

COMMUNICATION MODELS IN THE HOLY QUR'ĀN:
GOD-HUMAN INTERACTION

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ABSTRACT

Title : Communication Models in the Holy Qur'ān:
God-Human Interaction
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This thesis presents an indepth examination of the exegetical treatment of Qur'ānic themes and concepts. It explains the process of communication between God and human beings by using communication models. The invisibility of God to human beings, coupled with His difference in nature, make their interaction difficult to conceive but not impossible. This thesis will thus seek to show how that interaction is feasible, making it as comprehensible as possible.

Muslim theologians studied exhaustively the subject of God's speech and its nature without actually revealing its process in any detail or in systematic fashion. This thesis concludes that the theological differences have little bearing on God as a communicator. Finally, it demonstrates that the process of God-human interaction is entirely different from that of ordinary interpersonal communication.

RÉSUMÉ

Titre: Modèles de communication du Qur'ân:
Interaction entre Dieu et l'homme

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Diplôme: Maîtrise ès Arts

Cette thèse examinera à fond le traitement exégétique des thèmes et des concepts du Qur'ân. Elle expliquera le processus de la communication entre Dieu et les êtres humains en utilisant des modèles de communication, l'invisibilité de Dieu pour les êtres humains, ainsi que sa nature différente, rendent la conception de cette interaction très difficile mais non impossible. Cette thèse cherchera à montrer que l'interaction est faisable et à la rendre le plus compréhensible possible.

Les théologiens musulmans ont étudié exhaustivement la question de la Parole de Dieu et de sa vraie nature sans vraiment pouvoir en dévoiler le processus, ni dans ses détails ni d'une manière systématique. Cette thèse conclut que les différents théologiques ont peu de pertinence quant au rôle de Dieu comme communicateur. Finalement, elle démontre que le processus d'interaction entre Dieu et l'homme se distingue entièrement de la communication interpersonnelle commune.

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Mohammed Zakyi Ibrahim

Montreal, January, 1997

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

The transliteration scheme used throughout this thesis is that of The Institute of Islamic Studies. The Arabic words and names are transliterated according to the following table.

a = ا	‘ = ع
b = ب	gh = غ
t = ت	f = ف
th = ث	q = ق
j = ج	k = ك
h = ح	l = ل
kh = خ	m = م
d = د	n = ن
dh = ذ	w = و
r = ر	h = ه
z = ز	y = ي
s = س	Long vowels:
sh = ش	ā = آ
ṣ = ص	ī = ئ
ḍ = ض	ū = و
ṭ = ط	hamza in the middle or at the end:
ẓ = ظ	‘ = ع

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INTRODUCTION

The Qur'ān is perceived by Muslims as revelation from God to His messenger Muḥammad via the Angel Gabriel. Thus, it is a communication from God. Although certain heated arguments erupted among Muslim theologians regarding the nature of the Qur'ān,¹ none of them ever implied that it was not a communication from God. For communication is,

the transmission or exchange of information, signal messages or data by any means, such as talk (verbal communication), writing (written communication), telephone, telegraph, radio or other channels within a group or directed to specific individuals or groups.²

Therefore, whether the Qur'ān has been created by God, as the Mu'tazila believe,³ or uncreated, as the Ash'arites believe,⁴ it still remains a message, with God as its source.⁵

However, despite the fact that the Qur'ān is a

¹J. Bouman, *The Doctrine of 'Abd al-Djabbār on the Qur'ān as the Created Word of Allāh* (Overdurk uit Verbum: University of Utrecht, 1964) 67-68.

²Richard Webster, *Webster's New Dictionary of Communications* (New York: Webster's New World, 1990) 104.

³Zuhdī Ḥasan Jār Allāh, *al-Mu'tazila* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Miṣr, 1947) 77-78.

⁴'Alī Ibn Ismā'īl al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna 'an Uṣūl al-Diyāna* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1990) 47.

⁵Source is "any person or thing that creates messages. A source may be an individual speaking, writing, or gesturing or a group of persons formulating an advertising policy, or a computer solving a problem." Joseph A. Devito, *The Communication Handbook* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986) 302.

communication from God, how the communication process takes place between God and human beings has attracted little attention.

The Qur'ān outlines three possible ways by which God communicates with human beings: a. inspirational; b. from behind a veil; and c. sending of a messenger (Q.42:51). Typical examples are found in the Qur'ān indicating the possibility of such interactions.

The mother of Prophet Moses received an inspiration from God regarding her unborn son (Q.20:38-39). Prophet Abraham's dream urging him to sacrifice his son (Q.37:102), was believed to be an inspirational mode of God's communication. So is the revelation of the Psalms (*Zabūr*) to Prophet David.⁶ Inspiration seems to be the only way God continues to communicate with human beings.⁷

A typical example of "behind a veil" mode is God's conversation with Prophet Moses.⁸ The Mutazila believe that God created the speech in the bush which spoke to Moses.⁹ On the other hand, Ash'arites maintain that Moses heard God's

⁶Mahmūd al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol 25. (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1980) 53-55.

⁷Ahmad Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol 12 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1980) 352.

⁸Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol.27 (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1980) 188-189.

⁹Jār Allāh, *al-Mu'tazila* 77-78.

eternal speech (al-kalām al-qadīm).¹⁰

Examples of the third mode are God's sending of Angel Gabriel to the prophets, and particularly to Mary, mother of Prophet Jesus (Q.19:17).

It appears from these examples that God is always the source of the messages, and that human beings are the receivers.¹¹ But the channels¹² through which the communication takes place vary significantly.

The channel in the inspirational mode is either a dream or direct suffusion to the heart, making the message intangible except where it is supported by other evidence. As the receiver in the second mode does not see the source, it is characterised as taking place from behind a veil. But the element of hearing makes the message very tangible. Meanwhile, the message could not be more reliable in the messenger mode as the source is certain.

This apparent difference in the processes of God-human communication is difficult but not impossible to understand. Our study will investigate this aspect very thoroughly in order to make it as and comprehensible as possible by using communication models.

¹⁰Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām*, vol.12 (Rabat: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 1961) 509, Al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ* vol.16, 169.

¹¹A receiver is defined as "any person or thing that takes in messages." Devito, *The Communication* 255.

¹²"A vehicle or medium through which signals [messages] are sent." Devito, *The Communication* 52.

In order to come up with the models, this study will depend on the Qur'ān as the principal reference source, identify communication related verses, analyze the semantic components of the words, and reveal the rhetorical implications of the expressions. We will focus on Q.42:51, in which are outlined the only possible ways of God-human interaction.

The etymological roots of specific words such as *wahy* will be traced through Arabic lexicons and philological sources, before their translations are sought in English. Specific meanings of the words as well as verses will be traced through both classical and modern works of exegesis, such as that of al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, al-Alūsī and al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī. This will facilitate our understanding before any models are suggested. Some secondary and related sources on communication and exegesis, of course, will be consulted for the sake of clarification and guidance.

The first chapter will generally investigate how modern interpretation relates to the Qur'ān. More specifically, it will examine the need for interpretation, firstly by the Prophet and later by others. Modern interpretation, its necessity and salient approaches will also be discussed, since identifying communication models in the Qur'ān has a lot to do with interpreting the Qur'ān in modern fashion. The chapter will conclude with a look into the use of models as tools for interpreting the Qur'ān.

The second chapter will be devoted to God's speech, its nature, and its implication to God as a communicator. It will touch upon the theological arguments concerned with God's speech, and relating to the createdness and uncreatedness of the Qur'ān. This will pave way for the process of God-human communication.

The more substantial, third chapter will concentrate on identifying the God-human communication models in the Qur'ān. A general communication model will be constructed in accordance with Q.42:51. Later, specific models will be drawn according to the segments of the verse -- namely, inspirational model, behind a veil model, and messenger model. Each model will be elaborated using examples taken from the Qur'ān and the Tradition. In each model, we will try to simplify the process of God-human interaction by identifying the key elements and relationships, such as the source (sender), message, receiver, channel, feedback,¹³ response¹⁴ (effect), and whether or not noise¹⁵ is present.

¹³"Information that is fed back to its source." Devito, *The Communication* 117.

¹⁴"Any bit of overt or covert behaviour in reaction to some stimulus." Devito, *The Communication* 267.

¹⁵Noise is "anything that distorts the message intended by the source, anything that interferes with the receiver's receiving the message as the source intended [it] to be received." Devito, *The Communication* 209.

CHAPTER I

THE QUR'ĀN AND MODERN INTERPRETATION

The Qur'ān and the Tradition clearly indicate that Qur'ānic interpretation emerged during the era of Prophet Muḥammad. Thus, the Prophet himself elucidated some parts of the Qur'ān as part of his prophetic duties. As God declares in the Qur'ān, "and We have sent down unto thee (also) the message [The Qur'ān]; that thou mayest explain clearly to [people] what is sent for them, and that they may give thought."¹ Just as this verse commands the Prophet or at least shows his duty, reflected in *li-tubayyina*, to mean "that you may elucidate" in terms of the purpose of the remembrance and the duty of the Prophet, a few Traditions substantiate his discharge of this duty,² making him the first interpreter of the Qur'ān. This, however, is argued by some Western scholars to be "a piece of historical nonsense", as stated by McAuliffe.³

When the Prophet was asked by his wife 'Ā'isha, about

¹al-Qur'ān, 16:44; This study will be using, *The Holy Qur'ān: English Translation of the meanings and Commentary*. By The Presidency of Islamic Researches, Iftā', Call and Guidance. (Medina: King Fahd Holy Qur'ān Printing Complex, 1411).

²Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūtī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol.2 (Cairo: al-Maṭba'at al-Azhariyya al-Miṣriyya, 1900) 174; 191 f.

³Jane McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 26.

hisāban yasīran (easy reckoning) in Q.84:8, his answer was, "that is exposure" *al-'ard*.⁴ Also, *ẓulm* (wrong-doing or injustice) in Q.6:82, was explained by the Prophet as *shirk* (Polytheism) in Q.31:13.⁵ Based on these and similar examples, Gatje observed that, Qur'ānic interpretation took place with the occurrence of revelation itself, and was the exclusive reserve of the Prophet while he lived.⁶

THE NEED FOR INTERPRETATION.

In order to prove the necessity of Qur'ānic interpretation first by the Prophet and subsequently by others, al-Suyūṭī provides three instances where textual explanation in general is needed:

- a) Whenever a text contains brief expressions with deeper meanings;
- b) Whenever an author for one reason omits some points vital to the question under discussion; and
- c) whenever words or expressions contain more than one possible meaning.⁷

⁴Aḥmad 'Abd al-Latīf al-Zabīdī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī al-Musammā al-Tajrīd al-Ṣarīḥ li-Aḥādīth al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol.1-2, (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1986) 43.

⁵al-Zabīdī, *Mukhtaṣar* 31.

⁶Helmut Gatje, *The Qur'ān and its Exegesis: Selected Texts with Classical and Modern Muslim Interpretations*, trans. Alfred T. Welch (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976) 33.

⁷al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol.2, 174.

All these are indeed typical of the Qur'ān and call for its interpretation. Beyond this, there is the legitimate desire and the relentless search for a proper understanding of the Qur'ān on the part of Muslims,⁸ inspired by their confidence in acquiring its guidance.⁹ Al-Ṣābūnī feels this understanding will result in the proper worship of God,¹⁰ the very same "worship" that prompted the creation of human beings and *jinn* alike.¹¹

Taught by God the explanation of the Qur'ān,¹² the Prophet assumed the responsibility of interpreting it,¹³ so much so that no Companion would explain the Qur'ān as long as the Prophet was alive.¹⁴

A matter of great importance at this juncture, nevertheless, is whether or not the Prophet did in fact

⁸Badmas 'Lanre Yusuf, "Evolution and Development of Tafsīr," *The Islamic Quarterly* 38:1 (1994): 43; Ilse Lichtenstadter, "Qur'ān and Qur'ān Exegesis," *Humaniora Islamica* 2 (1974) 7.

⁹Mahmūd Shaltut, "al-Qur'ān wa al-Muslimūn," *al-Risāla* 407 (1941): 553.

¹⁰Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ṣābūnī, *al-Tibyān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasat Manāḥil al-'Irfān, 1981) 61.

¹¹al-Qur'ān, 51:57.

¹²al-Qur'ān, 75:19.

¹³Mahmūd Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and its Interpreters*, vol.1, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984) 25.

¹⁴Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ushayqir, *Lamaḥāt min Tārīkh al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī, 1988) 245; McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic* 17.

elucidate the entire Qur'ān. According to al-Dhahabī,¹⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah for instance argues affirmatively,¹⁶ while al-Suyūṭī is content that the Prophet did not and was not obliged to explain the entire Qur'ān.¹⁷ As outlined by al-Dhahabī,¹⁸ it appears that, both sides of the controversy have strong arguments. But although he refutes most of them, the reality is that the traceable Traditions regarding prophetic exegesis are limited in number,¹⁹ particularly the authentic ones. This clearly means a partial interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Prophet. Al-Suyūṭī cites what he considers authentic Traditions on Prophetic exegesis at the end of his *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*.²⁰ Al-Dhahabī further observed that the differences among the Companions (Ṣaḥāba) regarding some verses are a strong indication that the Prophet did not explain the entire Qur'ān.²¹

¹⁵Muḥammad Husayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, vol.1 (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1961) 49.

¹⁶Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddima fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* (Damascus: Maṭba'at al-Taraqqī, 1936) 5.

¹⁷al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol.2, 174-175.

¹⁸al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.1, 49-53.

¹⁹Fred Leemhuis, "Origins and Early Development of the Tafsīr Tradition," *Approaches to the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 14; Khālīd 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Akk, *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr wa Qawā'iduh* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1986) 32; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol.2, 179.

²⁰al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol.2, 191ff.

²¹al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.1, 54.

Why a huge portion of the Qur'ān was left unexplained by the Prophet is yet another intriguing question. Al-Suyūṭī maintains that since the Qur'ān was sent down to be investigated and pondered (*wa la'allahum yatafakkarūn*), the injunction about the interpretation was not meant to cover each and every verse.²² Again, as God reserves knowledge of some parts of the Qur'ān to Himself,²³ the Prophet is spared the task of explaining the whole Qur'ān.

This point is reflected in Ibn 'Abbās' typology of interpretation, a) a category known by the Arabs in their speech; b) a category no one could be excused for not knowing it; c) a category which only scholars know; and d) a category which only God knows.²⁴

Furthermore, Muslims quite often use of Q.4:83 -- which says "the proper investigators among them would have known it"-- to establish how it is permissible for some people to investigate and deduce meanings and principles from the Qur'ān.²⁵ Al-Mawardī even goes as far as considering it

²²al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol.2, 174-175.

²³al-Qur'ān, 3:7, This notion is only valid when one stops at *illā Allāh*.

²⁴Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Zarkashī. *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol.2, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1988) 181.

²⁵al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol.2, 179; Maḥmūd Basyūnī Fawda, *Nash'at al-Tafsīr wa Manāhijuh fī Daw' al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyya* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Amāna, 1986) 167.

obligatory.²⁶ If some meanings were left for the people to discover, then, it is obvious that the Prophet did not give a complete interpretation of the Qur'ān.

Of course, it might also be argued that the permission or the obligation to interpret the Qur'ān Q.4:83 only referred to meanings and principles that would be required as a result of later contingencies, and which were actually carried out by some prominent scholars, such as the four jurists, namely, Abū Ḥanīfah al-Nu'mān, Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, Mālik ibn Anas and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal.

In any case, it is hard to determine why the Prophet left some parts of the Qur'ān unexplained, since the absence of a complete interpretation remains a glaring fact in the few relevant Traditions.²⁷

A critical look at the Qur'ānic interpretation undertaken by persons other than the Prophet seems important. The verse "and We have sent down unto thee (also) the message [The Qur'ān]; that thou mayest explain clearly to [people] what is sent for them, and that they may give thought,"²⁸ indicates that interpretation was a duty of the Prophet. But although he interpreted the Qur'ān, he for some reasons covered only a small portion of it. It is interesting how this particular

²⁶al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol.2, 179.

²⁷al-Suyūtī, *al-Itqān*, vol.2, 174. For more, see "Kitāb al-Tafsīr" in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.

²⁸al-Qur'ān, 16:44.

verse is used to support opposing views. Ibn Taymiyya, for instance, uses this verse to back up his argument that the Prophet explained the entire Qur'ān, while al-Suyūṭī uses it to support the exact opposite. Ibn Taymiyya's position, as al-Dhahabī points out,²⁹ seems extreme and cannot in practice be considered in the absence of a complete interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Prophet. This is why we take al-Dhahbī's own comments-- although he was not necessarily in support of this argument-- with scepticism. Ibn Taymiyya's account in his *Muqaddima* remains unclear as far as the question of a complete interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Prophet is concerned.³⁰

We, on the other hand, construe the same verse more moderately, in the sense that it merely establishes the necessity of interpretation, or the need to help people understand and to ponder the Qur'ān through interpretation. This justifies the interpretation of the Qur'ān at least by certain people after the Prophet. If the elucidation of the Qur'ān by the Prophet was incomplete, it has to be assumed by some people so that the meanings and wisdoms behind many verses may be understood properly. Again, the continuation of this task by some people is inevitable "because the Qur'ān was sent down as a proof [*ḥujjah*] against humankind. If *tafsīr* is not allowed [for some people], then the proof would not be

²⁹al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.1, 49.

³⁰Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima*, 5.

decisive."³¹ Hence the immediate take-over of the interpretation by some Companions,³² who not only answered questions regarding the Qur'ān, but also invited them in a way of challenge.³³

As realistic as it may have been, interpretation was resented and rejected by many.³⁴ The basis of this resentment was the Tradition on the authority of the Prophet that "He who says [something] about the Qur'ān according to his personal opinion, even if he is correct, has made a mistake." According to other narrations, "... he should prepare to take his seat in hell-fire."³⁵ This clearly means exegesis based on personal opinion (*al-Tafsīr bi al-Ra'y*) was unacceptable, whereas exegesis on the authority of the Prophet (*al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*) was accepted.

However, the Prophet had once approved the use of personal opinion in judgement and leadership on condition that the question at stake had first to be sought in both the Qur'ān and the Tradition. This was when he was sending Mu'ādh

³¹Ayoub, *The Qur'ān*, vol.1, 24, citing al-Zarkashī.

³²M.O.A. Abdul, "The Historical Development of Tafsīr," *Islamic Culture* 50:3 (1976): 142.

³³Ayoub, *The Qur'ān*, vol.1, 22-23.

³⁴Gatje, *The Qur'ān* 32.

³⁵Muhammad ibn 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, vol.4, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1983) 368-369.

ibn Jabal to Yaman.³⁶ Since judgement and leadership were to be based on the Qur'ān,³⁷ they were inseparable. So, to approve personal opinion in judgement is equally to approve it in the Qur'ān, especially, since Mu'ādh passed not only as a judge but, most importantly, as a religious leader. Teaching the Qur'ān would certainly be part of his duty; but, as mentioned earlier, he and the other Companions never heard the Prophet explain the entire Qur'ān. Therefore, there might have been situations where Mu'ādh had to use his opinion regarding the Qur'ān.

Later, scholars took *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* to include exegesis on the authority of the Prophet, the Companions and their Followers. This type of exegesis was not without personal opinion.³⁸ On the authority of Ibn Abī Malīka, "I have seen Mujāhid asking Ibn 'Abbās for interpretation of the Qur'ān with his slates (*Alwāḥ*), and Ibn 'Abbās telling him "write," until he asked him for the whole interpretation."³⁹ This Tradition suggests that not only did some of the Companions or those who followed them explain the entire Qur'ān, but also it was fully committed to writing. However, what it certainly did not suggest is whether or not all that

³⁶Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad*, vol.5, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1980) 230h.

³⁷al-Qur'ān, 5:48, 49.

³⁸al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.1, 99.

³⁹Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol.1, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1986) 31.

Ibn 'Abbās dictated to Mujāhid was on the authority of the Prophet. Furthermore, a complete exegesis ascribed to Ibn 'Abbās but actually compiled by Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Fīrūzābādī is *Tanwīr al-Miqbās min Tafsīr ibn 'Abbās*. This, and other works of some *Tābi'ūn* (Followers) were categorised as *Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* even though they consisted of the personal opinions of the authors in addition to Tradition on the authority of the Prophet.⁴⁰ All these suggest the inevitability of including additional material in *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* in Qur'ānic interpretation.

Our discussion above is intended to establish the thesis that Qur'ānic interpretation is necessary for the Prophet and, after him, for "some people", particularly with every succeeding generation.

Inasmuch as the interpretation of the Qur'ān was met with great reservation, who should be permitted to do it was also not without disagreement. According to al-Zarkashī, some scholars hold the view that with proper knowledge in Islam and good conduct, one is allowed to interpret the Qur'ān. Probably to substantiate this view, al-Zarkashī quotes Ibn 'Abbās's categorization of interpretation into four.⁴¹ That Tradition makes it clear that the Qur'ān, by nature, is knowable to people at different levels; and so the scholars, better

⁴⁰al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.1, 99.

⁴¹See above, page 10, note 24; al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān*, vol.2, 181.

equiped to know it more than the rest, are qualified to interpret it.

