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CLASSIFICATION OF FIGURATIVE VERSES MISINTERPRETED BY CONTEMPORARY MOVEMENTS

Abstract. *This article examines the dangers arising from the incorrect interpretation of figurative (mutashabih) verses in the Holy Qur'an and their impact on Islamic creed and society. The study analyzes how radical and deviant movements interpret Qur'anic expressions only in their literal sense while rejecting the traditional scholarly methodologies of tafwid and ta'wil established by classical Sunni scholars. Special attention is given to theological issues such as tajsim (anthropomorphism), tashbih (likening Allah to creation), and extremist literalism. Through the analysis of selected Qur'anic verses including "The Hand of Allah is above their hands" (al-Fath, 10), "Allah plotted" (Al 'Imran, 54), and the dialogue between Musa (peace be upon him) and Allah regarding seeing Him (al-A'raf, 143) the article demonstrates how classical scholars such as Ibn Kathir, al-Baydawi, al-Nasafi, and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi interpreted these verses within the framework of Arabic rhetoric, theology, and creed. The paper further discusses the misuse of figurative verses by extremist groups for political radicalization and takfir. It concludes that preserving sound Islamic belief requires adherence to the balanced methodologies of traditional Sunni scholarship, consideration of linguistic and historical contexts, and the strengthening of scholarly responses against superficial and extremist interpretations.*

Keywords: *Holy Qur'an; mutashabih verses; figurative interpretation; ta'wil; tafwid; tajsim; tashbih; Islamic creed; radicalism; takfir; Qur'anic exegesis; Arabic rhetoric; Sunni theology; Maturidism; Ash'arism.*

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Qur'an was revealed as a universal source of guidance for humanity and contains profound meanings expressed through both direct and figurative language. The Arabic language of the Qur'an is distinguished by its eloquence, rhetorical beauty,

and richness of expression. For this reason, Muslim scholars throughout history paid special attention to understanding the linguistic and theological dimensions of Qur'anic verses, especially those classified as mutashabih figurative or allegorical verses whose apparent meanings may lead to misunderstanding if interpreted without reference to the principles of Arabic rhetoric, Islamic theology, and the methodologies of classical scholars (al-Suyuti, n.d.).

Islamic scholars divided Qur'anic verses into muhkam (clear in meaning) and mutashabih (having several possible interpretations). In the modern era, the incorrect interpretation of figurative verses by radical movements and groups operating under the guise of false Salafism has been causing serious doctrinal and social crises in the Islamic world. Three major tendencies are visible in such misinterpretation: tajsim, in which the attributes of Allah are imagined like human organs; political radicalism, which converts figurative verses into weapons for rejecting state systems and declaring takfir; and extreme literalism, which denies the subtle metaphors of Arabic eloquence. The aim of this article is to analyze selected mutashabih verses through the lens of classical Sunni exegesis and to demonstrate the dangers of departing from the established methodological frameworks of tafwid and ta'wil (al-Ghazali, n.d.; al-Maturidi, n.d.).

METHODS

The article employs source-critical and comparative analytical methods grounded in the classical Arabic science of balaghah (rhetoric). Four passages are selected for close analysis: al-Ma'idah 44 (on judgment), al-Fath 10 (the "Hand" of Allah), Al 'Imran 54 ("Allah plotted"), and al-A'raf 143 (the dialogue of Musa with Allah). The primary exegetical sources are al-Baydawi's "Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil" (al-Baydawi, 2000), al-Nasafi's "Madarik al-Tanzil wa Haqa'iq al-Ta'wil" (al-Nasafi, 2012), and al-Razi's "Mafatih al-Ghayb" (al-Razi, 1981). Theological perspectives are drawn from al-Ashari (n.d.), al-Maturidi (n.d.), al-Ghazali (n.d.), and al-Suyuti (n.d.). Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (n.d.) is employed for hadith-critical material.

RESULTS

1. Al-Ma'idah 44 and the dangers of decontextualized interpretation. In verse 44 of Surah al-Ma'idah: "And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed those are the disbelievers," Ibn Kathir narrates the following from Ibn Abbas. These verses were revealed regarding two groups of Jews who had established unequal blood-money rates

between themselves in the pre-Islamic period. When both groups submitted the dispute to the Prophet (peace be upon him), Allah revealed these verses in this specific context. From this narration it becomes clear that these verses were revealed not regarding Muslims but regarding the Jews of Medina. Extracting this verse from its context of revelation and applying it to modern political conditions as extremist groups do to justify takfir of Muslim rulers constitutes a fundamental methodological error (al-Suyuti, n.d.).

2. *Al-Fath 10 “The Hand of Allah is above their hands.”* Al-Baydawi, while interpreting this verse, states that this sentence is either circumstantial in grammar or an explanatory affirmation of the pledge, expressed figuratively (al-Baydawi, 2000). Al-Nasafi explains that what is intended here is that the covenant made with the Messenger of Allah is, without any difference, like a covenant made with Allah Himself, free from limbs and physical attributes similar to the verse “Whoever obeys the Messenger has indeed obeyed Allah” (al-Nisa, 80) (al-Nasafi, 2012).

