Reading the Qur'an in Light of the *Manār*

Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā's (d. 1935) Exegesis of Surah 5

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Abstract

Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā's (d. 1935) *Tafsīr al-Manār* is widely considered a turning point in Qur'anic exegesis for its presumed departure from traditional Sunni Arabic commentaries on the Qur'an, both methodologically and intellectually. This thesis investigates this assumption by taking a closer look at the text of the *Manār* commentary itself. With a primary focus on the *Tafsīr al-Manār*'s exegesis of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*—authorship of which should, along with most other parts of the commentary, be ascribed to Rashīd Riḍā—I argue that, although certain traditional exegetical techniques and features remain in this commentary, their presence and function appear to be superficial in many ways. Specifically, Rashīd Riḍā breaks with some of the conventions followed by classical *mufassirūn* not only by introducing a number of novel ideas, some of which stand in opposition to classical Sunni doctrine, but also by demonstrating a much more pronounced interest in the social and political realities of his day. In this context, the author often seems to use tradition in a way that serves the purpose of advancing his own agenda as a social reformer, although he does so in an arguably subtle and nuanced fashion. On the one hand, abiding by certain traditional exegetical rules allows him to showcase his own scholarly credentials to participate in the long-standing *tafsīr* genre. On the other hand, his proximity to and engagement with tradition seems to help him justify some

of his more blatant departures in a manner that signals to the reader that his views are, in fact, not far-fetched at all, but intrinsically Islamic.

Notes on Transliteration, Conventions and Abbreviations

Transliteration and Spelling

The Arabic transliterations used in this thesis follow a modified system largely based on the standard specified in the *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association*. Names, terms, and toponyms from non-Latin Alphabets are generally transliterated unless they are common in English and have entered the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Accordingly, words such as 'Sunni', 'Mecca', and 'surah' are rendered in their familiar English form. Conversely, Arabic terms not commonly encountered in English such as *tafsīr*, *ʿulamā'*, and *fiqh* are transliterated and italicised. In addition, the Arabic names of modern authors who have published in Western languages are spelt according to the respective Western publications. Full vocalisation, i.e., grammatical case endings, is generally omitted when transliterating classical or modern Arabic texts, but is used when transliterating quotations from the Qur'an. Moreover, as part of a chain of names, the patronymic designations *ibn/bint* are abbreviated to 'b.' or 'bt', except when in reference to an individual by *nasab* only, in which cases they are spelt out and capitalised, e.g. 'Ibn Kathīr' amd 'Ibn Taymīya'. Finally, this thesis has been written in British English, features the use of the serial (Oxford) comma, and numbers ranging from one to ten are generally spelt out.

Qur'anic Translations

Translations of Qur'anic text are generally not taken from one particular published translation. Although I have routinely consulted those by Alan Jones and Yusuf Ali, all translations of Qur'anic quotations that appear in this thesis have been modified by myself.

References and Abbreviations

Titles of works consulted are generally given in abbreviated form, with minimal bibliographic information, and page numbers. For example, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement inaugurated by Muḥammad ʿAbduh* by Charles C. Adams is abbreviated to 'Adams, *Islam and Modernism*'. In the case of multivolume works, the volume number is usually included (e.g., 'Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5). Finally, references to the Qur'an are made using 'Q 5:46' (for example, to indicate a reference to surah 5, verse 46), and the *Manār* commentary is abbreviated to '*TM*' followed by the volume umber (e.g., *TM* V).

Chapter I: The *Manār* Commentary – A Beacon of Light in a Dark Age

1. Chapter Introduction

This thesis examines how the thought and exegetical methods of the Egyptian Sunni cleric and political activist Muḥammad ʿAbduh (1849-1905) and his Syrian disciple Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935) crystallise in their twelve-volume Qur'anic commentary *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm al-mushtahir bi-ism Tafsīr al-Manār*.[1] ʿAbduh and Riḍā are generally identified with the group of so-called 'Modernists', whom one scholar has described as 'those who have made an articulate or conscious effort to reformulate Islamic values and principles in terms of modern thought or to integrate modern thought and institutions with Islam'.[2] In Sunni Muslim circles, the school of exegesis around ʿAbduh and Riḍā has often been given credit for tackling the social and political issues of their time by applying the guidance of the Qur'anic text and its laws to social activities.[3] Although both Muslim and Western scholars have routinely cited the *Manār* commentary as a good example of the first truly 'modern' work of *tafsīr* literature,[4] as of yet, relatively little research has been carried out on the text

[1] For the sake of simplicity, I shall abbreviate the full title of ʿAbduh and Riḍā's commentary to '*Tafsīr al-Manār*' or 'the *Manār* commentary' throughout this thesis. Furthermore, I shall provide dates using the Gregorian calendar unless a specific situation requires me to do otherwise.

[2] Rahman, *Islam*, p. 222.

[3] Jafar, 'Modern Qur'anic Exegesis', p. 78.

[4] By 'modern', scholars such as Fazlur Rahman, Iftitah Jafar, Muḥammad al-Dhahabī, and even Albert Hourani tend to mean that the *Manār* commentary constitutes a break from traditional works of Qur'anic exegesis not only in content and style, but also in that it seeks to establish in a much more

itself, despite its arguably huge impact on both contemporary and later Sunni Muslim thinkers within the Arab world and beyond. In particular, this commentary's new, and at times very original, way of dealing with issues of religion and society is said to have wielded considerable influence on a number of Islamic and nationalist movements of the 20th century and to continue to do so to this day.[5] Riḍā, for example, is known to have left a profound impression on Ḥassan al-Bannā (1904-1949), one of the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.[6] Specifically, al-Bannā became one of Riḍā's disciples, deriving from him his interpretation of what constituted an Islamic state, which entailed, among other things, the 'restoration of an earlier golden age of Islam'.[7] Indeed, Riḍā's impact on al-Bannā was to the extent that the latter initially sought to continue his teacher's work after Riḍā's death by continuing to publish the

concrete fashion the relevance of the Qur'ans teachings to the socio-political realities of its readers. In so doing, it appears that these scholars often rely on the authors' own claims of having produced a *tafsīr* that is unlike those of the past. In this thesis, I shall use the term in this sense. See Rahman, *Islam*; Jafar, 'Modern Qur'anic Exegesis'; al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr*; and Hourani, *Arabic Thought*.

[5] See Ryad, *Reformism*, p. 9. Malcom Kerr identifies al-Bannā as one of ʿAbduh and Riḍā's 'political heirs', along with Aḥmad Luṭfī and Gamal Abd al-Naser. See Kerr, *Islamic Reform*, p. 5. Similarly, Johanna Pink has observed that the Tafsīr al-Manār's influence is 'still very noticeable in contemporary *tafsīr* production' (Pink, 'Striving for a New Exegesis').

[6] Johanna Pink, for example, notes that '[s]ome of the intellectuals and organisations that were inspired by Rashīd Riḍā were modernists, but perhaps even more distinct is his influence on the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots, which is also discernible in the revolutionary Qur'ānic commentary by Sayyid Quṭb' (Pink, 'Rashīd Riḍā').

[7] Brown, *Islam*, p. 214. More specifically, Richard C. Martin and Mark R. Woodward note in reference to the Indonesian scholar Yusuf Abdullah Puar that '[t]he Modernist theology of *al-Manar* contributed significantly to the development of Indonesian tajdid movements. The revivalistic and sometimes intolerant character of Indonesian modernism can be attributed largely to the influence of Rashid Rida, who seems to have had a greater and more direct influence on the founders of Indonesian modernism than his teacher Muhammad 'Abduh.'. See Martin, *Defenders of Reason*, p. 154.

Manār journal, from which the commentary had emerged, between 1939-41.[8] Similarly, a number of scholars have noted the 'lasting impact' of the *Manār* commentary on reformist Islamic movements in Southeast Asia such as the Muhammadiyah and PERSIS.[9]

Although there exists scholarship that studies the authors' backgrounds, their political activities and some aspects of their thought, the literature on the specifically *exegetical* aspects of ʿAbduh and Riḍā's work remains limited.[10] Indeed, to this day, there exists no comprehensive textual study of the ideas and methodology of the *Tafsīr al-Manār* itself.[11] This thesis therefore seeks to provide more in-depth textual

[8] Esposito, 'Manar, al-'.

[9] See Abdullah, 'Egyptian Reformists' and Nabil, 'Muhammad Abduh', for instance. As for Indonesian exegetical works that have been influenced by the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Johanna Pink lists that of Hamka (d. 1981), which appeared in 1967, as well *Al-Qur'an dan tafsirnya*, the commentary published by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion in 1975. In addition, Pink notes that the *Tafsīr al-Manār* enjoys great esteem among Turkish commentators on the Qur'an (Pink, *Sunnitischer Tafsīr*, p. 45 and p. 81).

[10] Pink, for instance, has observed that there exist numerous works that deal with ʿAbduh and Riḍā, although their Qur'anic commentary does not take centre stage (Pink, *Sunnitischer Tafsīr*, pp. 6–7, footnote 35).

[11] To briefly review the existing research: In 1933, Charles C. Adams produced a book on ʿAbduh's reform movement with a very short section on the *Manār* commentary (Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, pp. 177–204); some twenty years later, Jean-Jacques Jomier published a summary of the commentary's main concerns as well as some literary characteristics (Jomier, *Commentaire*). Although Jomier's book constitutes a good survey of the *Manār* commentary's main trends, it does not provide an in-depth textual study. In 1980, J.J.G. Jansen published a book that dedicates approximately seventeen pages to the ʿAbduh's methods as a commentator on the Qur'an (Jansen, *Interpretation*). Similarly, J.M.S. Baljon's *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation* contains some references to the *Manār* commentary, although this is not his main focus (Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation*). Jane I. Smith briefly discusses some of the features of the *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Smith, *A Historical and Semantic Study*) and in 2007, Katharina A. Ivanyi published two articles in which she briefly analyses some of ʿAbduh and Riḍā's methods and views on selected verses (Ivanyi, 'Who's in Charge?' and Ivanyi, 'God's Custom'). More recently, Mark Sedgwick wrote a useful book on ʿAbduh's political activities with some mention, albeit no analysis, of the commentary (Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh*). Similarly, Ammeke Kateman's *Muḥammad ʿAbduh and His Interlocutors* provides useful insights into ʿAbduh's exegetical methods, although the *Manār* commentary itself does not take centre stage (Kateman, *Muḥammad ʿAbduh and His Interlocutors*). In

analysis of the *Manār* commentary. In so doing, I focus primarily on the text itself rather than those responsible for its content in an attempt to draw broader conclusions about the style, exegetical techniques, and ideas contained in this commentary. Specifically, I zero in on the following two questions:

1) In terms of content and style, what are the features that set the *Manār* commentary apart from traditional ones and justify the widely accepted claim that this is a truly 'modern' work of *tafsīr* literature?[12] In particular, to what extent does the *Manār* commentary represent a break with the pre-modern *tafsīr* tradition and to what extent might this work, despite its own claims, still be embedded in it?

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addition, Umar Ryad has written a number of articles on the *Manār* journal (Ryad, 'Islamic Reformism' and Ryad, 'A Printed Muslim "Lighthouse"'), while Johanna Pink has discussed both the authors and some aspects of their exegetical activity—including as these crystallise in the *Manār* commentary—in several of her publications. These include but are not limited to two *Encyclopaedia of Islam Supplement* articles (Pink, ''Abduh, Muḥammad' and Pink, 'Riḍā, Rashīd); a comprehensive survey of modern Sunni Qur'anic commentaries (Pink, *Sunnitischer Tafsīr*); and most recently an article on modern Qur'anic exegesis in the *Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān* (2nd edition), which also discusses the *Tafsīr al-Manār*'s treatment of the issue of polygamy, examined in this thesis (Pink, 'Modern and Contemporary Interpretation'). Finally, it is worth mentioning Christian van Nispen tot Sevenaer's *Activité Humaine et Agir de dieu*, which explores the concept of the *sunan allāh* across the Manār commentary (Van Nispen tot Sevenaer, *Activité humaine*). With regard to ʿAbduh specifically, it seems that the vast majority of the works written by Western scholars focus primarily on his political activities and, in particular, on his relationship with Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī. These works generally tend to portray him either as a devout believer, driven by the genuine desire to reform and defend Islam, or as a pragmatist who was willing to adopt whatever ideology was necessary in order to promote his views on social and political issues. See in particular E. Kedourie, *Afghani*, and Kerr, *Islamic Reform*.

[12] For the purpose of this thesis, I shall use the term 'traditional', which I will largely use interchangeably with 'classical' and 'pre-modern', as an umbrella term to refer to the vast body of *tafsīr* literature produced from around the middle of the ninth century AD onwards. Examples include but are not limited to Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's (d. 923) *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*; Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Aḥmad al-Thaʿlabī's (d. 1035) *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 1210) *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*; as well as Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī's (d. 1272) *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*.

2) To what degree does the *Manār* commentary engage with the concrete political and social realities of the period in which it was written? Specifically, I explore the way that ʿAbduh and Riḍā view the state and condition of Islam in the early 20th century as well as the reasons provided by them concerning the need to produce a new commentary on the Qur'an. In so doing, I also examine how the *Manār* commentary can be viewed as being a product of the wider *Nahḍa* period and highlight, where pertinent, some of the differences between ʿAbduh and Riḍā.

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter I defines its objectives and provides a concise overview of the social, political, and economic context in which the *Manār* commentary emerged. In addition, this first chapter contains a summary of the authors' respective biographies with reference to some of the key scholarly debates and controversies surrounding these two influential figures. Finally, this chapter features a brief discussion of the commentary's editorial history. Chapter II analyses the content and key literary features of the two introductions preceding the first volume of the *Manār* commentary. These introductions, which span approximately thirty-one pages, are of significance as they not only provide the reader with a first glimpse into ʿAbduh and Riḍā's methods as modern exegetes, but also because they shed light on the authors' motivations for writing a new commentary on the Qur'an. In this context, specific

attention is given to contrasting the authors' use of traditional material and sources with some of their *tafsīr*'s newer elements, as displayed in these two texts. Whenever appropriate and possible, this chapter also pays attention to the fashion in which ʿAbduh and Riḍā seek to apply the message of the Qur'anic text to the socio-political realities and events of the early 20th century. Chapter III takes a closer look at the introduction and concluding epitome to the *Manār* commentary's discussion of *Sūrat Al-Mā'ida*—arguably new elements in works of *tafsīr* at the time. While chapter introductions to individual surahs were not entirely absent from pre-modern works of *tafsīr*, they usually tended to be significantly shorter than those found in the *Manār* commentary. Conclusions, however, were an entirely new feature.[13] Specifically, I analyse the structure and thematic waymarks provided by these two texts in an attempt to draw broader conclusions Riḍā's methods as a modern commentator on the Qur'an, with a strong focus on surah 5.[14] As in other parts of this thesis, comparisons to pre-modern works of *tafsīr* will be made whenever this is pertinent. Chapter IV explores the dichotomy between the *Manār* commentary's modernising tendencies—as well as its author's self-proclaimed mission to constitute a 'break' with pre-modern commentaries on the Qur'an— and its embeddedness in tradition through its exegesis of *Sūrat Al-Mā'ida*. Particularly, I focus on Riḍā's discussion of

[13] Pink calls these 'eine echte Neuerung' (lit.: 'a true innovation') (Pink, *Sunnitischer Tafsīr*, p. 45).

[14] As I will explain in more detail later on in this thesis, authorship of surah 5 can be safely attributed to Rashīd Riḍā.

Q 5: 44-50, a passage that appeared suitable due to the verses' focus on Judaism, Christianity, and rule of Islam—all of which were pressing topics in the mind of not only the author of this text, but also a Muslim readership living under Western occupation and struggling to come to terms with the increased penetration of European thoughts and institutions into their societies. In so doing, I pay attention to topics including but not limited to language, the author's use of and engagement with traditional material and scholarship, and his inclusion of the social, political, and economic issues of the period into his work. Finally, Chapter V will review the key findings of this thesis and put forward concrete suggestions for future research on the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, possibly using this thesis as a starting point.

2. Historical Background – the Ottoman Empire in the 19th Century

The goal of this subsection is to provide the reader with a concise summary of some of the most important historical developments in 19th-century Arab-Ottoman history, with a specific focus on Egypt and the Modernist movement around Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā. In so doing, I do not intend to put forward a comprehensive, state-of-the-art history of the Ottoman Empire. Others have done so.[15] Rather, I aim at presenting an overview of those events and debates that occurred at the time and geographical region, which, to my mind, are most pertinent to understanding ʿAbduh and Riḍā's intellectual background.

In the 19th century the Ottoman Empire underwent a series of pervasive socio-political and economic transformations that created the need for the provinces of the empire—some of which, it is important to note, were more centralised than others—to redefine both their collective and individual images.[16] European presence, which

[15] Important works include but are not limited to Sükrü Hanioğlu's *A Brief History of the Ottoman Empire*; Howard Douglas' *A History of the Ottoman Empire*; *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs* by Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski; as well as Adeed Dawisha's *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, which provides a useful overview of the development of Arab nationalism with specific reference to Rashīd Riḍā.

[16] In *A Brief History of the Ottoman* Empire, Sükrü Hanioğlu notes that, already by the early 19th century, the Ottoman Empire was characterised by a high degree of decentralisation and that, in fact, only Istanbul, Anatolia, and Rumelia were directly governed by the central government. The rest of the Empire consisted of more or less independent provinces, which were basically only Ottoman in name. In practice, most parts of the Empire were run by strong governors and local notables, who were constantly looking for ways to compel the central government to guarantee them various degrees of autonomy, whereby the abuse of imperially sanctioned power was commonplace (Hanioğlu, *Ottoman Empire*, p. 14). Egypt, the region with which this thesis is primarily concerned, was de facto run independently from the central Ottoman government by the time an originally Albanian soldier named Mehmed Ali (r. 1805–1848) appointed himself governor of Egypt, having rebelled against the Ottoman Empire and having successfully established himself as a powerful and more or less independent ruler of the province (Sedgwick, *Abduh*, p. 1).

began with Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt and Syria in 1798, and which, in the case of Egypt, would last until the country's independence from the British in 1952,[17] made the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire[18] painfully aware of Europe's military superiority and their own relative backwardness.[19] In the course of the following century, the provinces of the empire would experience a fast-paced and hitherto unprecedented growth in Europe's political, economic, and cultural dominion, with European institutions, systems of law, finance, governance, as well as ideas increasingly penetrating into the region. While efforts were being made by both the central Ottoman as well as a number of provincial governments to counter these developments, they only succeeded to varying degrees,[20] and in the case of Egypt, the governments and banks of France and, in particular, those of the United Kingdom

[17] See Arnaud and Jankowski, 'Miṣr', for a concise overview of Egypt's history of occupation from 1798–1952.

[18] I should qualify at this point that by 'inhabitants' I intend primarily the views of promiment members of the Empire's Arabic-speaking intellectual and political elite, as witnessed through some of the writings that emerged during the *Nahḍa* period. I am not intending to make a sweeping statement about the Ottoman Empire's ordinary residents.

[19] The combination of a decentralised administration, antiquated institutions and systems, as well as a military that could not match that of Europe, had as a consequence that, by the end of the 18th century, the Ottoman Empire was finding itself in a state of continuous decline and ever-increasing disintegration (Fawaz, *Civil Conflict*, p. 22).

[20] As early as 1839, the Ottoman government initiated a series of structural reforms, usually referred to as the *Tanzimāt*, which attempted to centralise its administration in order to revert the process of decline and, above all, to make it competitive with the European powers. While the structural changes imposed by the Ottoman elite may have looked promising in theory, they were only successful to varying degrees in practice. In 'Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables' Albert Hourani notes that the process of change in the period was one 'imposed from above', and while it did affect the system of law and administration, it did not really affect the organisation of society (Hourani, 'Notables', p. 43). The Egypt under Mehmed Ali witnessed reforms similar to those carried out by the central Ottoman government. However, they, too, were only successful to some extent and it may be argued that their biggest achievement was to divide the country even further, as many of the changes came at the cost of the ordinary population (Sedgwick, *Abduh*, p. 1).

were more or less in direct control of the country's finances by the late 1870s.[21] Also in Egypt, the British presence would culminate in outright occupation in 1882, following Colonel Aḥmad ʿUrābī's failed attempt to depose Khedive Tawfīq Pasha in order to end foreign influence in the country.[22]

In addition to bringing about some very tangible transformations,[23] these events arguably had an enormous psychological impact on the inhabitants of an empire that had once played a leading role in the shaping of the world's political affairs.[24] As for Egypt, Ziad Fahmy, for example, speaks of a 'sort of national mass

[21] The reign of Khedive Ismāʿīl, which lasted from 1863 to 1879, was characterised by strong efforts to modernise Egypt similar to those of his grandfather Mehmet Ali and was, for a while, hailed as the beginning of a promising new era. The Khedive attempted vast schemes of reform, but these, coupled with over-expenditure, an increasing debt figure from European banks, unwise investment, personal extravagance and costly projects from railways and bridges to the completion of the Suez Canal, eventually resulted in Egypt's bankruptcy in 1876. European creditors, having become increasingly worried, thus introduced the first formal steps of European intervention, starting with the creation of so-called 'Mixed Courts' in January 1876. In May 1876, the *Caisse de la Dette Publique* was established with the goal to supervise the payment by the Egyptian government of the loans to the European governments following the construction of the Suez Canal. In November 1876, European control increased even more through the Dual Control system, as a result of which Egyptian revenue and expenditure were placed under the supervision of a British and a French controller (Schölch, *Egypt*, pp. 53–56).

[22] Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, p. 62.

[23] For example, Gershoni and Jankowski observe that '[i]n the socioeconomic sphere, the transformation of Egyptian economic relationships and social structures resulting from Egypt's integration into the modern world economy eroded older, more localized focuses of identity and loyalty' (Gershoni and Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs*, p. 3).

[24] It goes without saying that not all who were *de facto* citizens of the Ottoman Empire would readily have identified primarily as Ottomans, let alone viewed the Ottomans as key to any belief in their regions' former glory. This is not least due to what Rashid Khalidi, in his study of Palestinian identity, has described as 'conflicting loyalties', which may include a sense of belonging to the Ottoman Empire, but also one to a religious group or particular form of Arabness (Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, p. 19). Rather, what is meant here is the notion that there existed some form of collective view that the Ottoman Empire, and its various precurors, once occupied an important role on the global stage.

shock caused by British occupation'.[25] And indeed, regardless of their individual religious or ethnic ties, the developments of the 19th century continuously prompted intellectuals and writers to explore their regions' relationship with the West. Their works not only provide us with valuable insight into the key issues between the empire's local population and their European occupiers, but also enhance our understanding of some of the discussions that took place *within* the Ottoman Empire at that time. [26] While many appeared to agree that there was a pressing need to 'catch up' with the West,[27] they differed about the ways that this goal should be achieved, with some calling for a complete adoption of Western principles and institutions,[28] and others urging their complete rejection.[29] While all of these responses are worthy

[25] Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, p. 62.

[26] A sense of the degree of confusion which the new situation caused in an Egyptian context can be gauged in the work of the Egyptian writer Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Muwayliḥī, an in particular in his work *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām* (1907), for example (see Allen 'al-Muwayliḥī').

[27] The 'need to catch up' was initially first and foremost connected with military and scientific progress (see Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, p. 6 and Jabra, 'Modern Arabic Literature', p. 76). Aiming to catch up with the West in military terms, Muslim rulers had, in the early 19th century, encouraged visitors and sent students to Europe in order to copy European civilisation, often indiscriminately. With regard to the intellectual sphere, European philosophy was studied by Muslims and many European works translated into Arabic, in the hope that the importation of ideas from 'an obviously flourishing civilisation' would help bring Muslims back to their state of glory (Haddad, 'Pioneer', p. 34).

[28] The forced subjugation carried out by Western powers caused some Muslims of the Ottoman Empire to believe that the success of Western occupation was, in fact, a result of the inferiority of the Islamic religion itself. This self-criticism led to an array of responses including but not limited to the advocating of a separation of religion and politics as well as a stronger emphasis on nationalist ideals. See Esposito, *Islam*, and Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism*, for more concrete examples. Likewise, in the introduction to *Modern Arabic Literature*, Mohammed Mustafa Badawi and Pierre Cachia provide a useful overview of some of the key ideas and intellectual movements of the *Nahḍa* period, with a particular focus on Egypt (see Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, pp. 1–35).

[29] Wood, *Islamic Proofs*, pp. 18–20.

of closer study, they are not the concern of this chapter, let alone this thesis.[30] Rather, this chapter takes a closer look at the way religious thinkers from within the Ottoman Empire's Sunni Muslim population—and specifically, the so-called 'Modernists' around Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā—sought to make sense of and, indeed, deal with this new situation. Aware of the unstoppable transformations that the empire was undergoing and seemingly alarmed at the dangers of a blind and indiscriminate adoption of European institutions and thought, the Modernists set out to formulate an Islamic alternative that they not only deemed compatible with the needs of the modern era, but which at the same time remained faithful to what they considered truly Islamic principles.

It has been suggested by several scholars that, despite its shortcomings, the Ottoman Empire continued to occupy a special position in the collective consciousness of its 19th- and early 20th-century Muslim population. This is because it was viewed by many as a continuation of the first Muslim *umma*, which had provided Muslims with a unifying political frame at the emergence of Islam in the seventh century, and which, to many, had been synonymous with military success and advancement for centuries.[31] As such, Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and Syria—

[30] I should mention, however, that scholars such as Adeed Dawisha have suggested that Arab Muslims have been more 'concerned with the creeping cultural and political dominion of Christian Europe' than their Christian counterparts, arguably for religious reasons (Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism*, p. 17).

[31] For example, Shadi Hamid observes that '[f]or centuries, Muslim thinkers had looked down on Christian Europe, taking refuge in the uninterrupted success and dominance of Islamic Empires' (Hamid, *Islamic Exceptionalism*, p. 70). Similarly, and with specific reference to Rashīd Riḍā, Adeed

coupled with the subsequent period of Western occupation and loss of territory, which would eventually culminate in the abolition of the Ottoman Empire in the 1920s—arguably caused a significant trauma for the region's Muslim residents, as it was effectively interpreted by Muslim thinkers as not only a sign that the *umma* had lost God's support, but also that Muslims had 'moved away' from true Islam.[32] As Shadi Hamid puts it,

> In the writings of the Islamic modernists, there was a simple, repeated refrain, one that would color nearly every Islamist movement to the present day. Muslims were most successful in the temporal world—in their conquest of territory, in their knowledge of the sciences, and their technological prowess—when they were close to Islam. The more they moved away from religion, the more they suffered in this world, just as they would in the next.[33]

While this assessment of the Modernists' interpretation of history, as we shall see, certainly is a recurring theme in the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, I would urge caution in not overstating the importance that the Ottoman Empire and its surivival *per se* may have occupied in the minds of the Muslim reformers, particularly as far as Rashīd Riḍā is

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Dawisha somewhat seconds this assessment, suggesting that, despite his later criticisms, even Riḍā considered 'the continued health of the Empire as a strength for Islam'—at least the end of World War I, when 'defeat loomed on the horizon' and when, as we shall later see, he drastically changed his opinion on the matter (Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism*, p. 22)

[32] The importance of the event for later Muslim thinkers can be gauged from Emmanuel Sivan's observation that the 'recurring invocation of the traumatic events of the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 with its implied corollary, the end of the Abbasid Caliphate by the Mongols in 1258, would become a central metaphor in the Quṭb school' (Sivan, *Radical Islam*, p. 58).

[33] Hamid, *Islamic Exceptionalism*, pp. 73–74.

concerned. Indeed, scholars such as Umar Ryad have pointed out that Riḍā's own views on the importance of the Ottoman Empire to Islamic prosperity underwent significant change over time. Specifically, he notes that, although Riḍā had 'opened a propaganda campaign in favour of unity between Arabs and Turks in the Ottoman Empire' in 1908, only two years later he 'reached the sad conclusion that Young Turks were just mocking him', resulting in his loss of 'faith in the Ottoman Empire' altogether. In fact, during World War I, Riḍā is said to have gone so far as to instigate an Arab 'revolt against the Ottomans and liberate their countries from the Empire's yoke', reportedly even seeking the help of British intelligence for this endeavour at some point.[34]

Be that as it may, what does crystallise in the *Manār* commentary is the fact that ʿAbduh and Riḍā interpreted the developments of the 19th and 20th centuries as a sign that Muslims had, indeed, lost God's support. According to them, however, the culprit was not Islam itself but its practitioners and, as a consequence, the cure to the problem had to be sought above all *within* the Muslim community itself. To ʿAbduh and Riḍā, Islam—in what they considered it to be its pure and original form—was perfect and offered everything that Muslims required in order to achieve happiness and success in both this world as well as the hereafter. In their opinion, Muslims had, however, strayed away from 'true' Islam over the course of time. In his chapter on

[34] Ryad, *Islamic Reformism*, p. 7.

Rashīd Riḍā in *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, Albert Hourani underlines this point, highlighting that to the Modernists,

> the teachings and moral precepts of Islam are such that, if they are properly understood and fully obeyed, they will lead to success in this world as well as the next [...] If they are not understood and obeyed, weakness, decay, barbarism are the results.[35]

Therefore, in order to catch up with the West and restore the glory of the past, Muslims needed to find a way to 'return' to the true Islam, which ʿAbduh and Riḍā located in the Qur'an.[36] This call to return to the Qur'an, which, according to them, contained the true Islamic principles as they were lived by and, above all, *guided* the first generation of Muslims, is a central theme in the *Manār* commentary. It is a theme

[35] Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, pp. 227-8. It is worth emphasising, however, that the Modernists were not the first in idealising the early Muslim *umma* and in calling for a 'return' to the original sources of Islam. For example, Natana DeLong-Bas notes that ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792) 'called for a direct return to the Qur'ān and ḥadīth for study and interpretation' (DeLong-Bas, 'Wahhabism and the Qur'ān'). Similarly, in her study of the early 19th-century exegete al-Shawkānī (d. 1835) Johanna Pink observes that, in his *tafsīr*, he 'draw[s] an idealised image of the foundational years of Islam in which true belief has not yet been obscured by speculative theological reasoning and other "illicit" innovations' (Pink, 'Modernity', p. 331). However, this scholar's modernising tendencies were, unlike those of ʿAbduh and Riḍā, not a response to growing Western influence in the Muslim world (Pink, 'Modernity', pp. 323–324). I will discuss further parallels between al-Shawkānī and the Modernists later on in this chapter and make reference to him whenever appropriate in this thesis.

