CHAPTER III

THE QUR'ĀN AND ITS INTERPRETATION

A. The History of Qur'ānic Interpretation

Muslims believe that the Qur'ān consists of the word of God revealed in Arabic by God to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH over a twenty-two years period. He received the first revelation in the year 610 CE while engaging in a contemplative retreat in the Cave of Hira located on the Mountain of Light *(Jabal al-nūr)* (also known as Mt. Hira), which is in the outskirts of Mecca. The Qur'ān is distinct from *hadīth*, which are the sayings or the deeds of Muhammad. It is agreed that Muhammad clearly distinguished between his own utterances *(hadīth)* and God's words, the Qur'ān. Muslims and most Western scholars of Islam believe that the Arabic Qur'ān that exists today contains substantially the same Arabic that was transmitted by Muhammad.

Muslims regard the most reliable Qur'ānic commentary as being contained in the Qur'ān itself. In other words, the ways in which certain ayat clarify other ayat are regarded as being the most significant form of commentary. A second form of Qur'ānic commentary is how the Prophet interpreted the Qur'ān. And his comments on the Qur'ān (as well as everything he ever said or didn't) are recorded in the hadīth collections. After these two forms of commentary, knowledgeable companions and later generations of pious and learned Muslims expressed their view of the meaning of various ayat. It was on this foundation that the science of

Qur'ānic commentary was built. To see its historical development clearly, will be explained as below :

1) At The Prophetic Period

Prophet Muhammad PBUH as the last messanger of Allah and received revelation from Allah as guidance for his ummah, he has a big occupation and obligation to interpret the meaning of Qur'ān, to tell what doeas it means to his followers. Interpretation of Qur'ān was his primary role. As mentioned in Qur'ān.

$$\text{وَأَنزَلْنَآ إِلَيْكَ ٱلذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾}$$

"And We have sent down to you (O Muhammad (PBUH) the Remembrance, so that you may clearly explain to mankind what has been revealed to them, and so that they may give thought" [16:44]

So the interpretation of Qur'ān has been beginning at the time when it was revealed. The science of tafsīr during the Prophet's (PBUH) life was a relatively easy matter. This was so for a number of factors. Firstly, the Companions were witnessing the revelation of the Qur'ān, and the circumstances during which it was revealed. They were aware of the reason behind the revelation of a verse *(asbāb al-nuzūl)*, and as such did not need to search for this knowledge as later interpreters would have to. Secondly, the Arabic of the Companions was the Arabic of the Qur'ān, as the Qur'ān was revealed in their dialect. Therefore the Arabic of the Qur'ān was, in general, understood by them without any difficulties. Lastly, and most importantly, the Prophet (PBUH) was alive, and the

Qur'ān was still being revealed, so even if there were any difficulties in understanding any verse, they could turn to the Prophet (PBUH) for an explanation.

2) At The Period of Companions (*Shahabah*)

After the death of the Prophet (PBUH), the science of tafsīr took on a more systematic approach. Thus it can be considered that the first true mufassirs were actually the Companions. The sources that the Companions used for tafsīr were the Qur'ān, the statements of the Prophet (PBUH), the principles of Arabic grammar and rhetoric, their own personal reasoning *(ijtihaad)*, and pagan and Judaeo-Christian customs that were prevalent at the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān. These sources will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

There were many among the Companions who were well known for their knowledge of the interpretation of the Qur'ān. As-Suyūti wrote, "There are ten who were famous for their knowledge of tafsīr among the Companions: the four Khulafā ar-Rāshidūn'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, Abdullāh ibn Abbās, Ubay ibn Ka'ab, Zayd ibn Thābit, Abū Musā al-Ash'arī and Abdullāh ibn Zubayr. As for the Khulafā, Alī ibn Abee Tālib has the most narrations amongst them; as for the other three, there reports are very rare to find, since they died relatively earlier..."[1] In other words, the tafsīr narrations of Abū Bakr, Umar and Uthmān are not as common due to the fact that they were not compiled because of their relatively early

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[1] as-Suyuty, *al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Qur'an,* v. 2, (Beirut : Dar al-Fikr. 2004), 239.

deaths. Also, during their time, there was no great need to interpret much of the Qur'ān, as the Companions were many and wide-spread. During later times, however, such as during the Caliphate of Alī, the need to interpret the Qur'ān was much greater than before. There were others besides these ten Companions who were well known for their knowledge of tafsīr, such as Anas ibn Mālik, Abū Hurayrah, Jaabir ibn Abdillāh and 'Aishah, except that they were not in the same category as the ten whom as-Suyūty mentioned.

The most knowledgeable Companion with regards to the interpretation of the Qur'ān is considered to be Ibn 'Abbās. Abdullāh ibn 'Umar said, "Ibn Abbās is the most knowledgeable of this ummah concerning the revelation given to Muhammad (PBUH)".[2] This is due to the fact that the Prophet (PBUH) himself prayed for Ibn 'Abbās, for he (PBUH) said, "O Allah! Give him the knowledge of the Book, and of Wisdom!" and in another narration, "O Allah! Give him the knowledge of the religion, and interpretation." He used to accompany the Prophet (PBUH) during his youth, as he was his (PBUH) cousin. Also, his aunt Maymunah was a wife of the Prophet (PBUH).

The narrations of Ibn Abbās, along with those of 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, Alī ibn Abī Tālib, and Ubay ibn Ka'ab, are the most numerous narrations from Companions that are to be found in tafsīr literature. Each

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[2]Adh-Dzahabee's Tafsīr wa al-Mufasirun v. l, 72.

one of them established centres of learning during their lifetimes, and left many students among the Successors after their deaths.

The Companions did not leave narrations concerning every single verse in the Qur'ān. This is because the people of their time understood much of what the Qur'ān discussed, and only where the possibility for misinterpretation or ignorance existed did the Companions give their own interpretation of the relevant verse. Such interpretation typically consisted of explaining a verse in clearer words, or explaining a particular phrase or word with pre-Islamic poetry. Another characteristic of this time is the relatively trivial differences in tafsīr, as compared to later generations.