Significant indeed is the observation made by Bint al-Shāṭi' that a demarcation line ought to be drawn between understanding or trying to understand the Qur'ān and interpreting it. If the former is permitted to everyone--scholars and illiterates, Muslims and non-Muslims-- the latter is a prerogative and responsibility of expert scholars.⁴² This was following Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd's intention to escape her criticism by changing the title of his book compiled, from his previously published articles, to *al-Qur'ān: Muḥāwala li Fahm 'Aṣrī* (The Qur'ān: an attempt at a modern understanding).⁴³

However, being a scholar is too general a term to be accepted without qualification. Muslim scholars have identified specific disciplines to be demanded of an interpreter, without which his interpretation will be unsatisfactory. While Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd considered himself a scholar, Bint al-Shāṭi' may have felt that he lacked some of the disciplines.

Some of the important disciplines al-Suyūṭī offered as prerequisites to interpretation include the Arabic language: knowledge of synonyms, Arabic grammar, morphology, and the sciences of Arabic rhetorics. Deep --not superficial--

⁴²'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān (Bint al-Shāṭi'), *al-Qur'ān wa al-Tafsīr al-'Aṣrī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1970) 48.

⁴³Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Qur'ān*, 45.

knowledge of these disciplines is essential if scholarly justice is to be done to the Qur'ānic text. Equally important, too, are principles of jurisprudence, Sciences of Tradition and circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*).⁴⁴ Furthermore, an interpreter should possess the divine gift of knowledge (*'Ilm al-Mawhiba*), acquired through piety and practical application of one's knowledge. It may be observed that this was devised as a mechanism to control the interpretation of the Qur'ān, at least in principle, because, "He who interprets [The Qur'ān] without these disciplines becomes an interpreter with a forbidden opinion." So declares al-Suyūṭī.⁴⁵

From the above, it would appear that early Muslim scholars perceived Qur'ānic interpretation to be purely "religious", particularly when a principle such as sound faith (*ṣiḥḥat al-i'tiqād*) was cited as the foremost requirement of an interpreter.⁴⁶ This presumes the rejection of interpretations given by members of certain Muslim sects, such as Mu'tazila and Shī'a, not to mention non-Muslims, in view of the latter's critical and analytical approach to the Qur'ān.⁴⁷

⁴⁴al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol.2, 180-181.

⁴⁵al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol.2, 181.

⁴⁶Fawda, *Nash'at al-Tafsīr* 44.

⁴⁷Andrew Rippin, "The Qur'ān as Literature: Perils, Pitfalls and Prospects," *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin* 10:1 (1983): 41; McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic* 30-31.

Justifiable as it may appear to Muslims, this attitude is likely to end in the suppression of the academic aspect of the Qur'ānic interpretation, even though the religious aspect remains basic. Therefore, if the interpretation of the Qur'ān is to be approached both religiously and academically, some conditions --such as sound faith-- ought to be relaxed.

MODERN INTERPRETATION

In his *al-Tibyān*, al-Ṣābūnī lists a few modern Muslim works on exegesis.⁴⁸ According to Yusuf, they were cited either because the approaches used by the authors were modern, or merely because the exegetical spirit with which these works were undertaken is contemporary.⁴⁹ This section is basically devoted to explore the former, because it is not without controversies yet to be resolved. This is not to imply that the approaches adopted by the classical exegetes, by contrast, have all been approved by every-body. Despite his phenomenal contribution, al-Rāzī, for example, was criticized for his approach by some scholars. "*Fīhi kullu shay' illā al-tafsīr*" (It contains everything except exegesis); that was a remark aimed at derogating al-Rāzī's *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* by some scholars.⁵⁰ Quite clearly, al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf* was

⁴⁸al-Ṣābūnī, *al-Tibyān* 198.

⁴⁹Yusuf, *Evolution* 43.

⁵⁰al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.1, 294.

also not well received by all.⁵¹

Al-Dhahabī provides four approaches to modern Muslim exegesis, namely, 1) the sectarian approach; 2) the scientific approach; 3) the heretical approach; and 4) the social and literary approach.⁵²

THE SECTARIAN APPROACH

It should be succinctly mentioned that, although considered modern, the exegetes heavily depended on their classical counterparts,⁵³ and some of the modern approaches are deeply linked with the classical ones.⁵⁴ In fact, seeds of sectarianism in Qur'ānic exegesis can be traced to the time of the *Tābi'ūn* (The Followers of the Companions), such as Qatāda ibn Da'āma and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī who were both seriously involved in discussions about free-will and predestination.⁵⁵ However, this tendency entered exegesis during the period of collection and its aftermath. Al-Rāzī, Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Rummānī, al-Jubbā'ī, al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn 'Arabī and al-Ṭabarsī were some of the representatives of such sectarianism before the modern

⁵¹al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.1, 436-439.

⁵²al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.3, 162.

⁵³J.J.G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1974) 17; al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.3, 162.

⁵⁴Ignaz Goldziher, *Madhāhib al-Tafsīr al-Islāmī*, trans. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm al-Najjār. (Beirut: Dār Iqra', 1983) 3.

⁵⁵al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.1, 131.

period, and in fact, the majority of whom -if not all- were rejected in one way or the other.⁵⁶

The modern period has also witnessed this sectarianism in exegesis, probably as a continuation of the previous centuries. The exegetical contribution of 'Abduh's school, despite its other approaches, represents modern *Sunni* exegesis. Modern Shī'i exegeses include Sultān Muḥammad al-Khurāsānī's *Bayān al-Sa'āda fī Maqāmāt al-'Ibāda*, Muḥammad Jawād al-Najafī's *Ālā' al-Raḥmān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, and the most recent and important, *al-Mīzān* by al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī. *Hamayān al-Zād ilā Dār al-Ma'ād* is said to have been written by the Khārijite Yūsuf Itḥfayyish.⁵⁷ Some even believe in the existence of neo-Mu'tazilism in 'Abduh and Shī'i Imāmi schools.⁵⁸

Like the classical ones, the modern exegeses based on this kind of approach were condemned by some orthodox scholars.⁵⁹ The rejection of this approach and of these exegeses was basically religious. It seems understandable given the fact that, the Qur'ān is principally a religious Book. Even on these very grounds, the intentions of the authors could hardly be proven negative as far as service to

⁵⁶al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.1, 146-148.

⁵⁷al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.3, 187.

⁵⁸Bahā' al-Dīn Khurramshāhī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Tafāsīr al-Ḥadītha* (Beirut: Dār al-Rawḍa, 1991) 17.

⁵⁹Mahmūd Shaltūt, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 2nd ed., (Cairo: Dār al-Qalam, n.d.) 17-18.

the Holy Book is concerned. This is not to justify their position and certainly, however, not to deny any scholarly value the exegeses might contain.

Not inspired by modern elements, the origins of sectarian exegesis were deeply rooted in the earlier centuries of Islamic civilization.⁶⁰It is therefore envisaged that the sectarian approach will continue as long as the Islamic sects exist.

THE SOCIAL AND LITERARY APPROACH

Another approach considered modern, that may trace its roots to the classical exegesis is the social and literary approach. There seems to exist no categorically identified exegesis as social among the classical ones, but social aspects of the Qur'ān were discussed by the classical exegetes, particularly those verses with direct social implications, such as Q.4:35 and Q.5:8. This approach in the modern era was clearly fuelled by modern elements. The exposure of Muslims to Western culture, which was accused of corruption and lack of morality, very much bothered some of the modern Muslim reformists.⁶¹The situation of Muslims after colonization was thought of as having deteriorated politically, religiously, intellectually and of course, socially. Consequently, the exegetes were among the reformists

⁶⁰Goldziher, *Madhāhib* 3.

⁶¹Goldziher, *Madhāhib* 348.

calling for a sincere return to the proper understanding of the Qur'ān.⁶²

Those verses that had direct social implications were dealt with at length, and much attention was paid to elucidating the Qur'ān to correct social dilemmas.⁶³

Freedom of women, for instance, was a subject of interest, the interpretation of the verse of polygamy was revisited, and the process of divorce was seriously investigated, all taking on new interpretations. In view of the modern context, polygamy was not only discouraged by the exegetes of Egypt, such as 'Abduh and his students, but it was also seen as Islamically unlawful by their Indian counterparts, under the patronage of Sayyid Amīr 'Alī.⁶⁴

On the other hand, Qāsim Amīn had championed the issue of freedom of women in Egypt. He argued forcefully to liberate Muslim women from their situation, but Luṭfī al-Sayyid led the battle to a successful conclusion with the help of some women.⁶⁵ Muḥammad 'Abduh, with his disciple Rashīd Riḍā, was again an advocate for the equality and freedom of women, claiming -- apologetically -- that even Europe comes next to

⁶²Goldziher, *Madhāhib* 353.

⁶³'Iffat Muḥammad al-Sharqāwī, *al-Fikr al-Dīnī fī Muwājahat al-'Aṣr* (Beirut: Dār al-'Awda, 1979) 228.

⁶⁴Goldziher, *Madhāhib* 388.

⁶⁵al-Sharqāwī, *al-Fikr* 230-231.

Islam in its respect for women.⁶⁶

In addition, the modern exegetes were worried about the moral decay in Muslim societies. They felt that Muslims had turned away from Qur'ānic guidance, which resulted in their current conditions.⁶⁷ Al-Afghānī's articles in *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā* were widely influential in their social implications related to the Qur'ān, and were constantly urging return to the Qur'ān for spiritual and moral purification.⁶⁸ His friend and disciple, Muḥammad 'Abduh, treated the moral issues in the Qur'ān to a far greater extent.⁶⁹ Other Modern exegetes who addressed social issues include Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī,⁷⁰ Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī, Muḥammad Ḥijāzī and Maḥmūd Shaltūt.⁷¹

The literary approach may also have existed earlier, but not until the time of Muḥammad 'Abduh did it take a new shape, only to reach its height through the contribution of scholars such as Sayyid Quṭb and Bint al-Shāṭi'. In fact their contribution revealed new secrets of the Qur'ānic literary treasure which, in turn, enhanced the understanding of the

⁶⁶al-Sharqāwī, *al-Fikr* 233.

⁶⁷al-Sharqāwī, *al-Fikr* 271.

⁶⁸Khurramshāhī, *al-Tafsīr* 19; al-Sharqāwī, *al-Fikr* 271.

⁶⁹al-Sharqāwī, *al-Fikr* 272.

⁷⁰al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.3, 264.

⁷¹al-Sharqāwī, *al-Fikr* 273.

inimitability (*I'jāz*) of the Qur'ān,⁷² an idea they may not have intended. Certainly, however, they both intended literary treatment of the Qur'ān.⁷³

At first, in his *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān*, Sayyid Quṭb consciously tried to discuss the artistic and rhetorical implications of the Qur'ān. This was an idea to be employed later in his exegesis *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. He began his study in the former book, about which he said "I have begun this research with the Qur'ān as the basic reference, in order to gather the artistic and rhetorical forms from the Qur'ān".⁷⁴

It could be noted that Muḥammad 'Abduh and his student Rashīd Riḍā have also approached the Qur'ān literarily, but the like of Sayyid Quṭb's style is yet to be produced. Not only did he try to point out the literary features, but also, he used literary language and expressions to convey them. His book of exegesis could indeed be used as an Arabic literature text book. However, this literary master-piece did not lose its significance as far as exegesis is concerned.

Conspicuous among other modern exegetes by her philological method is 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān (Bint al-Shāṭi'). Her incredibly innovative method in the Qur'ānic exegesis has

⁷²*al-Sharqāwī, al-Fikr* 304.

⁷³Sayyid Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1984) 9; Issa J. Boullata, "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shāṭi's Method," *The Muslim World* 64.2 (1974): 111.

⁷⁴Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr* 9.

won her many adherents,⁷⁵ "although founded on a classical precept" as stated by Boullata.⁷⁶ The principles of her method are summarised in the following four:

- 1) Objective treatment of what is to be understood of the Qur'ān;
- 2) To understand the Qur'ānic notion, circumstances of time and places may be known;
- 3) The original linguistic meanings of the words must be sought in Arabic before the Qur'ān is properly understood; and
- 4) The text in its Qur'ānic settings should be studied, both the letter and the spirit of the text must be considered.⁷⁷

Unlike the earlier exegetes, Bint al-Shāṭi' has systematically put this method into practice and successfully demonstrated it in her *al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, in which she only treated a few short suras.⁷⁸

Among the findings of her method that won her many adherents is that there are no synonyms in the Qur'ān, for each word is used in a particular context, and conveys a meaning that no other word can do better. Words that are mostly cited as synonymous by some linguists, such as *aqsama* and *ḥalafa* to mean "to take an oath" have been differentiated by Bint al-Shāṭi'. *Ni'ma* and *na'īm* to mean "blessing" and, *na'y* and *bu'd* to mean "distance" have all been proven by her

⁷⁵Boullata, *Modern* 104.

⁷⁶Boullata, *Modern* 107.

⁷⁷Boullata, *Modern* 104-105.

⁷⁸Boullata, *Modern* 104.

to be not synonymous.⁷⁹

Unlike the sectarian approach, the social and literary approach did not generally encounter rejection, except on a few of its outcomes, such as polygamy.⁸⁰

THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

Furiously rejected by scholars is the scientific approach to the Qur'ānic interpretation. The rapid development and scientific advancement that took place in the West, following the industrial, social and political revolutions attracted some Muslims in most of the Muslim countries.⁸¹ Witnessing the advancement of the West first-hand, some of the Muslim intelligentsia admitted to the backwardness of their own societies due to the lack of scientific progress. Some exegetes felt the same way, and tried to encourage the Muslims and stimulate them by approaching the Qur'ān through scientific exegesis.⁸² Shaltūt argues that,

⁷⁹Boullata, *Modern* 109-110.

⁸⁰Goldziher, *Madhāhib* 388.

⁸¹Khurramshāhī, *al-Tafsīr* 98.

⁸²Muhammad 'Aṭā' al-Sīd, "The Hermeneutical Problem of the Qur'ān in Islamic History," (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Temple University, 1975) 334.

They explained the Qur'ān on the basis of modern scientific theories and applied its verses to whatever they found in the principles of natural sciences, thinking that it is a respect for the Qur'ān or a promotion of Islam through noble calls.⁸³

The Qur'ān, as argued by the proponents of the scientific approach, does not only contain all kinds of scientific theories with the verse in Q.6:38 "Nothing have We omitted from the Book", but also, that science can make the Qur'ān transparent.⁸⁴ Shaltūt feels this verse is being twisted only to suit their purpose of new interpretation.⁸⁵ They also found grounds for this approach through the verse Q.41:53 "Soon will We show them Our signs in the (furthest) regions of the earth and in their souls".⁸⁶ Consequently, they felt that "The scientist with all his discoveries is only writing footnotes to the Holy Book."⁸⁷

The first book geared to the scientific trend is said to be Muḥammad Aḥmad al-Samarqandī's *Kashf al-Asrār al-Nūrāniyya fī mā Yata'allaqu bi al-Ajrām al-Samāwiyya wa al-Arḍiyya wa al-Ḥayawānāt wa al-Nabātāt wa al-Jawāhir al-Ma'diniyya*. This was followed by *Ṭabā'i' al-Istibdād wa Maṣāri' al-Isti'bād*, by

⁸³Mahmūd Shaltūt, "al-Qur'ān wa al-Muslimūn" *al-Risāla* 408 (1941): 580.

⁸⁴J.M.S. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation (1880-1960)* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1968) 89.

⁸⁵Shaltūt, *al-Qur'ān* 580.

⁸⁶Aḥmad al-Sharbāsī, *Qiṣṣat al-Tafsīr* (Cairo: Dār al-Qalam, 1962) 124.

⁸⁷al-Sīd, *The Hermeneutical* 332.

'Abd al-Rahmān al-Kawākibī. Other books are Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rāfi'ī's *I'jāz al-Qur'ān*; 'Abd al-'Azīz Bāsha Ismā'īl's *al-Islām wa al-Ṭibb al-Ḥadīth*; and the most glaring, *al-Jawāhir*, by Tanṭāwī Jawharī. Other authors with this inclination include 'Abd Allāh Bāsha Fikrī, Ḥanafī Aḥmad, 'Abd al-Razzāq Nawfal and Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd.⁸⁸

In fact, this approach did not go unchallenged, for it is one of the most controversial approaches that provoked scholars in the history of modern Muslim Qur'ānic exegesis. Many scholars have indeed expressed their discontent with it, such as Maḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī. He particularly targeted 'Abd al-'Azīz Ismā'īl.⁸⁹ In the second part of his article entitled "*al-Qur'ān wa al-Muslimūn*" (The Qur'ān and the Muslims), Shaltūt strongly condemned this kind of approach and severely attacked those exegetes who adopted it,⁹⁰ in spite of his radical ideas about making the Qur'ān understandable and reconciling it to modern society.⁹¹ Also, Amīn al-Khūli

⁸⁸al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.3, 163; al-Sharbāṣī, *Qiṣṣat* 127; al-Sīd, *The Hermeneutical* 333-334; Baljon, *Modern* 89; and al-Sharqāwī, *al-Fikr* 423-427.

⁸⁹al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.3, 185.

⁹⁰Shaltūt, *al-Qur'ān* 581.

⁹¹Midhat David Abraham, "Maḥmūd Shaltūt (1893-1963), A Muslim Reformist: His Life, Works and Religious Thought," (Unpublished Phd.Dissertation, The Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1976) 132.

has expressed his objection to this approach,⁹²so did Bint al-Shāṭi' in her *al-Qur'ān wa al-Tafsīr al-'Aṣrī* (The Qur'ān and Modern Exegesis). She relentlessly directed her reservations to Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd not only for his scientific tendencies, but possibly also, for what some scholars called "a heretic" approach.⁹³

The Qur'ān is not a book of science, so they argued, and its object is absolutely religious and not scientific.⁹⁴ Imposing scientific theories upon the Qur'ān will

jeopardise faith in the veracity of the Qur'ān, for scientific theories are never finished and what is proved true today could turn out to be false tomorrow. To associate the Qur'ān with such unstable theories is to pave [the] way for bigger gaps and [a] crisis of understanding.⁹⁵

This idea, very close indeed in wording, is equally expressed by Shaltūt in his *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*.⁹⁶

However, Baljon sees the scientific approach as a kind of apologetics, bound to be engaged in by the exegetes when interpreting some "Qur'ānic notions appropriate to the thought-world of to-day".⁹⁷

As a matter of fact, the scientific approach is solely a

⁹²al-Sharqāwī, *al-Fikr* 425.

⁹³Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Qur'ān* 8; 52.

⁹⁴Shaltūt, *al-Qur'ān*, 581; al-Sharqāwī, *al-Fikr* 425.

⁹⁵al-Sīd, *The Hermeneutical* 335.

⁹⁶Shaltūt, *Tafsīr* 21.

⁹⁷Baljon, *Modern* 89-91.

modern phenomenon in the history of Qur'ānic exegesis. It is one of the typical characteristics of modern exegesis. Even though it has been strongly rejected by many scholars, others have aggressively called for pursuing it.

THE HERETICAL APPROACH

The modern period has given birth to yet another peculiar kind of exegesis, controversial enough to be considered by orthodox Muslims as "heresy and heterodoxy" (*al-ilhād*). This is because, as they believe, some people approach the Qur'ān without proper knowledge of either Arabic or religion, but interpret it according to their own whim, without the slightest regard for the Traditions. Further, some of them approach the Qur'ān with a mixture of preconceived ideas, in the belief that they are doing justice to scholarship.⁹⁸ Such are the charges laid against them by the orthodox scholars.

This particular approach was triggered partly by the strong desire for novelty and popularity,⁹⁹ and partly by the desire for applying textual criticism and historicity, only to be rejected by the orthodox scholars.¹⁰⁰

One scholar, picked and labeled a heretic by al-Dhahabī

⁹⁸al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.3, 189.

⁹⁹al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.3, 190. A typical example is Hāmid Muhaysin in his "al-Qur'ān wa al-Mufasssīrūn" *al-Īmān* 2:2 (1354): 54-57, where he deliberately attempted to offer different interpretations by saying "We have to take a second look at the verse."

¹⁰⁰McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic* 30-31.

is Hāmid Muḥaysin.¹⁰¹ In his article "al-Qur'ān wa al-Mufasssirūn", Muḥaysin accuses Muslim exegetes, classical and modern alike, of short-sightedness, lack of openness and brevity in dealing with the Qur'ān -- albeit acknowledging their sincerity.¹⁰² He then provides his own unique interpretation following his sarcastic refutation of some exegeses, such as al-Nasafī.¹⁰³ Muḥaysin was out to introduce radical changes to widely accepted Traditions.¹⁰⁴ For instance, the whole story of Prophet Ayyūb in the Qur'ān is manipulated and changed considerably, which would be unnecessary were there no hidden agenda, that Ayyūb was not physically ill, but rather was only worried about lack of belief on the part of his people. For that matter, *urkuḍ bi-rijlika* (strike with thy foot) Q.38:42, was changed to "Be steadfast and firm".¹⁰⁵

As mentioned earlier, Bint al-Shāṭi's arguments against Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd were based on this kind of approach combined with scientific tendencies. Most of Maḥmūd's interpretations eliciting Bint al-Shāṭi's critical remarks were of this sort. *Na'layka* (thy shoes) in Q.20:12 was

¹⁰¹al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.3, 189. He actually did not provide his name, probably, to conceal his identity.

