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Modern Interpretation of the Qur'an

The Contribution of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi

Hakan Çoruh

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Dedicated to my daughter Zeynep Vera

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Contents

In the life of Muslims, the Qur'an is of particular importance because it is the exact revealed word of God and the most significant source of Islam. It has an inimitable and unique nature, and it is protected by God from any corruption. The Qur'an is a true guide leading humanity to happiness in this world and the hereafter. The Qur'an is a book of law, prayer, wisdom, worship, commands and prohibitions. Muslims believe that the Qur'an was revealed for people of all centuries, and it meets the needs and requirements of all people. Therefore, interpretation of the Qur'an has been the most important concern of Muslims from the earliest period of Islam up to the present.

Various exegetical works have emerged from the earliest period of Islam to today. While some Qur'anic exegetes such as Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH/923 CE) relied on tradition-based exegesis, the others such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH/1210 CE) focused on reason-based exegesis. Moreover, by the ninth century CE, major religio-political schools such as Sunnī, Shi'a and Kharijite developed their distinctive approaches to Qur'anic exegesis. In addition, a number of other significant forms of exegesis also emerged in the first three centuries of Islam such as theological, legal, mystical and philosophical exegesis.[1]

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The world has experienced various changes in the modern period. Such changes like globalization, migration, scientific developments, materialism and positivism, secularism, the emergence of nation states and greater interfaith relations affected the Muslim world in the modern period. Because of the challenges that faced modern Muslims, Muslim scholars returned to the Qur'an and its interpretation. In the mid-nineteenth century, modernist exegesis emerged under the impact of Western critical and positivistic thought and modernism in various parts of Muslim lands such as India and Egypt. Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) and Muhammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) are two earlier and significant figures of this trend. Both approached the Qur'an differently in many respects, emphasizing the importance of moving away from imitation of the past towards a sensitive approach compatible with modern life. In their views, there was the need for reinterpretation of the Qur'an with a scientific world view in mind. They wanted to reinterpret miracles in the Qur'anic text in line with modern science and reason.[2]

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (1877–1960) is also a great modern Muslim scholar from the twentieth century. He may be considered to be the most influential scholar in the social and intellectual development of Islam in modern Turkey.[3] In the face of modernity, he also dealt with the interpretation of the Qur'an and attempted to respond to the challenges. His *magnum opus* the *Risale-i Nur* collection is a 6000-page commentary on the Qur'an. It is not necessary to all commentators to interpret all verses of the Qur'an. Some of them must give priority to serve the needs of their times. Nursi started his task from the most important point, at a period when religious education and the time given to religious sciences had been decreased. Nursi's commentary made strong explanations about topics like the existence of God, His attributes, the Angels, holy books, prophethood, revelation and the hereafter. The *Risale-i Nur* is a commentary that usually explains the verses concerned with the fundamentals of belief, which is a topic of the discipline of systematic Islamic theology. It clarifies and proves truths of the Qur'an related to belief with powerful arguments.[4] In his works, Nursi expressed the main issue of the Muslim world: the weakening of belief's foundations. He attempted to strengthen belief against the unceasing attacks of positivistic and materialistic science by reconstructing Islam from its foundations of belief.[5]

It is noteworthy that Nursi generally divides Qur'an commentaries into two categories: *literal tafsīr* (elucidates the Qur'anic phraseology and words) and *maʿnawī tafsīr* (exegesis on the Qur'an's meanings and mes-

sage), and then he defines his collection as a kind of *maʿnawī tafsīr*, a commentary on the Qur'an's meanings in a number of places.[6] The first type of Qur'an commentaries elucidates the Qur'an's phraseology, words and sentences. But the second type (*maʿnawī tafsīr*) elucidates and proves the Qur'an's truths related to belief with powerful arguments. Nursi emphasizes that the *Risale-i Nur* has made this second type its basis directly, and is a commentary on the Qur'an's meanings.[7] It is concluded from the above that Nursi focused in his collection on the meanings and the message of the Qur'an rather than verse-by-verse exegesis in classical-style commentaries except for his one-volume Qur'an commentary, *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz* (Signs of Inimitability). *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz* is a reason-based exegesis (*tafsīr bi-al-ra'y*), and Nursi utilizes the methods of the classical exegesis (verse-by-verse analysis) in his interpretation.

However, Nursi also defines his collection as "a work of *kalām*" in a number of places. Nursi emphasizes that the works of his *Risale* are lessons in the discipline of *kalām*, and the *Risale* showed a way to the essence of reality through logical proofs and scholarly arguments and a direct way of "greater sainthood" within the sciences of *kalām*, and *ʿaqīda* and *uṣūl al-dīn*.[8] In addition, Nursi's primary concern is the renewal of belief and the reform of the individual. While the majority of modern Muslim movements has put emphasis on the "implementation" of Islam at the sociopolitical level, discussion mainly on issues such as Islamic law and the concept of the Islamic state, Nursi is one of the few Muslim intellectuals who did not deal much with the socio-economic or political issues of Muslim life in the twentieth century.[9] It could be said that he made a distinction between Islam and politics and did not aim at political Islam.

Taking into account the information above, it could be said that Nursi combines a number of Islamic disciplines in his writings, attempting to see the whole picture as sciences (Islamic disciplines) break (divide) the religion into separate pieces very much. Therefore, Nursi's descriptions of *tafsīr, kalām* and other descriptions for his collection need a further study to discover his unique method. This book aims to analyse the existing approaches to the collection with regard to its method and develops the existing point of view by reformulating it such that the new version makes a better explanation of it.

In recent years, the world has witnessed the rise of narrow literalism in Islamic social and political movements. This literalism depends on reading straight from sacred text to modern world, as if every word of the Qur'an is a signpost for the twenty-first century. But this was not always the case,

as seen in the writings of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. Nursi is one of the distinguished Muslim scholars for the modern Islamic thought, and his ideas have been influential in the Muslim world. As a result, the *Risale-i Nur* has been translated into many languages, read by many people throughout the world, a number of symposiums organized for it and chairs and institutes established in its study.

Large numbers of PhD research theses have been written on Nursi and particular themes of the *Risale-i Nur* in contemporary Islamic scholarship. Also, a large number of academic symposiums have been organized since 1991 in a variety of different countries. Each symposium focuses on a particular theme of the *Risale-i Nur* collection such as ethics, justice and frugality. The fourth international symposium held in Istanbul in 1998 titled, *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of the Risale-i Nur* is a good example of such symposiums.[10] Colin Turner's recent published book, called *The Qur'an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi's Epistles of Light* (Gerlach Press, 2013), is a good source book for the major themes of the *Risale-i Nur*. However, there is a need for the analysis of the collection in the discipline of *tafsīr* and modern Qur'anic exegesis.

The objective of this book is an enquiry into Nursi's methodology of Qur'anic exegesis, seeking to locate Nursi within modern Qur'anic scholarship. How Nursi relates the Qur'anic text to concerns of the modern period needs to be examined. Therefore, this study aims to analyse Said Nursi and the methodology of exegesis in his *Risale-i Nur* collection generally, and particularly in his two books, *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz* (*Signs of Miraculousness*) and *The Muhākamāt* (*Reasonings*), in order to explore Nursi's approaches to Qur'anic exegesis. The book aims to compare Nursi's approach to two modernist scholars, Muhammad ʿAbduh and Syed Ahmad Khan. The reason for this comparison is that ʿAbduh and Khan are considered as the seeds of the Islamic modernism, and Nursi's method can be better placed within modern Qur'anic scholarship through this comparative analysis. While similarities are recognized, there are methodological differences among these scholars.

In the context of modernist exegesis, this book focuses on the difference between Nursi's reading of the Qur'an and that of his counterparts who follow both classical and modern approaches. Does he offer a new reading differing from others or does he follow very well-established exegetical traditions? Where does Nursi stand in relation to various modern Muslim scholarship on the Qur'an? The work attempts to respond to these questions.

This book comprises six chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the previous relevant literature on *tafsīr* and the *Risale-i Nur* collection. Later, the chapter analyses Nursi's life and his intellectual career. This section focuses on Nursi's life periods and their characteristics, his theological thoughts and his approaches to the Islamic disciplines such as *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *kalām* (Islamic systematic theology) and *tasawwuf* (Ṣūfism). After that, the chapter examines attempts to revitalize *kalām* and discussions regarding "new *kalām*" in the twentieth century CE since Nursi is a part of this movement. Finally, the chapter introduces Nursi's major books in the collection which are the most relevant to this study. Chapter 3 investigates approaches to the Qur'an and *tafsīr* in early Muslim modernism, the main figures of this period such as S. Ahmad Khan and Muhammad ʿAbduh, and the characteristic features of modern exegesis. Later on, the chapter discusses Nursi's definition of his collection and the place of the *Risale-i Nur* collection in Islamic disciplines, particularly in the discipline of *tafsīr*. Through this analysis, the chapter provides supporting evidence of the argument of this book.

Chapter 4 analyses Nursi's views on revelation and the nature of the Qur'an in the context of the modern approaches. The notion of revelation and the nature of the Qur'an are the significant theological subjects. The chapter also examines the major themes of the Qur'an and the distinctive characteristics of Meccan and Medīnan chapters in Nursi's writings. While Chap. 3 presents the main features of modern exegesis, Chap. 5 analyses natures and functions of the Islamic disciplines in the classical period, focusing on what happened to these disciplines in the modern period. After clarifying the methodological reforms in the Islamic disciplines argued by the modernist intellectuals, the chapter provides Nursi's approach in this context. Then, the chapter scrutinizes the exegetical principles of Nursi on *tafsīr bi-al-ma'thūr* (tradition-based exegesis) and *tafsīr bi-al-ra'y* (reason-based exegesis) with special reference to the views of the early Muslim modernist thinkers.

Chapter 6 discusses the sciences of the Qur'an (*ʿUlūm al-Qur'an*), analysing the views of modern Muslim scholars, particularly A. Khan and ʿAbduh, on these topics. In the context of the modernist views, the chapter focuses on Nursi's approach to the major Qur'anic sciences, which are occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), abrogation (*naskh*), clear and ambiguous verses of the Qur'an (*muhkam wa-mutashābih*), inimitability of the Qur'an (*iʿjāz al-Qur'an*), Qur'anic narratives (*qaṣaṣ al-Qur'an*), difficult words and passages (*mushkil al-Qur'an*) and intratextual hermeneutics (*tanâsub*). The chapter contributes

to the study and provides various aspects of Nursi's exegetical methodology, along with the views of modernist exegesis. Chapter 7 examines the major exegetical trends, which are theological, legal, mystical (Ṣūfī) and scientific exegesis. It presents the views of the modernist exegetes, particularly analysing Nursi's approach to these exegetical traditions in great detail. Finally, the conclusion briefly discusses the main points of the book, emphasizing how each chapter of the book fits within the argument of the study as a whole and contributes to the main argument of the work. It highlights some of the key contributions of this book. Later, the conclusion provides a summary and implications of this book.

This work represents a good contribution to existing works, attempting to show Nursi's place in the wider context of the exegetical discipline. The main argument of the book is that Said Nursi's methodology can be described as *kalāmisation* of *tafsīr* and other Islamic disciplines. Moreover, the main books of the collection can also be considered as a kind of thematic exegesis, while his one-volume commentary is a reason-based exegesis. Furthermore, this book brought together a large number of ideas related to the *Risale-i Nur* and situated them in a coherent framework in the context of modern Qur'anic exegesis. A large number of works have been done on modernist exegesis in the world, and one of the great contributions of this study is that it presents existing literature on modernist exegesis in contemporary Turkish academia. The book analyses developments in Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic thought in the modern period, focusing on what Nursi says about these discussions. Through this study, I have attempted to present the methodology of Said Nursi and modernist exegesis. I have examined what Nursi can address today's world and add to contemporary discussions.

As source materials, this study uses many primary Islamic sources from the Islamic disciplines, particularly *tafsīr* sources in the classical and modern periods and various academic works in the West and the East in the modern period. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem's English translation for all Qur'anic verses quoted is used in this study. The primary sources of this book are Nursi's works in his *Risale-i Nur* collection. Nursi's works have been translated into English and Arabic. The author has used Nursi's original Turkish texts, Hüseyin Akarsu and Şükran Vahide's English translations of the *Risale-i Nur* for this work. He has relied on his own translation from the original Turkish, adding sometimes significant concepts in brackets to the citations from Nursi. He has also checked the English translations with Nursi's original texts in Turkish. For the modernist exegetes,

the works of ʿAbduh and Ahmad Khan are available in English and Arabic. Also, various academic studies on Nursi and the modernist exegetes such as ʿAbduh and Khan have been conducted in English in the West. With a few exceptions, the transliteration system adopted by the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* is used.

1.1 *Tafsīr* (Qur'anic Exegesis) in the Classical and Modern Period

Tafsīr (Qur'anic exegesis) is one of the most important disciplines in Islamic studies, and is also a branch in the sciences of the Qur'an. *Tafsīr* is an Arabic word, meaning "interpretation". Specifically, it is the general term utilized in connection with all genres of literature which are commentaries on the Qur'an.[11] There is disagreement about the origin of the term *tafsīr* among linguists. Qur'anic scholars state that it is derived from *fasr* (to expound, reveal), or *safr* (to unveil or uncover), or *tafsira* (a tool used by a doctor to diagnose illness).[12] Edward Lane lists the meanings of *tafsīr* as "discovering, detecting, revealing, developing, or disclosing, what is meant dubious expression; expounding, explaining, or interpreting, the narratives that occur, collected without discrimination in the Qur'an, and making known the significations of the strange words or expressions, and explaining the occasions on which the verses were revealed."[13] Zarkashī (d. 795 AH/1392 CE), a scholar of the principles of *tafsīr*, defines "an area of knowledge which God's book is understood via it, the explanation of its meanings. Its rulings and wisdoms are derived through this discipline."[14]

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the exact revealed word of God. Qur'anic exegesis has emerged as one of the Islamic disciplines. Since the Qur'an was the most important interest in the life of the early Muslims, one of their primary concerns was to understand the message of the Qur'anic text. For this reason, Muslims engaged with it from the beginning in less formal ways even though Qur'anic exegesis as a discipline developed over time. They reflected on it, discussed it, as well as attempted to explain it to one another. A rudimentary *tafsīr* tradition began during the Prophet's time. According to the Qur'anic verse,[15] one of the Prophet's fundamental missions is to explain the Qur'an.[16] Therefore, we can find recorded in the traditional literature many instances of the Prophet interpreting the meaning and implications of Qur'anic pericopes because revelation needed exegesis.[17] It should be noted that there is a section on *tafsīr*

or on the virtues of the Qur'an in most of the canonical or sub-canonical collections of the prophetic traditions such as Bukhārī (d. 256 AH/870 CE) and Muslim (d. 261 AH/875 CE).[18] However, little of the Prophet's own Qur'anic interpretation is recorded. It was a practical exegesis, in that he illustrated the Qur'anic concepts and commands with his actions.[19]

Only a few companions of the Prophet reportedly contributed directly to interpretation of the Qur'an. These include the first four caliphs, Ibn ʿAbbas (d. 687 CE), Ubayy ibn Kaʿb (d. 656 CE) and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd (d. 653 CE). However, many other companions engaged in exegesis, using some sources in interpreting the Qur'an. These sources are the Qur'an (interpretation of the Qur'an in light of the Qur'an), the prophetic tradition, their intellectual effort and their own understanding of the text and the narratives of the People of the Book.[20] In the period of the successors, the need for exegesis increased. They were a more heterogeneous group. In this time, the certain locations (Medina, Mecca, Iraq) began to develop proto-traditions of local interpretation under the guidance of their respective companions (Ibn ʿAbbas, Ubayy ibn Kaʿb, and Ibn Masʿūd).[21] It should be noted here that there is a debate about the existence of exegetical literature in the first century AH/seventh century CE. As A. Saeed emphasized, the earliest Qur'anic exegesis (in the time of the Prophet and the companions) was mainly oral, as well as dependent on oral transmission. Written exegesis developed later.[22]

According to recent research, written exegetical literature emerged at least by the early second century AH/eighth century CE.[23] There is a huge range of literature that can be found from the eighth century CE to today. We will put forward the major exegetical sources of most relevance to this book. It is worth noting that the history of Qur'anic exegesis is customarily divided into three periods: the Formative Period, the Classical Period and the Modern Period.[24]

It should be emphasized that Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr*) is divided into two broad categories: *tafsīr bi-al-ma'thūr* (tradition-based exegesis) and *tafsīr bi-al-ra'y* (reason-based exegesis). Tradition-based exegesis emphasizes interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, by a ḥadīth of the Prophet, or by the opinions of the earliest Muslims (the companions of the Prophet, or the successors), as well as restricting the scope for independent reasoning in the understanding and interpretation of the Qur'anic text. On the other hand, reason-based exegesis relies not only on the Qur'an, ḥadīth and the earliest Muslims, but also on the views of later scholars, linguistic analysis and investigating the implications of different

language usages on meaning, including a metaphorical reading of certain types of the verses.[25]

In the classical period, Ṭabarī's *Jāmiʿ al-Bayānʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾan*[26] (the sum of clarity concerning the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'ān) is the most significant source of the tradition-based interpretations. Moreover, it is also accepted that the first *Sunnī*[27] exegetical corpus based upon traditions is Ṭabarī's exegesis.[28] Furthermore, his exegesis contains approximately 37,000 of the exegetical narrations with chains of transmission from the Prophet Muhammad, the companions, the successors and the followers of the successors, whereby he presents the first three centuries' endeavours to understand the Qur'an. He also makes his own views clear about diverse opinions of earlier commentators.[29] In addition, his landmark work is the first to combine fully the various formative stages or elements of Muslim exegesis which preceded his time.[30] For these reasons, Ṭabarī's exegesis is of particular significance in Qur'anic studies. It will be of particular value to us when analysing S. Nursi's approach to tradition-based exegesis in interpreting Qur'anic pericopes.

Another important tradition-based interpretation is Ibn al-Kathīr's (d. 774 AH/1373 CE) *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīm*.[31] Ibn al-Kathīr's exegesis is one of the encyclopedist *tafsīr* works in the tradition of Ṭabarī.[32] Like Ṭabarī's exegesis, his exegesis contains much traditional material; however, in contrast to Ṭabarī, it is not simply a compilation uncritically collected. Rather his interpretation is most thoughtfully ordered, as well as evaluated.[33] In other words, he examines and evaluates the exegetical traditions according to his rather strict conceptions in the manner of his teacher Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328 CE).[34] It is important to note that a turning point in the exegetical literature is Ibn al-Kathīr's exegesis. Norman Calder underlines that Ibn al-Kathīr has strong Sunnī tendencies, rejects mere reason-based exegesis and has a critical approach to *isrāʾīliyyāt* reports.[35] Ibn al-Kathīr does not generally like polyvalent readings; he argues vehemently for a single "correct" reading. In addition, he and his mentor Ibn Taymiyya represent appeal away from the authority of the community and the independent authority of the intellect, as well as not trusting the intellectual tradition of Islam and of the collected experience of the community.[36] It should be noted here that there is a turning towards the earlier tradition and polyvalent reading after Ibn al-Kathīr. At this juncture, Ebū al-Suūd's (d. 982 AH/1574 CE) and al-Ālūsī's (d. 1270 AH/1854 CE) commentaries may be given as significant examples.

Moving to reason-based exegesis here will be valuable. In the classical period, theological concerns also began to have a greater effect on Qur'anic exegesis, and this trend produced the most famous Qur'anic commentaries in the Muslim world. Debates were on the central questions of Islamic theology and the various positions to be found in the Qur'an. Free will and predestination, the attributes of God, the nature of the Qur'an, the imposition of the tasks of the law, and the nature and extent of the Hereafter were some major topics.[37] As A. Saeed states, the theologians from the Mu'tazilīte and Ash'arīte schools[38] contributed more to theological exegesis than other theologians.[39]

One of the most prominent theological commentaries is the Mu'tazilī grammarian and linguist al-Zamakhsharī's (d. 538 AH/1144 CE) *al-Kashshaf an Haqaiq al-Tanzil* (the unveiler of the truths of revelation).[40] His exegesis contains a quintessence of the Mu'tazilī doctrine.[41] However, his reputation as a Qur'anic exegete rests more on his qualities as a grammarian and philologist, as well as master of rhetorical and literary criticism. For these reasons, he is appreciated in mainstream circles up until today.[42] His work is relevant to this book because Nursi mentions al-Zamakhsharī[43] and puts emphasis on Arabic rhetoric[44] in his interpretation of the Qur'an. Moreover, from time to time Nursi disagrees with the Mu'tazilī doctrine, and criticizes some Mu'tazilī ideas.[45] Hence, this source will assist us in analysing Nursi's theological and rhetorical exegesis.

In reason-based exegesis, there are also two significant sources concerned with al-Zamakhsharī's exegesis. One of them is Shāfi'ite jurist and theologian al-Bayḍāwī's (d. 716 AH/1315–6 CE) *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl* (The lights of the revelation and the secrets of the exegesis).[46] Al-Bayḍāwī reduces al-Zamakhsharī's exegesis in parts where Mu'tazilī opinions are produced. On the other hand, he also expands it with details from other sources, as well as assimilating its Mu'tazilī theology into the Sunnite mainstream. The Sunnite theologians believe that al-Bayḍāwī's exegesis is best.[47] In addition, his commentary became one of the most popular interpretations in the Muslim world, and has been the subject of many glosses such as the Gloss of al-Kāzarūnī.[48] As for the other source, it is the Ḥanafite jurist and theologian Abū al-Barakāt al-Nasafī's (d. 710 AH/1310 CE) *Madārik al-tanzīl wa ḥaqā'iq al-ta'wīl* (The reaches of revelation and the truths of interpretation).[49] This work is a compendium of exegesis that might please the most mainstream of Sunnīs.[50] It is worth mentioning that al-Nasafi wrote his exegesis to defend mainstream Islam against al-Zamakhsharī's exegesis which contains

Mu'tazilī ideas. He removed al-Zamakhsharī's Mu'tazilī creed and opinions. However, he utilized al-Zamakhsharī's exegesis freely in many other topics, in particular, in rhetoric and grammar. Sometimes he shortened *al-Kashshaf*, and sometimes added extra information.[51]

Both of the interpretations described above are related to this work. It is important to note that the tradition of the Ottoman exegesis followed al-Bayḍāwī and al-Nasafī's line, which are reason-based exegesis, rather than Ibn al-Kathīr's line, which is a tradition-based exegesis.[52] In this respect, some of Nursi's exegetical approaches may be recognized in these sources because he lived during the end of the Ottoman Period, studied in tune with the Ottoman tradition, and thereby may be considered as a model of the tradition of the Ottoman exegesis in some respects.[53]

One of the most important theological interpretations is also Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (The Keys of the Unseen).[54] Al-Rāzī interprets the Qur'an with philosophical and theological erudition. In J. D. McAuliffe's opinion, in terms of method and arrangement, the closest, near-modern Western parallel to his exegesis would be the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274 CE). His biographer al-Safadī states regarding his method: "A frequently noted feature of al-Rāzī's exegesis is its anti-Mu'tazilī stance and its strong defence of Ash'arī Sunnism."[55] Moreover, it should be noted that the productive Sunnī Qur'anic exegesis reached a certain conclusion with Rāzī's interpretation.[56] Rāzī's commentary is of particular significance for theological, philosophical, mystical, scientific and rhetorical exegesis.

In the classical period, the field of specialized Qur'anic sciences also emerged, providing a number of subdisciplines within Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*). The general compendia of information emerged as a discipline named *Ulūm al-Qur'an* (the sciences of the Qur'an). One of the most significant sources is al-Suyūtī's (d. 911 AH/1505 CE) *al-Itqān fi Ulūm al-Qur'an* (The perfection of the sciences of the Qur'an).[57] Some topics in these types of books are as follows: Abrogation of some Qur'anic verses, the occasions of revelation and the inimitability of the Qur'an.[58] According to Claude Gilliot, it can be stated that al-Zarkashī's (d. 794 AH/1392 CE) *Burhān* and al-Suyūtī's *Itqān* show the result of centuries of Islamic studies on the Qur'an. They have remained the main sources until today, in particular the *Itqān*, for people who write new handbooks in Arabic on the Qur'anic sciences. For instance, Qaṭṭān's *Mabāḥith*[59] can be seen as a type of abridgement of the *Itqān*.[60] Therefore, al-Suyūtī's *Itqān* is of a particular importance for the classical Qur'anic sciences.

One of the types of exegesis is mystical (Ṣūfī) interpretation. It is based on opinions that developed among Muslim Ṣūfīs around the second century AH/eighth century CE. The mystical exegetes placed emphasis on the spiritual aspects of Islam, and considered that the mystical allusions in the Qur'anic text were connected most closely with the human spiritual condition and were impossible to understand through superficial readings over points of law and theology. Therefore the spiritual and inner meanings of the Qur'an are more important in this exegesis.[61] One of the most important works of mystical literatures is al-Sulamī's (d. 412 AH/1021 CE) *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr* (The spiritual realities of exegesis).[62] This work contributed to the establishment of mystical exegesis as an independent branch of Qur'anic hermeneutics, and compiled many Ṣūfī interpretations from the past. Therefore, in this respect, al-Sulamī's work in mystical exegesis is like Ṭabarī's commentary which compiled previous traditions in Sunnī exegesis.[63] Another source is al-Qushayri's (d. 465 AH/1072 CE) *al-Risāla al-qushayriyya* (Al-Qushayri's Epistle).[64] These sources contribute to understanding Nursi's mystical exegesis.

In addition to these exegetes, numerous prominent exegetes wrote commentaries on the Qur'an until the modern period. We should mention here some of them: Abū al-Suūd's (d. 982 AH/1574 CE) *Irshād al-ʿAql al-Salīm*, which is a reason-based exegesis; Shawkānī's (d. 1250 AH/1834 CE) *Fatḥ al-Qadīr*, combines both tradition- and reason-based interpretations; al-Ālūsī's (d. 1270/1854) *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*, which is a classical and mystical commentary; and Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır's (d. 1942 CE) *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, a reason-based commentary.

In the modern period, while the classical-style Qur'anic exegesis continued, various Qur'anic readings and interpretations emerged via the impact of Western thought and modernism in some Muslim areas such as India and Egypt in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some of the main qualities of this modern reading are as follows: The central concern is the Qur'an; the sceptical approach to the ḥadīth; denying various Islamic schools and *ijma*[65] (consensus of the scholars); claiming insufficiency of the Qur'anic sciences; generally denying abrogation in the Qur'an; emphasizing the connections between verses and sūras (*Munāsabāt al-Qur'an*); a critical approach to *isrā'īliyyāt* (Biblical materials in *tafsīr*); not giving importance to philological inimitability of the Qur'an; interpreting the Qur'an in the light of reason and modern science.[66] As has been seen, a

new Qur'anic exegesis emerged in the modern period in comparison with the past.

In addition, it should be noted that Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) was a discipline among the other Islamic disciplines such as Islamic law (*fiqh*) and systematic theology (*kalām*) in the classical period. These disciplines had been developed to interpret the basic Islamic sources such as the Qur'an and sunna, and they had connections with each other. Qur'anic exegesis generally puts into practice the method of textual analysis to ascertain the meanings of the Qur'anic texts. The purpose of *tafsīr* discipline is to account for the Qur'anic text. Thus, its interpretive function is only confined to explanation of the Qur'an. Qur'anic exegesis is not a prescriptive or binding discipline. In other words, knowledge produced by *tafsīr* is not practical, but generally an intellectual exercise. *Tafsīr* as a discipline is a flexible area in the classical period. On the other hand, Islamic law (*fiqh*) and systematic theology (*kalām*) are prescriptive disciplines. They also deal with the Qur'anic text. However, while the function of systematic theology is to establish a world view, religious ideology and creed, Islamic law produces the legal rules. When we come to the modern period, the definitions and the functions of these disciplines changed under the impact of modernity, as well as the relations among the disciplines being broken. *Tafsīr* became a prescriptive discipline via the impact of Protestant textualism, and the functions of systematic theology and Islamic law were given to Qur'anic exegesis. On the other hand, *kalām* and particularly *fiqh* largely lost their functions in the modern period. According to the modernist discourse, the Qur'an becomes a unique and sufficient Islamic source. As for Qur'anic exegesis, it was considered the best tool because this discipline is a flexible area.[67]

One of the main trends in modernist exegesis is interpreting the Qur'an from the perspective of Enlightenment rationalism.[68] Muhammad ʿAbduh and his pupil M. Rashīd Riḍā's (d. 1935) commentary, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Ḥakīm al-mushtaher bismi Tafsīr al-Manār*, includes the characteristic features of modernist exegesis. The analysis of the trend will assist us in comparing Nursi's methodology of exegesis with the modernist exegesis. This comparison will be one of the main points of this book.

Another significant trend in the modern period is scientific exegesis. Proponents of this kind of exegesis argue that all sorts of findings of the modern natural sciences have been foreseen in the Qur'an and that many clear references to them can be discovered in its verses. It should be noted that there was also the basic example of scientific exegesis in the classical

period. Several Qur'anic exegetes in the classical period, such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, had already stated the opinion that all the sciences were contained in the Qur'an. However, this method was rejected by some scholars from the classical and the modern periods such as al-Shāṭibī (d. 790 AH/1388 CE) and Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966 CE).[69] An important source of scientific exegesis is Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī's (d. 1940 CE) *al-Jawāhir fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Jewels in interpretation of the noble Qur'an).[70] Unlike most scientific exegetes who were interested in the "scientific miraculous nature of the Qur'an", Jawharī's main aim was to encourage Muslims to learn and know the sciences because he saw them as the major factor driving modern societies towards development.[71]

There are various useful resources in order to understand modern exegesis: One of them is J. M. S. Baljon's *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation*.[72] The positivism of the nineteenth century affected Muslim thought, and some Muslim scholars, in particular from Indo-Pakistan and Egypt, attempted to reinterpret the Qur'an differently in comparison to the classical exegetical trends. This work focuses on several topics such as modernist intellectuals' ways of interpretation and characteristic features of the Qur'an in the context of the modernist exegesis. Baljon examines the work of three modernist exegetes from the Indian subcontinent: Abu al-Kalām Āzād (d. 1958 CE), al-Mashriqī (d. 1963 CE), Ghulām Ahmad Parwez (d. 1985 CE); and he also mentions some important scholars such as Ahmad Khan, Muhammad A. Khalafallah (d. 1991 CE), Jawharī, Quṭb and Muhammad Iqbāl (d. 1938 CE). Another resource is J. J. G. Jansen's *The Interpretation of the Qur'an in Modern Egypt*.[73] In the second and third chapters, Jansen discusses Muhammad ʿAbduh's interpretation of the Qur'an and scientific exegesis. He gives some examples from classical and contemporary exegetes, expressing proponents' and opponents' arguments over scientific exegesis such as al-Ghazzālī (d. 505 AH/1111 CE), Jawharī and Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1967 CE). In the fourth chapter, Jansen analyses philological exegesis, its historical protagonists such as Ibn ʿAbbas, Abū ʿUbayda and al-Zamakhsharī. He then provides ʿAbduh's approach, Amīn al-Khūlī's ideas about literary-historical exegesis and his student and wife Bint al-Shāti's opinions. Finally, Jansen gives the modernist exegetes' ideas regarding the day-to-day affairs of Muslims in the current world, such as Islamic law, *ijtihad*,[74] polygamy.

Notes

1. Abdullah Saeed, *The Qur'an An Introduction* (London: Taylor&Francis e-Library, 2008), 178–182, 196, 202.
2. "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship And Interpretation," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005), Vol: XI, 7567; Daud Rahbar, "Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Principles of Exegesis: Translated from his Taḥrīr fi Usūl al-Tafsīr I-II," *The Muslim World*, no. 46 (1956): 104–12/324–35.
3. Adnan Aslan, "Said Nursi," in *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Oliver Leaman (London, New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2006), 2/169.
4. Suat Yıldırım, "Risale-i Nur'un Kur'ân Tefsirindeki Yeri," *Yeni Ümit* no. 83, January 2009. Online at www.yeniumit.com.tr
5. Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi al-Nuri: Seedbed of the Light*, trans. Hüseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: The Light, 2007), Introduction, xiv.
6. See, Said Nursi, "On Dördüncü Şuâ," in *Şuâlar* (Istanbul, Söz Basım Yayın, 2012), 638, accessed 31 March, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.4.638
7. Ibid.; Said Nursi, *The Rays*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözler Pub., 2002), 512–3.
8. Said Nursi, "Emirdağ Lahikası," in *Risalei Nur Külliyati* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Publications, 1996), II/1715–6; Şükran Vahide, "Toward an Intellectual Biography of Said Nursi," in *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim M Abu-Rabi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 18–9.
9. Colin Turner, "Preface," in Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *The Rays: Reflections on Islamic Belief, Thought, Worship, and Action*, trans. Hüseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2010), xv–i.
10. See, www.iikv.org/en/ (The Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture).
11. Andrew Rippin, "Tafsīr," in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), vol: XIV, 236.
12. Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, (London: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 57; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fi Ulūm al-Qur'an* (Saudi Arabia: Mucamma' Al Malik Fahd Li Tibae Al Mushaf Al Shareef, nd.), vol: VI, 2261.
13. Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Lebanon: Offset Conrogravure, 1968), vol: VI, 2397.
14. al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, Vol: VI, 2265.
15. Q. 16: 44.
16. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7561–2.

17. Fred Leemhuis, "Origins and Early Development of the Tafsīr Tradition," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 13.
18. Claude Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2002), 110.
19. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7562.
20. Ibid., 7562; M.H. Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, nd.), 31–47.
21. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7562.
22. Ibid., 7563.
23. Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 104; Andrew Rippin, *The Qur'an and Its Interpretative Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), X/7.
24. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: an Analysis of Classical And Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 18. In addition, Claude Gilliot mentions after the formative period an intermediary and decisive stage: the introduction of grammar and the linguistic sciences [till Ṭabarī's commentary]. Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 108.
25. Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 181–2.
26. Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayānʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Hacr, 2001); *The Commentary on the Qur'an*, trans. J. Cooper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
27. *Sunnism* is considered the "mainstream" because it reflected the position of the majority of Muslims. Basic features of Sunnī exegesis are as follows: emphasizing on the literal interpretation of the Qur'an, strongly given the reason by linguistic evidence, interpretation of the text by the tradition (ḥadīth, the earliest muslims), use of intellect within limits, rejection of the idea of esoteric meanings. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7565.
28. Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 110.
29. Mehmet Akif Koç, "Tabeī Tefsir'ini Anlamak Üzerine-1," *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 51, no. 1 (2010): 81; Peter G. Riddell, "Al-Tabari," in *The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia*, ed. Oliver Leaman (London-New York: Routledge, 2006), 623.
30. Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 111. In Claude Gilliot's view, the formative period of Qur'anic exegesis can be distinguished into three broad categories of *tafsīr*: paraphrastic, narrative and legal. Ibid., 105. As for John Wansbrough, he suggests five sequential categories for the formative period in his *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford, 1977). They are narrative (haggadic), legal (halakhic), textual (masoretic), rhetorical and allegorical. Rippin, *The Qur'an*, X/7. Ṭabarī

combined in his exegesis the categories in the formative period which preceded his time.

31. Ab al-Feda Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* (Cairo: Maktabat Avlad Al Shaykh Let- Turāth and Muassasat Qurtuba, 2000).
32. Rippin, *The Qur'an*, X/13.
33. McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 76.
34. Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 113.
35. "In a restricted sense, *isrā'īliyyāt* applies to the traditions and reports that contain elements of the legendary and religious literature of the Jews, but more inclusively and more commonly it also refers to Christian, Zoroastrian and other Near Eastern elements including folklore. In other words, every foreign element in exegesis is called *isrā'īliyyāt.*" Gordon Newby, "Tafsir Isrā'īliyyāt," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47, no. 4 (1979): 686, as cited in Ismail Albayrak, "Qur'anic Narrative And Isrā'īliyyāt In Western Scholarship And Classical Exegesis," (PhD Thesis, The University of Leeds, 2000), 114.
36. Norman Calder, "Tafsir from Tabari to Ibn Kathir: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham," in *Approaches to the Qur'an*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993): 101–139.
37. Rippin, *The Qur'an*, X/12.
38. "Mutazilis are eighth-century theological school that emphasized God's absolute uniqueness, unity and justice. Also known as *Ahl al-Adl wa al-Tawhid* (People of Justice and Unity). Rejected anthropomorphism. Taught that the Qu'ran was created rather than eternal. Preached human free will as a rational depiction of good and evil; preached harmony between human reason and revelation. Opposed the Ashari opinion that God's command is the sole criterion for determining the correctness of an act. Taught instead that the command by itself is insufficient as an agent for action." "Mutazilis," in *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press Inc., 2003), http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t125.e1669 (accessed June 22, 2011). "Asharis are classical Sunnī theological school (tenth to twelfth centuries), founded by Abu al-Hasan al-Ashari, that became an important religious movement forming a middle ground between the rationalism of the Mutazilis and the literalism of the Hanbalis." "Asharis," in Ibid., http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t125.e213 (accessed June 22, 2011).
39. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7566.
40. Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf an Haqaiq al-Tanzil* (Beirut: Dar al-Marifah nd.).

41. Helmut Gätje, *The Qur'an and Its Exegesis* (Oxford: Oneworld Pub., 2008), 35.
42. Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 115.
43. For instance, Said Nursi, *İşārātü'l-İ'cāz* (Istanbul: Şahdamar Yayın, 2009), 124.
44. Nursi, *Muhākemāt* (Istanbul: Şahdamar Yayın, 2009), 52, 53, 63.
45. For example, the topic of free will and predestination: Nursi, *İşārāt*, 72–75.
46. Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl* (Beirot: Dar Ehia Al-Tourath Al-Arabi, nd.).
47. Gätje, *The Qur'an*, 37; Peter G. Riddell, "Al-Baydawi," in *The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia*, ed. Oliver Leaman (London-New York: Routledge, 2006), 117.
48. Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 116.
49. al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr al-Nasafī (Madārik al-tanzīl wa ḥaqā'iq al-ta'wīl)* (Istanbul: Kahraman Yay., 1984).
50. Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 113.
51. Muhsin Demirci, *Tefsir Tarihi* (Istanbul: IFAV, 2003), 179.
52. Dücane Cündioğlu, "Çağdaş Tefsir Tarihi Tasavvurunun Kayıp Halkası: Osmanlı Tefsir Mirası," *İslamiyat* II, no. 4 (1999): 51–73.
53. For instance, Nursi mentions al-Bayḍāwī's a comment on verse 18/96 and disagrees. Nursi, *Muhākemāt*, 21–2.
54. Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, *Mafātīh al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār Al-Fikr, 1981).
55. McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 68–9.
56. Gätje, *The Qur'an*, 37.
57. al-Suyūtī, *al-Itqān* (Riyadh: Mucamma' Al Malik Fahd Li Tibae Al Mushaf Al Shareef).
58. Rippin, *The Qur'an*, X/13–4.
59. Qattān, *Mabāhith fi Ulūm al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, nd.).
60. Claude Gilliot, "Traditional Disciplines of Qur'ānic Studies," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2006), 335.
61. Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 205–6.
62. al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyya, 2004).
63. Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 120.
64. al-Qushayri, *al-Risāla al-qushayriyya* (Beirut: Al-maktaba Al-assrya, 2008); Alexander Knysh, *Al-Qushayri's Epistle on Sufism* (New York: Ithaca, 2007).
65. "Consensus or agreement. One of four recognized sources of Sunnī law. Utilized where the Quran and Sunnah (the first two sources) are silent on a particular issue." "Ijma," in *Oxford Dictionary*, ed. John L. Esposito, http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t125.e989 (accessed June 24, 2011).

66. Ismail Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde Kur'ān'a Yaklaşımlar* (Istanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2004), 32–6.
67. Mehmet Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a ve Tefsire Ne oldu?," *Islāmiyāt* VI, no. 4 (2003): 85–104.
68. Rotraud Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Early Modern and Contemporary," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2002), 126.
69. Ibid., 129–131.
70. Tantāwī Jawharī, *al-Jawāhir fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Egypt: Muṣṭafa Al-Bābī Al-Halabī, 1350 AH).
71. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7567.
72. J.M.S. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 1961).
73. J.J.G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).
74. "Islamic legal term meaning 'independent reasoning,' as opposed to *taqlid* (imitation)… Utilized where the Quran and Sunnah (the first two sources) are silent. It requires a thorough knowledge of theology, revealed texts, and legal theory (*usul al-fiqh*); a sophisticated capacity for legal reasoning; and a thorough knowledge of Arabic." "Ijtihad," in *Oxford Dictionary*, ed. John L. Esposito, http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t125.e990 (accessed June 27, 2011).

CHAPTER 2

The Life of Said Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* Collection: A Review

Contents

In this chapter, firstly, I will analyse Nursi's life and his intellectual career from his birth to his death. What were the major events which influenced him and his theological thought in his life will be discussed. Where he studied Islamic and modern sciences, and what are the main characteristics of his periods of life will be examined. Then, I will introduce briefly his theological thoughts, in particular his approach to the fundamentals of belief such as existence of God, prophethood and the notion of hereafter. Thereafter, I will discuss his approaches to the Islamic disciplines such as *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *kalām* (Islamic systematic theology) and *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis). Next, I will examine attempts to revitalize *kalām* and discussions concerning "new *kalām*" in the twentieth century because Nursi is a part of this discussion. Finally, I will introduce his major works related to this thesis in the collection.

H. Çoruh, *Modern Interpretation of the Qur'an*,
Palgrave Series in Islamic Theology, Law, and History,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15349-6_2

2.1 Said Nursi's Life and His Intellectual Career

Said Nursi is one of the most prominent Muslim scholars in the twentieth century. He divided himself his long life into two main periods: the "Old Said" and the "New Said". These periods roughly coincided with the final decades of the Ottoman Empire and then the first 27 years of the Turkish Republic (1923–1950). There is a third period named the "Third Said", which is the last ten years of his life (1950–1960). It was in essence a continuation of the "New Said"; however, some features of the "Old Said" still existed.[1] It should be noted that his intellectual career is of great importance in properly understanding his theological thoughts and exegetical methodology.

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi was born in 1878 CE in the village of Nurs, in the province of Bitlis in eastern Anatolia. He started his early education in his village and attended some madrasas (traditional schools) in the region.[2] Then Nursi studied in the Bayezit madrasa under Shaikh Muhammad Jalālī for three months. At the end of three months, he obtained his diploma (*ijazah*) from Shaikh Jalālī and was then known as Molla Said. After this, he continued his study in Bitlis and Siirt.[3] Tahir Pasha, the provincial governor, had a modern library in Van, an eastern city of modern Turkey; in addition, his residence was a centre of lively intellectual discussion. While in Van (1895?–1907 CE), Nursi took advantage of these, and he studied the modern sciences there for a while.[4] As a result of his studies, he realized the urgent necessity of renewing madrasa education, and he put great emphasis on establishing a madrasa named Medresetü'z-Zehra, where the religious sciences and modern sciences would be studied side by side. Therefore, he travelled to Istanbul to take the idea of his Islamic university, Medresetü'z-Zehra, to the Ottoman Sultan.[5]

It is important to note that one of the distinctive features of the Old Said is that he became an active supporter of constitutionalism. He argued that only through freedom and constitutionalism could the Ottoman state be saved, its development achieved, and Islamic civilization established. At this juncture, Nursi's main concern was to highlight the conformity of constitutionalism with the Sharī'a (Islam) and to insist that the Sharī'a be made the basis of constitutionalism. In general, it is worth mentioning that his main aim in this period was to strengthen the unity of the Ottoman state and Muslim world, and to urge its development and progress via the revival of the madrasas of the Eastern provinces of the Ottoman state, and as a whole the revitalization of the region, constitutionalism, Islamic Unity

and Ittihad-i Muhammedī Cemiyeti (Muhammadan union).[6] As has been seen clearly, Nursi engaged with politics to solve the problems in the period of the Old Said.

In 1910, he returned to Van and toured Kurdish tribes to inform them of constitutionalism, freedom, consultation, along with other political and Islamic issues of that day. Afterwards, he travelled on to Damascus, and gave his famous sermon (the Damascus Sermon) in the Umayyad Mosque. He returned to Istanbul to obtain official support for the establishment of Medresetü'z-Zehra. Even though some money was assigned to him for this purpose, it could not be established because of the First World War. He volunteered to fight in the war with his students, writing his well-known Qur'an commentary *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz* during the war. He was captured by the Russians, and remained for two years in captivity in Russia. Finally, he came back to Istanbul by escaping in 1918.[7]

In Istanbul, Nursi was appointed to the membership of the newly set-up *Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-Islamiyye*, which was an institution attached to the Shaykh al-Islam's office. It had been founded to deal with various problems facing the Muslim world and to answer attacks upon it; he issued publications informing the people concerning their religious duties. In spite of his inner turmoil, which was finally resolved with the emergence of the New Said, he continued his duties in this institution, and he published over 19 works.[8] It is important to note that Nursi's life and times in Istanbul after returning from Russia were turning points in the emergence of the New Said.

Nursi's mental and spiritual transformation began in the second half of 1920, and it was completed by the end of 1921. Nursi experienced a spiritual crisis in this process similar to those of other Muslim scholars such as Imām Ghazzālī. Nursi's spiritual crisis led him to withdraw from society, seeking seclusion in places removed from Istanbul's hectic political life. The first aid to Nursi came from ʿAbd al-Qādir Jīlānī. On opening the pages of *Futūh al-Ghayb* (Openings of the Unseen) at random, his eyes noticed these lines: "You are in the *Darü'l-Hikmet*, so search for a doctor to cure your heart." The second work that was crucial in transforming the Old Said into the New Said was *Maktūbāt* (Letters) of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī, known as Imām Rabbānī. He opened Sirhindī's book to cure his heart, and he came across two letters, named *Letter to Mirza Bediuzzaman*. He thought that this person's state of mind must have been similar to his own, realizing that these letters were the cure for his illness. Imām recom-

mended in these letters to "take only one *qiblah*/direction", meaning take one person as your master and follow him. The reason for this recommendation was that he was looking for a way to discover the essence of reality, and there were a number of ways available such as the Sūfīs, who proceed with the heart alone, or the great mystics, who approached reality with both the heart and the mind. The Old Said's much wounded heart realized that the one true master was the Qur'an.[9] It is interesting to note that Imām Rabbānī is one of the great masters of the Naqshibandi order and Nursi indicates him. Nursi's relations with Sūfism and the orders will be analysed later.

In this period, Nursi was invited to Ankara, the seat of the national government, because of his strong support of the independence struggle. While his aim was to assist in making the new centre of government a centre of Islamic civilization, he realized that supporters of Westernization and secularization controlled it. Therefore, he left Ankara for Van (17 April 1923).[10] While travelling to Van in the spring of 1923, he decided to educate students who devoted themselves to Islam by withdrawing himself from politics. However, after about two years he was sent into exile in Burdur, a city in western Anatolia because of the Shaykh Said Revolt even though he had not played any role in this event. In Burdur, he started to write his works named *Risale-i Nur*. This time too became a beginning of a life which lasted through exile, prison and courts. Then he was sent to the village of Barla in Isparta Province. He wrote the majority of his books in Barla, where he stayed for eight years. In 1935, he was sent to Eskişehir prison along with over 100 of his students. From there, he was sent into exile in Kastamonu, and stayed there for eight years. In 1943, he was sent to Denizli. It is important to note that Nursi partly returned to social life with the coming to power of the Democrat Party on 14 May 1950.[11]

When the life of the New Said is analysed, it is obvious that it is different from the Old Said in terms of his methodology in serving the religion. He lived in seclusion, focusing on explaining and teaching a theology based on the Qur'an and the fundamentals of belief such as divine unity and the resurrection. When we evaluate the period of the New Said, it should be emphasized that while Nursi pursued other urgent goals aimed at the revitalization of the Ottoman state and the Islamic world in his early life, he only devoted himself exclusively to expounding the Qur'an in the New Said period.[12] Nursi provides an explanation that he found a way to

the essence of reality through the guidance of the Qur'an by employing both the heart and the mind.[13] According to Şerif Mardin, the characteristics of the New Said are as follows:

> We now get a better understanding of the transformation that was involved when the "old" Said shed his persona to become the "new" Said. The New Said was taking leave from the intellectualisation of religion to grasp the bedrock of the "mysterium tremendum." For him, faith now overtook religion as "reasonable", although the latter still occupied an important place in his teachings.[14]

As has been noticed, Nursi changed his methodology to approach Islam from the first years of the Turkish Republic, turned away from politics, and focused on the Qur'an and its theology itself. We shall now examine the features of his last ten years, named the Third Said.

The Third Said period is generally defined in terms of changes Nursi made in his way. These are the expansions of his works with the *Risale-i Nur* collections; also, he becomes more closely involved with moral, social and political developments. This was directly related to the coming to power of the Democrat Party in 1950. It is worth pointing out that there was a one-party hegemony before, but Turkey changed from a one-party to a multiparty system in 1950. However, it should be noted that his involvement took the form of support and guidance for this party, and he did not permit his students to actively engage in politics. The reason for this caution is that Nursi saw them (the party) as "assisting" his students and followers in their struggle against communism and irreligion. It should be kept in mind that communism in the Turkish context is nearly equal to anarchy and atheism. Finally, it is worth mentioning that while Nursi engaged to a greater degree in social and political matters in this period, his main purpose was still to serve the Qur'an and Islamic faith via the publication and spreading of his works. Nursi died in Urfa, a province in eastern Anatolia, in March 23, 1960.[15] It is important to note that after his nearly 30 years of peaceful struggle, he had many followers and his works had a great impact on some young Muslims in this period in modern Turkey. It is clear from above-mentioned information that this period includes some characteristics of the Old Said.

2.2 His Theological Thoughts

In the prophetic tradition, there is a famous ḥadīth regarding the revitalization of the religion in each century. According to the ḥadīth, God will send someone to the Muslim community in order to revive religion during each century.[16] In Oliver Leaman's view, Nursi's theological thoughts are a continuation of the *ihya*' (revival) or *tajdīd* (renewal) tradition.[17]

What Leaman argues concerning Nursi is that:

> By far the best example of *ihya'* literature is provided by Nursi, and, in particular, by the *Risale-i Nur*. What he does is express himself clearly and in a way which combines emotion and argument. That is, he tends to mix his discussions of particular problems and Islamic text with personal illustrations and impersonal argument, thus making the ideas which he presents genuinely available to the widest possible audience…What a successful *ihya'* work does is express the cogent principles of religion within a format that is generally accessible to members of the community, and there can be little doubt that Nursi succeeds here. Nursi takes the *ihya'* tradition to new heights of clarity and eloquence and is an outstanding figure within this tradition of Islamic thought.[18]

This section will briefly describe Nursi's approach to the fundamentals of faith: the existence of God, divine destiny, theodicy, prophethood and the resurrection of the dead. It is important to point out that these are the major subjects of Islamic theology.

Nursi's theological thought based on the Qur'an may be inferred from his sentence: "The fundamental aims of the Qur'an and its essential elements are fourfold: divine unity (*al-tavhīd)*, prophethood (*al-nubuwwa*), the resurrection of the dead (*al-hashr*), and justice (*al-adāla*) and worship (*ʿibadah*)."[19] For this reason, these are his major themes in his collection. According to Nursi, the existence of the universe, its aim of creation and the place of human beings in the universe can only be cogently clarified in the light of the Qur'an. Moreover, he consistently underlines that since the aim of creation is belief in God, humankind's point of view towards the universe and themselves should be based on this belief.[20] In brief, we may state that his world view is based on faith.

The primary essential of faith is the existence of God. Therefore, it is good to start from this notion. Regarding proofs for the existence of God, Nursi criticizes the classical theologians' cosmological arguments (*hudūth*, *imkān*),[21] arguing that while these proofs are derived from the Qur'an,

human thought has given them their own forms. For this reason, they are complicated, and most people cannot understand them. Classical theologians have disproved the chain of creative cause and effect (*dawir*) and the notion of successive creators (*tasalsul*). They have broken the chain of cause and effect, and they have proved God's Existence. Instead of these, he prefers *dalil-i ināyat* (the argument of assistance or beneficence, purposefulness) and *dalil-i ikhtirā* (the argument of creation or origination), highlighting that these arguments are pure Qur'anic.[22] He also refers to the innate ability of conscience (*wijdān*) within human beings. It is important to note that these arguments are concerned with the observation and investigation of the physical and inner worlds, and hence possibly are easier to understand.[23] It is clear that the Qur'anic text is central to Nursi's proofs for the existence of God.

Another of Nursi's concerns is materialism and irreligiosity. He points out the danger of materialism which leads to disbelief in God.[24] Through his Qur'anic theology, Nursi attempted to protect the fundamentals of Islamic faith from the materialistic challenges of the age. In his way, he preferred an experimental method rather than any philosophical or theoretical methods.[25] His method may be plausible because materialistic currents used the same way. While materialistic trends attempt to prove their arguments by experiments from the physical world, Nursi dealt with the observation and investigation of the physical and inner worlds, connecting his results with Islamic faith.

Another important issue in relation to theology that Nursi focuses on is divine destiny. Because it is one of the fundamental principles of Islamic faith, Nursi frequently discusses it with special reference to its relation with free will. He simplifies divine destiny and human free will from the aspect of psychology, stressing that they are connected with believers' inner experiences and spiritual states. On the one hand, a human being has free will, is enjoined to follow religious obligations, and cannot ascribe his sins to God. On the other hand, divine destiny exists so that he does not ascribe his good acts to himself and thereby become proud. He attempts to reconcile divine destiny and human free will in various ways. For example, God is All-Wise and Just. Wisdom and Justice demand that we have a free will so that we can be rewarded or punished because of our acts. Moreover, free will does not contradict divine destiny; destiny confirms free will. In addition, destiny is a kind of knowledge (*ʿilm*), and knowledge is dependent on the thing known (*maʿlûm*). In other words, knowledge itself is not essential for the external existence (*khārijî wujūd*) of what is known (*maʿlûm*). In its external existence, the thing known depends on (*istinad*)

the divine power, which acts through the divine will.[26] It is clear from the information above that Nursi tends to prove mainstream Sunnī approach in relation to divine destiny. We will focus on his place among Islamic theological schools in Chap. 7.

With respect to the question of theodicy in Islam, he states that creation of evil (*khalq-i sharr*) is not an evil because people have free will. God provides objective existence to people's willed actions. They will and do something, and God creates it. For this reason, people's own willing and doing of evil (*kasb-i sharr*) is evil. God's giving objective existence to it cannot be described as an evil and ugly. Moreover, God's creation involves the universe, not just one act. Therefore, creation should be evaluated by results, and not only by the acts themselves. In addition, he gives an explanation that it is not an evil that God has created devils and apparently evil and disastrous acts because they produce good and significant results. For example, angels do not rise to the higher spiritual ranks since Satan cannot turn them from the right path. Animals also have fixed stations. As a result of creation of devils, human beings can get endless ranks or stations, from the top to the bottom.[27] As we have seen, his approach is compatible with mainstream Sunnī theology.

With respect to prophethood (*al-nubuwwa*), Nursi underlines that this is necessary to know Divinity and to understand the duties towards the Lord. In addition, prophethood is also essential for the progress of social life towards the principle of justice.[28] He believes that one of the three great and universal things that make the Lord known to humankind is the Prophets, especially the Prophet Muhammad.[29] Nursi argues in relation to the prophetic miracles that while the miracles essentially provide confirmation and verification of prophethood, they can also be examples of possible scientific discoveries.[30] It should be emphasized that his approach to these miracles is connected with his scientific exegesis.

Since materialistic currents deny the resurrection of the dead (*al-hashr*) as a result of their disbelief in God, Nursi frequently puts emphasis on the resurrection in his collection, providing various rational explanations regarding this matter. He quotes from Avicenna/Ibn Sina (d. 1037 CE), "the resurrection (*al-hashr*) could not be understood through rational criteria (*laysa ʿalā maqāyīsa ʿaqliyya*). As it is beyond human reason, we must believe in it."[31] Having received an inspiration from Q 30.50,[32] he attempts to prove the life of the hereafter through 12 ways which are based on God's names such as the All-Wise and All-Just.[33] It should be kept in mind that the concept of the resurrection (*al-hashr*) is one of the main themes in Nursi's writings. He states that "about one-third of the Qur'an deals

with the Hereafter, most of its short *sūra*s begin with powerful verses evoking it (*âyât-ı hashriya*), and it proclaims this truth explicitly (*sarîhan*) or implicitly (*ishāratan*) in hundreds of verses, thereby proving it".[34] He refers to this notion in a variety of places.

2.3 His Approaches to the Various Islamic Disciplines

It is important to note that Nursi emerged from the tradition of the Islamic disciplines. However, he put forward the essence of what the Islamic disciplines included in a different form. For this reason, Nursi's works could be seen as revolutionary.[35] This section will firstly analyse Nursi's approach to the *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *kalām* (Islamic systematic theology), *tasawwuf* (Ṣūfism) and philosophy. Finally, it will focus on his approach to *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis). It is important to note that these are the major Islamic disciplines, and they are related to each other.