3) At The Post-Companions Period

After the generation of the Companions, the students of the Companions took over the responsibility of explaining the Qur'ān. The Successors used the same sources to interpret the Qur'ān that the Companions did, except that they added to the list of sources the interpretations of the Companions. They understood that an interpretation given by the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) could not be compared to an interpretation of any person after them. Therefore, the sources for interpreting the Qur'ān during this generation were: the Qur'ān, the statements of the Prophet (SAW) that the Companions had informed them of, the Companions' personal reasoning (ijtihād) of the verse, the Arabic language, their own personal reasoning (ijtihād), and Judaeo-Christian tradition.

After the death of the Prophet (SAW), the Companions spread out to different Muslim cities in order to teach people the religion of Islam. Each one taught many Successors, most of whom became scholars in their own right in due time.

Historically, three primary learning centres were established in the Muslim empire: Mecca, Madīnah and Kūfah. Each of these areas became leading centres of knowledge during the period of the Successors, including the knowledge of tafsīr.

According to the placement period in :

1. Mecca where Ibn Abbās had taught, his primary students became the scholars of this area. In particular, Sa'īd ibn Jubayr (d. 95 A.H.), Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 104 A.H.), 'Ikrimah (d. 104 A.H.), Tāwoos (d. 106A.H.), and Atā ibn Rabāh (d. 114 A.H.) became leading authorities in this field, and their names are still to be found in many works of tafsīr.

2. Madīnah, the influence of Ubay ibn Ka'ab was the strongest in the arena of tafsīr, and his students Abū al-'Āaliyah (d. 90 A.H.), Muhammad ibn Ka'ab al-Quradī (d. 118 A.H.) and Zayd ibn Aslam (d. 136 A.H.) emerged as the scholars of tafsīr in Madīnah during this period.

3. Kūfah (Iraq at present time), Abdullaah ibn Mas'ūd left behind his great legacy to 'Alqamah ibn Qays (d. 61 A.H.), Masrūq (d. 63, A.H.), and al-Aswad ibn Yazīd (d. 74 A.H.). Other Successors from Kūfah who

were famous for their knowledge of tafsīr were: Āmir ash-Sha'by (d. 109 A.H.), al-Hasan al-Bashry (d. 110 A.H.) and Qatādah as-Sadusy (d. 117 A.H.)

4) Tafsīr In Modern Times

Though the mood of tafsīr writing in modern times is the same to make the text understandable and relevant, there have been other areas in which attempts are made to interpret the Qur'ānic text in the light of "modern and scientific reason". The earliest effort in this area was of Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d.1898). His modernist but incomplete subject wise commentary was entitled simply Tafsīr al-Qur'ān. He tried to interpret the question of revelation, miracles and the message of the Qur'ān in the light of available "enlightenment" from the West. To encourage social and educational reforms he tried to strike a balance between western and eastern ideas and find support in the Qur'ān.

Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905), from Egypt is considered by some the most significant exponent of the modernist school. He spent his time as a teacher and later as a judge, mufti, giving decisions, fatwas which embodied the modernist stance. He struggled against the traditional enterprise of tafsīr. His incomplete tafsīr of the Qur'ān, tafsīr al-Manar, based upon his class lectures and the text of his legal decisions has been edited and published by Rashid Rida, his follower.[3]

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[3]Rashid Rida, *Tafsīr al-Manar*, 12 vol., (Beirut: Dar al-Kutb al-Ilmiyya, 1999), 53.

Other tafsīrs in this area are Tarjuman al-Qur'ān by Abūl Kalam Azad (d. 1958), Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān by Syed Qutub (d. 1960), and Tafhim al Qur'ān, by Mawdūdi (d. 1979). In English there are several commentaries available today as of Yusuf Ali, Mawdūdi, and of Muhammad Asad etc. Abridged and some incomplete editions of a few classical commentaries, e.g. Tabarī, Baidhawī, Zamkhsharī and Ibn Kathīr are also available.

B. The Compilation Of Tafsīr

After the period of the Successors, the stage of the actual compilation and writing of tafsīr began. The most important works were by scholars of hadīth, who, as part of their narrations and works of hadīth, also had sections on tafsīr. Therefore, during this stage, the narrations of 'tafsīr were considered a branch of hadīth literature. Some of the scholars of this period that were known for their tafsīr narrations include Yazīd ibn Hārūnas-Sulamī (d. 117 A.H.), Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161 A.H.), Sufyān ibn Uyaynah (d. 198 A.H.), Wakie' ibn al-Jarāh (d. 197 A.H.), Shu'bah ibn al-Hajjāj (d. 160 A.H.), Ādam ibn Abī Iyās (d. 220 A.H.), and Abd ibn Humayd (d. 249 A.H.). None of their works have survived intact until the present day.[4]

The next stage in the history of tafsīr saw the separation of tafsīr literature from hadeeth, and the emergence of independent works solely on tafsīr. Another stride during this stage was that every verse was discussed, so that tafsīr was not only limited to those verses for which narrations

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[4] adh-Dzahabi, v.l.p. 152

from the Prophet (SAW) and Companions existed; rather, these tafsīrs encompassed all the verses in the Qur'ān.

