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**HAMKA'S METHOD OF INTERPRETING THE LEGAL VERSES
OF THE QUR'ĀN: A STUDY OF HIS *TAFSIR AL-AZHAR***

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May, 1995

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

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Abstract

Title: Hamka's Method of Interpreting the Legal Verses of the Qur'ān:
A Study of His *Tafsir al-Azhar*
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Decree: MA

Having been influenced by the Muslim reformist ideas championed by Muḥammad 'Abduh and his colleagues, Hamka attempted to disseminate and ameliorate the reform ideas in his country, Indonesia, through the means available to him; that is by preaching and writing. He was among the most prolific contemporary authors, having written 113 books including his monumental *Tafsir al-Azhar*. In this commentary, Hamka has probably included the sum of his ideas particularly those pertaining to religious aspects. With regards to the religious aspects, he mostly discusses the problems of theology, sufism and law. Hamka's conception of the law portrays his challenge and struggle towards the abolishment of *taqlīd* (uncritical acceptance of the decisions made by the predecessors) and the implementation of *ijtihād* (personal opinion). In addition, his legal comments and interpretations are quite different from many of the comments made by sectarian commentators, who saw in *tafsīr* a forum for defending their schools of thought. However, Hamka steered away from any school of thought and tried to be as objective as possible in his work, an attempt reflected in his method of interpreting the problematic legal

verses. Moreover, he did not limit himself to a single method of interpretation. On the contrary, he availed himself of both the *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* method (interpretation derived from the Prophet, the Companions and the Successors) and the *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* method (interpretation based on reason).

RÉSUMÉ

Titre: La méthode d'interprétation des versets légaux du Qur'ān selon Hamka:

Une analyse de son *Tafsir al-Azhar*

Auteur: Milhan Yusuf

Département: Institut des Etudes Islamiques, Université McGill

Diplôme: Maîtrise ès Arts

Ayant été influencé par la pensée réformatrice de Muḥammad 'Abduh ainsi que ses collègues, Hamka a tenté d'améliorer et de propager ces idées dans son pays, l'Indonésie, grâce à ses sermons et ses écrits. Il est considéré comme étant l'auteur indonésien contemporain le plus prolifique puisqu'il a publié 113 ouvrages, y compris son monumental *Tafsir al-Azhar*. Dans ce commentaire, Hamka a probablement réuni la totalité de sa pensée, en particulier celles reliées au domaine de la religion. En considérant cet aspect, l'auteur se concentre essentiellement sur les problèmes liés à la théologie, le sufisme et la loi. La conception de la loi selon Hamka illustre bien son combat et sa lutte pour l'abolition du *taqlīd* (acception inconditionnelle des décisions émises par les théologiens antérieurs) et pour l'instauration de l'*ijtihād* (opinion personnelle). De plus, les interprétations et commentaires légaux de l'auteur sont sensiblement différents de ceux donnés par les commentateurs sectaires qui voyaient dans le *tafsīr* un forum au sein duquel ils pouvaient défendre leurs écoles de pensée. Cependant, Hamka se tenait éloigné de toute école de pensée et s'efforçait à demeurer le plus objectif possible dans ses écrits et cet effort se reflète dans sa méthode d'interprétation des versets légaux problématiques.

De plus, il ne s'est pas limité à une seule méthode d'interprétation. Au contraire, Hamka s'est servi à la fois de la méthode du *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* (interprétation issue du Prophète, de ses Compagnons et de ses Successeurs) et du *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* (interprétation fondée sur la raison).

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Many people, whether directly or indirectly, have been very helpful in facilitating the completion of this thesis. The list is endless, but I would especially like to thank the staff of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), as well as the staff of the McGill Indonesia IAIN Development Project, particularly its Director Dr. Issa J. Boullata, its former Director Dr. Charles J. Adams, its Co-ordinator Ms. Wendy Allen, and Drs. Murni Djamal, M.A., of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs. My appreciation also goes to the staff of the Islamic Studies Library, especially Ms. Salwa Ferahian for her invaluable help in providing the necessary research materials. Finally, my thanks go to my colleague and friend, Yasmine Badr, for reading and editing the first

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TRANSLITERATION

In this study, I follow the transliteration system of the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University. However, the Indonesian words or names derived from the Arabic are written in the form cited in the sources, and as is usual in Indonesia, such as Muhammad instead of Muḥammad, tafsir instead of *tafsīr*, and ulama instead of '*ulamā*'.

The main differences in transliteration from Arabic are as follows:

Arabic	English	Indonesian
ث	th	ts
ح	ḥ	h
خ	kh	ch/kh
ذ	dh	dz
ش	sh	sy
ص	ṣ	sh
ض	ḍ	dl
ط	ṭ	th
ظ	ẓ	dh
ا	a/at/ah	ah

INTRODUCTION

One of the most unique features of the Qur'ān is that, unlike conventional books, it does not present a thematic classification of the topics it embodies.¹ However, in spite of this haphazard arrangement, the Qur'ān has continued to be the major source of law, politics, economics, ethics and social conventions for the Muslim community for the past fifteen centuries. Moreover, it has inspired a multitude of books that have been written about it. These books explore the Qur'ān from different vantage points, and were written by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars (Islamicists).² Of all the works written on the Qur'ān, *tafsīr* volumes (exegesis) are, perhaps, the most significant because through them, exegetes attempt to evince the profound messages of the Qur'ān. However, the science of exegesis is not an easy one since the Qur'ān contains a variety of highly artistic styles, metaphorical and allegorical usages. Therefore, in order to facilitate and systematize the interpretation of the Qur'ān, exegetes have devised several methods through which the messages of the Qur'ān can be gleaned, and its commandments and spirit illustrated for the benefit of mankind.³ In addition, Muslim exegetes considered interpretation to be a

¹Abdallah Yousuf Ali, *The Glorious Kur'an: Translation and Commentary* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 4-5.

²Many Islamicists, such as Ignaz Goldziher, Helmut Gätje, John Wansbrough, Arthur Jeffery and Andrew Rippin have written several books and articles which explore the Qur'ān from various angles.

³Qur'ān, 16: 89.

sacred religious obligation,⁴ without which Muslims would not be able to understand the messages of the glorious Qur'ān. As Ahmad Von Denffer says:

Tafsīr (exegesis) of the Qur'ān is the most important science for Muslims. All matters concerning the Islamic way of life are connected to it in one sense or another since the right application of Islam is based on the proper understanding of the guidance from Allah. Without *tafsīr* there would be no right understanding of various passages of the Qur'ān.⁵

Throughout the course of *tafsīr* history, Muslims have shown a keen interest in studying the Qur'ān and writing commentaries on it. Moreover, since Muslim commentators tended to represent the dominant intellectual and socio-cultural trends of their times, the history of the exegesis of the Qur'ān has truly become a mirror of the intellectual activities of Muslims. Thus, by surveying the development of Qur'anic exegetical literature, it can be seen that there had been several methods of interpretation aimed at evoking the meanings and messages of the Qur'ān. Some of these methods are:

1. Interpretation in terms of explanation derived from the Qur'ān itself, and from the traditions of the Prophet and his Companions and their Successors. This method is called *al-tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*.
2. Interpretation that is based on the valid ideas of the commentators. This kind of exegesis is called *al-tafsīr bi al-ra'y*. *Al-tafsīr bi al-ra'y* does not mean 'interpretation by mere opinion', but rather an interpretation through *ijtihād* (personal judgement) and on

⁴Muhammad Husayn al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, Vol. I (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Hadīthah, 1961), 29; 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Rahmān, *Al-Qur'ān wa al-Tafsīr al-'Asrī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1970), 47; Yousuf Ali, *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵Ahmad Von Denffer, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'ān* (London: The Islamic Foundation, 1983), 123.

the basis of sound sources.

3. *Al-tafsīr al-ishārī*. This indicates the interpretation of the Qur'ān beyond its outer meanings. The people practising this kind of interpretation concern themselves with the meanings attached to verses of the Qur'ān, which are visible only to those whose hearts Allah has opened to deep spirituality. This method of *tafsīr* is often found in the works of mystically-inclined authors.⁶
4. Interpretation that attempts to reconcile between the method of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* and that of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* as well as to prove that the Qur'ān is able to respond to modern needs both materially and spiritually. This method is called the modern *tafsīr*.⁷

The last method has been widely used by Muslim scholars since the nineteenth century reform movement spearheaded by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad 'Abduh. The latter (d. 1905 A.D.) called on Muslims to put aside blind adherence to traditions and to rely on the authority of the Qur'ān. He tried to compose a fresh interpretation of the Qur'ān with emphasis on the social aspect of its teachings. Not surprisingly, his ideas spread all over the Muslim world including Indonesia. In Indonesia, reformism was much appreciated by the modern scholars who, in turn, attempted to purify and strengthen the faith within the bosom of the Muslim *ummah* with regards to religious

⁶*Ibid.*, 132; Maḥmūd Basyūnī Fūdah, *Nash'at al-Tafsīr wa Manāhijuh fī Daw' al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyya* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Amānah, 1986), 51.

⁷J. M. S. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation (1880-1960)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 80; J. J. G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 17-9; Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Ridā* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 107.

teachings. Among those scholars was Hamka who was deeply influenced by the spirit of reform. Indeed, reform became a lifelong commitment for him, a commitment he advanced through both the oral and written mediums. Through his writings, particularly *Tafsir al-Azhar*, Hamka was successful in propagating numerous modern ideas that revitalized Indonesian Islam.

Hence, the aim of this thesis is to scrutinize Hamka's method of interpreting the Qur'ān, especially the problematic legal verses. The first chapter outlines Hamka's historical background, his life and work. The second chapter traces the classification of the methods of Qur'anic commentaries. While, the final chapter examines Hamka's method of interpreting the legal verses. The last section of that chapter consists of a conclusion summarizing the distinguishing features of his method.

The sources used for studying this subject can be divided into three categories: firstly, sources written by Hamka himself, particularly his *Tafsir al-Azhar*; secondly, writings by others on Hamka; and thirdly general sources related to the subject under discussion.

CHAPTER ONE

A BIOGRAPHICAL FOREWORD

In order to know thoroughly the character of a person and learn the extent of his involvement in disseminating his ideas and performing his philanthropic deeds, it is of paramount importance to evaluate his biography. What has he done and what works has he composed during his life? Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah is a person about whom these questions may be raised, as his life was much devoted to reforming and modernizing the thought and practice of the Indonesian *ummah* (community) through the oral and written mediums. The success of his life was achieved through his determination and perseverance. Moreover, his ancestors were renowned for their love of knowledge, and this intellectual aptitude was passed on to him.

A. Hamka's Life

Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, widely known by his abbreviated name Hamka, was born in Maninjau, West Sumatra¹ on February 17, 1908 and died in Jakarta

¹West Sumatra is one of the provinces of Indonesia and its capital is Padang. The land as well as its people are called Minangkabau. Minangkabau is regarded as one of the most Islamized regions in Indonesia. At the same time, this region is also famous for its adherence to its *adat* (local customs). See Murni Djamal, "Dr.H.Abdul Karim Amrullah: His Influence in the Islamic Reform Movement in Minangkabau in the Early Twentieth Century," (MA thesis, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1975), 5.

on July 24, 1981.² He was born into a well-respected religious family and grew up in a very religious milieu. His father, grandfather and great-grandfather³ were all scholars who devoted their life to the reform of Muslim religious thought and practice.

Hamka's father, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah,⁴ was a reformer in West Sumatra,⁵ who, along with three other Muslim scholars, namely, Taher Djalaluddin,⁶ Muhammad

²Rusydi, *Pribadi dan Martabat Buya Prof. Dr. Hamka* (Jakarta: Panjimas, 1983), 44.

³Hamka mentioned that one of his ancestors was Abdul Arif who was called 'Tuanku Pauh Pariaman' or Tuanku Nan Tuo. He was a patriot of the *Padri* (white people) who married a woman from Maninjau when he propagated Islam there. They had two children, Lebai Putih Gigi and Saerah. Saerah was later married to Abdullah Saleh, who was known as Tuanku Guguk Katur, and who was one of her father's students. From this marriage, they had Abdul Karim Amrullah, Hamka's father. See Hamka, *Ayahku: Riwayat Hidup Dr. H. Abdul Karim Amrullah dan Perjuangan Kaum Agama di Sumatra* (Jakarta: Yayasan Uminda, 1982), 27-51.

⁴Abdul Karim Amrullah, known as Haji Rasul, was born in Sungai Batang Maninjau, West Sumatra in 1879, and died in Jakarta on June 2, 1945. When he was sixteen, he went to Mecca and studied there with Ahmad Khatib for seven years. He was also the first Indonesian Muslim honoured with the title of Doctor from al-Azhar University. See Djamal, *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵Before Amrullah and friends launched their movement, there was another religious movement in Minangkabau in 1821-1838 which was known as the *Padri* Movement. The latter was led by three famous *hajis* (pilgrims) who returned to Minangkabau from Mecca probably in 1803 or in 1804. The three pilgrims: Haji Sumanik, Haji Miskin and Haji Piobang were much influenced by Wahhābī ideas. Their actions were directed towards a reformation of Islam. See Azyumardi Azra, "The Surau and the Early Reform Movements in Minangkabau," *Mizan* 2 (1990): 74.

⁶Taher Djalaluddin was born in Angkek, Bukittinggi in 1869. He studied in Egypt and from 1900 onwards lived in Malaysia. In 1906, he published a magazine entitled '*Al-Iman*' and established a school '*Madrasat Al-Iqbal al-Islamiyah*'. Djalaluddin did not participate in the field movement, but, his ideas influenced the thought of Abdul Karim and his associates through his magazine, which provided articles concerning religious as well as the thought of Muhammad 'Abduh. See Deliar Noer, *Gerakan Moderen Islam di Indonesia 1900-1942* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1980), 40-2.

Djamil Djambek⁷ and Haji Abdullah Ahmad⁸ urged Muslims to base their religious judgements on the primary sources, i.e, the Qur'ān and *Sunna*, and to seek the truth through the use of 'aql (reasoning). They condemned *taqlīd* (an unquestioning adoption of legal decisions made by the predecessors), the heterodoxy of sufism, and refused unauthorized innovations (*bida'*) in religious practices.⁹ Their movement was well organized and disseminated its ideas through issuing numerous publications, establishing new schools, holding public debates and *tabligh* sessions (public religious lectures). Moreover, the movement addressed people from all walks of life. According to Taufik Abdullah, "the most effective medium in promoting their ideas was the *tabligh* which allowed more personal and intimate communications between the religious experts and the laymen."¹⁰

Based on 'Abduh's ideas, Karim Amrullah and his associates launched their reform

⁷Muhammad Djamil Djambek was born in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra in 1860. He attended elementary school there and in 1896 left for Mecca where he stayed for 9 years studying Islam. In 1913, he established a social organization called *Sammaratul Ikhwan*. See, *Ibid.*, 42-4.

⁸Haji Abdullah Ahmad was born in Padang Panjang, West Sumatera in 1878. After finishing his elementary school, he went to Mecca in 1895 and returned to Indonesia in 1899. He moved to Padang in 1906 and established an organization called *Jammaah Adabiah* from which he propagated Islamic teachings. He also built a school. In 1911, he published a magazine named *Al-Munir* and in 1914, he was chosen as the chairman of journalists in Padang. See, *Ibid.*, 46-7.

⁹Taufik Abdullah, "Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra (1927-1933)," *Monograph Series* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1971), 13.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 53.

in the first half of the twentieth century. But, their movement¹¹ was opposed by *Kaum Tua* and *Kaum Adat* (Adat faction)¹² because the latter were afraid that the *Kaum Muda* movement would eliminate their influence and dignity in society. In order to defend the status quo, *Kaum Tua* and *Kaum Adat* attacked their opponents by labelling them a group of Mu'tazila, Wahhābī and Khawārij. The reformists were even accused of being *kāfir* (not Muslims), because they wore pants, coats and ties like the Dutch.¹³

Having imbibed the spirit of reform and been brought up in its midst, Hamka's father expected Hamka to be a good Muslim scholar, who would continue purifying Islamic teachings of contemporary social heresies. He hoped his son would dedicate himself to modernizing religious thought. So, in his childhood, Hamka was taught to recite the Qur'ān at home. Then, at the age of seven, he was sent to a public school in the morning and a religious school (*dīnīyah*) in the afternoon. At night he met with his

¹¹This movement was called the *Kaum Muda* (literally Young Group) Movement which was contrary to *Kaum Tua* (literally Old Group). The term 'young' was used as a symbol for progress while 'old' was seen as backward and conservative. The *Kaum Tua* strictly adhered to the traditions of their ancestors in understanding Islamic teachings. However, they were accused by *Kaum Muda* of practising several heresies (*bida'*) in their *'ibādah* (worship). Some of these *bida'* including reiterating the phrase *'uṣallī* (I intend to pray) at the outset of their prayers, doing *talqīn* (reciting "there is no God but Allah and Muḥammad is His messenger) at the grave of a dead person in order to teach the deceased, and celebrating the third, seventh, fortieth, hundredth and the thousandth day of the death with feasting. See *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²The *Kaum Adat* were also Muslims. However, due to their lack of sufficient knowledge of Islamic beliefs as well as other factors related to their position as the head-men (*penghulu*) of their *sukus* (clans), it seems that they became opponents of any religious movement in Minangkabau. See Djamal, *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³Hamka, *Ibid.*, 106-7.

friends in the *surau*.¹⁴

Unfortunately, the rote educational method used in schools at that time was not encouraging to the young Hamka. Thus, he did not excel in most subjects except for Arabic literature, which later helped him greatly in studying Islam comprehensively; as most Islamic teachings are written in Arabic. At the time, he had no free time to play like his friends, and accordingly disliked his father's attitude and control of his activities, as well as the latter's expectations of academic excellence from his son.¹⁵ The one thing that helped Hamka break the routine of his study activities was going to a bookstore and reading books and novels there. However, his father saw him once reading a novel there and was infuriated because he thought that novels were worthless and had no relation to religious teachings. Not surprisingly, Hamka later declared that he had had an unhappy childhood.¹⁶ Later, as a teenager, he encountered more conflicts which were to influence his thought permanently. A case in point, was the custom of polygamy, which had been practised by all including kings and scholars. He disagreed with this custom and was grieved and disappointed when his father divorced his mother.¹⁷ In accordance with the

¹⁴Linguistically, the word *surau* means "place" or "place of worship". In Minangkabau, the *surau*, even before the coming of Islam, had already acquired an important position in the social structure. Its function was more diverse than merely serving as a place for religious activities. The *surau* in the Minangkabau *adat* (local custom) system belongs to the people of either one womb or of one lineage. See Azra, *Ibid.*, 64-6.

