāliḥ, Mujāhid stated: "I studied the Qurʾān three times, from its beginning to its end. I stopped at every verse and I asked him about it." <sup>27</sup> Ibn Jarīr reported from Ibn Abī Mulayka: "I used to see Mujāhid asking about Qurʾanic interpretation while he was bringing slates. Ibn ʿAbbās said: 'Write!' and Mujāhid did not stop until he had asked him about all Qurʾanic interpretation." According to Ibn Taymiyya, Sufyān al-Thawrī said: "If you have the Qurʾanic interpretation of Mujāhid, it is sufficient for you." Ibn Taymiyya maintains that al-Shāfiʿī and al-Bukhārī as well as other knowledgeable people relied heavily on Mujāhid's interpretation. Also, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and the people who wrote *tafsīr*s followed Mujāhid's method much more than anyone else's. <sup>28</sup> The other *tābiʿūn* who were considered authoritative by Ibn Taymiyya include Saʿīd ibn Jubayr, ʿIkrima, a servant of Ibn ʿAbbās, ʿAṭāʾ ibn Abī Rabāḥ, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Masrūq ibn al-Ajdaʿ, Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab, Abū al-ʿĀliya, al-Rabīʿ ibn Anas, Qatāda, al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Muzāḥim, Zayd ibn Aslam, Ṭawūs and Abū al-Shaʿthāʾ. <sup>29</sup>

The authority of the *ṣaḥāba* and the *tābiʿūn* in interpreting the Qurʾān was, according to Ibn Taymiyya, also based on their temporal proximity to the Prophet. The age of both the *ṣaḥāba* as well as the *tābiʿūn* was the best age of mankind after the time of the Prophet. The Prophet himself said: "The best age is the age in which I was sent, the next best is the generation which follows mine, and then those who come after." <sup>30</sup> Ibn

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 102.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 60-1 and 104.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 24; Also his *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, Vol. 20, 294-95 and Muḥammad Khalīl Harās, *Ibn Taymiyya al-Salafī*, 43. However, Ibn Taymiyya states that



Taymiyya observes that the Companions are praised and promised Heaven by God himself. God has stated in the Qurʾān: "Certainly God was well pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquillity on them and rewarded them with a near victory."<sup>31</sup> God also states: "And (as for) the foremost, the first of *Muhājir*s and the *Anṣār*s, and those who followed them in goodness, God is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with His Messenger, and He has prepared for them Heaven beneath which rivers flow to abide in them for ever; that is the mighty achievement."<sup>32</sup> With regard to the Companions of the Prophet, Ibn Taymiyya mentions their virtues as follows:

"They were the first believers who undertook *jihād*; though facing enemies, they affirmed Muḥammad as the Messenger of God. The Companions believed in his words at the time when the truth of those words had not yet been proved and when his supporters were still few compared to the infidels and the hypocrites. Above all, they gave up their property for the sake of God. Their contribution cannot be compared to that of anyone else."<sup>33</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya also quotes the following verse: "And whoever acts with hostility to the Apostle after guidance has become manifest to him, and follows other than the way of the believers, We will turn him to that to which he has (himself) turned and make him enter hell; and it is an evil resort."<sup>34</sup> It is clear, from this verse, he states, that whoever follows other than the way of the believers (the *salaf*) would be punished in hell.<sup>35</sup> He says:

---

although the former must be better than the latter, some of the latter could also be better than the former. He notes the different opinions about the superiority of Muʿāwiya over ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz as a case in point. See his *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 66.

<sup>31</sup> Qurʾān, XLVIII: 18.

<sup>32</sup> Qurʾān, IX: 100.

<sup>33</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*, Vol 13, 66.

<sup>34</sup> Qurʾān, IV: 115.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Naqd al-Mantiq*, 1.

"Whoever explains the Qur'ān or the *Ḥadīth* and interprets it in a way which is not known to the *ṣaḥāba* and the *tābi'ūn*, belies God, denies God's verses, changes their expression from their proper place and thus opens the door of *zandaqa* and *ilhād* ..." <sup>36</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya affirms, therefore, that the knowledge as well as the beliefs of the *salaf* are the most perfect ones <sup>37</sup> and their supremacy over those of others is not to be doubted. He maintains that knowledge of their sayings and practices as regards, for example, *tafsīr*, the foundations of Islam (*uṣūl al-dīn*) and its derivations (*furū'*) etc., is better than the knowledge of later generations. Similarly, it is necessary to know their consensus and disagreement in knowledge and religion, for their consensus is infallible (*ma'ṣūm*) and their disagreement did not diverge from the truth. Their virtues are greater than their errors and their error in every branch of religious sciences is less than that of the later generations. He says, that it is forbidden to invalidate their sayings unless there is justification for doing so on the basis of the Book and the *Sunna*. <sup>38</sup>

The authority of the *ṣaḥāba* and in particular of the *tābi'ūn* presupposes their mutual agreement. Otherwise, their sayings are not authoritative. Ibn Taymiyya says that in case of disagreement, the matter should be returned back to the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*. <sup>39</sup> However, Ibn Taymiyya maintains that the *ṣaḥāba*'s and the *tābi'ūn*'s agreement was greater than that of the following generations. In addition, disagreements among the *ṣaḥāba*

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 243.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 24-7.

<sup>39</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, Vol. 20, 14 and Abū Zahra, *Ibn Ḥanbal*, 211.

have nothing to do with beliefs (*‘aqā'id*).<sup>40</sup> Ibn Taymiyya affirms that the nobler the community is the greater consensus they have. Thus, whoever contradicts the Qur'anic interpretation of the *ṣaḥāba* and the *tābi'ūn* imputes lies (*muftarī*) to God, rejects (*mulḥid*) His verses and distorts (*muḥarrif*) the correct understanding of statements.<sup>41</sup>

Given the aforementioned virtues of the *salaf*, Ibn Taymiyya emphasizes that the best way to interpret the Qur'ān is to refer to their *aqwāl* (sayings).<sup>42</sup> He stresses that the interpreter also should follow their views in dealing with the *mutashābih* and *ilāhiyyāt* verses of the Qur'ān. Like the *salaf*, the interpreter should refrain from giving an opinion on verses which he does not know. Abū Bakr said: "Which sky will protect me and which earth will help me to survive, if I say regarding the Qur'ān things which I do not know." 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān also said: "I have not said about the Qur'ān what I did not know." In another tradition, it is reported that 'Umar was angry at someone for asking him to interpret of the word "*abb*" in the Qur'ān. Again, there is a tradition which reports that when Sa'īd ibn Musayyab, one of the great *tābi'ūn*, was asked about a legal matter, he was a very enthusiastic and outspoken, but when asked regarding the Qur'ān, he was silent as if he had not heard the question. This shows how the *salaf* refrained from speaking about the Qur'ān without knowledge (*‘ilm*) and avoided giving mere personal opinion. In fact, Ibn Taymiyya insists that the interpretation of the Qur'ān through mere reason is forbidden<sup>43</sup>. According to Harris Birkeland, when the proponents of *tafsīr bi al-*

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, Vol. 19, 274.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 243.

<sup>42</sup> It is interesting that the word he uses is *aqwāl al-ṣaḥāba* or *aqwāl al-tābi'īn* (sayings), neither *afhām* (understanding) nor *tafsīr* (interpretation). It is very likely that the word is chosen to stress the necessity of precise quotations from them.

<sup>43</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 108-115.

*ma'thūr* emphasize the interpretation of the Qur'ān through *ilm* (knowledge) what they mean is interpretation through *al-ḥadīth*. In case of Ibn Taymiyya, however, it is not merely tradition, but also the Qur'ān as well as the sayings of the Prophet's Companions and their Followers and to some extent the sayings of Arabic philologists which have to be taken into account in interpreting the Qur'ān.

The interpreter also should not make *tahrīf* or *ta'wīl* <sup>44</sup> of the apparent meaning of the text. According to Ibn Taymiyya, when the *salaf* dealt with God's attributes and names, they did not change the meanings of the apparent expressions through their *ta'wīl*. What they did was to apply the apparent meaning of the verses, neither affirming it nor denying it. They submitted (*tafwīḍ* and *taslīm*) the true meaning of it to God alone who is Omniscient. For Ibn Taymiyya, to change the apparent meaning of the text through *ta'wīl* or *majāz* (rhetorical considerations) implies that reason can determine its true sense, but reason, as mentioned repeatedly above, cannot be trusted. So R. Marston Speight is right in saying that the supporters of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* equate the use of *ra'y* (personal opinion) with *hawā* (whims), <sup>45</sup> though Ibn Taymiyya's main argument is that reason is unreliable besides being subject to personal whims.

---

<sup>44</sup> Both terms are used by Ibn Taymiyya. However, he prefers to use *tahrīf*, which is clearly condemned by God in the Qur'ān, though that verse concerns the Jews who are described as the people who changed the word (*al-kalima*) and the meaning of the text. The word *ta'wīl* does not have a negative connotation in the Qur'ān where it usually means "to return to the point." But, when Ibn Taymiyya criticizes *ta'wīl*, what he means is *ta'wīl* as it is understood by the philosophers, the *mutakallimūn* and the *fuqahā*.

<sup>45</sup> See his "Function of *Ḥadīth* as Commentary on the Qur'ān as Seen in the Six Authoritative Collections", in Andrew Rippin, ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, 67.

### C. Ibn Taymiyya's View on the *Salaf*'s Disagreement

It is very clear that Ibn Taymiyya strongly urges later Muslims to follow the Qur'anic interpretation of the *salaf*. But, which opinion of the *salaf* should one follow? The problem with the *salaf*'s *tafsir* is their own disagreement. It is obvious that there is no settled opinion among them regarding the meaning of certain expressions of the Qur'ān. The same is true of reports on the "occasions of revelation." Each of the *salaf* seems to have had his own understanding or interpretation of the revelation. Ibn Taymiyya is not unaware of this problem. But, according to him, the *salaf*'s disagreement cannot be taken as a reason for the rejection of their authority in Qur'anic interpretation. His stance is based on two reasons. First, although there are disagreements among them, the traditions which were needed in religion are available and their soundness or unsoundness also can be known. Secondly, the disagreement of traditions cannot be deemed a contradiction (*ikhtilāf taḍādd*) but a diversity of views (*ikhtilāf tanawwu'*).<sup>46</sup>

#### 1. The Reliability of Traditions Can be Known

Ibn Taymiyya observes that disagreement in Qur'anic interpretation can take two forms: *al-naql* (the traditions)<sup>47</sup> and *istidlāl* (reasoning). As regards the former, he stresses that the traditions, whether transmitted from the trustworthy or untrustworthy people, can be divided into two categories: the traditions whose soundness (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsir*, Vol. 13, 381 and his *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, Vol. 19, 139-41.

<sup>47</sup> By *al-naql*, Ibn Taymiyya means: al-Qur'ān, al-Ḥadīth, the sayings of *ṣaḥāba* and those of the *tābi'ūn*. See his *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsir*, Vol. 13, 29. What Ibn Taymiyya seems to mean here is the traditions. See *Muqaddima fi Uṣūl al-Tafsir*, 55-79.

unsoundness (*kidhb*) can be known and those of which cannot be so known. Ibn Taymiyya maintains that the disagreement of the traditions occurs as regards the second category which, according to him, mostly discusses things which are not important (*mā lā fāʾida fīhi*) such as the tradition concerning the color of the dog of the people of the Kaʿb, or the cow in the story of Moses, the size of the ship of the Prophet Noah, the name of the child who was killed by Khidr and so forth. All these traditions were not transmitted soundly from the Prophet, though there are sound traditions regarding the same story such as a tradition informing us that the name of the Companion of Moses is Khidr.<sup>48</sup>

There also are traditions which are not transmitted from the Prophet but from people of the Book like Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, Wahb ibn al-Munabbih and Muḥammad ibn Ishāq. These traditions should not be validated or invalidated except with evidential argument (*ḥujja*).<sup>49</sup> As for the Isrāʾīliyyāt traditions, Ibn Taymiyya classifies them into three categories: first, the Isrāʾīliyyāt traditions which confirm the truth we have. Such traditions are undoubtedly true and can therefore be accepted. Secondly, there are Isrāʾīliyyāt traditions whose unsoundness is obvious for they contradict the truth we have. These traditions are to be rejected. Thirdly, there are certain Isrāʾīliyyāt traditions whose soundness or unsoundness is doubtful. As regards these traditions, Ibn Taymiyya maintains that they should neither be accepted nor rejected. To transmit them is permitted, particularly if there is a useful lesson (*fāʾida*) in them. The Messenger of God, Ibn Taymiyya says, stated: "Transmit from me even if only one verse and from the Banī Isrāʾīl without hesitation; and whoever intentionally lies about me will take his place in fire."<sup>50</sup> According to Ibn Taymiyya, the Isrāʾīliyyāt traditions contain a lot of disagreement

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 100 and his *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, Vol. 19, 6-7. Abū Zahra, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 224.

on such things as the opinions about the names of birds which were brought to life by God to show a sign to Abraham or about the trees which talked to Moses. But, according to him, such Isrā'īliyyāt traditions may be used for *tafsīr* as long as they are included in the first and the third categories mentioned earlier.<sup>51</sup> He affirms that the transmission or use of Isrā'īliyyāt traditions by the *salaf* had nothing to do with belief (*al-i'tiqād*) but with making or illustrating a point (*al-istishhād*).<sup>52</sup>

According to Ibn Taymiyya, similar traditions have also been transmitted from the *tābi'ūn*. These traditions, according to Ibn Taymiyya, are accepted as long as they are unanimously agreed upon. In case of disagreement, however, such traditions cannot be taken as a proof in an argument, and confirmation should be sought in reports from the *ṣaḥāba*, for it is very likely that they heard it from the Prophet or from the people who heard it from the Prophet. The sayings of the *ṣaḥāba* are more reliable than those of the *tābi'ūn* for they referred to the people of the Book less than the *tābi'ūn* did. In fact, they even refused to confirm the opinions of the people of the Book.<sup>53</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya is convinced that the contradiction of traditions in *tafsīr* merely occurs in case of traditions which have no proof (*dalīl*) for their validity.<sup>54</sup> He believes that if the tradition is valid it would not be contradictory. Ibn Taymiyya emphasizes that

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 55-7, 98-101.

<sup>52</sup> Ṣabrī al-Mutawallī concludes that in the view of Ibn Taymiyya it is justified to use *mawqūf*, *maqṭū'* or *mursal* traditions in *tafsīr* for textual evidence (*shawāhid*) and taking a lesson (*i'tibār*). See his *Manhaj Ibn Taymiyya fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1981), 68.

<sup>53</sup> This is based on the tradition: "If the people of the Book tell (something) to you, do not confirm them, nor negate them." Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 57-8.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 58.

the traditions relating to religion and *tafsīr* in particular, are available and their necessary soundness is known. In fact, a considerable number of the traditions needed for *tafsīr* are transmitted from the Prophet, though most of them, as in *maghazī* (military campaigns) and *malāḥim* (bloody fights), are *marāṣil*.<sup>55</sup> Thus, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal stated: "Three things that have no acceptable chains of transmission (*isnād*): *al-tafsīr*, *al-malāḥim* and *al-maghazī*." <sup>56</sup> To Ibn Taymiyya, however, *marāṣil* are acceptable.<sup>57</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya emphasizes the necessity of the soundness of tradition. He asserts, for example, that the tradition should be free from lies, fabrication, intended error, cheating, and that the transmitter should be free from making mistakes and being forgetful, though he does not explain how one can determine that a certain tradition is not a lie, fabrication, error, etc. It is likely, however, that those who are familiar with *ʿulūm al-ḥadīth* would not find it difficult to determine such matters, so that Ibn Taymiyya seems to consider it unnecessary to explain the ways of doing so. Nevertheless, he stresses the importance of the science of knowing the transmitters of *ḥadīth* (*ʿilm al-rijāl*). <sup>58</sup>

To Ibn Taymiyya, the piety of the Companions like Ibn Masʿūd, Ubayy ibn Kaʿb, Ibn ʿUmar, Jābir, Ibn Saʿīd and Abū Hurayra is not to be doubted. They are the people

---

<sup>55</sup> *Mursal* (pl. *marāṣil*) is the tradition transmitted from the Prophet Muḥammad but with a chain of transmission which is not connected to the Prophet or ends with the *tābiʿūn*. See the notes of ʿAdnān Zarzūr in *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 62; also see Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Ḥadīth*, Vol. 18 (Rabat: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, n.d.), 8. Also Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth wa Muṣṭalaḥuh* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li al-Malāyīn, 1988), 166.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>57</sup> Abū Zayra observes that this stance of Ibn Taymiyya toward tradition is different from that of al-Ghazālī, to whom only those traditions which are clearly transmitted from the Prophet directly are authoritative. See Abū Zahra, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 235.

<sup>58</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 62-4.



who could not have lied about the Prophet. They were also free from committing mistakes and being forgetful. In addition, they were morally sound. They had never stolen or robbed (*qatṭaʿ al-ṭarīq*) nor had they been untrustworthy witnesses. The same is true of the *tābiʿūn* of Medina, Mecca, Syria and Basra. Those people had never lied about the Prophet, particularly to the people who were higher than them.<sup>59</sup> Some of them are also said to have had a very good memory such as al-Shaʿbī, al-Zuhrī, ʿUrwa, Qatāda and al-Thawrī. In his time, it was said that al-Zuhrī had never forgotten in spite of his considerable traditions and his extensive memorizations.<sup>60</sup>

However, according to Ibn Taymiyya, mistakes and forgetfulness are sometimes unavoidable in human beings. This is particularly the case with traditions which have different paths of transmission. A tradition which reports the Prophet buying a camel from Jābir is a case in point. Considering the different paths of transmission, the tradition is sound. However, there are different reports about the price. Ibn Taymiyya can tolerate the presence of a mistake in a part of a long tradition :

"If a long tradition, for example, is reported by two different authorities without having made a secret agreement (*muwāṭaʿa*), it is prevented (*imtanaʿa*) from having a mistake as it is prevented from being a lie, for a mistake would not occur in a long different story, but in a part of it. If (someone) tells a long different story and another tells a similar one without *muwāṭaʿa*, the tradition as whole is guaranteed to be free from having a mistake just as it is guaranteed as a whole to be free from lie without *muwāṭaʿa*." <sup>61</sup>

In Ibn Taymiyya's view, shared by Bukhārī, a mistake in a part of a tradition does not invalidate the soundness of that tradition particularly if that tradition is accepted and

---

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 64-5.

