

APPROACHING THE WORD OF GOD: A STUDY ON FAZLUR RAHMAN AND SAYYID QUTB (The Second Part)

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Abstrak:

Teks-teks hasil refleksi iman (teologi) berciri interpretatif. Kitab Suci yang diterima sebagai Sabda Allah juga merupakan 'teks teologis' yang melewati tahap interpretasi. Hermeneutika, sebagai metode interpretasi, meneliti kaitan antara teks dan subjek yang ingin memahaminya. Dengan demikian, hermeneutika juga berkaitan dengan penggunaan prinsip-prinsip dan metode dalam proses penginterpretasian sebuah teks. Penulis telah mulai mengulas metode interpretasi yang dikembangkan oleh F. Schleiermacher dan K. Barth. Di sini, penulis melanjutkan dan sekaligus membandingkan pendekatan mereka dengan metode interpretasi Fazlur Rahman dan Sayyid Qutb.

Kata Kunci:

Hermeneutika, realitas, bahasa, Sabda Allah, pengalaman

1. Introduction

I have said in the last edition of *Orientasi Baru*¹ that hermeneutics concerns with the effort to examine the relationship between the realm of a text, or a work of art, and the realm of the person who wishes to understand it.² In conventional theological usage, hermeneutics is then used to denote the enterprise which identifies the principles and methods prerequisite to the interpretation of texts.³ I have also discussed, there, the approach to the Word of God as developed by Schleiermacher and Karl Barth.

In Islam, the practice of the interpretation of the Qur'ân is usually designated with the term *tafsîr* or *ta'wîl*.⁴ As such, in the widest sense, the interpretation of the Qur'ân is as old as the revelation that came to the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 632). The Prophet thus became the first interpreter or commentator of the Qur'ân. After the death of the Prophet, the interpretation of the Qur'ân was transmitted to his Companions and Successors. The range of the classical and modern commentators of the Qur'ân, then, came afterwards.

In this paper, I would like to present and reflect on the approach to the Qur'ân as built by Fazlur Rahman and Sayyid Quṭb. I would argue that their approach, in some extents, has some points of similarity to the effort made by Schleiermacher and Karl Barth.

2. Fazlur Rahman⁵ and His Qur'ânic Hermeneutics⁶

2.1. The State of Questions

Rahman argues that Islam, historically, is loaded with movements of reform and revival. Indeed, he does not accept the practice of blind imitation (*taqlîd*)⁷ since this would only lead Muslims to the stagnant state in which there is no renewal. Thus, he does not believe in the idea that the gate of *ijtihâd* was already closed. He says that, at the theoretical level, the door of *ijtihâd* had always remained open and no jurist had ever closed it.⁸ For him, *ijtihâd* is a kind of intellectual *jihâd*; and every Muslim has a duty to practice it. He urges Muslims to consider the problems of this modern time as a stimulus to do a systematic, comprehensive, and long-term *ijtihâd*.

Reform and revival, according to Rahman, cannot be effectively achieved by making a kind of Islamic solidarity in the political realm, as expressed in the idea of pan-Arabism or pan-Islamism.⁹ It must be begun from the cultural realm through education. As such, a good educational system must provide a patient and complex intellectual outlook which results in a necessary Islamic vision.¹⁰ In this matter, he lays more stress on the need for an intellectual renaissance. He complains that Muslims, especially the '*ulamâ*', tends to abandon the practice of critical thought and innovation. They have remained too much bound to the literal text, and do not allow enough weight to the actual spirit of the text.¹¹

2.2. The Nature of the Qur'ân

As other Muslims, Rahman believes that the Qur'ân is the Word of God revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad in twenty-two years (610 - 632). He says that, without this important belief, nobody can be called a Muslim by name.¹² The Qur'ân was, thus, dictated by God with an absolute authority. This also means that the Qur'ân maintains the otherness, the objectivity, and the verbal character of the revelation. In other words, the Qur'ân is distinct from the Prophet; it is in itself objectively a divine entity. And yet, Rahman does not stop only in this classical definition. He is equally certain that the revelation of the Qur'ân is inseparable from the Prophet. Therefore, he rejects the externality of the Qur'ân *vis-a-vis* the Prophet.¹³

Rahman's understanding of the nature of the Qur'ân might be considered too radical by Muslims in general, and by the traditional 'ulamâ' in particular. At the level of intellectual discussion, however, Rahman does not give up for being outspoken in his views.¹⁴ Indeed, he is convinced that the Qur'ân obviously holds both the otherness and verbal character of the revelation, and its intimate connection with the work and the religious personality of the Prophet. In sum, he understands the Qur'ân as entirely the Word of God in an ordinary sense, as well as entirely the word of Muḥammad.¹⁵ In other words, the Qur'ân is pure Divine Word, but it is of course equally intimately related to the inmost personality of the Prophet Muḥammad. In this matter, he quotes the statements given by Sirhindi (d. 1052/1642) and Shah Wali Allah (d. 1176/1762). "In the eyes of God," Sirhindi says, "The Word of God, is, in truth, one single [mental act]."¹⁶ In a different formulation, Shah Wali Allah argues, "Verbal revelation occurs in the mold of words, idioms and style which are already existent in the mind of the Prophet."¹⁷