Nursi refers to the *ḥadīth* discipline in many places, emphasizing that the classical *ḥadīth* collections are reliable. He divides divine revelation into two categories, explicit (*wahy sarih*) and implicit (*wahy zimnī*). In explicit revelation, the messenger merely announces (*tarjuman*), and he has no share in its content. The Qur'an and the sacred *ḥadīth* are revealed in this manner. In implicit revelation, essence and origin (*mujmal* and *khulasa*) are based on divine revelation and inspiration, but clarifications (*tafsilāt*) and descriptions (*taswirāt*) belong to the Prophet. When he provides his own interpretation, he either relies on the perceptive power (*ulvî kuvve-i kudsiye*) bestowed upon him by virtue of his prophetic mission or speaks as a person conforming to his time's common usages (*afkâr-ı âmme*), customs, as well as kinds of comprehension.[36] As we have seen here, he considers the *ḥadīth* in the category of implicit revelation. Moreover, he puts emphasis on confirmed authorities who compiled the six *ḥadīth* collections such as Bukhārī (d. 870 AH) and Muslim (d. 875), highlighting their reliability as follows:

> Any tradition (*ḥadīth*) accepted by those authorities after much scrutiny has the certainty of *tawatur*, even if it had only one chain of transmitters, for such people were so familiar with the Prophet's traditions and exalted style (*uslūb ʿālī*) that they could instantly spot and reject one false tradition (*mawdu' ḥadīth*) among 100 reports. Like an expert jeweler recognizes a

> pure diamond, they could not confuse other words with those of the Prophet…A chain of transmitters (*an'aneli sened*) has many benefits, such as showing the consensus of the truthful and reliable narrators (*ehl-i hadîs*), as well as the unanimity of the discerning authorities (*ehl-i tahkik*) mentioned. Also, it shows that each scholar in the chain puts his seal on its authenticity.[37]

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that he refers to a number of ḥadīth, which are considered weak but are frequently utilized in *adab* (ethics literatures) and *tasawwuf*.[38] Moreover, he argues that some ḥadīths in regard to the unusual events at the end of time involve several messages as ambiguous verses in the Qur'an. Therefore, they should be interpreted (*ta'wīl*).[39] To sum up, he frequently refers to the prophetic traditions in his analysis of the subjects, and he is not sceptical of the ḥadīth as some modernist thinkers are.

While Nursi deals with some topics related to Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) such as polygamy, slavery, inheritance[40] and the notion of *ijtihad*, he did not write any specific book on *fiqh*. Furthermore, he explicates the importance and the meaning of worship and Islamic life in a variety of places. He specifically discusses *ijtihad*, arguing that while it is open, but there are some obstacles to do it today.[41] Because we will analyse in detail his approach to *ijtihad* in last chapter, we note his one argument here in this regard. For example, he states:

> The essentials of Islam (*darūriyāt*) are not subject to *ijtihad*. They are specified (*muʿayyan*) and definite (*qatʿī*), like basic food and sustenance without which life is impossible. At present, they are abandoned and neglected (*tazalzul*). We must strive (*iqāma*) to restore and revitalize (*ihya'*) them. The early generations of Islam (*salaf*) deduced *ijtihad*s in the area of Islam's theoretical matters (*nazariyat*), which can be adequate for all times and places, from the main legal sources with perfect authority and pure intention (*sâfiyâne ve hâlisâne*). Abandoning these rules and seeking new *ijtihad*s in an indulgent and fanciful fashion (*heveskârâne*) is a harmful innovation (*bid'akârâne*) and a betrayal of Islam (*hıyanat*).[42]

Nursi gives priority to the topics of the fundamentals of faith and ethics over the issues regarding the detailed subjects of *fiqh*.[43] In other words, his top priority is to safeguard the Islamic faith, through explaining the principles of religion. However, it should be noted that his approach may be compatible with early Muslim scholars' understanding of *fiqh* as Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) named his famous treatise "*al-fiqh al-akbar*" (great

understanding) even though the book was actually about the pillars of Islamic faith.

Nursi also discusses *kalām, taṣawwuf* and philosophy in his collection, and he judges them. Firstly, it is important to note that his Qur'an-based methodology of explaining Islamic faith led him to go sometimes as far as to blame all of the classical traditions of Islamic thought, such as philosophers, mystics and theologians because they move away from the Qur'anic approach in some subjects.[44] In this regard, Nursi's opinions are as follow:

> In his letter to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Muhyiddin Ibn al-ʿArabi (d. 1240 CE) states 'Knowledge of God is different (*ghayr*) from knowledge of His existence.' (or Knowledge of God is contrary to knowledge of God's existence)'. What does it mean?…Ibn al-ʿArabi wrote what he did to al-Rāzī because he believes that theologians' explanations (*bayanāt*) regarding the principles of God's Existence and Unity (*vujūd-u Vâjibu'l-Vujūd* and *tawhid-i Ilâhî*) could not establish the essential reality and not satisfactory (*kâfi*). Knowledge of God (*marifet-i Ilâhiye*) acquired through theology (*ilm-i kalâm*) is imperfect and unsatisfactory and does not provide a perfect knowledge (*marifet-i kâmile*), whereas following the way of the Qur'an results in acquiring perfect knowledge (*marifet-i tamme*) and complete satisfaction (*huzur-u etemm*)…Just as (in Ibn al-ʿArabi's view) al-Rāzī's theology-derived knowledge of God (*maʿrifatullah* via *ilm-i kalâm*) is imperfect (*nuqsān*), knowledge gained through Ṣūfism (*taṣawwuf*) is incomplete when compared with knowledge acquired directly from the Qur'an…Some of Ibn al-ʿArabi's followers deny the universe's existence, saying that only He exists (*Lā mawjūda illā hū*), in order to gain permanent satisfaction (*huzur-u daimî*). Others, also seeking permanent satisfaction, ignore creation in their proposition (*nisyan-ı mutlak*) that 'there is no witnessed but He' (*Lā mashhūda illā hū*).[45]

In Nursi's view, the Qur'anic way of knowledge leads to perfect and permanent satisfaction, and does not sentence the universe to non-existence. It protects the universe from being in chaos, employing it in the name of God. Through this Qur'anic way, each thing becomes a mirror to knowledge of God.[46]

Based on the information above concerning *kalām, taṣawwuf* and philosophy, it is inferred from Nursi's ideas that each discipline dealt with one aspect of human being towards the essential reality. While philosophy and *kalām* dealt with the reason aspect of humanity, *taṣawwuf* dealt with the heart (spiritual) aspect of humanity. According to Nursi, reality may be understood only through combining these two aspects (the reason, the

heart) because the Qur'an deals with both aspects of humankind.[47] At this juncture, it is worth pointing out that some experts of Ṣūfism, such as Ekrem Demirli, describe the collection as a combination of *taṣawwuf*, *fiqh* and *kalām*.[48] It is concluded from this that the collection combined spirituality with actual and theological aspects of Islam.

It is also important to note that Nursi seems suspicious of Ṣūfism (*taṣawwuf*) in some places,[49] considering it inappropriate for modern times because it was ill-equipped to respond to the attacks of science and materialism.[50] He also emphasizes that "this is not the time of Ṣūfism; it is the time to save belief. Many people can enter paradise without following a Ṣūfī path, but none can enter it without belief. It is therefore the time to work for belief".[51] However, thinking critically, what he means by that remark needs to be further analysed. In Demirli's view, some people understand it as the time being not the time of *taṣawwuf*. However, *taṣawwuf* is not a business of luxury time, and its primary theme is faith.[52] It is concluded from this that Nursi dealt in his collection with faith, which is the primary theme of *taṣawwuf*.

While he denied any connection with Ṣūfī orders, it may be said that his purpose was to perform what he perceived to be the fundamental functions of *tasawwuf*.[53] It is significant to bear in mind that Nursi quotes from Ahmad Sirhindī, the great master of the Naqshbandi order, as stating that

> I would prefer to make one matter of belief from the truths of faith (*hakaik-i imaniye*) known (*inkishāf*) in plain terms than attain thousands of spiritual pleasures (*azwaq*) and ecstasies (*mawâjid*) and work miracles (*kerâmât*). The final station (*nokta-i müntehâ*) of all spiritual journeying is to attain the full perception (*wuzuh and inkishāf*) of the truths of belief.[54]

Moreover, he stated that al-Ghazzālī, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī and ʿAbd al-Qādir Jīlānī were among his spiritual masters. Sirhindī and Jīlānī's works guided him finding his path during his transformation into the New Said.[55] Finally, as Mardin underlines, it is fair to say that "his own style keeps reflecting the allusive style of the mystics."[56] Then, one might ask why Ṣūfism is not the way for the people at this time and why is it irrelevant to the modern period in Nursi's view.

Firstly, the reason for his approach may be that some of Ibn al-ʿArabī's followers emphasized spirituality in such a way as to deny the universe's existence, saying that only He exists. In Nursi's view, this approach is not compatible with the Qur'anic way.[57] It may not be an appropriate way for

everyone today, for his purpose is to address the widest Islamic community. Secondly, the difficulty in Ṣūfism is its emphasis on the personal and state of being impossible to express the sorts of experiences which the Ṣūfī shows. This aspect might be considered as a problem in a *ihya'* (revival) project. For this reason, in general, Nursi suspects that Ṣūfism is an essential condition for revival. In this sense, it seems to be limited to only particular sections of the Islamic community. Thirdly, in Leaman's view, Nursi implies that Ṣūfism can easily mislead the seeker after truth because he may misunderstand the nature of his experiences in relation to the nature of reality.[58] Finally, due to the political situation in which Ṣūfism was outlawed by the very strict secular state, it would have been unwise to link himself with any kind of Ṣūfism. On the whole, it is reasonably concluded that the collection has a spirituality and a mystical aspect. For this reason, its separation from the Ṣūfī tradition is not an accurate way to properly analyse it.

With respect to philosophy, he is very critical of it when it is separated from prophecy. He criticized Plato (348 BC), Aristotle (d. 322 BC) and Muslim philosophers al-Farabi (d. 950 CE) and Ibn Sina, alleging that they immersed in naturalism and unable to escape from ascribing partners to God (*shirk*).[59] The reason for the accusation relies on his emphasis that the philosophers do not provide any real scope of action to God. Moreover, Nursi underlines that human beings are more than rational creatures, and that there are significant aspects of human reality which go beyond reason. Prophecy deals with these aspects of humanity more appropriately. Therefore, philosophy has to be connected with prophecy in order to reflect correctly our diverse nature as human beings.[60] It is important to keep in mind that it is materialist philosophy of which Nursi is critical, not the whole of philosophy as a discipline.

Nursi's approach to *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis) relies on the Inimitability of the Qur'an (*Iʿjāz al-Qur'ān*). In his Qur'anic commentary *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz* (*Signs of Miraculousness*), written in his early life, he expounded on the inimitability of the Qur'an's word-order, which is of the greatest conciseness and subtlety. The inimitability of the Qur'an in composition (*naẓm*) is one aspect of the facets of the *iʿjāz al-Qur'ān*.[61] In his later work *Treatise* on *the Qur'ān's Miraculousness*, in *The Words*, Nursi mentions about 40 aspects of the inimitability of the Qur'an, and he explains them in detail giving examples from the Qur'anic text.[62] When confronted with a general assault regarding the foundations of belief and the principles of the Shariʿa, he countered these arguments with the truths of the Qur'an, which he put forward in the light of natural, rational logic and the sciences of his time.[63] It is also said in rela-

tion to his exegetical methodology that he integrated *kalām* and *tafsīr* disciplines, reviving them as a theology based on the Qur'an and on the methods of contemporary education.[64] It is safe to assume that *tafsīr* as a discipline is one of the main branches in his collection. I will explicate his approach to *tafsīr* and exegetical sciences in detail in the following chapters.

In general, it should be pointed out that Nursi maintains that Islamic disciplines should be revitalized in a balanced way on the basis of the tradition. In this regard, he describes Mustafa Sabri Efendi (d. 1954 CE) and Mūsā Jār Allah (d. 1949 CE) as deficient (*tafrīt*) and excessive (*ifrāt*), respectively.[65] The reason for his approach is that Mustafa Sabri Efendi had criticized Ibn al-ʿArabī, and Mūsā Jār Allah had some modernist ideas which went beyond the traditional mainstream understanding, and Jār Allah's had corrupted some truths of Islam with his false interpretations. It is concluded that Nursi has a strong connection with the Islamic tradition, and he puts emphasis on a mainstream (moderate) Islamic approach.

2.4 Attempts to Revitalize *Kalām* and Discussions Regarding "New *Kalām*" in the Twentieth Century CE

It is important to note that Nursi is a part of revival movements among the last Ottoman scholars.[66] In this respect, it will be useful to look at the theological discussions, in particular in the discipline of *kalām*, at the end of the nineteenth century to ascertain where Nursi stands in relation to revival movements. Before scrutinizing revitalization movements, *kalām* and its history will be discussed briefly.

Kalām is defined as a discipline whose aim is to clarify Islamic beliefs and to defend them against foreign ideas and beliefs which were considered heretical. It is important to note that Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324 AH/936 CE) and Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333 AH/944 CE) founded two mainstream (*sunnī*) *kalām* schools. Both schools preferred reasoning in defending Islamic faith, and they changed Sunnism into a theological school. However, they were very careful about dealing with philosophy and logic because they thought Aristotelian metaphysics, to some extent, was opposed to Islamic theology, and formal logic was also discerned as too risky. A significant change took place in the discipline in terms of its terminology and method by the fifth century AH/eleventh century CE. Al-Ghazzālī brought Aristotelian logic into the domain of *kalām*.

After al-Ghazzālī, a philosophical period of *kalām* and literature began. This period lasted until the thirteenth century AH/nineteenth century CE.[67]

From the early seventeenth century to the nineteenth century CE, the Western world had significantly developed. There had been a revitalization in Western thought and new ideas emerged. Moreover, the process of secularism as a result of some events, such as modern thought's priority on the physical experiential (empirical) approach, led to the appearance of a number of positivistic and materialist currents in the nineteenth century. Western secularism reached a peak in some thinkers and theories. The most influential ones in Muslim world were Auguste Comte (d. 1857 CE), Charles Darwin (d. 1882 CE), Karl Marx (d. 1883 CE) and Sigmund Freud (d. 1939 CE). It is important to note that some Western intellectuals and specific movements affected a number of the intellectuals in the Muslim world. Materialism, Positivism and Darwinism along with new philosophy and scientific discoveries entered the Islamic world.[68]

In this process, Muslim scholars began to study the Islamic disciplines in terms of their methodology. A number of articles were written, emphasizing the urgency of a substantial methodological change in the field of *kalām*. According to leading proponents of the Muslim theologians, there were two reasons for a methodological change. One was the rapid development of science and philosophy. They maintained that classical *kalām* had lost its basis, which was logical argumentation, once empirical method became used in scientific research. The second reason was new challenges emerging in the modern period which required different methods compared to past such as materialism and positivism because these ideas were attacking Islamic faith which is based on the unseen world. Some leading theologians of the new *kalām* movement are as follows: Abdullatif Harputi (d. 1916 CE) and İzmirli İsmail Hakkı (d. 1946 CE) from Ottoman Turkey, Muhammad ʿAbduh from Egypt, and Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Shiblī Nu'mānī (d. 1914 CE) from India.[69] In this regard, it is significant to scrutinize where Nursi stands in relation to this new *kalām* discussions among his contemporaries in his time.

In his life in Van, Nursi became aware that Islamic theology (*kalām*) in its traditional form was unable to answer the doubts and criticisms that had been raised about Islam. Having become aware of this, he took advantage of Tahir Pasha's library for the modern sciences.[70] Moreover, it would appear that the philosophical questions which were posed by Ottoman positivists at the end of the nineteenth century affected him profoundly. The questions were connected not with people, but with the operation of

a system of nature.[71] What's more, in Nursi's view, in this country (Turkey) materialism was widespread, as well as materiality being seen as the source of everything. The reason for this increase in recent materialistic movements was a presumption regarding links between modern sciences and unbelief.[72] As a result, he realized that the traditional form of Islamic theology (*kalām*) was unable to respond to them.[73] It is obvious from this that he was involved in current discussions in his time.

Hence, in order to clarify and defend Islamic faith, he utilized the Qur'an, its content and its style as the first source, particularly focusing on the fundamentals of faith, which are the majority of the themes in the Qur'anic text. His concerns were *kalām* issues and the Qur'anic approach to them.[74] Based on the information above, it may be concluded that he attempted to show that faith is compatible with the modern sciences which materialists and positivists connect with unbelief.

In addition, one of the distinctive features of this period is that various new topics were discussed and clarified in *kalām* books such as individual and social facets of the religion. All the criticisms raised about Islam and its Prophet were seen as the subjects of *kalām*, and the function of the theologians was to provide clear explanations regarding these matters. Nursi was also considered one of these theologians. He defended the entire fundamentals of the religion from faith and worship to ethics and frugality (*iqtiṣād*). When it is thought that Abū Hanīfah described his book about the pillars of Islamic faith as "*al-fiqh al-akbar*", this approach is meaningful.[75] It may be said from this that Nursi had a similar view with some of his contemporaries about this aspect of *kalām*.

2.5 His Major Works in the Collection

The *Risale-i Nur* collection consists of a great number of the books connected with the periods of the life of Nursi. Introducing the major books which are most relevant to this thesis is beneficial.

1. *Muhākamāt* (The Reasonings): It is called in the original Arabic *Sayqal al-Islām* (Burnisher of Islam) or *Rachatat al-Ulama* (Prescription for the Ulama), addressing the Muslim scholars. Its Turkish version is Muhākemat (*The Reasonings*), and it was published in 1911.[76] Nursi wrote this work to set out what he considered should be the principles of Qur'anic exegesis. It is made up of three sections: "The Element of Reality (*Haqīqāt*)", "The Element

of Rhetoric (or Eloquence-*Balāghat*)" and "The Element of Doctrine (*ʿAqā'id*)."[77]

2. *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz* (Signs of Miraculousness): It is Nursi's Qur'an commentary. He interprets the Qur'an verse by verse from the first chapter to verse 33 of the second chapter of the Qur'an.[78] In this work, he provides a detailed explanation regarding the inimitability of the Qur'an's word-order.[79]
3. *Al-Mathnawī al-ʿArabī Al-Nūrī*: The first work the New Said wrote was a collection of 11 or so treatises in Arabic. Later on, he combined them with the title of *al-Mathnawī al-ʿArabī al-Nūrī*. In the introduction, he describes it as "a kind of seed of the *Risale-i Nur*". In other words, *al-Mathnawī* is "the seedbed", and the *Risale-i Nur* is "its garden".[80] In this respect, it should be noted that Nursi expounded in his collection what he summarized in the *al-Mathnawī*. In 1955, Abdülmecid Nursi, brother of Said Nursi, translated Nursi's wartime Qur'anic commentary, *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz*, and his *al-Mathnawī al-ʿArabī al-Nūrī* from Arabic into Turkish.[81]
4. *Sözler* (The Words): It consists of 33 sections, explaining the essentials of faith such as the oneness of God and the hereafter, worship and ethic by using similes, allegories and metaphors. It shows Nursi's mature thought; in it, he demonstrates his own original style.[82]
5. *Mektūbāt* (The Letters): It shows the correspondence between Said Nursi and his disciples and Turkish Muslims in general in a harsh time in respect to religious life and activities. It provides responses to the various theological questions. It clarifies many issues such as rituals, miracles of the Prophet, and his own spiritual development.[83]
6. *Lem'alar* (The Gleams): It consists of 33 headings, including a number of topics such as Prophets, *sunnat-bid'at* (superstition), the wisdom of the prayers, impossibilities of naturalist materialism, sickness and oldness.[84]
7. *Şualar* (The Rays): It discusses a number of topics such as inimitability of the Qur'an, wisdom of its verses, the existence of God, the manifestations of God's most beautiful names, the characteristics of the *Risale-i Nur* and Nursi's defense in the courts. It is the very important part of the *Risale*, and it shows the mature metaphysical thought of Nursi.[85]

Notes

1. Vahide, "Toward an Intellectual Biography," 1.
2. Alparslan Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," in *Diyanet Islam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Diyanet V., 2008), XXXV: 565.
3. Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 10–4.
4. Vahide, "Toward an Intellectual Biography," 4.
5. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," XXXV: 565.
6. Vahide, "Toward an Intellectual Biography," 5–6.
7. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," XXXV: 566.
8. Şükran Vahide, "The Life and Times of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," *The Muslim World* 89, no. 3–4 (1999): 220–21.
9. Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 164–6.
10. Vahide, "Toward an Intellectual Biography," 12.
11. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," XXXV: 566.
12. Vahide, "Toward an Intellectual Biography," 1.
13. Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 167.
14. Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 146.
15. Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 305–7, 311, 343.
16. Abu Davud Sulayman, *Sunan Abi Davud*, Kitāb al-Malāhim B: 1 (Beirut: Daru Ibn Hazm, 1997).
17. Oliver Leaman, "Nursi's Place in the Ihya' Tradition," *The Muslim World* 89, no. 3–4 (1999): 324; Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 567.
18. Leaman, "Nursi's Place," 323–4.
19. Said Nursi, *İşārātü'l-İ'cāz* (Istanbul, Söz Basım Yayın, 2012), 30, accessed 5 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.6.30; Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness: The Inimitability of the Qur'an's Conciseness*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözler Publications, 2004), 19.
20. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 567.
21. *Hudūth (Createdness) Proof:* "The world is subject to change. Anything subject to change has a beginning, for it came into existence at a point in time. Anything that came into existence at a point in time has someone who brought it into existence. That being the reality, this universe has an Eternal Creator." *Imkān (Contingency) Proof:* "Contingency means equality between two possibilities. That is, if it is equally possible for something to come into existence or not, there must be one to prefer either possibility, one to create according to this preference, for contingent beings cannot create each other one after the other. Nor can they go back to eternity in

cycles with the former having created the latter. Given this, there is a Necessarily Existent Being Who creates all." Said Nursi, *Sözler* (Istanbul, Söz Basım Yayın, 2012), 933, accessed 5 April 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.933; Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *The Words: The Reconstruction of Islamic Belief and Thought*, trans. Hüseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: Light, 2005), 693.

22. Said Nursi, *Muhākemat* (Istanbul, Söz Basım Yayın, 2012), 131–4, accessed 5 April 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.13.131; Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *The Reasonings A Key To Understanding the Qur'an's Eloquence*, trans. Hüseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2008), 107–9.
23. M. Sait Özervarlı, "Said Nursi's Project of Revitalizing Contemporary Islamic Thought," in *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim M Abu-Rabi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 323.
24. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 567.
25. Özervarlı, "Said Nursi's Project of Revitalizing," 322.
26. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 567; Nursi, *Sözler* (Istanbul, Söz Basım Yayın, 2012), 623–30, accessed 5 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.623; Nursi, *The Words*, 479, 482–4.
27. Said Nursi, *Mektubat* (Istanbul, Söz Basım Yayın, 2012), 72–3, accessed 5 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.2.72; Nursi, *The Letters: Epistles on Islamic Thought, Belief, and Life*, trans. Hüseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: The Light, 2007), 71.
28. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 567.
29. Nursi, *Sözler* (Istanbul, Söz Basım Yayın, 2012), 319, accessed 5 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.319; Nursi, *The Words*, 247.
30. Özervarlı, "Said Nursi's Project of Revitalizing," 327; For examples, see, Nursi, *The Words*, The Twentieth Word, Second Station, 265–279; Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 568.
31. Nursi, *Sözler* (Istanbul, Söz Basım Yayın, 2012), 142, accessed 5 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.142; Nursi, *The Words*, 107.
32. "Look, then, at the imprints of God's mercy, how He restores the earth to life after death: this same God is the one who will return people to life after death – He has power over all things."
33. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 568. For twelve ways, see, Nursi, *Sözler*, 82–176.
34. Nursi, *Sözler*, 148, accessed 5 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.148; Nursi, *The Words*, 111.
35. Aslan, "Said Nursi," 170.
36. Nursi, *Mektubat*, 137–8, accessed 5 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.2.137; Nursi, *The Letters*, 122.
37. Nursi, *Mektubat*, 140, accessed 6 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.2.140; Nursi, *The Letters*, 123–4.

38. For instance, Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 24.
39. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 568.
40. Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 142; Nursi, *The Letters*, 64.
41. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 568.
42. Nursi, *Sözler*, 646–7, accessed 6 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.646; Nursi, *The Words*, 498.
43. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 568.
44. Özervarlı, "Said Nursi's Project of Revitalizing," 322.
45. Nursi, *Mektubat*, 461–3, accessed 6 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.2.461; Nursi, *The Letters*, 345. See Ibn al-ʿArabī's full letter, Mohammed Rustom, "Ibn 'Arabī's Letter to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: A Study and Translation," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 25, no:2 (2014): 113–137, accessed 6 April, 2018, http://www.mohammedrustom.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Ibn-Arabis-Letter-to-Fakhr-al-Din-al-Razi-JIS-25.2-2014.pdf
46. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 568; Nursi, *The Letters*, 345.
47. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 568.
48. According to Demirli, this is a characteristic of the theologians whose aim is guidance in Islamic tradition. Sciences (Islamic disciplines) break (divide) the religion into several separate pieces. The whole should be discerned by going beyond being broken. Nursi attempts to do this…The major theme of *tasavvuf* is faith. Nuriye Akman, "Oğlum Ibni Arabī'ye Ibram Abi diyor," http://www.zaman.com.tr/yazar.do?yazino=1222420&keyfield (accessed April, 30, 2012).
49. Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 167; Nursi, *The Letters*, 345.
50. Şükran Vahide, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Approach to Religious Renewal and its Impact of Aspects on Contemporary Turkish Society," in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim M Abu-Rabi (Massachusetts: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 60.
51. *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 223.
52. Akman, "Oğlum Ibni Arabī'ye."
53. Vahide, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Approach to Religious Renewal," 60.
54. Nursi, *Mektubat*, 47, accessed 6 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.2.47; Nursi, *The Letters*, 29.
55. Vahide, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Approach to Religious Renewal," 72.
56. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 37.
57. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 568; Nursi, *The Letters*, 345.
58. Leaman, "Nursi's Place," 318.
59. Nursi, *Sözler*, 732, accessed 5 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.732; Nursi, *The Words*, 557.
60. Leaman, "Nursi's Place," 319, 320, 322, 323.

61. Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *İşaratü'l- İcaz fi Mezanni'l-İcaz* (Ankara, Diyanet IB., 2014), 37–40; Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 11.
62. Said Nursi, "Mu'cizât-ı Kur'âniye Risalesi," in *Sözler* (Istanbul, Söz Basım Yayın, 2012), 490, accessed 6 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/index.jsp?locale=tr#content.tr.1.490; Nursi, *The Words*, 387–475.
63. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 9–10.
64. Özervarlı, "Said Nursi's Project of Revitalizing," 322.
65. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 569; See, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *The Gleams: Reflections on Qur'anic Wisdom and Spirituality*, trans. Hüseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2008), The Twenty Eighth Flash, The Answer to a Question, 397–8.
66. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 567.
67. M. Sait Özervarlı, "Attempts to revitalize Kalām in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries," *The Muslim World* 89, no. 1 (1999): 90–92.
68. *Kelāmda Yenilik Arayışları*, Second ed. (Istanbul: İSAM, 2008), 30–7.
69. "Attempts to revitalize Kalām," 93–100.
70. Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 27–8.
71. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change*, 39.
72. Özervarlı, "Said Nursi's Project of Revitalizing," 320–1.
73. Vahide, "Toward an Intellectual Biography," 4.
74. Özervarlı, "Said Nursi's Project of Revitalizing," 321.
75. Özervarlı, *Kelāmda Yenilik*, 150–1.
76. Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 92.
77. "Toward an Intellectual Biography," 8; Nursi, *The Reasonings*, Introduction, 7.
78. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 569.
79. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 11.
80. Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 167; Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Mesnevī-i Nuriye*, Introduction.
81. Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 323.
82. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 569; Aslan, "Said Nursi," 171.
83. Nursi, *The Letters*, xii; Aslan, "Said Nursi," 171.
84. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 569.
85. Ibid., 569; Aslan, "Said Nursi," 172.

CHAPTER 3

Tafsīr in the Modern Period and the *Risale-i Nur* Collection

Contents

As discussed before, various Qur'anic interpretations emerged via the influence of Western thought and modernism in some Muslim areas. For this reason, in this chapter, firstly, I will discuss the key concepts of modernity and Muslims' encounter with modernity. Then, I will focus on approaches to the Qur'an in the earlier modernism, giving a number of examples from its influential figures. Thereafter, I will introduce some new trends in modern *tafsīr* such as scientific exegesis, literary–historical exegesis, thematic exegesis and feminist exegesis. In the final section, I will discuss the place of the *Risale-i Nur* collection in the Qur'anic exegesis with special reference to the *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz* (Signs of Miraculousness) in terms of Nursi's exegetical methodology.

It is significant to introduce modernity and its key notions to properly comprehend its influence on Qur'anic exegesis. Modernity may be defined as Western civilization's ideology and lifestyle, an intellectual transformation produced as a result of the Enlightenment.[1] This modernity can be summed up under the headings of its key concepts. The first of these is

H. Çoruh, *Modern Interpretation of the Qur'an*,
Palgrave Series in Islamic Theology, Law, and History,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15349-6_3

secularism which could be described as a separation between state and church (religion and society/politics). Secondly, a knowledge of modernity emphasizes that nature is dependent on human domination. If it is compared with Islamic perspective, knowledge is life rather than power in Islam. Therefore, there may be an apparent contradiction between these approaches. In addition, the nation state, democracy and natural rights are political categories in modernity. Finally, individualism is a characteristic of Western modernity.[2] At this point, how is Muslims' encounter with modernity and what are their reactions to it should be examined.

It is important to note that Muslims' first introduction to modernity was via colonial occupation and military conquest. Naturally, the Muslims' way of understanding Islam in the face of modernity was to look at the analyses and studies of the fundamental document: the Qur'an.[3] Therefore, the Qur'an played a major role in response to concerns of modernity. It is important to bear in mind that reform (*islāḥ*) and renewal (*tajdīd*) are significant concepts in Islamic tradition. When Muslims are faced with the challenges of modernity, Muslim scholars turn the Qur'an to accomplish this renewal.[4] In this context, it is worth mentioning that unlike in the West, modernization in Muslim countries emerged as types of religious movements.[5] It may be concluded that endeavours to interpret the Qur'an, and in general Islam, were major reactions to modernity.

3.1 Modernist Exegesis

It is significant to make a distinction that Muslim modernism is divided into two periods: the earlier modernism and the neo-modernism. The early modernism emerged in the colonial period, aiming to synthesize Western thought and sciences with the best of the Islamic tradition. However, the neo-modernists are more aware of the possibility of modernity compatible with the needs of their society. Moreover, while the earlier modernists called for reforms in order to catch up to the West, the neo-modernist intellectuals are more critical about the components of the modelled development and result of the Western model of development. Furthermore, the writings of the early modernists were apologetic. As for the neo-modernists, they are more concerned with the issues of their own society such as various social problems.[6] While Fazlur Rahman is considered as a neo-modernist, Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad ʿAbduh are major representatives of the early modernism.[7] After this brief introduction to Muslim modernism, it is vital to mention the contours of this section.

In this section, I will analyse approaches to the Qur'an in the earlier modernism and review characteristic features of modernist exegesis. I will examine modern Muslim scholars' approaches to the interpretation of the Qur'an, the place of ḥadīth in exegesis, the concept of *ijtihad*, the concept of abrogation (*naskh*), occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), the place of reason and modern science in exegesis, miraculous events in the Qur'anic text, authenticity of the Qur'anic narratives, the historicity of the Qur'an, and mystical (*ishārī*) exegesis. In addition, in order to broad outline of modern exegesis I will also give some examples.

In the mid-nineteenth century, modernist exegesis emerged under the influence of Western science in various parts of Muslim lands such as the Indian subcontinent and Egypt. Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad ʿAbduh are two significant figures of modernist exegesis. Their approach to the Qur'an was different from the previous tradition in many respects while having similar ideas. Both emphasized the importance of moving away from imitation of the past towards a sensitive approach compatible with modern life. Moreover, while they were in connection with rationalist scholars in early Islam, such as Muʿtazilīs, they believed that there was the need for interpretation of the Qur'an with a scientific world view in mind. Furthermore, they wanted to reinterpret miracles in the Qur'an in line with modern science and reason. In addition, both underlined that the Qur'an should be made familiar to the modern mind, becoming aware of that exegetical procedures and jargon of previous commentaries had made the Qur'an unclear.[8] This point is very important because these scholars expressed their dissatisfaction with the classical methodologies clearly and encourage their followers to develop a new way to look at the Qur'an.

I shall start to review characteristic features of modernist exegesis by pointing out the place of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) as a discipline in the eyes of modern thinkers. It is important to note that Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) became the paramount discipline in modern period, although it was a discipline among the other Islamic disciplines in classical period. The reason for this is that Protestant textualism, the notion of *sola scriptura* and Western thought influenced modern scholars. Therefore, *sola corano* became a widespread principle among modernist exegetes.[9] Moreover, Islamic law (*fiqh*) and systematic theology (*kalām*), which are prescriptive disciplines, played a passive role because leading Muslim states such as the Ottoman and Mughal Empires lost their political power, and many Muslim countries were controlled by colonialist powers and secular elites. For example, British government had disregarded Islamic law in new courts in

India under their control in that period.[10] As a result of these, modern thinkers attempted to give the task of these influential disciplines to *tafsīr*.

One of the most significant aspects of modernist exegesis is its emphasis that the Qur'an should guide Muslims towards becoming a moral community.[11] ʿAbduh's pupil M Rashīd Riḍā notes:

> The duty of the Muslim is to read the verse remembering that it was revealed to give directives and provide lessons for those who believe…The Prophet came and the Qur'an was transmitted in order to guide humankind. A true commentary is one that explains perfectly what Allah expects of humankind, and the road he wishes it to take.[12]

Moreover, modern exegetes emphasize that everyone is allowed to ponder on the meanings of the Qur'an, and Qur'anic exegesis is not the monopoly of scholars and religious leaders.[13] Obviously, the notion of *sola scriptura* is the dominant theme among modern Muslim thinkers' response to the challenges of modernity. At this juncture, it is also vital to mention their approach to *ḥadīth*, second major Islamic source, because interpretation of the Qur'an in the light of the prophetic tradition is the famous classical technique in the discipline.

With regard to *ḥadīth*, it is safe to assume that they are very sceptical about prophetic traditions.[14] For example, according to Ahmad Khan, only very few prophetic traditions are reliable.[15] Aziz Ahmad (1913–1978 CE) states that his ideas on the doubtfulness of even the six most reliable classical collections of *ḥadīth* are not very different from the conclusions arrived at by Western scholars such as Goldziher (d. 1921) and Schacht (1969).[16] As mentioned in the literature review, Protestant textualism influenced a number of modernist scholars.[17] Their approach to *ḥadīth* may remind us of this influence.

As a religion of logic, Islam is based on *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), and therefore *ijtihad* is a sine qua non of the religion. One of the significant aspects of modern Qur'anic reading is the concept of *al-ʿaql al-awwal wa al-naql al-mu'awwal* (first reason and then the text or text should be interpreted in the light of rational explanation). One of the natural extensions of this approach is to put emphasis on the concept of *ijtihad*, arguing that previous scholars' *ijtihads* are not binding upon modern Muslims because they are historical. Moreover, they maintain that it can be exercised through a new Islamic jurisprudence that is based only on the Qur'an, disregarding other traditional juristic sources.[18] For

instance, ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā believe that *ijtihad* is a fundamental device of Muslim law and to close its gate would make the divine law unadaptable to changing circumstances of modern life.[19] However, it is worth mentioning that this excessive emphasis on reason makes the text itself very passive device in front of modern scholars.

Another disputable issue is the concept of abrogation (*naskh*).[20] In general, the early modernists are not much pleased with this notion. They interpret the annulment/abrogation (*naskh*) of *āyat*, mentioned in Q. 2:106,[21] differently. Instead of relating it to Qur'anic verses, they interpret it in two ways: the succession of natural phenomena and abrogation of the message of former prophets.[22] It is plausible to think that a number of the modernists' refutation of the *naskh* may be connected with their textualism.

With regard to occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), it is noteworthy that most traditionalists consider these reports and anecdotes in relation to the historical background of the Qur'anic verses be indispensable for exegesis.[23] However, this kind of historical research finds little favour in the eyes of the earlier modernist thinkers. There is no doubt that the denial of ḥadīth resulted in the refusal of these reports too. In their view, these reports distort the Qur'anic message, and outlines of the text get lost.[24] In general, they derive occasions of revelation directly from the textual contexts of verses. Moreover, referring to a number of the day-to-day affairs of Muslims, they frequently attempt to apply the verses to those issues.[25] It may be inferred from this that their negative approach to occasions of revelation may be also related to their textualism.

Another facet of modernist exegesis is that it is based on reason and modern science. The power of reason has significantly impressed Muslim modernism.[26] For example, ʿAbduh maintained that Islam and the Qur'an are rational. Moreover, he stresses that the Qur'an is the only sacred text that both argues in a deductive and demonstrative way and sees it as a necessary obligation of human beings to ponder scientifically and systematically. ʿAbduh underlines frequently that Muslim faith stands on reason.[27] Similarly, Ahmad Khan emphasizes that God's word, the revelation, cannot contradict his work, that is, nature. Any religion sent by God must necessarily be within the grasp of the human intellect. The reason for this is that we are able to perceive the obligatory character of a religion only by means of the intellect. As practical result of this approach, he eliminated miraculous events from his understanding of the Qur'anic text as much as possible, and all kinds of supranatural phenomena that were not compatible with his own scientific opinion.[28] However, although Khan tried to

eliminate these supernatural events in Qur'anic narratives, other more moderate modernists only attempted to minimize or rationalize miraculous elements of the Qur'anic stories as much as possible.[29]

None of the discussions among modern scholars is more vivid than the discussion on the authenticity of the Qur'anic narratives about prophets of earlier times. The Egyptian scholar Muḥammad Khalaf Allāh (d. 1998) maintains that the stories that the Qur'an tells about the previous prophets are not necessarily historically true, and their value lies in the religious values these narratives show rather than in the information they include about what happened in the past.[30] In addition, he argues that even though the Prophet's contemporaries definitely believed them to be authentic stories about what actually happened, God did not utilize them mainly as historical facts, but as psychological facts. For instance, they were revealed as a means of influencing the people's emotions. The Qur'anic stories supported the Prophet emotionally during his exhausting confrontation with the heathen Meccans.[31]

Another characteristic of modernist exegesis is that a number of the earlier modernist thinkers support the historicity of the Qur'an in more philosophical manner. According to this view, certain Qur'anic injunctions should be considered and evaluated with reference to socio-historical circumstances of revelation. For instance, according to Āṣafʿ Ali (1899–1981), while legal regulations in the Qur'an are valid for a given space of time, moral regulations are universal. In addition, they emphasize a high degree of flexibility in the injunctions commanded by the Qur'an to adapt Muslim life to the requirements of the modern age.[32] For example, M Abū Zayd, an Egyptian theologian who published a Qur'anic commentary, declares that deviations from the traditional prescripts of Islamic law are allowed if they work for human welfare in the broadest sense.[33]

Finally, modern thinkers who focus purely on the literal meaning of the text are highly critical of Ṣūfī (mystical) approaches to the Qur'anic text, refusing mystical (*ishārī*) interpretations, stated as richness of meaning (or secondary-hidden meanings) besides primary-apparent meanings of verses, and *taṣawwuf* in classical commentaries.[34] For example, Parwīz rejects the heritage of mysticism, even of mainstream Ṣūfism because he thinks that it is an unsatisfactory religious and intuitional experience, anti-rational, misleading and in disagreement with the prophetic revelation.[35] The reason for their view may be their rigorist emphasis on reason, modern science and nature. This subject will be discussed in detail in Chap. 7.

3.2 Other Modern Approaches to the Qur'an in Early Modern and Contemporary Periods

There are a number of exegetical trends in modern Qur'anic interpretation. In this section, I will briefly account for scientific exegesis, literary-historical exegesis, thematic exegesis and feminist exegesis because these forms of exegesis are related to this research.

3.2.1 Scientific Exegesis

Scientific exegesis is one of the major approaches to the Qur'an in the modern period. It deals with examining the Qur'an in the light of modern science. It may be divided into two ways. The first use of scientific exegesis was made by Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī. His commentary, *al-Jawāhir*, was an encyclopedia that allows Muslims to link the Qur'anic text to a modern scientific world view. He was not interested in the "scientific miraculous nature of the Qur'an", which came to be famous in the mid- to late twentieth century. His main aim was to encourage Muslims to study and to comprehend the sciences.

The second way of scientific exegesis is the use of science to emphasize the "scientific miraculous nature of the Qur'an". This approach attempts to show that modern scientific discoveries have been somehow foreseen in the Qur'an. This type of exegesis is also used as evidence that the Qur'an is the word of God, and the Prophet is the true messenger.[36] It is important to note that the main aim of this exegesis is to find further proof of the inimitability of the Qur'an and of its miraculous nature. While opponents of this form of exegesis criticized it, scientific exegesis has become one of the most significant approaches to the Qur'an in the modern period.[37] It is concluded from the information above that modern thinkers recognized modern scientific achievements in the West, and they attempted to find allusions to them in the Qur'an, thereby demonstrating the Qur'an's miraculous nature.

I will deal with scientific exegesis in detail in its own section, making comparison with Nursi's approach since there is a large number of a material in his collection.

3.2.2 Literary-Historical Exegesis

Modern literary-philological-historical studies emerged in the West and influenced some modern Muslim thinkers and scholars.[38] Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1967), an Egyptian professor of Arabic language, began the literary

studies of the Qur'an. He highlighted that the Qur'an is the most outstanding book of the Arabic language and the most significant Arabic literary work. In his view, exegetical studies of the Qur'anic text should consist of two parts: the examination of the historical background of the text, occasions of its genesis and its history and, secondly, the text must be interpreted in the light of these initial studies. During this process, it should be kept in mind that we need to comprehend the exact meaning of the Qur'an as its first listeners understood.[39] Moreover, al-Khūlī draws attention to the thematic units of the Qur'an, underlining that we need to take into account all verses and passages that speak to the same topic, and not to neglect other Qur'anic passages on the same subject.[40] It is clear that a number of modern Muslim thinkers are under the influence of literary studies and historical approaches that developed in the West.

Al-Khūlī's student and wife, ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Bint al-Shātiʾ (d. 1998), followed the method of al-Khūlī, and she wrote a short commentary. While she condemns traditional exegetes as being "without method", she states that the text must be dependent on a literary commentary (*tafsīr adabī*). In her view, we need to start from a scholarly and perfect knowledge of the Arabic language that includes all the literary tools of rhetoric and eloquence to comprehend the text.[41] In addition, like ʿAbduh, she points out that the task of the scripture is not providing the history of Arabs or the biblical prophets and scientific subjects. However, the aim of the Qur'anic narratives is to provide moral and spiritual guidance.[42] Based on the information above, it is inferred that a number of modern thinkers engaged in modern Western scholarship, and they dealt with the contemporary problems of Muslims.

*3.2.3 Thematic Exegesis (***Tafsīr Mawḍūī***)*

Thematic exegesis highlights the unity of the Qur'an instead of the interpretation of verses in isolation. This type of approach is connected with the ideas developed by al-Khūlī. He underlines that interpreting the Qur'an by focusing on specific themes is more useful. Proponents of this exegesis argue that the traditional verse-by-verse commentaries distort the Qur'anic message, not giving adequate emphasis to related verses on a specific theme in the text.[43] Two main advantages are mentioned in this method. Firstly, it gives an opportunity to the exegetes to have a comprehensive and well-balanced view of what Qur'anic text really says about the basic questions of belief. Therefore, it lessens the danger of a merely selec-

tive and biased reading of the text. Secondly, it enables exegetes to take a more active role in the process of interpretation, and they are able to bring their own modern outlook to the text more effectively.[44] It is concluded that this type of exegesis may be more appropriate for modern readers since it gives a comprehensive Qur'anic view about a specific subject.

There are a number of proponents of thematic exegesis such as Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988). He attacks the "atomistic approach" of numerous exegetes who seem unable to comprehend the underlying unity of the Qur'anic text. As a result of his emphasis on single unity of the Qur'an, he formulated a two-stage method (double movement). While the first stage includes deriving the universal principles, values from the historical context of the Qur'anic text, the second stage consists of applying these principles to the present specific socio-historical context of today. Rahman applies his method in his work *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*. Some of the themes discussed are as follows: God, nature, prophecy and revelation, and eschatology.[45] It is clear that this form of exegesis allows us to examine in depth the Qur'anic approach to a specific theme such as women, peace and war, justice, and freedom; and it may be more helpful in the modern age. Rahman's approach and his work are good examples of this form of exegesis.

3.2.4 Feminist Exegesis

A number of Muslim feminist exegetes have recently argued that since "male-oriented" interpretations of the Qur'an from the classical period to modern times are biased against women, it is significant today to reread the Qur'anic text. Moreover, they believe that the cultural and historical context of the revelation has remained as a hindrance to becoming aware of the Qur'anic principles about women. Therefore, the Qur'anic rules regarding women must be read with special reference to their socio-historical context of the revelation, and if the context changes, then the interpretations and rulings derived therefrom may change.[46] As has been seen, some ideas such as women rights and gender equality in the modern period have influenced a number of Muslim women thinkers.

Some advocates of feminist exegesis include Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi (b. 1940), Afro-American Amina Wadud (b. 1952) and Asma Barlas (b. 1950). For example, Asma Barlas has examined the origins of patriarchal exegesis. She argues that views of inequality and patriarchy in the exegetical literature in order to explain existing social structures. In this context, she reanalyses a number of the issues, and she

concludes that Qur'anic teachings are extremely egalitarian, not advocating patriarchy.[47] Secondly, Amina Wadud, one of the leading Islamic feminists, emphasizes that the Qur'anic text makes men and women equal, and it does not refer to God with a "sexual" qualification anywhere. At this point, she states the statement that the word "Allah" in the Qur'an is a masculine is an affront to transcendence of divinity.[48] It is concluded that certain modern Muslim intellectuals engaged in discussions regarding women rights and gender equality in the West, and they applied these ideas to the present Qur'anic exegesis.

3.3 The Place of the *Risale-i Nur* Collection in the Qur'anic Exegesis

In this section, firstly I will analyse the place of the collection in general, examining where the *Risale-i Nur* may stand in relation to diverse exegetical categorizations and where we can place it among modern Qur'an exegesis. Secondly, I will particularly focus on his commentary *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz*.

It is important to note that the scholars of *tafsīr* divide Qur'anic exegesis into a number of categories. As mentioned in introduction to *tafsīr*, literature review, the famous categorization is that it is divided into two broad categories: *tafsīr bi-al-ma'thūr* (tradition-based exegesis) and *tafsīr bi-al-ra'y* (reason-based exegesis).[49]

In another categorization, Ibn Qayyim (751/1350) divides exegesis into three categories: exegesis which elucidates the Qur'anic phraseology and words (*literal tafsīr-tafsīr lafẓi*); exegesis on the Qur'an's meanings and message (*maʿnawī tafsīr*); and Sūfī exegesis (*ishārī tafsīr*).[50] In this context, it is noteworthy that Nursi also generally divides commentaries into two categories, *literal tafsīr* and *maʿnawī tafsīr*, and then he defines his collection as a kind of *maʿnawī tafsīr*, a commentary on the Qur'an's meanings in a number of places.[51] Nursi states:

> There are two sorts of Qur'anic commentaries: The first is the well-known sort of commentary. Commentaries of this sort expound and elucidate the Qur'an's phraseology, words, and sentences. The second sort explain, prove, and elucidate the Qur'an's truths (*Kur'an'ın hakikatlerini*) related to belief (*imanî*) with powerful arguments (*kuvvetli hüccetlerle*). This sort has great importance (ehemmiyet). Sometimes the well-known, literal commentaries (*Zâhir malûm tefsirler*) include this sort in summary (*mücmel*) fashion. But

> the *Risale-i Nur* has made it its basis directly, and is a commentary on the Qur'an's meanings (*mânevî tefsir*) which silences obstinate philosophers (*muannid feylesofları*) in unprecedented (*emsalsiz*) manner.[52]

It is concluded that Nursi focused in his collection on the meanings and the message of the Qur'an rather than verse-by-verse exegesis in classical-style commentaries. One might question as to why the text was written in this particular manner. It may be said that Nursi perceived it to be the most desirable form in its particular time.

Nursi's another significant description for his collection is "*tafsīr shuhūdī*" (transempirical exegesis[53]). For example, he states in *al-Mathnawi al-Nuri*:

> Know that this epistle is a kind of transempirical exegesis (*tafsīr shuhūdī*) of some Qur'anic verses. The matters it raises are, indeed, like flowers that have been plucked from the gardens of the most-wise Qur'an. So, try not to let yourself be put off by the vagueness, or conciseness of its expressions. Do keep reading it until one of the secrets behind the repetitions of the Qur'an, as in the reoccurring verse "To him appertains the heavens and the Earth" (Q. 2:107; 5:40; 7:158 etc.), is disclosed to you.[54]

Here I shall discuss this form of exegesis in detail, giving a number of examples from the collection.

Tafsīr shuhūdī (transempirical exegesis) is one of the methods of interpretation in Qur'anic exegesis even though it is not stated as a technical term among the exegetes. It can be defined as clarification of comprehensive expressions of the Qur'an by visible and experiential phenomena.[55] As Nursi highlights that time is also an interpreter (*müfessir*), adding its own interpretation, and events, circumstances and developments (*ahval ve vukuat*) leads to meanings to be discovered (*keşşāf*).[56] In other words, interpretation of the Qur'anic realities which are mentioned as literal in the text by their manifestations in the visible world.[57] In this context, Nursi underlines that his collection is a witnessing (*şehadet*, *shuhūd*) experience.[58] Here we will give an example from the collection to properly comprehend what he meant with this form of exegesis. He notes:

> Look at the stamp pointed out in: *Look at the prints of God's Mercy, how He revives Earth after its death. He is the Reviver of the dead in the same way, and He is powerful over all things* (Q. 30:50). Earth's revival (*arzın ihyası*) is an astonishing "resurrection" or coming to life (*haşir ve neşir*) again. Countless animal and plant species are raised to life. There are far more members of

> many non-human species than there are of humanity. Nevertheless, to fulfill certain subtle purposes, most plants are not raised in their exact former identities, but in forms bearing a substantial and close resemblance (*ayniyete karib*). However they are revived, their revival indicates the ease of the Resurrection…Those who deny the Resurrection should observe its countless examples in Earth's quickening.[59]

It is clear from the information above that Nursi interprets the verses by visible events and experiments in the physical world. Moreover, as noticed in the verse (Q. 30.50) in the quotation above, this method is a Qur'anic method to prove the argument. In addition, he dealt with the observation and investigation of the physical world to interpret the Qur'anic text.

Moreover, based on the fact that human beings are more than rational creatures, and that there are significant aspects of human reality which go beyond reason, Nursi's main concern with *tafsīr shuhūdī* was to produce an exegesis that addresses all the aspects of humankind.[60] For instance, he states:

> *The Words* and 'Lights' – other parts of the *Risale-i Nur* – emanating from the Qur'an are not limited to scientific matters that address minds (*aklî mesâil-i ilmiye*), but also include matters of belief that address hearts and souls, spiritual states (*kalbî, ruhî, hâlî mesâil-i imaniye*), and provide knowledge of God (*maarif-i İlâhiye*) at the highest degree.[61]

Taking into account Nursi's approach above, it is important to point out that modernist exegesis is based on reason. The power of reason has significantly impressed Muslim modernism.[62] Then, it may be argued from this that Nursi's emphasis on this form of exegesis is of particular significance in terms of his approach to Qur'anic exegesis.

Furthermore, transempirical exegesis is to demonstrate that there is a harmony between the revelation of the Qur'an and the truth in the (furthest) regions of the earth, and in our own souls. In this context, it is noteworthy that Nursi highlights that there is a union between the Qur'an and the universe. In his view, the Qur'an comes directly from the everlasting "Speech" attribute (*kalām*) of God, while the universe and everything in it is derived directly from His attribute of *qudrah* (power). In other words, the Qur'an consists of verses (signs) that are the manifestation of God's attribute of *kalām* (speech) while the universe is the reflection of His attribute of *qudrah* (power). If one of them is transformed into other,

the transformed one will take other's form. Then *tafsīr shuhūdī* is the interpretation of the Qur'an, the manifestation of God's attribute of *kalām*, by cosmic signs (verses) that surround all the people in the universe.[63] Examples from his collection will make it easier to properly comprehend this form of exegesis.

For example, Nursi notes:

> In some verses, God Almighty mentions the wondrous deeds (*acaib ef'âl*) He performs in this world in order to impress upon the heart the wonder of what He will accomplish in the Hereafter, and to prepare the mind to accept and understand it. In other verses, He mentions the wonderful deeds (*ef'âl-i acîbe-i İlâhiye*) He will perform in the future (*istikbalî*) and the Hereafter (*uhrevî*) **by analogies with the similar deeds we see (*meşhud*) in this world** in such a way that we are convinced. One example is: *Has not humanity seen that we have created it from a sperm-drop? Then lo, humanity is a manifest adversary* (36:77), and the subsequent verses. The Wise Qur'an proves the Resurrection in seven or eight different forms. It first directs our attention to our own origin (*neş'e-i ûlâ*): "You see how you progressed from a sperm-drop (*nutfe*) to a blood drop (*alâka*), to a blood clot suspended on the womb's wall, from a suspended blood clot to a formless lump of flesh (*mudga*), and from a formless lump of flesh to a human form (*hilkat-i insaniye*). How can you deny your second creation (*neş'e-i uhrâ*)? It is just the same (*misl*) as the first, or even easier (*ehven*)."
>
> *When the pages are spread out* (81:10). This verse implies: "At the time of the Resurrection, everyone's deeds will be revealed on a written page." At first glance, this appears rather strange and incomprehensible. But as the *sūra* indicates, just as spring's renewal parallels another resurrection, the "spreading out of the pages" has a very clear parallel. Every fruit-bearing tree and flowering plant has its deeds, actions and functions. It performs its worship according to the kind of its glorification of God (namely, manifesting His names). All of its deeds and its life's record are inscribed in each seed that will emerge next spring in another plot of soil.[64]

It is clear from the information above that Nursi believes there is a union and harmony between the Qur'an and the universe, and they are two sides of the same coin. His interpretations reflect his view and what he means with *tafsīr shuhūdī*. In this context, it is interesting to note that Ahmad Khan similarly emphasizes that God's word, the revelation, cannot contradict his work, that is, nature. However, his approach led him to elimination of miraculous events from his understanding of the Qur'anic text as much as possible and of all kinds of supranatural phenomena that

were not compatible with his own scientific opinion.[65] We cannot see this result in Nursi's understanding of the harmony between the Qur'an and the universe.

In addition, by *tafsīr shuhūdī*, the Qur'an and the universe interpret each other.[66] Nursi indicates this in a number of places. For example, he points out that the Qur'an reads the universe in the greatest mosque of the universe (*kâinat mescid-i kebiri*). As it is an eternal translation (*tercüme-i ezeliye*) of the great Book of the Universe, it is also the interpreter (*müfessir*) of the visible world and the unseen world (*âlem-i gayb ve şehadet*).[67]

Finally, a notable style of expression in Nursi's writings is that he frequently uses allegories to interpret Qur'anic verses. His allegories are also connected with the method of transempirical exegesis since they are from the visible world. He provides an explanation by allegories from the visible world for numerous topics such as the relationship between God and his servant, God's omnipotence and will. For example, He accounts for God's closeness to all beings despite his infinite transcendence and his Oneness in spite of His control of everything simultaneously by the comparison of the sun. While the sun is one being, it is made universal by all transparent objects. And it fills the Earth with its images and reflections.[68] It is important to note here that the Qur'an encompasses parables, and it presents its truth by parables.

However, Nursi also defines his collection as "a work of *kalām*" in a number of places.[69] It is worth pointing out that Nursi's collection made strong explanations about a number of topics such as the existence of God, His attributes, the angels, holy books, prophethood, revelation, the hereafter and so on. In this sense, it should be emphasized that the collection explicates the verses concerned with the fundamentals of Islamic faith, which is a topic of the discipline of systematic Islamic theology (*kalām*).[70] Moreover, Nursi's main interest were *kalām* issues and Qur'anic approach to them. For this purpose, he joined *kalām* and *tafsīr* disciplines, and he revived them as a theology based on the Qur'an.[71] Taking into consideration the information above, the main argument of the book is that while what ʿAbduh attempts to do is *tafsīrisation* of other disciplines,[72] as we mentioned before, Nursi's approach is described as *kalāmisation* of *tafsīr* and other disciplines. At this point, it is important to mention that even though ʿAbduh's discourse is attractive for numerous people, Nursi's approach is seen as more appropriate for constant reform. I will focus on theological exegesis in Nursi's writings in Chap. 7.

With regard to modern trends in exegesis, the basic sources of the collection such as the *Words*, the *Letters*, the *Gleams* and the *Rays* may be considered as a kind of thematic exegesis because they discuss a topic under a title of a certain verse, generally take into consideration the unity of the topic and present the themes as an exegesis of numerous verses connected with the same subjects. Beki (b. 1953) perceives their forms as a new approach to thematic exegesis.[73] For example, the *Tenth Word*, titled *Treatise on the Resurrection*,[74] discusses entirely the resurrection. This treatise along with other parts in relation to the same topic could be gathered under the title of "the resurrection in the Qur'an". Another example, the *Twenty-fifth Word* is a treatise on the Qur'an's inimitability. Therefore, it can be described as "Inimitability in the Qur'an".[75] It is clear from the examples that the collection has an own form and structure.

After scrutinizing the whole collection in general, now it is necessary to look at his one-volume commentary, *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz* (Signs of Inimitability). It is important to note that unlike the majority of books of the collection, *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz* was recorded in the earlier period of his life, with his statement, in the period of Old Said. Nursi wrote this commentary on the front in the first year of the First World War without having any book or source. He wrote it briefly and concisely. As he underlines in his Reminder (*Tenbih*), his main concern in this exegesis is to expound the inimitability of the Qur'an's word-order (*i'câz-ı nazmî*), which is one of the aspects of its *i'jāz*. He also states that if obstacles had not arisen, such as the First World War, and other parts and letters had contained other truths of exegesis (*müteferrik hakaik-i tefsiriye*), a fine broad commentary (*tefsir-i câmi*) would have been written on the Qur'an.[76] It is clear from the information above that he primarily focused on *i'jāz*, which is an important sub-discipline in Qur'anic sciences in the exegetical tradition.