¹⁰²Hāmid Muḥaysin, "al-Qur'ān wa al-Mufasssirūn," *al-Īmān* 2:2 (1354) 55.

¹⁰³Muḥaysin, *al-Qur'ān* 56.

¹⁰⁴At least, among Muslims.

¹⁰⁵al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.3, 190-191.

interpreted as soul and body,¹⁰⁶ and the spider's web, cited as a "flimsiest home" Q.29:41, was interpreted as being strong.¹⁰⁷

However heretical these exegetes might be considered, it may be that they were sincere, and should therefore be given some credit. Sincerity, after all, is critical as far as the final reward is concerned, even if it leads to a wrong act.¹⁰⁸

It seems, however that, if a modern exegesis is to gain adherents, it needs to be rooted in earlier ones, such as the social and literary approach. Although widely condemned in the classical period, the sectarian approach nonetheless seems to flourish in the modern era. Here, the linkage of the modern to the classical times, or lack thereof, tends to have a determining effect upon how prevalent the sectarian approach becomes.

Overwhelmingly rejected, as shown above, the scientific approach is solely a modern phenomenon in the history of Qur'anic exegesis, which could be one reason for its rejection. Although less convincing, al-Dhahabī was critical of Muḥammad 'Abduh's inclination to scientific tendencies on the grounds that the Arabs in the earliest centuries were not

¹⁰⁶Bint al-Shāṭi', *al-Qur'ān* 52.

¹⁰⁷Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd, *al-Qur'ān: Muḥāwala li Fahm 'Aṣrī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1981) 203.

¹⁰⁸al-Zabīdī, *Mukhtaṣar*, vol.1, 21.

familiar with or did not have clues to that kind of interpretation.¹⁰⁹ This attitude indicates that the Qur'ān should at all times be understood in the manner of the pioneers. But that would be rather unfair to subsequent generations with respect to certain verses.

Without necessarily supporting the scientific approach, one may mention at this juncture that the Qur'ān is a guidance to all human beings (Q.2:185), and all generations: past, present and future.¹¹⁰ In view of this understanding, some parts of the Qur'ān¹¹¹ are justifiable in the context of any given generation. This, and what we would call "generational contextuality" should not necessarily lead to a negation of other types of understanding; nor should they by any means make any particular understanding absolute. This opinion, however, holds only in the absence of Prophetic interpretation.

To put this thesis in clearer perspective, one or two examples may suffice. Firstly, God says in the Qur'ān (Q.10:61),

In whatever business thou mayest be, and whatever portion thou mayest be reciting from the Qur'ān, and whatever deed ye (mankind) may be doing, We are Witness thereof when ye are deeply engrossed therein. Nor is hidden from the Lord (so much as) the weight of an atom on the earth or in heaven.

¹⁰⁹al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.3, 233.

¹¹⁰al-Sharbāṣī, *Qiṣṣat* 157.

¹¹¹Because some parts are not subject to different interpretations, such as Q.2:21; Q.2:43.

And not the smallest and not the greatest of these things but are recorded in a clear record.

This verse aims at establishing the fact that God knows and witnesses everything, and that nothing escapes His surveillance. *Dharra* is mentioned as an example of something small. What the earliest Muslims thought or knew as *dharra* might have meant something different from what it did to subsequent generations. Al-Ṭabarī, for instance, explains it as *namla ṣaghīra* (small ant),¹¹² and as al-Alūsī does not disagree with that, he offers another interpretation; that *Dharra* is a weightless thing and "signifies the motes that are seen in rays of the sun that enter through an aperture."¹¹³ In modern times, *dharra* is generally interpreted as an atom.¹¹⁴ All these do not, however, suggest that any of the meanings is incorrect, particularly when they all help clarify the point. Furthermore, the earliest generation might not have had the physical evidence for anything smaller than *dharra*, while the later generations did. Therefore, to know that there is something "smaller" yet than the atom in the modern context --which may be different from the earlier understanding-- and

¹¹²al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, vol.11, 90-91.

¹¹³Maḥmūd al-Alūsī, *Rūh al-Ma'ānī*, vol.11, (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1980) 145. This English translation of the definition is adapted from "Lane's Arabic-English Lexicon," vols.3-4, 957.

¹¹⁴Yūsuf Khayyāt, *Mu'jam al-Muṣṭalahāt al-'Ilmiyya wa al-Fanniyya*, vol.7, (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl and Dār Lisān al-'Arab, 1988) 250-251.

use it to clarify this verse should not be condemnatory.

Secondly, the Qur'ān says in the Qur'ān (Q.6:125),

Those whom Allah willeth to guide, He openeth their breast to Islam; and those whom He willeth to leave straying, He maketh their breast close and constricted, as if they had to climb up to the skies: thus doth Allah lay abomination on those who refuse to believe.

What is interesting about this verse is the way Muslims should understand how it is difficult to breathe as one gains height.¹¹⁵ Whichever way that example was construed by the earliest generation, it is obvious that modern ones are in a position to experience it directly, given their exposure to technological developments, and scientific advancements. The value of "generational contextuality" in shedding more --not better-- light on semantic points should not be underestimated.

Lastly, God is the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds, Q.1:2 (*Rabb al-'ālamīn*). Worlds are often interpreted as "worlds of human beings", "worlds of jinn",¹¹⁶ "worlds of animals", "worlds of plants" and "worlds of planets".¹¹⁷ All these only underscore God's sovereignty. Discovery of a new galaxy or even a new planet, for example, if positively proved, and used to interpret *'ālamīn*, will only enhance the

¹¹⁵For classical interpretation, see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, vol.8, 22-23; for modern, see Sayyid Qutb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, vol.3, (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1988) 1203.

¹¹⁶al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, vol.1, 48-49.

¹¹⁷al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.1, 67.

meaning of "worlds" and magnify God's sovereignty. This is what we mean by generational contextuality, which (if modern interpreters consider with regard to some verses) may not be inappropriate. What they should probably not be claiming is that the Qur'ān is meant to teach us scientific theories, and to tell us about technological improvements and modern discoveries.

Furthermore, the heretical approach, while consistently opposed, was also another new phenomenon. This is not to say that there has never been a strange interpretation in classical exegesis that manipulated and corrupted words.¹¹⁸ But the fact of the matter is, there is no connection between the so-called modern heretical exegeses and their predecessors in regard to approach. Perhaps, an exegesis with a modern approach and completely new elements, that would be widely accepted, is yet to be produced.

NECESSITY OF MODERN INTERPRETATION

As stated earlier, the verse Q.16:44, "and We have sent down unto thee (also) the message [The Qur'ān]; that thou mayest explain clearly to [people] what is sent for them, and that they may give thought", has been variously used in

¹¹⁸For instance, Ibn 'Arabī, in a work, probably ascribed to him by his disciple, al-Kāshānī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, has a lot of strange interpretations and was equally criticized by others.

support of opposing theories on the interpretation of the Qur'ān. One may easily see what Ibn Taymiyya's affirmative position implies, namely, that new interpretation is superfluous. And with that arises the question of the nonexistence of a complete prophetic interpretation of the Qur'ān. Al-Suyūṭī's contrasting opinion on the other hand, was aimed at revealing an important wisdom behind the revelation, namely, pondering the Book.¹¹⁹

The meeting point between these two conflicting opinions, adopted by this study and deduced from the verse, is that the Qur'ān must be both explained and understood, regardless of whether or not that was the prerogative of the Prophet, as indicated by the wording of the verse. This need for explanation legitimately makes the modern interpretation of the Qur'ān valid, if all the requirements of scholarship are fulfilled. Here, the challenge would, therefore, remain the definition of a scholar, already discussed above. Religious as the scholarly requirements may appear to be, specialization in Qur'ānic exegesis may be an academic licence for modern interpretation.

In addition, the universal nature of the Qur'ān seems to justify modern interpretation. If the Qur'ān did not address only the Arabs of the Prophet's era but all generations;¹²⁰

¹¹⁹al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol.2, 174-175.

¹²⁰W.C. Smith, "The True Meaning of Scripture: An Empirical Historian's Nonreductionist Interpretation of the Qur'ān," *I.J.M.E.S.* 11.4 (1980): 490.

if the Qur'ān is a guidance not only to earlier generations but to all;¹²¹ and if people of modern times are to be included in the expression "to people" employed in Q.16:44, then all generations and all people must understand it, and understand it properly. Here is how the notion of "generational contextuality" acquires its pertinence. Imposing the earlier generations' understanding of all the verses contained in the Qur'ān on later generations seems unjustifiable. This is not to deny the importance and the role of the early generations as the better source for understanding the Qur'ān.

Al-Dhahabī's critical stance on Muḥammad 'Abduh's inclination towards modern science in his interpretation of the Qur'ān was due to the fact that such interpretation does not correspond with what the early Arabs knew. He states, "Though with noble intention, he sometimes goes beyond what the Arabs were familiar with at the time of revelation."¹²²

This seems to be the prevailing attitude in the Muslim Qur'ānic studies milieu, as argued by Rippin,

This latter way of expressing things [the meaning of the text to the first hearers] has proven especially popular in the study of the Qur'ān, not because of a particular hermeneutical presupposition about the nature of the experience of text, but rather for reasons which are closely aligned to an apologetic approach in Islamic

¹²¹Shaltūt, *al-Qur'ān* 553.

¹²²al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.3, 233.

studies....¹²³

This attitude probably helps to explain why most modern exegeses without roots in the classical era have been rejected. Yet, modern interpretation in the modern context is sometimes inevitable. But to divorce it completely from the earlier interpretation, however, may not prove academically sound.

History has confirmed the fact that, as the generations move further away from the prophetic era, the difficulty in understanding the Qur'ān becomes greater. This makes its exegesis all the more urgent.¹²⁴ The modern era is no exception; and since the urgency has not receded, the task must continue. Since understanding has been the prime factor for both the emergence and the continuity of exegesis, any other factor that will enhance the understanding should be welcomed, as long as it does not contradict the Qur'ān itself and the *Sunna*. Modern interpretation is nothing but an attempt at making the Qur'ān more understandable either for religious or academic purposes.

The changes through which the exegetical undertaking has gone from the Prophet's era to modern times,¹²⁵ normally

¹²³Andrew Rippin, *Approaches to the History of Interpretation*, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 2.

¹²⁴al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.1, 97.

¹²⁵Abdul, *The Historical* 142-145; for more on this subject, see also, Yusuf, *Evolution*; and al-Dhahabi, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.1.

referred to as stages (*marāḥil*), are yet more elements reinforcing modern interpretation. Thus, some of those changes were based on the need to enhance understanding the Qur'ān. For the Qur'ān's meaning--though best known by God-- is "dynamic, rich, creative, continuing complex, deeply intertwined with lives of several hundreds of millions of persons over many centuries and many lands," as observed by Smith.¹²⁶

Finally, Ibn 'Abbās's use of poetic verses, mostly pre-Islamic,¹²⁷ as a means of interpreting the Qur'ān may help justify modern interpretation. This is because he applied to the Qur'ān a "science" readily available to him, as Abdul stated about some *Tabi'ūn* as well.¹²⁸ In other words, he sought to make the Qur'ān more comprehensible through the science of his day. This means that he could have used any other science --if available and pertinent-- for the same purpose. Interestingly, the majority of the poetry he used was undeniably non-Muslim, i.e. pre-Islamic, though this is justifiable and need not count as a defect in his interpretation, because proper understanding was his priority, making the religious affiliation of the sources highly

¹²⁶Smith, *The True* 504.

¹²⁷Issa J. Boullata, "Poetry Citation as Interpretive Illustration in the Qur'ān Exegesis: *Masā'il Nāfi' Ibn al-Azraq*," *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams*, ed. Wael B. Hallaq and Donald P. Little (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1991) 34.

¹²⁸Abdul, *The Historical* 145.

irrelevant.

It may also be countered that Ibn 'Abbās enjoyed certain privileges no other modern person did, for example, Prophetic prayer¹²⁹ and the status of a Companion. This is legitimate, but the issue at stake is not Ibn 'Abbās *vis a vis* the modern scholar; rather, it is a matter of proving the similarities between methods and goals. It may therefore be postulated that, in addition to the traditional explanation, one may seek additional support from any science available in quest of an enhanced understanding of the Qur'ān, so long as it does not contradict the Qur'ān and the Sunna. This is far from "applying" modern sciences to the Qur'ān, a procedure we are sceptical of. By "applying," one presumes that the Qur'ān has to adhere to those sciences in both right and wrong. That would "pave the way for bigger gaps and [a] crisis of understanding" in the Qur'ān, as remarked by 'Aṭā al-Sīd.¹³⁰

In conclusion, it is worth pointing out very simply that some modern exegeses such as *Tafsīr al-Manār* of Rashīd Riḍā, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* of Sayyid Quṭb and *al-Mizān* of al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī have been manifestly useful enough in justifying the need for a modern approach.

COMMUNICATION MODELS AS TOOLS FOR INTERPRETING THE QUR'ĀN ?

Models of communication are defined as "structures of

¹²⁹al-Zabīdī, *Mukhtaṣar*, vols.1-2, 39.

¹³⁰al-Sīd, *The Hermeneutical* 335.

symbols and rules designed to correspond to the relevant points of an existing structure or process,"¹³¹ or "visual or verbal description of processes."¹³² The main function of communication models is to describe a complex process of communication in simplified fashion, by identifying the most important components and the key elements, and by showing the relations between the elements.¹³³

USES OF MODELS

If information and data about a particular reality are disjointed and disorganized, a model may be constructed to serve as organizer. Thus, a model has the feature of bringing together relevant information in organized fashion, and identifying the similarities and possible ways of reconciliation between seemingly contradictory information.¹³⁴ As McQuail puts it, "A model gives a general picture of a range of different particular circumstances".¹³⁵

¹³¹Karl W. Deutsch, "On Communication Models in the Social Sciences," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 16 (1952): 356.

¹³²Joseph A Devito, *The Communication Handbook* (New York: Harper & Row., 1986) 203.

¹³³Denis McQuail, "Models of Communication," *International Encyclopedia of Communication*, vol.3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 36.

¹³⁴Deutsch, *On Communication* 360.

¹³⁵Denis McQuail and Sven Windahl, *Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communication* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1993) 2.

This organizing capacity of a model suggests an explanatory feature as well. For instance, when an unfamiliar and complex process of communication is organized by pulling together all the familiar processes, the explanatory quality becomes apparent. Through a model, predictions may be made which could be put into experimentation and testing in the physical sciences; or they may serve as a "mere explanation" when they are operationally impossible.¹³⁶ Even in the latter scenario, the new facts to be discovered are a useful quality of a model.¹³⁷

From the above, the division of models into structural and functional is clear. The structural models are those set to describe particular structures or phenomena, such as a diagram for a radio set and its components. But when systems and processes are described so as to show the key elements and the relations between them, as well as their influences on one another, the models are referred to as functional.¹³⁸ Models that would be constructed in this study are essentially of the latter category. This is because they are meant to describe the process of communication between God and human beings from its complex and ambiguous picture, to a more simplified and comprehensible fashion. This will include identifying the source, the receiver, the channel and feedback, and will show

¹³⁶Deutsch, *On Communication* 360.

¹³⁷Deutsch, *On Communication* 361.

¹³⁸McQuail, *Communication* 2-3.

the dynamic aspect of the whole process as communication.

Again, the models to be presented here may either be diagrammatical or descriptive. Another type is mathematical, which will not be part of our study.

However, this is not to imply that, models are not without shortcomings. It is argued that models seem to limit the focus of people to a narrow spectrum as compared to the actual process being modeled,¹³⁹ which, without deeper observation, may be misleading. As McQuail observed "They are inevitably incomplete, oversimplified and involve some concealed assumptions," probably the very basic fact, making them receptive to modifications and additions.¹⁴⁰

Now, the Qur'ān itself is a communication from God, which models could be of great help in explaining. More significantly, the Qur'ān has outlined three possible ways by which God communicates with human beings: 1) Inspirational, 2) from behind a veil, and 3) by sending of a messenger (Q.42:51). These are what we call "God-human interactions." They are indeed complex processes, because God and human beings are of different natures (Q.42:11; Q.112:4), and their interaction seems to be a difficult process. But since communication is not confined to speech alone, other forms of

¹³⁹McQuail, *Communication* 3.

¹⁴⁰McQuail, *Communication* 3.

communication,¹⁴¹ such as gestures,¹⁴² could make God-human interaction a possibility, even with the difference in nature. However, the invisibility of God to human beings (Q.6:104), coupled with the difference in nature, make the interaction highly difficult to conceive but not impossible. Hence, there is the need for further explanation, which, among other things could be done with the aid of models.

In addition, Deutsch's insight might help shed light on the use of models in interpreting God-human interaction.

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to both the use of symbols in the process of thinking, and to the problems that arise when symbols are combined into larger configurations or models-particularly-when those are then used as an aid in investigating or forecasting events that occur in the world outside the thinking system.¹⁴³

As to whether or not one may be able to construct models from the Qur'ān, Severin and Tankard have concluded, "Whether we realize it or not, we are using models every time we try systematically to think about, visualize, or discuss any

¹⁴¹Communication is defined as "The transmission or exchange of information, signal messages or data by any means, such as talk (verbal communication), writing (written communication), telephone, telegraph, radio or other channels within a group or directed to specific individuals or groups. Richard Webster, *Webster's New World Dictionary of Media and Communications* (New York: Webster's New World, 1990) 104.

¹⁴²Gesture is defined as "bodily action other than speech that is recognised as being done to express something." "Gesture" *International Encyclopedia of Communications*, 1989 ed. 217.

¹⁴³Deutsch, *On Communication* 356.

structure or process, be it past, present, or future."¹⁴⁴ Explaining God-human interaction according to the Qur'ān is no exception, and, especially with the abundance of exegeses, is not impossible.

However, it should be briefly mentioned that it is not our intention to approach models as theories to be applied to the Qur'ān. We are not engaging in apologetics, as the tone may seem to suggest. Our view is that applying theories to the Qur'ān gives them supremacy over it, which is unacceptable, at least to Muslims. Again, in this way, the Qur'ān would have to submit to those theories under every circumstance, which will seriously jeopardize its central role in the community. What we intend to do, rather, is simply to construct models according to the Qur'ānic verses, in order to enhance understanding of them. We cannot claim perfection, as the models will be based on our own understanding of the process of God-human communication, gained from some authentic sources of exegesis and Tradition. For, "any one is in a position to construct his own models of a given aspect of the communication process".¹⁴⁵ On account of this, models are always open to modifications and additions, a feature that causes them to develop rapidly.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴Werner J. Severin and James W. Tankard Jr., *Communication Theories: Origins, Methods and Uses In The Mass Media* (New York: Longman, 1991) 36.

¹⁴⁵McQuail, *Communication* 3-4.

¹⁴⁶McQuail, *Communication* 14; 16.

As we are of the opinion that communication models can be tools for the interpretation of the Qur'ān, we hope that students of Qur'ānic studies will find avenues for creating other models or for modifying existing ones.

Meanwhile, before the construction of the models, it is necessary to review God's speech and what it tells us about Him as a communicator. This is because, speech is an important aspect of communication, and touching upon God's speech may help explain God-human communication as a whole.

CHAPTER II

GOD'S SPEECH: ITS IMPLICATION TO HIM AS A COMMUNICATOR

It might be helpful first to define speech in human terms before discussing God's speech. As Bouman quotes 'Abd al-Jabbār,

there is no way to the doctrine concerning the speech of Allah (*kalām Allah*) and its qualities, unless there is first the clarification of definition of speech in the visible world.¹

Speech is defined as "a method of getting meaningful responses through the use of audible words and gestures produced by the activity of the human body."² This definition and others indicate not only that speech is one of the characteristics of a human being, but that it is what makes him human. It may however, be performed by non-humans.³ Another theory has it that speech may not necessarily be spoken or listened to.⁴

In fact, speech is always performed to satisfy certain needs. People speak for a variety of reasons, but three theories dominate as far as the function of speech is concerned. According to the first theory, self-expression

¹J. Bouman, *The Doctrine of 'Abd al-Djabbār on the Qur'ān as the Created Word of Allāh* (Overduik uit Verbum: University of Utrecht, 1964) 73.

²Jon Eisenson and Paul H. Boase, *Basic Speech* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975) 1.

³"Speech" *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 28, 1992 ed. 85.

⁴Joseph A. Devito, *The Communication Handbook* (New York: Harper & Row., 1986) 303.

motivates speech.⁵ This is either to express the "desire to relieve the pressure of extreme emotional states or desire to express an intense conviction."⁶ The second theory argues that speech is sometimes intended to communicate for the sake of learning or teaching, or simply to explain something.⁷ The last theory has to do with social adaptation. Quite often, speech is used to harmonize between people's activities in a society or to direct their attention and efforts toward a common goal.⁸ This is commonly used by elites or those in leadership positions.

From the above brief discussion on speech, it is quite apparent that -- Qur'ānic attestations (Q. 2:253; 4:164), Muslim consensus aside⁹-- God, while being non-human, can and should have speech. How this is so will follow, but first let us examine God's Speech.

Before we enter this discussion, it should be recognized that according to the Qur'ān, nothing can be in resemblance to God, (Q.42:11; 112:4). This fundamental dogma is held by all Muslims without exception. In fact, guarding against any

⁵Robert T. Oliver and Rupert L. Cortright, *Effective Speech* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970) 11.