No doubt, Rahman's understanding counters the traditional doctrine which says that the Qur'ân is not only the very Word of God, the *ipsissima verba*, but also the uncreated and eternal Word of God. In the traditional doctrine, the Qur'ân is regarded as a part of God's eternal attribute of speech. In the light of the traditional doctrine, the Prophet's own role as the recipient of the revelation of the Qur'ân is obviously not accounted for. Here the revelation to the Prophet is said to take place through God's Spirit or the angel (Jibrîl); and the Prophet received the revelation through his 'ears.'¹⁸ For Rahman, this understanding can be misunderstood that the Prophet did not have any active role in the process of revelation. The traditional doctrine of revelation, according to Rahman, just gives a mechanical and externalistic picture of the relationship between the Prophet Muḥammad and the Qur'ân. He expresses his criticism by cynically saying that Jibrîl's coming and delivering God's message to the Prophet is almost like the coming of the postman to deliver letters.¹⁹ In fact, it is also contradicted with the Word of God in the Qur'ân.²⁰ Rahman's psychological explanation clearly shows that the Prophet Muḥammad was intrinsically involved in the process of the revelation of the Qur'ân. The Prophet was not the outsider; he was a part of the internal agent of the revelation. After all, by his understanding of revelation and prophecy, Rahman emphasises that the Divine Word of the Qur'ân has entered into the human history and internalized in the worldly life of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Concerning the contents, Rahman insists that the Qur'ân is primarily a Book of Moral, and not a Book of Law. Indeed, the Qur'ân offers specific rules, and yet the Qur'ân is loaded with many moral principles as well, since the Qur'ân is a document that is squarely aimed at human beings.²¹ The basic *élan*

vital of the Qur'ân is, thus, moral. The Moral Law is, in fact, God's command; so human beings cannot do anything except submit to it.²²

2.3. The Double-Movement Theory

Through his reflection on the nature of the Qur'ân, Rahman demonstrates the relationship between revelation, prophecy, and history. On this point, he shows that, on the one hand, Muslims must hold the ethical values of the Qur'ân, and on the other hand, they must take into account the context in which they live today. In addition, Rahman still mentions other preconditions for a proper understanding of the Qur'ân. According to him, it is necessary for Muslims to regard the Qur'ân as one body. Therefore, all verses must be considered as a unity and interpreted in the light of the classical dictum: 'the Qur'ân explains itself by itself'.²³

Based on all those principles, Rahman then develops three steps to practice his theory of Qur'anic hermeneutics.²⁴ The first step is to understand the meaning of a given statement by studying the historical situation to which it was the answer. In this matter, Muslims must practice a kind of historical approach to determine the meaning of the Qur'anic text. Consequently, the Qur'ân must be examined according to the chronological order. Specific pronouncements must be scrutinised in the light of specific circumstances surrounding particular passages of the Qur'ân. The knowledge of the Prophet's historical contexts, such as the society, religion, customs, institutions of life in Arabia on the secular period of Islam, and particularly in and around Mecca, is certainly very important. On this point, Rahman says, "A prophet is a person who is centrally and vitally interested in swinging history and moulding it on the divine pattern. As such, neither the prophetic revelation nor the prophetic behaviour can neglect the actual historical situation obtaining immediately, and indulge in purely abstract generalities; God speaks to the prophet *in*, although certainly not merely *for*, a given historical context The message must – despite its being clothed in the flesh and blood of a particular situation – outflow through and beyond that given context of history."²⁵

The second step is to generalise those specific answers and enunciate them as statements of general moral-social objectives. In doing so, Muslims need to distinguish between legal instructions and moral ideals of the Qur'anic teaching. As we know, according to Rahman, the Qur'ân is primarily a Book of Religious, and Moral Principles, as well as Exhortations; it is not a legal document.²⁶ What must become the source of the Islamic Law are the moral principles and the values of the Qur'ân, and not its literal texts. According to Rahman, the Qur'ân is itself the divine response, through the Prophet's thought, to the social-moral situations in Arabia at the time of the Prophet. No doubt,

it will be very difficult to find the moral principles of the Qur'ân, due to the fact that, in the majority, the Qur'ân only gives solutions for specific and concrete historical problems.²⁷ And yet, in Rahman's opinion, the Qur'ân explicitly or implicitly always provides the reasons from which the moral principles can be deduced.