It is worth mentioning that *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz* is a reason-based exegesis (*tafsīr bi-al-ra'y*), and Nursi utilizes the methods of the classical exegesis in his interpretation except for the connections between chapters. Beki particularly considers it as a kind of scientific and literary exegesis in reason-based interpretation.[77] As we pointed out earlier, one feature of reason-based exegesis is that it relies heavily on linguistic analysis and investigating the implications of different language usages on meaning.[78] Nursi also mainly examined the theory of the word-order (*naẓm*) in his commentary. In this context, Muḥsin ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (b. 1937) notes:

> It seems to me that Ustad Nursi studied this theory of the word-order thoroughly and then it became clear to him that the earlier commentators like al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī and Abū Su'ūd had not attempted to apply it as a complete system treating all the sūras, verses, and words one after the other, in all its details. So he wanted to emulate these great commentators but to compose a commentary in which the theory was applied in detail and comprehensively in respect of the structures and meanings, and the wording and its related sciences both intellectual and intuitive, universal and particular. He relied on all these while disclosing the Qur'an's systematic ordering, through which its miraculousness and inimitability become apparent. He disclosed too and elucidated the subtle qualities of the literary styles and devices of the Qur'an, which when it first appeared opposed some current usages of Arabic, and astounded the Arab orators and silenced their eloquent masters…It was not only to prove the Qur'an's miraculousness in respect of eloquence and rhetoric that Nursi directed his efforts towards explicating the theory of its word-order; it was to penetrate into the meanings of the verses. For he wanted to expound them in detail in the light of reason in order to set forth the main beliefs of Islam and demonstrate their relations with the truths of existence.[79]

It is clear from the quotation above that Nursi's commentary must be placed among reason-based interpretations. In addition, because his main concern is to develop the theory of the word-order (*naẓm*), the commentary may be considered as a literary exegesis. Finally, the last part of the quotation supports previous argument, namely *kalāmisation* of *tafsīr*, regarding the collection.

Suat Yıldırım (b. 1941) asserts that Nursi's commentary is a branch that began to develop from the tradition and has extended to the present. This work gives examples in detail in relation to peculiarities of *naẓm* (word-order, composition), *balāghat* (rhetoric) and *uslūb* (literary style) which are the foremost aspects of the Qur'an's inimitability. In addition, the commentary deals with philosophical grounds of several subjects, indicating legislative inimitability (*tashrīʿī iʿjāz*), a moderate scientific exegesis, and aspects of the sociological and psychological exegesis of the Qur'an.[80] It is reasonably concluded that the commentary has a traditional background, and various readings of the Qur'an arose throughout the text.

Moreover, Yıldırım believes that the commentary includes the qualities which may become a model for the primary subjects in the Qur'anic exegesis; he also lists the main subjects Nursi discussed: introducing the Qur'an briefly, fundamental purposes of the Qur'an, a comparison of faith

and unbelief, putting forward the proofs for the unity of God to counter the naturalist and materialist movement, a revitalization regarding the purpose of *balāghat* (rhetoric), analysis on hypocrisy, philosophical grounds of worship, philosophy of the science, the need for prophecy and revelation, rational proofs for the resurrection, predestination, inimitability of the Qur'an, the seven heavens and the earth, existence of the angels, and the connection between the miracles of the prophets and scientific discoveries.[81] Because every theme will be discussed in their own sections, it is fair to mention them briefly here.

To sum up, the Qur'an played a major role in modern period in response to concerns of modernity. Modernist exegesis emerged under the impact of West in the Indian subcontinent and Egypt in the mid-nineteenth century. Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad ʿAbduh are two significant scholars of this form of exegesis. Scientific exegesis, literary-historical exegesis, thematic exegesis and feminist exegesis are other types of modern exegesis. Moreover, in general, Nursi defines his collection as a kind of *maʿnawī tafsīr*, a commentary on the Qur'an's meanings. Nursi's another notable description for his collection is "*tafsīr shuhūdī*" (transempirical exegesis). He also describes it as "a work of *kalām*" in some parts. The main books of the collection may also be considered as a kind of thematic exegesis. In addition, his commentary, *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz*, is a reason-based exegesis, and he primarily developed the theory of the word-order (*naẓm*) in his work.

Notes

1. Ömer Demir and Mustafa Acar, "Modernizm," in *Sosyal Bilimler Sözlüğü* (İstanbul: Ağaç Y., 1992), 251.
2. Massimo Campanini, *The Qur'an Modern Muslim Interpretations*, trans. Caroline Higgitt (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 1–2.
3. Ibid., 2.
4. Campanini, *The Qur'an*, 4.
5. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 27.
6. Azhar Ibrahim, "Contemporary Islamic Thought: a critical perspective," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23, no. 3 (2012): 285.
7. Abdullah Saeed, *Islamic Thought An Introduction* (UK: Routledge, 2006), 139.
8. "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7567; See, for ʿAbduh's methodology, Muhammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Ḥakīm al-mushtaher bismi Tafsīr al-Manār*, *Muqaddima* (Dār al-Manār: Cairo, 1947), 17–31.

9. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 96.
10. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 53.
11. Ibid., 75, 101; Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 127; Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 5, 37; Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan, A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House PVT LTD, 1978), 167.
12. Jacques Jomier, cited in Campanini, *The Qur'an*, 17; ʿAbduh and Riḍā, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Ḥakīm*, 25.
13. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 16.
14. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 32–33.
15. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 144.
16. Ibid., 49.
17. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 85–104.
18. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 121, 33.
19. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 87.
20. *Naskh* means abrogation of one Qur'anic ruling by a subsequent Qur'anic ruling. It is based on a number of Qur'anic verses such as Q. 2:106. It occurs in several ways. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 77–8.
21. "Whatever verse [of the Qur'an] do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring a better one or similar to it. Know you not that God is able to do all things?"
22. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 49–50.
23. Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, Second ed. (London: SCM Press, 2003), 62.
24. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 46.
25. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 34.
26. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 21; Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 35.
27. Campanini, *The Qur'an*, 14–5.
28. Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 126–7.
29. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 24; Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 36.
30. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 68.
31. Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 133–4; Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 37.
32. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 42, 102.
33. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 88.
34. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 39.
35. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 233.
36. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7567.
37. Campanini, *The Qur'an*, 34–7.
38. Rippin, *The Qur'an*, X/21.
39. Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 131–2; Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 65.

40. Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 132; Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 67.
41. Campanini, *The Qur'an*, 46–8.
42. Rippin, *The Qur'an*, X/21.
43. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7568.
44. Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 138.
45. Campanini, *The Qur'an*, 77–8, 80; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam & Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 2–3, 5–7.
46. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7568.
47. *The Qur'an*, 213.
48. Campanini, *The Qur'an*, 116–7.
49. Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 181, 182.
50. Qattān, *Mabāhith*, 348.
51. See, Said Nursi, *The Rays*, trans. Şükran Vahide, 512–3; Niyazi Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri Risale-i Nur* (Istanbul: Şahdamar Yayınları, 2008), 30.
52. Said Nursi, "On Dördüncü Şuâ," in *Şuâlar* (Istanbul, Söz Basım Yayın, 2012), 638, accessed 31 March, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.4.638; Nursi, *The Rays*, 513.
53. Translator Redha Ameur emphasizes in his note that "translating *shuhūdī* by the adjective 'experiential' is by all means the laudable option in many a case. However, due to the emphasis the author places on the sensorial experience of the onlooker as he peruses the sheets of the cosmos, and his insistence that the very *matter* of the world is pervaded with Qur'anic *ayah*-signs, the translator has envisaged to propose 'transempirical' to, hopefully, contain the meaning of direct experience as well as all of the intellectual connotations proper to the author." Redha Ameur, "Preface to the *al-Mathnawī al-ʿArabī al-Nūrī*," in *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, ed. Ibrahim M Abu-Rabi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 350.
54. Ibid., 335; Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Mesnevī-i Nūriye*, trans. Abdülmecid Nursī (İstanbul: Şahdamar Yayınları, 2010), Münderecat Hakkında 240, İ'tizar 66.
55. Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 255.
56. Nursi, *Muhākemāt*, 16; Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 20–1.
57. İshak Özgel, "Said Nursî'nin Tefsire Getirdiği Yenilikler," in *Uluslararası Bediüzzaman Said Nursî Sempozyumu* (Tahran Mezhepler Üniversitesi, 2011), 4.
58. Said Nursi, *Mektubat* (Istanbul: Şahdamar Yayın., 2009), 424.

59. Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi al-Nuri*, 8–9; *Mesnevī-i Nuriye*, (Istanbul, Söz Basım Yayın, 2012), 25, accessed 16 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.5.25
60. Özgel, "Said Nursî'nin Tefsire," 5.
61. Nursi, *Mektubat*, 496, accessed 16 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.2.496; *The Letters*, 365.
62. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 21; Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 35.
63. Özgel, "Said Nursî'nin Tefsire," 6–7.
64. Nursi, *The Words*, 126–8; *Sözler*, 172–3, accessed 16 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.172
65. Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'ān," 126–7.
66. Özgel, "Said Nursî'nin Tefsire," 8.
67. Nursi, *The Words*, 46, 388; *Sözler*, 490, accessed 16 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.490
68. Nursi, *The Words*, 209–10.
69. For example, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Barla Lahikası* (İstanbul: Envar Neşriyat, 1994), 162; Vahide, "Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Approach to Religious Renewal," 60.
70. Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 29.
71. Özervarlı, "Said Nursi's Project of Revitalizing," 321–2.
72. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 100.
73. Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 25.
74. Nursi, *The Words*, 67–130; "Onuncu Söz Haşir Bahsi," in *Sözler*, 82, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.82
75. Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 26–7.
76. Nursi, *İşārātü'l-İ'cāz*, 17–8, accessed 16 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.6.17; *Signs of Miraculousness*, 11.
77. Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 25.
78. Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 182.
79. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 8.
80. Suat Yıldırım, "Said Nursi'nin İşârâtü'l-İ'caz Tefsiri," *Yeni Ümit* 89, July 2010, www.yeniumit.com.tr
81. Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

Revelation and the Nature of the Qur'an

Contents

This chapter firstly will explain the concept of revelation (*waḥy*) and the Qur'an. The Qur'an is considered as the exact revealed word of God in Muslim tradition. We primarily focus here on the classical and modernist scholars' approach to this notion, analysing Nursi's views regarding it in detail. Next, I will evaluate Nursi's definition of the Qur'an because his definition indicates his theological approach to Qur'anic exegesis. I will investigate his approach to the nature and status of the Qur'an as divine revelation, its place in primordial existence, the epistemic value of the Qur'an and its universality. Nursi argues that the major themes of the Qur'an are divine unity, prophethood, the resurrection and justice-worship/ethics.[1] How these themes affect Nursi's hermeneutics is a significant question in this context. I will account for his view, giving a number of examples from his *Risale-i Nur*. Finally, I will examine Nursi's interpretations regarding Meccan and Medīnan chapters and their stylistic differences.

H. Çoruh, *Modern Interpretation of the Qur'an*,
Palgrave Series in Islamic Theology, Law, and History,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15349-6_4

4.1 The Notion of Revelation (*Waḥy*) in Classical and Modern Period

It is important to note that the Arabic noun, *waḥy*, and its derivations have become the significant technical terms for the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad in Islamic theology. Revelation (*waḥy*) has come to indicate the recitation of Qur'anic words to the Prophet by the angel Gabriel. The Qur'an usually uses this term for this particular form of communication, but it is not confined to it.[2] The word *waḥy* and its variants occur in a number of shades of meaning in the Qur'anic text, and each of them points to the main underlying idea of inspiration directing or guiding someone. They are used in a number of places to denote the following: guidance in natural intuition (such as God's inspiration of Moses' mother to suckle him. Q: 28.7), guidance in natural instinct (such as God's inspiration of the bees to take the mountains as habitation. Q: 16.68), guidance by signs (such as Zakhariah's inspiration of the people by his gesture to glorify God's praises. Q: 19.11), guidance from evil (Q: 6.112) and guidance from God to the angels (Q: 8.12).[3] To sum up, in Islamic theology, *waḥy* in the sense of "revelation" is guidance from God for his servants, brought by the Prophets, who received the word from God. The Prophet Muhammad received the revelation of the Qur'an through the angel Gabriel, who recited to him God's words exactly, in a form the Prophet could understand, the Arabic language.[4]

It is noteworthy that the mainstream Muslim view of revelation is that it is an initiative of God, who reveals His Will to human beings via chosen prophets. According to mainstream Muslim belief, the Prophet experienced the presence of the "voice" of God in his heart, and he described this experience only in metaphorical terms. God's Will, not His Being, was revealed in the revelation; this Will was transmitted in an understandable human language. The Prophet received the content of revelation from an external source, and he did not have any effect on the actual content of the revelation. This content is what we know as the Qur'an. The mainstream Muslim view declares the significance of the linguistic content of the revelation. Therefore, revelation is identical to the Qur'an, and the words of Qur'anic text are equivalent to the verbal revelation received by the Prophet from God.[5] It is concluded that Muslims believe that the Quran is God's speech, and it is the exact revealed word of God.

It is useful to point out that the Qur'an mentions the means of revelation, in the sense of communication between God and people, in the following Qur'anic verse:

> It is not granted to any mortal that God should speak to him except through revelation or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal by His command what He will: He is exalted and wise.[6]

It is clear from the verse above that the means of revelation are inspiration, for example in a dream, speech hidden away, and words sent via a special messenger from God such as the angel Gabriel as the messenger to the Prophet Muhammed to reveal God's message.[7] In addition, the verse also shows us that revelation is always mediated. Firstly, it lies in the transmission of a message rather than the "unveiling" of God himself as implies in the English word revelation with its Christian origins. Secondly, an intermediary, generally recognized as the angel Gabriel, delivers the message of God.[8]

It is worth mentioning that the Qur'an emphasizes that the revelation was sent to the Prophet in the Arabic language. For example:

> Truly, this Qur'an has been sent down by the Lord of the Worlds: the Trustworthy Spirit brought it down to your heart [Prophet], so that you could bring warning in a clear Arabic tongue…We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an so that you [people] may understand.[9]

It should be noted that the Qur'an states its divine origin in numerous verses, asserting that the revelation came directly from God. Besides, it particularly denies that it contains the speech or ideas of the Prophet.[10] Toshihiko Izutsu (d. 1993) underlines the significance of God's "speaking" in the Islamic tradition as follows:

> And Revelation means in Islam that God 'spoke', that He revealed Himself through language…not in some mysterious non-human language but in a clear, humanly understandable language. This is the initial and most decisive fact. Without this act on the part of God, there would have been no true religion on earth according to [the] Islamic understanding of the word religion.[11]

Another important topic relating to the notion of revelation is understanding the problem that God has revealed a divine message in a human

language. Muslim scholars in the classical and modern periods have discussed this issue, asking how the eternal, immutable, non-contingent "speech" of God could have been transmitted via the vehicle of a contingent, mutable human language. Most have highlighted that God's speech was somehow transmitted in a form we could understand. Otherwise, it would have remained wholly beyond our comprehension.[12] Moreover, some scholars draw attention to the difference between the revelation as it is connected with the "speech" of God (at the level of the "Unseen") and revelation as it is concerned with a human language. In this context, it is stated that while revelation at the Unseen level is a "theological mystery" unable to being comprehended by human thought, revelation in a human language is able to be grasped. In addition, it is also stressed that investigating God's speech at the Unseen level would be similar to seeking to describe what is in the invisible world. Therefore, the eternal speech of God at the Unseen level is not accessible to human beings.[13]

In classical Islamic theology, there is a debate about the nature of the Qur'an as God's speech. The subject is whether the Qur'an was a divine attribute or not. Subsequently, another dimension of the point gradually acquired greater importance: Is the Qur'an created (*makhluq*) or not (i.e., *ghayr makhluq*)? It is important to bear in mind that this controversy has influenced Islamic scholarship in general and Qur'anic scholarship in particular.[14] Muslim theologians have discussed endlessly whether the Qur'an was "created" like any other creation in the world. As we point out, the reason for this debate is connected with theological discussions regarding the nature of God and God's attributes. If the Qur'an is the "speech of God" and "speech" is God's attribute, then the Qur'an is associated with God as an attribute. If this is so, the Qur'an, as an attribute of God, must be eternal, co-eternal with God. There are two theological approaches to this issue. The Ashʿarīte school maintained that because the Qur'an is the word of God and the divine speech, it is "uncreated" and co-eternal with God. In contrast, according to the Muʿtazilī school, there could not be any eternally pre-existent other than God; therefore, the Qur'an must be "created". It should be noted here that Ashʿarī school stressed that only the Qur'an's "spirit and inner meaning" (*kalâm al-nafsî*) is "uncreated", while both schools agreed that its "language and utterance" and "letters and writing" (*kalâm al-lafzî*) are "created". A third approach is that of the traditionalists. In their view, Muslims should not debate whether the Qur'an is "created" since this was not mentioned in the Qur'an or by the Prophet or the companions.[15] These theological discussions may be of

particular significance because a number of rationalist ideas such as Muʿtazilī views in the early period of Islam reappeared in modern period.

We can summarize the mainstream Muslim belief on the nature of revelation as follows: The Qur'an is God's speech, one of His attributes. God with all His attributes is eternal and not contingent. So His speaking is also eternal without letters and sounds. It is not He nor is it other than He. Because God created sound and letters and enabled Gabriel to hear it by that sound and those letters, Gabriel heard his speaking as sound and letters. The angel Gabriel memorized it, stored it and transmitted it to the Prophet via revelation. Gabriel recited it to him, and the Prophet memorized it. The Prophet recited and transmitted it to his companions.[16]

Finally, another significant subject in relation to the concept of revelation is that ḥadīth are considered *waḥy*, and ḥadīth are part of the revelation in Islamic tradition. Here it is important to note that while the term "sunna" refers to the Prophet Muhammad's words, actions and approval of the sayings or deeds of the companions, ḥadīth are the records of sunna. And the tradition emphasizes the complete identification of the Prophet's sunna with ḥadīth reports which went back to the Prophet and judged to be authentic.[17] Therefore, we can arrive at sunna via ḥadīth. After the definitions of the terms, it is noteworthy that according to classical principles of jurisprudence, revelation is made up of two dimensions: "Recited Revelation" (*waḥy matluw*) and "Unrecited Revelation" (*waḥy ghayr matluw*). The recited revelation is the Qur'an, which is the speech of God, while the unrecited revelation is the ḥadīth, which is the Prophet's sayings and deeds. In general, the unrecited revelation is seen as inspiration from God. It is useful to point out here that "Recited" indicates the fact that recitation of the Qur'an is an act of worship in Islamic tradition. However, in classical principles of jurisprudence, both are "revelation" while the Qur'an, the recited revelation, is superior.[18] In other words, the classical approach underlines that sunna (ḥadīth) was revealed by God through the Prophet just like the Qur'an. Whenever the Prophet received a revelation, he was also given a sunna to clarify it.[19] In this context, it is reported that the Prophet states: "Indeed, I was given the Book and something similar to it."[20] Nursi's following sayings are a good example of the traditional understanding of the concept of revelation which includes ḥadīth:

> The Messenger is a human being and so acts as a human being. He is also a Messenger of God and thus an interpreter and envoy of the All-Mighty. His message is based on the two kinds of Divine Revelation: explicit (*wahy sarih*)

> and implicit (*wahy zimnī*). In the case of explicit Revelation, the Messenger merely interprets and announces – he has no share in its content. The Qur'an and those Sacred Traditions (*hadith qudsi*)…In the case of implicit Revelation, the essence and origin of which (*mujmal* and *khulasa*) is based on Divine Revelation and inspiration, but clarifications (*tafsilāt*) and descriptions (*taswirāt*) belong to the Prophet.. When he does so, he relies either on direct Revelation and inspiration or on his own insight. When giving his own interpretation, he either relies on the perceptive power (*ulvî kuvve-i kudsiye*) bestowed upon him due to his Prophetic mission or speaks as a person conforming to his time's common usages, customs, and kinds of comprehension.[21]

As has been seen, the mainstream Muslim view of revelation highlights that *ḥadīth* are part of the revelation. Now I shall analyse some modern thinkers' approach to prophecy, the notion of revelation and the nature of the Qur'an.

In nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thinkers such as S. Ahmad Khan and Muhammad ʿAbduh were influenced by rationalist scholars in early Islam, such as Muʿtazilītes, and they believed that there was the need for an interpretation of the Qur'an with a scientific world view in mind.[22] For this reason, their rationalist ideas led them to a different approach to the notion of revelation. Moreover, because of the attempts to revitalize *kalām* and reformation movements in relation to "new *kalām*" among earlier modernists, almost all modern intellectuals stated an idea about the revelation of the Qur'an.[23] Furthermore, a number of thinkers such as Ahmad Khan limited the concept of revelation, rejecting the idea that ḥadīth were part of the revelation.[24] In addition, some contemporary scholars such as Fazlur Rahman began to develop a slightly different approach to the notion of revelation, including the role of the "religious personality" of the Prophet Muhammad and his community in the revelation process.[25] After providing the contours of the subject, I shall scrutinize them in detail.

It is important to note that in general these reformist thinkers provide naturalistic descriptions of prophethood. In their view, a prophet is held to be a man of excellent intelligence who discerns things by a natural vision. For example, Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī (1839–1897) identifies prophecy with philosophy. What the Prophet learns by means of revelation is similar to what the philosopher reaches by the use of reason. However, the difference between them is that whereas the Prophet transmits his message for the people and talks via symbols that the masses can comprehend com-

pletely, the philosopher gives a message only for a few intellectuals and employs clear concepts in place of religious symbols. As another example, Muhammad ʿAbduh emphasizes the purity of the Prophet's soul and his inward character. This quality combined with an abundance of divine grace allows the Prophet to discern things by a natural vision. In addition, the intelligence of the Prophet is also highlighted. Hence, in ʿAbduh's view, the Prophet is man of excellent intelligence, high spirituality and worthy inward disposition, along with divine grace.[26] It is interesting that both ʿAbduh and Afghānī point out seeing things by a natural vision. Besides, Afghānī's comparison between the Prophet and the philosopher and the similarities between the consequences of revelation and reason are worth mentioning. His approach reminds us of the reformist figures' argument that there is a harmony between reason and revelation.

S. Ahmad Khan is another significant thinker in this context. It is good to mention that Ahmad Khan adopted from 1870 onwards a world view that eliminated the possibility of mediation from the supernatural, stating that all created reality is controlled by a universal, consistent and unbreakable system of natural laws possibly completely comprehensible to human reason. For this reason, he had to redefine the concepts of prophethood and revelation in a naturalistic way. What would these notions signify when they were adapted to this natural system?[27]

It should be noted that S. Ahmad Khan's views based on nature enabled him to have a different approach to prophecy and revelation. He argues that prophecy is a natural phenomenon, and all the prophets have a prophetic faculty.[28] In other words, Ahmad Khan provides an explanation of prophethood in naturalistic and deterministic terms. In his view, all the prophets have a faculty of prophethood. Every prophet is gifted with this faculty. Since all the human faculties depend on the physical form of man, the faculty of prophethood is closely connected with the Prophet's physical form. Moreover, Ahmad Khan believes that the prophetic faculty in man keeps working till the Day of the Resurrection even though prophethood has finished with the Prophet Muhammad. He thinks that the Prophet of Islam has stated the last words regarding the spiritual progress or the spiritual culture of people. In this respect, those last words made him the last Prophet. However, the prophetic faculty and God's grace have not ended.[29] In other words, he believes that prophethood is, in reality, as natural to human beings as other human faculties, a result of one's natural constitution.[30] It is clear from the information above that Khan has a naturalistic approach to prophethood, and he sees prophecy as a natural

event. His view that the prophetic faculty in humanity keeps working till the Day of the Resurrection is a different idea compared to the traditional understanding.

Ahmad Khan goes on to state that the prophetic faculty is inborn and not acquired, and any human cannot reach correct moral judgement simply through his own attempts and efforts. The right kind of morality can be perceived by reflecting carefully and analysing the laws of nature. If a man has adequately improved and discovered the secrets of his faculties, then he will attain it. However, in his view, very few people are able to reach this degree of perfection. Even though a man not gifted with the faculty of prophethood is capable of reaching a true idea of morality, he cannot get certainty despite all his attempts. And he will clarify his philosophy to the people in technical terms. On the other hand, by the prophetic faculty in him, when the Prophet reflects on something concerned with morality, he can reach conclusions that are true and certain and show the will of God who has formed the laws of nature. This inspiration is of numerous types and agrees with natural laws. At the same time, he can provide an explanation regarding the deepest problems of life in a way that people can comprehend since he is gifted with the prophetic faculty that does not need any philosophical jargon.[31] We can see here that Khan identifies revelation and inspiration as a natural phenomenon. He also argues that one needs to be gifted with the prophetic faculty in order to get certainty.

One of the subjects of Islamic theology is necessity of prophethood in humanity. Modern thinkers discuss this topic, providing their arguments. For example, Ahmad Khan maintains the necessity of prophethood in order to comprehend human purpose in this world. He emphasizes that humanity is formed from opposite powers: the angelic (*malakūtī*) and carnal (*nafsānī*). There needs to be a balance between these two. Experience demonstrates that humans have not arrived at a clear notion of the fundamental purpose of human existence by the effort of reason. Hence, reason requires that a person who possesses a natural *habitus* (*malakah*) can teach the essential objective of human existence such as belief in God. This person alone is a prophet, and his natural *habitus* is the *habitus* of prophethood. Thus, reason itself needs the existence of a prophet. Only a prophet has an accurate knowledge of these opposite powers and how to balance them. In Khan's view, prophets guide people to remind them of the forgotten commands of former prophets. Moreover, they provide explanations on subjects that were comprehended only partly. In addition,

they elucidate realities for which there is no example in this world, realities that are beyond human comprehension, such as the divine essence and His attributes, the Hereafter.[32] It is clear from this that Khan believes that prophethood is necessary in order to discover the fundamental objective of human existence. It is interesting to note that while Khan generally puts emphasis on reason, here he realizes that the effort of reason is not enough for arriving at the fundamental purpose of humanity. Khan's ideas on this subject is similar to the mainstream approach.

Another facet of revelation in classical teaching is that it descends by the mediation of the angel Gabriel. However, Ahmad Khan denies any angel who acts as an intermediary to deliver the message of God to the Prophet. He argues that it is not an angel but the prophetic faculty that hears the divine message. The prophetic faculty is the seat of revelation, and it is given revelation. In his view, the true nature of Gabriel is that it puts an idea in the mind or heart of man, an idea related to man's inmost nature. It cannot be anything outer and foreign to the nature of human being.[33] In addition, as has been stated, the mainstream traditional view teaches that the Qur'an came down to the Prophet by the mediation of the angel Gabriel. Ahmad Khan, like Ibn Sīnā (980–1037 CE), radically changes the nature of Gabriel while maintaining the term "angel". In Ahmad Khan's thought, the angel is another name for the *habitus* of prophethood taught by the Muslim philosophers. Ibn Sīnā does this on the basis of the Neoplatonic, emanational and deterministic system of the universe. In both situations, prophethood is part of the predetermined natural system; it is not dependent on divine choice.[34] Ahmad Khan's approach is different from the classical mainstream view regarding the role of an intermediary during the process of revelation. Besides, Khan emphasizes a predetermined natural system and also adopts the Muslim philosophers' concept of *habitus* of prophethood. One might then ask what is the relationship between Khan and the Muslim philosophers.

It should be noted that Ahmad Khan renews, to a large extent, the teaching of the philosophers in his approach to prophethood and prophetic revelation in the context of his own characteristic ideas in a nineteenth-century context. In the classical tradition, the Muslim philosophers (*falāsifah*) maintained that the truths of revelation are completely comprehensible to "people of deep knowledge", and they taught that the power of reason is the source of their knowledge of all religious realities. However, they also underlined that prophetic revelation is necessary since it explicates the duties related to worship. In addition, the masses come to

know the completeness of religious realities only by way of the symbolic and allegorical teaching of the prophets. Ahmad Khan identifies himself with a philosophical group that he called theistic philosophers (*falāsifah-i ilāhīyīn*), who resemble "the people of deep knowledge" in classical Muslim philosophy. With the assistance of the results of modern science and philosophy, the contemporary theistic philosophers arrive at reality by the law of nature, the same reality that prophetic revelation communicates in a language accessible to all people. Even though the knowledge of the theistic philosophers concerning the real system of things is not complete, possibly the sayings of the prophetic revelation would be inside the range of human reason as they are inside the final reach of the theistic philosophers.[35] Taking into account the information above, it is inferred that Ahmad Khan engaged in Islamic philosophy, reviving ideas about prophethood and revelation in his own specific context. He draws attention to the fact that the theistic philosophers like himself can reach reality by the law of nature.

Making a comparison of the modernist thinkers' approaches, M. Siddiqi notes that Ahmad Khan's approach to prophethood is similar to Afghānī's and ʿAbduh's ideas, except that a further subject is added. In Ahmad Khan's view, the faculty of prophethood keeps living and acting among the people.[36] Then on the whole we can see a naturalistic approach to prophethood and revelation among the contemporary thinkers, while they have a number of differences in their ideas.

Among some contemporary thinkers, the Muʿtazilīte view regarding the nature of the Qur'an as God's speech reemerged. As we mentioned earlier, one of the major discussions in classical Islamic theology was about whether the Qur'an was "created" or was co-eternal with God. It is important to note that the Ashʿarī and traditionalist Sunnī doctrine of the eternity of the Qur'an has predominated up to the present. However, a number of modern scholars have agreed with the Muʿtazilī doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an. M. ʿAbduh was one of the proponents of this Muʿtazilī doctrine in the late nineteenth century. However, he took out his view of the createdness of the Qur'an after the publication of the first edition of his famous work, titled *Risāla al-tawḥīd*. Recently, some contemporary thinkers such as Muhammed Arkoun (1928–2010) suggested a return to the Muʿtazilī view of the createdness of the Qur'an.[37] It may be concluded from this that a number of modern intellectuals such as M. ʿAbduh returned to some Muʿtazilī ideas, and they considered these rational opinions to be a response to the challenges of modernism.

Another dimension of the nature of the Qur'an is the universality or particularity of the Qur'an's message. It is important to point out that the most dominant Muslim approach is that all Qur'anic rules, both legal and moral regulations, are universal and valid for all times and all places. Muslims must follow and practise Qur'anic instructions. Because the Qur'an is the word of God, it is relevant to the needs of all societies for all times and places.[38] In the modern period, a number of thinkers emphasize the historical context of the Qur'an. According to this idea, certain Qur'anic injunctions should be considered and evaluated with reference to socio-historical situations of revelation. For example, Āṣaf ʿAli states that, while legal regulations in the Qur'an are valid for a given space of time, moral regulations are not time bound. He also emphasizes that he cannot agree with the idea that any order in the Qur'an requires strict obedience. In addition, these commentators emphasize a high degree of flexibility in adapting the instructions given in the Qur'an to the necessities of the modern age.[39] Discussions on the universality or particularity of the Qur'an's injunctions continued in the period of neo-modernism. Fazlur Rahman is one of the most influential figures in this respect.

Fazlur Rahman attempts to relate the Qur'anic text to the contemporary needs of Muslim societies. He relies heavily on comprehending the socio-historical background of the revelation, at a macro level, and then connecting it with a specific concern of the modern period. His method is described as "double movement theory". In the first movement, he focuses on the socio-historical background of the Qur'an in examining particular Qur'anic instances in order to reach general principles such as justice and human dignity. Rahman speaks of a group of general principles that would later rule specific circumstances. In the second movement, rules and laws which are based on these general principles are developed for the needs of the modern period. In order to develop such rules, particular circumstances of the contemporary period must be well known. In this process, he makes use of the idea of "prophetic spirit", trying to imagine that if the Prophet had lived in the contemporary period, how he might have acted.[40] Besides, he believes that the rigidity of the Muslim jurists' expositions, and their denial of a historical background of the revelation, caused archaic rules that both stopped Muslims from engaging in modern issues and weakened the energy of Islam.[41] Fazlur Rahman studied in the West. His writings are still influential, and his ideas are propagated by his students in the Muslim world.

Another important topic in relation to the contemporary intellectuals' approach to revelation is that whether *ḥadīth* are part of the revelation or not. Classical Islamic teaching emphasizes that the Prophet received not only Qur'anic revelation, but also special revelation besides the Qur'an. Thus, Gabriel transmitted the sunna (wording or meaning) just as he brought the Qur'an. Both the Qur'an and the sunna begin with God, both are mediated via the Prophet's agency, and we cannot make any distinction between them with regard to their authority. The mainstream classical view recognizes the fundamental identification of sunna with divine guidance.[42] According to Islamic law, both have equal authority in ethico-legal subjects.[43] In addition, the classical understanding of the relationship between the Qur'an and the sunna is briefly stated as follows: "The Qur'an has more in need of the sunna than the sunna has in need of the Qur'an."[44] In other words, in order to ensure the meaning of the Qur'an, to explain its aims, and to put into practice its instructions, the sunna is necessary. Without it, the Qur'an is not comprehensible. There are a number of functions of the sunna. Firstly, while the Qur'an gives general orders, the sunna states the exact aim. Secondly, the sunna presents additional information that is certainly fundamental to religious practice, but it is not included in the Qur'an. For example, the sunna clarifies five daily prayers and fasting in detail, while the Qur'an points out these commands in general terms only.[45] However, challenges to the nature of revelation and ḥadīth and the relationship between the Qur'an and sunna emerged in the modern period.

In this period, a number of reformist scholars challenged the classical view in relation to the nature of the sunna, rejecting the view that *ḥadīth* were part of the revelation, or even an interpretation of the Qur'an. Firstly, they maintained that if *ḥadīth* were to be thought as revelation, there would not be any implication in the Qur'an's admonishment of the Prophet in a number of examples such as his decision regarding the prisoners of the Battle of Badr.[46] However, the Qur'an clearly admonished the Prophet because of his certain views. Therefore, the Prophet's sayings cannot be considered to be revelation. Secondly, they also denied the earlier scholars' interpretation of certain terms in the Qur'an as indicating *ḥadīth*. For example, the concept of *ḥikmah* (literally "wisdom") was earlier considered to be referring to the sunna. However, M. ʿAbduh did not accept the exposition of *ḥikmah* in Q. 2: 129 as sunna. He interpreted the term as "understanding the purposes of the Qur'an, its emphasized reasoning, the Qur'an's congruence to people's nature, the laws of human society,

and the people's interests in all places and times".[47] M. Aslam Jayrājpūrī (1881–1955 CE) states that *ḥikmah*, with *kitāb*, must be recognized as the Qur'an, not the sunna. *Ḥikmah* must be involved in the Qur'an and cannot be identified with something separate.[48] It is clear that both ʿAbduh and Jayrājpūrī did not accept the concept of *ḥikmah* to be referring to the "sunna" even though their interpretations of the term are different. As another example, Parwez argues against the traditionalist Qur'anic arguments for commending faith in ḥadīth, insisting that considering *ḥikmah* an equivalent of the prophetic traditions is not right. It is a general term representing "wisdom". Parwez's view is that there is nothing in the Qur'an about putting an equally certain belief in Qur'an and ḥadīth.[49] It is clear from the examples above that the reformist figures reject ḥadīth as part of the revelation. This approach is in line with the reformist thinkers' textualism and scripturalism. However, it should be noted that these modern scholars' arguments are open to criticism. For example, it cannot be inferred the rejection of ḥadīth as part of the revelation from the Qur'an's admonishment of the Prophet with regard to his some decisions because ḥadīth reports also include the Prophet's personal opinions in a number of matters. Therefore, not all the sayings of the Prophet are considered to be revelation.

The Qur'anic scripturalists' main arguments against the revealed status of sunna are as follows: they emphasize certain characteristics of the revelation which God plans to be universal. Firstly, *waḥy* must be revealed and brought down verbatim, and every word must be from God. Secondly, the process of revelation must be wholly independent of the influence of the Prophet; it must in no way be internal to him. Finally, revelation must be recorded and protected in writing and transmitted accurately without any risk of corruption or distortion. According to the reformists, sunna does not fulfil these requirements.[50] This position is very different from the most dominant classical view, which sees *ḥadīth* as part of revelation.

Furthermore, several contemporary intellectuals think that the prophetic traditions and sunna restrict the Qur'anic text to particular meanings, and that our understanding of the Qur'an improves with the centuries.[51] For example, Parwez states that some injunctions in the Qur'an are explicit while others are unclear. God's aim is to allow such details and gaps to be adapted according to new circumstances. However, in the classical period, most of the scholars held the view that sunna is revelation.[52] As another example, Ahmad Khan argues that too heavily resting on *ḥadīth* in order to interpret the Qur'an puts at risk the universality of the Qur'an.[53] It may therefore be inferred that the modernists'

denial of the prophetic traditions is related to their textualism and the notion of *sola scriptura*. There are also other reasons for this modernist approach, such as a large number of *ḥadīth*s and being unable to explain rationally the meanings of some *ḥadīth*s.

Reformist thinkers discuss the reasons for classical doctrine of sunna and its revealed status. For them, Muhammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204 AH) is a crucial scholar in the classical approach. He achieved in promoting the identification of sunna with prophetic *ḥadīth*, and he established the superiority of this sunna over other sources. He underlined that since the command of the Prophet is the command of God, the Qur'an and sunna are equal sources in authority. Sunna, like the Qur'an, is also a revelation. Both emerged from the same source, and they have authoritative status. After al-Shāfiʿī, this classical approach dominated up to the present; the idea that sunna could be described as extra-Qur'anic revelation received a general acceptance.[54]

In other words, al-Shāfiʿī stressed that *ḥadīth* are equivalent to sunna. And he brought the Qur'an and sunna closer to each other. Like the Qur'an, *ḥadīth* had an authoritative status.[55] For example, Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayd (d. 2010) states that al-Shāfiʿī can be considered as responsible for the crisis of religious discourse because he emphasized the importance of the sunna in regard to the Qur'an, and he moved the sunna of the Prophet into a "holy text", equal or even superior to the Qur'anic text. By doing this, he vastly lessened the importance of reasoning and personal enquiry.[56] As has been noticed, reformist intellectuals have a critical approach to the classical doctrine of sunna, suggesting another view for which they attempted to find a basis in the tradition. However, their arguments are open to criticism, and this view has not got much reception from the masses.

Parwez provides another reason against the classical conception of sunna. He states that we cannot find anything in the Qur'an or in the earliest traditions in order to support for the notion that sunna is revelation. Because the Prophet, his companions and early Caliphs considered only the Qur'an to be revelation, it is clear that the elevation of sunna to this level must have been an invention of later Muslims. In his view, this teaching was actually an imitation of the Jewish conception of the oral revelation of the Mishna in Jewish tradition.[57] It is interesting that Parwez traces back to the earliest periods of Islam in order to support his argument.

In relation to the prophetic authority and revealed status of sunna, it is good to mention the *Ahl-i-Qur'an* (Followers of the Qur'an) movement.

The movement, which emerged in the Indian subcontinent, relies on the Qur'an as the only authoritative text, suggesting that the ḥadīth are superfluous. In other words, the *Ahl-i-Qur'an* movement elevates the status of the Qur'an, and it clearly rejects all supports to its interpretation, including sunna.[58] In addition, the movement distinguishes between the Prophet's human and prophetic activities. It regards the Qur'an as God's eternal law, whereas the Prophet's sunna was solely intended for the first generation of Muslims. Except for the Qur'an, the Prophet's sayings and actions are not binding on later Muslim generations. The sunna represents the authoritative practice of divine law for specific occasions, but details of the law must of necessity change because circumstances have changed throughout history. In other words, the Qur'an illustrates fundamental unchangeable principles, and the sunna shows the practical action of these rules.[59] It is clear that *Ahl-i-Qur'an* rejects the authority of *ḥadīth* and sunna, and so maintains that the application of sunna is not binding on later Muslims and modern believers.

Another important topic in relation to the modernist thinkers' approach to revelation is that some modern thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayd and Farid Esack (b. 1957) have started to develop a slightly different approach to the notion of revelation, including the role of the "religious personality" of the Prophet and his community in the process of revelation.[60] For example, Fazlur Rahman states:

> The Qur'an itself certainly maintained the 'otherness', the 'objectivity' and the verbal character of the revelation, but had equally certainly rejected its externality vis-à-vis the Prophet … But orthodoxy (indeed, all medieval thought) lacked the necessary intellectual tools to combine in its formulation of the dogma the otherness and verbal character of the revelation on the one hand, and its intimate connection with the work and religious personality of the Prophet on the other, i.e. it lacked the intellectual capacity to say both that the Qur'an is entirely the Word of God and, in an ordinary sense, also entirely the word of Muhammad.[61]

According to A. Saeed, here Rahman highlights the close connection between the Qur'an as word of God, the Prophet and his mission, and the socio-historical background against which the Qur'an was revealed. Rahman does not think that the Qur'an is the word of the Prophet. The classical view of revelation did not include analysis of the role of the Prophet in the revelation. It gave little attention to the socio-historical

context in which revelation appeared or to the role of the Prophet in the process of revelation. The dominant Muslim approach underlined that the Prophet was a passive receiver, and that there was no connection between revelation and the socio-historical context.[62] However, critically thinking, we can argue that there has been enough emphasis on the socio-historical context of revelation. For example, when we look at the approaches in the earliest period of Islam and the classical sources such as Ṭabarī's commentary, the Qur'anic verses are analysed in the light of their occasions of revelation.

Nasr Hāmid Abū Zayd is another example in this regard. He stresses the anthropological character of the revelation. This character emphasizes the communicative character of the revelation. Communication includes the descent of the Qur'an in history as the divine word that involves itself in human matters. When the revelation began, the text entered history, becoming to address and secularized. However, the traditional view has "fossilized" the Qur'an and lost its vision of itself as the true word of God that can meet the needs of human beings. In Abū Zayd's view, the coming of the Qur'an into history means that God and human beings have been linked and placed in direct communication. The Qur'an is a religious text, and it is fixed in terms of its literal expression. However, when it is brought into relation with human reason, it becomes a "concept" that loses its fixed quality, receiving innumerable new meanings.[63] Abū Zayd indicates the close connection between the text and human beings.

Now I shall examine S. Nursi's approach to prophecy, the notion of revelation and the nature of the Qur'an.

4.2 S. Nursi's Approach to Prophecy and the Notion of Revelation

The concept of revelation is of particular significance in Islamic scholarship. The Qur'anic text itself puts emphasis on this notion in various places. There has been a classical mainstream view on this term, while a number of different ideas emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this section, I will discuss S. Nursi's approach to the existence and the necessity of prophethood, and the notion of revelation, ascertaining his place in this regard.

It is important to note that Nursi believes in the necessity of the institution of prophethood. In his view, God does everything with a purpose, and there are numerous examples of wisdom in his deeds. There is an

order in everything, even in the seemingly most unimportant things in the universe. Nothing is disregarded in nature, and human beings need someone for guidance. This underlines the necessity of the prophet. Nursi refers to the purpose and wisdom in God's actions and the fact that an order is seen in everything. These realities led him to the conviction regarding the necessity of prophethood. Nursi goes on to say that humanity's superiority to animals in the following three subjects indicates the necessity of prophethood.[64]

First of all, humankind is capable of perceiving the relationship between causes and effects. By this knowledge of this relationship, people reach new combinations, forms or rules, and the laws that seem to underlie cause and effect. Science is able to examine these combinations; it is able to discover these laws. People can develop new inventions. However, humans' capacities and skills are limited. People's innate ignorance and weakness leave them in need of the guidance of prophethood. The perfect orderliness of the universe can only be sufficiently perceived by means of prophethood. The balance and order of people's lives depend on the skill to grasp this universal order.[65]

Secondly, human beings have been gifted with limitless inclinations and ambitions, unrestricted hopes and tendencies to lust and anger (*quwwa-i shahawiyya* and *quwwa-i ghaḍabiyya*). All these need training and control. This fundamental aspect of humankind also shows the necessity of prophethood.[66] It is interesting to note that Ahmad Khan also emphasizes that human beings are formed from opposite powers: the angelic (*malakūtī*) and carnal (*nafsānī*). They are called to balance the two.[67] Therefore, in order to prove the necessity of prophethood, both Nursi and Khan indicate the need to control human propensities.

In Nursi's view, third point in relation to humanity's superiority to animals is the balance in the characters of humanity (*itidal-i mizac*), the delicateness in its nature (*letafet-i tab'*), as well as its tendency for making things better. Humankind has a gifted tendency (*meyl-i fıtrî*) to live in a way that is suitable to its fundamental nature and its essential honour. Because of this inborn tendency, people need to enhance and adorn their place, clothes and foods and utilize sciences and occupations. However, an individual cannot have sufficient knowledge regarding all such sciences. Hence, people need to live and work together, exchanging (*mübadele*) their goods among each other. The fulfilment of this need requires justice and the existence of a number of rules because the desires (*inhimak*) and faculties of humanity (*kuvâ-yı insaniye*) are not limited from birth, and it

can be the cause of injustice. Any person cannot be capable of establishing these rules. Therefore, there must be a universal mind that has all the information. It is divine revealed religion. There must also be a power that can control people's spirits and consciences, and it carries out the required justice and rules. This power must also have some kind of supremacy over others. As for this power, it is the institution of prophethood.[68] As has been seen, Nursi indicates faculties and inborn tendencies of humanity in order to demonstrate the necessity of prophethood. Moreover, he indicates that people need to live and work together, and this need requires justice and the existence of a number of rules. His approach is in line with M. ʿAbduh's sociological argument for the necessity of prophecy. As ʿAbduh states, differences in the natures of the people and in the powers of intellect could cause differences among the people due to their mutual competition. Therefore, God sent the prophets to instruct them to respect one another's rights, and to teach them what these rights are.[69] Based on the information above, it is clear that while mentioning humanity's superiority to animals Nursi's main argument here is based on the nature of human, the need for living in a society, and justice and rules.

Nursi goes on to state that individuals lack sufficient knowledge to lead their lives in a correct way which will allow happiness in their individual and social life. Besides, they experience whims (*evham*) and errors, and their carnal desires require discipline. Thus, humanity needs a perfect guide; this teacher is a prophet. Secondly, human laws and systems cannot meet the continual needs and expectations of the people, and they cannot limit people's aggression (*meylü't-tecavüz*) and train their faculties in an appropriate way. They also cannot guide their natures to progress. Therefore, human beings need a divine law. The Prophet brings to us this everlasting divine law. Moreover, even though there has been the development of some beauty in our old world, new immoral activities and evil appear in even worse ways. Just as the rules of wisdom are dependent on the rules of government, thus too is the order of people's life progressively in need of the divine rules and virtues (*kavanin-i şeriat ve fazilet*) which control human conscience. Furthermore, new systems of education, which are considered as having no need of divine law, (*mevhume meleke-i tâdil-i ahlâk*) are not totally capable of training the three fundamental human faculties (faculties of intellect, desire and anger) correctly or of cultivating them into wisdom, chastity and moderation, nor of maintaining them as such. For this reason, humankind needs a prophet who provides the balance of divine justice (*mizan-ı adalet-i İlâhiye*) which affects and grasps humanity's nature and

conscience. In addition, thousands of prophets appeared throughout the history of the world, proving their prophecy with numerous miracles. These miracles declare and establish the institution of prophethood. Finally, a number of pleasures and love are found in the basic aims and benefits of life such as eating and drinking. Then we can perceive the divine favour (*inayet-i İlâhiye*) in this single fact of life, and we can comprehend that there is nothing useless (*adem-i abesiyet*) or neglected (*adem-i ihmal*) in existence. Therefore, we can recognize that prophethood is necessary for people's life and existence. It is the pivot of the most essential purposes of existence (*mesalih-i külliye*). If there were no such institution, human beings would have come to this regular and ordered world from a chaotic world, and they would have broken the harmony of the course of all the events, and this world would have turned into complete chaos.[70]

It is clear that Nursi emphasizes human weakness and lack of knowledge. He also underlines that human-made laws cannot meet the needs of humanity, and people are in need of divine rules. He frequently indicates human's basic faculties and carnal desires, stating that these require discipline and need to keep them balanced. At the same time, he mentions human experience and suffering such as whims and errors, maintaining that people need a guide. One of Nursi's arguments for prophethood is the history of the prophets and miracles of the prophets. In addition, he finds certain evidence for this institution from the visible world, seeing the divine favour in the fundamental purposes of the life such as eating and marriage. Nursi often declares that all these realities demonstrate the necessity of prophethood. We see that Nursi believes in the institution of the prophecy. Then we shall analyse his approach to the notion of revelation.

Nursi highlights that the truth of revelation (*vahiylerin hakikati*) gets control at all times throughout the invisible world as a powerful way of manifestation. A testimony (*şehadet*) to God's Existence and Unity comes from the One All-Knowing of the Unseen (*Allâmü'l-Guyûb*) via the truths of revelation and inspiration, and this testimony is stronger than that of the universe and its creatures. God speaks with a pre-eternal speech (*kelâm-ı ezelî*) that is suitable to himself. Just as the meaning of His speech informs about Him, His speech (*tekellüm*) also makes Himself known by this attribute. In Nursi's view, the establishment and the certainty of the truth of the revelation are clear through the following realities: There is the consensus of more than 100,000 prophets. Moreover, their announcements are based on divine revelation. In addition, the evidence and miracles included in the sacred books (*kütüb-ü mukaddese*) and heavenly scrolls

(*suhuf-u semâviye*) have also confirmed this truth (*hakikat-i vahy*).[71] According to Nursi, the truth of the revelation explicates the following five sacred truths.

The first truth is that revelation, described as God's lowering His speech to the level of People's minds so that they can comprehend it (لِلتَّنَزُّلَاتِ الْاِلٰهِيَّةِ اِلٰى عُقُولِ الْبَشَرِ), is a type of divine kindness (*tenezzül-ü İlâhî*). As God allows His creatures to speak and he understands their communications, His being the Lord of all creation (*rububiyet*) requires His participation in them with His own speech. Secondly, in order to inform Himself, the One who has created the universe with marvellous artefacts will certainly make Himself known by His own words also. The third reality is that as God responds with His deeds (*fiilen*) to the supplications (*münâcât*) and thanks that are provided by the most select (*müntehab*) truly humans, He also responds with His speech, and it is a characteristic of His being the Creator (*hâlıkıyetin şe'ni*). The fourth reality is that the attribute of speech is a necessary requirement of knowledge and life, and it is a manifestation of knowledge and life. The attribute of speech certainly is found in a complete and eternal (*sermedî*) form in God, who is all-knowing and the ever-living. Finally, God provides His most loved, anxious, very poor creatures powerlessness (*acz*), long desire (*iştiyak*), poverty (*fakr*) and need, anxiety for the future (*endişe-i istikbal*), and love and adoration (*perestiş*). For this reason, revelation is a result of His divinity (*ulûhiyet*) that He should observe His own Existence to the creatures through His speech.[72] It is interesting that Nursi derives the truths of the revelation from God's attributes, the nature of human beings and creatures. According to Nursi, the realities of revelation are as follows: Revelation means that God participates in His creatures' speech with His own speech. He informs Himself by His own words through revelation. Revelation is that He responds to the supplications of his servants with His speech. His speech via revelation indicates His two attributes, all-knowing and the ever-living. Revelation is also a consequence of His divinity.

By use of a parable, Nursi makes a distinction between revelation (*vaḥy*) and inspiration (*ilhām*): A king has two types of speech and address. He utilizes the first one when he speaks to an ordinary citizen on his phone regarding a common subject concerning a minor affair or private need. In his second type of speech, He is the chief sovereign, the head of the religious office, and the greatest ruler. He addresses his words towards an envoy or a high official so that his orders will be announced via an exalted decree that shows his majesty.[73] In Nursi's view, while true inspiration is similar to revelation in one respect, and is a type of the Lord's speech, they

are different in two ways. The first difference is that revelation, much more elevated than inspiration, is generally communicated by angels, while inspiration in general comes directly. God speaks with the name the Lord of the worlds and with the title the Creator of the universe, by means of revelation or the comprehensive inspiration (*şümullü ilhām*) that has the duty of revelation. In inspiration, He may address in a private (*hususi*) manner, as the Lord and Creator of every individual and each living being, from behind the veils and in accordance with people's capacities. The second difference is that revelation is clear, pure (*sâfi*) and special to the most elect (*havass*). However, inspiration is not as clear (*gölgeli*) as revelation; it can be complicated, and it is more general (*umumî*). There are several types of inspiration, such as inspirations that come to angels (*melâike*), human beings and animals (*hayvanat*). Therefore, inspiration constitutes an area for the multiplication (*teksir*) of God's words (*kelimat-ı Rabbâniye*) to the extent of the drops (*katre*) in the oceans.[74] In this context, Nursi indicates the following Qur'anic verse: "Say [Prophet], 'If the whole ocean were ink for writing the words of my Lord, it would run dry before those words were exhausted' – even if We were to add another ocean to it."[75] Taking into account the information above, it should be stated that while acknowledging revelation (*vahy*) and inspiration (*ilhām*), Nursi distinguishes between these two terms. It could be said that Nursi follows the traditional understanding of these terms, while he makes them clear by a parable and his unique explanations. At this point, one might ask whether there is a degree among divine words.

According to Nursi, the Qur'an takes the greatest status among infinite words of God, and the Qur'an is called as the word of God (*Kelâmullah*). Other divine words (*sair kelimât-ı İlâhiye*) are divine speech revealed for a specific purpose, with a minor name (*cüz'î bir ünvan*), and via the specific manifestation (*cüz'î tecellî*) of a specific name (*hususî isim*). It is important to note that divine words differ (*muhtelif*) in degree in terms of particularity (*hususiyet*) and universality (*külliyet*). Most inspirations (*ekser ilhāmat*) are of this type, while their ranks (*derecat*) are different (*mütefavit*). For instance, the most particular (*cüz'î*) and simple inspiration (*basit*) is sent to animals. Then follow, respectively, inspiration to ordinary people (*avâm-ı nâs*), ordinary angels (*avâm-ı melâike*), saints (*evliya*) and greater angels (*melâike-i izam*). Nursi makes it clear with an example: A saint (*veli*) who supplicates without any mediation (*vasıtasız*) directly by means of the telephone of the heart states: "My heart tells me from my Lord." The saint does not say: "My heart reports to me from the Lord of the Worlds

(*Rabbü'l-Âlemîn*)." This is because he receives the divine address only according to his ability (*kabiliyet*) and the rate of the removal (*nisbet-i ref'*) of 70,000 veils (*hicap*) between God and humanity.[76] As has been seen, Nursi's ideas regarding revelation, inspiration and the capacity of the saints are similar to the traditional mainstream understanding. However, a number of different approaches emerged in the modern period. For example, ʿAbduh believes that the denial of the miracle of the saint (*karāmah*) is not against the fundamentals of the religion.[77]

Regarding revelation, Nursi divides divine revelation into two categories, explicit and implicit. In the case of explicit revelation, the messenger merely announces, and he has no share in its content. The Qur'an and the sacred ḥadīth are revealed in this manner. In implicit revelation, the essence and origin of which is based on divine revelation and inspiration, the Prophet is permitted to clarify and describe it. In this case, he uses direct revelation and inspiration or his own insight. When he gives his own interpretation, he either relies on the perceptive power bestowed upon him by virtue of his prophetic mission or talks as a person conforming to his time's common usages, customs, as well as kinds of comprehension. Therefore, in Nursi's view, not all the details of every ḥadīth are inevitably derived from pure revelation, and we do not seek the noble signs of the Prophet's messengership in his human ideas and transactions based on the requirements of humanity. Some realities are revealed to him in a brief, abstract and unqualified/unrestricted form, and he describes them via his insight and in accordance with normal understanding. While he depicts an event, he uses the metaphors and allegories which need explanation or interpretation.[78]

When we compare Nursi's ideas with the reformist ideas regarding revelation, it is clear that Nursi's approach follows the most classical dominant line. For example, we do not see in Nursi's writings Fazlur Rahman's idea that the Qur'an is entirely the word of God and, in an ordinary sense, also wholly the word of the Prophet.[79] According to Nursi, the Prophet has no share in the content of the Qur'an and the sacred ḥadīth. However, Nursi does not limit the messenger's prophetic functions merely to the transmission of revelation, emphasizing that the Prophet is allowed to clarify and describe what he receives in a brief and unrestricted form.

Furthermore, as in the Islamic tradition, Nursi divides the Prophet's *persona* into "human" and "prophetic" fields. Classical theologians state that the Prophet's words and actions in his everyday life and in personal matters are not legally binding.[80] Nursi does not see the signs of his messengership in his human ideas and deeds in his everyday life. What's more, Nursi

believes that ḥadīth is part of revelation, and that the Prophet's sayings and actions related to the prophetic mission are binding on later Muslim generations. For Nursi, the Prophet is not just a messenger, but he is also a ruler. Thus, he acknowledges the authority of ḥadīth and sunna as a necessary source of stability of Islam, while he finds a flexibility by stating that not all the details of every ḥadīth are inevitably derived from pure revelation. In addition, we do not meet in his writings the argument put by A. Khan that prophecy is a natural phenomenon, and all the prophets have a prophetic faculty.[81] Finally, it should be emphasized that Nursi clarifies the concept of revelation via parables and his own unique style in a way that ordinary people can comprehend.

4.3 His Approach to the Nature and Status of the Qur'an

In this section, I will discuss Nursi's views on the nature and status of the Qur'an as divine revelation, the epistemic value of the Qur'an and its universality. In order to properly understand Nursi's exegetical approach, it is vital to look at his general opinions on the nature and status of the Qur'an. I will investigate Nursi's definition of the Qur'an because his definition indicates his approach to the nature and status of the Qur'an, as well as Qur'anic exegesis.

