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MODERN QUR'ĀNIC EXEGESIS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE METHODS OF MUḤAMMAD 'ABDUH AND MUḤAMMAD RASHĪD RIḌĀ

By

Iftitah Jafar

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

INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES
McGILL UNIVERSITY
MONTREAL

DEDICATION

to my parents

H. Muḥammad Jafar Lareng & Hj. Syakran Baco Saiye

and to my sister and brother

H. Rosliah Jafar and Drs. Ambo Sakka Jafar

ABSTRACT

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Title : Modern Qur'ānic Exegesis: A Comparative Study of the Methods of Muḥammad 'Abduh and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍa

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Degree : Master of Arts

This thesis is an attempt to analyze and compare the methods of exegesis of 'Abduh and Riḍa. The analysis focuses . on their works of Qur'ānic exegesis, especially their joint project *Tafsīr al-Manār.* Their school of exegesis and principles of exegesis are a reflection of the socio-political setting in which they found themselves. They provide an antithesis to the schools and principles of exegesis favoured by traditional exegetes. 'Abduh and Ridā accused traditional exegetes of deviating from the guidance of the Qur'ān by allowing their exegesis to develop into an intellectual exercise in grammar, theology, jurisprudence or even philosophical dispute. In the views of 'Abduh and Riḍā, traditional exegetes tended to treat the Qur'ān as a justification of their position in debate, a tendency that should be reversed. Both men tried to reformulate the approach of Qur'ānic hermeneutics which they regarded as being applicable to social issues. Due to the differences in their respective intellectual backgrounds, experiences and attitudes towards different schools of thought, they applied different methods of interpretation. 'Abduh was consistent in his modernist call to go "back to the Qur'ān," for which he extracted guidance from the Qur'ān through his own perception. As a consequence he limited the use of the intertextual approach to *ḥadīth* and philological analysis in his commentaries. Riḍā, on the other hand, extended their use in his interpretation. Riḍā also favoured the use of scientific knowledge in exegesis which 'Abduh rejected due to its relativity. Riḍā's interpretation was also characterized by the extensive use of the opinions of earlier exegetes, which 'Abduh tended to neglect.

RÉSUMÉ

Auteur : Iftitah Jafar

Titre : L'exégèse Qur'ānique moderne: Une étude comparative des méthodes de Muḥammad 'Abduh et de Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā

Département : Institut des Études islamiques, Université McGill, Montréal, Québec, Canada

Diplôme : Maîtrise ès Arts

Ce mémoire tentera d'analyser et de comparer les méthodes d'exégèse de 'Abduh et Riḍā. L'analyse se concentre sur leurs travaux d'exégèse Qur'ānique, en particulier leur projet commun, le *Tafsīr al-Manār*. Leur école et leurs principes d'exégèse sont une réflexion de l'environnement sociopolitique dans lequel ils se retrouvaient. Ces auteurs on apporté une antithèse aux écoles et aux principes d'exégèse favorisés par les experts traditionnels. 'Abduh et Riḍā ont accusé ces derniers de dévier de la voie du Qur'ān en permettant que leur exégèse se transforme en un exercice intellectuel de grammaire, de théologie, de jurisprudence et même de dispute philosophique. Selon le point de vue de 'Abduh et de Riḍā, les experts traditionnels ont tendance à traiter le Qur'ān comme une justification de leur position dans un débat, une tendance pouvant être reversée. Les deux hommes ont tenté de reformuler l'approche herméneutique Qur'ānique qui est considérée comme étant applicable dans les questions sociales. Tenant compte des différences de leur formations intellectuelles, expériences et attitudes respectives à l'égard des différentes écoles de pensée, ils appliquent une interprétation alternative. 'Abduh fut consistant dans son appel moderniste au "retour au Qur'ān" duquel il a extrait une ligne de conduite du Livre Saint à travers sa propre perception. Par conséquent, il a limité l'usage de l'approche intertextuelle de *ḥadīth* ainsi que de l'analyse philosophique dans

ses commentaires. Pour sa part, Riḍā a étendu leur usage dans son interprétation. Ce dernier a aussi favorisé l'utilisation des connaissances scientifiques dans son exégèse que 'Abduh a rejeté en raison de leur relativité. L'interprétation de Riḍā fut aussi caractérisée par l'usage étendu des opinions des experts précédents, ce que 'Abduh avait tendance à négliger.

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TABLE OF TRANSLITERATION

The transliteration of Arabic words applied in this thesis is based on the system used by the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University.

Consonants:

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

Vowels and diphtongs:

Short: ـَ = a; ـِ = i; ـُ = u

Long: ـَا = ā; ـِي = ī; ـُو = ū

Diphtongs: ـَيْ = ay ـَوْ = aw

Long with *tashdīd*: ـِيّ = *īya*, ـُوَّ = *ūwa*

In the case of *tā' marbūṭa* (ة) *h* is omitted, unless it occurs within an *iḍāfa* where it is written *at*.

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INTRODUCTION

The Qur'ān introduces itself as a guidance which encourages man to realize the nature of his existence. The man who would reflect upon God's guidance should therefore have a thorough understanding of the Qur'ān. The effort of interpreting the meaning of this guidance according to man's ability is called *tafsīr* or hermeneutics.[1] Muslims feel the need to interpret the Qur'ān because of the variety of its wording, for while there are clear and detailed verses in it, there are also ambiguous and general ones. On this subject, 'Abd Allāh Dirāz remarks:

> If you read the Qur'ān, its meanings will be clear to you. However, if you read it again you will find other meanings which are different from the previous ones. Qur'ānic verses have the appearance of a diamond, each of whose angles reflects light differently so that it is possible that, if you ask other people to look at it, they will find more than what you have seen.[2]

Moḥammed Arkoun, a contemporary Algerian thinker, supports Dirāz's view. He argues that the Qur'ān contains an unlimited possibility of meanings. The impression that it has upon our thoughts stands at the level of absolute existence. Therefore its verses are

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[1] Hermeneutics refers to the principles, the presuppositions, and in some cases, also to the rules that govern or condition the act of interpretation. According to Michael Fishbane, when it is applied to the text, distinction may be made between *explicatio*, whose avowed task is to explain the philological or historical setting, and *interpretatio*, which always involves a more far-reaching retrieval of the document by and for later generations. For more information on the differences between *explicatio* and *interpretatio*, see Michael Fishbane, "Hermeneutics," in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Concepts, Movements, and Beliefs*, ed. Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1987): 353-4.

[2] 'Abd Allāh Dirāz, *al-Naba' al-'Aẓīm* (Cairo: Dār al-'Urūba, 1960), 25. The translation is mine.

always open to new interpretation, it can never be restricted to a single interpretation.[3] Similarly, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the sixth Shī'ī *imām* states: "The Book of God contains four things: the announced expression (*'ibāra*), the allusion (*ishāra*), the hidden meaning related to the supra sensible worlds (*laṭā'if*), and the spiritual truth (*ḥaqīqa*)."[4] According to him, the announced expression is meant for the common people (*'awāmm*), the allusion for the elite (*khawāṣṣ*), the hidden meaning for the friends of God (*awliyā'*) and the spiritual truth for the Prophets (*anbiyā'*).[5]

The variety of possible interpretations of the Qur'ānic verses shows the need for a similar variety of approaches. Qur'ānic exegetes formed schools and formulated principles of exegesis and methods of interpretation which often reflected the socio-political environment of their eras.[6] Ḥassan Ḥanafi expressed his scepticism about whether there can be exegesis of the Qur'ān without political afterthoughts or at least political implication.[7]

'Abduh and Riḍā, who are generally considered to be Muslim reformists, developed a new school of exegesis whose principles are reflected in their *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-*

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[3] See Mohammed Arkoun, "Algeria," in *The Politics of Islamic Revivalism*, ed. Shireen T. Hunter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988): 171-86.

[4] Sayyid Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Reality of Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 59.

[5] See Nasr, *Ideals*, 59.

[6] According to Wilfred Cantwell Smith, every theologian, jurist, mystic, heresiarch, nationalist, agitator, philosopher, has tended over the centuries, and across the Muslim world, to incorporate an interpretation of the Qur'ān or (more usually) of individual parts of it into his system: sometimes in a distinctive way, slightly or markedly. See his *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 71.

[7] See Stefan Wild, *The Qur'ān as Text* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), x.

Ḥakīm.[8] This *tafsīr* is considered to have been one of the most important modern exegetical works. The first part of this book is based on 'Abduh's lectures at al-Azhar, while the second is entirely written by Riḍā. The work is also known by the title *Tafsīr al-Manār,* because the *al-Manār* journal published parts of it on a periodical basis between 1898 and 1935;[9] the first volume was published in its present form in 1927.[10] It introduces itself as the only exegetical work that relies on both valid traditional narratives and rational views in explaining God's laws.

'Abduh and Riḍā brought different backgrounds and interests to the writing of this work of exegesis. 'Abduh, for instance, was known as a pioneer amongst the Muslim modernists at the turn of the century. His interest in the Western liberal tradition contributed to his fresh approach to the sources. Riḍā, on the other hand, was a well-known reformist scholar, revered for his contribution to both modern exegesis and the modernization of education. However, they both found themselves targets of criticism,[11]

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[8] It consists of twelve volumes, four of them written with the approval of Muḥammad 'Abduh and the rest written by Rashīd Riḍā. The former interpreted the Qur'ān from Sūrat al-Fātiḥa until Sūrat al-Nisā', verse 125 and the latter continued this interpretation until Sūrat Yūsuf, verse 52. Basically, Rashīd Riḍā's commentary is until verse 101; however, the Journal of *al-Manār* published only until verse 52. Later, Bahjat al-Bayṭār completed the interpretation of this Sura and published it separately in the name of Rashīd Riḍā. See Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1976), 243.

[9] See Assad Nimer Busool, "Shaykh Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā's Relations with Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad 'Abduh," *The Muslim World* 64 (1976): 272-86.

[10] See J. J. G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 24. cf. Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 272.

[11] 'Abduh, for instance, was accused of being a free thinker holding heterodox ideas because of his rational approach in interpreting the Qur'ān. See Elie Kedourie, *Afghānī and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam* (New york: The Humanities Press, 1966), 14. Al-Muḥtasib cynically asserts that 'Abduh's commentaries and those of his follower's are only an effort to

and were considered controversial figures.[12] This thesis investigates and compares the methods of 'Abduh and Riḍā as reflected in *Tafsīr al-Manār.*

Before comparing their methods, however, this thesis will first of all try to describe, in brief, their position as modern exegetes. The discussion will deal with their respective intellectual backgrounds, their reformist ideas and their assessments of the traditional exegetes. Attention will also be paid to the question of who was the real author of *Tafsīr al-Manār,* a problem which still remains unanswered. Moreover, this thesis will try to determine why 'Abduh and Riḍā became the objects criticism and it will therefore examine the views of various scholars on 'Abduh and Riḍā.

This project of research is significant for several reasons. First, there are no works which focus on a comparison of the exegetical methods of 'Abduh and Riḍā. The literature on 'Abduh and Riḍā as modern exegetes is still limited.[13] Jomier tried to analyze critically the method of exegesis used by the authors in their *Tafsīr al-Manār.*[14] J. J. G. Jansen has compared the commentaries of 'Abduh with those of some traditional exegetes such as al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī.[15] Jane I. Smith has briefly discussed the

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reconcile Islam and western civilization. See his *Ittijāhāt al-Tafsīr fī al-'Aṣr al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1973), 210.

[12] Charles C. Adams for example claims that 'Abduh's theological doctrines can be regarded as *Ahl al-Sunna's* thoughts. Meanwhile, 'Abd al-Rāziq argues that 'Abduh was influenced by the Mu'tazila. An interesting discussion on this issue can be seen in Harun Nastion, *Muḥammad 'Abduh dan Teologi Mu'tazilah* (Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia Press, 1987), 3.

[13] Works on 'Abduh mostly deal with his capacity as a modern thinker, philosopher, and *muftī.* Meanwhile the works on Riḍā mostly focus on his position as reformer, *mujtahid* and politician.

[14] See his *Le Commentaire du Manār* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve & Cie, 1954).

[15] See his *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill in 1974).

characteristics of *Tafsīr al-Manār* and the criticism directed at it.[16] In his survey of the schools and the principles of exegesis, al-Dhahabī studied both 'Abduh and Riḍā.[17] 'Abd Allāh Maḥmūd Shiḥāta has made an effort as well to extract 'Abduh's principles of exegesis.[18] Ignaz Goldziher has surveyed 'Abduh's principles of exegesis and his rational approach.[19] 'Abd al-Ghaffār 'Abd al-Rahīm focuses his study on various scholars' assessments of 'Abduh's method and those who developed 'Abduh's school of exegesis.[20] The most recent study on *Tafsīr al-Manār,* done by the Indonesian scholar and exegete M. Quraish Shihab, focuses on the criticism of 'Abduh's rational approach.[21] It is clear, however, that the similarities and differences between the methods of 'Abduh and Riḍā are still largely unexplored.

The second reason justifying examination of this subject is that until now there have not yet appeared any works that sufficiently explain the figures who played such an important role in producing *Tafsīr al-Manār.* Jomier, for instance, argues that the

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[16] See her *A Historical and Semantic Study of the Term 'Islam' as seen in a Sequence of Qur'ān Commentaries* (Missoula: University of Montana in 1982).

[17] See his *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn*, vol. 3 (Dār al-Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1976).

[18] See his *Manhaj al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Jāmi'a, 1983).

[19] See his *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr al-Islāmīya*, trans. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm al-Najjār (Beirut: Dār al-Iqra', 1983).

[20] See his *al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh wa Manhajuh fī al-Tafsīr* (Cairo: al-Markaz al-'Arabī li al-Thaqāfa wa al-'Ulūm, 1980).

[21] See his *Studi Kritis Tafsir al-Manar Karya Muhammad Abduh and M. Rasyid Ridha* (Bandung: Pustaka Hidayah, 1994).

commentary is the work of a group of scholars associated with the periodical *al-Manār*.[22] Ibn 'Āshūr sees it as the work of three individuals: Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897) who held ideas on modernity; 'Abduh who directly interpreted the Qur'ān based on al-Afghānī's ideas; and Riḍā, 'Abduh's friend and disciple, who developed his teacher's interpretative approach.[23] The appearance of Riḍā's name on the title page of every volume of this commentary may give the impression that he is its primary author. However, as Maḥmūd Shiḥāta notes, there are many scholars who claim that the work is that of 'Abduh, including the famous Orientalist Ignaz Goldziher, who declares this to be the case in his monumental work *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*.[24] This thesis intends to clarify this issue by presenting the various arguments in an objective fashion.

The third reason for comparing 'Abduh's method of exegesis with Riḍā's is that it enables one to evaluate their contributions and avoid false evaluation. There are two groups of scholars who contribute to this discussion; the first one claims that 'Abduh and Riḍā shared the same methods because they were both modernists, and both followers of

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[22] See O. P. Jomier, *Le Commentaire du Manār* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve & Cie., 1954), 25. See also Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 170.

[23] Ibn 'Ashūr, *al Tafsīr wa Rijāluh* (Cairo: Majma' al-Buḥūth al-Islāmīya, 1970), 167-68.

[24] This book has been translated into Arabic twice; the first translation, by 'Alī Ḥasan 'Abd al-Qadīr, entitled *al-Madhāhib al-Islāmīya fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, published in Cairo in 1944. See J. J. G. Jansen, *The Interpretation*, 5. The second translation, by 'Abd al-Ḥalīm al-Najjār, entitled *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr al-Islāmī*, published in Cairo in 1955. Unlike the former which consists of a part of the book, the latter presents explanation in the footnotes, either in confirmation or in correction to I. Goldziher's work. As for I. Goldziher's mistake in his claim that 'Abduh is the the author of *Tafsīr al-Manār*, it has been mentioned by al-Najjār in the preface of his translation. See Ignaz Goldziher, *Madhāhib*, 4. Cf. Shiḥāta, *Manhaj*, 195.

the *Salafiya* movement. Moreover, they were friends, the former a teacher, the latter a disciple, and both wrote in the same work of exegesis; as a follower, Riḍā merely continued 'Abduh's commentary. The second group insists that they were different because they had different intellectual backgrounds and experiences which influenced their approach to interpreting the Qur'ān. This thesis will carefully trace the similarities and differences between their methods.

The most important sources for our study is *Tafsīr al-Manār* itself as well as other books and articles written by 'Abduh and Riḍā. We will also rely on books and articles written on these two authors. In analyzing these writings, we take a comparative approach based on the principles of comparative exegesis (*al-tafsīr al-muqāran*), as well as a hermeneutical approach based on the theories of hermeneutics.

The present thesis consists of three chapters. The first chapter pertains to 'Abduh's position as a modern exegete. The first part of this chapter portrays his environment, his family background, his education, his relationship with al-Afghānī, his contact with Western thinkers and his experience of living in Western countries. The second part presents 'Abduh's ideas on reformation as reflected in his Qur'ānic exegesis and his other scholarly works. Finally, the discussion will turn to the question of 'Abduh's reaction to traditional exegetes and the extent to which he condemns them.

The second chapter looks at the development of Rashīd Riḍā as a modern exegete. This chapter begins with Riḍā's intellectual background, describing his upbringing, the schools he attended, and the figures who influenced or shaped his way of thinking. The next part discusses his reformist ideas as reflected in *Tafsīr al-Manār* and other

publications. Finally, the chapter examines Riḍā's attitude to previous exegetes, many of whom Riḍā criticized, including 'Abduh. Ridā's admiration for 'Abduh did not prevent him from criticizing his mentor.

The third chapter discusses the similarities and differences between the methods of 'Abduh and Riḍā. This chapter tries to determine in what respects they were similar and on which points they differed, and the reasons behind each. The last question addressed in this chapter is the effect of environment, intellectual background, affiliation to a school of thought, and attitude towards reason on the way in which each understood the verses of the Qur'ān.

The last section of the thesis will consist of a conclusion which will summarize the main ideas of our investigation and note where further study of the issues needs to be done.

CHAPTER ONE

MUḤAMMAD 'ABDUH AS A MODERN EXEGETE

Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) has been hailed as a man of great breadth, independence, and nobility of mind. The appearance of this figure gains significance in relation to Islamic modernism.[1] Today, 'Abduh is identified as a thinker, theologian, modernist and exegete. In his own time, however, 'Abduh's brilliant modernist ideas were challenged by anti-modernist forces not only in his own country, but also in other parts of the Muslim world, including Indonesia. In Egypt itself, his career would endure repeated upheavals as his innovative ideas were rejected by those who resisted the impending hegemony of modern empiricism.[2] In Indonesia, traditional scholars often accused 'Abduh of having "gone astray," accelerating the disintegration of Muslim society.[3] This chapter

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[1] John L. Esposito presents three views of Islamic reformism: (1) reform becoming an Islamic doctrine; (2) reform as a movement that echoes the effort to return to the Islamic doctrine and shed western influences; (3) the attempt to return to original principles, taking into account the demands of changing situations. Proponents of the first view believe that the classical Islamic model should serve as starting point for reform, while those who hold the second and third views claim that reformist movements began when Islam first came into contact with the modern West, dating from the time of the British in Mughol India, the Ottomans in the Middle East and the Safavis in Persia. According to them, reform arose at the end of the nineteenth century pioneered by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and propagated by Muḥammad 'Abduh. For a detailed explanation of the differences between these views see John L. Esposito, ed. *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); 32.

[2] This point can be discerned from his biography. In 1879, for example, he was released from his position as a professor at Dār al-'Ulūm by Khedive Tawfiq Pasha and confined to his village, Maḥallat Naṣr. The following year, he was released and appointed editor of the government journal *al-Waqā'i' al-Miṣrīya*. See Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 8, 405-6. In 1888, he was allowed to return to Egypt by the Khedive and promoted to the position of judge at a native court. In 1890 he was elected counselor in Cairo, and in 1899 he was appointed grand *muftī* of Egypt. See Rashīd Riḍā, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh al-Imām al-Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh*, vol. 3 (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Manār, 1931), 21. In the same year (1899) he was promoted to be a permanent member of the Legislative Council. See Riḍā, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, 726.

will assess 'Abduh's contributions to modern Qur'ānic exegesis through an analysis of his intellectual background, his suggestions for modernization and his assessment of traditional exegesis.

A. 'Abduh's Intellectual Background

Muḥammad 'Abduh[4] was the Arab world's foremost Muslim reformist, following two other 19th century *shaykhs*, al-Afghānī and Sayyid Aḥmad Khan,[5] publicly championed Western empiricism. 'Abduh was born into an educated family in the Nile Delta.[6] As a boy, he learned to read and write at home; by the time he was twelve he had read the Qur'ān so many times that he had memorized it.[7] One of his biographers notes

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[3] See for example Sirajuddin 'Abbas' comments in *40 Masalah Agama*. 'Abbas claims that the transmission of 'Abduh's thought and the *Wahhābī* movement to Indonesia created disintegration in the Islamic community which had previously been united under the Shāfi'ī school of law (*madhhab al-Shāfi'ī*).

[4] Born in a village of the Nile Delta to a family of modest means. The same year that Muḥammad 'Alī, the founder of modern Egypt, died. 'Alī's regime generated debate surrounding issues of modern change associated with 'Abduh's pioneering leadership as a journalist, theologian, jurist and, in the last six years of his life, grand *muftī* of Egypt. See Kenneth Cragg, "Muḥammad 'Abduh," in John L. Esposito, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 11. According to Hourani, 'Abduh came from a family belonging to what had been the creative class of modern Egypt. His father, 'Abduh Khayr Allāh was perhaps of distant Turkish origin, his mother, Junainah, was from an Arab family that claimed descent from one of the early heroes of Islam. See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 130. Haddad offers a portrait of 'Abduh's family background showing that his father had two wives. The young Muḥammad learned early in life the difficulties of a polygamous family, a subject he addressed with great conviction in later years when he spoke out strongly for family reform and the rights of women. Yvonne Haddad presents this point in her "Muḥammad 'Abduh: Pioneer of Islamic Reform," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahnema (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1994): 30-63.

[5] See Aziz al-Azmeh, *Islam and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993), 43.

[6] See Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 621.

[7] See Haddad, "Muḥammad 'Abduh," 30.

that, spared the environment of a Qur'ānic school, 'Abduh never swayed back and forth while reading or reciting from the holy book, as many did who had learned it by heart.[8]

When 'Abduh was thirteen, his father sent him to Ṭanṭā to study at the Aḥmadī mosque, second only to al-Azhar in its teaching of the Qur'ānic sciences and methods of recitation (*tajwīd*). His first experience learning by rote was unpleasant; he found memorizing texts, commentaries and laws as tools for understanding the Qur'ān, tedious and unhelpful. This early experience played a major role in his commitment to the thorough reform of the Egyptian educational system in later years. Perplexed and unhappy, he fled the Ṭanṭā mosque convinced that he would never become a scholar.[9]

He studied under his paternal uncle, a village *shaykh* named Darwīsh Khiḍr who was a follower of the Shādhilī *Ṣūfī* order; Khiḍr had memorized both the Qur'ān and books relating to Prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*).[10] He taught 'Abduh mysticism, logic, mathematics and geometry, encouraging him to enter al-Azhar and supplement his studies there by pursuing those subjects independently.[11] Mysticism would play an important role in 'Abduh's thought, especially in the early stages of his career; in fact, his first book, *Risālat al-Wāridāt* about Ṣūfism. Taking his uncle's advice, 'Abduh resumed his studies

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[8] See Osman Amin, *Muḥammad 'Abduh* (Washington D. C.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1953), 3.

[9] See Haddad, "Muḥammad 'Abduh," 31.

[10] See Manī' 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, *Manāhij al-Mufassirīn* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī, 1978), 306.

[11] In his study of Egyptian education, Heyworth-Dunne lists a number of logic, geometry (*handasa*) and mathematics (*ḥisāb*) texts that were studied at al-Azhar. However, the staff may not have been qualified

and found other teachers who helped facilitate his intellectual development. *Shaykh* Muḥammad al-Bāsyūnī who taught him literature,[12] while the liberal scholar *Shaykh* Ḥasan al-Ṭawīl taught 'Abduh disciplines not offered by al-Azhar, including lessons in Ibn Sinā's philosophy and Aristotle's logic.[13]

The young 'Abduh's independent mind drew him to a fourth scholar: the activist al-Afghānī, a powerful influence on the development of 'Abduh's thought.[14] Al-Afghānī's career encompassed theology, philosophy, and revolutionary conspiracy. 'Abduh was still at al-Azhar when al-Afghānī began encouraging him to study the works of Taftāzānī (d. 1389), whose Mu'tazilite-oriented *kalām* was beyond al-Azhar's margin of respectability.[15] Al-Afghānī[16] also guided 'Abduh in the empirical sciences, teaching him

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to teach them. See Heyworth Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt* (London: Routledge, 1968), 61-5.

[12] M. Quraish Shihab, *Studi Kritis Tafsir al-Manār, Karya Muḥammad 'Abduh dan Muḥammad Rasyīd Ridhā* (Bandung: Pustaka Hidayah, 1994), 13.

[13] See Shihab, *Studi*, 13.

[14] Al-Afghānī was a revolutionary inspired by an enthusiastic religious drive to advance the development of his community. His pioneer ideas attracted many followers; he succeeded in arousing community sentiment and his actions inspired a variety of revolutionary movements opposing colonialist and western domination. As a politician, al-Afghānī seems to have been more dependent on rhetorical speech than on written works. However, his work retains great value in the modern era as can be seen from a short article elucidating his thoughts on the backwardness of Muslims in comparison to Europeans and his call to revive the religious spirit which embodied the greatness of earlier generations of Muslims. See Nurcholish Madjid, *Khazanah Intelektual Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1984), 58.

[15] Because of his inclination to Mu'tazilī thought, 'Abduh was accused of trying to revive this school. As a consequence he was asked by Shaykh al-Layth, a leading figure who rejected Mu'tazilī doctrines, whether or not he was Mu'tazilī. In his response, he denied any intention to attach himself to any particular school. He wanted to be a free thinker. This event almost cost him the successful completion of his study at al-Azhar. See *Ensiklopedi Islam*, vol. 3 (Jakarta: P. T. Ikhtiar Baru van Hoeve, 1993), 255.