⁶Oliver, *Effective* 12.

⁷Oliver, *Effective* 12-13.

⁸Oliver, *Effective* 13-14.

⁹A.S. Tritton, "The Speech of God," *Studia Islamica* 36, (1972) 7; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Khalq al-Qur'ān Bayna al-Mu'tazila wa Ahl al-Sunna* (Cairo: al-Maktab al-Thaqāfī, 1989) 49.

deviation from it led to much complex debate and disagreements among Muslims. More specifically, createdness of the Qur'ān has long been a point of disagreement, leading even to persecution of some Muslims;¹⁰ but it was nothing but an attempt to safeguard the doctrine of the unity of God.¹¹ It was argued that God is One and Unique in His names and attributes. But this does not mean that the words by which God's attributes are conveyed are exclusive to Him, for some words attributed to God may be used to describe creatures as well, without suggesting any similarities between them, or negating the doctrine of unity of God.¹² For instance, *al-Rahīm* (The Most Merciful) occurred several times in the Qur'ān in reference to God (Q.2:143; 15:49; 36:58), to the Prophet (Q.9:128), and at times, to the believers (Q.48:29). The fact of the matter is, although the same word is used in all cases, the reality of the attribute and its scope are dissimilar among them all.¹³ But contrary to the Jahmiyya's belief, this attribute would be realistically and not metaphorically applicable to them all.¹⁴

¹⁰ 'Uthmān Ibn Sa'īd al-Dārimī, *Radd al-Imām al-Dārimī 'Uthmān Ibn Sa'īd 'alā Bishr al-Mirīsī al-'Anīd* ('Ābidīn: Maṭba'at Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1358) 118.

¹¹ Zuhdī Hasan Jār Allāh, *al-Mu'tazila* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Miṣr, 1947) 79; Bouman, *The Doctrine* 68.

¹² al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 4.

¹³ al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 4.

¹⁴ Montgomery Watt, "Early Discussion about the Qurān," *The Muslim World* 40 (1950): 31.

GOD'S SPEECH

Now, God's speech is understood to be the Holy Qur'ān¹⁵ and other divine Scriptures, such as the Holy Bible.¹⁶ In the Qur'ān, God tells the Prophet "If one amongst the Pagans asks you for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the Word [speech] of Allah" (Q.9:6). Here, God refers to the Qur'ān as His speech even though it is to be heard from the Prophet as the latter recites it.¹⁷ Again, *kalām Allah* in 2:75, is interpreted to mean "Torah" by Ibn Kathīr.¹⁸ Further, Ibn al-Manzūr in his *Lisān al-'Arab al-Muḥīṭ*, refers to the Qur'ān as God's speech and makes all "*kalim Allāh, kalimāt Allāh* and *kalimat Allāh*" synonymous with God's speech.¹⁹ Tritton, on the other hand, argues that despite Muslims' agreement on the Qur'ān being God's speech, he is not convinced that they have demonstrated the relations of the Qur'ān to *kalima*.²⁰

It is intriguing to note that the Qur'ān has been referred to on two occasions as *qawlu rasūlin karīm* "the word

¹⁵Bouman, *The Doctrine* 68; Tritton, "The Speech" 7.

¹⁶Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām*, vol.12 (Rabat: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 1961) 37.

¹⁷Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'*, vol.12, 258-259.

¹⁸Ismā'il Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol.1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1987) 119.

¹⁹Ibn al-Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab al-Muḥīṭ*, vol.5 (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl and Dār Lisān al-'Arab, 1988) 290.

²⁰Tritton, "The speech" 7.

of a most honourable messenger". *Rasūl karīm* in Q.81:19 is the Angel Gabriel, while in Q:69:40 it is the Prophet Muhammad. This may suggest contradiction, which might raise certain suspicions as to the source of the Qur'ān, on the assumption that *qawl* is synonymous with *kalām*.²¹ Remarkable indeed is the argument put forth by Ibn Taymiyya to the effect that the Qur'ān used *rasūl* instead of *malak* and *nabī* for Gabriel and the Prophet Muhammad, respectively, and indicated that both were transmitters and not originators (*munshi'*). In addition, had the Qur'ān been the speech of one, it could not have been that of the other. Therefore, relating the Qur'ān to *rasūl* in either case to indicate authorship is inconceivable and unacceptable.²²

Now, to say that God speaks and therefore has speech is not inappropriate. The Qur'ān clearly states that God spoke, and that He has speech. That is why, on consensus, Muslims agreed on God being a "Speaker" (*Mutakallim*),²³ although, according to some accounts, the Jahmiyya implied and sometimes plainly asserted that God does not speak.²⁴ According to al-

²¹There are different philological opinions with regard to that. See Ibn al-Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol.5, 290.

²²Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'*, vol.12, 265-266.

²³al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 49.

²⁴Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'*, vol.12, 503; Montgomery Watt, "The Political Attitudes of the Mu'tazila," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* --(1963): 39; Wilfred Madelung, "The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Qur'ān," *Orientalia Hispanica* 1 (1974): 506.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī, speech from God is different from that of human beings, who speak with a voice coming from the throat and through the use of parts of the human body.²⁵ This is perhaps what the verse cited earlier (Q.42:11) refers to.

Since God is unique, His speech must be unique, and may not necessarily fall under the definition of human speech. Yet, God's speech being different from human speech does not mean it is not a speech. For the goal of human speech is -- among others things -- to make others understand human intentions. Since there is no better way to do so than by way of speech,²⁶ people coin audible words as representations of the meanings they have in mind.²⁷ This implies that other ways of expressing themselves are possible, and may qualify as speech as well.²⁸

It is not necessary, then, that God should speak in the same fashion as humans do. For, He is *Qādir* (potent), and capable of speaking in any form. This form may be inconceivable to human beings, but that should not deny Him the quality of speaking.²⁹ This is probably why the Mu'tazila did not hesitate to assert that God speaks by creating speech

²⁵Muhammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol.2 (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī, 1970) 315.

²⁶al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān*, vol.2, 315.

²⁷al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 49.

²⁸Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol.1 (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1980) 26.

²⁹al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān*, vol.2, 320.

in a particular body, such as a bush, when He wanted to speak to Prophet Moses.³⁰

In addition,

the reality of speech is determined by the subtle and hidden meaning it refers to. But its other characteristics, such as the sound that occurs as it passes through the throat, interacting with other parts of the mouth, and that it must be heard, are to be excluded in the real meaning of what constitutes speech.³¹

Therefore, to utter a word in order to express one's intention constitutes speech, and so also making a sign.³² For example, a teacher may point at a chair to indicate "sit". However, in the conventional communication study, even though it serves the purpose of speech, this is called a "gesture" and is not defined as speech, as argued also by 'Abd al-Jabbār.³³ Certainly, it is a type of communication.

From the above, it may be noted that it is not impossible for God to speak and to become a speaker. This is not a kind of metaphor, but it is to be taken, rather, realistically, as far as God is concerned.³⁴ The reality of God's speech is reflected in the expression that He used when He spoke of His

³⁰Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'*, vol.12, 503.

³¹al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol.2, 325.

³²al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol.2, 325.

³³"Gesture" *International Encyclopedia of Communications*, vol.2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 217; al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa* ('Ābidīn: Maktabat Wahba, 1965) 529.

³⁴al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān*, vol.2, 314.

speech to Prophet Moses "and to Moses Allah spoke direct" (Q.4:163). Grammatically speaking, *taklīman* is *maf'ūl mutlaq* (absolute object), which is often used to emphasize an action. It would be inappropriate therefore, to use it metaphorically. Hence, the real was intended.

NATURE OF GOD'S SPEECH

Belief in the unity and oneness of God is perhaps the Muslims' foremost doctrine,³⁵ the most important message sent by God. Deviating from this by any other form of belief or act is thought to result in polytheism, the unforgivable sin (Q.4:48; Q.4:116).

For this reason, the unity of God has long been the concern of Muslim theologians. In their efforts to elucidate this theological base of Islam, and to strictly guard against associating anything with God in both belief and action, theologians found themselves debating the nature of the Qur'ān,³⁶ which turned into heated dispute and at times, mortal hatred.³⁷ More specifically, these arguments centred around whether or not the Qur'ān, that speech of God, was created.

³⁵Bouman, *The Doctrine* 67.

³⁶Madelung, "The Origin" 504; Bouman, *The Doctrine* 68.

³⁷Bouman, *The Doctrine* 69.

CREATEDNESS OF THE QUR'ĀN

Doctrines vary among Muslim sects concerning the nature of God's speech and thus, of the Qur'ān, as Ibn Taymiyyah makes clear.³⁸ However, three doctrines predominate as far as createdness of the Qur'ān is concerned. The first holds that it is created; the second that it is uncreated; and the third rejects both.

THE QUR'ĀN AS GOD'S CREATED SPEECH

There is little evidence that the early generation of Muslim theologians had held this doctrine. Therefore the exact period during which it took shape is unknown.³⁹ According to Ibn Taymiyya, the Jahmiyya, whom he considers part of the Mu'tazila, were the patrons of this doctrine.⁴⁰ This was essentially based on their belief that God does not speak⁴¹ and that the Qur'ān consequently must be created.

The first person known to have held this doctrine was Ja'd ibn Dirham, who was reportedly slain for his beliefs by Khālid ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Qasrī, on the day of sacrifice. Khālid, after delivering the sermon, continued;

³⁸Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'*, vol.12, 163.

³⁹Watt, "Early" 28.

⁴⁰Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'*, vol.12, 163.

⁴¹Madelung, "The Origins" 506; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'*, vol.12, 245.

Oh people! go back and make sacrifice, may God accept our sacrifices. For I am going to sacrifice Ja'd ibn Dirham, because, he claims that God did not take Prophet Abraham as a friend, nor spoke to Prophet Moses. God is exalted above what Ja'd says!

This was followed by Ja'd's killing.⁴²

Watt clearly mentions that Ja'd was killed by the Umayyad Caliph Hishām.⁴³ However, there may not be any contradiction here because, Hishām as Caliph might have ordered Khālid, the governor of 'Iraq, as revealed by Madelung,⁴⁴ to do so. In that case, both attributions could hold true.

The doctrine of the created Qur'ān is fundamental to the Jahmiyya, a movement which takes its name from Jahm ibn Safwān, as the source of the doctrine. Meanwhile, Ibn Taymiyya attributes the doctrine to both Ja'd and Jahm at once.⁴⁵ Perhaps, the sect was associated with Jahm instead of Ja'd due to the latter's early death, without having had the chance to commit his beliefs to writing. On the other hand, it may have been due to Jahm's provision of his *Maqāla Jahmiyya*.⁴⁶ Although Jahm was killed about two years later, the spread of his treatise from the hands of Bishr ibn Ghiyāth al-Marīsī,⁴⁷

⁴²al-Dārimī, *Radd al-Imām* 118.

⁴³Watt, "Early" 28.

⁴⁴Madelung, "The Origins" 505.

⁴⁵Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'*, vol.12, 301.

⁴⁶Watt, "Early" 29.

⁴⁷Ja'd was killed in 125/743, while Jahm died in 128/745. Madelung, "The Origins" 505.

might have won Jahm the patronage of this sect. But still, bringing this doctrine to light and developing it theologically was credited to Bishr.⁴⁸

Since this doctrine was also taught by the Mu'tazila, their contribution should not be ignored. They believed that God speaks, but His speech is not eternal (*qadīm*), but rather originated and created every time He needs to speak. This created speech does not subsist (*qā'im*) in Him, but rather outside His essence, and which He creates in a place where it will be heard.⁴⁹ That is the position they argued.

In his "Early Discussion About the Qur'ān," Watt declares that even though there is enough proof that the Mu'tazila held the doctrine of createdness of the Qur'ān, there is little indication that they argued over it. For most of the related arguments seem to concentrate on questions of detail.⁵⁰ For example, in a review on 'Abd al-Jabbār, Bouman states about *Khalq al-Qur'ān*⁵¹ of *al-Mughnī*,

in which speech in general, the speech of Allah in particular and subsequent nature of the Qur'ān are discussed...[that] many kinds of arguments are brought forth by 'Abd al-Djabbār to prove the thesis of the created Qur'ān.⁵²

⁴⁸Watt, "Early" 29.

⁴⁹Jār Allah, *al-Mu'tazila* 77-78.

⁵⁰Watt, "Early" 33.

⁵¹The seventh volume of *al-Mughnī*.

⁵²Bouman, *The Doctrine* 72-74.

The Mu'tazila, proud though they be,⁵³ admired the epithet given to them by others as "People of the Divine Unity and Justice." According to some sources, this is how they called themselves.⁵⁴ Quite apart from its beauty, which added to the sense of dignity they felt for their mission as the protectors of the faith, this title contained two basic points on which are based most of their teachings,⁵⁵ which included the createdness of the Qur'ān, free will and predestination.⁵⁶

Consequently, the doctrine of the created Qur'ān held and defended by the Mu'tazila resulted primarily from a more basic doctrine of divine unity. Being the protectors of the divine unity, they said that any other belief that negates it must be either entirely rejected or corrected. Considering the Qur'ān uncreated, in their view, would contradict the unity of God, because being uncreated, it must also be eternal, an attribute belonging to God alone. To qualify the Qur'ān with that attribute is to allow it to share the same level reserve for God. And this would be tantamount to polytheism. Therefore, the Qur'ān must be created, and "he has no belief in God's unity who does not confess that the Qur'ān is created." So

⁵³Jār Allah, *al-Mu'tazila* 6.

⁵⁴Jār Allah, *al-Mu'tazila* 5.

⁵⁵Jār Allah, *al-Mu'tazila* 6.

⁵⁶Bouman, *The Doctrine* 67.

they argued.⁵⁷

The Mu'tazila reportedly based their doctrine of the created Qur'ān on quotations from the Qur'ān, and not uncharacteristically, on rational arguments. In his letter to Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm, whose arguments exemplified those presented by the Mu'tazila, Caliph al-Ma'mūn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Hārūn supported his position through the Qur'ān.⁵⁸ They proceeded as follows.

1. God says "We have made it a Qur'ān in Arabic," (Q.43:2). The Mu'tazila feel that by using "made" (*ja'alnā*), God treated with the Qur'ān as He did other creatures.⁵⁹ It also shows that "it came to being after it was not" (*kāna ba'da an lam yakun*).⁶⁰ Another aspect of this verse, used by the Mu'tazila according to al-Rāzī is that the Qur'ān is not just made, but made of chapters, verses, letters and expressions, indicating that the speech of God may occur either in Arabic or in Hebrew. All this reveals the fact that it is originated and created.⁶¹

2. God says, "Thus do We relate to thee some stories of what happened before" (Q.20:99). This implies that many things

⁵⁷Watt, "Early" 33.

⁵⁸al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 54.

⁵⁹Watt, "Early" 33.

⁶⁰'Alī Ibn Ismā'il al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa-khtilāf al-Muṣallīn* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1954) 232.

⁶¹al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 57.

happened about which God intends to give an account, and following which the Qur'ān was originated.

3. God says, "Ṣād: By the Qur'ān, full of admonitions" (Q.38:1); and "And this is a blessed message which We have sent down" (Q.21:50). The Qur'ān is an admonition and a message, and this indicates that it was originated.

4. God says, "Nay, this is a Glorious Qur'ān, (inscribed) in a Preserved Tablet" (Q.85:21-22). This shows that the Preserved Tablet contains the Qur'ān, and that it contains nothing but created things. Therefore, the Qur'ān must be created.⁶²

5. God says, "For to anything which We have willed, We but say "be" and it is," (Q.16:40). The line of argumentation based on this verse seems philological. Firstly, the verse is a statement that consists of a condition (*shart*) and a consequence (*jazā'*). Any consequence must be preceded by a condition. Therefore, God's speech must be preceded by His will, and what is preceded by something else must be originated. God's speech is thus originated.⁶³ Secondly, the "fā'" in *fayakūna* (and it is) indicates sequence (*ta'qīb*), which necessitates occurrence of what is to be, immediately after utterance. Something that precedes anything originated even by a moment must itself be originated. Therefore, God's

⁶²Jār Allah, *al-Mu'tazila* 79.

⁶³al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 54.

utterance, "kun" is originated.⁶⁴ Lastly, the word "kun" consists of two letters, which indicates that the first one came before the second; so, the whole word must be originated and God's speech created.⁶⁵

It was typical of the Mu'tazila to use a rationalistic approach in defence of their doctrines. The rationalistic arguments they presented for the created Qur'ān included the following:

1. That it is impossible for God's speech to be eternal, because there was nothing to command or to forbid in eternity, as there was no one to be charged with that. This calls for the non-existence of God's speech in eternity. For instance, it would be unlikely for God to say, "O Moses, verily I am thy Lord! therefore put off thy shoes" (Q.20:11-12), without Prophet Moses existing. Furthermore, God's eternal speech would have to be intended either for Himself --which is needless-- or for some one else --who does not exist-- or not intended at all. The above scenarios indicate that God's speech is not eternal and is, therefore originated.⁶⁶

2. The past tenses are frequently used in the Qur'ān, for example, "We sent Noah to his People (with the command)" (Q.71:1); and "Allah has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing" (Q.2:7). Had these utterances in the past

⁶⁴al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 57.

⁶⁵al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 57.

⁶⁶al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 59.

tenses been eternal, it would mean that God spoke in eternity about what had happened earlier. This implies that eternity is preceded by something else, and that God's speech is a lie. Since both implications are impossible, God's utterances cannot be eternal, but rather originated.⁶⁷

3. If God's speech were eternal, it would have to be infinitely permanent. This is because once the eternity of something is established, its finitude becomes impossible. In this case, all the imperative terms (*ṣiyagh al-amr*) by which people are obliged to carry out specific individual duties, as in Q.11:114, still hold, even after they carry them out or die. This is impossible and so establishes the opposite, that whenever a duty is performed by a person, such a command is dropped or terminated, which proves that it was above all originated and not eternal.⁶⁸

4. In his *al-Mughnī*, al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār establishes that the Qur'ān is not God, because it is characterised by attributes that are impossible to God; it is subject to division, it can be read and heard and people worship God with it. On the other hand, all that is appropriate to God is impossible to the Qur'ān. God is Potent, Knowledgeable and All-Hearing. This confirms 'Abd al-Jabbār's arguments that the

⁶⁷al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 60.

⁶⁸al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 60.

Qur'ān is different from God, and for this reason, is created.⁶⁹

It is interesting to note how the theological conviction associated with the arguments for the creation of the Qur'ān, as championed by al-Ma'mūn, was questionable. Watt argued that political motives were mixed up with theological zeal in al-Ma'mūn's pursuit to make this doctrine compulsory. The political motive, Watt believed, was to gain allegiance of some Shi'is.⁷⁰ However, we are of the opinion that this

political motive

if true, pales in comparison with the theological dimension. Firstly, the text of al-Ma'mūn's letter must be critically studied before the existence of ulterior motives can be proved, which would probably be quite difficult to achieve. The text reveals ample evidence of theological motives.⁷¹

Watt might have come to his conclusion by considering al-Ma'mūn's relations with some of his subjects, in particular the Shi'a. But any act -- not only on this doctrine -- by a "religio-political leader" having the least impact on his subjects might not be possible to separate from politics. The political aspect is, therefore, inevitable, though not determinant of his motives.

⁶⁹al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawhīd wa al-'Adl*, vol.7 (Cairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub, 1961) 86.

⁷⁰Watt, "Early" 34.

⁷¹al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 54-56.

Abū Ḥanīfah's relation to the doctrine of created Qur'ān seems appealing. His belief in the createdness of the Qur'ān was widely speculated,⁷² which subjected him to severe criticism. According to some accounts, however, he backed away from this belief.⁷³ The authenticity of these narrations has also been put into question. As Momin argues,

There is incontrovertible evidence, in the reported statements of the Imam himself and those of his distinguished disciples, that he never held the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān.⁷⁴

Momin tries to prove his arguments by examining the Imam's statements in *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, along with the statements of his close friends and disciples.⁷⁵

UNCREATEDNESS OF THE QUR'ĀN

According to Madelung, early Muslim scholars, it seems, were less engaged in detailed discussions about the nature of the Qur'ān.⁷⁶ They felt comfortable only with the assertion that the Qur'ān was God's speech. But were reluctant to assert as a doctrine that it was the "uncreated" speech of God, although they believed it and always denied the opposite. As

⁷²Madelung, "The Origins" 509.

⁷³'Alī Ibn Ismā'il al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-Diyāna* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1990) 57-58.

⁷⁴'Abdur-Raḥmān Momin, "Imam Abū Ḥanīfa and the Doctrine of Khalq al-Qur'ān," *Hamdard Islamicus* 9:3 (1986): 43.

⁷⁵Momin, "Imām" 44.

⁷⁶Madelung, "The Origins" 504.