The third step is to particularise the general principles of the Qur'ân in the contemporary context. Of course, applying retrieved historical values to the present situation will require knowledge of the current context. To do such a thing, Muslims must practice a careful study and accurate analysis about all elements existing in the current socio-historical context. In this matter, Rahman stresses on the contribution of the modern social sciences and humanities. They can be considered as proper tools for evaluating the present situation and grasping a good understanding of the contextual history. This third step is, in fact, also helpful for correcting the results of the interpretation of the Qur'ân in the first and the second steps. If the results of the interpretation fail to be applied, then a mistake must have taken place either in evaluating the present context or in understanding the meaning of the Qur'ân.²⁸

The term used by Rahman to call his Qur'ânic hermeneutics is: The Double Movement Theory.²⁹ There are, in fact, two movements here. The result achieved from the first step to the second step is a movement from particularisation to generalisation. Then, the result achieved from the second step to the third step is a movement from generalisation to particularisation. We can say, therefore, that, in those three steps, there is a kind of dialectical process between past and present, as well as between particularisation and generalisation.

There is no doubt that the *élan vital* of the first movement would lead Muslims to the root of Islamic sources, namely the Qur'ân and the Tradition. For Rahman, however, going back to the Islamic sources does not mean leaving out the present time in order to feel saved in the past. Instead, it is a systematic effort to find normative values by which Muslims can have a basis for entering into a concrete situation. In other words, going back to the spiritual root is only an intermediary process by which Muslims would be able to deal with the challenge of the contemporary context.

2.4. Significance and Criticism

One of the risks in doing the first movement is perhaps subjectivism. Yet, Rahman is aware of it. He solves the problem by pointing out that the Qur'ân, implicitly or explicitly, always says something about the moral principle of a certain passage. The difficulty to find the moral principle underlying a certain passage, in fact, could become a kind of *ijtihad*. In this matter, there could be

a possibility of having different interpretations, but Muslims should not be afraid of it, as far as it is intended to obtain a real comprehension and not just an arbitrary reason. Rahman says, "To insist on the absolute uniformity of interpretation is neither possible nor desirable. What is important is, first of all, to use the kind of method I am advocating to eliminate vagrant interpretations. For the rest, every interpreter must explicitly state his general assumptions with regard to the Qur'anic interpretation in general, and specific assumptions and premises with regard to specific issues or passages."³⁰

Another risk concerning the first movement is a tendency to restrict the message of the Qur'ân. Muslims could misunderstand the message of the Qur'ân, as they think that it is only related to a certain time and place. Yet, according to Rahman, Muslims must distinguish between 'understanding the message of the Qur'ân according to the historical context' and 'restricting the message of the Qur'ân only to a certain historical context'. They are different and must not be confused.

Concerning the second movement, there could be a fear that the current context will create a distortion of the legislation of the Qur'ân. Thus, there could be a danger that the legal application will contradict the standard of justice proposed by the Qur'ân. According to Rahman, however, Muslims do not need to worry about it, due to the fact that the general principles of the Qur'ân will always succeed in controlling and answering all the needs of the present situation. As a matter of fact, this second movement can be used for testing how far the general principles of the Qur'ân succeed in being applied to the current situation.³¹

There can be impression that Rahman's effort is just the modification of the technique of analogical reasoning (*qiyâs*).³² He also realises that his hermeneutics methodology is not totally new. The historical analysis applied to the revelation of the Qur'ân has been practiced since the beginning of Islam. Muslims have been aware that, to understand the message of the Qur'ân, they need to know the dialectical relation between revelation and history. Their awareness is clearly seen in their effort to make effective the theory of the circumstances of revelation (*asbâb al-nuzûl*) and the theory of abrogation (*naskh*). The theory of *asbâb al-nuzûl* demonstrates the reasons or circumstances under which certain Qur'anic passages were revealed, whereas the theory of *naskh* speaks of the substitution of certain Qur'anic passages for others. The revelation or the substitution of a Qur'anic passage was, of course, connected with certain socio-historical backgrounds.³³ Yet, according to Rahman, those theories are problematic. He insists that his double-movement theory is more systematic and comprehensive.

3. Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966)³⁴ and His Qur'ānic Hermeneutics

3.1. The Undiluted Qur'ān as the Font of Inspirations

The work written by Sayyid Quṭb on the exegesis of the Qur'ān is entitled *Fī-Zilāl al-Qur'ān (In the Shades of the Qur'ān)*. This is undoubtedly the most widely circulated of all his works. It is used among many Muslims, as a reference for teachers, preachers, and writers. According to Badmas Lanre Yusuf, 35 this work was written due to two reasons. Firstly, Quṭb might have wanted to discuss socio-political issues using the Holy Book as his parameter, so that his readers will know that the source of the points being used in his write-up could be traced to the divine revelation. Secondly, Quṭb might want to join the class of the commentators of Qur'ān, who left an indelible legacy for their generation and the generations after, through their selfless services towards amplification of the Qur'ānic message and its dissemination to every nook and corner of the Muslim world.