[16] 'Abduh claims that al-Afghānī had studied European mathematics and astronomy in India. See his "Tarjamat Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī," in *al-A'māl al-Kāmila li al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh*, vol. 2 edited by Muḥammad 'Imāra (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabīya li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, 1980), 345.

mathematics, logic, *kalām*, astronomy, metaphysics (especially Ishrāqī Ṣūfism),[17]politics and journalism.[18] 'Abduh became al-Afghānī's most important student, and his most intimate confidant, spreading his teacher's message throughout the Muslim world.[19]

After receiving the certificate of *'ālim* from al-Azhar in 1877, 'Abduh embarked on a career as a teacher.[20] He taught various branches of Islamic science such as theology, logic and philosophy at al-Azhar.[21] In 1878, he taught literature and Arabic history based on Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima* at Dār al-'Ulūm.[22] Besides teaching at these two institutions, he also offered lessons at his house in which Muslim and Christian students studied together.[23] In his teachings, 'Abduh stressed the importance of critical and rational thought which would preclude slavish adherence to established opinion.[24]

As a pioneer of Muslim modernism, 'Abduh made a significant contribution to the development of the modern Islamic reform movement, not only in Egypt but throughout

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[17] See Madjid, *Khazanah*, 59. Cf. 'Abd al-Salām Kafāfī and 'Abd Allāh al-Sharīf, *Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān: Dirāsāt wa Muḥaḍarāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍa al-'Arabīya lī al-Ṭabā'a wa al-Nashr, 1972), 343.

[18] See *Ensiklopedi Islam*, 255.

[19] See Kafāfī and al-Sharīf, *Fī 'Ulūm*, 343.

[20] See M. M Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1983), 1491. It is worth noting that besides teaching, 'Abduh also devoted himself in journalistic activity. At the beginning he acted as the editor of "The Official Journal" and then became its chief editor.

[21] See Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mun'im Khafājī, "Muḥammad 'Abduh wa al-Iṣlāh al-Dīnī: Fī al-Dhikrā al-Khāmisa wa al-Sab'īn li Wafāt al-Imām," *Majallat al-Azhar* 53 (1981): 293-99.

[22] See Kafāfī and al-Sharīf, *Fī 'Ulūm*, 344.

[23] He offered special topics on ethics and history of Europe; for ethics he used Ibn Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, while for history he used F. Guizot's *History of European Civilization*.

[24] See *Ensiklopedi Islam*, 255-6.

the Muslim world.[25] Through the journal *al-Manār*, 'Abduh's modern ideas reached North West Africa, India, and Indonesia.[26] *Al-Manār's* modernism injected new life and enthusiasm into Indonesian Islam,[27] which resulted in the foundation of the Muhammadiyah movement,[28] the Sumatra *Ṭawālib*[29] and *al-Irshād*.[30]

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[25] 'Abduh tried to encourage Muslims, particularly his compatriots, to accept modern empiricism and reject the moribund traditions of the past. See Maḥmūdul Ḥaq, *Muḥammad 'Abduh: A Study of A Modern Thinker of Egypt* (Aligarh: Institute of Islamic Studies, 1970), ix.

[26] See H. A. R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), 36.

[27] On the *Manār* movement in Indonesia see H. A. R. Gibb, *Whither Islam ? A Survey of the Modern Movement in the Muslim World* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1932), 268.

[28] See David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 228. Fazlur Rahman also notes the influence of 'Abduh on the Muhammadiyah movement in his *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 82-3. However, some Indonesian writers, such as H. M. Rasyidi and Nurcholish Madjid Arbiah Lubis question this interpretation. Lubis presents some differences between 'Abduh and Muhammadiyah, especially in theology, *fiqh* and education. In theology, for example, as Lubis believes, 'Abduh stresses the the function of reason (*'aql*) while Muhammadiyah stresses the function of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth. Moreover, in the discussion of free will and predestination, 'Abduh followed Qadarīya which promotes free will while Muhammadiyah followed Jabarīya which stresses God's will. For further information, See Arbiah Lubis, *Pemikiran Muhammadiyah dan Muhammad 'Abduh: Suatu Perbandingan* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1993), 163-79. Cf. Karel Steenbrink, "Menangkap Kembali Masa Lampau: Kajian-kajian Sejarah oleh Para Dosen IAIN," in *Jalan Baru Islam: Memetakan Paradigma Mutakhir Islam Indonesia*, ed. Mark R. Woodward, trans. Ihsan Ali Fauzi (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, 1998), 174-5.

[29] 'Abduh's ideas of modernization were transmitted in Indonesia through his Qur'ānic commentary *al-Manār* which was taught in the mid-1920s. See Burhanuddin Daya, *Gerakan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam: Kasus Sumatra Thawālib* (Yogyakarta: P. T. Tiara Wacana, 1990), 147. This process is parallel to developments in the Young Sumatran Union (1918). Shaykh Aḥmad Khaṭīb (1855-1916), for example, studied in Mecca, was introduced to the ideas of Muḥammad 'Abduh, and returned to raise a new generation of young Sumatran and Malayan scholars who in turn founded new schools, publications and religious missionary movements. Further explanation can be found in Lapidus, *A History*, 764.

[30] *Al-Irshād (Jam'īyat al-Islām wa al-Irshād al-'Arabīya*, Arab Association of Islam and Guidance) was founded in Jakarta in 1913 by a group of Arab traders. The organization's founders chafed at the deference demanded of them by Arabs in Indonesia who claimed the status of *Sayyid*, or decent from the Prophet Muḥammad. They formed *al-Irshād* to promote equality and educational advancement within the Arab community. Their religious leader was Sheikh Aḥmad Surkati, born in Sudan in 1872. Surkati had taught in Mecca, where he was impressed by the writings of Muḥammad 'Abduh. He was recruited by the Indonesian Arab community and arrived in Jakarta in 1911. From 1913 until his death in 1943 he served as the spiritual leader of *al-Irshād*. See Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942*

'Abduh lived in a community both influenced and challenged by the social and economic development of 19th century Europe. Sayyid Quṭb states that 'Abduh grew up in a strict society where rational inquiry was discouraged, among scholars who regularly neglected the role of reason in understanding God's doctrines.[31] At that time, the Islamic community relied primarily on interpretations of earlier religious scholars, whose thought may have been influenced by superstition or even heresy. During this same period, the era of Enlightenment was transforming Europe as scientific inquiry contributed to astonishing technological progress. At this time, Orientalists began to apply a more critical approach to Islamic doctrines.[32]

Europe's technological superiority first made itself felt in the Muslim world with the arrival of Napoleon's expedition in Egypt in 1798. Less than a century later, that influence was apparent at al-Azhar, where the professors could be classified in different categories. The first group followed *taqlīd* (blind acceptance),[33] teaching students the opinions of traditional scholars[34] without encouraging them to evaluate those teachings, perform comparative studies or engage in critical analysis.[35] The second group of

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 62-69; John R. Bowen, *Muslims Through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 61.

[31] Sayyid Quṭb, *Khaṣā'iṣ al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī wa Muqawwimātuh* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1980), 19.

[32] 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād, *Abqarī al-Iṣlāḥ wa al-Ta'līm, al-Ustādh Muḥammad 'Abduh* (Cairo: al-Fajjāla, n. d.), 110.

[33] *Taqlīd* can be defined as "the acceptance of the pronouncement of a *mujtahid* without understanding its basis, and those who practice it are incapable of that understanding." 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Bin Badīs presents this definition in *Mabādi' al-Uṣūl* (Algiers: al-Mu'assasa al-Waṭanīya li al-Kitāb, 1988), 51.

[34] al-'Aqqād, *Abqarī al-Iṣlāḥ*, 110.

professors applied *tajdīd* (renewal), using reason and common sense to interpret the texts.[36]

The importance of certain figures in shaping 'Abduh's career must be acknowledged. According to John Obert Voll, 'Abduh was inspired by al-Afghānī[37] to reject the passive reception of ideas and scientific theories in favour of positive ownership and application. 'Abduh, internalizing this advice, spent his life as an active member of society, attempting to find solutions to its social problems. H. A. R. Gibb argues that 'Abduh was deeply influenced by the work and thought of Ibn Khaldūn,[38] appreciating the historian's philosophic approach to politics; 'Abduh, however, embraced the Islamic faith with more tenacity.[39]

With regard to revelation, 'Abduh applied al-Ghazālī's acceptance of philosophy to his approach to modern science. However, 'Abduh went beyond al-Ghazālī, acknowledging the capacity of reason to illuminate basic truths.[40] 'Abduh accepted the Mu'tazilī view that reason had the capacity to show, a priori, what is good and therefore,

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[35] 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad Shiḥāta, *Manhaj al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Maṭba'a Jāmi'a, 1984), 33.

[36] al-'Aqqād, *Abqarī*, 110.

[37] See John Obert Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 95.

[38] See Gibb, *Modern*, 128. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) is known for his famous work *Muqaddima* in which he undertakes a systematic study of history, the growth of population, man's relation to his environment, economic theories, governing labour and management and sociology. See B. K. Narayan, *Pan-Islamism: Background and Prospects* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd., 1982), 66.

[39] See Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in A World Civilization*, vol. 3 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 275.

[40] See Hodgson, *The Venture*, vol. 3, 275.

incumbent on man. On the grounds of purification of faith, 'Abduh was indebted to classical authorities such as Ibn Taymīya (d. 1328 AD) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya (d. 1350 AD).[41] Concerning the theory of sociology 'Abduh borrowed from Ibn Khaldūn who he acknowledged as the founder of sociology.[42]

To broaden his scientific insight and experience 'Abduh traveled to Paris to master French, observe a new social system and contact European thinkers like Herbert Spencer.[43] Marshall G. S. Hodgson explains that:

> He was influenced by many modern European thinkers and by none more than Comte, whose positivism had exalted scientific objectivism even in the analysis of human culture, yet who called for a new religious system to meet a persisting human need, provided it be consistent with science. But 'Abduh was convinced it was Islam which could provide that religious system.[44]

His attention focused on two areas, religion and science, 'Abduh was able to concentrate his effort on one of his primary objectives: freeing religious thought from the shackles of *taqlīd,* which hindered the development of religion. 'Abduh wanted to see a return to the methods of "pious forefathers" (*al-salaf al-ṣālih*) who derived Islamic teachings directly from the principal source, i. e. the Qur'ān,[45] and weighed them on the

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[41] See Shiḥāta, *Manhaj,* 57. Ibn Taymīya, for example, vehemently opposed innovation (*bid'a*) in Islam, such as saint-worship, and called for a return to the true *sunna.*

[42] 'Abduh usually quotes Ibn Khaldūn's opinion in his Qur'ānic commentary.

[43] 'Abd al-'Aṭī Muḥammad Aḥmad, *al-Fikr al-Siyāsī li al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣrīya li al-Kitāb, 1978), 85.

[44] Hodgson, *The Venture,* vol. 3, 275.

[45] cf. Riḍā, *Tārīkh,* vol. 1, 11; Hourani, *A History,* 308; Aḥmad Amīn, *Min Zu'amā' al-Iṣlāh: Muḥammad 'Abduh* (Cairo: Mu'assasat al-Khānjī, 1960), 88.

scale of human reason.[46] In basic terms, 'Abduh attempted to reconcile secular (purely scientific) with purely religious thought.[47] For him religion and science were flip sides of the same coin. A second important goal for 'Abduh was the improvement of the Arabic style used in government administration, mass media, translation and correspondence.[48]

I would like to underline that, whatever 'Abduh's intentions, his scholarship betrays neither blind imitation nor adoption of Western precepts. Had this been the case, 'Abduh would have simply been replacing traditional *taqlīd* with a new Western paradigm. In 'Abduh's opinion, Islam should serve to remedy the negative facets of Western civilization, allowing new kind of civilization, supportive of Islamic teachings, to emerge. In his effort to rehabilitate Islamic theology, "'Abduh tries to blend a high esteem for the Islamic past with a healthy respect for Western science."[49]

'Abduh's claims that a return to the original Islamic sources would enable the Muslim community (*umma*) to examine and reconstruct its philosophy and a modern vision of history forms a basic principle of his thought. The only true Islam, he argues, is that conceived by the early Muslims because they directly studied Islam through the

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[46] cf. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 308.

[47] See Hodgson, *The Venture*, vol. 3, 275.

[48] See Maḥmūd, *Manāhij*, 308; Amīn, *Min Zu'amā'*, 89. In a close scrutiny of 'Abduh's works, al-Ṭanāḥī argues that 'Abduh's thought carries the added dimension to elaborate on pure Islamic doctrines and relate them to the contemporary period. See Ṭāhir al-Ṭanāḥī, *Mudhakkirāt al-Ustādh al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, n. d.), 81. Aḥmad, on the other hand, claims that 'Abduh aimed to strengthen the mental and spiritual fabric of Muslim life by liberating it from the paralysis which had come to dominate Islamic thought following the social upheavals of the 19th century. See his *al-Fikr al-Siyāsī*, 99.

[49] See Edward J. Jurji, *The Great Religions of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 192.

Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* according to the Prophet and his Companions. M. Lahbabi states that 'Abduh's Islamic reformism can be seen either[50] as a movement of purification, or a struggle to reopen the "gate" of *ijtihād* (independent reasoning).[51] Adopting *ijtihād* as a basic principle, "this *salafīya* sought to interpret Islam in a novel way and adapt to the new conditions created by the encounter with the West." As Issa J. Boullata observes, 'Abduh argued that Islam has fundamentals (*uṣūl*) and branches (*furū'*): the former relate to doctrine, ritual and ethics and are immutable; the latter refer to social relations that can be modified to meet changing circumstances.[52] *Ijtihād* deals mainly with the latter branch of Islamic discourse. 'Abduh also insisted that the Islamic message precludes all sectarian and religious differences from rupturing the *umma*.

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[50] Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 140-41. See also Ibrāhīm Abū Rabī', "Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: An Intellectual Biography of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd," Ph. D. dissertation, Temple University, 1987, 57. 'Abduh and other late 19th century reformers argued that the restriction of *ijtihād* had been disastrous and that the doors must be thrown wide open. 18th century reformers had laid the ground work, calling for *ijtihād* to restore early legal sources; from the late 19th century, however, *ijtihād* clearly meant an interpretation of the sources in line with modern circumstances. Esposito presents this point in his *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 45, 216. Cf. James P. Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation-States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 8.

[51] According to John L. Esposito, the Gate of *Ijtihād* remained closed until the nineteenth century when Islamic modernists, notably Afghānī, 'Abduh and Iqbal insisted that freeing Islamic knowledge from its "dogmatic slumber" was a precondition to its adaptation to the requirements of life in the modern world. See John L. Esposito, *Islam, the Straight Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 142; Ozay Mehmet, *Islamic Identity and Development: Studies of the Islamic Periphery* (London: Routledge, 1990), 61. For another perspectives on traditional *ijtihād*, see Wael B. Hallaq "Was the Gate of *ijtihād* Closed?," *Middle East Studies* 16 (1984): 3-41. Hallaq himself claims that in fact the gate of *ijtihād* was never closed.

[52] See Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* (Albany: State University of New Press, 1990), 22, 67. See also Muḥammad al-Nuwayhī, *Naḥwa Thawra fī al-Fikr al-Dīnī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1983), 146-8. Cf. Patrick Bannerman, *Islam in Perspective: A Guide to Islamic Society, Politics and Law* (London: Routledge, 1988), 132.

'Abduh launched his ideas on modernization in the journal *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā* (The Firmest Bond),[53] published in collaboration with al-Afghānī in Paris between March and October 1884.[54] The journal consistently promoted the cause of Islamic unity in the face of European domination.[55] 'Abduh insisted that Muslims could achieve this unity only by adhering to Islam's true principles and abandoning innovations grafted onto the religion over time. 'Abduh and al-Afghānī called on *'ulamā'* to edit out the fabricated oral reports (*al-aḥādīth al-mawḍū'a*), which facilitated scriptural distortions, and to discredit fatalism among Muslims, which obstructed the exercise of free will critical to the success of any revival.[56]

B. 'Abduh's Concept of Modernization

Muslim modernists embarked on the path of religious reform and modernism to persuade Muslims of the viability of Islamic teachings in relation to reason, science, modern civilization and certain Western precepts, to encourage Muslims to uphold Islamic

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[53] The name of this journal is derived from Qur'ān, 2: 56 and 31: 22. As Burhanuddin Daya argues, its name is based on a secret organization established not long before, which aimed at community awareness and unified the public opinion throughout the Islamic world. Its principal is that Islam serves as a strong rope for the unification of Muslims, and their struggles against Western domination. See al-Afghānī and 'Abduh, *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Ahlīya, 1927), 47-9, 293 and 321-3; Zaki Badawi, *The Reformers of Egypt* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 35; Ismail Djamil, *Islam dan Dunia Modern di Mesir* (Jakarta: Pustaka Rakyat, 1947), 48, and Harun Nasution, *Pembaharuan dalam Islam: Sejarah Pemikiran dan Gerakan* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1987), 53. According to Nasution, members of this organization came from India, Egypt, Syria, and North Africa.

[54] See al-Azmeh, *Islam*, 82. Daya suggests 1883 as the date of of *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*'s publication. See his *Gerakan*, 5.

[55] Cf. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣrīya al- 'Āmma li al-Kitāb, 1976), 11, 55 and 310-11.

beliefs and practices; and finally to discourage Muslims from becoming either secularists or conservatives.[57] By scrutinizing some of 'Abduh's ideas on the modernization of religion, education and politics, it is possible to determine the major themes of his thought.

1. Religious aspect

'Abduh's initial interest in Ṣūfism was later abandoned. He emphasized God's transcendence and rejected the mystical notion of personal communion with God. Nevertheless, he acknowledged the possibility of the existence of saints. To reduce the influence and power of certain mystical teachings as propagated by some extreme Muslim mystics, 'Abduh proclaimed Islam to be unfettered by belief in the charisma of any saint. Therefore, Muslims do not violate any fundamental doctrine of Islam by rejecting charisma. For 'Abduh, Muslims who exhibit excessive reverence for mystics and saints, visiting their tombs and entreating their intercession, have subjected "themselves to impostors and tricksters" trembling "before unusual natural phenomena." As such people invariably make connections between the work of some holy man and the occurrence of any accident that might befall them, they do not constitute "good monotheists."[58]

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[56] See Afghānī and 'Abduh, *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Ahlīya, 1927), 50. See also David Dean Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politic and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 31.

[57] Ibrahim Abu Bakar, "Islamic Modernism: An Outline," *Hamdard Islamicus* 18 (1995): 57-81; Ibrahim Abu Bakar, *Islamic Modernism in Malaya: The Life and Thought of Sayyid Syekh al-Hadi 1867-1934* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1994), 34.

[58] Adams, *Islam*, 163.

'Abduh vehemently rejected the doctrine of fatalism, commonly attributed to Islam. For him, true Islam signified the negation of fatalism and the affirmation of free will. The divine, he argued, does not espouse fatalism. He claimed that sixty-four Qur'ānic verses which explicitly maintain the primacy of free will support his argument.[59] In addition, the Prophet and his Companions, through their words and deeds, "testify to an unshakable faith in the freedom of our actions."[60] 'Abduh explains that the term *qaḍā'* does not imply predestination as understood by Muslim fatalists, but rather hints at "a principle of causation in nature, while within this framework, freedom of will still operates." He elaborated this argument still further, pointing out that free will, based on divine commandments, is imposed on human beings because they are responsible for actions within their will and power to control.[61]

Concerning *taqlīd* and *ijtihād*, 'Abduh rejected the former, beseeching Muslim jurists and judges to utilize the latter.[62] Citing Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, he made strong arguments in favour of the validity of *ijtihād*.[63] Muslims, he states, are allowed to follow personal opinion on a given religious issue when they are unable to find proof (*dalīl*) of its

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[59] See Amīn, *Min Zu'amā'*, 96.

[60] Osman Amin, "Muḥammad 'Abduh-Islamic Modernist," in *The Contemporary Middle East*, ed. and intro. Benyamin Rivlin and Joseph S. Szyliowicz (New York: Random House, 1965): 161-7.

[61] Osman Amin, "Some Aspects of Religious Reform in the Muslim Middle East," in *The Conflict of Traditionalism and Modernism in the Muslim Middle East*, ed. Carl Leiden (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), 80-100.

[62] Noel J. Coulson, *Conflicts and Tensions in Islamic Jurisprudence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 44-5.

[63] See Bowen, *Muslims*, 320.

indisputability.[64] In his words, "no person in Islam has religious authority over others, nor has any one the right to impose doctrines or prescribe religious rulings, not even the caliph, a *qāḍī*, a *muftī* or a *shaykh al-Islām*."[65] While it remains true that Islamic principles requires Muslims both to advise others and to call them to perform good deeds and avoid bad ones. There is no compulsion to follow such actions; even Muslim is responsible for his or her own decision to implement, or not to implement, this advice.[66] If Muslims exerted themselves to follow the path of *ijtihād* and avoid *taqlīd*, 'Abduh believed that all their problems would be solved.[67] For 'Abduh the gates of *ijtihād* "were wide open to all questions raised by the new conditions of life."[68] Inevitably, perhaps, contemporary Muslim traditionalists opposed 'Abduh's stance on *taqlīd* and *ijtihād*, reaffirming the centrality of *taqlīd* and insisting that the gates of *ijtihād* were closed.[69]

In the eyes of traditionalists, Muslim modernists were neither eligible nor qualified to reopen the gates of *ijtihād*. In direct contrast to their opinions, 'Abduh considered

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[64] See Muḥammad 'Abduh, *al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 1983), 69.

[65] Issa J. Boullata, *Trends*, 77. See 'Abduh, *al-Imām*, 6. Cf. Muḥammad 'Imāra, *al-Islām wa al-Sulṭa al-Dīnīya* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabīya li al-Dirāsat wa al-Nashr, 1980), 37-9.

[66] See 'Imāra, *al-Islām*, 37-9; Boullata, *Trends*, 77. For reference in the Qur'ān, see 3: 104, 110 and 2: 40.

[67] Bassam Tibi regards these efforts as central to the arguments of 'Abduh's modernism. See his *The Crisis of Modern Islam: A Pre-Industrial Culture in the Scientific-Technological Age*, trans. Judith von Sivers (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 137.

[68] Amin, "Muḥammad 'Abduh," 161; Osman Amin, "The Modernist Movement in Egypt," in *Islam and the West*, ed. Richard N. Frye, (S'Gravenhage: Mouton and Co., 1957): 165-78.

[69] It is important to note that the controversy over the closing and/or reopening of the gates of *ijtihād* was a sunnī dilemma; the shī'a neither declared nor assumed that the gates of *ijtihād* were closed.

ijtihād to be the inviolable right of all Muslims, not one belonging exclusively to the earliest generations of Muslims. Iqbāl went even further by declaring *ijtihād* to be compulsory for Muslims. Ṭaha J. al-Alwānī even argues that *taqlīd* can be considered an act of impiety as, arguably, the Qur'ān and the Prophet reject it.[70] Islam itself freed man's mind from rigidity and *taqlīd*.[71] According to 'Abduh, Islam "attributed folly and levity to those who accept blindly the words of their predecessors."[72]

In short, 'Abduh, like other Muslim modernists, opposed *taqlīd*, holding it responsible for stunted development of a dynamic, liberal and progressive Islam. Harun Nasution,[73] an Indonesian modern thinker who claims to be a student of 'Abduh, relates the practice of *taqlīd* to the backwardness of Muslims. Nasution asserts that the backwardness of Muslims in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led modernists, like 'Abduh, to attribute this state of inertia to the practice of *taqlīd*.[74]

'Abduh holds reason in high esteem.[75] According to him, the importance of reason to each individual mirrors the importance of a Prophet to his community.[76] Reason is the

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[70] See Greg Noaker, "*Ijtihād*: A Key to the Renewal of 'Critical Faith'," *Hamdard Islamicus* 58 (1995): 116-25.

[71] See Muḥammad Ṭayyib al-Najjār, "al-Islām Yuḥarrir al-Fikr al-Insānī min al-Jumūd wa al-Taqlīd," *Majallat al-Azhar* 2 (1981): 232-40.

[72] Adams, *Islam*, 132.

[73] He is a graduate of the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University who has become a light-house of Islamic learning in Indonesia and even South East Asia. He was considered by his disciples as a neo-Mu'tazilī who brought 'Abduhism to Indonesia. As a reflection of his efforts to modernize Islamic thought in Indonesia, he was regarded as the founder of the Harumi school.

[74] See Harun Nasution, "The Place of Reason in 'Abduh's Theology: Its Impact on his Theological System and Views," Ph. D. dissertation, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, 1968, 60.

foundation of life which serves as a mark of distinction for people. In his *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*,[77] 'Abduh states that reason gives people the capacity to discern the divine attributes, discriminate between good and evil, and undertake good deeds and avoid bad ones. However, as a theologian, 'Abduh believed that it was sinful to subject the divine to the application of human reason. 'Abduh based this view on the *ḥadīth* which states: "Think about the creation, but do not think about the Creator."[78] God's own descriptions of Himself in the Qur'ān support this position; according to Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī, "The Qur'ān expresses God's inconceptualizability in the most emphatic manner."[79]

'Abduh's stance on the power of reason resembles that of the Mu'tazila. P. J. Stewart remarks that:

> By using the expression the Divine Unity (*tawhīd*) in the title of his book, 'Abduh was deliberately recalling the Mu'tazilites, for that was the term that they used to sum up their doctrine. It is clear that he was in fact a latter-day Mu'tazilite, for in the first edition of his Epistle he stated that the Koran is created and not eternal. He was obliged to remove this statement from the later editions, but there seems to be no doubt that his view did not

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[75] I think 'Abduh's assertion is reasonable since the Qur'ān itself strongly encourages Muslims to use their intellect (*'aql*) appropriately. The word *'aql* can be found in 45 verses. Many other words that suggest thinking activities: *naẓara, tadabbara, tafakkara, faqiha, tadhakkara* and *fahima*. All of these verbs have as their predicate words like *ulū al-albāb, ulū al-abṣār, ulū al-nuḥā* and *āyāt al-kawnīya* which motivate or even require people to use their brain effectively. See Harun Nasution, *Akal dan Wahyu dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Penerbit Universitas Indonesia, 1986), 39-51.

[76] See Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Risālat al-Tawḥīd* (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1366 A. H.), 127.

[77] One of 'Abduh's most important works, it is the principal explanation of his basic theology. It was translated into French by B. Michel and M. Abdel Raziq, Paris, 1925, was later translated into English by Ishaq Musaad and Kenneth Cragg, as *The Theology of Unity*, London: Arno Press, 1980. In this book, 'Abduh stresses the need to purge Islam of its superstition, to correct Muslim conceptions of the articles of faith, and eliminate errors that crept into Islam on account of textual misinterpretations. See Caesar E. Farah, *Islam: Beliefs and Observances* (New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1994), 231.