¹⁵Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup*, Vol. I (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1974), 56-9.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 62-3.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 66-9.

custom of polygamy, Hamka's father had eleven wives¹⁸. Since then, Hamka opposed this local custom.

At the age of sixteen, he decided to travel outside West Sumatra in search of more experience. His first destination was Java because he had heard that many prominent scholars there were spreading their ideas on community development through education. Moreover, they were fighting customs contrary to Islamic teachings, propagating the importance of independence, and introducing the thought of Muslim reformists such as Muḥammad 'Abduh¹⁹ and Rashīd Ridā. He visited Yogyakarta where he had the opportunity to come into contact with such scholars as H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto,²⁰ and Ki Bagus Hadikusumo.²¹ He also had the chance to attend courses held by the

¹⁸Hamka, *Ayahku*, *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁹Although the ideas of Muḥammad 'Abduh had already been disseminated by reformers in Hamka's own country, West Sumatra. Yet the ideas introduced were mostly concerned with the purification of Islamic teachings, not with modernity, as emphasized by the Javanese modernists.

²⁰Tjokroaminoto was born on August 16, 1882 in Madiun and passed away on December 17, 1934 in Yogyakarta. He was a famous leader of Syarikat Islam from 1911 to 1934. See Amelz, *H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto: Hidup dan Perjuangannya* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1952).

²¹Hadikusumo was born on November 24, 1890 in Yogyakarta. His father was an officer of Islamic affairs at the Sultan's palace in Yogyakarta. He first studied in his village school and then moved on to a *Pesantren*, or Islamic boarding school, in Wonokromo, Yogyakarta. He was the chairman of Muhammadiyah in 1942-1953 and through his proposal, the formula of *Pancasila* (the five principles of Indonesian ideology) was accepted and written in the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution. See Djarnawi Hadikusumo, *Derita Seorang Pemimpin: Riwayat Hidup dan Buah Pikiran Ki Bagus Hadikusumo* (Yogyakarta: Persatuan, 1979).

Muhammadiyah²² and Syarikat Islam organizations.²³ He stayed in Java for one year and later maintained that his first visit to Java had inspired in him a love for the pursuit of Islamic knowledge.²⁴

With this new spirit, a new movement was started in his own country by Hamka. He wanted to train his community in the study of Islam and to motivate their consciousness towards the development of their community. Hence, he was active in giving sermons that would introduce these ideas to his contemporaries. Moreover, he became involved in the Muhammadiyah organization and was elected in 1934 as a member of its Council for central Sumatra.²⁵ However, his involvement in religious affairs was not limited to West Sumatra but extended to neighbouring islands, as he was sent by the Muhammadiyah to neighbouring regions to sound the trumpet of reform. Moreover, Hamka had displayed from the outset an independence and originality of thought, that refused to be blindly tied to the thought of any organization. Hence, he often

²²Muhammadiyah is an organization which was founded by Haji Ahmad Dahlan on November 18, 1912 in Yogyakarta. Its aim is the protection of Indonesian Islam from corrupting influences and practices, the reformulation of Islamic doctrine in the light of modern thought, the reformation of Muslim education, and the defense of Islam against external influences and attacks. See Abdul Mukti Ali, "The Muhammadiyah Movement: A Bibliographical Introduction," (MA thesis, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1957), 50.

²³Officially established in 1912, Syarikat Islam was the first and one of the largest Indonesian Muslim organizations. This organization was, at first, much involved in politics against Dutch colonialism and stressed the importance of independence. See George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952), 28.

²⁴Hamka, *Kenang-kenangan*, *Ibid.*, 101.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 45.

voiced his opinion concerning contemporary issues without waiting for official statements from Muhammadiyah. A case in point, is his opposition of Permi's ideas²⁶ which added nationalism to Islam. Hamka criticized Permi's slogan 'Islam and nationalism' and emphasized that Islam was already perfect, and did not need the prop of nationalism added to it.²⁷

Inevitably, Hamka became entrenched in the contemporary political arena and it will be the business of this thesis to highlight salient points in Hamka's political career, not only in the field of practical politics but also in his leadership of organizations which had contributed to state policy.

It is to his credit that Hamka's political career was marked by the consistency of his opinions and his steadfast representation of the *ummah* (Muslim community), not the promotion of his personal interests. Although his political role was not as significant as that of Soekarno,²⁸ Muhammad Hatta²⁹ or Muhammad Natsir,³⁰ this does not mean that he had no role in politics at all. He was a seasoned politician who had been introduced to the field by such magnates as Tjokroaminoto, the prominent leader of

²⁶Permi is the abbreviation of Persatuan Muslim Indonesia (Association of Indonesian Muslims). It is a political party, and its aim was to reconcile the two different ideologies, at that time, of Islam and nationalism. See Abdullah, *Ibid.*, 134-5.

²⁷Hamka's views concerning Islam and nationalism changed in the late of 1930's. He mentioned that if nationalism were not taken as exclusivism or chauvinism, it would not be contradictory to Islam. *Ibid.*, 167-8.

²⁸He was the first President of Indonesia.

²⁹He was the first Vice President of Indonesia.

³⁰Natsir was a most eminent leader of *Masjumi* (Muslim political party) and he was also the Prime Minister in 1952.

Syarikat Islam, and Ki Bagus Hadikusumo who was the chairman of the Muhammadiyah. These two leaders, in particular, were very prominent at the time and were among the pioneers for Indonesian independence. Moreover, Hamka was involved in the Masjumi Party,³¹ through which he was appointed as a member of the Constituent Assembly. Another proof of Hamka's credibility in politics was his role in founding Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesia Muslim Scholars' Council), followed by his resignation from his position in 1981 due to a disagreement with the government concerning the ritual of the Christmas ceremony.

Through his attitude in politics one can derive significant insight into the extent to which he attempted to voice the interests of the *ummah*. First, when he was a member of the Constituent Assembly, after the first General Elections of 1955, the policy of the government was not as democratic as the spirit of the 1945 constitution had been. The government, at the time, applied a system they called 'Guided Democracy'. He felt that this system was contrary to real democracy since Soekarno, as President, tried to concentrate power in his own hands. Hamka criticized this unlawful action and branded 'Guided Democracy' as nothing but a straight path to dictatorship.³² He boldly stated his ideas for the benefit of the *ummah* because he was sure that it was his responsibility as the representative of the people to do so, even though he knew he could face some risks

³¹Masjumi is the contraction of Majelis Sjiro Muslimin Indonesia (Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslims). It was the biggest Islamic political party, established on November 7, 1945 and dissolved on September 13, 1960.

³²Saifuddin Anshari, "The Jakarta Charter of June 1945: A History of the Gentleman's Agreement between the Islamic and the Secular Nationalists in Modern Indonesia," (MA thesis, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1976), 80.

because of his opposition. At this time, Hamka worked together with other Muslim intellectuals, supported by some army generals such as Abdul Harris Nasution and Sudirman, in opposing the Communist intervention in state affairs. The former centered their activities at the *Al-Azhar* Grand Mosque in Kebajoran, Jakarta. Unfortunately, during these activities, Hamka was suspected by Soekarno of dissension and was later sent to jail.³³

Another significant attitude of Hamka's was his support of the government's establishment of the Muslim Scholars' Council. He felt sure that the council would be useful for all Indonesian Muslims. The council was officially required to:

- Issue *fatwas* (advice) on matters of religion and society to the government and the people with the framework of *al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wā al-nahy 'an al-munkar* (commanding the right, shunning the wrong).
- Strengthen Muslim brotherhood and maintain peaceful relationships with other religious communities.
- Represent the Muslim community in any meeting with other religious communities.
- Act as a liaison between Muslim scholars and government officials and interpret government development policies in such a way that they might be easily understood by the common people.³⁴

However, the council's *de facto* function was to translate government policies into language that the *ummah* could understand.³⁵ However, Hamka attempted to be a true representative of the *ummah* when he was elected as the first chairman of this council.

³³Howard M. Federspiel, "The Military and Islam in Sukarno's Indonesia," *Pacific Affairs* 46 (1973): 414.

³⁴Noer, "Administration of Islam in Indonesia," *Monograph Series* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1978), 74.

³⁵Martin Van Bruinessen, "Indonesia's Ulama and Politics: Caught between Legitimizing the Status Quo and Searching for Alternatives," *Prisma* 49 (1990): 64.

A case in point, is his stand towards the Christmas ceremony. Hamka held that, according to Islamic law, it was forbidden for Muslims to take part in the ritual ceremony of Christmas day. His statement drew a strong reaction from the government and pressure was put on him to withdraw it in the interest of harmony among Indonesians. But Hamka refused to rescind it and subsequently decided to resign his position.³⁶

The above-mentioned stand should not indicate that Hamka advocated any one religion over the other. On the contrary, he was a moderate scholar who strove for religious harmony and fraternity in his homeland. He asserted that one has to respect other religions and opposed proselytizing practices. Religion, he remarked, is the right of everyone to choose and it depends upon faith and will, and these would be meaningless if they were induced by force.³⁷ This is in accordance with the assertion of God that there should be no coercion or compulsion in religion.³⁸

As a further instrument in circulating his reformist ideas and commenting upon current social issues, a magazine *Panji Masyarakat*,³⁹ was published by Hamka. *Panji Masyarakat* kept pace with social issues such as the debate concerning modernization which appeared in the early seventies. Concerning this issue, Hamka declared that true

³⁶*Ibid.*, 66.

³⁷Hamka, *Sejarah Umat Islam* (Jakarta: Keluarga, 1952), 146-7.

³⁸Qur'ān, 2: 256.

³⁹*Panji Masyarakat* was established by Hamka and KH Fakhri Usman (former Minister of Religious Affairs) in July 1959. This magazine was banned in August 1960 by the government for an article which criticized the policy of the rulers. In 1967, *Panji Masyarakat* was once again allowed to publish. See *Ensiklopedi Islam*, 1993 ed., s.v. "Hamka."

modernization is the "transformation of a colony to an independent nation, of feudalism to democracy, of an agrarian society to an industrialized one".⁴⁰

In addition, Hamka fought against those who feared Islam and attacked his magazine for trying to Islamize the national culture. Hamka explained that Islam had been embraced by Indonesians long before the independence of their country. Indonesians had already become accustomed to Islamic culture which had been supported by the kingdoms of Malay, Java, Banten and Banjarmasin from the 13th up to the 16th century, when the colonialists came to Indonesia. Thus, Islamic culture had already established its niche in Indonesia and Indonesian Muslims are entitled to voice their religious values. He stressed the legitimacy of expressing one's religious inclination, regardless of which religion, as long as one does not impose on, or alienate other religious values.⁴¹

Similarly, he envisaged a more pragmatic role for the Indonesian '*ulamā*' (Muslim Scholars). He persuaded the religious leaders to actively participate in developing their nascent republic and saw such participation as a religious duty imposed upon them by God. If a government's policy is good, the '*ulamā*' should support it. But, if it is bad, they are duty-bound to correct it. He did not agree that the '*ulamā*' should be puppets in the hands of the government. He said:

It used to happen that the '*ulamā*' would be brought together by the authorities ... for informal talks with high officials. At the end of the meeting they would be

⁴⁰Mohammed Kamal Hasan, "Contemporary Muslim Religio-Political Thought in Indonesia: The Response to New Order Modernization," (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1975), 28-9.

⁴¹Hamka, "Kebudayaan Arab atau Kebudayaan Islam," *Panji Masyarakat* 16 (1960): 1.

sent home by air ... the '*ulamā*' continued to be discontented if, in spite of this official approach, social evil continued to flourish. In the end, they arrived at the conclusion that those social gatherings were no more than 'a show' to impress the common people that the authorities do indeed respect religion.⁴²

As for his spectacular eloquence and preaching ability, it is stated by Rahayu Effendi, one of Hamka's admirers, that in his sermons Hamka commanded the full attention of his audience. His forceful delivery, his vibrant voice, and his erudite use of language were extremely articulate and mesmerizing. In any seminar or conference, his performance set him apart from other speakers, for his enthusiasm to the subject, and the vast store of knowledge he commanded in many fields, illuminated and broadened every discussion and made these hours enchanting and stimulating at once. Moreover, he had a tasteful appreciation of humor and a sharp wit.⁴³

In addition to his active participation in organizations, politics and preaching, Hamka was also a very talented writer. At first, he wrote novels and then focused on religious works such as *Tasauf Modern* (1939), *Keadilan Ilahi* (1962) and *Tafsir al-Azhar* (1982). According to Abdurrahman Wahid,⁴⁴ *Tafsir al-Azhar* is the most monumental among all his works.⁴⁵

⁴²Hasan, *Ibid.*, 270. See also Hamka, "Partisipasi Ulama dan Pembangunan," *Panji Masyarakat* 154 (1974): 2.

⁴³Rahayu Effendi, "Buya Sampai ke Rongga Spiritualku," in *Hamka di Mata Hati Umat*, ed. Nasir Tamara et. al. (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1984), 337-39.

⁴⁴Abdurrahman Wahid is presently the General Chairman of the Central Executive Board of the biggest Muslim social organization in Indonesia, that is, Nahdhatul Ulama. He is also a leader of Forum Demokrasi which is concerned with democracy issues.

⁴⁵Abdurrahman Wahid, "Benarkah Buya Hamka Seorang Besar?," in *Hamka di Mata Hati Umat*, *Ibid.*, 30.

B. Hamka's Works

The publication of no less than 113 books in the areas of literature and religion not only indicate that Hamka was an extremely prolific author, but also, that his thought was not confined to a particular field. Moreover, his eloquent style led to the continuous appeal and demand of his books. For example, *Tasauf Modern* received its seventeenth publication in the early 1980's.⁴⁶ As a novelist, he was much influenced by Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī.⁴⁷ He wrote many novels, such as *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah* (1938), *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck* (1938), *Merantau ke Deli* (1941), and *Tuaniku Direktur* (1940). His career as an author started in 1925 when at the age of seventeen⁴⁸ he began to write novels. The stories in his novels depict the daily experiences of human beings and the characters represent people who are obedient to religion.⁴⁹ One of his literary works, *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van Der Wijck*, was criticized by his opponents who accused Hamka of plagiarism. However, such accusations were frequently sounded, at the time, by Indonesian Communists who felt threatened by writers with opposing political inclinations. At the time, writers were divided into two groups. One was the Communist group represented by Abdoellah Said Patmadji and Pramoedya Ananta Toer, and the other was the non-Communist group represented by Hamka, H.B. Jassin, Umar Ismail and N.

⁴⁶Sides Sudyarto, "Hamka, Realisme Religius," in *Hamka di Mata Hati Umat*, *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁷Al-Manfalūṭī was an Egyptian writer born in 1876 in Manfalūt and died in 1924 in Cairo.

⁴⁸Rusydi, *Ibid.*, 335.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

Sulaiman.⁵⁰

Not only did Hamka, the author, enjoy considerable success because of his literary creations, but also because of his religious works. The latter displayed a simplicity and lucidity of language that made them comprehensible to all, even though most of his books have a declared didactic purpose, which is leading people back to religion and enhancing the significance of theology in their daily lives. *Tafsir al-Azhar*, for example, has had a great influence on its readers because in it Hamka described the need for explaining the Qur'ān better than any other Indonesian exegete.

Among all Hamka's works, *Tafsir al-Azhar* will be discussed in great detail in this thesis since it is his monumental work and it is the topic of my research. The name of this *tafsīr* was derived from the name of the grand mosque of *al-Azhar*⁵¹ in Jakarta, which was also the headquarters of Hamka's *da'wah* activities (religious propagation), and the administrative centre for the publication of his Islamic magazine *Panji Masyarakat*. His commentary was written while he was in prison from 1964 to 1966⁵² during the 'Guided Democracy' era (1959 to 1965) of Indonesian history, when the government followed leftist⁵³ policies and Communists exercised considerable influence.⁵⁴ Several parts of

⁵⁰Saleh Iskandar Poeradisastra, "Dalam Karya Sastrapun Berdakwah dan berkhotbah," in *Hamka di Mata Hati Umat*, *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵¹The mosque was given this name by Maḥmūd Shalṭūt, the Rector of al-Azhar University in Cairo, during a visit to Indonesia in 1960.

⁵²Attempts at writing Qur'anic commentary in Indonesia date back to the seventeenth century when Abdurrauf Singkel wrote *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*.

⁵³Left is related to Communism and Right is related to religion. Both are two popular idioms in Indonesia.

this commentary had been delivered earlier during Hamka's morning sermons in the mosque, and were later printed in the magazine *Panji Masyarakat*.

Federspiel mentions that the number of scholars writing commentaries has increased greatly since the beginning of the twentieth century. He also sees Hamka as one who has attempted to improve the way of writing commentaries by adhering to a sound methodology. As Federspiel sees it, three generations of exegetes have appeared since the early twentieth century, but the last generation has applied the soundest methodology. The distinctions are:

1. The first generation goes back to the early part of this century up to the 1960s. It was marked by partial translations and commentaries and was represented by Tjokroaminoto and Adnan Nur.
2. The second generation of commentaries set the standard, it would seem, for translating the meaning of the Qur'ān into Indonesian and providing further explanatory text. H.Zainuddin Hamidy, H.S. Fachruddin, Ahmad Hassan and H. Mahmud Yunus were among this generation.
3. The third generation has been identified by an attempt to improve the second generation's commentaries. They aimed at comprehension of the message of the Qur'ān and, consequently, their work contains material about the Qur'anic text itself and the methodology of analyzing the commentary. This generation was represented by H.A. Halim Hassan, H. Zainal Arifin, Abdurrahim Haitami, Hasbi ash-Shiddiqy and Hamka.⁵⁵

The declared purpose of Hamka's interpretation of the Qur'ān was to motivate Muslim youths and Islamic propagators towards a better understanding of the teachings of the Qur'ān.⁵⁶ In addition, many scholars consider this commentary significant because in it Hamka drew from his broad knowledge to support and elucidate his ideas, and

⁵⁴Howard M. Federspiel, *Deepening Faith and Strengthening Behaviour: Indonesian Studies of Qur'an and Hadīth* (Jakarta: Privately published, 1987), 99.