[36] According to ʿAbduh and Riḍā, the Qur'an contained all of the elements that were needed in order to achieve progress and success at both the spiritual and material levels. However, contemporary Muslims failed to realise this as they had been blinded in the course of time by non-Islamic elements that had entered both Muslim tradition and practices (see later parts of this chapter). Indeed, as the 20th century scholar Muḥammad al-Dhahabī points out, ʿAbduh believed that the Qur'an contained answers even to scientific and medical questions, a good example for this being his efforts to demonstrate how the Qur'an actually predicted some of the later findings of modern science (see al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr*, p. 394).

which, in fact, appears to be so important to Rashīd Riḍā that it is repeated in the introductory paragraphs preceding each tome of his commentary:[37]

> (...) It is the nature of the Qur'an to be a general guidance for man at all times and places (*hidāya ʿāmma li-l-bashar fī kull zamān wa-makān*), and evidence of God and His marvellous miracle for both the good man and the perpetrator (*li-l-ins wa-l-jānn*), and to balance between its guidance and that which is incumbent on Muslims in this age. However, most of them have turned away from [this guidance] (*aʿraḍa aktharuhum ʿanhā*) and from the way in which their predecessors had clung to it with great zeal, in view of the fact that it is proven that it is the path to the happiness of the two worlds.[38]

As we shall see in the following chapters, this strong conviction demonstrated by ʿAbduh and Riḍā in the Qur'an's offer of guidance—which, according to them, applies 'at all times and all places', and which is closely tied to their understanding of history[39]—to mankind runs throughout the *Manār* commentary. Already in the first introduction to the first volume of the commentary, Riḍā takes this idea even further,

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[37] Although the exact wording of these remarks may vary between different volumes and editions, the core message remains the same. In particular, the idea that the Qur'an is a 'general guidance to mankind' (*hidāya ʿāmma li-l-bashar*) which improves 'the welfare of people at all times and places' (*maṣlaḥat al-nās fī kull zamān wa-makān*) can be found across editions.

[38] *TM* VII, p. 1, ll. 4—7. In *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, Albert Hourani notes that, despite the situation in which the Muslim community was finding itself at the moment, the Modernists also shared a certain degree of optimism about the future, as the following quotation shows: 'But what happened in the past can happen again: Islamic civilization was created out of nothing by the Qur'an and the moral precepts enshrined in it, and can be re-created if Muslims returned to the Qur'an' (Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, p. 228).

[39] The authors' understanding of history is closely tied to how they, and specifically ʿAbduh, employed the notion of *sunan Allāh*. It will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter II of this thesis.

arguing that the Qur'an is, in fact, all that the Muslim community needs in order to be prosperous:

> The Arab Muslim[40] would assume power of a country or a province when he knew nothing in the art of leadership[41] (*wa-huwa lā ʿilm ʿindahu bi-shay' min funūn al-dawla*), nor about the laws of government, nor did he practise the methods of politics or the ways of administration. All he had in terms of knowledge were some surahs from the Qur'an (*kull mā ʿindahu min al-ʿilm baʿḍ suwar min al-qur'ān*), and he would fix the corruptions of that province (*yuṣliḥ min tilka al-wilāya fasādahā*), preserving its people, resources and prestige, without taking away any of its rights.[42]

It has been suggested that Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā's work was above all 'a reflection of the socio-political setting in which they found themselves'.[43] As such, their writings are believed to display a tendency to connect theoretical considerations with the concrete conditions of their time.[44] I have mentioned before that the authors of the *Manār* commentary believed that Muslims themselves were the biggest obstacle to progress; more specifically, they levelled this criticism at what

[40] The inclusion of the word 'Arab' in this passage is significant. As we shall explore in more detail in Chapter II of this thesis, ʿAbduh and Riḍā considered the Arabs as well as the Arabic language to be key elements in restoring Islam's former success and glory.

[41] Arguably, a more literal translation for *funūn al-dawla* is 'statesmanship'.

[42] *TM* I, p. 5, ll. 20–24.

[43] Jafar, 'Modern Qur'anic Exegesis', p. iii.

[44] Other publications attributed to Muḥammad ʿAbduh include *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā*, a short-lived yet influential journal with a strong pan-Islamist and anti-European agenda that he wrote along with al-Afghānī; *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*, his arguably most famous theological treatise; as well as *Tafsīr al-Fātiḥa*, which, although published by Riḍā, 'encompasses some of 'Abduh's central exegetical ideas and embodies his vision of the Qur'ān as a book of guidance' (Pink, 'ʿAbduh, Muḥammad').

were effectively their own peers—i.e., scholars and exegetes from the Arab Sunni tradition—whom they accused of having deviated from the true guidance of the Qur'an.[45] According to ʿAbduh and Riḍā, those scholars had turned *tafsīr* into what they considered an 'intellectual exercise in grammar, theology, jurisprudence and philosophical dispute', which bore little relevance to the concrete needs of Muslims.[46] In this context, ʿAbduh and Riḍā often attacked these scholars' adherence to the practice of *taqlīd*—and, by extension, their abandoning of *ijtihād*—in interpreting the Qur'an, a scholarly practice which, in the modern period, began to carry an increasingly negative connotation.[47] To the Modernists, *taqlīd* concerned the perceived practice of pre-modern exegetes of simply referring to and reusing the works of previous scholars without making any intellectual effort to engage with the Qur'an in order to adapt it to the needs of their time.[48]

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[45] It is worth mentioning at this stage already that the authors of the *Manār* commentary rarely identify the specific individuals whom they blame for Islam's perceived state of decline and stagnation. This may be partly in order to avoid public indignation—indeed, who were they to insult the likes of al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī?—but perhaps also due to the fact that, as we shall see, the authors of the *Manār* commentary, too, are more engaged in the practices and techniques of the tradition they denigrate than they may care to admit in these passages.

[46] Jafar, 'Modern Qur'anic Exegesis', p. iii.

[47] Edward William Lane notes that the original meaning of the Form II verb *qallada* is 'to adorn somebody with a necklace' (*qalladahā qillādatan*, lit.: he put a necklace upon her), whence the notion of 'to invest somebody with authority' is derived (e.g., *qalladahu ʿamalan*, lit.: he invested him with an office [of administration]). According to Lane, the verb's more common meaning of '[t]he investing with authority in matters of religion', or, put more simply, 'to imitate', is derived from the word being understood in the sense of 'a man's following another in that which he says or does, firmly believing him to be right therein, without regard or consideration of the proof, or evidence' (Lane, *Dictionary*, p. 2557).

[48] Discussing the concept of *taqlīd*, Norman Calder explains that 'the term has been widely adopted into Orientalist discourse where it is almost invariably translated as "blind imitation"'. He continues to state that '[t]he same is broadly true of modernist Islamic discourse' as the 'absence of any positive

Interestingly, to a certain extent, this view as expressed by the Modernists appears to have been, for quite some time, also that of Western scholars. Indeed, Joseph Schacht and Duncan B. McDonald have suggested that, in the ninth century, after the formative period of Islamic law had come to an end, the question of who was qualified to exercise *ijtihād*, that is, the use of individual reasoning in legal matters by analogy (*qiyās*), was increasingly being asked by the scholar-jurists of all Sunni schools.[49] From about the middle of the ninth century the idea began to gain ground that only 'the great scholars of the past'—more specifically, the founders of the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfiʿī, Ḥanbalī schools of law—had had the right to practise *ijtihād*.[50] By the beginning of the tenth century, according to Schacht and McDonald, the majority of the scholars of the Sunni legal schools (*madhāhib*) felt that all essential questions had been settled, and a consensus gradually established itself to the effect that, from that time onwards, no one might be deemed to have the necessary qualifications for independent reasoning in law, and that therefore all future activity would have to be confined to explanation and application through analogy (*qiyās*). Schacht and McDonald condlude that this 'closing of the gate of *ijtihād*' (*insidād bāb al-ijtihād*) gave way to the demand

assessment of this term in modern commentary tends to produce a negative view of more than 1,000 years of Islamic history' (Calder, 'Taḳlīd').

[49] From *ijtahada* (Form VII), lit.: 'to work hard' or 'to excert oneself' (Schacht and MacDonald, 'Id̲j̲tihād')

[50] Schacht and MacDonald, 'Id̲j̲tihād'.

for *taqlīd*, 'the unquestioning acceptance of the doctrines of established schools and authorities'.[51]

However, this view has since been challenged, with scholars such as Jean Calmard—largely in reference to Wael Hallaq's and Ella Landau-Tasseron's work on the topic—noting that none of the major Sunni legal schools seriously called into question the use of *ijtihād* until at least the 14th century. A turning point arguably occurred following the death of the 15th/16th-century exegete al-Suyūṭī' (d. 1505), who had reportedly 'claimed to exercise *ijtihād* in its highest degree'—a claim which was 'vigorously opposed' by some of his scholarly contemporaries. According to Calmard, following al-Suyūṭī's death there was a 'marked reduction in the number of Sunnī jurists capable of exercising *ijtihād* or claiming this right to themselves'.[52] This appears to have been coupled with a move to classify jurists into 'categories of excellence', leading to a further decrease of *mujāhidun* and an increase of *muqallidūn* in the 16th century, with members of the Ḥanafī school, in partular, expressing the belief that those capable of practising *ijtihād* had ceased to exist. Despite this, Calmard observes that 'numerous jurists continued to practice the methodology of *ijtihād*, especially in the Ottoman Empire'.[53]

To the Modernists, however, this had not been the case. Instead, the 'blind imitation' of the opinions of older authorities which they identified and which,

[51] Schacht and MacDonald, 'Iǧtihād'.
[52] Calmard, 'Muǧtahid'.
[53] Calmard, 'Muǧtahid'.

according to them, ruled out the application of individual reasoning, was one of the primary causes of the backwardness of the present day as it stunted the development of a dynamic and progressive Islam. Thus, to them, not only *were* the gates of *ijtihād* wide open in the modern period, but, in fact, they *had* to be. In a sense, this turned *ijtihād* into a duty for all Muslims.[54]

The Modernists' position should be viewed in the context of what Calmard has described as a wider 'offensive against those who proclaimed the closure of the door of *ijtihād* and the extinction of *mujtāhid*s' that took place in both the Ottoman Empire and Mughal India and which is said to have begun in the 18th entury.[55] According to Calmard, '[t]his resurgence of *ijtihād* owes much to the attitude of Ḥanbalīs, especially that of Ibn Taymiyya, who influenced the thinking of pre-modern reformists who, from North Africa to India, advocated the practice of a new and free *ijtihād'*, and who, in so doing, went 'much further than what had been permitted at the time of the formulation of Islamic law'.[56] To this I would add that ʿAbduh and Riḍā's view on the matter should also be considered in the context of their self-perception as continuing

[54] Jafar, 'Modern Qur'anic Exegesis', p. 24.

[55] Calmard, 'Mud̲j̲tahid'.

[56] Calmard, 'Mud̲j̲tahid'. In this context, it is worth mentioning, however, that Thomas Bauer, too, has questioned the Modernists' account. Specifically, he argues that, while the gates of *ijtihād* were still open during the golden age of Islam, they were, in fact, only closed in the 19th century—a period during which what he describes as the 'Islamisierung des Islams' (lit.: 'the Islamicisation of Islam') took place. Bauer sees the 'loss of tolerance for ambiguity' (Jomier: 'Verlust der Ambiguitätstoleranz') that had once characterised classical scholarship as the result of an increased pursuit of more clarity and disambiguity on the part of modern Muslim intellectuals. In so doing, Bauer argues, these thinkers were, in fact, copying a Western ideology in order to distance themselves from the very same (Bauer, *Ambiguität*, p. 52).

a line of Islamic 'renewers' (Arabic: *mujaddidūn*)—individuals sent by God to the Muslim community at the beginning of each century in order to restore or rectify Islam.[57] In so doing, it appears that Riḍā, in particular, would resort to the works of 18th- and early 19th-century thinkers such as Ibn Wahhāb in a fashion that not only made them corroborate his own views, but also allowed him to posit 'a continuous tradition of Islamic political reform'[58]—even if this was not *always* the case. As Ahmad Dallal notes,

> Similarly, Riḍā published a number of the works of 18th-century thinkers, whose emphasis on *ijtihād* [...] and rejection of *taqlīd* [...] was used to corroborate [his] calls for *ijtihād*. It is worth noting that Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's only reference to *ijtihād* is to deny that he himself was a *mujtahid* or that *ijtihād* is a prerequisite for his doctrine; nowehere in his meager and simple writings does he discuss *ijtihād* or call for its reintroduction.[59]

Conversely, one exegetical precursor who had indeed identified the practice of *taqlīd* as problematic, and whose work undoubtedly influenced the author of the *Manār* commentary, was the Yemeni scholar Muḥammad al-Shawkānī (d. 1835).[60] Writing a century before Riḍā, this early 19th-century exegete had already expressed

[57] Donzel, 'Mudjaddid' and Hernandez, *Legal Thought*, p. 135. Similarly, Pink has remarked that Riḍā considered himself and his teacher 'as part of a chain of reformers fighting corruption and the scholars who caused it' (Pink, 'Riḍā, Rashīd).

[58] Dallal, *Islam Without Europe*, p. 23.

[59] Dallal, *Islam Without Europe*, p. 23.

[60] Pink, for example, notes that Riḍā 'expressed [his] admiration' for this scholar (Pink, 'Modernity', p. 355).

similar views by rejecting what he considered 'the authority of men', based on a conviction that '[w]however imitates previous scholars, instead of following the Prophet and his scripture, will risk confusing right with wrong, good with bad, [and] false opinions with correct traditions'.[61] However, there are at least three important differences worth noting: first, although al-Shawkānī's work demonstrates that there had indeed been attempts at Islamic reform before the Modernists, this scholar's ideas were not a direct response to Western dominance, which, at the time, had not yet reached the same degree as it would during Riḍā's life. As such, al-Shawkānī's thinking about *taqlīd* would hardly have been guided by notions of a 'stunted Islam' that is in urgent need to 'catch up' with the West.[62] Second, al-Shawkānī's rejection of *taqlīd* does not necessarily equate to an outright call for the increased use *ijtihād*. Instead, it appears that his exegetical methods had a strong focus on what he considered 'sophistic and erudite linguistic analysis' as well as reliance on Prophetic *ḥadīth*s and the canonical Sunni *ḥadīth* collections.[63] Third, unlike Riḍā, al-Shawkānī did not go so far as to consider ordinary Muslims as an audience at which his calls to reject *taqlīd* were aimed. As Johanna Pink notes,

[61] Pink, 'Modernity', p. 349.

[62] Johanna Pink remarks that '[i]n the field of Qur'anic exegesis, as in other fields of Muslim intellectual activity, modernisation, in the sense of trying to "catch up" with a Western-dominated modernity and of redefining the place of the Islamic cultural heritage with respect to a Western counterpart, did not start before the mid-nineteenth century, and began considerably later than that in many regions of the Western world' (Pink, 'Modernity', pp. 323–324).

[63] Pink, 'Modernity', p. 346.

> One might ask how it is possible for Shawkānī to reject *taqlīd*, on the one hand, and on the other hand to expect everybody to follow his conclusions, which he seems to deem correct above anyone elses', as he sees no room for several equally correct judgements. The answer to this would be that in his criticism of *taqlīd*, he does not address ordinary Muslims. His Qur'anic commentary is directed towards other scholars, and those scholars are expected to examine the scriptural proofs that Shawkānī presents and to draw their own conclusions, which, he is certain, will confirm the correctness of his approach and his results.[64]

As such, al-Shawkānī's rejection of *taqlīd* may be seen, as Pink has put it, as 'an emancipation from tradition, not for the individual believer, but for himself as a scholar'.[65] Nevertheless, it would be hard to deny that al-Shawkānī's work did not pave the way for the Modernists' ideas on *taqlīd* and, by extension, *ijtihād* in the decades that followed and, as such, initiated a certain trend.[66]

Accordingly, in the *Muqaddima*—the second introduction to the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, which is attributed to Muḥammad ʿAbduh—ʿAbduh goes further than this early 19th-century scholar, stating clearly that 'every person should [try to] understand the

[64] Pink, 'Modernity', p. 350.

[65] Pink, 'Modernity', p. 351.

[66] I should however add that, although Riḍā's commentary was undoubtedly aimed at a new reading public which, as such included ordinary Muslims, Pink has also noted that, according to Riḍā, 'the need for lay Muslims to engage with the contents of the Qur'ān was [...] negligible, and should be satisfied by religious scholars' (Pink, 'Riḍā, Rashīd). As a consequence, while not denying the fact that there is a clear difference between Riḍā's work and that of al-Shawkānī, one could debate the extent to which Riḍā actually sought to include ordinary Muslims in practice. Again, some of these tensions on the topic that are discernible in the *Tafsīr al-Manār* might be due to the text's complex editorial history, which is discussed at various points in this thesis.

verses of the book to the best of his ability (*bi-qadr ṭāqatihi*), whether he is a learned or uneducated (*lā farq bayna al-ʿālim wa-l-jāhil*)'.[67] Moreover, both ʿAbduh and Riḍā were of the opinion that Qur'anic interpretation should not be the monopoly of the *imām*s or that of recognised *mujtahid*s; rather, everyone could and should reflect upon scripture.[68] One of the steps necessary in order to lift the scholars' effective monopoly on the interpretation of scripture was thus to make the Qur'an accessible to the common person.[69] According to Riḍā, this would, however, require putting an end to the centuries-long practice of cluttering exegetical works with what he considered theological speculation, detailed grammatical discussions and the like, as those bore no practical relevance to the Muslim community:[70]

> It was bad luck for the Muslims (*kāna min sū' ḥaẓẓ al-muslimīn*) that most of which has been written about Qur'anic exegesis distracts its reader from these lofty purposes (*yashghal qāri'ahu 'an hādhihī al-maqāṣid al-'ālīya*) and this sublime guidance (*al-hidāya al-sāmiya*). Among that which distracts him from the Qur'an are studies concerning desinential vocalisation (*mabāḥith al-i'rāb)*, rules of

[67] *TM* I, p. 20, ll. 10–11.

[68] Baljon, *Koran*, p. 16. This view becomes particularly apparent in the *Tafsīr al-Manār*'s exegesis of Q 3:1–7, verses which deals with the question regarding who has the ability to interpret the Qur'an's obscure or ambiguous statements, known as the *mutashābihāt al-Qur'ān*. Not only do the authors break with conventional wisdom in that they argue that the knowledge of these verses is not restricted to God alone, but they effectively call it every Muslim's duty to reflect on their meaning (see Brandl, 'The Clear and the Ambiguous', pp. 26–42).

[69] Jafar, 'Modern Qur'anic Exegesis', p. 35.

[70] Jafar, 'Modern Qur'anic Exegesis', p. 35.

grammar and syntax (*qawā'id al-naḥw)*, semantic subtleties (*nukat al-ma'ānī*), and the technical terms of rhetorics (*muṣṭalaḥāt al-bayān*).[71]

Instead, the author of the *Manār* commentary advocated an approach to the Qur'an which he, along with his teacher, identified with that of the first Muslim community (*al-salaf*),[72] who 'were preserving its simplicity of expression' (*al-murā'ī fīhi al-suhūla fī al-ta'bīr)* and avoided 'the blending of theology (*kalām*) with scientific and artistic terminology (*iṣṭilāḥāt al-'ulūm wa-l-funūn)*, so that it would be understood by ordinary people and be indispensible to the elite (*bi-ḥaythu yafhamahu al-'āmma lā yustaghnā 'anhu al-khāṣṣa*)'.[73]

The self-declared goal of the *Manār* commentary was thus to make Muslims conscious of what ʿAbduh and Riḍā considered to be the true exigencies of their religion. This not only allowed, but in fact required the use of personal reasoning.[74] To ʿAbduh and Riḍā, true Islam was not only *compatible* with modern ideas and reason, but in fact encouraged them, as Islam essentially equalled reason.

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[71] *TM* I, p. 7, ll. 9–11.

[72] According to Islamic tradition, the *salaf*—also known as *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (lit.: 'the pious predecessors')—comprised the first three 'generations' of Muslims, namely the Companions of the Prophet (*al-ṣaḥāba*), their Successors (*al-tābiʿūn*), as well as the Successors of the Successors (*atbāʿ al-tābiʿīn*). See Chaumont, 'al-Salaf wa 'l-Khalaf' for more detail. According to ʿAbduh and Riḍā, these early generations of Muslims still lived what they considered to be truly Islamic principles. As already mentioned in Footnote 35, this idealised view of the first generation of Muslims is already discernible in the works of authors such as al-Shawkānī and Ibn Wahhāb.

[73] *TM* I, p. 1, ll. 6–7.

[74] It should be noted, however, that ʿAbduh and Riḍā did not completely reject the traditional heritage either and even they themselves admitted that there are some laws in the Qur'an that were clear enough and thus needed to be followed. See Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, p. 137 as well as the upcoming chapters.

3. Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā: A Brief Biographical Sketch

The following subchapter provides a brief summary of the most important stages in the lives of Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā. Although the authors' biographies are not a key concern of this thesis—as mentioned above, the primary goal of this work is to study the ideas put forth and the exegetical methods discernible in the text of the *Manār* commentary—a certain amount of biographical background knowledge will be useful to the reader in order to contextualise some of the content discussed in subsequent chapters.

3.1 Muḥammad ʿAbduh

Born to a Turkish father and an Egyptian mother in Egypt's Nile Delta in 1849, Muḥammad ʿAbduh is today considered by many one of the key contributors to what is often referred to as modern Islamic thought.[75] Having memorised the Qur'an by the age of twelve, ʿAbduh was sent to study the Qur'an and its recitation at the Aḥmadī mosque in Tanta when he was thirteen.[76] However, increasingly disillusioned with life at Tanta and, in particular, with what he considered old-fashioned teaching methods,

[75] Haddad, 'Pioneer', p. 30.

[76] Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen describes the Aḥmadī mosque, which specialises in Qur'anic recitation, as 'the second most important centre of Islamic education in Egypt' after al-Azhar. In the 19th century, when it was officially affiliated with al-Azhar, its number students reportedly amounted to around 1,000 (Mayeur-Jaouen, 'Ṭanṭā').

he abandoned his studies at this institution after three years and got married at age sixteen.[77] As Yvonne Haddad notes,

> [h]is first experience with learning by rote, memorizing texts and commentaries and laws for which he was given no tools of understanding, was formative in his later commitment to a thoroughgoing reform of the Egyptian educational system.[78]

However, ʿAbduh's initial passion for learning was rekindled after just one year with the help of his uncle Darwīsh Khaḍr, who reportedly introduced him to Sufism,[79] and in 1866 he decided to enrol at al-Azhar University.[80] Although he did not drop out this time, ʿAbduh's regained enthusiasm at this institution, too, was short-lived: just like at his previous school in Tanta, he quickly grew disappointed by the 'pedantry

[77] Haddad, 'Pioneer', pp. 30–31.

[78] Haddad, 'Pioneer', p. 31. However, Mark Sedgwick argues in *Muhammad Abduh* that ʿAbduh may have exaggerated in his own accounts of how bad the system at Tanta really was. Sedgwick bases his claims on the findings of a researcher who recently carried out interviews at a school in Morocco that was like ʿAbduh's, his conclusion being that discussions were, in fact, essential to the understanding of the texts, but that they usually took place informally (see Sedgwick, *Abduh*, p. 3)

[79] Sufism was widespread in rural Egypt at the time. Sedgwick notes, however, that the Sufism to which Muḥammad ʿAbduh was exposed was that of Muḥammad al-Madānī, an international movement of a scholarly and intellectual nature, often critical of popular Sufism. More specifically, this kind of Sufism was part of a 'revivalist and reformist movement', which according to Sedgwick 'stressed both spiritual experience and proper practice of Islam, and was in contact with leading scholars in Medina who argued for closer adherence to the founding teachings of Islam and against taqlid' (see Sedgwick, *Abduh*, p. 4).

[80] Haddad, Y., *Pioneer*, p. 31. Haddad also notes, as have others, that ʿAbduh kept an interest in the inner life Sufism throughout his life even though he would eventually become more critical of its external forms and teachings. In his description of the Azhar as ʿAbduh would have experienced it, Sedgwick notes that, apart from having poor hygienic standards, the Azhar also attracted students who only went there to avoid conscription, which would explain the stale intellectual climate that ʿAbduh would have experienced (see Sedgwick, *Abduh*, pp. 6–7).

and rote memorisation' that he believed characterised al-Azhar.[81] This would change in 1869, when ʿAbduh was introduced to a new teacher, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897), under whom he began studying philosophy as well as social and political sciences.[82] While his first encounter with al-Afghānī was short, the pair met again in 1873, after al-Afghānī had been expelled from Istanbul following a controversial lecture in which he had reportedly suggested that 'philosophers were in some ways superior to prophets'—a statement which, if really made by him, would have caused outrage at the time, especially with the religious establishment.[83]

Meeting al-Afghānī seems to have had a significant impact on the young ʿAbduh from early on. What impressed ʿAbduh in particular was that al-Afghānī was not one of the usual 'dry' al-Azhar academics, but more of an activist who taught his students about what he considered the urgency of resisting European intervention and the importance of seeing the Islamic peoples as a unified community.[84] Under al-Afghānī, ʿAbduh also began reading works of philosophy such as those of Avicenna, Aristotle, Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima*, and a number of European works.[85] In addition, whereas during his first years at al-Azhar, ʿAbduh appears to have kept to himself,[86]

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[81] Haddad, 'Pioneer', p. 31.

[82] Haddad, 'Pioneer', p. 31. For a good introduction to the thought and activities of al-Afghānī, see in particular Kedourie, Elie, *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam*.

[83] Sedgwick, *Abduh*, pp. 9-10.

[84] Haddad, 'Pioneer', p. 32.

[85] Sedgwick, *Abduh*, p. 11.

[86] It appears that, during his first years at al-Azhar, ʿAbduh 'avoid[ed] speaking to other people unless he had good reason to speak' (see Sedgwick, *Abduh*, p.8).

meeting al-Afghānī is also believed to have caused ʻAbduh to cast off the last vestiges of world-denying asceticism and to enter the world of socio-political activism from which he never retired, although ultimately he was eschew to al-Afghānī's revolutionism in favour of a more conciliatory and evolutionary approach'.[87]

In 1878, ʿAbduh embarked on a teaching career at the Dār al-ʿUlūm, where he reportedly gave lectures and wrote on political and social matters, with a particular focus on national education.[88] In 1879, however, al-Afghānī, who was increasingly being perceived as politically too dangerous, was exiled and ʿAbduh, as his close associate, removed from his teaching post soon after for similar reasons.[89] ʿAbduh was soon reappointed by the Prime Minister, though, and made one of the editors of *al-Waqāʾiʿ al-Miṣrīya*, the official Egyptian gazette, which wielded a major influence on Egyptian public opinion at the time.[90] However, due to his repeated criticism of the actions of the political and military leaders, his position became increasingly jeopardised and he eventually had to choose between the nationalist cause and the

[87] Haddad, 'Pioneer', p. 32.

[88] Established by the former Egyptian minister for education, ʿAlī Pasha Mubārak (d. 1893), in Cairo in 1872, the self-declared mission of the Dār al-ʿUlūm (lit.: 'House of Sciences') at the time was to introduce a number of al-Azhar students to 'modern [i.e. Western] branches of learning by means of a five year course, in order to fit them for teaching in the new schools'. Nowadays affiliated with the University of Cairo, the Dār al-ʿUlūm continues to be in operation and has a strong focus on teaching both Arabic language and Islamic studies (Jomier and Ansari, 'Dār al-ʿUlūm').

[89] Haddad, 'Pioneer', p. 32. I assume that ʿAbduh may have been removed for similar reasons, even though Haddad does not explicitly say so.

[90] M.M. Badawi notes that *al-Waqāʾiʿ al-Miṣrīya*, Egypt's first periodical, which had been founded in 1828, marked the 'birth of journalism' and constituted a 'potent factor in the development of not only modern Arab thought, society and politics, but also of modern Arabic literature' (Badawi, *Arabic Literature*, p. 8).

pro-British occupation policies of the khedive. Choosing the former he was sent into a three-year exile in 1882. During his exile, ʿAbduh rejoined al-Afghānī and the two founded the short-lived, yet influential, society and newspaper *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā*, which was dedicated to warning Muslims of the dangers of European intervention and to freeing Egypt from British occupation.[91]

After the society was dissolved ʿAbduh returned to Beirut and started teaching at a Muslim school. According to Haddad, '[h]is home was a centre for young men of all faiths', where Muslims, Christians and Druze alike were 'captivated by his magnetic teaching style'. It was also during his time in Beirut that ʿAbduh wrote one of his most important theological works, *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*.[92] In 1888, the khedive allowed him to return to Egypt. However, as he was still considered too influential on the minds of the young, he was not allowed to teach. Instead, he occupied other positions, such as that of a judge on the native courts, then a member of the administrative council of al-Azhar, before he was eventually appointed to the position of Grand Mufti of Egypt. Johanna Pink notes that '[i]n this prestigious position he did not limit himself to writing fatwas, but also published in newspapers, wrote books, and gave lectures,

[91] Haddad, 'Pioneer', p. 32. More specifically, according to Haddad ʿAbduh's self-proclaimed purposes for the newspaper's publication were to show ways to remedy the problems that had led to decline; to give Muslims new hope and eradicate despair; to encourage people to cling to the 'principles of the fathers and forbears'; to refute the accusation that adhering to Islam meant being backward; to report on political events; and to enhance relations between nations and improve public welfare (Haddad, 'Pioneer', p. 33).

[92] Haddad, 'Pioneer', p. 33. Roxanne L. Euben explains that the *Risālat al-Tawḥīd* was 'a collection of lectures on theology' which ʿAbduh had initially given during his time in Beirut. Having revised some of their content, he went on to deliver these lectures again back at al-Azhar before Riḍā published them in 1897 (Euben, 'Mapping Modernities', p. 32).

especially on the subject of Qur'ānic exegesis'[93] However, due to pressure from various sides—some reportedly criticised him for his allegedly 'good relations with the British', while others disliked what they considered to be his unconventional views—ʿAbduh's position became increasingly fragile and he eventually died of cancer in 1905.[94]

[93] Pink, ''Abduh, Muḥammad'.

[94] Pink, ''Abduh, Muḥammad'.

3.2 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā

The second section of this subchapter discusses the background and some of the key stages in the life of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā—the main author of the *Tafsīr al-Manār* and arguably ʻAbduh's most famous disciple in the Modernist movement.[95] In addition, I dedicate some attention to the debate surrounding Riḍā's role and motives in taking up ʿAbduh's legacy.

