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Munʾim Sirry (ed.)

# New Trends in Qurʾānic Studies

Text, Context,  
and Interpretation

Mun'im Sirry, editor

New Trends in Qur'anic Studies  
Text, Context, and Interpretation



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# Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Contributors	ix
Foreword by Reuven Firestone	xiii
Notes on Transliteration and Translation	xvi
Abbreviations	xvii

Introduction: Recent Trends in Qur'anic Studies — <i>Mun'im Sirry</i>	1
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## PART 1: TRENDS AND ISSUES IN QUR'ANIC STUDIES

Reflections on the History and Evolution of Western Study of the Qur'ān, from ca. 1900 to the Present — <i>Fred M. Donner</i>	21
Indonesian Muslim Responses to Non-Muslim Approaches to Qur'anic Studies — <i>Yusuf Rahman</i>	45
Semitic Rhetoric and the Qur'ān: The Scholarship of Michel Cuypers — <i>Adnane Mokrani</i>	61
From Clerical to Scriptural Authority: The Qur'ān's Dialogue with the Syriac New Testament — <i>Emran El-Badawi</i>	83
A Qur'anic Theodicy: Moses in the <i>Sūrat al-Kahf</i> (Q 18) — <i>David Penchansky</i>	95
Contemporary Shi'i Approaches to the History of the Text of the Qur'ān — <i>Seyfeddin Kara</i>	109
The Computer and the Qur'ān: An Analysis and Appraisal — <i>Adam Flowers</i>	125

## PART 2: TRENDS AND ISSUES IN TAFSĪR STUDIES

Reading the Qur'ān Contextually: Approaches and Challenges — <i>Abdullah Saeed</i>	151
“Qur'anism” in Modern Qur'ān Interpretation — <i>Izza Rohman</i>	163

Understanding Patriarchal Interpretations of Q 4:34 in the Light of Stanley Fish's "Interpretive Communities" — <i>Adis Duderija</i>	173
The Global Islamic Tradition and the Nation State in the Contemporary Muslim Exegesis of the Qur'ān — <i>Johanna Pink</i>	193
Interpreting the Qur'ān between Shari'ah and Changing Custom: On Women's Dress in Indonesia — <i>Munirul Ikhwan</i>	211
The Hermeneutics of Legitimate Leadership: Qurṭubī's Commentary on Q 2:30 (the Adam Verse) — <i>Han Hsien Liew</i>	233
"Deviant" Qur'anic Interpretation in Indonesia: Reading Lia Eden's Defense of the Claim to Prophethood — <i>Al Makin</i>	249
Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Indonesia: The Poetry of Ḥamzah al-Fanṣūrī and Haji Hasan Mustapa — <i>Jajang A. Rohmana</i>	261
Bibliography	279
Subject Index	305

## “Qur’anism” in Modern Qur’ān Interpretation

IZZA ROHMAN

This chapter highlights some key interpretive assumptions in modern qur’anic hermeneutics, a trend (*ittijāh*) that I call “Qur’anism.” This trend is characterized by emphasis on the need to be faithful to the Qur’ān itself in the interpretation of the Qur’ān, which means that a comprehensive reading and cross-referential approach is a key to understanding the qur’anic text. Qur’anism challenges the role of extra-qur’anic materials in the interpretation of the Qur’ān. These emphases and challenges have contributed to the emergence of modern varieties of interpretation of the Qur’ān by the Qur’ān (*tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi’l-Qur’ān*—hereinafter TQbQ).

This chapter examines how TQbQ is understood by several modern Muslim exegetes, including Farāhī, Iṣlāhī, Bint al-Shāṭi’, Ṭabāṭabā’ī and al-Shanqīṭī and by some progressive intellectuals who have challenged traditionally dominant approaches to the Qur’ān. It also addresses the impact of such an approach on the treatment of exegetical difference of opinion, and on exegetical contestation. The chapter concludes with a brief reflection on the inability of Qur’anism to prevent different interpretations of the Qur’ān.

### **Qur’anism in the *Tafsīr* Tradition**

What is the best way to interpret the Qur’ān? One of the most frequent responses to this question is that the Qur’ān is best interpreted by reference to the Qur’ān itself. While this answer is found in Qur’ān-related works by classical Muslim scholars, it is modern scholars who see the application of the idea as becoming more urgent and seek to apply it in an intensive and extensive way.

Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) are among classical scholars quoted by modern ones to argue in favor of TQbQ, but both exegetes treat the subject as a minor element as compared to linguistic analysis, logical reasoning, and theological orientation. Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) is more frequently cited to support TQbQ. In his *Muqaddimah fī usūl al-tafsīr*, Ibn Taymiyyah places this hermeneutical device at the top of a hierarchy of what is commonly known as *al-tafsīr bi'l-ma'thūr*, thereby initiating a novel development in *tafsīr*.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, the significance of TQbQ was emphasized by Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392), al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), and others. However, none of them makes TQbQ a major element in their exegesis, relying instead on traditions (*riwāyāt*) and the opinions of past generations.

Beginning in the twentieth century, some scholars have noted that earlier Qur'ān exegetes did not apply TQbQ or holistic approaches to the Qur'ān more broadly. Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981), for instance, says that TQbQ was ignored and not pursued in the past. Some scholars have now published works on Qur'ān interpretations in which they make TQbQ their main component, for example, *al-Mīzān* by Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Adwā' al-bayān* by al-Shanqīṭī, *Tadabbur-i-Qur'ān* by Iṣlāḥī, and *al-Furqān* by al-Ṣādiqī. In addition, TQbQ is the main component of many modern thematic commentaries on the Qur'ān. These thematic commentaries represent the modern development of the classical principle of intratextuality: that one part of the Qur'ān interprets the other (*al-Qur'ān yufassiru ba'duhu ba'du*).<sup>2</sup>

For some scholars, letting the Qur'ān explain itself is the way to “real” *tafsīr*. This means that external interpretive sources must be ignored. Support for TQbQ and similar holistic approaches to the Qur'ān is often accompanied by the de-emphasis of extra-qur'anic sources. As Mustansir Mir has observed:

many modern Muslim scholars in modern times attach diminished importance to several traditionally important exegetical sources and have chosen to focus on the qur'anic text itself, studying it with a view to finding answers and solutions to questions and issues of today. In doing so, they tend to accord primacy to the qur'anic text itself over the traditional repertoire of sources and devices for understanding that text.<sup>2</sup>

1. See Walid A. Saleh, “Ibn Taymiyya and the Rise of Radical Hermeneutics: An Analysis of An Introduction to the Foundations of Qur'anic Exegesis,” in Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (eds.), *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times: Studies in Islamic Philosophy* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 145.

2. Mustansir Mir, “Continuity, Context and Coherence in the Qur'ān: A Brief Review of the Idea of Nazm in Tafsīr Literature,” *Al-Bayān* 11:2 (2013): 28.

The tendency to put greater dependence upon the qur'anic text itself, coupled with a disinclination to rely on extra-qur'anic sources, is what I call "Qur'anism," which should not be confused with the Qur'anists/Qur'anites/Ahl al-Qur'an/Qur'an-alone movement, the followers of which do not accept the authority of ḥadīth and view the Qur'an as the sole source of religious guidance. Their interpretive approach to the Qur'an, which may be regarded as a kind of TQbQ, is an inevitable consequence of their rejection of ḥadīth. However, what I mean by Qur'anism is the endorsement of the primacy of the Qur'an in Qur'an interpretation, coupled with the delegitimization of reliance on traditional, non-qur'anic sources. Qur'anism does not completely abandon secondary sources, but it seriously challenges their long-established central role.

Qur'anism is characterized by the following four interlinked hermeneutical assumptions:

1. Reliance on the Qur'an itself is the most legitimate mode of *tafsīr*.
2. No extra-qur'anic ideas should be imposed on the Qur'an.
3. External sources play only a secondary role in interpretation.
4. The Qur'an serves as a "referee" for diverse exegetical opinions.

In what follows I will clarify each of these principles as practiced by contemporary scholars. In the conclusion, I will make some remarks on how Qur'anism has had an impact on the treatment of differences of exegetical opinion, and how it has reoriented exegetical contestation.