⁵⁵Federspiel, *Ibid.*, 85.

⁵⁶Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, Vol. I (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1982), 4.

because he sometimes included the opinions of other scholars.⁵⁷ It was only at the end that he offered his opinion after clear explanation and argument.

The thought of numerous prominent exegetes, whether Sunni or Shi'i is portrayed in *Tafsir al-Azhar*. They are, the Sunni, Muḥammad 'Abduh, Rashīd Rīdā, Sayyid Qutb, as well as Ṭabāṭabā'ī, the Shi'i scholar. Indeed, Hamka is to be complimented on depicting the opinion of both Sunni and Shi'i scholars, an act that has been rarely seen either in Indonesia or in other Muslim countries, as most commentators are divided into Sunnis and Shi'is and neither cares about the opinion of the other. But, Hamka, although a Sunni, attempted to provide the opinion of some Shi'i scholars. This can be seen in his comment on the verse concerning the creation of Adam as the *Khalīfah* (Vicegerent) of God on earth. In this instance, as in others, he drew widely from the opinions of Sunni and Shi'i scholars and then let the readers decide for themselves.⁵⁸ Hamka tends to present certain ideas in order to introduce the readers to moderate ways of interpreting the scriptures. Moreover, he tries to emphasize that Muslims must not be restricted to one school of thought; they should be able to review the ideas offered by various scholars, and then be free to form their own opinions.

To frame this discussion, one must also mention the great effect 'Abduh's thought had on the reform movements in the modern Muslim world, especially in Indonesia. Not

⁵⁷Yunan Yusuf acknowledges that Hamka showed great ability in interpreting each verse of the Qur'ān, supported by many arguments. For example, Yusuf is surprised at the way Hamka has commented upon the word *'ilāh*, with several explanations drawn from the history of old Malay. See Yunan Yusuf, "Karakteristik Tafsir al-Qur'an di Indonesia Abad Keduapuluh," *Ulumul Quran* 4 (1992). 56-7.

⁵⁸Hamka, *Ibid.*, 166-70.

surprisingly, Hamka too was attracted to 'Abduh's ideas and displayed them with greater frequency in his commentary than he did the penmanship of other scholars. This was declared by Hamka when he highly praised the character of *Tafsīr al-Manār*.⁵⁹

Finally, it remains to be said that Hamka had built for himself the reputation of being a self-educated genius, successful in both literature and the Islamic arts, even though he had never attended university, not even high school. However, he received much recognition for his scholarly achievements. Atho Mudzhar mentions that "his knowledge of Islam was so internationally recognized that in 1959 the Azhar University of Cairo conferred an honorary doctorate upon him. In 1974 he received another honorary doctorate from the University of Kebangsaan Malaysia".⁶⁰

Before discussing Hamka's method of interpreting legal verses in chapter III, the next chapter will offer a classification of methods of Qur'anic commentaries in general.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁰Mohammad Atho Mudzhar, *Fatwas of the Council of Indonesia Ulama: A Study of Islamic Legal Thought in Indonesia 1975-1988* (Jakarta: INIS, 1993), 55.

CHAPTER TWO

A CLASSIFICATION OF THE METHODS OF QUR'ANIC COMMENTARIES

This chapter will provide a description concerning the historical development of exegetical literature as well as the methods of exegesis. The purpose of this chapter is mainly to observe several methods of Qur'anic interpretation which have been employed by the scholars from the early Islamic period until modern times.

A. The Beginning and Development of *Tafsīr* (Exegesis)

The word *tafsīr* is derived from the root '*fasara*' which means to explain, expound, explicate, elucidate, interpret or comment upon something.¹ This word occurs only once in the Qur'ān.² It also denotes a scholarly discussion when it is associated with such words as *ma'ānī*, *ta'wīl* and *sharḥ*.³ In the course of time, when religious knowledge had branched into various sciences, *tafsīr* became a technical term for Qur'anic exegesis.

¹Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Ithaca: Spoken Language Service, Inc., 1976), 713.

²"And no question do they bring to thee but We reveal to thee the truth and the best explanation". Qur'ān, 25: 33.

³Andrew Rippin, "Tafsīr," in Mircea Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987).

In its broadest sense, it denotes the explanation, interpretation and commentary of the Qur'ān. This interpretation avails itself of all the possible means of obtaining knowledge, which can contribute to the proper understanding of the Qur'ān, explain its meaning and clarify its legal implications. As such, al-Suyūṭī's remarks that:

Tafsīr is the knowledge through which the meaning of the book of God, as revealed to the Prophet, its laws and wisdom may be understood. This knowledge comes through the study of language, principles of jurisprudence, and also the science of recitation. A knowledge of the background of the revelation and of abrogation and abrogated verses is also necessary in *tafsīr*.⁴

The appearance and development of *tafsīr* took place during the first century of Islam. It started at the time of the Prophet⁵ when his Companions (*Ṣaḥāba*) requested explanations for the verses of the Qur'ān. They used to ask Muḥammad various kinds of questions concerning those verses whose meanings were unclear, or those verses which had problems. They also requested from Muḥammad the details of certain historical events (such as the circumstances of revelation) or other spiritual matters on which they sought more insight. The apostle's explanations were then committed to memory by the Companions, who afterwards wrote them down.⁶ In this way, the people around Muḥammad became acquainted with the text. As for the next generation, i.e the Successors of the Companions (*Tābi'ūn*), they learned from the Companions what the latter had previously acquired from the Prophet. In this way, knowledge was handed down

⁴Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Vol. II (Cairo: Maktab Dār al-Turāth, n.d.), 174; Rashid Ahmad Jullandri, "Qur'ānic Exegesis and Classical Tafsīr," *The Islamic Quarterly* 12 (January-June 1968): 73.

⁵Sayyid M.H. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *The Qur'ān in Islam: Its Impact & Influence on the Life of Muslims* (London: Zahra Publications, 1987), 46.

⁶*Ibid.*, 46-7.

from one generation to the next. The following generations always verified the knowledge they acquired through an analysis of the chain of transmission, which had to extend from the *Tābi'ūn* and the *Ashāb*, to the Prophet himself. In this manner, the science of *ḥadīth* or tradition was born.⁷ At the time, however, the *ḥadīth* literature encompassed all manner of religious concepts, including exegesis, ethics and history.⁸ Later on, during the early years of the third century of the Hijra, exegesis became an independent science which came to be called *tafsīr*.⁹

The development of exegetic literature, if analyzed from the chronological point of view, can be divided into four phases.¹⁰ However, there is no strict demarcation line between one phase and the next. The first phase is that of the *Ṣaḥāba*, which started during the life of the Prophet when his Companions used to seek his clarification of certain remarks in the revealed text. It is recorded that among the Companions, there were ten who mastered the science of *tafsīr* more than any other. They were, Ibn Mas'ūd, Ibn 'Abbās, Ubayy b. Ka'b, Zaid b. Thābit, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī and 'Abdullāh b. al-Zubayr together with the four Caliphs.¹¹

⁷Abdallah Yousuf Ali, *The Glorious Kur'an: Translation and Commentary* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 35.

⁸Aḥmad Amīn, *Ḍuḥā al-Islām*, Vol. II (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'līf wa al-Tarjama wa al-Nashr, 1952), 137.

⁹*Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁰Faruqī mentions five phases. See I. H. Azad Faruqī, *The Tarjuman al-Qur'ān: A Critical Analysis of Maulana Abu'l-Kalam Azad's Approach to the Understanding of the Qur'ān* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1982), 2.

¹¹Ṣubḥī al-Ṣālīh, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 1988), 289.

After the death of the Prophet, any questions which appeared concerning the Qur'ān were addressed directly to the Companions, who based their answers on what they had learned from the Prophet, their knowledge of the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), as well as their personal opinions. In the course of time, discussion groups sprung up in important cities around the scholarly Companions who settled there, and who started disseminating their knowledge of *tafsīr*. Each group was led by an eminent scholar of exegesis. For instance, in Mecca people gathered around 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās and several of his colleagues such as Sa'īd b. Jubayr, Mujāhid, 'Ikrimah, Tāwūs b. Kaysān al-Yamānī and 'Atā' b. Abī Riyāh. The group in Medina was led by Ubayy b. Ka'b who counted among his disciples Zaid b. Aslam, Abū al-'Āliyah and Muḥammad b. Ka'b al-Qurazī. Around 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, who was sent by 'Umar to teach the new religion in Iraq (Kūfah and Baṣrah), were 'Alqamah, Masrūq, Aswad b. Yazīd, Murrah al-Hamdānī, 'Āmir al-Sha'bī, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Qatādah b. Di'āmah al-Sadūsī. The latter group were considered the pioneers of *ra'y*¹² and most of them later became the sources of interpretation for subsequent generations.

During this period, sectarian *tafsīr* is reported to have begun with the interpretation of the Qur'ān by the *Tābi'ūn* who held differing opinions. A case in point, was the explanation of the Qur'ān by the Qadarites, namely Qatādah ibn Di'āmah al-Sadūsī (d. 730 A.D.) and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728 A.D.) which betrayed their belief in the doctrine

¹²Muḥammad Husayn al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, Vol. I (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, 1961), 101-127.

of *qadar* (predestination).¹³ Faruqi explains that "due to this and other factors, differences of opinion among *Tābi'ūn* in the matter of interpretation of a verse are clearly noticeable. These differences gradually increased in subsequent centuries".¹⁴

The second phase is famed for the codification of *ḥadīth* and it started during the last decades of Ummayyad rule. In the early days of this era, certain *Tābi'ūn* scholars travelled from one city to another observing and collecting information about *tafsīr*, which they wrote down in the manner of the *ḥadīth* collections. In fact, *tafsīr* up to that period was still part of the *ḥadīth* and there was no separation between the two. Among those travelling scholars, one may count Sufyān b. 'Uyaynah (d. 198), Wakī' b. al-Jarrāh (d. 196), Shu'bah b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160) and Ishāq al-Rāhawayh (d. 238).¹⁵ Even though the scholars attempted to collect all the transmissions of *tafsīr* given by the Prophet, as preserved by the Companions and their Successors, yet, their collections could not cover all the explanations of the verses of the Qur'ān. Thus, in an attempt to provide information on the verses to which they could find no explanation, they searched "the meaning of words philologically,...the usage and meaning of words in the purest original Arabic before it became mixed up with foreign idioms and usages".¹⁶ They also relied upon the historical circumstances of the Prophet's era in their elaboration of those verses to which they could find no prophetic explanation. They went even further and tried to

¹³*Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁴Faruqi, *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵Amīn, *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁶Yousuf Ali, *Ibid.*

ascertain for themselves the exact details of various stories in the Qur'ān, which have no clear clues in them. For instance, they wished to know the colour of the dog of the men in the cave,¹⁷ or the name of the boy who was killed by the holy man whom Moses accompanied,¹⁸ or the size of Noah's ark,¹⁹ etc. Inevitably, they had to rely on legends and knowledge of the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) for answers to these ambiguous queries. As such, their *tafsīrs* reflected much of the knowledge of the contemporary Jewish and Christian people.²⁰

The third phase is characterized by the separation of *tafsīr* from the main body of *ḥadīth* literature and its establishment as an independent discipline. It starts from the early days of the third century of the Hijra and extends until the beginning of the eighteenth century A.D., when scholars claimed to have found a modern way of interpretation. During this period, the whole Qur'ān was commented upon verse by verse²¹ and some exegetes composed their commentaries on the basis of the transmissions given by distinct religious authorities in particular cities. For instance, it is reported that Ibn Jurayj composed a commentary based upon the collections of Ibn 'Abbās; that al-Suddī relied mainly on the collections of Ibn Mas'ūd; that Muqātil b. Sulaymān and Ibn Ishāq resorted to the collections of Wahb b. Munabbih and Ka'b al-Aḥbār, which, in turn, were said to

¹⁷Qur'ān, 18: 18.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 18: 74.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 10: 73.

²⁰Amīn, *Ibid.*, 143-4.

²¹Faruqi, *Ibid.*, 11.

contain an amount of Jewish input.²²

Moreover, the development of *tafsīr* at this period was marked by a simultaneous development in literary works, which exhibited a variety of styles and genres.²³ They included works derived from earlier traditional authorities (*tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*), and others which were based on the author's own opinion (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y*).²⁴ It is also worth mentioning that during the first half of the second century, critical attention towards *tafsīr* literature was begun. This methodical verification of facts culminated in the critical activities of Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767), Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722), and 'Atā' b. Abī Ribāh (d. 114/732). By the second half of the century, the focus of attention shifted towards the classification of *tafsīr* into four main branches: "legalistic *tafsīr*, from the knowledge of which no one is excused; linguistic *tafsīr*, based on the speech of the Arabs; the formal *tafsīr*, of scholars; and the *tafsīr al-mutashābihāt*, a kind of interpretation which is known only by God".²⁵ Also in the second half of the second century, the works of the most influential early commentators began to be evaluated and graded as either "sound" or "unsound". Among the soundest volumes are the works of Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid, Sa'īd b. Jubayr, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalḥah and Ibn Ishāq, while the unsoundest contained the works of Dahḥāk, Abū Sālih, al-Suddī and Muḥammad b. al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī.²⁶

²²Amīn, *Ibid.*, 140-1; Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, 140-44.

²³Rippin, *Ibid.*

²⁴Jullandri, *Ibid.*, 81-86.

²⁵Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri: Qur'ānic Commentary and Tradition*, Vol. II (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), 112.

²⁶*Ibid.*

Again in this period, as knowledge of *tafsīr* began to develop, scholars began to discuss the quality of *isnād*,²⁷ as well as the content of each type of *tafsīr*. They did so in an effort to lay down precise criteria that would help them in the evaluation, acceptance or rejection of any work. As such, commentaries which were known to contain heretical material, or commentaries on the *mutashābihāt* which led to controversy over the attributes of God, the concept of anthropomorphism or eschatology, were dismissed by most of the contemporary orthodox scholars.²⁸ *Tafsīr al-mutashābihāt* was only accepted by religious scholars after a careful scrutiny of the *isnāds* of that *tafsīr* and its related traditions.²⁹

The development of *tafsīr* was also approached from the point of view of philology and lexicography. This occurred when some of the *Tābi'ūn* embraced philology and lexicography as their main field of study and applied the principles of this science to the study of *tafsīr*. Hence, the words, phrases and structures of the Qur'ān became of special importance in the understanding of the text. Old Arabic poetry and classical usages were called upon and were cited in support of the explanation of selected passages. It is known, for example, that Abū 'Ubayda (d. 209/824), a philologist of Baṣra, had employed this method by resorting to everything related to the history and culture of the Arabs. He wrote several philological works on the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, and his first known work on

²⁷*Isnād* is the chain of authorities on which a tradition is based. See, Wehr, *Ibid.*, 435.

²⁸Abbott, *Ibid.*, 112.

²⁹Suyūṭī, *Ibid.*, 6.

the Qur'ān was *Majāz al- Qur'ān*.³⁰

By the middle of the third century, the considerable activity in the field of *tafsīr* was represented by the works of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī who, in turn, made frequent recourse to earlier works³¹. After al-Ṭabarī, the development of *tafsīr* was marked by the growth of works which reflected a variety of interests in philosophy, jurisprudence, scholasticism and doctrinal and sectarian inclinations. In the philosophical commentaries, for example, scholars regarded philosophy as the basis of their writing and strove to find proof of their ideas in the Qur'anic statements. This can be seen in the work of Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, in which he delved into philosophy to the extent that his commentary was considered to contain everything but *tafsīr*.³²

The fourth phase is considered to begin at the dawn of the eighteenth century A.D., with the birth of the modernisation movements across the Muslim world. Unlike the commentators of the third phase who concentrated on intra-sect theological disputes, the next group, which may be termed "the modernists", held a different attitude towards Qur'anic commentaries. Their main concern was an attempt to reconcile the statements of the Qur'ān with the requirements of the whole modern Muslim society. Such names as Shaikh Waliyyullāh, Muḥammad 'Abduh, Rashīd Ridā, Sayyid Quṭb, Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī, Mawdūdī, Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr present themselves to the fore in the

³⁰H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, eds. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), s.v. "Abū 'Ubayda," by H.A.R. Gibb.

³¹Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, 210.

³²Kamali, "Abū al- Kalām Āzād's Commentary on the Qur'ān," *Muslim World* 49 (1959): 8.

Modernist movement. These scholars attempted to ameliorate the previous methods of interpretation and to bring Qur'anic commentary into the modern world.

B. The Methods of Interpretation

Following the delineation of the process of development of exegetic literature, an attempt will be made in this section to highlight several Qur'anic methods of interpretation that have been applied by the exegetic scholars. However, one should caution the reader that not all methods will be covered.

It is worth mentioning that the term "method" is used to mean the Arabic term "*nahj*"³³ which is frequently used in books containing knowledge about the Qur'ān (e.g. '*ulūm al-Qur'ān*'). Cases in point are the books of Maḥmūd Basyūnī Fūdah³⁴ and Maḥmūd al-Naqrāshī al-Sayyid 'Alī.³⁵ There are four methods of Qur'anic interpretation which will be discussed in this chapter. They are: *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*, *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*, *al-tafsīr al-ishārī* and modern *tafsīr*. This order was chosen because it will provide more insight into the method adopted by Hamka, which will be discussed in Chapter III.

Traditional theory teaches that all scholars wishing to embark upon an interpretation of the Qur'ān are advised to adhere as closely as possible to the text which

³³Wehr, *Ibid.*, 1002.

³⁴Fūdah, *Nash'at al-Tafsīr wa Manāhijuh fī Daw' al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyya* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Amānah, 1986).

³⁵'Alī, *Manāhij al-Mufasssīrīn* (Riyad: Maktabat al-Nahdah, 1986).

they seek to interpret, since the Qur'ān provides the best explanation,³⁶ followed by the explication of the Prophet in the form of his *Sunna*, which was divinely inspired.³⁷ The next step of interpretation, should take into account the clarifications of the Companions and their Successors. Moreover, exegetes are not required to refrain from expressing their own opinion or their intrinsic (*bātin*) notions in their comprehension of the messages of the Qur'ān.