Madelung argues,

The early scholars in other words merely insisted that, the Koran is truly the speech of God and denied it is created without turning this denial into positive doctrine affirming its eternity or pre-existence.⁷⁷

But when, shortly before the *mihna* and its aftermath, the createdness of the Qur'ān was emphasized, arguments and assertions refuting it proliferated, as evident in titles such as *al-Radd 'Alā al-Jahmiyya* "Refutation of the Jahmiyya".⁷⁸

Although, the Mu'tazila disliked being associated with the Jahmiyya,⁷⁹ Ibn Taymiyya considered the latter part of the Mu'tazila,⁸⁰ while al-Ash'arī, in his *al-Ibāna*, considers both as Jahmiyya without any distinction.⁸¹ With regard to the uncreatedness of the Qur'ān, the Ash'arites, among the orthodox scholars, although distinguished by Ibn Taymiyya from the "*Salaf*",⁸² were known to be the strongest rivals of the Mu'tazila.

Al-Ash'arī argues strongly for uncreatedness with quotations from the Qur'ān itself, but in the form of rationalistic explanations:

1. God says, " For to anything which We have willed, We but

⁷⁷Madelung, "The Origins" 513.

⁷⁸Madelung, "The Origins" 504-505.

⁷⁹Watt, "The Political" 41.

⁸⁰Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'*, vol.12, 163.

⁸¹al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna* 44-52.

⁸²Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'*, vol.12, 202-203.

say "be" and it is" (Q.16:40). It is worth noting that this is the same verse used by the Mu'tazila in support of their doctrine, and the Ash'arites were following their footsteps. The Ash'arites argued that if the Qur'ān were created, "kun" must be said to it, and in that sense "kun" becomes saying in itself. In this case, either the "kun" is uncreated, or else any "kun" must need another one continuously, which is impossible. Since the latter is impossible, the former must be true, therefore, God's utterance is uncreated.⁸³

2. We read in the Qur'ān, "Say: He is Allah, the One, Allah the Eternal, Absolute," (Q.112:1-2). These verses as well as others show that the Qur'ān contains God's names. If the Qur'ān were created, then the names would be, too. This implies that His unity, knowledge and potence are all created, which is impossible; therefore, the Qur'ān is uncreated.⁸⁴

3. The Qur'ān says, "The Most Gracious! It is He Who has taught the Qur'ān. He has created man," (Q.55:1-3). This line of argument distinguishes between the Qur'ān (uncreated), and human beings (created). If the Qur'ān were created, this distinction would have been unnecessary.⁸⁵

4. The Qur'ān says, "Nor Allah (deign to) speak to them or look at them on the Day of Judgment," (Q.3:77). Speaking and seeing are both associated with God which He confirms doing,

⁸³al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna* 42-43.

⁸⁴al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna* 47.

⁸⁵al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna* 55.

and from which certain people may be deprived as a way of punishment. Had His speech been created, so would have His sight. Since the latter is absurd, it is apparent that God's speech is uncreated.⁸⁶

About al-Ash'arī and his predecessors' use of these Qur'ānic quotations, along with their explanations, Watt states,

It must not be thought that these are purely arbitrary explanations, forced upon the selected verses. They are thoroughly in line with an important strand in the teaching of the Qur'ān.⁸⁷

However, since our study is not meant to evaluate the basis of these arguments, we neither intend to compare them nor to cite each party's refutation of the other.

ABSTAINING FROM THE CREATEDNESS AND UNCREATEDNESS OF THE QUR'ĀN

There was a third party in this debate which, due to the simplicity of their position, was less enthusiastic than others. They simply believed that the Qur'ān is God's speech. But whether or not it is created, they were unwilling to say. This stand was inspired by the fact that there is no explicit mention of either doctrine by God or by the Prophet Muḥammad; nor is there any consensus among Muslims to that effect. To

⁸⁶al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna* 58.

⁸⁷Watt, "Early" 100.

them, it was better to abstain from giving any opinion.⁸⁸

It is noted that majority of scholars, including Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal before the *miḥna* had abstained.⁸⁹ Only after the createdness of the Qur'ān was explicitly held did assertions to the contrary become clear for many of the early abstainers.⁹⁰ Still, there were those who insisted on abstaining and were opposed to the affirmation of either doctrine. They included, Abū Bakr b. 'Ayyāsh, Abū Mu'āwiya al-Darīr, Abū Usāmah Ḥammād b.Usāmah and Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb Ibn Ibrāhīm, the friend and disciple of Abū Ḥanīfah.⁹¹

Although they hoped to avoid controversy, the abstainers were regarded as the Jahmiyya/Mu'tazila,⁹² and according to Ibn Ḥanbal, they were worse off than the Jahmiyya.⁹³ Al-Ash'arī, not only considered them Mu'tazila, he also made do with the same arguments he used against Mu'tazila in refuting the abstainers' position.⁹⁴ As Ibn Ḥanbal argues, one must take sides and not abstain, "if you will not say that it [the Qur'ān] is created, then you should say it is."⁹⁵ Although he

⁸⁸al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna* 63.

⁸⁹Madelung, "The Origins" 520.

⁹⁰Madelung, "The Origins" 522.

⁹¹Madelung, "The Origins" 519-520.

⁹²Madelung, "The Origins" 521.

⁹³al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna* 55.

⁹⁴al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna* 63-67.

⁹⁵al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna* 55.

earlier believed in abstaining and was quoted as saying, "whoever asserts that the Koran is created is a Jahmite, or that it is uncreated is a heretic (*mubtadi'*)."

He was also quoted after the *miḥna*, when asked about the doctrine, as saying, "it is the speech of God, uncreated." Regarding these contradictory remarks he explains, "I established it based on firm knowledge only later," (*wa'anā lam uthbit-hu ma'rifatan illā ba'd*).⁹⁶

These, then, are the three doctrines regarding the nature of God's speech, the Qur'ān. Now, turning to the implication they may have on God as communicator, it is clear that none of the doctrines suggests that God does not communicate. Speech is an obvious form of communication, which has been established for God by all parties except the Jahmiyya.⁹⁷ Yet, even a denial does not mean God does not communicate. This is because, like the Mu'tazila, the Jahmiyya believe that whenever God intends to speak or communicate, He creates the speech in something else.⁹⁸ This, however, to the Jahmiyya

⁹⁶Madelung, "The Origins" 520. Madelung translated it as "I established firm knowledge of it only later," which seems incorrect, because the pronoun "hu" is taken as a genitive construction (*muḍāf ilayhi*) instead of an object (*maf'ūl*). The difference this makes is, according to his translation, knowledge of it is established; while according to our translation, the doctrine is established after a firm knowledge which, seems more appropriate.

⁹⁷Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'*, vol.12, 245; Madelung, "The Origins" 506.

⁹⁸Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'*, vol.12, 245; Watt, "Early" 32.

does not mean speech as it does to the Mu'tazila.⁹⁹ Certainly, it means communication for both, because creating the speech in something so as to be heard is still a communication. For communication is defined as

the transmission or exchange of information, signal messages or data by any means, such as talk (verbal communication), writing (written communication), telephone, telegraph, radio or other channels within a group or directed to specific individuals or group.¹⁰⁰

In order to establish the fact that God communicates but does not necessarily speak, the Mu'tazila shifted attention toward the implication of communication on society. It is impossible for a person to live alone, or for people to ignore each others' help; otherwise, none will accomplish his objective fully. Consequently, people should be able to express their needs, and hence to speak. Based on this, the Mu'tazila believe that God, after bringing creatures into existence, wished to communicate with them. Here the essence of communication is brought to full view. In order to make known their position on how God communicates, they argued further that to communicate, God creates the voices in certain things.¹⁰¹

Since God's communication is generally established, the

⁹⁹al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 49.

¹⁰⁰Richard Webster, *Webster's New World Dictionary of Media and Communications*, vol.2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 104.

¹⁰¹al-Rāzī, *Khalq* 49.

modes through which He communicates, receiving little attention from scholars, deserve further investigation. The following chapter will be devoted to describing how communication takes place between God and human beings.

CHAPTER III

GOD-HUMAN COMMUNICATION MODELS

In the 20th century, the study of communication has grown very rapidly from simple and modest to more complex forms. Yet, it has received little attention from Muslim scholars.¹ Communication models have attracted virtually no attention despite their use in the explanation and simplification of complex processes. They can organize scattered information, simplify complicated and ambiguous processes of communication, and help predict outcomes or reveal new facts about certain realities.²

The Qur'ān has outlined three possible ways by which God communicates with human beings: 1. inspiration; 2. from behind a veil; and 3. sending of a messenger, (Q.42:51). These are complex processes of communication which, without further clarification, may be difficult to understand. As noted in the previous chapter, Muslim theologians have embarked on elaborate discussions on the nature of God's speech which confirm His act of communication. But the process of Divine communication, which is rather complex, was left unexplained in any details. For this reason, this section is dedicated to pursuing the process of the God-human interaction, aimed at

¹Mohammed A Siddiqui, "Interpersonal Communication: Modeling Interpersonal Relationship, An Islamic Perspective," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 5:2 (1988) : 239.

²Surendra Singh, "Models of Communication : An Overview," *The Eastern Anthropologist* 37:1 (1984) : 16.

making it as comprehensible as possible with specific examples taken from the Qur'ān and through the use of communication models. This would be done by identifying, in each example, the basic elements the of communication process; namely, the source, the message, the receiver, the channel, the effect, and the feedback.

GENERAL GOD-HUMAN COMMUNICATION MODEL

The Qur'ān says,

It is not fitting for a human being that Allāh should speak to him except by inspiration [revelation], or from behind a veil or by sending of a messenger, to reveal with Allāh's permission, what Allāh wills, for He is Most High, Most Wise. (Q.42:51).

According to the Qur'ān, these are the only possible ways by which God may communicate with human beings.

In his *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, al-Wāḥidī relates the circumstance of this verse (*sabab al-nuzūl*), without a chain of transmission --namely, that the Jews asked the Prophet that, if he were really a Prophet, why then did he not talk to and look at God, simultaneously, as Prophet Moses did? They also asserted that they would not believe him until he did. But that, said the Prophet, did not happen to Moses either. Thereafter, the verse in question was then revealed³ for the sake of clarifying the modes of God's speech.

This same Tradition is cited by al-Zamakhsharī in his *al-*

³Alī Ahmad al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1982) 214.

Kashshāf. Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's comment on it was simply, "I have not found it"⁴ This shows that the Tradition has no source and may be unreliable.

Without relying on that Tradition, however, one could very well say that the verse was revealed in order to put the forms of God's interaction with human beings into perspective. On the other hand, Ibn 'Āshūr points out that this verse has been sent down to negate the conviction of the non-believers that the Qur'ān was not from God. The main purpose of the entire sūra, as he sees it is, is to establish that the Qur'ān is a revelation from God to His messenger Muḥammad.⁵ The Qur'ān is not to be revealed the way they -- the non-believers -- suggest. But that does not mean that it is not from God. This is because God speaks to human beings -- Prophets and other people -- in only three modes as identified in the following figure.

⁴Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl*, vol.4. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1947) 234.

⁵Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol.25 (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya, 1984) 140.

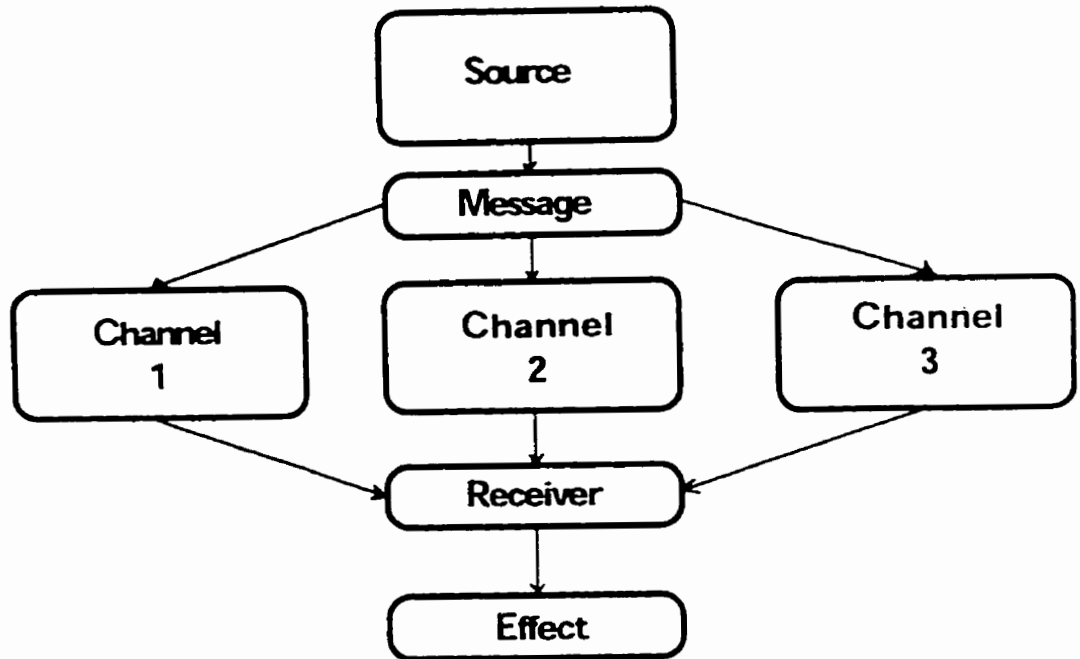


Figure 1: God-human communication: General model

This model shows how God interacts with human beings. It depicts God as the source of the messages, and human beings as the receivers. The media through which the messages are passed to the receivers, however, vary significantly both from each other and from ordinary interpersonal communication. God and human beings are of different natures. This, coupled with the fact that human beings occupy a position subordinate to God,

the media and the channels of their interaction must reflect a superior-subordinate relationship. Hence these three modes (channels) of communication, namely, inspiration, from behind a veil and through a messenger. This is the reason for the vertical shape of this and the subsequent models --unlike most other models. It allows for a brief discussion of communication flow.

Again, the model indicates the effect of the God-human communication, which may be either positive or negative. What is not reflected in this model is feedback. Because it is nevertheless present, it will be considered in our discussion of specific models. Generally, there is nothing like noise in God-human communication, as pointed out by Siddiqui.⁶ But the way we construe this verse is that, with respect to some modes (the inspirational, for example), there could be noise, unless the receiver is a prophet (Q.22:52).

FLOW OF COMMUNICATION

Unlike Lasswell's model, we perceive God-human communication as being vertical, with God at the apex, passing down the message to human beings. Generally, the communication process flows either vertically or horizontally. This may be symbolized as in Figure II.

⁶Siddiqui, "Interpersonal" 243.

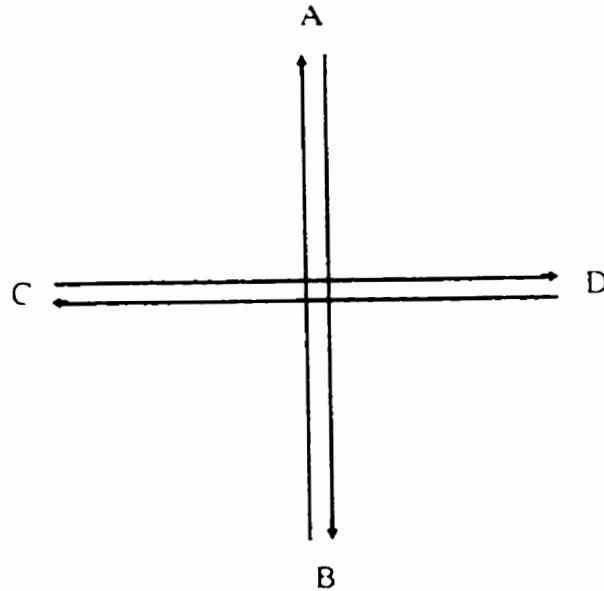


Figure II: Communication Flow Model

Line AB shows a superior communicating with a subordinate. In God-human interaction, A is God and B is the human being -- either a Prophet or a non-Prophet. Therefore, AB is a downward communication. In ordinary human communication, A may be a parent, manager, or teacher; while B may be a child, employee, or student respectively. The message in the downward communication in God-human interaction is to be taken very seriously, as there is always a consequence.

On the other hand, BA indicates when the subordinate communicates with the superior; this is considered upward communication.

Lines CD and DC show the interaction between colleagues.

based on mutual respect. Since God has no associate, the vertical shape of modelling becomes the appropriate and only choice.

Beside this inexorable choice, the idea of making God-human interaction vertical is still supported by the Qur'ān and the Tradition. There are many indications in the Qur'ān that God is "physically" above human beings, clearly suggesting that any God-human communication should be vertical. This is only if physical position counts. In fact, managers enjoy superior status and produce downward communication -- even though they are as human as their employees -- because they are placed on top of the organizational structure.⁷

1. The Qur'ān says "Do ye feel secure that He Who is in heaven will not cause you to be swallowed up" (Q.67:16). Exegetes interpret the pronoun *man* (He Who) in this verse along with what follows it as God. Although there are other opinions to the effect that the pronoun refers to some Angels, al-Alūsī favours God as its reference due to some supporting evidence concerning the context of these verses.⁸ In his *Lisān al-*

⁷Richard Ellis and Ann McClintock, *If You Take My Meaning: Theory into Practice in Human Communication* (London: Edward Arnold, 1990) 131.

⁸Mahmūd al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol.29 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1980) 15. For clearer evidence, see Q.16:45.

'Arab, Ibn al-Manzūr explains that anything above is *samā'*.⁹ In this sense, the verses establish the fact that God is "physically" above.

2. God addresses Prophet Jesus in the Qur'ān with the words, "O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself " (Q.3:55). Without engaging in any arguments as to whether or not Jesus died, let us simply assert that this verse confirms that God raised Jesus up to His place.

3. We read in the Qur'ān that "To Him mount up (all) words of purity: it is He Who exalts each deed of righteousness" (Q. 35:10); "The Angels and the Spirit ascend unto Him in a day the measure whereof is (as) fifty thousand years" (Q.70:4); "They all fear their Lord, High above them, and they do all that they are commanded" (Q.16:50). All these verses, together with many others where words like "anzala," "nazzala," and "anzalnā,"¹⁰ indicating how the Qur'ān was sent down, support the higher position of God. We find this point worth proving due to theological differences regarding God's "whereabouts".

However, al-Rāzī rejects this concept of God's physical location in the *samā'* in his interpretation of "it is He Who is God in the heaven and on earth; and He is Full of Wisdom and Knowledge" (Q.43:84). He says,

⁹Ibn al-Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab al-Muḥīṭ*, vol.3 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1988) 210-211.

¹⁰al-Qur'ān, 2:176; 3:3; 3:7; 4:113; and 4:105.

This verse is one of the strongest proofs that God, May He be Exalted, is not physically in heaven. This is because, it shows that His relation to the earth is the same as that of the heaven to it. Since it is clear that He is not physically on earth and, yet, is God, so does being God of the heaven not necessarily make Him physically there.¹¹

This argument seems sound, but Ibn 'Āshūr reveals that the purpose of the verse was to preclude the association of anything with God, and to establish Him as the only God in both heaven and earth. After all, the polytheists believed that the Angels, in heaven, were daughters of God (Q.43:15-19) while on this earth, they associated their gods with Allāh (Q.15:96).¹²

Finally, there is a Tradition that clearly affirms that God is in heaven. This occurred when the Prophet asked a woman, who fell in Muslim captivity through war, "Where is God?" : "In heaven," she replied. Due to that, the Prophet ordered her released, and added, "She is in fact a believer."¹³ Again there is a Tradition in which the Prophet categorically says "our Lord, God, who is in heaven..."¹⁴

¹¹Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol.27 (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1980) 232.

¹²Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr*, vol.25, 267.

¹³'Uthmān Ibn Sa'īd al-Dārimī, *Radd al-Imām al-Dārimī 'Uthmān Ibn Sa'īd 'alā Bishr al-Mirīsī al-'Anīd* ('Ābidīn: Maṭba'at Anṣār al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya, 1358) 81; 'Uthmān Ibn Sa'īd al-Dārimī, *Kitāb al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyya* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1960) 17.

¹⁴Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Muṣṭafā*, vol.2, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1980) 155.

Beside this physical consideration of God, His stature and relation with human beings demand that His communication be downward, and that our models be vertical. We have already mentioned why managers communicate downwardly; parents, also, enjoy a superior-subordinate relationship with children due to many factors, not the least of which is having given birth to them. By the same token, God is the sole creator of human beings; He is the provider of sustenance (Q.74:11-14; 11:6). Either of these two aspects is enough for His superiority. For all these reasons, then, we strongly feel that all God-human communication should be vertical.

THE INSPIRATIONAL MODEL

The Qur'ān says, "It is not fitting for a human being that Allāh should speak to him except by inspiration [revelation]" (Q.42:51). Inspiration is the first mode, channel and medium through which God communicates with human beings. The term *waḥy* in Arabic has many implications. According to *Lisān al-'Arab*, *waḥy* suggests a signal (*al-ishāra*); writing (*al-kitāba*); inspiration (*al-ilhām*); and hidden speech (*al-kalām al-khafī*). More generally, it indicates whatever meaning is imparted to someone in a hidden or near hidden form.¹⁵ All these testify that *waḥy* is a form of communication. Its root is *waḥā* or *awḥā*, meaning to

¹⁵Ibn al-Manzūr, *Lisān*, vol.6, 892.

whisper, make a sign or reveal.¹⁶

The Qur'ān has also used it in a variety of contexts. Again, all of these reveal the communicative implications. In his *Nuzhat al-A'yun al-Nawāzir fī 'Ilm al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir*, Ibn al-Jawzī reveals seven ways of Qur'ānic usage of the term *wahy*. 1. sending of a messenger (*al-irsāl*) (Q.4:163; 6:19); 2. signal (*al-ishāra*) (Q.19:11); 3. inspiration (*al-ilhām*) (Q.5:111; 16:68; 28:7); 4. command (*al-amr*) (Q.99:5); 5. speech (*qawl*) (Q.53:10); 6. notification through dream (Q.42:51); and 6. notification through whispering (*waswasa*) (Q.6:121).¹⁷

However, *wahy* technically refers to "all heavenly messages given to a selected prophet, either to implement them himself, or to convey them to a group of people."¹⁸ This definition covers the Qur'ān and all the Traditions of the Prophet. About the inclusion of the latter, the Qur'ān explains, "Nor does he say (aught) of (his own) desire. It is no less than inspiration sent down to him" (Q.53:3-4).¹⁹ Furthermore, this definition is not exclusive in the first

¹⁶Ibn al-Manzūr, *Lisān*, vol.6, 892.