And yet, the concept of Sayyid Quṭb on the approach to the Qur'ān – which is characterized by Aref Ali Nayed as radical³⁶ – cannot be found in his *Fī-Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. Rather, it can be traced out in his manifesto entitled *Jilun Qur'āniyyun Farīd (A Unique Qur'ānic Generation)*. It is based on this last-mentioned work that Nayed builds and develops his critical reflection on Quṭb's Qur'ānic hermeneutics.

What is meant by Quṭb with the expression 'the unique Qur'ānic generation'? This would refer to the generation of the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad in Mecca and Medina as he preached Islam. Quṭb says that the unique Qur'ānic generation would point to 'a generation that has a pure heart, a pure mind, a pure vision, a pure consciousness, and a pure formation; pure from any other outside influence besides the divine way contained in the glorious Qur'ān'.³⁷ According to Quṭb, the source from which this unique generation drew inspiration is undoubtedly the Qur'ān itself, for it is through the Qur'ān that God has spoken to them.³⁸ And yet, the Qur'ān here is, for him, the undiluted Qur'ān, and thus the Qur'ān, and only the Qur'ān.

3.2. The Tripartite Scheme for a Qur'ānic Hermeneutics³⁹

Quṭb says that the 'first generation' is unique because, firstly, they were isolated from any kind of non-Islamic teachings, such as Greek philosophy, Persian mythology, Jewish folklore, Christian theology, and others. Secondly, the 'first generation' did not read the Qur'ān – in Nayed's word – 'in order to become cultured or better informed, nor, for that matter, to aesthetic pleasure'. According to Quṭb, they read the Qur'ān in order 'to receive God's

commands regarding personal and communal matters' and to implement 'upon hearing as a soldier receives his daily orders in a battle field ...' Thirdly the 'first generation' practiced what Quṭb calls 'existential seclusion', because they were isolated from any kind of *jāhiliyya*.

Quṭb's concept of *jāhiliyya* is very important.⁴⁰ For most Muslims, the term *jāhiliyya* would refer to the society in Arabia before the Prophet's revelation a time of ignorance of God's true religion. And yet, Quṭb gives it a new meaning.⁴¹ In his opinion, *jāhiliyya* becomes increasingly used as a term of abuse to describe everything that is not Islamic. On this point, he says, "Today we live in a state of *jāhiliyya* similar to, or darker than, the state of *jāhiliyya* which was contemporary to Islam. Everything around us is a state of *jāhiliyya*: the concepts and beliefs of people, their habits and customs, the sources of their culture, their arts and literature, and their laws and regulations. And even much of what we consider Islamic culture, Islamic classics, Islamic Philosophy, and Islamic thought is also the product of *jāhiliyya*."⁴²

In this context, Sayyid Quṭb proposes three ways to approach the Qur'ān. Firstly, it is to re-create the existential seclusion. Secondly, it is to abandon all traditional sources of Islam, except the Qur'ān. Only the Qur'ān itself should be the basis for understanding the Qur'ān. Thirdly, it is to read the Qur'ān with the view to put it into practice. The Qur'ān is to be lived, and not just intellectually appreciated. All these are built on the basis of the main questions "What does the Qur'ān want us to do? What overall vision does the Qur'ān want us to hold? How does it want our ethics, position, and living practical matters to be?"⁴³

3.3. Significance and Criticism

Quṭb says that only the Qur'ān itself should be the basis for understanding the Qur'ān. His belief must be disputable, because it must be hard to say that one could just zip through history straight to the Qur'ān. It is also naive that one can understand the Qur'ān all by itself. Badmas Lanre Yusuf has ever shown in his article, "A History of *Fi-Zilâlil-Qur'ân*", that Quṭb's work on the exegesis of the Qur'ān (*Tafsîr al-Qur'ân*) was composed by using other works, those which were written by his predecessors, such as Ibn Kathîr (d. 774/1373), al-jabarî (d. 370/923), al-Tha`labî (d. 427/1035), Ibn Muḥammad al-Baghawî (d. 510/1117), al-Suyûfî (d. 911/1505), al-Zamakhsharî the Mu'tazilite (d. 538/1143), al-Alûsî (d. 1270/1854), the authors of the *Ḥadîth*, the historians, and even the Western writers whose works have been translated into Arabic.⁴⁴