Scholars have divided the methods of interpretation, used from the era of *al-mutaqaddimīn* (the early era of Islam) until the modern era, into three basic groups; namely, (1) *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*, also known as *tafsīr bi al-riwāya*, (2) *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* or *al-dirāyah* and (3) *tafsīr bi al-ishārī*.³⁸ In the modern era, the modern and *mawḍū'ī* (thematic) methods have been applied by scholars. The following is a brief rendering of the salient points of each method of interpretation.

³⁶ Yousuf Ali, *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁷ This concept was instituted by al-Shāfi'ī, a very famous Islamic jurist, who asserted that everything which was explained by the Prophet was inspired by God. See 'Abd al-Rahmān al-'Ak, *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr wa Qawā'iduh* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1986), 79. Al-Shāfi'ī also invented a magnificent theory relating the *Sunna* to the law. In it, he mentioned that there are four major sources of Islamic law; the Qur'ān, *Sunna* (behaviour of Muḥammad), *Ijmā'* (consensus) and *Qiyās* (analogy through personal judgment). According to him, the repeated command to "obey God and His Prophet", establishes Muḥammad's behaviour as the second source of law. See N.J. Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1991), 53-60.

³⁸ Denffer, *Ibid.*, 125-6. John Wansbrough in his *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) suggests five categories of *tafsīr*; i.e, the narrative, legal, textual, rhetorical and allegorical methods.

1. *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*.

This genre of interpretation is based upon three sources; namely, Muḥammad, the *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions) and the *Tābi'ūn* (Successors of the Companions). Muḥammad was commanded by God to explain the Qur'ān as part of his duty as a messenger of God. The Qur'ān says: "And We have sent down unto thee (also) the Message; that thou mayest explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought."³⁹ Muslims believe that Muḥammad's explanation was sound and undeniable because he never spoke according to his own desires.⁴⁰ Moreover, if his explanation deviated from the purpose of the verse, God corrected him through His revelation. Thus, Muḥammad was able to elucidate the Qur'anic message despite any ambiguities or the use of figurative or metaphorical devices in many verses.

The question that poses itself is whether Muḥammad explained all the verses of the Qur'ān or not. A group of scholars led by Ibn Taimiyya argued that the Prophet explained all the verses of the Qur'ān. This opinion is based upon the word "*li-tubayyina*" (to explain) in the above-mentioned verse, which they take to indicate that Muḥammad elucidated to the Companions all the meanings and words of the Qur'ān. The scholars also based their opinion on the report made by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī that such Companions as 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd and others would not consider that they had mastered any verse until they learnt its explanation from the Prophet.⁴¹

³⁹Qur'ān, 16: 44.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 53: 3.

⁴¹Ibn Taimiyya, *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* (Kuwait: Dār al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, 1971), 35-6.

There is also a report that 'Umar had affirmed that the Prophet had explained the Qur'ān in its entirety. In another tradition, 'Umar is said to have asserted that the last verse revealed to Muḥammad was a verse on usury, which the Prophet did not explain because he passed away soon afterwards. As such, scholars concluded that Muḥammad had explained all the meanings and verses of the Qur'ān to the Companions before his death, except the last verse, which was on usury.⁴²

By contrast, the above argument is rejected by other scholars who believe that the Prophet explained the difficult verses only to the Companions. This opinion was proposed by al-Suyūṭī⁴³ who, together with his associates maintained that 'Ā'ishah, the wife the Prophet, had mentioned that Muḥammad did not explain all of the Qur'ān, but several parts of it, through the guidance of Gabriel.⁴⁴ However, the report from Sulamī was resorted to, and this group of scholars denied that the Companions relied solely on the Prophet for explanation of the Holy Text. They reasoned that the Companions could have gleaned the meaning of the verses from each other's explanations, observation and understanding.⁴⁵

The above difference of opinion between scholars could be resolved if one considers the Qur'ān to be the provider of universal guidance to Man anywhere and at any time. In this light, Muḥammad will be seen as the interpreter of the Qur'ān, but not the

⁴²Al-'Ak, *Ibid.*, 116.

⁴³Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁵Fūdah, *Ibid.*, 66.

whole Qur'ān. He explained only those verses which baffled the Companions and which needed clarification in order to answer their contemporary theological and legal problems. By contrast, modern or future problems, which are different from those appraised by the Prophet were not addressed by the latter. Hence, contemporary Muslim scholars are entitled to seek solutions for new problems in the Qur'ān. This allowance is provided for by God who asked Muslims to use their intellect in understanding the Qur'ān. This means that the Prophet knew that there would be different cases emerging at different times, and that he only responded to the cases that were raised to him. This is in accordance with Dhahabī's opinion that the *tafsīr* transmitted from the Prophet was not a limited number of a larger body of knowledge, but simply all that was available at the time.⁴⁶

a. The Qur'ān as Explained by the Qur'ān

The explanation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān is the highest grade of interpretation to be done since the time of the Prophet.⁴⁷ From around six thousand verses,⁴⁸ there are several verses that explain other verses. Accordingly, the exegete is required to turn to the Qur'ān first for the interpretation of any verse, before resorting to other sources; since God determined that the Qur'ān is an exposition of all things.⁴⁹ If, however, this

⁴⁶Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁷Al-'Ak, *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁸The exact figure of verses is disputed among the scholars. A report from ibn 'Abbās says that the number of verses is 6600, but al-Dānī mentions 6000 verses only. See Al-Suyūṭī, *Ibid.*, I, 189.

⁴⁹Qur'ān, 16: 89.

way is not fruitful, the exegete may refer to other sources for *tafsīr*.⁵⁰ Accordingly, students wishing to discover the spirit of the Qur'ān are asked to study the social and religious circumstances in which the Qur'ān was revealed and to see the message it embodies and presents in its own words.⁵¹ This requires considerable effort from the student, since the topics are not classified in a thematic order but are scattered over different chapters (*suwar*). This irregular classification is due to the fact that revelation did not occur at one time, but lasted for around twenty-three years. It started from the day Muhammad received the first revelation in Mecca and lasted until his last day in Medina. Another factor for this haphazard ordering, is that verses and religious dictums were revealed to Muhammad as the need for them arose. In other words, revelations were sent according to the need for them. It is rather exaggerated to argue that the Committee led by Zaid ibn Thābit, who was appointed by the third Caliph, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, had no experience in the compilation of the Qur'ān.⁵² Indeed, this committee arranged the verses in accordance with the arrangement which was received by the Prophet and memorized by the Companions.⁵³ Ibn Thābit and his associates did not dare modify what had been revealed by God to Muhammad, since they considered such an arrangement to be divinely inspired by Allah. When the committee compiled the verses, its members compared their

⁵⁰Suyūṭī, *Ibid.*, II, 181-2; Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, 37-44.

⁵¹Jullandri, *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵²Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, Vol. II, trans. F. Rosenthal (New York: Bollingen Foundation Inc., 1958), 445.

⁵³Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Ibid.*, 101.

classification with the knowledge and memory of the *Ṣaḥāba*.⁵⁴

The next step in the interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān is accomplished by investigating the status and relation of the verses to each other, since a verse in one chapter may be explained by another in the same or in another chapter. Thus, it can be found that a verse may have a general (*mujmal*) sense, or that it may be specified (*takhṣīṣ*) by another verse, or that an absolute verse may be restricted (*muqayyad*) by another. Hence, the exegete has to collect all the verses belonging to one topic together and to scrutinize them, in order to determine their relation which shed more light on the others.⁵⁵

Two examples of the interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān are as follows:

1. When God says: "Then learnt Adam from his Lord words of inspiration, and his Lord turned towards him; for He is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful",⁵⁶ a question was raised regarding the meaning of the 'words of inspiration'. This verse is explained by another, in which the 'words of inspiration' are clearly described as the prayer of Adam to God. As God says: "They said: "Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls. If Thou forgive us not and bestow not upon us Thy mercy, we shall certainly be lost".⁵⁷
2. Another example is when God illustrates the lawful and unlawful animals for consumption. He says: "Lawful unto you (for food) are all four-footed animals with the

⁵⁴Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, Vol. I, trans. and ed. Zafar Ishaq Ansari (London: The Islamic Foundation, 1988), 20-1.

⁵⁵Fūdah, *Ibid.*, 54-56.

⁵⁶Qur'ān, 2: 37.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 7: 23.

exception named:"⁵⁸ This verse is explained by another verse:

"Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which hath been invoked the name of other than God; that which hath been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall, or by being gored to death; that which hath been (partly) eaten by wild animals; unless you are able to slaughter it (in due form); that which is sacrificed on stone (altars); (forbidden) also in the division (of meat) by raffling with arrows: that is impiety..."⁵⁹

b. The Qur'ān as explained by the *Sunna*.

The second source to be used in the interpretation of the Qur'ān, after the explanation of the Qur'ān by itself, is the explanations of the Prophet. The authority of the Prophet was recommended by God⁶⁰ and there is a report that one of the Companions, Mu'ādh ibn Jabal always decided on religious cases using the *Sunna*, whenever he did not discover the answers to them in the revelation. It is reported that the Prophet, while sending Mu'ādh as a judge to Yemen, asked him:

"On what will you base your judgments?" Mu'ādh replied: "On the Book of God". The Prophet Asked: "But what if you do not find it there?" Mu'ādh said: "Then I will act according to the *Sunna* of the Apostle of Allah". The Prophet again asked: "What if you do not find it there either?" Mu'ādh said: "I will exert my own judgment". The Prophet said: "Thanks to God who gave success to him".⁶¹

Muslims hold that the credibility of the *Sunna*, as the explication of the Qur'ān, was divinely determined. The *Sunna* was revealed to Muḥammad by way of inspiration

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 5: 2.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 5: 4.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 16: 44.

⁶¹Abū Dāūd, *Sunan Abī Dāūd*, Vol. III (Beirut: al-Maktabat al-'Aṣriyya, n.d.), 303.

(*wahy*) just like the Qur'ān was, although it was not narrated by Gabriel like the Qur'ān.⁶²

The *Sunna*, according to ibn Kathīr, functions as a method of explaining the Qur'ān (*shārh li al-Qur'ān*) and a means of elucidating its messages (*mūwaddih lahu*).⁶³ Indeed, the functions of the *Sunna* are as follows:

1. The *Sunna* consolidates and reaffirms (*mu'akkidah*) the Qur'ān. This is clear in the traditions concerning the obligations for praying, fasting and pilgrimage.
2. It offers detailed expositions (*tafsīl*) of the Qur'ān. Cases in point are the details given in the *Sunna* about the manner (*kaifiyyah*) of praying.
3. It is also the source of new laws. Whenever a dictum is not made in the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* calls for it, without contradicting the Qur'ān, it will be adopted as a new law.⁶⁴

Traditional Muslim literature has preserved numerous examples of explanations given by the Prophet regarding Qur'anic verses. One such instance was the time when he was asked the meaning of the following verse: "...And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn appears to you distinct from its black thread..."⁶⁵ by 'Adi ibn Hātim. The latter had said: "O Allah's Apostle! What is the meaning of the white thread becoming distinct from the black thread? Are those two threads?" The Prophet said: "You are not intelligent,

⁶²Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, Vol. I (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1987), 4.

⁶³*Ibid.*

⁶⁴Al-'Ak, *Ibid.*, 129-30.

⁶⁵Qur'ān, 2: 187.

if you watch the two threads." He then added, "No, it is the darkness of the night and the whiteness of the day."⁶⁶

There is no reason to refuse either the explanation of the Qur'ān that comes from the Qur'ān itself or that of the Prophet since the Qur'ān was revealed by God and the Prophet was His Messenger and was instructed to explain the Qur'ān.⁶⁷ However, how can we determine whether the explanations of the Prophet truly originated from him or not, especially when we know that many reports related to him were fabricated? To combat this problem, several steps were established in order to prevent false interpretations. One of them calls for the investigation of the content (*matn*) of *ḥadīths* in order to determine whether they are sound or unsound. Based upon this analysis, the *ḥadīths* will be classified as either *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic), *ḥasan* (good) or *da'īf* (weak). Another step used by scholars examines the chain of authorities through whom a tradition was narrated (*sanad*).⁶⁸

c. The Interpretations of the Companions

After the explanation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān and of the Qur'ān by the Prophet himself, the next source of explanation is derived from the Companions. They were considered to be the people who had the best knowledge of *tafsīr* due to their

⁶⁶Al-'Ak, *Ibid.*, 41. This explanation is mentioned by most exegetes in their books.

⁶⁷Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Vol. II (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Misrī, n.d.), 13.

⁶⁸Al-'Ak, *Ibid.*, 131. Because this thesis does not concentrate on the problems of *ḥadīth*, it is suggested that one looks at *'Ilm al-Ḥadīth* (knowledge of tradition) for further details about traditions.

intimate relationship with the Prophet. The Companions used to stay with the Prophet till they knew when and where the Qur'ān was revealed to him. Besides, their good understanding of the language, deep knowledge of the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and accurate insight into religion were considered as good basis for their commentaries.⁶⁹

The Companions had several methods in interpreting the Qur'ān. To gain a correct meaning, they resorted to the interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān, to the *Sunna* of the Prophet, or to their knowledge (*'ilm*) or even to the explanations of *Ahl al-Kitāb* (the People of the Book) who converted to Islam.⁷⁰ At this stage, the point which should be clarified further is that they often interpreted the Qur'ān on the basis of their own knowledge. The extent to which the Companions resorted to their knowledge in the interpretation of the Qur'ān depended on several conditions, such as their intellectual ability, their intimacy with the Prophet, and their knowledge of the circumstances of revelation. It is, of course, understood that some of them possessed better knowledge than others in the field of interpretation. The interpretation of any Companion was deemed acceptable and used as a reference for Qur'anic explanation when it was in accordance with the circumstances of revelation and philology. Whereas, if the interpretation was solely based on the personal judgement (*ra'y*) of a Companion, it was rejected.⁷¹

Of all the Companions, Ibn 'Abbās was deemed the most knowledgeable in the

⁶⁹Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, 63.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 37.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 94-6.

field of exegesis, a quality that earned him the title of '*tarjumān al-Qur'ān*', i.e. the interpreter of the Qur'ān.⁷² He is also renowned as a person who dedicated himself to the quest for knowledge through learning and teaching.⁷³ He is also considered as a most reliable source among the Companions, for he always accompanied the Prophet and thus obtained more information from him. Besides, the Prophet asked God to bless him and to grant him a sound knowledge and understanding of the Qur'ān. As such, whenever a difference appeared among the various sources of the Companions, scholars are advised to adopt the version narrated by ibn 'Abbās.⁷⁴ A case in point was the interpretation of '*Idhā jā'a naṣru llāhi wa-l-fathu*'⁷⁵ by some Companions as 'the instruction to praise and ask forgiveness from God'. However, since other Companions did not volunteer any comment on the above-mentioned verse, 'Umar asked ibn 'Abbās to explain this verse. The latter then elucidated that the verse indicates that the signal for the death of the Prophet had come from God.⁷⁶

d. The Interpretations of the Successors

The interpretations of the Successors came after those of the Companions, when no explanations were found in the Qur'ān, the Prophet or the Companions. However,

⁷²Ignaz Goldziher, *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr al-Islāmī*, trans. 'Abd al-Halīm al-Najjār (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1955), 83.

⁷³Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, 68.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 161-2.

⁷⁵Qur'ān, 110: 1. "When comes the Help of God and Victory".

⁷⁶Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, 66.

scholars are in disagreement about their interpretations. Although a group of scholars claimed that the interpretations of the Successors are *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*, other scholars asserted that their interpretations are *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*. Before going on, a few comments are called for concerning Abū Ḥanīfa's position regarding the interpretations of the Successors. He had mentioned that what is derived from the Prophet is obligatory for all Muslims, but what comes from the Companions is not. In other words, Muslims must accept what the Prophet had said, but can choose to accept or to refuse what his Companions had declared. As for the Successors, their opinions are not compulsory on anybody.⁷⁷

Given the above declaration by Abū Ḥanīfa, the question that poses itself becomes: How should later generations react towards the interpretations of the Prophet, the Companions and the Successors? Scholars affirm that their interpretations can be developed further, since they are, in general, divided into two categories. One category is beyond the perception of the rational faculties (*la majal li al-'aql fīh*) such as the explanations of metaphysical matters or matters related to worship, while the other category falls under the domain of the rational faculties (*fī majal al-'aql*) such as social problems.⁷⁸ Interpretations regarding the first category are regarded as absolute interpretations whenever the report (*riwāyah*) of their interpretation is sound. As for the second category, scholars assert that it is the duty of the next generations to develop it, since the interpretations of the Prophet, and the Companions come under various forms

⁷⁷Fūdah, *Ibid.*, 99.

⁷⁸Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Mizan, 1992), 95.

such as *ta'rīf* (determination), *irshād* (instruction) or *taṣhīh* (correction).⁷⁹

Among the *ma'thūr* works, scholars believe that the commentary of al-Ṭabarī (224/838-310/923)⁸⁰, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, which was written by the middle of the third century of the Hijra, is the the most complete of the earliest *tafsīr*. Al-Ṭabarī compiled his interpretation by explaining the Qur'anic verses one by one. In doing so, he also incorporated a tremendous amount of exegetical *ḥadīths*.⁸¹ He was also concerned with the time and circumstances of revelation, and applied philological, historical and dogmatic criteria to his compilation. In addition, he was very critical of the *sanad* (the chain of transmission on which a tradition is based) and *matn* (the text) of any tradition he incorporated. When he came across several opinions on one verse, he attempted to explore the exact interpretation from the Qur'ān itself before comparing it with the explanation of the Companions.⁸² Thus, this commentary has been categorized as one which employs the *ma'thūr* method.⁸³ However, in spite of its numerous merits, a thorough analysis reveals that the author of this *tafsīr* has sometimes made assertions

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

⁸⁰Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī was born in the Sassanian province of Tabaristān, a mountainous region which lies behind the southern coast of the Caspian Sea. Besides the above-mentioned commentary, he wrote another famous book, *Tarīkh al-Rusūl wa al-Mulūk*. See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and ibn-Kathīr," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. by Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 47-8.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 48.

⁸²Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, 210.