<sup>61</sup> It is very likely that by *muwāṭaʿa* he means secret agreement between transmitters of tradition. Ibid., 65.

affirmed by knowledgeable people who, in his view, would not make an agreement on error (*ḍalāla*). He is strongly convinced that knowledgeable people cannot agree in affirming a weak tradition or in lying about a sound one. Once they make an agreement in judging the status of a tradition, the result is bound to be known. In his eyes, their *ijmāʿ* (consensus) is *maʿṣūm* (infallible).<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately he does not explain who the knowledgeable people are and how they make an *ijmāʿ* or how do we know that a certain tradition is agreed upon by them. So far as I am aware, he leaves questions like these unanswered. In any case, the *ijmāʿ* of the knowledgeable people is crucial both in his accepting and rejecting a tradition. In his opinion, for example, although the status of the tradition might be that of *al-ḥadīth al-gharīb*, it is obligatory to know if it was accepted, affirmed and practiced by the *umma*. For instance, the tradition, "Surely deeds (are judged) by their intentions" was at first a *ḥadīth gharīb* which later became a *mutawātir*. Another example is the tradition: "No will (may be made to the benefit of) an inheritor." He notes that this is too accepted and affirmed by the *umma* and must be followed, though in *al-Sunan* it is not considered as a sound tradition.<sup>63</sup> Ibn Taymiyya applies the same rule to *al-ḥadīth al-wāḥid*. He states:

"A *khābar al-wāḥid* which becomes generally accepted has to be known according to the majority of the *ʿulamāʾ* from the followers of Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik, al-Shāfiʿī and Aḥmad. It is also the opinion of the majority of al-Ashʿarī's followers like Isfarāʾīnī, Ibn Fūrak, that though it only conveys probability (*al-ẓann*), when it is supported by the *ijmāʿ* of the knowledgeable, it is in the position of the *ijmāʿ* on law which is based on analogy or *khābar al-wāḥid* in which, according to the majority, the law becomes *qaṭʿī*. It is not *qaṭʿī*, when it is without *ijmāʿ*; *ijmāʿ* is infallible because the knowledgeable people in Islamic law (*al-aḥkām al-sharʿiyya*) do not make agreement in allowing what is forbidden nor in forbidding what is

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Ḥadīth*, Vol. 18, 16-7, 41, 49, 51.

<sup>63</sup> What he means by *al-Sunan* is apparently the collection of traditions by Abū Dāwūd. Ibid., 49.

lawful. The same is true of the knowledgeable people in tradition, they do not make agreement in validating a false tradition nor invalidating a sound one..."<sup>64</sup>

In this quotation, Ibn Taymiyya seems to consider *ijmā'* as a determinant factor in deciding the acceptance or rejection of traditions. He does emphasize, however, that in case a tradition is unreliable but the *umma* affirms and accepts it, *ijmā'* on it must be rejected; unfortunately he does not give an example of this situation.<sup>65</sup> What can be said on the basis of his latter principle is that he does not blindly adhere to the classification of traditions made by the knowledgeable people but is always ready to examine a tradition critically. Given this standpoint, he easily has a large number of traditions available for *tafsīr*.

It has been mentioned above that Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal warned that most traditions used in *tafsīr* are *mursal*, i.e. traditions going back to the Prophet without the intermediary link of a Companion. The *muḥaddithūn* (traditionists) classify such traditions as *ḍa'īf* ("weak" traditions).<sup>66</sup> Muslim, the second great traditionist after Bukhārī, for example, said: "*Mursal* in our opinion and in the opinion of people knowledgeable in reports (*akḥbār*) cannot be used as proof."<sup>67</sup> To Ibn Taymiyya, however, such a tradition is acceptable as long as it does not amount to error and is not fabricated, though he does not explain those qualifications. He says:

"And the *marāsīl*, if the paths of their transmission are numerous and free from planned secret agreement or unplanned agreement, are undoubtedly sound ...

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>65</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 67.

<sup>66</sup> The other weak traditions are *al-munqati'*, *al-mu'aḍḍal*, *al-mudallas*, *al-mu'allal*, *al-muḍṭarib*, *al-maqlūb*, *al-shādhḍh*, *al-munkar* and *al-matrūk*. Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, 165-207.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 166.

Whenever the tradition is free from intended lie and error, it is authentic without any doubt." <sup>68</sup>

It is very likely that Ibn Taymiyya's acceptance of *mursal* traditions is rooted in his belief in the authority of the *tābi'ūn* in interpreting the Qur'ān . He seems to think that although in its transmission, a tradition ends with the *tābi'ūn* and is not connected through the Companions to the Prophet, the *tābi'ūn* themselves were in their own right one of the best generations of the Muslims, as mentioned by the Prophet. In addition, he would probably have been aware that the majority of the 'ulamā' did not consider *al-ḥadīth al-mursal* as *al-ḥadīth al-ḍa'īf*. <sup>69</sup>

It has been mentioned earlier that Ibn Taymiyya accepts the use of *Isrā'īliyyāt* traditions by the *ṣaḥābā* and the *tābi'ūn* in *tafsīr* because, in his opinion, such traditions are meant not for *i'tiqād* (beliefs) but for *istishhād* (evidence) . Furthermore, he makes the further qualification that in case of traditions bearing on *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* or legal matters, their use should be strict <sup>70</sup> and any tradition regarding such matters should be rejected unless it is sound without doubt. However, this is not his stance on non-legal matters. He, for example, allows the use of *al-ḥadīth al-ḍa'īf* for *shawāhid* (evidence) and *i'tibār* (taking a moral lesson). <sup>71</sup> In this respect, he refers to his Ḥanbalite master, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal who, according to Ibn Taymiyya, allowed the traditions of 'Abd Allāh ibn Lahī'a for purposes of *shawāhid* etc. even though he forbade Ibn Lahī'a's traditions for the other purposes. Ibn Taymiyya mentions that 'Abd Allāh ibn Lahī'a, the Qāḍī of Egypt, was one of the most virtuous men as well as one of the people who narrated the

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* , 62.

<sup>69</sup> Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* , 66.

<sup>70</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Ḥadīth* , Vol. 18, 65.

<sup>71</sup> Ṣabrī al-Mutawallī, *Manhaj Ibn Taymiyya fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* , 68.

most traditions . But because his books were burnt his later traditions are mixed with mistakes. <sup>72</sup> Such traditions are still useful for *shawāhid* and *i'tibār* .

Ibn Taymiyya also notes that it is allowed to use *al-ḥadīth al-ḍa'īf* if its content comprises *targhīb* and *tarhīb* . He quotes Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal who said: "If a tradition deals with *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* (legal matters) we are strict regarding chains of transmission and if it deals with *targhīb* and *tarhīb* we are lenient." Ibn Taymiyya points out that this is one of the reasons why the 'ulamā' use *al-ḥadīth al-ḍa'īf* (weak tradition) for *faḍā'il al-a'māl* (virtuous deeds). By so doing, they do not intend, however, to make them the basis of legally suggested deeds ( *istiḥbāb* ) for *istiḥbāb* is an Islamic legal matter which should be based on an Islamic legal argument ( *dalīl shar'ī* ). <sup>73</sup>

Although he seems lenient or uncritical toward *al-ḥadīth al-ḍa'īf*, Ibn Taymiyya is in fact very critical, even towards *al-ḥadīth al-mutawātir* . It seems that his basic principle in relation to traditions is that every tradition should be scrutinized critically, both from the point of view of content ( *matn* ) and from that of chains of transmission ( *isnād* ). He maintains that the fact that a tradition is transmitted by a trusty transmitter does not guarantee its soundness. He points out several examples. One of them is the tradition of Ibn 'Abbās reporting that Muḥammad on entering the Ka'ba ( *al-Bayt* ) did not pray, while in fact he did. Again, the tradition of Ibn 'Umar, reporting that the Prophet performed 'umra in the month of Rajab, while in fact Muḥammad did not perform 'umra except in

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* , 69.

<sup>73</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Ḥadīth* , Vol. 18, 65. Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ notes that Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal is one of the imāms who allowed the use of *al-ḥadīth al-ḍa'īf* in *faḍā'il al-a'māl* (virtuous deeds). However, he emphasizes that what the imām means by *al-ḥadīth al-ḍa'īf* is not the same as is understood today, for in the time of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, the traditions had not yet been divided except into *al-ṣaḥīḥ* and *al-ḍa'īf* . What he means by *al-ḥadīth al-ḍa'īf* is therefore still comprised within what we call *al-ḥadīth al-ḥasan* now. See his *Uḷūm al-Ḥadīth* , 210.

the month of Dhū al-Qaʿda.<sup>74</sup> All these mistakes are found in traditions transmitted by Ibn ʿAbbās and Ibn ʿUmar, who are deemed to be trustworthy.

As regards traditions, according to Ibn Taymiyya, there are two groups: the *mutakallimūn* and the people who claimed to be follower of the tradition. The first group is far from knowing the sound from the unsound traditions and they doubt the trustworthiness of traditions. The second group comprises people who invariably follow the traditions when their transmitters are deemed to be reliable.<sup>75</sup> Both groups exaggerate their position. Although there are traditions which are doubtful, this judgment cannot be applied to all traditions, for the traditions which are necessary to religion remain available and their soundness also can be known. On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyya also disagrees with the second type of attitude which easily accepts the traditions of the trusted transmitter, since there is no guarantee that the transmitters are necessarily free from mistakes. What he emphasizes, then, is the necessity of a critical attitude toward tradition even *al-ḥadīth al-mutawātir*. He believes that this is the attitude of the knowledgeable people in tradition. He describes what the knowledgeable people did in dealing with traditions:

"Just as they used a *ḥadīth* which has a lapse of memory for evidence (*istishhād*) and consideration (*iʿtibār*), they invalidated the tradition whose transmitters are trustworthy (*thiqa*), honest (*ṣadūq*) and accurate (*ḍābiṭ*) in case of its mistakes are obvious. They are guided by instructions named as *ʿilm ʿilal al-ḥadīth* and this is one of the noblest sciences among them."<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> See his *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 71-2 and the instructive notes by the editor, ʿAdnān Zarzūr.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 70.

In Ibn Taymiyya's view, *al-ḥadīth al-ḍaʿīf* should not necessarily be rejected because it can be used for *shawāhid* and *iʿtibār*. Nor can the traditions of trustworthy people be blindly accepted, for their mistakes are also sometimes obvious. This critical attitude, according to Ibn Taymiyya, can be achieved by mastering *ʿilm ʿilal al-ḥadīth* (science of the faults of tradition) and by referring to the *ijmāʿ* of knowledgeable people in tradition for their agreement is infallible. Through this knowledge, according to Ibn Taymiyya, the soundness of the traditions on *tafsīr* can be recognized.

The fabricated traditions too can be distinguished just as the sound ones can. Ibn Taymiyya acknowledges that the number of fabricated traditions (*al-ḥadīth al-mawḍūʿ*) in *tafsīr* are many. He refers to the traditions of al-Thaʿlabī and al-Wāḥidī. He acknowledges that al-Thaʿlabī was undoubtedly a virtuous and pious man but because he was not aware of invented traditions he gathered those traditions together with the sound ones. The same is true of his companion, al-Wāḥidī. Although he was more knowledgeable than al-Thaʿlabī in Arabic, he was farther from the way of the *salaf*. Ibn Taymiyya also mentions several examples of fabricated traditions, such as a tradition connecting some Qurʾanic verses to ʿAlī. One of them is the verse: " (There is ) a guide for every people " <sup>77</sup>. According to the Shīʿites, the "guide" mentioned in this verse is ʿAlī. The other one is the verse: " The retaining ear might retain it " <sup>78</sup>. In relation to this verse too, they claimed that " the retaining ear " of the verse refers to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib. <sup>79</sup> According to Ibn Taymiyya, such fabricated traditions are found in some *tafsīr* s, however, their existence cannot be a reasonable argument of rejecting *tafsīr bi al-maʾthūr* for the reliability of traditions can be known.

---

<sup>77</sup> Qurʾān, XII: 7.

<sup>78</sup> Qurʾān, LXIX: 12.

<sup>79</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 75-8.

## 2. The *Salaf*'s Disagreement was not Mutually Contradictory

The second reason for accepting *tafsīr* through traditions is based on Ibn Taymiyya's observation that the *salaf*'s' disagreement cannot be deemed as contradictory in its nature ( *ikhtilāf taḍādd* ) but only signifies diversity ( *ikhtilāf tanawwu'* ).<sup>80</sup> Their point, according to Ibn Taymiyya, was essentially the same although it was expressed in different words. He gives four reasons why the *salaf*'s opinions tend to be incorrectly regarded as contradictory.

### a. *The salaf did not always use the first name of a thing*

One reason is that *salaf* often did not refer to something by its usual or original name ( *bi 'aynih* ), but rather used its second or a similar name or equivalent ( *naẓīrih* ), e.g. by using the word *al-ṣārim* or *al-muḥannad* instead of *al-sayf* (sword). It is also like calling God *al-Raḥmān* rather than *Allāh*. To do so is surely permitted for the Qur'ān itself confirms: "Say: call upon *Allāh* or call upon *al-Raḥmān* ( the Beneficent ), whichever you call upon, He has the best names".<sup>81</sup> But it should be realized that the word *al-Raḥmān* is not the first name of God. The Prophet Muḥammad himself is also often called *Aḥmad*, *al-Ḥāshir*, *al-Māḥi*, *al-ʿĀqib*. Similarly, the Qur'ān is often called *al-Furqān* (what separating the false from the true), *al-Dhikr* ( the Remembrance ), *al-Hudā* (the Guidance), *al-Shifā'* (the Healing), *al-Bayān* (the Explanation) and *al-Kitāb* (the Book). Although different names are used, the named thing ( *al-musammā* ) is the same.

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 381. Also his *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, Vol. 19, 139-41.

<sup>81</sup> Qur'ān, XVII: 110.



By using a variety of names, Ibn Taymiyya emphasizes, the *salaf* did not intend to contradict the original name or meaning at all.<sup>82</sup>

As an example, Ibn Taymiyya refers to the following verse of the Qurʾān: "And whoever turns away from *dhikr* his shall surely be a straitened life, and We will raise him on the day of resurrection, blind."<sup>83</sup> According to him, there are two interpretations of *dhikr*, viz. "remembrance of God" (*dhikr Allah*) or "word of God" (*kalām Allah*), the Qurʾān. Both meanings, from the point of view of grammar are reasonable. The first meaning is justified by the consideration that God is an object. While in the second meaning, God is understood as the subject. Ibn Taymiyya prefers the understanding *kalām Allah*. However, both *dhikr Allah* or *kalām Allah*, Ibn Taymiyya stresses, are essentially the same, for the named one (*al-musammā*) is the same (Allah).<sup>84</sup> Another example is *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (the straight path). There are two interpretations of this expression: the Qurʾān and Islam. Both meanings are derived from the Prophet's traditions which come from the same authority, al-Tirmidhī. In this respect, Ibn Taymiyya emphasizes that these two meanings of the text are in harmony (*muttafiqān*) for they could together be understood to mean that Islam is to follow the Qurʾān. According to Ibn Taymiyya, such different descriptions basically signify the same essence.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, Vol. 19, 38. Also his *Majmūʿat al-Rasāʾil wa al-Masāʾil*, Vol. 1 to 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992), 198.

<sup>83</sup> Qurʾān, XX: 124.

<sup>84</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 40.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-2 and his *Majmūʿat al-Rasāʾil wa al-Masāʾil*, Vol. 1-3, 199.

b. instead of using a general name, the *salaf* used its varieties

The other source of the *salaf*'s disagreement is their tendency to use the general name (*al-ism al-‘āmm*) by using a particular form of it (*naw‘*) either for stressing its similarity or for attracting the listener's attention. For example, when a foreign man wanted *al-khubz* (the general word for bread) he used the word *raghīf* (a loaf of bread) but what he wanted was bread, not a *raghīf* in particular. The same case relates to *ẓālim li nafsih*, *muqtaṣid* and *sābiq bi al-khayrāt* in the verse: "Then we gave the Book for an inheritance to those whom We chose from among Our servants; but of them is he who makes his soul to suffer a loss (*ẓālim li nafsih*), and of them is he who takes a middle course (*muqtaṣid*), and of them is he who is foremost in deeds of goodness (*sābiq bi al-khayrāt*).<sup>86</sup> Those words signify something general: *al-ẓālim li nafsih* basically includes anyone who neglects religious obligations (*al-wājibāt*) and violates religious prohibitions (*al-muḥarramāt*); *muqtaṣid* refers to whoever practices *al-wājibāt* and avoids committing *al-muḥarramāt*; and *sābiq bi al-khayrāt* covers anyone who goes beyond *al-wājibāt* and approaches (*taqarrab*) God with good deeds (*al-ḥasanāt*). Some of the *salaf*, however, understood or interpreted them specifically in terms of the levels of obedience (*anwā‘ al-tā‘āt*) stating that *al-sābiq* is the person who prays at the beginning of the appointed time; *muqtaṣid* is the person who prays in the middle of the appointed time and *ẓālim li nafsih* is the person who prays toward the end of the appointed time. Later, other interpreters understood those expressions in terms of property, asserting that *al-sābiq* is someone who gives alms in addition to what is obligatory; *al-muqtaṣid* is someone who merely gives the obligatory alms and does not receive "an exploitative interest" (*al-ribā*); while *ẓālim li nafsih* is someone who receives *al-ribā* or who

---

<sup>86</sup> Qur‘ān, XXXV: 32.

refuses to give the obligatory alms. These examples indicate that a general name is understood or interpreted in particular terms. According to Ibn Taymiyya, to express something by using an example ( *bi al-mithāl* ) makes it easier to understand than a precise definition does.<sup>87</sup>

The point that Ibn Taymiyya is trying to make through these arguments is apparently related, among other things, to the disagreement regarding the occasions of revelation ( *asbāb al-nuzūl* ). In this connection, Ibn Taymiyya seems to realize that there are many verses in which the general was specified to a particular case. Such cases are often related to a particular person. For example, the verse on *ḡihār* was revealed with reference to the wife of Thābit ibn Qays; the verse on *li'ān* was occasioned by 'Uwaymir al-'Ajlānī or Hilāl ibn Umayya; the verse of *kalāla* referred to Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh; the verse "And that you should judge between them by what Allah has revealed"<sup>88</sup> was connected to the Qurayṣa and the Naḡīr tribes; the verse "He from whom it is averted on that day" was related to the battle of Badr, and so forth. In other words, those verses which are essentially general are understood in a somewhat particular manner. Ibn Taymiyya, however, maintains that although these verses were revealed about particular persons or occasions, they are surely not specific to them.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, he affirms that what should be paid attention to is not the mere variety of the names or particularities of the occasions of revelation, for the audience of the revelation includes both particular persons and occasions as well as others. He asserts that knowing the particular occasions of revelation is

---

<sup>87</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 43-4 and his *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 382-84.