The doctrine of approaching the Qur'ān in existential seclusion is not only difficult to understand, but also impossible. According to Nayed,⁴⁵ even if such seclusion were possible, it would still be a bad idea because, [a] it is not to

the benefit of the one going into seclusion, and [b] it is a form of violence against the very being of human beings who do not share the realm of this seclusion. Furthermore, Nayed says that, even if existential seclusion from *jāhiliyya* culture were possible, it would not be a good idea. Firstly, it would lead to a fragile self-enclosed emptiness that fails to benefit from the richness of human experience in general, and from the struggles of fellow human beings, to make sense of, to live in, and perhaps to improve the world. Secondly, the existential seclusion that Quṭb recommends would lead to the most sinister of all human vices, [namely] arrogance. To say that everything around one is *jāhiliyya* and therefore not worthy of consideration or respect is an act of utmost violence against other Muslims who hold different views, and most importantly against humanity at large.⁴⁶

Apart from the fact that Quṭb does not help Muslims to grasp how they could disclose the message of the Qur'ān for their contemporary time, due to the fact that he does not deal with the cultural problems which are conditioning the reading context, but his approach is helpful in bringing the Qur'ān in to the daily life. We have to acknowledge that Quṭb gives a positive contribution on the field of hermeneutics in relation to his demand to live the Qur'ān on the basis of the question 'what should I do!' He rightly points out the fact that many people deal with the Qur'ān just for intellectual or aesthetic appreciation. Quṭb lightens the role of the Qur'ān as the Book of Guidance in bringing human beings to a righteous life. What should be noted is the fact that Quṭb manages to make the application dimension in Qur'ānic hermeneutics very clear.

4. Concluding Remarks

We have tried to present and reflect on the approach developed by Fazlur Rahman and Sayyid Quṭb in dealing with the Qur'ān. It could be seen directly that these two big Muslim scholars have the same concern in bringing the Qur'ān in relation to the daily life. And yet, both of them follow different ways in relation to the non-Islamic sources. As a matter of fact, Fazlur Rahman is persistently accused of following the approach of the Western scholars,⁴⁷ whereas Sayyid Quṭb, through his tripartite scheme for a Qur'ānic approach, would propose to reject and not tolerate any kind of Western idea, due to the fact that it is regarded as non-Islam. As such, Quṭb considers non-Islam, or everything that is not Islamic, as a state of *jāhiliyya*; and thus not a single compromise is to be made with *jāhiliyya*.

It must be remembered, first of all, that for Muslims in general, the Qur'ān is not only the very Word of God, the *ipsissima verba*, but also the uncreated and eternal Word of God. In this matter, the Qur'ān is regarded as a part of

God's eternal attribute of speech. As for Christians in general, they call the Holy Bible the written Word of God, neither in the sense that it fell from heaven ready made, nor in the sense that God dictated the Bible word for word to men who were merely His passive instruments.⁴⁸ Thus, the nature of the Qur'ân and the Holy Bible is not precisely the same. And yet, we may seemingly compare, here, the way how Fazlur Rahman and Sayyid Qub understand the Qur'ân and the effort made by Schleiermacher and Karl Barth in dealing with the Holy Bible.

Fazlur Rahman's approach to the Qur'ân is comparable to what Schleiermacher develops in relation to the Holy Bible. Both of them take into consideration the combination between 'the empathetic experience', 'the critical-literary analyses' and 'the relation to history'. Concerning Rahman, this is recognizable from his effort to understand the historical background in which the revealed Qur'ân is inherited, to distinguish between historical Islam and normative Islam, and to determine how those normative values can be particularised in the contemporary context.

With regard to Rahman's approach to the Qur'ân, on the one hand, we could bear in mind some crucial problems. Firstly, there is an impression that he applies a double-standard. He speaks of the historical background of the revelation only when he deals with the legal Qur'ânic passages, but not in relation to the metaphysical or theological Qur'ânic passages?⁴⁹ Secondly, we will certainly agree with his idea about the necessity of the historical contexts to understand the Qur'ân. We may have a big problem, however, in determining the historical context of a revealed passage. The distance of the present and the past is too far for us. We do not know exactly the context of the revelation. Thirdly, he emphasises the importance of finding the ethical values of the Qur'ân. Yet, in dealing with the normative values of a passage, we could have a difficulty in avoiding the danger of subjectivism. In addition, by over-emphasising the world-view and ethical teachings, we may fall into a trap of abstraction. There are also problems in determining the 'normative values'. Who would have an authoritative power to do so? It is certainly very difficult to reach consensus on it. Moreover, by drawing on universal values, there is an impression that the Qur'ân is no longer the prime guidance. It is now subordinated to other things. Fourthly, how do we draw a conclusion to achieve universal normative values? It is also interesting to take note that he still believes in some kind of universal values about which the post-modernist society tends to deny. Fifthly, we realise that the application of Qur'ânic values in the present requires a very sophisticated analysis.⁵⁰ In fact, he does not comprehensively discuss his analysis on social and political matters.