¹⁷'Abd al-Rahmān Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nuzhat al-A'yun al-Nawāzir fī 'Ilm al-Wujūh wa al-Nazā'ir* (Beirut: Mu'assast al-Risāla, 1984) 621-622.

¹⁸'Abd al-'Āli Sālim Mukrim. *al-Fikr al-Islāmī Bayn al-'Aql wa al-Wahy wa Atharuh fī Mustaqbal al-Islām* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982) 18.

¹⁹'Abd al-Majīd al-Najjār, *Khilāfat al-Insān Bayn al-Wahy wa al-'Aql: Baḥth fī Jadaliyyat al-Naṣṣ wa al-'Aql wa al-Wāqī'* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1987) 55.

segment of Q.42:51; rather, it covers all the rest.²⁰ But it is specifically used for the first mode of God-human communication, as al-Rāzī points out, because it is an inspiration (*ilhām*) to the heart which occurs suddenly (*duf'a*). Therefore, considering the original meaning of *wahy*, its specific usage here is more appropriate.²¹

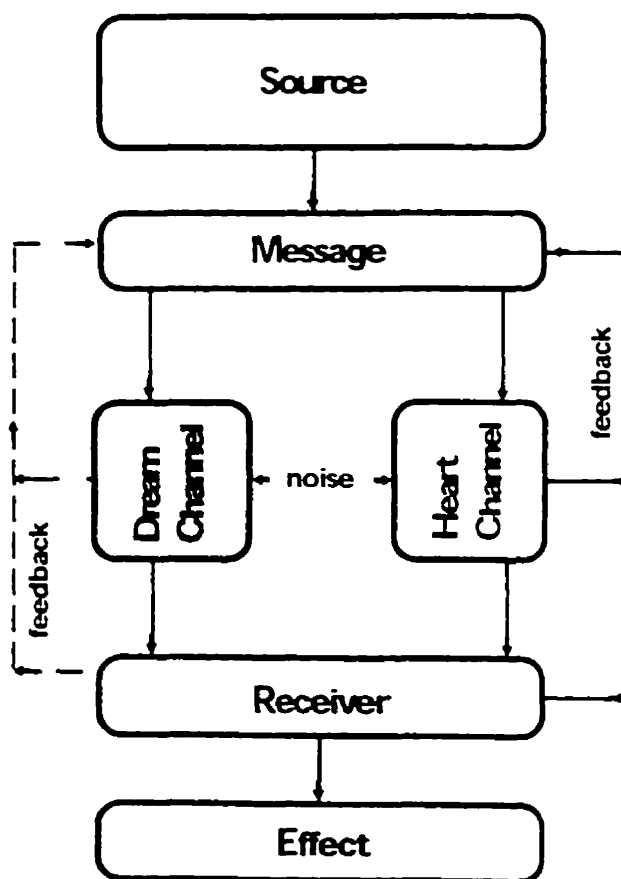


Figure III: God-human communication: Inspirational model

²⁰Mukrim, *al-Fikr* 19.

²¹al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.27, 189.

The inspirational model depicts the message from God down to human beings through one of two channels, either in a dream or in a waking state.²² Meanwhile, Ibn al-Jawzī, in his *Zād al-Masīr fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr*, is of the opinion that the inspirational mode occurs in dream alone.²³ This mode is, however, considered semi-direct by al-Rāzī because, although there exists no intermediary between God and a human being, the latter does not hear God speaking.²⁴

Specific examples of God's interaction with human beings through inspiration identified by exegetes, as illustrated in the Qur'ān, are God with the mother of Prophet Moses; God with Prophet Abraham; and God with Prophet David.

GOD'S INTERACTION WITH PROPHET MOSES' MOTHER

The Qur'ān says:

Behold! We sent to thy mother, by inspiration, the message: "throw (the child) into the chest, and throw (the chest) into the river: and the river will cast him up on the bank...", (Q.20:38-39).

Again,

So We sent this inspiration to the mother of Moses: "suckle (thy child), but when thou hast fears about him, cast him into the river, but fear not nor grieve: for We shall restore him to thee, and We shall make him one of Our messengers." (Q.28:7).

According to Muslim exegetes and historians, these verses are

²²al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol.25, 54.

²³'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masīr fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr*, vol.7, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1984) 297.

²⁴al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.27, 187.

connected with a particular historical event, which, due to its importance, necessitated God's interaction with the mother of Prophet Moses,²⁵ -- as indicated by *mā yūhā*, to mean what ought to be revealed.²⁶

The gist of the story is that the Pharaoh of Egypt ordered the slaying of all²⁷ male babies born to "the children of Israel", in the hope of ridding himself of the one in whose hands lay the cause of the Pharaoh's demise, and with it the collapse of his dynasty. To that end, women were deployed to register all pregnant women, so that no delivery of a baby boy would go unnoticed.²⁸ But as the Qur'ān promised, "and to show Pharaoh, Hāmān, and their hosts, what they were dreading from them." (Q.28:6).

In order for the promise to be fulfilled, news of Prophet Moses' birth at first did not reach the royal family. There was the need for God's communication with Moses' mother, "so We sent this inspiration to the mother of Moses." Inasmuch as *waḥy* being subject to various interpretations in the inspirational mode, it did not preclude the case of the mother

²⁵Although the Qur'ān does not give her name, some exegetes have speculated on it.

²⁶*al-Rāzī, al-Tafsīr, vol.22, 52.*

²⁷Some sources say that, he ordered the yearly killing of baby boys by alternation, due to the intercession of some in his entourage to spare some of the children of Israel, for service. *Al-Hāfiẓ Ibn Kathīr, al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya, vol.1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1985) 223.*

²⁸Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk, vol.1 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1972) 387.*

of Prophet Moses. According to al-Rāzī, six theories are possible. It may have come (a) through a dream; (b) as a firm and sudden determination in her heart; (c) as inspiration, which to al-Rāzī was equivalent to the second; (d) as information obtained from Prophets of her time; (e) as information obtained from previous Prophets; and (f) through an Angel who appeared to her, as he did to Mary, mother of Prophet Jesus.²⁹

The message God intended to transmit to the mother of Prophet Moses was to "suckle (thy child), but when thou hast fears about him, cast him into the river, but fear not nor grieve: for We shall restore him to thee, and We shall make him one of Our messengers." (Q.28:7). One may observe the timeliness of the mother's knowledge of what to do; consequently, the message contained all the important elements to that effect. It is fascinating how this was revealed by a woman --whose name was never offered -- praised for her rhetorical ability upon reciting a poem of hers. She dismissed any praise by saying,

is this [her poem] considered rhetorics compared to God's utterance "so We sent this inspiration to the mother of Moses: "suckle (thy child), but when thou hast fears about him, cast him into the river, but fear not nor grieve: for We shall restore him to thee, and shall make him one of Our messengers." He gathered in a single verse, two statements, two orders, two prohibitions and two glad tidings.³⁰

²⁹al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.22, 51-52.

³⁰Ibn 'Āshūr, *Rūḥ*, vol.20. 72.

The statements are: "We sent this inspiration to the mother of Moses" and "but when thou hast fears about him." The orders are: "suckle (thy child)," and "cast him." The prohibitions are: "fear not" and "nor grieve;" and the glad tidings are "We shall restore him to thee and shall make him one of Our messengers."³¹ For this, al-Alūsī feels the verse illustrates perfectly the inimitability of the Qur'ān.³²

This important information had to pass through the channels depicted in the model, either while she was awake or through a dream. The channel in this case may be vulnerable to noise. This is because she was not a prophet.³³ Although the crucial importance of the message in this particular situation calls for accuracy, she is, in fact, not infallible (*ma'sūm*) nor immune to "satanic temptations".³⁴ Hence the possibility of noise.

However, the above observation contrasts with Siddiqui's general assertion that "the channel is unrestricted - it should be as free from noise as possible."³⁵

³¹Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr*, vol.20, 75.

³²Ibn 'Āshūr, *Rūh*, vol.20, 72.

³³al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.22, 51.

³⁴Ahmad Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol.12 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1980) 351; Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr*, vol.25, 143. Even Prophets, who are supposed to be infallible and protected from Satan, face his constant attempts to corrupt God's revelation to them, whose accuracy God has insured (Q.22:52).

³⁵Siddiqui, "Interpersonal" 243.

Yet, this is the only mode through which God continues to communicate with human beings. In his *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān al-Rāghib* cites a Tradition that "revelation has stopped, and what is left of prophecies are a believer's dream, inspiration, and subservience."³⁶ A similar Tradition is cited in *Fath al-Bārī*, on the authority of Abū Hurayra: "There is nothing left in prophethood except prophecies (*mubashshirāt*). They asked: what are prophecies? He said: good dreams."³⁷ At the same time, these good dreams are not confined to sleep only.³⁸ What is important is that these Traditions do not only confirm the continuation of God-human interaction, but above all they support its possibility.

To identify the source of the message received in this channel as God is difficult. There is no absolute certainty in the case of non-prophets, as Satan is equally capable of sending such messages. Satan is described in the Qur'ān as one "who whispers [of evil] into the hearts of mankind" (Q.114:5), "but the satans ever inspire (*layūḥūna*) their friends" (Q.6:121). Significant here is the Qur'ānic usage of "*yūḥūna*" to express how "satans" communicate with some people, without the latter being able to see or hear them. This, at least, reinforces the possibility of God's interaction with human

³⁶Al-Ḥusayn Ibn Muḥammad al-Rāghib, *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1961) 516.

³⁷Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath*, vol.12, 352.

³⁸Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn, *Tafsīr al-Aḥlām* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayā, 1986) 9.

beings.

What is said about uncertainty regarding the source is equally true about the message especially when the notion of noise comes into play. One may add here that, the validity of the message -- if fully grasped -- depends largely on the authenticity of the source. Yet, in the case of Prophet Moses' mother, the situation was so crucial that she had to trust both the source and the message. But if so, why did she hesitate and entertain so much fear? "It is human to be afraid," says al-Rāzī. He added that even Prophet Moses himself, who later heard God's command directly to return to Pharaoh, was equally afraid to do so.³⁹

Meanwhile, dream is acknowledged in Islam as an authentic channel of God-human interaction if the person is considered pious⁴⁰ and is pleased with the dream.⁴¹

The model further indicates that the message received by Prophet Moses' mother had an effect. The effect was positive, because she complied with what she was ordered to do.⁴² This is indicated by the Qur'ān in one of its rhetorical forms, namely, *al-ījāz* (brevity). The Qur'ān does not elaborate how or what she did; instead, it goes on to speak of the consequences of her compliance. "Then the [household] of

³⁹al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.22, 52.

⁴⁰Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath*, vol.12. 361.

⁴¹Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath*, vol.12, 369.

⁴²Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, vol.1, 224.

Pharaoh picked him up (from the river)" (Q.28:8). According to al-Ṭabarī, the mother suckled him for a while after his birth, and later placed him in the box and cast it to the river.⁴³

Feedback is considered very important in modelling communication processes. Its paucity in Lasswell's basic model along with Shannon and Weaver's own mathematical model, has been criticized.⁴⁴ It is, however, not so important in God-human communication, though it may be present. This is because, feedback is an element that makes the receiver also a source and vice versa, in which case the source lacks and needs the feedback in order to expand his knowledge of a particular situation.⁴⁵ The Qur'ān depicts God as the "All-knowing" ('Alīm) and "who knows the hidden" ('Ālimu 'l-Ghayb). "Verily, Allāh Knows (all) the hidden things of the heavens and the earth: verily, He has full knowledge of all that is in (men's) hearts." (Q.35:38). Therefore, God needs no feedback to shape His subsequent communication, as suggested by Osgood and Scramm's model, or by Dance's model in reference to human communication.⁴⁶ But this may not prevent people from producing feedback in their communication with God. Hence our model's provision of the element of feedback, either in a

⁴³al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol.1, 389.

⁴⁴Denis McQuail and Sven Windahl, *Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communication* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1993) 15-17.

⁴⁵McQuail, *Communication*, 22.

⁴⁶McQuail, *Communication*, 19-21.

dream or in a waking state.

GOD'S INTERACTION WITH PROPHET ABRAHAM

Another example of God-human interaction reflected in the Qur'ān is Prophet Abraham's dream inspiring him to sacrifice his son. The Qur'ān says "Then, when [the son] reached [the age of serious] work with him, he said: "O my son! I have seen in a dream that I offer thee in sacrifice: now see what is thy view!" (Q.37:102).

The dreams of prophets, unlike those of other people, are considered revelation from God.⁴⁷ In the present example, God, the source, intends to communicate with Prophet Abraham, the receiver. In a dream, the message may be either direct or indirect. That is why al-Alūsī feels that Prophet Abraham might have considered sacrificing his son as the direct message, or he might have seen something else and have had to interpret it.⁴⁸ The latter would be indirect. The message, in any case, was to sacrifice his son.

However, in his *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, al-Tha'labī narrates a Tradition to the effect that Prophet Abraham asked God for a son. When he was informed that his request was granted during the visit of the Angels (Q.11:69), he vowed he would sacrifice him then. Therefore, the message was "fulfil your pledge"

⁴⁷Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath*, vol.12, 354.

⁴⁸al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol.23, 128.

(*awfi bi nadhrik*).⁴⁹ This, of course, was interpreted as the sacrifice. It also supports one of al-Alūsī's views.

Although all sources point to the sacrifice of Abraham's son as being the message, which son was to be offered in sacrifice was far more contentious. In fact, the disagreements were too great to be resolved. According to Firestone, "one hundred thirty authoritative statements consider Isaac to be the intended victim; one hundred thirty three consider it to have been Ishmael."⁵⁰ This does not mean that no one opinion has dominated.⁵¹ But we shall not enter into this discussion.

Clearly, the medium of the communication was a dream, "I have seen in a dream that I offer thee in sacrifice" (Q.37:102). It should be "as free from noise as possible" as rightly stated by Siddiqui.⁵² Ibn Kathīr in his *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya* cites a Tradition on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that "dreams of Prophets are revelations."⁵³ Consequently, there should be no noise, particularly, when the message needs to be adhered to. Any noise can adversely affect the result, and that, in turn, may vitiate the purpose of the interaction.

⁴⁹Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad al-Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā' al-Musammā bi al-'Arā'is* (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-Arabiyya, 1347) 65.

⁵⁰Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolutions of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: State of University of New York Press, 1990) 135.

⁵¹Firestone, *Journeys* 151.

⁵²Siddiqui, "Interpersonal" 243.

⁵³Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, vol.1, 148.

Intimately related to the case in point is the issue surrounding Prophet Abraham's consultation with his son -- "now see what is thy view" (Q.37:102). This may beg the assumption that he had no confidence in the channel and its adequacy. But Al-Rāzī offers a Tradition affirming that, in fact he had the dream several times, indicating that he was certain. Furthermore, it is not improbable that those dreams were supported by more firm revelation.⁵⁴ Consulting his son did not indicate hesitation; rather, it was intended for several reasons, namely, to involve him in decision-making for a maximum reward for both, not to take him unawares, to ease the tension, and above all, to set a precedence in consultation.⁵⁵

The effect of the message was undoubtedly positive, even though Abraham did not in the end perform the sacrificial act, the Qur'ān declared that he fulfilled his pledge, "We called out to him, "O Abraham! Thou hast already fulfilled the dream!" (Q.37:104-105). God did not really wish his son sacrificed; instead, He wanted to test Prophet Abraham's faith.⁵⁶ The Qur'ān says, "For this was a clear trial" (Q.37:106).

In the case of a non-prophet, the effect of this message

⁵⁴al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.26, 153

⁵⁵Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, vol.1, 148; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.26, 157; al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol.23, 129.

⁵⁶Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, vol.1, 148. Again, this does not undermine the question of God's attribute of all-knowingness.

would be negative, because Satan would be suspected immediately as the source. Killing someone without a religiously valid reason is considered an evil act and, according to the Qur'ān, God does not command evil or bad deeds (Q.7:28), whereas Satan does (Q.2:268; 24:21).

In the God-Abraham interaction, while there is no evidence of feedback, it is not impossible. This opinion is reflected in the model.

GOD'S INTERACTION WITH PROPHET DAVID

A third example of the inspirational mode of God-human communication is between God and Prophet David. God says in the Qur'ān, " and to David We gave the Psalms" (Q.4:163). The example's pertinence here is more particularly due to the channel through which the communication took place. According to some exegetes, the *Zabūr* (Psalms) was suffused to him directly into his heart;⁵⁷ it was transmitted neither through an Angel nor through a dream. There is actually not much evidence to this effect. Al-Rāzī and al-Alūsī depend on a Tradition on the authority of Mujāhid, and most of the Muslim historians neither mention this mode of transmission nor discuss the *Zabūr* in any details.⁵⁸

⁵⁷al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.27, 186; al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol.25, 54.

⁵⁸See for instance, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*; Ibn Kathīr's *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*; and Ibn al-Athīr's *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1987).

However, putting aside the Tradition on the authority of Mujāhid for the moment, it is not impossible for the *Zabūr* to be revealed in this fashion. What is worth mentioning here is that, based on that account, the *Zabūr*, unlike the Qur'ān, would be expressed in Prophet David's own words.⁵⁹

The authenticity of the channel is confirmed by the fact that the *Zabūr* is considered by the Qur'an to be of the status of the other scriptures. Al-Rāzī argues that the words "and to David We gave the Psalms" were especially mentioned to indicate that certain scriptures, including the *Zabūr*, were not revealed in the manner of the Torah; and yet they were from God.⁶⁰

According to al-Tha'labī and Ibn Kathīr, the Psalms' message consists of religious exhortations and pieces of wisdom,⁶¹ which, whenever recited by Prophet David in his beautiful voice, attracted even the jinn and the animals.⁶² This would perhaps prove its effectiveness.⁶³

Part of the *Zabūr*'s message cited by the Qur'ān is,

O David! We indeed make thee a vicegerent on earth:
so judge thou between men in truth (and justice):

⁵⁹It seems in this sense to be equivalent to a *ḥadīth qudsī*.

⁶⁰al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.11, 109.

⁶¹al-Tha'labī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 192; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, vol.2, 11.

⁶²al-Tha'labī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 192.

⁶³Although emphasis is laid on the beauty of his voice as an enchanting element.

nor follow thou the lust (of thy heart), for it will mislead thee from the path of Allāh: for those who wander astray from the path of Allāh, is a chastisement grievous, for that they forget the Day of Account. (Q.38:26).

Meanwhile, in his short article on the *Zabūr*, Horovitz claimed Muslims are indulging in apologetics when they hold that the *Zabūr*, like the Torah, contains the prophecy of Prophet Muḥammad as well.⁶⁴ What interests us here is the hint that Muslims claim that there was an additional message in the *Zabūr*, one that foretold about Prophet Muḥammad. In an attempt to substantiate this claim, however, 'Alī Ṭabarī devoted an entire chapter of his *The Book of Religion and Empire*, to the subject.⁶⁵

It should be reiterated that, as a scripture, the message of the *Zabūr* should be free from noise, and that what Prophet David produced was exactly as what God revealed to him. For God has guaranteed the accuracy of messages sent through any prophet. (Q.22:52).

Finally, considering the meaning of the word *waḥyan* in Q.42:51, as illustrated by the examples above, it may be added that God still communicates with human beings by means of inspiration. In other words, human beings may still receive messages from God, either in a dream or by being directly inspired through their hearts. However, the message might be

⁶⁴"Zabūr," *The First Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1987 ed.

⁶⁵'Alī Ṭabarī, *The Book of Religion and Empire*, trans. A. Mingana (London: Benard Quaritch Limited, 1922) 88-92.

highly intangible, since no one beside the Prophets is infallible⁶⁶ or safe from entrapment by Satan. It is said that when Prophet Abraham first had the dream to sacrifice his son, he hesitated and did not rule out the possibility of Satan being the source, only when it was repeated did he accept it as a message from God. The uncertainty of the source, the message and the channel do not necessarily nullify present-day God-human communication. Effect and a feedback are also possible scenarios in present-day God-human interaction.

BEHIND A VEIL MODEL

One mode of God-human interaction cited by the Qur'ān is from behind a veil, referred to in the phrase *aw min warā'i ḥijāb* (Q.42:51). It occurs when God speaks to someone who hears Him without seeing Him. As put by al-Alūsī, it is likened to a situation where a king talks to some of his distinguished subjects from behind curtains, so that they could hear him without seeing him.⁶⁷

Exegetes categorically cite the communication that took place between God and Prophet Moses as an example of what "behind a veil" interaction essentially indicates.⁶⁸ Some

⁶⁶Some Muslims believe that some saints are infallible. Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr*, vol.25, 143. For more on infallibility of Prophets, see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *'Iṣmat al-Anbiyā'* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 1986).