In general, the Qur'an is defined as follows: It is the speech of God, sent down to the last Prophet Muhammad, via the Angel Gabriel, in its exact meaning and exact wording, and it has been transmitted to us by reliable authorities (*tawātur*), both verbally and in writing. It is inimitable and unique, and it is protected by God from corruption.[82] Nursi writes:

> The Qur'an is an eternal translation (*tercüme-i ezeliye*) of the great Book of the Universe (*kitab-ı kebir-i kâinat*) and the everlasting translator (*tercüman-ı ebedî*) of the "languages" in which the Divine laws of the universe's creation and operation (*âyât-ı tekvîniye*) are "inscribed"; the interpreter of the books of the visible, material world and the World of the Unseen; the discloser (*keşşaf*) of the immaterial treasuries of the Divine Names (*esmâ-i İlâhiye*) hidden on Earth and in the heavens; the key to the truths concealed (*muzmer hakaik*) beneath the lines of events (*sutûr-u hâdisât*); the World of the Unseen's tongue in the visible, material one (*âlem-i şehadet*); the treasury of the All-Merciful One's favors (*iltifâtât-ı ebediye-i Rahmâniye*) and the All-Glorified One's eternal addresses (*hitâbât-ı*

> *ezeliye-i Sübhâniye*) coming from the World of the Unseen beyond the veil of this visible world; the sun of Islam's spiritual and intellectual worlds, as well as its foundation and plan; the sacred map of the Hereafter's worlds (*avâlim-i uhreviye*); the expounder (*kavl-i şârih*), lucid interpreter (*tefsir-i vâzıh*), articulate proof (*burhan-ı kàtı*), and clear translator (*tercüman-ı sâtı*) of the Divine Essence, Attributes (*sıfât*), Names and acts (*şuûn-u İlâhiye*); the educator and trainer (*mürebbî*) of humanity's world (*âlem-i insaniyet*) and the water and light of Islam, the true and greatest humanity (*insaniyet-i kübrâ*); and the true wisdom of humanity and the true guide leading them to happiness. For humanity, it is a book of law, prayer, wisdom, worship and servanthood to God, commands and invitation, invocation and reflection. It is a holy book containing books for all of our spiritual needs (*hâcât-ı mâneviye*); a heavenly book that, like a sacred library, contains numerous booklets from which all saints (*evliya*), eminently truthful people (*sıddıkîn*), those well-versed in knowledge of God (*urefâ*), and all discerning scholars (*muhakkıkîn*) have derived their own specific ways, and which illuminate each way and answer their followers' needs.[83]

Nursi's definition of the Qur'an is worth examining. It is important to note that he perceives that there is a union and harmony between the Qur'an and the universe; the Qur'an and the universe interpret each other. His emphasis that "the Qur'an is an eternal translation of the great Book of the Universe and the everlasting translator of the languages in which the divine laws of the universe's creation and operation are inscribed; the interpreter of the books of the visible world and the World of the Unseen" indicates this reality. Moreover, it can be derived from his statement that Nursi follows the classical mainstream view regarding the non-createdness of the Qur'an, (*laysa bi makhluq*). His first statement that "it is an *eternal* translation of the great Book of the Universe" implies this truth. Furthermore, his definition illustrates his understanding of the Qur'an as a multidimensional text. For example, he states that the Qur'an is a book of law, prayer, wisdom and worship, and like a sacred library. In addition, he highlights that the Qur'an is the lucid interpreter of the divine essence, attributes, names and acts. He frequently refers to this reality in his writings, affirming that the foundation, source, light and spirit of all true knowledge is knowledge of God (*marifetullah*); and its very basis is belief in God (*iman-ı billâh*).[84] In this context, it is good to bear in mind that, as ʿAbduh maintained, understanding the nature of God in Islamic theology is considered to be beyond human reason.[85] Then it is concluded that

Nursi's definition of the Qur'an provides us information on his approach to the nature and the status of the Qur'an, its place and its epistemic value.

Nursi goes on to say that the Qur'an has come from God's Supreme Throne (*Arş-ı Âzam*), His Greatest Name (*İsm-i Âzam*) and each name's greatest rank (*mertebe-i âzam*). Therefore, it is the word of God in respect to His being the Lord of the worlds. It is His decree (*ferman*) as regards His having the title of Deity (*İlâh*) of all beings. It is a discourse (*hitap*) in the name of the Creator of all the heavens and the Earth. It is speech (*mükâleme*) from the point of view of absolute divine lordship (*rububiyet-i mutlaka*). It is an eternal sermon (*hutbe-i ezeliye*) on behalf of the All-Glorified One's universal sovereignty (*saltanat-ı âmme-i Sübhâniye*). It is also a notebook of the Most Merciful God's favours (*defter-i iltifâtât-ı Rahmâniye*), and it is a collection of messages. Thus, according to Nursi, "the Word of God" has been the title of the Qur'an.[86]

Regarding the universality of the Qur'an's message, Nursi believes that the messages of the Qur'an, including ethico-legal content, are contemporary and universal. They are valid for all times and all places. At this point, he emphasizes that the Qur'an was not revealed for the people of one century only, but it came down for people of all centuries. It is not for one class only, but for all the classes of humanity.[87] It is clear that for Nursi the Qur'an meets the needs and requirements of all the people, and it is the true guide leading them to happiness.

4.4 The Major Themes of the Qur'an and Its Chapters

In this section, I will examine Nursi's views on the major themes of the Qur'an, how these themes affect his hermeneutics and his approach to the chapters of the Qur'an.

According to the certain scholars, the main themes of the Qur'an are knowledge about the fundamentals of the faith (belief in God's existence and oneness, prophecy, and the hereafter), knowledge about worship, knowledge about life and knowledge about stories (history).[88] It is important to bear in mind that the major themes of the Qur'an are expressed by various terms by the Qur'anic scholars according to their insights into the text. Nursi's view on this subject is worth examining.

Nursi argues that the major themes of the Qur'an are divine unity (*al-tawḥīd*), prophethood (*al-nubuwwa*), the resurrection (*al-ḥashr*), and justice-worship (*al-ʿadāla*, *al-ʿibāda*).[89] He provides cosmic evidence for

these fundamental aims and essential elements of the Qur'an through a parable, as follows: When humanity, like a successive caravan, leaves from the valleys of the past, journeys in the deserts of existence and life, and goes on towards the heights of the future, the universe turns its attention to them. It is as though the government of creation sends science (*fann al-ḥikma*) to understand their situations: Who are these strange creatures? Where are they from? Where are they going? *Al-Ḥikma* (Natural philosophy) asks: "O humankind! Where are you from? Where are you going? What are you doing? Who is your ruler?" Then the Prophet Muhammad says on behalf of human beings: "O *Ḥikma*! We come by the power of God from the darkness of non-existence to the world of existence. We are on our journey, travelling through the road of the resurrection towards eternal life. And we are busy on this Earth in preparation of that eternal life, and the development of our abilities. I am their master and spokesman through a messengership from God. Here it is my manifesto, the word of God." Nursi underlines that the Prophet's answers, which are based on the Qur'an, indicate those four essential aims of the Qur'an: divine unity, prophethood, the resurrection and justice-worship.[90] In this context, he adds that the Qur'an refers to the "natural" facts only parenthetically (*istidrādī*) except when these are indicated as evidence to support the basic aims of the Qur'anic text.[91] We will discuss his views on scientific exegesis in Chap. 7.

In Nursi's view, just as these four fundamental elements are seen in the entire Qur'an, they are also shown in the Qur'anic chapters, verses and phrases, even if they are only hinted at (*işareten*) or alluded to (*remzen*). The reason for this is that each part of the Qur'an is like a mirror to the whole, just as the whole is seen in each part of the Qur'an. Nursi provides the following example to support his view: The four essential aims of the Qur'an are hinted at *Bismillāh* (In the name of Allah), *al-Ḥamdulillāh* (All praise be to Allah) and the first chapter (*Al-Fatiha*). Because *Bismillāh* came down to order God's servants, "Say!" (*Qul*) is implicit in *Bismillāh*, it is fundamentally implied by the words of the Qur'an. Therefore, there is an indication to prophethood in "Say!"; and a sign to the Godhead in *Bismillāh*; and a sign to divine unity in the prefixing of "*bi-*" of *Bismillāh*; and an allusion to the order (of the universe) and justice in "the Lord of Mercy (*al-Raḥmān*)"; and a hint of the resurrection in "the Giver of Mercy" (*al-Raḥīm*). Similarly, there is an indication of the Godhead in "all praise be to Allah" (*al-ḥamdulillāh*), a sign of divine unity in the *lām* of specification (the "*li-*" of "*li-llah*"). And there is a hint of justice, and also of prophethood in "the Lord and Sustainer of the worlds" (*Rabb*

al-ʿālamīn), because the education of humanity is provided by the prophets. And there is a clear statement of resurrection in "Master of the Day of Judgement" (*Mālik yawm al-dīn*). Similarly, the statement of *Innā aʿṭaynāka al-kawthar*[92] includes these pearls (of the Qur'an's four essential aims).[93] It could be said that as Nursi's analysis of the Qur'an is based on these four fundamental purposes, he also attempted to investigate these realities in a deep way in his collection.

It is important to note that Nursi refers to these notions in a variety of places. For example, regarding the resurrection (*al-hashr*), he precisely states that "about one-third of the Qur'an deals with the Hereafter, most of its short *sūra*s begin with powerful verses evoking it, and it proclaims this truth explicitly or implicitly in hundreds of verses, thereby proving it."[94] In addition, in his commentary *Ishārāt al-I'jāz*, he provides a comparison of faith and unbelief, putting forward the proofs for the unity of God to counter the naturalist and materialist movement. He also clarifies philosophical grounds of worship, the need for prophecy and revelation, and rational proofs for the resurrection.[95] What we recognize is that Nursi consistently refers explicitly or alludes to his four fundamental purposes of the Qur'an in his writings.

If we compare Nursi with the reformist exegetes such as ʿAbduh, it may be inferred that Nursi's main concerns are these aims, which relate to faith, while ʿAbduh focuses on derivation of the general meanings related to guidance (*hidāya*), which can give directives and provide lessons for people, from the Qur'an.[96] On the other hand, they have similar views regarding consciously strengthening belief. As Nursi distinguishes between imitative belief (*taklidî imân*) and substantial (certain) belief (*tahkikî imân*),[97] ʿAbduh also focuses on submissive belief (*idhʿānī* and *inqiyādī belief*), meaning absolute submission.[98] Nursi stresses the fact that belief is renewed (*teceddüt*) via its continued existence (*istimrar*) and is manifested through the succession of interior and exterior evidence. It is certain that the clearer the evidence, the firmer is belief.[99] In this context, Nursi underlines that his collection provides substantial (certain) belief, describing the collection as verification (*taḥqīq*).[100]

It is important to note that the knowledge of Meccan and Medīnan revelations is one of the significant branches in the sciences of the Qur'an (*ʿUlūm al-Qur'an*). It is not simply of historical interest, but it is of particular significance in order to understand and interpret the specific verses. Numerous Qur'anic chapters do include material from both periods, while

there is a difference of view among scholars regarding categorization of a specific passage in some cases. However, in general, this knowledge is a well-established feature, fully applied in the discipline of *tafsīr*. It is also acknowledged that the distinction between Meccan and Medīnan revelations is best derived from the internal evidence of the Qur'anic text itself. However, generally speaking, what we know regarding Meccan and Medīnan revelations is derived from the companions of the Prophet and the successors, and there is no saying of the Prophet on this subject.[101] Then it should be noted that the knowledge of this subject relies on the reports from the earliest period of Islam even though we may identify the chapters from the internal evidence of the text. One might ask how we can distinguish between them.

The authorities in the field affirm that there is a difference between Meccan and Medīnan chapters in terms of style and content.[102] The Meccan stage of the revelation continued for about 13 years, from the first revelation up to the *hijra*, the migration to Medīna (622 CE). The main themes of the Qur'anic revelation of this period are God and His unity, the coming resurrection and judgement, and righteous behaviour. The Medīnan period lasted about ten years, from the *hijra* to the Prophet's death. In this phase, the formation of the Muslim community (*umma*) is the distinctive feature, while Muslims also had a close relationship with a number of other groups such as Jews and Christians.[103] It is evident that the different styles of the Qur'anic chapters and their contents can be indicative of their stages of the revelation. At this point, it can be asked how the reformist thinkers' approach this subject.

In the modern period, while the classical approach still continued, some intellectuals argued that traditional Qur'anic sciences are insufficient, and this field takes people away from the Qur'an.[104] Moreover, ʿAbduh hesitates in accepting any material from outside the Qur'an itself as meaningful towards the interpretation of the Qur'an,[105] and he believes that the Qur'an itself is sufficient; any material from outside of the Qur'an is unnecessary.[106] On the other hand, it is also said, that while the Meccan chapters contain theory, the Medīnan chapters include practice.[107] In the period of neo-modernism, historical branches of the Qur'anic sciences gained importance for the thinkers who argued the historicity of the Qur'an.[108] They consider these reports not only as occasions of revelation but also as occasions of existence for the verses and passages. For example, Fazlur Rahman rests heavily on comprehending the socio-historical background of the revelation in his theory.[109] In addition, Sudanese scholar

M. Mahmūd Tāhā (d. 1985 CE) put forward an interesting approach to the Meccan and Medīnan Qur'an. In his view, the message of the Meccan Qur'an is universal and eternal; while the message of the Medīnan Qur'an, with its legislative rules and necessities, is historically contextualized. Therefore, the message of the Medīnan Qur'an must be replaced by the message of the Meccan Qur'an. The Sharī'a itself, perceived as an applied system of laws, is fundamentally a human product rather than the work of God.[110] Critically thinking, because the knowledge of Meccan and Medīnan revelations are connected with the reports narrated by the earliest generations in the classical period, a number of reformist figures can be highly critical of these narrations. However, since there is internal evidence in the Qur'anic text itself and the historical fact that the Qur'an was revealed gradually over a period of 22 years, Muslim scholars recognize the difference between Meccan and Medīnan revelations. Nevertheless, many miss the point that there are many Qur'anic verses and passages which have no reports of occasions of revelation.

Now I shall analyse Nursi's interpretations regarding Meccan and Medīnan chapters and their stylistic differences. Nursi highlights that Meccan and Medīnan chapters differ from each other in eloquence (*belâğat*) and inimitability (*i'caz*), elaboration (*tafsil*) and conciseness (*icmal*). He clarifies the reasons as follows: Because Meccans were mainly polytheists from the clan of Quraysh, the Qur'an had to employ forceful, eloquent and concise language with a great style, and repeat certain points to confirm its truths. The Meccan *sūra*s repeatedly emphasize the pillars of Islamic faith (*erkân-ı imaniye*) and the category of divine unity in a very strong and inimitably concise language. In Nursi's view, they do so not only in any one page, verse, sentence or word, but even in one letter, via grammatical devices like changing the word-order (*takdim*, *tehir*), through definite articles (*târif*), making a word indefinite (*tenkir*), or omitting and mentioning (*hazf*, *zikir*) certain statements, phrases and sentences. Through these, the Meccan chapters prove the beginning and end of the world, the divine being, and the Hereafter in so powerful a way that the authorities of the science of eloquence have been astonished. Two of Nursi's works, his *Twenty-fifth Word* and his commentary *Ishārāt al-I'jāz*, show that the greatest style of eloquence and the inimitable conciseness reside in the Meccan chapters and verses.[111] His statements clearly demonstrate that in his writings he deals with the pillars of Islamic faith and the categories of divine unity, which are the themes of Meccan *sūra*s. Moreover,

his main concerns are eloquence and inimitability in his Qur'anic exegesis, while certain modern thinkers such as ʿAbduh do not give importance to these aspects.[112] In addition, based on his intentions and themes in his writings, it may be argued that Nursi offers a model that is similar to the Meccan period of the Qur'an in order to revive Islamic thought and the Muslim community.

Medīnan chapters and verses, he goes on, mainly address Jews and Christians. Because of the requirements of circumstance (*mutabık-ı makam*), guidance (*irşad*) and eloquence (*mukteza-yı belâğat*), the passages explain the Sharīʿa's laws, orders, the matters that cause a conflict and particular subjects—not the pillars of Islamic faith and the greates principles of the religion—in a simple, clear (*vâzıh*) and detailed style (*tafsil*). In a unique style special to the Qur'an, these passages usually finish their explanations with a sentence or phrase connected with belief, divine unity, or the Hereafter (*cümle-i tevhidiye ve esmâiye ve uhreviye*) in order to make the laws of the Sharīʿa universal and to secure obedience to them via belief in God. Nursi highlights that, while the Qur'an clarifies the secondary principles of Islam (*teferruat-ı şer'iye*) and social laws (*kavânin-i içtimaiye*), it suddenly raises its audience's attention to the greatest, universal realities, passing from the lesson of the Sharīʿa to the lesson of divine unity. It also changes from an ordinary style to an elevated one. As a result of this, the Qur'an demonstrates that it is both a book of law and wisdom, and a book of creeds, faith, reflection, prayer and call to the divine message.[113] Nursi points out that Medīnan revelations are mainly different from the Meccan ones because of the audience and that Medīnan chapters discuss the Sharīʿa's laws, issues that lead to a conflict, special subjects, and social laws in a simple, clear and comprehensive language. However, he connects Medīnan pericopes, particularly their ends, with the fundamentals of belief, thereby indicating the main themes in his writings. For this reason, it may be said that Nursi can derive the truth of faith from the passages connected with the laws of the Sharīʿa, special subjects, and social laws.

To sum up, in this chapter, I focused on the concept of revelation (*waḥy*) and the Qur'an, and the classical and modernist scholars' approach to this notion, analysing Nursi's views in detail. Next, I examined his approach to the nature and status of the Qur'an as divine revelation. Finally, I investigated his views on the major themes of the Qur'an and its chapters. It could be concluded that Nursi's approach to the notion of revelation and the nature of the Qur'an follows the established mainstream

tradition. However, while his writings demonstrate his ability to maintain a level of traditionalism, he expresses the classical teaching in very different style and language that is distinctive of his approach. He discusses what he perceives as the needs of his time in a way accessible to the modern mind. At the same time, he makes an original contribution to the classical understanding.

Notes

1. Nursi, *İşārāt*, 9.
2. W. Montgomery Watt, *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 20.
3. Ahmad Von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1994), 22–3.
4. Ibid., 23–4; Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 32.
5. Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 22.
6. Q. 42: 51.
7. Von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, 23.
8. Daniel A. Madigan, "Revelation and Inspiration," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2004), 437–8.
9. Q. 26: 192–5; Q. 12: 2.
10. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 33–4.
11. Toshihiko Izutsu, cited in Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 27.
12. Ibid., 27.
13. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 29–30.
14. Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: A User's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 105.
15. Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 28–9.
16. Nasafī, cited in F.E. Peters, *A Reader on Classical Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 173.
17. Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking tradition in modern Islamic thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6–7.
18. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 18.
19. Brown, *Rethinking tradition*, 7, 16; Von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, 18–9.
20. Abū Dāvud, *Sunan*, *Kitab al-Sunna* 6, thk. Naṣir al-Din al-Albānī (Riyad: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1424 AH).
21. Nursi, *The Letters*, 122; *Mektubat*, 137–8, accessed 16 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.2.137
22. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7567.
23. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 102.

24. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 19.
25. Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 30.
26. Mazheruddin Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought in the Muslim World* (Islamabad (Pakistan): Islamic Research Institute, 1982), 53–4.
27. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 183–4.
28. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 66.
29. Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought*, 54; Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 66–7.
30. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 185, 190.
31. Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought*, 55.
32. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 187.
33. Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought*, 55–6; Rahbar, "Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Principles," 105–6.
34. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 192.
35. Ibid., 192–3.
36. Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought*, 56; Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 67.
37. Richard C. Martin, "Createdness of the Qur'ān," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 471; Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 103–4.
38. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 3, 5.
39. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 42, 102; Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 37–8.
40. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 4, 128; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam & Modernity*, 5–7.
41. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 25.
42. Brown, *Rethinking tradition*, 51–2.
43. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 18.
44. Brown, *Rethinking tradition*, 43; Muhammad b. Nasr Marwazī, *Al-Sunna* (Beirut: Muassasa al-Kutub al-Thaqafiyya, 1408 AH), p. 33, no: 104
45. Brown, *Rethinking tradition*, 43.
46. Q. 8: 67.
47. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 19.
48. Brown, *Rethinking tradition*, 56–7.
49. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 17–8.
50. Brown, *Rethinking tradition*, 52–3.
51. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 18.
52. Brown, *Rethinking tradition*, 55.
53. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 19; Brown, *Rethinking tradition*, 44.
54. Ibid., 7–9, 51.
55. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 54, 60.
56. Campanini, *The Qur'an*, 55.

57. Brown, *Rethinking tradition*, 55.
58. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 19–20.
59. Brown, *Rethinking tradition*, 67.
60. Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 30.
61. Fazlur Rahman, cited in Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 26–7.
62. Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 31–2.
63. Campanini, *The Qur'an*, 57–60.
64. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 121–2.
65. Ibid., 122.
66. Ibid., 122; Nursi, *Muhākemat*, 151, accessed 17 April 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.13.151
67. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 187.
68. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 122, 124; *Muhākemat*, 152–3, accessed 17 April 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.13.152
69. Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muḥammad 'Abduh* (Islamic Book Trust: Kuala Lumpur, 2010), 156–7.
70. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 125–7; Nursi, *Muhākemat*, 153–6, accessed 17 April 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.13.153
71. Nursi, *Şuâlar*, 169, accessed 17 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.4.169; *The Rays*, trans. by Hüseyin Akarsu, 140.
72. Ibid., 140–1; Nursi, *Şuâlar*, 170, accessed 17 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.4.170
73. Nursi, *The Words*, 148.
74. Nursi, *The Rays*, 141–2; *Şuâlar*, 171, accessed 18 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.4.171
75. Q. 18: 109.
76. Nursi, *Sözler*, 197, accessed 18 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.197; *The Words*, 149.
77. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 126.
78. Nursi, *The Letters*, 122.
79. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 27.
80. Brown, *Rethinking tradition*, 62; Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, *Hadislerle İslām* (DİB: Ankara, 2014), 1/135.
81. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 66.
82. Von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, 17.
83. Nursi, *The Words*, 388–9; *Sözler*, 490–1, accessed 18 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.490
84. Nursi, *Sözler*, 423, accessed 18 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.423; *The Words*, 332.
85. Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, 121.

86. Nursi, *The Words*, 389; *Sözler*, 492, accessed 18 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.492
87. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 47.
88. Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 79–80.
89. Nursi, *İşārāt*, 9, 121; Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 11.
90. Nursi, *İşārāt*, 9; Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 19–20.
91. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 12.
92. "We have truly given abundance to you [Prophet]," Q. 108: 1.
93. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 20–1; *İşārāt*, 10–11.
94. Nursi, *The Words*, 111.
95. Yıldırım, "Said Nursi'nin İşârâtü'l-İ'caz."
96. ʿAbduh and Riḍā, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Ḥakīm*, 25; Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 101.
97. Nursi, *The Words*, 699.
98. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 109.
99. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 49; *İşārāt*, 41.
100. Nursi, *Mektubat*, 424.
101. Von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, 88–9; Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 88–9.
102. Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 102.
103. Von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, 85–6.
104. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 33.
105. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 25.
106. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 97.
107. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 245.
108. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 101.
109. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 4, 128.
110. Campanini, *The Qur'an*, 72.
111. Nursi, *Sözler*, 612–3, accessed 19 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.612; *The Words*, 469.
112. ʿAbduh and Riḍā, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Ḥakīm*, 17–31; Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 100–2.
113. Nursi, *Sözler*, 613–4, accessed 19 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.613; *The Words*, 469–70.

CHAPTER 5

Qur'anic Exegesis and Said Nursi's Exegetical Methodology

Contents

This chapter firstly will examine the place of Qur'anic exegesis among Islamic disciplines in the classical and modern period, ascertaining Nursi's general approach to Qur'anic exegesis and his views on this discipline. Then, we will focus on his hermeneutics in approaching the Qur'an. Thereafter, we will analyse his views on tradition-based exegesis and reason-based exegesis that are commonly utilized in the past and present. We will discuss his use of the conventional exegetical sources in his collection, his interpretation of the Qur'anic verses via the exegetical reports, and his analysis of the text linguistically and rhetorically, providing a number of examples from the collection.

We start by discussing the classification of the sciences in relation to Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) in the tradition of Islam.

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5.1 Classification of Islamic Sciences and Their Functions in the Tradition of Islam with Special Reference to *Tafsīr* (Qur'anic Exegesis)

There has been debate about the scientific identity of *tafsīr* discipline from the early period of Islamic history. Since the third century AH, Muslim scholars have discussed whether *tafsīr* is a scientific field or not. As a result of this discussion, three distinct opinions have emerged. While some scholars think that *tafsīr* is not a science, other scholars accept that it is a separate science. According to a third group, it is a hypothetical/uncertain science (*ẓannī ʿilm*), without objectivity.

The Muslim scholars of the first group, for example al-Farabi (d. 339/950) and Kharizmī (d. 387–997), do not consider *tafsīr* to be a science in their classification of the sciences. Khādimī (d. 1176/1762) argues that *tafsīr* includes details and particulars, but it does not have comprehensive principles. A science that does not have comprehensive rules does not exist. Nowadays, this issue is also discussed, and proponents of this idea emphasize that *tafsīr* is not a scientific discipline, rather it is a field that exhibits the Muslims' knowledge connected with several sciences and cultures. In other words, it does not produce knowledge regarding a particular subject, rather it is a great number of collected comprehensive pieces of information that includes everything considered to be in Islamic culture and civilization.[1] However, these approaches may be open to a number of criticisms, and arguments against *tafsīr* as a science may not necessarily lead to this conclusion.

On the other hand, a great number of eminent scholars acknowledge the scientific identity of *tafsīr* as a discipline, emphasizing that it is a distinct scientific field. For instance, Ibn Hazm (d. 456/1064) classifies the sciences and shows *tafsīr* as a first science in religious and legal sciences. Moreover, Imām Ghazzālī judges *tafsīr* to be a science, listing it in complementary sciences (*al-Ulūm al-Mutammimāt*). Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun, in his classification, divides the sciences into traditional and intellectual, mentioning Qur'anic exegesis at the top of the traditional disciplines. Besides, Sayyid Sharif Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), al-Kāfiyajī (d. 879/1478), and al-Ṭāhir b. ʿĀshūr also highlight that *tafsīr* is a separate scientific area. Al-Ṭāhir b. ʿĀshūr underlines that *tafsīr* has to be judged as a science before all else since it is the source of *fiqh*, Arabic grammar and linguistics. Even poem glosses are considered to be a scientific area. As a third group, some scholars such as Molla Fanāri (d. 834/1431) argue that

tafsīr is a hypothetical/uncertain science, without objectivity. Their reason for this is that the source of *tafsīr*, occasions of revelation and generally the reports, are mainly individual reports (*khabar wāḥid*), and thus they are not certain. Since its source is uncertain, *tafsīr* itself is also an uncertain science.[2]

In conclusion, it is reasonably stated that the majority of the great authorities acknowledge that *tafsīr* is a distinct scientific area, and their arguments seem to be stronger and more reasonable than those who do not consider *tafsīr* to be a science. Here it is worth mentioning also that *tafsīr* can be considered to be a comprehensive science that includes other Islamic sciences and provides them with materials.[3] The discussion about the scientific identity of *tafsīr* may be a useful example in order to demonstrate the place of Qur'anic exegesis in the scientific history of Islam.

It is important to note that in the scientific tradition of Islam, sciences are mainly divided into two categories: traditional sciences (*al-Ulūm al-Naqlī*) and intellectual sciences (*al-Ulūm al-ʿAqlī*). According to this category, *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis), *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *kalām* (Islamic systematic theology) are considered as traditional sciences.[4] For example, Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1405) classifies the sciences into traditional and intellectual, mentioning Qur'anic exegesis at the top of the traditional disciplines.[5] In this context, it is worth mentioning that Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. circa 333/944) emphasizes that Qur'anic exegesis is the duty of the Prophet's companions, who witnessed occasions of revelation.[6] In addition, Imām Ghazzālī describes *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* disciplines as pure traditional sciences (*naqlī maḥḍ*), and he adds that mastering such sciences is easy. Everyone, both old and young, is equal in learning the knowledge of these disciplines because the power of memorization is enough, and there is not much scope for the intellect in these fields. At this point, he also underlines that *tafsīr* only deals with the meaning of the Qur'an. He refers to pure intellectual sciences (*ʿaqlī maḥḍ*) such as mathematics, geometry and astronomy, emphasizing that the greatest science is the science in which intellect and tradition go together. *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *usūl al-fiqh* are such disciplines.[7]

Now I shall analyse the function of Qur'anic exegesis among other traditional disciplines.

It is important to note that the discipline of *tafsīr* aims to provide an explanation for the Qur'anic text in terms of hermeneutics in Islamic tradition. For this purpose, Qur'anic scholars study the text in two funda-

mental areas: linguistics and history. Taking into account the sciences of the Qur'an (*'Ulūm al-Qur'an*), subtitles and research areas of *tafsīr*, it is clear that their main concerns are the two fields above.[8] Focusing on occasions of revelation in Qur'anic exegesis means that Qur'anic passages are expressions related to a particular period of history. In other words, *tafsīr* follows a method of linguistic and historical analysis, and it uses necessary sub-sciences such as grammar, rhetoric, ḥadīth and history for this purpose. At this point, it is useful to point out that the main aim of this method in *tafsīr* is to protect the Qur'anic text, and to not allow going beyond the text by subjective tendencies. Basically, *tafsīr*, with its analytical and descriptive character, has become the most fundamental means for carrying the language, history, the basic texts (Qur'an and ḥadīth) and the circumstances of the formative period and the tradition to every generation and for considering its starting point. Moreover, Qur'anic exegesis strengthened the primary meanings of the text, and it played an important role in laying the groundwork for *kalām* and *fiqh*, which carry out subsequent points of analysis.[9] Thus, it is obvious where the discipline stands in relation to other traditional disciplines. Qur'anic exegesis examines the text in the light of linguistic and historical analysis, thereby ascertaining its meanings. Essentially, it takes us to the time of Qur'anic revelation and the occasions of the formative period.

Another aspect of the topic is that classical *tafsīr* perceives the Qur'an to be a discourse, and it starts the process of interpretation from this point. In this regard, Mehmet Paçacı notes that

> As the subject of the discipline of *tafsir* the Qur'an went through a process of becoming textual discourse. The process of transformation from oral discourse to written one is concurrently the process of autonomization of the Qur'anic discourse from its historical context. Classical *tafsir* aims at going back to (the) original oral discourse mode of the Qur'anic text and starts the process of interpretation from this original point. At this descriptive level of interpretation the narrations from the first generation on both (the) historical and linguistic context of the Qur'anic discourse constitute the main sources of interpretation. The normative disciplines of *fiqh* and *kalām* mostly implemented a method that takes the Qur'an and other sources of the religion as autonomized texts. Modernist criticism of not following a holistic approach of interpretation against classical *tafsir* is problematic since almost every sentence of the Qur'an has its own historical context. Moreover linguistic analysis of the Qur'anic sentences and words could be done only studying them one by one. Besides *israiliyyat* narrations are used as available

historical sources mostly for the stories of earlier prophets despite their authenticity issue frequently raised by modernist position against classical *tafsir*.[10]

Then it is concluded that the main aim of Qur'anic exegesis as a discipline is going back to the circumstances of the first period of the Qur'anic revelation. Its major sources are the reports about the historical and linguistic context of the Qur'an. However, the exegete who has a limited number of disciplines connected with linguistics and history does not complete the process of understanding. The normative disciplines of *fiqh* and *kalām* continue the process of understanding from the place where the discipline of *tafsīr* finished, and they produce rules that have practical results. While systematic theology establishes a world view, religious ideology and creed, Islamic jurisprudence produces the legal rules. Furthermore, the meaning of the Qur'an is different for *fiqh* and *kalām*. While the Qur'an is a subject and material for *tafsīr*, it is an input into practical reasoning for *fiqh* and *kalām*. In one sense, *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* glosses are sources of these normative disciplines.[11]

In Islamic tradition, another characteristic of classical *tafsīr* is that *tafsīr* does not provide any rule, and its interpretive function is confined to explanation of the Qur'an. Qur'anic exegesis is not a prescriptive or binding discipline. In other words, knowledge produced by *tafsīr* is not practical, and it has no power of sanction. For example, *tafsīr*'s relationship with any verse is that it attempts to ascertain the meaning of the text rather than producing any normative conclusion. Derivation of such normative conclusions from this meaning for certain particular circumstances is the duty of *fiqh*. In other words, in Islamic tradition, the theologians and the jurists take the process of interpretation to this point, and they derive normative values from textual sources.[12]

What we notice here is that traditional disciplines developed to interpret the basic Islamic sources such as the Qur'an and sunna, and they had distinctive functions, while having connections with each other. Firstly, classical *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* take the process of interpretation, and they provide the primary meaning of the text. As the normative disciplines, *fiqh* and *kalām* use *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* materials, and they derive normative conclusions. But, *tafsīr* is not a binding discipline; it has no power of sanction in the scientific tradition of Islam.

In the modern period, however, a number of scholars approached the Qur'an differently under the impact of the West. Modern scholars held the

view of *sola scriptura* and of "solely inspiration from the Qur'an", ignoring the tradition. In their view, "solely the Qur'an" was enough as the source of Islam. In this context, it is worth mentioning that this approach is similar to the notion of *sola scriptura* in the Protestant reformation movement in Christianity in the West.[13] Actually, some of the reformers' ideas and clear statements indicate this reality. For example, Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī argued the need for Reform movement among Muslims, similarly to the way of the Protestant movement under M. Luther (d. 1546). ʿAbduh also believed that a reform movement was essential for the Muslim world. As for Sayyid Ahmad Khan, his following statement clearly shows his view in this regard: "The fact is that India needs not merely a Steele or an Addison, but also, and primarily, a Luther."[14]

Therefore, reformist thought aimed to ignore the tradition, mainly holding the idea of *sola corano*. The Qur'an was recognized as a document by itself, and it was considered to be independent of the tradition. In modernists' view, the Qur'an was the primary source of salvation, whereas tradition was the greatest obstacle to it.[15] At this point, one might ask if we can look at the Qur'an as the single independent text in terms of hermeneutics. The reason for this question is that there are a great number of references and allusions to the prophetic tradition, the historical materials in the Qur'an. For traditionalists, it cannot be looked at the Qur'an as the single independent text since the Qur'an needs the traditional reports and references. Nonetheless, modernist scholars consider the Qur'an to be an independent text, remaining sceptical about tradition. As a result of these reformists' understandings of the Qur'an, their approach to the traditional Islamic disciplines differed considerably from the classical view.

In the modern period, because of the reformist ideas, the traditional classification of the sciences collapsed, and the contents and the functions of Islamic disciplines that interpret the Qur'an changed. And relations among the disciplines that interpret the textual sources were broken. The normative disciplines such as *kalām* and particularly *fiqh* largely lost their functions. As for *tafsīr*, it lost its classical function in Islamic disciplines, and was defined by new functions. *Tafsīr*, refined from its classical elements and redefined, was seen to be the best means to restart everything and to produce a new paradigm around the Qur'an. Therefore, the functions of systematic theology and Islamic law were given to Qur'anic exegesis, which placed Qur'anic commentary ahead of all other disciplines. Modernist discourses and opinions were produced in the light of the Qur'an and *tafsīr*, considered to be the sole resource and discipline.

Consequently, the functions of Islamic disciplines were considered under the general title of *tafsīr*, whose function is "solely true understanding of the Qur'an", in the modern period. Instead of the tradition, modernist intellectuals used new disciplines and methods that were taken from a number of the tendencies which were produced by the modern age, redefining the old ones. For example, Fazlur Rahman believes that until the modern period no method of Qur'anic exegesis had been sufficiently developed in order to understand the Qur'an. A method of hermeneutics needs to be developed in order to meet the needs of Muslims in the modern world. Embracing the historical method, arbitrary interpretations will come to an end at once.[16] In the eyes of the modernist intellectuals, "solely the Qur'an" is of particular significance, and *tafsīr* became a major field in order to produce a number of normative rules from the Qur'an in response to the concerns of modernity.

Another characteristic of the modernist approach is its emphasis on the *maqāṣid* tradition. The *maqāṣid* is a development in the area of law. Shāṭibī (d. 766/1388) attempted to make a system of what he called *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (objectives of the religion). According to the leading figures of *maqāṣid*, there are a number of universal values such as protection of life, property, honour, progeny and religion; and these values represent the key objectives of the religion. Some scholars in the early twentieth century used this *maqāṣid* literature in order to argue for change in the interpretation of some of the ethico-legal rules of the Qur'an.[17] Moreover, the modernist thinkers used classical *maqāṣid* to ascertain universal principles of the Qur'an. In their view, following the *maqāṣid* method, a number of new values could be developed in response to the needs of the modern world. Derivation of universal values of the Qur'an enabled them to go beyond the literal meaning of the text and to produce normative rules.[18] However, it should be noted here that the scholars of *maqāṣid* did not mean by their approach what the modernist thinkers attempted to do. For example, traditional scholars did not argue for change in the interpretation of certain ethico-legal rules of the Qur'an on the basis of *maqāṣid* method. What modern scholars have attempted is to broaden a method on the basis of the *maqāṣid* tradition.

It is important to keep in mind that early modernism emerged in the colonial period, aiming to synthesize Western thought and sciences with the best of the Islamic tradition. Furthermore, the writings of the early modernists were apologetic.[19] Therefore, early modern scholars confined the idea of "true understanding of the Qur'an" mainly to a number of

modern theological issues such as gender equality, women's testimony, monogamy, denial of the institution of slavery, redefinition of interest, prescribed punishments (*ḥadd* punishments) and consultation (*al-shūra*) that could be considered under the principles of the French Revolution such as liberty, equality and fraternity.[20] While the modernist scholars attempt to synthesize modern Western concepts with the Qur'anic text, the traditional scholars insist that the Qur'an has concepts of equality, justice and freedom that include polygamy, slavery and *ḥadd* punishments.

Having discussed the classification of Islamic sciences with special reference to *tafsīr* in Islamic tradition and their place in Muslim modernism, now I shall focus on Nursi's approach to Qur'anic exegesis in order to ascertain where he stands in relation to this topic.

When Said Nursi's writings and his collection are collectively evaluated, we see that he has great respect for the traditional division of Islamic disciplines. As mentioned before, Nursi underlines that Islamic disciplines should be revitalized in a balanced way on the basis of the tradition. In this regard, he describes Mustafa Sabri Efendi and Mūsā Jār Allah as deficient (*tafrīt*) and excessive (*ifrāt*), respectively.[21] The reason for his approach is that Mustafa Sabri Efendi had criticized Ibn al-ʿArabī, and Mūsā Jār Allah had some modernist views.

Moreover, Nursi solely focuses on the Qur'an, considering the collection to be a Qur'anic commentary. As he states, his writings explain, prove and elucidate with powerful arguments the Qur'an's truths related to belief.[22] Then it could be said that his main concern is theological subjects and the Qur'anic approach to them. Nursi's revival of Islam and his renewal (*tajdid*) are based on systematic theology (*kalām*). Through his writings, he attempts to establish a world view and religious creed and to strengthen Islamic faith. As for his one-volume commentary, *Ishārāt al-I'jāz*, it is a reason-based exegesis (*tafsīr bi-al-ra'y*), and he utilizes the methods of classical exegesis in his interpretation except for the connections between chapters.[23]

Furthermore, while Nursi combines a number of Islamic disciplines, and various readings related to the major disciplines can be found in his writings, he does not give any normative function to *tafsīr*, not placing Qur'anic commentary ahead of all other disciplines. Besides, Nursi maintains the traditional approach regarding modern issues such as polygamy, inheritance, interest and prescribed punishments.[24] He does not disregard the traditional understanding by producing any normative rule in relation to these issues solely via the Qur'anic text and *tafsīr* discipline. Finally, it

needs to be emphasized that Nursi's approach can be described as *kalāmisation* of *tafsīr* and other disciplines. Actually, his methodology seems to be compatible with the traditional division of Islamic disciplines. For example, according to Ghazzālī, the discipline of *kalām* is the most comprehensive science. *Tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh* and *usūl al-fiqh* disciplines share and examine areas that *kalām* deals with entirely.[25]

5.2 Qur'anic Hermeneutics: The Views of Said Nursi

As stated before, Nursi's approach to *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis) relies on the inimitability of the Qur'an (*Iʿjāz al-Qur'an*).[26] In his Qur'anic commentary *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz* (*Signs of Miraculousness*), he particularly provides examples in detail in relation to peculiarities of *naẓm* (word-order, composition), *balāghat* (rhetoric) and *uslūb* (literary style), which are the primary aspects of the Qur'an's inimitability. In this context, he considers the primary elements in order to completely evaluate the nature of the Qur'an, its texts and its speech. In his view, these elements are as follows: the speaker, the person addressed, the purpose and when the words are spoken (occasion).[27] It could be said that these elements may be considered to be Nursi's hermeneutics. Nursi states:

> They [literati, authors] say we should consider what is spoken, not the speaker. But I say that eloquence requires considering all of these points: Who says it? To whom is it said? On what occasion is it said? On what authority is it said? For what purpose is it said?[28]

Nursi refers to these four elements in a number of places. For example, he states that the Qur'an cannot be compared with other speech because there are different categories of speech. Speech derives its superiority (*ulviyet*), power, strength and beauty from the following four sources: the speaker (*mutakallim*), the person addressed (*mukhāṭab*), the purpose (*maqsad*) and when the word is spoken (situation, *maqām*). Its source is not only the occasion (*maqām*), as certain literary people have wrongly thought. Therefore, not only the speech itself should be considered. If we study the source of the Qur'an carefully, we will comprehend the degree of its eloquence, superiority and beauty. Thus, in order to understand the strength of a speech, we need to look at these four elements. According to

their degrees, the category of the speech is understood.[29] Nursi expands on these elements, providing a great number of examples in his collection.

For example, he goes on state that because speech is first judged according to the speaker, if this speech is in the form of command and prohibition, it includes a will and power compatible with the speaker's rank. Then this speech may have an effect like electricity, and its superiority and power multiply. At this context, Nursi quotes two following verses from the Qur'an: "Earth, swallow up your water, and sky, hold back"[30]; "Then He turned to the sky, which was smoke—He said to it and the earth, 'Come into being, willingly or not,' and they said, 'We come willingly."[31] In his interpretation, these verses mean that

> "O heaven and Earth, come willingly or unwillingly, and submit yourselves to My Wisdom and Power. Come out of non-existence (*adem*) and appear as places where My works of art will be exhibited." They answered: "We come in perfect obedience (*kemâl-i itaat*). We will carry out, by Your leave and Power, all duties You have assigned us."[32]

If we consider the sublimity and power of those real and effective commands that have power and will, it is certain that they are different from any human command that has no authority over the sky and the Earth. The difference is like that between an order from a commander and the order of just anyone. In this regard, Nursi indicates the fact that the greater this authority and power, the more effective and exalted is his speech. The difference is recognized between "when He wills something to be, His way is to say, 'Be'– and it is!"[33] and people's words. The "angels" of the words of the Creator are different from the words of the people. The words of the Qur'an, coming out from the Supreme Throne of the Lord of Mercy, are "mother of pearls" of guidance, sources of the realities of belief and the fundamentals of Islam. They are composed of the eternal address embedded in divine knowledge, power and will. Therefore, they are different from the worthless human words of whim and desire. No human words can be compared with the words of the Qur'an.[34]

In another place, Nursi reiterates those essential factors that in order to evaluate a word's value, sublimity and eloquence, we need to ask who spoke it, to whom it was spoken and why it was spoken. In his view, when we think in this way, the Qur'an has no equal and is beyond the scope of human speech, because it is the word of the Lord of all beings, the speech of the Creator. It is God's speech; nothing in it causes us to perceive that

it has been fabricated by someone and then falsely ascribed to God.[35] Nursi compares the words of the Qur'an with other words, stating that all other words are like small reflections of stars in a glass in comparison to the stars themselves.[36]

Based on the information about, it is concluded that Nursi underlines the four elements in order to judge a word's value. Those are the speaker (*mutakallim*), the person addressed (*mukhāṭab*), the purpose (*maqsad*) and when the word is spoken (situation, *maqām*). And those can be seen as Nursi's hermeneutics. Besides, those elements indicate that *balāghat* (rhetoric) and *uslūb* (literary style) play a great role in Nursi's approach to the Qur'an, unlike ʿAbduh's and many other modern thinkers' views on these hermeneutical aspects.

As stated before, Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) is divided into two broad categories: *tafsīr bi- al-ma'thūr* (tradition-based exegesis) and *tafsīr bi-al-ra'y* (reason-based exegesis or exegesis based on independent reasoning or considered opinion) in the discipline of *tafsīr*.[37] We shall focus next on Nursi's hermeneutics in relation to the types of Qur'anic exegesis.

5.3 Tradition-Based Exegesis

It is good to scrutinize *tafsīr bi- al-ma'thūr* (tradition-based exegesis), providing information regarding its value from the classical perspective and a number of modernist scholars' approach to this form of exegesis. Subsequently, I will go into detail over Nursi's views on tradition-based exegesis, elaborating on it through various examples from his writings.

Tradition-based exegesis is defined as interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, by a ḥadīth of the Prophet, or by the opinions of the earliest Muslims (the companions of the Prophet, or the successors), restricting the scope for independent reasoning in interpretation of the Qur'anic text.[38] In other words, it signifies all interpretations of the Qur'an that can be traced back to a sound source via a chain of transmission such as the Qur'an itself, the interpretation of the Prophet and the interpretation of the companions.[39] In another definition, it is an exegesis that relies on the Qur'an, the Prophet's *sunna* (normative behaviour), the reports narrated from the earliest scholars, Arabic language, and pre-Islamic Arab poems.[40] In this context, it is worth mentioning that *isrā'īliyyāt* reports (Biblical materials) were used by the earliest Muslims in order to interpret the Qur'an in the early stages of Islamic history.[41] *Isrā'īliyyāt* narrations are used as available historical sources mostly for the stories of earlier

prophets.[42] Therefore, these reports are also included in tradition-based exegesis. It is concluded that this type of exegesis means the interpretation of the Qur'an through the Qur'an, the prophetic tradition and the traditional reports from the earliest authorities. This is one of the most significant forms of exegesis in the history of *tafsīr*.

However, in the modern period, a number of modern scholars such as M. ʿAbduh approached *tafsīr bi-al-ma'thūr* (tradition-based exegesis) quite differently from the classical understanding. For example, ʿAbduh[43] denies the authority and the validity of certain traditions narrated from the first generations of Muslims. He does not accept their relevance to Qur'anic interpretation. According to ʿAbduh, the classical interpretations are to be rejected since they attempt to clarify something that the Qur'an left unexplained, do not take the context into account and rely on a tradition that is doubtful. He also believes that Qur'an commentaries must not include theoretical speculations, grammatical monographs and learned quotations.[44] Moreover, in ʿAbduh's view, tradition-based commentaries conceal the Qur'an, and the readers of such commentaries stray from the purposes of the Qur'an.[45] Therefore, ʿAbduh mainly disregarded the classical commentaries in his interpretation of the Qur'an.[46] In general, in the writings of the modernist exegetes we can find various objections against the classic interpreters.[47]

One of the most important aspects of modernist exegesis is the sceptical approach to the ḥadīth, the major source of tradition-based exegesis.[48] A number of modern scholars denied that ḥadīth were part of the revelation, or even an interpretation of the Qur'an.[49] For example, several intellectuals argue that prophetic traditions and sunna restrict the Qur'anic text to particular meanings, while our understanding of the Qur'an improves over the centuries.[50] Ahmad Khan argues that too heavily resting on ḥadīth for the interpretation of the Qur'an puts at risk the universality of the Qur'an.[51] Besides, *Ahl-i-Qur'an* (followers of the Qur'an) movement clearly rejects all supports to the interpretation of the Qur'an, including sunna. The proponents of this movement believe that the Qur'an does not need anything external for its interpretation except for a sufficient knowledge of Arabic.[52] As for ʿAbduh, he is not interested in ḥadīth in his exegesis and marginalizes the sunna.[53]

Another important aspect of the modernist approach is that there is a critical attitude towards *isrā'īliyyāt* (Biblical materials in *tafsīr*).[54] The rejection of *isrā'īliyyāt* became a major concern of Qur'anic exegesis from the reformist movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This

was influenced by historical criticism in the West from certain modern scholars such as ʿAbduh.[55] Modernist figures often reject the *isrā'īliyyāt* traditions due to their irrational, miraculous and fantastical features. For example, ʿAbduh writes, in his interpretation of the first chapter of the Qur'an, that *isrā'īliyyāt* reports are not commensurate with reason. His pupil Rashīd Riḍā even argued that these reports had been fabricated in order to weaken Islam.[56]

As we have seen, tradition-based exegesis is one of the most dominant types of exegesis from the earliest period of Islam up to the present. However, a critical approach to this form of exegesis emerged in the modern period. In this context, it needs to be analysed where Nursi stands in relation to these classical and modern approach to *tafsīr bi- al-ma'thūr* (tradition-based exegesis).

First of all, it should be stated that Nursi acknowledges the authority and the validity of certain traditions narrated from the first generations of Muslims, accepting their relevance to Qur'anic interpretation. At this point, Nursi draws attention to the earliest figures and confirmed authorities who compiled the six *ḥadīth* collections such as Bukhārī and Muslim, highlighting their reliability. History books and biographies of the Prophet indicate that the companions, along with preserving the Qur'an, did their best in order to record the Prophet's deeds and words, particularly those about miracles and divine orders, and to verify their authenticity. In his view, they never disregarded even a minor act of the Prophet. Numerous companions wrote down the miracles and traditions about the religious commands, particularly "Seven ʿAbdullahs" such as ʿAbd Allah ibn ʿAbbās (the Interpreter of the Qur'an), and ʿAbd Allah ibn ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAs (d. 65 AH). After some 30 or 40 years, thousands of researchers of the successors recorded these reports, and later on the four imāms of Islamic jurisprudence and thousands of investigator traditionists also wrote them down and transmitted them. Two centuries after the Prophet's emigration, the compilers of the six most authentic *ḥadīth* collections, such as Bukhārī and Muslim, preserved the traditions.[57]

What's more, Nursi points out that we should believe in the literal and explicit truths of the Qur'an (*hakaik-i zâhiriye-i Kur'âniye*) expounded by the righteous predecessors (*salaf*) because belief in the certain and true realities forming the essentials of the Qur'an and Islam is necessary. He goes on to clarify that the Qur'an clearly states that it was revealed in clear Arabic; therefore, its meaning is clear and understandable. The divine speech gives attention to, strengthens and expounds on these meanings.

Denying them means contradicting God and the messenger's comprehension. In his view, the explicit meanings forming the basic Qur'anic truths (*maânî-i mensûsa*) came from the source of messengership and were transmitted via established reliable means (*müteselsilen*). At this point, Nursi mentions the exegete Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī as an example. Al-Ṭabarī connected each verse's meaning with the source of messengership through reliable chains of transmission (*muan'an senet*), and he recorded a most comprehensive Qur'anic commentary.[58] Moreover, Nursi underlines that authentic traditions (*ehâdis-i sahiha*) are sufficient for us in order to interpret the Qur'an, and we are satisfied with true narratives (*tevarih-i sahiha*) evaluated on the scales of reason. What reliably interprets the Qur'an is mainly the Qur'an itself and the sound-reported *ḥadīth*. The prophetic traditions are a mine of truth and inspire the truth.[59] Here it can be said that only a small number of the exegetical reports are *ḥadīth*s (ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad). However, Nursi considers the reports narrated by the companions and the successors to be *maʿnawī mutawātir* (consensus in meaning) even though these reports are not the Prophet's ḥadīths.

Furthermore, he points out the fact that the Qur'an's subtle meanings and its fine points are found spread in Qur'an commentaries, and a new commentary should be based on that exegetical literature and written by a committee of authoritative scholars.[60] Besides, Nursi wrote his one-volume commentary on the front in the first year of the First World War without any book or source. Therefore, what he wrote is made up only of what occurred to his heart because it was not possible to have any books or commentaries to refer to. In this context, he highlights that if these inspirations of his are suitable for Qur'an commentaries, these are right and acceptable. However, if they include contradictory aspects against authoritative exegetical literature, these can be referred to his own faults.[61] Thus, it is concluded that Nursi accepts the authority and the validity of the prophetic traditions and the sound exegetical reports narrated from the first generations of Muslims. He follows very well-established exegetical traditions.

Secondly, it is important to note that while Nursi's one-volume commentary and his overall exegetical endeavour are mainly considered to be *tafsīr bi-al-ra'y* (reason-based exegesis),[62] sometimes he uses the method of tradition-based exegesis, referring to the prophetic tradition and the exegetical reports from the earliest authorities in his interpretation of the Qur'an. Now, we shall examine each type of interpretation under tradition-based exegesis used by Nursi, providing a number of examples from his writings.

The first type of interpretation in tradition-based exegesis is *interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an*. This means that difficult passages or verses of the Qur'an are explained in another part of the Qur'an. An unclear verse may have its explanation in another Qur'anic verse. This method is considered by many exegetes to be the best type of interpretation and the highest source of *tafsīr*. Attempting to explain a Qur'anic verse by referring to another verse is regarded as the first and primary duty of the exegetes.[63] Here it is important to bear in mind that the early modern scholars' main concern is the Qur'an, and they emphasize that the meaning is elucidated with the Qur'an itself because God takes full responsibility for the interpretation. At this point, they refer to Q. 75: 19, "and We shall make it clear".[64] Thus, it can be said that in general many authorities in Qur'anic exegesis agree with this type of interpretation.

Nursi also stresses the importance of this interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, stating that one part of the Qur'an expounds on another. In his interpretation of Q. 1: 7, "the path of those You have blessed", he refers to Q. 4: 69, "Whoever obeys God and the Messenger will be among those He has blessed: the messengers, the truthful, those who bear witness to the truth, and the righteous–what excellent companions these are!".[65] In another example, in his interpretation of the expression of *al-ṣāliḥāt* (good deeds) in Q. 2: 25, he states that this word is left unclear. M. ʿAbduh thinks that here it has a general meaning since people know full well what good deeds are. However, Nursi maintains that this expression is general and ambiguous because it relies on the details at the beginning of the chapter. Q. 2: 3, "keep up the prayer, and give out of what We have provided for them", provides explanation of *al-ṣāliḥāt* (good deeds) in Q. 2: 25.[66] In addition, in his interpretation of Q. 2: 28, "How can you ignore God when you were lifeless and He gave you life…", he makes a reference to Q. 76: 1, "man was nothing to speak of".[67] In this context, Nursi also highlighted that just as the Qur'an's verses interpret each other, the parts of the Book of the Universe interpret each other also.[68] Then it should be reasonably noted that Nursi gives importance to this form of exegesis and intertextuality in order to elucidate the Qur'anic text.

The second type of interpretation in tradition-based exegesis is *interpretation of the Qur'an by the Prophet*. In general, Muslim scholars underline that this form of exegesis is the second most authoritative and valid interpretation. The Prophet's duty is to elaborate and explain the Qur'an. There are various examples recorded in relation to this type of exegesis in the prophetic tradition.[69] Nursi does not often make a reference to a

ḥadīth of the Prophet in his interpretation of the Qur'an, but in a number of places he does mention the prophetic tradition.

For example, in his interpretation of Q. 2: 25, "Whenever they are given sustenance from the fruits of these Gardens, they will say, 'We have been given this before,' because they were provided with something like it", he refers to a ḥadīth regarding the expression of "they were provided with something like it". According to this ḥadīth, sustenance will be similar in form but different in taste.[70] In another example, regarding "the seven heavens" in Q. 2: 29, he quotes a prophetic tradition that "The heavens are a wave held back".[71] Moreover, Nursi indicates a number of the prophetic traditions related to the virtues of religious commands. For example, about the formal prayer and *zakāt* (almsgiving) in Q. 2: 3, he says that just as the formal prayer is the pillar of religion, *zakāt* is the bridge of Islam.[72]

The third type of interpretation is *interpretation of the Qur'an by the Companions*. It is worth mentioning that the companions' exegesis (*tafsīr*) has been seen as the most significant source in order to interpret the Qur'an after the prophetic exegesis in the tradition of *tafsīr* because they were familiar with the revelation of the Qur'an and occasions of its revelation.[73] While many companions engaged in Qur'anic exegesis, only a few companions of the Prophet reportedly contributed directly to interpretation of the Qur'an. They included the first four caliphs, ʿĀʾishah (d. 678), ʿAbd Allah ibn ʿAbbās, Ubayy ibn Kaʿb, ʿAbd Allah ibn Masʿūd and Zayd ibn Thābit (d. 665). The most celebrated ones are ʿAbd Allah ibn ʿAbbās, who is well known as the "Interpreter of the Qur'an", Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 660) and ʿAbd Allah ibn Masʿūd. In their interpretation, their sources are the Qur'an (interpretation of the Qur'an in the light of the Qur'an), the prophetic tradition, their intellectual effort and their own understanding of the text and the narratives of the People of the Book.[74]

Nursi's approach to the companions' exegesis may be of particular significance because he often puts emphasis on the path of the companions in his writings. For example, he states that the Qur'an became the true and sufficient source of guidance for the greatest saints among the companions of the Prophet and the two succeeding generations. This illustrates that the Qur'an declares the truth at all times and inspires enough light for the greatest saints. In Nursi's view, passing from Islam's outward practice (*zâhir*) to its truth (*hakikat*) can be achieved in two ways: by joining a spiritual order (*tarikat berzahı*) and rising via its ranks (*kat-ı merâtip*), or

directly through divine grace (*lûtf-u İlâhî*) without joining a spiritual order. The latter path is the most direct way, and it was followed by the companions and their successors. In this context, Nursi believes that it can be said that his collection and *The Words* are able to reach the truth by following this most direct way.[75]

In another place, he goes on to state that the companions are blessed with the rank of major sainthood (*walayat al-kubrā*), reached through a direct inheritance of the prophecy (*warāthat al-nubuwwa*). Without having to follow a religious order, and by fully observing the religious commands, they pass directly to the truth and finally attain the ultimate closeness to God. This sainthood is the most direct and extremely great way, even though it is seldom favoured with wonder-working. According to Nursi, the companions reached the rank of major sainthood through reflection, attraction and the elixir of the Prophet's presence without having to follow a spiritual order's discipline for many years. Therefore, the way of the companions and their followers is the safest and broadest way.[76]

While Nursi emphasizes the path of the companions and their way to penetrate to the truth, he does not often refer to the interpretation of the companions and the successors in his writings. Occasionally, he relies on this type of exegesis in his interpretation. For example, in his interpretation of Q. 2: 21, "People, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, so that you may be mindful [of Him]", Nursi mentions Ibn ʿAbbās's exegesis. According to Ibn ʿAbbās, the meaning of "worship" in question is "profess God's unity (*waḥḍidū*)". Nursi points out that the verse is about the proof of divine unity on the basis of Ibn ʿAbbās's exegesis.[77] In another example, he makes a reference to Ibn ʿAbbās again regarding rewards of food and marriage in Paradise mentioned in Q. 2: 25. As Nursi explains, it is not possible to compare the eternal world with this world, and the pleasures of the hereafter with the pleasures of this world. Ibn ʿAbbās indicates this huge difference, saying that "The only thing in this world from Paradise is the Names".[78] He means by this statement that we only see models and examples about Paradise in this world. The origin and true form of these examples will be showed in the hereafter.