### **Reliance on the Qur'an Itself as the Most Legitimate Mode of Tafsīr**

Ṭabāṭabā'ī argues that the Qur'an does not need anything external to it to act as a guide for human beings because the Qur'an refers to itself as "a clear explanation for everything" (*tibyān li-kull shay'*), "an illuminating light" (*nūr mubīn*), "a guidance" (*hudā*), "a clear proof" (*bayyinah*), and "a distinguishing criterion" (*furqān*). With all of these attributes, the Qur'an is clearly sufficient to guide people to comprehend it. The Qur'an must be the best guide to our understanding of it.<sup>3</sup>

In line with Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Farāhī (d. 1930) argues that the Qur'an is the most reliable guide to itself. He states that the Qur'an itself serves as the firm basis of exegesis and it does not depend on anything external to it in making

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3. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (22 vols.; Beirut: Mu'assasat al-'alāmī li'l-maṭbū'āt, 1997), 1:14; 3:99; idem, *The Qur'an in Islam: Its Impact and Influence on the Life of Muslims*, trans. Assadullah ad-Dhaakir Yate (Blanco, TX: Zahra, 1987), 27, 34, 52–55.



its meaning clear. Farāhī emphasizes the status of the Qurʾān as the guide, the basic criterion and the deciding force.<sup>4</sup>

Reliance on the Qurʾān in interpretation is justified by qurʾanic instructions. As is evident in some verses (Q 4:82, 38:29, 47:24, 23:68), one is urged to perform *tadabbur* (deep reflection) over the Qurʾān. According to Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *tadabbur* means “to study one verse after another.” The association of *tadabbur* with the doctrine of no contradiction in the Qurʾān (*lā ikhtilāf fiʾl-Qurʾān*), as mentioned in Q 4:82, means that the command for deep reflection is connected to the fact that one part of the Qurʾān explains another.<sup>5</sup>

A similar argument is found in the writings of progressive Muslim intellectuals. Asma Barlas quotes several qurʾanic verses that support a holistic reading of the Qurʾān as a textual unity. Central to her argument are verses 89–93 of Q 15, which warn people not to break the Qurʾān into parts. These verses criticize those who divided the Muslim Scripture into arbitrary parts (*al-muqtasimūn*) and who tear the Qurʾān into shreds (*taʾḍiyah*). The Qurʾān rejects any reading that approaches it in a decontextualized, selective, and piecemeal way.<sup>6</sup>

Some traditions of the Prophet and early generation of Muslims support a cross-referential approach to the Qurʾān. Performing TQbQ is consistent with the practice of the Prophet, to whom it was revealed and who served as the teacher (*muʾallim*) and elucidator (*mubayyin*) of the Qurʾān. It is also consistent with the practice of religious authorities, such as Shīʿi Imāms, Companions, and Successors.<sup>7</sup> In two instances, the Prophet is reported to have explained Q 6:82 with reference to Q 31:13, and Q 14:17 with reference to Q 40:15 and Q 18:29. The interpretation of one qurʾanic verse by another is also credited to two Companions, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and Ibn ʿAbbās, each of whom is reported to have said that in the Qurʾān, one part speaks for another and one part testifies for another (*yantiqū baʾḍuhu baʾḍim wa-yashhadu baʾḍuhu baʾḍim*), and that one part of Qurʾān is comparable to another, and one part refers to another (*yushbihu baʾḍuhu baʾḍim wa-yuraddu baʾḍuhu ilā baʾḍ*). Albeit limited in number, these traditions justify TQbQ.

4. Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī, *Exordium to Coherence in the Qurʾān*, trans. Tariq Mahmood Hashmi (Lahore: Al-Mawrid, n.d.), 29, 37.

5. Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, 5:19–21.

6. Asma Barlas, “Believing Women” in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretation of the Qurʾan (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 15–16. Cf. Ṭāhā Jābir al-ʿAlwānī, “Al-Wiḥdah al-bināʾiyyah liʾl-Qurʾān al-majīd,” *Thaqāfatunā liʾl-dirāsāt waʾl-buḥūth* 24 (2010), 15. On the spread of this idea among progressive Muslim intellectuals, particularly Muslim feminists, see Aysha A. Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qurʾan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 87–109.