⁶⁷al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol.25, 54-55.

⁶⁸al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.27, 188-189; Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr*, vol.25, 143.

believe that Prophet Muhammad, too, heard and spoke to God in the same manner, in the night of ascension (*laylat al-mi'rāj*). But we consider that instance to be different from the method of suggested transmission from "behind a veil," since the Prophet may have seen God. We will inquire into this later. God-Angel communication --although outside the scope of this study-- is also seen to occur from behind a veil.⁴⁰ The example to be thoroughly studied is suggested in the following model.

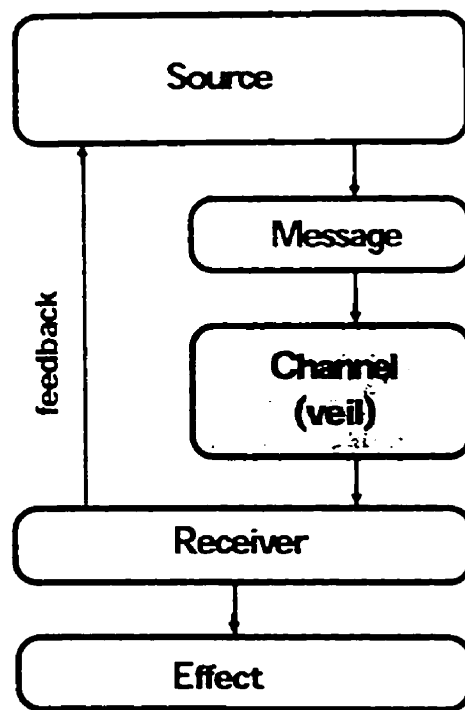


Figure IV: God-human communication: Behind a veil model

⁴⁰Al-Alūsī, *Rūh*, vol.25, 55. Particularly those with whom God spoke about the creation of Ādam.

GOD'S INTERACTION WITH PROPHET MOSES

The story leading to interaction between God and Prophet Moses is a long one. Since this section purports to describe the process of interaction, the whole narration may be superfluous as far as our purpose is concerned.

According to Muslim historians, Prophet Moses knew he was going to communicate with his Lord. The forty days of fasting (Q.7:142; 2:51) was a preparation for that.⁷⁰ When he left his people under the supervision of his brother Hārūn and went toward the fire (Q.20:10), the call came with suddenness. "O Moses" (Q.20:11). Where did that call come from ? and who was the source? Although the verb at this point is in the passive form, "nūdiya" (he was called), the next verse discloses the source, "verily, I am thy Lord." In addition, other verses are explicit about both the subject as the source, and the object as the receiver. "Behold, thy Lord did call to him in the valley of Ṭuwā" (Q.79:16); "and We called him from the right side of Mount [Sinai], and made him draw near to Us, for converse in secret" (Q.19:52).⁷¹

Consequently, the model depicts God as the source. He is clearly the subject of the call. In fact, one need not search far in the Qur'ān in order to be convinced that God was the

⁷⁰ 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Muṭāwi', *Mūsā Kalīm Allāh 'Alayhi al-Salām* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1947) 96-97.

⁷¹ Despite the fact that pronouns are used, the preceding verse clarifies the attribution.

source. However, it may not have been that simple for Prophet Moses. Al-Rāzī considers two possibilities; either through necessary (i.e. unreflected) knowledge (*al-'ilm al-ḍarūrī*), or through a miracle (*mu'jiza*). The latter was favoured by scholars, who speculated endlessly on its nature: a) That it was through a miracle which need not have been known to other people; b) that he saw the light shining from the trees up to the sky, and heard the glorification of Angels, after which the call came, followed by his response. Then Satan interrupted by asking him how he could have assumed it was from God. "I heard it from all sides and from my entire body" replied Prophet Moses, adding that "so it could not possibly have come from anyone else"; c) that it was through an inanimate body (*jamād*), and that in itself is a miracle.⁷² That Prophet Moses was certain God had been the source is the most likely possibility, seeing that the above are mere speculations.

The message God intended to impart to him was all that followed the call. This includes the whole lengthy conversation that took place thereafter. However, information about his prophethood with its responsibilities was the core message of God-Moses interaction. The repetition of the pronouns suffix "yā'" in *innanī*, and "anā", following the call, was intended to introduce and to emphasize the source, while eliminating any hesitation. But it may not accurately be

⁷²al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.22, 16-17.

considered the main message, especially when, immediately in the next verse, it is followed by "listen then to the inspiration [given to thee]" (Q.20:13). Al-Alusī observes that God asked him to listen, on account of the importance of the following piece of information, one that needed his full attention.⁷³

This marked the beginning of the actual message. "Verily I am Allāh: there is no god but I: so serve thou Me (only), and establish regular prayer for my remembrance" (Q.20:14). Again, the emphasis based on repetition of pronouns is employed. Exegetes believe that the entire prophethood and its contents are compressed in this verse. First, *tawhīd* (monotheism) is established; then a general order is issued for worship, followed by a specific mention of prayer as an example of worship, perhaps due to its virtue and status among the other rituals, as speculated by al-Alūsī.⁷⁴

Significant indeed for this study, and closely relevant to communication, is the observation made by Ibn 'Āshūr that self-introduction between those involved in communication is vital to sound and smooth interaction, -- which is partly why the message began with "verily, I am thy Lord" and more specifically, with "verily, I am Allāh."⁷⁵ But introducing Prophet Moses was superfluous for, his name was pronounced

⁷³al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol.16, 170.

⁷⁴al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol.16, 171.

⁷⁵Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr*, vol.16, 199.

earlier by the source. The verse was considered to be of prime importance as a message also because it simply negates polytheism, the most hated activity of people as far as God is concerned (Q.4:116).

Another important message resulting from prophethood is God's charging of Prophet Moses with a mission to return to Pharaoh in Egypt, "go thou to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds" (Q.20:24; 79:17). This, in fact, supports our thesis of the prime message, because Pharaoh was worse than a simple polytheist; he considered himself the lord, not only of his people (Q.79:24) but also of the rivers (Q.43:51). To God, this was a totally unacceptable claim. Hence the order given to Prophet Moses to return to challenge Pharaoh.

The crucial importance of this message (Q.20:24) is illustrated in the preceding verses, considered as a preamble to or preparation for the challenge.⁷⁶ It was a remarkable observation by al-Alūsī, because it helped explain the long separation between the two important messages, -- namely, Q.20:14 and Q.20:24.

How these messages got to Prophet Moses -- the channel -- is the intriguing question in this section. The Qur'ān is clear about God's interaction with Prophet Moses: "and to Moses Allāh spoke direct" (Q.4:164). There is, in fact, little room for argument over this matter. What is far from enjoying

⁷⁶al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol.16, 181.

consensus is the form of conversation that took place. According to the model, God spoke to him from behind a veil. This is what exegetical books reveal; but whether or not he actually did see God is yet another unresolved theological debate, part of which -- the nature of God's speech -- has been treated earlier.

The Mu'tazila hold that whenever God intends to speak, He creates that speech in something else to be heard from it. In that sense, Prophet Moses would then have heard His speech from the bush, which would be regarded the speech of God only metaphorically.⁷⁷ Here, the bush would be the channel. However, the explanation was to be quickly rejected by opponents, who argued that the bush would, in that sense, be the actual speaker declaring its lordship to Moses. But this would be absurd and unacceptable.⁷⁸

It must be admitted that the Mu'tazila's position is possible, and would not necessarily lead to anthropomorphism, against which they strove. But hearing the speech from the bush does not make it the speaker. The danger avoided, the arguments of their opponents would have lost their force. This argument is supported especially by the possibility that he heard the speech from all sides and through his entire body,

⁷⁷Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr*, vol.6, 37. We pointed out earlier how inappropriate it would be to use "*taklīman*" for a metaphorical situation.

⁷⁸The Mu'tazila were impelled toward safeguarding God from anthropomorphism, which is considered a negative concept if there is nothing like God.

a fact he himself used to authenticate the source of the message as God. Since he heard it through his body and that did not make him the speaker, hearing it from the bush does not turn it into the speaker either.

The Ash'arites, on the other hand, believe he heard the eternal speech of God -- which in essence, is without letters or a voice; "and there is no way of understanding that through the intellect," adds al-Alūsī.⁷⁹ Al-Māturīdī is quoted as saying, "It is impossible to hear that kind of speech, and therefore what he heard was made of letters and a voice."⁸⁰ Ibn 'Āshūr elaborates the Ash'arite position that God creates a consciousness in Moses's hearing such that he knows God's speech without letters or a voice. This is illustrated further by citing a Tradition, on the authority of Abū Hurayra, that whenever God issues an order in heaven, the Angels hit their wings in submission; and after gaining back their senses, they are asked about what their Lord says, and they reply, "That is which is true and just; and He is the Most High, Most Great."⁸¹ It is, therefore, possible that an Angel or a Prophet may hear God without letters or a voice.⁸² In this case, the channel, as admitted by al-Alūsī, would be difficult to identify. But since it is not impossible, it is, as put

⁷⁹al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol.16, 169.

⁸⁰al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.6, 200.

⁸¹This is probably quoted from the Qur'ān (Q.34:23).

⁸²Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr*, vol.6, 37

forth by the Qur'ān, from behind a veil.

Again, this whole description of God's speech by the Ash'arites may not tally with God's use of *taklīman* in the Qur'ān. According to *Tafsīr al-Manār*, it is possible enough to interpret the speech of God (as in Q.2:253) in any form, since it is open to all possibilities, but it would be unacceptable to do so when specification or emphasis is made by the use of *taklīman*.⁸³

What is interesting from the above is, that both the Mu'tazila and the Ash'arites admit that God communicated with Prophet Moses; that the communication was heard; and that the way it was heard was from behind a veil. For the Mu'tazila, the latter -- behind a veil -- is essentially right because Moses heard it through the bush. For the Ash'arites, it is correct because it occurred neither through letters nor voice.⁸⁴ And for both Mu'tazila and Ash'arites, it is correct because he did not see God (Q.7:143).

The model shows the feedback or the response of Prophet Moses to be direct rather than occurring from behind a veil. This is because God hears and sees him as he speaks. As a matter of fact, this notion is confirmed in the course of God-Moses communication when Prophet Moses and his brother Hārūn were asked to return to Pharaoh. "He said: "Fear not: for I am

⁸³Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm al-Musammā Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol.6, (Cairo: al-Hay'at al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma, 1972) 59.

⁸⁴al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.27, 188.

with you: I hear and see [everything]" (Q.20:46). Consequently, the veil only affects the Prophet, and this is depicted in the model.

The first feedback Prophet Moses sent was in response to God's question, "And what is that in thy right hand, O Moses?" (Q.20:17). That was, "he said, my rod: on it I lean; with it I beat down fodder for my flocks; and in it I find other uses" (Q.20:18). Among the characteristics of an effective feedback are immediateness and informativeness.⁸⁵ It should be stated that Prophet Moses's feedback was not in response to the prime message, yet it was immediate. What is significant here is the informativeness. It means the feedback must convey an information already not known to the source. God is far from being perceived as ignorant of any situation (Q.35:38; 6:59). The feedback, for that matter, was actually known to God.

As to the wisdom behind the question, some exegetes feel, it was meant to produce calmness (*iṭmi'nān*) and familiarity (*īnās*), such that after the rod turns into a snake he would not be afraid, and the miraculous aspect would be apparent.⁸⁶ The lack of real new information in this feedback does not make it ineffective, as the question was, first of all, not intended to yield any response affecting the subsequent

⁸⁵Joseph A. Devito, *The Communication Handbook* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986) 120.

⁸⁶Ismā'īl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, vol.3 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1987) 152; Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr*, vol.16, 205; al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol.16, 177.

message.

Another feedback following God's order to Prophet Moses to return to Pharaoh was that long prayer "[Moses] said: "O my Lord! expand my breast..." (Q.20:25-35). What is unique about this kind of feedback is that it also called for another feedback, and that was exactly what happened. For a positive reply followed immediately, "[Allāh] said: "Granted is thy prayer, O Moses!" (Q.20:36).

Clearly, the effect of the communication was positive. The model illustrates that God-human communication from behind a veil always has a positive effect. It does not occur with ordinary people, but rather with Prophets or Angels,⁸⁷ or with Satan.⁸⁸ In the case of the Angels --which is beyond the scope of this study-- "they receive from Allāh, but do [precisely] what they are commanded." (Q.66:6). This is equally true for the Prophets (Q.33:38-39; 72:28; 5:67).

All that Prophet Moses was asked to do as part of his prophetic duties and in preparation for his challenge of Pharaoh was positively responded to. He answered the question⁸⁹ (Q.20:18) and adhered to all the instructions he was given. The verse "he threw it, and behold! it was a snake,

⁸⁷al-Alūsī, *Rūh*, vol.25, 55.

⁸⁸al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.27, 189. Al-Rāzī feels that, based on Qur'ānic verses, God communicated with Satan, a subject that needs a thorough investigation.

⁸⁹Exegetes feel that the answer was more than adequate as he went on citing the benefits of his rod. Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr*, vol.16, 205-206.

active in motion" (Q.20:20) indicates his positive response to the previous command (Q.20:19). To prove that he actually responded to "now draw thy hand closer to thy side" (Q.20:22), is to be inferred by the fact that, he did in fact carry it out later, when he was challenging Pharaoh and his people (Q.7:108; 26:33). Therefore, any lack of compliance and, for that matter, negative outcome would have been anomalous within a context of interaction from behind a veil.

The next typical -- perhaps the only -- example beside the case of Prophet Moses is that of Prophet Muḥammad. The latter illustrates how a human being can hear God's speech. This is elaborately illustrated in the Tradition of the "night journey and the ascension," which is considered an authentic Tradition.⁹⁰ The Tradition transmitted on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās reveals that God communicated with Prophet Muḥammad, and the latter heard Him and replied to Him.⁹¹

However, our model does not categorically reflect this God-Muḥammad interaction, because it is not considered to occur from behind a veil. Whether or not the Prophet actually

⁹⁰Although with slightly different renditions, this may be verified through the Traditions gathered in Muslim Ibn Ḥajjāj, *al-Isrā' wa al-Mi'rāj kamā Warada fī Ṣaḥīḥay Muslim wa al-Bukhārī wa al-Imām Ibn 'Abbās Raḍīya Allāh 'Anhum* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1900).

⁹¹'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Abbās, *al-Isrā' wa al-Mi'rāj* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī and al-Dār al-Ifrīqiyya al-'Arabiyya, 1983) 30-40.

saw God as they were communicating is still debatable,⁹² but our decision to exclude it is based on the Tradition's own explicit denial of "behind a veil." "Although I spoke to Moses, I did so from behind a veil on [Mount] Sinai.⁹³ But I spoke to you on a carpet of nearness (*bisāṭ al-qurb*) without any veil."⁹⁴

The challenging question remains why was God-Muhammad interaction not included in the Qur'ānic typology? Either Prophet Muhammad did not actually see God, in which case the interaction was considered from the behind-a-veil mode,⁹⁵ or perhaps he did see Him but his was an exceptional case by virtue of the fact that it took place in heaven. To clarify this point, it should be stated that the verse in Q.42:51 came down to deny the possibility of direct interaction -- talking, hearing and seeing -- between God and human beings, (in the context of this earth). This argument gains strength in view of God's designation found in the Tradition of ascension, where the purpose was to differentiate between God-Moses and God-Muhammad interactions -- "on Mount Sinai" as opposed to

⁹²With the majority including Ibn Mas'ūd, Ibn 'Abbās and Ja'far Ibn Muhammad al-Bāqir, believing affirmatively. (Q.53:13-14). *Al-Alūsī, Rūḥ*, vol.25, 56.

⁹³According to this source, it is *sūr sīnā'* (wall of Sinai), which seems inappropriate

⁹⁴Ibn 'Abbās, *al-Isrā'* 36.

⁹⁵Possible as it may be, this argument seems to be a weak one in comparison with verses of the Qur'ān (Q.53:11-17) and Tradition.

"on a carpet of nearness." Therefore, this exception legitimately justifies the exclusion of God-Muhammad interaction from the list. This is the reason for its omission in the model.

MESSENGER MODEL

Listed last among the possible modes of God-human interaction is the sending of a messenger ("or by the sending of a messenger," Q.42:51). The exegetes interpret the messenger here either as the Angel Gabriel in particular or others in general.⁹⁶ This means whenever God intends to convey a message to a prophet, or any human being, either for his own consumption or to be passed on to their people, He sends it through an Angel. This model should be regarded as the standard way of God's revelation to Prophets. Even though, God's communication with Prophet Moses from "behind a veil" that does not preclude sending Gabriel to him later.⁹⁷ Standard though the messenger mode may be for prophethood, it is actually not exclusive to Prophets. For Mary, mother of Prophet Jesus received God's message through an Angel (Q.19:17).

GOD'S INTERACTION WITH ALL PROPHETS

The model in Fig. V. below, depicts God as the source of

⁹⁶Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr*, vol.25, 144.

⁹⁷Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr*, vol.25, 143-144.

the message. He created human beings and jinn for the purpose of worshiping Him (Q.51:56). They needed to be informed about how to worship Him and, most importantly, about the obligation to worship in the first place. This is viewed as the message.

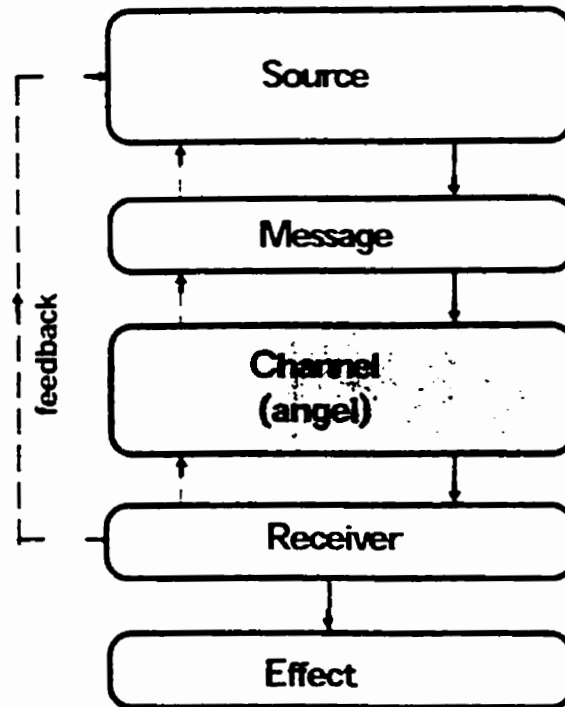


Figure V: God-human communication: Messenger model

To this end, special people are elevated as messengers to serve as intermediaries between God and the people,⁹⁶ but that never caused them to cease being human beings (Q.18:110).

⁹⁶Muhammad 'Alī al-Sābūnī, *al-Nubuwwa wa al-Anbiyā'* (Damascus: Maktabat al-Ḡhazālī, 1985) 15.

Because God does not speak directly to human beings, generally speaking, some Angels⁹⁹ were made messengers to those people. This is shown in the model as the channel. Therefore, the chosen individual -- not just anyone -- becomes the receiver, and therewith the Prophet. Feedback is depicted as occurring two ways; either through the Angel, or directly to God. And the effect is always positive, because the source, the channel, and the message are always trusted.

Examples of this kind of mode in God-human communication are numerous, according to the Qur'ān. For God has sent many prophets and sent angels to all. A useful distinction to make at this juncture is the one between a prophet and a messenger. According to al-Ṣābūnī, a prophet is "a human being who receives a revelation from God, but is never charged to deliver it," while a messenger is "a human being who receives a revelation from God with the order of delivering it to people."¹⁰⁰

Based on these definitions, a messenger has many more responsibilities than a prophet, but every messenger is also a prophet, though the reverse is not true.¹⁰¹ What is

⁹⁹Actually, the Qur'ān shows that Gabriel was the Angel designated for this purpose.

¹⁰⁰al-Ṣābūnī, *al-Nubuwwa* 13.

¹⁰¹al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ Ibn Mūsā, *al-Shifā bi Ta'rīf al-Muṣṭafā*, vol.1, (Beirut: Mu'assasat 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān, 1986) 488-9. We use the word "prophet" more often, because that, as a lower level, indicates an automatic inclusion of messenger. This notion is probably adapted from the Qur'ānic expression as it puts a seal on prophethood. "Muḥammad is not the father of any

significant here is that both receive revelation from God normally through an Angel.

About the numbers of the prophets, the Qur'ān does not offer any information at all. It only says "We did aforetime send messengers before thee: of them there are some whose story We have related to thee, and some whose story We have not related to thee" (Q.40:78); again, "of some messengers We have already told thee the story; of others We have not." (Q.4:164). Although the Qur'ān is silent about the number of prophets and messengers, only twenty-five names occur in it, and Muslims believe they are those of messengers.¹⁰² This discussion about the prophets is intended to set the context for the messages with which they were sent.