It is important to note that while Nursi reports the exegesis of a few companions such as Ibn ʿAbbās, he is also critical of the fabricated exegetical reports attributed to some companions, including Ibn ʿAbbās himself. He states that attributing some fabricated traditions to eminent companions such as Ibn ʿAbbās to urge people to fulfil religious commands or to discourage them from prohibited acts is ignorance and a great fault. In his

opinion, authentic traditions are sufficient for us for the interpretation of the Qur'an, and we should be satisfied with true narratives evaluated on the scales of reason.[79] It could be said that Nursi evaluates the exegetical traditions in terms of their authenticity, and his statement "accurate narratives weighed on the scales of reason" draws attention to the importance of ḥadīth discipline and rational analysis of the content of the reports.

In summary, Nursi admits the authority and the validity of *tafsīr* traditions and the reports from the first generations of Muslims, accepting their relevance to Qur'anic interpretation. However, he also argues that relying on *isrā'īliyyāt* narrations in order to interpret the Qur'an is a major weakness of tradition-based commentaries, as clarified below.

It is important to note that Nursi is critical of using *isrā'īliyyāt* reports in order to interpret the Qur'an. In his view, the Qur'an itself and the authentic *ḥadīth* are the fundamental materials of Qur'anic exegesis. Instead of *isrā'īliyyāt*, he would prefer modern sciences and scientific information whose truth has been confirmed, along with true narratives and authentic historical sources.[80] Nursi expounds on his views as follows.

According to Nursi, some converted Muslims from Jewish background such as Wahb ibn Munabbih (654–737 CE) and Ka'b al-Ahbar (d. 653 CE) caused *isrā'īliyyāt* reports to find their way into the minds of Muslims. Those narrations were acknowledged uncritically because in appearance these borrowed reports were not contradictory to the essentials of Islam and spread in the form of narratives. However, they later came to be accepted as standards for certain truths and for interpretation of some Qur'anic verses. In Nursi's opinion, these reports could be used to comprehend some implications of the Qur'an and sunna, but they could not be accepted as meanings or interpretations of the Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions. However, those who focused only on the literal meanings of the Qur'anic verses and lacked reliable sources for the interpretation of the Qur'an attempted to interpret some Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions in the light of *isrā'īliyyāt* reports. At this point, Nursi reiterates his argument that what reliably interprets the Qur'an is mainly the Qur'an itself and the authentic reported ḥadīth. Nursi underlines again that *isrā'īliyyāt* narratives can be used in order to interpret connotations of the Qur'an. However, these connotations cannot be received as the essential meanings, even though they were put forward as if they were fundamental.[81] As has been seen, Nursi is mainly critical of taking *isrā'īliyyāt* narratives as the essential meanings, even though he believes that these reports may be used to interpret connotations of the Qur'an.

Nursi clarifies his argument in the light of the example of *Dhu'l-Qarnayn*, related in Q. 18: 83–98. Explicit truths that exist in the Qur'an's story of *Dhu'l-Qarnayn* must definitely be considered as being confirmed, and they cannot be denied. However, the Qur'an is not clear about the detail of what is reported and the meanings that it is possible to infer. According to the rule, whatever a statement says clearly in respect to its underlying and fundamental meaning is sufficient for it. Therefore, the Qur'an does not inevitably indicate any detail. However, because the Qur'an does not reject it, we can comment on it, and the comments may possibly be accepted. Hence, all the interpretations, explanations and analyses (*teşrihat*), other than the explicit meaning and the clear truth, are speculative suggestions (*ahkâm-ı nazariye*). Exegetes can think about them, and they can be given different meanings. Here Nursi emphasizes that various opinions among the scholars indicate that the inferences and connotations, other than the obvious and essential meanings, are putative and speculative. Some people attempted to reach different, conflicting conclusions from the verses, adding into the fundamental meaning (*mânâ*) their personal interpretations (*mâsadak*) and certain people or events that they considered to be appropriate to the Qur'anic story. They even presented these as if they were the essential meanings. The literalists acknowledged such explanations and inferences as part of the fundamental meaning, while the authoritative scholars regarded them as harmless accounts, and did not criticize them. However, according to Nursi, acceptance of some interpretations in the light of altered versions of the Bible, such as Lot and David's stories in the Biblical narrative, is contrary to the sinlessness of the Prophets in the Islamic creed.[82] The reason why Nursi maintains this view is that Islamic teaching underlines the prophecy of Lot and David and their protection from committing great sins. Therefore, Biblical stories, as they stand, of Lot and David are considered to be contrary to Islamic theology. It is clear that Nursi argues that *isrā'īliyyāt* reports can be used for the inferences and connotations of the Qur'an, but these explanations and inferences are speculative and different from the underlying meaning of the text. Besides, Nursi examines and evaluates the content of *isrā'īliyyāt* narratives according to Islamic theology and the notion of prophetic immunity from sin.

Another example of his cautious approach to *isrā'īliyyāt* narratives is his analysis on Mount *Qaf*, attributed to the interpretation of Q. 50: 1, "*Qaf* By the glorious Qur'an!". He emphasizes that the only indication of *Qaf* in the Qur'an and the authentic prophetic traditions is Q. 50: 1, "*Qaf* By

the glorious Qur'an!" The *Qaf* referred to in this verse is a letter of the Arabic alphabet. Its location is in part of the mouth, not in a geographical place. Therefore, this has nothing to do with Mount *Qaf*. In this context, Nursi points out the reports attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās regarding the existence of a mountain called *Qaf*. In his view, whatever Ibn ʿAbbās stated is not inevitably a report from the Prophet, and we are not required to consider whatever he narrated from others as being true, because Ibn ʿAbbās, during his youth, took help from Israelite sources to elucidate some realities by way of the narrative. Nursi maintains that *Qaf* exists, but it cannot be said what it is. If he finds an authentic narrated prophetic tradition regarding the nature of it, he will believe that what the Prophet indicated by it is definitely true. However, he also does not reject the Ṣūfīs' descriptions about *Qaf*, providing a few approaches related to Mount *Qaf*.[83] In this example, Nursi's cautious approach to the Israelite narratives, particularly to some reports of Ibn ʿAbbās, can be clearly seen. Here he draws attention again to the importance of the Qur'an and the authentic prophetic traditions for the interpretation of the Qur'an. In this context, one might ask as to where Nursi's view could be placed among the diverse Muslim scholarship on *isrāʾīliyyāt*.

Regarding Nursi's view on *isrāʾīliyyāt*, it could be argued that Nursi seems to follow the critical approach to this notion in Islamic tradition. In the conclusion of his research on *isrāʾīliyyāt*, Albayrak emphasizes that the technical term *isrāʾīliyyāt* was not used before Ibn al-Kathīr, and Ibn al-Kathīr is the first systematic user of this concept. Ibn al-Kathīr put some limitations on these reports, explaining that *isrāʾīliyyāt* are reported *li al-istishhād* (for supplementary attestation) not *li al-iʿtidād* (for full support and reliance or *iʿtiqad*, belief).[84] However, this word was used as a technical term by a historian, Masʿūdī (d. 345/956), and an Andalusian exegete, Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1148), together with some exegetes such as Ibn Taymiyya and Ṭūfī (d. 716/1316), who discussed the term before Ibn al-Kathīr. For example, Ṭūfī underlines that classical commentators cannot be accused provided that they use *isrāʾīliyyāt* for explanation and not as absolute truth.[85] Besides, Albayrak highlights that some changes in presentation and understanding of *isrāʾīliyyāt* happened within the classical Qur'anic commentaries. There are a number of exegetes who obviously reduced the number of *isrāʾīliyyāt* narratives in their commentaries. Ibn ʿAṭiyya (d. 546/1151) is one of them in this respect. Following him, to some extent, Ṭūsī (d. 460/1068) and al-Rāzī also distanced themselves from these reports. Ibn ʿAṭiyya analysed *isrāʾīliyyāt* on the basis of

the chain of transmitters and the content of the reports. Ṭūsī and al-Rāzī preferred a different method in order to reduce the Israelite narratives in their commentaries. They primarily focused on rational grounds and prophetic immunity from sin.[86] Taking into account the information above, it could be said that Nursi seems to follow the established critical attitude towards *isrā'īliyyāt* in the Islamic tradition.

5.4 Reason-Based Exegesis

In this section, we shall examine *tafsīr bi-al-ra'y* (reason-based exegesis), one of the most important types of Qur'anic exegesis, delineating its main characteristics from the classical perspective and modernist scholars' approach to this form of exegesis. From various examples from his writings, Nursi's views on exegesis based on independent reasoning will then be outlined.

Reason-based exegesis, as we have seen, relies not only on the Qur'an, ḥadīth and the earliest Muslims, but also on the views of later scholars, legal rulings and principles of jurisprudence, historical texts and theological writings. Linguistic analysis is used to investigate the implications of different language usages on meaning, including a metaphorical reading and an allegorical interpretation of texts. Reason-based exegesis allows greater scope for interpretation of texts based on independent reasoning, albeit with certain limitations, while tradition-based exegesis restricts the use of independent reasoning in the interpretation of the Qur'an.[87]

In other words, *tafsīr bi-al-ra'y* is not based directly on transmission of knowledge by the earliest Muslims, but it relies on the use of reason and independent reasoning (*ijtihad*). However, it should be noted that reason-based exegesis does not signify "interpretation by mere opinion", but it means deriving a view via *ijtihad* based on authentic sources. Therefore, the authorities in Qur'anic exegesis emphasize that if reason-based exegesis is in agreement with the sources of *tafsīr*, the rules of Shari'a and the Arabic language, then that exegesis is valid and acceptable. If reason-based exegesis is done without relying on sound sources, it is based on mere opinion and rejected.[88] Then it could be reasonably said that an interpretation based on independent reasoning must be grounded in sound sources that can be traced back to the Prophet or the earliest authorities, Islamic tradition and the Arabic language, in which that interpretation is valid and able to be accepted.

It should be noted that reason-based approaches to the Qur'an are the characteristic feature of the Muslim modernism. Several approaches of modernist thinkers can be considered to be forms of reason-based exegesis. Their aim here was to synthesize Western thought and sciences with the best of the Islamic tradition, and they called for reforms in order to reach the West.[89] They maintained that there was a need for interpretation of the Qur'an with a scientific world view in mind.[90] They argued in favour of interpreting the Qur'an in the light of reason and modern science, metaphorical and symbolic approaches to certain Qur'anic verses such as Paradise and Hell, giving more importance to social, political and current topics, and to views based on human, psychological explanations.[91] It is clear that because modernist ideas are based on reason and scientific world view, these modern approaches should be recognized to be forms of reason-based exegesis.

However, while reason-based approaches to the Qur'an are the major feature of the Muslim modernism, modernist scholars are highly critical of various aspects of reason-based exegesis. The scholars such as M. ʿAbduh and Ahmad Khan criticized some forms of reason-based exegesis, emphasizing the concept of *ijtihad*, the power of reason and modern science.[92] In the main, however, these scholars expressed their dissatisfaction with the classical methodologies clearly, maintaining the need to develop a new way of looking at the Qur'an. For instance, Ahmad Khan and ʿAbduh, becoming aware of the fact that exegetical procedures and the jargon of previous commentaries had made the Qur'an unclear, highlighted that the Qur'an should be made familiar to the modern mind.[93] ʿAbduh also believes that Qur'an commentaries must not include theoretical speculations, grammatical monographs and learned quotations.[94] As we have seen, modernist intellectuals criticize various forms of reason-based exegesis in Islamic history. They believe that Qur'anic exegesis should address modern people rather than focus on technical and academic analysis on the meaning of the Qur'an.

Moreover, while linguistic analysis and investigating the implications of different language usages on meaning are very common endeavours in reason-based commentaries, ʿAbduh acknowledges that focusing on various aspects of *tafsīr* such as *uslūb* (literary style), *balāghat* (eloquence), *maʿānī* (sub-discipline of rhetoric) and *iʿrāb* (the semantic grammar) takes people away from the primary purpose.[95] These modern intellectuals appear to downplay the classical emphasis on the linguistic inimitability of the Qur'an in reason-based exegesis, arguing that the inimitable nature of

the Qur'an is in the guidance that it provided, not in its words. They do not take into consideration linguistic analysis of the Qur'an's words, nor do they rely much on classical Arabic dictionaries.[96] ʿAbduh's critical approach to several fields of *tafsīr* such as *uslūb* (literary style) and *balāghat* can indicate to us that his aim is to address the ordinary people through his exegesis. He believes that Qur'an commentaries should function as a guidance rather than examine such technical topics.

I turn now to Nursi's place among these classical and modern approaches to *tafsīr bi-al-ra'y* (reason-based exegesis).

As noted before, Nursi's one-volume commentary and his overall exegetical endeavour are primarily judged to be *tafsīr bi-al-ra'y* (reason-based exegesis).[97] Nursi uses numerous methods of reason-based exegesis in his writings, particularly in his one-volume commentary, such as linguistic analysis and investigating the implications of different language usages on meaning, qualities of *naẓm* (word-order, composition), *balāghat* (rhetoric) and *uslūb* (literary style). Moreover, he discusses the views of later scholars such as al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī, legal rulings and principles of jurisprudence, theological writings, philosophical foundations, rational proofs for the resurrection, and the connection between the miracles of the prophets and scientific discoveries.[98] Furthermore, Nursi puts emphasis on reason with regard to the apparent conflict between tradition and reason. He highlights that it is an established principle that when any religious knowledge (*nakil*) which is narrated as based on the Qur'an or the sunna of the Prophet seems to be conflict (*teâruz*) with reason, the assessment of reason takes priority (*asıl itibar*), and the religious knowledge (*nakil*) in question is interpreted (*teʿvil*) as long as that reason is valid and authentic.[99] It is clear from this that Nursi embraces reason-based exegesis. He also points out the fact that the judgement of reason is of great significance for the interpretation of the Qur'an.

As mentioned before, Nursi can be seen as an exemplary figure in the tradition of the Ottoman exegesis, which is reason-based exegesis. It is important to note that the tradition of Ottoman exegesis followed al-Bayḍāwī and al-Nasafī's line, which are reason-based exegesis, rather than Ibn ʿAṭiyya or Ibn al-Kathīr's line, which are tradition-based exegesis. As well known, the primary concern of reason-based exegesis is language and linguistics, not the report from the earliest scholars on the meaning of the Qur'an. It can be noticed that the literature of Ottoman exegesis relied heavily on language rather than on traditional narrations. Moreover, as a result of their reason-based approach, they applied the principle of *al-ʿaql*

al-awwal wa al-naql al-mu'awwal (first reason and then the text, or text should be interpreted in the light of rational explanation), making the tradition dependent on reason. Furthermore, they considered themselves a continuation of the chain of al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī and al-Bayḍāwī in the discipline of *tafsīr*, and they attempted to develop and to deepen this legacy.[100] In this respect, it could be argued that Nursi is a modern representative of the Ottoman exegetical school. First of all, he lived at the end of the Ottoman Period, and studied in tune with the Ottoman tradition. Secondly, in his Qur'anic commentary, *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz*, he expounded on the inimitability of the Qur'an's word-order, which is of the greatest conciseness and subtlety. The inimitability of the Qur'an in composition (*naẓm*) is one aspect of the Qur'an's inimitability.[101] Finally, Muḥsin ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd believes that Nursi studies the theory of word-order (*naẓm*), and he recognized that the earlier exegetes like al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī and Abū al-Su'ūd had not attempted to apply it as a complete system treating all the *sūra*s, verses and words one after the other, in all its details. Therefore, he developed this theory and applied it in detail and completely. He also clarified the subtle qualities of the literary styles and devices of the Qur'an.[102] It is also interesting to note that ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd's statement implies that the theory of word-order (*naẓm*) is related to the field of *munāsabā* (the connection between verses and between *sūra*s). This subject will be discussed in the following chapter.

5.4.1 Linguistics, Rhetoric and Exegesis

It is noteworthy that in contrast to some modern thinkers who criticize specific references to detailed linguistic information, Nursi certainly embraces this classical method. For instance, we frequently come across references in Nursi's exegetical writings dealing with whether a word has a definite article or not, whether the objects are prioritized or delayed, whether the verb is transitive or intransitive (i.e., the structure of the verb), and the meaning of the conjunctions, derivations and many other linguistic issues. In other words, he generally refers to numerous linguistic rules and structures in the interpretation of the Qur'an, examining the implications of different language usages on meaning, qualities of *naẓm* (word-order and composition) and *balāghat* (rhetoric). Then it could be reasonably concluded that the linguistic and rhetorical interpretations in Nursi's hermeneutics are a sine qua non of Qur'anic exegesis.

I briefly list linguistic and rhetorical rules and their elements to which Nursi frequently referred as follows: inversion of the natural word-order (*taqdīm wa-taʾkhīr*); restriction (*ḥaṣr*); conciseness (*ikhtiṣar*); choosing one word instead of another; the use of the perfect tense and the imperfect tense that means renewal through the constant repetition, and their impact on meaning; being a verb, a passive participle that implies continuation, an active participle, and the effect on meaning; concision and prolixity (*ījāz wa iṭnāb*); every sentence and word in the verse respond to each other while looking to the primary aim; the definite article "*al*"; aspects of the pronominal suffix –*hi*; the choice of one preposition instead of other prepositions, and several meanings of prepositions; the subject and the predicate (*mubtada' wa khabar*); the use of definite article and the indefinite that used sometimes to disparage and sometimes to praise; general and particular (*ʿāmm wa khāṣṣ*), unqualified/restricted (*muṭlaq wa muqayyad*); the relative pronoun and the relative clause; elaborating after previous synoptic statements (*ijmal wa tafṣīl*); making omissions in order to make general what it is said or addressing in absolute terms in order to make it comprehensive; the verbal noun and the product of the verbal noun (*maṣdar* and *ḥāṣil bi'l-maṣdar*); the meaning of the conjunctions such as "and" (*wāw*), *fa*, and "then" (*thumma*); the repetitions, the subtleties of *inna* (the intensive particle) and *alladhīna* (the relative pronoun); the proper noun instead of the first-person pronoun; the use of *iltifāt* (a rhetorical principle, indicating a turning from the first person to the third person or from the third to the first person); the transitive verb; the singular and plural forms of the words; the use of nominal sentence, implying fixed and constant, and verbal sentence, indicating renewal and continuation; etymological information of certain words; not attaching any object to the verb; the way of metonymy and allusion (*kināya wa taʿrīḍ*); the implications of several verbal structures; the use of *mushākala* (the rhetorical device, using similar words, but indicating different meanings); literal and figurative (*ḥaqīqa wa-majāz*); comparison and metaphor (*tashbīh wa istiʿāra*), and clear and obscure (*muḥkam wa-mutashābih*).[103]

In addition, Nursi puts emphasis on "eloquence" (*balāghat*) in the interpretation of the Qur'an. He maintains:

> It is an established fact that the most distinguishing feature (*hássa-i cazibedar*) of the revealed Qur'an is the inimitability (*i'câz*). Its inimitability primarily lies in the matchless degree of its eloquence. Eloquence is founded upon certain elements of style, including in particular metaphors (*istiare*),

> allegories (*mecaz*), and other figures of speech. One who does not look at the Qur'an through the binoculars of these elements cannot see its merits… This being so, interpreters of the Qur'an (*Ehl-i tefsir*) must pay full respect to the Qur'an, and, therefore, should not attempt to interpret it based on things that do not bear the stamp of eloquence.[104]

Moreover, Nursi underlines that many scholars think that the inimitable nature of the Qur'an lies in its being so extraordinarily eloquent, and it is beyond human power. And the most subtle aspect of the Qur'an's inimitability relies on the eloquence of its word-order (*naẓm*). His commentary deals extensively with this reality.[105] In this respect, it could be argued that Nursi's commentary is a kind of literary exegesis as we have seen certain proponents of this type of exegesis in the modern period. Then we shall provide several examples from his writings in order to clarify Nursi's approach to linguistic and rhetorical interpretations.

Nursi focuses on the implications of different language usages on meaning. For example, in the use of the imperfect tense for "they believe" instead of "the believers" that means fixed and unchanging in Q. 2: 4, there is an indication that belief is continuously renewed through the repeated coming of revelation. Moreover, in Q. 1: 5, "It is You alone we worship", the precedence of "You alone" implies sincerity, the essence of worship, and the use of second person points out the reason for worship, because the One who is qualified by the previous attributes is deserving of worship. Furthermore, in Q. 2: 3, "and give out of what We have provided for", the Qur'an left a concise statement (*ījāz*), using a prolix sentence (*iṭnāb*) in order to make the following subtle points: With "out of" (*min*) the text points out the refusal of wastefulness in the giving of almsgiving. By putting "out of what" (*mimmā*), the text first indicates that almsgiving should be done out of the donor's property. And by "We have provided" (*razzaqnā*), it is implied that it is God who is the provider, and the giver is simply the means. And by the "We" (*-nā*), the text hints that we should never fear poverty. And since "sustenance" (*rizq*) here is general and not specific, it is implied that almsgiving also involves the giving of knowledge, ideas and other such gifts. And by "spend" (*yunfiqūn*), the Qur'an refers to the condition that the recipient of almsgiving should spend the alms on his livelihood and fundamental needs.[106]

Nursi often highlights *balāghat* (rhetoric) and its principles, declaring that the key to the treasure of the aspects of inimitability in the Qur'anic verses is the eloquent language of the Qur'an.[107] For example, he draws

attention to the principle that all the sentences and words in the verse respond to each other and remind the reader of each other, while looking to the primary aim. Q. 21: 46, "yet if a mere breath of your Lord's punishment touches them", is a great example in this regard. It conveys the terribleness of the punishment through demonstrating the harshness of the least amount. Therefore, every word in this verse completely works to strengthen that purpose. The word "if" (*In*) indicates doubt, and doubt looks to fewness. Therefore, this word is a sign of the slightness of the punishment. The word "touches" (*massa*) signifies to touch lightly and indicates a small amount, while "a mere breath" (*nafḥa*) implies littleness or smallness via its singular and indefinite form. The partitive "of" (*min*) expresses a part, meaning a bit. The word punishment (*'adhāb*) alludes to a light type of punishment rather than the word "chastisement" (*nakāl*), which would suggest something greater. Finally, the word "Lord" (*Rabb*) indicates compassion, implying the lightness of the punishment. Then it is said that each word in a verse supports in its special way the primary aim, and this principle is of considerable importance for rhetorical speeches.[108] In another example, from Q. 24: 43 and Q. 36: 38, "He sends hail down from [such] mountains in the sky," and "The sun, too, runs its determined course laid down for it,", Nursi states that rigid literal interpretations of these verses mean denying the right of eloquence. The metaphor in the first verse is so beautiful, and the eloquence of the other verse is so shining and clear.[109]

In summary, Nursi acknowledges the authority and validity of reason-based *tafsīr* and relies on numerous hermeneutical devices in this type of exegesis for the interpretation of the Qur'an. However, he also finds a number of weaknesses in reason-based commentaries, as clarified below.

5.4.2 Weaknesses in Reason-Based Qur'an Commentaries

For Nursi, there are a number of weaknesses in reason-based commentaries, and he criticizes some qualities of the reason-based exegesis in the classical period.

First of all, relying on Greek philosophy in the interpretation of the Qur'an is a major weak characteristic of reason-based exegesis. Instead of Greek philosophy, Nursi would prefer a reflection system produced by modern philosophy and the products of modern reason.[110] Nursi underlines that some sources from ancient Greek philosophy were translated so as to "Islamize" that philosophy. However, that philosophy, based to some

extent on various myths and superstitions and thus polluted to a certain extent, was mixed with the pure thoughts of the Muslim Arabs and led to the change from investigation to imitation to a certain degree. Some scholars of Islam attempted to purify Islam of the corrupt aspects of Greek philosophy, when that philosophy began to spread to the area of Islam. In spite of their great success, some elements of Greek philosophy and certain borrowings remained and were not removed. Besides, when the efforts began to focus on Qur'anic exegesis, some of those who limited themselves to the literal meanings of the verses attempted to interpret some intellectual points in terms of ancient Greek philosophy. They noticed that the Qur'an and ḥadīth include the intellect and the revealed knowledge. Thus, because they imagined that there was some sort of agreement between certain intellectual questions in the Qur'an and ḥadīth and ancient Greek philosophy, they attempted to apply that philosophy to the interpretation of the Qur'an and the ḥadīth. In Nursi's view, this was absolutely the wrong way. What will interpret the Qur'an is itself, its own sentences and statements. The meaning of the Qur'an is in and of itself. Therefore, we must look for the meaning of the Qur'an in the Qur'an, and in its wording.[111]

In another place, Nursi re-expresses his critical view of Greek philosophy, supporting modern philosophy (*ḥikmat al-jadīda*) and the new scientific approach. He emphasizes that the literalists' attachment to Greek philosophy confused their minds in their interpretation of the Qur'an. In this context, Nursi gives the example of the four elements of the universe. He firmly states that the acceptance of four basic universal elements of existence, namely air, water, fire and earth, is a remnant of ancient philosophy and not the product of Shari'a. Unfortunately, because the faults of Greek philosophy entered into the terminology of the famous scholars in the past, they were then used as a reference by others. There is no evidence, however, that those scholars believed that all existence consisted of four elements only. There are four other fundamental elements, declared by modern science with regard to the formation of living things: hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen and carbon. Based on this information, Nursi concludes that, while ancient philosophy and science imprisoned minds, the new science has brought down the walls of that prison and revealed the faults of ancient philosophy.[112]

Comparatively speaking, while modernist thinkers put emphasis on reason and science, some of their approaches to Greek philosophy seem to be in line with Nursi's approach. For example, Ahmad Khan underlines that

our learned exegetes mixed their interpretation of the Qur'an with Greek teachings that at that time were judged correct, but today have been proved wrong. They mixed them in such a way to suggest that the Qur'an established these Greek teachings, or that the Qur'an had the same meanings as these Greek ideas.[113] However, ʿAbduh and his pupil, Rashīd Riḍā, state that the Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā made a mistake by entering the area of religious discussions and attempting to apply their principles in that area. If they had not mixed up their philosophy with religion, it would have been better. ʿAbduh argues that philosophy and the secular sciences should not be mixed with questions of religion. The fields of religion and the natural world (philosophy) should be kept distinct.[114]

For Nursi, another weakness in reason-based Qur'anic commentaries is the knowledge that goes beyond the scope of someone's expertise. Nursi thinks it is not possible that all the information provided by a Qur'anic exegete should be considered in the field of Qur'anic exegesis. An interpreter such as al-Bayḍāwī could make a mistake in a topic connected with geography.[115] Nursi draws attention to the fact that not everything that is in a Qur'anic commentary is inevitably to be included in the meaning of the Qur'an, or in the interpretation of the Qur'an.[116]

Other weaknesses Nursi discusses are as follows: exaggeration, mixing literal and figurative expressions (*ḥaqīqa wa-majāz*), and disregarding the style of the Qur'an that God's speech is divine condescension to the level of people's minds so that they can understand it.[117]

To sum up, firstly, Nursi has great respect for the traditional division of Islamic disciplines. While Nursi combines a number of Islamic disciplines, and various readings connected with the major disciplines can be seen in his writings, he does not give any normative function to *tafsīr*, not placing Qur'anic commentary before all other disciplines. Moreover, Nursi does not produce any normative rule in relation to modern issues solely via the Qur'anic text and *tafsīr* discipline, disregarding the traditional understanding. Furthermore, Nursi's revival of Islam and his renewal (*tajdid*) are based on systematic theology (*kalām*), and his approach can be described as *kalāmisation* of *tafsīr* and other disciplines. Secondly, Nursi highlights the four elements to judge a word's value. Those are the speaker (*mutakallim*), the person addressed (*mukhāṭab*), the purpose (*maqsad*) and when it is spoken (situation, *maqām*). These elements are fundamentals to Nursi's hermeneutics. Thirdly, Nursi acknowledges the authority and validity of *tafsīr* traditions and the reports from the first generations of Muslims, accepting their relevance to Qur'anic interpretation. Finally,

Nursi's one-volume commentary and his overall exegetical endeavour are primarily considered to be *tafsīr bi-al-ra'y* (reason-based exegesis), and he can be seen as a modern representative of the Ottoman exegetical school. In addition, linguistic and rhetorical interpretations in Nursi's hermeneutics are a sine qua non of Qur'anic exegesis.

Notes

1. Muhsin Demirci, *Tefsirde Metodolojik Sorunlar* (İstanbul: İFAV, 2012), 204–5.
2. Ibid., 206–10.
3. Ibid., 210–1.
4. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 86.
5. Demirci, *Tefsirde Metodolojik Sorunlar*, 208.
6. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 88.
7. Abu Hamid al-Ghazzālī, *Al-Mustasfa*, 4 vols., vol. I (Medina: Al-Jamiʿa al-Islamiyya 1413 AH), 3–4, 12.
8. See al-Suyūtī's *al-Itqān fi Ulūm al-Qur'an*.
9. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 88–92; Mehmet Suat Mertoğlu, "Tefsir (Literatür)," in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, ed. Komisyon (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfi, 2011), Vol: XXXX/292.
10. Mehmet Paçacı, "Klasik Tefsir Neydi?," *İslāmī ilimler Dergisi* II, no. 1 (2007): 7.
11. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 94; Mertoğlu, "Tefsir," XXXX/292.
12. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 92–4; Mertoğlu, "Tefsir," XXXX/292.
13. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 95–6; M. Suat Mertoğlu, "Doğrudan Doğruya Kur'an'dan Alıp İlhamı": Kur'an'a Dönüş'ten Kur'an İslamı'na," *Dīvān*, 15, no: 28 (2010/1): 81–4, 90, 100, 104–8.
14. Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought*, 3–5.
15. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 96–8; Mertoğlu, "Doğrudan Doğruya Kur'an'dan Alıp İlhamı," 84, 86–9, 91.
16. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 95, 103, 99, 100–1; Mertoğlu, "Tefsir," XXXX/291–2; Tahsin Görgün, "'Yeni' Anlama ve Yorumlama Yöntemlerinin Fıkıh Usūlüne Göre Durumu," in *İslami İlimlerde Metodoloji / Usul Mes'elesi – I*, ed. İsmail Kurt and Seyit Ali Tüz (Ensar Neşriyat: İstanbul, 2005), 691.
17. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 127, 133, 88–9, 145.
18. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 101; Mertoğlu, "Doğrudan Doğruya Kur'an'dan Alıp İlhamı," 82–3.

19. Ibrahim, "Contemporary Islamic Thought," 285.
20. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 102; Mertoğlu, "Doğrudan Doğruya Kur'an'dan Alıp İlhamı," 81–4.
21. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 569; See, Nursi, *The Gleams*, The Twenty-Eighth Gleam, 397–8.
22. *The Rays*, 513; Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 30.
23. Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 25.
24. Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey*, 142, 295.
25. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 94.
26. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 568.
27. Yıldırım, "Said Nursi'nin İşârâtü'l-İ'caz."
28. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 99.
29. Nursi, *Sözler*, 578–9, accessed 19 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.578; *The Words*, 449; *Mesnevī*, 218.
30. Q. 11: 44.
31. Q. 41: 11.
32. Nursi, *Sözler*, 579, accessed 19 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.579; *The Words*, 449.
33. Q. 36: 82.
34. Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi al-Nuri*, 40–2.
35. Nursi, *The Words*, 464, *Al-Mathnawi al-Nuri*, 40.
36. Nursi, *The Words*, 451.
37. Qattān, *Mabāhith*, 337–44; Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr*, 112–147, 183–205; Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 178; *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 42–68.
38. Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 178–80; Qattān, *Mabāhith*, 337.
39. Von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, 124; Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 198.
40. Demirci, *Tefsir Tarihi*, 128.
41. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 96.
42. Paçacı, "Klasik Tefsir," 7.
43. I often compare Nursi with ʿAbduh because ʿAbduh is considered to be the beginning of Muslim modernism, and his views influenced a number of Muslim countries. He can be also seen to be the most influential Muslim intellectual in the modern Muslim world. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 96; Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 145.
44. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 27, 29–30; ʿAbduh and Riḍā, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Ḥakīm*, 24–6.
45. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 96.
46. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 101–2.
47. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 16.
48. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 32–3.
49. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 19.

50. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 18.
51. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 19; Brown, *Rethinking tradition*, 44.
52. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 19–20.
53. Johanna Pink, "'Abduh, Muḥammad," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Brill Online, 2016).
54. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 35; Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 16.
55. Albayrak, "Qur'anic Narrative And Isrā'īliyyāt," 130.
56. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 27; ʿAbduh and Riḍā, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Ḥakīm*, 18.
57. Nursi, *The Letters*, 123–4, 140.
58. Nursi, *Mektubat*, 553, accessed 19 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.2.553; *The Letters*, 382.
59. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 23, 17, 20; *Muhākemat*, 36, accessed 19 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.13.36
60. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 14.
61. Ibid., 11, 15.
62. Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 198, 25.
63. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 43; Von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, 124.
64. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 16.
65. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 31; Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 199.
66. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 219–20; Nursi, *İşārāt*, 152.
67. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 249.
68. Nursi, *The Letters*, 193.
69. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 44–6; Von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, 125.
70. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 218; Nursi, *İşārāt*, 150; Tabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, I/414.
71. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 255; Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Tafsīru sura al-ḥadīd, 58/1.
72. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 51–2.
73. Davut Aydüz, *Tefsir Tarihi, Çeşitleri ve Konulu Tefsir* (Istanbul: Işık Yayınları, 2004), 43.
74. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7562.
75. Nursi, *The Letters*, 365; *The Words*, 508–9.
76. *The Letters*, 90, 29–31, 110, 112.
77. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 168, 197; Nursi, *İşārāt*, 92, 124.
78. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 217; Nursi, *İşārāt*, 148.
79. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 23.
80. Niyazi Beki, "Yeni Bir Tefsir Metodolojisi: Muhakemat Örneği," *Islamic Univ. of Europe-Journal of Islamic Research*, no. 5 (2010): 164, 172–3.
81. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 16–8; Beki, "Yeni Bir Tefsir Metodolojisi," 164.

82. *The Reasonings*, 60–1; *Muhākemat*, 79–80; accessed 19 April 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.13.79
83. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 57–9.
84. Albayrak, "Qur'anic Narrative And Isrā'īliyyāt," 128–9, 290.
85. Ibid., 129.
86. Ibid., 290.
87. Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 181–2.
88. Von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, 130–2; Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 91–2.
89. Ibrahim, "Contemporary Islamic Thought," 285.
90. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7567.
91. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 35–9.
92. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 33, 35–6.
93. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7567.
94. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 29–30.
95. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 101–2.
96. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 37; Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 35.
97. Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 198, 25.
98. See, Yıldırım, "Said Nursi'nin İşârâtü'l-İ'caz"; Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*.
99. *The Reasonings*, 11; *Muhākemat*, 22, accessed 19 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.13.22
100. Cündioğlu, "Çağdaş Tefsir Tarihi Tasavvurunun Kayıp Halkası," 51–73.
101. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 11; Nursi, *İşārāt*, 1, 3, 6.
102. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 8.
103. Nursi, *İşārāt*, 9–213; Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 19–277.
104. *The Reasonings*, 66; *Muhākemat*, 85, accessed 19 April, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.13.85
105. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 197.
106. Ibid., 55, 27, 52.
107. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 75.
108. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 42–3.
109. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 71.
110. Beki, "Yeni Bir Tefsir Metodolojisi," 173.
111. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 18–9.
112. Beki, "Yeni Bir Tefsir Metodolojisi," 173, 164; Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 74–5.
113. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 304.
114. Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, 125.
115. Beki, "Yeni Bir Tefsir Metodolojisi," 165.
116. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 25.
117. Beki, "Yeni Bir Tefsir Metodolojisi," 165–8.

CHAPTER 6

Nursi's Approach to the Qur'anic Sciences

Contents

The sciences of the Qur'an is a field which serves to understand the Qur'an, and were developed in the exegetical tradition, starting from the companions of the Prophet.[1] There are a large number of sources concerning this field from the classical and modern periods, such as al-Zarkashī's and al-Suyūtī's books. However, some modernist scholars argued that the Qur'anic sciences are insufficient. For instance, according to al-Mashriqī and Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988 CE), this field takes people away from the Qur'an.[2] This chapter will focus on the sciences of the Qur'an (*ʿUlūm al-Qur'an*), analysing the views of modern Muslim scholars, particularly A. Khan and ʿAbduh, on these important hermeneutical devices in Muslim exegetical traditions and comparing them with

H. Çoruh, *Modern Interpretation of the Qur'an*,
Palgrave Series in Islamic Theology, Law, and History,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15349-6_6

Nursi's approach. The difference between the views of Nursi and those of modern intellectuals will also be discussed. In this context, Nursi's approach to various Qur'anic sciences, such as occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), abrogation (*naskh*), clear and ambiguous (*muhkam wa-mutashābih*), inimitability of the Qur'an (*i'jāz al-Qur'an*), Qur'anic narratives (*qaṣaṣ al-Qur'an*), difficult words and passages (*mushkil al-Qur'an*) and intratextual hermeneutics (*tanâsub*) will be investigated in order to ascertain how he deals with these exegetical sciences in Qur'anic exegesis.

6.1 *Asbāb al-nuzūl* (Occasions of Revelation)

In Islamic tradition, the discipline of *asbāb al-nuzūl* in the Qur'anic sciences is one of the most significant areas of knowledge in order to properly understand and interpret Qur'anic verses and passages. While it is emphasized that the Qur'anic message is universal, it is also recognized that various verses of the Qur'an were revealed at a particular time in history and in special circumstances. *Asbāb al-nuzūl* is the area of knowledge regarding the reasons and occasions of these revelations. It is important to note that the reports of occasions of revelation provide an explanation of the implications of the verse, and give guidance for the process of interpretation and application of the verse in question to other situations. In Islamic tradition, the reports about the verse are therefore of particular significance.[3]

Occasions of revelation have been reported by the companions of the Prophet. However, only the reports that are judged to be authentic according to the science of ḥadīth can be considered fully reliable. The narrator who reports the occasion should have been present at the time and occasion of the revelation. We need to know exactly who reported this event, whether he was present or not, and who transmitted this occasion to us.[4] It is reasonably concluded that the knowledge of occasions of revelation can only be known through the reports narrated from the first generations of Muslims. However, it should be noted here that there are a great number of reports related to occasions of revelation attributed to the first generations of Muslims. Some occasions of revelation have also been reported by certain successors. Moreover, sometimes we can find two different reports narrated from two different companions in relation to occasions of the same verse. Therefore, occasions of revelation are not clear-cut reports, and *tafsīr* and ḥadīth scholars have studied them in detail.

In the modern period, several Muslim scholars adopted a critical approach to this genre of Qur'anic sciences. In the eyes of the early modern Muslim thinkers, this type of historical research finds little favour. There is no doubt that the modern denial of ḥadīth also led to the refusal to accept these reports of occasions of revelation. In the opinion of the modernist thinkers, these reports distort the Qur'anic message, and the main contours of the text are lost.[5] In general, they derive occasions of revelation directly from the textual contexts of the verses. In addition, referring to a number of day-to-day affairs of Muslims, they frequently attempt to apply the verses to those issues.[6] For example, Ahmad Khan states that Muslim scholars have given attention to the examination of the occasion of revelation (*sha'n al-nuzûl*), yet this may be based only on weak evidence. In his view, the safest way is deriving the historical context of the verse as far as possible from within the context of the Qur'an (*qarîna haliyyah*) itself and its style.[7]

Besides, what the modern thinkers attempt to do with their critical approach is to show close connections in the chapters, in their succession, and in their constitutive parts. For instance, Sayyid Quṭb takes Q. 2: 109–115 in their general meaning, rejecting the efforts of the exegetes to connect these verses with a certain event of the Prophet's life.[8] It can be argued that the modern intellectuals' critical approach to occasions of revelation is related to their textualism. They believe that the Qur'an is an independent document in its own right, and that the great emphasis on historical research can cause the close connections in the chapters and in their succession to be lost. Against this background, we turn now to Nursi's approach to occasions of revelation.

It is important to note at the beginning that Nursi acknowledges the validity of *asbāb al-nuzūl* material narrated from the first generation of Muslims, accepting their relevance to Qur'anic interpretation. Nursi highlights that, even though the Qur'an was revealed over 23 years on various occasions, its parts are so supportive of each other that it is as if it were revealed all at once on one occasion. Although the Qur'an came in response to different and repeated questions, its parts are so united with each other that it is as if it were the answer to only one question. Nursi believes that, normally, the Qur'an's revelation over 23 years on various occasions would be a reason for confusion and disconnection among its parts, but the unity of its parts contributes to the inimitability of the Qur'an's explanations as well as to its fluency of style and harmony. Elegant fluency, beautiful proportion, harmony and matchless eloquence are sig-

nificant features of the Qur'an.[9] It is interesting to note that, while Nursi admits the fact that the Qur'an was revealed on various occasions, he also stresses the importance of its cohesion and harmony, and the accord among its verses and parts. Unlike the modern intellectuals such as A. Khan, Nursi does not seem to think that attention to the knowledge of occasions of revelation will create any problem alongside the harmony and fluency of style among the parts of the Qur'an. On the contrary, Nursi considers this aspect to be a sign of the inimitability of the Qur'an, because the Qur'an has a thematic unity even though it was revealed on various different occasions.

However, while Nursi embraces this type of historical research, he does not often make reference to occasions of revelation, because his exegetical writings are mainly reason-based exegesis, and previous tradition-based commentaries have already included this material in detail. Still, certain reports in relation to occasions of revelation can be seen in his exegetical writings. For example, in his interpretation of Q. 2: 6—"As for those who disbelieve, it makes no difference whether you warn them or not: they will not believe"—Nursi states that the "who (*alladhīna*)" here indicates notable unbelievers like Abu Jahl (d. 624), Abu Lahab (d. 624) and Umayya ibn Khalaf (d. 624), and that the verse is related to such unbelievers.[10] For ʿAbduh, on the other hand, an exegete needs to interpret the text as it stands and not to provide the proper names of the people and places left unexplained by the Qur'an. For him, an exegete has no right, and is as a matter of fact forbidden, to identify anything that is left unnamed and unexplained by the text. Thus, while ʿAbduh makes extensive use of the actual context within the text itself to determine the meaning of a certain verse or word,[11] Nursi on this occasion refers to the report with regard to occasions of revelation.

To take another example, in his interpretation of Q. 2: 26—"God does not shy from drawing comparisons even with something as small as a gnat, or larger"—Nursi points out that, when the Qur'an provides examples of gnats and spiders and mentions ants and date-palms, the Jews, the hypocrites and idolaters perceive these examples as an opportunity to oppose the Qur'an. They ask: "Does God – in spite of His sublimity – condescend to talk about such lowly matters, whereas the people of excellence scorn even to mention?", "Is not Muhammad's Lord ashamed by these parables about insignificant matters?" It is to these people that the Qur'an responds with this verse.[12]

Moreover, regarding Q. 36: 8–9,[13] Nursi recounts two similar reports for the occasion of those verses. In line with the first report, he emphasizes that most interpreters consider the following event to be the occasion of the verse. Abu Jahl picked up a large rock and swore that if he saw the Prophet prostrating, he would hit him with it. When finding the Prophet prostrating, he raised the rock to smash it on the Prophet's head. However, his hands stopped moving in the air. The Prophet completed his prayer and stood up. At that moment, Abu Jahl's hands were untied. The second report states that in a similar event, a man from Abu Jahl's clan (Walid ibn Mughira according to one version) went to the Ka'ba with a large rock to injure the Prophet while he was prostrating. However, his eyes became sealed and he could not see the Prophet. When he returned to those who had sent him, he was still unable to see even though he could hear them. When the Prophet finished his prayer, the man's eyes were opened because there was no need for them to remain closed any longer.[14] Thus, in relation to this matter, Nursi refers to two similar reports for the occasion of the one revelation. While the themes of these two reports are similar, Nursi relates both of them without evaluating the differences between them. The reasons for this may well be that tradition-based *tafsīr*s already contained this material in detail, and Nursi wishes to focus on the theological issues rather than on such technical details.

Furthermore, Nursi does not discuss the validity of occasions of revelation which have been reported by certain successors. He does not express an evaluative opinion on two different reports narrated from two different companions in relation to occasions of the same verse, or on the use of one report for occasions of multiple verses.

In the period of neo-modernism, modern Muslim Qur'anic scholarship rediscovered the importance of *asbāb al-nuzūl* due to the historical approach to the Qur'an. As mentioned in the third chapter, intellectuals such as Fazlur Rahman argued for the historical nature of the Qur'an and put emphasis on its socio-historical context. Their main concern was rethinking the interpretation of the ethico-legal content of the Qur'an. In this approach, they relied heavily on occasions of revelation to examine particular Qur'anic instances in order to reach general principles and relate the text to the concerns of the modern period.[15] However, unlike these modern scholars' frequent emphasis on the reports of the occasions of revelation, Nursi does not give this function to reach general principles to occasions of revelation; his approach is in line with the traditional understanding. The traditional approach did not allow a high degree of freedom

and change in the interpretation of the ethico-legal content in the way that Fazlur Rahman thought. For Nursi, the occasion of revelation is a hermeneutical means in the interpretation of Qur'anic verses, and the authentic reports from the first generation of Muslims give guidance to the process of interpretation and application of the verse.

However, it seems that in Nursi's view, there is no necessary connection between occasion (*sabab*) and revelation (*nuzûl*), and it cannot be thought that if there were no occasion (*sabab*), there would be no revelation. Events (occasions) in seventh-century Arabia did not determine the incidence of revelation, but God revealed Qur'anic verses because of His divine wisdom and mercy, and His revelation came down in "connection" with a particular occasion in time. Nursi's concept of *iqtiran* (accompaniment, conjunction and connection) implies this reality. He underlines that two things—the bounty and the means—come together, and this is called "*iqtiran*" (accompaniment). Some people suppose that, because the two things exist together, they cause one another. However, accompaniment is one thing, and the ultimate cause for the existence of something is another. The real cause is the Divine Mercy.[16] Nursi's statements imply that the fundamental reason for the revelation of Qur'anic verses is God's divine wisdom, while certain verses did come down in connection to some particular events in seventh-century Arabia.

To a certain extent, it is true; Nursi does refer to a number of day-to-day affairs of Muslims, and attempts to apply some Qur'anic verses to these issues. For example, he underlines that each new generation considers the Qur'an as being revealed to itself and receives its commands therefrom. That the phrase "People of the Book" also means *ahl al-maktab* (O people of schooling and education) is a very good illustration of this approach. For Nursi, the message seems to be fully directed to the people of his own time and this century.[17] In another example, when addressing the Turkish nation, he emphasizes that, having carried the flag of the Qur'an for 1000 years since the ʿAbbasids, they are included in the meaning of Q. 5: 54, "God will bring a people He loves and who love Him, humble towards the believers, hard on the disbelievers, and who strive in God's way."[18] Nursi thus connects post-Qur'anic events with the revelation of certain Qur'anic verses. In his view, those verses seem to be directed to these events which post-date the Qur'an in history. This is another way of Nursi's re-reading of the Qur'an from a universalistic perspective.

6.2 *Naskh* (Abrogation)

The concept of *naskh* (abrogation) is one of the important fields in the Qur'anic sciences. It literally means "to annul, supersede, obliterate, efface or cancel". As a technical term, it signifies abrogation of one ruling by a subsequent ruling.[19] It is based on a number of Qur'anic verses such as Q. 2:106: "Whatever verse [of the Qur'an] do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring a better one or similar to it. Know you not that God is able to do all things?" Most Muslim scholars emphasize that this verse indicates that certain Qur'anic verses were abrogated by subsequent Qur'anic verses.[20] While the concept of *naskh* is a Qur'anic phenomenon, there have been several opinions regarding the number of the abrogated verses in the Qur'an. Given the many different approaches to the term, the number of the abrogated verses could be counted as high as 500. Al-Suyūtī decreased the number to twenty, and Shah Wali Allah (d. 1176/1762) reduced it to as low as five.[21]

As in the field of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, the information regarding abrogation must be based on reliable reports, according to the discipline of ḥadīth; and the information should be able to be traced back to the Prophet or his companions. Another way of knowing about *naskh* is *ijma* (consensus of the Muslim scholars upon the abrogating and abrogated verse). Thus, mere personal opinion regarding abrogation cannot be accepted.[22] The knowledge of abrogation can be determined only through the reports narrated from the first generations of Muslims or through the consensus of Muslim scholars. As seen above, the main concerns of the Qur'anic sciences (*'Ulūm al-Qur'an*) are linguistics and history.[23] The notion of *naskh* (abrogation) is connected with the historical circumstances of the revelation because which verse precedes and which one comes after need to be known in the process of abrogation. Therefore, the field of *naskh* reasonably relies on the reports from the earliest period of Islam.

In general, the early Muslim modernists are not much pleased with the concept of *naskh* in the Qur'an. Early modern thinkers generally denied the existence of the abrogation of one Qur'anic verse by a subsequent Qur'anic verse.[24] For example, Ahmad Khan argues that there is no abrogating verse (*nāsikh*) and no abrogated verse (*mansūkh*) in the Qur'an. No verse in the Qur'an is abrogated by any other verse. For Khan, there is no evidence regarding abrogation in the text.[25] In this context, numerous early modernists came to the conclusion that the classical theory of *naskh* in the Qur'anic text is based on individual judgement (*ijtihad*), and that

God's words cannot be abrogated by human opinion.[26] Let us then analyse these modernists' approaches in response to the classical arguments regarding the existence of abrogation in the Qur'an.

Firstly, in their refutation of abrogation, modern scholars attempt to show that there is no question of the annulment by other verses in many so-called abrogated cases. They reconcile so-called abrogated verses with abrogating verses. Secondly, modern intellectuals interpret certain verses that have been considered to show evidence of abrogation (*naskh*) in the Qur'an in a different way. In their interpretation, for example, of Q. 2:106, instead of relating the concept of *naskh* in question to Qur'anic verses, they interpret it in terms either of the succession of natural phenomena or of "abrogation" of the message of former prophets.[27] For instance, in his interpretation of Q. 2:106, Ahmad Khan thinks that the verse refers to abrogation of rules in pre-Islamic legal codes, not to abrogation of Qur'anic verses. The context of the verse demonstrates that the abrogation in question is associated with the pre-Islamic religious laws.[28] Khalīfa ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm (d. 1957) interprets the same verse as follows. In this verse, God points out the world-order as the example of His omnipotence and He asks: If you look at the alternations of day and night, is therein not evidence of God's omnipotence for you?[29] In addition to the application of abrogation to something else, an evolutionary principle is found by certain modernists at the root of *naskh* (abrogation). For example, Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī underlines regarding *nāsikh* and *mansūkh* that God has taught the nations on earth by showing how night and day abrogate each other; then they began to abolish old methods in order to embrace more modern methods.[30] As the examples above show, certain Muslim modernists do not accept the abrogation of one Qur'anic verse by a subsequent Qur'anic verse, interpreting certain verses related to abrogation in a different way.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that there are also certain modern scholars who acknowledge abrogation (*naskh*) of the verses in the Qur'an. M. ʿAbduh is among those modern thinkers. He believes in abrogation of one Qur'anic verse by a subsequent Qur'anic verse, and he refers to Q. 16:101 as Qur'anic evidence: "When We substitute one revelation for another – and God knows best what He reveals – they say, 'You are just making it up,' but most of them have no knowledge." Moreover, in line with many modern scholars, he also reduces a great number of the abrogated verses accepted in the classical approach.[31] It is clear from the above that while the majority of the traditional scholars admit abrogation (*naskh*) of the verses in the Qur'an, numerous modern thinkers deny this type of

abrogation. How does Nursi deal with the notion of *naskh* (abrogation) and where does he stand in relation to the majority of modern Muslim views which deny abrogation?

Nursi discusses the concept of *naskh* in a broad context, admitting it to be a Qur'anic phenomenon.[32] He underlines that it is a fact that creation has an innate inclination towards perfection, and it is through this reality that creation is bound to the law of development. Human life also has a tendency towards perfection. This tendency grows through views and theories being built on one another throughout the centuries. Views and theories become established by means of the results gained, as well as by devising ways in order to carry out the principles learnt. Established facts and principles are the seeds of sciences. Those seeds grow through experience and experimentation.[33] Moreover, Nursi mentions "The Tablet of Effacement and Reaffirmation" (*lawḥ maḥw wa ithbāt*) in relation to God's Supreme Preserved Tablet (*lawḥun maḥfūz*). The Tablet of Effacement and Reaffirmation is a slate for writing and erasing, and it is the ever-changing notebook of the unchanging Supreme Preserved Tablet. This is the reality of time. In Nursi's view, what we call time has a reality like everything else, and its reality is like the ink and pages of the writing of Power on *lawḥ maḥw wa ithbāt*.[34] In light of this approach, it can be inferred that, while Nursi puts emphasis on abrogation, he perceives this concept to be the very reality of humanity, human life and human history.[35]

Secondly, Nursi does not discuss the famous Qur'anic verses related to abrogation, namely Q. 2:106 and Q. 16:101. As stated earlier, Nursi gives priority to the topics of the fundamentals of faith over technical subjects such as abrogation (*naskh*). However, he provides his opinions regarding abrogation in his writings, emphasizing that *naskh* means abrogation of rules in pre-Islamic legal codes.[36] For example, Nursi highlights that the Qur'an does not bring any new fundamentals or central beliefs, but it amends (*mu'addil*) and perfects (*mukammil*) existing principles (*uṣūl*). The reason for this is that the Qur'an combines the virtues of all the previous books and the essentials of all the former laws. The Qur'an only establishes new rules in secondary matters (*furū'āt*; literally, details), which are subject to change because of differences in time and place. In Nursi's view, just as with the change of seasons, food and dress and numerous other things, the stages of a person's life also require changes in the manner of their education and pedagogy. Similarly, as wisdom and need dictate, religious rules regarding secondary matters (*furū'āt*) change in accordance with the stages of human development.

Many of these rules are beneficial at one time, but are harmful at another time. Many medicines may have been effective in infancy, but they stop being remedies in youth. For this reason, the Qur'an abrogated some of its secondary rules (*furū'āt*). The Qur'an announced that the time of these abrogated secondary rules had finished, and the turn had come for other laws to take their place.[37]

In another place, in his response to the reason of different outlooks of the prophets, and their diverse ways of worship, Nursi reiterates that all the prophets followed the principles of faith and essential rules because these are fixed, timeless and unchanging. The difference among the prophets is based on secondary rules (*furū'āt*), which are subject to change in the course of time. Nursi explains this by rational argument. The stages of the life of human beings necessitate differences in secondary rules.[38] As has been seen, Nursi clearly defends his view that *naskh* means abrogation of the rules that obtained in pre-Islamic legal codes. Moreover, he points out that, while the prophets are united in the fundamentals of faith and essential rules, secondary rules (*furū'āt*) in the prophets' ways are subject to change in the course of time.

While Nursi acknowledges the concept of *naskh* to be a Qur'anic phenomenon and sees it to be the reality of human history, he does not clearly discuss abrogation (*naskh*) of the verses in the Qur'an.[39] It can be thought that, because Nursi focused on the topic of the fundamentals of faith, he did not want to discuss such disputed subjects.[40] However, his views may show us that he considers abrogation (*naskh*) to be a dynamic of legal, sociological and progressive aspects of the Qur'an which are dependent upon time and conditions.[41] Nursi looks at the notion in terms of the social aspect and human development. For him, abrogation is not a simple interpretive method, and he connects this concept with human history. Nursi's approach is actually an original idea. He uses this notion as a dynamic hermeneutical tool, while Muslim jurisprudence has a narrow understanding of abrogation. As can be seen, while the modernists generally denied the existence of the abrogation in the Qur'an, Nursi does not clearly seem to refuse the abrogation among Qur'anic verses. It is likely that Nursi has no problem with the traditional understanding of abrogation. The modernists' denial of the classical theory of abrogation in the Qur'an may result from their critical approach to the traditional reports and from their textualism, since the field of *naskh* relies on the reports from the earliest period of Islam.

6.3 *Muhkam and Mutashābih* (Clear and Ambiguous Verses)

The notion of *muhkam* and *mutashābih* is one of the primary fields of the Qur'anic sciences. Two of the most important categories of Qur'anic verses are clear and ambiguous verses. This division of Qur'anic verses is based on the Qur'an itself, and the famous relevant verse runs as follows: "It is He who has sent this Scripture (Qur'an) down to you (Prophet). Some of its verses are definite in meaning – these are the cornerstone of the Scripture – and others are ambiguous."[42] The first type of verse mentioned above is called *muhkam* (clear), while the second type is described as *mutashābih* (ambiguous). The definitions of these notions have long been discussed in Islamic scholarship and are still being refined. Some scholars define *muhkam* as referring to those verses that can be comprehended without additional interpretation or reflection, while *mutashābih* are those that require interpretation. Other scholars maintain that *muhkam* verses have only one possible meaning, whereas *mutashābih* verses have numerous possible meanings, from which the most "appropriate" meaning must be derived. It is also argued that *muhkam* verses do not need any interpretation because their meanings are clear to anyone who is fluent in Arabic. As for *mutashābih* verses, they include verses whose meanings are ambiguous and must generally be interpreted in order for the meaning to be understood.[43]

The relevant examples from the Qur'an enable us to understand the notion of *muhkam* and *mutashābih*. In the Qur'an, those verses dealing with *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* (permissible and prohibited), punishments, inheritance, promise and threat and so on are considered to be *muhkam*, while verses regarding the attributes of God, the nature of the resurrection, judgement and hereafter and so on are regarded as *mutashābih*.[44] Among the most important *mutashābih* verses are references to God being on, or ascending, "the Throne" or having "Hands" and a "Face".[45] These examples clarify the concepts of *muhkam* and *mutashābih*. Besides, Qur'anic division of verses into these two categories reveals that the notion of clear and ambiguous verses is of great significance for the Qur'anic text, and also for Qur'anic exegesis. At this point, it is good to look at approaches of early Muslim modernism to this notion.