In attempting to answer who the first person to write a comprehensive tafsīr of the Qur'ān was, the researcher is faced with a rather significant impediment: a lack of almost all manuscripts written during the first century of the hijrah. However, there are a number of references in later works to such manuscripts, and among the earliest works referenced is that of Sa'id ibn Jubayr (d. 95 A.H.).[5] Most likely, this work was not a complete tafsīr of the Qur'ān, but rather composed of narrations from the previous generations. An interesting narration in the *Fihrist* of Ibn Nadīm (d. 438 A.H.) reads as follows.[6]

Umar ibn Bukayr, one of the students of al-Farrā, was with the governor Hasan ibn Sahl. He wrote to al-Farrā: "The governor sometimes questions me concerning (the tafsīr of) a verse in the Qur'ān, but I am unable to respond to him. Therefore, if you think it suitable to compile something with regards to the Qur'ān, or write a book concerning this, I can return to this book (whenever he asks me)". al-Farrā said to his students, Gather together so that I may dictate to you a book on the Qur'ān...and he told the muadhin to recite Sūrah al-Fātihah, so that he may interpret it, until the whole book (the Qur'ān) was finished. The narrator of the story, Abū al-Abbās, said, "No one before him ever did anything like it, and I don't think that anyone can add to what he wrote".

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[5] Ibid V 1 , 155
[6] Ibid ,154

Al-Farrā died in the year 207 A.H., and thus we can say that this is definitely one of the earliest works of this nature. Ibn Mājah (d. 273), of Sunan fame, also wrote a tafsīr of the Qur'ān, but again this was limited to narrations from the previous generations.

One of the greatest classics available is without a doubt the monumental tafsīr of the Qur'ān by Muhammad ibn Jarīr at-Tabarī (d. 310A.H.). This tafsīr, although heavily based on narrations, also discusses the grammatical analysis of the verse, the various qira'āt and their significance on the meaning of the verse, and, on occasion, Ibn Jareer's personal reasoning (ijtihād) on various aspects of the verse. In many ways, this can be considered to be the first tafsīr to attempt to cover every aspect of a verse. Other tafsīrs followed quickly; in particular the tafsīrs of Abū Bakr ibn Mundhir an-Naisapūrī (d. 318 A.H.), Ibn Abī Hātim (d. 327 A.H.), Abū Shaykh ibn Hibbān (d. 369 A.H.), al-Hākim (d. 405 A.H.) and Abū Bakr ibn Mardawayh (d. 410).[7]

This era also saw the beginning of the specialisation in tafsīr, with tafsīrs being written, for example, with greater emphasis on the grammatical analysis and interpretation of the Qur'ān. Greater emphasis was also placed on personal reasoning (ijtihād), and tafsīrs written solely for the defence of sectarian views (such as the tafsīrs of the Mu'tazilah), and even for the de

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[7] Ibid ,152

fence of one's fiqh madh-hab (such as the tafsīrs of the Hanafīs, Shafi'īs and Maalikīs) appeared. Another aspect that started during this era was the deletion of the isnaad from tafsīr narrations, and this led to the increasement of weak and fabricated reports in tafsīr literature.

C. Tafsīr And ta'wīl

1. The Basic Understanding Of Tafsīr

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

The word *tafsīr* is derived from the root *'fassara'* – to explain, to expound which literally means to lift the curtain, to make clear, to show the objective, and hence by analogy tafsīr is the body of knowledge which aims to make clear the true meaning of the Qur'ān, its injunctions and the occasions of its revelation.. It means 'explanation' or "interpretation". In technical language the word tafsīr is used for explanation, interpretation and commentary on the Qur'ān, comprising all ways of obtaining knowledge, which contributes to the proper understanding of it, explains its meanings and clarifies its legal implications. The word mufassir (pl. mufassirun) is the term used for the person doing the tafsīr, i.e. the "exegete" or "commentator".

Another word ta'wīl has been also used to denote the interpretation or reclamation of meanings of the Qur'ān text. Some scholars believe that ta'wīl is synonymous with tafsīr, others have denied and suggest that tafsīr refers to the illumination of the external meaning of the Qur'ān while ta'wīl is the extraction of the hidden meanings.[8]

The word *ta'wīl*, which is also used in this connection, is derived from the root *"awwala"* and also means "explanation, interpretation" . In technical language it similarly refers to explanation and interpretation of the Qur'ān.

Tafsīr in the language of the scholars means explanation and clarification. It aims at knowledge and understanding concerning the book of Allah, to explain its meanings, extract its legal rulings and grasp its underlying reasons. Tafsīr explains the 'outer' *(zahir)* meanings of the Qur'ān. ta'wīl is considered by some to mean the explanation of the inner and concealed meanings of the Qur'ān, as far as a knowledgeable person can have access to them. Others are of the opinion that there is no difference between Tafsīr and ta'wīl.

The commentator or exegete is called a mufassir. His responsibility is to explain the text of the Qur'ān as fully as possible. He aims to show where, when and why a subject is written and what it meant during the time of the Prophet, his companions and subsequent followers. He

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[8] Suyuti, al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Qur'an, chapter 77, 424-430.

eventually tries to make the text communicate meaningfully within his or her own time and cultural framework.

Some Muslims scholars have warned against Tafsīr. Ahmad b. Hanbal, e.g. has said: "Three matters have no basis: Tafsīr, malahim (tales of eschatological nature) and maghazi (tales of the battles)".[9]

Muslim scholars have laid down certain basic conditions for sound Tafsīr. Any Tafsīr, which disregards these principles must be viewed with great caution, if not rejected altogether. The most important among these conditions are the following:

The mufassir must:

- Be sound in belief *('aqida)*.

- Well-grounded in the knowledge of Arabic and its rules as a language.

- Well-grounded in other sciences that are connected with the study of the Qur'ān *('ilm al-riwāya)*.

- Have the ability for precise comprehension.

- Abstain from the use of mere opinion.

- Begin the Tafsīr of the Qur'ān with the Qur'ān.

- Seek guidance from the words and explanations of the Prophet.

- Refer to the reports from the *sahābah*.

- Consider the reports from the *tabi'īn*.

- Consult the opinions of other eminent scholars.

2. Kinds Of Tafsīr

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[9] Ibn Taimiya, muqaddima fi usul al-tafsīr, Kuwait, 1971, .59.