⁸³Ilse Lichtenstadter, "Qur'ān and Qur'ān Exegesis," *Humaniora Islamica* 2 (1974): 12.

and interpretations not supported by facts, but by his personal inclination.⁸⁴ That is why al-Ṭabarī was accused by the Ḥanbalīs, the adherents of a strict orthodoxy, of being a supporter of the Mu'tazila.⁸⁵

It is unfortunate that Muslim literature does not boast a pure interpretation of the Qur'ān according to the narrative from the Prophet and Companions exclusively. However, any commentary book can be categorized as a *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* volume, as long as it incorporates a great number of exegetical *ḥadīths* (traditions) as is the case with al-Ṭabarī's volume.⁸⁶

The weaknesses of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* derive from many of their reports which claim to be from the Prophet, but when critically scrutinized, one finds that they have unsound *sanads* and *matns*.⁸⁷ Al-Dhahabī compiled a list of some of the elements that could lead to the unsoundness of *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*. They are:

1. A great amount of discourses are imposed as *ma'thūr*.
2. The penetration of unsound reports, particularly in those fields which were introduced by Jewish and Christian converts into Islam.
3. The chain of authorities of some reports have, in some parts, disappeared or become disconnected.⁸⁸

⁸⁴Rippin, *Ibid*; R. Marston Speight, "The Function of Ḥadīth as Commentary on the Qur'ān, as Seen in the Six Authoritative Collections," In *Approaches*, *Ibid.*, 68.

⁸⁵Lichtenstadter, *Ibid*.

⁸⁶McAuliffe, *Ibid.*, 48.

⁸⁷Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, 156; Ṣāliḥ, *Ibid.*, 291.

⁸⁸Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, 157-203.

However, these unsound reports will not demean the status of *al-ma'thūr*, as long as a more critical analysis is applied to the dubious ones. Such an analysis will enable one to determine the sound from the unsound reports.

2. *Tafsīr bi al-Ra'y*

Another method employed by scholars in interpreting the Qur'ān relies on the exertion of their personal opinions (*ra'y*). Through this method, what the early exegetes really wanted to achieve was an explication of those parts of the Qur'ān which were not brought to the Prophet's attention. This method had been employed mostly by the Companions and the Successors, as it is commonly known that many of them exerted their personal judgment in fathoming the meaning of several verses, to which they did not receive any transmission or explanation from the Prophet. However, after the development of Islamic theology, the method of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* gradually deviated from the sound to the unsound usage of *ra'y*. This is identified with the emergence of several Islamic theological schools such as the Mu'tazila, the Ash'āriyah and the Shī'a.⁸⁹ Among those schools, the Mu'tazila was hotly condemned and the Mu'tazilites were accused of following their personal opinions and abandoning the transmissions that came from the Prophet. They are said to have done this in order to defend the views of their school or in accordance with their famous statement that "what is good is good, as long as, reason

⁸⁹Sālih, *Ibid.*, 294.

says that it is good and what is bad is bad, if reason says so".⁹⁰

Because some scholars applied their mere personal opinions, this method of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* later came to be classified into the praiseworthy (*mahmūd*) and the blameworthy (*madhmūm*). The latter is rejected because of its unsoundness, while the former is accepted when the method and rationale of its comment are in accordance with such conditions as the quotation and provision of a Qur'anic proof supporting the author. However, if the author's explication can be directly traced to the Qur'ān itself, but the exegete applied his personal opinion, his *tafsīr* is rejected. As such, it became a must to refer to the explanations of the Prophet and the Companions, particularly concerning the problems of the circumstances of revelation. This is done when the reports are reliable. It is also necessary to take into consideration the standard of the language of the Qur'ān, i.e., the Arabic language.⁹¹ Not surprisingly, scholars are in disagreement concerning *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*. There are those who reject it and those who support it. The scholars who reject this interpretation argue that any interpretation by *ra'y* must be dismissed because its author does not prove that what he mentioned is true or not.⁹² The scholars also argue that God prevents men from mentioning what they do not know,⁹³ and there is a sound *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet prohibits men from using their '*aql*' in the interpretation of

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

⁹¹Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, 265-73. Ṣāliḥ, *Ibid.*, 292.

⁹²Al-'Ak, *Ibid.*, 168.

⁹³Qur'ān, 7: 33.

the Qur'ān.⁹⁴

The above-notion is opposed by those who allow the interpretation by *ra'y*. These scholars assert that uncertainty is part of knowledge. Moreover, they acknowledge that the best knowledge is the one based on certainty, but if this cannot be achieved then one can resort to the uncertain knowledge,⁹⁵ as God says that He does not lay a burden on those who cannot bear it.⁹⁶ Moreover, al-Ghazālī allowed the usage of *ra'y* in the interpretation of the Qur'ān when he said:

- a. If the traditionists maintain that *tafsīr* should be based only on the traditions and that deduction (*istinbāt*), or personal opinion (*ra'y*) have no place in it, then they should reject the sayings of ibn 'Abbās and ibn Mas'ūd because they often do not derive directly from the Prophet.
- b. Since the Companions held completely different views about the interpretation of some verses, it is impossible to ascribe all of them to the Prophet. Hence, logically, the traditionists should reject all except the one which could be attributed to the Prophet.
- c. The Prophet prayed to God on behalf of ibn 'Abbās, saying: 'Oh Lord, bestow upon him a clear comprehension of religion, and the knowledge of interpretation.' If interpretation of the Qur'ān has to be based on the traditions only, then what is the significance of this prayer?
- d. In the Qur'ān itself the deductions of scholars are praised,⁹⁷ so it is obvious that such deductions are a different thing altogether from the tradition. As such, it becomes clear that such an interpretation of the tradition is not correct.⁹⁸

It is also worth mentioning Raghīb al-Aṣḥfahānī's statement concerning the allowance of *ra'y*. He mentioned that if we confine our interpretation to *al-ma'thūr*, we will miss a lot

⁹⁴Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, Vol. IV (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1983), 268.

⁹⁵Al-'Ak, *Ibid.*

⁹⁶Qur'ān, 2: 286.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 4: 83.

⁹⁸Jullandri, *Ibid.*, 86. Quoted from Ghazālī, *Ihya' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, Vol. III (Cairo: n.p., 1937), 142.

of what we need from the Qur'ān.⁹⁹

In the course of time, it became inevitable that the supporters and opponents of the use of reason would clash with one another.¹⁰⁰ This clash was marked by the publication of numerous *tafsīr* volumes,¹⁰¹ in which the supporters of each group applied their method and sometimes condemned that of their opponents.

The above difference is not actually very great, especially when one considers the method of the Companions. The latter avoided the application of *ra'y* when an authentic explanation from the Prophet was found. However, if one was not found, they exerted their personal judgment cautiously and availed themselves of the knowledge of the Arabic language and circumstances of revelation .

3. *Al-Tafsīr al-Ishārī*

This method of interpretation takes cognizance of the esoteric meanings of the verses, as well as their outer meanings. The proponents of this method are concerned with the hidden meanings attached to the verses of the Qur'ān, which are not visible to anyone

⁹⁹Al-'Ak, *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁰⁰Speight, *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁰¹Some famous *tafsīr* books written in accordance with the *ma'thūr* method are, besides that of al-Ṭabarī: *Al-Kashf wa al-Bayān 'an tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tha'labī, *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl* by Hassan ibn Mas'ūd al-Baghawī and *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Azīm* by Ismā'īl ibn 'Amr ibn Kathīr. Those written *bi al-ra'y* are, besides that of Zamakhsharī: *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* by Muḥammad ibn 'Amr al-Ḥusain al-Rāzī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl* by 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar al-Baidāwī and *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* by Shihāb al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Alūsī. See Denffer, *Ibid.*, 137-9; Jullandri, *Ibid.*, 81-96.

except those whose hearts Allah has opened.¹⁰² This must not indicate that those who applied this method rejected the obvious meanings of the Qur'ān, or the juristic deductions of the canonical verses, but simply that they were not concerned with them. The object of their mystical interpretation was to shed a new light on the spiritual aspect of the Qur'ān. As al-Ghazālī elaborated, the most important aspect of interpreting the Qur'ān is to understand the deep, hidden meaning of the Book and to minimize the importance of the exoteric exegesis.¹⁰³ This deep and hidden meaning can only be brought to light by those who possess a deep-rooted knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm*), a mastery of various sciences, a purity of soul, a serious concentration on the Qur'ān, and a full dedication to the quest of its meanings.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the method applied in this kind of interpretation is known as the esoteric method. Those who support the existence of this kind of interpretation emphasize that it has its basis in the verse which says: "Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur'ān, or are their hearts locked up by them?"¹⁰⁵ These scholars also quote the Prophetic *ḥadīth* which indicates that the Qur'ān has its inward and outward meanings. The outward meanings can be understood through an understanding of the Arabic words; whereas the inward meanings cannot be gleaned through an understanding of the language only, but also through the light of God that

¹⁰²Denffer, *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁰³Muhammad Abul Quasem, "Al-Ghazālī in Defense of Sufistic Interpretation of the Qur'ān," *Islamic Culture* 53 (1979): 64.

¹⁰⁴Quasem, "Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Qur'ān Exegesis According to One's Personal Opinion," *International congress for the Study of the Qur'ān* 1 (May 1980): 81.

¹⁰⁵Qur'ān, 47: 24. See also Fūdah, *Ibid.*, 394.

comes from His blessing of those whom He intends.¹⁰⁶

Volumes of *tafsīr ishārī* were mostly composed by people who claimed to be either Bāṭinīya¹⁰⁷ or Ṣufīs. The Ṣūfī viewpoint of the Qur'ān appeared in a *tafsīr* attributed to Ibn al-'Arabī (560-638 A.H./1165-1240 A.D.),¹⁰⁸ who accepted the thesis of mystics that each verse of the Qur'ān contains exoteric and esoteric meanings. Moreover, in his commentary, he frequently employed symbolism and allegory.¹⁰⁹ He even declared that the *ishārī* method is the best way of interpreting the Qur'ān because it encompasses all of its essential meanings.¹¹⁰

Although the *ishārī* method focuses on esoteric meanings, scholars still accept this method if it is in agreement with the exoteric meanings of the Qur'ān, if it is not contradictory to Islamic law (*shar'*) and reason (*'aql*), and if its authenticity can be verified by Islamic law.¹¹¹ An example of an *ishārī* interpretation can be seen in Tustarī's interpretation of the verse concerning the creation of Adam.¹¹² In it, Tustarī does not give any reference to his argument from the *Sunna*, but seems to base his

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷Al-Bāṭinīya is a name of a school of thought in Islam, characterized by divining a hidden, secret meaning in the revealed texts. See Wehr, *op. cit.*, 64.

¹⁰⁸Besides Ibn al-'Arabī, several exegetes also practiced the *ishārī* method in their commentaries such as, Sahl al-Tustarī and al-Sulamī.

¹⁰⁹Lichtenstadter, *op. cit.*, 18-9.

¹¹⁰Goldziher, *op. cit.*, 243.

¹¹¹Al-'Ak, *op. cit.*, 208.

¹¹²Qur'ān, 2: 30.

interpretation solely on his inner interpretation. He explains that Adam was created out of honoured clay (*tīn al-‘izzah*) and that this honoured clay was created out of the light of Muhammad.¹¹³

4. The Modern Interpretations

This method has been espoused by those who want to prove that the Qur’ān can adequately meet the needs of the present century, both materially and spiritually.¹¹⁴ In order to achieve this, modern interpreters devoted themselves to an interpretation of the Holy Book that takes into account all aspects of modernism such as the scientific aspects, practical issues, political thought and social demands.¹¹⁵ They also attempted to bridge the gap between the sectarian entities of the Muslim communities. A case in point, is Muhammad ‘Abduh whose thought on political issues was published in *al-Manār* journal. In this journal, a continuous series of homilies on Qur’anic ideas and religious tenets were voiced. Moreover, in his commentary, ‘Abduh disseminated anti-imperialist ideas and attacked the whole concept of imperialism, which he considered to be cruel. Through these ideas, he called upon Muslims, who were mostly under the control of the colonialists, to liberate themselves.¹¹⁶ In addition, ‘Abduh avoided interpreting the ambiguous verses, because they created fierce disputes among the sectarian commentators.

¹¹³Sahl al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Halabī, n.d.), 10.

¹¹⁴J. M. S. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation* (1880-1960) (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 80.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 88-120.

¹¹⁶Lichtenstadter, *Ibid.*, 22.

He reasoned that it is not necessary to elaborate, in great depth, upon the status of the angels who write the activities of man.¹¹⁷ It is not a must, he affirmed, that scholars reveal the substance from which these angels are made and whether they have paper and pens to record man's deeds or not. The most important thing, he asserted, is that we believe in the existence of angels who write down man's deeds.¹¹⁸

Other modern commentators attempted to ameliorate the previous methods of interpretation by correcting the ways of past commentators. In considering the cases of the abrogated (*mansūkh*) and abrogating (*nāsikh*) verses,¹¹⁹ for example, the modernists reviewed the abrogating principle and declared that any abrogated verse has a different message from the abrogating one. Thus, the abrogated verse may actually be restored. This can be perceived from Sayyid Qutb's reformulation of this case. He argues that verse 2: 178, which is considered to be abrogated by verse 5: 45, possesses its own subject and that the abrogating verse (5: 45) also possesses its own subject. Qutb explains that while the first verse bears upon collective requital, the second is concerned with personal retaliation.¹²⁰ Qutb's concern for modernity can be seen from his premise that calls for the reinterpretation of the Qur'ān, in order that its messages becomes relevant to modern

¹¹⁷Qur'ān, 82: 11-2.

¹¹⁸Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, III, 226.

¹¹⁹Qur'ān, 2: 100-6.

¹²⁰Sayyid Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, Vol. I (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1988), 165; Baljon, *Ibid.*, 48-9.

life. He also affirms that the *sharī'a* (God's law) is relevant in every time and place.¹²¹

In addition to the above scholars, there appeared another most scientific-oriented commentator, Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī, who wrote a twenty-six-volume commentary called *al-Jawāhir fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Jewels in the Interpretation of the Qur'ān), in which he delves into scientific problems. With regards the relation between the Qur'ān and science, Jawharī argues that:

"God would not have revealed the Qur'ān, had He not included in it everything that people needed to know; science is obviously necessary in the modern world, so it should not be surprising to find all of science in the Qur'ān when that scripture is properly understood."¹²²

However, all the methods discussed above may be characterized as *tahlīlī* or *tajzī'ī* methods, because the exegetes attempt to derive interpretations of the Qur'ān by examining each verse individually starting with the first chapter, *al-Fātiḥah*, (the opening chapter) and ending with the last chapter, *al-Nās*, (mankind).¹²³

To improve this method, a new methodological approach was devised by scholars in order to achieve a better understanding of the Qur'ān. Contemporary scholars reformed the previous methods by devising what they called a *mawḍū'ī* or a thematic classification

¹²¹Yvonne Y. Haddad, "Sayyid Quṭb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival," in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 71.

¹²²Rippin, *Ibid.*

¹²³Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr, *Muqaddimah fī al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī li al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Tawjīh al-Islāmī, 1980), 10; Aḥmad Jamāl 'Umārī, *Dirāsāt fī al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī li al-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ānī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1986), 38.

of Qur'anic verses.¹²⁴ Actually, the seed of this method appeared during the era of the Prophet when he interpreted verses in relation with others, whenever they fell under the same category.¹²⁵ Through this kind of interpretation, exegetes discuss topics by grouping all the verses of the Qur'ān which have the same theme together. However, there are several steps that should be followed when applying the thematic method.

The first step, is the determination of the theme revealed in the verses. Then, all verses pertaining to that particular theme are collected in accordance with the times of revelation and their circumstances (*asbāb al-nuzūl*).¹²⁶ A case in point, is the interpretation of verses dealing with orphans. There are twenty three verses¹²⁷ concerned with this topic which were revealed in both Mecca and Medina. As such, the verses that elaborate upon this topic are assembled together, even though they are scattered across several chapters. Moreover, a knowledge of the arrangement of the verses according to the place they were revealed in, the reason for their revelation as well as their chronological order is very important. The second step is accomplished by apprehending the correlation of the collected verses; i.e, the relation between the verses in Mecca and those revealed in Medina, and the relation between the former and the latter verses in

¹²⁴ Abd al-Hayy al-Farmāwī, *Al-Bidāyah fī al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī* (Cairo: Al-Ḥadārah al-'Arabiyya, 1977), 36.

¹²⁵ Umarī, *Ibid.*, 48.

¹²⁶ Al-Farmāwī, *Ibid.*, 61-2.

¹²⁷ Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, *Al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1988), 936.

order to determine the purpose of a verse and its effect on the others.¹²⁸ The third step demands the inclusion of all traditions (*ḥadīths*) which are relevant to the discussed theme. Finally, the last step deals with the scrutiny of the collected verses and the determination of which possesses a general (*‘ām*) meaning and which has a specific (*khāṣ*) meaning, as well as which verse is restricted (*muqayyad*) by other verses.¹²⁹

Several modern Qur’anic scholars have discussed this method in an attempt to understand the message of the Qur’ān more fully. The commentary which is considered to represent this method is the work of Mawdūdī.¹³⁰

To conclude this chapter, one must declare that commentators must base their motivation in interpreting the Qur’ān on the attempt to derive its right meanings, which should act as guidance for all human beings, particularly Muslims. In addition, modern interpretations should help Muslims in this world and should prepare them for the hereafter. Therefore, it is recommended that those in search of true interpretations, apply the most reliable methods and refrain from any interpretation which is based on their personal desire (*al-hawā*). Moreover, their interpretations must not defend a personal interest or a school’s (*madhhab*) inclination, or that they manipulate Muslims by saying that such an interpretation is recommended by Allah, without giving proof for their arguments.¹³¹

¹²⁸Al-Farmāwī, *Ibid.*, 62.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*

¹³⁰Mawdūdī, *Al-Ribā* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.)

¹³¹Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, 275.

CHAPTER THREE

HAMKA'S INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'ĀN

As was mentioned in chapter two, there are several methods of interpreting the Qur'ān. Therefore, in this chapter an attempt will be made to delve into Hamka's commentary *Tafsir al-Azhar*¹ and to outline his principle of interpretation in general, and his method of interpreting the problematic legal verses in particular. However, before assessing his commentary, I will provide his conception of Islamic legal thought and his treatment of the problematic verses. The term problematic verses indicates a number of verses from which various kinds of different interpretations have been drawn by scholars. Although these scholars held different perspectives, they were all united in their venture to apply the spirit of the Qur'ān to their contemporary and ever-increasing legal problems.