On the other hand, we could take note that Rahman's theory of Qur'anic hermeneutics shows a certain positive achievement. Firstly, his understanding of the Qur'ân is not atomistic or partial. All verses of the Qur'ân are seen as one body of revelation. The understanding of the Qur'ân is thus more comprehensive. Moreover, the understanding of the Qur'ân does not stop only in the literal and informative texts, but goes deeply into the basic meanings, and even into the spirit of the passages. Secondly, it may be true that his theory of Qur'anic understanding does not 'reveal' its original idea. There is an impression that he just tries to modify the technique of *qiyâs*. We have to acknowledge, however, that his double-movement theory is formulated in a more systematic and comprehensive way. Thirdly, he shows the way to understand the Qur'ân in a dynamic sense. This is, in fact, in accordance with the spirit of Islam itself. His Double-Movement Theory has brought Muslims to appreciate both tradition and modernisation. His Double-Movement Theory also demonstrates a contextual understanding of the Qur'ân. Through his theory of Qur'anic hermeneutics, Muslims could be more aware of the fact that revelation occurs in human history. Of course, by finding its relation with the present context, there will be always a new and fresh message. Fourthly, he seems to believe that all traditions are important to give a good understanding of history. By giving a good appreciation of history, Muslims would understand much better the message of the Qur'ân, and live it appropriately in accordance with the present situation. Fifthly, as a prominent Muslim scholar, he accepts and recognises pluralism within Islamic traditions, as well as outside the boundaries of religious traditions.⁵¹ By doing so, he certainly brings Islam in an open dialogue with the world.

In relation to Sayyid Quṭb's approach to the Qur'ân, it could be compared with Karl Barth's method in understanding the Holy Bible. Both develop the idea that the approach to the Word of God must not be governed by what is in the mind of the interpreter. It must be built on the basis of what is revealed by God itself. An interpreter, therefore, must let the Word of God speak for itself, under the principle of obedience. This also means that an interpreter places himself or herself beneath the Word of God which is superior to human being. In this matter, Quṭb refers to the 'unique Qur'anic generation' who received God's commands, with regard to personal and communal matters, and implemented upon hearing as a soldier receives his daily orders in a battle field. Quṭb, thus, builds his approach to the Qur'ân on the basis of the spirit of *taqwâ*. His proposition, however, may still leave Muslims in doubt on how they surely know and recognise what God wants to do. His emphasis on the self-revelation of God and the self-interpreted Qur'ân, on the basis of the spirit of obedience, could be easily misunderstood as if Quṭb would give no room for human reason to participate in understanding the Word of God as attested in the Qur'ân.

According to Sayyid Quṭb, an interpreter must try to put into practice what God says, on the basis of the question 'what I should do'. And yet, some notes must be taken into consideration here. Nayed says that, even though it is good to say that a Muslim should ask the Qur'ân about what to do, a Muslim should never think that the answer he or she hears is purely God's answer, or that it is the only possible answer. A Muslim interpreter of the Qur'ân should always keep in mind that what he or she really receives is God's answer as understood by a particular human being and conditioned by a particular tradition as well as living in particular circumstances. After all, a Muslim should live according to what God says, but he or she must also still acknowledge that he or she has no monopoly over its meaning.⁵²

Just like Barth, Quṭb tries to protect the interpretation of the Word of God from any threat of modern thoughts. Quṭb even proposes to approach the Qur'ân in existential seclusion. Nayed questions this approach, due to the fact that seclusion from today's world and culture is impossible. Thus, Nayed argues, "The fact of the matter is, even if one tries to escape from surrounding culture, and into an existentially secluded haven, outside culture will not leave one alone. The world will always be there Running away from the world into solitary bliss is not a viable option. If we are not happy with the world, we should fully engage it, understand it, and contribute in changing it. Hiding our heads in the sand is no way to win the battle of living a righteous life in an unsatisfactory world."⁵³

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Endnotes

- 1 J.B. Heru Prakosa, "Approaching the Word of God: A Study on Schleiermacher and Karl Barth", *Orientasi Baru*, 17-33.
- 2 W. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 1.
- 3 J.D. McAuliffe, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics: The Views of Al-jabari and Ibn Kathir", 47.
- 4 Al-Râzi (d. 606/1209), for example, says that *tafsîr* is the same as *ta'wil*. 'Commentary (*tafsîr*) is called 'interpretation (*ta'wil*)' because it deals with the way to search for explanation whose indication cannot be found in the Qur'ân. For him, it refers to the attempt to get to something to which it must turn, and at which it must arrive. F.D. Al-Râzi, *Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr*, IV/7, 190-191.
- 5 Fazlur Rahman is, in fact, his first name. In the West, the second part of his first name, Rahman, became the equivalent of his family name. F. Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam*, 1. Fazlur Rahman was born on 21 September 1919 in the Hazara district in India, now part of Pakistan. He came from a family with a Sunnite background belonging to the Hanafite school of Islamic Law. He died on 26 July 1988 in Chicago, the United States.