7. E.g., Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *al-Mīzān*, 1:15.

The performance of TQbQ is associated with reliance on its "author," that is, Allah. Since no one knows more about the meaning of Allah's Word than Allah Himself, reliance on His speech (i.e., the Qur'an) is the best way to know the meaning of the Qur'an. This argument is made by al-Shanqīṭī and al-Ṣābūnī, among others.<sup>8</sup>

Other scholars advocate for a cross-referential/intratextual approach and, due to the distinctive nature of qur'anic structure or style, regard it as the most appropriate approach. The Qur'an often addresses one topic in numerous places—in different verses, in different *sūrah*s. Therefore, an interpreter must consider all relevant verses dealing with a given subject. Without taking this step, an interpreter is likely to arrive at incorrect conclusions or to fail to get a clear picture of how an issue is treated in the Qur'an.<sup>9</sup>

### No Imposition of Extra-Qur'anic Ideas

No extra-qur'anic ideas should be superimposed on the Qur'an. Farāhī rejects all traces of subjective interpretation, which he construes as the deliberate imposition of one's bias on the meaning of the text. He calls this *taḥrīf* (distortion) of the text, comparable to what Schleiermacher calls "active misunderstanding."<sup>10</sup> Farāhī attempts to reduce the possibility of the subjectivist imposition of meanings on the qur'anic discourse.

Bint al-Shāṭī' (d. 1998) strongly opposed reader subjectivity that colors the interpretation of the Qur'an. Her criticism of traditional hermeneutical, *isrā'īliyyāt*-oriented, theological, mystical, philosophical, and "scientific" approaches is based on what she sees as tendentious projections of extra-qur'anic ideas and materials onto the Qur'an.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Ṭabāṭabāī seeks to avoid imposing preconceived views or the results of academic or philosophical arguments onto the Qur'an.<sup>12</sup> For him there is a clear difference between

8. See Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Shanqīṭī, *Aḍwā' al-bayān fī ṭdāh al-Qur'an bi'l-Qur'an* (9 vols.; Mecca: Dār 'ālam al-fawā'id, 1426 AH), 1:8; Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ṣābūnī, *al-Tibyān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'an* (Karachi: Maktabat al-bushrā, 2011), 93.

9. E.g., Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style* (London: Tauris, 2011); Ṣalāḥ 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Khālidī, *Tārīf al-dārisīn bi-manāḥij al-mufasssīrīn* (Damascus: Dār al-qalam, 2008), 150–153.

10. Abdul Rahim Afaki, "Farāhī's Objectivist-Canonical Qur'anic Hermeneutics and Its Thematic Relevance with Classical Western Hermeneutics," *Transcendent Philosophy* 10 (2009): 258–259.

11. Sahiron Syamsuddin, "An Examination of Bint al-Shāṭī's Method of Interpreting the Qur'an" (MA thesis, McGill University, 1998), 9–43.

12. Mohammad Hossein Mokhtari, "The Exegesis of Tabatabaei and the Hermeneutics of Hirsch: A Comparative Study" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2007), 155.

asking “what does the Qur’ān say?” and “how can this verse be explained so as to fit into one’s belief?” The former means that we go where the Qur’ān leads us, while the latter means that we decide in advance what to believe and find ways to fit Qur’anic verses to that belief. The latter approach is called adaptation (*taḥbīq*), rather than explanation (*bayān*) or interpretation (*tafsīr*). Many traditional approaches to the Qur’ān qualify as *taḥbīq*.<sup>13</sup>

Among modern progressive Muslims, one finds continuing efforts to free the Qur’ān from non-Qur’anic ideas and other post-Qur’anic sources, as, for instance, in the hermeneutical projects of Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988) and scholars who follow in his footsteps.<sup>14</sup> Rahman’s rejection of interpretations based on extra-Qur’anic influences is noticeable in his application of a thematic approach in his *Major Themes of the Qur’an*.<sup>15</sup>