Tafsīr may be divided into three basic groups[10] :

1) *Tafsīr bi al-riwāya* (by transmission) also known as *Tafsīr bi-l-ma'thur.*

> Books of this class of tafsīr include those attributed to Ibn Abbās, Ibn Abī Khatim, Ibn Habbān, and that of Imam Suyūtī known as Al-Dur al-Mansūr, tafsīr by Kathīr and al-Shaukani may also be included in this group.

> This is meant all explanations of the Qur'ān which can be traced back through a chain of transmission to a sound source:

- The Qur'ān itself.

- The explanation of the Prophet.

- The explanation by Companions of the Prophet (to some extent).

> Naturally, the explanation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān and the explanation of the Qur'ān by the Prophet are the two highest sources for tafsīr, which cannot be matched nor superseded by any other source. Next to these rank the explanations by the sahāba, since the sahaba were witnesses to the revelations, were educated and trained by the Prophet himself and were closest to the period of the first Muslim umma. Of course all reports of explanations by the Prophet or by a sahabi must be sound according to the science of riwaya as in 'ulūm al-hadīth.

2) *Tafsīr bi al-ra'y* (by sound opinion; also known as *tafsīr bi-l-dirāya*, by knowledge) is not based directly on transmission of knowledge

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[10] At-Tibyan 63, Qathhtan 25

from the past, but on reason. Exegesis is derived through opinion based on reason and Ijtihad or Qiyas. In this area we find tafsīrs like al-Kashāf by Zamaksharī (d. 1144).

Tafsīr bi'l-ra'y does not mean "interpretation by mere opinion", but deriving an opinion through ijtihād based on sound sources. While the former has been condemned already in the hadīth, the latter is recommendable, when used in its proper place as sound ijtihād, and was also approved by the Prophet, e.g. when he sent Mu'ādh bin Jabal to Yemen.[11]

Tafsīr bi'l-ra'y on the other hand has been declared haram on the basis of the following hadīth:

From Ibn 'Abbās: Allah's messenger said: "He who says (something) concerning the Qur'ān without knowledge, he has taken his seat of fire" '[12].

However this hadīth has been explained in two ways:

- That no one should say of the Qur'ān what is not from the sahaba or tabi'un.

- That no one should say of the Qur'ān what he knows to be otherwise.[13]

    3) *Tafsīr bi-l-Ishāra* (by indication / intuition, from signs).

    It goes into the detail of the concepts and ideas associated with the words and verses of the Qur'ān. This kind of tafsīr is often

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[11] *Mishkat al-masabih...*, II, p.794: (Arabic), Vol. 2, No. 3737.
[12] Ibn Taimiya, p.105, from Tirmidhi, who says it is hasan sahih.
[13] Sabuni. *At-Tibyan,* p.174.

produced by mystically inclined authors. The most famous are those by al-Rāzī and al-Khāzin.

Ibn Jarīr has reported through Muhammad ibn Bashshar Muammal, Sufyān and Abūl Zanad that Ibn Abbās said, "tafsīr is of four kinds: One which Arabs can know from the language; second which no one can be excused for not knowing; third which only the scholars know; and fourth, which God alone knows."[14]

3. **The Diffirence Between Tafsīr and** ta'wīl

There are five main opinion of the diffirent between tafsīr and ta'wīl :

1). They are equivalent in meaning. This was the opinion of at-Tabari (d.310 A.H.), as his commentary of the Qur'ān uses these two terms inter-changeably.

2). Tafsīr is used in explaining a word which carries only one meaning, whereas ta'wīl is used in choosing one of the connotations of a wordthat possesses many connotations.

3). According to al-Maturidī (d. 333 A.H.), when the interpretation is based on certain knowledge, this is called tafsīr, whereas when it is based on personal reasoning (ijtihād), it is known as ta'wīl

4). Abū Tālib at-Tha'labi held the view that tafsīr was the explanationof the literal meaning of the verse, whereas ta'wīl was the actualintent behind the verse. For example, the tafsīr of the verse,Verily, your

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[14]Ibn Taymiyah, tr. M. Abdul Haq Ansari, An introduction to the exegesis of the Qur'an, (Riyadh: Ibn Saud Islamic University, 1989), 48.

Lord is ever-Watchful [89:14] is that Allaah is aware of all that man does, but the ta'wīl is that the verse is a warning to man not to lapse into sins or to be little the commandments of Allah.

5). Tafsīr is meant to give the meanings of the individual words in averse, whereas ta'wīl gives the meaning of the verse as a whole

D. New Understanding Of Qur'ān and Its Interpretation

By the development of times, in Islamic thought there is a new offer on the way of Qur'ān interpretation is called hermeneutics. many Islamic intellectuals who are interested in this new method. as already mentioned in the previous chapter, this hermeneutical method was originally known as the interpretation of the Bible and other humanitarian texts. Some muslims intellectual are use the hermeneutic in understanding the Qur'ān and its interpretation although in its reality they face some rejection from other muslims intellectual.

1. Fazlurrahman

Fazlur Rahman (1332 H/1919 M – 1408 M/1988 H), known as one of brilliant modern Islamic intellectuals. His intelligence is reflected in the ideas which he poured in a number of booksand articles, ranging from philosophy, theology, mysticism, law problems until the development of Islamic contemporary. In connection with the challenges of modern life, seems made Fazlur Rahman's thought hard in finding the recipe that can solve arisen problems, and bring around to review some of the views among Muslims tradition, but it seems even less accommodating difficult

when dealing with development of modern life. In this context, Fazlur Rahman came with an offering thought and the formulation methodology of how the Quran should be understood that the values contained in it is always current and relevant to the issues and problems that occure in Islamic society.

Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutics revealed the problem of the historicity of the Qur'ān to be one of the most fatal problems confronting contemporary Muslims. While indicating the two dimensions -- temporal and historical -- of the Qur'ānic text, he failed to reconcile them due to his adherence to a subject-object ontology in his method of interpretation. By his new method of interpretation of the Qur'ān, he tried to make the following three points:

1. The Qur'ānic text can be understood objectively;

2. The historical Islamic tradition, the historical interpretations of the Qur'ān can be criticized from the Qur'ānic view itself; and

3. The activity of interpretation of the Qur'ān is a dynamic (endless) process.

In Rahman's hermeneutics, the process of interpretation consists of "a double movements",[15] from the present situation to Qur'ānic times, then back to the present." The first of the two movements consists of two steps. First, one must understand the import or meaning of a given statement by studying the historical situation or problem to which it was the answer.

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[15] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam dan Modernitas: Tentang Transformasi Intelektual,* translated by Ahsin Mumammah (Bandung: Penerbit Pustaka, 1985), 1-5.

Hence the first step consists of understanding the meaning of the Qur'ān, as a whole as well as in terms of the specific tenets that constitute responses to specific situations. "The second step is to generalize those specific answers and enunciate them as statements of general moral-social objectives that can be 'distilled' from specific texts in the light of the socio-historical background and the often-stated *rationes legis*".

In the first moment, an interpreter moves from the broadest horizon which embraces all kinds of historically and culturally significant events on the eve of Islam to the narrowest horizon or problem to which a particular Qur'ānic verse was an answer. This means that without taking the historical problems into account, there cannot be any access to the meaning of the Qur'ān. Hence, the interpretation of the Qur'ān is a dialectical movement of question and answer. In this dialectical movement, the interpreter scrutinizes the particular meanings of the verses in terms of the whole context of the Qur'ānic text so as to grasp the most general principles (universals) of the Qur'ān.

The interpreter experiences a tension which emanates out of leaving his own present horizon by plunging into the particular historical horizons of the Qur'ānic verses to attain their historical ground. It is clear that when the historical ground is attained, all kinds of distinctiveness (temporality) of the Qur'ānic verses disappear and the interpreter finds himself or herself in a world of meaning not circumscribed or designated by any historical event. This is a world that has no immediate relation to

the temporality of the interpretations. Moreover, this is a world which each temporal interpretation of the Qur'ān tries to incorporate.

2. Muhammad Arkoun

a. The Qur'ān According to Arkoun

According to Arkouns though, there are two types of text in the Islamic tradition; namely forming text *(al-Mu'assish al-Nash)* and hermeneutical text *(Nash al-Tafsīri)*. The text-forming puzzle of the Qur'ān and heremeneutical text is interpretative texts, fiqh, tasawwuf and etc. Because, these litelatures are nothing but appear to provide an explanation and interpretation of the Qur'ān[16].Arkoun said that the Quranic text is a text-forming. In this regard, the supreme position of the Qur'ān as al-Nas al-Mu'assis apparently did not suddenly considered transcendental.

Regarding about revelation, Arkoun divide it in two places. The first is what is called the Qur'ān as *Umm al- Kitāb* (The Main Book) (QS, 13:39; 43:4). The second rank is all several books including the Bible, the Gospel, and the Qur'ān. Umm al- Kitāb is the Book of Heaven, the perfect revelation, from which the Bible and the Qur'ān originated. In the first rank *(umm al- Kitāb)*, revelation is eternal, not bound by time, and contains the highest truth. However, according to Arkoun, absolute truth is beyond human reach, because the form of revelation as it secured in the *Lawh Mahfuz* (Preserved Tablet) and still be there with the Lord himself. Revelation can only be known by humans via the form on the second rank.

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[16]Mohammed Arkoun,*Islam Kontemporer Menuju Dialog Antar Agama* (Rethingking Islam Today), translated by Ruslani (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2006), 232.

This second rank, in terms of Arkoun called "world edition" (edition terrestres). According to him, at this stage, the revelation has undergone modifications, revisions and substitutions.[17]

> "We need a new intellectual strategies to understand the revelation in the Muslim tradition and the other rich traditions who have developed and got culture and practice of ideological stratification during ages. In building this new strategy, we must examine carefully all traditions sources, particularly the central concept of orthodoxy. For every orthodoxy certainly an ideological vision that is too oriented to the interests of the original opinion"[18]

With reference to the opinions of Paul Ricoeur, Arkoun distinguished three levels of revelation. First, the revelation of God as a transcendent, with a few small fragments are revealed through the prophets. Second, the revelation handed down orally through the prophets of Israel, Jesus and the prophet Muhammad. This revelation embodied in various languages, revelation down to the prophets of Israel use Hebrew, revelation descended on Jesus intangible Aramaic and Prophet Muhammad received a revelation in the form of Arabic. This revelation by Arkoun delivered orally in a long time before it had been compiled. Third, the objectivity of God's word and take a written corpus this holy book can be read by the faithful only through the written version, sheltered in officially closed corpus. In the concept of the Qur'ān, the canon word of God was inaugurated in writing by Khalifah ibn Affan Ustman.[19]

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[17] See Abdul Kadir Hussain Salihu, *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an menurut Muhammad Arkoun: Sebuah Kritik*, dalam *ISLAMIA: Majalah Pemikiran Dan Peradaban Islam*, Thn I No 2, Juni-Agustus 2004,21.

[18] Ibid.., 1

[19] Mohammed Arkoun, *The Concept of Relevation:From the People of the Book to the Societies of the Book*, (Claremont,CA: Claremont Graduate School, 1987),16.

Thus the Qur'ān is no more then just a product of history. Arkoun analyze historical-fenomologic approach which concluded that historically, al-Qur'ān that we receive now is no longer associated with the transcendent word. It is a phenomenon readings received by the prophet Muhammad in Arabic form. Before being transformed into written text - the Qur'ān is a revelation given orally in the prophetic period (rethinking Islam Today 104). Arkoun called *al-Mushāf* as Closed Official Corpus (official closed canon) or a copy of the standards prescribed official and final.[20]

> "The task of the prophets, such as Moses, Jesus and the prophet Muhammad, was delivering a discourse revealed to them as part of His remarks which were not created, not limited and coeternal" [21]

From the all of his statement clearly, Arkoun called the Qur'ān or other scriptures are the word of God's discourse. If al-Qur'ān downed to the prophet Muhammad SAW was the discourse then, it includes historical products - in terms of Nashr Hamīd Abū Zayd it's called *muntaj thaqafī* (cultural products). Therefore, by Arkoun, the revelations in this level has been reduced, it does not reveal the whole word of God as contained in the *Umm al- Kitāb* in *lawh Mahfūz*.