- 6 The presentation here is based on my long essay presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the Master of Studies in Study of Religion. See, Heru Prakosa, *Fazlur Rahman and His Qur'anic Hermeneutics*, 2001, the University of Oxford, Oxford, 56 pp.
- 7 *Taqīd* essentially means 'unquestioning acceptance of authority'. According to Rahman, *taqīd* was originally recommended for the common people. Later, however, it has enveloped almost all members of the Muslim society. F. Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History*, 152 and 173.
- 8 F. Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History*, 172.
- 9 T. Sonn, "Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Methodology," 212.
- 10 F. Rahman, "Roots of Islamic Neo-Fundamentalism", 25, as cited in, F. Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam*, 7.
- 11 F. Rahman, *Islam*, 198.
- 12 F. Rahman, "Divine Revelation and the Prophet", 66.
- 13 F. Rahman, *Islam*, 31.
- 14 "At the level of intellectual discussion," Rahman says, "I did not, and do not believe in compromises extraneously motivated, such as the case with many intellectuals in Pakistan." F. Rahman, "Some Islamic Issues in the Ayyūb Khān Era", 298.
- 15 F. Rahman, *Islam*, 31; F. RAHMAN, "Divine Revelation and the Prophet", 67-68.
- 16 F. Rahman, "Divine Revelation and the Prophet", 66.
- 17 F. Rahman, "Divine Revelation and the Prophet", 67.
- 18 This classical understanding is in accordance with the *Ḥadīth*-s. According to Rahman, however, those *Ḥadīth*-s were generally acknowledged and accepted much later, around the second and third centuries after the Hijra. F. Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History*, 33. F. Rahman, *Islam*, 13.
- 19 F. Rahman, "Some Islamic Issues in the Ayyūb Khān Era", 299.
- 20 It is said in Q. 26: 193-194, "The Trusted Spirit has brought it [i.e. the Qur'ān] down upon your heart, that you should be a warner...." F. Rahman, *Islam*, 14.
- 21 F. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*, 1.
- 22 As a matter of fact, this is rightly reflected in the *weltanschauung* or the world-view of the Qur'ān, namely the mutual relationship between God, nature, and human beings. See, F. Rahman, "The Qur'anic Concept of God, the Universe and Man", 1-11.
- 23 In Arabic, the dictum says: *Al-Qur'ān yufassiru ba'du-hu ba'dan*. See, F. Rahman, "Ribā and Interest", 2.
- 24 F. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, 5-7.
- 25 Cited in, T. Sonn, "Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Methodology", 220.
- 26 F. Rahman, *Islam*, 37.
- 27 F. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, 5.
- 28 F. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, 7.
- 29 With regard to 'The Double Movement Theory', see, F. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of Intellectual Tradition*, 5-7; F. Rahman, "Towards Reformulating the Methodology of Islamic Law: Sheikh Yamani on 'Public Interest' in Islamic Law", 221.
- 30 F. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, 144.
- 31 F. Rahman, "Towards Reformulating the Methodology of Islamic Law: Sheikh Yamani on 'Public Interest' in Islamic Law", 223.
- 32 Concerning *qiyās*, Rahman says that it can be practised by following a series of steps: [i] to find a text relevant to the new case in the Qur'ān or the Tradition; [ii] to discern the essential similarities or *ratio legis* ('*illāh al-ḥukm*) between the two cases; [iii] to allow for differences and to determine which one can be discounted; [iv] to extend or to interpret the *ratio legis* which will cover the new case. According to Rahman, *qiyās* is perfect as an idea. In practice, however, *qiyās* is very problematic. Although neatly formulated in theory, *qiyās* became very difficult to wield in practice. This is primarily due to the fact that there will be many different