<sup>88</sup> Qur'ān, V: 49.

<sup>89</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, Vol. 19, 14-5 in addition to his *Majmū'at al-Masā'il wa al-Rasā'il*, Vol. 1-3, 199.

undoubtedly very important because it would help the reader to have a better understanding of its contents (*al-munazzal*).<sup>90</sup>

*c. The Possibility that a word has two meanings*

The other source of the *salaf*'s disagreement is the fact that a word may very often be ambivalent in meaning (*iḥtimāl al-lafẓ ilā al-amrayn*) as either *mushtarak* (one word has several meanings) or *mutawāṭiʾ* (one word which can refer to several things). An example of the first is a word like *qaswara* which has two probable meanings: *al-rāmī* (archer) and *al-asad* (a lion); or like *ʿasʿas* which can mean *iqbāl al-layl* (the coming of night) and *idbār al-layl* (the end of night). An example of *mutawāṭiʾ* is the verse: "Then he drew near (*danā*), then he bowed (*tadallā*)."<sup>91</sup> Regarding the "he" in the sentence "he drew near" (*danā*), the exegetes have different opinions. One of them maintained that "he" refers to Gabriel, while the other maintained that "He" refers to God. The case of verses *wa l-fajrī*, *wa layālīn ʿashrin*, *wa sh-shafʿī wa l-watrī* is similar.<sup>92</sup> Ibn Taymiyya asserts that all different meanings of a verse which come from the *salaf* can be accepted for three reasons. First, it was very likely that the verse was revealed two times thus causing a variation in meaning. Second, that the expression itself is *mushtarak*. According to Ibn Taymiyya, most legal schools, like the Mālikites, the Shāfiʿites, the Ḥanbalites and many of the theologians permitted all meanings of that expression. Third, the word or

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 45-7.

<sup>91</sup> Qurʾān, LIII: 8.

<sup>92</sup> According to ʿAdnān Zarzūr, "*al-Fajr*" could refer to "*al-Nahār*" as well as to "*ṣalāt al-ṣubḥ*" See his notes in *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 50.

expression might be *mutawāṭiʿ*. This is also justified in so far as there is no specific qualification (*takhṣīṣ*).<sup>93</sup>

*d. The salaf expressed a meaning with words close in meaning*

The disagreement of the *salaf* is also related to the fact that instead of expressing ideas by using synonyms (*mutarādifāt*) of the words, they rather used approximate words (*alfāḥ mutaqāriba*). To Ibn Taymiyya, the reason for this is clear. Synonym for certain Qurʾanic words are hard to find. What the *salaf* chose then were words which were considered to have meanings close to the first. This is the case with their Qurʾanic interpretations. The word *mawr* in *yawma tamūru s-samāʿu mawrā* (On the day when the heaven will move with (awful) movement)<sup>94</sup> was interpreted *al-ḥaraka*. The word *al-ḥaraka*, according to Ibn Taymiyya, is not a synonym of *al-mawr*, but an approximate word. The word *al-ḥaraka* (movement), however, could be used for *al-mawr* because *al-mawr* itself means "a soft and fast movement". Also *al-waḥy* (revelation) is sometimes interpreted as *al-iʿlām* (information). This is certainly accepted because *al-waḥy* is basically a secret and fast information. Another example is *yaftinūnaka*<sup>95</sup> which is interpreted as *yuzīghūnaka wa yaṣuḍḍūnaka* (to turn you away), or *lā rayb* which is interpreted as *lā ṣhakkā* (no doubt). In the opinion of Ibn Taymiyya, *al-shakk* is also not a synonym of *al-rayb*, but it is a close word, for *al-rayb* implies *iḍṭirāb* (disruption) and *ḥaraka* (movement), while *al-shakk* does not imply such meanings. Again, the same applies to *dhālika al-kitābu* which is understood as *hādhā al-Qurʾānu*. The second is not a synonym of the first. The word *hādhā* refers to something rather

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>94</sup> Qurʾān, LII: 9.

<sup>95</sup> The verse that the expression occurs in is the following: "*wa in kādū layaftinūnaka ʿan al-ladhī awḥaynā ilayka*." See Qurʾān, XVII: 73.

near and present while *dhālika* on the contrary suggests something distant. In addition, *al-kitāb* is not necessarily *al-Qurʾān* for the former is basically something written while *al-Qurʾān* is a word which has more to do with reading. All of these are examples of the disagreements among the *salaf*.<sup>96</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya strongly argues that the disagreement of the *salaf* amounts to diversity not contradiction. Thus, there is no reason to reject their authority in interpreting the Qurʾān. Moreover, he emphasizes, that the disagreements in interpreting the Qurʾān in fact occurred among people who use the method of *istidlāl* (rational method). According to Ibn Taymiyya, the proponents of this method are of two kinds. First, they are the people who have had certain convictions which they try to impose on the words of the Qurʾān. On the other hand are people who interpret the Qurʾān exclusively in terms of the Arab speech, ignoring the speaker (*al-mutakallim bih*), the audience (*mukhāṭab*) and the context (*siyāq al-kalām*). The first group is more concerned with the meaning and the second with the word.

The people whom Ibn Taymiyya accuses of having imposed their beliefs on the Qurʾān are the Khārijites, the Rāfiʿites, the Jahmites, the Muʿtazilites, the Qadarites and Murjiʿites. The Muʿtazilites include ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kaysān al-Aṣamm, al-Shaykh Ibrāhīm ibn ʿUlayya, Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī, al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, ʿAlī ibn ʿIsā al-Rummānī and Abū al-Qāsim al-Zamakhsharī. The later Shīʿites like al-Mufīd, Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī too seem to have been in agreement with the Muʿtazilite doctrines. They, according to Ibn Taymiyya, imposed their beliefs on the Qurʾān, ignoring the interpretations of the Companions of the Prophet, their Followers and the imāms of the Muslims.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 53.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 85.

What is the best *tafsīr* in the opinion of Ibn Taymiyya? The best *tafsīr*, according to him, is that of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. He gives two reasons : first, his *tafsīr* refers to the opinions (*maqālāt*) of the *salaf* with full chains of authority; and second, because in Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* there is no innovation and it was not transmitted from suspect people (*al-muttaḥamūn*) like Muqāṭil ibn Bakīr<sup>98</sup> and al-Kalbī.<sup>99</sup>

#### D. Ibn Taymiyya's *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*

Having discussed Ibn Taymiyya's *salafī*-oriented method and principles of Qur'anic interpretation, it is important to examine his own *tafsīr* closely in order to analyze whether his *tafsīr* merely repeats the *salaf*'s *tafsīr* or he if has distinct ideas and a method of his own. Before discussing the subject, it should be noted that Ibn Taymiyya did not author a complete *tafsīr* such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Fakhr al-Rāzī or Ibn Kathīr did. Therefore, he is usually not regarded as a *mufasssīr* (a Qur'anic exegete),<sup>100</sup> though his thought has never lacked Qur'anic basis, and his writings and *fatwā*s can almost be seen as another kind of Qur'anic commentary. Nor does the absence of a complete Qur'anic commentary reflect the lack of his concern for *tafsīr*. On the contrary, Ibn Taymiyya is very concerned about *tafsīr*s by the *firaq* of his time. He observes that some of the Qur'anic commentaries of his time had not gone substantially beyond repeating what has been said earlier. He says:

---

<sup>98</sup> According to Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, what Ibn Taymiyya probably means is Muqāṭil ibn Sulaymān. See his *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, Vol. 1, 208.

<sup>99</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 90. and his *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*, Vol 13, 385.

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, the list of Qur'anic exegetes by tradition mentioned by Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī in his *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, Vol. 1, 204.

"The Qur'ān has some verses which are clear. A part of it has been explained by Qur'anic exegetes in their books. Some verses, however, are more difficult to interpret. Someone may consult several books on that matter and no *tafsīr* explains it. An author may explain one verse and another may do the same thing. I would like to explain such verses with argument (*bi al-dalīl*) for it is more important than anything and if the meaning of one verse is clear, it is clear for the other similar ones too." <sup>101</sup>

This seems to be one of the reasons why he undertakes an extensive commentary on *al-Ikhlāṣ*, taking 289 pages to explain the meaning of the four verses of that *sūra*. <sup>102</sup> His extensive *tafsīr* on this *sūra* is incomparable to that of any other Qur'anic exegete, for even the most praised *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by al-Ṭabarī does not spend more than four pages on it; <sup>103</sup> *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* by Fakhr al-Rāzī devotes 10 pages to it <sup>104</sup> and the Mu'tazilite al-Zamakhsharī gives merely two pages on this *sūra* to explain the basic principles of his own theological school. <sup>105</sup> Ibn Taymiyya's *tafsīr* on *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* is the longest to date.

### 1. The Place of *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*

The principles and method of Ibn Taymiyya's Qur'anic interpretation, as applied in the *tafsīr* of *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*, will be studied to determine whether he consistently follows his own principles and method or not. The choice for our study here is based on several reasons. First, in terms of the pages devoted to it, this *tafsīr* is his longest commentary by

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. 1, 10.

<sup>102</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 18, 214-503.

<sup>103</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* Vol. 28-30 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1986), 221-224.

<sup>104</sup> Fakhr al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. 31 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī), 174-85.

<sup>105</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, Vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1987), 242-43.



far, compared for instance to his *tafsīr*s on *al-Aʿlā*, *al-Falaq* and *al-Nās* etc.<sup>106</sup> Second, the subject matter of this *sūra* really represents a very central concern of Ibn Taymiyya, viz. *tauḥīd* and its relationship to his principles and methods of Qurʾānic interpretation. This is why his *tafsīr sūrat al-Nūr* has not been chosen here, although it too is long, that *tafsīr* does not fully express his central concern. Third, it is very likely that, for the reasons already noted in his *tafsīr sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*, he would offer the best method to explain and to interpret the issues that he considers significant.

Why does Ibn Taymiyya choose *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* to explain the concept of God's unity rather than another *sūra* or other verses of the Qurʾān, for the theme of God's unity is hardly limited to this *sūra*. One of the reasons is that Ibn Taymiyya regards the value of *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* as equalling one third of the Qurʾān. His view is based on several sound traditions from the Prophet, saying that "*Qul huwa Allāh aḥad*" is equivalent to one third of the Qurʾān.<sup>107</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya does realize that giving preference (*tafḍīl*) to certain parts of the Qurʾān could easily be taken to mean that he lowers the value of the rest. Abū Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, al-Bāqillānī and the *fuqahāʾ* contended that giving preference to one part of the Qurʾān meant to devalue the others while all of them are the word of God (*kalām Allāh*) and the word of God is not divided into parts.<sup>108</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, however, affirms that giving preference to a part has nothing to do with *al-nawʿ* (quality) and *al-ṣifa* (description), but is related to *al-qadr* (value). He contends, that when the Prophet said that *al-Fātiḥa* was neither revealed to the Jews nor the Christians, the implication was that the

<sup>106</sup> See his, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 10 volumes (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1988).

<sup>107</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 103.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

Messenger gave preference to *al-Fātiḥa* over the rest of the Qurʾān.<sup>109</sup> Ibn Taymiyya states that when Abū al-ʿAbbās ibn Surayj was asked the meaning of the Prophet's saying "*Qul huwa Allāh aḥad*" is equivalent to one third of the Qurʾān, he said, it means that the Qurʾān is revealed into three parts: one third of it is legal (*al-aḥkām*), one third is promise and threat (*al-waʿd wa al-waʿid*) and the rest is names and attributes; and *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* encompasses names and attributes. Ibn Taymiyya confirms that this statement is undoubtedly true.<sup>110</sup> As regards the contents of the Qurʾān, he emphasizes that there are two kinds of information in it: information about the Creator (*al-Khāliq*) and about the creature (*al-makhlūq*). In Ibn Taymiyya's reasoning, the former is surely superior to the latter; "*Qul huwa Allāhu aḥad*", where God describes His unity, is certainly higher than "*Tabbat yadā Abī Lahab*" which tells God's punishment of his creatures.<sup>111</sup> In Ibn Taymiyya's view, although the Qurʾān as a whole is the word of God, giving preference to some parts of it is acceptable both on account of the fact that the Prophet himself did so and also because of the nature of revelation. *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* contains, according to Ibn Taymiyya, the best description of God and, therefore, it needs a full interpretation.

## 2. The Purpose of Ibn Taymiyya's *Tafsīr sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*

The main purpose of Ibn Taymiyya's *tafsīr sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* is to explain the true meaning of *tauḥīd* or God's unity. In his view, though the concept of God's existence had been widely accepted by the people of the Book as well as by the Muslims, the way they understood and explained its meaning was unacceptable. In fact, they were far from the true understanding of it. Although the Jews strongly believed in God's unity, for example,

---

<sup>109</sup> See his lengthy discussion on the problem of giving preference to certain parts of the Qurʾān over others. *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, from 103-212 and his own opinion can be seen in page 121.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 103-4, 111-4, 121-2, 135, 138.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 190, 208 and 210

some of them, still insisted on 'Uzayr being the son of God.<sup>112</sup> Likewise, the Christians affirm that Jesus is the son or word of God, despite the fact that they also claim to believe in God's unity.<sup>113</sup> The Arab polytheists, for their part, regarded angels and idols as the sons of God.<sup>114</sup>

The speculative *ṣūfis* are not much better, for they emphasize the unity of God and man (*al-wujūd wāḥid*) while ignoring His uniqueness.<sup>115</sup> In addition, Ibn Taymiyya observes, the *ṣūfis* very often turn their teacher into a holy man, putting him in the position of God. Like the polytheists and some Christians who deify their righteous predecessors and venerate them, the *ṣūfis* also build tombs for their teachers and pray to them for their protection. They often consider praying at the tomb of their teacher better than doing so in the mosque. To Ibn Taymiyya, this attitude cannot be tolerated.<sup>116</sup> Those who affirm that 'Uzayr, Jesus or the angels are sons of God as well as those who insist that there is only One essence imply that they do not recognize an absolute dissimilarity between God and His creation. According to Ibn Taymiyya, such convictions are opposed to the true concept of God which has been emphatically described in *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*.

There are two related words of the *sūra* which are extensively discussed and elaborated on by Ibn Taymiyya, *aḥad* and *al-ṣamad*. To Ibn Taymiyya, the word *aḥad* in "*Qul huwa Allāh aḥad*" (Say: He, God, is one) means "the denial of (the idea of) having a partner" (*nafy al-mushāraka*) with God and "the denial of (making) similarity" (*nafy al-*

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 272-3.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 272-4.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 272-4.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 456, 461 and 463.

*mumāthala* ) between human beings and God, and stresses that God is a unique Being: He is absolutely dissimilar to any other being or existence, the creatures are neither a part of Him nor do they have an essence similar to His. He quotes other verses of the same *sūra* , saying: "He begets not, nor is He begotten and none is like Him " To him, the description of God as *aḥad* (One) means that God is a unique Being.<sup>117</sup> There is no one who can be considered equal to Him as the popular *ṣūfis* have done with their teachers. *Al-ṣamad* means that God does not generate other beings nor does anything emanate from Him.

Ibn Taymiyya observes that misunderstanding the concept of God's unity is also found among the Jahmites, the Muʿtazilites and the Ashʿarites. Insisting on God's unity, the Jahmites consequently reject all attributes and names of God in the Qurʾān.<sup>118</sup> The same is true of the Muʿtazilites: they deny the attributes of God. The Ashʿarites do likewise except for the "informative" attributes of God (*al-ṣifāt al-khabariyya* ). To Ibn Taymiyya, their understanding of God's unity, which leads to a rejection of God's attributes, is misleading because the names and attributes of God are described by God Himself in the Qurʾān. In addition, God describes Himself in *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* as *al-ṣamad*, meaning that God is a perfect being. In fact, Ibn Taymiyya insists, as *al-ṣamad* God even proclaims Himself as the only Being who is entitled to have perfect attributes (*ṣifāt al-kamāl* ). Those names and attributes in the Qurʾān are the perfect names and attributes which are only suitable for Him and they are absolutely dissimilar to those of human beings.<sup>119</sup>

So the main purpose of his *tafsīr sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* is to emphasize God's unity and His uniqueness as well as His absolute dissimilarity either in form or in essence. At the

---

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 449.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 300, 305 and 447.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 452.

same time, while affirming that notion, Ibn Taymiyya rejects any denial of God's names and attributes for these are described in the Qur'ān itself, and he stresses that the affirmation of God's names and attributes does not mean accepting the anthropomorphic sense of them; the latter contradicts the true nature of God as a unique Being absolutely dissimilar to any other creature.

### 3. Ibn Taymiyya's Method in *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*

The main focus of the following discussion is the way Ibn Taymiyya explains the verses of *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*. Reading his *tafsīr sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*, it can generally be said that he consistently follows his principles and method of Qur'anic interpretation: he always uses authorities like the Qur'ān, the *Sunna*, the sayings of the *ṣaḥāba* and the *tābi'ūn* as well as Arabic philologists and even poets to argue what he believes is the true meaning of the verses.

Although *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*, so far as its words are concerned, is hard to interpret through other verses of the Qur'ān, Ibn Taymiyya still comes up with verses functioning as additional explanation. Insisting on his notion that generation (*tawallud*) must be from two *aṣl*s. Ibn Taymiyya, for example, cites the verse of the Qur'ān: "How could He have a son when he has no consort."<sup>120</sup> Al-Dhahabī's admiration for Ibn Taymiyya's astonishing fluency in citing the verses of the Qur'ān to make his point appears quite justified in case of this *tafsīr*.<sup>121</sup> Ibn Taymiyya believes, after all, that the best interpretation of the Qur'ān is through the Qur'ān itself. So in so far as he finds an

---

<sup>120</sup> Qur'ān, VI: 101 which he quotes in *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 222.