[78] See Annemmarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 220.

[79] See Kenneth Cragg, "*Tadabbur al-Qur'ān*: Reading and Meaning," in *The Quest of an Islamic Humanism*, ed. A. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984): 185-200.

change. He also shared the Mu'tazilite view on such matters as free will and the role of reason in religion.[80]

The high value that 'Abduh placed on the human intellect (*'aql*)[81] is apparent in his treatment of the term *furqān* which appears in Qur'ān 3: 4. As Rashīd Riḍā notes, 'Abduh interprets this word to signify the reason by which man may distinguish truth from falsehood.[82] J. J. G. Jansen argues that 'Abduh would seem to have replaced revelation with reason. He points out that "an obvious implication of this stance would be that if one wishes to know why he should not kill, or not ask for interest on capital, it is sufficient for him to use his intellect; there is no need for him to consult Scripture."[83]

'Abduh disagreed with Western critics who viewed Islam as a philosophy at odds with reason, science and modern civilization.[84] 'Abduh also rejected the view that Islam

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[80] P. J. Stewart, *Unfolding Islam* (London: Garnet Publishing Ltd., 1995), 194. He argues that like the Mu'tazila [the Mu'tazilīs], the majority of the modernists emphasize the high place of reason in their scale of values and try to show the perfect compatibility of true Islam with the findings of a mind free from the scourge of ignorance, prejudice and superstitions. Like the Mu'tazila, the modernists think that Islam upholds the principles of free will (*ikhtiyār*), as opposed to that predestination (*jabr*), since it has been obvious to both groups that Muslims first conceive of their capacity to determine their destiny. See Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 8.

[81] The word *'aql* was used to denote practical intelligence in the era of ignorance (*jāhilīya*); in the modern psychological sense it is used to explain problem-solving capacity. People with *'aql* have the ability to solve problems, a kind of wisdom appreciated by Arabs in the time of ignorance. See Tosihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'ān* (Tokyo: Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964), 141.

[82] See J. J. G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 21. Other exegetes claim the word *furqān* as one of the names of the Qur'ān. Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī is one of the followers of 'Abduh's school of exegesis who accepts 'Abduh's rational interpretation of *furqān*.

[83] See Jansen, *The Interpretation*, 23.

[84] 'Abduh responded to western critics like Ernest Renan (1823-1892) and Sir William Muir (d. 1905) who criticized certain Islamic teachings. "In his lecture on 'Islam and Science,' given at the Sorbonne in 1883, Renan maintained that Islam and Science . . . were incompatible with one another." Hourani presents this point in his *Arabic Thought*, 120. Renan and Muir "contended that social and economic backwardness of the late medieval Muslim society was due to the inherently inferior character of the Islamic

has traditionally been hostile to reason and science. He maintained that "Islam is pre-eminently a religion of reason;"[85] and that "Islam and reason were totally compatible if Islam was properly understood."[86] In the event that reason and tradition contradict each other, 'Abduh suggests that the right of decision should rest with reason. He says that "very few people oppose this principle, and only people who are of no account."[87] In line with 'Abduh's philosophy, 'Abd al-Raḥīm treats reason as a requirement incumbent upon all Muslims which encourages them to think critically.[88] For 'Abduh, Islam persistently encourages people to use reason to study the governing laws of nature in order to know their Creator, God.[89] He further explained that Islam encourages Muslims to seek and spread knowledge; the Prophet of Islam urged Muslims to seek knowledge, even if they have to go to China.[90] 'Abduh claimed that Islam emphasized the importance of knowledge and noted that, within two centuries of its emergence, "the Muslims were already excelling in all the branches of human knowledge."[91]

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civilization. This, in turn, was alleged to stem from the inferiority of Islam as a religion which was seen as a 'Beduin' phenomenon alien to 'reason' and tolerance." Rahman, *Islam*, 215.

[85] Adams, *Islam*, 128.

[86] Andrew Rippin and Jan Knappert, eds., *Textual Sources for the Study of Islam* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 31.

[87] Muḥammad 'Abduh, *al-Islām wa al-Naṣrānīya ma'a al-'Ilm wa al-Madanīya* (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1373 A. H.), 56. See also Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 110.

[88] See 'Abd al-Ghaffār 'Abd al-Raḥīm, *al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh wa Manhajuh fī al-Tafsīr* (Cairo: al-Markaz al-'Arabī li al-Thaqāfa wa al-'Ulūm, 1980), 242.

[89] Adams, *Islam*, 128.

[90] This is a well-known ḥadīth. See Mehmet, *Islamic Identity*, 61.

2. Social and economic

'Abduh was also concerned with social and economic issues. His belief that Muslims were allowed to eat animals slaughtered by Christians contributed to interfaith dialogue.[92] He bases this belief on two arguments: the Qur'ānic verse that says: "And the food of those who have been vouchsafed revelation is lawful to you . . ."[93] and the acknowledgment that modern Christians are *ahl al-kitāb* who share a status similar to that accorded to Christians during the time of the Prophet.

'Abduh argued that it was admissible to accrue dividends from a savings bank.[94] He also devoted a great deal of attention to women's emancipation, arguing for women's right to a full education and calling for restrictions on polygamy. He criticized the polygamous family environment as ill adapted to the raising of children. These convictions may have stemmed from his personal experience as the only educated child in a polygamous family.

3. Political aspects

Unlike al-Afghānī, 'Abduh was both pragmatic and practical in his political thought. Initially influenced by the pan-Islamism al-Afghānī advocated and by Egyptian nationalism, he deleted both ideologies from his modernist program, following the three-

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[91] Amin, "The Modernist," 172; and "Muḥammad 'Abduh," 165.

[92] See Charles C. Adams, "Muḥammad 'Abduh and the Transvaal *Fatwa*," in *The Macdonald Presentation Volume* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1933): 13-29.

[93] Qur'ān 5: 5. All Qur'ānic translations used in this thesis are based on Muḥammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān* (Gibraltar: Dār al-Andalus, 1980).

[94] See Goldziher, *Introduction*, 235.

year exile imposed on him after his involvement in the 'Urābī revolt against the British in 1882. 'Abduh cautioned al-Afghānī that "this political method would not result in any good, for establishment of a just and reformed Muslim government did not depend alone on the removal of the hindrances occasioned by foreigners."[95]

'Abduh adopted a conciliatory and participatory attitude towards British administrators in Egypt following his return from exile. He "became the close friend and adviser of Muṣṭafā Pāshā Fahmī, Prime Minister from 1895 to 1908, and also the friend and confidant of Lord Cromer."[96] He cooperated with both British administrators and the Egyptian ruling class in the hopes that Egyptians could accrue certain benefits from this leadership. In his words, "What Egypt needed was a period of genuine national education; every political and social problem should be seen in the light of this need. If constitutional government hindered the process it was bad or at least premature; if autocratic rule, or even foreign rule, helped it, it was to be tolerated."[97] 'Abduh revered the law, lauding its impartiality and supremacy: "Reverence for the laws of the country is one of the essentials for its prosperity. . . ."[98]

4. Educational aspect

'Abduh emphasized the importance of education in freeing Muslims from intellectual, moral and social decadence and from backwardness. He wrote: "Those who

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[95] Adams, *Islam*, 63.

[96] Adams, *Islam*, 64.

[97] Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 157-8.

really desire good for the country should turn their attention essentially to education. For it is by reforming education that one will most easily realize all other reforms."[99] 'Abduh was confident that the advancement of education and the sciences lay behind the West's ascendancy in power, progress and wealth. He said: "We see no reason for their progress to wealth and power except the advancement of education and the sciences among them. Our first duty then is to endeavour with all our might and mind to spread these sciences in our country."[100] He firmly held that improvement in education was the first step in the long process towards the realization of duty incumbent upon all Muslim nations; education would reform individual character, thoughts and deeds.[101] He considered the impoverishment of Muslims the consequence of poor education which left them ill prepared to manage their national resources efficiently. He wrote that, "True poverty is lack of education and inability to use material advantages."[102]

'Abduh clearly believed that Islam "required its adherents to pursue all branches of learning and science with their utmost endeavours."[103] He demanded Muslims study not only Arabic and Islamic studies (to defend their religion) but also "the modern sciences

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[98] Adams, *Islam*, 50.

[99] Amin, "Muḥammad 'Abduh," 162.

[100] Adams, *Islam*, 135.

[101] Adams, *Islam*, 49; Sami Abdullah Kaloti, "The Reformation of Islam and the Impact of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad 'Abduh on Islamic Education," Ph. D. dissertation., Marquette University, 1974, 111-2.

[102] Adams, *Islam*, 50.

[103] H. A. R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 126.

and the history and religion of Europe in order to learn the reason for the progress of the West."[104] He argued that "the Qur'ān commands men to engage in scientific studies, and that our first duty is to endeavour with our might and mind to spread sciences in our country."[105]

In practical terms, 'Abduh struggled to reform and modernize Muslim education in his own country, especially at al-Azhar. He "tried to introduce a broader and more philosophical conception of religious education." He felt that if al-Azhar, the oldest and greatest center of Islamic higher learning in Egypt and the Muslim world, could be reformed, then Islam could be reformed as well.[106] His suggestions for reform included widening al-Azhar's curriculum to incorporate modern sciences within its Islamic syllabus. His ultimate goal was to develop al-Azhar into an educational system comparable to any European university in its administration, methods of instruction and academic courses. Its prestige and influence would enable a reconstructed al-Azhar to lead the way in a reform of Islam in Egypt, as well as in other Muslim countries. "Thus the Azhar would become a 'lighthouse' and means of guidance to all the Muslim world." 'Abduh also planned to aid the Egyptian government in the establishment of an Egyptian university, a project which came to completion after his death; this university later became "Cairo University."[107]

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[104] Gibb, *Modern*, 39.

[105] Gibb, *Modern*, 44.

[106] Cf. Amīn, *Min Zu'amā'*, 15.

C. 'Abduh's Views of Traditional Exegesis

Many writers, including Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht, attribute *Tafsīr al-Manār* to 'Abduh.[108] Rashīd Riḍā attended 'Abduh's lectures at al-Azhar and took notes. Later he elaborated on these notes and showed them to 'Abduh, who revised them. After a final correction of the entire text, Riḍā began to publish it in the journal which he edited, *al-Manār*. In 1927, he published these works of exegesis in book form. The methodology of this work was based on 'Abduh's method of exegesis.

Other scholars argue that as Riḍā not only contributed to the work's composition but even suggested the idea of interpreting the Qur'ān to 'Abduh in the first place, he deserves to be regarded as its author. Believing that a new interpretation of the Qur'ān was needed in light of modern developments, Riḍā approached 'Abduh and asked him to write a commentary. Reluctant in the beginning, 'Abduh finally agreed to the project. Jane McAuliffe points out that *Tafsīr al-Manār* is largely Riḍā's work in the sense that Riḍā was solely responsible for almost eight suras or two-thirds of the total published,[109] covering Sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 126 to Sūrat Yūsuf (12): 52,[110] while 'Abduh interpreted only

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[107] See Shihab, *Studi*,16-17.

[108] Adams, *Islam*, 111; Joseph Schacht, "Muḥammad 'Abduh," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 3, ed. M. Th. Houtsma et al., (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1913): 678-80. More recent examples of attributing this work to 'Abduh include G. H. A. Juynbol, *The Authenticity of Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 21; and Jansen, *Interpretation*; Chapter 2 of this book is entitled "Muḥammad 'Abduh's Koran Interpretation." The most recent work on this topic is M. Quraish Shihab's *Studi Kritis Tafsīr al-Manār, Karya Muḥammad 'Abduh and M. Rasyīd Ridhā* (A Critical Study of *Tafsīr al-Manār*, the Work of Muḥammad 'Abduh and M. Rashīd Riḍā).

[109] Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 79.

to Sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 125. According to Jomier, *Tafsīr al-Manār* is the outcome of a team effort by scholars associated with the periodical *al-Manār*.[111] Ibn 'Āshūr argues that three figures played an important role in producing *Tafsīr al-Manār* : al-Afghānī, 'Abduh and Riḍā. Al-Afghānī spread the concept of modernization, while 'Abduh applied it in his interpretation, and Riḍā developed this approach.[112]

In his own interpretations of the Qur'ān, al-Afghānī rejected the philosophical approach, regarding it as too speculative.[113] He also employed critical methods of exegesis to differentiate between esoteric and exoteric verses. He suggested that obscure verses (*al-āyāt al-mutashābihāt*) should be understood based on clear verses (*al-āyāt al-muḥkamāt*). Although al-Afghānī did not define what he regarded as the characteristics of proper exegesis,[114] he inspired 'Abduh to interpret the Qur'ān on rational grounds, paying special attention to what its verses revealed about social matters. According to Nurcholish

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[110] There are some discrepancies about this number that may be derived from different editions of the work or simple typographical errors. Jane Smith, for example, claims that the commentary ends with 12: 25, presumably an accidental transposition of the Arabic numbers. See her *An Historical and Semantic Study*, 187. Jansen in his *Interpretation*, 24, states that the *tafsīr* ends with 12: 107. This would be in line with Jomier's report in *Le Commentaire*, xvi on its publication history in the journal *al-Manār* that commentary covering the beginning of *juz'* 13 up to 12: 107 was published in the first three numbers of vol. 35 of the journal. According to Aḥmad Sharabāṣī, Rashīd Riḍā completed the *tafsīr* to 12: 101 before his death. At this point Shaykh Muḥammad Bahjat al-Bayṭār undertook completion of the rest of Sūrat Yūsuf, through 12: 111. According to M. Quraish Shihab, the interpretation of the rest of Sūrat Yūsuf was completed by al-Bayṭār and published in a separate book under the name of Rashīd Riḍā.

[111] See O. P. J. Jomier, *Le Commentaire Coranique du Manār* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve & Cie., 1954), 25; W. Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 170.

[112] See Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Tafsīr wa Rijāluh* (Cairo: Majma' al-Buḥūth al-Islāmīya, 1970), 167-8.

[113] See Olaf H. Schumann, *Pemikiran Keagamaan dalam Tantangan* (Jakarta: Penerbit PT. Gramedia Widia Sarana Indonesia, 1993), 256-7.

[114] See Schumann, *Pemikiran*, 257.

Majid, al-Afghānī was a revolutionary politician who expressed his ideas only in outline, while his most famous student, 'Abduh, enunciated them.[115]

The first part of *Tafsīr al-Manār* (the first four suras), featuring 'Abduh's interpretation, and Riḍā's editorial work, should be attributed to both Riḍā and 'Abduh. Suras five to twelve deserve to be regarded as Riḍā's alone, however. Riḍā acknowledges his debt to 'Abduh in the title of each volume, called *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm li al-Ustādh Muḥammad 'Abduh.* He marks his own efforts with the sentence which follows, "written by Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā." Riḍā's tribute to his mentor is both a signal of appreciation and a statement of fact. However, the overall body of the published work compels me to concur with Jomier's thesis that Riḍā's contributions form the basis of the work.[116]

'Abduh concludes that modern traditional exegesis offers little more than an elaborate repetition of the various opinions of the classical exegetes, and that these essentially dated interpretations tend to alienate people from the aims of revelation.[117] Moreover, some works of exegesis focus only on the literal meaning of words, structure and other philological aspects of the Qur'ānic verses, offering nothing more than practical exercises in language; these works, 'Abduh claims are not really exegesis at all.[118] Other

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[115] See Madjid, *Khazanah*, 59.

[116] See McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 79.

[117] See Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Fātiḥa al-Kitāb* (Cairo: Kitāb al-Ṭāhir, 1382 A. H.), 13.

[118] For 'Abduh, the relevance of this kind of exegesis is limited; God will not ask these points in the hereafter, nor are they beneficial to society. In 'Abduh's view, people needed guidance to lead them towards happiness in this world and the hereafter. See his *Fātiḥa*, 5 and 12.

traditional exegetes considered the Qur'ān as the justification of their argument, in his words: "traditional exegetes treated the Qur'ān as *ma'mūm*, not as *imām*." 'Abduh asserts that the Qur'ān does not follow any beliefs and that it is the source of beliefs.[119]

Andrew Rippin depicts 'Abduh's interpretative approach as an effort to remedy these problems. According to him, 'Abduh argued that Qur'ānic commentary needed to be made accessible to the common person. The efforts of the past, he claimed were of little relevance to the needs and questions of his day. His commentary therefore dispensed with theological speculation, detailed grammatical discussions and obtuse scholarship characteristic of past commentaries.[120]

For 'Abduh, traditional exegesis did not impinge on the practical life of the community. Qur'ānic commentators who interpreted the Holy Book in light of their contemporary reality usually failed to transcend the demands of growth and development, adaptation and change. Thus, an ideal blue-print through the ages is characterized by its flexibility.[121] 'Abduh interpreted the Qur'ān in modernist terms as an effort to make Islam compatible with modern Western empiricism. As Nikki R. Keddie points out, the Qur'ān,

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[119] *"al-Qur'ān lā yattabi'u al-'aqīda wa innamā tu'khadhu al-aqīda min al-Qur'ān."* Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn*, vol. 3 (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1968), 222. Cf. Maḥmūd Shaltūt, "al-Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh wa Ṭarīqatuh fī al-Tafsīr," *al-Risālah* 576 (1944): 581-83.

[120] Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 1995), 88.

[121] See Barbara F. Stowasser, "Religious Ideology, Women, and the Family: The Islamic Paradigm," in *The Islamic Impulse*, ed. Barbara F. Stowasser (London: Croom Helm, 1987): 262-96.

like many other prophetic scriptures, possesses the potential for reform along humanistic lines.[122]

Despite 'Abduh criticism of traditional works of exegesis he appreciated some of them, such as al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf,* which he regarded as a sound text for students due to its careful analysis of language. 'Abduh cited this work in answer to Riḍā's request for an example of a good commentary.[123] 'Abduh also referred to al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān* and al-Qurṭubī's *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* as reliable student texts. 'Abduh appreciated these works because their authors avoided *taqlīd* and tried to illuminate Islamic doctrines without getting entangled in controversial or divisive issues, helping engineer a more scientific approach to Islamic discourse. As he regarded the Qur'ān as a work revealed not only to a particular generation of illiterate Arabs, but to every generation thereafter as well, he did not accept any Qur'ānic interpretations as the final word in Scriptural content. 'Abduh believed it was compulsory for every Muslim to understand the Qur'ānic verses to the best of his or her ability. 'Abduh's perspective resulted in two revolutionary concepts in Qur'ānic exegesis: an emphasis on modern scientific reasoning in understanding the Qur'ānic verses and a reorientation, by placing more emphasis on Qur'ānic relevance to social issues.

Riḍa credits 'Abduh with enlarging the concept of interpretation narrowed by the excessive emphasis of traditional exegetes on words, structures, rhetoric and narratives. 'Abduh himself insisted on the need to simplify and modernize Qur'ānic interpretation. As

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[122] See Nikki R. Keddie, "Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī," in *Pioneers*, 11-29.

'Abduh based his work on independent judgment, he read and interpreted the Qur'ān directly, without grounding his thought in certain exegetical books. He refers to exegetical works only when faced with unusual words. "I do not read other books when I teach, but sometimes I refer to exegetical books if there are strange structures or strange sentences."[124] Riḍā added that 'Abduh sometimes referred to *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* in search of a definition for a strange word or sentence.

D. Scholars' Views of 'Abduh's Method of Interpretation

In his preface and introduction to *Tafsīr al-Manār,*[125] 'Abduh outlines the areas that should be taken into account or excluded when writing *tafsīr.* His practical approach to the *Qur'ān* is evident: "The *tafsīr* at which we aim is to understand the Book as a path which guides people to that which will give them happiness in this life and the next, for this is its highest aim, and all other endeavours are subordinate to this or a means of attaining it."[126] The concept of the Qur'ān as a source of guidance is not new, the Qur'ān itself states this repeatedly. 'Abduh was the first *mufassir,* however, to subordinate all other considerations to the question of guidance. This may be seen as a turning point in the history of *tafsīr.*[127] His *tafsīr* also represents one of the first conscious attempts to

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[123] See al-'Adawī, *Rashīd Riḍā al-Imām al-Mujāhid* (Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 1964), 91.

[124] See al-Kafāfī and al-Sharīf, *Fī 'Ulūm,* 349; al-Rūmī, *Manhaj,* 30.

[125] The preface (*Fatiḥat al-Tafsīr*) is by Rashīd Riḍā, and the introduction (*Muqaddimat al-Tafsīr*) is based on Muḥammad 'Abduh's lectures; the aims set out in them are essentially the same.

[126] Riḍā, *Tafsīr,* vol. 1, 17.

[127] See Kate Zebiri, *Maḥmūd Shaltūt and Islamic Modernism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 135.

popularize *tafsīr* and appeal to a wider audience.[128] To achieve this, 'Abduh avoided, as much as possible, the use of technical terms in his *tafsīr*. 'Abduh also paid close attention to the interpretation of obscure verses, especially those relating to the unseen, "using the old technique of *bi-lā kayf*, of recognition that anthropomorphism and other dubious expressions must be received without attempt to envisage what they can really mean."[129]

'Abduh's exegetical approach has not, of course, escaped scholarly criticism. Al-Dhahabī, the most objective of 'Abduh's critics, evaluated both the strengths and weaknesses of 'Abduh's thought. He argues that while 'Abduh made a significant contribution to Qur'ānic exegesis, the bulk of which is irreproachable, a portion of his work remains open to dispute.[130] Any criticism of 'Abduh must, however, take into consideration 'Abduh's position as a modernist with a social agenda.

Maḥmoud Ayoub states that " 'Abduh's interpretation is a modern *sunnī tafsīr* [which] appeared in the 19th century as a reaction to the challenge of western technology, science and education. It was rational and apologetic; its primary aim was to present Islam to Muslims and defend it against the western secular and missionary onslaughts."[131] Ayoub compares 'Abduh to Sayyid Quṭb; Quṭb, he believes, represents a more confident

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[128] See Zebiri, *Maḥmūd*, 135.

[129] See Hodgson, *The Venture*, vol. 3, 275-6. An example of this interpretation will be presented in Chapter Three.

[130] A detailed assessment of 'Abduh's exegetical approach can be found in al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 41.

[131] Maḥmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and Its Interpreters*, vol. 1 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 39.

return to the Qur'ān, free of 'Abduh's apologetics.[132] I would argue that 'Abduh played an integral role in the development of contemporary exegesis. 'Abduh's influence continues to manifest itself in the wide appeal of his work for both Sunnī and Shī'ite youth.

Ahmad von Denffer's claim that 'Abduh's commentary on the Qur'ān represents an effort to harmonize contemporary scientific and social developments with the teachings of the Qur'ān is misleading. In his criticism, von Denffer disagrees with 'Abduh's interpretation of Sūra 2: 276, where he identifies the jinn as microbes causing diseases.[133] This verse deals with the Day of Resurrection and does not discuss jinn; however, 'Abduh relates it to jinn. 'Abduh says that the jinn are said to represent the activity of microbes; for the etymological meaning of this word is 'that which is hidden'. Thus it is permissible to say that the living bodies, whose existence today has been made known by the microscope and are called microbes, may possibly be a species of jinn. It has been proven that the microbes are the cause of most diseases.[134]

Al-Muḥtasib asserts that 'Abduh's interpretation is simply an effort to reconcile Islam with Western civilization.[135] Ḥamid Algar,[136] a professor in Persian and Islamic

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[132] See Ayoub, *The Qur'ān*, vol. 1, 39.

[133] See Ahmad von Denffer, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'ān* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1994), 39.

[134] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 335.

[135] See al-Muḥtasib, *Ittijāhat al-Tafsīr fī al-Aṣr al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1973), 210.

[136] Originally from Britain, Hamid Algar currently heads the department of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. A devout Muslim who follows the Naqshabandiya Ṣūfī order and a leading intellectual, he has written many books about Islam. In one of these books he sharply criticized Muslim modernists, including 'Abduh. See Hamid Algar, *Mīrzā Malkum Khān: A Study in the History of Iranian Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), ix.

Studies at the University of California, told the journal *Gatra*, that 'Abduh was a rationalist who tried to interpret the miracles of the Qur'ān in a scientific way.[137] Algar illustrates his point with 'Abduh's discussion of the Qur'ānic *abābīl* (the birds that the classical exegetes identified with those mentioned in Sūra 105 that halted Abraha's army as it attacked Mecca). According to 'Abduh, the tale depicting birds which bear stones from hell is symbolic, referring to deadly diseases which ravaged the aggressors.

Algar says that 'Abduh was a thinker sympathetic to British colonialism,[138] a claim difficult to reconcile with 'Abduh's repeated entreaties to Muslims to strive against Britain. Algar's views are supported by Maryam Jameelah, however,[139] who accuses 'Abduh of having brought disaster upon the Muslim community by reconciling Islamic doctrines with British imperialism and opening Egypt to Westernization.[140] Algar's criticism of 'Abduh is best understood in light of his personal background: a devout Muslim, Algar is a follower of the Naqshabandiya Sufi order and betrays inclinations to the esoteric qualities of his new faith.[141]

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[137] See Ḥamid Algar's interview in *Gatra*, no. 41 26 August 1995, 99.

[138] See Ḥamid Algar's interview in *Gatra*, no. 41 26 August 1995, 99

[139] Originally Margaret Marcus, Maryam Jameelah, was a Jewish-American woman who moved to Pakistan after converting to Islam and became a militant follower of *Jama'at-e-Islam*, led by Abū al-A'lā al-Mawdūdī. She wrote a book entitled *Islam and Modernism*, in which she analyzed and criticized the opinions of Muslim reformers. See Madjid, *Khazanah*, 75.

[140] Maryam Jameelah, *Islam and Modernism* (Lahore: Muḥammad Yūsuf Khan, 1968), 70.

[141] See Madjid, *Khazanah*, 76.

Although Riḍā appreciated and defended his mentor's thought, he criticized 'Abduh for never mastering the science of prophetic tradition (*'ilm al-ḥadīth*),[142] especially *'ilm al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl.* [143] As a result, Riḍā often adds parallel passages or gives brief excerpts of the traditional position; in some cases, he goes so far as to say that his master was simply mistaken about certain issue.[144] At other times, he acknowledges that he does not possess documentary evidence of the opinion of his mentor on particular verses and hence offers his own explanations.[145] On these occasions, he presumes that his master's commentary would have been in agreement with his own.[146]

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[142] The science of *ḥadīth,* dealing with Islamic traditions, their transmission and criticism, can be considered a branch of Islamic thought. It has been developed more fully than other Muslim fields, such as those dealing with philosophy, physics and mathematics. The science of Islamic tradition, *ḥadīth,* is an original field devised and formulated by Muslims. Nobody can refute this statement or question its validity. 'Abdullah Kanoun presents this view in his article "*Ḥadīth*: Its Scientific and Religious Value," in *al-Azhar, Academy of Islamic Research,* the third conference of the Academy of Islamic Research, 1966: 25-35.