As shown in the model, the message comes from God, passes through the Angel, and on to the Prophet. Accordingly, it consists of all that is revealed to that Prophet, or what is contained in a Book sent to him. This implies that the messages vary. However, there is one message common to all --

of your men, but [he is] the messenger of Allāh, and the seal of the Prophets" (Q.33: 40). If he is the seal of the Prophets -- who do not even have to deliver any message, -- then, coming of yet another messenger -- especially to be charged with delivery of a message -- is highly improbable.

¹⁰²Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol.7, 501. Some believe the number is twenty-four, or twenty-three. The following are the 25 names: Ādam, Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, Ismā'īl, Ishāq, Ya'qūb, Dāwūd, Sulaymān, Ayyūb, Yūsuf, Mūsā, Hārūn, Zakariyyā, Yaḥyā, Idrīs, Yūnus, Hūd, Shu'ayb, Sāliḥ, Lūṭ, Ilyās, Ilyasa', Dhū 'l-Kifl, 'Īsā, and Muḥammad. However, according to Tradition, prophets number up to 120,000, of which 315 were messengers. *Al-Ṣābūnī, al-Nubuwwa*, 14.

namely, establishing monotheism and combating polytheism through both belief and action. In the Qur'ān, God says to Prophet Muhammad "not a messenger did We send before thee without this inspiration sent by Us to him: that there is no god but I; therefore worship and serve Me" (Q.21:25); and "for We assuredly sent amongst every people a messenger, [with the command], "serve Allāh, and eschew evil"(Q.16:36).

What is special about these verses is that they show that God sends His messages through a member of the community, and that the most important of all the messages is monotheism¹⁰³ - the worship of one God. The verses above confirm the crux of God's message, the clearest examples of which may be found with respect to some specific prophets.¹⁰⁴ Those verses are enough to point out that, obedience and belief in those prophets as God's messengers are included in the messages. Yet, other versions of the narrations have spelled it out clearly.¹⁰⁵ Strategically indeed, the words "so fear Allāh and obey me" are repeated in the story of each Prophet, often with only a few verses between the repetitions.

At this stage, it is not inaccurate to assert that all the prophets came to convey the same message. It would,

¹⁰³Whenever monotheism is considered in the Qur'ān, so also is polytheism, even without any mention of it, and vice versa.

¹⁰⁴On Prophet Nūḥ (Q.7:59); on Hūd (Q.7:65; 11:50); on Ṣāliḥ (Q.7:73; 11:61); and on Shu'ayb (Q.7:85; 11:84; 29:36).

¹⁰⁵Such as Q. 26:105-108; 26:124-126; 26:142-144; 26:161-163; and 26:177-179.

however, be incorrect to hold this in respect of specifics and details. Clearly, in *Sūra 26 (al-Shu'arā')*, the messages that follow the common ones express unique concerns. For example, the people of Prophet Lūṭ, who engaged in sodomy, certainly needed a different message from that of the people of Prophet Shu'ayb, who had a propensity for commercial dishonesty.

Still, when it comes to describing God's messages to prophets, the primary scriptures in Islam (the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms, and the Qur'ān), ought to be given more careful consideration. Individual distinctions become more critical when discussing the context of each scripture. In the present study, though, we are interested only in demonstrating the different aspects of communication, a survey -- even a brief one -- of these scriptures being unnecessary.

As we saw earlier, the standard channel is the Angel Gabriel, about whom the Qur'ān says: "Say: whoever is an enemy to Gabriel- for he brings down [the revelation] to thy heart by Allāh's will (Q.2:97); "with it came down the truthful spirit to thy heart that thou mayest admonish" (Q.26:193-194); and "say, the Holy Spirit has brought the revelation from thy Lord in truth" (Q.16:102). Briefly, these verses were revealed in order to gainsay the non-believers' claim that the Qur'ān was concocted by the Prophet Muḥammad -- "They say, "Thou art but a forger" (Q.16:101). Consequently, these verses were sent down.

Having established Gabriel as the channel through which

God imparts His messages to the prophets, we should now ask how Gabriel in turn conveys the messages. Basically, this happens in two ways. According to a Tradition, on the authority of 'Ā'isha, Prophet Muḥammad was describing the process to al-Ḥārith Ibn Hishām, when the latter inquired about the process of revelation. "Sometimes, he [Gabriel] comes to me like the ring of a bell. That is the toughest one on me. After he relieves me, I would grasp what he had said. And on certain occasions, the Angel comes to me in the form of a man and I would grasp what he says to me."¹⁰⁶

In the first form, which seems to be the most frequent, only the Prophet may see the Angel. Its occurrence, however, is confirmed by 'Ā'isha, who relates that "I have seen him [the Prophet] sweating on a very cold day as he received a revelation."¹⁰⁷ People other than the Prophet may see the Angel in the second form. This theory is supported by yet another Tradition on the authority of 'Umar, who describes a person going to the Prophet and asking him some questions. Although, that person seemed to be familiar, none of the Companions ever saw him. When the man departed, the Prophet said after seeing that they had no inkling who he was, that, "that was Gabriel, who came to teach you [the fundamentals of]

¹⁰⁶Aḥmad 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Zabīdī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī al-Musammā al-Tajrīd al-Ṣarīḥ li-Aḥādīth al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol.1-2, (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā'is, 1986) 21.

¹⁰⁷al-Zabīdī, *Mukhtaṣar*, vol.1-2, 21.

your religion."¹⁰⁸

No channel could in fact be more dependable, for the Qur'ān has associated with it (him) all the necessary qualities required to ensure its credibility. "With it came down the truthful spirit"; and "verily this is the word of a most honourable Messenger, endued with power, held in honour by the Lord of the Throne, with authority there, [and] faithful to his trust" (Q.19-21).

Important for our case, is that, beside all the other attributes, Gabriel has a designated epithet as *amīn* (trustworthy). Ibn 'Āshūr remarks that, "he is *amīn* because God trusted him with His revelation."¹⁰⁹ In addition,

not only was the bringer of the revelation, Gabriel, an honourable Messenger, impeccable of deceit, but he had, in the angelic kingdom, rank and authority before Allāh's Throne, and he could convey an authoritative divine message. He was, like the Holy Prophet, faithful to his trust; and therefore there could be no question of the message being delivered in any other way than exactly according to the divine will and purpose.¹¹⁰

This is an interesting commentary on these verses, accurately summing up our point.

There is no room for noise in this type of revelation. This is because, the messages are meant to reach the people of

¹⁰⁸Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, vol.2 (Beirut: Dār al-Janān, 1988) 635.

¹⁰⁹Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tafsīr*, vol.19, 189.

¹¹⁰*The Holy Qur'ān: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Medina: King Fahd Holy Qurān Printing Complex, 1411) 1908.

those Prophets, while maintaining their accuracy. That would not be possible with noise. But, two causes of noise may be considered. Firstly, Satan constantly tries to corrupt God's message to His Prophets which, according to some exegetes, he is actually capable of.¹¹¹ They support their argument by depending on the first segment of the verse in Q.22:52: "never did We send a messenger or a prophet before thee, but, when he framed a desire, Satan threw (*alqā*) some [vanity] into his desire." *Alqā* implies that he is capable and actually does it.

The story of the *gharānīq* (cranes) is often used to illustrate this point as the circumstance of the verse (*sabab al-nuzūl*) (Q.22:52). The story has different renditions, as related to Ibn 'Abbās -- most of which have no chains of transmitters but only one Companion (*hadīth mursal*). The story has it that, as Prophet Muḥammad was reciting *sūrat al-najm* (Q.53), reaching Q.53:19-20, which mentioned some of the gods, Satan made him say "and those are the elevated *gharānīq* (cranes), and their intercession may be sought." When the polytheists heard that, they prostrated along with him.¹¹²

On the other hand, the majority of exegetes believe that this cannot happen and has never happened to the Prophet, arguing with the second segment of the verse, "But Allāh will cancel anything (vain) that Satan throws in, and Allāh will confirm (and establish) His signs" (Q.22:52). This assertion

¹¹¹Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol.3, 241.

¹¹²Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol.3, 239.

appears to indicate exactly what God would do whenever the interference occurs. The exegetes' argumentation is supported by the fact that Muslims -- who were right behind him -- did not hear what the polytheists -- who were a bit far -- had heard.¹¹³ This means that Satan did not corrupt the message by making the Prophet actually utter those words; instead, he made the polytheists hear what he intended them to hear. This observation was made by al-Baghwī.¹¹⁴

The other possibility of noise has to do with making error in conveying the message on the part of the Prophet. However, God's promise to prevent this takes the following command.

Move not thy tongue concerning the (Qur'ān) to make haste therewith. It is for Us to collect it and to recite it: but when We have recited it, follow thou its recital (as promulgated): nay, more, it is for Us to explain it (and make it clear) (Q.75:16-19).

As a result of the above, noise will not be depicted in our model.

The model shows that feedback may flow directly from the prophet to God, or through the Angel. It is direct because, God is believed to be the Most Hearing (*Samī'*) and above that, Most Close (*Qarīb*), much more than human beings often expect. The Qur'ān says, "It was We Who created man, and We know what suggestions his soul makes to him: for We are nearer to him than [his] jugular vein" (Q.50:16). In his *Lubāb al-Nuqūl fī*

¹¹³According to some renditions of the Tradition.

¹¹⁴Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol.3, 240.

Asbāb al-Nuzūl, al-Suyūṭī narrates that, the believers once asked the Prophet about the proximity of God, with the hope of offering their prayers accurately. "Is God close enough that we may say our prayers confidentially, or is He at a distance that we need to call?"¹¹⁵ In response to that, God revealed, "When my servants ask you concerning Me, I am indeed close (to them): I respond to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me (Q.2:186)."¹¹⁶

These verses imply -- among other things -- that God is so close that an intercession between human being and Himself is not needed, when it comes to prayer. Therefore, they confirm the possibility of direct communication. Still, the "angelic" channel is possible for feedback.

Potentially, all the messages sent to the Prophets had salutary effects. But these effects may not have been viewed in quite the same way in the case of their people. The Prophets have carried out the responsibilities contained in the messages, "If ye turn away, I [at least] have conveyed the message with which I was sent to you" (Q.11:57). That was Prophet Hūd declaring the execution of his duty to his people. The Prophets Ṣāliḥ (Q.7:79) and Shu'ayb (Q:7:93) did the

¹¹⁵"a huwa Qarīb fanunājīh am Ba'īd fanunādīh?"

¹¹⁶Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl fī Asbāb al-Nuzūl* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-'Ulūm, 1978) 33.

same.¹¹⁷

GOD'S INTERACTION WITH MARY

Mary, mother of Prophet Moses was not a prophet yet, she received a message from God through an Angel. The Qur'ān has provided a complete account of her reception of God's message, considered as an example of the God-human communication through a messenger mode. However, as mentioned earlier, this is unique but not exclusive for prophets.

In her youth, Mary had received a message from God through the Angels. The Qur'ān says,

Behold! the angels said: "O Mary! Allāh hath chosen thee and purified thee -- chosen thee above the women of all nations. O Mary! worship the Lord devoutly: prostrate thyself, and bow down (in prayer) with those who bow down (Q.3:42-43).

The message consisted of glad tidings and several commands. However, there were other messages, sent later, which were intimately related to the birth of her son, Prophet Jesus (Q.19:19-26).

Obviously, the channel was an angel.¹¹⁸ But an additional element worth pointing out is the direct appearance of that angel to her in the form of a man. Unlike the Prophet,

¹¹⁷Although it would seem appropriate to discuss the effect of God's message on people in general, we shall omit this since the latter were not the immediate receivers. The effects of the messages were, therefore, considered limited to the prophets.

¹¹⁸In Q.3:45, angels [in the plural] are mentioned.

who may receive revelation through an angel in two forms, a non-prophet may only receive it through an angel in human form: "Then We sent to her Our angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects" (Q.19:17).

The authenticity of the channel will result in the credibility of the message. But how could Mary be sure about the channel -- namely, the angel -- particularly one appearing in the form of a man? It is believed that uncertainty, or perhaps fear, necessitated the angel's self-introduction, through the words, "Nay, I am only a messenger from thy Lord [to announce] to thee the gift of a pure son" (Q.19:19). But as al-Rāzī observes, that was not enough, for she still needed a proof. It is possible that a miracle had happened by which she knew, or she might have been made aware of certain signs through Prophet Zakariyyā by which she could identify an angel.¹¹⁹ Moreover, that was not the first time miraculous things happened to her. According to the Qur'ān, as a young girl, Mary knew how God can do unusual things,

Every time he [Zakariyyā] entered (her) chamber to see her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said: "O Mary! whence (comes) this to you?" She said "From Allāh: for Allāh provides sustenance to whom He pleases, without measure" (Q.3:37).

This means she needed little observation in order to realize that he was, in fact, a messenger from God.

With a high degree of certainty, this communication was free of noise. The angel, according to the majority of

¹¹⁹al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.21, 198.

exegetes, was Gabriel,¹²⁰ whose credibility is strongly established by the Qur'ān and discussed above. Regarding the distortion of the message, while there is little chance of noise occurring in interpersonal communication in general,¹²¹ this was typical God-Mary interaction where noise is least expected in order to produce a positive effect.

About the effect of God-Mary communication, her response to the commands was positive. God used her as an excellent example of devotion and belief in God's commands,

"and Mary, the daughter of 'Imrān, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into (her body) of our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His revelations, and was one of the devout (servants) (Q.66:12).

Suffice it to say that she believed in the words of her Lord but, more appropriately, in reference to the previous command contained in Q.3:43, her devotion is still made explicit.

Again, in order to prove her positive response to the commands concerning her pregnancy and its aftermath, the Qur'ān, while omitting the rest of the proofs, only mentions how she practically adhered to the last command. Instead of answering her people, "she pointed to the babe" (Q.19:29). Hence, God's declaration "and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and His revelations, and was one of the

¹²⁰al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol.21, 196.

¹²¹Even though it was between the angel and Mary.

devout (servants)" (Q.66:12).¹²²

¹²²Another God-human interaction that seemed to occur in this mode reflected in the Qur'ān was between God and 'Uzayr (Q.2:259), whose name, however, was never mentioned in that narration. For more, see, Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, vol.2, 40-42. Again Khidr, whose name was never mentioned in Qur'ān either, seemed to have received communication from God (Q.18:65), but in a process which the Qur'ān never expounded. But the possibility of that process may be considered, since his prophethood is debatable, with a majority of Muslims arguing that he was actually a Prophet. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, vol.1, 305-306.

CONCLUSION

To identify communication models in the Qur'ān, and to explain God-human interaction through models, is a kind of interpretation, certainly a modern interpretation.

Consequently, we have established that the interpretation of the Qur'ān was inevitable for the Prophet and, after him, for "some people", with every succeeding generation. Although, interpretation by people other than the Prophet was finally condoned by scholars, under conditions justifiably considered religious, we still maintain that, for academic purposes, certain conditions such as "sound faith", should be relaxed.¹²³

However, we have shown that if modern exegesis is to gain wider acceptance, it needs to be rooted in earlier exegetical tradition as far as approach is concerned. But, as we clearly demonstrated, the universal nature of the Qur'ān, backed by our notion of "generational contextuality" and the ultimate need for proper understanding, justify the modern interpretation.

Regarding the use of models, and the need for making the Qur'ān comprehensible, we have shown that models may be useful tools in explaining the Qur'ān, especially God-human interaction.

¹²³For instance, *al-Kashshāf* of al-Zamakhsharī and *al-Mīzān* of al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī may not survive the "sound faith" condition put forth by the orthodox, but they certainly have an academic value that cannot be denied.

The study has also proven that God speaks, but in a different way than that of humans. This does not necessarily negate His attribute as a speaker. It seems, however, that no theological arguments regarding God's speech and its nature have any significant bearing on God as a communicator. This implies that they do not indicate that God does not communicate.

The Qur'ān has outlined three ways through which God communicates with human beings -- namely, inspirational, from behind a veil, and by sending a messenger. We have demonstrated that, as God is always the source and the human being the receiver, the message in the inspirational mode may be intangible, and its transmittence through either dream or heart, makes it vulnerable to noise. It is nonetheless, the only mode through which God continues to communicate with human beings.

In the "behind a veil" mode, God speaks directly to a person, with the latter hearing Him without seeing Him. Prophet Moses is said to have had the privilege of conversing with God in that fashion. Some scholars believe that Prophet Muḥammad also did when he ascended to heaven. However, based on the Tradition of "the night journey and ascension", we excluded God-Muḥammad interaction from the "behind a veil" mode. Contrary to the inspirational, this mode is free of noise.

Gabriel is the channel in the "messenger mode." That is

the standard way in which God interacts with prophets, although not exclusively so. Even though some exegetes and historians see the possibility of noise here, we have proven otherwise.

All God-human communication has a positive effect as we saw, except perhaps in the inspirational mode, where the source, the channel, and the message may be uncertain.

Feedback, the paucity of which in other communication models subjects them to criticism, is however not overly important in God-human interaction. Although God does not need feedback to shape His subsequent communication, it may exist in God-human interaction; hence, its reflection in the models.

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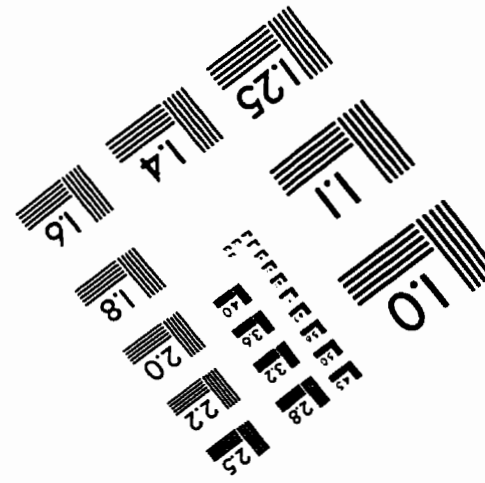
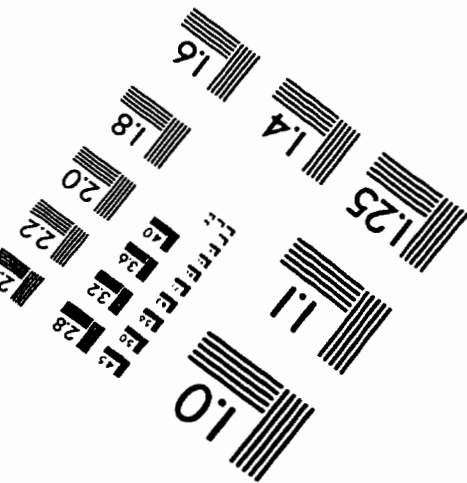
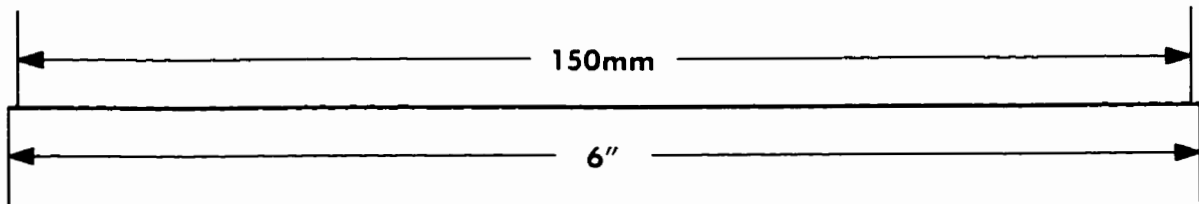
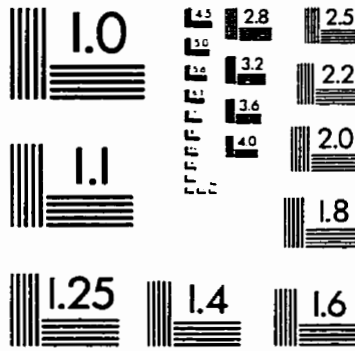
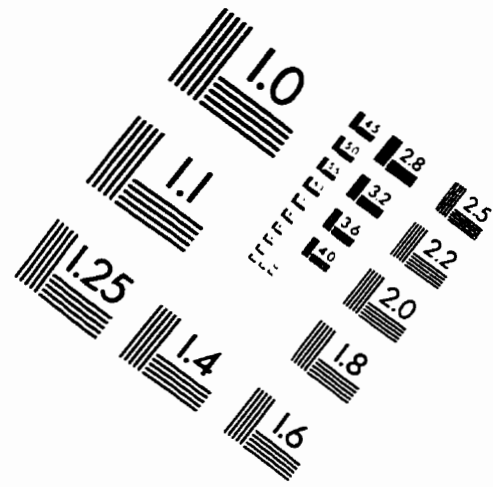
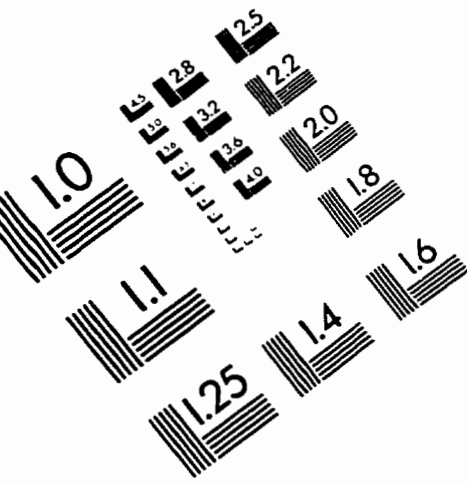
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IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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