<sup>121</sup> See 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Umayra's introduction in Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. 1, 63. The same is also said by his pupils and his other contemporaries. See Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 73-4.

explanation in the Qurʾān itself, Ibn Taymiyya would first refer to it. But in case he does not find it, he would refer to the *Sunna*, the Prophet's sayings or actions.

In this *tafsīr*, the tradition is invoked too and mostly in relation to the occasion of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*). The function of *sabab al-nuzūl* is in Qurʾānic exegesis, as Andrew Rippin puts it, is to create an edifying narrative in which interpretation of a given Qurʾānic verse may be embodied.<sup>122</sup> The *asbāb al-nuzūl* make the reader understand that the verses of the Qurʾān are very often revealed in responding to certain questions or circumstances of the people at the time of the Prophet, and helps him make a proper interpretation of it. One example concerns the verse: "*lā ikrāha fī-l-dīni*" (There should be no coercion in religion). It is not clear whether this verse refers to family, community or others. According to *sabab al-nuzūl*, the verses were revealed when the Christian converts to Islam tried to force their sons to follow their new religion;<sup>123</sup> from this it is clear that the intended message of the text concerns even the parents. It can be said therefore that Islam teaches individual religious freedom. This interpretation is made possible by reference to the occasion of this verse's revelation.

Ibn Taymiyya cites different traditions of the Prophet on the revelational background of *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* and each report about the occasion of revelation is not necessarily the same. As regards this *sūra*, four different reasons are given as its the background. First, it is said on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās that this *sūra* was revealed in response to ʿĀmir ibn al-Ṭufayl who asked the Prophet: "To what do you call us, O Muḥammad?" The Prophet said: "To God" He said: "Describe Him to me. Is He made of

---

<sup>122</sup> Andrew Rippin, *The Quranic asbāb al-nuzūl material: an analysis of its use and development in exegesis*, Ph.D. dissertation, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1980, v.

<sup>123</sup> Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, Vol. 3, 10.

gold or silver or iron?" Then this *sūra* was revealed. <sup>124</sup> Second, it is reported on the authority of Ubayy ibn Ka'b in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal that the *sūra* was revealed when the Arab polytheists asked the Messenger of God to tell them about his God. <sup>125</sup> Third, it is stated on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās that a group of Christians from Najrān came to the Prophet with seven bishops from Banū al-Ḥārith ibn Ka'b. They said to the Prophet: "Describe for us your God, of what is He made?" The Prophet said: "My God is not made of anything. He is different from everything." Then God revealed this *sūra*. <sup>126</sup> In another tradition, on the authority of Abū Saʿīd, those people who asked the Prophet about God were a group of Jews. The following is that tradition, as cited by Ibn Taymiyya:<sup>127</sup>

"Ibn Ḥamīd told us, from Salama, from Ibn Ishāq, from Muḥammad ibn Saʿīd, saying: "A group of the Jews came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and said: O, Muḥammad! It is God who created the creatures. Who created Him?" The Prophet, peace be upon him, became angry whose voice expressed his upsetness (*intaqaʿa*) and he attacked (*sāwara*) them with anger for his God. Then angel Gabriel came and he calmed the Prophet down and said: "Make lower your humble (*janāh*), O Muḥammad" And the answer from God came to him to reply what they asked. He said: God says: "Say, He, God, is one" till the end of the *sūra*. When Prophet, peace be upon him, read it for them, they said to him: "Describe for us your God, how is His temper, how is His arm, how is His hand, how is His forearm. The Prophet became more angry than the first occasion and attacked them. Gabriel came and said to him (the Prophet) something similar to what he said the first time. He (Gabriel) came with the answer to what they asked and God revealed "And they measured not God with His true measure " <sup>128</sup>

So, Ibn Taymiyya refers to the Prophet's traditions mostly for *asbāb al-nuzūl* of the *sūra* but not for the proper meaning of words for it is very likely that the Prophet's

---

<sup>124</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 451.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

<sup>127</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 222-3.

<sup>128</sup> Qurʾān, VI: 91.

traditions do not provide such meanings. The case is different when he refers to the *ṣaḥāba* like Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn Masʿūd, Ubayy ibn Kaʿb, Anas ibn Mālīk, Saʿīd ibn Jubayr or Abū Hurayra and the *tābiʿūn* like Mujāhid, ʿIkrima, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, al-Shaʿbī, Saʿīd ibn Musayyab, al-Suddī. Although he refers several times to them in relation to *asbāb al-nuzūl*, those authorities are frequently referred to for the true meaning of words. In this respect, Ibn Taymiyya states that their sayings might sometimes appear as disagreement, but in fact they are not. Different opinions are equally valid.

What is striking in this *tafsīr* is that Ibn Taymiyya also refers to the opinions of Arabic philologists (*ahl al-lughā*) like Ibn Qutayba, Abū Bakr al-Anbārī, al-Jawharī, Abū al-Najm and Yaḥyā ibn Kathīr and even poets like al-Ṭarafa<sup>129</sup> and al-Nābigha.<sup>130</sup> Though he does urge Qurʾanic exegetes in his *Muqaddima* to seek their help in understanding the Qurʾān, Ibn Taymiyya does not mention them as authorities in interpreting the Qurʾān. In this *tafsīr*, he brings forth linguistic arguments and cites the authorities in Arabic philological studies. However, his reference to Arabic philologists is not intended as a basis of his opinion but only a device to elaborate the basic meaning laid down by the *salaf* like Ibn ʿAbbās. In other words, his reference to Arabic philologists is complementary rather than primary.

Referring to these authorities and recognizing that they are not in disagreement, Ibn Taymiyya tries to arrive at his own formulation. His emphasis on the authority of the *salaf* does not necessarily mean merely repeating their sayings. As regards this *sūra*, he gives a new context, examples, formulation and elaboration. His exegesis of the term *al-ṣamad* is a case in point.

---

<sup>129</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 217.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.



#### 4. Ibn Taymiyya's Exegesis of *al-ṣamad*

Ibn Taymiyya states that *al-ṣamad* has two meanings: first, it means "a being with no inside" and second, "the lord on whom someone in need depends." The first meaning, he states, is held by the majority of the *ṣaḥāba* like Ibn Maṣ'ūd and Ibn 'Abbās and *tābi'ūn* like Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Mujāhid, Sa'īd ibn Musayyab, Sa'īd ibn Jubayr, 'Ikrima, Maysara, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, al-Suddī, Qatāda and some of the Arabic philologists like Ibn Qutayba. The second meaning is held by the majority of the Arabic philologists like al-Anbārī as well as some of the *salaf* such as Ibn 'Abbās.<sup>131</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya reports that, according to Ibn 'Abbās, *al-ṣamad* is "a being with no inside" (*lā jawfa lah*). The same is stated by another great Companion of the Prophet, Ibn Maṣ'ūd, who says that it is "a being with no interior" (*lā aḥshā'a lah*). This is confirmed by one of the *tābi'ūn*, Sa'īd ibn Musayyab who says, it denotes something *lā ḥashwa lah*. Al-Sha'bī, too states that *al-ṣamad* is "a being who neither eats nor drinks." 'Ikrima states that it is "a being from whom nothing else comes out." In addition, Maysara affirms that the term refers to a "solid" being (*muṣmat*). Ibn Qutayba, one of the great Arabic philologists, says that the word *al-ṣamad* is to be understood by changing the *dāl* to *tā'*: from *al-ṣamad* to *al-ṣamat*, viz. something solid.<sup>132</sup>

In explaining the meaning of verses in this *sūra*, Ibn Taymiyya always tries to cite his authorities in full. One of his examples is as follow:

---

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 214-5.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

"Ḥakam ibn Maʿbad reported in *Kitāb al-Radd ʿalā al-Jahmiyya* from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Nuʿmān who reported from Salama ibn Shabīb who reported from Yahyā ibn ʿAbd Allāh who reported from Ḍarar who reported from Abūn from Anas. He said: 'The Jews of Khaybar came to the Prophet, peace be upon him. They said: 'O, Abū al-Qāsim, God created angels from light of darkness (*nūr al-ḥijāb*), Ādam from fetid mire (*ḥamaʿ masnūn*) and Satan from the flame of fire, the sky from smog and earth from the essence of water, tell us about your God. He (Anas) said: the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not answer them. Then, Gabriel came and said: O, Muḥammad!: 'Say: He, God, is One. God is He on Whom all depend. He begets not, nor is He begotten. And none is like Him.' He has no stems that become branches. '*Al-ṣamad*' is a being which has nothing inside. He neither eats nor drinks, he begets not, nor is He begotten and none is like him. There is no one from His creature equivalent to His position and (He) restrains the skies and the earth from their destruction (*zawāl*).'" <sup>133</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya also cites the saying of Ibn ʿAbbās for the second meaning of *al-ṣamad*. As regards this meaning, he mentions his chains of authorities as follows:

"Ubayy told me that Abū Ṣāliḥ reported from Muʿāwiya ibn Ṣāliḥ from ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalḥa from Ibn ʿAbbās, who said: *al-ṣamad* is the Lord whose power is perfect, the noble Being whose nobleness is perfect, the exalted (One) whose greatness is perfect, the Omniscient being whose knowledge is perfect, the Judge whose decision is perfect. He is One whose nobleness and authority are perfect. He is God Praiseworthy, the sublime. The description of Him is not suited to anyone but Him, there is nothing comparable to Him and nothing similar to Him, praise be to God, the One, the Almighty." <sup>134</sup>

Along the lines of the second meaning, according to Ibn Taymiyya, Abū Hurayra, one of the Companions of the Prophet, said: *al-ṣamad* is "a being who does not need anyone, but is needed by everyone." Furthermore, Abū Wʿil, one of the *tābiʿūn*, said that it means "the Lord whose power reaches the highest levels." In addition, ʿIkrima said that it means "the being above or beyond whom there is no one." Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, a converted Jew and one of the Companions of the Prophet, stated that *al-ṣamad* is "the

---

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 223-4.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 220.

being who cannot be compared to anyone of His creatures." Furthermore, al-Suddī, from among the *tābi'ūn*, asserted that it is "the Being intended in a state of desire and besought in a state of calamity." To Sa'īd ibn Jubayr, the meaning of *al-ṣamad* is "the Being who is perfect in His attributes and actions." According to Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān, it is "the Being who has no defect." In line with that meaning, Ibn Kaysān said, *al-ṣamad* is "the Being to whom no one can be compared." Ibn Taymiyya says that, according to al-Anbārī, all Arabic philologists agree that *al-ṣamad* is "the Lord above whom there is no one and who is the one sought by people in their needs and affairs." <sup>135</sup>

Having presented both meanings of *al-ṣamad*, with their respective authorities, Ibn Taymiyya maintains that the argument of the majority of the *salaf* and some Arabic philologists that *al-ṣamad* is the Being who has no inside" are more convincing (*adall*) because from the etymological point of view too (*ishtiqaq*), such meaning is well founded. Therefore, he says:

"*Ishtiqaq* bears out both opinions, the opinion of someone who says that *al-ṣamad* is "a being who has no inside" and someone who says that it is the "lord". The first opinion is more cogent for it is the root (*asl*) for the second; and in language the expression *al-ṣamad* is used to designate something which has no inside. Yaḥyā ibn Abī Kathīr said: the angel is *ṣamad* (has no inside) and the sons of Adam are *jūf* (have inside). In a tradition concerning Adam, Iblīs told about him that he (Adam) is *ajwaf* (has inside) and he is not *ṣamad* (has no inside). And al-Jawharī said: *al-muṣmad* from the point of view of language is *al-muṣmat* (something solid) and it has no inside. He (al-Jawharī) said: *al-ṣamād* is *ʿifāṣ al-qārūra* (the lid of a long-necked bottle). <sup>136</sup> And he said that *al-ṣamad* is the rugged elevated place. And the basis of the matter is *al-jamʿ* (joining) and *al-quwwa* (strength) <sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>136</sup> Al-Jawharī states that *al-ʿifāṣ* is a leather which is used for the head of long necked bottle. Ibid., 227.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 226.

Arguing that the first meaning can also be traced to the root of the word, Ibn Taymiyya analyzes the nature of its letters and compares it to the letters of other similar word. He takes *al-ṣamam*, *al-ṣawm*, *al-ṣamat* and *al-ṣabr* as his examples. According to Ibn Taymiyya, the meaning of *ṣamam al-qārūra*, as al-Jawharī says, is "the lid of a long necked bottle", *al-ḥajar al-aṣamm* is "hard and solid stone", and *rajul ṣamm* is "a strong man."<sup>138</sup> He goes on to say that the same is applied to *al-ṣawm*. The meaning of this word is to refrain (*al-imsāk*). Abū 'Ubayda said: everyone who refrains from eating, talking or walking is *ṣā'im* (a fasting man). And the fasting man does not take anything inside.<sup>139</sup> Ibn Taymiyya argues that the meaning of *ṣamad* is *lā jawf*, like *al-muṣmad* and *al-muṣmat* which mean "having no inside"; but he also notes that the letter *dāl* in *al-ṣamad* is stronger than *tā'* in *al-ṣamat*, and the stronger the letter the more powerful its meaning.<sup>140</sup> The same is the case with *al-ṣabr*. To him, *al-ṣabr* is joining (*al-jam'*) and refraining (*al-imsāk*). Therefore, it is said that *al-ṣabr* is to restrain the self from mourning (*al-jaza'*). In relation to food, *al-ṣabra* means to be *mujtami'a* (joined) and *mukawwana* (accumulated) and *al-ṣabāra* means *al-ḥijāra* (stone). Ibn Taymiyya asserts that *ṣabr al-shay'* is *ghilazuh* (the ruggedness of a thing) and its opposite meaning is *al-jaza'*, which means disjointed, disconnected (*taqaṭtu'*) and divided (*tafarruq*).<sup>141</sup>

It is interesting and somewhat intriguing to see Ibn Taymiyya so concerned to affirm that the primary meaning of *al-ṣamad* is that of "a being who has no inside or interior" or that "*al-ṣamad*" is something solid, strong, undivided, unseparated, accumulated, etc.. His main purpose, as mentioned above, is to declare the superiority of the

---

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 232-3.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 233.

*salaf* 's opinion. In addition, the purpose also is to affirm God's absolute unity and uniqueness. By affirming God's unity in this way, Ibn Taymiyya simultaneously refutes the belief of the Arab polytheists that the angels are the sons of God, and of the philosophers that the world necessitates the first cause (*al-ʿilla al-ūlā*)<sup>142</sup> which comes about like the generation of a child from its mother, and of some of the Jews who claimed that ʿUzayr is the son of God and of the Christians that Jesus is a son and a word of God. The exegesis of *al-ṣamad*, for Ibn Taymiyya, is the means of refuting them all. Insisting that God is *al-ṣamad* who has no inside, is solid, rugged and strong, he maintains that this notion rejects the idea of generation (*tawallud*), division (*taqaṭṭuʿ*, *tabaʿuḍ*, *inqisām*), separation (*tafarruq*) and fragmentation (*tajziʿa*). Quoting the two following verses of the *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*, he insists that the word *al-ṣamad* indicates that God does not beget and he is not begotten and nothing is similar to Him. For *al-tawallud* a second being (*aṣl ākhar*) is necessary. Jesus himself was generated through the angel Gabriel's blowing the spirit into Mary. Any generation (*tawallud*) needs two *aṣl*s. So, in Ibn Taymiyya's view, to hold beliefs such as those of the Arab polytheists, philosophers, some of the Jews and Christians is to oppose the fundamental meaning of *al-ṣamad*.<sup>143</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya also regards the second meaning of *al-ṣamad*, held by the majority of Arab philologists, as correct. In terms of the second set of meanings of the second meaning of *al-ṣamad*, viz. "the Lord on whom someone in need depends" or "the being like whom there is no one", or "the being who has no one above him", or "the being who has no one comparable to him", or "the being who has no defect", or "the being who does not need anybody but is needed by everybody", Ibn Taymiyya is able to bring into relief the second emphasis of the meaning of *al-ṣamad*, i.e. that God is the only One who

---

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 293-5.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 238-9.

deserves all the perfect attributes. So, in Ibn Taymiyya's opinion, the second meaning of *al-ṣamad* is pivotal in affirming the perfect attributes mentioned in the Qur'ān. This understanding is of course radically opposed to that of the Mu'tazilites who regard *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* as a basis for denying the attributes of God.

Ibn Taymiyya recognizes that the word *ṣamad* in the indefinite form (without *alif* and *lām*) is often used in the Arabic language, but in *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*, *al-ṣamad* is used in the definite form (with *alif* and *lām*). To Ibn Taymiyya, this means that God is the *only* One who deserves the perfect attributes. He mentions other reasons: "And the creature, though in some respects he is *ṣamad*, the essence of *ṣamad* is absent from him for he has the attributes of separation and division, and in addition he depends on Him." <sup>144</sup>

#### 5. Analysis of Ibn Taymiyya's *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*:

As for the question raised above, whether Ibn Taymiyya essentially repeats the *salaf's* opinions or also expresses his own, this *tafsīr* shows him to be a faithful follower of the *salaf*. He maintains that to acquire a true understanding of Islam on a matter for instance such as God's unity, two things are needed. One of them is the following:

"...to know the words of the Book and the *Sunna* as they are intended by God and His messenger, peace be upon him, to know the language of the Qur'ān in which it was revealed and what was said by the *ṣaḥāba* and the people who followed them in goodness as well as some *ʿulamāʾ al-muslimīn* about the meaning of those words, because when the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, addressed them with the Book and the *Sunna*, he explained what is intended by those words. And the *ṣaḥāba*'s knowledge of the meaning of the Qur'ān is more perfect than their memorization of its words. And they conveyed those meanings to the *tābiʿūn*, and the meanings are greater than these words which they conveyed, because the general meanings that were needed by common Muslims are like the meaning of *al-*

---

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 238.