¹Published in 30 volumes, Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1982. This work is written in Indonesian. Historically, the writing of commentaries in Indonesia was accomplished in three languages; local languages such as Javanese and Sundanese, Indonesian or Malay, and Arabic. The commentaries in the local languages include the work of Muhammad Munawar Khalil, *Tafsir Qur'an Hidjatur Rahman* which was written in Javanese (Jakarta: Sitti Sjamsiyah, 1958). The Indonesian commentaries are presented by, besides Hamka's, Ahmad Hasan's *Tafsir al-Furqan* (Jakarta: Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, 1956), Hamidy, Zainuddin and Hs. Fachruddin's *Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Widjaya, 1959). The Arabic commentaries include the work of Imam Muhammad Nawawi Tanara, *Marāh Labīd: Tafsīr al-Nawawī* (Cairo: n.p., n.d.). The latter was born in Banten, West Java in 1815. For a more detailed description of Indonesian literature on the Qur'ān, see Howard M. Federspiel, *Popular Indonesian Literature of the Qur'an* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1994); Anthony H. Johns, "Quranic Exegesis in the Malay World: In Search of a Profile," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

The verses discussed in this chapter are derived from four Qur'anic chapters² and are representative of Hamka's method of interpretation. Lastly, a comparison will be drawn between Hamka's method and those of other modern scholars such as Muhammad 'Abduh, Sayyid Qutb and Fazlur Rahman.

A. Hamka's Perception of Islamic Law

When discussing Islamic law, one inevitably encounters the terms '*sharī'a*'³ and *fiqh*.⁴ *Sharī'a* is deemed by Muslims to be the divine law which embraces all human activities, as laid down by God and His Apostle, whereas *fiqh* deals with the legal acts resulting from human endeavors. However, these two terms are often used interchangeably. It is, Khan remarks, not easy to make a clear distinction between the two terms as the law in Islam is so intermixed.⁵ With regards to Islamic law, scholars are not

²*Al-Baqarah*: 275-279, *Āl 'Imran*: 130 *al-Nisā'*: 3 and *al-Mā'idah*: 5.

³The Arabic root '*shara'a*' and its derivatives are employed 5 times in the Qur'ān and are scattered in four different chapters; 5: 48; 7: 163; 42: 13, 21; 45: 18. See 'Abd al-Bāqī, *Al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Dār al-Hadīth, 1988), 480. The word *Sharī'a* literary means the road to be followed and in the technical sense, it means the Canon law of Islam. This term is found in 45: 18; "Then We put thee on the (right) Way of Religion: so follow thou that (Way), and follow not the desires of those who know not." See Mohammad Hameedullah Khan, *The Schools of Islamic Jurisprudence: A Comparative Study* (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1991), 5.

⁴*Fiqh* literary means understanding, comprehension and knowledge, whereas in its technical sense, it denotes Islamic jurisprudence. See Hans Wehr, *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Ithaca: Spoken Languages Services, Inc., 1976), 723.

⁵Khan, *Ibid*. For further elaboration on Islamic law and its history. See, Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); N.J. Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991).

in agreement on whether it may be changed or not. Those who declare that it is impervious to change believe that Islamic law has been established once and for all by the four *madhhabs*; i.e, the Mālikī, Ḥanafī, Shāfi'ī and Ḥanbalī Islamic legal schools. Thus, Islamic law is regarded by these scholars as immutable and in need of neither supplement nor change.⁶ While those who hold that Islamic law is not immutable maintain that the law derived from the legal verses of the Qur'ān is the manifestation of human ingenuity and effort. As such, they argue that the *Shari'a* may be changed in the wake of changing human understanding. As a result, legal verses should be continuously re-interpreted, in order to form feasible and applicable rules for Muslims.⁷

It is very significant to mention that Hamka held very dynamic views regarding this case. He stated that one could adjust the application of certain Islamic laws, if the socio-cultural and political conditions of certain laws necessitated doing so. In this context, he explained two famous cases which were decided by the Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (the second Caliph). The first case, involved 'Umar's decision not to give any portion of *zakat* (alms tax) to the *mu'allafah qulūbuhum* (non-Muslims who were expected to convert to Islam, or new converts to Islam).⁸ The second case, involved refraining

⁶J. N. D. Anderson, *Islamic Law in the Modern World* (New York: University Press, 1959), 1.

⁷Hammūdah 'Abd al-'Aṭī, *The Family Structure in Islam* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publication, 1977), 13-4.

⁸Concerning this case, the Qur'ān mentions that among those who are entitled to receive alms are the people intending to embrace Islam or the newly converted (*mu'allafah qulūbuhum*). See, Qur'ān, 9: 60.

from cutting off of the hand of a thief during a famine.⁹ Hamka determined that 'Umar was able to decide and implement those changes on the basis of his comprehension and grasp of *rūh al-sharī'a* (the spirit of Islamic Law).¹⁰

The above premise clearly indicates that Hamka called for the comprehension of the message of God through its spirit, not its literal meaning. This opinion is in line with the ideas of some modernist Muslim scholars such as Muḥammad 'Abduh and Aḥmad Khan. Moreover, this resolution appears to be the result of a long struggle, and much observation of many Muslims' blind adherence to *taqlīd* (an unquestioning adoption of legal decisions made by the predecessors). The practice of *taqlīd* spread widely in the Muslim world, when Muslims assumed that past scholars had settled all the Islamic legal problems. As such, Muslims just followed the scholars' explanation and even claimed that the "gate of exerting personal opinion is closed" (*insidād bāb al-ijtihād*). In this sense, Schacht mentions:

By the beginning of the fourth century of the hijra...the point had been reached when the scholars of all schools felt that all essential questions had been thoroughly discussed and finally settled, and a consensus gradually established

⁹The Qur'ān explains that a thief has to be punished by having his hand amputated. *Ibid.*, 5: 38.

¹⁰Mohammad Atho Mudzhar, *Fatwas of the Council of Indonesia Ulama: A study of Islamic Legal Thought in Indonesia 1975-1988* (Jakarta: INIS, 1993), 56. This is based on Mudzhar's interview with Hamka on July 18, 1974. It is worth noting that the decisions of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb have continued to be the issue of controversy among the Islamic legal scholars throughout history. For further discussion on the subject, see Abū Bakr al-Rāzī al-Jaṣṣaṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, Vol. III (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, n.d.), 124; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyya, *I'lām al-Muwaqqi'īn 'an Rabb al-'Ālamīn*, Vol. III (Cairo: al-Sa'ādah, 1955), 22; Maḥmūd Shaṭṭūt, *Al-Islām: 'Aqīda wa Sharī'a* (Cairo: Dār al-Qalam, 1966), 109; Muḥammad Baltaǧī, *Manhaj 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb fī al-Tashrī'* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1970).

itself to the effect that from that time onwards no one might be deemed to have the necessary qualifications for independent reasoning in law, and that all future activity would have to be confined to the explanation, application, and, at the most, interpretation of the doctrine as it had been laid down once and for all. The 'closing of the door of *ijtihād*', as it was called, amounted to the demand for *taqlīd*.¹¹

However, this concept had been rejected by the modernists¹² who argue that Muslims have to oppose this notion and that contemporary Muslims are equally entitled to apply their personal opinion (*ijtihād*) in the derivation of laws. Since then, many Muslim scholars composed books on *tafsīr* (exegesis), *fiqh* (Islamic law) and *tawhīd* (theology). The influence of the modernists, which firstly appeared in the Middle East, spread all over the Muslim world including Indonesia. In Indonesia, the modernist movement was, at first, accepted by a few scholars such as Ahmad Soorkatie, Ahmad Dahlan and Ahmad Hassan. However, the idea of modernism later became symbolic of the thought of the young generation of scholars such as Hasbi Ashiddiqy, Muhammad Yunus, A. Hassan and Hamka.

As opposed to the established notions of *taqlīd*, Hamka encourages Muslims to apply their reason in understanding and developing religion. Therefore, in order to achieve this goal, Muslims should enjoy the freedom of thought (*hurriyat al-fikr*) and high motivation. Indeed, he goes further by declaring that *taqlīd* is more dangerous than

¹¹Schacht, *Ibid.*, 70-1. Yet, Hallaq believes that the door of *ijtihād* was never closed in theory nor in practice. One of his arguments is he mentions that, after analyzing the relevant literature on the subject from the fourth/tenth century onwards, jurists who were capable of *ijtihād* existed at nearly all times. See Wael B. Hallaq, "Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?," *Middle East Studies* 16 (1984): 4.

¹²The same idea was also forwarded, before the Muslim modernists launched their movement, by several scholars such as Ibn Taimiyya.

slavery.¹³ Not surprisingly, he appreciates those who are able to apply their personal opinion (*ijtihād*), even if this diversity appears to foster dissimilarity (*ikhtilāf*). This dissimilarity, according to Hamka, is a mercy (*rahmah*) from God and it is a tragedy for Muslims when the door of *ijtihād* is closed. It is a tragedy because Muslims are not allowed to exert their own ideas and are obliged to follow their predecessors' and, of course, this way Muslims do not invent any original works. This does not mean that he belittled the achievements of previous scholars. On the contrary, he felt indebted to what they had done and respected their devotion and effort in promoting the value of the religion by exerting their opinion.¹⁴

Hamka's struggle in disseminating his ideas concerning the application of *ijtihād* and the discontinuation of *taqlīd* was reflected in his works, especially in *Tafsir al-Azhar*, and in his involvement as the chairman of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesian Muslim Scholar's Council) from 1975 until 1981. During this period, several *fatwās* (legal opinions)¹⁵ were issued, most of which were regarded as new among Indonesian Muslims. One of these *fatwās* involved the permission for a person to donate his/her cornea after his/her death by undergoing a post-mortem surgery.¹⁶

¹³Hamka, *Mutiara Filsafat* (Jakarta: Wijaya, 1956), 104-7.

¹⁴Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, Vol. VI, *Ibid.*, 270.

¹⁵A *fatwā* is an Islamic legal opinion given by a Muslim jurist scholar as a response to a question. The person who gives the legal opinion is called a *muftī* (jurisconsult). See Mudzhar, *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 145-6. This *fatwā* was challenged by other scholars who held a post-mortem surgery is forbidden. They employed a tradition narrated by Abū Dāūd as their argument. It says: "Breaking the bone of a corpse is like breaking it when the person is still alive".

B. The Principles of Hamka's Qur'anic Interpretation

It is hard to elaborate Hamka's principle of interpretation comprehensively, since he did not compose a special work on it.¹⁷ Moreover, the works which discuss his commentary do not focus on his principle per se.¹⁸ Therefore, the only way to apprehend it is through his commentary, where he explains and employs this principle.

The way adopted in writing this commentary, Hamka remarks, is the way of the *salaf*. In other words, it is the way of the Prophet, the Companions and the Successors.¹⁹ The explanation of the Prophet is obtained from his *Sunna*; that is his sayings (*aqwāl*), deeds (*af'āl*) and his decisions (*taqrīr*) concerning the activities of the Companions. The authority of the Prophet's explanations of the Qur'ān was testified by God through His

¹⁷Hamka is different from the other Indonesian exegetical scholars, such as T.M. Hasbi Ashiddiqy. The latter does not only write commentaries but also writes several works on the principle of interpretation. His commentaries are: *Tafsir al-Quranul Majied "An-Nur"*, 30 Volumes. (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1976); *Tafsir al-Bayan*, 4 Volumes (Bandung: Al-Ma'arif, 1966), while his works on the principle of interpretation are: *Sejarah dan Pengantar Ilmu al-Quran/Tafsir* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1954) and *Ilmu-Ilmu al-Quran: Media Pokok dalam Menafsirkan al-Quran* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1972).

¹⁸At the time this thesis was written, two works discussing his commentary were found. They are: Yunan Yusuf's *Corak Penafsiran Kalam: Tafsir al-Azhar* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1990). Yusuf examines Hamka's manner of interpreting the theological verses. The author concludes that Hamka's way is very similar to the approach of the Rationalists. However, he does not adopt the whole method of the Mu'tazila. This conclusion is based on Hamka's interpretation of eight essential theological concepts. They are: the authority of reason (*'aql*), the function of revelation, free will and predestination, faith, the authority and will of God, the justice of God, the action of God and the attributes of God. The second book is written by Federspiel, *Ibid*. In his book, Federspiel does not actually focus on Hamka's commentary. He just assesses the development of exegesis in Indonesia, including Hamka's work.

¹⁹Hamka, *Ibid.*, I, 41.

saying "And We have sent down unto thee (also) the Message; that you mayest explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought".²⁰ From his elaboration of the authority of Muḥammad as the interpreter of the Qur'ān, Hamka rejects any interpretation that is contradictory to the explication of the Prophet,²¹ since the Prophet's elucidations were sanctioned by God.

Furthermore, Hamka recommends the study of the *Sunna* because through it, one can observe that the Qur'ān consists of three main components. The first component comprises the legal verses, from which all legal dictums are drawn. Moreover, since most legal verses had been thoroughly explained by the Prophet, it is unnecessary to seek any interpretation other than that of Muḥammad. Hamka even condemned those who deny the interpretation of the Prophet concerning the *Shari'a* and merely apply their own interpretations instead.²² The second component is related to '*aqida* or belief. To establish belief, Hamka explains, in the hearts of believers God reveals numerous signs throughout the Qur'anic verses about the creation of this universe. Interestingly, He shrouds some of their contents in mystery and ambiguity. However, several of these can be interpreted in accordance with scientific developments or with philology.²³ The third component of the Qur'ān deals with the history of the previous peoples or prophets, such as the stories of Joseph and Moses. In interpreting the historical verses, Hamka

²⁰Qur'ān, 16: 44.

²¹Hamka, *Ibid.*, 25.

²²*Ibid.*, 26.

²³*Ibid.*, 27.

determines, one should be extremely careful in adopting the interpretations of the previous scholars, since several of them are false. The untrue interpretations mostly originated from the *isrā'īliyyāt*.²⁴

With regards to the *isrā'īliyyāt*, Hamka classifies them into three categories: first, those which are not contrary to the Qur'ān or the *Sunna* of the Prophet. Such traditions are undoubtedly true and can be accepted as the basis for interpretation. Secondly, those traditions whose unsoundness is obvious, for they are incompatible with the purpose of the Qur'ān or the principles of Islam. Those traditions, Hamka recommends, have to be rejected. Thirdly, there are certain *isrā'īliyyāt* traditions whose soundness or unsoundness is doubtful. These traditions, Hamka declares, should be neither accepted nor rejected.²⁵

In order to avoid misinterpretations, Hamka suggests following the literal meaning of stories, since they provide explanations of past events, which can, in turn, be adopted as educational elements not as real tales.²⁶ This is in line with the Qur'anic message saying that "There is, in their stories, instruction for men endued with understanding. It is not a tale invented, but a confirmation of what went before it, a detailed exposition of

²⁴*Ibid.*, 29. *Isrā'īliyyāt* is an Arabic term which refers to those narratives which are found in commentary books written by Jews or Christians who had converted to Islam. Among the eminent *isrā'īliyyāt* authors one may count 'Abd al-Allah ibn Salām, Ka'b al-'Aḥbār, Wahb ibn Munabbih and Ibn Juraij. These authors were interested in explaining the Qur'anic verses pertaining to past events, especially to previous prophets and their followers. Understandably, these authors often drew from the vast repertoire of their previous religious knowledge, and this in turn inevitably coloured their writing. Hence, the *isrā'īliyyāt* narratives are divided into three categories; the accepted, the rejected and the non-accepted and rejected ones. See Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssirūn*, Vol. I (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, 1961), 165-200.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 33.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 30.

all things, and a Guide and a Mercy to any such as believe".²⁷

Following the interpretation of the Prophet, one may employ that of the Companions. Their elucidations, Hamka declares, are very similar to the Prophet's, especially concerning the legal matters, because "we believe that the Companions derived the interpretation of legal verses directly from the Prophet".²⁸ However, Hamka cautioned against a blind acceptance of the Companions' interpretations, especially when the latter appear to base themselves upon their personal point of view, or when a particular matter appears to draw a variety of differing opinions. In that case, our author advocated caution while scrutinizing and choosing from the various interpretations.²⁹

The interpretations of the Successors of the Companions on legal verses were sanctioned by our author since they derived from their predecessors. However, their interpretation of historical verses were cautioned against since they often drew from the *isrā'iliyyāt* and hence should be rejected.³⁰

It seems that Hamka's approach closely followed the *ma'thūr* method. However, that was not the only means he deemed satisfactory in understanding the message of the Qur'ān. Instead, he advocated a compromise between *naql* (traditions) and *'aql* (reason). In other words, he suggested following the way of the *salaf* (scholars of early Islam) when it is not contradictory to reason and applying reason where it is necessary to do so.

²⁷Qur'ān, 12: 111.

²⁸Hamka, *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 31.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 33.

Any commentary which limits itself to the thought of earlier scholars, he further remarks, is an example of "textbook thinking".³¹ On the other hand, an interpretation based solely on reason will likely deviate from the real purpose of the Qur'ān.³² In addition, a measure of partiality is inevitable when writing a commentary. Many commentators, Hamka declares, have turned aside from the main objective of *tafsīr* and have concentrated instead on propagating or defending the opinion of their school of thought. This can be witnessed in the work of Zamakhsharī, in which he propagated and defended the doctrine of the Mu'tazila, al-Razī who advocated the Shafī'ī doctrine, and Alūsī who promoted his Hanafī inclination.³³

Although Hamka greatly appreciated the method of Ibn Taymiyya³⁴ and mentioned that "the way that had been followed by ibn Taymiyya in interpretation is free from *ra'y* (reason)",³⁵ yet, he was not against the use of reason per se. Indeed, one cannot ignore reason especially when the Qur'ān declares: "He granteth wisdom to whom He pleaseth; and he to whom wisdom is granted receiveth indeed a benefit overflowing; but none will grasp the Message but men of understanding".³⁶ How can the wisdom of

³¹*Ibid.*, 40.

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Ibn Taymiyya emphasizes that the only sound method of interpretation is to refer, in descending order, to the Qur'ān itself, the *Sunna* (the Prophet's traditions), the *aqwāl* (sayings) of the *Ṣahāba* (the Companions of the Prophet) or to those of the *Tābi'ūn* (the Followers of the Companions of the Prophet). See Dhahabī, *Ibid.*, 48-50.

³⁵Hamka, *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁶Qur'ān, 2: 269.

the Qur'ān be obtained, Hamka questions, if ibn Taymiyya's strictest methodology is to be followed?