If one should not impose any extra-Qur’anic ideas, then how should one approach the question of presupposition? Ṭabāṭabā’ī says that TQbQ makes it possible for the text to answer questions asked by an interpreter and prevents him from imposing personal ideas on the text. Although presuppositions may pave the way for questioning the text, it is the text that should produce and organize the answer. An interpreter should not let his personal ideas, based on his pre-understanding and presuppositions, be projected onto the text. If he does, his interpretation cannot be accepted. Of course, it is impossible for any interpreter not to interpose in the act of interpretation. But the interposition is not always related to the content of the text onto which the interpreter intends to impose his or her personal perspective. An interpreter raises questions, but does not answer those questions himself or herself. Rather, it is the Qur’ān that responds to the questions. The answers are not shaped by the interpreter’s interrogation. Ṭabāṭabā’ī argues that the Qur’ān interpreter should not impose his or her prejudice in order to determine the meaning of the Qur’anic text and that such an interpretation is unacceptable.<sup>16</sup>

Ṭabāṭabā’ī argues for the possibility of keeping an interpretation free from the interpreter’s presuppositions. He objects to any approach to the Qur’ān that lets a reader impose his opinion on the Qur’ān. Such an approach would

13. Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *al-Mīzān*, 1:11.

14. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); idem, *Major Themes of the Qur’an* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Amina Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Barlas, “Believing” Women in Islam; Taufik Adnan Amal and Syamsu Rizal Panggabean, “A Contextual Approach to the Qur’an,” in Abdullah Saeed (ed.), *Approaches to the Qur’an in Contemporary Indonesia* (London: Oxford and The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2005), 107–133. See also Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur’an*, 87–109.

15. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an*.

16. Mokhtari, “The Exegesis of Tabatabaei,” 60, 205, 244, 271.

represent or be closer to *tafsīr bi’l-ra’y* (exegesis based on personal opinion) or *tafsīr bi-ghayr ‘ilm* (exegesis based on something other than knowledge), which was condemned by the Prophet.<sup>17</sup> It should be noted, however, that Ṭabāṭabā’ī rejects presupposition only when he thinks it invalidates the natural meaning of the text, and that he sometimes thinks that a presupposition may help in understanding God’s intention.

### The Role of External Sources Revisited

The rethinking of the role of extra-qur’anic materials in Qur’ān interpretation is another notable aspect of Qur’anism. This rethinking marks a shift from traditional dependence upon those materials. Many modern scholars have emphasized that the authority of the Qur’ān is greater than that of external sources. In Qur’ān interpretation, this authoritative asymmetry means that it is not appropriate to rely on secondary literature, such as ḥadīth/*riwāyāt*, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *sīrah*, Arab history, lexicons, poetry and earlier exegeses. Instead of relying on external authorities, like traditions of the Prophet and the early generations or the opinions of exegetes, some scholars argue that one should refer to other parts of the Qur’ān that may clarify the meaning of that word or verse. An external source—whether it be a sound ḥadīth, an established historical fact, or a citation from a scripture of the earlier nations—may be invoked only in order to endorse one’s interpretation.

For these scholars, external sources are secondary and in theory dispensable. One may refer to them only to confirm the interpretation that one has derived from a holistic reading of the Qur’ān. These sources are not the real source of Qur’ān interpretation. As Iṣlāḥī puts it, “The real source of *tafsīr* is the language of the Qur’ān, the context and placement of its verses and parallels drawn from within its text.”<sup>18</sup> Even the sunnah, which has long been considered to be the elucidator of the Qur’ān, and which has a crucial role in *tafsīr bi’l-ma’thūr* (tradition-based *tafsīr*), has now been repositioned. Farāhī argues that “the *ḥadīth* narratives work only as an explanatory and non-categorical resource that must accord with the foundational one and may never override it.”<sup>19</sup> Ṭabāṭabā’ī insists that greater reliance upon the reports of ear-

17. On Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s discussion of *tafsīr bi’l-ra’y*, see Louis Abraham Medoff, “*Ijtihād* and Renewal in Qur’anic Hermeneutics: An Analysis on Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*” (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2007), 36–43.

18. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qur’ān* (9 vols.; Lahore: Fārān Foundation, 1983), 9:8, cited by Shehzad Saleem, “Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-e-Qur’an*: Pondering Over the Qur’an, Volume One (Book Review),” *Islamic Studies* 48:1 (2009): 120.