*tauḥīd* , *al-wāḥid* , *al-aḥad* , *al-īmān* , *al-islām* and so on. All *ṣaḥāba* knew what is loved by God and His messenger, peace be upon him ..." <sup>145</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya's *salafī* outlook is manifested in his strong emphasis, for example, that the first meaning of *al-ṣamad* , which he sees as the opinion of the majority of the *salaf* , is superior to the second meaning held by the majority of Arabic philologists. However, he does not limit himself to their argument. Considering it necessary to show that the meaning of *lā jawf* is superior to other meanings, this Hanbalite theologian argues that this meaning is not only proved by sayings of the majority of the *salaf* , but it is also supported by philological findings. He goes on to maintain that *al-ṣamad* 's meaning of *lā jawf* can also be seen in other similar words like *al-ṣamat* , *al-ṣamam* , *al-ṣawm* and *al-ṣabr* and their derivations. Arguing that *al-ṣamad* philologically means *lā jawf* (a being who has no inside or is solid or something strong), Ibn Taymiyya affirms that the same is applied to *al-ṣamam* in the expression *al-ḥajar al-aṣamm* which means *al-ḥajar al-ṣalb* (strong or hard stone); or to *al-ṣawm* which means "to refrain from taking anything inside "; or *al-ṣabr* in its derivation, *al-ṣibāra* which means *al-ḥijāra* (stone). With this method, Ibn Taymiyya basically elaborates the *salaf* 's argument. Such an effort is not found in al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī or Fakhr al-Rāzī. These earlier Qur'anic exegetes, at least regarding *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* , seem to consider it sufficient to mention *lā jawf* as one of the meaning of *al-ṣamad* and they do not lay special emphasis on this particular meaning as Ibn Taymiyya does.

Another example of his *new* arguments to prove the opinion of the *salaf* concerns the idea of *tawallud* (generation). The meaning of *al-ṣamad* , he says, is *lā jawf* (a being who has no inside). This notion is discussed by the *salaf* to refute any idea of generation or bearing a child, as claimed by some of the Jews, the Christians or by the

---

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 353.

Arab polytheists, and to stress the oneness of God. It is interesting that Ibn Taymiyya goes on to argue that any *tawallud* be it among animal or trees, cannot happen except with two beings (*aṣlayn*). Even fire, he notes, must come out from *zandayn* (a primitive device for kindling fire), either two pieces of wood or iron and stone. Referring to the Qurʾān "Have you considered the fire which you strike? Is it you that produce the trees for it, or are We the producers?"<sup>146</sup>, he notes that in the opinion of more than one Qurʾānic exegete, one of two trees that produce fire is said to be male (*al-markh*) and the other is female (*al-ʿifār*).<sup>147</sup> God, however, is a unity, therefore, the idea of generation as well as bearing a child is impossible for Him and must be rejected.

Another striking feature of Ibn Taymiyya's *tafsīr sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* is that he offers some new formulation as well. His emphasis on the view that *al-ṣamad* means that God is the only One who deserves to have perfect attributes is one example of this. This emphasis does not go back to the *salaf* or to the earlier Qurʾānic exegetes mentioned above. Although he does refer certainly to the statement of the *salaf* that the word *al-ṣamad* denotes "the Lord on whom someone in need depends" or "the being to whom none can be likened" or "the highest being" and so on, Ibn Taymiyya arrives at a new formulation, viz. that *al-ṣamad* means the being who is entitled to have the perfect attributes. Ibn Taymiyya seeks thereby to refute those who deny God's attributes. It is certain that this new formulation does not convey a new opinion, for the *salaf* had already affirmed God's attributes; but the way Ibn Taymiyya formulates this view and the emphasis he gives it are completely new.

---

<sup>146</sup> Qurʾān, LVI: 71-2.

<sup>147</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatawā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, 17, 241-2.



It was probably necessary for Ibn Taymiyya to develop new arguments on God's unity for he was faced with growing followers of popular *ṣūfī* master's like Ibn ʿAṭā Allāh in Egypt as well as speculative *ṣūfis* like Ibn Sabʿīn ( a follower of Ibn ʿArabī).<sup>148</sup> In addition, the Shīʿites were growing stronger in certain parts of the Muslim world. There also were admirers of philosophical convictions, one of whom Ibn Taymiyya was to meet in prison. Again, his was a time when the Ashʿarites dominated the theological scene. Moreover, some Christians of Cyprus had recently produced an apology of their concept of God.<sup>149</sup> All these groups, in the view of Ibn Taymiyya, had misunderstood the concept of God either because they acknowledged the emanation of the creatures from God (as the philosophers and speculative *ṣūfis* did) or believed that God had a son ( as the Christians did) or denied (like the Ashʿarites) some of the attributes of God or elevated human beings to the position of God (like the followers of popular *ṣūfis* and the Shīʿites). Such misconceptions about God needed to be rectified. Ibn Taymiyya does realize that these theological challenges were not new, they had to some degree been answered by some of his predecessors like Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal; but the persistence and recurrence of challenges made him feel that he too had to respond to them, and with a stronger argument and a finer formulation.

Ibn Taymiyya is convinced that his understanding of God is *salafī* and the only true one. Such conviction makes it religiously incumbent upon him to refute anyone that he considers to have departed from the true understanding of the *salaf*. His works are therefore frequently polemical in character, and his thought can never be separated from the circumstances he lived in and the issues confronting him. Consequently, his thought is far from being mere intellectual exercise. Ibn Taymiyya was an activist theologian who was

---

<sup>148</sup> Muhammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taymīya's Struggle Against Popular Religion*, 5.

<sup>149</sup> Thomas F. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity* (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1984), vii.

fully aware that religious beliefs ought to be translated into action regardless of counter-criticism and imprisonment. This spirit is amply reflected in his *tafsīr sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*.

### CHAPTER THREE

## THE ORIGINALITY OF THE PRINCIPLES OF IBN TAYMIYYA'S QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION

How do Ibn Taymiyya's principles of Qur'anic interpretation compare to those of previous thinkers? Ibn Taymiyya's views on Qur'anic interpretation, scattered in several of his writings, have already been studied in the previous chapter. The main purpose of this chapter is to show that Ibn Taymiyya does not only preserve the ideas of previous thinkers but also contributes new arguments and insights to the method of interpreting the Qur'ān by tradition ( *al-tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* ).

#### A. The School of Ibn Taymiyya's *Tafsīr*

There are some characteristics of the *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* school which Ibn Taymiyya shares. The adherents of this school believe that the best method of Qur'anic interpretation is by referring to what is explained in another part of the Qur'ān, or to the Prophet's traditions, or to the sayings of the Companions of the Prophet or to those of their Followers (*tābi'ūn*).<sup>1</sup> They emphasize the superiority of these authorities over reason and some of them tend to distrust the ability of reason even to determine the meaning of the Qur'ān.<sup>2</sup> Their belief is that the Prophet had explained the meaning of the Qur'ān to his Companions and then the latter had passed it on to the *tābi'ūn*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Muḥammad Husayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, Vol. 3 (Cairo: Dār 'Ālam al-Kutub al-Hadītha, 1961), 152.

<sup>2</sup> See the standpoint of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī regarding *ra'y* (personal opinion) in his *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1986), 27.

Since the purpose of this study is to show where Ibn Taymiyya's emphases differ and the new arguments he adduces in support of *tafsīr bi al-maṭhūr*, it is necessary to compare his thought regarding the principles of Qur'anic interpretation to that of the previous thinkers of the same school. This will enable us to identify what ideas already existed before Ibn Taymiyya and what were contributed by him. A comparison of his principles to those of other schools can also help place his thought in a broader framework but such a comparison will not help in assessing the precise contribution of Ibn Taymiyya to principles of Qur'anic interpretation according to the school of thought he claimed to belong to.

Therefore, it would not be proper to compare Ibn Taymiyya's view on the principles of Qur'anic interpretation to those of al-Ghazālī or al-Zamakhsharī or Ibn ʿArabī or al-Ṭabarsī, for those thinkers had views fundamentally different from Ibn Taymiyya's. Al-Ghazālī, for example, believed that the Prophet did not explain the Qur'ān except in so far as some of its verses are concerned. Consequently, al-Ghazālī rejected the interpretation of the Qur'ān by tradition unless the latter is transmitted soundly from the Prophet Muḥammad (*masmūʿ wa musnad ilayh*). In addition, in his opinion, the different sayings of the Companions of the Prophet as well as those of the *tābiʿūn* are basically the expression of their own opinion for if they were truly transmitted from the Prophet they would not have such differences as they exhibit. Al-Ghazālī suggested therefore that it is not necessary for the later Muslim generations to follow their opinions.<sup>3</sup> He maintained that the apparent meaning of the Qur'ān is not the ultimate meaning of it, and he stressed the

---

<sup>3</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, Vol. 1 (Damascus: Dār al-Khayr, 1990), 385; Muhammad Abul Quasem, "Al-Ghazālī in Defence of Ṣūfistic Interpretation of the Qur'ān", *Islamic Culture*, 1, 1979, 66. This article includes an English translation of part of al-Ghazālī's view on interpretation of the Qur'ān by personal opinion, 68-79. See idem, *The Recitation and Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1982) 86-104. Abū Zahra, *Ibn Taymiyya, ḥayātuh wa ʿaṣruh, ārāʾuh wa fiqhuh* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, n.d.), 229.

inner and outer meanings of the Qurʾān. Such notions are not found in Ibn Taymiyya's thought. As for the Muʿtazilite exegete al-Zamakhsharī, he basically held the view that it is sufficient to interpret the Qurʾān rationally through examining the language of the verses; for him, in fact even *al-Sunna* has only a supplementary role, after rational reasoning.<sup>4</sup> In addition, he did not deem the sayings of the Companions and their Followers to be authoritative, though he used them for determining *sabab a-nuzūl* etc.<sup>5</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī's thought was rooted in his faith in the superiority of reason, and a belief that human reason could determine the meaning of a verse.<sup>6</sup> In case of disagreement between the apparent meaning of the verse and rational understanding, al-Zamakhsharī held that the former has to be adjusted according to the latter. It should be borne in mind that the purpose of Qurʾanic commentary according to the Muʿtazilites is also to make clear what they regarded as the *mutashābih* verses of the Qurʾān.<sup>7</sup> Nor can Ibn Taymiyya be properly compared to Ibn ʿArabī, for this master of speculative ṣūfis based his *tafsīr* on a completely different notion, viz. the notion of the union of man and God.<sup>8</sup> In addition, although Ibn ʿArabī, like al-Ghazālī, remained committed to the apparent or the external meaning of the Qurʾān, he

---

<sup>4</sup> Muṣṭafā al-Ṣāwī al-Juwaynī, *Manhaj al-Zamakhsharī fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān wa Bayān Iṣṭizāh* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, n.d.), 93, 95 and Lutpi Ibrahim, "The Relation of Reason and Revelation in the Theology of al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī", *Islamic Culture*, 1, 1980, 95.

<sup>5</sup> Muṣṭafā al-Ṣāwī al-Juwaynī, *Manhaj al-Zamakhsharī*, 154-5 and al-Shahḥāt Zaghlūl, *al-Ittijāhāt al-Fikriyya fī al-Tafsīr* (Alexandria: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li al-Kutub, 1975), 214.

<sup>6</sup> Muṣṭafā al-Ṣāwī al-Juwaynī, *Manhaj al-Zamakhsharī*, 107-8. and Lutpi Ibrahim, "The Relation of Reason", 63.

<sup>7</sup> Ignaz Goldziher, *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr al-Islāmī*, Trans. by ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm al-Najjār (Cairo-Baghdad: Maktabat al-Khanjī and Maktabat al-Muthannā, 1955), 152; Muṣṭafā al-Ṣāwī al-Juwaynī, *Manhaj al-Zamakhsharī*, 109; Naṣr Abū Zayd, *al-Ittijāh al-ʿAqlī fī al-Tafsīr, dirāsa fī qaḍiyyat al-majāz fī al-Qurʾān ʿind al-muʿtazila* (Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr, 1982), 244-45.

<sup>8</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, Vol. 3 (Cairo: Dār ʿĀlam al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1961), 72 and 77.

also greatly emphasized the importance of allusions (*ishārāt*) of the Qurʾān and criticized the interpretation of the Qurʾān by mere tradition which he regarded as causing loss of its spiritual dimension.<sup>9</sup> Ibn Taymiyya is also different from al-Ṭabarsī for this Shīʿite exegete distrusted the traditions of the Companions circulating among the Sunnites, and particularly those which contradicted the Shīʿite beliefs<sup>10</sup> relying instead on the authority of imām ʿAlī and his descendants.<sup>11</sup> On a theological question like seeing God in Heaven, he was also influenced by the Muʿtazilite point of view. All these thinkers are very different from Ibn Taymiyya. For the latter insists that the Prophet had explained all meaning of the Qurʾān and emphasizes the authority of the sayings of his Companions and even those of the *tābiʿūn*.<sup>12</sup> Such authorities, to him, are superior to reason.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, this study would only compare the principles of Qurʾanic interpretation as proposed by Ibn Taymiyya to those of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. According to Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, there are eight outstanding Qurʾanic exegetes whose *tafsīr*s have had wide circulation and who can be seen as the representatives of the *tafsīr bi al-maʾthūr* school. They are Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d.983), Abū Ishāq al-Thaʿlabī (d.1035), Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn al-Baghawī (d.1118), Ibn ʿAṭīyya

---

<sup>9</sup> Goldziher, *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr al-Islāmī*, 267 and 274-5 and Helmut Gätje, *The Qurʾān and its Exegesis*, Transl. by Alford T. Welch (London-Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 40-1. For a further discussion of the principles of Ibn ʿArabī's Qurʾanic interpretation, see Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Falsafat al-Taʾwīl, dirāsa fī taʾwīl al-Qurʾān ʿind Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Waḥda, 1983).

<sup>10</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, Vol. 2, 37.

<sup>11</sup> Mahmoud Ayoub, "The Speaking Qurʾān and the Silent Qurʾān: A Study of Principles and Development of Imāmī Shīʿī *tafsīr*" in Andrew Rippin (Ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 185.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, Ed. by ʿAdnān Zarzūr (Kuwait: Dār al-Qurʾān al-Karīm, 1971), 93-105.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 79.

al-Andalusī (d.1154), Abū al-Fidā' al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Kathīr (d.1373) 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Tha'ālībī (d.1497) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d.1505).<sup>14</sup> Of these eight, the first five Qur'anic commentators lived before Ibn Taymiyya. It is unfortunate, however, that none of them except Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī elaborated principles of Qur'anic interpretation. For the purposes of this study, this great exegete is the most appropriate thinker to be compared to Ibn Taymiyya. Although he was not a Ḥanbalite, his principles of Qur'anic interpretation share with Ibn Taymiyya the same fundamental convictions.

### **B. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d.923)**

The principles of Qur'anic interpretation as articulated by Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī were foreshadowed in some of the ideas of earlier Muslim thinkers. Muḥammad Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d.820) believed, for instance, that the Qur'ān and the Prophet's sound traditions (*al-sunna al-thābita*) are a unity and cannot be separated, for in his view both are revelation.<sup>15</sup> In his *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of legal reasoning), the Prophet's traditions serve to explain the generality of the Qur'ān even though they might be *al-akhbār al-āḥād*.<sup>16</sup> Sharing this opinion, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal insisted that the Qur'ān and *Sunna* are inseparable, and the *Sunna* explains the apparent, the inner, the specific, the general, the abrogating and the abrogated verses of the Qur'ān. He maintained that it is the Messenger of God who elaborated the meaning of the Holy Book. Therefore, it is not allowed to interpret the

---

<sup>14</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, Vol. 1, 204.

<sup>15</sup> Abū Zahra, *Al-Shāfi'ī, ḥayātuh wa 'aṣruh, āra'uh wa fiqhuh* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1948), 184.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

Qurʾān through *raʾy* (personal opinion) or allegorically or to disregard what has been explained by the Prophet.<sup>17</sup>

Both al-Shāfiʿī<sup>18</sup> and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal stated that in case explanation of the Qurʾān was not found in the *Sunna*, the interpreter must seek the explanation of the Prophet's Companions or of one of them in case of a difference of opinion. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal believed that the Companions very likely witnessed the occasions of revelation and undoubtedly understood its content and, in addition they knew and heard directly the Prophet's tradition. Consequently it is very likely that their understanding of the Qurʾān was derived from the *Sunna* itself.<sup>19</sup> Al-Shāfiʿī asserted that although the Companions might say something on the basis of their opinions, their opinion is still better than ours.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Henri Laoust, "Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, Ed. by B. Lewis, V.L. Menage et al., Vol. III, 1971, 275.

<sup>18</sup> Abū Zahra, *Al-Shāfiʿī*, 182.

<sup>19</sup> Abū Zahra, *Ibn Ḥanbal ḥayātuh wa ʿasruh ārāʾuh wa fiqhuh* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, n.d.), 210-11 and Henri Laoust, "Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal", *the Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, 275.

<sup>20</sup> Abū Zahra, *al-Shāfiʿī*, 182. Some modern scholars, like Amīn al-Khūlī, often base themselves on the saying of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal: "Three things have no *aṣl* or *isnād* (chain of authority): *al-tafsīr*, *al-malāḥim* and *al-maghāzī*", and al-Shāfiʿī's statement: "Ibn ʿAbbās only has about one hundred traditions" to suggest that even among earlier Muslim scholars, including al-Shāfiʿī and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, there was a sceptical attitude toward the reliability of tradition in *tafsīr*. Therefore, al-Khūlī proposes a literary approach to understanding the Qurʾān as an alternative to *tafsīr bi al-maʾthūr*. See Amīn al-Khūlī, *Manāḥij Tajdīd fī al-Naḥw wa al-Balāgha wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1961), 274 and 276. However, the point of the statement by al-Shāfiʿī or Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal is not to reject Qurʾānic interpretation by tradition. On the contrary, their critical stance toward tradition in *tafsīr* is because of their defence of *tafsīr bi al-maʾthūr*. Therefore, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, for example, regretted the fact that reliable traditions from the Companions to explain the Qurʾān were available but not used by commentators. He said: "In Egypt there is *tafsīr* of Ibn ʿAbbās which is reported by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalḥa but not many go to Egypt for it." (Goldziher, *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr al-Islāmī*, 98). His statement expressed his concern that so often the Qurʾān was interpreted without taking advantage of reliable traditions reported by Ibn ʿAbbās, one of the most authoritative Companions of the Prophet in *tafsīr*. In addition, they not only regarded the Companions of the Prophet as



To him, the only kind of personal opinion that can be tolerated is *qiyās* (analogy).<sup>21</sup> Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal believed that there is no issue in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* which has not been explained by the Companions, either precisely or allusively.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, he criticized the innovators (*ahl al-bidaʿ*) for having neglected the *Sunna* and the explanations of the Companion.<sup>23</sup> It is interesting, however, that neither al-Shāfiʿī, who was among the followers of the *tābiʿūn* (*tābiʿ al-tābiʿīn*)<sup>24</sup> nor Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal who was among the followers of the *tābiʿ al-tābiʿīn*,<sup>25</sup> mentioned the *tābiʿūn* as one of the authorities in interpreting the Qurʾān.