[143] Riḍā, *Tafsīr,* vol. 2, 46.

[144] Riḍā, *Tafsīr,* vol. 2, 48; 8, 222. cf. Shiḥāta, *Manhaj,* 50.

[145] Riḍā, *Tafsīr,* vol. 4, 139, 458.

[146] Riḍā, *Tafsīr,* vol. 3, 318-19; 4, 221.

CHAPTER TWO
MUḤAMMAD RASHĪD RIḌĀ AS A MODERN EXEGETE

Riḍā (1865-1935) occupies a special place in modern Arabic and Islamic thought. He was an indefatigable writer on the religious, social and literary problems of the time, whose views carried weight with friend and foe alike.[1] He was an expert in Qur'ānic exegesis, prophetic tradition, literature and history.[2] In the first field, Riḍā built his reputation by continuing Muḥammad 'Abduh's Qur'ān commentary after the latter's death in 1905. The emphasis throughout Riḍā's work is on the rationality of the holy text and its compatibility with modern ideas. A consistent attempt is made to identify broad, universal principles from the literal script.[3] This chapter focuses on Riḍā's career as a modern exegete, reflecting on his intellectual background, his modernist thought and his impressions of other exegetes.

A. Riḍā's Intellectual Background

Riḍā was a Syro-Egyptian Islamic thinker who epitomized the conservative and rationalist reformer in the course of his intellectual career.[4] He was born in the Ottoman

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[1] See A. L. Tibawi, "From Rashīd Riḍā to Lloyd George," in *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honour of Sayyid Abū al-A'lā Mawdūdī*, ed. Khurshid Ahmad and Zafar Ishhaq Ansari (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1980): 335-42.

[2] See Mani' 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, *Manāhij al-Mufassirīn* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī, 1978), 315.

[3] See P. J. Stewart, *Unfolding Islam* (Reading: Garnet Publishing Ltd., 1995), 195.

[4] See Juan Ricardo Cole, "Rashīd Riḍā on the Bahā'i Faith: A Utilitarian Theory of the Spread of Religion," *Arabic Studies Quarterly* 5 (1983): 276-85

Empire, in 1865, in the village of al-Qalamūn,[5] near Tripoli, in what is now Lebanon.[6] He came from a family of devout Muslim shaykhs, many of whose members had mastered the Islamic sciences.[7] Riḍā, however, rarely used the title *shaykh*, preferring, instead, that of Sayyid. Reared in an educated family which appreciated knowledge and an environment conducive to learning, Riḍā was thus set on the road to intellectual development. His parents taught him to recite the Qur'ān and helped him to memorize it. In the mean-time, he also learned to write and acquired basic mathematical skills at a traditional school in his village.[8]

When Riḍā was still young, his parents sent him to Tripoli, Lebanon to study at al-Madrasa al-Rushdīya,[9] a Turkish government school.[10] This school offered instruction in Arabic grammar, theology, Islamic law (*fiqh*), mathematics, geography and Turkish.[11] However, Riḍā lost interest in the school as the instructors spoke only in Turkish and its

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[5] A beautiful village, about three miles from Tripoli, Lebanon. Eliezer Tauber, "Rashīd Riḍā as Pan-Arabist before World War I," *The Muslim World* 65 (1957): 102-10.

[6] See Donald Malcolm Reid, "Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935)," in *Encyclopedia of Modern Middle East*, vol. 3 ed. Reeva S. Simon, et al. (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1996), 1537-38.

[7] See Quraish Shihab, *Metode Penyusunan Tafsir yang berorientasi pada Sastera, Budaya dan Kemasyarakatan* (Ujungpandang: C. V. Yusgar, 1984), 33. See also Harun Nasution, *Pembaharuan dalam Islam: Sejarah Pemikiran dan Gerakan* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1986), 69.

[8] See Muḥammad Warnīqah, *al-Sayyid Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā: Islāḥātuh al-Ijtimā'īya wa al-Dīnīya* (Beirut: Dār al-Īmān, 1986), 21.

[9] A state primary school (*madrasa ibtidā'īya*). For more information about this school, see A. L. Tibawi, *Islamic Education: Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National System* (London: Headley Brothers Ltd., 1972), 66.

[10] See Haifaa Jawad, "Pan-Islamism in the Middle East: Prospects and Future," *Islamic Quarterly* 10 (1990): 213-20.

[11] Cf. Warnīqah, *al-Sayyid*, 22.

alumni were destined for public office, a fate he did not relish. As a result, he spent only one year at this school.

In 1883, at the age of eighteen, he entered al-Madrasa al-Waṭanīya al-Islāmīya (The National Islamic School). This school had been founded by the enlightened and moderately progressive shaykh of Tripoli, Ḥusayn al-Jisr,[12] a scholar who was sympathetic to the reformist agenda. At the time, it was considered the best school in Lebanon, providing instruction in modern topics such as French, logic, physical education and psychology.[13] Riḍā remained a student there for several years until the school was forced to close when authorities refused to assign it the status of a religious institution, whose students were thereby exempt from military service.[14] Consequently, Riḍā moved to another school, al-Madrasa al-Dīnīya (Religious School), but retained his contacts with his former teacher, Shaykh al-Jisr, who had been his guide during his adolescence.[15] After studying under al-Jisr's supervision for eight years, Riḍā was granted the diploma of *'ālim* in 1897.[16] Furthermore, al-Jisr gave him a certificate (*ijāza*) in the areas of religious

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[12] He was a graduate of al-Azhar. He worked in the *Tripoli Journal* and built a school in Tripoli, he wrote many books, such as *al-Risāla al-Ḥamīdīya*. See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 50.

[13] See Ibrāhīm Aḥmad al-'Adawī, *Rashīd Riḍā al-Imām al-Mujāhid* (Cairo: al-Mu'assasa al-Miṣrīya al-'Āmma li al-Ta'līf wa al-Anbā' wa al-Nashr, 1964), 23.

[14] See Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theory of Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 154. Cf. Nasution, *Pembaharuan*, 69.

[15] See Amīr Shakīb Arslān, *al-Sayyid Rashīd Riḍā aw Ikhā' Arba'īn Sana* (Damascus: Ibn Zaydān Press, 1937), 35-6.

[16] See Shihab, *Metode*, 35.

sciences, language and philosophy.[17] With this certificate, Riḍā had gained the right to teach Islamic studies.[18]

Riḍā also studied under other scholars while in Tripoli. One was Maḥmūd Nashāba al-Ṭarābulusī (d. 1890) who had spent thirty years studying and teaching at al-Azhar. Riḍā studied *al-Aḥādīth Arba'īn* of al-Nawawī under him and was granted another certificate. He also studied *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim* and *Sharḥ al-Manhaj Fiqh al-Shāfi'iya*.[19] Another of his teachers was 'Abd Ghanī al-Rāfi'ī (d. 1890),[20] who introduced Riḍā to the *Kitāb Nayl al-Awṭār* by Qāḍī al-Shawkānī.[21] Al-Rāfi'ī was an expert on prophetic tradition, mysticism, Islamic law, poetry and literature.[22] Riḍā also studied under Shaykh Muḥammad al-Qāwuqjī (d. 1887),[23] who instructed him in *al-Aḥādīth al-Silsila* and part of *al-Mu'jam al-Wajīz*, two of his own works.

In view of the schools that Riḍā' attended, Malcolm H. Kerr has suggested that his formal education was probably broader and more modern than 'Abduh's. None of the

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[17] See *al-Manār* 9 (1927), 652.

[18] See *al-Manār* 18 (1904), 799.

[19] See *al-Manār* 3 (1919), 155.

[20] 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Rāfi'ī born in Tripoli in 1816. See 'Abd Allāh Nawfal, *Tarājim 'Ulamā' Ṭarābulus* (Tripoli: n. p., 1984), 83, 86. See also *al-Manār* 3 (1919), 155.

[21] Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Shawkānī, an expert in Islamic law and prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*).

[22] One of his popular works is *Kitāb Tarṣī' al-Jawāhir al-Makkīya fī Tazkiyat al-Akhlāq al-Marḍīya*. See Nawfal, *Tarājim*, 83, 86. See also *al-Manār* 3 (1919), 155.

[23] Muḥammad al-Qāwuqjī, known as Abū al-Maḥāsin, was born in Tripoli in 1809. Having finished his primary school in Tripoli, he went to Egypt and spent twenty years at al-Azhar. He then returned to Tripoli to teach and preach, educate students and write. As a prolific writer, he left several books: some of

subjects offered in Turkish school held much appeal for him, however. By Riḍā's own account, he considered language instruction to be superfluous, whereas 'Abduh, by contrast, took pains to master French, at the age of 44. 'Abduh once voiced the opinion that "no one can claim any knowledge enabling him to serve his country . . . unless he knows a European language."[24] Thereafter, 'Abduh read widely in French and traveled repeatedly to Europe. Riḍā's only visit to the West was to Geneva in 1921, as a member of the Syrian-Palestinian delegation protesting the imposition of the French and British mandates at the League of Nations. In some ways, therefore, Riḍā was much more conservative and traditionalist than 'Abduh.[25]

Under al-Jisr's guidance, Riḍā acquired self-confidence and literary skills, and was granted his first working assignment as a writer for "Tripoli newspapers," an assignment which earned him valuable practical experience. As a consequence, he soon acquired a reputation, and attracted a wide readership. Notwithstanding this success, al-Jisr continued to exercise his prerogative as teacher, criticizing the modernist sentiments expressed in Riḍā's prose.

Riḍā also participated in intensive discussions in the field of legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and logic, sponsored by Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī and Shaykh Muḥammad Kāmil al-

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them are: *Rabī' al-Jinān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* and *Mawāhib al-Raḥmān fī Khaṣā'iṣ al-Qur'ān*. See Nawfal, *Tarājim*, 58-9.

[24] Rashīd Riḍā, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Manār, 1931), 84.

[25] See Abdelwahab El-Affendi, *Turābī's Revolution: Islam and Power in Sudan* (London: Grey Seal, 1993), 10.

Rāfi'ī'.[26] Having read al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'*, Riḍā grew interested in *taṣawwuf* and adopted some Ṣūfī practices such as refraining from good food and sleeping on the ground; he even neglected common cleanliness of body and clothes, a practice he was unable to continue for long.[27] During this period he joined the Naqshabandīya order but, according to his own account, he eventually understood the danger of this spiritual approach and left the order. For a short time he was a committee member for the improvement of educational institutions in Tripoli, where his criticism of anything that seemed negative to him did not please the authorities.[28]

Another influential figure who inspired Riḍā's thought was Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897) through his journal, *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*.[29] Charles C. Adams explains how this journal inspired Riḍā's reformist vision:

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[26] See Shihab, *Metode*, 35.

[27] See Zaki Badawi, *The Reformers of Egypt: A Critic of al-Afghānī, 'Abduh and Riḍa* (Slough Berks: The Open Press, 1976), 47.

[28] See Eliezer Tauber, "Three Approaches, One Idea: Religion and State in the Thought of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī, Najīb 'Azūrī and Rashīd Riḍā," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Sudies* 21 (1994): 190-98.

[29] 'Abd al-Qādir al-Maghribī described Riḍā's first contact with al-Afghānī's thought through his Journal, *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*. He states that Riḍā came to learn of al-Afghānī through his journal by accident. While rummaging through his father's papers, he came upon two issues of the journal and began reading them. Al-Maghribī claims that he was the one who introduced Riḍā to *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā* for the first time in Tripoli and that both of them started searching for the issues to copy them. Al-Maghribī added that he copied the whole issue, but his friend, Shaykh Rashīd, copied only the important articles. See al-Maghribī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī: Dhikrayāt wa Aḥādīth* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1967), 112-117. Having read the issues, his interest sparked, Riḍā eagerly sought other issues, obtaining some from his father and the rest from his teacher, al-Jisr. Riḍā copied them all by hand and reread them time and again. Aḥmad Sharabāṣī found these copies among Riḍā's papers. Riḍā was impressed in the methods used in its articles especially in the way the writers interpret the Qur'ān. See al-Sayyid Ḥasan Qārūn, "Min Dhikrayāt Rashīd Riḍā," *Majallat al-Azhar* 6 (1991): 694-97.

> His chief concern had been orthodoxy of belief and practice; if he had any thought of reform, it was of a purely local character. But the reading of *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā* changed all this. Its appeals for the reform of Islam as a whole, and the regeneration of all Muslim nations and the restoration of the early glory of Islam, placed a new ideal before him and inspired within him new desires. His first teacher, he says, had been the *Iḥyā'* of al-Ghazālī, which was the first book to take possession of his mind and heart. His second teacher was *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*, which changed the course of his life.[30]

As a result of reading *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*, Riḍā was consumed with a desire to attach himself to al-Afghānī. Al-Afghānī, however, died soon after in Constantinople, frustrating Riḍā's ambitions. After al-Afghānī's death, Riḍā chose to associate himself with 'Abduh, leaving Syria for Egypt in 1897 to fulfill this objective. In 1898, Riḍā attended al-Azhar in Cairo to further his studies. Once in Cairo, Riḍā studied under 'Abduh's supervision and remained his close colleague until the latter's death in 1905. 'Abduh, for his part, loved and trusted his disciple; the latter regarded his master with unbridled admiration and respect, praising him as the greatest teacher of Islam in modern times.[31]

Under 'Abduh's tutelage, Riḍā gained considerable knowledge, particularly in Qur'ānic commentary. Riḍā's notes on 'Abduh's lectures were eventually published after he had elaborated upon them and submitted them to 'Abduh for correction. Riḍā published

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[30] Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 179. Cf. Anwar G. Chejne, "Intellectual Revival in the Arab World: An Introduction," *Islamic Studies* 2 (1963): 413-37. Riḍā's exposure to *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā* drew him to a new understanding of Islam, which he no longer saw as simply a spiritual medium towards the herefater, but as a religious ideology which is both spiritual and temporal. Islam seeks to guide man to supremacy on earth as a deputy of God, committed to the establishment of love and justice. See Riḍā, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, 15. Riḍā's understanding of reform was initially limited, therefore, to a view which saw it as a correction of erroneous beliefs and as guidance for the faithful in their obedience to God.

[31] See Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 55.

'Abduh's lectures in the journal *al-Manār* (The Lighthouse)[32] after he became the editor in 1897.[33] This journal was conceived and produced along the same lines as the journal *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*, which had been published by al-Afghānī and 'Abduh in Paris.[34] The new journal went on to became the leading organ of Islamic reformist thought. Unquestionably, it was through this journal that Riḍā's writings were disseminated throughout the Islamic world and his standing as an influential reformer was established.[35] Thus, Riḍā's ideas came to shape Muslim thought across North Africa, to Southeast Asia[36] and particularly, in Indonesia.[37]

In addition to al-Jisr, al-Afghānī, 'Abduh and al-Ghāzālī, Ibn Taymīya also inspired Riḍā's thought. Ibn Taymīya's influence on Riḍā's work can be gleaned from

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[32] *Al-Manār* was regarded as one of the most influential publications in Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century. For information on publications in the modern Arab world, see George N. Atiyeh, ed., *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 233-54.

[33] See H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), 406. According to Quraish Shihab, *al-Manār* was a weekly journal with its first edition published on March 17th, 1898. However, Emad Eldin Shahin argues that *al-Manār* appeared in 1898 as a weekly and, after one year, as a monthly journal. See his *Through Muslims Eyes: M. Rashīd Riḍā and the West* (Herndon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1993), 8.

[34] See Muḥammad Abū Rayyā, "al-Sayyid Rashīd Riḍā bi Munāsabat al-Dhikrā' al-Tāsi 'a li Wafātih," *al-Risāla* 584 (1944): 747-48.

[35] See Asad Nimer Busool, "Shaykh Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā's Relationship with Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad 'Abduh," *The Muslim World* 66 (1976): 272-86.

[36] See John Obert Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 162.

[37] Riḍā's modernist thought penetrated Indonesia through the journal *al-Manār* and his *Tafsīr al-Manār*. In the educational institutions in Parabek and Padang Panjang, Sumatra, for example, *Tafsīr al-Manār* is required reading for graduate students. In addition, graduate students also study the books of Ibn Taymīya (d. 1328) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya (d. 1356). See Philip Khuri Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1860), 68. Cf. Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 56.

articles found in the journal, *al-Manār*. This publication was instrumental for the dissemination of Ibn Taymīya's ideas in North Africa, and it fueled the Islamic nationalist movement led by 'Abd al-Ḥamīd bin Bādis (d. 1940). Seyyed Hossein Nasr notes that the feature of Riḍā's *Salafīya* movement is almost the same as that of the *Wahhābīya*. Both these movements stress the preeminence of the *Sharī'a* while rejecting Ṣūfism, Islamic philosophy and theology.[38] The *Salafīya* movement tends to be strictly Sunnī, hostile to non-Sunnī sects and opposed to the veneration of saints. Its doctrinal dogmas are, however, often tempered by a political flexibility.[39]

Basing my argument on Riḍā's intellectual background, I would like to present some of the points on which he differed from his mentor, 'Abduh. Although Riḍā's ideas are similar to 'Abduh's, we find some variations. The teacher was more liberal than the student, for instance, and did not hold to one school in either theology or law. When he was accused of being a follower of the Mu'tazila school, 'Abduh strongly protested, since he was open to the views of all schools in order to permit freedom of thought. Similarly, for 'Abduh, moving from one school to another did not mean freedom but rather dependence on a new school.[40] Riḍā by contrast followed only one *madhhab* or school; he

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[38] See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Plight of Modern Man* (London: Longman, 1975), 146; Dekmeijian, *Islam*, 56.

[39] It is important to note that Muslim thinkers contemporary with Riḍā were subdivided into three groups. The first group was made up of those who were rigid in their adherence to the doctrines of schools of Islamic teachings. The second group was comprised of those who believed that Islam was not suited to the modern era. Members of the third group were active in the propagation of Islamic reform, envisioning a future in which Islam is renewed through a return to the Qur'ān, authentic tradition and the guidance of the forefathers (*al-salaf al-ṣālih*). See *al-Manār* 29 (1928), 67; Warniqah, *al-Sayyid*, 17.

followed the opinions of Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Taymīya. He also was sympathetic toward the Wahhābī movement.

B. Riḍā's Concept of Modernization

The term "modernization" has been employed in a wide range of fields and contexts, from art to politics, from agriculture to religion.[41] For our purposes it will be defined as "the social change whereby less developed societies acquire characteristics common to more developed societies."[42] A modernist can be defined as a person who wishes to change ideas, manners, and old institutions in order to make them more suitable to the new conditions which are brought by science and modern technology.[43] Rahman defines Muslim modernists as "those who have made an articulate and conscious effort to reformulate Islamic values and principles in terms of modern thought or to integrate modern thought and institutions with Islam."[44]

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[40] See Nasution, *Pembaharuan*, 76. According to Nasution the differences between 'Abduh and Riḍā can be seen most clearly in theological issues. 'Abduh was more liberal than Riḍā in interpreting the anthropomorphic verses. For 'Abduh, the verses that portray God as having a face or hands should be regarded as allegorical in meaning; thus, God's throne (*'arsh*) means power. Riḍā, on the hand, prefers the lexical meaning that God does have a throne, even though His throne is different from man's. Furthermore, in their respective interpretations of Q. 2: 25, which speaks about the reward that God will provide in the hereafter, 'Abduh advances a philosophical interpretation, i.e. that the reward will be in a spiritual form, while Riḍā claims that the reward will be material in nature.

[41] See for example, Louis Kampf, *On Modernism: The Prospects for Literature and Freedom* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), 5.

[42] D. Rustow, *A World of Nationalism: Problems of Political Modernization* (Washington D. C.: Brooklings, 1967), 15 and Ciril Edwin Black, *The Dynamics of Modernization: A Study in Comparartive History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 20.

[43] See Nasution, *Pembaharuan*, 11.

[44] See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1979), 222.

Riḍā can be considered a modernist because of his influence on Islamic reformation in Egypt and in other Islamic countries, such as Indonesia. Juan Ricardo Cole argues that Riḍā was an Islamic thinker who combined elements of the conservative and rationalist reformer in the course of his intellectual career. He admired both the fundamentalist Wahhābīs and the heterodox radical al-Afghānī.[45] However, even though Riḍā was open-minded, he was more systematic and categorical than 'Abduh, and, on questions of orthodoxy, he recalls the intransigence of the Hanbalites.[46] His ideas on reformation can be seen in three different areas, religious, social, and political.

1. Religious aspects

After observing the general state of Muslim countries, Riḍā concluded that Muslims were backward as a result of their diminished religion, a condition which was aggravated by despotic political leadership. He believed that Islamic civilization was founded upon the Qur'ān and the moral precepts it contained. Reviving this civilization is only possible he believed, if Muslims returned to the Qur'ān.[47] However, he did not explain how this return to the Qur'ān would be undertaken.

According to Riḍā, the deterioration of Islam commenced with the rise of fatalism (*jabr*) as a popular concept. Thus, the tenets of Ṣūfism[48] weakened Islam as they de-

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[45] See Cole, "Rashīd Riḍā," 276.

[46] See Moḥammed Arkoun, *Arab Thought* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd., 1988), 85.

[47] See Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 228; Javaid Saeed, *Islam and Modernization: A Comparative Analysis of Pakistan, Egypt, and Turkey* (London: Praeger Publishers, 1994), 130.

[48] The term Ṣūfi constitutes what we understand in our modern terminology as a mystic, while Ṣūfism (or better *taṣawwuf*) expresses what we understand as mysticism. Muslim Ṣūfis began appearing as

emphasized every Muslim's duty to direct his/her life in accordance with mankind's status as God's vice-regent on earth (*khalīfatun fī al-arḍ*). The Sufi had popularized the notion of Islam as a passive religion. In fact, however, Islam is a dynamic religion which encourages its followers to exploit nature for their needs and to recognize God's munificence in this bounty.[49] Riḍā condemned the Ṣūfi-inspired innovation. However, this does not mean he was anti-Ghazālian, but rather that the Ṣūfism Riḍā criticized was not the same Ṣūfi tradition al-Ghazālī supported.[50]

Having analyzed Riḍā's conception of Islamic reformism and his attempts to apply it, David Commins argues that Riḍā did not succeed in converting many Egyptians to his vision of Islam.[51] Most Egyptians continued to practice their faith by following the examples and opinions of the conservative scholars of al-Azhar or by attending the ceremonies of Ṣūfi orders and attributing miraculous powers to a given order's living and dead saints.

Concerning the Islamic law, Riḍā emphasizes the need for a return to its spirit and for better knowledge of the principles on which it is founded. He says that many people

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early as the seventh century C. E., or the first century of Islam as a religion. Ṣūfism developed and spread in different forms all over the Muslim world. In general, Ṣūfism could be said to be a product of diverse forces working together "speculative development of the Mohammadan monotheistic idea, Christian asceticism, Greek and Indian Philosophies." See Alfian, "Islamic Modernism in Indonesian Politics: The Muhammadiyah Movement during the Dutch Colonial Period (1912-1942)," Ph. D. dissertation, The University of Wisconsin, 1969, 107.

[49] See Musthafa Kamāl et al., *Muhammadiyah Sebagai Gerakan Islam* (Yogyakarta: P. N. Persatuan, 1988), 16.

[50] See Mohammed M. H. Shehab Eddin, "Pan-Arabism and The Islamic Tradition," Ph.D. dissertation, The American University, Washington, 1966, 263.

[51] See David Dean Commins, "Ḥasan al-Bannā (1906-1949)," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. Ali Rahnema (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1994): 125-53.

know what is lawful and what is unlawful but they do not know why one particular act has been declared lawful and another unlawful. It is necessary to understand the logical underpinnings of the law prior to its application so that the purposes or general interests that they serve are clear. He further argued that today people know the *ḥukm* (injunction) without knowing the *ḥikma* (wisdom) behind it. Yet it was essentially this knowledge of the wisdom behind the laws which enabled the Companions of the Prophet to rule over vast, newly acquired territories and administer them in the best interests of the people.[52]

Similarly, in regard to the relationship between the Qur'ān and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), Riḍa emphasized the Qur'ān's status as the premier or first *aṣl* (foundation) upon which the decisions of a school of jurisprudence should be based. He criticized the current tendency of rendering the opinions and rulings of the jurist as *aṣl* and to judge the Qur'ān on their basis by means of far-fetched interpretations. This procedure had come in for heavy criticism and, in the eyes of many Muslim thinkers, had to be reversed.[53]

Riḍā also rejected fanatic loyalty to any one religious school (*madhhab*) and called on people to be more tolerant. He insisted that people have to accept certain basic Islamic principles; beyond that, they should be encouraged to use reason when dealing with scriptural teachings of fiqh. Riḍā pleaded for the use of *ijtihād* by stressing that Islam is based on reason and that *fiqh* is itself founded upon the basis of *ijtihād*. Therefore, any person who stands in the way of *ijtihād* or tries to prevent it is in fact undermining the

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[52] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 30.

basis of Islam and its *Sharī'a* and destroying the adaptive facility which distinguishes it from other religions.[54]

In reference to Riḍā's point, Sayyid Aḥmad Khan had previously suggested the need for a living *mujtahid* to whom all problems could be referred.[55] Muslims should cultivate a spirit of inquiry and research. Life in every age evokes new problems and new needs. If there are no living *mujtahids*, how can a dead *mujtahid* be consulted about contemporary needs and problems not previously encountered. Muḥammad Asad, one of Riḍā's contemporaries, stressed the view that the *ijtihād* of the Companions of the Prophet cannot be taken as authoritative for all times, because it was limited by their historical experience.[56]

2. Social aspects

According to Riḍā, the improvement of society can be achieved through unity in community, nation, religion, law, brotherhood, citizenship, justice and language. These eight concepts of unity are called *al-waḥda al-thamānīya*.[57] Riḍā states that one of the causes of social decline is disintegration within the Islamic community. If Muslims want to play a leading role in the modern world, they have to do so as a united society.

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[53] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 71.

[54] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 6, 420.

[55] See Mazheruddin Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought in the Muslim World* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1982), 83.

[56] See Muḥammad Asad, *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (Berkeley: University of California, 1961), 26.

[57] See Rashīd Riḍā, *al-Waḥy al-Muḥammadī* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Manār, 1935), 225.