19. Farāhī, *Exordium to Coherence*, 29.

lier generations should be regarded as “a concealed form of *tafsīr bi'l-ra'y*.” Indeed, in his view, “every hermeneutic, other than *tafsīr* of the Qur’ān by the Qur’ān, fails to qualify as true *tafsīr* and tends toward *ra'y*.”<sup>20</sup>

Scholars of this branch of Qur’anism—Ṭabāṭabā’ī and Farāhī are striking examples—tend to argue that the meaning of the Qur’ān is clear, rather than that it can be correctly understood only with the aid of a tradition, that is to say, prejudgments, interpretations, and commentaries. They emphasize the sufficiency of the Qur’ān and the immediacy of its meaning. A connotation of a qur’anic expression is considered the least preferable when it requires interpretation through an expression external to the qur’anic discourse.

The dependence on external sources has now been reduced by the exploration of several kinds of intra-qur’anic connections: (1) the relationship between all parts of a verse; (2) the relationship between a verse and its surrounding verses, both before (*al-sābiq*) and after (*al-lāḥiq*); (3) the relationship between a statement and the textual context (*siyāq*) of the set of verses in which it is located; (4) the relationship between a verse and the pillar/central theme (*amūd*) or the objective (*gharad/hadaḥ*) of the *sūrah* in which it is located; (5) the relationship between a verse and another part of the Qur’ān containing a similar message; (6) the relationship between a verse and another part of the Qur’ān that gives more detailed and clearer information; (7) the relationship between a verse and another part of the Qur’ān that may be useful to clarify the possible meanings hinted at by the verse; (8) the relationship between one verse and other verses whose meaning seems to be in conflict; (9) the relationship between one verse and other verses having similar or different linguistic features; (10) the relationship between the use of a word or phrase in a verse and the usage of the same word or phrase elsewhere in the Qur’ān; (11) the relationship between a conclusion derived from one verse and that derived from other qur’anic verses; (12) the relationship between variant readings (*qirā’āt*); (13) the relationship between different sections of a *sūrah*; and (14) the relationship between two or more consecutive *sūrahs*.

### The Qur’ān as the Judge for Exegetical Opinions

Proponents of TQbQ contend that an exegetical opinion supported by the Qur’ān is stronger than one not supported by the Qur’ān. It is thus understandable that some scholars argue that TQbQ is the first criterion to be used to select the best among available opinions or possible meanings. While this method of *tafsīr* has scarcely been put in practice in Qur’ān commentaries, Qur’anism puts a greater emphasis on this idea.

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20. Medoff, “*Ijtihād* and Renewal,” 37, 48.

The idea of seeking qur'anic judgment (*al-ihtikām ilā'l-qur'ān*) is central in Bint al-Shāḥī's hermeneutic. In her view, any uncertainty about meaning can be resolved by "the judgment of the Qur'ān." This judgment can be achieved by paying close attention to word usage and to thematic linkages between a verse and its surrounding verses or between a verse and the *sūrah* in which it is located. Bint al-Shāḥī holds that a systematic cross-examination of the overall usage of a word in the Qur'ān will produce the true meaning among lexical or metonymical possibilities. Her *al-Tafsīr al-bayānī* contains many examples of this kind of reliance on the judgment of the Qur'ān.

Similarly, the idea of *tarjih* (giving preponderance to one piece of evidence or opinion over another) is central to the hermeneutic of al-Shanqīḥī (d. 1973), as demonstrated here and there in his *Aḍwā' al-bayān*—a *tafsīr* with many qur'anic cross-references and minimal reference to other exegetical sources. He repeatedly shows how exegetical opinions can be rejected as invalid or less preferable by paying attention to all available clues (*qarā'in*) in a given verse and to a comprehensive reading of the Qur'ān.