### 1. The Question of the Quantity of the Prophet's traditions

Later, the authority of the *Sunna* and of the Companion in understanding the Qurʾān was also upheld by Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, though he did not insist on their authorities. In fact, even the emphasis on the authority of the *tābiʿūn* can be seen in his principles of Qurʾānic interpretation. It is likely that by his time the function of the *Sunna* as explaining the Qurʾān had become widely accepted by the majority of Muslim thinkers, thanks to the brilliant contribution of al-Shāfiʿī. The same is likely in connection with the authority of the Companions in interpreting the Qurʾān. Thus, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī did not have to emphasize

---

an authority in the interpretation of the Qurʾān, they also insisted on the necessity to refer to them.

<sup>21</sup> See the introduction of Majid Khadduri (ed.), *Al-Shāfiʿī's al-Risāla* (Cambridge: The Islamic Text Society, 1987), 39.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatawā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, Vol. 19 (Rabat: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, n.d.), 285.

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatawā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, (Rabat: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, n.d.), 415.

<sup>24</sup> Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth wa Muṣṭalahuh* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li al-Malāyīn, 1988), 388.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 394.

what had already been stated by al-Shāfi'ī or Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. There were those, however, who questioned the sufficiency of the Prophet's traditions for *tafsīr* and believed in the unavoidability of Qur'anic interpretation by personal opinion (*ra'y*). The question confronting Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī is whether the Prophet explained all verses of the Qur'ān or only a very limited number of them. The question of the number and the quantity of the Prophet's traditions offering explanations of the Qur'ān had become a fundamental concern of the time and made it necessary for Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī to respond in terms of his principles of Qur'anic interpretation. In his response, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī argued that the number of the Prophet's traditions explaining the Qur'ān is not small; therefore, he criticized the interpretation of the Qur'ān through the use of *ra'y* (personal opinion).

## 2. The Response of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī

To begin with, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī classified the content of the Qur'ān into three categories. One is that aspect of the Qur'ān which is not known by anyone except God; it is not known even by the Prophet Muḥammad or the angels. This category consists of the *mutashābih* (unclear) verses like those on the descent of Jesus, the time of the rising of the Sun from the west, the blowing of the trumpet, the day of resurrection, the decline of the universe and the meaning of *al-ḥurūf al-muqatta'a* (the mysterious letters).<sup>26</sup> In these matters, the Prophet himself did not know anything except the portents (*ashrāf*) of these events.<sup>27</sup> According to Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, anyone who claims to know the meaning of these verses is a liar.<sup>28</sup> The second category is that aspect of the Qur'ān which is known by everyone who knows the Arabic language in which the Qur'ān is revealed (*dhū 'ilm bi*

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 3-4, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1986), 115 and that of Vol. I, 26 and 31

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 26.

*al-lisān al-ladhī unzila fīh al-Qurʾān* ). This aspect, however, is limited to such things as inflection (*iʿrāb* ), the fixed names (*aʿyān al-musammayāt bi asmāʾihā al-lāzima* ) which do not have concurrent meanings (*ghayr al-mushtarak* ) and things described by specific attributes (*al-mawṣūfāt bi al-ṣifāt al-khāṣṣa* ), to the exclusion of others such as legal judgments, their qualities and their forms, since the knowledge about them is given to the Prophet alone. This second aspect of the Qurʾān is elucidated through the words *al-ifsād* (causing corruption) and *al-iṣlāḥ* (putting something right). According to Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, when someone who is familiar with (*dhū ʿilm* ) the Qurʾānic language hears somebody reciting the Qurʾānic verse: "*Wa idhā qīla lahum lā tufsidū fī l-arḍi qālū innamā naḥnu muṣliḥūna alā innahumu l-mufsidūna wa lākin !ā yashʿurūna* " <sup>29</sup> he would know that *al-ifsād* in that verse is something which has to be avoided for it is detrimental and *al-iṣlāḥ* is something which has to be done for it is beneficial, <sup>30</sup> but he does not know God's criterion to judge some actions as *ifsād* and others as *iṣlāḥ* . Such a criterion can only be known by referring to the explanations of the Prophet. <sup>31</sup> The third category of the Qurʾān's content is that which is known by the Prophet. To Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, its quantity is not small. These verses relate to such things as obligations (*wujūb* ) and recommended acts (*nadb* ), guidance (*irshād* ), various kinds of prohibition (*nahy* ), rights (*ḥuqūq* ) and legal punishments (*ḥudūd* ). Ibn Jarīr maintained that these verses could not be understood except by referring to the traditions of the Prophet. <sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> " When it is said to them, 'Do not corrupt in the land', they say: 'We are only ones that put things right.' Truly they are the workers of corruption, but they are not aware." Qurʾān, II: 11.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* , Vol. 1, 30.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

With reference to the third category of the contents of the Qurʾān, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī argued that the main message of the Prophet in relation to the Holy Scripture is to explain it to the people. A Qurʾānic verse which confirms his conviction is: "We have revealed to you the Qurʾān (*al-dhikr*) that you may make clear to the peoples what has been revealed to them."<sup>33</sup> His view is also supported by another verse of the Qurʾān: "And We have not revealed to you the Qurʾān (*al-kitāb*) except that you may make clear to them that about which they differ, and (as) a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe."<sup>34</sup> On the basis of these verses, he held that God clearly ordered His messenger to explain the meaning of the Qurʾān. Muḥammad must have done so because these verses are also confirmed by the traditions of the Prophet's Companions. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd, for example, said: "A man from among us, if he studied ten verses of the Qurʾān, does not proceed to others before he understands their meanings and practices."<sup>35</sup> According to Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, this tradition implies that the Prophet had truly explained the meaning of the Qurʾān to his people.

Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī argues that without the Prophet's teachings, our knowledge of the Qurʾān would be very limited. As regards the verses known by God alone, for example, he maintains that they relate to an invisible world, such as resurrection. As for the language of the Qurʾān which was known by the ancient Arabic poets, he maintains that their knowledge was limited to the clear words like the word *ifsād* and *iṣlāḥ* and their grammar.<sup>36</sup> Conversely, those verses whose meanings were known by the Prophet encompass different things. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī makes the point therefore that the Prophet's

---

<sup>33</sup> Qurʾān, XVI: 44.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, Vol. 1, 27.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 26 and 31.

explanation regarding the Qurʾān is not insignificant (*lā yakūnu qalīla* ). Thus, in his opinion, it is not allowed to interpret the Qurʾān by *raʾy* or personal opinion.

According to Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, there are two traditions that led the people to hold the notion that the number of the Prophet's explanations regarding the Qurʾān is small. The first is a tradition of ʿĀʾisha: "The Prophet does not explain the Qurʾān except certain verses which were taught by Gabriel to him." <sup>37</sup> Reacting to this tradition, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī said that if ʿĀʾisha's statement was true, it would mean that Muḥammad had ignored a clear command of God. However, the tradition, he asserts, is not true. On the contrary, the Prophet fulfilled his duties and not a small number of the verses of the Qurʾān were explained by him. <sup>38</sup> ʿĀʾisha's tradition was transmitted by a person whose reliability is suspect, viz. Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad al-Zubayrī. This individual was not knowledgeable in tradition (*ahl al-āthār* ); therefore, this tradition cannot be used as an argument. <sup>39</sup>

According to Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, traditions describing the cautious attitude of the *salaf* in interpreting the Qurʾān are another reason for the notion that the Prophet did not explain much of the Qurʾān. Asked about the meaning of the Qurʾān, Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab, one of the great *tābiʿūn* , said, for example, that he would never talk about the Qurʾān. According to a report, his attitude was completely different when he dealt with legal matters. The same was the attitude of al-Shaʿbī. He reportedly refrained from talking about the Qurʾān, the soul (*rūḥ* ) and on the basis of personal opinion (*raʾy* ). Such traditions were considered by the opponents of *tafsīr bi al-maʾthūr* as suggesting that

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

the number of the Prophet's traditions on the Qurʾān is limited (*qalīl*).<sup>40</sup> To Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, however, these reports did not indicate that. Rather, they support his own conviction, because the attitude of Saʿīd ibn Musayyab and al-Shaʿbī basically discourage Muslims to interpret the Qurʾān unless they have knowledge and to refrain from talking about the Qurʾān on the basis of personal opinion. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī asserted that these people did not reject the idea of Qurʾānic interpretations, but they refrained from talking about the Qurʾān in terms of personal opinion and urged Muslims to always refer to what has been explained by the Prophet, for otherwise one would fall in error.<sup>41</sup>

Having disproved the basis of his opponents' view, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī then refuted the validity of interpretation through *raʾy* or the interpretation which ignores the Prophet's explanation, and declared that such interpretations would remain erroneous even when they say what is correct, for the exegete lacked conviction of truth (*mūqin*). He said:

"The interpretation of the Qurʾān cannot be known except by the explanation of the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, or (except) by argument regarding it; it is not allowed to anyone to talk about it through his *raʾy*. One who speaks about it through his *raʾy* remains in error even though he reaches the truth... For such a person is not like one who has a firm conviction that he is true, but in the position of a forteller (*khāriṣ*) and of one who presumes (*ẓānn*). But to make statements in God's religion on the basis of one assumption is to give opinion without knowledge and God has prohibited that : ' Say: My Lord has only prohibited indecencies, those of them that are apparent as well as those that are concealed, and sin and rebellion without justice, and that you associate with God that for which He has not sent down any authority, and that you say about God what you do not know." <sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 27 and Qurʾān, VII: 33.

It appears from the foregoing statement that the objection of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī to Qurʾānic interpretation by *raʾy* was not only that the number of the Prophet's traditions for *tafsīr* is not small, but also because he doubted the capacity of *raʾy* itself to determine the true meaning of the Holy Book. It seems that, in his view, the nature of the decision of *raʾy* is that it is a probable and relative opinion. This view is characteristic of the supporters of *tafsīr bi al-maʾthūr* and, later on, it was to be much elaborated by Ibn Taymiyya.<sup>43</sup>

### 3. The Advancement of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's thought

As has already been discussed above, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī refuted two things: the notion that the explanation of the Qurʾān as offered by the Prophet is small (*qalīl*), and Qurʾānic interpretation through *raʾy*. Ibn Jarīr's emphasis was a reaction to a growing sceptical attitude that considered the *Sunna* which explained the Qurʾān to be limited and the interpretation of the Qurʾān through *raʾy* therefore to be justifiable. This challenge had neither been faced by al-Shāfiʿī nor by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī went beyond al-Shāfiʿī and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal for he stressed not only that the *Sunna* functions as the elaboration of the Qurʾān, but also that the number of the Prophet's traditions serving as such an elaboration is not small. In addition, he also argued more cogently both from the point of view of reason or on a revelational basis against the use of *raʾy* in interpretation. Later, Ibn Taymiyya was to go even further in some respects, for he declares that the Prophet Muḥammad has explained *all* the meaning of the Qurʾān despite the fact that he admits that there are Qurʾānic verses which are only known by God

---

<sup>43</sup> See Ibn Taymiyya's views on the subject in the first chapter of this thesis.

( namely the unclear verses of the Qurʾān [*mutashābih* ] on the true essence of God, His attributes, His *kayfiyya* ,<sup>44</sup> *qadar* , the hereafter (*al-maʿād* )<sup>45</sup> and the invisible world .<sup>46</sup>

Ibn Jarīr's advance over al-Shāfiʿī and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal can also be seen in his regarding the *tābiʿūn* (the Followers of the Companions of the Prophet) as authoritative besides the Companions. He even tried to indicate who the commendable (*maḥmūd* ) *tābiʿūn* were, like Mujāhid, and who were the objectionable ones (*madhmūm* ) like Abū Šāliḥ and al-Suddī. <sup>47</sup> But the way that Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī mentioned their authority is often indirect. He, for example, quoted traditions that describe the enthusiasm of the *salaf* (the Companions of the Prophet and their Followers) in understanding the Qurʾān and those which show their amazing mastery of it. It is reported, for instance, that Ibn ʿAbbās used to deliver such sermons that if the Daylamīs and the Turks heard them, they would have converted to Islam. On that occasion, he interpreted *sūrat al-nūr* of the Qurʾān. <sup>48</sup> Moreover, Saʿīd ibn Jubayr, one of the great *tābiʿūn* , asserted: "Whoever reads the Qurʾān and does not interpret it is like the blind or the Bedouin (*al-aʿrābī* )." Again, Mujāhid, the great authority of the *tābiʿūn* , stated: "I studied the Qurʾān (*al-muṣḥaf* ) with Ibn ʿAbbās three times from its beginning to its end. On every verse I stopped to ask him about it." <sup>49</sup> Through these traditions, Ibn Jarīr probably wants to illustrate the point that

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ al-Rasāʾil al-Kubrā* , Vol. 2, 34 ; his *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr* , Vol. 17, 357, 419, 424-26, 450 and Šabrī al-Mutawallī, *Manhaj Ibn Taymiyya fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Karīm* (Cairo: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1981), 248.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr* , Vol. 17, 396 and 402.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr* , Vol. 13, 280.

<sup>47</sup> Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* , 30-1.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 31.



the *tābi'ūn* , besides the Companions, were really keen students and scholars of the Qur'ān and, therefore, their understanding of it is extraordinary.

The only occasion when Ibn Jarīr notes the necessity to refer to the *tābi'ūn* is during a discussion of who among the commentators are the most entitled to be followed in their exegesis. To him, they are the people whose interpretation of the Qur'ān is supported by the Prophet's traditions and by the ancient Arabic language in which the Qur'ān was revealed. It is certain that Ibn Jarīr had no objection to investigating the ancient Arabs' sayings or poetry in order to gain a true understanding of some Qur'anic verses, but he stipulated that the result of such an investigation has to be in conformity with the sayings of the *salaf* . It is in this context that Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī mentioned the authority of the *tābi'ūn*.. The following is his saying:

"The (Qur'anic) commentators most likely to be true in their interpretation of the Qur'ān ... are those who have the clearest argument ...from the Prophet's tradition... and the clearest proof from language (*al-lisān* ) ... from their poetry... their sayings or from their well-known language in so far as their *ta'wīl* and *tafsīr* does not deviate from the sayings of the Prophet's Companions ... and the *tābi'ūn* ..." <sup>50</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya, as has already been shown in his commentary of *sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* , shares the view of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī and agrees that the sayings of the *salaf* are superior to those based on the ancient Arabic language and that the latter does not, by itself, constitute conclusive proof in support of an interpretation. <sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>51</sup> See the discussion of this issue in chapter II of this thesis under subtitle: " An Analysis of Ibn Taymiyya's *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* ".

### C. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328)

It is difficult to deny that Ibn Taymiyya was influenced by his predecessors. Al-Shāfi'ī had bequeathed him the idea of the unity of the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*, with the latter explaining the former;<sup>52</sup> and he followed Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal in insisting on the sayings of the Companions as the second authority in understanding the Qur'ān after the *Sunna*.<sup>53</sup> Another scholar who influenced him very much in his principles of Qur'anic interpretation was Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. Ibn Taymiyya does not only quote the same verses, the Prophet's traditions, the sayings of the Companions and of the *tābi'ūn* as Ibn Jarīr does,<sup>54</sup> but also restates some of the latter's arguments. His belief that the Prophet Muḥammad had fulfilled God's order to explain the Qur'ān to his peoples is a case in point.<sup>55</sup> Also, his insistence that the Prophet had explained the meaning of all the Qur'ān to his people must be considered as a development of Ibn Jarīr's emphasis that the Prophet's explanation of the Qur'anic verses was not insignificant. The same is true of Ibn Taymiyya's refutation of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* as well as of his emphasis on the excellence the *salaf*'s understanding of the Qur'ān.<sup>56</sup> What is stated by Ibn Taymiyya is very often a repetition of what Ibn Jarīr had said. His indebtedness to Ibn Jarīr is understandable for he

---

<sup>52</sup> See his reference to al-Shāfi'ī in *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 94.

<sup>53</sup> See his reference to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal in *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 447 and *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, Vol. 19, 285.

<sup>54</sup> Compare, for instance, Ibn Taymiyya's *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 93-4 to Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 25 or *Muqaddima*, 105-7 to *Jāmi' al-Bayān* 27.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 35-7.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-112.

clearly acknowledges the latter's *tafsīr* as the best available. This is not to say, however, that Ibn Taymiyya does not go beyond the ideas of his predecessors. His contribution consists in a stronger emphasis on some earlier views as well as some new arguments.

### 1. The Stronger Emphasis of Ibn Taymiyya's Arguments

Ibn Taymiyya insists that the Prophet explained *all the meaning* of the Qur'ān to his Companions and, later, they taught it to the *tābi'ūn*.<sup>57</sup> This position is clearly an advance over Ibn Jarīr's, who maintained that the number of the Prophet's explanations regarding the Qur'ān is not small. To Ibn Taymiyya, it is not allowed for a Muslim to believe that God revealed the message (*kalām*) without its meaning.<sup>58</sup> In addition, Ibn Taymiyya discusses the process of transmission of Qur'anic knowledge, suggesting a perfect transmission from the Prophet to the *tābi'ūn*. The Companions are portrayed as receiving the meaning of the Qur'ān from the Prophet and transmitting it to the *tābi'ūn*.<sup>59</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, therefore, emphasizes the authority of the Companions of the Prophet, the *tābi'ūn* and even the followers of the *tābi'ūn*:

"... We know that the Qur'ān is read by the Companions of the Prophet, the *tābi'ūn* and their followers (*tābi'ūhum*) and they know most of its *tafsīr* and its meaning as they know most of the truth that God sent to His messenger, peace be upon him. (Therefore) whoever contradicts (*khālaḥa*) their sayings and interprets the Qur'ān by contradicting their interpretation errs in proof (*dalīl*) and meaning (*maḍlūl*). And there is no doubt that whoever contradicts their sayings, his argument is specious (*shubha*) whether he supports it on rational or revelational (*ṣam'iyya*) grounds."<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 402-3.

<sup>58</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 17, 390 and his *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 37.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-8.

<sup>60</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 361-2.