Born in 1865 into a religious Sunni family in al-Qalamūn,[96] a village near Tripoli, then Ottoman Syria, Riḍā received his early education first at a local primary school, and later in Tripoli.[97] There, he enrolled at the National Islamic School of Tripoli, an institution founded and directed by the then well-known Muslim scholar Sheikh Ḥusayn al-Jisr (d. 1909). The school's curriculum reportedly included a combination of traditional Islamic disciplines and modern sciences—especially mathematics—as well as natural sciences, French, in addition to Arabic and Turkish.[98]

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[95] By the 'most famous' I mean that he is at least the most famous of 'Abduh's disciple to us today, even though, as we will see, doubts have been raised about his actual relationship with 'Abduh during the latter's lifetime.

[96] Ryad, *Reformism*, p. 3. Ende notes that the inhabitants of Qalamūn were exclusively Sunni Muslim, with the vast majority of them claiming descent from the Prophet himself (Ende, 'Rashīd Riḍā.').

[97] Ende, 'Rashīd Riḍā'.

[98] Ryad, *Reformism*, p. 3. Although less well-known today than he was during his lifetime, Björn Bentlage describes al-Jisr as 'a widely-read author' who had 'access to the highest circles of political power'. Bentlage adds that, although al-Jisr's 'ideas and books shaped the reception of natural sciences in the Ottoman Empire and the attitude towards European and American Christians among many of his contemporaries', his legacy was soon forgotten. According to Bentlage, this was due to the fact that al-Jisr's 'traditional mode of argumentation', which was coupled with his 'differentiated positions' had no place in what was soon to become the 'dominant dichotomy between urgent reformism versus rigid traditionalism' (Bentlage, 'Ḥusayn al-Jisr al-Ṭarābulusī' p. 125). This assessment of al-Jisr's methods and ideas is also supported by Adam's claim that al Jisr did not approve of 'the lengths to which [Riḍā] later

Werner Ende notes that '[it] was from [al-Jisr] that Rashīd Riḍā received the incentives that were essential for his intellectual development, such as, for instance, those regarding the modernistic interpretation of scientific achievements'.[99] Al-Jisr also received some recognition in Riḍā's autobiography, which appeared shortly before Riḍā's death in 1935, although less so for the impact he had on the student than for appreciating the latter's seemingly phenomenal command of the Arabic language at a young age already. In this context, Rainer Brunner remarks that al-Jisr would 'routinely consult [Riḍā] on difficult [linguistic] matters whenever there was no dictionary at hand':

> Sogar sein Schulleiter und Lehrer [Ḥusayn al-Jisr] pflegte ihn bei schwierigen Problemen zu konsultieren, wenn gerade kein Lexikon greifbar war, und [Rashīd Riḍā], der als Kenner der Grammatik herausragte, war nie um eine Antwort verlegen.[100]

Riḍā's fascination with the significance of the press for religious reform is said to have started when he came across copies of the short-lived *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā* among his father's papers.[101] Having spent a number of years preaching his religious views to locals in his home village in Lebanon, where he is said to have taught

went in his advocacy of reform' (Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, p. 178). For a more comprehensive survey of al-Jisr's life, also see Ebert, *Religion und Reform in der Arabischen Provinz.*

[99] Ende, 'Rashīd Riḍā'. However, Ende also observes that, later on in his life, Riḍā would have heated differences of opinion with al-Jisr.

[100] Brunner, 'Lātinīya', p. 73.

[101] Ryad, *Reformism*, p. 3.

especially lessons in *tafsīr*,[102] he eventually left for Egypt in the winter of 1897-98, allegedly in search of greater freedom.[103] Werner Ende notes that, already the day after his arrival in Cairo, Riḍā went to see Muḥammad ʻAbduh in order to expound to him his aim of publishing a journal that dealt with Islamic reform. The first issue of his journal, the *Majallat al-Manār*, appeared in the middle of March 1898 and would, along with the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, become his life's work.[104] In it, Riḍā published 'his reflections on spiritual life, his explanations of Islamic doctrine, endless polemics, his commentary on the Qur'ān, fatwās, and his thoughts on world politics'.[105]

The inclusion of a Qur'anic commentary in the *Majallat al-Manār* always appears to have been a central mission of Riḍā's. For example, Johanna Pink observes that '[r]ight from the beginning of his time in Cairo, Rashīd Riḍā had tried to convince Muḥammad ʻAbduh to write a Qur'ānic commentary in the spirit of *al-ʻUrwa al-wuthqā*'.[106] Although sceptical at first, 'Abduh eventually agreed and started delivering lectures on exegesis at al-Azhar in 1899, which Riḍā, in turn, began publishing in his journal the following year.[107] While 'Abduh was still alive, he reportedly proofread the transcripts before Riḍā would publish them, but following his death in 1905, Riḍā took

[102] Ryad, *Reformism*, p. 3.
[103] Ryad, *Reformism*, p. 4.
[104] Ende, 'Rashīd Riḍā'.
[105] Ryad, *Reformism*, p. 4.
[106] Pink, 'Riḍā, Rashīd'.
[107] Pink, 'Riḍā, Rashīd'.

complete charge of the commentary and its contents.[108] It is assumed that 'Abduh's lectures comprised material from Q 1:1 to Q 4: 125.[109]

Unlike 'Abduh, Rashīd Riḍā was not involved in any inter-religious societies, nor did he hold any high office such as Mufti of Egypt;[110] however, he did display a significant interest in the politics of his time. In addition to linking the Qur'an's message to concrete social and political developments, Riḍā renewed al-Afghānī's call for pan-Islamic unity and developed 'Abduh's idea of returning to what he considered pristine Islam.[111] In this context, a number of scholars have commented on Riḍā's role in appropriating and reinterpreting not only traditional Islamic sources such as Ibn Taymīya, but also in 'authenticat[ing] his interpretations by positing a continuous tradition of Islamic political reform and by attempting to revive this reconstructed tradition'.[112] As Ahmad Dallal puts it,

> Riḍā published the works of several eighteenth-century Muslim thinkers, who, he argued, promoted the ideals of liberty, justice, equality, and the like. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb was one of the authors invoked by Riḍā, and his simple idea of *tawḥīd* (professing the unity of God) was reconstituted and understood to mean a rejection of despostim and human tyranny.[113]

[108] Ryad, *Reformism*, p. 4.
[109] Pink, 'Riḍā, Rashīd'.
[110] Ryad, *Reformism*, p. 5.
[111] Ryad, *Reformism*, p. 6.
[112] Dallal, *Islam Without Europe*, p. 23.
[113] Dallal, *Islam Without Europe*, p. 23.

Throughout his life, Rashīd Riḍā was a strong proponent of the idea of an Islamic caliphate,[114] and unlike his teacher, Riḍā witnessed upheavals in the Arab world that 'Abduh might arguably not have foreseen. These ranged from World War I to the eventual abolition of the Ottoman Empire and were coupled with an even more concentrated penetration of European thought and religion into Muslim lands. For example, Riḍā witnessed Christian missionaries teaching the Bible to local Muslims.[115] All of these are factors that might explain why he adopted a harsher and, indeed, more 'radical' tone towards Christians in his later writings.[116]

As for inner-Islamic threats, Riḍā preoccupied himself with what he considered un-Islamic beliefs and superstitions and regularly attacked what he viewed as the spiritual dangers of excessive mysticism. According to the author of the *Manār* commentary, these could lead to a neglect of the forms of worship imposed by the Qur'an and the *sunna:*

[114] As we shall see later in this thesis, however, Riḍā eventually came to see the Ottoman Empire as unfit for that purpose.

[115] Ryad, *Reformism*, p. 7.

[116] Mohamed Haddad, for example, notes that the period between 1905 and 1931 was one of great change and debate. Many intellectuals formerly touched by 'Abduh became more liberal, whilst Riḍā regressed towards a 'salafisme plus puritain' (lit.: 'a more puritan salafism), who in all the debates of the time was more conservative than his master. It was during that period that he discovered the works of Ibn Taymīya. 'Abduh, on the other hand, considered the Wahhabists fanatics and never referred himself to Ibn Taymīya. See Haddad, *Lecteurs*, p. 28. In this context, it is also worth mentioning that, in 1905, Riḍā published some articles he had initially written in the *Manār* journal that were aimed at refuting Christian criticisms against Islam in a separate book called *Shubuhāt al-naṣārā' wa-ḥujjaj al-islām*. Simon A. Wood has analysed these in his *Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proofs*.

> The neglect of religious duties by those Sufis could lead, in Riḍā's mind, to weakness in Islamic society, and to the corruption of the *umma* by teaching that Islam is a religion of passive submission.[117]

As hinted elsewhere, there has been some controversy surrounding the exact nature of Rashīd Riḍā's actual relationship with Muḥammad 'Abduh. In particular, there exists doubt on whether Riḍā was indeed as close to his master as the pupil may have portrayed himself to be. According to Mohamed Haddad, this doubt is justified due to three reasons. First, following 'Abduh's death, a committee consisting of some of 'Abduh's close friends and relatives was reportedly set up in order to decide on what to do with his written legacy. However, Haddad notes that records of the committee do not identify Riḍā as one of its members.[118] Second, the fact that Riḍā was not Egyptian would have meant that his access to the Egyptian elite, to which his master belonged, would have been limited. Riḍā's not being considered one of the Egyptian elite's 'own', according to Haddad, is compounded by the fact that Riḍā was not invited to speak at his teacher's funeral. Third, the fact that Riḍā was unmarried would have prevented him from joining any of the city's social clubs, where informal gatherings took place, and in which 'Abduh socialised.[119]

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[117] Ryad, *Reformism*, p. 8.

[118] According to Haddad, the list contained the names of prominent individuals such as Sa'd Zaghlūl (d. 1927), the future prime minister of Egypt; the Egyptian jurist and one of the founders of the national movement Qāsim Amīn (d. 1908); as well as the Islamic philosopher Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Rāziq (d. 1947) (Haddad, 'Lecteurs', p. 25).

[119] Haddad, 'Lecteurs', pp. 25–26.

According to Haddad, it was due to luck and circumstance that Riḍā succeeded in establishing himself as his master's principle heir and closest disciple following the latter's death. Specifically, Haddad argues that this was the result of what he describes a state of 'forced amnesia' surrounding 'Abduh that began after he died and would last until the late 1920s.[120] This forced amnesia was, on the one hand, due to a spat between 'Abduh and Khedive 'Abbās II (d. 1944) that had its roots in a recurring disagreement regarding the allocation of funds.[121] The khedive had reportedly asked for money from the religious establishment, presumably for his own family's benefit, which 'Abduh opposed, leading to the latter's fall from grace. On the other hand, Haddad suggests that 'Abduh's ideas were also losing support within Egypt's nationalist circles—particularly, after the khedive had began depicting 'Abduh as a 'collaborator of the English'.[122] According to Haddad, this is the reason why the generation that actually knew 'Abduh 'did not leave us anything'. According to Haddad, this provided Riḍā—who, as Haddad suggests hoped 'Abduh's ideas would eventually gain popularity again—to take up his master's legacy, largely unchecked. Haddad continues to state that this also allowed Riḍā to distort 'Abduh's legacy and infuse it with his own ideas—ideas which would eventually also include a call for the

[120] Haddad, 'Lecteurs', p. 31.

[121] ʿAbbās Ḥilmī II (1874–1944) served as khedive of Egypt between 1892 until his deposition from the throne by the British in December 1914, shortly after the beginning of World War I. Having been in conflict with the British occupiers for most of his reign, he spent the following years in Istanbul and Vienna before he retired in Geneva, where he also died (Colombe, 'ʿAbbās Ḥilmī II').

[122] Haddad, 'Lecteurs', pp. 31–33.

establishment of an Islamic caliphate. According to Haddad, this also allowed Riḍā to include the ideas of Ibn Taymīya, an author which he believes 'Abduh would have considered a 'fanatic'.[123]

While most of Haddad's arguments seem plausible—in particular those concerning the fact that Riḍā's personal background would have barred him from entering Egypt's elite—the notion that, during this period of forced amnesia, Riḍā would have seen any benefit in 'exploiting' 'Abduh's legacy for future political benefit is less convincing. This is particularly so since Haddad himself concedes that this period lasted up until the late 1920s, i.e., nearly 15 years after 'Abduh's death. It thus seems more plausible that Riḍā, who had for years demonstrated a strong interest in his master's work, was genuinely keen on carrying on 'Abduh's legacy. Nevertheless, Haddad's ideas present us with a useful starting point for possible future research into the matter. In particular, Haddad's suspicion of Riḍā's manipulating 'Abduh's ideas could be investigated by juxtaposing some of the writings that were produced under 'Abduh's own name during his lifetime with the *Manār* commentary.[124]

[123] Haddad, 'Lecteurs', p. 28.

[124] See Chapter V for an elaboration of this suggestion.

4. The *Manār* Commentary – A Brief Editorial History

The contents of the *Tafsīr al-Manār* were published in one form or another over a period of more than 30 years, largely based on material that had previously appeared in the *Manār* journal (*Majallat al-Manār*).[125] It is often assumed that, while the first four surahs covered in the *Manār* commentary were ʻAbduh and Riḍā's joint product, the remaining sections were written by Riḍā alone.[126] However, Riḍā himself maintained that most of the exegetical material contained throughout the commentary is based on lecture notes from ʻAbduh. Below is a concise overview of the editorial history of both the *Manār* journal and the commentary.[127]

The first issue of the *Manār* journal appeared in March 1898. During its initial year, the journal, which was then published on a weekly basis, consisted of approximately eight pages and contained telegrams, news bulletins, as well as a number of articles on religious and social matters. Due to its low popularity—indeed, Adams suggests that, up until its third year, the *Majallat al-Manār* did not have more than 300 or 400 readers—Riḍā changed the journal to a monthly periodical in its second year. The journal witnessed a dramatic increase in readership starting in 1903

[125] Umar Ryad notes that '[t]hrough his journal, Riḍā claimed himself to the organ and disseminator of the reformist ideas of his teacher and the then mufti of Egypt Muḥammad 'Abduh' (Ryad, 'Lighthouse', p. 28).

[126] As suggested in the previous section of this chapter, the editorial history of the *Manār* commentary is highly unclear. All of the data contained in this final subchapter is based on the little information we have available and should be treated accordingly.

[127] The data contained in this section is predominantly based on Charles C. Adams's book *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muḥammad ʿAbduh*. Whenever pertinent, I also consulted Umar Ryad's useful article, 'A Printed Muslim "Lighthouse" in Cairo: Al-*Manār's* Early Years, Religious Aspiration and Reception (1898-1903)'.

and, by 1909, copies of the first volume were reportedly selling at four times the original price.[128] From its inception, Riḍā himself appears to have been the journal's most prolific contributor, regularly criticising contemporary Egyptian politics as well as advocating Islamic reform based on the teachings of his master. Beginning with its third year, the journal started featuring a section devoted to 'Abduh's 'Qur'anic commentary' (*Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*), usually followed by a section containing fatwas as well as questions submitted by readers on religious and legal matters.[129] The transition to a separate *tafsīr* occurred in 1903, while 'Abduh was still alive, when the commentary on *Sūrat al-'Aṣr* was printed. The years 1908–1931 witnessed the publication of volumes 2–12 of the *Manār* commentary.[130] In addition, the volume containing the content of the first *juz'* (Q 1:1–2:141)—initially not published as Riḍā reportedly believed it did not conform in style and methods to the other volumes—was revised and appeared as volume 1 in 1927.[131]

The following chapter provides an analysis of the content and literary features of the two introductions that precede the first volume of the *Manār* commentary. These texts are worthy of closer study for two reasons. On the one hand, they provide the reader with a better understanding of the extent to which 'Abduh and Riḍā, despite

[128] Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, p. 180.

[129] Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, p. 181-182.

[130] It is worth mentioning that, during this time, the second editions of a number of volumes were already in the process of being produced. However, given the obscure and at times contradictory information available on this matter it is difficult to pinpoint exact dates.

[131] Unless otherwise state and necessary for the purpose of my analysis, I shall adhere to the standard practice of using the second edition of the *Manār* commentary.

their own claims, remain embedded in the tradition they hold responsible for many of the Muslim community's shortcomings. On the other hand, however, these two texts also display a number of elements in support of the claim that the *Manār* commentary represents a certain turning point for Qur'anic exegesis. Specifically, it becomes clear that the authors of this *tafsīr* appear to use the text as a platform to express their own worldview within the frame of classical Qur'anic exegesis.

Chapter II: An Analysis of the Content and Literary Features of the Two Introductions Preceding the *Manār* commentary

1. Chapter Introduction

1.1 Objectives

This chapter analyses the content and literary features of the two introductions that precede the first volume of the *Tafsīr al-Manār*. While the basic ideas that we encounter and the fashion in which the authors seek to portray themselves do not differ drastically from what has repeatedly been said in much of the secondary literature written on Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā,[132] these two texts are fascinating for other reasons. One of these reasons is that they provide the reader with a better understanding of the extent to which these two thinkers, despite their own claims, remain embedded in the tradition they hold responsible for many of the Muslim community's shortcomings. This is particularly visible at the methodological and structural levels, as these two introductions feature certain literary and exegetical techniques similar to those employed by classical commentators on the Qur'an. For instance, not unlike traditional *mufassirūn*, ʿAbduh and Riḍā, too, provide a fairly detailed discussion of the methods employed in their work; offer assertions about the nature and importance of engaging in the *tafsīr* discipline; and routinely

[132] For a brief survey and literature review of what is generally held to be the thought of Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā, as it emerges in the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, see Chapter I of this thesis.

denigrate the efforts made by other exegetes before them. Although many of these structural similarities may be hard to deny, I will show, however, that these two texts display a number of elements in support of the claim that the *Manār* commentary represents a certain turning point for Qur'anic exegesis.[133] Already in these thirty-one pages, the reader can increasingly observe how, for ʿAbduh and Riḍā, exegesis is more than a discipline that simply attempts to make sense of the obscurities of the Qur'an within fixed formal boundaries, in the confines of which the exegete has, at most, the opportunity to demonstrate to his peers his own mastery of and significance to the genre; rather, the reader witnesses a skilful fusion of both traditional and modern techniques aimed at turning this familiar format into an outlet through which the authors of these two texts first and foremost express their personal worldview. In so doing, ʿAbduh and Riḍā not only break with some of the key scholarly techniques of a centuries-old tradition, but, most significantly, turn the discipline into a platform through which they seek to address the wider political, socio-economic, and cultural issues of their time.

[133] For example, in *The Literature of Islam: A Guide to the Primary Sources in English Translation*, Paula Youngman Skreslet and Rebecca Skreslet Hernandez describe ʿAbduh and Riḍā's work as 'a major exegetical contribution, a turning-point text'. Specifically, the authors argue that '[Riḍā's] commentary departs from the previous exhaustive semantic and syntactical analysis of isolated words and phrases' and 'critically engages the modern world's rationality and empiricism' (Hernandez, *Literature of Islam*, p. 67).

1.2 The Question of Authorship

It is generally assumed that the first introduction, entitled *Fātiḥat tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ḥakīm*, is entirely Rashīd Riḍā's work, by whom it is also signed,[134] and that the second one, the *Muqaddimat al-tafsīr*, reflects primarily the ideas of Muḥammad ʿAbduh.[135] The text itself supports this assumption by means of an introductory remark in which Riḍā states that the *Muqaddima* is 'adapted from the content of the teaching of *al-ustādh al-imām* [i.e. ʿAbduh], with some elaboration and clarification' (*al-muqtabasa min dars al-ustādh al-imām bi-l-maʿnā maʿa al-basṭ wa-l-īḍāḥ*).[136] Speaking of the *Manār* commentary as a whole, Jean-Jacques Jomier provides some evidence in support of Riḍā's self-proclaimed fidelity in keeping his own ideas distinct from those of his master by pointing to the various speech markers employed by Riḍā, such as *aqūlu* or *qāla al-ustādh al-imām*, as well as the fact that he sometimes even contradicts ʿAbduh by calling a particular view 'absurd' (Jomier: 'aberrante').[137]

In many ways, my own reading of the *Fātiḥa* and the *Muqaddima* has confirmed Jomier's assessment: Riḍā's frequent speech markers,[138] in addition to his occasional comments on some of ʿAbduh's statements and input by means of footnotes, do create

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[134] *TM* I, p. 16, l. 25.

[135] For the sake of simplicity, I shall refer to these introductions as 'the *Fātiḥa*' and 'the *Muqaddima*' throughout the remainder of this thesis.

[136] *TM* I, p. 17, l. 2.

[137] Jomier, *Commentaire Coranique*, pp. 50-52.

[138] Examples of the recurring speech markers contained in these two introductions which I have been able to identify include but are not limited to 'I say' (*aqūlu*) (*TM* I, p. 9, l. 6); 'the Teacher-Imām said' (*qāla al-ustādh al-imām*) (*TM* I, p. 23, l. 7 and *TM* I, p. 25, l. 7); and 'the Teacher-Imām also talked about' (*takallama al-ustādh al-imām ayḍan ʿan*) (*TM* I, p. 25, l. 9).

the impression that the student does indeed reliably distinguish between his own ideas and those of his teacher.[139] As such, I shall abide by this distinction as proposed by Riḍā himself, except for those instances where there is sufficient reason to believe that the text of ʿAbduh's *Muqaddima* has undergone a significant process of editing at the hands of Riḍā.

As for the remaining passages examined in this thesis, my default position shall be to attribute authorship to Rashīd Riḍā. Indeed, according to Johanna Pink, 'at least 85% of the material in the *Tafsīr al-Manār* was written by Rashīd Riḍā'.[140] In addition, the fact that ʿAbduh's lecture notes only covered material up to Q 4:125 entails that ʿAbduh's input on the *Manār* commentary's exegesis of surah 5—the key focus of Chapters III and IV—can be negligeable at most. Finally, the *Tafsīr al-Manār* as a free-standing book was only published after ʿAbduh's death and accompanied with 'extensive additions to the *al-Manār* [journal] articles'.[141] The only exceptions that will be made to this default position are those instances where the student's opinion

[139] For example, in reference to Q 2:213, Riḍā mentions in a footnote that '[ʿAbduh] wrote an interpretation (*tafsīran*) of this verse, in which he mentioned things that do not exist in any other book (*jā'a fīhi bi-mā lā yūjad fī kitāb*)' (*TM* I, p. 23, Footnote). Similarly, when relating ʿAbduh's views about making *tafsīr* relevant to specific audiences—in addition to the amount of preparation ʿAbduh reportedly carries out before explaining the Qur'an to specific audiences—Riḍā suggests that ʿAbduh's statement 'because I do not go into deep detail when I read [out aloud]' (*li-annanī lā uṭāliʿ ʿindamā aqra'*) might be understood as 'before (*qabla an*) I read [out aloud]', meaning that 'he does not prepare for it by delving very deep [into the matter]' (*lā yastaʿidd la-hā bi-l-muṭālaʿa*) (*TM* I, p. 14, l. 10 and *TM* I, p. 14, Footnote). Other examples of explanatory footnotes as part of these two introductions can be found in *TM* I, p. 13, p. 22, p. 21, p. 22, and p. 27.

[140] Pink, 'Riḍā, Rashīd'.

[141] Pink, 'Riḍā, Rashīd'.

differs from that of his master, and where this is clearly marked, such as ʿAbduh and Riḍā's exegesis of polygamy, which will be discussed in Chapter IV.

2. The *Manār* Commentary – A Tradition Continued?

The content and structure of the two introductions preceding the *Manār* commentary can be summarised as follows:

Riḍā's *Fātiḥa*

1. Pastiche of Qur'anic quotations (p. 2, l. 1 – p. 4, l. 9)
2. The Qur'an's message of guidance (p. 4, l. 10 – p. 5, l. 2)
3. The superiority of the early Arab-Muslim community (p. 5, l. 3 – p. 6, l. 17)
4. The reasons for the Muslims community's current state of weakness
   4.1 Widespread moral corruption (p. 6, l. 18 – p. 6, l. 25)
   4.2 Mistakes made by previous exegetes, with a particular focus on exegesis through transmission, and the ensuing need for a new commentary (p. 6, l. 25 – p. 10, l. 20)
5. Personal reminiscences: the beginnings of the *Manār* commentary (p. 10, l. 21 – p. 16, l. 25)

ʿAbduh's *Muqaddima*

1. An introduction to the discipline of *tafsīr*
   1.1 Its importance and the challenges posed by the discipline (p.17, ll. 2 – 11)

1.2 Its various sub-disciplines and the risks associated therewith (p. 17, l.12 – p. 18, l. 18)

2. The need for a new commentary and ʿAbduh's approach (p. 18, l. 19 – p. 20, l. 5)
3. *Tafsīr* as a collective duty (p. 20, ll. 6 – 11)
4. The two ranks of *tafsīr*
    4.1 The lower rank (p. 20, l. 11 – p. 21, l.5)
    4.2 The higher rank (p. 21, l. 5 – p. 25, l.8)
5. The reasons for the Muslim community's state of weakness
    5.1 Neglect of the Arabic language (p. 25, ll. 9 – 17)
    5.2 Blind adherence to misguided exegetes (p. 25, l. 18 – p. 26, l. 11)
    5.3 Religious education (p. 26, l. 12 – p. 29. l. 2)
6. Arabic and the Arabs (p. 29, l. 3 – p. 31, l. 21)

A recent study by Karen Bauer examines the introductions to the *tafāsīr* of nine classical exegetes who lived between the tenth to the twelfth centuries AD.[142]

[142] See Bauer, 'Introductions', pp. 39-65. For her study, Bauer examined the introductions of nine commentaries written by seven authors. They include Muḥammad b. Jarīr al- Ṭabarī's (d. 923) *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī tafsīr āy al-Qur'ān*, ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī's (fl. 10th century) *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, Abū'l-Layth al-Samarqandī's (d. 375/985) *Baḥr al-ʿulūm*, Abū Ishāq Aḥmad al-Thaʿlabī's (d. 1035) *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, Muḥammad b. al-Hasan al- Ṭūsī's (d. 1067) *Tafsīr al-Tibyān*, Abū'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī's (d. 1075) *al-Wajīz fī tafsīr al-Kitāb al-ʿazīz* and *al-Waṣīt fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-majīd* as well as Abū Bakr ʿAtiq Sūrābādī's (d. 1101) *Tafsīr al-tafāsīr* and al-Ḥusayn b. Masʿūd al-Baghāwī's (d. 1122) *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*. In addition, Bauer notes that she 'draw[s] on scholarly articles relating to the introductions of Rashīd al-Dīn Abū'l-

Specifically, Bauer observes that these introductions all share a number of 'tropes', which include

(i) 'praise of the Qur'an and *tafsīr*,

(ii) assertions about the nature of *tafsīr*,

(iii) arguments against interpreting through personal opinion (*ra'y*), and in favour of interpreting through *ḥadīth*s,

(iv) denigration of the efforts of other exegetes,

(v) and a description of the methods of the work at hand.'[143]

Even a cursory reading of the *Fātiḥa* and the *Muqaddima* reveals that the authors of the *Manār* commentary, too, have opted to employ a recognizable variant of this familiar format. In fact, introductory tropes (i), (ii), (iv) and (v) are presented in a rather traditional fashion, and even a lengthy discussion of (iii) takes place, even if this topic is, as we shall see, explored from a different viewpoint and with a different conclusion. Thus, we repeatedly find the authors discussing the importance of studying the Qur'an, the mistakes that have been made by their predecessors in their

Faḍl Maybudī (fl. 520/1153), Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), and Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200)' (Bauer, 'Introductions', p. 40).

[143] Bauer, 'Introductions', pp. 40–41. I have slightly modified Bauer's list by numbering the items. Bauer notes that, while these elements 'are almost always all included in any introduction', they do not always occur in the same order (see Bauer, 'Introductions', p. 41).

attempt to do so, and their own reasons for adding yet another title to the long list of existing commentaries.

In fact, some of the similarities could not be more striking: when al-Ṭabarī (d. 923),[144] near the beginning of his lengthy introduction, asserts that the Qur'an 'is the best thing to which you can turn your attention, the knowledge of which will enable you to reach the ultimate end of that which is pleasing to God, and the knower of which reaches the path of right guidance',[145] one is immediately reminded of the numerous passages in the *Fātiḥa* and the *Muqaddima* that emphasise the Qur'an's guidance to a life of happiness and success.[146]

Equally, Bauer notes that, in classical works of *tafsīr*, one finds a tendency of commentators reprimanding their colleagues for not having done the job as well as they should have.[147] Thus, on the multiple occasions when ʿAbduh and Riḍā list the issues they take with the works of their predecessors—chiefly, the latters' perceived obsession with grammar, superstitions, irrelevant legal issues, technical terms, as well as their lack of interest in people's actual conditions[148]—in order to justify 'the strong

[144] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd al-Ṭabarī, historian and Qu'ranic commentator of Persian descent. Among his most famous works are his Qur'anic commentary, entitled *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr āy al-Qur'ān*, as well as a historical chronicle, which is commonly known as *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* (Bosworth,' al-Ṭabarī').

[145] Bauer, 'Introductions', p. 42.

[146] Since the topic of guidance is so central to these texts, it would be difficult to provide an exhaustive list. For some examples, see *TM* I, p. 2, l. 8,; p. 3, l. 10; p. 4, ll. 1 & 10; p. 5, l. 4; p. 6, l. 9ff.; p. 7, l.1; p. 17, l. 12.

[147] Bauer, 'Introductions', p. 46.

[148] For example, in the *Fātiḥa* Riḍā states that 'it was bad luck for Muslims (*kāna min saw' ḥaẓẓ al-muslimīn*) that most of what has been written on *tafsīr* distracts its reader from these high purposes

need' that there is for a new commentary,[149] one can again point to some of the claims made in introductions to classical commentaries: al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1035),[150] for example, felt that he had to gather together his knowledge into a commentary because nobody else would do so.[151]

In view of Bauer's findings, as well as my own cursory reviews of a number of traditional commentaries, it would be hard to deny the existence of certain methodological as well as thematic similarities between the introductions to the *Manār* commentary and those to classical commentaries on the Qur'an. As the above tables of content demonstrate, especially passages denigrating the efforts made by other commentators, in addition to ʿAbduh and Riḍā's repeated description of their own methods—namely to rid their *tafsīr* from those elements distract Muslims from the Qur'an's true message—take up a considerable amount of space, which suggests

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(*yashghal qāri'ahu 'an hādhihī al-maqāṣid al-'ālīya*) and from the [Qur'an's] sublime guidance (*al-hidāya al-sāmīya*). Among that which distracts [the reader] from the Qur'an are studies on desinential inflection (*mabāḥith al-iʿrāb*), the rules of grammar (*qawāʿid al-naḥw*), plays on words (*nukat al-maʿānī*), and the technical terms (*muṣṭalaḥāt al-bayān*)' (*TM* I, p. 7, ll. 9–11). Another example can be found in *TM* I, p. 4, ll. 12–13, where Riḍā informs the reader that 'God did not reveal [the Qur'an] as a dry worldly law (*qānūnan dunyawīyan jāffan*)', nor as a 'medical book (*kitāban ṭibbīyan*) to cure bodies', nor as a 'human history (*tārīkhan basharīyan*) [book] to explain actual events'.