The modernist intellectuals do not at all tend to view the Qur'an as an unclear book; even they do not presume that the Qur'an might include

superfluous parts. While it is mainly said that verses dealing with the attributes and essence of God and the hereafter can be described as *mutashābih*, Āzād adds that these subjects are not anti-rational. Moreover, the modern scholars have views that go beyond the scope of the traditional understanding of *muhkam* and *mutashābih*. For example, Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī deals with the notion from a purely scientific perspective, and he discusses the topic in the context of certain biological and zoological sciences and theories. He relates the notion to the assumed connection between Revelation, the Word of God, and Nature, the Work of God. In his view, both categories can be observed in the animal world. *Muhkam* might be ascribed to the many species occurring. Someone can indicate all the disputes regarding Darwinian theories and define *mutashābih* as the question of the order of these species and their lineage.[46] Thus, scientific interpretations can be seen even in the notion of clear and ambiguous verses. Furthermore, like certain classical scholars, some modern scholars emphasize that allegorical verses encourage further study. For example, Ahmad al-Dīn states that verses telling the fact (*ḥaqīqat*) are *muhkam*, and those that are the object of investigation (*taḥqīqāt*) are *mutashābih* verses. In this context, al-Mashriqī perceives that a special duty of scientists is to make the ambiguous verses clear. He mentions Q. 36:38, "The sun, too, runs its determined course laid down for it", arguing that this verse could be added to *muhkam* verses after F. M. Herschel (d. 1822) had proved a spherical motion of the sun.[47] Al-Mashriqī's statement may indicate to us the influence of modern science and positivism on the modern Muslim scholars.

Finally, ʿAbduh holds the view that the righteous predecessors' (*Salaf*) worldly happiness mainly relies on their focus on *muhkam* verses.[48] ʿAbduh's Salafī approach can be seen in this example. He puts emphasis on clear verses and their literal meanings, and understanding other verses should be based on *muhkam* verses. As recognized, this notion is a main sub-discipline in Qur'anic sciences, and a scholar's approach to this notion can reveal the nature of his hermeneutics in Qur'anic exegesis.

As for Nursi's place in relation to diverse views on clear and ambiguous verses, it can be stated that the notion of *muhkam* and *mutashābih* is of great importance in his writings, and plays a major role in his hermeneutics. Regarding *muhkam*, Nursi emphasizes that Muslims should believe in the literal and explicit truths of the Qur'an that have been expounded by the righteous predecessors since belief in the certain and true realities forming the essentials of the Qur'an and Islam is essential. He goes on to

clarify that the Qur'an clearly states that it was revealed in clear Arabic; hence, its meaning is clear and understandable (*muhkam*). The divine speech gives attention to, strengthens and expounds on these meanings. Denying them means contradicting God and the Messenger's comprehension. In his opinion, the explicit meanings forming the basic Qur'anic truths come from the source of Messengership and have been transmitted via established reliable means.[49] It can be inferred from this that the explicit meanings (*muhkam*) forming the essential Qur'anic truths and the literal and clear truths of the Qur'an that have been clarified by the righteous predecessors are definite (*qaṭʿī*), primary principles (*asās*), that form the cornerstone of the book. In addition, *mutashābih* verses should be understood in the light of these literal and explicit truths of the Qur'an.

It could be said that ambiguous verses are one of the subjects to which Nursi gives most importance among Qur'anic sciences.[50] He states that the Qur'anic guidance is for all people, and most of the people are the masses. In the question of guidance, the minority follows the majority of the people, since when the masses are addressed, the educated people can benefit from guidance. Now the masses cannot free their minds from what is familiar to them and imaginary things. Therefore, they are not capable of understanding complete truths and abstract ideas except through the telescope of their imaginations and by illustrations of things that are familiar to them. For this reason, in the Qur'an, *mutashābih* verses are used such as God being on, or ascending, "the Throne", or having "Hands". However, when understanding complete truths through things that are familiar to them, the ordinary people should not direct their attention towards the apparent forms of those expressions and should not believe in something impossible such as the physicality of divine attributes or the Divine having "sides"; but they should look at these expressions as a means in order to reach the truths behind them. Nursi clarifies his view with an example. The ordinary people can comprehend the reality of divine disposal over the universe in the form of a king seated on the throne of his power. Therefore, the Qur'an uses a metonymy in Q. 20:5, "the Lord of Mercy, established on the throne". Because of the feelings of the ordinary people, their understanding needs to be taken into account, and their feelings and their intellects esteemed.[51]

Nursi's definition of *mutashābih* also needs to be discussed. Nursi defines *mutashābih* as follows: The styles of the Qur'an, called *mutashābih* (ambiguous verses), put the forms before the people's eyes like telescopes or powerful spectacles. Most of the masters of eloquence use figures of

speech (*al-istiʿāra*) in order to illustrate subtle meanings or depict different views. Therefore, *mutashābih* verses are figures of speech of an abstruse kind because they depict subtle truths.[52] In other words, because of the intellectual capacity of the ordinary people, the Qur'an depicts the subtle truths in allegorical form (*mutashābihāt*), with metaphors (*istiʿāra*) and similes (*tashbīh*).[53] For example, regarding the use of Merciful (*al-Rahmān*) and Compassionate (*al-Rahīm*) in reference to God, Nursi underlines that both attributes are ambiguous forms (*mutashābihāt*), like God having a "Hand". This style is a divine condescension to human minds, and it makes something familiar to the mind and causes the subtle truths to be understood. This style is like one's speech to a child, in terms that he is familiar with. The ordinary people gather their information through their senses, and they can only understand subtle truths in the mirror of what they envisage them to be.[54]

Secondly, Nursi thinks that *mutashābih* verses constitute a greater part of the Qur'an since the Qur'an speaks to a very wide spectrum, and it was sent to guide humanity in every century.[55] In this context, Nursi notes that:

> …underlying the explicit meaning are numerous layers or levels, one of which is the allusive and symbolic meaning, and the allusive meaning is a generality. Every century, this has particularities…. that element is intentionally held in view and will perform an important function, and this does not harm the verse of the Qur'an or its clear meaning, but serves its miraculousness and eloquence.[56]

It is clear from these statements that Nursi holds the view that, in addition to the clear meaning of Qur'anic verses, there are numerous layers of meaning. One of the layers is the allusive meaning, and the allusive meaning also has a general meaning. This general meaning in the allusive has also particularities in every century. In line with this approach, he also highlights that the people of truth state that the Qur'an is an unlimited treasury. All people in every century receive their share from its complementary and implicit truths, while they admit primary principles and explicit meanings (*muhkam*). Over time, the Qur'an becomes better comprehended in greater detail; its reality is clarified in its many aspects.[57]

In another place, Nursi emphasizes that each Qur'anic expression has a universal content, and it addresses each level of understanding in all times. For this reason, any particular interpretation indicates only one aspect of that universal content. Every Qur'anic exegete and saintly scholar choose

one aspect. At this point, Nursi provides the example of Q. 55:19–20: "He released the two bodies of [fresh and salt] water. They meet, yet there is a barrier between them they do not cross." He refers to a great number of aspects of those verses, pointing out that all of those aspects are included in the content, whether literally or figuratively.[58] Nursi's approach to the Qur'anic content in this manner shows that Qur'anic verses can address each level of understanding across different times, and this feature is connected with the notion of *mutashābih* verses. It should be noted here that this approach above is unique, and we cannot see this view of *mutashābih* among other modern scholars.

Thirdly, another topic in relation to *muhkam* and *mutashābih* is the place of the scholars who are "firmly grounded in knowledge", which is mentioned in Q. 3:7. The second part of this verse continues as follows: "The perverse at heart eagerly pursue the ambiguities in their attempt to make trouble and to pin down a specific meaning of their own: only God knows the true meaning. Those firmly grounded in knowledge say, 'We believe in it: it is all from our Lord.'" With regard to this expression, Muslim commentators have discussed to what extent the scholars who are "firmly grounded in knowledge" may know the meaning of *mutashābihāt*.[59]

In this context, Nursi believes that the scholars in question have a significant duty to understand *mutashābih* verses.[60] For example, he highlights that some prophetic traditions, like some Qur'anic verses, are ambiguous (*mutashābih*), and they have meanings that can be comprehended only by eminent scholars.[61] In another place, he states that, like ambiguous verses, some of the prophetic traditions regarding the events which will take place towards the end of time have refined and deep meanings. Those prophetic traditions cannot be clarified in the same way as *muhkam* verses which are clear in meaning; therefore, not everyone can understand them. They are interpreted (*ta'wīl*), rather than being expounded (*tafsīr*). Nursi refers to Q. 3:7: "Only God knows the true meaning and those firmly grounded in knowledge", maintaining that the exact meaning of such events can only be understood after the events have happened. Then those firmly grounded in knowledge say "We believe in it: it is all from our Lord", and they reveal those hidden truths.[62] In addition, he also underlines that the Qur'an includes ambiguous verses which are in need of interpretation or require complete submission.[63] His expression clearly indicates that there are two types of ambiguous verses: One can be interpreted by the eminent scholars, and the other requires absolute submission, like the "detached letters" at the beginning of some *sūra*s.[64]

It could thus be said that Nursi draws attention to the fact that those firmly grounded in knowledge have a responsibility to interpret *mutashābih* verses. Moreover, he makes a distinction between interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and explanation (*tafsīr*). He underlines that certain prophetic traditions regarding the events which will take place towards the end of time have profound meanings, and they should be interpreted (*ta'wīl*). It is to be borne in mind that, in the later period of Islam, *tafsīr* came to be connected with tradition and text, while *ta'wīl* was concerned with reason and opinion.[65]

Finally, Nursi points the wisdom and benefits in the use of ambiguous verses in the Qur'an. While most of them are indicated by other scholars, Nursi has also his own original approaches to the wisdom of ambiguous verses. Nursi's instances of wisdom are as follows: (1) The Qur'an considers the intellectual capacity of the ordinary people in its guidance by using ambiguous verses. (2) The Qur'an expresses what needs to be stated without unnecessary words. (3) The Qur'an addresses all levels of people until the end of time. (4) The notion of *mutashābih* assists the Qur'an's aim of eloquence and inimitability. It makes scholars understand their powerlessness. (5) The Qur'an takes into account the external senses of human beings because the masses gather their information through their senses. (6) The subtle and deep meanings in ambiguous verses encourage scholars to investigate. (7) The notion of *mutashābih* assists in preserving the freshness and youthfulness of the Qur'an. It proves that translating the ambiguous verses and a true translation of the Qur'an are impossible.[66] In Nursi's view, the Qur'an addresses all levels of people in every age, and the statements of the Qur'an are not restricted to a single meaning. The concept of *mutashābih* provides this feature for the Qur'an, and *mutashābih* is a very distinctive aspect of the universality of the Qur'an.

6.4 *I'jāz al-Qur'an* (Inimitability of the Qur'an)

It is noteworthy that *i'jāz al-Qur'an* is a major field of Qur'anic sciences. The word *i'jāz* comes from "'*ajaza*", which has many meanings. Those meanings are as follows: To be incapable, to make powerless, to be impossible and to be inimitable. *I'jāz al-Qur'an* is defined as the inimitable and unique nature of the Qur'an that leaves the opponents of the Qur'an incapable of meeting the challenge which the revelation poses to them. The Islamic teaching emphasizes that the Qur'an is the miracle of the Prophet Muhammad.[67] For Muslims, the Qur'an is the most perfect expression of

the Arabic language. As the Qur'an underlines, the Qur'an is a unique piece of writing that is incomparable to any other thing and cannot be matched by any human composition. This aspect of the Qur'an is called its inimitability (*iʿjāz al-Qur'an*). Certain Qur'anic verses indicate the idea of the inimitability of the Qur'an. Those verses challenge the Prophet Muhammad's opponents in Mecca to produce a literary collection similar to the Qur'an. For example, Q. 17: 88 states that "Say, 'Even if all mankind and *jinn* came together to produce something like this Qur'an, they could not produce anything like it, however much they helped each other.'" Then the Qur'an challenges people to produce ten chapters similar to the Qur'an. Later on, the Qur'an reduces the challenge to producing just one chapter like the Qur'an because the people of Mecca constantly failed to meet the greater challenges.[68] Based on the definition and relevant Qur'anic verses above, it can be concluded that the inimitable nature of the Qur'an is connected with the style of the Qur'an.

In Islamic tradition, the commentators discussed various aspects of the Qur'an's inimitability (*iʿjāz al-Qur'an*). For example, al-Qurtubī (d. 656/1258) in his commentary shows the ten aspects of the Qur'an's inimitability, which are expressed generally by other Muslim scholars. Those aspects are as follows: Its language is superior to other Arabic languages, its style is superior to all other Arabic styles, the comprehensiveness of the Qur'an cannot be matched, its legislation cannot be outdone, the narrations of the Qur'an regarding the unknown can only come from revelation, its lack of contradiction with the valid natural sciences, its achievement of all that it promises, both good news and threat. The knowledge it includes (legal and about the creation), it fulfils human needs and its influence on the hearts of men.[69] It should be noted that in general, the majority of Muslims believe, regarding the basis for the Qur'an's inimitability, that its inimitability is because of the Qur'an's unique style and content. The content of the Qur'an, especially its inclusion of historical information regarding earlier prophets and their communities, and its apparent lack of contradictions in the text are also seen as evidence of the Qur'an's inimitability.[70]

While in the classical period the inimitability of the Qur'an is recognized in its excellent composition and high degree of eloquence, the early modern Muslim scholars mainly do not give importance to the philological inimitability of the Qur'an.[71] The modernist scholars emphasize that "not the heavenly speech but the divine guidance it grants is looked upon as the most specific feature of the Qur'an".[72] For example, Ahmad Khan

focuses on divine guidance as constituting the inimitable nature of the Qur'an.[73] While ʿAbduh underlines that the most important aspect of the Qur'an's inimitability is its divine guidance, he also recognizes the classical approach to the Qur'an's inimitability in terms of the high degree of eloquence, attempting to follow a moderate way between the classical and modern approaches.[74] It could be said that the modern thinkers mainly put emphasis on the content and the meaning of the Qur'an rather than on its eloquence and linguistic styles.

A number of reasons for the modernist approach above can be mentioned here. First of all, certain modern intellectuals such as ʿAbduh think that Qur'anic commentaries must not include theoretical speculations, grammatical monographs and learned quotations.[75] Moreover, ʿAbduh also believes that focusing on various aspects of *tafsīr* such as *uslūb* (literary style), *balāghat* (eloquence), *maʿānī* (sub-discipline of rhetoric) and *iʿrāb* (the semantic grammar) serves to take people away from the primary aim.[76] It can be inferred from the above that Qur'an commentaries should be open to the understanding of ordinary people, and that too much emphasis on the jargon of previous commentaries and linguistic tools could be an obstacle to the divine guidance received through the Qur'an. Now our task is to look at Nursi's approach to *iʿjāz al-Qur'an*.

It is important to note that Nursi's approach to *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis) relies on the inimitability of the Qur'an (*Iʿjāz al-Qur'an*),[77] and he believes that this inimitability lies primarily in its eloquence. He notes that

> It is an established fact that the most distinguishing feature of the revealed Qur'an is the inimitability. Its inimitability primarily lies in the matchless degree of its eloquence. Eloquence is founded upon certain elements of style, including in particular metaphors, allegories, and other figures of speech. One who does not look at the Qur'an through the binoculars of these elements cannot see its merits.[78]

In other words, Nursi highlights that the inimitable nature of the Qur'an lies in its being so extraordinarily eloquent, and this is beyond human power. The most subtle aspect of the Qur'an's inimitability, according to Nursi, is its reliance on the eloquence of its word-order (*naẓm*). His commentary deals extensively with this feature.[79] Thus, in contrast to the modernist intellectuals who disregard specific references to the inimitable linguistic nature of the Qur'an, Nursi certainly embraces this classical method. For instance, Nursi's exegetical writings frequently

refer to numerous linguistic rules and structures in the interpretation of the Qur'an, and analyse the implications of different language usages on meaning, the qualities of *naẓm* (word-order, composition) and *balāghat* (rhetoric).[80]

Nursi states that the Qur'an's inimitable eloquence comes from the beauty, order and composition of its words; its textual beauty and perfection; its stylistic originality and uniqueness; the superiority, excellence and clarity of its clarifications; the power and truth of its meanings; as well as linguistic purity and fluency. The eloquence of the Qur'an is so remarkable that its eternal challenge to every person to produce something like it still continues. Nursi draws attention to the fact that the people of Arabia were mainly unlettered at that time, and thus preserved their tribal history and pride in oral poetry. They put great emphasis on eloquence, and any unique expression was memorized because of its poetical form and thus transmitted to posterity. Eloquence and fluency were in a great demand at that time. The odes of seven poets were inscribed in gold and hung on the wall of the holy shrine Kaʿba at Mecca. At a time when eloquence was in such demand, the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet. God had provided Moses and Jesus with the miracles which were most suitable to their times. As magic was common during Moses' time, his miracles were of that nature. Medicine was widespread during Jesus' period, and therefore his miracles were of that type. The Prophet Muhammad's chief miracle was the Qur'an, and God made eloquence the most important aspect of the Qur'an. The Qur'an amazed people of eloquence as they listened to it in total admiration.[81]

Nursi underlines that there are two opinions regarding the reason why humans are incapable of producing something like the Qur'an. The first opinion is that some scholars believe that it would be possible to meet the challenge of producing a chapter like the Qur'an, but that God prevents it by a miracle of the Prophet. This view is known as *sarfa*, which teaches that God prevents people from producing even a chapter. However, the mainstream prevailing opinion emphasizes that the eloquence of the Qur'an and its virtues are beyond human capacity. This opinion is claimed by ʿAbd al-Qahir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078), al-Zamakhsharī and al-Sakkākī (d. 626/1229). They state that composing the Qur'an's elevated word-order is beyond human capacity and power.[82] It is clear that Nursi follows the mainstream approach in this context.

Nursi follows al-Jurjānī's school regarding the possibility of comprehension of the Qur'an's inimitability. Al-Jurjānī holds that the Qur'an's

inimitability can be experienced and expressed. It is possible to express its inimitability in words. However, the school of al-Sakkākī argues the opposite that its inimitability can only be experienced and sensed, but cannot be expressed.[83] Nursi believes that all people, according to their different levels, can comprehend and sense the Qur'an's inimitability. He attempts to clarify the inimitability to all levels of the people according to the requirements of this age.[84] It should be noted here that his approach regarding comprehension of the inimitability is compatible with his aim, for his purpose is to address the widest Islamic community.

Nursi highlights that the Qur'an challenges its opponents to produce a literary collection similar to itself at nine levels. In his view, these levels of challenge (*Ṭabaqāt al-tahaddī*) are as follows: The first level of challenge states that "Produce the like of the entire Qur'an together with its realities, sciences, predictions, and elevated word-order, all from one who is illiterate". The second level notes that "If you cannot do that, fabricate something, but with similarly eloquent word-order." The third level of challenge points out that "If you cannot do either of them, produce around ten chapters." The fourth level requires that "If you are not able to do that, just produce a long chapter equal to the Qur'an's long chapter." The fifth level underlines that "If that is too difficult for you as well, just bring one chapter even if it is very short." The sixth level says that "If it is not possible for you to produce it by someone illiterate, get a scholar or professional writer to do it." The seventh level of challenge states that "If that is too hard for you as well, a number of you cooperate to produce it." The eighth level stresses that "if you cannot do that, seek the help of all people and *jinn*, and the assistance of all the results of their common knowledge from the time of Adam until the end of the world, and views found in the books available to you regarding the Arabic language and its styles." The ninth level enjoins: "Do not complain saying that you do not have any witnesses and supporters. Call your witnesses, and let them help you. Will they be so brave about supporting what you claim disputing the Qur'an?" Nursi draws attention to the fact that these levels of challenge demonstrate how the Qur'an is inimitable.[85] While many scholars mention three or four levels of challenge, Nursi lists the levels of challenge in detail.[86] Nursi's insistence on the many aspects of challenge regarding the inimitability of the Qur'an is in close keeping with his aim to defend Islamic faith and to revive Islamic theology. In order to strongly defend Islamic faith, he needs to demonstrate the inimitable divine nature of the

Qur'an since the Qur'an is the Prophet Muhammad's greatest miracle proving his prophecy.

Nursi indicates seven major aspects of this inimitability (*wujūh al-iʿjāz*) in his Qur'anic commentary *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz*. He states that the seven aspects of its inimitability have been confirmed for 13 centuries providing proof of these claims.[87] It should be noted that these seven aspects in his commentary are primary aspects of the inimitability that have been accepted by mainstream Muslim scholars throughout Islamic history. Nursi mentions these comprehensive seven aspects in his commentary, written in Arabic, addressed to Muslim scholars and dedicated to the inimitability of the Qur'an's word-order (*naẓm*).[88] The seven major aspects of inimitability noted by Nursi in his commentary are as follows: (1) Eloquence in the composition (*naẓm*) of the Qur'an, which is the greatest aspect of the inimitability and beyond human power. (2) Harmony among the verses and chapters of the Qur'an (*tanāsub*). (3) Predicting the future. (4) Its bringing together of truths and sciences that are beyond human power. (5) Its freedom from contradictions and defects. (6) The originality of its styles and the singularity of the beginnings and ends of its verses and chapters. (7) Its emergence from someone illiterate who could neither read nor write.[89] It may be concluded that Nursi in his Qur'anic commentary acknowledges the seven major aspects of inimitability recognized by mainstream Muslim scholars, particularly focusing on inimitability of the Qur'an's word-order (*naẓm*).

In his later work, *Treatise on the Qur'ān's Miraculousness*, in *The Words*, Nursi underlines 40 aspects of the inimitability of the Qur'an, and he explains them in detail, giving examples from the Qur'anic text.[90] He notes that, out of countless aspects of the Qur'an's inimitability, he has chosen to point out about 40.[91]

The greatest of the aspects of inimitability which Nursi clarifies is inimitability of the Qur'an's word-order (*naẓm*). He states that there is a remarkable eloquence and stylistic purity in the Qur'an's word-order or composition (*naẓm*). This aspect is explained in his commentary. Just as a clock's hands complete and are fitted to one another in exact orderliness, so does each word and sentence—the entire Qur'an—complete every other.[92] Moreover, he emphasizes that the verses and their phrases and parts are also like the hands of a clock in that they stand for the seconds, the minutes and the hours. If one hand shows one thing, another hand corroborates it in its own way, while also helping it as far as it can. Likewise, if this one wants something, that one assists, and the other supports it in

such a way as to invoke the recognition that: "Our phrases are diverse, but your beauty is one. And all of us point to that beauty." For this reason, Nursi emphasizes, the Qur'an's fluency, its greatest level and its fineness reach the degree of the inimitability.[93] In other words, in Nursi's view, there is a great harmony and mutual support among the sentences, words and letters in one verse. All the words in any verse look to the one purpose, and there is a sublime harmony between verses and purposes.[94] It is clear from the above that the theory of word-order (*naẓm*) is connected with the field of *munāsabā* (the connection between verses and between *sūra*s), because the theory indicates the great harmony among verses and chapters.

On the whole, it should be noted that Nursi mainly examined the theory of word-order (*naẓm*) in his commentary. In this context, Muḥsin ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (b. 1937) states

> It seems to me that Ustad Nursi studied this theory of the word-order thoroughly and then it became clear to him that the earlier commentators like al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī and Abū al-Su'ūd had not attempted to apply it as a complete system treating all the *sūra*s, verses, and words one after the other, in all its details. So he wanted to emulate these great commentators but to compose a commentary in which the theory was applied in detail and comprehensively in respect of the structures and meanings, and the wording and its related sciences both intellectual and intuitive, universal and particular. He relied on all these while disclosing the Qur'an's systematic ordering, through which its miraculousness and inimitability become apparent. He disclosed too and elucidated the subtle qualities of the literary styles and devices of the Qur'an, which when it first appeared opposed some current usages of Arabic, and astounded the Arab orators and silenced their eloquent masters…It was not only to prove the Qur'an's miraculousness in respect of eloquence and rhetoric that Nursi directed his efforts towards explicating the theory of its word-order; it was to penetrate into the meanings of the verses.[95]

It is clear that Nursi mainly focused on the theory of word-order (*naẓm*), which is the greatest of the aspects of inimitability. While he followed ʿAbd al-Qahir al-Jurjānī's approach to the Qur'an's composition (*naẓm*), he developed what the earlier exegetes and rhetoricians such as al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī did. Nursi applied it as a complete system treating all the chapters, verses and words one after the other, in all its details. He produced a commentary in which the theory was applied in

detail. The following example related to inimitability of the Qur'an's word-order (*naẓm*) assists us in understanding the theory:

Q. 21: 46 states that "*Wala'in massathum nafḥatun min ʿazabi Rabbika*" (yet if a mere breath from your Lord's punishment touches them). In order to indicate the strictness of God's punishment, this sentence in the verse points to the least amount or slightest part of the punishment. As the whole clause expresses this slightness, all of its parts should support that meaning. The words *yet if* (*la'in*) indicate uncertainty and thus imply slightness (of punishment). The verb *massa* means to touch slightly. A mere breath (*nafḥatun*) is merely a puff of air, and grammatically the word *nafḥatun* is a derived form of the word used to state singleness, which again points to the slightness. The double *n* (*tanwin*) at the end of *nafḥatun* shows indefiniteness and declares that it is slight and unimportant. The partitive *min* (from) implies a part or a piece, hence again emphasizing something little. The word *ʿadhab* (punishment) is less severe in meaning compared to *nakal* (exemplary punishment) and *ʿiqab* (heavy penalty), and represents a light punishment. The use of *Rabb* (Lord, Provider) implies affection and thus again expresses slightness, instead of using Overwhelming, All-Compelling or Avenger.[96]

The second aspect of inimitability, which Nursi notes, is that there is a wonderful eloquence in the meanings of the Qur'an. For example, Q. 57:1 states that "Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies God—He is the Almighty, the Wise." In order to understand fully the eloquence in meanings, people should imagine that they are living in the desert of pre-Islamic Arabia. At a time when everything is surrounded by the darkness of ignorance and heedlessness, and everything is enveloped in the lifeless veils of nature, people hear from the Qur'an: "The seven heavens and the earth and everyone in them glorify Him", (Q. 17: 44) or similar verses. It will be understood how, in people's mind, those entities in the seven heavens and the earth acquire a purposeful existence at the sound of: "Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies God" and recite God's names.[97] On this basis, it is reasonably concluded that there is an extraordinary eloquence not only in the Qur'an's word-order (*naẓm*), but also in the meanings (content) of the Qur'an. Moreover, here Nursi connects eloquence with the fundamentals of faith. Furthermore, he draws attention to the historical context of the Qur'an, the spiritual situation of the first people who heard the Qur'an, and the influence of the Qur'an on those people in that time in order to show us the eloquence in meanings.

The third aspect of inimitability is inimitability in the style of the Qur'an (*Uslūb al-Qur'an*). The Qur'an has unique, original styles that are novel and persuasive. The styles of the Qur'an still preserve their originality and freshness, and its styles do not imitate and cannot be imitated. Nursi discusses the Qur'anic styles in disconnected, individual letters (*al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭ'a*), chapters, aims, verses, sentences and phrases and words. Nursi states that individual letters at the beginning of some Qur'anic chapters (e.g., *Alif-Lam-Mim*, *Alif-Lam-Ra*) contain five or six gleams of inimitability. For example, they comprise half of each category of the categories of letters—emphatic, whispered, stressed, soft, labio-linguals and *qalqale*. *Al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭ'a* take more than half from the "light" letters and less than half from the "heavy" letters, neither of which can be divided, the Qur'an has halved every category.[98] The example shows that preference of letters in *al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭ'a* has an inimitable character. Nursi explains five or six gleams of inimitability in individual letters in his one-volume commentary. For example, individual letters are divine cyphers addressed by God to his messenger; the human mind has not yet reached it, and its key is at the hand of the Prophet.[99] It should be noted that Nursi analyses the style of the Qur'an in detail because it is connected with linguistics, eloquence and inimitability.

Moreover, Nursi points to a number of characteristics of the style of the Qur'an. The Qur'anic style is different from existing literary types. The style of the Qur'an addresses different levels of people at the same time. It is natural and free from artificiality. The style of the Qur'an resembles the style of dialogue in human affairs because it is guidance for the people. The style of the Qur'an addresses reason and emotion in a balanced way. The themes of the Qur'an are mingled within each other, and the Qur'an's arrangement is not according to its themes. The style of the Qur'an is at the top of fluency and harmony.[100] It could be said that Nursi's views on the style of the Qur'an play a major role in his approach to Qur'anic exegesis.

A significant feature of the Qur'anic style is repetitions. Nursi discusses this issue in detail. He emphasizes that some words and speech are reality and fundamental sustenance; they reinforce the mind and feed the spirit. The more they are repeated, the better they appear and the more familiar they become, like sunlight. There are also other words like fruits and embellishments, and they provide pleasure in their variety. In Nursi's view, as a whole, the Qur'an offers sustenance and strength for hearts, and its repetition provides delight and pleasure. It does not cause boredom. Likewise, in the Qur'an, there are parts that are the spirit of that sustenance

and strength. The more they are repeated, the more they shine, spreading lights of truth and reality. Among those repetitions are some like *bismillah* (In the name of God) that are fundamental principles, sources of life and eternal lights. The story of Moses may be given as an example: In each place (*maqam*), it is repeated due to one of the aspects the story contains. Repeated expressions are assumed to be repetitions because those expressions resemble each other in words. In fact, those repeated expressions are not repetitions. Nursi clarifies *bismillah*, underscoring that there are several aspects to *bismillah*. Some express the seeking of help, while some look to the aim of the particular chapter to follow. Other facets of *bismillah* show that *bismillah* is an index to the basic points of the Qur'an. *Bismillah* also includes different levels of meaning such as divine unity, praise, divine glory (*jalāl*) and beauty (*jamāl*). It also indicates the four main purposes of the Qur'an. In Nursi's view, most chapters have one of these aspects as its primary aim, while the other aspects of *bismillah* are secondary.[101]

Nursi thus draws attention to the fact that repetition in the Qur'an provides delight and pleasure, while it does not cause boredom. Besides, in each place (*maqam*), an expression is repeated for one of its aspects connected with the theme of the chapter. In this context, the modern thinker, Khalaf Allāh, thinks that, in the Qur'an, the context and situation of one and the same episode varies when repeated.[102] Ahmad Khan also indicates that "the Qur'an has a quality of repetition. Just as when we talk about something, on many occasions we need to repeat an earlier statement to suit the demands of a new situation with the objective of reminding our interlocutors of what has preceded. Some important subjects have to be declared time after time. Sometimes also, allusion has to be made to a story already told."[103] Thus, Nursi's views on repetition in the Qur'an are not entirely exceptional among modern scholars, and he clarifies this significant element of Qur'anic style by similes and examples.

Other major aspects of inimitability are discussed by Nursi: The Qur'an is remarkably fluent and pure in wording and word arrangement. The Qur'an's expressions include a supremacy, power, sublimity and magnificence. Its explanations are of the greatest degree of excellence in all categories of expression and speech, such as the category of exhorting and urging good deeds, the category of threat, the category of praise, the category of censure and restraint, the category of proving and demonstration, the category of guidance, the category of silencing and overcoming and the category of teaching and explaining. The Qur'anic expressions are

concise, but all-inclusive (*ījāz al-Qur'an*). There are many categories of predictions in the Qur'an. The Qur'an gives news of the past and the future. The Qur'an also informs about the unseen, divine truths and the realities of the hereafter. The Qur'an expresses all the divine truths in a very balanced way. The Qur'an has inimitable qualities at the ends of many Qur'anic verses. The Qur'an has miraculous features showed through its summaries and original style of using God's Beautiful Names in order to conclude numerous of its verses. There is unity in explanation of the Qur'an like the human body, and there is a precise fluency, an excellent harmony, and a strong mutual support and connection in explanation of the entire Qur'an.[104]

The Qur'an's freedom from contradictions and defects is another inimitable aspect. The Qur'an addresses all levels of people in every century at the same time. There is also the scientific inimitable aspect of the Qur'an. The Qur'an does not cause boredom. There is the Qur'an's inimitability in guidance and wisdom. Eloquence of the Qur'an is superior to human eloquence and literature. The Qur'an affects the heart, reason and soul. Another aspect of inimitability is that the Qur'an is always fresh. It is as if it were revealed anew in every century. The Qur'anic civilization is also inimitable. Human words and laws become old and thus need to be changed. However, the laws and principles of the Qur'an are so established and constant. Its emergence from someone illiterate is also another aspect of inimitability. The Qur'an can be memorized easily. Qur'anic verses please people and do not cause hardness and bother. Finally, the Qur'an includes the greatest and most exalted expressions and clauses.[105] As we have seen, Nursi expands on the aspects of the Qur'an's inimitability since he considers this field to be vital to Islamic theology. However, because of the limited scope of this research, we mentioned briefly many facets of the inimitability on the above. These aspects of inimitability are significant because they show that this field plays a major role in Nursi's collection, and particularly in his commentary. Therefore, they contribute to this research.

Another significant aspect of inimitability in Nursi is the Qur'an's extraordinary comprehensiveness (*jāmi'iyya*). Nursi indicates five main areas in which the Qur'an shows such comprehensiveness: in wording or expression; in meaning; in knowledge; in the different subjects dealt with; and in style.[106] Nursi clearly explicates in detail those five main areas, but we shall focus only on the comprehensiveness in wording in the Qur'an.

With regard to comprehensiveness in wording or expression of the Qur'an, Nursi highlights a prophetic tradition (ḥadīth) regarding this subject. The ḥadīth is as follows: "Each verse has outer and inner meanings, limits and a point of comprehension, as well as boughs, branches, and twigs."[107] Nursi adds that each phrase, word, letter and diacritical point has numerous aspects. Each person who hears a particular verse receives his share through a different door.[108] In other words, Nursi states that the wording of the Qur'an is such that all of its phrases, words and letters, have many aspects, and give all of those whom the Qur'an addresses intellectual and spiritual nourishment commensurate with people's different capacities. In his view, each verse speaks to different levels of people in accordance not only with their capacity to comprehend generally, but also in a way that addresses their special intellectual skill. Moreover, the wording of the Qur'an indicates that it is comprehensive of all manners of speech, while sensitive to the nuances of each particular manner. For example, it speaks to scholars of the natural sciences in the same way that it addresses poets, even though the Qur'an cannot be called a book of science nor of poetry. Furthermore, Nursi underlines that in many places, the Qur'an intentionally leaves the wording open to achieve generality so that it may express numerous meanings. The Qur'an also keeps its verses brief so that everyone can find his share.[109] Brevity is, in almost everything, a virtue, and concision (*ījāz*) is a significant aspect of eloquence and provides comprehensiveness. In this context, Colin Turner emphasizes that Nursi's idea of comprehensiveness should be understood in terms of the openness of Qur'anic verses to many interpretations rather than of the concept maintained by numerous Muslims that the Qur'an is somehow the repository of all knowledge.[110] What can be inferred from Nursi's views above is that he embraces polyvalent readings when he interprets the Qur'anic text. Nursi's perspective on polyvalent readings indicates that the nature of the Qur'anic text and its wording enable us to derive different readings and numerous meanings.

In addition, regarding comprehensiveness in wording, Nursi states that he uses Arabic grammatical rules, principles of rhetoric, semantics and eloquence in his commentary in order to prove that the words of the Qur'an include and intend various meanings. According to the consensus of Muslim jurists, exegetes and scholars of religious methodology, all aspects and meanings understood from the Qur'anic text can be considered among its authentic meanings if they agree with Arabic grammatical rules, Islam's basic principles and the sciences of rhetoric, semantics and

eloquence. Thousands of Qur'anic commentaries prove comprehensiveness in wording or expression of the Qur'an.[111] It is clear that Nursi follows the way of polyvalent reading common in the classical period, referring to the conditions of polyvalency according to Muslim scholars. It seems that Nursi is respectful of the intellectual tradition and recognizes its authority. In other words, he trusts the intellectual tradition of Islam and the collective experience of the community. He also mainly admits grammatical and rhetorical qualities in the Qur'an, underlining that these characteristics function in such a way as to improve the possibilities of the Qur'an and polyvalent reading.

Finally, another important aspect of inimitability in Nursi is legislative inimitability (*tashrīʿī iʿjāz*).[112] This aspect is of particular significance because it is connected with the legal content of the Qur'an. Nursi holds the view that Islamic religion and law are grounded in rational proof, and that they are the sum of the branches of knowledge including the essence of all the fundamental sciences such as the science of refining the spirit, the legal sciences, the science of human relations, social behaviour. Moreover, the Shari'a clarifies where necessary, but it is concise and short where this is not necessary or people's minds are not ready or the times do not allow. That is to say, the Shari'a establishes principles that can be elaborated, deduced and developed via consultation and the exercise of reason. Nursi here emphasizes that not all these sciences, or even a third of them, could be found in a single person in civilized places and among intelligent people in the contemporary period. The Shari'a is always beyond human power.[113] As has been seen, Nursi considers the inimitable nature of legislation in the Qur'an and believes the universality of the legal content of the Qur'an. Furthermore, he points out that the Shari'a only provides primary principles. Based on these principles, the scholars and the jurisprudents derive and deduce secondary rules through the exercise of reason.

In conclusion, Nursi's approach to Qur'anic exegesis rests heavily on the inimitability of the Qur'an (*Iʿjāz al-Qur'an*). While the early Muslim modern scholars such as A. Khan focus on divine guidance as constituting the inimitable nature of the Qur'an, they generally do not give importance to philological inimitability. Nursi, on the other hand, highlights that the inimitability of the Qur'an lies primarily in the matchless degree of its eloquence. He indicates seven major aspects of the inimitability (*wujūh al-iʿjāz*) in his Qur'anic commentary. He points out about 40 aspects in his later writings and thus expands on seven major aspects in his commentary. The reason for Nursi's emphasis on linguistics and eloquence in

defining the inimitability of the Qur'an could be traced back to his education in the Ottoman context as indicated in the previous chapter. It is also safe to note that he wants to revive the respect of people to the wording of the Qur'an and elevates the Qur'anic text to the highest level.

6.5 Qur'anic Narratives (*Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'an*)

The Qur'an includes many narratives. Approximately one-fifth of the Qur'an deals with narratives of past prophets, their messages and their communities. These narratives differ in length and detail, and are spread throughout the Qur'an. Muslim scholars emphasize that the primary objective of these narratives related to prophetic figures is to highlight particular teachings, rather than to present a full story of their lives. Therefore, it could be seen that the majority of the Qur'an's narratives do not provide biographies of prophetic figures.[114] Rather, their purposes have been described as, for example, explaining the general message of Islam, offering general guidance, reinforcing the belief in the Prophet and in Muslims and providing a reminder of the previous prophets and their struggle.[115] Qur'anic narratives constitute a significant part of the Qur'an, and they are generally considered to be real stories in the traditional approach. As with approaches to Biblical narratives, the modern era has seen discussions in the Muslim world regarding the nature of the Qur'anic narratives.

In the modern period, there has been discussion concerning the authenticity and historical truthfulness of the Qur'anic narratives. For example, the Egyptian scholar, Muḥammad Khalaf Allāh, maintains that the stories that the Qur'an tells about the previous prophets are not necessarily historically true, and that their value lies in the religious values these narratives show rather than in the information they contain about what happened in the past. The Qur'anic stories supported the Prophet emotionally and made him feel better during his exhausting confrontation with the unbelievers.[116] Moreover, some scholars use various ways to rationalize the contents of these narratives. While some eliminate all that is supernatural in Qur'anic narratives, others attempt to minimize as much as possible the miraculous elements of the story.[117] For example, Ahmad Khan argues against the traditional explanations and says that the seven sleepers (The Companions of the Cave), mentioned in Q. 18:9–26 really died.[118] What can be inferred from these approaches is that certain modern intellectuals have been influenced by modern historical criticism and

positivistic ideas. Now Nursi's approach to Qur'anic narratives should be examined as he lived at the same period when positivism was having a great effect on the Muslim world.

It is important to note that Nursi acknowledges the authenticity and historical truthfulness of the Qur'anic narratives. Firstly, sometimes Nursi discusses details of the Qur'anic narratives. For example, he analyses who is *Dhul-Qarnayn*?[119] Where is the barrier of *Dhul-Qarnayn*? Who were Gog and Magog (*Ya'juj* and *Ma'juj*)? referring to the argumentation of several interpretations made by the Qur'anic exegetes regarding these events.[120] At this point, Nursi criticizes al-Bayḍāwī's interpretation regarding the steep mountains in *Dhul-Qarnayn*'s story, mentioned in Q. 18: 96.[121] In Nursi's view, these narratives in the Qur'an are true historical events.

Secondly, in Nursi's view, the Qur'anic narratives are clear proofs of the prophethood of Muhammad. The purpose of the Qur'anic narratives is instruction and admonition. Moreover, the stories of the Qur'an indicate to humanity, the destination for which they should aim in their attempts for progress and development. They are like summaries of human experience. Furthermore, the particular events in the Qur'anic narratives indicate a great universal principle.[122] Nursi underlines that the Qur'an includes many apparently unimportant events, each of which hide a universal principle and provide the tip of a general law. For example, regarding the story of the Cow (*al-Baqara*), mentioned in Q. 2: 67–71, Nursi states that the Egyptians of Prophet Moses' time really worshipped cows and bulls, as can be seen by the Jews making a calf to worship years after the Exodus. With the story of the Cow, the Qur'an clarifies that Moses destroyed this ingrained concept by sacrificing a cow and via his Messengership. Hence, this apparently unimportant event refers to a universal principle, and elaborates on it as a most fundamental lesson of wisdom for all people in every time. Nursi reiterates that certain small stories, such as the story of Moses, indicated in the Qur'an as historical events, are actually the tips of universal principles.[123] What we discern is that Nursi attempts to find universal principles in the Qur'anic narratives. His approach indicates his idea of the universality of the Qur'an. He also holds the view that these narratives provide particular teachings, rather than presenting full historical information.

Finally, Nursi grasped the inward aspect of the Qur'anic narratives and discovered numerous meanings in them. In his method, he established an interactive relation between the Qur'anic stories and man's life, and he

connected the past, present and future.[124] In other words, he seeks to relate the Qur'anic stories to the modern reader's life. For example, Nursi points to the story of the Prophet Jonah, mentioned in Q. 21:87, where Jonah was cast into the sea and a large fish swallowed him. The sea was stormy; the night was turbulent and dark. There was no sign of hope from anywhere. In that difficult time, the Prophet Jonah prayed as follows: "There is no God but You, glory be to You, I was wrong." After this story, Nursi turns his readers' attention to our situation now. We are in a situation one hundred times worse than the Prophet Jonah's. Our night is the future. When we look upon our future with the eye of heedlessness towards our religious responsibilities, it is a hundred times darker and more terrifying than Jonah's night. Our sea is this moving earth. There are thousands of dead bodies in each wave of this sea, and so it is a thousand times more fearful than Jonah's sea. Our fish is made up of the lusts and caprices of our evil-commanding soul, which attempt to destroy our eternal life. Our fish is therefore a thousand times more harmful than Jonah's fish. Nursi goes on state that because we are in this situation, we should do as Prophet Jonah did. We should turn away from all terrifying means and take refuge directly in our Lord.[125] In this example, an interactive relation between the story of the Prophet Jonah and a believer's life can readily be seen. Through Nursi's method, a Qur'anic story does not stay as a past event in history; rather people can experience that story in their lives today. In another example, Nursi relates the story of the Prophet Job, mentioned in Q. 21: 83–4, to a believer's situation. For example, similar to the physical wounds and illnesses of the Prophet Job, we have inner and spiritual diseases and wounds due to our sins and doubts related to belief. Therefore, we need the prayer of Job more than he did.[126] It could be said that Nursi attempts to approach Qur'anic narratives in such a way that readers may feel that they experience a similar story. This method could be a reason for the influence of Nursi's writings on the people.

6.6 *Mushkil al-Qur'an* (the Apparently Contradictory Passages of the Qur'an)

It is important to note that the field of *mushkil al-Qur'an* in the Qur'anic sciences deals with certain difficult verses or passages which seem to be inconsistent with one another. Muslim scholars emphasize the fact that there certainly cannot be any real inconsistency in the Qur'an, referring to

Q. 4:82: "Will they not think about this Qur'an? If it had been from anyone other than God, they would have found much inconsistency in it." Therefore, this point deals with only apparent inconsistencies (*ẓahirī ikhtilaf*) in the Qur'anic text which can all be solved through interpretive methods.[127] Muslim scholars have discussed such difficult verses or passages from the early period of Islam up to the present. Modern Muslim scholars such as Nursi also attempt to clarify such passages.

In his response to the existence of apparent obscurities (*mushkilāt*) in the Qur'an, Nursi highlights that these are due to the subtlety and profundity of what obscure (*mushkil*) passages indicate, and the conciseness and loftiness of the style. In his view, these are the kinds of obscurities one meets in the Qur'an.[128] Nursi discusses certain difficult verses and expounds obscure passages. For example, some verses show that God is infinitely near to us: "We are closer to him [i.e., man] than his jugular vein" (Q. 50:16), while other verses indicate that we are infinitely far from God: "by which the angels and the Spirit ascend to Him, on a Day whose length is fifty thousand years" (Q. 70:4). Nursi reconciles those verses by the example of the sun. The sun's unrestricted light and immaterial reflection makes it nearer to us than the pupil of our eye, while our being bounded by certain conditions keeps us far from the sun. Similarly, God is infinitely near to us, while we are infinitely far from Him.[129] Thus, Nursi makes these seemingly incompatible verses understandable through evoking the simile of people's being very near to or very far from the sun.

Another good example is found in certain verses related to God's creation of things. Some of these verses demonstrate that things happen immediately and through God's command. "When He wills something to be, His way is to say, 'Be'– and it is!" (Q. 36:82) and "It was just one single blast and then – lo and behold! – they were all brought before Us" (Q. 36:53) are such verses. Other verses, however, indicate that things come into existence gradually via a great power on the basis of knowledge, and that everything is a delicate work of art depending on wisdom. "The handiwork of God who has perfected all things" (Q. 27:88) and "who gave everything its perfect form" (Q. 32:7) are such verses. Nursi points out that there is no contradiction between these verses. Some verses announce the extremely fine artistry and enormous perfection of wisdom in beings, and such verses point particularly to the start of their creation. Other verses express the great ease, speed and great obedience, and such verses indicate particularly repeating and renewing created things.[130]

Finally, Nursi also reconciles some verses connected with God's creation of the seven heavens and the earth. Q. 2:29 states that "It was He who created all that is on the earth for you, then turned to the sky and made the seven heavens." This verse indicates that the earth was created before the heavens. Q. 79:30, however, declares that "And after that, the earth, too, He spread out", indicating that the heavens were created before the earth. Q. 21:30 reads that "the heavens and the earth used to be joined together and that We ripped them apart", implying that they were created together and then split apart as the same matter. Nursi solves the apparent contradictions between these verses by using both the teachings of the Shari'a and modern scientific information. In Nursi's view, as we may correlate both the Shari'a's teaching and scientific information, "the solar system and the earth were a sort of dough kneaded by the hand of power out of a simple substance: ether. After the creation of the ether, it received God's first manifestation giving existence. That is, God created the ether, then He made it into the essential atoms, then He made dense some of these. He created the seven globes from these dense ones, one of which is our earth. Then the earth solidified before all the rest and speedily formed a crust, and the earth became the source of life over a long period of time. For these reasons, the creation of the earth and its formation was before that of the heavens. However, because uses of the earth, its benefits and its being spread out were completed after the arrangement and ordering of the heavens, the creation of the heavens started before the earth. At the beginning, the heavens and the earth were together. Therefore, the three verses above look to the three aspects of the topic."[131] Through his explanations, Nursi solves the apparent contradictions between the verses related to the creation of the heavens and the earth.

6.7 *Munāsabāt al-Qur'an* (*Tanâsub*, Harmony Among the Verses and Chapters of the Qur'an)

The classical exegetical literature admits that the field of *tanâsub* is the most prestigious science in Qur'anic exegesis although Qur'anic commentaries have not paid it sufficient attention. Nonetheless, early modern Muslim thinkers insistently emphasize this notion. There can be a number of reasons behind this great interest. Even though it is said that the reason for this modern interest in *tanâsub* is a reaction to Western scholars' criticism of Qur'anic text in terms of its lack of thematic and chronological

order, the primary reason may be that modern Muslim intellectuals consider groups of chapters and verses as a whole, in contrast to the atomist approach of the classical period. Their anti-atomist leaning enables them to see various subtle points which can be brought to light by the notion of *tanâsub*.[132]

For example, ʿAbduh thinks the Qur'an is coherent and reads it as a continuous narrative. He believes that the primary reason for contradictions in Qur'anic commentaries is the atomist approach. Therefore, firstly we should consider the Qur'an as a whole. In his view, the notion of *tanâsub* is of great importance for understanding the Qur'an. What makes ʿAbduh original compared to the classical exegetes is that he sees *tanâsub* is ascertained through a rational discovery, not only through textual references such as the common themes in chapters.[133] It is interesting to note that ʿAbduh thinks the atomist approach in the classical commentaries led to inconsistencies, and that focusing on harmony, Qur'anic unity and intratextuality may enable us to properly understand the Qur'an. As Nursi gives importance to linguistics and rhetoric, his approach to this notion should be analysed.

As stated earlier, Nursi focused on the Qur'an's word-order or composition (*naẓm*) in his commentary. Because the word-order (*naẓm*) emphasizes the great harmony between verses, it is connected with the field of *tanâsub*. In his commentary, he attempted to apply the word-order as a complete system treating all the *sūra*s, verses and words one after the other, in all its details.[134] Moreover, Nursi states that "just as a clock's hands complete and are fitted to one another in exact orderliness, so does every word and sentence – the entire Qur'an – complete each other."[135] Furthermore, he also underlines that "it is as if each Qur'anic verse has an eye that sees most of the verses and a face that looks toward them. Given this, it extends to them the immaterial threads of relationship to weave a design of miraculousness."[136] In addition, in his view, there is great harmony and mutual support among the sentences, words and letters in one verse. All the words in any verse look to the one purpose, and there is a sublime harmony between verses and purposes.[137] As a result, a great number of references to the notion of *tanâsub* are seen in his commentary. Examples from his exegetical writings can help us to understand his view on this notion.

When we look at Nursi's commentary, it can be easily seen that he always indicates the notion of *tanâsub* in every verse he interprets, referring to the relationship of the verse with the preceding verse, and the

harmony and the connection among the clauses and the words in one verse. For example, regarding Q. 1:1–4, "In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy. Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds. The Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy. Master of the Day of Judgement", he states that because "the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy" points to the divine bounties, praise is essential for them. Therefore, he explains the relationship between the first two verses. "The Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy" indicates the two essentials in education (*tarbiya*). The Lord of Mercy (*al-Rahman*) refers to the attraction of benefits (*jalb al-manāfiʿ*) because of its meaning of Provider (*al-Razzaq*). The Giver of Mercy (*al-Rahīm*), on account of its meaning of the most Forgiving (*al-Ghaffār*), implies the repulsion of harm (*dafʿ al-maḍarrat*). These are two fundamental principles of education. For this reason, these two words are tied to each other, and they have a connection with the word of "Lord" (*Rabb*) in the previous verse. In his view, the relationship of "Master of the Day of Judgement" with the preceding verse is as follows: This verse is the result of the previous verse which expresses mercy because mercy is the greatest proof of resurrection and eternal happiness. The reason for this is that real mercy and bounty depend on the existence of resurrection and eternal happiness. Otherwise, intellect would be a calamity for humanity when they consider death to be eternal separation, and affection and compassion would turn to very serious pain.[138] As has been seen, Nursi connects the first four verses of the first Qur'anic chapter.

In his commentary, Nursi interprets the second chapter of the Qur'an until verse 33, and he frequently indicates the notion of *tanâsub*. For example, Nursi states that chapter *Baqara* divides human beings into three groups: the believers, the obdurate disbelievers and the hypocrites until its verse 21. The first five verses are related to the believers, while the subsequent two verses are connected with the obdurate disbelievers and the following 13 verses are concerned with the hypocrites. Having clarified the categories of human beings, the Qur'an addresses all of them with Q. 2:21, "People, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, so that you may be mindful [of Him]." Nursi states that "It makes this the result of what preceded it in the same way that a building follows the plan, and commands and prohibitions related to actions follow knowledge, and the divine decree (*al-qaḍā'*) follows divine determining (*al-qadar*)." After the Qur'an mentioned the three several groups and explains their characteristics, Q. 2:21 orders action and worship in the context of the previous verses.[139] As has been recognized, here Nursi draws attention to the

connection among several passages in the chapter, which seem as if they are disconnected narratives.

Another useful example in Nursi's writings is the relationship between verses 21 and 23 of the second chapter: "People, worship your Lord", and "If you have doubts about the revelation We have sent down to Our servant, then produce a single *sūra* like it." He finds the harmony between these verses as follows: Verse 21 is about divine unity (*al-tawḥīd*), the first of the four main aims of the Qur'an, because Ibn ʿAbbās interprets worship in the verse as divine unity. Verse 23 is about proof of prophecy and the prophethood of Muhammad, which is the second of main purposes of the Qur'an. And the prophethood of Muhammad is also the most significant proof of divine unity. Besides, proof of the prophethood is done through miracles, and the Prophet Muhammad's greatest miracle is the Qur'an. Nursi points out the second aspect of the relationship between these verses. When verse 21 orders worship, the listener asks: "How should we worship?" The Qur'an responds: "As the Qur'an teaches you". Then the person asks: "How can we know that the Qur'an is the word of God?" And verse 23 replies saying: "If you have doubts about the revelation We have sent down to Our servant, then produce a single *sūra* like it."[140]

In order to understand Nursi's approach to intratextual hermeneutics, another great example is his interpretation of Q. 2:25, "[Prophet], give those who believe and do good the news that they will have Gardens graced with flowing streams…" Nursi discusses the word-order of this verse in terms of three aspects: The relationship of the verse as a whole with the previous verses, relationships of the phrases in the verse and relationships of the parts of the phrases. In his view, there are numerous relations between the meaning of this verse and the previous verses, and different lines from this verse extend to those verses. For example, the Qur'an praises the believers at the beginning of the chapter because of their belief and good deeds. Then the Qur'an, by this verse (Q. 2:25), demonstrates the result of faith and the fruit of good deeds. In the same way, the Qur'an mentioned the obdurate disbelievers and the hypocrites at the beginning and depicted their way, and it points out with this verse the light of eternal happiness and expresses them this great reward to increase their sense of loss. Moreover, the Qur'an ordered the people to worship with the previous verse (Q. 2:21) even though worship signifies hardship, difficulty and the abandoning of immediate pleasures. Then with this verse, the Qur'an promises them future pleasures in heaven and satisfies

them. Furthermore, the previous verses verified divine unity, while this verse declares the fruits of divine unity. What is more, the Qur'an established prophethood through the inimitability of Q. 2:23. Then by this verse, it indicates the duties of prophethood such as warning and giving good news. In addition, while the previous verse warned and threatened, this verse excites desire and delivers glad tiding. Therefore, there is the relation between opposites. Finally, the previous verses indicated Hell, one part of the hereafter. Then with this verse, the Qur'an points to the other part of the hereafter, clearly referring to Paradise.[141] It is clear in this example above that Nursi attempts to show the relationships and the harmony among the different sections of the one chapter, and he successfully connects them.

It could be reasonably concluded that like certain modern intellectuals, Nursi puts emphasis on the notion of *tanâsub* in his commentary, and he frequently refers to this notion. Nursi believes that there is a great harmony and relationship among the Qur'anic verses, different passages, even among the sentences, words and letters in one verse. Through his approach, he attempts to points out that the several passages and verses of the Qur'an are not disconnected narratives. It is evident from his emphasis on the Qur'an's word-order or composition (*naẓm*) that a major aim of Nursi in his commentary is to develop the field of *tanâsub*.

To sum up, in this chapter, we examined Nursi's views on various Qur'anic sciences such as occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), abrogation (*naskh*), clear and ambiguous (*muhkam wa-mutashābih*), the inimitability of the Qur'an (*iʿjāz al-Qur'an*), Qur'anic narratives (*qaṣaṣ al-Qur'an*), difficult words and passages (*mushkil al-Qur'an*) and intratextual hermeneutics (*tanâsub*), pointing to certain modern intellectuals' more critical and rationalist approaches. This analysis enables us to properly discover Nursi's and the modernists' hermeneutics in relation to Qur'anic sciences and exegesis. Moreover, it may also refer to Nursi's major concerns in his reading of the Qur'an and his exegetical methodology. As can be seen, Nursi used these fields in Qur'anic sciences to clarify various theological subjects. Benefiting from the opportunities of Qur'anic sciences, he developed his theology. Therefore, as a whole, this chapter fits within the argument of the book: *kalāmisation* of *tafsīr* and other disciplines. Our next chapter will focus on trends and tendencies in Qur'anic exegesis such as theological exegesis, mystical exegesis and scientific exegesis.

Notes

1. Muhsin Demirci, *Tefsir Usūlü* (Istanbul: IFAV, 2003), 139–146.
2. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 33.
3. Von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, 90, 101; Qattān, *Mabāhith*, 71–94.
4. Von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, 91–2.
5. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 46.
6. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 34, 242; Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 26, 28.
7. Rahbar, "Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Principles," 325.
8. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 47.
9. Nursi, *The Words*, 433; *Al-Mathnawi al-Nuri*, 179–180.
10. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 73.
11. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 26, 28.
12. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 225, 234.
13. "[It is as if] We had placed [iron] collars around their necks, right up to their chins so that their heads are forced up and set barriers before and behind them, blocking their vision: they cannot see."
14. Nursi, *The Letters*, 182–3; *Mektubat*, 232, accessed 19 April 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.2.232
15. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 34; Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 4, 128.
16. Nursi, *The Gleams*, 184.
17. *The Words*, 426.
18. *The Letters*, 339.
19. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 77.
20. Ibid., 77–8.
21. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 34.
22. Von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, 103–4; Demirci, *Tefsir Usūlü*, 166.
23. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 88; Mertoğlu, "Tefsir," 292.
24. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 48–9; Mertoğlu, "Doğrudan Doğruya Kur'an'dan Alıp İlhamı," 89.
25. Rahbar, "Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Principles," 112.
26. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 34.
27. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 49–50.
28. Rahbar, "Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Principles," 112.
29. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 49.
30. Ibid., 50–1.
31. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 105–108, 34.
32. Albayrak, "Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır ve Bediüzzaman Said Nursī'nin Nesh Konusuna Yaklaşımı," *Yeni Ümit* no. 64, April 2004, www.yeniumit.com.tr
33. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 14–5.