The Islamic community however, as Riḍā conceived of it, had to be based primarily on sameness of faith, and not merely on that of nation or language. As a consequence, he rejected the concept of nationalism for Egypt sponsored by Muṣṭafā Kāmil and for the Turkey sponsored by the Young Turks. He argued that nationalism contradicted the doctrine of brotherhood in Islam. Brotherhood, according to Riḍā's view of Islamic teaching, does not recognize differences in nation, language or country.[58] He states that the only nationalism that Islam recognizes is the religion itself; brotherhood that is based on religion should not be separated by language and government. From this, we see how Riḍā's concept of modernism is applied in a social context, and how he stressed the importance of the unity of the Islamic community under the banner of faith.

Like 'Abduh, Riḍā contributed to the sphere of social reform by insisting on the well-being of women.[59] In his *Ḥuqūq al-Nisā' fī al-Islām,* Riḍā attempts to give proof that the Sharī'a prescribed equal rights for women.[60] Basing himself on Qur'ān 2: 228 and 4: 38, he insisted on the equality of the sexes. For instance, he maintained that women can add to the income of the household, meaning that they are allowed to work for a living.[61]

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[58] See Nasution, *Pembaharuan*, 74. Cf. Yusran Asmuni, *Aliran Modern dalam Islam* (Surabaya: al-Ikhlas, 1982), 61.

[59] See Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, vol. 3 (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1983), 192-3; Burhanuddin Daya, *Gerakan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam: Kasus Sumatra Thawālib* (Yogyakarta: P. T. Tiara Wacana, 1990), 208.

[60] See A.G. Chejne, "Intellectual Revival," 413-37.

[61] Cf. Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, "Some Reflections on the Separation of Religion and Politics in Modern Islam," in *Studia Semitica*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971): 171-206.

His opinion on the restriction of polygamy is further proof of this point; he states that Islam neither makes polygamy compulsory nor encourages men to practice it.[62]

Riḍā also contributed to better interfaith relations, according to Issa J. Boullata's analysis of his interpretation of one of the doctrinal principles enunciated in the Qur'ān.[63] Christianity today, Riḍā states, is the same as it was in the Prophet's era; Christians are people of the book (*ahl al-kitāb*). As people of the book, Christian women are eligible to marry Muslims, just as the food that they prepare may be eaten by Muslims. According to Riḍā, it is only polytheist women whom Muslims are forbidden to marry, as stipulated in Qur'ān 2: 221, which refers is to polytheist Arab women.[64] Furthermore, in interpreting the verses which forbid Muslims to choose Jews or Christians as friends (*awliyā'*), Riḍā argues that this prohibition can only be applied if they fight against Muslims or intend to harm them.[65] This opinion is based on the occasion of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) of this verse as recorded by al-Ṭabarī, who stated that it was revealed at a tense moment after the

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[62] This point is based on 'Abduh analysis of the Qur'ānic verses 4: 3 and 129 which Riḍā developed further. For a detailed explanation of these verses, see Riḍā's *Ḥuqūq al-Nisā' fī al-Islām: Nidā' li al-Jins al-Laṭīf* (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1351 A. H.), 44.

[63] See Issa J. Boullata, "*Fa-stabiqū 'l-khayrāt*: A Qur'ānic Principle of Interfaith Relations," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadi Zaidan Haddad (Gainesville: The University Press of Florida, 1995): 43-53.

[64] See M. Quraish Shihab, "Ahl al-Kitāb," in *Rekonstruksi dan Renungan Religious Islam*, ed. Muhammad Wahyuni Nafis (Jakarta: Penerbit Paramadina, 1996), 7. Regarding the issue of food, Hassan Hathout states that Muslims are permitted to eat the food offered by *Ahl al-Kitāb*, unless specifically prohibited, such alcohol or pork. As for the case of marriage, he suggests that in this situation it is unlawful for the Muslim husband to try to exert pressure on his wife to convert to Islam, because that would contradict the Qur'ānic injunction, "let there be no compulsion in religion" (Q. 2: 256). In fact it would be his Islamic duty to ensure her right of worship according to her own faith. See Hassan Hathout, *Readings in the Muslim Mind* (Plainfield: American Trust Publications, 1995): 14-15.

Jews had violated an agreement with the Prophet. Riḍā also criticized some exegetes, such as al-Bayḍāwī and al-Zamakhsharī, who interpreted this verse to mean a total prohibition against Muslims befriending Christians or Jews.[66]

Similarly, in the case of apostasy (*ridda*), Riḍā argues that those declared to be apostates should not necessarily be killed. If they abandon Islam without harming it in any way, they should be free; they should only be punished if they cause problems for Islam. This point is completely at odds with the opinion of the majority of Muslim scholars (*jumhūr al-'ulamā'*) who held apostasy to be punishable by death. Riḍā discarded the *ijmā'* that was not based on a clear text of the Qur'ān. He argued, "there is a text which forbids all compulsion in religion" and the *ijmā'* is, therefore, in contradiction with "a higher *aṣl* (the source of method)."[67] In reference to this discussion, Mayer remarks that:

> Contemporary scholars have found many indications that the premodern *sharī'a* rule that the apostate must be killed should not be considered a definitive interpretation of the Islamic sources in this area. Ṣubḥī Maḥmassānī, the Lebanese scholar, for example, asserted that the circumstances in which the penalty was meant to apply were extremely narrow. He pointed out that the Prophet never killed anyone merely for apostasy. The death penalty was only applied when the act of apostasy from Islam was linked to an act of political betrayal of the community. This being the case, Maḥmassānī argued that the death penalty was not meant to apply to a simple change of faith but to punish acts such as treason, joining forces with the enemy, and sedition.[68]

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[65] See Shihab, "Ahl al-Kitāb," 7. For more information on this issue, see Shihab, *Wawasan al-Qur'an: Tafsir Mawdhu'i atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat* (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, 1997), 429-32.

[66] See Shihab, "Ahl al-Kitāb," 7.

[67] Cf. 'Abdul Ḥamīd A. Abū Sulaymān, *The Islamic Theory of International Relations: New Directions for Islamic Methodology and Thought* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1987), 15.

[68] For more information, it is recommended to see Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Politics* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1995), 141-160. See also Ṣubḥī Maḥmaṣānī, *Arkān Ḥuqūq al-Insān* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 1979), 123-4. The discussion on the perspectives of fiqh

Riḍā also encouraged Muslims and Christians to cooperate in fighting the colonialists who dominated Egypt and other Muslim countries. In his reply to a question dealing with the patriotism of a non-Muslim, Riḍā said that Muslims are obligated to defend the non-Muslim who is subject to their rule and to treat him as an equal according to the just rules of Sharī'a. As a consequence, he is allowed to join them in defending the country and promoting its development.[69] Riḍā supported his argument by pointing to the historical fact that the Companions of the Prophet exempted the *dhimmīs*[70] who joined them in war from the poll tax during 'Umar's caliphate.

3. Political aspects

Unlike 'Abduh, Riḍā took a pro-active posture in respect to political discourse, on both a theoretical and practical level.[71] In terms of theory, Riḍā proposed several brilliant political formulas, especially concerning the concepts of the caliphate and the Islamic state.[72] He was regarded as a founding theoretician of the modern notions of the Islamic

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schools (*madhāhib*) can be seen, for example, Safia M. Safwat, "Offences and Penalties in Islamic Law," *Islamic Quarterly* 26 (1982): 137-81.

[69] See John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito, eds. *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 59; Sylvia G. Haim, ed. *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 76.

[70] *Dhimmīs* are the protected people in a Muslim country, i.e. Jews and Christians. They have particular social, political and economic satus. Cf. Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmī: Jews and Christians under Islam*, trans. David Maisel, et al. (London: Associated University Presseas, 1985), 28.

[71] Riḍā also differed with 'Abduh over key political issues. 'Abduh can be said to have been a supporter of Western culture, while Riḍā tried desparetly to stem its impacts. They also parted company over the issue of the restoration of the caliphate; 'Abduh ignored it, while Riḍā feared that it would be abandoned as an institution. See Badawi, *The Reformers*, 120. See also Patrick Bannerman, *Islam in Perspective: A Guide to Islamic Society, Politics and Law* (London: Routledge, 1988), 140.

[72] However, Riḍā's political ideas can only be understood in light of the Egyptian situation at the time he began to become more involved in both national and international affairs. Like his predecessors al-

state. His political beliefs are set out comprehensively in his treatise *al-Khilāfa aw al-Imāma al-'Uẓmā*[73] published in Cairo in 1930. This treatise represents the program of the reformist party and is also considered an authoritative pronouncement on modernist attitudes to politics.[74] The treatise was, in part, a reaction to the Turkish reduction of the Ottoman Caliphate to a purely ceremonial and spiritual office with no political authority.[75]It was also a reaction to the pressures of Western powers and the Zionist movement placed on Muslim Society.[76]

Afghānī and 'Abduh, Riḍā lived in an Egypt that had been victimized by Western economic, political and legal penetration as well as cultural westernization since the 1860's. Egypt, which had enjoyed relative autonomy under the Ottoman Empire after 1840, come under outright British military occupation in 1882, and faced increasing missionary activities. In that politico-historical setting Riḍā's school of thought emerged with a call for political Islamic unification in the face of western hegemony. See Wafid Maḥmoud 'Abdelnasser, *The Islamic movement in Egypt: Perception of International Relations 1967-81* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1994), 32.

[73] The treatise originally was published in serial form in the journal *al-Manār*. In his study, Riḍā reviews the theories and ideas of medieval scholars such as Māwardī and Taftāzānī. He analysis the historical role of the caliphate and finally suggests guidelines for its restoration. See Badawi, *The Reformers*, 121.

[74] See Rosenthal, "Some Reflections," *Studia Semitica*, vol. 2, 171-206.

[75] The caliphate which had functioned for 417 years under the Ottomans and which kept the Muslims world together, suffered a setback when the caliphate was itself abolished in 1924. This abolishment is a reflection of Atatürk's secular reform movement. However, Patrick B. Kinross argues that despite the abolition of the caliphate, the new Turkey was not irreligious, but needed a religion stripped of artificiality, whish implies nothing contrary to reason or hostile the progress. According to Kinross, Atatürk's policy is motivated by his idea to liberate and to elevate the Islamic religion from its position of being a tool of politics, in the way that has been traditional for centuries. Kinross further states that in the Moslem world, the abolition created a certain initial dismay, especially in India where the Turkish Revolution had been seen as a fight by a Moslem state for its freedom, with Kemal as the 'Sword of Islam.' See Lord Kinross, *Atatürk: The Rebirth of A Nation* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1990), 384-87. Cf. Ümit Cizre Sakallioglu, "Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28 (1996): 231-51.

[76] See Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 69; Donohoe and Esposito, eds., *Islam*, 157-96; and Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London: Routledge, 1993), 64.

Riḍā believed both that Islam contains a system of belief based on universal characteristics and that Islam covers all aspects of life. The Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, the primary sources in Islam, possess a system of rules, and the best of all counsels because they are the product of divine wisdom, according to Riḍā. The fundamental premise in Riḍā's thought is that Islamic rule, by virtue of its divine inspiration, is superior.[77] By contrast, some thinkers, such as 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq argue for the separation of "Church" and state. 'Abd al-Rāziq, for example, maintains that Islam never claimed a worldly government; this was left to be freely considered by the believers.[78] He further maintains that since the Qur'ān does not mention the caliphate, it cannot form part of Islamic dogma. The Sunni idea of the caliphate was created in legal handbooks compiled centuries after the death of the Prophet.[79]

Riḍā attacked 'Abd al-Rāziq's book, saying that "it was the latest attempt of the enemies of Islam to weaken and divide it from within."[80] He affirmed that Islamic law requires political power to maintain and apply it and that it is not possible to reform

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[77] See Ḥusayn Aḥmad Amīn, *al-Islām fī 'Ālam Mutaghayyir wa Maqālat al-Islāmīya Ukhrā* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1988), 127-8.

[78] See 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq, *al-Islām wa Uṣūl al-Ḥukm* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1966), 39. Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam And Its Relevance To Our Age* (Kuala Lumpur: Iqra', 1987), 13. Muḥammad 'Imāra concurs 'Abd al-al-Rāziq opinion on Islamic political system. He states that Islam as a religion has not specified a particular system of government for Muslim, for the logic of this religion's suitability for all times and places requires that matters will always be changing by the force of evolution should be left to the rational human mind, to be shaped according to public interest and within the framework of the general precepts that this religion has dictated. Muḥammad 'Imāra, *al-Islām wa al-Sulṭa al-Dīnīya* (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfa al-Jadīda, 1979), 76-77.

[79] See 'Abd al-Rāziq, *al-Islām*, 152.

[80] See Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 189.

Islamic law without re-establishing an Islamic state.[81] 'Abd al-Rāziq did not attempt to weaken Islam, of course; his aim was most likely to differentiate between Islam in theory and Islam in practice. 'Abd al-Rāziq simply reproduced the ideas of European thinkers which were common at that time and applied them to Islam.[82]

One important point in Riḍā's exposition of the Islamic political system involves the question of minorities. He advises the non-Muslims in Muslim domains to trust their future to a caliphal government, which would give them autonomy, in preference to a secular one, which would deprive them of it.[83] However, Riḍā suggests that "consultation between Muslims and non-Muslims and sharing each others opinions is not prohibited. It may even be obligatory."[84] He therefore saw no reason to question the membership of non-Muslims in parliament, especially when they are not dominant in number over the Muslims.

According to Riḍā, in Islam power resides within the community and is legitimated through consultation (*shūrā*). The leader of the nation must be an *imām* or caliph[85] who holds legislative power, but who acts as a coordinator rather than wielding

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[81] See Giacomo Luciani, ed. *The Arab State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 254.

[82] See Shehab Eddin, *Pan-Arabism*, 272.

[83] See *al-Manār*, 24, (1341/1342 A. H.), 259-61.

[84] See *al-Manār*, 12, (1327 A. H.), 608-9.

[85] The words *imām* and "caliph" both mean leader of the Muslim community, the former refers to a Shī'ī leader while the latter to a Sunnī leader. The Sunnīs use the term *imām* for the leader of a congregation in prayer. According to Mernissi, the difference between these terms in the Islamic concept of leadership is that the first is based on a spatial conception and the second on a temporal one. For more information about these two terms see Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, trans. by Mary Jo Lakeland (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1993), 23-24.

absolute power. People retain the right to choose the caliph and to end his tenure.[86] Riḍā also states that a caliph should seek the counsel of *'ulamā'*, who would revise the laws of Islam in accordance with contemporary needs.[87] Maḥmūd Shaltūt adds that in Riḍā's conception, the caliph should be an acknowledged expert in all areas of life, including military, legal, political and fiscal issues.[88] Despite his appreciation for the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, Riḍā criticized the method of Abū Bakr's election as it was not preceded by consultation with all parties concerned.

Riḍā explained that the Muslim political system decayed because of the absence of *shūrā* (consultation). In these times, he said, the *ulū al-amr* (people in authority) consist of eminent scholars, chiefs of armies, distinguished merchants and agriculturists, leaders of political parties, medical doctors and lawyers in whom the nation has confidence and to whom it refers all difficulties. All these persons should be brought together for *shūrā*. In practice, Riḍā pointed out, the ruler has no use for *ulu al-amr* except to corrupt them and corrupt the people; he neither likes nor permits the approach of anyone except sycophants.[89] Riḍā called for opposition to the despotism of the Ottoman sultan on the basis of the Islamic concept of deliberative consultation (*shūrā*).[90]

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[86] See Riḍā, *al-Waḥy*, 239.

[87] See Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 666.

[88] See Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *al-Islām: 'Aqīda wa Sharī'a* (Cairo: Dār al-Qalam, n. d.), 443.

[89] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, 198-9. See also Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist*, 118.

[90] See Abd al-Aziz Duri, *The Historical Formation of the Arab Nation*, trans. Lawrence I. Conrad. (Beckenham: Croom Helm and Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1987), 186.

In response to Riḍā's concept of *shūrā*, Mazheruddin Siddiqi argues[91] that like 'Abduh, Riḍā is not very clear in his political ideology. He adheres to the institution of *shūrā* but he does not make clear whether his *shūrā* would be nominated by the ruler or elected by the people; nor does he discuss whether or not the ruler could be bound by the verdict of the majority of *shūrā*. Similarly, he does not explain how the ruler could be deposed. If he rules unjustly, who will depose him and by what method ? In any case, however, Riḍā does not support 'Abduh's theory of a just dictator who will exercise unlimited authority. Riḍā would enforce the condition of *shūrā* even for a just dictator.

Riḍā's antipathy towards Western culture included complete rejection of Western political concepts. He called upon his fellow Muslims to seek inspiration from the ideas and practices of the first generation of Islamic rulers. He also opposed all forms of secular reform in the Young Turks' program, accusing them of facilitating the Western eradication of Muslim identity. As a matter of principle, he opposed the Westernized elites in Muslim countries.[92] However, Sami Zubaida argues that despite his enlightened orientation of thought, Riḍā did not succeed in transferring his ideas into the field of political struggle or incorporating them into the modern state.[93] Although Riḍā's ideas did not create any political organization, they did in fact inspire later political movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*) under Ḥasan al-Bannā' (d. 1949)

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[91] See Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist*, 118.

[92] See Godfrey H. Jansen, *Militant Islam* (London: Pan Books, 1979), 94.

which "became the largest and most influential Islamic organization in the Sunnī Arab world."[94]

4. Educational aspect

Riḍā made significant efforts in the development of education. Like his master, 'Abduh, Riḍā exhorts Muslims to devote themselves financially to the establishment of schools; he called this the most excellent of all good works. He considered the founding of schools to be better than the founding of mosques, for the prayer of an ignorant man in a mosque has no value, while education in schools can eradicate ignorance. He criticized the prevalent governmental system of education for failing to provide adequate religious training.[95]

Like 'Abduh, Riḍā believed that education was among the most important tools for social change.[96] He tried to fight against what he saw as Muslim weakness and immorality by concentrating on the improvement of the education system.[97] To meet students' intellectual potential, Riḍā propounded the modernization of education as a necessary step. These goals could be realized through the infusion of modern sciences into the curriculum, alongside religious and linguistic subjects.

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[93] See Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State: Essays on Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (London: Routledge, 1989), 47. Cf. Jacques Waardenburg, "The Rise of Islamic State Today," *Orient* 28 (1987): 200-10.

[94] See Joel Beinin and Joe Stork, "On the Modernity, Historical Specificity and International Context of Political Islam," in *Political Islam: Essays From Middle East*, ed. Joel Beinin and Joe Stork (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 6.

[95] See Adams, *Islam*, 185-6; Saeed, *Islam*, 131.

[96] See Nasution, *Pembaharuan*, 75.

According to Riḍā, modern Western civilization is based on the promotion of science and technology. In order to achieve the same level of development, Muslims must accept Western advances in these areas. Muslim civilization was initially superior in the classical era; it made great strides in the advancement of the sciences. Westerners would later benefit from this body of knowledge developed by Muslims. By this line of reasoning, Muslim intellectuals apologetically claim that adopting modern Western sciences is, essentially, merely retaking what Muslims originally possessed. However, this claim is disputable because Muslims did not possess modern Western sciences since the time of the origins of Islam.

One of Riḍā's educational project was *Madrasat al-Da'wa wa al-Irshād* which he founded in Cairo in 1912 after failing to do so in Constantinople. This *madrasa* was in response to intense Christian missionary activities in Muslim countries, especially Egypt. The *madrasa* offered two programs: (1) a three-year program for those who strove to be religious guides or wished to propagate the faith among their fellow Muslims and (2) a six-year program for those who wanted to act as missionaries, inviting people to Islam. Unfortunately, however, the outbreak of the First World War forced the school to close.[98]

C. Riḍā's Views of Traditional Exegesis

In his exegesis, Riḍā tried to adopt and yet modify 'Abduh's approach to Qur'ānic interpretation. Like 'Abduh, Riḍā claimed that traditional works of exegesis were nothing

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[97] See Nasution, *Pembaharuan*, 75.

more than compilations of differing opinions which ultimately led people to deviate from the primary message of the revelation. Some of these works only focused on the expressions or the grammatical and lexical meaning of verses. Others adopted different sides of a given theological debate, such as that over the *istinbāt* of jurists who practiced *taqlīd* or mystical exegesis, or the fanatical positions of religious sects.[99]

Riḍā also assessed the use of traditions in that style of exegesis known as *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*. According to him, it was generally the case that the exegete's exposition in *tafsīrs* of this kind was a kind of veil, obscuring the teachings of the Qur'ān, which are able to purify the soul and to guide reason (*'aql*).[100] Quraish Shihab asserts that Riḍā was very cautious when quoting the hadiths of the Prophet's Companions. Riḍā's caution was warranted in light of the fact that many reports attributed to the Companions were invalid, especially those attributed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Ibn 'Abbās.[101]

Riḍā did not, however, fail to realize that among those hadiths found in exegetical books that are attributed to the Prophet, his Companions and the Successors of the Companions, some were very important. Thus, what was narrated from the Prophet could not be overlooked, in spite the fact that some of these traditions dealt only with

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[98] See Warnīqah, *al-Sayyid*, 144.

[99] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 10; 'Abd al-Majīd 'Abd al-Salām al-Muḥtasib, *Ittijāhāt al-Tafsīr fī al-'Aṣr al-Ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1973), 302.

[100] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 10.

[101] See Shihab, *Metode*, 57.

etymology or their own good deeds. Riḍā maintains, nonetheless, that these kinds of traditions are few in number.[102]

Even while Riḍā appears to have been sharply critical of traditional works of exegesis, especially *tafsīr bi al-m'athūr*, he was in some ways influenced by Ibn Kathīr's methodological approach to the Qur'ān. This influence can be seen in two respects: the use of ḥadīth and the effort to reconcile passages of the Qur'ān that appear to be contradictory. Moreover, similar weight is given to the historical events which relate to jurisprudential issues in the Qur'ān. It may be argued, therefore, that because these two exegetes were influenced by Ibn Taymīya (d. 727 A. H.), they were similarly inclined to follow the *Salafīya* movement.[103]

Like 'Abduh, Riḍā did not accept all prophetic traditions, even when those narratives could be found in al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* and Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*. Unlike 'Abduh, however, Riḍā, in rejecting certain Prophetic traditions used arguments derived from the discipline of ḥadīth sciences (*'ulūm al-aḥādīth*).[104] Riḍā's main objections to some of the hadiths found in Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, for instance, were that many of them were ambiguous or, often, in clear contradiction with one another, making their reconciliation impossible.

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[102] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 7-8. Cf. Maḥmūd, *Manāhij*, 318.

[103] See 'Abd Allāh Maḥmūd Shihāta, *Manhaj al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh fī al-Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Maṭba'a Jāmi'a, 1984), 229.

[104] See Shihab, *Metode*, 65.

Further Riḍā's attitudes towards classical exegesis can be seen in three basic types of classical exegesis al-Ṣābūnī[105] proposed.

1. Tafsīr bi al-riwāya

This kind of *tafsīr* stresses the explanation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān itself, by the Prophet and by the Companions of the Prophet. Al-Ṭabari's *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* and al-Qurṭubī's *al-Jāmi'u li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* are the examples of this *tafsīr*. Rashīd Riḍā accepts this *tafsīr* and applies its principles in *Tafsīr al-Manār*. According to al-Dhahabī, the sources of Riḍā's *tafsīr* are the Qur'ān itself, ḥadīth and the explanation of the Prophet's Companions and the followers of the Companions.[106] Warnīqah acknowledges that Riḍā prefers interpreting the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān to other sources in the first level, but if he does not find its interpretation in the Qur'ān he will use ḥadīth.[107] As shown later in the third chapter, Riḍā employs internal cross-reference widely in his *tafsīr*.

As a consequence of Riḍā's careful scrutiny of the Prophet's explanation of the Qur'ān he used it selectively based on his *ḥadīth* background. Apart from Riḍā's attitudes towards the Prophet's explanation, Riḍā is also very careful in applying the explanation of the Companions of the Prophet and the followers of the Companions. Riḍā accorded Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya (1350) and Ibn Taymīya (d. 1328) great respect.

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[105]See Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ṣābūnī, *al-Tibyān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Irshād, 1970), 63.

[106]See al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 244.

[107]See Warnīqah, *al-Sayyid*, 116.

Riḍā praises them in his work and also relies on quotation from them in support of his own exegetical interpretations.

Despite his appreciation of al-Ṭabarī as an expert in *tafsīr bi al-riwāya*, Riḍā accused him of being careless in the use of ḥadīth in his interpretation. A case in point is al-Tabarīs' commentary on the verse "(Zachariah) prayed: O Sustainer, appoint a sign for me!" (Q. 3: 41). In interpreting this verse al-Ṭabarī quotes tradition narrated by al-Suddī and 'Ikrimah stating that Satan made the Prophet Zachariah unable to differentiate between revelation and the call of Satan and was thus obliged to ask for a proof.[108] Riḍā dismisses al-Ṭabarī's position, for he believes that it is impossible that the Prophet Zachariah was influenced by Satan.

2. Tafsīr bi al-ra'y

This kind of *tafsīr* is not directly based on the transmission of knowledge by the predecessors, but on the use of reason and *ijtihād*. According to Ahmad von Denffer, this *tafsīr* does not mean interpretation by mere opinion derived through *ijtihād* based on sound sources.[109] Von Denffer divides this *tafsīr* into two kinds: (1) *tafsīr maḥmūd* (praiseworthy), which is in agreement with the sources of *tafsīr*, the rules of *sharī'a* and the Arabic language, and (2) *tafsīr madhmūm* (blameworthy), which is done without proper knowledge of the sources of *tafsīr*, *sharī'a* and the Arabic language.[110]

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[108]See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 298-99.

[109]See Ahmad Von Denffer, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān: An Introduction to Sciences of the Qur'ān* (Leichester: The Islamic Foundation, 1994), 130.

[110]See Von Denffer, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 131.