[149] Specifically, Riḍā states that 'there was a strong need (*fa-kānat al-ḥāja shadīda*) for a commentary whose primary concern (*al-ʿināya al-ūlā*) is the guidance of the Qur'an (*hidāyat al-Qur'ān*) in a fashion that is consistent in its description with the noble revealed verses and that which was revealed for this sake in terms of warning (*al-indār*), glad tidings (*al-tabshīr*), guidance (*al-hidāya*), and reform (*al-iṣlāḥ*)' (*TM* I, p. 10, l. 14–16).

[150] Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Abū Isḥāq al-Nīsābūrī al-Thaʿlabī was a Qur'anic commentator and collectors of popular stories. In addition to his tafsīr, al-Thaʿlabī is known for his book on the stories of the prophets, known as Qiṣṣas al-anbīya', which one scholar has described as 'a work of popular imagination designed for education and entertainment' (Rippin, 'al-Thaʿlabī').

[151] Bauer, 'Introductions', p. 46. Specifically, Bauer remarks that commentators such as al-Thaʿlabī, al-Ṭūsī, and Zamakhsharī 'all include insults against their peers or potential audiences in their introductions'.

that they, too, were applying some literary techniques that were similar to those of their predecessors.[152]

Nonetheless, at a deeper level, the differences that I have been able to detect in my own analysis of these introductions outweigh the similarities, even though they may be subtle at first glance. Apart from those areas in which ʿAbduh and Riḍā clearly differ from their classical colleagues—such as their views on 'exegesis through transmission' (*al-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*) and the relevance they see between the message of the Qur'an and the real world—discrepancies can even be detected within the shared tropes described above.[153] For example, the tone adopted by Riḍā in discrediting the works of his predecessors appears much harsher than that of the authors of classical *tafāsīr*. Thus, while al-Wāḥidī's (d. 1076)[154] claim to have written a book that surpasses 'others in details, organization, composition and perfection'[155] may be viewed as criticism of his colleague's efforts, this is essentially where his criticism ends. He certainly does not go so far as to blame other exegetes, let alone the majority of them, for the political and social shortcomings of his period. This stands in stark contrast to some of the statements that we find the *Fātiḥa*, where the author explicitly identifies

[152] The similarities that I have observed so far are primarily thematic. It would be fascinating to investigate whether there exist terminological links within these shared tropes as well.

[153] I should mention, however, that ʿAbduh and Riḍā's respective views on the use of transmitted material display a number of differences. These will be discussed later on in this chapter.

[154] Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Mattūya al-Mattūyī (Mattuwī) al-Naysābūrī al-Shāfiʿī al-Wāḥidī, a Qu'ranic commentator and Arab philologist. In addition to writing numerous scholarly works on the Qur'an, al-Wāḥidī is arguably most famous for his commentary, generally known as *Tafsīr al-Basīṭ* or, simply, *al-Basīṭ* (Sellheim, 'al-Wāḥidī').

[155] Saleh, 'Wāḥidī's al-Basīṭ', p. 83.

the reasons for the Muslim community's predicament in the fact that 'most which has been written on *tafsīr* distracts the reader from [the Qur'an's] high purposes and sublime guidance'.[156] Moreover, and as already hinted at in Chapter I, such denigrations of the efforts of previous exegetes in classical commentaries do certainly not extend to an author launching an attack on the very toolbox of the tradition itself. When Riḍā laments the fact that the works of most exegetes 'distract' their reader from the Qur'an with discussions of the grammatical, philological, and technical features of the Qur'an, theology and law,[157] he essentially attacks the entire catalogue of Islamic disciplines that classical exegetes used to draw upon.[158]

I shall not go into a detailed analysis of the nature of those attacks at this point, as they will be examined further into in this chapter. Nevertheless, I believe that even these few preliminary examples show that there are reasons that urge us to apply caution when emphasising the similarities of these introductory tropes in the *Manār* commentary to pre-modern *tafāsīr*, despite their apparent existence at the surface level.

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[156] *TM* I, p. 7, ll. 9–10.

[157] *TM* I, p. 7, ll. 10–12. The full list of the disciplines attacked includes 'investigations concerning desinential inflections (*iʿrāb*), rules of grammar (*qawāʿid al-naḥw*), semantic subtleties (*nukat al-maʿānī*), technical terms of rhethorics (*muṣṭalaḥāt al-bayān*) [...] the disputes of the theologians (*jadal al-mutakallimīn*), the explanations of the legal theorists (*takhrījāt al-uṣūlīyīn*), the inferences of the legal scholars who blindly follow one another (*istinbāṭāt al-fuqahā' al-muqallidīn*), the esoteric interpretations of the Sufis (*ta'wīlāt al-mutaṣawwifīn*)'.

[158] See Calder, '*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr', p. 106.

3. The *Tafsīr al-Manār* as a Modern Commentary

In this section I turn my attention to those passages of the *Fātiḥa* and the *Muqaddima* that constitute an arguably more significant break with introductions to classical commentaries on the Qur'an.[159] In terms of their content, they feature more pronounced examples in support of the claim that ʿAbduh and Riḍā's exegetical attitudes differed considerably from those of their predecessors. At a methodological and/or structural level, these passages are interesting because they provide us with better insight into the various literary techniques employed by the authors of these introductions in order to justify and promote their views. The first passage discussed in the following sub-section, which can be found in the *Fātiḥa*, is a rather peculiar one, as it demonstrates how Riḍā not only heralds, but, in my opinion, also achieves a break with tradition purely by the way in which he organises and presents the material to which he resorts, rather than through the claims he makes, which, as we shall see, are very scarce on this occasion.

3.1 Loyalty to the Qur'an Itself

Strikingly, the first two and a half pages of the *Fātiḥa* consist of an uninterrupted string of Qur'anic quotations.[160] Their content can be summarised as follows: the

[159] I should emphasise that I do not intend to make generalisations for the vast body of pre-modern *tafsīr* literature as a whole. The comparisons made in this chapter exclusively focus on those passages of classical works that I have actually analysed and which are repeatedly mentioned in this chapter.

[160] *TM* I, p. 2, l. 3 — p. 4, l. 9. According to the authors, the passages given are Q 18:15, Q 2:1, 22-23, Q 3:1 (*sic*!), 5, Q 11:1–4, Q 12:1–3, 111, Q 29:47–49, Q 38:28, Q: 4:81, Q 39:23, Q 59:21, Q 33:56 and Q 33: 40–244

Qur'an was revealed to mankind as guidance (*hudan*)[161] and a blessing (*mubārakan*).[162] Those who follow the Qur'an's true guidance and worship God will receive a 'goodly reward' (*lahum ajran ḥasanan)* both in this world and the next,[163] while those who deviate will be punished.[164] Furthermore, the Qur'an is a confirmation of 'that which has been sent down before' (*muṣaddiqan li-mā bayna yadayhi*),[165] and while the status of the Torah and the Gospel as scriptures revealed to provide guidance to mankind is not denied, the Qur'an's status is nevertheless elevated as it is 'the best of statements' (*aḥsan al-ḥadīth*), a scripture that is 'self-similar' (*kitāban mutashābihan mathāniyā*).[166] The Qur'an's special nature is even more underlined by the quotation that immediately follows, Q 59:21, which says that '[i]f we had caused this Qur'an to descend upon a mountain, you [O Muhammad] verily would have seen it humbled, split apart by the fear of God (*la-ra'aytahu khāshiʿan mutaṣaddiʿan min khashyati allāhi*)'.

It is by no means unusual for a work of *tafsīr* to draw heavily on Qur'anic material. In fact, extended strings of Qur'anic quotations are a rather traditional

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(*sic!*). 'Q 3:1' is presumably a mistake as we are, in fact, dealing with Q 3:3; similarly, 'Q 33: 40-244' should be 'Q 33: 40-44'.

[161] Q 2:1, Q 3:1 (*sic*!), Q 12:111, Q 39:23.

[162] Q 38:28, Q 33:56 and Q 33:40-244 (*sic!*).

[163] Q 18:15. The text literally speaks of a reward 'in which people will remain forever' (*mākathīna fīhī abadan*). Other passages that deal with the Qur'an's leading to glad tidings are Q 11:1–4 (*matāʿan* [...] *wa-faḍlahu*, lit.: 'enjoyment and His grace'), Q 12:1–3 (*laʿallakum taʿqilūna*, lit.: 'so that you may be endowed with reason'), Q 12:111 (*hudan wa-raḥmatan*, lit.: 'guidance and mercy'), and Q 33:40–244 (*sic*!) (*ajran ḥasanan*, lit.: 'a goodly reward').

[164] Q 18:15, Q 2:22–23, Q 11:1–4 and Q 39:23.

[165] Lit.: 'a confirmation of that which is in front of him [i.e. the Torah and the Bible , both of which were at the Prophet's disposal'.

[166] Q 39:23. A more literal translation of this phrase might be 'a book that is consistent with itself'.

technique, both in Qur'anic commentaries and elsewhere.[167] Furthermore, the content of these quotations is not unusual, either; on the contrary, as we saw earlier, praise for the Qur'an as the finest revelation, its merits, and the idea that those who are guided by it will be rewarded by God are in fact among the tropes that are routinely found in introductions to pre-modern commentaries. For example, Walid Saleh observes that already the 11th-century exegete al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1035) systematically incorporated so-called '*faḍā'il*' *ḥadīth*s — that is, content that highlights the merits or virtues of either the Qur'an as a whole, or that of individual surahs—in his Qur'anic commentary.[168] Similarly, in the context of his discussion of al-Suyūṭī's *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Stephen Burge identifies '*faḍā'il*' material as a common feature of pre-modern *tafsīr* literature in general, and al-Suyūṭī's commentary in particular. In so doing, he makes a convincing case that the inclusion of such material should, in fact, be considered a mode of exegesis 'as [it] allows the Qur'an to be placed in a wider spiritual context, which in turn may have an effect on the interpretation of the verses in question'.[169]

Nevertheless, it is somewhat peculiar that Riḍā would choose to dedicate nearly three pages to a list of completely uncommented Qur'anic quotations at the

[167] It is, in fact, a very traditional way of manipulating scripture that can already be found in the Dome of the Rock (see Grabar, 'Ḳubbat al-Ṣakhra').
[168] Saleh, *The Formation of Classical Tafsīr*, p. 103. Specifically, Saleh notes that '[e]ach of al-Thaʿlabī's cinnebtarues ib tge 114 suras (chapters) of the Qur'ān begins with a number of ḥadīths (prophetic traditions) recounding the merits a believer incurs by reading or reciting that particular sura'.
[169] Burge, 'Suyūṭī', p. 295.

very beginning of his work. One possible explanation for this profusion of Qur'anic quotations is that this is a visual indicator through which Riḍā is trying to tell his audience that the commentary which they are about to read is not like the ones of the past and, as such, does not follow traditional conventions in quite the same way. And indeed, if this is his strategy, he actually has some evidence in support of his claim, as this way of starting a work of *tafsīr* is uncommon. While Bauer's findings suggest that longer lists *per se* can also be found in the introductions to traditional commentaries, it seems, however, that such lists are rare and that, if they appear at all, they tend to be restricted to *ḥadīth* reports, transmitter chains, and definitions of terms.[170] Similarly, Burge's analysis suggests that al-Suyūṭī chiefly, if not exclusively, resorts to *ḥadīth*s when highlighting the Qur'an's merits and, although these are numerous, they are 'not clumped together in one place'.[171]

Considering what we know about both ʿAbduh and Riḍā's criticism of many of their predecessors' exegetical methods, and, in particular, in view of the caution to which, as we shall see, they urge in regard to the use of transmitted material, these first few pages become even more significant as they may be indicative of a certain shift of focus and, perhaps even loyalty, in the *Manār* commentary. Classical Sunni

[170] See Bauer, 'Introductions', pp. 56-60. The somewhat extreme example given by Bauer is the introduction to al-Thaʿlabī's commentary, whose approximately fifty pages she describes as consisting mostly of 'his *isnāds*' (Bauer, 'Introductions, p. 59). It should be noted, however, that al-Thaʿlabī seems to have done this for practical reasons: instead of burdening his reader by repeating the full chains of transmitters in the remainder of his work, he decided to just give them once in his introduction (see Saleh, *The Formation of Classical Tafsīr*, pp. 82-83).

[171] Burge, 'Suyūṭī', p. 296.

commentaries on the Qur'an in their mature form are usually characterised by their authors' drawing upon a large array of other disciplines. In particular, their authors tend to emphasise the use of transmitted material, often with named authorities, which one scholar has interpreted to be not just as an expression of their individual mastery of the skills required by the *tafsīr* genre, but also an indication of their loyalty to certain figures within their tradition.[172] In light of this, the pastiche of Qur'anic quotations in Riḍā's introduction, in addition to both authors' explicit warnings regarding the use of transmitted material that I shall discuss later on, could perhaps be seen as an expression of their belief that the Qur'an should not only serve as the primary source for an exegete, but even more importantly, that it is only the word of God—rather than that of other exegetes—to which a *mufassir* should express his loyalty. And indeed, even in the *Fātiḥa*, Riḍā makes no secret of the fact that he considers his pre-modern colleagues' strong emphasis on the works of other scholars to be highly problematic:

> However, on the last day God will not ask us about the opinions of people [i.e. the scholars] and what they understood; rather, he will ask us about his book, which he has sent down to lead (*li-irshādinā*) and guide us (*hidāyatinā*) [...][173]

[172] See Calder, '*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr'.
[173] *TM* I, ll. p. 6, l. 5.

In addition to what may be described as a certain shift of loyalty which Riḍā may be expressing through this string of quotations,[174] I believe that this passage is significant for yet another reason: it seems that by means of this literary move he is wishing to signal to the reader that his own ideas are, in fact, anchored in the Qur'an itself. This is particularly so as the ideas expressed in these quotations are, in essence, a digest of some of the themes that repeatedly occur not just in these two introductions, but also in many other parts of the *Manār* commentary. We can, in fact, observe an intriguing interplay of two aspects here: by commencing the way he does, Riḍā is not only telling his audience that he is offering an approach that differs fundamentally from that of the past, but also that he is an exegete whose ideas correspond entirely to those of the Qur'an itself. It may, in fact, be viewed as a sophisticated literary move: by virtue of the thematic emphases that can be discerned from the specific selection of Qur'anic verses made, the collage pastiche procedure allows the author of the *Manār* commentary to establish certain thematic waymarks, but at the same time, this procedure also camouflages his own interests behind the text of scripture. In other words, the author's voice is seemingly drowned out by God's word; however, by selecting specific verses it is still Riḍā who gets to set the agenda.

[174] By using the phrase 'shift of loyalty' I am not intending to imply that an exegete like al-Ṭabarī would have thought of himself as being loyal to the word of other humans *rather* than that of God. Instead, he would probably have insisted that the only way one can access the word of God is by engaging with the work of fellow human interpreters. As such, one may argue that the main issue here is not just about loyalty, but about how to access the word of God, that is, about the extent to which one must do so through the lens of the accumulated tradition, rather than making a fresh start.

3.2 The Use of Transmitted Material

Another passage that demonstrates some of the new exegetical features of the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, and which makes up nearly an entire page in the *Fātiha*, is an abridged quotation from Ibn Taymīya's (d. 1328) *Muqaddima fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*.[175] Walid Saleh has described this work as a bold attempt to 'overhaul the entire history of Qur'ānic exegesis' that has provided 'the basis for how modern conservative Muslim intellectuals conceive of Qurānic exegesis'.[176]

This passage is significant for several reasons: first, because of the conclusions Riḍā draws, it provides us with a good example of an ideological break with traditional commentaries, as well as a certain modernising tendency in his work. Effectively arguing that the vast majority of transmitted sources, which make up a considerable part of the classical *tafsīr* tradition, cannot be trusted due to their dubious origins and should thus be discarded, he departs significantly from his predecessors, who, as we have seen, draw heavily on those traditions in their works and, in fact, tend to use their introductions as a place to discuss benefits of 'exegesis through transmission'

[175] Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymīya, a famous and controversial Ḥanbalī scholar, theologian. and jurisconsult. His unorthodox views and breaks with mainstream Ḥanbalī and Sunni doctrine resulted in recurring disputes with his contemporaries and even led to several prison sentences. Although considered a minority figure in his own time by some scholars, Ibn Taymīya's thought is considered to have had a lasting impact on Modernist Sunni Muslim thinkers such as Rashīd Riḍā and played a major role in the nascent doctrines of Salafism and Wahhabism. A prolific writer, his most famous works include *al-Ḥamawīya al-kubrā* as well as *Radd ʿalā al-manṭiqiyīn* (Laoust, 'Ibn Taymiyya'). Jon Hoover has written several useful works on Ibn Taymīya, some of which discuss his impact on Modernist and, later, radical Islamic movements (see, for example, Hoover, 'Ibn Taymiyya between Moderation and Radicalism' and Hoover, 'Reconciling Ibn Taymiyya's Legitimisation of Violence with His Vision of Universal Salvation').

[176] Saleh, 'Radical Hermeneutics', p. 124 and p. 126.

(*al-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*).[177] Second, the fact that, in his interpretation of the passage, Riḍā primarily, if not exclusively, links the dangers posed by transmitted material to a potential association with the 'People of the Book', i.e., Jews and Christians, may be viewed as an example of this commentary's engagement with the political and social realities of its time and its authors' views thereof. Third, this passage provides us with a good insight into Riḍā's own exegetical methods. Recruiting Ibn Taymīya as an ally, the author of the *Manār* commentary appears to justify his radical break by showing his reader that, in fact, what he is advocating is not that unusual at all, but was already proposed by this traditional heavyweight himself many centuries ago. Thereby, the author seemingly demonstrates both his familiarity with a tradition he generally tries to denigrate, as well as his readiness to enter into a dialogue with it.

The passage as we find it in the *Manār* commentary is, however, not a direct quotation from Ibn Taymīya's *Muqaddima*, but appears to be directly taken from al-Suyūṭī's (d. 1505)[178] *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*.[179] It is somewhat unlikely that Riḍā, a learned scholar familiar with the Islamic tradition in general and Ibn Taymīya in particular, would not have known the proximate source of the quotation, and it seems

[177] See Bauer, 'Introductions', p. 40.

[178] Abū al-Faḍl ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr b. Muḥammad Jalāl al-Dīn al-Khuḍayrī al-Suyūṭī was an Egyptian scholar, theologian, and one of the most prolific authors in medieval history. Estimated to have written up to 900 works, Al-Suyūṭī's most famous publications include the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, a Qur'anic commentary which he co-authored with his teacher Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī as well as *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qur'ān* (Geoffroy, 'al-Suyūṭī').

[179] See al-Suyūṭī's *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 4, pp. 204–5. It is worth mentioning that, in the *Manār* commentary, al-Suyūṭī himself is not given credit for this particular passage.

more likely that he left out this detail on purpose.[180] This may at least partly be due to the above-mentioned fact that demonstrating one's familiarity with somebody like Ibn Taymīya, rather than al-Suyūṭī, might lend even more credibility to Riḍā's own argument.[181] Moreover, the passage as found in al-Suyūṭī's book features a number of omissions when compared to the original. These are not just limited to several smaller, albeit significant modifications in the quotation's immediate source (namely, al-Suyūṭī's *al-Itqān*). More importantly, as we shall see, the passage as quoted by al-Suyūṭī leaves out a considerable part of Ibn Taymīya's discussion of exegesis through transmission. As a consequence, al-Suyūṭī's version leaves more room for interpretation, which is something that the author of the *Manār* commentary appears to have taken advantage of. For a look at the original quickly shows that Ibn Taymīya does not draw the same conclusions as Riḍā: unlike the author of the *Manār* commentary, he does not in fact call for the vast majority of narratives to be

[180] It is, of course, impossible to look inside the head of the author and establish completely that this was a deliberate act of manipulation. Nevertheless, considering the fact that Riḍā is known to have edited some of Ibn Taymīya's works, and in light of what we know concerning his appropriation of traditional material (see Chapter II), it is somewhat surprising that he did not resort to the original on this occasion (see Knysh, 'Ibn ʿArabi', p. 90 and Özervarli, 'Divine Wisdom', p. 39, Footnote 6, for example).

[181] Although Jon Hoover has rightly observed that '[t]here is as yet no comprehensive study and assessment of Ibn Taymiyya's reception in the modern world' (Hoover, 'Moderation and Radicalism', p. 196), there exist a number of works that have at least partially studied Ibn Taymīya's influence on modern and, especially, would-be radical Islamic thinkers. For example, Ana Soage explains that 'Abduh identified with '*ulamā*' who had been deemed mavericks in their time, like al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyya', while Riḍā regularly cited him in his work (Soage, 'Rashīd Ridā's Legacy', p. 7). Similarly, Laith Saud mentions Ibn Taymīya, along with Aḥmad b. Ḥanbāl (d. 855) and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) as one of the 'three thinkers from the classical period [that] come together to form the backbone of contemporary Sunnism' (Laith, 'Islamic Political Theology', p. 98) For a good survey which, in part, discusses Ibn Taymīya's influence on a variety fundamentalist intellectuals of the 20th century, see Fazlur Rahman's *Revival and Reform in Islam: A Study of Islamic Fundamentalism*.

discarded as a result of the difficulties in establishing their authenticity. But before I examine these differences in greater detail, let us have a look at the passage itself, as we find it in the *Manār* commentary.

According to Ibn Taymīya,[182] 'the disagreement regarding *tafsīr* rests on two kinds'. First, there is disagreement that is based only on transmission (*mā mustanaduhu al-naql*), i.e., it results from conflicting or contradictory reports. Second, there is disagreement that can be known without reliance on transmission (*mā yu'lam bi-ghayr dhālik*, lit.: 'that which is known through something else').[183] Specifically, this second kind of disagreement and the ensuing conflict of opinions between later interpreters is said to arise from rational inference (*bi-l-istidlāl*).[184]

Transmitted reports, which make up the first source of disagreement, contain information that either originates 'from someone infallible (*al-ma'ṣūm*)', presumably the Prophet, or 'from somebody else (*ghayrihi*)'. Some transmitted reports are such that their authenticity can be established, while for others this is not possible.[185] The latter do not seem to pose a significant challenge, as Ibn Taymīya suggests that such reports generally do not provide any benefit (*lā fā'ida fīhi*) and that, as a consequence,

[182] Phrases like 'according to Ibn Taymīya' should be understood in the sense of 'according to what is attributed to Ibn Taymīya', as the passage with which we are presented is in fact not a direct quotation.
[183] *TM* I, p. 8, ll. 11–12
[184] *TM* I, p. 9, l. 3.
[185] *TM* I, p. 8, ll. 12–13.

Muslims do not need to know them (*lā ḥāja bi-nā ilā maʿrifatihi*).[186] Examples include information concerning the size of Noah's boat and the 'colour and name of the dog of the Companions of the Cave' (*lawn kalb aṣḥāb al-kahf wa-ismuhu*).[187] The authenticity of such reports can only be established through transmission, which would only be possible if they came directly from the Prophet.[188] As for the reports to which this applies—i.e. those that can be attributed safely to the Prophet (*manqūlan naqlan ṣaḥīḥan ʿan al-nabī*)—Ibn Taymīya states they are accepted (*qubila*); as for those to which this does not apply—on account of their coming via the 'People of the Book like Kaʿb and Wahb',[189] but, in some cases, even from certain Successors—Ibn Taymīya urges his reader to suspend judgment.[190] As for authentic reports from the Companions, however, the 'soul is more confident in them' (*fa-l-nafs ilayhi askan*). And indeed, Ibn Taymīya continues, 'there exist a lot [of authentic reports]', despite of

[186] *TM* I, p. 8, ll. 13–15.

[187] TM I, p. 8, l. 15. A story narrated in Q: 18, also known as the legend of the 'Seven Sleepers of Ephesus': a group of Christians hide inside a cave outside the city of Ephesus at around 250 AD to escape a persecution of Christians. They fall asleep and then wake up approximately 150–200 years later, by which time the Roman empire had become Christian (see Paret, 'Aṣḥāb al-Kahf'). For more examples regarding scholarly disagreement in this context, according to the authors of the *Manār* commentary, see *TM* I, p. 8, ll. 15–17.

[188] *TM* I, p. 8, l. 18.

[189] Ibn Taymīya appears to be referring to Kaʿb al- Aḥbār (d. 652 or 653) and Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 728 or 732), both prolific narrators of *israʾīlīyāt* and somewhat controversial figures in the Sunni tradition. It is generally believed that the former was an early Jewish convert to Islam and that the latter may also have had a Jewish background. For more information, see Schmitz, 'Kaʿb al-Aḥbār' and Khoury, 'Wahb b. Munabbih'.

[190] *TM* I, p. 8, ll. 18–21. The passage literally reads as follows: 'One holds back from deeming it to be true or a lie' (*wuqifa ʿan taṣdīqihī wa-takdhībhī*). It is also worth mentioning that the author does not identify any specific Successors by name.

what the Imām Aḥmad had said,[191] 'because what is predominant in them are the *mursal* reports' (*li'anna al-ghālib ʿalayhā al-marāsīl*).[192]

It is the second category, *tafsīr* through rational inference (*bi-l-istidlāl*), which leads to most mistakes. In particular, Ibn Taymīya identifies two kinds of mistakes. The first is that exegetes try to make the Qur'an conform to preconceived ideas; the second mistake is to interpret the Qur'an by exclusively relying on the Arabic language without taking into account the one 'who speaks through the Qur'an' (*al-mutakallim bi-l-qu'rān*), viz. God'.[193]

Ibn Taymīya's quotation ends here and the reader is now presented with what could best be described as an exercise of Riḍā interpreting Ibn Taymīya, in the course of which the author of the *Manār* commentary exclusively focuses on the dangers posed by exegesis through transmission.[194] As his line of argument develops, it becomes increasingly clear that Riḍā's *real* concern is less about whether the

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[191] Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) was an important Sunni theologian and founder of the *Ḥanbalī* school, one of the four major Sunni schools. Henri Laoust notes that 'he was, through his disciple Ibn Taymīya, the distant progenitor of Wahhābism, and has inspired also in a certain degree the conservative reform movement of the Salafiyya' (see Laoust, 'Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal'). More recently, Christopher Melchert published a book on Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, in which he examines the importance of this scholar's teachings in modern Sunni Islam (Melchert, *Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*). Ibn Taymīya identifies the statement he attributes to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal as follows: 'there are three things that do not have an origin: *tafsīr*, the heroic battles (*al-malāḥim*), and the military campaigns of the Prophet (*al-maghāzī*)' (*TM* I, p. 9, l. 2).

[192] *TM* I, p. 9, l. 1ff. A *mursal* tradition is one in which a Successor quotes the Prophet directly (see Juynboll, 'Mursal'). Specifically, the chain of transmitters in these reports goes back no further than the second generation after the Prophet.

[193] *TM* I, p. 9, ll. 3–10.

[194] It is, indeed, interesting to observe that the discussion revolves entirely around the dangers of exegesis through transmission; the 'second category', viz. interpretation through reasoning is completely uncommented.

authenticity of transmitted material can be verified or not; rather, Riḍā is seemingly on a mission to discard sources that he considers to be irrelevant to the needs of Muslims and which, as a consequence, should have no place in a work of *tafsīr*.

Accordingly, Riḍā, states that the reason why there is such a strong possibility of narratives being corrupted is due to their potential transmission via the 'People of the Book' or 'transmitters of the *isrā'īlīyāt*', i.e. Jewish and Christian sources.[195] In addition to repeating Ibn Taymīya's call to suspend judgment when dealing with this category of reports, Riḍā, however, goes a step further, suggesting that even reports coming from the Companions cannot always be trusted, as 'it is known that some of the scholars of the Companions (*baʿḍ ʿulamā' al-ṣaḥāba*) have transmitted (*rawaw*) from the People of the Book, even from Kaʿb and Wahb'.[196] In light of this, Riḍā concludes that most narratives 'are not authentically characterised by a continuous chain of transmitters (*lā yaṣiḥḥu lahu sanad muttaṣil)*, and of those that have an authentic chain going back to some Companion, only few are raised [back to the Prophet] (*yaqillu fīhi al-marfūʿ*) and thus amenable to being adduced as an argument'.[197] More significantly, however, the author of the *Manār* commentary also uses this opportunity to remind his reader of a similar point he had made just a few pages earlier: apart from the issue of authenticity, Riḍā explains, 'most of what is reported in transmitted exegesis, or [at

[195] *TM* I, p. 9, ll. 11–12. Pink notes that Riḍā 'drew extensively on Ibn Taymiyya [...] in order to bring up the polemical notion of *isrā'īliyyāt*' and that the notion of their untrustworthiness had been 'promoted particularly by Ibn Taymiyya's school' (Pink, 'Riḍā, Rashīd').
[196] *TM* I, p. 10, ll. 1–2.
[197] *TM* I, p. 10, ll, ll. 8–9.

least] much of it, is a veil (*ḥijāb*) upon the Qur'an' and something that distracts (*shāghil*) its follower from [the Qur'an's] sublime aims which purify the soul (*anfus*, lit. 'souls') and enlighten (*munawwira*) the intellect (*ʿuqūl*, lit. 'intellects')'.[198]

Based on what we know about the importance that the introductions to traditional commentaries on the Qur'an attribute to exegesis through transmission,[199] it would be hard to deny that this new attitude,[200] as presented in Riḍā's conclusions, constitutes a considerable ideological break with the classical *tafsīr* tradition. This change of attitude becomes particularly transparent through the last comment, in which the author of the *Manār* commentary effectively states that, regardless of the issue of authenticity, narratives should be kept out of works of *tafsīr* altogether due to the risk they pose to obscuring the Qur'anic message.

As mentioned elsewhere, throughout these two introductions, both ʿAbduh and Riḍā repeatedly inform their reader that one of the main reasons why Muslims in their day and age are no longer truly guided by the Qur'an is due to the fact that many of their exegetical colleagues had focused on and included too much other material in

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[198] *TM* I, p. 10, ll. 10–11.

[199] See Bauer, 'Introductions', p. 41 and p. 44ff.