Ibn Taymiyya also declares that the age of the Companions and that of the *ṭābiʿūn* were the best ages of Islam because the Messenger himself asserted so.<sup>61</sup> He invokes the Qurʾān itself in support of the *salaf*'s authority: "And whoever acts with hostility to the Apostle after that guidance has become manifest to him, and follows other than the way of the believers, We will turn him to that to which he has (himself) turned and make him enter hell; and it is an evil resort."<sup>62</sup> Ibn Taymiyya is of the opinion that "the way of believers" mentioned here is the way of the *salaf*.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, anyone who interprets the Qurʾān should follow the way in which they interpreted it. He even goes further to declare that *tafsīr* by using mere personal opinion (*raʾy*) is forbidden (*ḥarām*).<sup>64</sup> His reason is that once *raʾy* directs Qurʾānic interpretation, *tafsīr* becomes not only subject to whims (*hawā*) of the interpreters but their own theological and ideological interests as well. To Ibn Taymiyya, those who interpret the Qurʾān metaphorically (*taʾwīl*) have basically already had their own convictions by which they imposed them on the words of the Qurʾān.<sup>65</sup> Although Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī had clearly opposed the use of reason in interpreting the Holy Book, they did not declare such fine critical view as Ibn Taymiyya does.

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 13, 24 and his *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, Vol. 20 (Rabat: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, n.d.), 294-95.

<sup>62</sup> Qurʾān, IV: 114. Ibn Taymiyya, *Maʿārij al-Wuṣūl*, 32-4.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Naqd al-Mantiq*, Ed. by Muḥammad al-Fiqī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1951), 1.

<sup>64</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 105-15.

<sup>65</sup> See his statement, among others, in *ibid.*, 81.

## 2. The New Arguments of Ibn Taymiyya

The major contribution of Ibn Taymiyya relates to his new arguments for the authority of *naql* and the *salaf*. Before discussing that subject, the evolution of thought within the *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* school is worth considering. As has already been indicated earlier, in the time of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) there began to appear a sceptical attitude, questioning and even rejecting the traditionist claim that the *Sunna* was sufficiently detailed to explain the Qur'ān. This scepticism towards the supporters of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* continued to develop even after Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. By the time of Ibn Taymiyya, however, the critical question that was being posed by opponents of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* was not about the nature of the relationship of the *Sunna* to the Qur'ān, nor about the authority of the Companions and the *tābi'ūn*, nor whether the Prophet explained many verses of the Qur'ān or only a few of them, but rather that the transmitted opinions and sayings of the *salaf* were full of disagreements and contradictions. So, according to the opponents of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*, even if they accepted *naql* and the sayings of the *salaf* as authoritative, how could the divergence and contradictions in their views be resolved? This challenge had not been addressed by al-Shāfi'ī (d.820) and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d.855) for they were still striving to establish the authority of the *Sunna* of the Prophet as well as that of Companions. Nor was it faced by al-Ṭabarī (d.923) who was disturbed only by scepticism about the sufficiency in number of the Prophet's explanation of the Qur'ān, as already discussed.

In connection with this issue, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) does not mention the names of particular opponents. However, it is very likely that one of them is al-Ghazālī (d.1111), and for this there are several reasons. One of them is that this Ash'arite theologian, in his

book *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, severely criticized Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's Qurʾānic interpretation for his reliance on the apparent meaning of the Qurʾān and his opposition to *taʾwīl*.<sup>66</sup> In addition, he also rejected the equation of a prohibition of *tafsīr bi al-raʾy* to the necessity of Qurʾānic interpretation by mere *naql* (transmitted religious tradition). To him, the prohibited *tafsīr bi al-raʾy* is the interpretation of the Qurʾān following the desires and the convictions of the interpreter or following the apparent sense of the Arabic language while disregarding the traditions of the Prophet.<sup>67</sup> But his opposition to *tafsīr bi al-maʾthūr*, as he explained it, was also due to the fact that the Prophet himself only explained a few of the Qurʾānic verses, while the sayings of the *salaf* contradicted each other and could not be reconciled. To al-Ghazālī, their contradictory sayings were due to the fact that they reflected their own opinions, for it was impossible that they had come down from the Prophet.<sup>68</sup>

In response to such a stance, Ibn Taymiyya asserts that the Messenger had explained all the meanings of the Qurʾān to his Companions, who passed them on to their Followers. Ibn Taymiyya also argues that disagreement of *naql* (transmitted traditions), merely happens in traditions whose soundness is unknown and which are valueless for religion. The sayings of the *salaf*, he insists, are not contradictory but only diverse. Ibn Taymiyya's arguments in this regard have been discussed in the second chapter of this thesis and there is no need here for repetition. However, it should be borne in mind that despite the fact that Ibn Taymiyya's argument essentially revolves around such linguistic

---

<sup>66</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, Vol. 1, 136. His view on *taʾwīl* can be found also in Iyā A. Bello's *The Medieval Islamic Controversy between Philosophy and Orthodoxy: Ijmāʿ and Taʾwīl in the Conflict between al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 52-65.

<sup>67</sup> Muhammad Abul Quasem, "Al-Ghazālī in Defence of Šūfistic Interpretation of the Qurʾān", 66.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 385-6.

features as *mushtarak* , *murādif* and *mutawāḥiḥ*<sup>2</sup> and does not consider the real contradictions, this argument seems to have helped his school of Qur'anic interpretation to refute the criticism of their opponents. Ibn Taymiyya does succeed at least in convincing his readers that not all traditions which might be thought contradictory are necessary so. This is an original argument, not found in thinkers like al-Shāfi'ī, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī.

### 3. Analysis of the Advancement of Ibn Taymiyya's Thought

The *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* school shows therefore a gradual but significant intellectual development, brought about by the need to respond to its critics. Al-Shāfi'ī (d.825) established the authority of the Prophet's *Sunna* and emphasized its inseparability from the Qur'ān and that the former explains the latter. Following him, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d.923) emphasized that the number of Prophet's explanations regarding the Qur'ān is not small. Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328) for his part declares that the Prophet explained all the meanings of the Qur'ān to his Companions and that they taught them to their Followers. The same relates to the authority of the *tābi'ūn* . Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d.855) had not yet mentioned the authority of the *tābi'ūn* . Later, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d 923) began an account of it. Ibn Taymiyya reemphasizes this authority more explicitly and adds another argument drawn from both the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* . Then, he goes on to insist that their difference of opinion does not constitute contradictions, and these differences can be reconciled.

The question which needs some consideration now is this: what is the context in which Ibn Taymiyya's stand in favour of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* is to be explained? This context may be described in terms of the following two factors:

*a. Ḥanbalite world-view*

As a Ḥanbalite, Ibn Taymiyya's thinking matured in a theological and intellectual atmosphere characterized by emphasis on the superiority of revelation over reason and the authority of *al-Sunna* or *ḥadīth*, *al-āthār* and *naql*, and the *salaf* and so forth, and a distrust of and opposition to personal opinion (*ra'y*) or rational reasoning. Having internalized this world-view by virtue of his *madhhab* and family background and education, he was very much disturbed by any deviation from Islam (*bid'ā*) and denounced all those he considered to have departed from the practice of the early generations of pious Muslims (*salaf*). Such sensitivity towards *bid'ā* is characteristic of the Ḥanbalites and is not shared by the followers of the Mālikite, Shāfi'ite or Ḥanafite schools.

*b. the struggle against bid'ā*

Later, the Ḥanbalite notions Ibn Taymiyya had imbibed continued to be strengthened by long intellectual and political conflicts with his opponents. The history of the Ḥanbalite school itself till at least the time of Ibn Taymiyya was basically the history of intellectual and political conflicts with other schools of thought such as Jahmites, Mu'tazilites, ṣūfis, Shī'ites and Ash'arites. The founding father of Ḥanbalism himself showed vehement opposition towards the Jahmites and Mu'tazilites and his position on the question of "the createdness" of the Qur'ān caused him much suffering during the *Miḥna*.<sup>69</sup> Later, the conflict of Ibn Taymiyya with the Ash'arites, whom he considered as

---

<sup>69</sup> See his *al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyya wa al-Zanādiqa*, Ed. by 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Umayra (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Liwā', 1977); and see Walter M. Patton, *Aḥmed ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1897).



the inheritors of certain Mu'tazilite attitudes, was not only an intellectual struggle but also had social and political implication. His writing the *ʿAqīda al-Ḥamawīyya al-Kubrā* and *al-ʿAqīda al-Wāsiṭiyya* led to interrogation and imprisonment. He was also imprisoned for his sharp criticism of popular ṣūfism and his denunciation of the veneration of the tombs of ṣūfī shaykhs as *bidʿa*. He also took up arms against the Shīʿites accusing them of having facilitated the invasion of Baghdad by the Mongols.<sup>70</sup> All this intellectual and political tension must have contributed to Ibn Taymiyya's confrontational style, which is also in evidence in his principles of Qurʾanic interpretation.

Ibn Taymiyya's was a time when metaphorical interpretation of the Qurʾān (*taʾwīl*) had come to be seen by many as not only unavoidable and necessary but as the truth itself. To Ibn Taymiyya, *taʾwīl* not only legitimated the beliefs of the innovators like the ṣūfis, the Shīʿites and the Ashʿarites but also created disunity in the *umma*. The ṣūfis, for example, though they helped educate the people also encouraged them to escape their public responsibilities. Ibn Taymiyya was shocked when the followers of the ṣūfī orders of the time rejected his call to take up arms against the Tatars claiming that to fight them is to fight God. He considers such a view not only as dividing Muslims into many groups of *bidʿa* but also weakening the unity and the strength of the *umma*. He is convinced that to oppose the people of *bidʿa*, whether in the intellectual or political realm, was necessary to return to the *salaf*'s understanding of the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. His principles of Qurʾanic interpretation, under discussion here, are an intellectual vehicle to reach that goal. Once the *umma* believes in and practices Islam as the Prophet did, the Muslims could, he hoped, regain their earlier glory.

---

<sup>70</sup> For an account of Ibn Taymiyya's *miḥan*, see Ḥasan Qāsim Murād, *Miḥan of Ibn Taymiyya: a Narrative Account Based on a Comparative Analysis of the Sources*, (MA thesis, McGill University, 1968), 74-112.

#### 4. The Influence of Ibn Taymiyya

Although Ibn Taymiyya is usually not considered as a Qurʾān exegete, the influence of his principles of Qurʾānic interpretation on later thinkers cannot be ignored. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d.1350-1), for instance, strongly restated the point that the differences of opinion of the *salaf* are not to be seen as contradictions but as diversity of views, and he adduced other examples.<sup>71</sup> Al-Zarkashī (d.1391) also seems to be influenced by Ibn Taymiyya when he states that the people who do not understand very often think that the difference of opinions of the *salaf* constitutes disagreement (*ikhtilāf*) while it is not. In the view of al-Zarkashī, each of the *salaf* had pointed out the apparent meaning of the Qurʾān and their differences came from the fact that they tried to explain the Qurʾān using the expression clearest to the speaker (*al-qāʾil*) or the most appropriate one to the one raising the question (*al-sāʾil*). Thus, although the *salaf* explained the Qurʾān in different terms, they pointed to the same meaning.<sup>72</sup> His argument is similar to Ibn Taymiyya's though it is unfortunate that al-Zarkashī does not mention him. The following is a statement of Ibn Taymiyya that al-Zarkashī quotes *verbatim*:

"The best method of *tafsīr* is the interpretation of the Qurʾān by the Qurʾān, (because) what is stated generally in one place is elaborated in detail in another and what is stated shortly in one place is explained in another. In case you are unable to do that, you must take the *Sunna* for it elaborates the Qurʾān and explains it. God said: 'We have not revealed to you the Qurʾān (*al-kitāb*) except that you may make clear to them that about which they differ, and (as) a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe.'<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Ṣabrī al-Mutawallī, *Manhaj ahl al-Sunna fi Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 73-4.

<sup>72</sup> Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, Vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1988), 176.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

It is not easy to determine which of al-Zarkashī's ideas are original and which are not. The acknowledgement of indebtedness to earlier writers was very much a matter of an author's choice. Thus, al-Zarkashī very often mentions the earlier writers he quotes from but in some cases he neglects to do so.

A later scholar who clearly acknowledged his debt to Ibn Taymiyya's principles of Qur'anic interpretation (*qawā'id al-tafsīr*) is al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) in his *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*.<sup>74</sup> Ibn Taymiyya's influence can particularly be seen when al-Suyūṭī discusses the ranks of the knowledgeable people in *tafsīr*, maintaining that the most knowledgeable are the people of Mecca like Mujāhid and 'Aṭā' ibn Abī Rabāḥ because they were the followers of Ibn 'Abbās. Later, they were the people of Kūfa, for they are the followers of Ibn Mas'ūd. Next are the people of Medina like Zayd ibn Aslam etc.<sup>75</sup>

The influence of Ibn Taymiyya's principles of Qur'anic interpretation is easier to recognize on Ibn Kathīr (d.1373).<sup>76</sup> This pro-Ḥanbalite Shāfi'ite thinker is often considered to be the second only to Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī in *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* school. He studied under different scholars of the time, one of his most influential teachers being Ibn Taymiyya.<sup>77</sup> Ibn Kathīr followed his ideas and even gave a *fatwā* on a controversial

---

<sup>74</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1985), 19.

<sup>75</sup> Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maṭba'at 'Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Shurakāh, n.d.), 19-21. The influence of Ibn Taymiyya's thought on al-Suyūṭī is shown in the latter's opposition to logic. See Wael B. Hallaq, ed., *Ibn Taymiyya Against the Greek Logicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), xlix.

<sup>76</sup> See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr" in Andrew Rippin, ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 56-61.

<sup>77</sup> Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 72-3.

issue, *ṭalāq* (divorce) in line with the view of Ibn Taymiyya, which caused him to endure *mihna* as did his teacher. Ibn Taymiyya's influence on Ibn Kathīr's principles of Qur'anic interpretation is obvious. The latter very often quotes his teacher's ideas *verbatim*. Ibn Taymiyya's statements in *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 93-115 is, for instance, repeated by Ibn Kathīr in *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm* Vol. 1, 4-6, though Ibn Taymiyya is not mentioned here. The case is different when Ibn Kathīr quotes Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (pp. 6-8) and explicitly refers to him. Again, in relation to the issue of *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, Ibn Kathīr says:

"Isrāʾīliyyāt traditions are of three kinds. First, those whose soundness we know from what we have that supports it. Second, those whose unsoundness we know from what we have that contradicts it. Third, those which are neither from the first nor from the second category. Therefore, we neither trust in them nor deny them and to report them is lawful and most of such (traditions) consist of something which is of no use in respect to religious affairs " <sup>78</sup>

This statement is exactly what Ibn Taymiyya says in his *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*. <sup>79</sup> Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to say that Ibn Taymiyya's principles of Qur'anic interpretation not only show much originality, they have also been very influential. In fact this influence is not limited to the medieval thinkers and exegetes, but extends to modern writers. <sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1987), 5.

<sup>79</sup> See page 100.

<sup>80</sup> See Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, for example, who rephrases what was stated by Ibn Taymiyya regarding the *Isrāʾīliyyāt* tradition in his *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, 179. Khālid ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-ʿAkk also restates Ibn Taymiyya's method of Qur'anic interpretation and his argument regarding the nature of the difference of opinions of the *salaf*. See his *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr wa Qawāʿiduh* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 1986), 79-80 and 83-6.

## CONCLUSION

Ibn Taymiyya's deep concern with what he perceived as distortions in understanding and interpreting the Qur'ān is reflected throughout his polemical writings, refutations and criticisms of the *ahl al-bida'* (the "innovators"). This study of his principles of Qur'anic interpretation reveals that Ibn Taymiyya's refutation of those he considered as the *ahl al-bida'* --- the philosophers, the *mutakallimūn*, the *ṣūfis* and the *Shī'ites* --- was essentially because of his objections to their Qur'anic interpretations. According to Ibn Taymiyya, these *ahl al-bida'* very often imposed "foreign" and "un-Islamic" beliefs (*bida'*) on the words of God (*kalām Allāh*) through *ta'wīl* (metaphorical interpretation), and changed or distorted or contradicted the true meaning of the Qur'ān in accordance with their preconceived beliefs. They claimed such beliefs to be the true understanding of the Qur'ān and often regarded the views of the other schools of Qur'anic interpretation as false. Such an attitude created confusion and disunity among Muslims and contributed to their deterioration. Ibn Taymiyya therefore rigorously opposes them, even sometimes charging them with unbelief, for in his view these *ahl al-bida'* are themselves misled and mislead others.

According to Ibn Taymiyya, the meaning of the Qur'ān was taught by God to His messenger, and the messenger is the only one who has the best understanding of it; the messenger, later, transmitted the meaning of the Qur'ān in its entirety to the *salaf*. Therefore, in trying to understand the Qur'ān one has to refer to the understanding of the *salaf*. To Ibn Taymiyya, their *tafsīr* is sufficient: it needs neither *ta'wīl* nor allows the imposition of foreign ideas on the Qur'ān. That Islamic teachings in general and the meaning of the Qur'ān in particular have been perfectly and in their entirety transmitted

from the earliest is a conviction fundamental to Ibn Taymiyya's thought. It is only by being aware of this conviction of his that we can understand Ibn Taymiyya's rigorous polemical works as well as his painstaking efforts to restore the *salaf*'s understanding of the Qurʾān.

An important implication of Ibn Taymiyya's belief in the primacy and authority of the *salaf*'s understanding of the Qurʾān is that the *salaf* for him are the most ideal people after the Prophet. He suggests, for example, that what was handed down by the *salaf* always can be explained and argues that the differences in their sayings as regards *tafsīr* do not concern matters of belief (*ʿaqīda*), there are no contradictions in them, and their sayings are far better than those of later generations; in addition their piety is beyond doubt, and it was impossible for them to lie about the Prophet or to fabricate traditions. Ibn Taymiyya even suggests that their opinion cannot be separated from the opinion of the Prophet, because the Prophet was their teacher, and / or their opinions derive from an understanding of the Prophet's *Sunna*. Nor does he entertain the possibility that the *salaf* as readers or interpreters of the text (the Qurʾān) could have been conditioned by their historical circumstances or social political biases, particularly because of the oral transmission of materials.<sup>1</sup>

Another implication of seeing the *salaf* as the most ideal people after the Prophet is that the injunction of the Qurʾān to think and ponder over the scripture is limited by Ibn Taymiyya to the *first hearers* or *first audience* of the revelation. Such Qurʾanic verses as: "Do they not ponder the Qurʾān?"<sup>2</sup> or "We have sent it down as an Arabic Qurʾān; haply

---

<sup>1</sup> For a critical discussion of *naql* in *tafsīr*, see Amīn al-Khūlī, *Manāhij al-Tajdīd fī al-Naḥw wa al-Balāgha wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1961), 296-7.