In order to reconcile between the application of *naql* and *'aql*, Hamka proposes conforming to the system of al-Ghazālī. The latter had mentioned that it was not enough to follow the literal meaning of the verses and the interpretations of the *salaf*, but that one should contemplate the Qur'ān as a whole and try to understand its global essence.³⁷ In addition to striking a middle course between the ideas of ibn Taymiyya and al-Ghazālī, Hamka also attempted to pursue the technique of the Companions in interpretation. He admired their devotion and their method, which consisted of referral to the explanations of the Prophet and the application of their sound personal opinions.³⁸

With regards to sound narratives in which the *matn* (content) contradicts reason, Hamka favoured the recourse to reason. This can be seen from his refutation of the reports concerning the revelational background of verse 22: 52.³⁹ These reports explain that Satan made the Prophet pronounce the following words: "Verily they (idols) are the exalted maidens (*gharānīq*)"⁴⁰ after Muḥammad had recited verses 53: 19-21.⁴¹ Hamka

³⁷*Ibid.*, 36.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 37.

³⁹"Never did We send an apostle or a prophet before thee, but, when he framed a desire, Satan threw some (vanity) into his desire: but God will cancel anything (vain) that Satan throws in, and God will confirm (and establish) His signs: for God is full of knowledge and wisdom".

⁴⁰The story of the *gharānīq* (exalted maidens) is well known.

⁴¹"Have ye seen Lāt, and 'Uzzā, and another, the third (goddess), Manāt? What! For you the male sex, and for Him, the female?"

acknowledged that the story of the *gharānīq* had been accepted as sound by a number of classical scholars,⁴² because, based on their requirements, the chain of its *isnād* is solid enough to warrant the acceptance of its authenticity. However, Hamka argued, if we accept the above tradition, it would indicate that we believe that Satan could intervene and influence Divine Revelation.⁴³ In addition, Hamka classified the tradition as part of the unsound *isrā'ūiyyāt*.⁴⁴

Hamka also vehemently criticized any interpretation contrary to philology. He rejected the interpretation of those who mention that all the verses of the Qur'ān are accumulated in the dot under the letter b in the phrase *bismillāh*. This idea, he remarks, is baseless and highly imaginative, for it is clear that the letter b itself has no sense if it is not related to the other letters. Moreover, the dot has no meaning by itself.⁴⁵

Another significant element of Hamka's principle is his view of the authorization of the learned scholars (*'ulamā'*) in discussing the Qur'ān. He declares that the learned scholars are permitted to express their ideas about the Qur'ān, even if their ideas are not in conformity with the interpretations of past scholars. In other words, he grants the scholars the right to devise their own opinions.⁴⁶ In addition, he proposes a new method

⁴²Among them is al-Ṭabarī who argues that this story is sound by presenting several reports, see his commentary, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vol. XVII (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1987), 131-3.

⁴³Hamka, *Ibid.*, XVII, 189-96.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, I, 33.

⁴⁵Hamka, *Ibid.*, I, 71-2.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 38.

of interpreting the Qur'ān that is compatible with the modern era. This ideal process calls for the involvement of numerous scholars, whereby each scholar is talented in a specific field of knowledge. For instance, when a psychological matter is discussed, there should be a psychologist involved and when a social topic is examined there should be a sociologist involved.⁴⁷

Having outlined the salient features of Hamka's method of interpreting the Qur'ān; a method which tries to reconcile between the principles of the *salaf* and the use of *ra'y*, one can deduce that his method is based on the following principles:

1. The interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān as the first step.
2. The interpretation of the Qur'ān by the *Sunna* of the Prophet, when one does not encounter any explanation from the Qur'ān itself.
3. If one does not find any interpretation from the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*, one can resort to the interpretations of the Companions. According to Hamka, the latter were the people who knew the best interpretation of the Qur'ān after the Prophet. This can be deduced from the statement in which he praises Ibn Taymiyya's method of interpreting the Qur'ān through *al-ma'thūr* method.⁴⁸
4. When no explanation from the Qur'ān, the *Sunna* and the Companions is found, Hamka consulted the interpretation of certain Successors of the Companions.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁸Ibn Taymiyya resorts to the Companions, as the third source of interpretation after the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*. This is in accordance with his remark: "When the interpretation of the Qur'ān is not discovered from the Qur'ān itself or from the *Sunna*, I will try to find it from the Companions, for they were the most knowledgeable about that". See his book, *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* (Kuwait: Dār al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, 1971), 95.

5. If one does not encounter any of the above-mentioned sources. Hamka allowed scholars to apply *ijtihad*. *Ijtihad* here refers to all the fields of knowledge that can help one to understand the meaning and the purpose of the Qur'ān. A case in point is Arabic philology because the Qur'ān was revealed in the Arabic tongue, as God says: "With it came down the Spirit of Faith and Truth, To thy heart and mind, that thou mayest admonish, In the perspicuous Arabic tongue".⁴⁹

When Hamka's principles are compared to his remark on 'Umar's *ijtihad*, as mentioned above, one is led to believe that Hamka is greatly concerned with the rationalist approach. However, in order to comprehend his principles and method comprehensively, the following part will dwell on his method of interpretation as well as his decisions regarding the actual problems he faced during his lifetime.

C. Hamka's Method of Interpreting the Legal Verses

Having discussed Hamka's principles of Qur'anic interpretation, the following part will focus on his method of interpreting the legal verses. This study will limit itself to three areas of the law. They are polygamy, banking interest and inter-religious marriages, particularly those between Muslims and the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*). The reason for focussing on these three areas is because of the controversial nature of the relevant verses and the appearance of different, and sometimes opposite, interpretation to them. The appearance of differences is the consequence of the scholars' attempt to base their opinions on the Qur'ān and to use it as the supreme guide for solving every problem.

⁴⁹Qur'ān, 26: 193-5.

Thus, the verses dealing with the above-mentioned problems have not been interpreted in the same manner, an act which has produced considerable debate. A case in point is the scholarly venture to solve the problem of banking interest and to determine whether it is usury or not. However, this issue has not been decisively resolved and scholars have often differed quite radically from each other. It is worth mentioning that in dealing with interpretation, Hamka employs several systematic approaches in his commentary.

1. Hamka's Systematic Approach

In his *tafsīr*, Hamka always starts each *sūrah* (chapter) with an introduction about the place and time of its revelation, and whether it was revealed during the Meccan or the Medinan periods. His purpose in doing so is to facilitate the reader's understanding of the *sūrah*, as each period has its own distinct characteristics. The chapters revealed in one period have their own style which helps provide a proper understanding of the situational context. This can be seen from his introduction to *sūrat al-Nisā'* where he begins by providing the situational origin of the chapter. *Al-Nisā'*, Hamka asserts, is a Medinan *sūrah* as it was revealed after Muḥammad's migration to Medina. This notion is based on 'Ā'ishah's assertion that it is a Medinan *sūrah*. The latter was able to make such an assertion on the basis of her cohabitation with the Prophet. It was after their cohabitation, she affirmed, that this *sūrah* was revealed.⁵⁰ Although Hamka concludes that *al-Nisā'* is a Medinan *sūrah*, he still acknowledges the information from al-Qurtubī that one of *al-*

⁵⁰'Ā'ishah was married by her father, Abū Bakr, to the Prophet when they were still in Mecca. However, they did not stay together (cohabit) until Muḥammad and his followers migrated to Medina.

Nisā' verses, namely verse 57 was revealed in Mecca.⁵¹ However, even though verse 57 was revealed in Mecca, yet it cannot be said to belong to the Meccan period since it was revealed after the migration of the Prophet to Medina. Hamka further argues that any *sūrah* revealed after the migration of the Prophet to Medina is to be considered a Medinan *sūrah*.⁵²

Hamka explains the distinction between the Meccan and Medinan verses in the following terms. The Meccan verses, he elucidates, are primarily concerned with matters of faith while the Medinan ones incorporate all manner of social, legal, political and inter-human interactions (*mu'āmalāt*). In *al-Nisā'*, for instance, one finds the rights and duties of husbands and wives, the law of inheritance (*mīrāth*), marriage regulations, as well as the status of orphans.⁵³

After providing the background information of each verse, Hamka begins his exegesis by examining one verse at a time. Moreover, before starting his interpretation, he translates each verse into the Indonesian language. For example verse 4: 3:

Dan Jika kamu takut tidak akan dapat berlaku adil (bila menikahi) anak-anak yatim, maka nikahilah wanita-wanita (lain) yang kamu senangi; dua, tiga atau

⁵¹Al-Qurtubī, *Mukhtaṣar Tafsīr al-Qurtubī*, Vol. I (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1987), 391. Qurtubī mentioned that *sūrat al-Nisā'* was revealed in Medina except for verse 57. This verse was revealed on the Muslims' day of victory (*'ām al-Fath*) over the pagans of Mecca.

⁵²Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, Vol. IV, 215. Hamka's notion is in accordance with al-Zarkashī's idea. The latter had held that the Meccan verses are those revealed before the migration of the Prophet to Medina, while the Medinan verses are those revealed after the migration to Medina, including those verses revealed in Mecca. See Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Vol. I (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1988), 239.

⁵³Hamka, *Ibid.*

empat. Tetapi jika kamu jika kamu takut tidak akan bisa berlaku adil, maka seorang sajalah, atau hamba sahaya yang kamu miliki. Yang demikian itulah yang lebih memungkinkan kamu terhindar dari berlaku sewenang-sewenang.⁵⁴

The translation in English is as follows:

If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three, or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess. That will be more suitable to prevent you from doing injustice.

After translating the verse, Hamka examines its constituent parts especially those he considers to be significant. Sometimes he also discusses the key words according Arabic philology.

Then, after discussing each verse, Hamka draws his conclusion concerning the verse or verses discussed. The conclusion depends on the central issue raised in the verse or verses. This helps the reader understand the objective of the verse or verses. A case in point is his exposition of 4: 58-59⁵⁵ which he believes to be an elaboration of the main foundations of governing the state. In administering a state or a government, he declares, the trust (*amānah*) has to be bestowed on those who are worthy of it and can look after it properly. Not only that, but they must be skillful as well. They, as the leaders of the community, must dispense justice among people impartially and without making any

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 225.

⁵⁵4: 58, "God doth command you to render back your trusts to those to whom they are due; and when ye judge between man and man, that ye judge with justice; verily how excellent is the teaching which He giveth you! For God is He Who heareth and seeth all things".

4: 59, "O ye who believe! Obey God, and obey the Apostle, and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to God and His Apostle, if ye do believe in God and the Last Day: that is the best, and most suitable for final determination".

exceptions to their relatives and friends.⁵⁶

In his discussion of the legal verses, Hamka attempts to steer away from sectarian debates on Islamic law. Hence, he does not promote the ideas of any *madhhab* (school) over the ideas of other *madhhabs*, and even though he sometimes presents ideas from different legal scholars, he does not undermine the ideas that are not in agreement with his own. Instead, he focuses his attention on searching and providing the best objective explanation to the verse, an explanation that can answer the situational need. In addition, Hamka does not follow the methods employed by sectarian commentators whose purpose is to defend the ideas of their schools. This can be seen from his refrain from saying whether a *yatīma* (orphan girl) in 4:3 is allowed to marry before reaching maturity (*al-bulūgh*) or not, as had been elaborated by ibn ‘Arabī and al-Jaṣṣaṣ. Ibn ‘Arabī, who seems to be in agreement with the Shāfi‘ī school of thought, maintains that the term "orphan girl" in the above-mentioned verse, indicates a girl who is no longer a child but has reached adulthood. As such, by following the literal (*ẓāhir*) meaning of the verse, one will conclude that any orphan girl is not allowed to get married till she is mature. Ibn ‘Arabī also bases his notion on the need to solicit the orphan’s opinion on whether she wants to get married or not, since marriage cannot be recognized without her permission.⁵⁷ Similarly, he also holds that the word *yatīma* means *bālighah*. This is based on the phrase ‘*wa yastaftūnaka fī al-nisā’i...*’⁵⁸ where the noun ‘*al-nisā’*’, is a general term that refers

⁵⁶Hamka, *Ibid.*, V, 136.

⁵⁷Ibn ‘Arabī, *Ahkām al-Qur’ān*, Vol. I (Beirut Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, n.d.), 310.

⁵⁸Qur’ān, 4: 127. ‘They ask thy instruction concerning the women...’

to all women including orphan girls, and is also a term that indicates adults (*al-kibār*).⁵⁹ On the other hand, al-Jaṣṣaṣ argues that the essential (*ḥaqīqah*) meaning of 'yatīma' indicates someone who is not an adult yet. Moreover, when an adult is termed 'yatīm', this term is used metaphorically (*majāz*). Hence, al-Jaṣṣaṣ concludes that it is not permitted to ignore the essential meaning and adopt its metaphorical counterpart, except when there is valid evidence (*dalāla*) for the latter.⁶⁰

2. Method of Legal Interpretation

a. Polygamy

On the basis of verse 4: 3, the classical Qur'anic commentators declared that polygamy is not a forbidden act. The main focus of their interpretation is related to the permission clause (*fankihū ...*) and the term 'adl (justice). However, in the course of time, many modern scholars attempted to reinterpret the above-mentioned verse, to reformulate their predecessors' interpretations and to find an answer compatible with the contemporary social dynamics. All scholars discussing the polygamy issue refer to one main verse, 4: 3, and to another prop verse, 4: 128.

When commenting on verse 4: 3, Hamka starts by describing its *asbāb al-nuzūl* (revelational background). He then quotes several traditions explaining the revelational background behind God's sanction of polygamy. One such tradition is 'Ā'ishah's answer to the question of 'Urwah ibn al-Zubair concerning the verse.

⁵⁹ Arabī, *Ibid.*, 310-11.

⁶⁰ Al-Jaṣṣaṣ, *Ibid.*, II, 52.

"Ā'isha explains that the verse 4: 3 has been revealed in connection with an orphan girl under the guardianship of her guardian who is attracted by her wealth and beauty and intends to marry her with a dowry less than what other women of her standard deserve. So they (such guardians) have been forbidden to marry them unless they do justice to them and give them their full dowry, and they are ordered to marry other women instead of them."⁶¹

After quoting the report, Hamka states his own ideas on the matter by indicating that there are, at least, two interpretations to the tradition. Firstly, that the guardian wants to marry the orphan girl in the hope that he can give her a less than normal dowry and that he can seize her property once she becomes his wife. Secondly, that the guardian wants to marry the orphan without giving her any dowry at all, because he knows that no one would protect her. Thus, the guardian's real aim is to exploit her property. Therefore, in order to deter men from abusing their wards, Hamka asserts, God grants them the permission to marry up to four wives. However, if the guardians really want to marry their orphan wards, they may do so by giving them dowries that are acceptable to other women of the same social standing. However, the guardians are not entitled to possess the orphans' property after marriage. To Hamka, any injustice dealt to an orphan is a part of a grave sin.⁶²

Hamka's focus in interpreting verse 4: 3 is to trace the extent to which polygamy is permitted according to this particular verse. He perceives that the permission clause (*fankihū*) of 4: 3 is related to the inability of men to be just to their wards and their wives. It means that if men are afraid of being unjust to their wards, they have the

⁶¹Hamka, *Ibid.*, IV, 226. See also Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Translation of the Meanings of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. VII (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1979), 2.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 228.

alternative of marrying up to three other women, although it is very risky to do so. However, the permission to marry up to four women is restricted by the requirement of justice that should be performed by men towards all their wives. Justice here indicates the right of all wives to an equal share of the husband's love and esteem, as well as the provision of daily expenses, lodging, clothing and so on.⁶³

With regards to the term '*adl* (justice) in "... *fa'in khiftum allā ta'dilū fa wāhidah* ...",⁶⁴ Hamka interprets it according to another verse, namely, 4: 129 "*wa lan tastatī'ū 'an ta'dilū baina annisā'i wa law ḥaraṣtum...*".⁶⁵ He then concludes that the term '*adl* in both verses indicates that justice in polygamy extends to both *zāhir* (outward) matters such as providing daily expenses, lodging and clothing, as well as to *bāṭin* (inward) matters such as equity in love and esteem.⁶⁶ However, he takes a rather lenient view of men's injustice in *bāṭin* matters.⁶⁷ His view is based on the tradition explaining that the Prophet asked God's forgiveness for failing to be equally loving to all his wives. Although, the Prophet was a very impartial man, Hamka affirms, he was still unable to be perfectly just in dividing his love and esteem among all his wives. This indicates that fairness in *bāṭin* matters is sometimes impossible to achieve among co-wives. Although, taking a lenient view of the matter, he still forbids men from preferring one of their wives

⁶³*Ibid.*, 229.

⁶⁴"...but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly, then marry (only) one..."

⁶⁵"Ye are never able to be fair and just as between women..." See Hamka, *Ibid.*, 241.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 229.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, V, 308.

over the others. To merely follow one's inclination is a real sin, he affirms. Thus the best way for keeping away from injustice towards women is to have just one wife, he states.⁶⁸

In his deduction (*istinbāt*) of the rule imbedded in the verse, Hamka attempts to maintain a balance between the permission of polygamy and the demand for justice among co-wives. As a result, he neither permits nor forbids polygamy. He merely acknowledges it as a restricted act (*rukḥṣah*).⁶⁹

Hamka's interpretation is different from 'Abduh's. The latter emphasizes that polygamy is essentially a restricted permit (*rukḥṣah*), it is neither an obligation (*wājib*) nor a recommendation (*mandūb*). It is even forbidden (*ḥarām*) if it is meant for leisure or for disappointing and oppressing one of the wives.⁷⁰ 'Abduh provides his interpretation by considering all the phrases of 4: 3. The phrase "*wa 'in khiftum 'allā tuqṣitū fī l-yatāmā fankihū mā tāba lakum min an-nisā' mathnā wa thulātha wa rubā'*"⁷¹ which is restricted by the next phrase "*fa 'in khiftum 'allā ta'dilū fawāḥidah*",⁷² which is also not complete except with another phrase "*dhalika 'adnā 'allā ta'ulū*".⁷³ Thus, the verse will come to mean that it is sufficient for a man to have only one wife, an act

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, IV, 141.

⁷⁰Rashīd Ridā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Vol. IV (Cairo: Al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-Āmmah li al-Kitāb, 1973), 293-4.