Al-Rāzī's *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, al-Bayḍāwī's *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*[111] and al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf* can be categorized as belonging to the type of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*. According to 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Āṣim, Riḍā uses his own judgment in his commentary, which is free from *taqlīd* except for his *taqlīd* of his mentor, 'Abduh.[112] Riḍā's position is evident in his response to al-Rāzī's commentary on the verse which states "If Thou cause them to suffer, verily they are Thy servants: and if Thou forgive them, verily Thou alone art almighty, truly wise!" (Q. 5: 118). In interpreting this verse, al-Rāzī asserts that according to his school of thought (*madhhab*), it is possible that God may be referring to putting the infidels in Heaven and sending the devout to Hell. In response to this position, Riḍā argues that it contradicts reason (*'aql*), the *ḥadīth* and the Qur'ān itself. Furthermore, Riḍā asserted that al-Rāzī's position might cause chaos in the principles of Islamic doctrines.[113]

What al-Rāzī mentioned above is merely his opinion as a leading theologian and the issue which he launched is disputable. However, Riḍā objected to this assertion because al-Rāzī does not base his opinion on the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth* or the explanation of the Prophet. Riḍā claims that al-Rāzī lacks the use of tradition derived from the Prophet or his successors, the Companions. Al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Dhahabī, a leading figure in *'Ilm al-Rijāl* [114]

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[111]This commentary was written based on al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf* but considerably amplified from other sources. Al-Bayḍāwī's commentary is regarded by the sunni as the best and alsmost as a holy book. For more information, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam (1913-1939)*, vol. 2 ed. M. Th. Houtsma, et al. (Leiden: E. J, Brill, 1987), 390-91.

[112]See al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 244.

[113]See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 11, 271.

argued that in his time al-Rāzī never mastered the science of tradition (*'ilm al-ḥadīth*). The same criticism is directed against al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī. Riḍā, for instance, states that these two exegetes have only a limited knowledge of *ḥadīth*. They also do not refer to the forefathers' views, whose competency has been acknowledged.[115]

In passing judgment on al-Rāzī's exegesis, Riḍā quotes the statement, popular among scholars, that the former's work includes everything except *tafsīr*, as observed by al-Suyūṭī in his *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. This assertion arose because of al-Rāzī's effort in accommodating scientific theories in his *tafsīr*. It is of course a kind of exaggeration, which was intended to weaken confidence in his *tafsīr*, i.e. that of introducing the opinions of philosophers and theologians, particularly those of Mu 'tazilis and Ash'aris.

3. Tafsīr ishārī

This kind of *tafsīr* tries to explore the esoteric meaning of the Qur'ān as done by mystically-inclined authors.[116] Historically, this *tafsīr* was a reaction against the legal and exoteric interpretation of the jurists.[117] Ibn 'Arabī's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*,[118] al-

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[114] *'Ilm al-Rijāl* is a science of evaluating the qualities of narrators of *ḥadīth* in their transmission of ḥadīth. See Iftikhar Zaman, "The Science of *Rijāl* as a Method in the Study of Ḥadīth," *The Journal of Islamic Studies* 5 (1994): 1-34.

[115] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 6, 428.

[116] Cf. Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1976), 18.

[117] See Hassan Hanafi, "Method of Thematic Interpretation of the Qur'an," in *The Qur'an as Text*, ed. Stefan Wild (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996): 195-211.

[118] This work is actually written by 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (d. 1329), but it is ascribed to Ibn 'Arabī. It is often cited as a representative work of Ṣūfī-oriented *tafsīr*. Some examples of this *tafsīr* are cited in Gätje's *The Qur'ān and Its Exegesis* and Ayoub's *The Qur'ān and Its Interpreters*.

Tustarī's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, al-Sulamī's *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, al-Shīrāzī's *Arā'is al-Bayān fī Ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān* are categorized as *tafsīr ishārī*. As an example of this *tafsīr*, one writer presents Ibn 'Arabī's commentary on Q. 4: 106-7 as follows.

> For Ibn 'Arabī whiteness and blackness are likewise symbolic of light and darkness. Whiteness of faces signifies the illumination of the face of the heart with the light of the truth [i.e. God] in turning to Him and turning away from the dark psychic direction of the lower world. But this cannot be realized except in a life of upright faith of the heart. Thus would the entire being [of a person] be illumined with the light of God. In contrast, Ibn 'Arabī explains blackness as the darkness of the face of the heart in turning to the pleasure-seeking soul and turning away from the direction of divine luminescene by befriending the soul which follows vain desires in attaining its pleasures. This ensues from following disparate satanic ways.[119]

Since Riḍā had a *Ṣūfī* background, he was, to some extent, inclined to *Ṣūfī*-oriented *tafsīr*, especially that of al-Ghazālī. When Riḍā comes to the interpretation of the verse "If You avoid the great sins which you have been enjoined to shun, We shall efface your [minor] bad deeds, and shall cause you to enter an abode of glory." (Q. 4: 31), he refers to al-Ghazālī's opinions as reflected in his *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. Riḍā, for instance, quotes al-Ghazālī's concept of repentance, i.e. regretting the sins and promising not to commit them later.[120]

The aforementioned Riḍā's attitudes towards traditional exegeses reveal his scholarly capacity, the depth of his knowledge and his critical ability to analyze and evaluate the traditional exegetes' points of view.

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[119]Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and Its Interpreters*, vol. 2 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 286.

[120]See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, 54-5.

D. Scholars' Views of Riḍā's Method of Interpretation

Rashīd Riḍā is considered to be a scholar who tried to rethink Islam through his Qur'ānic interpretation and called for returning to the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. He interpreted the Qur'ānic verses in light of a new method.[121] In this section, I will present a selection of scholars' views on Riḍā's method of Qur'ānic interpretation.

Dawam Rahardjo, the Indonesian writer of *Ensiklopedi al-Qur'an*, claims that Riḍā basically applied two significant methods in his commentary.[122] He says that, before commenting on a verse or a group of verses, Riḍā first tried to extract the universal meaning so that certain general concepts could be grasped. He was careful in treating the occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) in order to avoid a narrow conclusion that would indicate a failure to capture the guidance of the Qur'ān. Secondly, Riḍā applied the holistic method by implementing a thematic approach in which he scrutinized the contents of other related verses.

Alwi Shihab[123] appreciates Riḍā's moderately liberal method of interpretation, especially his contribution to interfaith dialogue. He says, for instance, that Riḍā supports 'Abduh's opinion that belief in God is not necessarily limited to the belief of Muslims. He

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[121]See Syahrin Harahap, *Islam Dinamis: Menegakkan Nilai-nilai Ajaran al-Qur'ān dalam Kehidupan Modern di Indonesia* (Yogayakarta: Tiara Wacana, 1997), 172.

[122]See Dawam Rahardjo, *Ensiklopedi Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Sosial Berdasarkan Konsep-konsep Kunci* (Jakarta: Penerbit Paramadina, 1996), 454.

[123]He is an Indonesian visiting scholar at Hartford Seminary. He earned two doctorates, the first from 'Ain Shams University and the second from Temple University in Comparative Study of Religion.

argues that pure belief in Allah can be also found outside of Islam.[124] The Christian faith, according to him, does not contradict the Islamic faith; Christians, however, tend to alienate themselves from Islam. Riḍā asserts that the Qur'ān does not condemn Christians, it just makes an effort to correct what it claims to be a bias by those who follow Jesus's faith.[125]

Hasbi al-Shiddiqi, an Indonesian modern exegete, appreciates Riḍā's method of interpretation, especially his liberal and modern views on the ethical concepts of the Qur'ān. A case in point is his commentary on the verse "Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity . . ." (Q. 24: 30). Riḍā asserts that God's commandment to men to lower their gaze does not necessarily mean they should look down to the ground and pay no attention to other people around. According to Riḍā, this verse means that men should not see the parts of women's bodies that must be covered (*'awrāt*). Therefore, if men see these parts by accident, they should close their eyes or turn their sight and they should not try to see them again.[126] On these grounds, S. Othman Kelantan, a Malaysian contemporary thinker, appreciates Riḍā's brave interpretation concerning the unlawful parts of a woman's body. According to him, in Riḍā's views, women's arms, neck and legs are not forbidden to see by men.[127]

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[124]See Alwi Shihab, *Islam Inklusif: Menuju Sikap Terbuka dalam Beragama* (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, 1997), 79-80.

[125]See Shihab, *Islamic Inklusif*, 102.

[126]See Muhammad Hasbi al-Siddiqi, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Madjīd*, vol. 18 (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1956), 1222-23. Cf. Nourazzaman Shiddiqi, *Fiqhi Indonesia: Penggagas and Gagasannya* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1997), 175

On the other hand, M. Quraish Shihab criticizes Riḍā for being inconsistent in his attitude towards the use of Jewish sources in his interpretation. Riḍā criticized traditional exegetes because they used Jewish sources in their interpretation; however, as Shihab says, they are also found in his own interpretation, especially his commentary on Q. 6: 157, 7: 24.[128] According to Shihab, Jewish sources in Riḍā's interpretation are not primary commentary; he used them only to strengthen his opinions. Moreover, he clearly mentions that they are derived from the Bible. Shihab also accused Riḍā of being too critical of traditional exegetes.

Apart from Riḍā's inconsistency in his method of interpretation, his *tafsīr* is occupied by scientific discoveries. 'Abd Allāh Maḥmud Shihāta states that Riḍā accused al-Rāzī of being involved in demonstrating scientific views in the Qur'ān. In fact, Riḍā himself, as shown in his *Tafsīr al-Manār,* employs this method of exegesis. Shihāta insists that the Qur'ān is not a book of sociology or history or science but that it is useful for establishing laws and it functions as guidance.[129]

In addition, Syahrin Harahap pays attention to Ridā's unique and challenging interpretation, especially his commentary on the verse "Today have I perfected your religious law for you, and have bestowed upon you the fullness of My blessing, and willed that self-surrender unto Me shall be your religion . . ." (Q. 5: 3). According to Harahap,

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[127]See Othman Kelantan, *Ruang Perjalanan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1989), 175; Abdul Rahman Haji Abdullah. *Pemikiran Islam di Malaysia: Sejarah dan Aliran* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press,1997), 183.

[128]See Shihab, *Studi Kritis,* 91.

[129] See Shihāta, *Manhaj,* 28.

Riḍā seems to understand this verse as an indication of the perfectness of the list of lawful and unlawful foods. Furthermore, Harahap says that Riḍā wrongly believes that only Abū Ishāq al-Lakhmī al-Gharnaṭī interprets this verse as the perfectness of the Qur'ān and of Islam.[130]

[130]See Harahap, *Islam Dinamis, 285.*

CHAPTER THREE

THE METHODS OF EXEGESIS OF MUḤAMMAD 'ABDUH AND MUḤAMMAD RASHĪD RIḌĀ

The exegetical approaches of 'Abduh and Riḍā share many points of similarity. Riḍā, as 'Abduh's student and intellectual heir, applied his teacher's method of Qur'ānic interpretation to his own work. 'Abduh himself considered Riḍā to be the interpreter of his thought: *ṣāḥib al-manār turjumānu afkārī.*[1] This chapter will investigate the similarities and differences between the methods of 'Abduh and Riḍā in their explanations of the passages of the Qur'ān.

A. The Similarities of the Methods of 'Abduh and Riḍā

1. The School of Exegesis

'Abduh and Riḍā introduced a new exegetical method called *al-tafsīr al-adabī al-ijtimā'ī*, or socio-literary exegesis, which focuses on contemporary social issues. This exegetical method examines the meaning of the verses and then shows how the literary style of the Qur'ān expresses these ideas in an elegant manner. It also applies the guidance of the Qur'ānic text and its laws to social activities.[2] Al-Dhahabī claims that this school

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[1] See Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manar*, vol. 2 (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣrīya al-'Āmma li al-Kitāb, 1975), 498.

[2] See Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1976), 213 and 215; 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Faramāwī, *al-Bidāya fī Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ḥaḍāra al-'Arabīya, 1977), 41-2.

of exegesis is suited to the modern period because it enables the commentator to discuss contemporary social and political issues within a framework of Qur'ānic guidance.[3]

Ḥasan al-Bannā' argues that this kind of exegesis elucidates social problems and historical events. By attempting to ascertain the position of the Qur'ān on certain issues, it enables scholars to develop guidelines for correcting social behaviour. Al-Bannā' notes that this type of exegesis was first introduced by 'Abduh and later developed by Riḍā, as can be seen in *Tafsīr al-Manār*.[4] Socio-literary exegetes, who approach the Qur'ān independently from the influence the Islamic theological and legal schools, are better able to avoid the imposition of traditional doctrine and develop a fresh, authentic approach to the Qur'ān.[5]

This exegetical method also condemns the use of Jewish sources (*isrā'īlīyāt*) in interpreting scripture, despite the fact that they are a common feature of both classical and medieval exegetical works. They were used to fill in the gaps in stories in the Qur'ān. Similarly, this approach rejects the employment of fabricated (*mawḍū'*) and weak (*ḍaīf*) traditions, and avoids the domain of the unseen (*ghayb*), which only God knows it as Qur'ān mentions in a number of times. Moreover, it establishes basic beliefs in a global sense but avoids offering detailed comments on them. These principles ensure that

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[3]See al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 215.

[4]See Ḥasan al-Bannā', *Muqaddima fī al-Tafsīr wa Tafsīr al-Fātiḥa wa Awā'il Sūrat al-Baqara* (Kuwait: Dār al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, 1971), 12-13.

[5]See al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 214.

interpretation does not rely on legends, which both reason (*'aql*) and faith (*'aqīda*) consider unreliable.[6]

Another characteristic that distinguishes the socio-literary school from other exegetical schools is its concern with natural laws and social systems. It also offers solutions to social problems encountered by Muslims and other people, based on the guidance of the Qur'ān. Quraish Shihab describes this as the ongoing miracle of the Qur'ān.[7] Socio-literary exegetes interpret the Qur'ānic message in ways that are consistent with modern scientific theories, showing that the Qur'ān is a living book, relevant to the modern era. These perspectives are presented in an elegant rhetoric that charms the readers, leaving a deep impression of love for God's Book and a zeal to know the secrets it contains.[8]

In the next passages religious pluralism and polygamy will be discussed as two aspects or concerns within this approach.

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[6] See al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 214-15.

[7] According to Muhammad Quraish Shihab, the inimitability of the Qur'ān (*i'jāz al-Qur'ān*) in our day lies in the ability of the Qur'ān to heal a community's illness and to solve its problems. In his M. A. thesis entitled *al-I'jāz al-Tashrī'ī li al-Qur'ān*, Shihab examines a number of different claims regarding the miracle of the Qur'ān and concludes that those are not miracles, but rather extraordinary features of the Qur'ān seen from the subjective viewpoint of Muslims. For example, al-Zarqānī claims in his *Manāhil al-'Irfān* that the miracle of the Qur'ān lies in its ability to provide for all human needs. According to Shihab, this statement is based on al-Zarqānī's subjective attitude as a Muslim, which would be rejected by non-Muslims. Some exegetes claim that the Qur'ān is a miracle because it can touch the reader's heart. This statement is questionable as there are many readers of the Qur'ān whose hearts have not been touched by this experience. Others claim that the Qur'ān is a miracle because of its language. Shihab acknowledges this, but insists that this applies only to the Arabs who understand it. Those who do not understand Arabic, such as Indonesians, cannot grasp the beautiful language of the Qur'ān. In addition, Shihab points out that some Muslims claim the Qur'ān is a miracle because it is beyond natural law, and therefore treat its verses as magic. See Arief Subhan, "Menyatukan Kembali al-Qur'ān dan Umat: Menguak Pemikiran Muhammad Quraish Shihab," *'Ulūmul Qur'ān* 5 (1993): 9-16.

(a) Religious Pluralism

Tafsīr al-Manār is concerned with religious pluralism. Its authors interpret the Qur'ān in such a way as to extend the meaning of "the People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*), increasing harmony in the global community. However, Riḍā's interpretation, in fact, is not consistent with the Qur'ānic usage of this expression. The *Ṣābi'ūn*, mentioned three times in the Qur'ān, are considered *ahl al-kitāb* for example.[9] This interpretation indeed is not new because classical exegetes interpreted it in the same sense. Riḍā goes even further, arguing that the followers of Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism and other religions can also be categorized as People of the Book.[10] This is contrary to the classical position: al-Shahrastānī, for instance, differentiates between People of the Book and those only partially defined by this term. The former includes Jews and Christians, who clearly possess a book, while the latter are those who have something that only resembles a holy book, such as the Zoroastrians.[11]

Furthermore, Amīr 'Abd al-'Azīz argues that the *Ṣābi'ūn* are not *ahl al-kitāb*, rather they are polytheists (*mushrikūn*).[12] As a consequence, he says Muslim men are

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[8] See al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 215; al-Faramāwī, *al-Bidāya*, 36.

[9] See Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm Juz' 'Amma* (Cairo: al-Jam'īya al-Khayrīya al-Islāmīya, 1361 A. H.), 134.

[10] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 6, 187-88. According to Syed Anwar Ali, the term *ahl al-kitāb* can be extended to all teachers of moral law. See his *Qur'ān: The Fundamental Law of Human Life*, vol. 2 (Karachi: Hamdard Foundation Press, 1984), 250.

[11] See al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Azhar, 1947), 209.

[12] See Amīr 'Abd al-'Azīz, *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Baqara* (Beirut: Dār al-Furqān, 1985), 118. According to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Karakhī, there are two kinds of *Sābi'ūn*: those who followed Christians and recited the Bible and those who worshipped the stars. According to Abū Ḥanīfa, the former are *ahl al-kitāb* and the

forbidden to marry *Ṣābi'ūn* women and all Muslims are forbidden to eat their food.[13] According to 'Abd al-Azīz, there are only three religious communities: the Qur'ānic *umma*, the Christians and the Jews. There is no third lawful community.[14] 'Abd al-'Azīz's opinion is difficult to accept however, since the Qur'ān mentions the *Ṣābi'ūn* in the same verse in which it enumerates others who believe: Jews, Christians, and Magians. Moreover, many other religious communities may also qualify for inclusion as 'people of the book.'

Riḍā's thesis has an important social significance; in this era of globalization, his ideas can contribute to improve interfaith relations. However, Riḍā tends to manipulate the historical facts when he claims that Muslims treated adherents of other religions as *ahl al-kitāb* in the countries they conquered and did not regard them as pagans. Riḍā believes that this attitude encouraged assimilation between Muslims and the natives and that it had positive results.[15] As proof, Riḍā cites the spread of Islam in China. A similar process took place in India. When Islam conquered this region, the scholars (*'ulamā'*) issued a *fatwā* declaring that the followers of the religion of Brahma were *ahl al-kitāb*. This *fatwā* gave a positive impetus to assimilation, especially through marriage.[16] It seems

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latter are not. See 'Abd al-Karīm Zaydān, *Aḥkām al-Dhimmiyīn wa al-Musta'minīn fī Dār al-Islām* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1982), 13.

[13] See 'Abd al-'Azīz, *Tafsīr*, 118.

[14] See 'Abd al-'Azīz, *Tafsīr*, 118. Cf. Faruq Sherif, *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur'ān* (London: Garnet Publishing Ltd., 1995), 131.

[15] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 6, 188. See also Harifuddin Cawidu, *Konsep Kufr dalam al-Qur'ān: Suatu Kajian Teologis dengan Pendekatan Tafsīr Tematik* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1991), 168.

that Riḍā made the hermeneutical jump of giving the Qur'ānic expression a new meaning for the 20th century, a practice which is generally performed by other modern Muslim interpreters who advocate change.

(b) Polygamy

Another social issue which *Tafsīr al-Manār* confronts is polygamy. 'Abduh presents two verses of the Qur'ān which deal with polygamy. The first is Sūra 4: 3 "And if you have reason to fear that you might not act equitably towards orphans, then marry from among (other) women such as are lawful to you (even) two, or three, or four: but if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then (only) one-or (from among) those whom you rightfully possess . . ." The second is Sūra 4: 129 "And it will not be within your power to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire it . . ." (Q. 4: 129). This translation incorporates 'Abduh's famous reinterpretation, giving a meaning that the classical exegetes did not see in these verses.

The Qur'ān thus contains an apparent contradiction between permission for polygamy involving up to four wives; the requirement of justice among these wives and the unequivocal declaration that such justice is, in the nature of things, impossible.[17] Some traditional interpretations maintained that the permission has legal force while the demand for justice, though important, is left to the conscience of the husband. Muslim

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[16] For further information on the Islamization of the Hindu community of India see for example, Romila Thapar, *A History of India* (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 289-90.

[17] See Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, Inc., 1994), 47.

modernists, on the other hand, give primary importance to the demand for justice, coupled with the declaration of the impossibility of complete equality in a polygamous marriage, and conclude that permission to have more than one wife is meant to be only temporary and for a restricted purpose.[18]

'Abduh believed that even though the Qur'ān allows polygamy, many factors support the call for its prohibition in modern times. First, from a psychological perspective, polygamy is degrading to women; a wife is generally unpleased to share her husband with another woman. These feelings are a natural part of human nature (*tabī'i*). Secondly, according to 'Abduh, polygamy may result in hostile feelings between brothers and sisters who have different mothers. There would be no peace among them, as each mother would want to advance herself and her children at the expense of the other wives and their children. A strife in the family frequently results in divorce, according to 'Abduh, the practice of polygamy may promote an unhealthy family life in Islamic countries. In this situation, he points out, it is difficult for a family to achieve happiness.[19]

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[18]Amir Ali is opposed to polygamy but also allows it under certain conditions. He says even so early as the third century Hejira during the the reign of al-Ma'mūn, the first Mu'tazilite doctors taught that the developed Qur'ānic laws inculcated monogamy. The conviction is forcing itself on all sides, Amir Ali adds, that polygamy is as much opposed to the teaching of Mohammad as it is to general progress of civilized society and true culture. But he modifies the statement by remarking that among unadvanced communities, polygamy, hedged by all the safeguards imposed by the Prophet, is by no means an evil to be deplored. At least it is preferable to those polyandrous customs, habits and modes of life which betoken an utter abandonment of all moral self restraint. As a culture advances, Amir Ali adds, the mischiefs resulting from polygamy are better appreciated and the meaning of the prohibition better comprehended. Amir Ali, *The Spirit of Islam: A History of Evolution and Ideals of Islam with A Life of the Prophet* (Sadar Bazar Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delhi, 1978), 327. For comparasion of Amir Ali's opinion on polygamy and those of other scholars, such as Rashīd Riḍā, Syed Ahmad Khan and Mohammad Iqbal, see Mazheruddin Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought in the Muslim World* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1982), 196-98.

'Abduh's point of view is based on the consideration of public interest (*al-maṣlaḥa al-mursala*). For 'Abduh, the existing regulations on polygamy in Egypt do not represent the essential teachings of Islam, and can thus be modified in accordance with changing needs and circumstances. Polygamy, therefore is allowed only when necessary: for example, a wife is sick and cannot perform her duties or when she is infertile, as procreation (*tanāsul*) is the purpose of marriage.

Riḍā played an important role in developing socio-literary exegesis. His followers include exegetes like Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī and Shaykh Maḥmūd Shaltūt, as reflected in their exegesis.[20] Amīn al-Khūlī and 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān also applied this approach in their interpretations. Both state that socio-literary oriented exegesis begins by examining the collected verses that relate to the problem under discussion and analyzing the linguistic sense of the word or words involved. The exegete then invesigates the structure of the verse as a whole to determine the Qur'ānic use of the word.[21]

2. The Principles of Exegesis

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[19] Cf. Helmut Gätje, *The Qur'ān and Its Exegesis: Selected Text with Classical and Modern Muslim Interpretations*, trans. and ed. Alford T. Welch (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996 [first published in 1976]), 249-50. In reference to the discussion, Stowasser states that 'Abduh wrote in empassioned language about male tyranny and lasciviousness, female exploitation and oppression, the corruption of new generation, all features of the 19th century reality of polygamy gone wrong. According to her, indeed it was this theme that inspired 'Abduh's most daringly innovative Qur'ān interpretation and *fatwā* (legal opinions) in which he called for the abolition of polygamy in Islam. Polygamy, he argued, had been sound and useful practice among the righteous early believers (*al-salaf al-ṣālih*) but had developed into a corrupt practice of unbridled lust, devoid of justice and equity, and thus was no longer conducive to the community's welfare. For more information, see Barbara Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'ān, Traditions and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 121. See also Muḥammad 'Abduh, *al-Islām wa al-Mar'a fī Ra'y al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh*, edited by Muḥammad 'Imāra (Cairo: n. d.), 117-18.

[20] See al-Faramāwī, *al-Bidāya*, 36.

[21] See 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān, *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1962), 10.

a. The general teachings of Qur'ānic verses

'Abduh and Riḍā both believed that Qur'ānic verses constitute a living guidance and are not limited to only one generation. They disagreed with scholars who limited their interpretation to those speaking certain languages or belonging to specific groups. This characteristic can be seen in their commentary on the verse "It is not for those who ascribe divinity to ought beside God to visit (or tend) God's houses of worship" (Q. 9: 17). According to the writers of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, the meaning of *ya'murū masājid Allāh* is to enter and sit down in the mosque.[22] Al-Qurṭubī, on the other hand, says that this verse means that polytheists are not allowed to perform pilgrimage (*al-ḥajj*), as they are forbidden to enter the Masjid al-Ḥarām of Mecca.[23] Abū Su'ūd al-Ḥanafī argues that this verse means that the polytheists are not allowed to participate in building the Masjid al-Ḥarām mosque.[24] Moreover, Ṭanṭawī Jawharī claims that the *masājid Allāh* covers not only the *Ḥarām* mosque but others as well.[25]

Riḍā disagrees with those who limit the meaning of *ya'murū masājid Allāh* to merely worshipping God, or to performing *'umra* at the Masjid al-Ḥarām. The true meaning of this verse, Riḍā explains is that humans should worship God in a general sense, as well as in more specific senses, such as prayer. It also covers activities like

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[22] See al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 158.

[23] See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 8 (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī li al-Ṭibā'a wa al-Nashr, 1967), 89.

[24] See Abū Su'ūd al-Ḥanafī, *Tafsīr Abī Su'ūd aw Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm ilā Mazāya al-Kitāb al-Karīm*, vol. 2 (Riyāḍ: Maṭba'at al-Sa'āda, n. d.), 529.

building and renovating mosques. Riḍā's interpretation of the word admits as wide a variety of meanings (*mushtarak*) as possible, and is based on the opinions of al-Shāfi'ī and al-Ṭabarī.[26]

According to al-Shāfi'ī and al-Ṭabarī, although a word has a general meaning, it can be understood in a variety of ways as long as these are applicable within the context of its surrounding words. Of course, some ambiguous words may possess meanings that contradict each other, such as the word *qurū'* in the verse *wa al-muṭallaqātu yatarabbaṣna bi 'anfusihinna thalāthata qurū'in.* (Q. 2: 228). The meaning of this word can be either cleanliness or uncleanliness.

b. The Use of Reason in Approaching the Qur'ān

The interpretation based on personal judgment (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y*)[27] denotes the use of logical principles in elucidating Qur'ānic propositions. This kind of interpretation is based on individual rational judgment. It is a speculative, sometimes philosophical, interpretation proffered by intellectual and liberal Muslims. It also emphasizes theological issues.[28] *Tafsīr bi al-ra'y* leads its users to draw conclusions inductively or deductively,

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[25] See Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī, *al-Jawāhir fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm,* vol. 5 (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bāb al-Ḥalabī wa Awlāduh, 1350 A. H.), 96.