34. *The Letters*, 58–9.
35. Albayrak, "Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır ve Bediüzzaman,".
36. Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 95–6.
37. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 57; *İşārāt*, 48–9.
38. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 31–2.
39. Albayrak, "Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır ve Bediüzzaman,".
40. Beki, *Kur'ān'ın Yüksek ve Parlak Bir Tefsiri*, 96.
41. Albayrak, "Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır ve Bediüzzaman,".
42. Q. 3: 7.
43. Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 183.
44. Von Denffer, *Ulum al Qur'an*, 80–1.
45. There was extensive debate regarding such God's attributes in the early centuries of Islam, and this debate still continues up to the present. For example, some scholars, such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d.241/855), argued that these attributes should be interpreted literally, while the rationalist Mu'tazilīs believed that they need interpretation and should be read metaphorically. The prominent exegetes, such as al-Rāzī, Zamakhsharī, al-Bayḍāwī, and Ibn ʿArabi held the views that are more similar to the Mu'tazilīs' approach, and they considered verses connected with God's attributes to be "ambiguous" and in need of some form of interpretation. Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 184.
46. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 51–2; Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 32.
47. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 52–3.
48. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 102.
49. Nursi, *The Letters*, 382.
50. Suat Yıldırım, "Important Principles in the *Risale-i Nur* For Understanding the Qur'an's Allegorical Verses," in *A Contemporary Approach To Understanding Qur'an: The Example of The Risale-i Nur*, edit. The Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture (Istanbul: Sözler Pub., 2000), 238.
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57. Nursi, *The Letters*, 382.
58. Ibid., 343.
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66. Yıldırım, "Important Principles in the *Risale-i Nur*," 244–5.
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77. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 568.
78. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 66.
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99. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 38–41.
100. Kileci, *Risāle-i Nur'da Kur'ān*, 187–190; Nursi, *The Words*, 416–22.
101. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 36–7.
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107. Ibn Hibban, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, cited in Nursi, *The Words*, 410.
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126. Ibid., 11–2.
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141. Ibid., 211–2.

CHAPTER 7

Trends and Exegetical Traditions

Contents

It is important to note that the third AH/ninth century CE saw the maturation of distinct trends or schools of thought within Islam. This process was actually the result of heated debates among Muslims on religio-political, legal and theological issues. While the origins of these schools trace back to the middle of the first AH/seventh century CE, the establishment of the schools took approximately one or two centuries. In addition to the major religio-political groups such as the Sunnīs, Shi'ites and Kharijites, there were also theologians, jurists and Ṣūfīs. Also, a number of trends including theological, legal and mystical exegesis emerged. Therefore, from the ninth century onwards, the body of exegetical works became increasingly large and varied, and came to include theological, legal, religio-political and mystical works.[1]

After providing background information on the emergence of trends in *tafsīr*, this chapter will focus on the major exegetical trends comprising theological, legal, mystical (Ṣūfī) and scientific exegesis. It will examine the views of the modernist exegetes such as ʿAbduh on these exegetical

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tendencies, comparing them with Nursi's approach. In the context of this research, we will analyse where Nursi stands in relation to such exegetical trends.

7.1 Theological Exegesis

As previously noted, certain modern intellectuals such as Ahmad Khan and ʿAbduh are proponents of the new *kalām* movement.[2] They discussed various theological subjects such as the unity of God, God's attributes and human freedom versus God's power in their exegetical works. Moreover, both Ahmad Khan and ʿAbduh were influenced by the early rationalist theologians in early Islam, such as the Muʿtazilīs.[3] For example, Ahmad Khan's new theological ideas are described as a revival of the doctrines of the Muʿtazilite school, the acceptance of the (Western) conceptions of conscience and nature, and the re-establishment and reformulation of pure *tawḥīd* and the whole of Islamic theology.[4] Furthermore, many early twentieth-century scholars showed an interest in Muʿtazilī learning with the renaissance (*nahḍa*) in Arabic literature in the late nineteenth century. ʿAbduh, aware of the changes that had occurred in the Muslim world, attempted to respond to the challenges by reviving some Muʿtazilī views.[5] In addition, as previously stated, many modern scholars such as Ahmad Khan and ʿAbduh placed Qur'anic commentary ahead of all other disciplines.[6] They attempted to establish a theology based on the Qur'an in the confines of the discipline of *tafsīr*. Finally, "simplicities of faith" is the motto of the modernist scholars. For instance, Ahmad Khan aimed to eliminate from his creed and code of practice all the additional material that had entered into Islam via the endeavours of Muslim jurists, commentators, theologians (*Ahl al-Kalām*) and Ṣūfīs. He confined himself only to the Qur'an and a few authentic prophetic traditions, on condition that they could pass the test of reason.[7]

In line with certain modernist intellectuals, Nursi was also a part of this revitalization and the new *kalām* movements among the last Ottoman scholars.[8] Moreover, both ʿAbduh and Nursi were immersed in the Qur'an and intended to reach the masses through their writing by articulating Islamic theology and the essentials of faith in more popular form.[9] Nursi also analysed numerous theological subjects such as the unity of God, God's attributes, human freedom as related to God's power, and the hereafter in his exegetical writings. Therefore, while theological exegesis can be frequently seen in Nursi's works, unlike the modernist scholars, he

generally follows the mainstream Sunnī theological approach, in particular mostly the Ash'arīte school.[10]

Moreover, as this research highlights, Nursi's approach can be described as *kalāmisation* of *tafsīr* and other disciplines. What Nursi attempts to do is to formulate an Islamic metaphysics and theology mainly based on the Qur'an by drawing together multiple fields, a task whose importance has been indicated by Fazlur Rahman.[11] Nursi points out that the Qur'an includes whatever is necessary for the complete affirmation of divine unity and its related aspects and notes the balance among all exalted divine realities. The Qur'an observes whatever is required by the divine beautiful names and maintains the harmony among them. The Qur'an also contains the fundamental qualities of Lordship and Divinity with perfect balance.[12] In addition, in his one-volume Qur'anic commentary, Nursi examines several major theological issues such as belief-unbelief, prophethood, Paradise and the resurrection of the dead in the context of the interpretation of the relevant Qur'anic verses.[13] Therefore, it can be said that Nursi's theological concerns made a very great impact upon his *tafsīr*. Examples taken from Nursi's exegetical writings will give us an opportunity to understand his approach to theological exegesis.

ʿAbduh holds the Mu'tazilite view, defending human free will and the occurrence of natural causes unlinked to God's direct mediation. However, the Ash'arīte school of classical Islamic theology stresses that God creates the actions of people and that nature only works because God constantly determines and regulates its processes.[14] Nursi also prefers the mainstream theological approach stating that, in the creation of actions, the middle way is the Sunnī School between the Jabriyya and the Mu'tazila. In his interpretation of Q. 2: 7, "God has sealed their hearts and their ears, and their eyes are covered. They will have great torment", Nursi critically analyses major theological views on the creation of actions. He reiterates that the Sunnī School is the straight path and the others such as the Jabriyya and Mu'tazila are either excessive (*ifrāt*) or deficient (*tafrīt*). He indicates the established reality that there is no effective agent (*ta'thīr al-ḥaqīqī*) other than God. For this reason, the Mu'tazilite view that human beings create their own actions is contrary to the truth. Moreover, it is God's practice that his universal will governs the special will of his servant. This means that God's will is manifested in accordance with the people's will.[15]

Furthermore, in Nursi's view, human free will cannot cause something to happen. God uses this particular will to bring his universal will into

effect and to guide the people in whatever direction they wish. Consequently, humankind is responsible for the results of its choice. He expounds this subject through an example. If a child riding on one's shoulder asks to be taken up a high mountain, and this is done, the child might catch a cold. This child cannot blame the carrier for that cold, since he himself asked to go there. Nursi draws attention to the fact that God has made his will somewhat dependent on human's free will.[16] As we discussed earlier, while ʿAbduh supports the Muʿtazilite view and human free will, Nursi embraces the Sunnī School and emphasizes God's universal will. The modernist intellectuals believe that human will must have a scope for action, and they searched for every available sign of a choice or decision given to human beings in the Qur'an.[17]

Another interesting example is the relationship between cause and effect. The Muslim modernists believe that the world is a system of causes and effects. This worldview results either in a denial of miracles or in their interpretation by reference to more or less rational concepts.[18] For example, ʿAbduh was greatly involved in showing that Islam does not reject the principle of causality. He was therefore concerned to limit the extent of the miraculous, reviving the Muʿtazilīs' view of the world in preference to the Ashʿarīte Sunnīs, who seemed to deny any automatic relationship between cause and effect.[19] In contrast, Nursi embraces the Ashʿarīte view in relation to the natural occurrences, emphasizing that causes do not have any effective power to create an effect since the real effective factor is the action of divine power. Like the Ashʿarīte theologians, Nursi stresses that, "The Causer of causes (*musabbib al-asbāb*) creates all effects directly", and denies the existence of a necessary connection between cause and effect independently of God.[20] It could be said that while ʿAbduh attempted to respond to the Western critics of causality, Nursi tried to criticize the materialist understanding of the relationship between cause and effect. Besides, Nursi does not see any necessity to revive some Muʿtazilī views in response to the challenges of modernity.

Miracles (*muʿjiza*) are another theological subject for a comparative analysis. Certain modernist thinkers hold the view that Islam is a religion without mystery, especially with regard to God. There is nothing secret regarding God to be made known. The obviousness of God is certain, and people can seek their conclusion through science and nature. Therefore, there is no reason for miracles. For example, ʿAbduh says that a miracle had an apologetic character that functioned to support the reliability of revelation, arguing that the era of the miracle is now over. From the time

of the Prophet Muhammad onwards, this has been the age of reason. Miracles were essential at the time when humanity was still in its childhood. In ʿAbduh's view, "Muslim faith stands on reason."[21] Nonetheless, Nursi's approach to miracles seems to follow the traditional lines. He states that the biography of the Prophet (*sīra*) and the works of history also narrate many of the Prophet's perceptible miracles and wonders which he performed in the presence of the people. In his view, the Prophet's miracles consist of three categories. Firstly, the various miraculous events which happened before his Prophecy such as the Zoroastrians' fire being extinguished. Secondly, the Prophet's predictions of many future events such as the defeat of the Byzantines and the conquest of Mecca. Thirdly, the wonders that could be perceived by the physical senses. The Prophet performed this category of wonders when he confronted the Quraysh and made the call to Islam. Examples of such wonders are stones speaking, trees moving, the splitting of the moon and water flowing from the Prophet's fingers. Nursi draws attention to al-Zamakhsharī's statement that there were as many as a thousand wonders of this last category.[22] As we have seen, Nursi relies on the traditional sources regarding the miracles and he does not intend to limit the extent of the miraculous in his theology. He uses the books of the Prophet's biography (*sīra*) and their reports in order to prove the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad.

In his interpretation of Q. 2: 3,[23] Nursi defines belief as follows: "Belief is a light produced by affirming in detail all the essentials of religion brought by the Prophet and affirming the rest of the religion in general."[24] In this context, he quotes the famous Ashʿarīte theologian al-Taftāzānī's (d. 1390) definition of belief that it is a light God instils in the hearts of his servants, which He wishes to give them after the servants have used their will. Moreover, he also stresses that belief is renewed via its continued existence and the manifestation of inner and outer evidence.[25] Furthermore, Nursi analyses the relationship between belief and action. In his interpretation of the phrase "believe and do good", in Q. 2: 25,[26] he points out that the word "and" indicates both the connection and the separation between belief and good deeds. Therefore, in contrast to the Muʿtazilīs' views, actions are not included in belief, but belief without action is insufficient.[27] This statement means that while a believer who commits a grave sin cannot be considered to be excluded from Islam because of the separation between belief and actions, his belief requires good deeds for complete salvation in the hereafter. Here, Nursi analyses the statement not only theologically and existentially, but also linguisti-

cally. Furthermore, Nursi frequently presents the benefits of belief and the dangers of unbelief in his exegetical writings. For example, he states that all pain comes from misguidance and that belief is the source of all pleasure. Belief is a light bestowed upon the human conscience from God and it fully illuminates the inner face of conscience. Through this belief, it reveals familiarity with the whole universe and establishes relations between it and everything. A believer, through the moral strength in his heart, can overcome every event and misfortune.[28] Nursi examines numerous aspects of belief and unbelief in his works. However, analysis of all these aspects is beyond the scope of this research.

With regard to the wisdom in the creation of evil, ugliness and misguidance, Nursi stresses that what is good in creation is original, fundamental and inclusive, whereas what is evil is derivative and dependent and of second degree. He goes on to say that there is a branch of science that has been developed for every kind of creation and every species has general characteristics and general principles. The branch of science that studies each species is made up of those general principles. The general principles reveal the beauty of the order in the life of that species. This indicates that all sciences bear witness to the beauty of that order. Therefore, in his view, all of the natural sciences that are based on general rules or laws prove that the basic and dominant purpose for the creation of the universe is good, beauty and perfection. Evil, ugliness and falsehood are derivative, superficial and in the minority. Even if evil sometimes seems to have control, it is only temporary.[29] It is interesting that Nursi finds evidence from the natural sciences and their principles to prove that good and beauty are dominant in the universe. His approach may demonstrate his ability to find solutions from the visible world.

In another place, Nursi notes that

> Perfection, good, and beauty are essentially what are intended in the universe, and are in the majority. Relatively, defects, evil, and ugliness are in the minority, and are insignificant, secondary, and trivial. Their Creator created them interspersed among good and perfection not for their own sakes, but as preliminaries and units of measurement for the appearance, or existence, of the relative truths of good and perfection…A lesser evil may therefore be forgiven, approved even, for the sake of the greater good. For to abandon the greater good because it contains some lesser evil, is a greater evil. And in the view of wisdom, if the lesser evil encounters the greater evil, the lesser evil becomes a relative good, as has been established in principle in *zakāt*

> and *jihād*, for example. As is well-known, "things are known through their opposites," which means that the existence of a thing's opposite causes the manifestation and existence of its relative truths. For example, if there were no ugliness and it did not permeate beauty, the existence of beauty with its infinite degrees would not be apparent.[30]

Moreover, Nursi highlights that the creation of evil is not an evil. What is evil is the execution of evil. Hence, the creation of Satan and evil by God is good because they cause good and universal results. For example, angels do not rise to the higher spiritual ranks because they cannot deviate from correct guidance. However, testing through good and evil in this world provides human beings the opportunity to acquire higher ranks or stations than angels. Therefore, it can be said that God's creation of evil is not evil, but all evil that happens to people is a result of their free will.[31] In addition, it is clear from the above that Nursi argues against the Mu'tazilīs' view regarding God as the creator of evil. Following the mainstream Sunnī school, Nursi emphasizes that God creates evil, but the creation of evil is in order to complete the good. So evil can lead to good.[32]

Another significant theological topic and one of the fundamentals of belief is resurrection and the hereafter. It is worth mentioning that even though the Muslim modernists do not deny its existence, they are not much involved with the life hereafter. The concept of the life hereafter experiences a revaluation in modernist discourse. Via the right ordering of worldly matters, they aim to foster a happier life in this world. For them, the collective destiny of humanity is more significant than the future of the individuals in the hereafter. A believer should also be interested in the salvation of the whole of humanity. And this salvation can be achieved only if the world order is rebuilt on true ethical lines and the Islamic teachings are followed.[33] For example, Ahmad Khan criticizes the whole concept of personal reward in the hereafter, instead identifying Islam with the affairs of Muslims collectively. He therefore encourages the people to work for the good of their nations rather than to be concerned only with one's own future life. Ahmad Khan points out that the power of Islam relies on the power of Muslims, and Islam was admired at times when the Muslims were strong and progressed in science and knowledge. Abul Kalām Azād holds the view that the Qur'an, the noble reformatory work of Islam, is involved with this world. However, Qur'anic exegetes neglect this fact and refer everything to the hereafter.[34]

In this context, the Muslim modernists give priority to this worldly life over the life hereafter in their interpretation of the Qur'an.[35] For example, Parwez interprets the word *al-muddaththir*, "You, wrapped in your cloak", in Q. 74: 1 as "world-reformer".[36] Moreover, metaphorical and symbolical approaches to certain Qur'anic verses related to the hereafter such as Paradise and Hell can be seen in their commentaries.[37] For instance, al-Mashriqi states that "heaven (*jannāt*) is world-dominion and is unrelated to a hereafter."[38] It can be reasonably inferred that the modernist intellectuals recognized the signs of stagnation in the Muslim world. Hence, they emphasized in their exegetical writings that the Qur'an is also a guide for worldly progress and the development of the Muslim world. However, through their approach, they went beyond the traditional commentaries and literal meaning of the Qur'an without any justification.

In contrast to the modernist discourse, Nursi frequently deals with the reality of the hereafter in his exegetical works. As he emphasized, the major themes of the Qur'an are divine unity (*al-tawḥīd*), prophethood (*al-nubuwwa*), the resurrection (*al-ḥashr*) and justice-worship (*al-ʿadāla-al-ʿibāda*).[39] Since resurrection and the hereafter are the central subjects of the Qur'an, both are the significant key terms of Nursi's exegetical hermeneutics. Nursi focuses extensively on rational proofs of the resurrection in his works. For example, in his interpretation of Q. 2: 4, "those who have firm faith in the Hereafter", Nursi underlines that he deduced ten proofs of the resurrection from the Qur'an, as summarized below.

The resurrection is a reality because there is perfect and planned order in the universe. There is complete wisdom in creation. There is nothing useless in the world, and creation (*al-fiṭra*) includes nothing wasted. Moreover, there are repeated resurrections in all species such as days and years, and so on. Those indicate the resurrection of the dead. Humanity's innate disposition, inclinations and hopes point to the resurrection. God's mercy also hints at the resurrection, and the trustworthy messenger of God clearly declares it. Finally, the Qur'an certainly proves the incidence of the resurrection through such verses as "when He has created you stage by stage?" (Q. 71: 14) and "your Lord is never unjust to His creatures" (Q. 41: 46).[40]

Based on these ten proofs above, Nursi explicates the reality of eternal happiness. Firstly, the perfect order in the universe can only be such if it leads to eternal happiness. The fine points and aspects of the order will only grow in the hereafter. And the power inherent in the order states that

it will not be broken and wasted. Secondly, the complete wisdom in the universe points to eternal happiness. Otherwise, we would have to deny wisdom and benefit in every species and individual. In this case, each of these benefits and wisdoms turns to its opposite, and the wisdom would not be wisdom. In his view, the absence of futility and wastefulness in the creation also elucidates the complete wisdom. Moreover, Nursi underlines that God's mercy also indicates the reality of eternal happiness, which is ultimate mercy. The mercy of God will bestow eternal life upon humanity, protect the universe from being the cause of suffering and save it and humanity from eternal separation. If Divine Mercy did not bestow eternal happiness, then all divine bounties in the world would become suffering and it would necessitate the denial of Divine Mercy that is self-evidently proved by the entire universe. Furthermore, in his view, the Qur'an's explanations on the bodily resurrection prove eternal happiness. Many Qur'anic verses have opened up windows looking to the resurrection, presenting its reality with all its contents and dimensions. For example, as the Qur'an directs attention to humanity's first creation in order to prove the bodily resurrection,[41] Nursi also elaborates on this example in his works. He highlights that whoever reflects on the first creation will not have any doubts regarding the second creation. The second creation is for God just the same or even easier than the first. The Qur'an reminds the people of their progress from a sperm-drop to human form. Nursi supports this reality with the prophetic tradition and states that a few cells from the coccyx (*'ajb al-dhanab*) will be enough as a seed and material for the bodily resurrection.[42]

Taking into account the information above, it can be said that Nursi attempted to respond to the positivist and materialist ideas about the major fundamentals of belief such as faith in the hereafter in Islamic theology. Moreover, it seems that for Nursi, belief in the hereafter through investigation (*taḥqīq*) is a core value for spiritual development. In addition, Nursi explicates the reality of the bodily resurrection and the hereafter in great detail in his works. In this context, he draws attention to the fact that the Qur'an examines the resurrection and Last Judgment with full emphasis and in perfect detail. The previous prophets did not teach their somewhat simple and primitive communities the resurrection at the greatest level and with the most comprehensive detail when compared with the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad. Nursi points out also that the resurrection and Last Judgment will happen due to the most comprehensive manifestation of God's Greatest Name and some other names. Therefore, those who can-

not reach the most comprehensive rank of God's Names, such as the All-Powerful (*Qadīr*) and Life-Giver (*Muḥyī*), believe in the resurrection imitatively (*taqlīdī*) and argue that reason cannot comprehend it.[43] Finally, as can be seen, Nursi uses various rational arguments drawn from what we see in the visible world, humanity's innate nature, Qur'anic verses and the Prophet in order to prove the reality of the resurrection.

Nursi discusses four major points in relation to the resurrection and the hereafter: The possibility of the world's ruin and its death, the occurrence of destruction, the repair of the world and being raised to life, and the possibility of its repair and its occurrence. Nursi emphasizes the law of evolution (*qānūn al-takāmul*) operative in the universe. If a thing is dependent on this law, it experiences growth and development. Therefore, it has also a natural life time and death. Most members of the species in the universe are also subject to the law of evolution, thus the world cannot be saved from destruction and death. If the Maker of the universe does not destroy it earlier, then the world's destruction will certainly come according to scientific reckoning. Moreover, all the revealed religions agree with its occurrence as the change, transformation and renewal of the universe show the occurrence of periodic destruction. Furthermore, Nursi underlines that the resurrection of the dead can be proven by both rational arguments and the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition, while the Qur'an provides rational proofs for divine unity (*tawḥīd*) and prophethood (*nubuwwa*). The transmitted (*naqlī*) evidence for the resurrection is that the Qur'an and all the prophets agree with the occurrence of the resurrection. Nursi refers to al-Rāzī's commentary for both the rational (*'aqlī*) and the transmitted (*naqlī*) evidence on the resurrection in Qur'anic verses that set out this subject.[44]

The reality of Paradise and Hell, reward and punishment in the hereafter are the major theological topics which have been discussed throughout Islamic history. In his interpretation of Q. 2: 25, Nursi discusses the reality of Paradise and Hell and stresses that they are two fruits which always exist, from the tree of creation and throughout eternity. They are two results of the chain of the universe, and they are like two pools that flow into eternity. God created a world for examination and willed it to be the place of change and transformation for numerous wisdoms. He mixed there good and evil, harm and benefit, and ugliness and beauty to be seeds of Paradise and Hell in the hereafter.[45]

With regard to eternal happiness and Paradise, Nursi acknowledges that eternal happiness consists of two types. The first is God's pleasure, grace

and nearness. The second is physical joy whose foundations are home, food and marriage. Physical bliss varies according to the degrees of these foundations. What makes this pleasure perfect is its continuation for all eternity. If pleasure and bounty are eternal, they are the only real pleasure and bounty. Nursi holds the view that the benefits of food and marriage are not limited to maintaining life and reproduction, but are moreover a source of great bliss in this painful life. There will be pleasure of a pure, superior kind in Paradise. The pleasures and bounties in this world are models and examples, and the origin and true form of these examples will be bestowed in Paradise. Nursi highlights that the people of Paradise and their wives and the pleasure of Paradise are eternal in the context of Q. 2:25.[46] For Nursi, "Paradise is the means of all spiritual and bodily pleasures."[47] As we have seen here, unlike some modernist intellectuals, metaphorical and symbolical approaches to certain Qur'anic concepts connected with the hereafter such as Paradise cannot be seen in Nursi's interpretation of the Qur'an. Besides, Nursi does not give priority to this worldly life over the life hereafter in his works.

With regard to Hell, Nursi analyses a number of aspects of Hell and punishment in the hereafter. First of all, he follows the mainstream Sunnī theological approach about the current existence of Hell. In his interpretation of Q. 2:24, "…then beware of the Fire prepared for the disbelievers", he points out that the word "prepared (*u'iddat*)", with the form of the perfect tense, implies that Hell is created and in existence at present, contrary to what the Mu'tazilīs argued.[48] Secondly, in his commentary, Nursi discusses where Hell is located. While he emphasizes that the Sunnī school believes in its current existence, the place of Hell cannot be stated. However, the literal meanings of some prophetic traditions indicate that Hell is under the earth. In his view, there is a minor Hell and a major Hell. The minor Hell exists under the earth and in its centre, and the minor Hell does many of the major Hell's functions in this world and in the intermediate world (*'alam al-barzakh*). In the hereafter, the minor Hell will be extended and transformed into the major Hell. The reason why some Mu'tazilīs think Hell is not currently existent is that Hell is like an egg at present and will be expanded fully to include its future contents in the hereafter.[49]

Moreover, Nursi analyses the eternity of Hell and the eternal punishment of the unbelievers in the hereafter. He agrees with most Muslim theologians on the view that Hell will be eternal, and the punishment of the unbelievers there will be also eternal.[50] In his interpretation of Q. 2:7,

"…They will have great torment", Nursi provides his several arguments for eternal punishment of the unbelievers in Hell. For example, unbelief is an infinite crime since it denies the entire universe which bears witness to divine unity. Unbelief is ingratitude for infinite bounties. Unbelief is a crime against the divine essence and attributes. In his view, for the unbelievers, Hell is better than non-existence. As a punishment, non-existence is real evil and the source of all misfortunes. Nevertheless, after some time, God's mercy will be manifested for the people of Hell. After the unbelievers pay their penalty for their deeds, they will in a way become accustomed to Hell. In addition, God will show his mercy on them in a way because of their good actions in this world.[51] As can be seen, Nursi examines many times the theological issues connected with the hereafter such as Hell in his exegetical works. Nursi gives the opportunity of discussing the theological subjects in his *tafsīr* work, because his aim is to explain the theology of the Qur'an.

Signs of the end of the world (*'alāmāt al-qiyamā*) are also another significant theological field in Islamic theology. In this context, Nursi underlines that some ḥadīths with regard to the unusual events at the end of time include several messages as ambiguous verses which contain various meanings in the Qur'an. Thus, they should be interpreted (*ta'wīl*).[52] For example, with regard to the return of Jesus, the prophetic tradition states that Jesus Christ will come to the world a second time to judge with justice, and will also kill the Antichrist (*al-Dajjāl*).[53] Nursi's interpretation of these ḥadīths is as follows: "Denying God will spread via the materialist philosophy at the end of time. At that point, Christianity will join Islam. As a result, Muslims and Christians will be able to defeat the atheistic current in the world."[54] In this example, it is interesting that Nursi interprets the Antichrist (*al-Dajjāl*) in the ḥadīth with the promotion of "materialist philosophy", which will lead to the total denial of God. Besides, Nursi finds a religious basis for Muslim-Christian cooperation and states that certain Christians will work with Muslims to defeat *Dajjāl* at the end of time.

7.2 Legal Exegesis

It is important to note that legal exegesis was one of the first forms of exegesis. The reason for this is that there was an urgent need to understand rulings, commandments and prohibitions of the Qur'an as they connected with Muslims' daily life after the death of the Prophet. Differences

in opinions emerged and eventually led to the development of the different classical schools of law such as the Hanafi or Shafite schools of law. Jurists from several schools of law wrote a large number of works of legal exegesis. Such commentators often concentrated on those texts of the Qur'an pertinent to law, thereby producing exegesis in the form of legal views.[55] Now let us analyse the modernist scholars' approach to legal exegesis.

First of all, it should be noted that almost all Muslim modernist intellectuals aim to go back to the Qur'an and the Sunna, and they reject the medieval Muslim jurisprudence developed by the famous four jurists. In response to modern problems, the modernist scholars rely on *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), taking the Qur'an and the Sunna as a starting point. They accept that man-made laws change, and therefore argue that the classical Muslim jurists' *ijtihad*s for their own times are not binding on the modern day Muslims. Even though they think that the medieval Muslim jurisprudence includes certain useful information, they regard this material as requiring re-evaluation.[56] Secondly, the modernist intellectuals put more emphasis on the socio-historical context of the Qur'an in their interpretation of legal texts in the Qur'an. They underline the point that a number of Qur'anic orders should be considered and evaluated with reference to the socio-historical circumstances of revelation. In this context, the caliph Umar b. al-Khattab's (d. 23/644) following practice is often referenced: Q. 9:60 clearly states that "those whose hearts need winning over" are also among the categories of recipients of *zakāt*. However, Umar refused to pay them *zakāt* in his time because he thought that it was necessary at the time of revelation due to the weak position of Islam, but when Islam was established, there was no longer any need of giving a share to the people, "whose hearts need winning over". Umar's view in question went beyond the literal reading of the Qur'anic text because the context changed, and the original aim of the text was no longer operative.[57]

Moreover, they highlight a high degree of flexibility regarding their interpretation of Qur'anic verses, in order to adapt Muslim life to the needs of the modern age.[58] For example, Āṣaf ʿAli argues that while legal regulations in the Qur'an are valid for a given space of time, moral regulations are universal. He also underlines that any Qur'anic command does not require strict obedience. While laws may change, the authority of religion pertains over a longer length of time than law. In his view, the divorce rule on the basis of Q. 4:34/38, "Husbands should take good care of their wives, with [the bounties] God has given to some more than others",

is no longer valid. In modern principles, a wife is not any more a toy, but she is a mate of her husband.[59] In line with this approach, ʿAbduh became aware of the great advantage to be found in exegetic flexibility, urging the use of all schools of thought and the works of scholars as sources in order to choose the most suitable law for any present problem. The obvious contradiction between Islam and modern society comes from the rigidity of Muslims. In his view, this rigidity in the rules of the Shari'a results in difficulties. However, in the days of true Islam (the early period), the Shari'a was tolerant to the extent that it embraced the whole world.[60]

Fazlur Rahman also holds the view that "the rigidity of the jurists' interpretations, and their denial of a historical context to the revelation, resulted in archaic laws that not only prevented Muslims from dealing with modern problems, but also undermined the vibrancy of Islam itself."[61] It is clear that the modernist intellectuals are highly critical of classical Islamic law and its rules. In their view, "solely the Qur'an" is enough as the source of Islam, whereas the classical Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is a great obstacle to understanding the Qur'an. As stated before, in the modern period, the normative disciplines such as *kalām* and particularly *fiqh* largely lost their functions, and the functions of systematic theology and Islamic law were given to Qur'anic exegesis.[62] It is worth mentioning that ʿAbduh states that the jurists made people stray from the Qur'an and the Sunna, and they distorted the Qur'an and the Sunna more than the Jews had distorted the Torah. In his view, the misguidance and loss of the religion was caused by the situation of the jurists.[63] In this context, ʿAbduh and his student Rashīd Riḍā maintain that those prescripts of traditional Islamic law that are inapplicable in a modern society are "additions" to the command of God. The jurists of the past are responsible.[64] In addition, it is interesting that ʿAbduh draws attention to the first period of Islam in which the Shari'a was tolerant, and he finds flexibility in that period to embrace more liberal views.

Furthermore, certain modern scholars such as ʿAbduh put emphasis on the changing nature of details of the Shari'a and the interest of the public in Muslim jurisprudence. For example, ʿAbduh states that the Shari'a consists of two major parts. One part includes clearly specified laws that all the Muslims must obey. Individual independent juristic reasoning cannot be used in this area. The second part is made up of rules not derived from explicit texts nor supported by the consensus of the scholars. Thus, there is room for independent thought in their interpretation. This type deals with the details of the religion and the relationship between individuals

(*muʿamalat*). In his view, *muʿamalat*, where there is no explicit text, should depend on the interest of the public. ʿAbduh adopts the principle of *maṣlaḥa* (public interest) in Mālikī jurisprudence, giving it a more general meaning. ʿAbduh and his school made this concept a rule for reaching particular laws from general principles of social morality. The general welfare of humanity (public benefit) is a guiding rule at any time.[65] It can be said that while the views of the modernist scholars such as ʿAbduh's principle of *maṣlaḥa* are rooted in the classical Muslim jurisprudence, they attempted to broaden the scope of such classical concepts. Now our task is to focus on Nursi's approach to legal exegesis.

Nursi deals with a number of the topics related to Islamic jurisprudence and legal issues in his interpretation of the Qur'an. As stated before, his collection can be described as a combination of *tasawwuf*, *fiqh* and *kalām*.[66] First of all, he clarifies the importance and the meaning of worship and Islamic life in a variety of places, providing philosophical grounds of worship in his exegetical writings.[67] For example, in his interpretation of Q. 2:21–22, "People, worship your Lord", he highlights that worship makes the principles of belief a part of the believers' character (*meleke*). Worship is a means for happiness in this world and the hereafter, helping to order (*tanzim*) the life of both worlds and to gain individual and collective perfection (*şahsî ve nev'î kemâlât*). Worship is also a great relation (*nisbet, rabıta*) between God and his servants. Nursi provides several reasons with regard to why worship is the cause of happiness in this world, as follows: Since the intellects of members of society are unable to comprehend justice, humanity needs a universal intellect in order to establish justice. That universal intellect and law (*kanun*) are the Shariʿa. The Prophet protects the effectiveness of the Shariʿa and its implementation. In order to establish obedience to God's commands and prohibitions, people need to maintain the idea of God's majesty (*azamet*), and this is possible via the manifestation (*tecellî*) of the principles of belief (*ahkâm-ı imaniye*). The tenets of belief are firmly strengthened (*takviye ve inkişaf*) only through a repeated and renewed act, and that act is worship.[68]

Moreover, Nursi points out that worship aims to turn minds (*fikir*) towards God. The servant's turning (*teveccüh*) to God leads him to obedience and submission. This obedience incorporates worshippers in the perfect order (*intizam-ı ekmel*) in the universe. Furthermore, through obeying God's commands and prohibitions, many connections are made for a person with the numerous levels of society. In addition, through

Islam and worship, a Muslim makes firm relations with all other Muslims and forms strong bonds. These lead to brotherhood (*uhuvvet*) and true love (*muhabbet*), which are the first steps for the development of social life (*heyet-i içtimaiye*). In Nursi's view, worship is also the means of personal perfection (*al-kamālāt al-shakhṣiyya*). Humankind has a very strange nature, and he is created as if he is an index (*fihriste*) of all the species and all the worlds. Worship raises (*inbisat*) the human spirit and value, and human abilities develop (*inkişaf*) through worship. Worship also helps to purify (*temyiz ve tenzih*) inclinations (*meyiller*), and it limits (*had*) the powers of appetite (*Şeheviye*) and anger (*gadabiye*).[69] It is clear that Nursi, in his interpretation, focuses on the meaning and wisdom of worship rather than its jurisprudential details. Thus, he provides the foundations of worship based on the Qur'an. It is interesting to note here that Rashīd Riḍā also highlights the need for returning to the spirit of Islamic laws and for knowledge of the principles on which they are established. Today many people know commands (*aḥkām*) and what is lawful and unlawful. However, they do not know the reasons, purposes and wisdom (*ḥikmah*) behind these injunctions. What makes the companions of the Prophet successful is their knowledge of the wisdom behind the commands.[70] Therefore, in this regard, a similar approach can be seen among certain modern scholars.

Nursi specifically examines the notion of *ijtihad*, arguing that while it is open, there are some obstacles to its application today.[71] Firstly, he states that Muslims are faced with anti-Islamic beliefs, many religious innovations and widespread misguidance in the modern period. People's minds are estranged from spiritual matters. In the name of *ijtihad*, opening new gaps and avenues of attack in the castle of Islam is a crime against Islam. Secondly, the fundamentals of Islam (*zaruriyât*) are not open to *ijtihad* since they are clearly stated and definite (*kat'î ve muayyen*). Today, people abandon these essentials; therefore, we must attempt to revitalize them. The early Muslims and jurists with pure intention deduced rules and *ijtihad*s in Islam's theoretical matters (*nazariyat*) from the major legal sources. These *ijtihad*s can be enough for all times and places. Leaving these rules and attempting new *ijtihad*s in an indulgent way (*heveskârâne*) is a bad innovation. Nursi also draws attention to the fact that 90% of the Shari'a is comprised by the essentials of Islam, while only 10% are matters subject to *ijtihad*, controversial and secondary. The matters which are open to *ijtihad*, only 10%, must follow the essentials of Islam. Moreover, if those who have entered the area of Islam via pure intention and being

mindful of God and have obeyed the essentials of Islam engage in *ijtihad*, such an *ijtihad* is a merit and perfection. However, if the desire to engage in *ijtihad* comes from the people who would prefer worldly life to the hereafter, and who have abandoned the essentials of Islam, dealing with materialistic philosophy, such an *ijtihad* damages the body of Islam.[72]

Furthermore, in Nursi's view, the law of Islam and *ijtihad*, which discovers its hidden rules, are heavenly. However, the following three reasons make *ijtihad* worldly in this time. The cause (*ʿillat*) in order to establish a rule is different from the wisdom that the rule has. The existence of a rule depends on the cause (*ʿillat*), and the cause (*ʿillat*) requires the existence of the rule. Today, nevertheless, people replace the cause (*ʿillat*) with wisdom and establish a rule based on wisdom. Such *ijtihad*, in his view, is worldly. The second factor is that people today give precedence to worldly happiness, while the Shari'a gives absolute priority to eternal happiness in the hereafter. Thus, the present viewpoint cannot use *ijtihad* in the name of the Shari'a. The third factor is as follows:

> The principle that "absolute necessity makes permissible what the Shari'a forbids" (*inna ad-ḍarūrāt tubīḥu'l-maḥẓūrāt*) is not always valid, regardless of time and place. If the necessity does not arise from a forbidden act, it may be the cause for permission. But if it arises from a misuse of willpower and unlawful acts, it cannot be the means for any dispensation. For example, if someone becomes drunk and commits some crimes, he cannot be excused for his actions…But if his drunkenness is due to force or threat, and not from his own willpower, the divorce and the punishment are considered non-binding. Thus a chronic drunkard cannot claim innocence by saying: "I am forced to drink it, and so it is lawful for me." These days, many things that are not necessary for people's life have become necessary and an addiction because of people's voluntary misuse of their will-power, unlawful inclinations, and forbidden acts. Thus they cannot be the means for a dispensation or making the unlawful lawful. Those who favor exercising *ijtihad* in the present circumstances build their reasoning on such "necessities," and so their *ijtihad* is worldly, the product of their fancies…[73]

Finally, another obstacle to do *ijtihad* today is that since eminent *mujtahid*s (*müctehidîn-i izâm*) such as Abū Ḥanīfa lived close to the time of the Prophet and the companions, they got a pure (*sâfi*) light and exercised *ijtihad* with pure intentions (*hâlis*). The Muslim jurists (*ehl-i içtihad*) of the modern period look at the Qur'an from a great distance, and there are so many veils between them and the first period.[74]

Taking into account the information above, it can be concluded that Nursi acknowledges the schools of medieval Muslim jurisprudence developed by the famous four jurists. Unlike certain modern scholars, he is not critical of classical Islamic law and its rules, and he does not see the classical Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) as a great obstacle to an understanding of the Qur'an. Besides, Nursi puts emphasis on the permanent nature of the general principles of the Shari'a, becoming aware of the need for their revival. Nursi also identifies the great richness of the classical Muslim jurists' *ijtihad*s, arguing that these *ijtihad*s can be sufficient for all times and places. For Nursi, only 10% of legal matters are open to *ijtihad*, but the modernist thinkers tend to find a greater flexibility and broader scope for *ijtihad*. Regarding the 10% in Nursi, it may be argued that he attempted to raise the level of people's religiosity because many people of his time were uninterested in religion. Nursi himself also exercised numerous *ijtihad*s on various political and religious issues. Also, unlike the works of some modern intellectuals, we cannot see in Nursi an emphasis on the socio-historical context of the Qur'an in the interpretation of legal texts. It could be said that Nursi does not deny the medieval Muslim jurisprudence, and he does not perceive any great challenge faced by the Muslims of the modern period because of *fiqh*.

The obligation of *zakāt* and prohibition of *riba* and interest are significant juristic topics. In his interpretation of Q. 2:3, "and give out of what We have provided for them", Nursi analyses the obligation of *zakāt* and the prohibition of *riba*. He underlines that *zakāt* is a bridge of the religion, and Muslims help one another through this bridge. In his opinion, the essential reasons for all the revolutions, corruption and the source of all moral failings are only to be found in following two approaches: "Once I'm full, I do not care if others die of hunger", and "You work so that I can eat, and you struggle so that I can rest." The Qur'an eradicates the first saying and solves its problems through *zakāt*, and the only remedy for the second approach is the prohibition of *riba*. A peaceful social life depends on the balance between the classes of people. The only means of reconciliation between the upper classes (*havas*) and the lower classes (*avam*), and the rich and the poor in the society is the obligation of *zakāt* and prohibition of *riba*. If the command of *zakāt* and the prohibition of *riba* have been neglected, a great gap will emerge between the elite and common people, and the connections between them will be lost. Nursi points out that the Qur'an states "If you want to end social conflict and struggle, do not engage in interest."[75] As can be seen, Nursi provides the

wisdom of the command of *zakāt* and prohibition of *riba*, not dealing with their jurisprudential details, or modern discussions. Nonetheless, many modernist intellectuals particularly discussed *riba*, allowing certain types of *riba* according to the requirements of a modern economy. Many of them believe that modern economic life today makes a necessity of interest.[76] For example, Abū Zayd argues that the Qur'anic prohibition of *riba* means only "exorbitant interest" (*al-riba al-fāḥish*), and it does not include a fair payment for the use of borrowed money.[77] Such discussions on *riba* cannot be found in Nursi's exegetical writings. The reason for this may be that Nursi left such jurisprudential debates to the experts in that field, and he attempted to focus on more urgent topics, such as the essentials of faith, Islamic metaphysics and theology.

As stated before, the early modernist scholars confined the idea of "true understanding of the Qur'an" mainly to a number of modern issues such as gender equality, women's testimony or monogamy-polygamy.[78] Certain modern intellectuals such as M. ʿAbduh argued several liberal ideas with regard to women such as more education for women, showing of the face and hands of women, the significance of abolishing women's seclusion and making both polygamy and divorce more difficult. In their interpretation of a range of Qur'anic texts connected with women, they put emphasis on the socio-historical context of the Qur'an; justice, equality and fairness as the entire Qur'anic message; non-patriarchal readings; focusing on the language of the text; and approaching the Qur'an holistically and intratextually.[79] For example, in the interpretation of Q. 4:3, "If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them], then marry only one", some modern Muslims hold the view that because no man can be unbiased between several women, this passage in question almost makes polygamy impossible.[80] Polygamy is a temporary order to reach monogamy. In other words, a long-term purpose of the Qur'an is monogamy.[81] Let us turn to Nursi's views on polygamy, women's inheritance and the veiling of women.

With regard to polygamy, Nursi addresses the modern criticism on this subject. He underlines that

> The rules of Islam are made up of two sorts: The first consists of those rules on which the Shari'a is based, and this type is pure good (*hüsn-ü hakikî, hayr-ı mahz*); the other is modification of laws and customs through the Shari'a. In this type, the Shari'a takes issues that are primitive and cruel, and it corrects them and requires them to be practised and fulfilled with human nature as the lesser of two evils (*ehveniyyet*). Making it possible to transfer to

> pure good, the Shari'a put such matters in a form that was compatible with the time and place. Such rules were common practices during the revelation of the Qur'an, and suddenly abolishing (*ref'*) such practices could mean reversing human nature (*tabiat-ı beşer*). Slavery and polygamy (*taaddüd-ü zevcat*) are such matters. The Shari'a did not raise the number of wives from one to four, but it reduced the number from eight or nine to four. Also, polygamy is compatible with nature, reason and wisdom. The Shari'a established such conditions that polygamy does not lead to any harm (*mazarrat*). Even if there is some bad (*şer*) in polygamy, this bad is considered to be the lesser of two evils (*ahwan al-sharr*). The lesser of two evils is also a relative justice (*al-'adala al-iḍāfiya*). (*Heyhat*) every situation of this world cannot be pure good (*hayr-ı mahz*).[82]

As can be seen here, Nursi followed the medieval Muslim jurisprudence in his arguments on polygamy and used jurisprudential rules in this subject. After this, Nursi considered the socio-historical context of the Qur'an in the interpretation of the polygamy verse. A number of customs such as polygamy and slavery were common practices in the early seventh century CE. The Qur'an took that context into account, reduced the number of wives a man could marry to four and established rules to be practised in a way that it can cause no harm. Next, Nursi believes that polygamy is conformable with nature, reason and wisdom, as indicated below his arguments for this approach.

Nursi states that modern civilization condemns polygamy (*taaddüd-ü ezvâc*) as being unwise (*muhalif-i hikmet*) and opposed to (*münâfi*) human's benefit (*maslahat-ı beşeriye*). If the wisdom of marriage were sexual gratification, polygamy would be a lawful method to achieve it. However, the aim and wisdom of marriage and sexual relations is reproduction (*tanāsul*), as all animals and plants bear testimony to this reality. In his view, sexual pleasure (*kazâ-yı şehvet*) in the marriage is a small payment (*ücret-i cüz'iye*) which is bestowed by Divine Mercy to fulfil this duty. Then marriage is for reproduction and maintenance of the species.[83] It is clear that unlike the modernist discourse, Nursi seems to follow the traditional line in classical Qur'anic commentaries, not attempting to limit polygamy in the Qur'anic text. Moreover, Nursi indicates the life of animals and plants and the nature of man and woman to give evidence on the subject. In addition, Nursi highlights that the main purpose of marriage is reproduction, and so the permission of polygamy can serve in this purpose. Critically thinking, it could be stated that Nursi took the conditions

of his time into account. While he did not ever marry in his life, as a scholar from the eastern Anatolia, Nursi could not disregard completely this common practice in the east of Turkey, where he was born and lived for a while.

Inheritance law and Q. 4:11, "a son should have the equivalent share of two daughters", is other important topics discussed in the modern period. Nursi declares that this topic demonstrates the superiority of the Qur'anic commandments over modern civil law. Modern civilization criticizes the Qur'an because it gives a woman half of her brother's share in inheritance. However, this Qur'anic rule is perfectly just and a mercy for women. In general, a woman finds a man to look after her, while a man has to maintain someone else. According to the Islamic law, the husband is legally responsible for providing for his wife and children, while the wife has no legal obligation to contribute to her husband. In this case, a woman's husband will compensate for half of her brother's inheritance. Her brother will spend half of his share on his wife. Therefore, the inheritance of a woman and her brother will be equal in this way. This is an example of Qur'anic justice. Nursi indicates that inheritance law and its rules in the Qur'an have psychological, social and economic reasons and meanings.[84] Nursi also criticizes modern civilization for depriving a mother of her rightful share of her son's wealth in inheritance, while Q. 4:11 underlines "If he has brothers, his mother has a sixth."[85] It is clear that Nursi acknowledges that legal regulations in the Qur'an are valid for every time and place. He also compares the laws of the Qur'an with modern civil law, stressing the superiority of the legal text of the Qur'an. Nursi takes a holistic approach to inheritance law and does not discuss it in great detail.

The veiling of women is another notable subject discussed in the context of the modern period.[86] Nursi also contributes to this debate in his interpretation of Q. 33:59, "Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and women believers to make their outer garments hang low over them." He declares that this verse commands the veiling of women. Even though modern civilization disagrees with this injunction, considering it to be unnatural and a form of slavery for women, veiling is wholly natural for them. At this point, Nursi indicates that his understanding of Q. 33:59 relies on the traditional mainstream approach in the exegetical literature by referring to his defence for the court. He notes that

> I say to this court of law: If there is justice on the face of the earth, it will surely quash the decision which has convicted a person who, based on the

> unanimous agreement of around three hundred and fifty thousand commentaries of the Qur'an and the common belief of all our forefathers during over one thousand, three hundred and fifty years, discussed a sacred, true Divine principle, which every century, hundreds of millions of people have followed in their social life during those one thousand, three hundred and fifty years.[87]

Nursi underlines that this Qur'anic order regarding the veiling is natural for women, providing four wisdoms of this command. For example, veiling is natural, and the women's innate character requires it. This order also saves women from degeneration, baseness, spiritual slavery and lowness.[88] In addition, with regard to the superiority of the Qur'anic orders over modern civil law, Nursi points out that the Qur'an, as a mercy, commands women to wear the veil of modesty in order to preserve respect for themselves and to stop their transformation into objects of low desire or a tool of lust. Modern civilization took women out of their homes, destroyed their veils and led humanity astray. In Nursi's opinion, while family life relies on mutual love and respect between spouses, women's immodest dress destroyed sincere love and respect in family life. What Nursi expresses is that the Shari'a mercifully invites women back to their homes. In their houses, they are respected and comfortable. Increased freedom for women caused a sudden spread of bad morality in mankind. Unveiling of women played a large role in leading modern men astray.[89] It can be concluded that Nursi focuses more on the wisdom of such topics as the veiling rather than jurisprudential discussions. As a result of his revival project, Nursi emphasizes the superiority of the Qur'anic commands over other laws. Moreover, with regard to women's seclusion, Nursi seems to disagree with the modernist views that attempt to seek its abolition. It may be argued that Nursi did not disregard completely the practice of women's seclusion in eastern Anatolia, so his view can be considered to be a contextualist approach. In addition, Nursi defends Qur'anic orders such as veiling against the criticisms of his time, and his explanations regarding these matters are seen as the subjects of *kalām*. Therefore, these support the argument of this thesis.

In his commentary, Nursi also discussed lying and listening to music from a juristic perspective. In his interpretation of Q. 2:10, "There is a disease in their hearts, to which God has added more: agonizing torment awaits them for their persistent lying", Nursi responds to the question that whether lying is permitted for some good benefit (*maṣlaḥat*). He

emphasizes that lying can be legally permitted if its benefits are certain and necessary. However, he believes that in fact what they call a good benefit is usually a false excuse. As stated in the principles of the Shari'a, a matter that is not exact and whose quantity is not measured cannot be made the cause (*'illat*) and the basis of rulings since such a matter is open to abuse. Also, if the harm of a thing is greater than its benefits, that thing becomes abrogated and benefit relies on its non-existence. The anarchy and disorder in the world bear witness that the harm outweighs the benefit that is regarded as an excuse. Nevertheless, he also points out that allusion (*kināya*) and hinting (*ta'rīḍ*) are not lying.[90] Regarding the rule of music, Nursi indicates in the interpretation of Q. 2:7, "God has sealed their hearts and their ears", that the Shari'a judges some sounds lawful and some unlawful. Sounds which excite heavenly sorrows and divine loves are lawful, while sounds that provoke the carnal appetites and cause cries of mourning and sorrow based on disbelief are unlawful. In his view, sounds that the Shari'a does not give any rule should be judged according to the effect, which those sounds have on our spirit and conscience.[91] While the verse is not clearly related to music, Nursi discusses the rule of music from a legal perspective in its interpretation. In his approach, he has a liberal view, considering the effect of music on people's heart to give any rule. Therefore, he takes people of his period and their situations into account to judge listening to music.

7.3 Mystical Exegesis

It is important to note that the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis developed between four general approaches: A *linguistically driven approach*, *reason-based approach*, *tradition-based approach*, *mystically driven approach* (Ṣūfī interpretation). Ṣūfī exegesis (*tafsīr isharī*) means a mystically oriented reading of the Qur'an, looking for "hidden" meanings of the text.[92] If this trend in *tafsīr* is briefly introduced, this form of exegesis is connected with the development of the Ṣūfī movement, *tasawwuf*, and it is based on views of the Muslim mystics around the second AH/eighth century CE. Proponents of mystical exegesis argued that the mystical allusions in the Qur'anic text were related most closely to the human spiritual condition, and those allusions and inner meanings could not be understood by superficial readings or arguments about aspects of law and theology. Therefore, mystical exegesis gives precedence to the spiritual and inner meanings of the Qur'an.[93]

Ṣūfīs provide various arguments for mystical exegesis from the Qur'anic text and the prophetic traditions. They often quote a number of verses such as Q. 6:38, "We have missed nothing out of the Book", and Q. 31:27, "If all the trees on earth were pens and all the seas, with seven more seas besides, [were ink,] still God's words would not run out." In the eyes of the Ṣūfīs, the image of the Qur'an is considered to be the ocean of all knowledge.[94] The Ṣūfīs also emphasize that there are exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and inner (*bāṭin*) meanings of the Qur'an, and their approach is based on a ḥadīth attributed to ʿAbd Allah ibn Masʿūd.[95]

> The messenger of God said, "The Qur'an was descended in seven letters (*aḥruf*). Each letter (*ḥarf*) has a back (*ẓahr*) and belly (*baṭn*). Each letter (*ḥarf*) has a limit (*ḥadd*), and each limit (*ḥadd*) has a point of comprehension (*muṭṭalaʿ*)".[96]

Consequently, most Ṣūfīs believe that the Qur'an has many levels of meaning, thus the meaning of the Qur'an cannot be restricted only to the transmitted meanings from the first generation. As there is the literal aspect of the Qur'anic text, there are also other levels of meaning. The interpretations of other levels of meaning are the result of Ṣūfīs' spiritual practices and divine grace since they believe that "knowledge cannot be separated from spiritual practice".[97] At this point, it is worth mentioning that in the classical period, the mainstream Sunnī line accepted certain forms of *tafsīr isharī* by several conditions, as long as Ṣūfī interpretations did not (a) cause the derivation of laws and rulings or theological positions, (b) contradict other Qur'anic passages or ḥadīth texts, (c) contradict the apparent meaning of the text. Also, the interpreter should not claim that the meaning reached was the only meaning possible.[98] As can be recognized, Ṣūfī exegesis established from the early period of Islam, and the mainstream Sunnī approach allowed such forms of exegesis according to the certain criteria. Now we shall look at the modern period because the critical views on *tafsīr isharī* have emerged.

First of all, the revolt against Ṣūfism is a general characteristic of Muslim modernism. The Muslim modernists aimed to return to the Qur'an and the Sunna, and they were interested in the reconstruction of their socio-political order. Social order and its improvement were the motto of many Muslim modernists. For them, the reconstruction of social order was more important than the improvement of the individual. However, according to them, Ṣūfism is not interested in society, or history, or socio-

political powers. It focuses on the reform of the individual and his or her salvation in the hereafter. In their view, Ṣūfism teaches docility, passivity and contentment; and energy, bravery, nationalism, attempts to lofty and active interest in material improvement decline through Ṣūfism. Therefore, the modernist intellectuals disagreed with such a philosophy of life since their purpose was the reconstruction of their society. An individual's salvation does not lie in isolation, but it relies on the right ordering of his society.[99] However, when viewed critically, the modernist ideas about Ṣūfī teachings are open to question. As Itzchak Weismann argues, Ṣūfism and Ṣūfī reformist brotherhoods played a leading role throughout the history of Islam.[100] The Ṣūfī movement (*tasawwuf*) became a means of revival many times in Islamic history. Examples make it easier to understand the attitude of the modernist intellectuals towards Ṣūfism.

For example, Ahmad Khan uses the Shari'a as a criterion in his approach to Ṣūfism. The validity of Ṣūfism depends on its accord with the Shari'a. He emphasizes that following the companions of the Prophet on the way to spiritual development is better than practising the innovations accepted by the Ṣūfīs. Like many other modernists, Parwīz also rejects Ṣūfism and aims instead to improve the social order. Fazlur Rahman is also another proponent of this attitude. He is also critical of Ṣūfism because he argues it prevents people from the effort to establish a moral-social order. He draws attention to the social aspect of Islam, emphasizing that the companions did not live a way of life independent of the society-building principles of Islam. In his view, Ṣūfism brought Messianism into Islam and stressed the widespread feeling of hopelessness. However, the effort to establish a moral-social order in the world is the significant feature of pure Islam.[101] It is interesting that various modern thinkers make a distinction between the original Islam and Islam's present form or the historical Islam,[102] and some such as Ahmad Khan and Fazlur Rahman put emphasis on the way of the companions in their critical approach to Ṣūfism and Ṣūfī ideas.