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[20]The status of official closed corpus according to the procedures that developed and supervised by the scholars: *official* because these texts were the result of opinios by the authors of the community at the time; *closed* because no one is allowed to add or reduce the words and modifying a recitation in nowadays Corpus which it considered as an authentic compilation Lihat Arkoun, Mohammad, "*Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar) 1996.50

[21] Rethinking Islam.., 140

b. Arkoun's and the Qur'ānic Interpretation

Muhammad Arkoun's study about the text of the Qur'ān is to find another hidden meaning. So, to get the context reconstruction, there must be a text deconstruction. Arkoun is one of Muslim intellectuals who are very brave in interpreting the Qur'ān instead of the Islamic tradition but with the methodologiy imported from western culture.

1. Historical-Anthropological

Mohammed Arkoun -in his book translated into Arabic- *Tarikhiyāh al-Fikr al-'Arabī al-Islamī* (Arab-Islamic thought historicism). Arkoun intended going to see the entire socio-cultural phenomenon through historical perspective, that the past should be seen by historical strata level. Looking historically should be limited according to the chronological sequence and the real facts. This means that the role of historicism as a method of reconstruction of meaning through the elimination of the relevance of the text to the context. If this method is applied to the religious texts, what is needed, according to Arkoun, is the new meanings that potentially resides in those texts.[22]

How does Arkoun see the islamic tradition or turats? In general, Arkoun distinguishes between the two forms of tradition. In these works he wrote in French, he simultaneously using two words "tradition" and turats, and split them to two kinds: first, tradition or Turats with large T,

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[22] M. Arkoun, *Tarikhiyah al-Fikr al-Islami*. Beirut, 1986,14.

the transcendent tradition always understood and perceived as an ideal tradition , which comes from God and can not be changed by historical events. Such tradition is eternal and absolute. While the second type of written tradition with a small T (tradition / turath). This tradition is shaped by history and culture of human beings, which is inherited from generation to generation throughout the history of life, or the interpretation of man over God's revelation through scriptural texts.[23] Between these two types of tradition, Arkoun asided the first type, because according to him, the tradition is outside the knowledge and capacity of the human mind. That way, the target and the object of study to be done is turats the second type; turats shaped by historical conditions (the conditions of space-time).

Reading *Turath* is reading the text, the whole text types. Because turats is formed and standardized in history, it has to be read through the framework of history, here's the historicism. According to Arkoun, one purpose of reading the text, in particular sacred text, the text is to appreciate in the midst of changes that continue to occur. In other words, religious preachings which come from the sacred text must always be appropriated and not contrary to all the circumstances, this is one of Islam's core message; *al-Islāmu yashluhu li kulli al-zaman wa al-makan.* From here, what is being sought by Arkoun, seems want to impose the Qur'ān to follow the times and not the Qur'ān used as guidance throughout the ages.

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[23] M. Arkoun, *Al-Fikr al-Islami: Qira'at al- 'Ilmiyyah,* translation by Hashim Shaleh. (Beirut, 1987),17-24.

2. Linguistic - Semiotics Interpretation

Mohammed Arkoun in semiotic theory affected or rather adopted the theory of Ferdinand de Daussure (1857-1913), a prominent French semiotics, according to De Daussure phenomenon of language in general is indicated by the term *langange*. In langange there is a dichotomy between *langange* and *parole*. Parole is part of the language that is fully individualized.[24]. One thing that became characteristic of parole is the language uniqueness of each person. While *langue* is a coding system thtat known to all members of the user community the language, and as if the codes have been agreed in the past between the language user[25] Langue is a social system and at the same meaning as value system. As a social system langue unplanned own. That's the social side of langange.[26] Implicitly, it's understood that langue and parole are on each opposition, but at the same time both are interdependent. On the other side, the system prevailing in the langue is the production of parole activities, while on the other hand, disclosure of parole and its understanding is only possible when based on the tracking of langue as a system.

As linguistic experts are investigating a language with only confine themselves in langue region . Arkoun considers that the Qur'ān can be touched by a human is actually only the langue side of the God's revelation . Because of its infinite and transcendent, the human can not

[24]Martin Krampen, "Ferdinand se saussure dan Perkembangan Semiologi", dalam Panuti Sudjiman dan Aart van Coest (ed.), serba-serbi Semiotika, Cet. 2, (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1996). 57.
[25] Ibid 57
[26] Roland Barthes, "Unsur-Unsur Semiologi,. 57.

possibly touch God's parole. In addition, God's parole, human will not be able to reach it. because of its uniqueness, As well as the uniqueness of the individual human language, anyone else (the other) of the ownself does not know its true meaning.

Therefore, the influence of Ferdinand de Daussure semiotic was brought by Arkoun to classify the levels of meaning of the revelation, to know the position of the Qur'ān that we hold today. Arkoun says there are three levels of meaning revelation: *First*, the revelation of a parole (word, kalām) transcendent God, infinite (unlimited). To appoint such a reality usually al-Qur'ān use the term *al-lawh al-Mahfūdz* (the well preserved Table) or umm al- Kitāb (the Archetype Book). [27]

The second level, the revelation in history. With regard to the Qur'ān, the concept of revelation in this second level refers to the reality of the word of God as revealed in Arabic to Muhammad more than twenty years. If at first revelation refers to God parole then at the second stage we can say that it refer to the *langue* of the Qur'ān. But it is important to note that at this second level of the Qur'ān is still an oral.