[200] I should point out, however, that, as individual exegetes, ʿAbduh and Riḍā appear to have expressed different opinions on the topic. Jafar, for example, notes that the former is said to have mostly relied on the Qur'an itself as the primary source for exegesis (see Jafar, *Modern Qur'ānic Exegesis*, p. 102). On the rare occasions that he did resort to *ḥadīth* reports, al-Dhahabī notes that ʿAbduh did not distinguish between *ḥadīth*s narrated by al-Bukhārī and those narrated by others (see al-Dhahabi, *al-Tafsīr*, p. 382). In general, he only evaluated them on the basis of their content (*matn*), disregarding whether they had a sound chain of transmitters or not. Riḍā, by comparison, would, despite his above criticism, use *ḥadīth*s more readily, and was reportedly also more critical in his approach, attributing particular importance to some reports from the Prophet and the Successors, thus somewhat following in the footsteps of the traditional commentators in this respect (see Jafar, *Modern Qur'ānic Exegesis*, p. 103).

their works. The latters' 'excesses' in focusing on specifics (*al-ikthār fī maqṣid khāṣṣ min hādhīhī al-maqāṣid*) in their commentaries entailed that they increasingly lost sight of the Qur'an's actual purpose.[201] This is not to suggest, however, that the importance of extra-Qur'anic material is denied completely in the *Tafsīr al-Manār*—in fact, speaking specifically of narratives, Riḍā informs his reader elsewhere that what he considers 'useful' narratives could be collected in 'independent books' (*kutub mustaqilla*) and, if absolutely necessary in interpreting the Qur'an, then be briefly cited without an *isnād*.[202] Nevertheless, there is a strong emphasis in these two introductions that other disciplines, and in particular narratives, should have no place in *tafsīr* unless they contribute to clarifying scripture.[203] Perhaps this call for clarity—as seen in Riḍā's proposal to keep out the vast majority of narratives from works of *tafsīr* in an attempt to render the discipline more accessible and comprehensible to a wider audience—could also be viewed in the wider context of ʿAbduh and Riḍā's activities as social reformers with an interest in raising the levels of education of the society in which they lived. After all, how could a wider audience possibly understand something as

[201] *TM* I, p. 18, ll. 19–21.

[202] TM I, p. 8, ll. 7–8. The example given on this page concerns specifically narratives that Riḍā considers 'beneficial' (*al-riwāyāt al-mufīda*).

[203] This is also not to suggest that ʿAbduh and Riḍā did not believe that a *mufassir* needed to be properly trained in a number of traditional disciplines. Indeed, when discussing what they call the 'higher rank' of *tafsīr*, ʿAbduh provides a list of the skills an exegete needs to master in order to do his job properly. They include, among other things, an appreciation of Qur'anic vocabulary in the context of its revelation; an excellent command of *irāb* and the *aṣālīb*; knowledge of the occasions for revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and knowledge of human history; knowledge concerning the conditions of mankind (*aḥwāl al-bashar*); as well as knowledge of the biography (*sīra*) of the Prophet and the Companions (*TM* I, p. 21, l. 5 – p. 25, l. 8.).

important as the Qur'an if most commentaries are cluttered up with what the authors consider to be superfluous distractions, some of which are only meaningful to a very scholarly elite?

Another interesting element in Riḍā's conclusions, which arguably also constitutes an example of his engagement with the socio-political realities of his day, is his repeated mention of the 'People of the Book' or 'transmitters of the *isrā'īlīyāt*', i.e., Jews and Christians.[204] It is, in fact, a topic that Riḍā also discusses a few paragraphs before the quotation attributed to Ibn Taymīya. There, he laments the fact that, in his view, some of their exegetical predecessors have 'turned away from the Qur'an', as most of their commentaries are blended with 'Israelite' legends of doubtful origin (*khurāfāt al-isrā'īlīyāt)*, as well as material derived 'from the mathematical and natural sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-riyāḍīya wa-l- ṭabīʿīya*) and other sciences that were new in the [Islamic] religious community' (*milla*).[205]

To provide some background: the term *isrā'īlīyāt* generally denotes those traditions in exegetical works that contain elements of the legendary and religious literature of Jews and Christians, but more comprehensively, it can also refer to Zoroastrian and other Near Eastern elements, including folklore.[206] The term can already be found in

[204] I am not suggesting that the author uses these expressions synonymously. However, in this passage they are often mentioned in the same context.

[205] *TM* I, p. 7, ll. 14–16.

[206] See Ismail Albayrak's 'From *isrā'īliyyāt* to *islāmiyyāt*', pp. 113–127. It is worth emphasising that, when ʿAbduh and Riḍā used the term *isra'īlīyāt* they did, of course, not associate it with the modern state of Israel. However, for many contemporary readers this notion will be present. And indeed, as early as

works dating from the 10th century,[207] even though the first author to employ it systematically was Ibn Taymīya, usually in reference to traditions that he rejected.[208] Georges Vajda remarks that it was especially due to the 'increased incorporation of folklore themes and their use by *ḳuṣṣāṣ* in their over-loaded, embellished versions of the histories of the prophets which have caused the *isrā'īlīyāt* to be increasingly condemned by scholars'.[209] Ibn Kathīr[210] (d. 1373), for example, uses the word to talk about 'unreliable traditions dealing with Biblical and cosmological subjects which he considers to be of Jewish origin'.[211] Referring to modern Muslim exegesis, R. Tottoli remarks that the term *isrā'īlīyāt* indicates traditions and materials dealing with cosmogony, patriarchs and prophets, which are reputedly of Jewish origin and thus alien to Islam'.[212]

1946, one of Riḍā's closest pupils, Maḥmūd Abū Rayya (d. 1970) established this connection when he wrote an article on Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, a famous transmitter often associated with *isra'īlīyāt*, entitled 'Kaʿb al-Aḥbār – the first Zionist' (Totolli, 'Isra'īlīyyāt', p. 209). For more background on Abū Rayya, see Nettler, *Muslim-Jewish Encounters*, p. 5ff. as well as Juynboll, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature*.

[207] Tottoli refers to a passage in Mas'ūdī's (d. 345/ 956) *Murūgh al-dhahab*, in which the term is used 'to indicate a kind of extravagant tradition, which the materials he cites belong to, i.e. a kind of tradition connected to the Banū Isrā'īl, and belonging to historical reports' (see Roberto Totolli, 'Isrā'īliyyāt', pp. 194–195).

[208] Tottoli, 'Isrā'īliyyāt' pp. 201–202.

[209] Vajda, 'Isrā'īliyyāt'.

[210] 'Imād al-Dīn Ismāʿīl b. ʿUmar b. Kathīr, generally known as 'Ibn Kathīr', was a famous Damascene historian, traditionist, and commentor on the Qur'an. Having initially pursued the path of a traditional *ʿālim*, Ibn Kathīr soon fell under the influence of Ibn Taymīya and his thought, echoing many of the latter's views. His most famous works include a history of Islam, entitled *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, as well as *Tafsīr al-qur'ān al-ʿaẓīm*, a Qur'anic commentary more commonly known as *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Laoust, 'Ibn Kathīr').

[211] See See Vajda, 'Isrā'īliyyāt' and also Totolli, 'Isrā'īliyyāt', p. 203.

[212] Tottoli, 'Isrā'īliyyāt', p. 193.

The fact that, in his interpretation of Ibn Taymīya's words, the author of the *Manār* commentary exclusively blames the corruption of narratives on the influence of Christian and Jewish sources may be more than just an explanation of the corruption of narratives as such, and it appears that his criticism is directed more specifically at the 'Jewishness' and the 'Christian-ness' of those influences. Again, this has to be seen in the wider context of the historical period in which the *Manār* commentary was written. Both ʿAbduh and Riḍā—although, the latter arguably even more so—were not only living at a time when the influence of Europe was most keenly felt, but also at a time when Muslim attitudes towards those influences were undergoing a significant change.

Here, too, some background may be useful: in the first half of the 19th century Europe was still seen as a role model by many of the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire. Aiming to catch up with the West in military terms at the beginning of the 19th century, Muslim rulers would, for example, encourage visitors to Egypt or send students to Europe in order to copy European civilisation, often indiscriminately. European philosophy was being studied by Muslims and European works of literature were being translated into the Arabic language,[213] in the hopes that the import of ideas from 'an obviously flourishing civilisation' would help bring Muslims back to

[213] Examples of prominent works of European literature that were translated into Arabic during that period include La Fontaine's *Fables*; *La Vengeance* by Pierre Zaccone; several plays by Molière, including *L'Avare*; Fénelon's *Télémaque*; *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe; as well as numerous poems by Lord Byron (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, pp. 23–28.

their former state of glory.[214] This perception changed drastically in the second half of the 19th century, when the political influence of Europe was increasingly being felt, with Egypt falling under effective British control by the middle of the 1870s. This change of attitude caused Muslim intellectuals such as ʿAbduh and Riḍā not only to start viewing Europe as an oppressor, but also prompted them to emphasise the dangers of an indiscriminate import of Western ideas into the Arab Muslim world. Discussing Riḍā's views on Christian missionaries, Simon Wood, for example, remarks, that, according to Riḍā, missionaries were 'open enemies', fully aware of traditionalist stagnation and that Muslims had abandoned the Qur'an and thus bent on 'hit[ting] them when they were the most vulnerable'.[215] As a result, as Yvonne Haddad notes, 'the effort to infuse the heritage of Islam with new, liberal western ideas became subsidiary to, perhaps even co-opted by, the need to face issues and independence from European hegemony'.[216]

Although the conclusions which Riḍā' draws from Ibn Taymīya's passage may conform to what we know about his own Modernist agenda, they are, however, at odds with the conclusions this medieval exegete appears to draw in his own work. Far

[214] Haddad, 'Pioneer', p. 34. It is worth mentioning that the translation movement of European works into Arabic that took place during the so-called *Nahḍa* period was something the Muslim Arab world had not experienced since the 'Golden Age' of Islam. As M. M. Badawi notes, '[b]etween the time when Arabic-speaking peoples acquainted themselves with Greek thought and the beginning of their modern renaissance, not one of their scholars or men of letters is known to have mastered any European language' (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, p. 23).

[215] Wood, *Christian Criticisms, Islamic Proofs*, pp. 35–36.

[216] Haddad, 'Pioneer', pp. 34–35.

from attempting to discredit the authenticity of the vast majority of narratives, Ibn Taymīya's original version appears to focus primarily on the question of how one can establish the authenticity of a report even in those cases when its *isnād* is weak or seemingly untrustworthy. Accordingly, rather than calling for the vast majority of *ḥadīth* reports to be discarded, the solution offered by Ibn Taymīya is to focus on their content on the one hand, and on the consensus of both *ḥadīth* scholars and the Muslim community on the other. According to him, if a number of independent individuals agree on a large number of a given report's content, then the report *must* be true, regardless of whether it has a conflicting *isnād* or even a hole in the chain of its transmission:

> The point is (*al-maqṣūd*) that, if a long *ḥadīth* has been narrated by two different parties (*idhā ruwiya min wajhayn mukhtalifayn*) without connivance (*min ghayr muwāṭa'a*), then it cannot be a mistake (*ghalaṭan*), just as it cannot be a lie (*kidhban*). The mistake cannot be in a long, complex story (*fī qiṣṣa ṭawīla mutanawwiʿa)*; it can merely be in some of its details (*fī baʿḍihā*). Therefore, if a person narrates a long and complex story, and another [person] narrates exactly the same [story] without connivance, then both stories cannot be a mistake, just as they cannot be lies.[217]

[217] Ibn Taymīya, *Muqaddima*, p. 65, ll. 6–11.

Based on this passage, it appears that Ibn Taymīya differs from Riḍā intellectually in the sense that he demonstrates a much stronger and, indeed, genuine attachment to the Muslim tradition. For example, he explicitly values the *ḥadīth* reports collected by Bukhārī[218] and Muslim,[219] of which he says that the 'majority of what is in [these works] can be ascribed to the Prophet with certainty'.[220] Similarly, he emphasises the consensus of theologians, jurists, and the scholars of *ḥadīth* from 'all confessions' (*min jamīʿ al-ṭawā'if*) and all schools of *fiqh*—namely the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfiʿī, and Ḥanbalī *madhāhib*— as a criterion to establish the validity of reports, even if they only contain one narrator in their chain.[221] Moreover, Ibn Taymīya also attributes a strong significance to the Muslim community as a whole in confirming the authenticity of the accepted narratives, dismissing the idea that the entire community might 'unite on an error' as preposterous:

> The *umma* cannot unite upon an error (*al-umma lā tajtamiʿu ʿalā khaṭa'*), for if a *ḥadīth* is in fact (*fī nafs al-amr*) a lie, but the *umma* believes (*muṣaddiqa lahu)* and accepts (*qābila lahu*) it, they have in fact united around believing a lie. This is

[218] Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī (d. 870) is considered one of the most famous collectors of prophetic traditions. His most famous work, the so-called *Ṣaḥīḥ*, contains a total of 7,397 traditions with full chains of transmitters spread over 97 books (Robson, 'al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl).

[219] Muslim b. al-Hajjāj (d. 875?) was also a famous collector of *ḥadīth*s who is most readily associated with his *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*. Excluding repetitions, his work is assumed to contain approximately 3,000 prophetic traditions (Juynboll, 'Muslim b. al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ'). Along with al-Bukhārī's collection, Muslim's work counts among the most prestigious of the *al-kutub al-sitta* (lit. 'the six books'), i.e. the six most authoritative Sunni Muslim *ḥadīth* collections.

[220] Ibn Taymīya, *Muqaddima*, p. 66, l. 2-3. Lit.: 'It can be affirmed with certainty that the Prophet said it' (*yuqṭaʿ bi-anna al-nabī qālahu*).

[221] Ibn Taymīya, *Muqaddima*, pp. 67-68.

> unity upon error and is impossible. Without unity and consensus it is possible that a narration contains a mistake or lie, just as it is possible in an analogy in which the truth may be in the opposite of what we believed. However, once unity is achieved upon a matter, we affirm its esoteric (*bāṭinan)* and exoteric (*ḍhāhiran*) meaning.[222]

Indeed, to Ibn Taymīya, a narrative's content is so important that he argues that even a *ḥadīth* from an unknown transmitter may be true, just as there may be something wrong with *ḥadīth*s that are ascribed to usually reliable transmitters, i.e., when there is nothing wrong with the *isnād* itself.[223]

Apart from the considerable amount of text that is missing in al-Suyūṭī's version, as printed in the *Manār* commentary, even the text that is largely the same in both versions[224] contains a few minor omissions that are, however, significant. Thus, while the passage as found in al-Suyūṭī, when talking about reports 'for which authentic traditions cannot be distinguished from weak ones', focuses on the aspect that most of them have no benefit to the believer, Ibn Taymīya's original informs its reader that, even in this category, there are some that are beneficial to Muslims and that 'God has placed for them sufficient signs showing them the truth.'[225] Moreover, Ibn Taymīya's original version even provides us with examples of the details that are sometimes passed down truthfully from the Prophet, such as 'the name of the

[222] Ibn Taymīya, *Muqaddima*, p. 66 l. 4 – p. 67, l. 6.
[223] Ibn Taymīya, *Muqaddima*, pp. 69–73.
[224] I.e. in al-Suyūṭī's version and in Ibn Taymīya's original.
[225] Ibn Taymīya, *Muqaddima*, pp. 56, ll. 3–4.

companion of Moses being al-Khiḍr'.[226] More significantly, despite his general call for caution when dealing with reports passed down from the 'People of the Book', Ibn Taymīya makes an extremely important concession: while it is true that one should generally suspend judgment in such cases, this is not the case when one has 'evidence [for the report's authenticity]' (*illa bi-ḥujja)*,[227] a tiny, but important detail that has been left out in al-Suyūṭī's version.

In general, a comparison between these two versions and their different conclusions suggests that Ibn Taymīya seems to take a much more favourable view on transmitted reports than the author of the *Manār* commentary does. And while it may be true that Ibn Taymīya, too, appears to break with tradition at times—for example, when he suggests that even narratives without valid *isnād*s might be reliable or when he places more emphasis on the consensus of the *umma* than on the authenticity of the *isnād* itself—his general conclusions nevertheless display, as we have seen, a stronger attachment to the classical *tafsīr* tradition. Furthermore, the emphasis which Riḍā places on the potential connections of narratives to Jewish and Christian sources appears to be absent in the original.[228]

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[226] Ibn Taymīya, *Muqaddima*, p. 56, ll. 9–11. Al-Khiḍr, who is also sometimes referred to as al-Khāḍir (lit.: 'the green one') is a legendary figure in Islam often associated with Q 18: 59–81, a story describing a journey of Mūsā—presumably the prophet Moses, although there exists some controversy—and one of his servants. The servant is assumed to be al-Khiḍr (Wensinck, 'al-Ḵẖaḍir (al-Ḵẖiḍr)').

[227] Ibn Taymīya, *Muqaddima*, p. 57, l. 1.

[228] It should be noted, however, that, while Ibn Taymīya was concered with the transmission of sound *ḥadīth*s, this was not necessarily the concern of Qur'anic commentators, let alone the authors of the *Manār* commentary (see Ahmed, 'Ibn Taymiyya', p. 78, for example).

In view of these differences as well as my suspicion that the author of the *Manār* commentary would have been familiar with the original text, it appears that, on this occasion, he may have ignored Ibn Taymīya's original version on purpose. Arguably, this is indicative of his techniques as a modern exegete and, in particular, his, as well as ʿAbduh's, use of tradition, similar examples of which I will examine in later chapters of this thesis. Specifically, this passage may be viewed in the context of Riḍā seeking to establish his own credentials as commentators on the Qur'an. By recruiting this prominent scholar as his ally, it appears that the author of the *Manār* commentary is trying to establish his own position in a discipline to which his name was relatively new at the time. This effort to find allies with whose names their readership was more familiar—in this case, Ibn Taymīya—seems particularly important in the case of an author who was advancing views that constituted a considerable break with those of his predecessors. Indeed, as we have seen, Riḍā was effectively arguing for a defining component of traditional *tafsīr* to be discarded altogether. Furthermore, in the context of both authors, one should not forget ʿAbduh and Riḍā's own reputation, or lack thereof, during and after their lifetimes. While ʿAbduh may have been a more familiar name—after all, he served as Grand Mufti of Egypt between 1899 until his death in 1905—some scholars have suggested that his importance during his lifetime may have been exaggerated.[229] Others, such as

[229] Kedourie, *Afghani and ʻAbduh*, pp. 5–6. Also see Chapter I, which provides brief biographical sketches

Mohamed Haddad, have gone even further, suggesting that during the first twenty or so years after his death, it had become unpopular, and perhaps even unacceptable, to talk about ʿAbduh due to a falling out he had had with Khedive ʿAbbās II just before the former's death in 1905.[230] In view of the fact that these introductions were only published in the latter half of the 1920s—in addition to the ensuing consequence that Riḍā's first readers would have belonged to the generation that had witnessed that 'period of oblivion [of ʿAbduh]' (Haddad: 'phase d'oubli')—[231] the need for the author of the *Tafsīr al-Manār* to find readily recognisable allies seems even more important.

of both authors.

[230] Haddad, 'Lecteurs', p. 32ff. Chapter I provides more information on ʿAbduh's difference with the khedive.

[231] Haddad, 'Lecteurs', p. 34.

4. The *Manār* Commentary as an 'Engaged' Commentary

One scholar has described the *Manār* commentary as 'a reflection of the socio-political setting in which [its authors] found themselves'.[232] In particular, it was to constitute an antithesis to the schools and principles favoured by traditional exegetes, whom ʿAbduh and Riḍā, as we have seen, accused of having deviated from the true guidance of the Qur'an by allowing their exegesis to develop into an 'intellectual exercise in grammar, theology, jurisprudence and philosophical dispute'.[233] While considerably less harsh in his description, Nicolai Sinai confirms this evaluation to the extent that it appears that classical commentators were primarily committed to a close reading of the scriptural text, rather than to dealing with issues external to the canonical texts such as social or political conflicts.[234] While some of my previous discussion has already given us some idea of ʿAbduh and Riḍā's engagement with the political and social realities of their time, I shall explore this assessment even further in this section.

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[232] Jafar, *Modern Qur'ānic Exegesis,* p. iii.

[233] Jafar, *Modern Qur'ānic Exegesis*, p. iii.

[234] Sinai, 'Koranexegese', p. 125. I am not trying to suggest that classical commentators on the Qur'an did not use sources and structures that were external to the Qur'an in their exegesis. On the contrary, they frequently resorted to other scholarly disciplines and *ḥadīth*. Rather, what I am trying to say is that the majority of pre-modern *mufassirūn* were typically not concerned with the concrete social and political issues of their day. And indeed, as we have seen, even in the thought of 18th-century scholars such as Ibn Wahhāb, political considerations were not necessarily as promoment as Riḍā would make them out to be. See p. 44 of this thesis.

4.1 Progress Through the Qur'an

The first example that I shall discuss provides us with a glimpse into the *Manār* commentary's understanding of early Islamic history, in which Riḍā establishes a link between the overwhelming military successes of the early Muslim community and the Qur'an's guidance.[235] Thus the reader is informed that, despite being small in size, poor and not experienced in politics,[236] the early Muslims managed to subdue the militarily much superior neighbouring empires of Persia and Byzantine, as well as 'some European countries',[237] and subsequently established in all of them 'an Arab state that was the crown of the earth in terms of sciences, art, and civilisation' (*allafū fīhā dawla ʿarabīya kānat zīnat al-arḍ fī al-ʿulūm wa-l-funūn wa-l-ḥaḍāra*).[238] According to the author of the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, the reason for these astonishing accomplishments lies solely in the Qur'an's guidance:

> The Arab Muslim would assume power (*yatawallā ḥukm)* of a country or a province at a time when he knew nothing about the art of leadership (*funūn al-dawla*), nor about the laws of government (*qawānīn al-ḥukūma*), nor did he practise the methods of politics (*asālīb al-siyāsa*) or the ways of administration (*ṭuruq al-idāra*). All he had in terms of knowledge were some surahs from the Qur'an, and he would fix (*yuṣliḥu*) the corruption (*fasādahā*) of that province

[235] The idea that there exists a link between military success and religious faith is nothing new in Sunni thought. As W.C. Smith remarks in his discussion of early Islamic history, '[t]he Muslim achievement was seen as intrinsic to their [i.e. Sunni] faith' (Smith, *Islam in History*, p. 29).

[236] *TM* I, p. 5, ll. 3–4.

[237] *TM* I, p. 5, ll. 9–10.

[238] *TM* I, p. 5, l. 10.

(*tilka al-wilāya*), preserving its people, resources and prestige, without taking away any of its rights.[239]

In a second step, Riḍā introduces the theme of moral righteousness, which he considers the direct result of the fact that Muslims were once guided by the Qur'an:

> When the human soul is good (*ṣalaḥa*) it will improve (*aṣlaḥa*) everything that it takes up and takes command of (*tatawallā amrahu*). Man is master of this earth and its righteousness and corruption depend on whether he is righteous or corrupt.[240]

And indeed, according to the author of the *Manār* commentary, this was once the case: the Arabs of the seventh century were righteous through the Qur'an because they 'recited it properly' (*kānū yatlūnahu ḥaqq tilāwatihi*). As a consequence, the Qur'an guided their souls in a way that enabled them to 'subjugate all of the earthly world' (*arshadahā ilā taskhīr hādhā al-kawn al-arḍī kullihi*), not just in military terms, but also in the various branches of science and industry.[241]

Arguably, the significance of this passage lies in the fact that it provides the reader with a good insight into the notion of *sunan Allāh* (lit.: 'God's customs), which Pink has identified as a central idea in both ʿAbduh's and Riḍā' exegesis. As for ʿAbduh's thought, the concept of *sunan Allāh* covers three main areas. First, it regards

[239] *TM* I, p.5, ll. 20–24.
[240] *TM* I, p. 6, ll. 1–3.
[241] *TM* I, p. 6, 11–14.

the idea that God has established natural laws that from which he will not digress, thereby excluding the possibility of miracles. Second, it includes ʿAbduh's belief that God has created humans with a natural disposition (Arabic: *fiṭra*), enabling them to distinguish right from wrong. Finally, Pink notes that ʿAbduh's 'most frequent and pervasive application of the notion of *sunan Allāh*' concerns his understanding of historical events. Specifically, ʿAbduh believed that God rewards 'moral societies that foster scientific inquiry and learning' rather than 'lazy, complacent and ignorant' ones.[242] As for Riḍā, who, according to Pink also 'drew heavily' on this concept, '[t]he downfall of nations invariably occurred when they, out of selfishness, laziness, or fatalism, refused to implement God's message, to use their God-given intellect, to follow the principles of good governance, and to purify their society from corruption'.[243] In addition, Christian Nispen tot Sevenear suggests that, to both ʿAbduh and Riḍā, this understanding of history—and, specifically, 'God's customs'—was key to combatting the 'apathy and passive, negative resignation' they perceived their Muslim contemporaries to be suffering from, instead pushing them to become masters of their own fates.[244] More specifically, Nispen tot Sevenaer states:

> C'est en face de ce spectacle désolant qu'il s'agit de rendre aux musulmans leur dignité et gloirs perdues en les ramenant à la vérité de leur religion, au sens

[242] Pink, ''Abduh, Muḥammad'.
[243] Pink, 'Riḍā, Rashīd'.
[244] Nispen tot Sevenaer, 'Sunan Allāh', p. 657ff.

> original de son enseignement comme on le retrouve chez les Pieux Anciens, avant sa déformation par les écoles [...] et par les pratiques populaires déviées; revenues à l'origine pure de leur religion, ils seront capables d'assumer les sciences et techniques modernes qui permettront de resister à la domination occidentale et de refaire la communauté glorieuse d'antant.[245]

Having introduced the reader to his belief in the existence of a direct connection between moral righteousness and both military and scientific progress, Riḍā now applies these ideas specifically to the political conditions of his time. Thus he inform his reader that, because of the widespread moral corruption he sees in Muslim countries, the outstanding achievements—namely, dominion and civilisation (*al-mulk wa-l-ḥaḍāra*)—that Muslims had once inherited from their forefathers are now lost.[246] However, according to the author of the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, simply trying to catch up in the sciences and arts, while neglecting proper moral upbringing, will not help in the Muslims' battle against being 'enslaved by foreigners' (*istiʿbād al-ajānib*).[247] The problem of moral corruption, according to Riḍā, is especially prevalent in the political sphere, with politicians being primarily concerned with amassing wealth for themselves and being responsible for the fact that 'everything that exceeds their

[245] Nispen tot Sevenaer, 'Sunan Allāh', p. 663.
[246] *TM* I, p. 6, l. 8.
[247] *TM* I, p. 6, 18–19.

greed (*kull mā faḍala ʿan shahawātihim*), even if what they spend is greater than it, is the share of the foreigners (*naṣīb al-ajānib*)'.[248]

We are presented here with an even more pronounced instance of the text's engagement with the political realities of its time. As mentioned previously, both ʿAbduh and Riḍā were living at a period during which the provinces of the Ottoman Empire were experiencing tremendous political change, which posed several challenges to the Muslim community. Specifically, intellectuals like ʿAbduh and Riḍā were facing the following issues. On the one hand, they found themselves increasingly disillusioned with their own governments, whom they perceived as corrupt and collaborating with the European occupying forces. On the other hand, their view on Europe, which, as we saw earlier, had originally been more favourable, changed, too: rather than perceiving them as that 'obviously flourishing civilisation' from which they could learn, the Europeans, and in particular the British, were increasingly considered to be colonial exploiters.[249] It is in view of this changed attitude towards the West, that a seemingly minor quotation receives its significance: in the course of his 'history lesson', Riḍā remarks that the early Muslim's achievements in the sciences were so extraordinary that they even prompted 'one of the sages of the West' (*min ḥukamā' al-gharb*) to express his amazement in a book on the development of nations:

[248] *TM* I, p. 6, 19–24.
[249] Y. Haddad, 'Pioneer', p. 34.

> A habitus of the different branches of the arts and sciences (*malakat al-funūn*) can only become deep-rooted (*tastaḥkimu*) in a community (*fī umma min al-umam*) in the course of three generations: the generation of imitation (*jīl al-taqlīd*), the generation of transition (*jīl al-khaḍrama*) and the generation of independence (*jīl al-istiqlāl*). The Arabs alone were exceptional (*shadhdha al-ʿarab waḥduhum*) in this respect, as a habitus of the different branches of art and science became deep-rooted among them in one single generation (*fī jīl wāḥid*).[250]

While the name of this 'sage of the West' is not given on this occasion, it appears that Riḍā is quoting the French sociologist Gustave Le Bon (d. 1931).[251] Apart from the fact that the latter was an author whom Riḍā often cited,[252] this quotation, albeit in a slightly different wording, appears again in one of the *Manār* commentary's later volumes, where Le Bon is explicitly mentioned as its author.[253]

I believe that this quotation is significant for two reasons. The first concerns the fact that it is attributed to a Western scholar.[254] As mentioned earlier, Riḍā's attitude towards the West, which even in his younger years had never been as

[250] *TM* I, p. 6, ll. 15-17.

[251] M. M. Badawi notes that Gustave Le Bon appears to have been one of the earliest European philosophers whose works were translated into Arabic. Specifically, he singles out Fatḥī Zaghlūl (d. 1914) as having been an 'important pioneer' in this respect as he also translated several of Jeremy Bentham's works as well as one by E. Desmoulins (Badawi, Modern Arabic Literature, pp. 29—30).

[252] See Ryad, 'Islamic Reformism and Christianity', p. 4 and p. 21, for example, as well as Emad Shahin's *Through Muslim Eyes*, p. 114.

[253] We find a slightly differently worded version of the same quotation in *TM* XI, p. 210, ll. 19–22.

[254] However, it should be noted that bringing in the 'friendly Westerner' is a common trope throughout the *Tafsīr al-Manār*. As we shall see later, Riḍā also resorts to this technique in his discussion of polygamy (see Chapter IV). In addition, Le Bon was an author whom Riḍā often cited, with Umar Ryad going so far as to call the sociologist one of his 'favourite Western writers' (Ryad, 'Islamic Reformism and Great Britain', p. 265).

positive as that of ʿAbduh, deteriorated even more over time, with the author of the *Manār* commentary increasingly viewing the West in hostile terms. Moreover, due to his familiarity with Western thinkers as well as political figures, Riḍā was also aware of some of their less flattering views on Islam and the Arabs. A good example of this is the accusation put forward by the French diplomat Gabriel Hanotaux, who believed that Arab backwardness was a result of features intrinsic to Islam and of the Arab race.[255] Quoting Gustave Le Bon therefore seems to have been an excellent way through which Riḍā was able to refute such accusations and advance his own belief in Islam as a religion that is conducive to progress. More importantly, however, it makes him appear as having found an ally from the otherwise so hostile West itself. This may have lent his views even more weight in the eyes of his readership.