[26] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr,* vol. 10, 206-7.

[27] Scholars have divided the methods of interpretation 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-dirāya* and (3) *tafsīr bi al-ishārī.* See Ahmad von Denffer, *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān: An Introduction to the Science of the Qur'ān* (London: The Islamic Foundation, 1983), 125-6. Cf. John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 35.

[28] Because of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*'s predilection for rational analysis and speculation, it has frequently been attacked by orthodox scholars as too freewheeling and subjective. This antagonism stems in part, from the identification of this type of exegesis with the famous Mu'tazilite (rationalist) school of theology. See Frederick Mathewson Denny, *An Introduction to Islam* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1985), 152-3.

through a process called "inference."[29] The use of this technique is based on the assumption that the interpretation of the Qur'ān is a scientific activity.[30] The principles of logical thinking are present in *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal theory) and the Qur'ānic sciences.[31] In addition, there are some prophetic traditions and the explanation of the Prophet's Companions who advocate the use of reason in interpreting the the Qur'ān. Ibn 'Abbās, for example, interprets the word *al-ākhira* in Q. 14: 27 as the end of the Prophet's life,[32] not the condition of the Hereafter as some scholars believe.

'Abduh's views on the role of reason and his belief that it cannot contradict revelation led him to employ reason extensively in interpreting Qur'ānic verses. This is reflected in his commentary on points of theology (*kalām*) and Islamic law (*sharī'a*). For instance, in interpreting Q. 2: 255, he states that *al-ḥayy* denotes God as the possessor of life and the source of the senses, knowledge, movement and growth. Riḍā reports that 'Abduh defined this word by citing the example of plants and animals. Both are alive, but

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[29] See Dagobert. D. Runes, *The Dictionary of Philosophy* (Totowa: Littlefield, 1975), 146. See also J. Brough, "Inference," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, vol. 7 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 279-82. Further investigation of inductive and deductive thinking can be found in 'Azmī Islāmī, *Uṣūl al-Manṭiq al-Ramzī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjlū al-Miṣrīya, 1970), 25.

[30] See Q. 38: 29. This verse insists that the Qur'ān was revealed in order for man to apply himself to the study of its contents, an exercise that will lead him closer to the truth.

[31] The discussion of *qiyās* (analogy), as one of sources of the *Sharī'a*, is proof of the use of the principles of logical thinking in legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). Imām al-Shāfi'ī himself describes *qiyās* and *ijtihād* as efforts to extract Islamic laws by searching for guidance from religious evidence in the right way. See Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risālah* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlāduh, 1969), 205-6. Logical implications can be found in the Ḥanafī system of legal theory *dilālat al-ishārat* as mentioned in Muḥammad Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, n. d.), 140; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Nadwa al-Jadīda, n. d.), 32.

[32] See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 6 (Cairo: Dār al-Maṭabi' al-Sha'b, n. d.), 221.

their levels of existence are naturally different. More examples can be seen in 'Abduh's interpretation of black magic (*siḥr*), and birds (*abābīl*).

(1) Black magic (*siḥr*)

According to 'Abduh, black magic (*siḥr*) in the Qur'ān refers to illusions that may be perceived where nothing really exists. To support his opinion, he quotes the Qur'ānic verse: "He answered: 'Nay, you throw (first).' And lo! by virtue of their sorcery, their (magic) ropes and staffs seemed to him to be moving rapidly." (Q. 20: 66). In his interpretation of the Qur'anic statement ". . . but those evil ones denied it by teaching people sorcery . . . " (Q. 2: 102), 'Abduh explains these words as meaning that magic can be learnt. He concludes that *siḥr* is nothing but deception or knowledge which can be learnt and practiced by people whom he calls magicians, because they practice little-known procedures. In the same vein, 'Abduh considers that the magic performed by the magicians in Moses' presence was nothing more than a trick. He believes that the sticks and ropes contained quicksilver (put there by the magicians) that enabled them to move forward.[33]

Based on this understanding, 'Abduh refuses to accept any prophetic traditions (*aḥadīth*) which suggest that the Prophet Muḥammad was ever influenced by magic or that the angel Gabriel informed him of the secrets of the magicians. 'Abduh writes that if Muḥammad had actually experienced this, it would have justified the polytheists' claim, "And so these evil doers say (unto one another), 'If you were to follow (Muḥammad, you

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[33] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 399.

would follow) but a man bewitched!, . . ." (Q. 25: 8). He also points out that declaring that the Prophet had been bewitched could create the impression that his intellect may have been affected, raising doubts as to the legitimacy of his revelation.[34] 'Abduh's opinions on magic were influenced by the Mu'tazila who denied its existence. 'Abduh adopted this approach in an attempt to explain the Qur'ān logically, scientifically and rationally, especially to Orientalists.

(2). Birds (*abābīl*)

In his discussion of Q. 105: 3-4, 'Abduh interprets the word *ṭayran abābīl* as meaning flies or mosquitoes which carry the germs of various diseases; he explains that the words *bi ḥijāratin min sijjīl* refers to stones made of poisonous clay.[35] According to 'Abduh, Abraha and his soldiers were attacked by an epidemic of smallpox and measles. He supports this opinion with a narrative from 'Ikrima: "It was the first time smallpox had appeared in the Arab lands." 'Utbah added that the diseases had an almost unparalleled effect on human bodies, causing their flesh to virtually fall apart. The soldiers and their commander were horror-stricken and ran away. Abraha was also hit by the disease; eventually, his chest broken, he died at San'ā'[36]

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[34] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol.1, 399. However, al-Dhahabī argues that the magic that the Prophet experienced neither affected his intellect nor render him mad. The Prophet, he says, merely grew dejected and experienced other annoyances that did not disturb his prophetic task. See al-Dhahbī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 341.

[35] See Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 6 (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1988), 3976. According to Watt, each bird is alleged to have three stones of baked clay, one in its beak and one in each foot, and to have dropped these on the Abyssinian army. Each stone is said to have hit the man whose name was written on it. See William Montgomery Watt, *Companion to the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1994), 325.

[36] See Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl*, vol. 6, 3976.

This interpretation is difficult to understand for several reasons. Smallpox does not cause the decay of flesh but rather, "only a pustular eruption that often leaves permanent pits or scars."[37] Furthermore, an epidemic could not have affected the army alone, the disease would have struck all the Arabs in the vicinity.

Sayyid Quṭb presents three possible motives behind 'Abduh's rational explanation. First, 'Abduh may have wanted to limit the field of the supernatural when explaining the holy Qur'ān, a motive both commendable and understandable. 'Abduh and his followers tried to explain such events within the bounds of known and familiar natural laws. Second, he confronted the superstitious trend which exercised considerable influence over a large number of Muslims at that time. Third, he was also interested in preventing the flood of legends and false interpretations and keep them away from affecting religious belief.[38]

Perhaps a more complete explanation would accept that human experience includes not only the rational but also the irrational and the supernatural as well. The extensive use of reason in the exegetical methods of 'Abduh and Riḍā was a positive contribution to the study of the Qur'ān. However, the uncontrolled use of reason may lead scholars to neglect the supernatural and forget that reason has its limits. In a balanced approach, based on the role of the Qur'ān as a source of faith and law, the Qur'ān is accepted as it is, and faith and understanding are formed according to its message. Instead of limiting himself to reason, the scholar can incorporate other analytical tools as well, including poetry, prophetic

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[37] Stuart Berg Flexner, ed., *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1983), 1803. Cf. Noah Webster, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* (Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Inc. Publishers, 1981), 2149.

traditions and linguistic analysis. From the hermeneutical point of view, G. B. Madison argues that one cannot become a good interpreter simply by mastering and applying a certain method.[39] Reason as the sole tool in an attempt to analyze the Qur'ānic verses on natural events, human history and unseen matters may be inadequate for understanding the absolute and limitless Divine.

This does not mean that reason should be abandoned as a means of interpreting the Qur'ān; in fact, its value in detecting illogical exegetical arguments is undisputed. On the other hand, if the meaning of a text is clear and in keeping with reason, it is unnecessary to force a logical interpretation. Nevertheless, 'Abduh and his followers' use of reason to shed light on religious teachings may have encouraged Muslims to explore the truths about nature and the universe contained in revelation.

It is significant to note that even though 'Abduh was known as an exegete who used reason extensively, he still refrained from interpreting Qur'ānic verses whose content could not be explained by reason or those seen as obscure or vague. In his interpretation of Q. 101: 6-7, for instance, in reference to the scale that will be used to weigh man's reward in the hereafter, he says that God's measurement of one's deeds and the type of reward that will be granted are known to Him alone, and cannot even be guessed at by human beings.[40] 'Abduh's decision to leave this question to God may be seen as a reflection of his faith.

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[38] See Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl*, vol. 6, 3977.

[39] Gary B. Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 29.

C. Considering the Sūra as a Unity

According to Mustansir Mir, "a number of twentieth-century Qur'ān exegetes regard a Sūra as a unity."[41] The first of these was Ashraf 'Alī Thanavī who introduced the theory that each verse is connected to both the preceding and the following verses in the sūra. 'Izzat Darwaza insisted that most of the passages in a sūra are interconnected. Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī and Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī introduced the theory that every sūra of the Qur'ān has a central theme[42] while al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī tried to identify the central idea of a given sūra, calling it the *gharḍ* (aim).[43] Similarly Sayyid Quṭb argues that every sūra revolves around a principal idea, the verses of a sūra can only be understood in reference to this idea.[44] This principle is supported by the theory of correlative verses (*tanāsub al-āyāt*) introduced by al-Biqā'ī.[45] According to him, there are seven correlations between Qur'ānic verses and the suras they belong to:

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[40] 'Abduh presents this point in his *Tafsīr Juz' 'Amma*, 139.

[41] Mustansir Mir, "The Sūra as a Unity: A Twentieth Century Development in Qur'ān Exegesis," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993): 212-24.

[42] This distinctive theme is called *'amūd* or pillar. According to Robinson, the process of identifying the theme of a given sūra is often slow and arduous. First, the sūra is divided into sections on the basis of changes of theme. Then, each section is studied in turn until an idea emerges which seems to unite all the verses contained in it. Finally, the commentator endeavours to discover the distinctive theme which unites the key ideas of the various sections. For more information, see Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'ān: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London: SCM. Press Ltd., 1996), 271-83.

[43] See Mir, "The Sūra," 215.

[44] See Mir, "The Sūra," 213-15.

[45] Al-Biqā'ī is very concerned with the theory of *munāsaba*. In the preface of his book, he begins his discussion with the statement "Peace be to Allah who revealed His Book whose suras and verses are interrelated" (*al-ḥamd li Allāh al-ladhī anzala al-kitāb mutanāsib suwaruhu wa āyātuhu*). See his *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*, vol. 1 (Haydarābād: Maṭba'at Majlis Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Uthmānīya, 1969), 2. According to Aḥmad Abū Zayd, some scholars of *i'jāz* concur with this theory

> The first is the coherence between words in one verse. The second is the coherence between the content of the verse and the end of the verse (*faṣīla*). The third is the coherence between one verse and the other verse previous to it. The fourth is the coherence between the explanation of the beginning of each sura and the end of the sura. The fifth is the coherence between the end of the description of each sura and the beginning of the next sura. The sixth is the coherence between the central theme of each sura under discussion and the theme of the next sura. The seventh is the coherence between one sura and the one that comes before it.[46]

'Abduh and Riḍā gave some attention to this matter in the Qur'ān.[47] They made an effort to interpret issues with which their predecessors were less concerned. According to 'Abduh, one verse has harmonious relation to the next in one sūra. He also states that the meanings of one word or passage are related to the purpose of the sūra as a whole. An example can be seen in 'Abduh's commentary on the verse "Consider the day break and the ten nights" (Q. 89: 1-2). According to 'Abduh, the meaning of the words *layālin 'ashr* is impossible to separate from the meaning of the previous word *al-fajr* which denotes the end of dark (night).[48] Therefore, the words *layālin 'ashr* should be understood in relation

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although they apply certain distinctions, some of them focusing on correlating words, and others on correlating meaning. See his *al-Tanāsub al-Bayānī fī al-Qur'ān: Dirāsat fī al-Naẓm al-Ma'nawī wa al-Ṣawtī* (Rabāt: Maṭba'at al-Najāḥ al-Jadīda, 1992), 24.

[46] The writer's translation of Arief Subhan's article, "Menyatukan Kembali," 12. Even though the application of the theory of correlation may sometimes seem to be forced, this theory is important for three reasons. The first is that it counters the view of some Orientalists that the Qur'ān is unsystematic, moving from one point to another: the first is not fully explained while the second explanation has no connection with the previous one. The second reason is that it can restore consistency to the interpretation of the Qur'ān, countering the tendency to disconnectedness due to the different outlooks of exegetes. The third reason for its importance is that it can contribute to a wholistic and comprehensive understanding of the Qur'ān.

[47] This point is based on the research of 'Abd al-Ghaffār 'Abd al-Raḥīm and Shihab. 'Abd al-Raḥīm, for instance, states that *"wa minhu ayḍān al-naẓaru fī al-sūra al-wāḥida kawiḥda mu'talifa tatarābaṭu ajzā'uhā wa tatamāsaku ma'ānīhā fī siyāq wāḥid liyakūna wiḥda minhā dhāta mawḍū'* . . ."For detailed explanation, see his *al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh wa Manhajuh fī al-Tafsīr* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Ḥalabī, 1980), 203-8.

[48] See 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 77.

to *al-fajr*. For the coherence of these two verses, the words *layālin 'ashr* should be interpreted as the nights whose condition is suited to the condition of the word *al-fajr*, i.e the ten bright nights every month in which the light of the moon overtakes the darkness of the night.[49]

Another example is Riḍā's interpretation of the verse ". . . Whenever Zachariah visited her in the sanctuary he found her provided with food . . ." (Q. 3: 37). Al-Barūsawī explains in his *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Bayān* that this food was of an extraordinary nature, sent from heaven. The Prophet Zachariah found summer fruits in the winter and vice versa.[50] 'Abduh disagrees with this interpretation, claiming that the term *rizq* need not always be connected with extraordinary things (*khāriq li al-'āda*). *Rizq*, after all, commonly comes from God. Moreover, neither scripture nor any other source mentions that *rizq* in this context means summer fruits in the winter.

In addition, the narratives used by traditional exegetes contradict one another.[51] Riḍā discusses this point in detail, examining the placement of the story of Mary in Sūrat Āl 'Imrān. Basing himself on 'Abduh's opinions, Riḍā explains this in the context of the Qur'ān's primary aim: a description and explanation of the essentials of the faith, resurrection and reward, and revelation and prophethood. At the beginning of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān, God explains the meaning of faith and the day of resurrection; after interjecting

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[49]See 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 78.

[50]See Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī al-Barūsawī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Bayān*, vol. 3 (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1988), 29. Cf. al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlāduh, 1972), 427.

[51] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 293.

the story of Mary, He goes on to discuss prophethood. Therefore, both the story of Mary and the stories which come after it should be seen in connection with the verse "Behold, God raised Adam and Noah, and the House of Abraham, and the house of 'Imrān above all mankind." (Q. 3: 33). This verse states that the election of the prophets of the Banū Isrā'īl was the will of God. If God provided food for Mary this was also God's will. His will does not necessarily conform to man's expectations; for example, it is unusual for a woman like Mary to devote herself to the sanctuary (*miḥrāb*) (Q. 3: 35), or for an old, infertile woman (Zachariah's wife) to become pregnant and give birth (Q. 3: 39-40). Riḍā also considers that the *rizq* was significant because of its abundance, not because it consisted of summer fruits in the winter or vice versa.[52]

Riḍā's explanation reveals that Mary's experience, although rare, was nonetheless a human experience and not something extraordinary. If Riḍā's view is related to al-Biqā'ī's theory that the name of the sūra refers to a central theme of the sūra, it can be implied that the central theme of Sūrat Āl Imrān is the extraordinary events that were experienced by Imrān's family. Therefore, all of verses in this sūra should be understood in the light of this central theme. According to Shihab, Riḍā himself refers to al-Biqā'ī's work on this issue.[53]

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[52] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 293.

B. The Differences of the Methods of 'Abduh and Riḍā

According to al-Dhahabī, Riḍā's *tafsīr* amplifies the spirit of 'Abduh's work. In essence, they are similar in their sources, aims, schools of exegesis and systems of thought; there is almost no difference between them except in certain areas.[54] However, as these discrepancies lie in key areas of exegesis, it is worth examining them in some detail.

1. The Use of Cross-reference Interpretation

Cross-reference interpretation is the use of one part of the Qur'ān to elucidate another part.[55] The Qur'ān itself indicates the use of this method[56] and the Prophet applied it. This method is the highest type of interpretation which exegetes should use before resorting to other sources.[57] The Qur'ān says: ". . . We have bestowed from on high upon thee, step by step, this divine writ, to make everything clear, . . ." (Q. 16: 89). This method is based on the consideration that a verse may have a general sense (*mujmal*), may be specified by another verse (*takhṣīṣ*), or that an absolute verse may be restricted by another

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[53]See M. Quraish Shihab, *Studi Kritis Tafsir al-Manar Karya Muhammad 'Abduh dan Muhammad Rasyid Ridha* (Bandung: Pustaka Hidayah, 1994), 72.

[54] See al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 243.

[55]According to Issa J. Boullata, the basis of this exegetical method is the dictum which some classical exegetes held in the past, "the Qur'ān explains itself by itself" (*al-Qur'ān yufassiru ba'ḍuhu ba'ḍa*). However, they did not practice it systematically. See his "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi''s Method," *The Muslim World* 64 (1976): 103-13. Cf. Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1962), 18; Fazlur Rahman, "Interpreting the Qur'ān," *Inquiry* 3 (1986): 45-49.

[56] See, for example, Q. 16: 44 and 2: 185.

[57] Al-Jubūrī, for example, argues that "*inna khayra wa asdaqa man fassara al-Qur'ān huwa al-Qur'ān nafsuhu.*" See his *Dirāsāt fī al-Tafsīr wa Rijālih* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-'Arabīya al-Ḥadītha, 1981), 31. Cf. Ibn Taymīya's opinion in 'Alī Aḥmad Farrāj 'Alī, *al-Tafsīr wa Uṣūluh 'Inda al-Shī'a al-Ithnā 'Asharīya* (Cairo: Dār al-Ṭabā'a al-Muḥammadīyah, 1992), 26; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*," vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1987), 3; Maḥmūd al-Naqrāshī al-Sayyid 'Alī, *Manāhij al-Mufassirīn: Min al-'Aṣr al-Awwal ilā al-'Aṣr al-Ḥadīth* (Buraydah: Maktabat al-Nahḍa, 1986), 179.

(*muqayyad*).[58] According to Stefan Wild, an intertextual approach is suggested due to the nature of the Qur'ān as a literary document whose own structure in which is dialectically linked to its liturgical function as recitation. Oral and written forms of scripture have to be distinguished but both are aspects of one and the same entity.[59]

Riḍā refers to this method of exegesis as internal cross-reference interpretation (*tafsīr al-āya bi al-āya*), which he subdivides into two categories: the first in the interpretation of the content of one verse by another, as can be seen in his commentary on Q. 6: 165: "For , He it is who has made you inherit the earth, and has raised some of you by degrees above others, so that he might try you by means of what He has bestowed upon you . . ." According to Riḍā, many verses that might help to interpret this verse explain that God's blessings both on earth and in heaven are also a temptation (*fitna*) through which God educates people. This test will make clear who has acted rightly and is deserving of God's rewards.[60]

Riḍā presents a number of verses which he claims elucidate the aforementioned passage: Q. 7: 168, 11: 7, 18: 7, 25: 20 and 67: 2. After quoting some of these verses to explain the concept of temptation in Q. 6: 165, he remarks: "God guides us in these verses to follow His laws in order to fulfill our role as His successors (sing., *khalīfa*) in the world.

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[58] See Maḥmūd Basyūnī Fūdah, *Nash'at al-Tafsīr wa Manāhijuh fī Ḍaw' al-Madhāhib al-Islāmīya* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Amāna, 1986), 54-6.

[59] See Stefan Wild, *The Qur'ān as Text* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), x. Wild argues that the Qur'ān is in a remarkable and possibly unique way a strongly referential text, a holy text with a fair share of metatextuality.

[60] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 8, 252.

We should therefore be patient in disaster and thankful in happiness; indeed, we should thank God by using His blessings according to their purpose."[61] At the end of his commentary on Q. 6: 165 he presents additional verses in support of his interpretation, including Q. 17: 20-21 and 72: 16-17.

In Riḍā's second type of cross-reference interpretation the exegete interprets a word in relation to the different contexts in which it is found in other suras. Riḍā uses this kind of interpretation in his analysis of the word *ajal* in Q. 6: 2: " He it is who has created you out of clay, and then has decreed a term [for you] - a term known [only] to him. And yet you doubt." According to Riḍā, the word *ajal* in the Qur'ān, when examined in human context, means the span of man's life, ending with his death. He points to other verses which support this definition, such as Q. 11: 3, 16: 61 and 71: 4.[62] Internal cross-reference interpretation, as applied by Riḍā in *Tafsir al-Manār*, is generally regarded as the best way to understand the meaning of the Qur'ānic verses. However, 'Abduh limited his use of this method, preferring his own interpretation, based on a modern rationalist approach. To supplement internal cross-reference, 'Abduh also introduced the concept of the thematic approach. However, an examination of 'Abduh's commentaries reveals no examples of this method. This interpretation has been developed by Amīn al-Khūlī and his wife 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān (Bint al-Shāṭi'). The latter, for instance, applied it in two of her works: *al-Insān fī al-Qur'ān* and *Sub-Atomic World in the Qur'ān.*

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[61] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 8, 252.

[62] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 7, 298.

The method of internal cross-reference interpretation presents at least one key problem. Since the death of the Prophet, no one has had the authority to decide when one verse can interpret another. As a result, one exegete's interpretation of a verse may differ from that of another exegete. Furthermore, examples of hadiths (the Prophet's sayings) which explain verses by other verses are of limited use because they were based on the needs of the Muslim community of his time.

2. The Use of Hadiths in Interpretation

The second source for the interpretation of the Qur'ān after the Qur'ān itself is the corpus of hadiths. Muslims hold that the credibility of the hadiths as an explanation of the Qur'ān was divinely determined.[63] Hadiths play an important role in the interpretation of the Qur'ān. Their use in explaining the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), for example, is a rudimentary element in the interpretation of the Qur'ān.[64] According to Ibn Kathīr, the hadiths (*matn al-ḥadīth*) were revealed to Muḥammad just as the Qur'ān was, although they were not narrated by Gabriel.[65] Al-Jātikāmī argues that if we consider the Qur'ān to be the spirit of the Islamic sciences, we can consider hadiths as the nervous system.[66] Hadiths serve both as elucidation (*bayān*) of the Qur'ān and as a supplement to

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[63] This statement is based on Q. 16: 44, stating that: ". . . And upon thee (too) have We bestowed from on high this reminder, so that thou might make clear unto mankind all that has bestowed upon them. . ."

[64] See R. Marston Speight, "The Function of *ḥadīth* as Commentary on the Qur'ān, as Seen in the Six Authoritative Collections," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988): 63-81.

[65] See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1987), 4.

it.[67] The Prophet interpreted some Qur'ānic verses with his own opinion, taking the trouble to explain the meaning of the ambiguous words.[68] However, the Prophet did not interpret the entire Qur'ān.[69]

One way *hadīths* play an important role in the interpretation of the Qur'ān is providing details for some of the general commands mentioned in the Qur'ān: the procedure of prayer (*kayfiyat al-ṣalāt*), for example. They may also clarify obscurities present in the Qur'ān, especially the meanings and applications of words and expressions. Finally, it may restrict that which is absolute in the Qur'ān, for example, the punishment of cutting off of a hand for theft was restricted to amputation of the right hand only.[70]

Certain differences between 'Abduh and Riḍā can be seen in their use of hadiths in Qur'ānic interpretation. The use of *athar* or *riwāya* dominates Riḍā's commentaries, while only a few are found in 'Abduh's exegesis. Ibn 'Āshūr relates this difference to their respective intellectual backgrounds: Riḍā was *atharī* (hadiths-based) while 'Abduh *baḥthī nazarī* (dialectical and theoretical-oriented). Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir acknowledges that

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[66] See Muḥammad Junayd al-Jātikāmī, "al-Sunna wa Makānatuhā fi Ḍaw' al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," *al-Baḥth al-Islāmī* (1994): 32-42.

[67] See Muṣṭafā al-Sibā'ī, *al-Sunna wa Makānatuhā fī al-Tashrī' al-Islāmī* (Cairo: al-Dār al-Qawmīya, 1966), 344. Cf. al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Kifāyah fī 'Ilm al-Riwāyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, n. d.), 49.

[68] See Muḥammad Rajab al-Biyūmī, "Min al-Adab al-Nabawī: al-Tafsīr al-Nabawī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm," *Majallat al-Azhar* 3 (1980): 449-51.

[69] See Musa'id Musallam 'Abd Allāh Āli Ja'far, *Athar al-Taṭawwur al-Fikrī fī al-Tafsīr fī al-'Aṣr al-'Abbāsī* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1984), 78.

[70] Cf. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Akk, *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr wa Qawā'iduh* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1986), 129-30; Shams al-Dīn Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya, *I'lām al-Muwaqqi'īn 'an Rabb al-'Ālamīn* (Cairo, 1955), 34.

Riḍā's knowledge of *ḥadīth* far outweighed that of 'Abduh.[71] Riḍā himself admits 'Abduh's lack of knowledge of *hadiths* (*'ulūm al-ḥadīth*) frankly. He states that "it is clear that he ('Abduh) lacks knowledge of hadiths, including *riwāya*, memorization and *al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl*, as do other Azhar scholars."[72]

'Abduh frequently rejected prophetic traditions without applying a critical method to the science of hadiths. In contrast, Riḍā only rejected hadiths in accordance with maxims of hadiths experts, by using *ta'wīl, tarjīḥ al-rāwī* or other methods. 'Abduh, on the other hand, often rejected hadiths on rational grounds even those that had been declared valid (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by Bukhārī and Muslim, the two most trusted narrators of hadiths in Islam as the majority of scholars believe.[73] Nor did he also accept *āḥād* traditions that are valid on doctrinal issues. As a result, he used only a very small number of hadiths in his interpretation.