The third level, pointing to the revelation in the form of closed official corpus or a revelation that has been written in the Mushhāf with letters and other punctuation in them [28] the mean of understanding revelation here refers to mushhāf Utsmani, which in 1924 published the

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[27] Mohammad Arkoun, "Exploration and Responses: New Perspectives for a Jewish-Cristians-Muslim Dialogue", Journal of Ecuminical Studies, 26: 3, summer 1989, hlm. 526. The concept of God's parole is similar with the concept of kalimatullah in Qu'an: Luqman, 31: 27,

[28] Mohammad Arkoun, "Exploration and Responses", hlm. 526.

standard edition of the Qur'ān in Cairo, Egypt. Revelation on the third level is a record of langue that historic God on the second level, and at the same time, in some cases, has reduced the wealth of its oral nature. Meanwhile, the terms of the Qur'ān itself, in Arabic, referring simultaneously to all levels. Therefore, Suhadi in his book *Kawin Lintas Agama* (Inter-faith marriages) said that the level of revelation such it was ever existed in the Islamic tradition, the theory Mu'tazilah revelation stating that "the revelation of God was created" (Revelation God is jadid [new creatures, created]), but this claim was rejected by orthodoxy (Asha'ria) with the revelation theory qadim (past, not a creature, not created), which won the understanding of the concept of revelation since the 11th century AD[29] So if we Muslims accept theory of linguistic-semiotic as an interpretation of the Qura'n meant we had a setback. Although they are by giving frills as comtemporary scinces but it will take a lot of Muslims retreated backward.

In semiotics (science of signs (sign) or the study of the development of sign in society), Arkoun seeks to demonstrate the historical facts about the language of the Qur'ān and its contents. He suggested that the semiotic analysis of the Qur'ān basically have two objectives: first, to reveal the historical facts of the language of the Qur'ān. The second, to show how the meaning can only be derived from the text of the Qur'ān without being constrained by way of the traditional studies.

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[29] Ibid, 526-527.

3. Nashr Hamīd Abū Zayd

Abu Zayd was one of the Egyptian thinker who was born on July 10, 1943 in the village of the province Quhafa Tanta, Egypt. Nashr was a pious child who has studied the Qur'ān since childhood. He is a Qari ' and hafidz (memorized the Qur'ān) since he was eight years old. His family was a religious family, so since his childhood he had been trained religiously[30]

Nashr Hamīd Abū Zayd introduces study of Qur'ān with relationship propositions between text (nash) and interpretation (ta'wīl). According to him, the text and the interpretation is a matter that can not be separated as two sides of a coin. In the view of Abū Zayd, during these scholars always separates the text and ta'wīl, ta'wīl regarded as a t Abū and forbidden. It is resulted that text being closed and the contained meanings become unattainable. So that said, it is necessary to leave the method (he thought) as a traditional-convensional method, by putting "draft text" *(mafhūm al-nash)* as a study center, then the use of hermeneutical theory becomes inevitable. Thus, it can minimize subjectivity and ideological interests in the interpretation.[31]

The theory of interpretation according to Nashr Hamīd had awakened and in accordance with the concept of the Qur'ān itself. That is why the proposition of the relationship between text (nash) and interpretation (ta'wīl) can not be separated. So the use of the theory above

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[30] Kurdi, dkk, *Hermeunetik al-Qur'an dan Hadis,* (Yogyakarta: eLSAQ Press, 2005),116

[31] Abu Zayd, Nasr Hamīd. *Mafhum al-Nash: Dirasah fi Ulum al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Markaz al-Saqafi al-Arabi),12-13

is a necessity, due to the nature of the existence of these texts. Here's some analysis to understand the views of Nashr Hamīd that the Qur'ān has spawned its theory of interpretation.

The Qur'ān as a Text

Nashr Hamīd does not explicitly define the meaning of the text in his book *Mafhūm al-Nash* (text draft). In that book Nashr Hamīd revealed differences between the *nash* (texts), and the *Mushāf* (book). According to him, nash (text) means the meaning *(dalālah)* and requires understanding, explanation and interpretation. While manuscripts/mushaf will not do because it has been transformed into something *(syay')* is an aesthetic work *(tastakhdimu li al-zīnah)* or tools to get the blessing of God.[32]

Nashr Hamīd in this case took the distinction of Roland Barthes about the texts and works by changing a little interpretation and terms. According to Barthes, the work is an object that can be calculated over something that occupies a physical space. While the text is a methodological domains (methodological field). "The work is held in the hand, the text in language".[33]

According to him, the process of the Qur'ān declining to the Prophet Muhammad through two stages. *First*, it is the stage of tanzīl that the process of declining of the Qur'ānic text from Allah to the angel Gabriel. At the level of the vertical (God-Gabriel) the text is still a non-

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[32] Ibid, 15
[33] Moch. Nur Ichwan, *Meretas Kesarjanaan Kritis Al-Qur'an,* (Jakarta : Teraju, 2003), *65.*

language text.[34] The concept of "declining / *tanzīl*" is being understood as a "downgrade" to humans through two intermediaries: the first by the angel and the second in human form that is Muhammad. Thus it can be said that the verses of the Qur'ān in this stage still a meaning only. *The Second* is the process of *ta'wīl* that the Prophet Muhammad delivered Qur'ān with the Arabic language. In this process the texts of the Qur'ān changed from text to text Divine Spirit or tanzīl become ta'wīl [35]