The second reason why this passage is significant has to do less with its content or with the person to whom the author of the *Manār* commentary attributes it, but more with Riḍā's scholarly techniques. This is so because there are several reasons to doubt that we are presented with a faithful quotation of Le Bon's actual words. My first concern stems from the rather simple fact that I have not been able to

[255] Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh,* pp. 86–87. According to Sedgwick, a common accusation voiced by Europeans for Islam's backwardness was that it was a 'fatalist religion' (see Sedgwick, p. 67). Another Western intellectual who often voiced similar views to those of Hantoux, and of whom both authors would have been aware, was Ernest Renan (d. 1892). According to Gershoni and Jankowski, he viewed 'the Semitic peoples' as 'incurably inferior and backward in comparison to the Indo-European Aryans' (Gershoni and Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs*, p. 102).

find this quotation in any of Le Bon's works.[256] It is true that extensive online research yields the impression that the three-generations theory set forth in the above quotation appears to have entered the realm of common knowledge among a number of Muslim bloggers, who also usually attribute it to Gustave Le Bon, and specifically his *Les Lois Psychologiques de l'Evolution des Peuples*. However, it seems that this link emerged via Riḍā himself.[257] While I did come across a number of passages in Le Bon's works that emphasise the Arabs' extraordinary speed in creating a thriving civilization of their own,[258] there appears to exist no passage, neither in the original French editions nor in Arabic translations, in which Le Bon makes this specific statement.

Second, although Le Bon did praise the early Muslim community for their various achievements on a number of occasions, the Arabic rendering as we find it in the *Manār* commentary gives Le Bon's words what one could call a specifically Modernist, or even 'Manāresque', touch, which the French original is unlikely to have conveyed. This concern is based entirely on linguistic grounds and, in particular, on the occurrence of the words *taqlīd* and *khaḍrama*. It becomes even more valid when compared with the second occurrence of this alleged quotation in volume 11 of the

[256] I have unsuccessfully attempted to find this quotation in a number of Le Bon's works, including *Les Lois Psychologiques de l'Evolution des Peuples*, *La Civilisation des Arabes*, *Psychologie des Foules*, *La Civilisation de l'Inde*, and *l'Homme et les Sociétés*.

[257] See http://islamqa.info/en/149636, for example.

[258] See Le Bon, *Lois Psychologies*, p. 52, p. 57 as well as Le Bon, *Civilisation des Arabes*, p. 89, p. 118 and p. 135, for example.

Tafsīr al-Manār, where, interestingly, Riḍā refers to the 'third generation' as *jīl al-istiqlāl wa-l-ijtihād*, as opposed to *jīl al-istiqlāl* in volume 1. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1, *taqlīd* and *ijtihād* are concepts around which much of Riḍā's thought revolves. Specifically, to the author of the *Manār* commentary, *taqlīd* carried extremely negative connotations: after all, it was this 'blind imitation' of the opinions and decisions of previous religious authorities, which, according to Riḍā, disregarded the use of individual reasoning or personal effort in the interpretation of legal matters (*ijtihād*), that lay at the core of the perceived backwardness of the Muslim world. It is highly unlikely that Le Bon's French original would have featured anything remotely close to these two heavily loaded concepts that were so integral to Riḍā's thought.

The word *khaḍrama*, as used by Riḍā here to signify a transitional period, is equally peculiar. He presumably derived it from the term *mukhaḍram*, which in Classical Arabic is used for persons, especially poets, born in the *jāhilīya* and dying in Islamic times. The meaning of the word subsequently extended to also include those poets who straddled the Umayyad and Abbasid periods (*mukhaḍram al-dawlatayn*).[259] Considering the fact that the word *khaḍrama* itself cannot be found in standard dictionaries, the reader is thus not only presented with a peculiar neologism, but also with another occurrence of a word that carries distinctly Islamic connotations. One of

[259] See Jacobi, 'Mukhaḍram'.

these connotations concerns the concept of *jāhilīya*. While in traditional Sunni thought, the term *jāhilīya* referred to a specific period in the history of Islam,[260] ʿAbduh and Riḍā, and, in fact, many after them,[261] understood *jāhilīya* in a more ahistorical fashion. It was no longer merely a specific point in time, but rather an on-going state of ignorance that many of their contemporaries were finding themselves in as they had forgotten the Qur'an's real meaning. Again, it seems highly unlikely that a French sociologist's discussion of the development of the arts and sciences in human communities in general would have featured words with such specifically Islamic connotations. As a consequence, even if Le Bon had said something similar elsewhere, the choice of these particular terms in the Arabic translation shows that Riḍā at least engaged in some kind of interpretative process of his own. Again, this passage may be viewed as indicative of Riḍā's methods as a commentator on the Qur'an: in Gustave Le Bon he has found an ally who seemingly helps him advance his own views.

While not particularly 'Manāresque', there is one final linguistic peculiarity in this passage. It concerns the word *malaka*, which the author appears to use in Ibn Khaldūn's[262] (d. 1406) sense of 'a firmly rooted quality (*ṣifa rāsikha*) acquired by doing a

[260] Syahnan, *Quṭb*, p. 21

[261] Sayyid Quṭb is a famous example of a thinker who elaborated this concept significantly in his famous commentary *Fī ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* (see Syahnan, *Quṭb*, p. 21ff). For a useful introduction of how Quṭb understood this concept, also see Nettler, 'Guidelines'.

[262] Walī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan Ibn Khaldūn, commonly referred to as 'Ibn Khaldūn', is considered one of the most influential Arab historians. Although he has also authored a number of other works, not all of which have survived, Ibn Khaldūn is chiefly known for his *Muqaddima*, which, to this day, is widely regarded as a medieval precursor to the modern disciplines of sociology and cultural history (Talbi, 'Ibn Khaldūn').

certain action and repeating it time after time, until its form is firmly fixed'.[263] Even though often rendered into English as 'habit', I. M. Lapidus argues that the Arabic word is 'more than just a learned semiautomatic activity as in the English sense of the word' and 'bears the meaning of the Latin, *habitus* – an acquired faculty, rooted in the soul'.[264] In his *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldūn uses this term primarily to discuss an individual's or a society's acquisition of the crafts and sciences.[265] In view of both ʿAbduh and Riḍā's familiarity with this author,[266] as well as the similar context in which it occurs, it appears that Riḍā may have had Ibn Khaldūn in mind. Again, it seems highly unlikely that Le Bon's original quotation, even if it does exist somewhere, would have featured a term so closely associated with this Muslim historiographer and sociologist.

What, then, are the conclusions that one is to draw in regard to Riḍā's use of Western sources? Perhaps the instance of manipulation that we just witnessed serves as a good reminder of what this text is and what it is not. On the surface, this text is a work of *tafsīr*, partly because it refers to itself as one, but also because it meets, to some extent, the formal criteria that the genre imposes. On the other hand, this text

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Contemporary scholars such as Ron L. Nettler and Rober D. Lee have commented on Ibn Khaldūn's influence on non-fundamentalist modern Muslim intellectuals in the Arab world such as the late Tunisian intellectual Mohamed Talbi (d. 2017). See Nettler, 'Mohamed Talbi and Islamic Modernism' as well as Lee, 'Tunisian Intellectuals', for example.

[263] Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, p. 280, ll. 4–5

[264] Lapidus, 'Knowledge, Virtue and Action', p. 53

[265] See Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, pp. 280–290, for example.

[266] Frommherz, 'Ibn Khaldūn', pp. 154–55.

is arguably more than that, which is especially visible when considering its editorial history. As we have seen in Chapter I, the origins of the *Manār* commentary can be traced back to a journal whose primary purpose was neither to constitute a formal work of *tafsīr per se*, nor to address a readership of ʿ Riḍā's scholarly peers. Instead, the *Majallat al-Manār* aimed to discuss contemporary social and political matters before a new reading public and, in so doing, establish the relevance of the Qur'an in relation to them. Consequently, what mattered to the author was perhaps less his adherence to strict scholarly conventions[267] than the ideas that he was trying to communicate. Therefore, when Riḍā made the decision to turn those ideas into a freestanding Qur'anic commentary, he may have not been so much concerned with *actually* partaking in that longstanding tradition. Rather, it appears that he may have viewed the *tafsīr* genre as a respectable and, above all, recognisable medium through which he could spread his and ʿAbduh's reformist message. In this sense, one could argue that Riḍā's resorting to the *tafsīr* genre was perhaps a practical decision. Moreover, Riḍā was often writing in response not only to specific political events, but also to the judgements and accusations voiced by individuals both from within the Arab Muslim world and from Europe. Especially the latter would, as we have seen, accuse Islam of being inherently backward, an accusation which Riḍā naturally tried to ward off. After all, according to him, as well as ʿAbduh, the opposite was the case: Islam itself was

[267] In fact, those conventions seem to have mattered rather little to them, as suggested by his repeated denigrations of his predecessors' efforts.

perfect and not only compatible with progress in the various branches of the arts and sciences, but in fact conducive to it. Thus, the quotation attributed to Le Bon should perhaps be viewed in the larger context of the author's efforts to find allies from all sides that would help him justify his views to his readers.

4.2 Arabic and the Arabs

Another way in which ʿAbduh and Riḍā engage with the social, cultural, and political climate of their time and geographical area can be gauged from a discussion found in the *Muqaddima* on Arabic and the Arabs. Although Riḍā attributes this introduction to Muḥammad ʿAbduh, and, although it does reflect many of ʿAbduh's ideas, I have certain reservations in believing that this particular passage is exclusively the teacher's work.[268] At the very least, I suspect that it must have undergone significant editing at the hands of Riḍā. My suspicion is partly due to the fact that, as mentioned earlier, the first volume of the *Manār* commentary underwent signficiant revisions and was, in fact, only published in 1927, i.e., 22 years after ʿAbduh's death. Second, many of the ideas found in this specific passage carry some specifically political connotations and conform to many of the things we know regarding Riḍā's views on these matters.

The passage in question addresses the significance of both the Arabic language and the Arab people in the restoration of Islam's perceived former glory and, considered in the context of other statements in the two introductions to the *Tafsīr al-Manār* regarding the issue, reveals a certain tension. Earlier in this chapter, for instance, we saw that Riḍā vehemently criticised his exegetical predecessors for what

[268] I would like to make clear, however, that I am not seeking to question, neither here nor in the pages that follow, the fact that a solid command of the Arabic language was an importance concern for ʿAbduh, and, that this may have been, as Johanna Pink has observed, 'possibly for nationalist as well as religious reasons' (Pink, 'Abduh, Muḥammad').

he perceived to be the latters' inordinate emphasis on philological and grammatical discussions for their own sake. Similarly, in the *Muqaddima*, the reader is informed that an exegete's mastery of the Arabic language alone does not suffice for him to unravel fully the Qur'an's message of guidance. Specifically, ʿAbduh is said to have believed that, if this 'virtue that distinguishes the Sunnis from the other sects'—namely their 'excellent command of the Arabic language'—was enough, they would not be in the state of ignorance in which he currently perceives them to be.[269] Nonetheless, in the *Muqaddima*, the significance of the the Arabic language appears to be eleveated to a much higher position: not only does it guarantee the unity of the Muslim community, but we are also told that there will be no 'survival for Islam' (*lā baqā li-l-islām*) other than 'through the life of the Arabic language' (*bi-ḥayāt al-lugha al-ʿarabīya*).[270]

To be sure, the significance of the Arabic language to a proper understanding of religion and, to some extent, unity among believers *per se* is not new as such. For example, Walid Saleh notes that the tenth-century lexicographer al-Azharī[271] (d. 981) saw heresy as a 'direct result of a defective understanding of the working of Arabic' and, as such, established a similar connection, making the study of Arabic a

[269] *TM* I, p. 29, ll. 3–7.

[270] *TM* I, p. 29, ll. 8–9.

[271] Abū Mansūr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. al-Azhar was a lexicographer from Herat, modern-day Afghanistan. In addition to his commentaries on Abū Tammām's *Muʿallaqāt* and *Dīwān*, al-Azharī is known for a dictionary called *Tahdhīb al-lugha* (Blachère, 'al-Azharī').

prerequisite for exegetes.[272] Similarly, Shuruq Naguib has discussed the 'fundamental necessity' 16th-century Ottoman scholars attributed to the study of Arabic for religious education.[273] To this can be added the notion of the inimitability (*iʿjāz*) of the Qur'an, i.e. a concept developed by the 11th-century scholar ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078) that revolves around 'the Qur'an's literary inimitability on the basis of a linguistic theory of eloquence'.[274]

However, there is an important difference in ʿAbduh's—or, possibly on this particular occasion, ʿAbduh and Riḍā's—discussion of the matter. While al-Azharī's view suggests that pre-modern thinkers might have feared that a deficient understanding of Arabic may lead to dissent and nonconformity among believers (i.e. 'heresy'), it would not appear that they deemed the use of other languages in religious matters a threat to the very surivival of Islam.[275] Indeed, in his comprehensive examination of a range of early Persian translations and commentaries of the Qur'an, Travis Zadeh concludes that pre-modern scholars not only tolerated but even encouraged the use of the Qur'an in Persian as well as other languages—seemingly a reflection of 'the practical hermeneutic, if not liturgical, importance of approaching scripture in a linguistic medium other than Arabic' at the time.[276]

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[272] Saleh, *The Formation of Classical Tafsīr*, p. 130.

[273] Naguib, 'Guiding the Sound Mind', p. 14.

[274] Naguib, 'Guiding the Sound Mind', pp. 15–16.

[275] Johanna Pink has called Riḍā's 'polemic against the text being translated into other languages' 'a central aspect of [his] engagement with the Qur'an' (Pink, 'Riḍā, Rashīd')

[276] Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qur'an*, p. 133.

Again, one can only fully gauge the significance of the statements found in the *Tafsīr al-Manār* in the context of the cultural and political developments witnessed by the authors of this commentary, and, in particular, Rashīd Riḍā. I have stated elsewhere that the authors of the *Manār* commentary were fighting on several fronts. On the one hand, they viewed Europe as colonial exploiters whose presence in Arab lands they increasingly came to reject and from whom they wanted to distance themselves culturally. For example, ʿAbduh had arguably abandoned any pro-European sentiments he may previously have harboured by the time of the failure of the ʿUrābī revolt in 1882—an uprising of which he had been supportive, and which eventually led to the formal British occupation of Egypt. As for Riḍā, Rainer Brunner has suggested that he feared that any weakening of the status of the Arabic language would ultimately lead to Western languages being taught in Egypt's schools which, in turn, he feared would lead to atheism and digression from Islam altogether.[277] On the other hand, both ʿAbduh and Riḍā considered their own local governments as corrupted, incompetent, and, to some extent, as European puppets.

Perhaps even more significantly, however, one should not forget Riḍā's growing hostility towards the Ottomans, whom he increasingly came to blame for the perceived process of decline of Muslim regions. In so doing, he reportedly differed from ʿAbduh, who, according to Adeed Dawisha, was not 'particularly hostile to

[277] Brunner, 'Lātinīya', p. 81.

Ottoman rule over Arab lands'.[278] And indeed, as Jomier notes, the relationship between Turks and Arabs was a topic that occupied the thought and writings of Rashīd Riḍā, especially in the *Manār* journal:

> There are articles [in the *Manār* journal] on Arab nationalism, on relations between Turks and Arabs and on the need to ensure for the Arabic language a land of freedom where it may flourish; Islam cannot in fact survive without it, especially at a time when the Turks are adopting a hostile linguistic policy.[279]

Also talking in the context of Riḍā's anti-Ottoman views, Dawisha notes that, according to the author of the *Manār* commentary, Arabic was 'the only language "in which the doctrines and laws of Islam could be thought about"', that 'to invest the office of the Khalifa with the Ottoman rulers in Istanbul was a travesty', and, that the Ottomans had, in fact, 'undermined' Islam. [280] Similarly, Brunner has pointed to Riḍā's repeated condescending descriptions of Turkish as a 'barbaric and limited language' that Riḍā considered unable to compete with Arabic, particularly in the fields of

[278] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism*, p. 18. According to Eliezer Tauber, the 'most detailed exposition of [Riḍā's] ideas' about a future Arab Muslim empire, in which he also discsusses issues such as the relationship between religion and state, can be found in a document called 'General Organic Law of the Arab Empire' (Tauber, 'Three Approaches, One Idea', p. 197).

[279] Jomier, 'Al-Manār'. In addition to previous Ottoman policies, the 'hostile linguistic policy' mentioned here also refers to a 'process of language revolution' initiated by the government of Turkey in the 1920s and early 1930s aimed at solidifying the new republic's state ideology (Çolak, 'Language Policy and Official Ideology in Early Republican Turkey'). Arguably, the policies adopted by the Turkish Republic would also have been of concern to Rashīd Riḍā.

[280] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism*, p. 18.

religion, science, and politics.[281] It is perhaps in this broader ideological context—i.e. both authors' wariness of European influence coupled with especially Riḍā's anti-Ottoman sentiments—that the above statement concerning the 'survival' of Islam through the Arabic language should be viewed.

Similar notions of Arab superiority are also expressed in the *Fātiḥa*, where Riḍā dedicates a significant amount of space to emphasising the Arabs' leading role in the successes of the early Muslim community. Thus, the reader is informed that the 'state that was the crown of the earth in terms of sciences, art, and civilisation', which even impressed some Western observers,[282] was an 'Arab' one.[283] Moreover, the Muslims who 'would assume power of a country or a province at a time when [they] knew nothing about the art of leadership' and 'fix the corruptions of that province, preserving its people, resources and prestige, without taking away any of its rights'[284] were not just Muslims, but specifically 'Arab' Muslims (lit. in the singular, *al-muslim al-ʿarabī*).

In all of this, the reader can once again witness a certain tension. On the one hand, both introductions leave little doubt of their authors', and, specifically, Riḍā's conviction that Arabs once played, and should once again play, a leading role in a united and thriving Muslim *umma*; moreover, both texts suggest that Muslim unity

[281] Brunner, 'Lātinīya', pp. 84–85.
[282] *TM* I, p. 5, l. 10.
[283] *TM* I, p. 6, l. 15.
[284] *TM* I, p. 5, ll. 21–24.

can only be achieved through linguistic unity, for which Arabic—the language that 'made [Muslims] brothers (*ikhwānan*)'[285]—is most appropriate. On the other hand, however, the reader is also reminded that 'the only nationality Muslims have is their religion' (*laysa la-hum jinsīya illā dīnuhum*).[286] Muslims, according to the authors of these texts, are brothers who should not be separated by lineage, language, or government—statements which one scholar has interpreted as ʿAbduh and Riḍā's overall opposition to nationalist movements and their preference for a state that would include Muslims of various origins.[287]

Perhaps these tensions are best explained by taking, once again, into account not only the long and complex editorial history of the *Manār* commentary, but also the occasional difference in opinion of its authors, in addition to the tensions they themselves may have felt regarding certain topics. As mentioned above, ʿAbduh's opposition to Ottoman rule never appears to have been as strong as that of his pupil to begin with. What's more, scholars such as Christian van Nispen tot Sevenaer have remarked that ʿAbduh's exegetical methods were generally more ambiguous and less systematic than those of his pupil.[288] According to Johanna Pink, this may be a result

[285] *TM* I, p. 29, l. 20.

[286] *TM* I, p. 11, l. 14. The use of the modern concept of 'nationality' stands out as it is indicative of Riḍā's engagement with the modern world.

[287] Ramadan, *Aux Sources*, p. 141.

[288] Van Nispen tot Sevenaer, 'Sunan Allāh', p. 653.

of ʿAbduh's never having seriously intended to write a complete *tafsīr* in the first place.[289]

Rashīd Riḍā's writings over the years—despite his short-lived calls for unity between Arabs and Turks within the Ottoman Empire during the Young Turk movement—reveal a consistently stronger anti-Ottoman attitude than that which we can attribute to his teacher. In this context, Adeed Dawisha refers to an article written by Riḍā in 1900, in which the author contrasts Arab military achievements with those of the Ottomans, and in which he concludes that the 'greatest glory in the Muslim conquests goes to the Arabs'.[290] Nevertheless, Dawisha rightly observes that, even at those times that Riḍā called for political separation from the Ottomans and statehood for the Arabs, as he did during the 1916 Arab revolt, this stemmed from a belief that such change would be 'of benefit to all Muslims'. To put it in Dawisha's own words:

> Yet here again, as was the case of Afghani (*sic*!) and ʿAbduh, Rida's (*sic*!) primary concern was with the realm of Islam. Whatever arguments and recommendations he proposed were primarily aimed to serve the interests and glorification of Islam. If "Arabism" appeared as an element of Rida's writing, it was at best a corollary force to be used soley for the rejuvenation of Islam and the Muslim *Umma*. The cause of Arabism was in no way meant to supercede that of the wider Islamic solidarity, and so his antagonism toward the "Turkish usurpers" was not meant to undermine the Ottoman Empire, for

[289] Pink, 'Abduh, Muḥammad'.
[290] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism*, p. 19.

> he saw the continued health of the Empire as a strength for Islam. Consequently, Rida remained committed to his Ottoman nationality until the last years of World War I when Ottoman defeat loomed in the horizon.[291]

The driving force behind Riḍā's considerations of the role of Arabic and the Arabs—coupled with his growing anti-Ottoman sentiments—may thus have been primarily or, at least, to a certain extent, a practical one, with the author supporting those courses-of-action that, to him, had the greatest chance of ensuring the strength of Islam at a given time. This, along with these introductions' long editorial history—over two decades during which Riḍā's ideas and outlook undoubtedly underwent various transformations—might help explain why, in these texts, we witness some of the tensions described above. Specifically, all these factors might explain why Riḍā sought to emphasise the importance of Arabs assuming a leading role on the one hand, whilst nevertheless reminding his reader that, at the end of the day, Muslims did not have any 'nationality' but Islam on the other.

[291] Dawisha, Arab Nationalism, p. 19.

5. Chapter Conclusion

One scholar has noted that, '[i]n contemplating *tafsīr*, one stands before a sea of writing that has been expanding for the last millennium and a half. Muslims over the centuries who read verse 31:27 of the Qur'ān, which speaks of the forest of pens and the seas of ink that must be consumed in any attempt to write down the word of God, have managed themselves to write as much. The self-declared inexhaustibility of God's word found its match in the inexhaustibility commentators saw in its meaning. One could argue that the vastness of the literature of quranic commentary is itself a cultural confirmation of the fathomlessness of the word of God.'[292]

It appears that, to some extent, the material with which we have been presented in these two introductions largely conforms to this assessment; or, at the very least, it somewhat foreshadows that what is to follow in the remainder of the *Tafsīr al-Manār* will reveal the addition of more new elements to, or perhaps even breaks with, this well-known genre in Islamic literature. While it would be hard to deny, based on what we have seen in the *Fātiḥa* and the *Muqaddima*, that this commentary, too, features certain elements that, at first sight, makes it appear profoundly embedded in the classical tradition—and, consequently, might make the *Tafsīr al-Manār* seem like just another title on the long list of works of *tafsīr*—we have also seen that there appears to be something quite different and, in a sense, new

[292] Saleh, *The Formation of Classical Tafsīr*, p. 1.

about this commentary. Apart from some of the more blatant breaks with traditional viewpoints, a close reading of these two introductions suggests that the *Tafsīr al-Manār* does effect a significant transformation of the *tafsīr* genre, albeit a subtle one. Wrapped up in a seemingly traditional format, the two texts with which we are dealing here display, in certain ways, elements that could be described as being part of a kind of socio-political manifesto. In terms of the ideas expressed, the authors of the *Fātiḥa* and the *Muqaddima* not only demonstrate an interest in the world around them in a much more pronounced fashion than traditional commentators did, but, in fact, locate the very solution to the perceived political and socio-economic shortcomings of the Muslim world in the Qur'an itself. In so doing, ʿAbduh and Riḍā do not shy away from making their personal views heard in a fashion that is arguably unprecedented in the previous tradition. In terms of methods, these two texts demonstrate that, to ʿAbduh and Riḍā, the use of traditional sources is no longer an expression of loyalty or a demonstration of one's own skills as a *mufassir*; rather, tradition appears to serve a purpose, which is the advancement of the authors' own agenda.

Chapter III: An Analysis of the Content and Literary Features of the Introduction and Concluding Remarks to the *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*

1. Chapter Introduction

Strikingly, the detailed verse-by-verse exegesis of each of the twelve surahs treated in the *Manār* commentary is preceded by summary introductions. These are, as one scholar has rightly remarked, 'not an indispensable component of classical commentaries' on the Qur'an.[293] The tenth-century exegete al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), for example, loses no time and jumps into his discussion of the first verse without further ado (*al-qawl fī ta'wīl qawlihi jalla thanā'uhu ...*).[294] Whenever a pre-modern commentary does feature preface-like material, this will usually be in the form of a brief statement on whether a given surah, or some of its constituent parts, were revealed before or after the *ḥijra*.[295] Examples include al-Zamakshārī's (d. 1144)[296] *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqā'iq al-*

[293] Sinai, 'Reading Sūrat al-Anʿām', p. 139.

[294] Al-Tabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 8, p. 5, l. 3.

[295] Sinai, 'Reading Sūrat al-Anʿām', p. 139.

[296] Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī was a famous grammarian, philologist, lexicographer, and exegete of Perisan descent. One of the greatest authorities on the Arabic language, al-Zamakhsharī is arguably best known for his Qur'anic commentary, which features wealth of linguistic and grammatical discussions (Madelung, 'al-Zamakhsharī' and Versteegh, 'al-Zamakhsharī').

tanzīl wa-ʿuyūn al-ghawāmiḍ fī wujūh al-ta'wīl and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 1210)[297] *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*.[298]

On occasion, a pre-modern commentary will go further than that by including traditions, often *ḥadīth* reports or slight variations thereof, that provide background stories concerning the surah's revelation, its significance and merits (*faḍā'il*),[299] and, in some cases, provide a summary of the most important themes discussed in the surah.[300] A good example for this is *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān ʿan tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1035): in addition to providing his reader with the surah's more general features[301]—for example, that it is Medinan and that it contains nine abrogated verses, including Q 5:2 ('O Believers! Violate not the sanctity of the Symbols of God …'), which

[297] Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿUmar b. al-Ḥusayn Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī was an extremely prolific theologian, philosopher, and exegete of Persian descent. His most famous work is arguably his Qur'anic commentary (Anawati, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī').

[298] Griffel, 'Al-Rāzī', pp. 313–44. In the same article, Griffel remarks that al-Rāzī's date of death of sometimes erroneously appears as 1209 in Western scholarly works, which he dismisses, effectively arguing that the two reported dates in circulation fall between 29 March 1210 and May 1210 (see Griffel, 'al-Rāzī', p. 331, esp. Footnote 68).

[299] For a more detailed discussion of this term, see Chapter II.

[300] The use of the umbrella term '*ḥadīth* reports' in reference to the traditions cited in the works above is justified insofar as they largely meet the formal requirements of this technical term. Both traditional Muslim scholars and modern Western ones appear to agree that, for a tradition to qualify as a '*ḥadīth*', it must contain the following two features: first, the so-called *isnād*, which Muḥammad Zubayr Siddīqī defines as 'the chain of the narrators who transmitted it—from the Prophet, a Companion, or a Follower, down to the compiler itself', and second, the text iself, the *matn* (Siddīqī, *Ḥadith Literature*, pp. 76–77). All three authors listed above include traditions that contain both *isnād*s as well as a *matn*. For example, although the chains of transmitters in the works of al-Thaʿlabī and al-Suyūṭī appear to be abbreviated, they are nevertheless present. As for Ibn Kathīr, he even goes as far as to discuss the relative strength of each tradition in his footnote, classifying it as weak or strong and providing further information regarding the transmitters, as well as referring to other scholars such as al-Bayhaqī.

[301] Some of the other more general features listed by this author include that surah 5 is 'among the last [surahs] revealed in the Qur'an' (*inna sūrat al-mā'ida min ākhir al-qur'ān nuzūlan*), as well as that it contains 11,933 letters (*iḥdā ʿashara alfan wa-tisʿami'atu thalāthatu wa-thalāthūna ḥarfan*) and 2804 words (*alfān wa-thamānimi'atu wa-arbaʿatu kalimātin*). Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf*, vol. 4, p. 5, ll. 5–6.

was abrogated by Q 9:5, the so-called 'Verse of the Sword'—he also includes three *ḥadīth* reports that allude to the surah's thematic emphases as well as its merits, In the case of surah 5, this concerns, among other things, the surah's bringing definitive laws to the Muslim community and its concern with Jews and Christians.[302] In a similar fashion, Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) begins the verse-by-verse exegesis of surah 5 with a selection of *ḥadīth* reports that provide anecdotes surrounding its revelation and which emphasise *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*'s status as the last surah revealed to Muḥammad, as well as its specific qualities.[303] The arguably uncontested record-holder for offering an entirely tradition-based introduction is al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505), who, in his *al-Durr al-manthūr fī al-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr* dedicates nearly four pages to enumerating *ḥadīth* reports which, similar to Ibn Kathīr's commentary, discuss the merits and origins of surah 5.[304] In so doing, al-Suyūṭī provides no explanations of his own, instead leaving the reports seemingly speak for themselves.

[302] Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf*, vol. 4, p. 5, ll. 1–10. Specifically, this author's introduction reproduces a *ḥadīth* report attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad which tells its audience to 'abide by [the surah's] permissions and prohibitions' (*fa-aḥillū ḥalālahā wa-ḥarrimū ḥarāmahā).*

[303] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, p. 5 l. 1 – p. 6, l. 12. An example of such a *ḥadīth* report is one attributed to Jubayr Ibn Nufayr (d. 699): 'I performed the Hajj, and then I entered upon 'Ā'īsha, and she said to me: 'O Jubayr, do you read Al-Mā'ida?' I said: 'Yes.' She said: 'Indeed, it is the last chapter that was revealed, so whatever permitted things you find in it, then make it lawful, and whatever forbidden things you find in it, then make it unlawful' (Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 6, ll. 8–10).

[304] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr*, vol. 5, p. 156, l. 1 – p. 159, l. 11. I should note, though, that this appears to be a typical feature of the entirety of *Al-Durr*. Indeed, in his doctoral theses Shabir Ally describes al-Suyūṭī's commentary as the 'culmination of tradition-based exegesis (*tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*)' as it relies almost entirely on *ḥadith* throughout his work, with the commentator rarely offering a comment of his own. See Ally, 'Culmination', p. ii.

