

Conclusion

QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS has a long history. It aims to make clear the true meaning of the Qur'an. Each generation of exegetes has approached *tafsīr* from perspectives unique to the time, place and circumstances of the era in which they lived. Qur'anic interpretation began with the Prophet Muhammad, the supreme exegete, who gave precise and clear explanations. After his death, the Companions believed they had a divine obligation to disseminate and teach the Qur'an and its interpretation to the next generations of Muslims. During their time, four major schools of Qur'anic interpretation emerged named after the areas in which they became prominent: the Makkan School (led by ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās), the Madinah School (led by Ubay ibn Kaʿb), the Iraq School (led by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿud), and the Shām School (Greater Syria or Levant).

Each of these schools produced a number of highly regarded authorities on interpretation. During the era of the *Tābiʿūn*, the method and nature of interpretation was not much different from that of the Companions. It consisted of a combination of rote (or near rote) transmission and personal, but well founded intellectual opinion.

Later the *tafsīr* of the Companions and that of the Successors became the subject of heated debate among scholars centered on whether or not their *tafsīr* was a binding proof (a *ḥujjah* or *ḥujjiyyah*), an issue which would have future consequences at the Shariʿah level. Among the proponents of the Companions' Qur'an interpretation as being binding on future generations, were Imam Mālik, Imam

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim. Among its opponents were Imam Abū Ḥanīfah, Imam al-Shāfi‘ī, al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥayyān and ibn ‘Aṭīyyah. The arguments of those who held that the Companions’ *tafsīr* was a binding proof, were mostly based on the merits of the Companions, whereas the arguments of those who believed otherwise were based on textual evidence and intellectual analysis.

As for the authoritative nature of the *tafsīr* of the *Tābi‘ūn*, little concern was given to it. Ibn Qayyim was one of, if not the strongest, believers in the binding character of their *tafsīr*.

During the first century of Islam no exhaustive *tafsīr* work existed that covered the entire text of the Qur’an. The only known extant commentary of this type is al-Ṭabarī’s *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*. This work covers the whole Qur’an, surah by surah and verse by verse. Yet, both Ibn Ḥazm and al-Tahar ibn Ashur make two claims: first, that a comprehensive *tafsīr* did exist prior to al-Ṭabarī’s, written by Abu ‘Abd al-Raḥman Baqī‘ ibn Makhlad ibn Yazīd (d. 273/889), but that it was subsequently lost; secondly, that this commentary was more comprehensive than al-Ṭabarī’s. This view is supported by Tahir ibn Ashur who simply stated that he found some volumes of this work in Tunisia without giving further details, and by Ibn Ḥazm who commented that there was no *tafsīr* commentary comparable to Baqī‘’s interpretation.

After the fourth century AH three main developments occurred in the field of Qur’anic exegesis, these being: the use of unverified statements, the age of specialization, and the emergence of reprehensible interpretation or *tafsīr al-bid‘ah*. Al-Suyūṭī described the new trend as the age of the shortening of the chains of narration (*ikhtiṣār al-asānīd*).

The emergence of these three developments subsequently led to two further important developments in the field of Qur’anic interpretation. These were: *al-tafsīr bi al-ma’tḥūr* and its natural counterpart *al-tafsīr bi al-ra’y* as two distinctive fields. Various scholars further divided the latter into two categories: *al-tafsīr bi al-ra’y al-maḥmūd* and

al-tafsīr bi al-ra'y al-madhmūm. The second *al-tafsīr bi al-ra'y al-mahmūd* involved the formation or recognition of scholarly and intellectual prerequisites for sound *ijtihād* to ensure proper participation in the sciences of Qur'anic interpretation.

The age of specialization is characterized by an expansion of *tafsīr* into specialties with descriptions such as juristic, grammatical, intellectual as well as other forms of *tafsīr*. The emergence of *bid'ah al-tafsīr* – as termed by Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Suyūṭī and al-Dhahabī – is actually sectarian *tafsīr* produced by Mu'ṭazili, Shia or Sufi commentators.

Nonetheless, Muslim scholars have remained prolific in their production of Qur'anic commentary. New exegesis trends continued to appear, creating new *tafsīr* categories such as scientific, literary, natural history and philological interpretation. As noted previously, it was common for classical scholars to write *tafsīr* works with the main purpose of educating their generation. May Allah reward them for their laudable intentions.

In the twentieth century and in our own time, following in the footsteps of earlier *mufasssīr*, many contemporary scholars have striven hard to bring a proper understanding of the Qur'an to Muslims, and indeed to the world at large, as fully as possible, in an attempt to widen knowledge of the guidance contained therein, and how to live our lives in accordance with its principles. Generating precise comprehension of the Qur'an and the true meaning of its verses is in my opinion the essence of perhaps the most important of the Islamic sciences, Qur'anic exegesis or *tafsīr*.

The message, for Muslims at least, is clear, success both in this life and the hereafter cannot be achieved except by Allah's will and as a result of a life lived in accordance with the tenets laid down in His message to mankind – the Qur'an. It is therefore imperative that the text is given the study, attention, focus, priority, and the *respect* that it deserves.