- opinions with regard to relevant texts, particularly in the case of Tradition. Consequently sometimes the principle of *qiyās* might be applied in a strict and rigid manner, but sometimes it might be too liberal. F. Rahman, "Islam: An Overview", 310.
- 33 Fazlur Rahman understands the phenomena of the substitutions of certain Qur'anic passages (*naskh*) from the psychological point of view. For him, as a human, a prophet is not always consistent. There is abundant evidence in the Qur'an that, while the Prophet at times wished that developments would take a certain turn, God's revelation went a different way. Adjustments in the Qur'an, however, were always up to God, instead of him. F. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 89-90. Concerning *asbāb al-nuzūl*, Rahman says that its information is not always sufficient. On the one hand, the same verses may be regarded as having different contexts. On the other hand, different verses may be considered as having the same contexts. F. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, 17.
- 34 Sayyid Qutb was born in 1906 in Egypt. Up until 1945, his interests were mainly literary. When he first started writing political pieces, he had to leave Egypt in 1948 to avoid arrest by the government. Then he came to live in the United States. In 1951, he returned to Egypt to join up with *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*. He died in 1966. Cf. S. Qutb, *Beberapa Studi tentang Islam* 315.
- 35 B. L. Yusuf, "A History of Fi Zilālil-Qur'an", 17.
- 36 A. Nayed, "The Radical Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Sayyid Qutb", 355-363. Cf. Qutb, S., "A Unique Qur'anic Generation" (first draft transl. by A. Nayed), in *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq*, 1979, Dar al-Shuruq, Cairo.
- 37 Cited from, A. Nayed, "The Radical Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Sayyid Qutb", 356.
- 38 S. Qutb, *Fi-Zilāl al-Qur'an: Di Bawah Naungan al-Qur'an*, 11.
- 39 A. Nayed, "The Radical Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Sayyid Qutb", 356-358.
- 40 Cf. S. Qutb, *Milestones*, 11 and 19. The term is used several places in the Qur'an, for example, "Is it a judgment of the time of *jāhiliyya* that they are seeking? Who is better than Allah for judgment to a people who have certainty in their belief?" (Q. 5:50). See also, Q. 3:154; 33:33; 48:26.
- 41 The much stronger and less historical connotations of the term *jāhiliyya* are introduced by Abū al-A'lā al-Mawdūdī (1903-1979). See, C.J. Adams, "Mawdudi and the Islamic State", 99-133.
- 42 Quoted from, A. Nayed, "The Radical Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Sayyid Qutb", 357. The most sustained argument that Muslims today live in the state of *jāhiliyya* is presented by Muhammad Qutb, Sayyid's brother. See, for example, M. Qutb, *Jahiliyyah Abad Dua Puluh: Mengapa Islam Dibenci*, 1985, Mizan, Bandung.
- 43 A. Nayed, "The Radical Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Sayyid Qutb", 358-359.
- 44 B.L. Yusuf, "A History of Fi Zilālil-Qur'an", 23-26.
- 45 A. Nayed, "The Radical Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Sayyid Qutb", 360.
- 46 A. Nayed, "The Radical Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Sayyid Qutb", 360-361.
- 47 F. Rahman, "Some Islamic Issues in the Ayyūb Khān Era", 288. The Western scholars who work on Islamic Studies are also called the Orientalists. Rahman had many contacts with the Western scholars who work on Islamic Studies. According to him, they have attempted to offer a work of objective analysis, either in terms of the 'sources' or in terms of the 'development of ideas'. He says, "The present writer (i.e. Rahman) must acknowledge that he has learned a great deal about Islam from the insights of several Western scholars". Indeed, Rahman is not reluctant to offer a kind of praise for some of the Western scholars who work on Islamic Studies. He calls Ignaz Goldziher, for example, the first great perceptive student of the evolution of the Muslim Tradition... He also appreciates Noldeke-Schwally's *Geschichte des Qorans* (1970), Rudi Paret's *Koran-Kommentar* (1971), Jeffery's *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an* (1937), as well as Izutsu's *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Koran* (1966) and *God and Man in the Koran* (1964). See, F. Rahman, *Islamic Methodology in History*, 4; F. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, xiv-xvi. Rahman does not only read the works of the Western scholars in the field of Islamic Studies. He also reads the works of the Western scholars in other fields. Concerning the theory of hermeneutics, for example, he mentions at least two names, namely Gadamer (b. 1900) and Emilio Betti (d. 1968). With Gadamer, he shares his ideas on the

relationship between Tradition – or in this case a revealed truth – and history. From Gadamer, he learns that Muslims need to disclose the continuities and discontinuities of Tradition. See, F. Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam*, 17-18.

- 48 Karl Barth, for example, argues that the Bible as a witness to divine revelation means that the Bible becomes a human expression of God's revelation; it is a witness of revelation which is really given, and really applies, and is really received by us, just because it is a written word, and, in fact, a word written by men like ourselves, which we can read, hear and understand as such. And yet, in such limitation, the Bible is not distinguished from revelation. For this, in dealing with the Bible as a real witness of divine revelation, we must always keep these two things separate and give them their due weight. K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 463-464.
- 49 F. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, 154.
- 50 F. Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam*, 16.
- 51 According to Moosa, Rahman's position lies between the rationality of Arabo-Islamic and Western Enlightenment thought. F. Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam*, 204.
- 52 A. Nayed, "The Radical Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Sayyid Quṭb", 362.
- 53 A. Nayed, "The Radical Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Sayyid Quṭb", 361.

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