It appears that summary introductions—especially those offering not merely a list of traditional material—will become more common in commentaries produced after the publication of the *Tafsīr al-Manār*.[305] Sayyid Quṭb's (d. 1966)[306] *Fī ẓilāl al Qur'ān*, for example, features an eight-page introduction in which this author provides his reader with a summary of the topics discussed in the surah. However, his introduction to *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* differs from that of the *Manār* commentary in a number of aspects; in particular, Quṭb adopts a much less scholarly approach and appears to use his introduction first and foremost as a platform to re-iterate his worldview and, indeed, his doctrine.[307]

Chapter introductions appear to be equally common in non-Sunni Arabic commentaries of the modern period, with one fairly well-known example being the twenty-volume commentary *Al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by the Iranian scholar Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī[308] (d. 1981). Specifically, this 20th-century exegete usually prefaces his discussion of individual surahs with short general comments that

[305] See Johanna Pink's *Sunnitischer Tafsīr in der modernen Islamischen Welt* for more examples of contemporary commentaries, including those written in languages other than Arabic, that feature introductions.

[306] Ibrāhīm Ḥusayn Shādhilī Sayyid Quṭb, generally known as 'Sayyid Quṭb', was an Egyptian civil servant and writer who is sometimes dubbed as the 'ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood'. He wrote his most famous work, a 30-volume Qur'anic commentary called *Fī ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, predominantly while in prison following a failed assassination attempt of Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser. His new and largely ahistorical interpretation of a number of Islamic concepts including *jihād* has arguably inspired a number of radical movements and continues to do so to this day (Jansen, 'Sayyid Ḳuṭb'). See Nettler, 'Guidelines' for a concise overview of his life and thought.

[307] Quṭb, *Fī ẓilāl*, vol. 4, pp. 1–8.

[308] Muḥammad-Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī is arguably the most prominent Shi'ite commentator on the Qur'an of the 20th century. Louis Medoff has suggested that al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's commentary was, in part, written as a response to the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, which al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī is said to have found 'objectionable in its hasty rejection of miracles and other modernist tendencies' (Medoff, 'Ṭabāṭabā'ī').

provide the reader with a brief summary of the surah's thematic emphases, as viewed by the author. In the case of surah 5, such comments include the importance of the surah in its provision of 'numerous laws concerning legal punishment and retribution (*kathīr min aḥkām al-ḥudūd wa-l-qiṣāṣ*)'; references to 'many of the injustices committed by the Israelites (*al-ishāra ilā kathīr min maẓālim banī isrā'īl*)'; as well as some historical scholarly background: for example, according to al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, all transmitters agreed (*lam yakhtalif ahl al-naql*) that this surah was 'the last detailed chapter which was revealed to the Messenger of God [...] towards the end of his life'.[309] Further, the author mentions that both Sunni and Shia accounts (*riwāyāt al-farīqatayn*) agree that this surah is 'the abrogating surah, not the abrogated one (*nāsikha ghayr mansūkha*)'.[310]

In addition to its summary introductions, the *Manār* commentary also features short conclusions for surahs 4–11. These appear to be a feature pioneered by this commentary, as a brief look into the works mentioned above reveals that concluding remarks are generally not included in pre-modern commentaries on the Qur'an. While some commentators, such as the 13th-century exegete al-Rāzī, may include a line that informs their readers that their exegesis of a given surah's is now completed,[311] most commentators tend to continue immediately with the following

[309] Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mīzān*, vol. 5, p. 157, ll. 5–19.

[310] Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mīzān*, vol. 5, p. 157, ll. 17–18.

[311] Al-Razī, for example, usually ends his chapters in this fashion. The specific example for surah 5 reads that 'the exegesis of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* is now completed (*tamma tafsīr sūrat al-mā'ida*)'. Al-Rāzi, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, vol. 12, p. 148, ll. 16–17.

surah.[312] And indeed, even in later works of *tafsīr* concluding remarks will not necessarily become the norm: Sayyid Quṭb, while certainly not shying away from giving his personal views in general, does not provide conclusions at the end of his verse-by-verse exegesis of individual surahs. The same holds true for al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's commentary.

The goal of this chapter is to take a closer look at the introduction and conclusion of the *Tafsīr al-Manār*'s exegesis of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*. Specifically, I pay attention to the structure and the thematic waymarks provided by these two texts, in an attempt to draw broader conclusions about Riḍā's exegetical and intellectual methods as a modern commentator on the Qur'an. In so doing, I also examine the author's engagement with classical sources and scholarship, his use of language, as well as his views on textual coherence—i.e. the relationship between the Qur'an's individual surahs and verses—as it is apparent in these two texts.

[312] See the commentaries of al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn Kathīr and al-Thaʿlabī, for example.

2. The Introduction to *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*

The content and structure of the summary introduction to *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*, which makes up two pages in the *Manār* commentary, can be summarised as follows:[313]

1. The surah's technical features (p. 116, ll. 2–4)
2. The surah's origins and history (ll. 5–11)
3. The surah's relationship with *Sūrat al-Nisā'* (p. 116, l. 12 – p. 117, l. 18)
   3.1 Quotations from tradition (p. 116, l. 12 – p. 117, l. 4)
   3.2 A personal assessment (p. 117, ll. 5–18)

Riḍā begins his introductory remarks with a brief discussion of what one may describe as some of the surah's technical features, and does so in a fashion that is reminiscent of classical *tafāsīr*, which betrays his familiarity with those works. Accordingly, the reader is informed that this surah consists of 120 verses if one follows the Kufan system of verse division, 122 according to the *Hijāzī* and *Shāmī* systems of verse division, and 123 if one were to follow the Basran division.[314] Al-Tha'labī, for example, provides similar information in his introduction to surah 5,

[313] In accordance with the remainder of the commentary, each page of these introductory remarks is headed by a short description of the topics discussed. In this case, the heading reads '*Sūrat al-Mā'ida* and its interrelation with *Sūrat al-Nisā'* (*al-tanāsub baynahā wa-bayna sūrat al-nisā'*)'. *TM* VI, pp. 116–17.

[314] *TM* VI, p. 116, ll. 2–4. These differences in the respective schools' numbering systems appear accurate and are also confirmed by Anton Spitaler. See Spitaler, 'Die Verszählung', p. 36.

stating that the surah consists of '11,933 letters (*ḥarfan*), 2804 words and 120 verses'.[315] Likewise, al-Zamakhsharī and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767?) inform their readers that the surah contains 120 verses, with the latter specifying that he follows the *Kūfī* numbering system.[316] Although this way of introducing a surah is a technique commonly found in pre-modern commentaries on the Qur'an, the fact that the author of the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, too, chooses to provide an overview of all the major verse divisions is somewhat significant as it demonstrates to the reader his learnedness and familiarity with the long-standing tradition of Qur'an scholarship that he denigrates on many occasions elsewhere in the text. In addition, the fact that the author does not mention his own preference for a particular verse division—unlike many of their classical colleagues, who usually endorse one, regardless of whether they attribute it to a specific school or not—may be viewed as a sign that, to him, these technicalities, although perhaps indicative of one's knowledge of the scholarly discussion, do not really matter in a Muslim's attempt to unravel the true message of the Qur'an, thus in line with his general focus on content rather than form.[317]

[315] Al-Thaʿlabī, *Al-Kashf*, vol. 4, p. 5, ll. 5–6.

[316] Al-Zamakharī, *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl*, vol. 2, p. 321, l. 1, and Muqātil, *Tafsīr Muqātil*, vol. 1, p. 276, l. 2.

[317] However, it is worth mentioning that the provision of various numbering systems can also be found in al-Alūsī's commentary, published a few decades before the *Tafsīr al-Manār* (see al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol. 4, p. 48, for example). Whether or not this 19th-century exegete is part of the pre-modern tradition is open to debate as there exists alarmingly little scholarship on his commentary.

Riḍā's application of classical exegetical methods can also be witnessed in the following paragraph. Thus, the reader is told that the surah is Medinan[318] and that, more specifically, its revelation was completed on the Day of *ʿArafa*,[319] on a Friday during the Prophet's Farewell Pilgrimage, and not on the Day of *Ghadīr Khumm* or the twelfth day of *Dhū al-Hijja*, as others have suggested.[320] A similar overview can be found in al-Suyūṭī's list of *ḥadīth* reports that appear at the beginning of his *al-Durr al-manthūr*: for example, the reader is informed that the surah—which he, too, identifies as Medinan—was revealed between Mecca and Medina during the Prophet's Farewell Pilgrimage. However, al-Suyūṭī does not address the issue concerning the exact day the surah was revealed; instead, he puts greater emphasis on the surah's significance by emphasising on several occasions that the camel on which Muḥammad was riding nearly broke its members due to the surah's weight.[321]

Riḍā then provides his reader with an exposé of how *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* relates to the previous surah, viz. *Sūrat al-Nisā'*. At first glance, this discussion, too, does not seem to be novel as such, as questions concerning the relationship between the constituent elements of the Qur'an—often referred to as *munāsaba* ('interrelatedness')—also appear to have occupied classical commentators. In his

[318] Riḍā specificies that by 'Medinan' he means 'what was revealed after the *ḥijra* (*mā nazala baʿda al-ḥijra)'. *TM* VI, p. 116, l. 5.

[319] The text literally states that the verse 'on this day I have perfected your religion for you', i.e. Q 5:3, was revealed on that day.

[320] *TM* VI, p. 116, ll. 7–9.

[321] Al-Suyutī, Al-Durr, vol. 2, p. 446.

survey of a number of pre-modern introductions to *Sūrat al-Anʿām*, Nicolai Sinai, for instance, mentions Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) and Ibrahīm al-Biqāʿī's[322] (d. 1480) interest in the relationship between Qur'anic verses, remarking that '[...] some consideration of aspects of textual coherence is by no means absent from the earlier exegetical tradition'.[323] Although another scholar, Salwa El-Awa, notes that al-Rāzī's discussion of the topic, which can be found in the lengthy introduction to his *tafsīr*, 'does not contain a clear definition of al-Rāzī's view of *munāsaba* nor does it introduce the theoretical grounds for his analysis of the verses with regard to their relations or their order',[324] she concedes that this is not meant to suggest a lack of interest in the topic on the part of al-Rāzī. Rather, it 'indicate[s] the fact that until the time of Rāzī the approach of Qur'anic exegetes to the linguistic aspect of *munāsaba* was still in the development stage as shown by their intuitive employment of the idea rather than following a clear framework which guided their analysis.'[325]

[322] Al-Biqāʿī was a highly controversial Damascene exegete who lived towards the end of the Mamluk period. His open use of the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels as sources for his Qur'anic commentary resulted in severe criticism from his contemporaries, some of whom accused him of 'heresy' while others 'called for his book to be burned' (Saleh, *In Defense* of the Bible, p. 1). Johanna Pink has identified al-Biqāʿī as Riḍā's 'authority for the interconnection between verses' (Pink, 'Riḍā, Rashīd).

[323] Sinai, 'Reading Sūrat al-Anʿām', p. 136. The issue is studied in detail in a monograph by Mustansir Mir (Mir, *Coherence*).

[324] El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'an*, p. 14.

[325] El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'an*, p. 14. I should emphasise, however, that the authors of the *Manār* commentary do not provide a clear definition of *munāsaba* either, nor do they follow a clear-cut 'framework which guide[s] their analysis'. However, as we shall see below, they do dedicate a considerable amount of space to this topic in each of their surah introductions, justifying the assessment that their treatment of this topic was more systematic and arguably less 'intuitive' than that of their classical colleagues.

My own cursory reading of al-Rāzī's commentary, in the course of which I focused predominantly on surah 5, largely confirms this assessment. However, I would not go so far as to describe his discussion of this topic as purely 'intuitive', instead agreeing more with Mustansir Mir, who describes al-Rāzī's overall attempts to find coherence and continuity between Qur'anic verses as 'relatively systematic'.[326] A clear pattern is, for example, discernible in al-Rāzī's habit of beginning his analysis of new verses with discussions of the 'connection of the verse to what [was mentioned in the text] before it' (*ittiṣāl al-āya bi-mā qablahā*), usually at the beginning of his commentary on a new verse.[327] In addition, he also provides regular cross-references to other verses within the surah, further demonstrating that this topic regularly occupied his mind. Accordingly, when discussing the issue of whether hunting while on pilgrimage is forbidden, as suggested by Q 5:2, al-Rāzī mentions that 'in another verse' (*fī āya ukhrā*), namely Q 5:96, God clarifies that this restriction only applies to hunting on land, thus exempting fishing.[328] However, al-Rāzī does not specifically label this relationship of one verse complementing the other as *munāsaba*, instead

[326] In his article, Mir uses the umbrella term '*naẓm*' to encompass efforts made by premodern commentators to find 'continuity, context, and coherence' in the Qur'anic corpus. See Mir, 'Continuity', pp. 15-16.

[327] For example, at the beginning of his exegesis of Q 5:4, Al-Rāzī states that 'this is also interlinked (*muttaṣil*) with what has preceded [this verse]' (al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 11, p. 144, l. 6). In a similar fashion, he informs his reader within the first few lines of his discussion of Q 5: 7 that the verse is 'connected (*muta'alliq*) to that which has been mentioned from the beginning of the surah up to here' (al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 11, p. 182, ll. 16–17).

[328] In his exegesis of the same verse, al-Rāzī also informs his reader of the verse's connection to the previous one, viz. Q 5:1, stating that 'this verse is connected (*muta'alliqa*) to God's saying that "it is not permissible to hunt for you when you are in a state of *iḥrām*"' (al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 11, p. 133, l. 7).

describing it in more informal terms, such as the one given above, in addition to resorting to expressions such as *ittiṣāl* ('connection/coherence'), *taʿalluq* ('relationship'), and *naẓm* ('arrangement').[329]

Moreover, according to El-Awa, al-Rāzī, unlike al-Biqāʿī, appears to content himself with merely identifying the text's obscurities, rather than clarifying them.[330] While this generally, too, confirms my own impression of al-Rāzī's discussion of surah 5, there are nonetheless instances—albeit short—of the author's making an attempt to clarify apparent obscurities and contradictions. For example, providing a grammatical discussion of the use of 'if' (*idhā*) in Q 5:2, al-Rāzī states that '[...] "if" is used to express conditions' and that 'if the condition is not fulfilled, the thing based on that condition [i.e. the consequence] does not exist'.[331]

While we can thus conclude that the topic of *munāsaba* certainly occupied the minds of classical commentators in some form, it appears that, on the whole, whenever a pre-modern commentator did pay attention to the relationship between the component parts of the Qur'an, he would primarily focus on the relationship between the individual *verses* within a surah—and occasionally the links between the

[329] While this may be a literal translation for *naẓm*, see the previous footnote for Mir's use of the term.
[330] El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'an*, p. 16. Although I am not suggesting that al-Rāzī ignored the topic outright, my own cursory reading of his discussion of the topic appears to confirm El-Awa's general assessment.
[331] Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 11, p. 133, ll. 17–18.

final verse of one surah and the opening verse of the next one, as al-Rāzī did—rather than on how the overall thematic focus of an entire surah might be linked to others.[332]

Moreover, such discussions would usually occur within the text itself, rather than in the summary introductions of those commentaries that contained such forewords. Arguably the first exegete in the Arab world to display a stronger interest in how the Qur'an's surahs are related to one another was the 19th-century Iraqi scholar al-Alūsī (d. 1854). According to Sinai, al-Alūsī 'appears markedly less interested in *Sūrat al-Anʿām*'s internal thematic unity than it its thematic complementarity with other parts of the Qur'anic corpus'.[333] Although it is true that this exegete regularly raises the topic in his summary introductions, Sinai rightly remarks that these discussions were generally speaking not extensive in pre-modern commentaries.[334] Indeed, even a brief look at al-Alūsī's commentary reveals that the topic is usually confined to between ten and fifteen lines.[335]

In addition to the above-mentioned facts that—with the exception of al-Alūsī—such discussions primarily tend to circle around the relationship between individual verses and are rarely taken up in separate introductions, one might add that pre-

[332] As Mir puts it, '[...] it would be correct to say that the focus of Rāzī's *nazm*-based approach to the Qur'an is the verses of a *sūrah*, although in some cases he tries to establish *naẓm*-relationships between *sūrah*s as well, by linking up the closing verses of one *sūrah* and the opening verses of the next.' Mustanir, 'Continuity', p. 21.

[333] Sinai, 'Reading Sūrat al-Anʿām', p. 141.

[334] Sinai, 'Reading Sūrat al-Anʿām', p. 141–42.

[335] For surahs 4 and 5, see al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ*, vol. 4, p. 178, l. 23 – p. 179, l. 7, and al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ* vol. 6, p. 48, ll. 2 – 14, for example.

modern commentators do not approach the issue of *munāsaba* as systematically and, perhaps even as forcefully, as the author of the *Manār* commentary does. Indeed, each single one of the twelve introductory sections to the surahs treated in the *Tafsīr al-Manār* takes up the issue of inter-surah relationship, usually clearly labelled with the words *munāsaba* or *ittiṣāl*, and sometimes with great detail. Starting with the foreword to *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*—which also includes an elaborate discussion of the very concept of a 'surah', the etymology of the word, in addition to the difference between Meccan and Medinan surahs[336]— Rashīd Riḍā comments on the relationship between the surah under discussion and those that precede and follow it in every introduction, sometimes at length. For example, the introductions to surahs 6 and 8 dedicate approximately four pages exclusively to the question of inter-surah relationships.[337] In surahs 6 and 7, the author lends additional weight to the issue by inserting clear headlines to introduce the topic[338] Equally significant is the fact that such discussions are restricted to neighbouring surahs and do not establish links to chapters that appear later on in the Qur'an. In other words, Riḍā does not make connections whenever an opportunity to do so arises; rather, it appears that by focusing closely on the surahs immediately adjoining a given surah he is not only signalling to his reader

[336] See *TM* I, p. 32ff. For example, the authors of the *Manār* commentary inform their reader that a surah is 'a portion (*ṭā'ifa*) of the Qur'an consisting of three verses or more, with a well-known name and a narrative confirmed by *ḥadīth*s and relics (*lahā ism ma'rūf bi-l-tawqīf wa-l-riwāya al-thābita bi-l-aḥādīth wa-l-āthār)*' and that the word 'surah' itself is 'derived from the wall surrounding the country (*mushtaqq min al-sūr alladhī yuḥīṭ bi-l-balad*)'. *TM* I, p. 34, ll.3–4.

[337] See *TM* VII, pp. 287–291, and *TM* VIII, pp. 581–585.

[338] See *TM* VII, p. 287, l. 14, and *TM* VII, p. 294, l. 23.

that he is following a certain system and rules, but is also making a statement on the systematic nature of the order of the Qur'anic corpus itself.[339] At the same time, the author of the *Manār* commentary appears to extend the traditional assumption that textual coherence manifests itself in the interconnectedness of successive units of discourse from verses to surahs.

Let us now take a closer look at the actual text and explore how this topic is dealt with in the introduction to surah 5. Riḍā begins by informing his reader that *Sūrat al-Nisā'* contains both commands that are explicit (*ṣarīḥan*) and others that are implied (*ḍimnan*), examples of which include marriage contracts, oaths, and treaties. While, according to Riḍā, *Sūrat al-Nisā'* is primarily concerned with laying out these commands, *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* goes further by instructing people to fulfil the commands presented in the previous surah, in addition to providing commands of its own.[340] In his discussion of the relationship between the two surahs, Riḍā claims to have detected a 'concomitance' (*al-talāzum*) and 'unity' (*al-ittiḥād*) similar to what he observed earlier on in the *Manār* commentary with regard to surahs 2 and 3. Furthermore, the author of the *Manār* commentary also seeks to establish a

[339] This is not to suggest that it would be outright unscholarly to posit connections between non-neighbouring surahs. For example, one might make the valid observation that both surah 2 and surah 22 have a central section dealing with Abraham and the Meccan sanctuary. The point which I am trying to make here is that there is a clear tendency on the part of the authors to restrict discussions of inter-surah relationships to neighbouring surahs in their surah introductions, which to me suggests the existence of a certain system.

[340] Specifically the text reads 'it is as if [God] had said: O people, fulfil the contracts which have just been mentioned in the surah that has been completed, even though this surah also has contracts.' *TM* VI, p. 116, ll. 18–19. Arguably, the author's discussion of the merits of the surah could be viewed in the context of the category of *faḍā'il* traditions, as explored by Burge (see Footnote 292).

relationship between surahs 4 and 5 and surahs 2 and 3. Accordingly, the latter two are said to provide the theoretical basis (*aṣl*) of certain topics, such as God's oneness and prophecy, whereas surahs 4 and 5 deal with their practical legal applications (*al-furūʿ al-ḥukmīya*). According to Riḍā, 'it is as if [surah 4 and surah 5] were one surah (*ka'annahumā sūra wāḥida*), comprising regulations (*aḥkām*) from the beginning to the end'.[341] Specifically, he explains, the strongest and most apparent link between the two surahs is that *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* concludes and completes that which *Sūrat al-Nisā'* had paved the way for,[342] an assessment similar to that which Sinai, for example, came across in his analysis of the introduction to surah 6.[343]

Although the author of the *Manār* commentary does not completely hide his personal opinions in this introduction—for example, the reader is presented with his preference in regard to the surah's date of revelation, as well as his views on how this surah complements the one that precedes it[344]—anybody familiar with some of the other writings by Riḍā might be tempted to describe these introductory remarks as

[341] *TM* VI, p. 117, ll. 1–4.

[342] This is not to say that the surahs do not contain elements that are unique to them. The authors specifically mention that surah 5 stands out by means of its laws concerning food and hunting, just as surah 4 concerns some that you only find there, such as some on inheritance and fighting; those laws that do not occur in both surahs, according to ʿAbduh and Riḍā, were necessary when the respective surahs were revealed. See *TM* VI, p. 117, ll. 15–18.

[343] 'As we have seen, the passage that al-Alūsī quotes from al-Suyūṭī – reproduced at the end of Riḍā's preface – also conceives of the relationship between the first six surahs of the Qur'an as one of *ijmāl* versus *tafṣīl*. Riḍā thus deploys traditional tools in order to present the Qur'an as a work that exhibits a systematic order and proceeds from the general to the specific: Sura 2 broaches various issues in a general way (*ajmala*) and subsequent suras then go into further detail (*faṣṣala*). It seems plausible that this presentation may not be free from modern assumptions about ideal expositional structures.' See Sinai, 'Reading Sūrat al-Anʿām', p. 145.

[344] For example, ʿAbduh and Riḍā quite forcefully reject two other accounts regarding the surah's date of revelation, calling both of them 'not correct' (*kilāhumā lā yaṣiḥḥ*). *TM* VI, p. 116, l. 9.

unusually dry. Most strikingly, the author's otherwise so audible own voice appears to be muted in this introduction. For example, unlike in other parts of his *tafsīr*, this chapter introduction features no instances in which the author expresses harsh criticisms of the work of his exegetical predecessors. Equally, it does not reveal any attempts on the part of Riḍā to embed the surah in the socio-political realities of his time, an interest which, as we have seen, he displays in a much more pronounced fashion in the overall introduction to the *Tafsīr al-Manār*.[345]

Instead, the reader is presented with a text whose author appears to be more concerned with exhibiting his familiarity with the long-standing tradition of Sunni *tafsīr*. Thus, when discussing the surah's origins and the context during which it was revealed, the author of the *Manār* commentary refers to al-Bukhārī's *ḥadīth* collection, the *Ṣaḥīḥ*. Similarly, instead of simply stating his view that the surah was revealed on the Day of *ʿArafa*, Riḍā presents alternative accounts, even though he rejects them. These include the account of Ibn Mardawayh (d. 1020),[346] who, on the authority of Abū Saʿīd (d. 683?),[347] had narrated that the surah was revealed on the Day of *Ghādir*

[345] And indeed, we will see a number of instances in which the authors of the *Tafsīr al-Manār* link their discussion of scripture with the concrete events and conditions of the early 20th century in the next chapter of this thesis.

[346] Likely Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Mūsā Ibn Mardawayh, a famous medieval collector of prophetic traditions. Although he reportedly 'spared no effort to collect traditions on ʿAlī's virtues', both Sunni and Shia scholars generally agreed that he was Sunni (Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work*, pp. 248–249).

[347] Likely Abū Saʿīd Al-Khudrī, a prolific transmitter of *ḥadīth* reports and one of the Prophet Muḥammad's younger Companions. Ṣiddīqī estimates that he transmitted around 1,170 traditions (Ṣiddīqī, *Ḥadīth Literature*, p. 18 and p. 22)

Khumm,[348] as well as that of Abū Hurayra (d. 678?),[349] according to whom the surah was revealed on the eleventh day of the month of *Dhu al-Ḥijja*, when the Prophet returned from his Farewell Pilgrimage. Similarly, Riḍā points to the fact that there exists a debate on whether the whole of the surah was revealed at once or whether this happened in steps. Thus, the reader is informed that the 11th-century Persian scholar al-Bayhaqī[350] noted in his *Shuʿab al-Īmān*, a collection of Qur'anic verses and Prophetic narrations, that only the beginning of the surah was revealed in Minā, a town near Mecca, during the year of the Farewell Pilgrimage. In contrast, ʿUbayd is said to have reported on the authority of Kaʿb that the surah was revealed in its entirety during the Farewell Pilgrimage between Mecca and Medina.[351] In a similar fashion, the discussion on the surah's relationship with the previous surah begins with short quotations attributed to prominent scholars from the exegetical tradition, namely al-Alūsī, al-Suyūṭī, and the arguably less-well known 13th-century Iraqi exegete Muwaffaq al-Dīn al-Kawāshī (d.?).[352]

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[348] During his Farwell Pilgrimage in March 632, Muḥammad is believed to have stopped at Ghadīr Khumm and made a number of announcements, the most significant of which—according to Shi'ite belief—concerns his alleged appointment of ʿAlī as his successor. While Sunnis do not deny that Muḥammad may have expressed high esteem for ʿAlī, the idea of his appointing his son-in-law as his successor is generally disputed (see Vaglieri, 'Ghadīr Khumm').

[349] Presumably Abū Hurayra al-Dawsī al-Yamānī, a Companion of the Prophet and prolific narrator of prophetic traditions (Robson, 'Abū Hurayra').

[350] Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn Kātib al-Bayhaqī, famous Persian historian of the 5th/11th century, born in 995. See Said Naficy, 'Bayhaḳī' for more background information on this scholar.

[351] *TM* VI, p. 116, ll. 9–11.

[352] For some information on this exegete, see Pfeiffer, 'Double Rapprochement', p. 386.

Based on my analysis of the chapter introduction to *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*, I would like to draw the following key conclusions. First, while introductory remarks to the verse-by-verse exegesis of Qur'anic surahs were not completely absent in pre-modern commentaries, they were by no means compulsory or universal and, above all, not as standardised and systematic as they are in this *tafsīr*. The fact that the author of the *Manār* commentary begins his discussion of each surah with separate chapter introductions, each of which follows a clearly discernable structure containing a number of key elements, can thus be considered a new element in Riḍā's work. Second, with regard to his exegetical methods, it appears that Riḍā employs largely traditional techniques in this introduction. These include discussions of the surah's date and place of revelation, its composition, and background stories concerning its origin. In so doing, the author quotes previous *mufassirūn* and resorts to the well-used method of citing named authorities and providing polyvalent readings, which he either accepts or rejects.[353] This appears to conform to the assessment made by other scholars such as Johanna Pink, who has described Riḍā as generally 'more attached to the pre-modern exegetical tradition' than his teacher, noting that he 'made much more of an effort than Muḥammad ʿAbduh to corroborate exegetical opinions with quotations from previous works of *tafsīr* and/or *ḥadīth*s'.[354] Third, while discussions concerning the relationship between verses and surahs were not irrelevant to

[353] See Calder, 'From Midrash to Scripture', pp. 101–106,
[354] Pink, Johanna, 'Riḍā, Rashīd'.

classical commentators, it appears that this is an issue that interests the author of the *Manār* commentary significantly more than it did classical commentators. Finally, in contrast to the overall introduction to the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, this chapter introduction appears to concern itself surprisingly little with the socio-political realities of the period. Indeed, as mentioned above, this passage is virtually void of the author's well-known and often biting criticisms of the shortcomings of traditional Muslim scholarship in relation to the perceived stagnation and, worse, decline, of the Muslim community. Instead, whenever they do appear, accusations and personal opinions are wrapped up in a subtler fashion that is stylistically reminiscent of the works of pre-modern commentaries. Accordingly, the only instance of a somewhat critical engagement, where Riḍā's voice becomes more audible and more explicitly points to the shortcomings of his exegetical predecessors, may be found on the second page, where the reader is informed that 'this is all about which we have been informed on this topic (*hadhā ajmaʿ mā uṭliʿnā ʿalayhi*) and al-Rāzī and al-Biqāʿī did not provide [lit.: 'bring'] anything new (*bi-shay' jadīd*)'.

To some extent, one might even argue that the author of the *Manār* commentary is violating his own rules in this passage. Although the overall introduction to the *Tafsīr al-Manār* repeatedly warns of the dangers of a type of exegetical scholarship that relies too much on transmitted material—which, according to Riḍā, distracts its follower from [the Qur'an's] lofty aims which purify the

soul [lit. 'souls', *anfus*] and enlighten [*munawwira*] the intellect [lit. 'intellects', *ʿuqūl*]'[355]—this preface to *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* is essentially just that. And indeed, even a cursory look at the *Manār* commentary's introductions to other surahs reveals that this apparent violation of Riḍā's own exegetical principles is not limited to the introduction of surah 5 and, as Sinai discovered, that of surah 6.[356] Accordingly, the just-over-two-page long introduction to surah 4 contains nearly a page of technical discussions and, chiefly, transmitted material from classical scholars such as al-Bukhārī and al-Qurṭubī.[357] Similarly, the equally-sized introduction to surah 7 begins with a pastiche of transmitted material and, more significantly, appears to take much of its discussion of inter-surah relationship from al-Ṣuyūṭī.[358]

In his discussion of surah 6, Sinai remarks that 'an entrenched literary genre such as *tafsīr* is difficult to remake at will, even if the need to do so is programmatically asserted. It is therefore only to be expected that a traditionally trained *ʿālim* like Riḍā will exhibit a tendency to relapse into ingrained patterns of writing, at least when dealing with a topic also discussed by earlier interpreters [...]'.[359] In general, I believe that Sinai's assessment is plausible. Nevertheless, it would have

[355] See *TM* I, p. 10, ll. 10–11, for example.

[356] Interestingly, in his analysis of the preface to *Sūrat al-Anʿām*, Nicolai Sinai reaches the same conclusion, describing the passage as 'a pastiche of dense scholarly arguments and extended quotations from earlier scholars that presents [them as authors who are] in intimate engagement with a centuries-long exegetical tradition' (Sinai, 'Reading Sūrat al-Anʿām', p. 145).

[357] *TM* IV, p. 320–322.

[358] *TM* VIII, p. 294–296.