⁷¹"If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice two, or three, or four..."

⁷²See footnote 64.

⁷³"That will be more suitable to prevent you from doing injustice".

which will protect him from committing injustice. When justice, he adds, is impossible for a man who has more than one wife, it will be concluded that polygamy should be abandoned in his case.⁷⁴

Moreover, 'Abduh does not base the prevention of polygamy on the clausal structure of the above-mentioned verse, but also on verse 4: 129. If verse (4: 3) is related to (4: 129) and both verses are scrutinized, it will be seen that the permission of polygamy in Islam is restricted to the requirements of equity and justice. In other words, permission is only granted to him who can treat his wives equitably in both outward and inward matters. However, since it is impossible for someone to be impartial in both matters, injustice will ultimately take place. As a result, there will be enmity among the wives and harm (*ḍarar*) will ensue.⁷⁵ And, as long as polygamy creates harmfulness, polygamy will be forbidden. This is based on the principle of Islamic law (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) that 'stopping harmfulness is put in advance of bringing goodness' (*dar' al-mafūsid muqaddam 'alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ*).⁷⁶

Interestingly, Hamka's interpretation is also in sharp contrast to the interpretation of other Muslim modernists such as Fazlur Rahman. The latter interprets the term '*adl*' in view of the purpose of the Qur'ān concerning social justice in general, and with regards to justice to women in particular. Rahman believes that the injunction of 4: 3 concerning the justice of men towards their co-wives is more important than the clause of permission.

⁷⁴Riḍā, *Ibid.*, 293.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 286.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 287.

Since "the Qur'ān itself has also stated categorically that this justice is humanly unattainable, therefore, the Qur'anic demand amounts to monogamy". He also conceives that the legal act of the clause of permission in 4: 3 is temporary and that the real intention of the Qur'ān is to abolish polygamy.⁷⁷

Hamka, however, does not advocate a total ban on polygamy. There are instances, when polygamy can be allowed such as the inability of a wife to bear children. When a wife is known to be barren, he asserts, there is no alternative for the husband but to marry again. He argues that it is the instinct of every man to want children of his own blood.⁷⁸ Therefore, it is clear that Hamka does not forbid polygamy when there is a valid reason for it. However, when polygamy is meant to fulfill lust, it becomes entirely forbidden.⁷⁹ This idea has been rejected by the feminist movement in the Muslim world. The feminists do not see in barrenness an adequate excuse for polygamy. A family who has no children, they assert, will do more benefit by adopting an orphaned child.⁸⁰ The feminists even go as far as declaring that this interpretation of the Qur'ān, which seems to discriminate against women, is due to the exclusive elucidation of the Qur'ān by males.⁸¹

In the Indonesian context, Hamka's interpretation may be regarded as more

⁷⁷Fazlur Rahman, "The Status of Women in Islam: A Modernist Interpretation," in *Separate worlds: Studies of Purdah in South Asia*. ed. Hanna Papanak & Gail Minault (Columbia: South Asia Books, 1982), 300-1.

⁷⁸Hamka, *Ibid.*, IV, 241.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 239.

⁸⁰Amina Wadud Muhsin, *Qur'ān and Woman* (Kuala Lumpur: Fajar Bakti SDN. Bhd., 1993), 84.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 2.

advanced than most contemporary interpretations. The latter determined that 'adl in polygamy refers to external justice only. As long as a man has the economic means of providing adequate food, clothing and other domestic necessities, and is able to distribute them fairly, the door to polygamy is open to him, they declared.⁸²

b. Interreligious Marriages

The Qur'ān contains two verses that provide guidance to Muslims with regards to inter-faith marriages. The first Qur'anic verse deals with the prohibition of marriage between a Muslim man or a woman and a *mushrik* (idolator), because in the sight of God a Muslim slave is better than an idolator.⁸³ The second one concerns the permission granted to a Muslim man to marry a woman of the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*).⁸⁴ Of these two verses, the latter will be the object of this discussion, for Hamka's interpretation tends not to follow the explicit meaning of it. This can be seen from the comment in which he acknowledges that a Muslim man is allowed to marry a woman of the People of the Book⁸⁵ without any need for her to convert to Islam.⁸⁶ However in

⁸²The ideas of other Indonesian scholars are available in the translation and commentary of the Qur'ān by a group of prominent scholars. See Departemen Agama Indonesia, *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahannya* (Bandung: Gema Risalah Press, 1989), 115.

⁸³Qur'ān: 2: 221.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 5: 6.

⁸⁵Most Muslims scholars (*jumhūr al-'ulamā'*) agree that the People of the Book constitute the Jews and the Christians. See Ridā, *Ibid*, V, 154. While in Indonesia, the term People of the Book refers to Christians only because there are no Jews in that country. It is also based on the Constitution which mentions that the official religions in Indonesia are Islam, Christianity (Catholic and Protestant), Hinduism and Buddhism. However, there is a new interpretation of the People of the Book applied by the modernist

his *tafsīr*, he limits this permission to the faithful Muslims only.⁸⁷ Whereas later, in a collective interpretation with a group of scholars,⁸⁸ he went as far as forbidding a Muslim man to marry a non-Muslim woman, even if she is from *Ahl al-Kitāb*.⁸⁹ This is interesting because it was contrary to the explicit meaning of the verse.

Methodologically, Hamka's interpretation is based on the notion that a Muslim man, who is not strong in his faith, will likely be persuaded by his non-Muslim wife to forsake his religion. In that case, such a marriage will lead to a *mafsada* (harm) that is greater than its *maṣlahah* (benefit). Besides, the relationship between the followers of the different religions in Indonesia, especially Muslims and Christians, is not perfectly harmonious. In fact, Hamka regards several Christians to be the rivals of Islam due to their continuing missionary activities and attempts at proselytization. Thus, his repealment of the Qur'anic injunction is due to special circumstantial necessities or to the broader

scholars in Indonesia such as Nurcholis Majid. The latter believes that not only are Jews and Christians the People of the Book but also the Hindus, Buddhists and others. See Nurcholis Majid, "Beberapa Renungan Tentang Kehidupan Keagamaan di Indonesia," *Ulumul Quran* 4 (1993): 14-5. This statement has been hotly criticized by the majority of Muslims in Indonesia, especially by Daud Rasyid, a Middle East graduate scholar, who accuses Majid of having no proof (*dalīl*) of his idea. See Daud Rasyid, "Kesesatan Dikemas Dengan Gaya Ilmiah," *Media Dakwah* 223 (1993): 37-9.

⁸⁶Hamka, *Ibid.*, VI, 143.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 144.

⁸⁸The scholars are members of the Indonesia Muslim Scholars' Council.

⁸⁹This decree was issued in 1980 at the Annual Conference of Indonesia Muslim Scholar's Council and it was signed by Hamka and Kafrawi, the general chairman and the secretary of the council. See *Majlis Ulama Indonesia, Tuntunan Perkawinan Bagi Umat Islam Indonesia* (Jakarta: Sekretariat M.U.I., 1986), 71-3.

interest of the Muslim community (*al-maṣāliḥ al-mursala*).⁹⁰

When Hamka's interpretation is compared to Sayyid Qutb's explanation, one will note a marked difference between the two. Whereas the former had amended the previous interpretation on the basis of his social reality, the latter held to the explicit interpretation of the verse. Consequently, Qutb did not prohibit marriage between a Muslim man and a woman of *Ahl al-Kitāb*. Indeed, he advanced the explicit meaning of the verse without any consideration to the situational context.⁹¹

c. *Ribā*

There are several Qur'anic verses that deal with the question of *ribā*. However, the main verses dealing with this matter are 2: 275-9 and 3: 130. All these verses explain that God forbids any transaction incorporating *ribā* (usury). In Arabic, *ribā* means "the additional amount which a debtor pays to his creditor in consideration of the time he is given to use the creditor's money".⁹² In Islamic law, *ribā* was divided into two types: first, *ribā naṣī'a* which mostly refers to the practices of people in pagan times. It constitutes of a loan given by the creditors to the debtors with some additional interest to the original loan sum, in a fixed time, agreed by the two parties. When the debtors, at the time of repayment, expressed their inability to repay, the creditors would then grant them 'easing time' on condition that the debtors agree to pay a fixed amount in addition.

⁹⁰Hamka, *Ibid.*, 143-4; Mudzhar, *Ibid.*, 86-9.

⁹¹Sayyid Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, Vol. II (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1988), 848.

⁹²Anwar Iqbal Qureshi, *Islam and the Theory of Interest* (Pakistan: Ashraf Press, 1974), 44.

Secondly, *ribā fadl* which was the exchange of similar things, such as wheat for wheat and barley for barley, in which the debtor gave addition to the original things.⁹³

With regards to *ribā*, all Muslims unanimously agree that it is forbidden. However, a problem arises among Muslims concerning the different opinions about the relation between the *ribā* employed in pagan times and the system of interest employed in banks in the modern era. Muslim scholars have two opinions about interest. One group argues that interest is *ribā*, for it has a similar 'illa (cause) to the *ribā* employed in pagan times. The 'illa, in this case, is the excessive profiteering which leads to the exploitation of man by his fellow man. This is clearly prohibited by God who says that it is forbidden for man to devour *ribā* by doubling and quadrupling, 3: 130.⁹⁴ However, another group of scholars maintains that interest is not *ribā* since it does not lead to exploitation. In the transaction of interest, they maintain, the creditors and debtors are both in agreement (*ridā*).⁹⁵

In this instance, Hamka favours the former opinion. For him, interest is *ribā*. His opinion derives from his understanding of the revelational background of the verse, as well as the meaning of the term *ribā*. Hamka maintains that among the reasons behind the prohibition of *ribā* were the activities of the commercial Meccan society and the Jewish Medinese society. He also states that prior to the revelation of these verses, Muslims sometimes engaged in this kind of transaction; however, they ceased to do so after these

⁹³*Ibid.*, 57-8.

⁹⁴Qureshi, *Ibid.*, 77-9.

⁹⁵Fazlur Rahman, "Ribā and Interest," *Islamic Studies* III (1964): 38-9.

verses came down. The complete banning of *ribā* came after the revelation of 3: 130 and 2: 278-9. The revelational backgrounds of the last two verses were related to the activities of the Prophet's uncle, 'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, who, before becoming a Muslim, had operated his *ribā* business. However, when the latter embraced Islam, God revealed the above-mentioned verses and reminded Muslims not to take additional profit from the principal which they had lent to others.⁹⁶ Thus, Hamka affirms that banking interest, whether small or great in amount, is similar to the profiteering employed in pagan times and has to be prohibited.

In his interpretation of the word *ribā*, Hamka believes that whatever is the loan from which the creditors take profits, it has to be categorized as *ribā* whether it incorporates the element of doubling and quadrupling (*ad'āf mudā'afa*) or not.⁹⁷ It is not different from the system of interest, he states, that appears in modern times. He believes that the present system of interest is derived from the pagan system of *ribā nasī'a*, since it includes profiteering.⁹⁸ Moreover, even if the interest system, which is regulated by percentages, seems to help the needy, it still contains the element of exploitation because a loan with interest added to it is not intended to help the needy sincerely (*ikhhlās*). The real aid, according to Hamka, is giving a loan without any interest or giving impact as

⁹⁶Hamka, *Ibid.*, III, 72-3.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 68-9.

⁹⁸Hamka argues that the *ribā* or interest system creates a gap among the community and from it appears the rich and the poor classes. Furthermore, this system has been the seed of capitalism, imperialism and colonialism. See, *Ibid.*, 70. However, Hamka does not elaborate on how the interest system is the origin of capitalism.

recommended by God in 2: 277. That, he believes, is the real spirit of Islam.⁹⁹ At this point, the question may be raised as to Hamka's perception of business in modern times, a perception that is virtually impossible without the use of banks.

For his opinion on banks, Hamka seems to propose the institution of banks with interest-free systems. Such an interest-free system may be applied through the *mudāraba* (sharing) system, through which profit and loss fall under the responsibility of both creditors and debtors.¹⁰⁰

Hamka's idea about interest, which is similar to that many Muslim scholars, is rejected by some other Muslim scholars,¹⁰¹ particularly by the modernists such as Fazlur Rahman. Rahman maintains that the interest system of banks today is a separate kind of system from *ribā*.¹⁰² He provides several reasons to substantiate his ideas. First, Rahman believes that what is forbidden is a transaction which incorporates doubling and quadrupling. However, when it is not doubling and quadrupling it is not *ribā*, as had been the case in pagan times. To support this point, he quotes from the *Muwatta'* of Imām

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 74-8.

¹⁰¹In Indonesia, the controversial ideas concerning the status of interest have not been dealt with thoroughly. There are, at least, three opinions proposed by the scholars; first, that interest is *ribā*. This idea is similar to Hamka's. Secondly, that the status of interest is *mutashābihāt* (unclear) whether it is *ḥarām* (forbidden) or *halāl* (allowed). This idea was issued by one of the big Indonesian modernist organizations, i.e, Muhammadiyah. Thirdly, that interest is not forbidden when it is used productively, not just for consumption. For a more detailed account concerning interest according to Indonesian scholars, see Kahar Masyhur, *Beberapa Pendapat Tentang Riba* (Jakarta: Kalam Mulia, 1990).

¹⁰²Rahman, *Ibid.*, 8.

Mālik the reports that came from Zayd ibn Aslam who mentions that:

In the pre-Islamic days, *ribā* operated in this manner: if a man owed another a debt, at the time of its maturity the creditor would ask the debtor: 'Will you pay up or will you increase?'. If the latter paid up, the creditor received back the sum; otherwise the principal was increased on the stipulation of a further term.¹⁰³

He believes that the first term 'will you pay up' incorporates in it the initial interest, which was not *ribā*, because it was impossible for the commercial Meccan society or the Jewish Medinese society, where the *ribā* system was quite normal, to forgo the initial interest by way of charity. It also shows that the initial interest itself was not usurious and was, therefore, not considered *ribā*. He then remarks that "what made the interest *ribā* was the increase in capital that raised the principal several-fold by continued redoubling."¹⁰⁴

Secondly, Rahman views it from the point of the famous juristic principle of *al-maṣāliḥ al-mursala* (measures based on public interest). It is, he states, necessary to find out which of man's activities are morally destructive, are nearer to *ribā*, and can be categorized as leading to forbidden acts. The acts of feudalism, profiteering and hoarding are surely much nearer to the manifestation of *ribā* than the interests of bank, he argues.¹⁰⁵

Lastly, there are several points that may be deduced from Hamka's interpretation of the above three subjects, especially concerning his method. Firstly, that Hamka's method of interpreting the polygamy verse seems to have followed the *ma'thūr* method,

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 36.

since he provides traditions related to the revelational background of the verse and he also interprets the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān. A case in point is his interpretation of the term *'adl* in 4: 3 with 4: 129. However, he still resorts to reason when he describes why polygamy is allowed. Secondly, Hamka's interpretation of the inter-religious marriages verse is an example of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*. Thirdly, his comment on the third subject is the result of applying the *ma'thūr* and *ra'y* methods simultaneously.

Thus, when Hamka's principles and method of interpretation are observed, it will be found that he attempted to reconcile and apply both the *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* and the *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* methods in his commentary on the legal verses. However, even though he resorted to reason in elucidating the Qur'ān, he was less advanced than other contemporary Muslim scholars such as Fazlur Rahman.

CONCLUSION

Hamka, as one of the most influential Indonesian Muslim scholars (*'ulamā'*), was much concerned with modernism in Indonesia. His deep concern with this idea was reflected throughout his activities, which did not only include his sermons but also his writings. His interest in reform was twofold; he wanted Muslims to understand and implement Islamic teachings free from "foreign" and "un-Islamic" elements, and also to review the decisions of previous scholars before blindly accepting them. Thus, he propagated the urgency of *ijtihād* (personal opinion). Hamka maintained the banner of reform from the day he encountered it until the day he died.

As a Muslim leader, he called for the unity of the *ummah* (Muslim society), and worked hard to voice and defend the interest of his people. Not surprisingly, Hamka sometimes faced some risks due to the authorities' apprehension and distrust of his activities. They feared that Hamka's position and popularity would undermine their authority. This was not helped by the fact that his ideas spread far and wide, even in areas where he had not been. This was due to the popularity of his books, especially his monumental commentary, *Tafsir al-Azhar*.

In this commentary, Hamka was able to compromise between the *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* and *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* methods. As is well known, there are several methods employed in exegetical literature: *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*, *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*, *tafsīr ishārī* and

the modern method.¹ For Hamka, the application of the *al-ma'thūr* method only was tantamount to "textbook thinking" and was something he did not want to engage in. However, he did not want to follow solely the *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* for fear of deviating from the purpose of the Qur'ān. Thus, he applied the modern method of interpretation, which is a compromise between the *ma'thūr* and *ra'y* and is a method which tries to anticipate and answer the evolving needs of the *ummah*.

The purpose of this thesis has been to present and analyze Hamka's views with respect to his exegetical study of the Qur'ān, particularly his method of interpreting certain legal verses. We have shown that his principles of interpreting the Qur'ān are much concerned with the modern interpretation of the Holy Book. An interpretation firmly rooted in the belief that the Qur'ān and the sound *Sunna* of the Prophet, as well as the explanations of the Companions and the Successors are the best interpreter of the Qur'ān. However, Hamka advocates the application of both the *ma'thūr* and *ra'y* methods, in interpreting the Qur'ān, since either of them alone will not yield the required results. If applied alone, the *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* will not be sufficient, and recourse will have to be made to *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* when the need arises.

With regards to his method of interpreting the legal verses, one must point out that Hamka is very careful not to follow the sectarian way of interpretation and not to advance or defend the views of any school of thought. Rather, he seems to advocate and promote the use of both *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* and *bi al-ra'y* as the ideal way for modern Muslim exegetes. This is the sum of his ideas which bear a close affinity to the ideas of many

¹See chapter two.

Muslim reformists such as Muhammad 'Abduh, who wanted to harmonize between revelation and reason.² In addition, Hamka adhered to the atomistic methodology. In other words, he began with the first verse of the first chapter and proceeded to the next verse until the end of the Holy Book.

In conclusion, it should be noted that Hamka's commentary was one of his great contributions to the development of scholarship in Indonesia. It is also a penetrating and useful guide for someone attempting to understand the messages of the Qur'ān.

²Malcolm K. Herr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Ridā* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 109.

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