The claim that TQbQ will help to reduce or remove the possibility of multiple interpretations is also shared by Farāhī, Iṣlāḥī and Ṭabāṭabā'ī. Farāhī and Iṣlāḥī, for instance, hold that, properly applied, TQbQ may help us close the door of disputation among different sectarian groups. They contend that it has the potential to lead us to *kalimat<sup>m</sup> sawā'* or a "common word" in *tafsīr*.<sup>21</sup>

### Qur'anism and the Open Qur'ān

Qur'anism is characterized by greater reliance on the Qur'ān, quasi-objectivism, decreased reliance on external sources and a quest for meaning in the Qur'ān itself. Some may view this approach as an attempt to limit the meaning of the text and to argue against the legitimacy of other possible meanings of the same text.<sup>22</sup> As Farāhī and Iṣlāḥī have noted, TQbQ may help us to reevaluate multiple interpretations and to come up with a single, best interpretation. While such an attempt is regarded as positive for those seeking to unite Muslim perspectives, it can have an impact on how a reader of the Qur'ān treats differences in exegetical opinion and flexibility in meaning. The supremacy assigned to TQbQ may give an interpreter more confidence in arguing against other possible interpretations and presenting his interpretation as the best, if not the final and conclusive, interpretation. In this way, TQbQ

21. Farāhī, *Exordium to Coherence*, 29, 50; Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an: A Study of Iṣlāḥī's Concept of Naẓm in Tadabbur-i Qur'an* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986), 34–36.

22. Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2006), 104.

is not free from a softer form of reader authoritarianism (to borrow Abou El-Fadl's term), that is, when he assumes that there is only one way of TQbQ and it is only through TQbQ that one can "unveil" the meaning of the text or the intention of the Divine.

But Qur'anism does not stop the Qur'an from being an "open" text, that is, one subject to dynamic interpretations. Different scholars who employ the same method of TQbQ probably will come up with different exegetical opinions based on different *ijtihāds*. What Qur'anism does is to shift the ground of exegetical contestation in three main areas: (1) intra-qur'anic connections; (2) an inference derived from intra-qur'anic connections; and (3) the role that external sources can play.

Qur'an interpreters have different ideas about which parts of the Qur'an explain another part. For instance, with regard to the meaning of *man 'indahu 'ilm al-kitāb* (who has knowledge of the Book) at the end of Q 13:43, al-Shanqīṭī cites Q 3:18, Q 10:94, and Q 16:43 to argue that the phrase refers to those who have knowledge of the Torah (*Tawrah*) and the Gospel (*Injīl*). Ṭabāṭabā'ī, by contrast, cites five verses from Q 13 (i.e., Q 13:1, 13:7, 13:19, 13:27, and 13:43) to argue that the phrase refers to a person who has deep knowledge of the Qur'an, namely, Imām 'Alī.

Although proponents of TQbQ agree that one verse explains another verse, they may disagree on exactly which part explains which. For example, while al-Shanqīṭī and Ṭabāṭabā'ī agree that Q 4:69 is one of several verses that explain the phrase *alladhīna an'amta 'alayhim* (those on whom God has bestowed His grace) in Q 1:7, each draws a different conclusion from this relationship. For al-Shanqīṭī, it justifies the legitimacy of the caliphate of Abū Bakr, known as *al-Ṣiddīq*, while for Ṭabāṭabā'ī, it implies that the verse points to Q 5:55, which mentions the *wilāyah* (leadership) of Imām 'Alī.

Some interpreters differ about the use of external sources, such as *asbāb al-nuzūl*. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, for example, refers to the *sabab al-nuzūl* of Q 33:33 (known as the *tathīr* or purification verse) as well as narratives (*riwāyāt*) about the *ahl al-bayt* (People of the House) when discussing precisely who is to be included in the term *ahl al-bayt*. That reference to *sabab al-nuzūl* and *riwāyāt* complements his TQbQ, which confirms that the last part of Q 33:33 is independent of its surrounding verses. For al-Shanqīṭī, these *riwāyāt* legitimize the inclusion of *ahl al-kisā'* (People of the Cloak) in the term, but his TQbQ clearly does not regard the wives of the Prophet as being included in this group.

If Qur'anism continues to develop, debates over the three areas—intra-qur'anic connections, inferences based on intra-qur'anic connections and the role of external sources—are likely to increase in the future. Be that as it may, Qur'anism in contemporary Qur'an interpretation not only helps to keep the Qur'an open, its tendency to rigidity notwithstanding, but also leaves ample room for critical engagement with the qur'anic text itself, without being hindered by the long history of the *tafsīr* tradition.