Nashr Hamīd states that the text when it came down to the Prophet Muhammad only a meaning because of the language problem. As he said "revelation is a form of communication between God and man." But in this communication, the Lord is in a different category. God is a supernatural power whereas human being is worldly. What language do they use and what channel[36] here is the scheme channel:

| Allah | → | Gabriel | → | Muhammad SAW | → | People |

Tanzīl   Ta'wīl
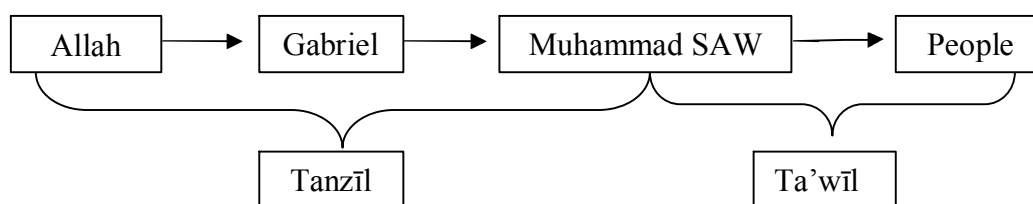
According to Nashr Hamīd, an over emphasis on the divine dimension makes Islamic thought become stagnant.[37] While *The word of Muhammad reporting what be asserts is the Word of God, This is the Qur'ān.*[38] And he said: *"The Word of God needed to adapt itself become*

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[34] Abu Zayd, Nasr Hamīd. *Mafhum al-Nash...,* 56-57
[35] Abu Zayd, Nasr Hamīd. *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini* (Kairo : Sina li al-Nashr, 1992),50.
[36] *Ibid, 69.*
[37] Lalu Nurul Bayanil Huda, Kritik Terhadap Kajian Al-Qur'an Nasr Hamīd Abu Zayd", *Islamia,* 1 (Maret, 2012), 69.
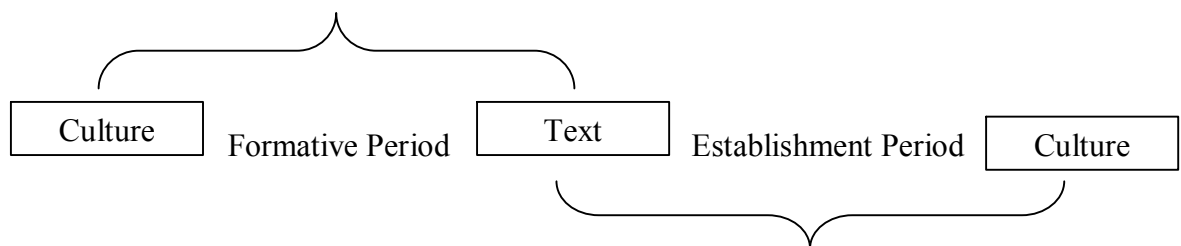[38] *Ibid*, 69.

human because God wanted to communicate to human beings. If God spoke God-Langage human beings would understand nothing.[39]

The Qur'ān as a Cultural Product

Nashr Hamīd also said that the Qur'ān is cultural product *(muntaj tsaqafi)*. This is because the Qur'ān is formed on the social and cultural realities of the past twenty years ago, the emergence and interaction with the cultural reality of the past twenty years was a phase "formulation" *(Marhalah takawwun wa al-a-tasyākul)*. The next phase is the phase of the "establishment" *(al-takin marhalah wa al-tasyākul)*, in which the Qur'ān then formed a new culture, so that the Quran itself is also a "cultural producers" *(muntij al-tsaqofi)*. Nashr Hamīd reasoned that when Allah revealed the Qur'ān to the prophet Muhammad by selecting human language as a code of revelation.

The Selection of language systems linked by means of the most important social system to capture and organize the world *(tajassad)*. On this basis, it is not possible to speak apart from the culture and reality of, as the text can not be separated from culture and reality.[40] Both phases can be explained as below:

| Culture | Formative Period | Text | Establishment Period | Culture |

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[39] *Ibid, 69.*
[40] Nashr Hamīd, *Mafhum al-nass…*, 24.

In the first phase, namely formulation phase, culture is the subject, while the text is the object *(*text as *muntaj thaqafī)*. While the next phase, which forms the subject of the text object, namely a new culture (text as *muntij al-thaqafī)*.[41] And finally, because the reality of culture can not be separated from the language of the Quran itself, then Qur'ān is a linguistic text *(al-nash al- lughawī)*.[42]

From the opinion of the dialectical relationship between the texts of the Qur'ān and the reality of the culture, Nashr Hamīd concluded that the use of linguistic methods, also required the use of the historical-critical method (historical criticism) in interpreting the Qur'ān. In a sense, approach to the study of the Qur'ān rests to the consciousness of epistimology that is dialectical interrelationships with social and cultural realities. The method of this study are very different from the theoretical implications and theocentric method as usually being understood by most scholars. Therefore, according to Nashr Hamīd, the interpretation of the Qur'ān can be more objective, not a-historical and free from ideological bias or vested interest[43]

At the same time, Nashr Hamīd said that the Koran is also a human text *(nash insanī)* because the text from the beginning when it revealed to the Prophet PBUH he changed from divine text. So it changed from *tanzīl* become *ta'wīl*.[44]

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[41] Moch. Nur Ichwan, *A New Horizon in qur'anic Hermeneutic...*, 52
[42] Nashr Hamīd, *Mafhum al-nass…*, 10-18
[43] Nash Hamīd Abu Zaid, *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini…*, 26.
[44] Ibid, 93.

By all criteria of the Qur'ān which he believed, Nashr Hamīd stressed that religious texts are texts in the same shape as the other texts in the culture. as he said:

أن النصوص الدينية نصوص لغوية شأنها شأن أية نصوص الأخري في الثقافة.[45]

This shows how much thought Nashr Hamīd affected by Schleirmacher, who has known as the father of modern hermeneutics, where he stated that the interpretation of scripture does not require special methods because if it takes a special method that just a little part of people are able to understand it. By equating theQur'ān with other texts, then he absolve anyone can interpret the Qur'ān as they want, as he emphasized "I study the Qur'ān as an Arabian text in order it could be learned by Muslims, Christians and Atheists". thus in view Nashr Hamīd, the starting point of interpretation of the Qur'ān are not tread of faith but rather to literature only.

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[45] Ibid., 197.