Several dangers arise from a literal interpretation of this verse. First, it creates tashbih likening Allah to creation contradicting “There is nothing like unto Him” (al-Shura, 11). Second, attributing a body to Allah implies dependence on space and time, which He Himself created contradicting divine transcendence. Third, it implies divisibility and composition, incompatible with the doctrine of divine unity (al-Ashari, n.d.; al-Maturidi, n.d.). Both classical methodologies tafwid (entrusting the true nature to Allah) and ta’wil (interpreting “hand” as power, strength, or blessing) guard against these dangers. The principle that whatever the human imagination conceives, Allah is absolutely beyond and different from it, is paramount in Islamic creed.

3. *Al ‘Imran 54 “And they plotted, and Allah plotted.”* Al-Razi explains that plotting originally means striving for corruption through concealment, or alternatively the gathering and strengthening of a plan. The Jews devised a scheme to kill Jesus (peace be upon him) and nullify his religion; Allah, however, elevated Jesus unto Himself and cast the likeness of Jesus upon the one who intended to kill him. Thus, Allah “plotted” against them (al-Razi, 1981). Al-Baydawi confirms: “And they plotted” some Jews devised a treacherous scheme to kill Jesus unexpectedly; “And Allah plotted” He raised Jesus unto Himself and cast the likeness of Jesus upon the one who intended to kill him (al-Baydawi, 2000).

The rhetorical key is the concept of mushakala (corresponding expression): since the disbelievers plotted evil, Allah returned their plot against them, using the same word in response. In human understanding, plotting is associated with cunning and weakness

qualities arising from inability to achieve a goal through open power. Attributing “plotting” to Allah in its literal sense implies deficiency in His power. The correct understanding recognizes *mushakala* as a rhetorical device naming Allah’s decisive retaliation through the same word the adversaries employed (al-Razi, 1981).

4. *Al-A’raf 143 “You will not see Me” and the Mu‘tazilite error.* The Mu‘tazila cited this verse to argue that seeing Allah on the Day of Judgment is absolutely impossible. Al-Baydawi refutes this by pointing out that Musa’s very request proves that seeing Allah is fundamentally possible: prophets do not ask for things that are essentially impossible regarding Allah, as this would imply ignorance concerning His nature (al-Baydawi, 2000). Al-Nasafi explains that “You will not see Me” means “You will not see Me in this worldly life,” not that seeing Allah is impossible in absolute terms. The particle “lan” does not necessarily indicate eternity in Arabic the disbelievers are told they will never wish for death, yet in Hellfire they cry out for it. Allah conditioned the vision upon the mountain remaining firm: since that condition is rationally possible, an impossible outcome cannot be conditioned upon it (al-Nasafi, 2012). Surah al-Qiyamah (22–23) clearly states that the faces of believers on the Day of Judgment will be “looking toward their Lord,” and numerous authentic hadiths confirm that believers will see Allah in Paradise as clearly as they see the full moon (Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani, n.d.).

DISCUSSION

The four passages analyzed confirm a consistent pattern: departures from classical Sunni methodology in the interpretation of *mutashabih* verses produce a predictable set of doctrinal errors. In each case the error originates in the same methodological failure the rejection of Arabic rhetorical context and the established scholarly tradition of interpretation (al-Ghazali, n.d.; al-Suyuti, n.d.). The al-Ma’idah 44 case illustrates how the willful disregard of *asbab al-nuzul* (occasions of revelation) converts a context-specific ruling into a universal political weapon. The al-Fath 10 case demonstrates how ignoring the rhetorical conventions of classical Arabic produces anthropomorphism. The al-‘Imran 54 case shows how ignorance of *mushakala* leads to attributing human weakness and deception to Allah. The al-A’raf 143 case illustrates how grammatical overreach reading “lan” as eternal impossibility produces a theological position in direct conflict with explicit Qur’anic verses (al-Ashari, n.d.; al-Maturidi, n.d.).

Several practical measures emerge from this analysis. The study of the Qur’an should proceed according to the methodologies of the established schools of Sunni scholarship

Maturidism and Ash‘arism rather than from independent or suspect sources. Every verse should be explained in light of its context of revelation and the linguistic characteristics of the era in which it was revealed. Scholarly refutations of superficial interpretations spreading through social media should be produced and disseminated through reliable religious platforms.

CONCLUSION

Figurative and mutashabih verses in the Holy Qur’an require careful interpretation grounded in the principles of Arabic language, rhetoric, and orthodox Islamic theology. Throughout Islamic history, classical Sunni scholars established balanced methodologies tafwid and ta’wil in order to preserve the transcendence of Allah and protect Muslim belief from anthropomorphism, theological extremism, and doctrinal corruption. The analysis of the four passages examined confirms that these methodologies are not arbitrary scholarly conventions but the outcome of sustained engagement with Arabic rhetorical theory, hadith criticism, and theological reasoning developed over centuries (al-Razi, 1981; al-Baydawi, 2000; al-Nasafi, 2012; al-Ghazali, n.d.).

Preserving sound Islamic belief in the contemporary period requires strengthening education in classical Sunni methodology, promoting the study of Arabic rhetoric and the occasions of revelation, and developing systematic scholarly responses to extremist and superficial interpretations circulating in digital media. The heritage of Maturidism and Ash‘arism represents a living resource for this task (al-Maturidi, n.d.; al-Ashari, n.d.).

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