<sup>2</sup> Qurʾān, IV: 82

you will think" <sup>3</sup> are understood as an injunction to the people of the time of revelation; for the later Muslims it will suffice to follow and clarify what those early people said. <sup>4</sup> In fact, the use of reason independently of the *salaf* is forbidden to them. In addition, he ignores the fact that there are several sayings of the Prophet and those of *salaf* urging the believers to think or to have recourse to *ta'wīl*. For example, he does not discuss the tradition : "The Qur'ān has an outer (*ẓahr*) and an inner (*baṭn*) meaning", or "No one speaks to the people except according to the level of (their) intellectual capacity", and so forth.<sup>5</sup> So, just as Ibn Taymiyya's opponents ignore his favorite traditions, he too chooses the traditions which confirm his own opinion; and if the supporters of *ta'wīl* de-emphasize what has been transmitted from the early Muslims, the supporters of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* (Ibn Taymiyya being one of the most prominent among them) idealize the transmission of Qur'anic meaning from the early Muslim generations.

Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyya's orientation to the *salaf* causes him not to show any willingness to make a distinction in the meaning of the Qur'ān between the ideal and the historical or the ideal and the real. <sup>6</sup> In fact, he is not interested in discussing the levels of meaning of the Qur'ān, the outer and the inner, as the ṣūfis and philosophers of his time did. On the one hand, Ibn Taymiyya's principles of *tafsīr* avoid dividing the community of Qur'ān interpreters into the elite (*khawāṣṣ*) and the masses (*ʿawāmm*), for all Muslims

---

<sup>3</sup> Qur'ān, XII: 2

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* (Kuwait: Dār al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, 1971), 35-8.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, Vol. 1 (Damascus: Dār al-Khayr, 1990), 130-1.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the levels of the meanings of the Qur'ān discussed by Ismāʿīl Rājī al-Fārūqī, "Towards a New Methodology for Qur'anic Exegesis", *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 1 (March 1962), 35-52.

have the same access to an understanding of the Qurʾān. But, on the other hand, his *salaf*-oriented principles of *tafsīr* lack an awareness of the need to take account of social change, for the sufficiency of the *salaf*'s understanding of the Qurʾān as a model for an ever-changing world is arguable at best.

The idealization of the *salaf* and its various implications follow from Ibn Taymiyya's fundamental belief in the perfect transmission of Qurʾanic understanding and of Islamic teachings in general from the time of the Prophet, the Companions and their Followers onwards. As a thinker with an astonishing mastery of tradition, Ibn Taymiyya criticizes what he considers distortions by later Muslim generations. His *salafī* outlook sometimes also leads him to opinions which go beyond the established legal schools.

Interestingly, Ibn Taymiyya's *salafī* orientation makes him a unique thinker whose intellectual legacy has contributed enormously to shaping almost all later development of Islamic thought. The traditionalists can claim him as among their precursors because he is a faithful follower of traditional religious authorities -- the Qurʾān, the *Sunna*, the Companions and the Followers -- and does not go beyond the opinions of his predecessors.<sup>7</sup> The modernists too can regard him as an inspiration for Ibn Taymiyya urges *ijtihād*, opposes *taqlīd* and develops a dynamic understanding of Islam.<sup>8</sup> The same

---

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Muḥammad Khalīl Harās, *Ibn Taymiyya al-Salafī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> It may seem paradoxical that, on the one hand, Ibn Taymiyya is a *salafī* thinker, and on the other, a reformer; but there is no contradiction here at all. For when he emphasizes *ijtihād* and opposes *taqlīd*, the purpose is not to form an opinion independently of the *salaf* but in accordance with their teachings.

According to Ignaz Goldziher, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā was inspired by writings of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. See "Ibn Taymīya", *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Ed. James Hastings et al., VII, 1955, 72. The same is true of Muḥammad ʿAbduh who held the works of Ibn Taymiyya in high esteem. See H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, "Ibn Taymīya", *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1961, 152. Also,



is true of the fundamentalists: they also can claim him as their model, for Ibn Taymiyya was an activist theologian who strove to restore Islam, in the crisis of the time, and remained undaunted by opposition and imprisonment.<sup>9</sup>

A simple way to characterize Ibn Taymiyya is as a *salafī*-reformer: one who sought to purify Islam from *bid'ā*, reformulate Islamic doctrines and rebuild Muslim society on the basis of the *salaf*'s legacy. His principles of Qur'anic interpretation are a fundamental part of his agenda for the purification of Islam.

---

Gibb's *Modern Trends in Islam* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1975), 34-5. For a more elaborate discussion, see Victor E. Makari, *Ibn Taymiyyah's Ethics: the Social Factor* (Chico-California, 1983), 177-94.

<sup>9</sup> Most modern political writers are of the opinion that contemporary Sunnite Islamic fundamentalism is rooted in Ibn Taymiyya's thought. See, for example, R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985), 39-40 and 99. Emmanuel Sivan and Menachem Friedman, *Religious Radicalism and Politics in Middle East* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 3-4 and 49; Dilip Hiro, *Holy Wars: the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 40-1; John Esposito, *Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 152.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abū Zahra, Muḥammad. *Ibn Ḥanbal: ḥayātuh wa 'aṣruh, ārā'uh wa fiqhuh*. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, n.d.
- , *Ibn Taymiyya: ḥayātuh wa 'aṣruh, ārā'uh wa fiqhuh*. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1952.
- , *Al-Shāfi'ī, ḥayātuh wa 'aṣruh, ārā'uh wa fiqhuh*. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1948.
- Abū Zayd, Naṣr Hāmid. *Falsafat al-Ta'wīl, dirāsa fī ta'wīl al-Qur'ān 'ind Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī*. Beirut: Dār al-Waḥda, 1983.
- , *Al-Ittijāh al-'Aqlī fī al-Tafsīr, dirāsa fī qaḍiyyat al-majāz fī al-Qur'ān 'ind al-Mu'tazila*. Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr, 1982.
- Al-'Akk, Khālīd 'Abd al-Raḥmān. *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr wa Qawā'iduh*. Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1986.
- Arberry, Arthur J. *The Koran interpreted*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Ayoub, Mahmoud. "The Speaking Qur'ān and the Silent Qur'ān: A Study of Principles and Development of Shī'ite tafsīr " in Andrew Rippin ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Bello, Iyssa A. *The Medieval Islamic Controversy Between Philosophy and Orthodoxy: Ijmā' and Ta'wīl in the Conflict between al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989.
- Boullata, I.J., "Modern Qur'anic Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shāfi's Method," *Muslim World*, LXIV (1974), 103-113.
- Danner, Victor and Wheeler M. Thackston. *Ibn 'Ata'illah, the Book of Wisdom and Kwaja Abdullah Ansari (intimate Conversations)*. New York: Paulist Press, 1978.
- Dekmejian, R. Hrair. *Islam in Revolution*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985.
- Al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn. *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*. Vol. 1. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1961.
- Al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad Uthmān. *Al-Muntaqā min Minhāj al-I'tidāl*. 2 Vols. Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Salafiyya, 1373 H.
- Al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad. *Tadhkirat al-Khuffāz*. Vol. 3. Haydarabad: Maṭba'at Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Nizāmiyya, 1334 H.
- Esposito, John. *Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

- Al-Fārūqī, Ismā'īl R. "Towards a New Methodology fo Qur'anic Exegesis." *Islamic Studies*, I, no. 1, March 1962, 35-52.
- Faura, Maḥmūd Bāsyūnī. *Nash'at al-Tafsīr wa Manāhijuh fī Daw' al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyya*. Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Amāna, 1986.
- Gätje, Helmut. *Koran und Koranexegesis*. Zurich, 1971. Trans. by A.T. Welch: *The Qur'ān and Its Exegesis*, Berkeley. 1976.
- Gharāba, Ḥamūda. *Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī*. Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Maktaba al-'Arabiyya, 1973.
- Al-Ghazālī, Muḥammad Abū Ḥāmid. *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. Vol. 1. Beirut: Dār al-Khayr, 1990.
- Gibb, H.A.R. and J.H. Kramers, "Ibn Taymīya", *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1961, 151-2.
- Gibb, H.A.R. *Modern Trends in Islam*. Beirut: Librairie du Luban, 1975.
- , *Mohammedanism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- Goldziher, I. "Ibn Taymīya," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, 7, 1955, 72.
- , *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr al-Islāmī*. Trans. by 'Abd al-Ḥalīm al-Najjār. 2nd ed. Beirut: Dār Iqra', 1983.
- Ḥaq, Sirājul. "Ibn Taymiyya's Conception of Analogy and Consensus," *Islamic Culture*, 17, 1943, 77-87.
- Harās, Muḥammad Khalīl. *Ibn Taymiyya al-Salafī*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1984.
- Hiro, Dilip. *Holy Wars: the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad. *Al-'Uqūd al-Durriyya min Manāqib Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1356/1938.
- Ibn Ḥanbal, Aḥmad. *Al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyya wa al-Zanādiqa*. Ed. by 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Umayra. Riyāḍ: Dār al-Liwā', 1977.
- Ibn Kathīr, Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl. *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.
- , *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*. Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1987.
- Ibn Rushd. *Faṣl al-Maqāl fīmā Bayn al-Ḥikma wa al-Sharī'a min al-Ittiṣāl*. Ed. Muḥammad 'Imāra. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.
- Ibn Taymiyya. *'Aqīdat Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Firqa al-Nājiya*. Ed. by 'Abd al-Razzāq 'Afifi. Cairo: Maṭba'at Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1358 H.

- , *Ibn Taymiyya Against the Greek Logicians* . Trans. with an introduction and notes by Wael. B. Hallaq. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- , *Ma'ārij al-Wuṣūl ilā ann Uṣūl al-Dīn wa Furū'ah qad Bayyanahā al-Rasūl* . Medina: al-Maktaba al-ʿIlmiyya , n.d.
- , *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Ḥadīth* . Vol. 18. Rabat: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, n.d.
- , *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Manṭiq* . Vol. 9. Rabat: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, n.d.
- , *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr* . Vol. 13. Rabat: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, n.d.
- , *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: al-Tafsīr* . Vol. 17. Rabat: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, n.d.
- , *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Tauḥīd al-Rubūbiyya* . Vol. 2. Rabat: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, n.d.
- , *Majmūʿ Fatāwā Ibn Taymiyya: Uṣūl al-Fiqh* , Vol. 19 and 20. Rabat: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, n.d.
- , *Majmūʿat al-Rasāʾil al-Kubrā* . Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-ʿĀmira al-Sharafiyya, 1323 H.
- , *Majmūʿat al-Rasāʾil wa al-Masāʾil* . 5 Vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992.
- , *Minḥāj al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya* . 2 Vols. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Madanī, 1382/1962.
- , *Mukhtaṣar al-Fatāwā al-Miṣriyya* . Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1949.
- , *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* . Kuwait: Dār al-Qurʾān al-Karīm. 1971.
- , *Muwāfaqat Ṣaḥīḥ al-Manqūl li Ṣarīḥ al-Maʿqūl* . 2 Vols. Medina: Maṭbaʿat al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1951.
- , *Naqd al-Manṭiq* . 2 Vols. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1951.
- , *Al-Radd ʿalā al-Ikhnāʾī* . Cairo: Al-Maṭbaʿa al-Salafiyya, 1346/ 1928.
- , *Al-Radd ʿalā al-Manṭiqiyyīn* . Bombay: Al-Maṭbaʿa al-Qayyima, 1949.
- , *Al-Risāla al-Tadmuriyya fī Taḥqīq al-Ithbāt li Asmāʾ Allāh wa Ṣifātih* . Cairo: Al-Maṭbaʿa al-Salafiyya, 1387/1967.
- , *Al-Siyāsa al-Sharʿiyya fī Iṣlāḥ al-Rāʾī wa al-Raʿiyya* . Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1988.
- , *Ṣiḥḥat Uṣūl Madhhab Ahl al-Madīna* . Beirut: Dār al-Nadwa al-Jadīda, n.d.

- , *Su'āl fi Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān* . Ed. by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munjid. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Jadīd, 1979.
- , *Ta'ārūḍ al-ʿAql wa al-Naql* . Ed. by Muḥammad Rashād Sālim. Cairo: Al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li al-Kitāb, 1971.
- , *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* . Ed. with introduction by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿUmayra. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1988.
- , *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* . Cairo: Maktabat Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, n.d.
- , *Al-Taṣawwuf wa al-Fuqarā'* . Ed. by Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh al-Samān. Cairo: Al-Maktab al-Fannī li al-Naṣhr, 1960.
- Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. *Al-Qiyās fī al-Sharʿ al-Islāmī* . Ed. by Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb. Cairo: Salafiyya Press, 1346.
- Ibrāhīm, Lutfī. "The Relation of Reason and Revelation in Theology of Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī, " *Islamic Culture* , 54 (1980), 63-74.
- Al-Julaynid, Muḥammad al-Sayyid. *Al-Imām Ibn Taymiyya: Mawqifuh min Qaḍiyyat al-Ta'wīl* . Cairo: Al-Hay'a al-ʿĀmma li Shu'ūn al-Maṭābiʿ al-Amīriyya, 1393/1973.
- Al-Juwaynī, Muṣṭafā al-Ṣāwī. *Manhaj al-Zamakhsharī fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān wa Bayān Iʿjāzih* . Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, n.d.
- Kamali, Sabih Ahmad. *The Types of Islamic Thought* . Aligarh: Institute of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, n.d.
- Al-Karmī, Marʿī ibn Yūsuf. *al-Kawākib al-Durriyya* . Ed. by Najm ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Khalaf. Beirut: Dār al-Gahr al-Islāmī, 1986.
- Khan, Qomaruddin. *The Political Thought of Ibn Taymiyya* . Delhi: Adams Publisher & Distributors, 1988.
- Al-Khūlī, Amīn. *Manhaj Tajdīd fī al-Naḥwi wa al-Balāgha wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab*. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1961.
- Laoust, H. "Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* . New Edition. 3, 1971, 272-77.
- , "Ibn Taymiyya," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* . New Edition. 3, 1971, 951-55.
- Leemhuis, Fred. "Origins and Early Development of the *tafsīr* Tradition." in Andrew Rippin ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān* . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Little, Donald P. "Did Ibn Taymiyya Have a Screw Loose?", *Studia Islamica* , 41, 1975, 93-111.
- , "Religion under the Mamlūks ", 73, *The Muslim World* , 1983, 165-81.

- Madjid, Nurcholish. *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalam and Falsafa* . Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1985.
- Makari, Victor E. *Ibn Taymiyyah's Ethics: the Social Factor* . California: Scholars Press, 1983.
- Makdisi, George. "The Tanbīh of Ibn Taymiyya on Dialectic," *Medieval and Middle Eastern Studies in Honor of Aziz Suryal Atiya* . Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972.
- McAuliffe, Jane Dammen. "Qur'anic Hermeneutics: the Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr" in Andrew Rippin ed. *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).
- , *Qur'anic Christians, an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Memon, Muhammad Umar. *Ibn Taymiyya's Struggle Against Popular Religion* . The Hague: Mouton, 1977.
- Michel, Thomas. "Ibn Taymiyya's Sharḥ on the Futūḥ al-Ghayb of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī," *Hamdard Islamicus* , 4, no. 2, 1981, 3-12.
- , *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity* . New York: Caravan Books, 1984.
- Murād, Ḥasan Qāsim. *Miḥan of Ibn Taymiyya* . MA thesis, Institute of Islamic studies, McGill University, 1968.
- Mūsā, Muḥammad Yūsuf. *Ibn Taymiyya* . Beirut: Dār al-ʿAṣr al-Ḥadīth, 1988.
- Al-Mutawallī, Ṣabrī. *Manhaj Ahl al-Sunna fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* . Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1986.
- , *Manhaj Ibn Taymiyya fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* . Cairo: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1981.
- Newby, G., "Tafsir Isra'iliyyat," *Journal American Academy of Religion* , 47, 1979, Supplement, 685-97.
- Patton, Walter M. *Aḥmed ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna* . Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1897.
- Quasem, M.A., "Al-Ghazālī in Defence of Sufistic Interpretation of the Qur'ān," *Islamic Culture* , 53, 1979, 63-86.
- Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam and Modernity* . Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- , *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* . Chicago and Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980.
- Al-Rūmī, Fahd ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Sulaymān. *Manhaj al-Madrasa al-ʿAqliyya al-Ḥadītha fī al-Tafsīr* . Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Risāla, 1407 H.

- Rippin, Andrew. *The Qur'anic asbāb al-nuzūl material: an analysis of its use and development in exegesis*. Ph.D. dissertation, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1980.
- Al-Ṣābūnī, Muḥammad ʿAlī, *Mukhtaṣar Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, Vol. 1. Beirut: Dār al-Qurʾān al-Karīm, 1981.
- Al-Ṣāliḥ, Ṣubḥī. *ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth wa Muṣṭalaḥuh*. Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li al-Malāyīn, 1988.
- Al-Shāfiʿī, Muḥammad b. Idrīs. *Al-Shāfiʿī's Al-Risāla*. Ed. and Trans. with introduction by Majid Khadduri. Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1987.
- Shakir, M.H. *Holy Qur'an*. New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1986.
- Sharif, M.M. *History of Muslim Philosophy*. 2 Vols. Karachi: Royal Book Company, n.d.
- Al-Shāfiʿī, ʿĀʾisha bint. *Al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī*, Vol. 1. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1962.
- Sivan, Emmanuel and Menachem Friedman. *Religious Radicalism and Politics in Middle East*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1990.
- Speight, R. Marston. "Function of Ḥadīth as Commentary on the Qurʾān as Seen in the Six Authoritative Collections" in Andrew Rippin ed., *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn. *Al-Itqān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*. Ed. by Faḍl Ibrāhīm. Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1985.
- Al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Jarīr. *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*. Vol. 1-3. Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1986.
- Veccia Vaglieri, L. "Ḥarrān", *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. New Edition. 3, 1971, 228.
- Watt, W. Montgomery. *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973.
- , *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1987.
- Wolfson, Harry Austryn Wolfson. *The Philosophy of the Kalam*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.
- Zaghāl, Al-Shahhāt. *Al-Ittijāh al-Fikrī fī al-Tafsīr*. Alexandria: Al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li al-Kitāb, 1975.
- Al-Zarkashī. *Al-Burhān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*. Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1376/ 1957.
- Al-Zarqānī. *Manāhil al-ʿIrfān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat ʿIsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Shurakāh, n.d.