Secondly, the modernist thinkers who focus purely on the literal meaning of the text are highly critical of Ṣūfī (mystical) approaches to the Qur'anic text refusing mystical (*ishārī*) interpretations, stated as richness of meaning (or secondary-hidden meanings) besides primary-apparent meanings of verses, and *tasawwuf* in classical commentaries.[103] While many modernists express their dissatisfaction with *tafsīr isharī*, there are also certain exceptions. For example, even though his methodology normally does not allow such a form of exegesis, ʿAbduh sometimes applies mystical

(*ishārī*) interpretations to some Qur'anic verses such as the first verses of the chapter, The Fig (*al-Tin*).[104] It is important to bear in mind that three distinct periods characterized ʿAbduh's thought. ʿAbduh travelled from Ṣūfism through rational liberalism to Salafism. Therefore, the elements of these three trends can be discerned in his writings.[105]

Because Nursi's approach to Ṣūfism has been discussed in the first chapter, now our task is to analyse his views on *tafsīr isharī*. When we look at Nursi's exegetical writings, it is clear that he does not deny mystical (*ishārī*) interpretations, indicated as secondary meanings and implications in addition to primary-apparent meanings of Qur'anic verses. As stated before, regarding comprehensiveness in wording or expression of the Qur'an, Nursi refers to the famous prophetic tradition (ḥadīth): "Each verse has outer (*ẓahr*) and inner meanings (*baṭn*), limits (*ḥadd*) and a point of comprehension (*muṭṭalaʿ*), as well as each has twigs (*shujūn*-شُجُونٌ), boughs (*ghuṣūn*-غُصُونٌ) and branches (*funūn*-فُنُونٌ)."[106] Nursi also adds that each phrase (*kelâm*), word, letter and diacritical point (*sükût*) has numerous aspects.[107] Moreover, he declares that in addition to the Qur'an's explicit meanings (*mânâ-yı sarîhi*), there are numerous layers or levels (*müteaddit tabakalar*), one of which is the allusive and symbolic meaning (*mânâ-yı işârî ve remzî*). The allusive meaning is also a generality (*kullī*), and this has particularities (*cüz'iyat*) in every century. Such levels of meaning do not harm the Qur'anic verses or its explicit meanings, but they show its miraculousness (*i'caz*).[108] Furthermore, he also stresses that Qur'anic expressions have a universal content because they address all levels of people at all times. Therefore, Qur'anic clauses are not restricted to a single meaning, and any interpretation indicates only one aspect of those universal meanings. Every exegete (*müfessir*) or saint (*ârif*) prefers one meaning, depending on their spiritual discovery (*keşf*), their evidence (*delil*) or their movements (*meşreb*).[109] In order to make it clear, Nursi provides the interpretation of Q. 55:19–20 as quoted below:

> For example: *He let forth the two seas that meet together, between them a barrier they do not overpass* (55: 19–20), which are repeated by saintly people (*ehl-i velâyet*) in their daily recitations, indicates all pairs of "seas" or realms (*mânâsındaki cüz'iyatlar*), spiritual or material, figurative or actual, from the realms of Lordship (*bahr-i Rububiyet*) and servanthood (*bahr-i ubûdiyet*) to the spheres of necessity (*daire-i vücub*) and contingency (*daire-i imkân*), from this world to the Hereafter, including the visible, corporeal world and the Unseen World (*âlem-i gayb ve âlem-i şehadet bahirleri*), the

> Pacific and Atlantic oceans, the Mediterranean and Red seas (*Bahr-i Ahmer*), and the Suez Canal, salt water and sweet water in the seas and underground, and such mighty rivers as the Nile, the Euphrates and Tigris carrying sweet water and salty seas to which they flow. All of these, together with many others I do not deem it necessary to mention here, can be intended (*murad*) and meant (*maksud*) in that expression's content (parts from meanings), are their literal (*hakikî*) and figurative (*mecazî*) meanings. Likewise, the expression: *Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds* includes many truths (*hakaik*). And so people of illumination (*Ehl-i keşif*) and truth (*ehl-i hakikat*), depending on their own insight and spiritual discovery, explain it differently.[110]

As we have seen, Nursi points out various layers or levels of the meanings of two Qur'anic verses. He embraces the literal meaning of the verses along with other levels of meaning. Of course, Qur'anic commentaries include these meanings which are indicated by Nursi. His emphasis on the interpretation through the saints' spiritual discovery (*kashf*) clearly demonstrates his attitude towards mystical (*ishārī*) interpretations. While many intellectuals denied *tasawwuf*, Nursi sees it standing firmly within the Islamic tradition. In order to understand Nursi's attitude, his early education should be taken into consideration. Nursi declares that al-Ghazzālī, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī and ʿAbd al-Qādir Jīlānī are among his spiritual masters. The works of these Ṣūfī masters have an impact on Nursi's intellectual thoughts. Nursi is respectful of the intellectual Ṣūfī tradition of Islam, admiring the richness of mystical interpretive thought.

In his certain examples, Nursi shows how people can understand several verses according to their intellectual levels and capacities. For example, in his interpretation of Q. 21:30, "the heavens and the earth used to be joined together and that We ripped them apart", he firstly clarifies the ordinary people's (*tabaka-i avâm*) understanding of the verse: The heavens were clean and had no clouds, could not send rain, while Earth was dry and infertile. Then, God formed a relationship between them. As a result, the heavens were able to send rain, and Earth began to produce its plants. After this understanding above, there is a higher level of meaning: The sun and planets were divided from the doughy matter (*al-mādda al-ʿajīniya*) that was created from the light of Muhammad (*al-nūr al-Muhammadī*).[111] Nursi supports this level of understanding with the famous prophetic tradition, cited frequently in Ṣūfī literature that "What God created firstly is my light, *nur*."[112] Nursi considers the Ṣūfī-centric approach to the verse to be the higher level of understanding. Nursi does

not disregard this rich mystical literature in the Islamic tradition, using this intellectual thought in his formulation of Islamic metaphysics and theology. Now we shall focus on several mystical (*ishārī*) interpretations in Nursi's one-volume commentary.

In his interpretation of Q. 1:2, "All praise (*al-Ḥamd*)", Nursi refers to the Ṣūfī interpretation, highlighting that the very famous meaning of praise is to demonstrate the attributes of perfection (*al-ṣifāt al-kamāliya*). God created humanity as a comprehensive summary of the universe and an index of eighteen thousand worlds. God put in humanity's essence a sample from each world, in which is manifested one of God's names. If a person applies all of his or her organs and abilities in the way of God, fulfils thankfulness and obeys the Shari'a, each of those samples in human nature becomes a window showing his world. Humanity looks at that world from this window, and he becomes a mirror reflecting it, a mirror of God's attribute manifested in each world, and a mirror of God's name that each world shows. Through this way, humanity, both in spirit and body, becomes a summary of the visible and invisible worlds. Human beings display what is manifested in both worlds. When a human being carries out the duty of praise, he or she becomes both a place of manifestation and a manifestor of the attributes of perfection. In this context, Nursi indicates the famous *ḥadīth qudsi* (sacred ḥadīth), cited frequently in Ṣūfī literature, that "I was a hidden treasure, so I created creation that they might know Me."[113] Also, he points to Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-ʿArabī's interpretation of this report. In Ibn al-ʿArabī's view, *ḥadīth qudsi* means that "I created creation to be a mirror in which I might observe My beauty."[114] Here, Nursi uses a number of Ṣūfī concepts such as humanity's essence, manifestation (*tajallī*), God's names and attributes (*asmāʿ* and *sifāt*), referring to the famous Ṣūfī Ibn al-ʿArabī.

Moreover, Nursi refers to numerous technical terms which are used in Ṣūfī literature such as *ma'iyyah* (togetherness with God), *wāḥidiyya* (divine unity) and *aḥadiyya* (Oneness), *ʿubûdiyya* (worshipfulness), *maʿrifat Allah* (knowledge of God), *muḥabbat Allah* (love of God).[115] In his interpretation of Q. 1:7, "those who incur no anger and who have not gone astray", Nursi expresses that this statement is a station of fear and fleeing (*khawf* and *firār*), and this station has a relationship with the previous stations. This station draws our attention in bewilderment and terror to the station of dominicality (*maqām-i rubūbiyya*), characterized by Glory and Beauty, in seeking refuge to the station of worship (*maqām-i ʿubûdiyya*) in "we worship" (Q. 1:5), in impotence to the station of reliance (*maqām-i*

tawakkul) in "we ask for help" (Q. 1:5), in consolation to the station of hope and relief (*maqām-i rajā*), which is its constant companion. In his view, the reason for this is that one who sees something very frightening experiences fear and bewilderment, then he tends to flee, then because of his impotence he places all trust in God, and then he seeks the ways of consolation.[116] As can be seen, Nursi applies the spiritual stations to Qur'anic verses. These spiritual stations are included in classical Ṣūfī literature, and Nursi does not hesitate to use such concepts. In his other works, Nursi explicates in great detail such spiritual concepts.

Furthermore, mystical (*ishārī*) interpretations can be found in Nursi's exegeses of individual letters (*al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭ'a*). For example, "*Alif. Lām. Mīm.*" in Q. 2:1 alludes to the following successive precepts: *Alif* means "this is the pre-eternal speech of God", *lām* hints "Gabriel brought down it" and *mīm* implies "to the Prophet Muhammad". He also adds his reason that the whole range of Qur'anic rules are expressed in summary in a single long chapter; a long chapter is showed allusively in a short chapter; a short chapter is contained in a single verse; a verse is seen in a single sentence; a sentence is implied in a single word; and such a comprehensive word may be hinted at in the disconnected letters like in *Sīn. Lām. Mīm.*[117] Nursi holds the view that because of this mystical idea, "*Alif. Lām. Mīm.*" can hint at the above meanings. Secondly, he also stresses that the importance of individual letters does not lie only in their meanings. There are natural mutual connections among letters like relationships between numbers, and the science of the secrets of letters (*'ilm asrār al-ḥurūf*) has discovered these connections. Nursi points out that this feature is also a reflection of the Qur'an's inimitability, and his collection has showed this quality.[118]

In addition, it is important to note that Nursi considers the science of *jafr (jifr)*,[119] to be a source of knowledge. In his view, the origin of *jafr*, which is based on *abjad* reckoning, is the fourth khalif ʿAli's treatise *Jaljalutiyya*. Nursi believes that *jafr* is one of the keys of the invisible world and an aspect of the Qur'an's inimitability. The Qur'anic verses have numerous meanings in addition to their literal meanings, and these meanings may be known through the science of *jafr*. In his writings, he says that he obtained some knowledge of the unseen, attempting to explain hidden truths in the future by means of *jafr*.[120] It is clear that Nursi's hermeneutics includes the science of *jafr*, and the inner meanings may be known through this source. For example, Nursi highlights that the Qur'an is full of predictions for scholars of the Qur'an's esoteric meanings (*'ulama*

al-bāṭin). One category in predictions is particular to saints and spiritual discovery (*kashf*). In this context, he mentions the two significant Ṣūfīs. Ibn al-ʿArabī discovered numerous predictions in chapter *al-Rum*, and Imām Rabbanī discerned signs of various future events in the individual letters (*al-ḥurūf al-muqaṭṭʿa*).[121] The following example explicitly illustrates how Nursi uses the science of *jafr* in his *ishārī* approach.

In his interpretation of the chapter *al-Falaq*,[122] Nursi highlights that this chapter points to all ages, and through its allusive meaning (*ishārī maʿna*) looks more to our strange age, even clearly, and invites believers to seek refuge with God. Nursi notes that:

> All the verses of this *sūra* have numerous meanings. Only in respect of its allusive meaning, its repeating the word "evil" (شَرّ) four times in five sentences; and with a powerful relation (*münasebet-i mâneviye*) and in four ways its pointing the finger with the same date to the four unparalleled, ghastly, stormy evils, material and immaterial, of this age, with its revolutions and clashes, and its implicitly giving the command: "withdraw from these;" is certainly guidance from the Unseen (*irşad-ı ġaybî*) in a way befitting the Qur'an's miraculousness. For example, the sentence Say: *I seek refuge with the Sustainer of the dawn* 'coincides' (*tevafuk*) with the date 1352 or 1354 according to *abjad* and *jafr* reckoning (*hesab-ı ebcedî ve cifrî*), alluding to the Second World War, which was brewing up then erupted due to the prevalent ambition and greed of mankind and the First War, and in effect saying to the community of Muhammad (PBUH): "Do not enter this war, but seek refuge with your Sustainer." With another of its allusive meanings (*mâna-yı remzi*), as a special favour to the *Risale-i Nur* students, who are servants of the Qur'an, it hints (*remzen*) to them that they were to be saved around the same date from Eskishehir Prison and an awesome evil, and that the plans to eliminate them would come to nothing. It was as though commanding them symbolically to seek refuge with God…[123]

Having explained other allusive meanings, Nursi draws attention to the fact that each verse has many meanings. Also, every meaning is universal, and it has particularities (*afrād*) in every century. What Nursi mentions above is only its level of allusive meaning which points to this century. This century is one particular (*fard*) within that universal meaning. But, because our century has gained a special character, this chapter points to it with its date. Nursi also adds that this chapter can include numerous secrets and allusions to this century and its wars.[124] These examples show us how Nursi derives allusive meanings from Qur'anic verses through the science

of *jafr*. In his view, according to *abjad* and *jafr* reckoning, the first verse of the chapter *al-Falaq* provides the date of 1352 or 1354 AH, and this date is around the same time as the Second World War and when his students were saved from the prison. Then Nursi connects the verses with those events in his interpretation.

Another example which illustrates Nursi's Ṣūfī interpretation can be seen in his explanation of *taqwa*. He points out that the Qur'an mentions *taqwa* in three stages: Abandoning associating partners with God (*shirk*), abandoning disobedience and sin and abandoning everything other than God (*māsiwā Allah*).[125] We can come across the last stage of *taqwa* here in classical Ṣūfī literature such as al-Qushayri's epistle.[126] After explanation of the general meaning, Nursi indicates the higher level of meaning of this concept. Finally, in his interpretation of Q. 2:3, "those who are mindful of God keep up the prayer", Nursi mentions secrets of the daily prayer. The daily prayer (*ṣalāt*) is a great link and a supreme relationship between the servants and God, and it is also an act of service. To charm and to attract every spirit is a characteristic of the prayer. He emphasizes that the pillars of the prayer (*ṣalāt*) include many mysteries and secrets, and those secrets have been expanded in books such as Ibn al-ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya*.[127] His emphasis on the mysteries of the prayer and his reference to Ibn al-ʿArabī show us his attitude towards *tafsīr isharī*.

7.4 Scientific Exegesis

As stated in the second chapter, the modernist exegesis is based on reason and modern science. The power of reason has significantly affected Muslim modernism.[128] In their interpretation of the Qur'anic text, the Muslim modernists found the telegraph, telephone, tramway and microbes indicated in the Qur'anic verses. As the results of modern research are rediscovered in the Qur'an, they also pointed out that modern science can make the Qur'anic passages clear.[129] Many scientific commentators show this form of exegesis as evidence that the Qur'an is the word of God, and the Prophet is the true messenger, and it is considered to be one aspect of the Qur'an's inimitability.[130] They put more emphasis on the inimitability of the scientific contents of the Qur'an than its linguistic and rhetoric inimitability.[131] Let us turn to the views of Ahmad Khan and ʿAbduh with regard to scientific exegesis.

Ahmad Khan believes that God's word, the revelation, cannot contradict his work, that is, nature. Any religion sent by God must necessarily be

within the grasp of the human intellect because we can perceive the obligatory character of a religion only by means of the intellect. Thus, in his view, the Qur'anic revelation does not include anything contradicting scientific reason. The violation of the law of nature, which God established, is impossible so long as that law exists. There is nothing in the Qur'an contradicting the law of nature. As a practical result of this approach, he eliminated miraculous events from his approach to the Qur'anic text as much as possible and all kinds of supranatural phenomena that were not compatible with his own scientific opinion.[132] For example, Ahmad Khan attempts to reconcile the theory of evolution with the Islamic principles of creation and the fall of Adam.[133] He clarifies that the prophet's night journey happened only in a dream, while the *jinn* are some kind of primitive savages living in the forest.[134] These examples clearly demonstrate Khan's naturalist interpretations of Qur'anic verses and concepts.

ʿAbduh, in his commentary, demonstrates the importance of reason and a positive approach to science in Islam. ʿAbduh underlines that many Qur'anic verses call for reflection upon the signs of God in nature, and these verses consist of approximately a half of the Qur'an. Basically, there is no conflict between religion and science since both are based on reason, and both examine the same occurrences to a certain extent. In this respect, religion is a friend of science. He advocates for Muslims the duty of acquisition of the sciences in which Western countries are proficient, in order to be able to contend against these countries. In his view, God has given two books: nature, which is created, and the Qur'an, which is revealed. The Qur'an urges us to study nature through the intelligence. ʿAbduh believes that the spirit of Islam, as truly comprehended, is tolerant of all scientific study.[135]

In ʿAbduh's view, because Islam is the religion of reason and progress, the Qur'an fits in with the laws of nature, instructing people about the laws involved in the historical development of nations and societies. Consequently, ʿAbduh, in his commentary, attempts to see the discoveries of modern science into the Qur'anic text. For example, he thinks that the *jinn* indicated in the Qur'an could be equal to microbes. He also considers the flocks of birds, mentioned in Q. 105, to be swarms of flies which, through their polluted legs, had transmitted a disease to the army of the elephant. In this way, he interprets this miraculous content of the Qur'an in a way that is acceptable to modern science.[136] Moreover, ʿAbduh endeavours to make compatible the theory of evolution with the story of Genesis in the Qur'an.[137] In his interpretation of Q. 4:1, "People,

be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide", ʿAbduh highlights that the address is general and indefinite, and the text does not literally mean by "a single soul" a reference to Adam. Therefore, each group of people can interpret their own origin according to their own beliefs. Those who state that all people came from Adam can refer this single soul to him, and people who believe that each race has its own ancestor can relate it to him. Because the address is general and many people do not know about Adam and Eve, a particular reference to Adam could not be meant. The origin of human beings from Adam is a story that came from the Hebrews, while the Chinese have a different tradition. He also holds the view that science and study on the history of humanity have disputed the Hebrew tradition. Therefore, the Muslims are not required to believe the story of the Jews because it is not certain whether the story authentically came to us from the Books of Moses. Briefly, God left the text general, and so the interpretation of "one soul" may include what European scientists argue over the origin of humanity.[138] ʿAbduh disregards a number of authentic ḥadīths with regard to the origin of human beings from Adam. Therefore, his critical approach to the story of creation in Islamic tradition, based on the sound ḥadīths and the Biblical story does not seem to be coherent. In addition, ʿAbduh is heavily criticized by various Muslims scholars because of his views on the *jinn* and the naturalist understanding of the story of the elephant.

It should also be noted that ʿAbduh's interpretations such as those above do not have similarities to the proponents of scientific exegesis: ʿAbduh's aim was to prove to his public that the Qur'anic passages in question were not contrary to reason according to modern scientific standards. As for the supporters of scientific exegesis, they attempt to prove that the Qur'an is many centuries ahead of Western scientists, and modern scientific discoveries have been foreseen in the Qur'an.[139] Based on the examples just cited, it could be reasonably stated that ʿAbduh attempts to rationalize various miraculous events in the Qur'an to make its teachings compatible with modern science. Nevertheless, ʿAbduh's attitude towards the prophetic miracles is not only to rationalize them. He does not see the miracles of the prophets to be impossible in terms of reason. For this reason, ʿAbduh does not always attempt to make rational explanations for every miraculous event, and he acknowledges many miraculous events of the previous prophets. At the same time, he thinks that the era of the

miracle is over with the coming of the Prophet Muhammad. Humanity entered the time of maturity through Islam.[140] Critically thinking, Khan and ʿAbduh's readings of the Qur'an based on modern reason and science are open to challenge. As Baljon indicated, while Muslim modernism has over time been heavily influenced by the power of reason, rationalism had given place to vitalism and existentialism in Europe long ago.[141] In addition, one could argue in favour of a way of harmonization between religion and science without disregarding the traditional understanding of certain concepts. It can be recognized that modern reason and its scientific discoveries have a huge influence on modern scholars. Let us now turn to Nursi's approach to the relation between religion and science and the scientific exegesis.

Firstly, Nursi acknowledges that there is a union between the Qur'an and the universe. In his opinion, the Qur'an comes directly from the everlasting "speech" attribute (*kalām*) of God, and the universe and everything in it is derived directly from His attribute of *qudrah* (power). The Qur'an is made up of verses that are the manifestation of God's attribute of *kalām* (speech) as the universe is the reflection of His attribute of *qudrah* (power). Nursi points out that if one of them is transformed into the other, the transformed one will take the other's form. At this point, he also thinks that the Qur'an and the universe interpret each other.[142] In this context, he underlines that an established true scientific discovery cannot be in contradiction with the Qur'an.[143] In addition, he attempts to correlate between the Shariʿa's teachings and scientific information and theories, sometimes criticizing ancient philosophy and modern science.[144] However, in this respect, Nursi's approach does not drive him to rationalize various miraculous events in the Qur'an.

Secondly, Nursi emphasizes that the Qur'an's approach to the universe is different from the attitude of modern science. Nursi states that science and materialistic philosophy have gone astray from the path of truth. The Qur'an mentions creation and the universe to inform people about God and His names. In order to make known the Creator, the Qur'an clarifies the meaning of the Book of the Universe. Thus, the Qur'an examines creation for the knowledge of its Creator, but science looks to creation for its own sake and particularly speaks to scientists. In other words, the Qur'an looks at everything on account of God, not on its own account, while philosophy looks at the universe in terms of itself or material causes.[145] For example, Nursi notes the following:

> The knowledge of the universe derived from the Qur'an is infinitely superior to that taught by modern science and philosophy. For example, the Qur'an says: He has made the sun as a lamp (71:16). What a broad, profound view the Qur'an gives you to look at the series of the Divine Names' manifestations. Despite its huge size, the sun serves as a light to illuminate your home, a fire to ripen or cook your food, by the command of Him Who nurtures you. You have such a powerful and compassionate Owner that the sun and innumerable others like it are lamps in His guest-house. Science or philosophy tells you that the sun is a huge mass of fire moving by itself. Our Earth and other planets were detached from it and move in their orbits determined by their attraction to the sun and gravity. This information gives you either a sense of fright or wonder [bewilderment].[146]

Nursi here indicates that the Qur'an looks at the world and any creature on behalf of God and the manifestation of his divine names, while science or philosophy looks to the world on behalf of itself. In his view, therefore, the Qur'anic worldview is more valuable than the scientific and philosophical worldviews. Philosophy is outwardly (*zâhiren*) magnificent (*mutantan*), but inwardly (*bâtınen*) worthless (*kof*).[147] Moreover, Nursi also expresses that one who is far from something cannot comprehend it in the same way as one who is close to it. European philosophers and scientists (*Avrupa feylesofları*) penetrated deeply (*şiddet-i tevaġġul*) into material subjects (*maddiyat*), and they are very far from the truths of belief, Islam and the Qur'an. Hence, it cannot be said that those who made many scientific discoveries such as lightning and steam could also discover the secrets of truth and of the Qur'an. Their minds are restricted to their eyes, but eyes cannot see what heart and spirit perceive, especially when hearts have died because heedlessness (*ġhaflat*) causes them to decay through absorption in naturalism.[148]

Based on the information above, it can be concluded that Nursi criticizes any form of science or philosophy that disregards metaphysical realities such as the existence of God, but does not wholly dismiss philosophy as a discipline. In addition, he believes that science and scientific wonders may not be a sufficient proof for Islamic faith for certain people, and it seems that Nursi alludes to religious experience as a proof for religious faith because his emphasis on what the heart and spirit perceive can indicate this reality.

As mentioned in the fourth chapter, in his Old Said period, Nursi was maintaining modern philosophy (*ḥikmat al-jadīda*) and the new scientific

approach.[149] With regard to this approach, a development in his intellectual thought can be seen after his transformation into the New Said. He draws attention to this development by pointing out that the Old Said and various other thinkers accept the principles of human philosophy and Western thought to a certain degree, and they depend upon these principles in their response to Europe. However, Nursi believes that because they acknowledge certain principles in advance, as if they were established scientific principles, they cannot demonstrate the true value of Islam. They think as if they reinforce Islam by grafting philosophy's supposedly deep-rooted branches onto the body of Islam. Nursi left this way later because he believes that overcoming anti-Islamic tendencies through this way is little and demeans Islam. Later on, he showed that the essentials of Islam are so deep that philosophy's principles cannot reach them. In this former way, these thinkers regard human philosophy as deep and Islam's pillars as extrinsic (*ẓahirī*) and think that the pillars can be supported by grafting them onto the principles of philosophy. But Nursi highlights that the principles of philosophy cannot reach the pillars of Islam.[150] Nursi's attitude in this regard can indicate to us the view that the essentials of Islam, as a divine religion from Adam to the Prophet Muhammad, have an authority, and they are the origin of any development and science.

Thirdly, as mentioned earlier, for Nursi, the major themes of the Qur'an are divine unity (*al-tawḥīd*), prophethood (*al-nubuwwa*), the resurrection (*al-ḥashr*) and justice-worship (*al-ʿadāla*, *al-ʿibāda*).[151] It is only the Qur'an that can give the correct and certain answer to the questions asked of the universe by philosophy. Those basic questions are the following: O universe! From where and by whose command do you come into existence? Who is your sultan and guide? What is your purpose here? Where will you go? In Nursi's view, except when they are used to support these fundamental themes, natural facts are indicated by the Qur'an only parenthetically and as secondary matters. The universe and the workings of the cosmos are used in the Qur'an for purposes of deduction and to show their Maker through revealing the order of the divine art in the universe. In other words, the main purpose of the Qur'an in referring to the book of the universe and the facts of creation such as its order is to prove God's existence and Oneness. Therefore, exactly how the universe was formulated is not really the issue. In Nursi's view, any cosmic occurrence that is mentioned in the Qur'an has four functions. Firstly, it announces the glory of God through the voice of the order (*intizam*) and through being in perfect harmony with all other parts of creation. Secondly, because any cos-

mic phenomenon is the subject of a particular science, it demonstrates that Islam is the essence (*zübde*) and the bedrock of all true sciences (*fünun-u hakikiye*). Thirdly, because a cosmic occurrence is representative of a whole species, it clearly shows the harmony (*tatbik ve mutabık*) existing between Islam and the divine laws (*kavanîn ve nevâmis-i İlâhiye*) in the universe. Through understanding this harmony and the support of the divine laws, Islam is better understood and develops. Finally, because every cosmic phenomenon is a manifestation of the truth (*hakikatın nümunesi*), it directs and urges minds towards the truth.[152] Nursi holds the fact that the Qur'an is not a book of science, and it mentions cosmic and natural facts parenthetically in order to indicate their Maker. The reason why Nursi heavily embraces scientific exegesis, which is a common trend in the modern period, can be that he seeks to demonstrate that Islam is the essence of all true sciences. Because the attacks of materialistic and positivistic ideas on Muslims' faith come from modern sciences, Nursi aims to defend the Islamic faith through the Qur'anic worldview on nature and universe and responds to positivistic movements.

Moreover, Nursi states that the Qur'an is obscure (*mubham*) and general (*muṭlaq*) regarding the truths of creation and the physical sciences. In his response to the relevant question, he maintains that if the Qur'an had taught modern sciences to the people living ten centuries ago, it would have confused their minds and caused them to fall into error. If the Qur'an had stated: "O people! Look at the stationary sun, rotation of the earth, and the thousands of living beings in a drop of water, then comprehend the Maker's grandeur!" it would have driven the people of that time to denial. Because sciences ten centuries ago were not as advanced as in the modern period, this statement was contrary to their external senses. For them, such scientific discoveries were outside the bounds of possibility and probability. It is good to remember that sciences are born only as the result of many experiments, and the scientific discoveries developed as the result of a meeting of minds and the conjunction of thousands of ideas. Therefore, in his view, confusing people throughout the period of ten centuries and satisfying only the people who have come after the emergence of the modern sciences are contrary to wise guidance and the spirit of eloquence. Eloquence required that the scientific discoveries should be mentioned in obscure and general terms by respecting those people's feelings and not confusing their minds.[153] Nursi points out that the Qur'an does not provide specific details about the truths of creation and sciences. Through this method, it takes pre-modern people and their knowledge

into account. At the same time, the Qur'an also alludes to modern sciences through its obscure and general terms. Nursi also stresses that incorrect information and matters related to the natural sciences in classical Qur'anic commentaries should not be considered to be the real meanings and interpretations of the Qur'an.[154]

Furthermore, Nursi also responds to another doubt, which is that some of the literal meanings of verses seem to be contrary to rational evidence and scientific discoveries. He reiterates that the Qur'an mentions the universe and the workings of the cosmos in order to show their Maker. Since their evidence has to be known before the thesis, and that the evidence, which the Qur'an provides for the people in the seventh century CE, has to be clear, the Qur'an reasonably inclines towards their emotions and literary knowledge through some of its literal meanings. Nevertheless, he points out that such literal meanings are not deliberately expressed for affirming or indicating their knowledge and feelings, but they are allusive or associative statements. Since the literal meanings of such verses inclining towards their feelings are allusive and indirect expressions (*min qabīl al-kināya*), their literal meanings are not considered to be the subject of either true or false. As a result, Qur'anic verses are not really contrary to rational evidence and scientific discoveries. In this context, Nursi draws attention to his understanding of scientific exegesis that the Qur'an contains signs (*amāra*) and indications (*qarīna*) on any occasion in order to point to the truth for the authorities (*ahl al-taḥqīq*). He also emphasizes that the Qur'an, by taking the scientists of the modern period into account, indicates, implies and alludes to the truths of creation, modern sciences and scientific discoveries through signs and associated meanings (*qarā'in*).[155]

As can be seen, Nursi believes that on the one hand the Qur'an directly addresses the people in the seventh century CE, taking their feelings and literary knowledge into account through some of its literal meanings. Hence, today these literal meanings seem to contradict science. However, in his view, these literal meanings are allusive, and the Qur'an does not intentionally incline towards their feelings to indicate their knowledge. On the other hand, the Qur'an also addresses the people in every century through its universal messages, including indications about the truths of creation and the universe. For example, for the modern period, the Qur'an implies the realities of creation, certain modern sciences and scientific findings through signs (*amāra*) and indications (*qarīna*), which point to the truth and can be discovered by the experts.

In addition, as noted above, Nursi stresses the importance of the relationship between religion and science and scientific exegesis, which is an influential tendency in the modern period. The motive behind Nursi's approach here can be that he shows an interest in providing the religious foundations of these issues. In his view, human beings will turn towards knowledge and the natural sciences in the contemporary period and subsequent periods. Authority and power will be at the hand of knowledge and science. The future age will be an age of reason, knowledge and science. Since the Qur'an relies on the rational evidence, the future will be the age of the Qur'an.[156] Therefore, Nursi discusses scientific exegesis in great detail. As he defines the Qur'an as "an eternal translation of the great Book of the Universe",[157] he clarifies the Qur'anic worldview on the universe, nature and the natural sciences. Various Muslim scholars such as ʿAbduh believe that "The world will not come to an end, until the promise of God to make His light complete will have been fulfilled, and religion will take science by the hand, and they will aid one another in rectifying both the intellect and the heart."[158] In line with this approach, it seems that Nursi saw the necessity of elucidating these subjects.

It is important to note that Nursi is one of the great proponents of scientific exegesis. As noted before, his one-volume commentary can be considered to be a kind of scientific and literary exegesis.[159] Based on Q. 6:59, "nor anything fresh or withered, that is not written in a clear record", Nursi argues that according to one interpretation, the clear record is the Qur'an. This verse declares that everything, fresh and dry, is found in the Qur'an. While this is true, things are included at different levels (*muhtelif derecelerde*). Therefore, not everyone can see everything in the Qur'an. They are presented sometimes as seeds, sometimes as nuclei (*nüve*), sometimes summaries (*icmal*), sometimes principles (*düstur*) or signs (*alâmet*), as well as explicitly (*sarahaten*) or implicitly (*işareten*), allusively (*remzen*), obscurely (*ibhâmen*) or suggestively (*ihtar*). According to the need and occasion, one of these is preferred in a way compatible with the purposes of the Qur'an (*maksad-ı Kur'ân*) and in connection with the context's requirements (*iktizâ-yı makam münasebeti*).[160] Nursi emphasizes that what he understands from the Qur'an's indications in the stories of the prophets and their miracles is that there are two purposes and wisdoms in the miracles of the prophets in the Qur'an: One is to prove their prophecy and the other is to show to humanity examples for the material progress and to encourage them to attain similar achievements. It is as if through these stories, the Qur'an points to the main foundations and final results

of progress which humankind will attempt in the future.[161] Nursi relies on one interpretation of Q. 6:59 for his scientific exegesis and embraces polyvalent reading of the Qur'an. Unlike the opponents of this form of exegesis, Nursi follows the line of scientific exegesis in the classical period, such as Ghazzālī and al-Rāzī.

Nursi also thinks that as the result of progress in science and industry, many wonders of science and technology have been produced such as the airplane, electricity, railways and the telegraph. Such things take an important position in people's daily lives. Since the Qur'an addresses all the people in every century, it does not neglect these discoveries. In his view, the Qur'an indicates them in two ways: Through the miracles of the Prophets (*Mu'cizât-ı enbiya*) and certain historical events (*hâdisât-ı tarihiye*). For example, the stories in Q. 85: 4–8 and Q. 36: 41–42, "damned were the makers of the trench, the makers of the fuel-stoked fire! They sat down to watch what they were doing to the believers. Their only grievance against them was their faith in God, the Mighty, the Praiseworthy", and "Another sign for them is that We carried their seed in the laden Ark, and We have made similar things for them to ride in", refer to the railway. Nursi provides another example that the light verse (Q. 24:35), in addition to its many other connotations and mysteries (*envâr*, *esrâr*), alludes to (*remz*) electricity.[162] While Nursi's such approaches seem to be in line with the views of the modernists, Nursi does not argue that these indications are the only possible meanings.

Nursi focuses more on the miracles of the Prophets in relation to scientific exegesis. He holds the view that as God sent the prophets as the leaders of spiritual progress (*terakkiyât-ı mâneviye*); he also made them the masters of humanity's material progress (*terakkiyât-ı maddiye*) by bestowing upon them certain miracles. Through showing the prophets' miracles, the Qur'an encourages people to achieve similar things (*nazire*) via science. He also believes it could even be said that material achievements and wonders (*maddî kemâlât ve harikalar*) were first bestowed upon humanity as a gift through the hand of prophetic miracles such as Noah's ship. Moreover, Nursi maintains that since investigative scholars (*ehl-i tahkik*) and the science of eloquence (*ilm-i belâğat*) agree that each Qur'anic verse includes many aspects of guidance (*vücuh-u irşadî*) and instruction (*müteaddit cihât-ı hidayet*), the verses of the prophets' miracles are not mere historical stories, but rather contain numerous meanings of guidance (*maânî-yi irşâdiye*). Through presenting these prophetic miracles, the Qur'an traces the final limit (*nihayet hudud*) of science and industry (*fen*

ve san'at-ı beşeriye), states their furthest aims (*gayât*) and specifies their final goals, urging humanity for this purpose.[163] Nursi's scientific interpretations on various prophetic miracles in the Qur'an are as follows:

Combined human thought produced the thousands of rational sciences, and therefore humanity has come to display Adam's miracle, indicated in Q. 2:31, "He taught Adam all the names [of things]." By means of smelting iron, which is the crucial factor of all wonders of art, humanity made many achievements and showed the Prophet David's miracle: "We softened iron for him" (Q. 34:10). Through combined human thought, humankind produced aerial achievements like the airplane and has come too close to the Prophet Solomon's miracle: "And [We subjected] the wind for Solomon. Its outward journey took a month, and its return journey likewise" (Q. 34:12). Humanity invented staffs to strike very dry deserts and sandy wastes, causing waters to flow out, and manifested the Prophet Moses's miracle: "Strike the rock with your staff" (Q. 2:60). Humanity achieved the wonders of medicine by experiments and combined human thought, and these medical achievements are an inspiration of the Prophet Jesus's miracle: "I will heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead back to life with God's permission" (Q. 3:39). The Prophet Abraham's following miracle has also an indication for the scientific discoveries related to fire: "Fire, be cool and safe for Abraham" (Q. 21:69). The Prophet Solomon's miracle, "we have been taught the speech of birds" (Q. 27:16), is a source of speaking machines such as the radio and some species of birds' speech such as the pigeon and their employment. Solomon's other miracle, "I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye" (Q. 27:40), is an indication of humanity's invention of means of bringing images and sounds to you instantaneously from far away.[164] Regarding this miracle, Nursi notes that

> In order to attract Bilqis' throne (*taht-ı Belkıs*) to him, one of Solomon's (Peace be upon him) ministers who was versed in the science of attraction (*âlim-i ilm-i celp*) said: "I'll have the throne here before you can blink your eyes." The verse suggests then that it is possible to bring either things themselves (*aynen*) or their images (*sureten*) to one instantaneously from far away, and it is a fact that Almighty God bestowed this ability on Solomon (PBH) in the form of a miracle, to establish his innocence and justice. For being honoured with rulership as well as his Messengership, Solomon could in this way himself be informed of events in all the regions of his extensive dominions, and see the condition of his subjects and hear of their ills. That means,

> if man relies on Almighty God, and asks it of Him with the tongue of his innate capacity (*lisan-ı istidad*), like Solomon (PBH) asked for it with the tongue of his chastity (*lisan-ı ismet*), and if he conforms to His laws of wisdom (*kavânîn-i âdet ve inâyet*) in the universe, the world may become like a town for him. That is to say, while Bilqis' throne was in Yemen, it was instantaneously present (*aynıyla*) in Damascus, or its image (*suretiyle*) was, and it was seen. The images of the men around the throne were also certainly conveyed there, and their voices heard. This therefore indicates splendidly the attraction of images and sounds (*celb-i suret ve savt*) from long distances.[165]

In this context, it is worth mentioning that Nursi believes that the verses related to the prophetic miracles allude to numerous future wonders which have not yet been discovered by modern scientific studies.[166] Based on the information above, it could be inferred that while certain modern intellectuals seek to rationalize various miraculous events in the Qur'an, Nursi finds in these stories an inspiration and indication for many scientific discoveries and inventions. For him, the miracles of the Prophets and their stories in the Qur'an should not be regarded as mere historical events, they imply and indicate modern discoveries and state their final limits. Nursi urges modern thinkers to pay attention to the miracles of Prophets in the Qur'an, and to be inspired by them to conduct further scientific research. Nursi's logical argument for his scientific exegesis is as follows: Because the Qur'an is the word of God and addresses all the people at every time, the Qur'an does not neglect this modern age and its scientific discoveries. Therefore, Nursi's views on scientific exegesis are also connected with his theological approach to the Qur'an.

Finally, Nursi argues that scientific exegesis of the Qur'an is beyond the limited understanding of individuals in the modern period. Therefore, he calls for a collective study to accomplish a scientific exegesis. He states that the Qur'an includes numerous sciences and fields connected with the physical aspects of the world, whose knowledge is beyond the capacity of a single person or small group. Hence, a single individual's commentary cannot truly clarify the Qur'an since his comprehension is very limited with regard to time, place and specialization. He suggests that a commentary should be written by a great committee of authorities, each of them an expert in a number of sciences. After studies and researches, they should present the Qur'an's subtle meanings and its fine points in other commentaries, along with its truths which become manifest by experience of time

through the discoveries of science.[167] Nursi believes that the Qur'an has many truths which will be discovered by science. Therefore, it can be reasonably concluded that he is one of the great proponents of scientific exegesis.

In conclusion, Nursi embraces a number of exegetical trends in both the classical and modern periods. First of all, he examines many theological subjects in his exegetical writings, and these themes can be frequently recognized in Nursi's works. However, unlike the modernist scholars, he generally follows the mainstream Sunnī theological approach. As this book proved, Nursi's approach can be described as *kalāmisation* of *tafsīr* and other disciplines. It seems that he seeks to formulate an Islamic metaphysics and theology primarily based on the Qur'an by using multiple fields. Moreover, Nursi analyses a number of the topics connected with Islamic jurisprudence and legal issues in his interpretation of the Qur'an such as the meaning and wisdoms of worship, and the notion of *ijtihad*. He admits the medieval Muslim jurisprudence. Unlike certain modern scholars, he embraces classical Islamic law and its rules, and he does not consider the classical Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to be a great obstacle to an understanding of the Qur'an. Furthermore, Nursi accepts mystical (*ishārī*) interpretations, presented as secondary meanings and implications in addition to primary-apparent meanings of Qur'anic verses. There are numerous layers or levels of meanings besides the Qur'an's explicit meanings. He indicates the interpretation through the saints' spiritual discovery (*kashf*), respecting the intellectual Ṣūfī tradition of Islam. People can understand Qur'anic verses according to their intellectual levels and capacities. Nursi explicates many technical terms used in Ṣūfī literature. Finally, Nursi reads the Qur'an from the scientific perspective, but he does not seek to rationalize various miraculous stories in the Qur'an.

Notes

1. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7564–5; Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 196, 202–3.
2. Özervarlı, "Attempts to revitalize Kalām," 93–100.
3. Saeed, "Qur'an: Tradition of Scholarship," 7567.
4. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 20.
5. Nedžad Grabus, "Islamic theology between tradition and challenge of modernity," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23, no. 3 (2012), 267.

6. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 99, 100.
7. Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought*, 4–5.
8. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 567.
9. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey*, 140–1; Adams, *Islam and Modernsim*, 113–4.
10. Musa Koçar, *Eleştirel Açıdan Said Nursī'nin Kelāmī Görüşleri*, (PhD Thesis: University of Marmara, 1999), 255–72.
11. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 24.
12. Nursi, *Al-Mathnawi al-Nuri*, 188.
13. See, Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*.
14. Campanini, *The Qur'an*, 15.
15. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 30, 79–82.
16. Nursi, *The Words*, 484.
17. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 59–60.
18. Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought*, 6–14.
19. M. A. Zaki Badawi, *The Reformers of Egypt* (London: Croom Helm, 1976–8), 57.
20. Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 95–6; Yusuf Sevki Yavuz, "Said Nursi's Views on the Science of Kalam as Portrayed in the Risale-i Nur," July 08, 2014, http://www.bediuzzamansaidnursi.org/en/icerik/said-nursis-views-science-kalam-portrayed-risale-i-nur
21. Campanini, *The Qur'an*, 15.
22. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 195–6; Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 144–6.
23. "Who believe in the unseen, keep up the prayer, and give out of what We have provided for them."
24. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 49.
25. Ibid., 49–50; Yavuz, "Said Nursi's Views on the Science of Kalam."
26. "[Prophet], give those who believe and do good the news that they will have Gardens graced with flowing streams…"
27. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 219.
28. Ibid., 34, 50.
29. Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 36.
30. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 32–3; Turner, *The Qur'an Revealed*, 63–4.
31. Nursi, *The Letters*, 71–2; Mehmet Aydın, "The Problem of Evil in the Risale-i Nur," July 12, 2014, http://www.bediuzzamansaidnursi.org/en/icerik/problem-evil-risale-i-nur
32. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 79.
33. Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought*, 53.
34. Ibid., 52.
35. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 39.
36. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 99.
37. Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 37.

38. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 100.
39. Nursi, *İşārāt*, 9, 121.
40. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 59–60; Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 147–150.
41. Q. 36: 77.
42. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 60–5; Nursi, *The Reasonings*, 148–150; Nursi, *The Words*, 125–6.
43. Ibid., 359–360.
44. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 213–5.
45. Ibid., 212–3.
46. Ibid., 216–223.
47. Nursi, *The Words*, 515.
48. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 202.
49. Ibid., 203–4; Nursi, *The Letters*, 6–8.
50. Yavuz, "Said Nursi's Views on the Science of Kalam."
51. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 88–9.
52. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 568; Nursi, *The Rays*, 351.
53. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1981), 244; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ḥalabī, 1955), 6.
54. Nursi, *Letters*, trans. by Ş. Vahide, 78.
55. Saeed, *The Qur'an*, 204–5.
56. Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought*, 83, 73.
57. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 42; Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-first Century: A Contextualist Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 29–30.
58. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 102; Mertoğlu, "Doğrudan Doğruya Kur'an'dan Alıp İlhamı," 82–3.
59. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 42–3.
60. Badawi, *The Reformers of Egypt*, 81–2.
61. Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 25.
62. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 95, 103, 99, 100–1; Mertoğlu, "Tefsir," XXXX/291–2.
63. Mertoğlu, "Doğrudan Doğruya Kur'an'dan Alıp İlhamı," 91.
64. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 87.
65. Badawi, *The Reformers of Egypt*, 82–3, 85–6; Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought*, 73.
66. Akman, "Oğlum Ibni Arabī'ye,".
67. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 568; Yıldırım, "Said Nursi'nin İşârâtü'l-İ'caz,".
68. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 160–1; *İşārātü'l-İ'cāz*, 193–6, accessed 3 May, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.6.193
69. Ibid.; Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 161–3.
70. Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought*, 74–5.
71. Açıkgenç, "Said Nursi," 568.

72. Nursi, *The Words*, 497–9; Nursi, *The Words*, trans. Ş. Vahide, 737; *Sözler*, 646–9; accessed 3 May, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.646
73. Ibid., 649–50; Nursi, *The Words*, 499–500.
74. Ibid., 500; *Sözler*, 651; accessed 3 May, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.1.651
75. Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 52–3; Nursi, *The Words*, 427–8; *İşārātü'l-İ'cāz*, 73–4, accessed 3 May, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.6.73
76. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran*, 116–8; Mertoğlu, "Doğrudan Doğruya Kur'an'dan Alıp İlhamı," 102; Albayrak, *Klāsik Modernizmde*, 38.
77. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 89. For modern discussions, Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an*, 160–73.
78. Paçacı, "Çağdaş Dönemde Kur'an'a," 102; Mertoğlu, "Doğrudan Doğruya Kur'an'dan Alıp İlhamı," 101.
79. Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an*, 38–47.
80. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 91–3.
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123. Nursi, *The Rays*, trans. Şükran Vahide (İstanbul: Sozler, 2009), 286; *Şuâlar*, 348–9, accessed 13 May, 2018, http://www.erisale.com/#content.tr.4.348
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CHAPTER 8

Discussion and Conclusions

The Qur'an played a major role in modern period in response to concerns of modernity. Modernist exegesis emerged under the impact of the West in India and Egypt in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad ʿAbduh are two important intellectuals of the modern exegesis. Scientific exegesis, literary-historical exegesis, thematic exegesis and feminist exegesis are other types of modern exegeses. Bediuzzaman Said Nursi is also another influential scholar, who is not necessarily labelled a "modernist", from this period. These scholars and their ideas have been influential in the modern Muslim world. In the context of the modernist approach, this book has attempted to analyse Nursi's methodology of Qur'anic exegesis in his whole collection generally, and particularly in his *usūl al-tafsīr* book, *Muhākamat* (*The Reasonings*) and his one-volume commentary, *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz* (*Signs of Miraculousness*). The work has aimed to explore the difference between Nursi's re-reading of the Qur'an and that of his counterparts and where Nursi stands in relation to various modern Muslim scholarship on the Qur'an.

The book emphasizes that Said Nursi's approach can be described as the *kalāmisation* of *tafsīr* and other disciplines. To demonstrate this argument, I firstly focused on Nursi's intellectual career. As his life demonstrates, Nursi's main concerns have been Islamic theology, which deals with the proof of fundamentals of faith, and the Qur'an. In his view, a successful *ihya'* (revival) work should be based on Islamic theology (*kalām*) as indicated in the classical literature. Description of the collection as a

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combination of *kalām*, *tasawwuf* and *fiqh* indicates Nursi's use of multiple disciplines in his writings. It should be noted that Nursi discusses numerous subjects related to other Islamic disciplines such as ḥadīth and *sīra* (biography of the Prophet) in terms of Islamic theology, relating these issues to theological discussions. For example, he focused on some ḥadīths in regard to the unusual events at the end of time, while signs of the end of the world (*'alāmāt al-qiyamā*) are a theological field in Islamic theology. He also connected various *sīra* reports with Islamic theology to prove the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad in his famous *The Nineteenth Letter*. Moreover, since Nursi's major concerns are the pillars of Islamic faith, his approach seems to be compatible with early Muslim scholars' understanding of *'al-fiqh al-akbar'* such as Abū Hanīfa. Furthermore, because the primary theme of *tasawwuf* is faith, it can be reasonably connected with Islamic theology. Nursi's references from certain Ṣūfīs advocate the combination of *kalām* and *tasawwuf*. Ahmad Sirhindī's emphasis on "the full perception of the truths of belief" is a good example in this regard. In addition, his criticism of philosophy when it is separated from prophecy is also another supporting evidence of the argument of this book. He criticizes any philosophy when it is separated from Islamic theology.

As analysed in Chap. 3, in general, Nursi defines his collection as a kind of *maʿnawī tafsīr*, a commentary on the Qur'an's meanings. He also describes it as "a work of *kalām*" in some parts. Nursi's other notable description for his collection is "*tafsīr shuhūdī*" (transempirical exegesis). Nursi sought to produce a work of *kalām* by employing exegetical devices of *tafsīr* and other disciplines, while under the influence of the notion of *sola scriptura*, the so-called modernist exegetes gave more importance to *tafsīr* and attempted to give the task of *fiqh* and *kalām* to *tafsīr*. But Nursi combined *kalām* and *tafsīr*, and made Qur'anic commentary a *kalām*. The natures of these disciplines allowed this combination since Qur'anic exegesis was a flexible discipline, and *kalām* and *fiqh* were binding disciplines in the classical period. On the other hand, it should be noted that the main books of the collection may also be considered as a kind of thematic exegesis. In addition, his commentary *Ishārāt al-Iʿjāz* is a reason-based exegesis, and he primarily developed the theory of the word-order (*naẓm*) in his work. While modern thinkers mainly attribute the inimitability of the Qur'an to its content and meaning, Nursi stresses both the Qur'an's rhetorical and linguistic nature and its meaning as inimitable

aspects of the Qur'an. This approach is an important distinctive feature of Nursi's methodology.

Nursi's analysis of the notion of revelation is of paramount importance for his methodology because it is one of the significant subjects in Islamic theology and Qur'anic exegesis. As illustrated in Chap. 4, Nursi's approach to the notion of revelation and the nature of the Qur'an follows the established mainstream theological tradition. However, while his writings show his ability to maintain a level of traditionalism, he expresses the classical teaching in a very different style and language that is distinctive of his approach. He clarifies what he perceives as the needs of his time in a way accessible to the modern mind. Moreover, with regard to the nature of the Qur'an, his definition of the Qur'an indicates the relationship between *kalām* and *tafsīr* in his methodology. Furthermore, Nursi's major themes of the Qur'an and his approach to the Meccan and Medīnan chapters also demonstrate that his major interest was *ʿaqāid* and *kalām* issues.

In Chap. 5, I attempted to analyse natures and functions of Islamic disciplines in the classical period, focusing on what happened to these disciplines in the modern period. In the Islamic tradition, while *tafsīr* only deals with the meaning of the Qur'an, *fiqh* and *kalām* become the normative disciplines. Modernist thinkers produced their views in the light of the Qur'an and *tafsīr* and considered *tafsīr* to be solely a resource and discipline. The functions of Islamic disciplines have been considered under the general title of *tafsīr*. However, Nursi has great respect for the traditional division of Islamic disciplines. While Nursi combines a number of Islamic disciplines, and various readings connected with the major disciplines can be seen in his writings, he does not give any normative function to *tafsīr*, not placing Qur'anic commentary before all other disciplines. Moreover, Nursi does not produce any normative rule in relation to modern issues solely through the Qur'anic text and *tafsīr* discipline, and he does not disregard the traditional understanding. Furthermore, Nursi's revival of Islam and his renewal (*tajdid*) are based on systematic theology (*kalām*). Actually, his methodology seems to be compatible with the traditional division of Islamic disciplines. According to Ghazzālī, the discipline of *kalām* is the most comprehensive science. *Tafsīr*, ḥadīth, *fiqh* and *usūl al-fiqh* disciplines share and examine areas that *kalām* deals with entirely. In addition, Nursi acknowledges the authority and validity of *tafsīr* traditions and the reports from the earlier generations of Muslims, accepting their relevance to Qur'anic interpretation. Therefore, it could be said that the nature of *tafsīr* did not change in Nursi's methodology. Finally, Nursi's

one-volume commentary and his overall exegetical endeavour are primarily considered to be *tafsīr bi-al-ra'y* (reason-based exegesis), and he can be seen as a modern representative of the Ottoman exegetical school. Besides, linguistic and rhetorical interpretations in Nursi's hermeneutics are a sine qua non of Qur'anic exegesis. Hence, Nursi follows the established exegetical tradition.

While some modernist scholars have expressed their dissatisfaction with the classical Qur'anic sciences, Nursi does not have a problem with the hermeneutical devices in the sciences of the Qur'an, as illustrated in Chap. 6. As noted earlier, the main concerns of the Qur'anic sciences (*'Ulūm al-Qur'an*) are two areas, linguistics and history, and Nursi is respectful of these fields. Moreover, Nursi discusses a number of topics in the Qur'anic sciences in connection with their theological aspects. For example, Nursi thinks that while the Qur'an was revealed on various occasions, it has a thematic unity. For him, this aspect is a sign of the inimitability of the Qur'an. Occasions in seventh-century Arabia did not determine the incidence of revelation. Also, he considers abrogation (*naskh*) to be a dynamic of the legal, sociological and progressive aspects of the Qur'an, which is dependent upon the time and conditions. The Qur'an does not teach any new fundamentals or central beliefs, but it amends and perfects existent precepts. Due to differences in time and place, the Qur'an only establishes new rules in secondary matters. *Mutashābih* verses are of particular significance for Nursi. Qur'anic verses can address each level of understanding at all times, and this aspect is related to the notion of *mutashābih* verses. Nursi considers verses connected with God's attributes such as God having "hand" to be "ambiguous" and clarifies them in his exegetical works. In his view, some of the prophetic traditions regarding the events at the end of time are ambiguous and they should be interpreted (*ta'wīl*). Nursi stresses that *mutashābih* is a very distinctive aspect of universality of the Qur'an, and it supports the Qur'an's aim of eloquence and inimitability.

Furthermore, Nursi's approach to *tafsīr* relies on the view that the inimitability of the Qur'an (*I'jāz al-Qur'an*), and the miraculousness of the Qur'anic text are directly connected with Islamic theology (*kalām*). In any aspect of its inimitability, Nursi directs his efforts towards explicating the fundamentals of faith. Nursi elaborates on the aspects of the Qur'an's inimitability because he thinks this science to be vital to the Islamic theology. What is more, Nursi holds the fact that Qur'anic narratives are clear proofs of the prophethood of Muhammad. In addition, Nursi discusses certain difficult verses, clarifies obscure passages and sometimes reconciles

those verses. He firmly supports the Islamic tradition in the age of positivism.

As examined in Chap. 7, Nursi embraces a number of exegetical trends. First of all, theological exegesis can be frequently recognized in Nursi's works; his theological concerns made a great impact upon his *tafsīr*. However, unlike the modernist scholars, he generally follows the mainstream Sunnī theological approach. It seems that Nursi seeks to formulate an Islamic metaphysics and theology primarily based on the Qur'an by using multiple fields. Moreover, Nursi analyses a number of the topics connected with Islamic jurisprudence and legal issues in his interpretation of the Qur'an such as the meaning and wisdoms of worship, and the notion of *ijtihad*. His analysis on the importance and the meaning of worship and Islamic life indicates that he examines certain jurisprudential issues in connection with Islamic theology. He acknowledges the medieval Muslim jurisprudence. Unlike certain modern scholars, he embraces classical Islamic law and its rules, and he does not consider the classical Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to be a great obstacle to the understanding of the Qur'an.

Furthermore, Nursi accepts mystical (*ishārī*) interpretations, presented as secondary meanings and implications in addition to primary-apparent meanings of Qur'anic verses. There are numerous layers or levels of meanings besides the Qur'an's explicit meanings. People can understand Qur'anic verses according to their intellectual level and capacities. In addition, he indicates the interpretation through the saints' spiritual discovery (*kashf*), respecting the intellectual Ṣūfī tradition of Islam. Nursi recognizes that *tasawwuf* became a means of revival many times throughout the history of Islam. Nursi also explicates many technical terms used in Ṣūfī literature. Finally, Nursi reads the Qur'an from the scientific perspective, but he does not seek to rationalize various miraculous stories in the Qur'an. He attempts to provide the religious foundations of the relationship between religion and science since he believes that the future will be an age of reason and science. In his approach to the science and scientific exegesis, he relies on the Qur'an and Islamic theology. Nursi's views on scientific exegesis are also concerned with his theological approach to the Qur'an. In his response to positivistic understandings, Nursi seeks to defend Islamic faith through the Qur'anic worldview on nature and the universe.

This study can indicate to us a number of points. Firstly, our modern Muslim scholars have recognized that various changes such as scientific

developments, materialism and positivism, globalization, the emergence of nation-states and greater inter-faith relations affected the Muslim world in the modern period. The modern context was very different from the classical period. The modern age had its specific characteristics and concerns. They attempted to address these modern issues in their writings and aimed to make the Qur'an and its interpretation accessible to modern Muslims. They thought that certain aspects and principles of the religion are more important than others because of the modern context. Nursi gave more importance to the essentials of Islamic faith and *kalām*. Today new challenges may also appear and need responses due to the contemporary context.

Secondly, modern Muslim scholars have used multiple disciplines in their methodology. While *tafsīr* has been a central discipline for the modernists in order to arrive at flexible interpretations, *kalām* has become a major discipline for Nursi in order to defend Islamic faith. Moreover, Nursi's influence on many Muslims and non-Muslims in the world shows his success in his methodology. However, certain modernist intellectuals such as ʿAbduh have been also influential in academic and intellectual circles and the masses through their liberal ideas. At the same time, many people have criticized various modernists because they ignored the tradition and went beyond the boundaries of traditional understanding. Therefore, it could be said that modernist ideas may not be widely and easily welcomed by the masses. Nursi, becoming aware of this fact, does not seem to embrace modernist approaches. For example, he criticizes Mūsā Jār Allah and describes his modernist ideas as excessive (*ifrāt*).

Furthermore, a work that addresses all the aspects of humankind such as minds, hearts and souls can be a very effective for contemporary people. Also, presenting the classical teaching in a very unique style and language will have an influence on modern readers. Moreover, the intellectual tradition of Islam and the accumulated experience of the community are important and Islamic tradition and disciplines can be developed on the basis of the tradition in the contemporary period. In addition, close interactions between the East and the West can lead to new approaches, methodologies and re-evaluation of the tradition. Such interactions can allow the exchange of ideas and experience. Ahmad Khan and ʿAbduh went to Europe; their European experience had an impact on their ideas.

Before I conclude, I'd like to summarize the main points of this book. Main argument of this book emphasizes that Said Nursi's approach can be described as *kalāmisation* of *tafsīr* and other Islamic disciplines. Nursi

defines his collection as a kind of *spiritual tafsīr* (*maʿnawī tafsīr*), a commentary on the Qur'an's meanings. He also describes it as "a work of *kalām* (Islamic theology)" in some parts. Nursi's main concerns are *kalām* subjects and the Qur'anic approach to them. Therefore, he combined *kalām* and *tafsīr*. Nursi seeks to formulate an Islamic metaphysics and theology primarily based on the Qur'an by using multiple fields. Furthermore, the main books of the collection can also be considered as a kind of thematic exegesis. In addition, his one-volume commentary is a reason-based exegesis, and he primarily developed the theory of the word-order (*naẓm*) in his work. Unlike the modernist exegesis, Nursi stands on a middle way between classical and modern approaches.

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