According to al-Dhahabī, 'Abduh saw no distinction between hadiths narrated by Bukhārī and those narrated by others. Moreover, Quraish Shihab concludes that 'Abduh evaluated hadiths solely on the basis of their content (*matn*) and not on their guarantors (*sanad*).[74] Consequently, 'Abduh sometimes accepted hadiths as long as their contents

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[71]See Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, "al-Sayyid Rashīd Riḍā." *Al-Muqtaṭaf*53 (1918): 318-20.

[72] *". . . athbata annahu kāna muqaṣṣiran fī 'ulūm al-ḥadīth min ḥaythu al-riwāyatu wa al-ḥifẓu wa al-jarḥu wa al-ta'dīlu kaghayrihi min 'ulamā'i al-azhar.*" Rashīd Riḍā, *Tārīkh al-Ustādh al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduh*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Manār, 1931), 6.

[73] According to some modern *ḥadīth* critics, such as Muhammad Syuhudi Ismail, some hadiths in both *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* should no longer be regarded as valid because their *matn* may contradict the Qur'ān, historical fact or scientific truth.

conformed to reason. An example can be seen in his interpretation of Q. 3: 3. According to him, the word *furqān* in this verse means reason (*'aql*); it is not simply another name for the Qur'ān, or the separator between Muslims and non-Muslims as claimed by some scholars. His interpretation is supported by a *ḥadīth* narrated by al-Bayhaqī: "The existence of man is determined by his reason, there is no religion for those who do not use their reason."[75]

However, as some *ḥadīth* critics have observed, it is almost impossible to determine whether a *ḥadīth* is valid simply on the basis of reason (*'aql*). Yūsuf Mūsā, for instance, states that Ibn Taymīya and other experts in hadiths (*ahl al-ma'rifa bi al-ḥadīth*) believed that the hadiths narrated from the Prophet on *'aql* have no reliable source or credible transmitters (*thiqa*).[76] Opinions will always differ on this. Further debate will accomplish little.

Riḍā argues in his writings that there are many narratives from the Prophet, Companions (*ṣaḥāba*) and Successors of the Companions (*tābi'īn*) that can help to explain the contents of the Qur'ān. At the same time he admits that many hadiths, especially those relating to stories of the Prophets, metaphysical issues and beliefs about the hereafter, have been mixed with Jewish and Persian legends. Riḍā only used hadiths which he considered valid. He was more critical than other experts in exegesis and hadiths

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[74] See A. Malik Madani, "Tafsīr al-Manār (Antara al-Syaikh Muḥammad 'Abduh dan al-Sayyid Muḥammad Rasyid Ridha)," *al-Jāmi'ah* 46 (1991): 63-81.

[75] *Qiwāmu al-mar'i al-'aqlu, lā dīna liman lā 'aqla lahu*, From another *sanad*, Abū Shaykh narrates: "*Dīnu al-mar'i 'aqluhu, wa man lā 'aqla lahu la dīna lahu.*" See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 160.

[76] See Yūsuf Mūsā, *al-Qur'ān wa al-Falsafa* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1966), 44.

in that he judged narratives not solely by their content *(matn)* or their transmitters (*ruwāt*), but according to both.

Thus, in his explanation of the term "*al-'uqūd* " in Sūra 5: 1, Riḍā quotes the opinions of the *ṣaḥāba* and *tabi'īn*. He states that the command to fulfill the promise in this verse has a general context and therefore all kinds of promises should be included under this general context. The requirements of a contract, since these are also general, are also included. There is no argument (*dalīl*) which forbids the honouring of a promise, while many hadiths support this universal teaching. Riḍā presents one hadiths which says that agreement is recommended among Muslims, except in the matter of following forbidden things or vice versa. Muslims are obliged to fulfill the pledges they agree to. This *ḥadīth* is narrated by Abū Dāwūd and al-Dāraquṭnī.

3. The Use of Scientific Discoveries in Interpretation

The Qur'ān exegesis containing an interpretation of natural phenomena in accordance with scientific knowledge[77] extends far back in Muslim history. It was first established as a discipline during the 'Abbāsid era under the reign of al-Ma'mūn (d. 853), in the wake of the translation movement and the proliferation of scientific publications. This is not to suggest, however, that the works of former exegetes were always dogmatic. The advent of new branches of knowledge such as jurisprudence, philosophy, theology and metaphysics did, however, change the way in which exegetes examined the texts.[78] An

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[77] It is called *al-tafsīr al-'ilmī* and it analyzes the Qur'ānic verses in order to extract information from them on matters of scientific truth. See al-'Akk, *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, 86.

enthusiastic proponent of such change was Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), [79] who employed reason in his *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* and *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān.*

Al-Ghazālī states that all the science that had been discovered and the science which remained unknown originates from the Qur'ān.[80] All science is entailed in God's actions (*af'āl*) and attributes (*ṣifāt*), which are, in turn, expounded on in the Qur'ān. He substantiates this view with the Qur'ānic verse in which God says; ". . . no single thing have We neglected in Our decree . . ."(Q. 6: 38). Knowledge is limitless, and the Qur'ān provides signs of all its basic principles; Q. 26: 80, states, for example, "and when I fall ill, He is the One who restores me to health." Medicines and diseases, according to al-Ghazālī, can only be understood by those involved in the field of medicine. "The one who restores" in the aforementioned verse becomes, for al-Ghazālī, the medical practitioner.[81]

Amīn al-Khūlī, after comparing the verse "No single thing have We neglected in Our decree" (Q. 6: 38), which al-Ghazālī uses to support his opinion, with the verse "for indeed, We did convey unto them a divine writ which We clearly and wisely spelled out as a guidance and a grace unto people who will believe" (Q. 7: 52), claims that the Qur'ān has left nothing out in the realm of the religious truths destined to guide men. It is not

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[78] See al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 130-31; Badmas 'Lanre Yusuf, "Evolution and Development of *Tafsīr*," *The Islamic Quarterly* 38 (1994): 34-47.

[79] Cf. al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 140.

[80] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmīya, 1356 A. H.), 301.

[81] See Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabīya, 1933), 27-28.

destined to prove scientific discoveries. It is therefore absolutely out of the question to look in the Qur'ān for an indication of modern discoveries.[82]

Al-Khūlī puts forward several arguments against the use of exegesis for scientific purposes, as described by Jansen:

> Firstly, its lexicological unsoundness. The meanings of the words of the Koran do not bear a shift into the field of modern science. Secondly, scientific exegesis is philosophically unsound. The Koran addressed the Arab contemporaries of the Prophet Mohammad, and consequently cannot contain anything they would be unable to understand. Thirdly, it is theologically unsound. The Koran preaches a religion. It brings a religious and ethical message. It is concerned with man's view of life, not with cosmological views. Lastly, Amīn al-Khūlī emphasizes that it is a logical impossibility that the Koran, a static unchanging limited quantity of texts, should contain the ever-changing views of nineteenth and twentieth century scientists.[83]

One of the greatest differences between 'Abduh and Riḍā can be found in the use of scientific exegesis in Qur'ānic interpretation. Riḍā uses this approach, sometimes giving the impression that he forces the issue, as he attempts to justify scientific theory with Qur'ānic verses. For instance, Riḍā attempts to support Darwin's theory of evolution in his commentary.[84] Having interpreted Q. 2: 249-252 which tells the story of Ṭalūt and Jālūt, Riḍā presents fourteen sociological concepts he has extracted from these verses. The thirteenth theory is that of the struggle for existence (*tanāzu' al-baqā'*), while the

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[82] Jacques Jomier, "Aspects of the Qur'ān Today," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 266-76.

[83] J. J. G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 54.

[84] Jacques Jomier briefly refers to this in his "Aspects of the Qur'ān Today," in *The Cambridge History*, 266. In response to this interpretation, al-Kirmānī argues that scholars have the right to interpret the Qur'ān as long as their interpretations are in line with Islamic principles. Based on this argument, he rejects Darwin's theory that human beings represent the final stage in the process of evolution. He states that this theory contradicts the Qur'ānic concept of the creation of man as portrayed in Q. 95: 4: "Verily, We create man in the best conformation." See al-Shaykh 'Izzat Dasūqī, "Ra'y fī Tafsīr al-'Ilmī," *Majallat al-Azhar* 10 (1979): 2326-36.

fourteenth is that of natural selection *(intikhāb al-ṭabī'ī)* or survival of the fittest (*baqā' al-amthal).*[85] In analyzing the question posed by the angels as to why God would create another creature, he points out that this might imply that men with a tendency to cause discord or bloodshed had existed before Adam. According to Riḍā, this indicates that Darwin's theory does not contradict the Qur'ān.[86]

Ignaz Goldziher argues that one of the aims of Riḍā's interpretation was to prove that the Qur'ān anticipates all the scientific truths later discovered by scholars, especially philosophers and sociologists; it is therefore impossible for it to contain anything that contradicts scientific facts. Scientific discoveries of the 19th and 20th centuries can therefore be found in the Qur'ān, even though they are not apparent to the narrow-minded.[87] The scientific contents of the Qur'ān are claimed by some scholars as one of its miracles,[88] both because they were revealed at a time when people could not recognize them and because the Prophet who received the revelations was illiterate (*ummī*).[89]

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[85] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 492-98; Shiḥāta, *Manhaj*, 250.

[86] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 8, 738; Ignaz Goldziher, *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr al-Islāmīya*, trans. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm al-Najjār (Beirut: Dār Iqra', 1983), 375.

[87] See Goldziher, *Madhāhib*, 375.

[88] Ṣāliḥa 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Sharaf al-Dīn presents three kinds of miracle of the Qur'ān namely: *al-i'jāz al-lughawī, al-i'jāz al-'ilmī* and *al-i'jāz al-tashrī'ī* in her *al-Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm: I'jazuh wa Balāghatuh wa 'Ulūmuh* (Kuwait: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabīya wa al-Ṭibā'a wa al-Nashr, 1984), 98.

[89] By contrast Richard Bell argues that the Prophet Muḥammad was able to write and read. *Ummī*, in his opinion, means that he had never read any previously-revealed holy book. He cites as evidence the fact that the Prophet was said to have written a secret letter and corrected some words in the constitution of Medina. For more details see his *Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1953), 17-20.

However, Issa J. Boullata disagrees with those who claim that the scientific truths in the Qur'ān are part of its miracle (*i'jāz*); he considers this idea to be forced.[90]

Despite 'Abduh's rational approach to the Qur'ān, he rejected Qur'ān exegesis employing scientific discoveries in understanding the Qur'ān. Although he believed that the Qur'ān both tolerates and encourages scientific investigation, 'Abduh did not view this latter as an important tool in the process of illuminating the Qur'ān's true meaning. So-called scriptural references to telephones and spaceships are, according to 'Abduh, flights of fancy derived from unsound principles of interpretation.

According to 'Abduh, the primary function of revelation is moral edification. It is therefore a mistake to seek answers in the Qur'ān to scientific or historical queries, as some modern apologists have tried to do. For 'Abduh, geographical, historical and astronomical references in the Qur'ān denote moral or religious instruction and do not prove scientific discoveries.[91] Furthermore, it is agreed that some scientific paradigms are now established scientific truths while others remain disputed. The aversion against interpreting the Qur'ān speculatively has given some scholars added reason to oppose scientific interpretation. Al-'Aqqād, supported 'Abduh's point; he, for example, insists that we are not obliged to justify scientific discoveries by Qur'ānic verses because the

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[90] See Issa J. Boullata, "The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'ān: *I'jāz* and Related Topics," in *Approaches to the History*, 139-54.

[91] See Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1983), 344.

truth of those discoveries is relative. It is not the Qur'ān's function, in al-'Aqqād's estimation, to comment on theory which is still hypothetical.[92]

4. The Use of Philology in Interpretation

Philology involves a systematic critical assessment of the actual content of a text.[93] It is favoured by modern exegetes who have tried to adopt a hermeneutic approach to understanding the Qur'ān. According to R. W. Gwynne, philology focuses its study on at least five components: the lexical, the poetic, the grammatical, the rhetorical and the literal meaning of a text.[94] As Riḍā focuses on the lexical and the literal meanings of the verses, this examination will be limited to those areas.

According to Shihab, the literal approach to understanding the Qur'ān may cause problems for interpreters, especially when they attempt to find answers to social, scientific and religious questions. He says that scholars dealing with difficult words were content merely to say "Only God knows its meaning" (*Allāhu a'lamu bi murādih*). However, exegetes now tend to explore their meanings, they, for instance, look for traces of metaphor (*tamthīl*) in these passages, realizing that literalism often narrows the meaning, while metaphor broadens it.[95] It is important to note that this statement is still

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[92] See 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād, *al-Insān fī al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, n. d.), 171.

[93] See Kenneth McLeish, ed., *Key Ideas in Human Thought* (New York: Prima Publishing, 1995), 557.

[94] See Rosalind Ward Gwynne, "The Tafsīr of Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī: First Steps Towards a Reconstruction, with Texts, Translation, Biographical Introduction and Analytical Essay," Ph. D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1982, 66-7.

[95] See Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan al-Quran: Fungsi dan Peran Wahyu dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat*, ed. Ihsan Ali Fauzi (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, 1992), 90. According to Quraish

used by some scholars after interpreting such words, showing their shortcomings in understanding Qur'ānic verses. This statement basically does not deal with the issue of literalism but more often involves lexical or grammatical questions or *asbāb al-nuzūl*.

'Abduh limits his use of philology, giving more room to reason in interpretation. Issa J. Boullata remarks that "'Abduh returned to a common sense of rational simplicity and directness . . . omitting detailed analysis of the syntactical and rhetorical element of the Qur'ānic style . . ."[96] 'Abduh restricts his application of philology to verses where it is necessary for the comprehension of the text. Therefore, he refrains from identifying obscure names and places mentioned in the Qur'ān. Our duty as believers, 'Abduh says, is to follow the meaning of a verse without entering into philological or other details.[97] He keeps silent as regards the determination of the *qarya* referred to in Q. 2: 58, in spite of its ambiguity. Similarly, when commenting on the word *rijzan* in Q. 2: 59, he does not make any effort to explain its meaning.[98]

Shihab, al-Jāhiẓ (d. 865), a scholar who favoured the rational trend in theology, is considered the first to have introduced a metaphorical interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses.

[96] Issa J. Boullata, "The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'ān," in *Approaches to the History*, 139-54. Versteegh acknowldges that some commentators were not interested in the language of the Qur'ān. However, they had to deal with the wording of the text in order to explain obscure words and passages. See C. H. M. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qur'ānic Exegesis in Early Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 84.

[97] 'Abduh, *Tafsīr Juz 'Amma*, 22. According to Sharif, 'Abduh tried to explain the spirit and general sense of the Qur'ānic verses without keeping too closely to the letter. He is careful, from the beginning, to discard as unwelcome the purely philological and grammatical considerations with which a great number of exegetes have been conversant. 'Abduh, moreover, criticizes the attitudes of the Arabic authors who, due to an exaggerated admiration for ancient Arabic poetry, make it the basis of grammar and then find numerous grammatical difficulties in the text of the Qur'ān. For 'Abduh, it is necessary, on the contrary, to make the Qur'ān the criterion for the rules of grammar. For more information, see Sharif, *A History*, 1504-06.

[98] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 375.

Amīn al-Khūlī criticized 'Abduh's attitude to the use of philology in interpretation. Al-Khūlī argues that one cannot profit from the spiritual guidance (*hidāya*) of the Qur'ān without knowing the exact "literal" meaning of the words as they would have been understood in the period of revelation.[99] 'Abduh himself argues that people can grasp the guidance of the Qur'ān without employing philology which he claims in certain cases may deviate from the guidance of the Qur'ān as is done by some traditional exegetes.

I would like to underline the opinion that it is unsuitable to interpret a verse merely on the basis of reason, to the exclusion of linguistic considerations. If we neglect the linguistic factor, we are neglecting the verse itself; the result is a denial of the miracle of the Qur'ān, which lies to a great extent in its linguistic aspects, especially its structure, eloquence and rhyme. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya (d. 1350), the noted Ḥanbalite theologian, simply says that "he who knows Arabic and is familiar with lexicography, grammar, rhetoric, Arabic poetry and prose will *eo ipso* recognize the supremacy of the Qur'ān."[100]

'Abduh's method of interpretation can be criticized based on a hermeneutical approach which advocates the use of grammar in understanding scripture. Walter C.

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[99]Amīn al-Khūlī, *Manāhij Tajdīd Fī al-Naḥw wa al-Balāgha wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1961), 303. In relation to al-Khūlī's point, al-Shāṭibī presents two basic requirements for interpretation; first is that a meaning should be chosen which is most compatible with the truth and which is accepted by scholars who are authorities in the field, and second that the meaning chosen should be recognized in classical Arabic. See his *al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'a*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n. d.), 100.

[100] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya, *Kitāb al-Fawā'id* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī,1990), 7. In this book, al-Jawzīya discusses extensively the grounds on which various authorities rest their doctrine of the *i'jāz*, especially pages 246-55 of this edition. See also Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *A Tenth Century*

Kaisar, for instance, argues that an accurate interpretation of scripture requires what has come to be known as "grammatico-historical exegesis." This approach focuses on the language in which the original text was written and on the specific cultural context that gave rise to the text.[101] G. B. Madison favours a contextual approach, suggesting that interpreters should not read scripture out of context, and without due regard for the historical environment in which the text emerged. In this approach there is the widest scope for the use of philology, historiography, and other social disciplines.[102]

In contrast to 'Abduh, Riḍā uses philology extensively in his interpretation, attempting to explain the meaning of difficult words or uncover the secrets hidden in each sentence.[103] He pays special attention to the different words used to express the same idea. This approach, now known as comparative exegesis (*al-tafsīr al-muqāran*), can be seen in his commentary on the verse "And nothing is the life of this world but a play and passing delight . . ." (Q. 6: 32). According to Riḍā, here *la'ib* means an action aimed not at taking advantage but at rejecting pain[104] while *lahw* denotes a deed which causes its perpetrator

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Document of Arabic Literary Theory and Criticism: The Sections on Poetry of al-Bāqillānī's I'jāz al-Qur'ān (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), xix.

[101] See Walter C. Kaiser and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 19.

[102] See Madison, *The Hermeneutics*, 30.

[103] Cf. Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Salmān, *Rashīd Riḍā wa Da'wat al-Shaykh Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb* (Kuwait: Maktaba al-Ma'allā, 1988), 232.

[104] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 7, 362.

to be less concerned with urgent and important tasks; this could include any and all activities which promote happiness in the individual.[105]

To support his argument, Riḍā quotes the opinions of al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī and Ibn Manẓūr, concluding that if the word *lahw* is not followed by another word, it means all things that occupy a person's thoughts, enabling him/her to forget his/her problems and difficulties. This can mean activities like games, songs or other things that create happiness.[106] Continuing to pursue the philological approach, Riḍā tries to compare this verse (Q. 6: 32) with other verses, especially Q. 29: 63 in which the word *lahw* comes before *la'ib*, while in other instances, the latter word appears before the former.

According to Riḍā, few exegetes have paid much attention to the different phrases in this verse. They assumed that the conjunction *waw* simply joined the first word to those that followed without considering the reason for a particular word's placement at the beginning or the end of a sentence. Having quoted the opinions of al-Ālūsī and al-Khaṭīb al-Iskāfī in support of this point, Riḍā then states that the reason why the word *la'ib* is put before the word *lahw* is that it shows the chronology of human life. This opinion is founded on the verse ". . . the life of this world is but a play and passing delight, and a beautiful show, and [the cause of] your boastful vying with one another, and [of your] greed for more and more riches and children . . ." (Q. 57: 20). Based on this explanation, Riḍā explains that exegetes should not question Q. 6: 32, but rather

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[105] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 7, 363.

[106] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 7, 363.

investigate Q. 29: 63 which places the word *lahw* before *la'ib*. Riḍā devotes seven pages of commentary to these two words and the placement of one before the other.[107]

According to Riḍā, the verse begins with the word *la'ib* because it signifies the beginning of human growth: a baby tastes the sensual pleasure of games. It then mentions *lahw,* an activity which cannot be performed except by those who are capable of using their minds (infants are thereby excluded). *Zina*, denoting the characteristics of an adolescent, is placed next, followed by the word *tafākhur*, a characteristic of youth. The final phrase: *takāthur fī al-amwāl wa al-awlād* denotes characteristics of adulthood.

5. The Use of Quotations from Other Exegetes' Commentaries

The attitudes of exegetes towards the commentaries of other exegetes vary. Some use the commentaries of other scholars to support their own interpretations. Others use a comparative method in which one commentary is compared with another. Others use a third method, quoting other commentaries and then criticizing them.

'Abduh and Riḍā differ in their use of the commentaries of other exegetes. 'Abduh, as shown in the first chapter, did not refer to other interpretations, except for certain exegetical works which deal with the meaning of strange words, especially *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*. 'Abduh's attitude to the opinions of exegetes shows his consistency to the motto "return to the Qur'ān" in which he tried to extract the guidance of the Qur'ān based on his own opinions. However, Shiḥāta says that 'Abduh sometimes quotes other scholars, such as al-Ghazālī and Ibn Khaldūn. In contrast, Riḍā frequently used other commentaries in his

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[107] See Riḍā, *Tafsir*, vol. 7, 362.

interpretation. Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, in his preface to Shiḥāta's thesis, claims that important features distinguished the commentaries of 'Abduh and Riḍā from each other, particularly the latter's great attention to *al-tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* and frequent quotation of other exegetes.[108] At times Riḍā used other exegetes' commentaries to support his arguments, while at times he criticized them. Riḍā sometimes gathered the opinions of various exegetes on one verse, then analyzed them, as can be seen in his commentary on Q. 11: 113. In interpreting this verse, he quoted fourteen exegetes: al-Ṭabarī, al-Jaṣṣāṣ, al-Baghāwī, al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn 'Arabī, al-Ṭūsī, al-Rāzī, al-Bayḍāwī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Nasafī, Ibn Kathīr, al-'Imādī, M. Ṣiddīq Khān and al-Ālūsī.[109] Riḍā, criticized all these exegetes either for wrong interpretation or for their neglect of certain specific points.[110]

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[108] See Shiḥāta, *Manhaj*, ix.

[109] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol. 12, 173.

[110] See Riḍā, *Tafsīr*, vol 12, 173.

FINAL REMARKS

'Abduh and Riḍā have long been regarded as exegetes whose commentaries represent a major source in modern Qur'ānic studies. In *Tafsīr al-Manār* they criticized classical exegetes, accusing them of having deviated from the guidance of the Qur'ān. According to them, classical exegetes injected grammatical, theological, juridical and philosophical dispute in their commentaries. Classical exegetes, in the eyes of 'Abduh and Riḍā, treated the Qur'ān as justification of their own approaches to the major intellectual issues of their time. 'Abduh and Riḍā not only criticized the classical works of exegesis but also suggested solutions to their problems, in effect filling in the shortcomings of their exegesis.

Despite their sharp criticism of classical works of exegesis, 'Abduh and Riḍā appreciated some of them. 'Abduh, for instance, admired al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf* because of the author's high appreciation of reason and his effort to free his exegesis from *taqlīd*. Yet even though 'Abduh was influenced by al-Zamakhsharī, he still differed from him. While 'Abduh did not relate his commentaries to any particular school of thought, although he clearly supported the Mu'tazilah. 'Abduh also admired *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī because of its concise way, giving little more than synonyms and paraphrases and because of its brief indications of possible solutions to grammatical problems. Riḍā appreciated Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* because the author was very careful in the use of *ḥadīth* in his commentary.

'Abduh developed the socio-literary exegesis (*al-tafsīr al-adabī al-ijtimā'ī*) which focuses on social issues. This exegesis offers guidance and solutions to social problems which people encounter. Riḍā developed this approach and was followed by his contemporaries such as Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī, Maḥmūd Shaltūt, Sayyid Quṭb and 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān (Bint al-Shāṭi'). 'Abduh and Riḍā also formulated some important exegetical principles in accordance with their reformist mission. These principles reflected the socio-political setting of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in which they found themselves.

'Abduh and Riḍā shared many points of similarity in their exegetical approach. The similarity can be seen in their method and principles of exegesis. The commentaries of 'Abduh and Riḍā are distinguished by the socio-literary approach, concerned with social issues such as religious pluralism and the emancipation of women. The interpretations of 'Abduh and Riḍā were based on at least three principles: The first is the concept of the general teachings of the Qur'ān in which the verses explained should be understood in the light of their universal message. The second is the use of a rationalist approach in which logical consideration should play an important role in interpretation. The third is the concept of the sūra as a unity, in which all verses should be understood in the light of the central theme of the sūra.

Despite the similarity of the methods of 'Abduh and Riḍā, they differed over certain key areas of exegesis. The differences can be seen in their disagreement over the use of internal cross-reference. Riḍā used this method extensively; he followed in the footsteps of Ibn Kathīr. The difference is also found in the extent of their use of prophetic

traditions in interpretation. 'Abduh limited himself in the use of *ḥadīth* due to his attitude to it, which was very selective and sometimes rejected the hadiths even if they were found in al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*. He preferred a rationalist approach in his commentary. He tended to reject a *ḥadīth* if it contradicted logical thinking. Riḍā, on the other hand, used a lot of hadiths in his interpretation due to his appreciation of *ḥadīth* and his background as an expert in this field.

Concerning the exegesis that uses scientific knowledge (*al-tafsīr al-'ilmī*), 'Abduh claimed it distracted people from the religious guidance of the Qur'ān. Riḍā, on the other hand, applied it in some cases to prove that the Qur'ān accommodates scientific discoveries and even foretells them. The difference of the methods of 'Abduh and Riḍā can also be seen in their application of the philological approach in their commentaries. 'Abduh avoided using this approach to expound on grammatical and lexical issues, which he considered as a hindrance to the religious guidance of the Qur'ān. Riḍā, in contrast, used it extensively because he believed that it contributed to the understanding of the Qur'ān. In addition, 'Abduh and Riḍā also differed in the use of the opinions of earlier exegetes. 'Abduh limited his use to references to al-Zamakhsharī and al-Jalālayn. Riḍā, however, quoted a lot of exegetes' opinions; he analyzed and compared them and even strongly criticized them. However, both men can be considered as scholars who contributed, each in his own way, to a better understanding of the Qur'ān in modern times.

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