[359] Sinai, 'Reading Sūrat al-Anʿām', p. 145.

been less surprising to witness these types of relapses during the actual verse-by-verse exegesis,[360] rather than in these chapter introductions, a place that the author of this commentary could have used as a platform to propagate his worldview and his views on the Qur'an's role in offering guidance—a theme so prominent in the overall introduction to the *Manār* commentary. Perhaps ʿ Riḍā's decision to employ a more traditional approach in his chapter introductions may be viewed as pragmatism: as we shall see, the content of the verse-by-verse exegesis of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* does provide numerous instances in which the author not only demonstrates novel views and exegetical techniques, but also his engagement with and keen interest in the social and political matters of the period in which he and his teacher lived. Indeed, as part of his exegesis of Q 5:46-50, Riḍā dedicates nearly four pages to the topic of 'judging according to English laws in India', a discussion prompted by a question submitted by a reader of the *Manār* journal.[361] In light of this, the author's traditional opening to each surah might be a clever way of demonstrating to his readership not only his familiarity with a tradition that he actually tries to overhaul and, in some cases, denigrate, but more significantly, his qualifications to critically engage with it.

[360] This is not to suggest that the actual verse-by-verse exegesis of this surah is free from references to and, indeed, a certain degree of reliance on classical material. However, my point here is that it is somewhat puzzling to see the authors of this *tafsīr* dedicate so much space to traditional sources in their chapter introductions. Indeed, one might say that the reader is confronted with a kind of curious hybridity: on the one hand, the medium of surah introductions is, as we have seen, rather novel. Surprisingly, though, ʿAbduh and Riḍā' opt to fill out this new frame with a significant amount of older material.

[361] *TM* VI, pp. 406-409.

3. The Conclusion to *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*

The content and structure of the concluding remarks to *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*, which constitute approximately seven pages in volume 7 of the *Manār* commentary, can be summarised as follows:

1. A brief overview of the surah's main themes (p. 276, ll. 8–11)
2. Selected theological and legal discussions (p. 276, l. 12 – p. 280, l. 16)
3. Statements and rulings regarding Jews and Christians (p. 280, l. 17 – p. 283, l. 1)
4. *Ḥadīth* reports (p. 280, ll. 2 – 8)
5. Editorial remarks (p. 280, ll. 9 – 16)

Thematically, the conclusion provided by Riḍā at the end of his detailed verse-by-verse exegesis of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* consists of two parts: the first is the author's selection of thirty of the surah's theological and legal discussions. The second part addresses some of the surah's laws and regulations in regard to Jews and Christians, in addition to a more general discussion of these two groups. In what follows, I analyse these concluding remarks in view of three main aspects. First, I explore the extent to which Riḍā's exegetical positions and religious thought, as expressed in this conclusion, differ from those of classical commentators on the Qur'an. My argument is that, while the vast majority of the topics addressed in these pages are largely traditional in

terms of the author's views, they nevertheless are presented with a discernible modern touch. Second, I assess the extent to which the author of the *Manār* commentary employs traditional exegetical techniques in his conclusion. In so doing, I analyse the author's style as well as the sources to which he resorts in making his case. Finally, I explore those elements of this conclusion that provide the reader with a better understanding of how Riḍā engages with contemporary social, economic, and political circumstances and conditions. Unlike the introduction to the surah, such circumstances are more conspicuous in the concluding remarks to *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*.

3.1 The First Part

At first glance, the topics discussed and views expressed in these concluding remarks do not appear to deviate significantly from those of the mainstream Sunni Muslim tradition. Specifically, the 'first part' (*al-qism al-awwal*), which provides a summary list of some of the surah's key theological positions, in addition to a number of laws, is presented in a rather neutral fashion:

General Topic Area	Brief Summary of Content[362]
Islam's special role in history	• Islam has been perfected through this surah. (1) • The dominance of the Qur'an over other scriptures. (6)

[362] The numbers in this chart indicate the order chosen by the authors in the text itself. My personal contribution has been to organise the various topics chosen by the authors into broader thematic areas.

	• The Prophet's successful mission despite adversaries. (8) • Believers will always be more successful than Non-Believers. (9) • The denial of Islam being a burden (*nafī min al-ḥaraja min dīn al-islām*). (11) • The significance of the Kaʿba. (19)
Continuity with Judaism and Christianity	• Emphasis on the role of previous prophets. (4) • The unity of religion. (5) • God's judgement in the afterlife, as also announced by Jesus. (30)
Rectification of Judaism and Christianity	• The Prophet's role in showing Jews and Christians their mistakes. (7)
Admonition to Muslims	• The prohibition of asking the Prophet about things that are harmful to the community. (2) • Islam is a religion based on certain knowledge, and *taqlīd* is void and unacceptable to God. (3) • The necessity to further good and reject evil. (10) • The prohibition of being extreme in religion (*al-ghulūw fī al-dīn),* [363] the

[363] A term originally used in reference to those Shi'ites, labelled '*ghulāt*', whose beliefs were considered 'extreme' or 'especially intensely religious' by mainstream Shi'ites and Sunnis. According to Hodgson, 'the first of the *Ghulāt* was ʿAbd Allāh b. Sabaʿ [*q.v.*], whose ghulū may have consisted in denying that ʿAlī

	prohibition of evil, animosity and being extravagant (*al-isrāf fī al-ṭayyibāt*) in one's favours. (12) • Admonition to kindness and justice in dealing both with Believers and Non-Believers. (16) • The necessity of working towards righteousness and piety. (18) • The prohibition of Believers to be friends with Non-Believers. (20) • The importance of piety due the quantity of its occurrence in this surah. (29)
Legal rulings	• The rule that necessity makes the prohibited, such as food, lawful to those in a state of *iḥrām*. (13) • The underlying reason for certain restrictions, such as those of alcohol and gambling. (14) • The prohibition of assaulting people because of their animosity. (15) • The necessity of meeting contractual obligations. (17) • The laws of ablution and their reasonableness. (21)

had died, and predicting his return (*radj̲ʿa*), as the later Imāmīs did that of the Twelfth Imām' (see Hodgson, 'Ghulāt').

	• Details about the laws pertaining to permitted and forbidden food. (22) • The prohibition of alcohol. (23) • The regulations of forbidden acts during *iḥrām*. (24) • Hunting laws. (25) • The limitations on those who make war, cause corruption and fight Muslims. (26) • Regulations pertaining to oaths and atoning for them. (27) • Regulations on wills. (28)

One might argue that this first part, and, indeed the entire conclusion, is, at first glance, not particularly exciting to those readers who were perhaps anticipating that Riḍā would use this chapter summary as a platform to propagate his views and positions in relation to the period in which he lived. Instead, we are presented with a seemingly straightforward and to-the-point summary of the thematic emphases and regulations as they appear in the text itself. Similar to the introduction to *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*, the voice of the author—which in other parts of the *Manār* commentary, and, in particular the overall introductions is so present—is again seemingly muted. Except for Riḍā's short editorial remarks at the end,[364] as well as a small number of short

[364] *TM* VII, p. 280, ll. 9–16. Riḍā ends his conclusion by giving some information about when the chapter was completed.

remarks that allude more explicitly to the current socio-political situation, this text appears primarily descriptive in nature. This is somewhat surprising, as, for reasons of rhetorical strategy among others, one would assume a conclusion to be the ideal place to drive home one's message in a way that leaves the strongest impression on the reader. Nevertheless, even this list of regulations contains a number of items that are indicative of Riḍā's modernising ambitions, as well as his socio-political agenda.

The first indicator lies in the fact that, throughout this passage, the reader is presented predominantly with a summary of the surah itself. Specifically, for four pages out of this approximately seven-page long concluding epitome, Riḍā keeps his promise to prioritise the Qur'an's own guidance over other discussions, such as later scholastic disputes. In other words, by exclusively restating the main points made in the surah, the author seemingly lets the Qur'an speak for itself instead of letting himself be distracted by any kinds of subordinate questions.

Secondly, Riḍā also demonstrates his modernising ambitions even within some sections of this summary, as can, for example, be observed in the second item of this list, which deals with the 'prohibition of asking the Prophet about things whose essence it is that they might harm believers if [those things] were revealed to them'.[365] Specifically, the passage in question reads as follows:

[365] The original Arabic reads as follows: *al-nahī 'an su'āl al-nabī 'an ashyā' min sha'nihā an tasū' al-muslimīn* (*TM* VII, p. 276, l. 16).

> Every divine ruling (*ḥukm dīnī*) concerning faith, worship, or that which is permissible or prohibited for which the text does not provide a clear indication (*dalāla ṣarīḥa*) or for which there is no *sunna ʿamalīya*[366] from the age of the Prophet [...] does not constitute a case (*ḥujja*) against Muslims (lit. 'everyone who the Prophet's call has reached') inasmuch as they demand it in this world or inquire about it in the next world. [...] As for those elements that the Qur'an (lit. 'the scripture') does not clearly indicate—and these are the ones about which the leaders in knowledge most disagree about—they constitute a case against those who have understood the ruling (*ḥujja ʿalā man fahima al-ḥukm*), and not against everyone else, as we have explained in our commentary on the verse that prohibits wine.[367]

This passage is significant for two reasons. First, it conforms to Riḍā's often repeated call for Muslims to stop paying too much attention to those elements in traditional *tafsīr* that, among other things, focus too much on detail and thus distract from the Qur'an's actual purpose, which is to provide guidance to man.[368] According to the author, *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* already contains a significant number of clear rulings; as a consequence, why should Muslims then focus on what one might describe as

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[366] Asma Barlas notes that '*aḥādīth* are divided into three categories based on their *matn:* those that record the Prophet's sunna *ʿamalīya*, or praxis; those that recount his *sunna qawlīya*, or sayings on ethical issues; and those that record his *sunna taqrīrīya*, or tacit approval of deeds he reputedly knew about' (Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam*, p. 23). Similarly, a German blogger writing on 'Lesewerk Arabisch und Islam' suggests that, by this term, ʿAbduh intended 'prophetic traditions that have been transmitted several times and which deal with practical issues such as the practicalities of prayer or the pilgrimage' (Anon., 'Der Islam ist nur der Koran').

[367] *TM* VII, p. 276, l. 18 – p. 277, l. 2.

[368] Especially in the overall introduction to the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, the authors routinely lament the fact that the works of most exegetes 'distract' their reader from what they consider the Qur'an's 'true' message by containing detailed discussions of the grammatical, philological and technical features of the Qur'an, theology and law. See Chapters I and II of this thesis for more detail.

additional 'religious baggage'—especially such that is not relevant for—if the Qur'an is not explicit about it? This point is given further weight by Riḍā's implication that *ordinary* Muslims can only be held accountable for those things that the Qur'an explicitly states, while those that are less clear will 'only constitute a case against those who have understood the ruling', i.e. more learned people. The passage is thus somewhat reminiscent of ʿAbduh's distinction between the lower and the higher ranks of *tafsīr*, which can be found in the *Muqaddima*, and where ʿAbduh states that, for the ordinary Muslim—i.e. a Muslim who belongs to the lower rank, as opposed to a learner person—it is sufficient to focus on the Qur'an's clear statements alone.[369] At the same time, the passage may be indicative of the fact that the group of people Riḍā really is settling a score with are religious scholars, a theme that is taken up again later on in this conclusion.

As mentioned elsewhere, one of the key challenges faced by the Modernists was the accusation voiced by some of their contemporaries that it was Islam itself that presented an obstacle to progress.[370] ʿAbduh and Riḍā vehemently refuted this accusation, believing that 'the teachings and moral precepts of Islam are such that, if they are properly understood and fully obeyed, they will lead to success in this world as well as the next [...]. If they are not understood and obeyed, weakness, decay and

[369] The following passage sums up the above point rather neatly: 'It is sufficient for an ordinary person (*al-ʿāmmī*) to understand verses like [lit. 'God's word]: "Successful indeed are the believers who offer their prayers with submissiveness" [i.e. Q 23: 1–2] in their apparent sense (*mā yuʿṭīhu al- ẓāhir min al-āyāt*)' (*TM* I, p. 20, ll. 12–13).

[370] See Haddad, 'Pioneer' p. 33, for example.

barbarism are the result.'[371] This prominent theme in ʿAbduh and Riḍā's thought—namely, the idea that the Qur'an's guidance can lead to success not only in the afterlife but also in this world—recurs in this conclusion as well.[372] Thus, under item nine the reader is reminded that, if the believers follow God's command to reform their souls individually and collectively (*iṣlāḥ anfusihim afrādihā wa-jamāʿatihā*), and 'if they walk straight on the path of guidance' (*istaqāmū ʿalā ṣirāṭ al-hidāya*), unbelievers will never gain the upper hand over them: 'those who have strayed will not lead them astray'.[373]

Much has been written on ʿAbduh and Riḍā's engagement with the politics of their time. Having occupied roles such as Grand Mufti of Egypt between 1899-1905, as well as being the editor of the official Egyptian gazette *al-Waqā'iʿ al-Miṣrīya*, ʿAbduh has often been given credit for having wielded significant influence on Egyptian public opinion. It is also known that, in these roles, ʿAbduh often did not hide his criticism of the actions and perceived moral corruption of the political and military leaders of his country, sometimes causing for his position to become jeopardised or leading to his exile.[374] Thus, it is no surprise that ʿAbduh's critical stance towards his country's

[371] Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, pp. 227–228.

[372] Riḍā's conviction that the Qur'an's guidance is key to both material and spiritual success also occupies a major position in the overall introduction to the *Manār* commentary. See *TM* I, p. 5 ff., for example.

[373] *TM* VII, p. 277, ll. 22-25-p. 278, ll.1–3.

[374] A good example of this would be ʿAbduh's recurrent issues with Khedive ʿAbbās II, whose allegedly pro-British occupation policies he routinely criticised and which, on one occasion, resulted in a three-year exile starting in 1882. Ironically, the khedive, too, accused ʿAbduh of being too close to the British and, at one point, even suggested he was a British spy. See Haddad, 'Pioneer', p. 32, as well as Chapter I

politicians should be picked up by his pupil—who, as editor of the *Manār* journal, too, took a keen interest in current affairs—and thus be a recurring theme in the *Manār* commentary.

Already in the overall introduction to this commentary, Riḍā laments the fact that the problem of moral corruption is especially prevalent in the political sphere, with politicians being primarily concerned with amassing wealth for themselves and that 'everything that exceeds their pleasures, even if what they spend is greater than it, is the share of the foreigners'.[375] We find a similar instance, although a very brief one, under the fifteenth item of his list. Arguing that believers should always 'commit themselves to truth and justice' (*an yaltazimū al-ḥaqq wa-l-ʿadl)* and avoid hostility (*al-iʿtidāʾ*), Riḍā warns that, in so doing, Muslims 'should not be like those exercising the craft of politics' (*lā yakūnū ka-ahl al-sīyāsa al-madanīya*).[376] Interestingly, in his description of how one should not act, the author of the *Manār* commentary resorts to a technical term already found in the title of a famous work by Abū Naṣr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Fārābī (d. 950).[377] In his work, al-Fārābī sets forth his theory of what constitutes the ideal political order (*al-siyāsā al-madanīya*), which he sees grounded in

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of this thesis. In addition, Fahmy has observed that ʿAbduh was 'frequently attacked [by Egyptian newspapers] as a result of his liberal policies and his perceived close relationship with the British' (Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, p. 85).

[375] *TM* I, p. 6, 19-24.

[376] *TM* VII, p. 278, ll. 22-24.

[377] Several scholars have remarked that little is known about al-Fārābī's biography, but most tend to agree that he probably died at around 950 AD. For more detail, see Nicholas Rescher's *Al-Fārābī*, as well as Richard Walzer's works on this medial philosopher and thinker, which are listed in the bibliography to this chapter. A more recent contribution on this intellectual as well as his works has been made by Damien Janos (see Janos, 'Oneness').

a combination of perfection (*kamāl*), virtuousness (*faḍlīya*), and justice (*ʿadl*).[378] In addition, ʿAbduh and Riḍā's belief that good moral behaviour, or more precisely perhaps 'fear of God' (*al-taqwā*), has a direct impact on worldly affairs is expressed a second time in item 29, where the Riḍā states that the 'goodness (*sāliḥ*) of this world and religion depends on clinging to it.'[379]

The Modernists around Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā have been given credit for their role as social reformers. Yvonne Haddad, for example, comments on ʿAbduh's strong interest in improving Egypt's public welfare.[380] Similarly, Johanna Pink observes that Riḍā believed that '[j]ustice and welfare should be among the primary aims of government'.[381] These views also become apparent in this conclusion. Specifically, in item 18 of his summary of the surah's most important topics, Riḍā remarks that the Qur'an's 'imposing of the obligation (*ījāb*) of righteousness (*al-birr*) and fear of God (*al-taqwā*)' should include the 'establishment of charitable and scientific organisations (*ta'līf al-jamāʿāt al-khayrīya al-ʿilmīya*)'.[382] Arguably, such statements also reveal the rather practical change and improvements both Riḍā and his teacher might have hoped to see in their time. A look at ʿAbduh's biography, in particular, points to a number of elements that suggest that he was not just a thinker but also a doer—traits that would certainly have rubbed off on his pupil in some way,

[378] See Al-Fārābī, *Al-siyāsā al-madanīya*, pp. 31-108.
[379] *TM* VII, p. 280, ll. 11–13. .
[380] Haddad, *Pioneer*, p. 59.
[381] Pink, Johanna, 'Riḍā, Rashīd'.
[382] *TM* VII, p. 279, ll. 10–11.

although Riḍā admittedly was not as active in societies and clubs as his teacher. An example of this is ʿAbduh's involvement in freemasonry, which one scholar has described as an expression of one's 'dislike of orthodox, traditional religion, the power it gave to ecclesiastics, and the hatreds and divisions it promoted and perpetuated in society'.[383] Indeed, as Kedourie remarks, ʿAbduh himself considered freemasonry as an active opportunity 'to resist the authority of kings and popes who were fighting against knowledge and freedom'.[384]

Another instance that shows Riḍā taking a more critical stance towards his exegetical predecessors can be found in item 14 of his list—a paraphrase of Q 5:101—in which he discusses difference between that which is good (*al-ṭayyib*) and that which is abominable (*al-khabīth*), and in so doing, zeroes in on regulations pertaining to food, gambling, and hygiene. According to Riḍā, the reason why certain regulations such as those pertaining to cleanliness exist—as well as why certain foods and activities are forbidden—has to do with the intention behind them (*tawakhkhī*). However, many Muslims appear to have forgotten that intention, instead turning things such as ablution (*wuḍū'*) and washing (*al-ghusl*) into something that is 'purely ritual' (*taʿabbudīyan maḥḍan*). In what appears to be a direct criticism levelled at his exegetical predecessors, the author of the *Manār* commentary laments that '[the latter] have claimed that the prohibition of wine is a purely ritual matter (*taʿabbudī*)

[383] Kedourie, *Afghani*, p. 22.
[384] Kedourie, *Afghani*, p. 22.

and that it does not indicate the prohibition of all intoxicants, based on their view that wine comes specifically from grape juice (*binā'an ʿalā ra'īhim anna al-khamr ma kāna min ʿaṣīr al-ʿinab khāṣṣatan*)'.[385] Such a view is apparently so bewildering to Rashīd Riḍā that he cannot help but wonder what these people 'have to say regarding their understanding of the remaining rulings (*sā'ir al-aḥkām*)'.[386] Specifically, this seems to be criticism directed at the Ḥanafī school of religious law, arguably the most prominent Sunni *madhhab* in Riḍā's geographical context, viz. the Ottoman Empire,[387] whose jurisprudents, at least traditionally, did not include spirits as prohibited food items.[388] Furthermore, this statement may be seen as an overt attack on Muʿtazilī theologians, some of whom, according to Nurdeen Deuraseh, argued that only certain types of intoxicating substances were prohibited, while others were permitted if consumed in moderation.[389] In view of the fact that the author of the *Manār* commentary, as well as his teacher, has arguably introduced a number of Muʿtazilī ideas in his discussions of free will and exegesis through reason alone, Riḍā's rather orthodox views on wine, shared by al-Ṭabarī for example, may be seen as his subtle

[385] TM VII, p. 278, ll. 20—21

[386] *TM* VII, p. 278, ll. 21. It is also worth pointing out the fact that this statement, which ends in a quotation mark, is a good example of the authors of the *Manār* commentary engaging their reader by asking rhetorical questions.

[387] Heffening and Schacht, 'Ḥanafiyya'.

[388] Wensinck and Sadan, 'Khamr'.

[389] Deuraseh, 'Al Khamr', p. 356.

attempt to distance himself from potential accusations of not being orthodox enough.[390]

The idea of an action's underlying intent, now coupled with the topic of reason, is further elaborated in item 21, where the author focuses on the laws of ablution and cleanliness. According to Riḍā, 'the inclusion of cleanliness in the verse of ablution is for purity of the outside and the inside'.[391] This indicates to the author that these laws are reasonable (*inna aḥkām al-ṭahāra kullahā maʿqula*), 'as we have indicated in our discussion of the 14th point'.[392] In other words, the prohibitions of certain things, as well as the commandment to others, are not there for purely devotional purposes, but have a reason.

[390] Indeed, in his *Islamic Reform*, Malcom Kerr notes that ''Abdūh's discussion of free will is essentially a Muʿtazilite one, but he cleverly avoids their terminology lest he be accused of blasphemy and instead remains faithful to certain Ashʿarite formulas' (Kerr, *Islamic Reform*, p. 111). Equally, this arguably indirect attempt of seeking distance from Muʿtazilite views may also be viewed as Riḍā's own contribution in editing the *Manār* commentary. Oliver Scharbrodt, for instance, has observed in reference to ʿAbdūh's *Risālat al-Tawḥīd* that '[w]hereas the first edition published in ʿAbduh's lifetime follows the Muʿtazila doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān, later editions published under the auspices of Rashid Rida (*sic!*) lack this section' (Scharbrodt, *Islam and the Baha'i Faith*, p. 205). In addition, Thomas Hildebrandt's *Neo-Muʿtazilismus?* and 'Waren Ǧamāl ad-Dīn al-Afġānī und Muḥammad ʿAbduh Neo-Muʿtaziliten?' are useful sources to explore this subject further.

[391] *TM* VII, p. 279, ll. 18–25.

[392] *TM* VII, p. 279, ll. 20–21.

3.2 The Second Part

The second part of this conclusion, which is approximately three pages in length, largely consists of a summary of the surah's statements on the People of the Scripture, viz. Jews and Christians. This section can be subdivided as follows:

1. General discussion of Jews and Christians (p. 280, l. 17–p. 281, l. 16)
2. A discussion of Jews (p. 281, l. 17 – p. 282, l. 6)
3. A discussion of Christians (p. 282, ll. 7–16)
4. Laws and regulations pertaining to both groups (p. 282, l. 17 – p. 283, l. 1)
5. *Ḥadīth* reports (p. 283, ll. 2–8)
6. Editorial notes (p. 283, ll. 11–16)

While, at first glance, this section, too, fails to live up to Riḍā's reputation as one of the great socio-political reformers of his time, it is significant due to the exegetical methods employed. Indeed, the vast majority of this section is a summary of the Qur'an's own words, which once again appear to have been left to speak for themselves. Accordingly, Riḍā begins with a summary of Q 5:13–14 and informs his reader that the Jews and Christians 'broke their contract with God (*naqaḍū mīthāq rabbihim*) and have forgotten a great share (*ḥaẓẓan ʿaẓīman*) of what God had

mentioned to them on the tongues of the prophets'.[393] Similarly, he confirms the belief that, although the Torah and the Christian Bible were originally revealed by God, '[the Jews and the Christians] did not uphold (*lam yuqīmū*) the Torah or the Gospels in the way that God had obliged them to do', reminiscent of Q 5:66-68.[394]

While the vast majority of this passage continues along similar lines—viz. the author continues with his summary of the Qur'anic text itself— a closer look reveals that Riḍā is doing more than just that. Let us, for example, examine the following passage, where Riḍā notes that

> [The Jews and Christians] do not stand out over the rest of mankind in terms of their souls and their selves, because humans only stand out over one another through genuine knowledge (*al-ʿulūm al- ṣaḥīḥa*), noble morals (*al-akhlāq al-karīma*) and good deeds (*al-aʿmāl al-ṣāliḥa)*, not through their descent from and affiliation with (*bi-l-nasab wa-l-intimā' ilā*) the prophets and the righteous, even though they violate them in their guidance and the mention of their reward by the badness of their actions in this world, throwing animosity and hatred (*al-ʿadāwa wa-l-baghḍā'*) between them. He will punish them, just like the rest of them in this world for their individual and collective sins (*bi-dhunūbihim al-shakhsīya wa-l-qawmīya*) [...].[395]

Here one can vividly observe not only the author's seeming desire to simply amplify the Qur'an's own message, but also his ambitions as a social reformer in

[393] *TM* VII, p. 280, ll. 22–23.
[394] *TM* VII, p. 280, l. 23.
[395] *TM* VII, p. 281, ll. 1–5.

general. Similar to the previous paragraph, many of the themes and expressions found in this short passage are simply reiterations of what the Qur'an itself says. Thus, the notion of animosity and hatred (*al-ʿadāwa wa-l-baghḍā'*) rising between Jews and Christians is found, with exactly the same words, in Q 5:15. Equally, the notion that Jews and Christians are but human beings and do not stand out by virtue of existing alone, but rather have to please God by undertaking good deeds and displaying moral behaviour, is essentially a summary of Q 5:18. However, the inclusion of 'genuine knowledge'—although not specifically defined—is arguably an addition to the Qur'anic text and indicative not only of Riḍā's views as a social reformer but also the influence ʿAbduh's ideas may have had on him. Mark Sedgwick, for example, remarks on ʿAbduh's interest on the topic of education in his discussion of ʿAbduh's editorials in Egypt's official journal *al-Waqā'iʿ al-Miṣrīya*. Specifically, he notes that, more often than not, ʿAbduh would dedicate even more attention to such questions than to political ones, especially in the context of his attacks on what he perceived to be blind imitation from the West.[396]

Riḍā then provides his views on Jews and Christians as separate groups, as well as on the interreligious dynamics between these groups and Muslims. Without explicitly referencing this verse, the author of the *Manār* commentary appears to centre most of his comments around Q 5:82, which states that

[396] Sedgwick, *Abduh*, p. 30.

> strongest among men in enmity to the Believers will you find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the Believers will you find those who say: 'We are Christians', because among them are learned men[397] and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant.[398]

In so doing, Riḍā not only continues his practice of serving the reader a more or less straightforward summary of the Qur'anic text itself, but also appears to be continuing a tradition of finding an explanation for Christian amicability in contrast to Jewish animosity. Specifically, Jews are depicted, among other things, as liars and deceitful people, who engage in 'the devouring of ill-gotten property' (*akl al-suḥt*), strive towards corruption on earth (*al-saʿī bi-l-fasād fī al-arḍ*), cause wars, have killed prophets unjustly, which effectively makes them 'the most hostile against the believers' (*ashadd al-nās ʿadāwatan li-l-mu'minīn*).[399] While the author concedes that this depiction does not apply to each and every single Jew on the planet, he nevertheless holds that this is true for most of them. While the interpretation of this verse is not new as such—indeed, it is as mentioned above a summary of what the Qur'an itself has

[397] In his translation, Yusuf Ali renders the Arabic *qissīsīn* as 'men devoted to learning'. It should be noted that in a more modern context the word is usually understood to mean 'priest' or 'clergyman'.

[398] As with all other Qur'anic quotations, I have here relied on a modified version of Yusuf Ali's translation.

[399] *TM* VII, p. 281, ll. 17–24. See Q 5:64, for example, as well as Q 5:70, which accuses Jews of calling 'impostors' or even 'killing' those prophets that 'to them [...] with what they themselves desired not'.

to say on this matter[400]— it is nevertheless noteworthy that this passage, which depicts Jews a much more negative light than Christians, is given so much space. While the latter, too, are accused of having forgotten part of the scripture, in addition to their transgressions such as their belief in the Trinity and that Jesus is the Son of God, Riḍā nevertheless describes them as being 'the closest people in love to the believers' (*aqrabu al-nās mawaddatan li-l-mu'minīn*), because 'among them are learned men (*qissīsīn*) and monks (*ruhbānan*) who do not display arrogance (*lā yastakbirūna)*'.[401]

As mentioned above, the author of the *Manār* commentary hereby appears to follows the path of some of his exegetical predecessors who also used this verse as an opportunity to depict Christians in much more favourable terms than Jews. Like numerous exegetes before and after him, the 13th-century Sunni theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, too, employed the verse to establish a contrast between Jewish greed for worldly things and Christian renunciation thereof.[402] Similarly, al-Kāshānī[403] contrasts the vices of the Jews with the virtues of the Christians in his discussion of this verse.[404] While another 12th-century exegete, Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī[405] (d. 1200), too, used

[400] Reynolds, for example, notes that a 'prominent element of the Qur'an's material on the Jews is its report that the Israelites killed prophets sent to them'. See Reynolds, 'Killers of the Prophets', p. 9. Also see McAuliffe's *Qur'anic Christians* for more examples.

[401] *TM* VII, p. 282, ll. 11–12.

[402] Other examples include Al-Zamakhshari. See McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, p. 222.

[403] 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 1329), sometimes also spelt 'al-Qāshānī' or 'al-Qāshī', was a famous Sufi author, whose most well-known works include his *Ta'wīlāt Qu'r'ān* as well as a commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* by Ibn ʿArabī (MacDonald, 'Abd al-Razzāḳ Kamāl al-Dīn b. Abu 'l-Ghanāʾim al-Ḳāshānī').

[404] McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, pp. 225-26.

[405] Abū al-Faraj ʿAbd Al-Raḥmān b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-Jawzī, generally referred to as 'Ibn al-Jawzī', was a Baghdadi polymath with a strong interest in Qur'anic exegesis. Jane Dammen McAuliffe has

this verse to discuss the shortcomings of Jews, his exegesis includes a significant caveat for Christians. According to him, this verse does not constitute praise for Christians in general; rather, it only praises those among them who became Muslims. As McAuliffe notes,

> Lest there be any lingering doubt about pervasive Christian defectiveness, this commentator contrasts Jewish and Christian doctrine (*maqāla*) to the grave detriment of the latter: 'There is no doubt that Christian doctrine is more repugnant (*aqbaḥ*) than Jewish.' The only redeeming feature attributable to the Christians is the presence among them of men of learning whose scholarly ability has not been corrupted by arrogance.[406]

It appears that, in his exegesis of this verse, the author of the *Manār* commentary follows most closely the views of Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373), an exegete to whom he resorted extensively, especially in his polemics. Ibn Kathīr, too, criticised what he perceived to be the moral deficiencies of the Jews, believing that they were the reason for this group's killing of previous prophets. In contrast, McAuliffe notes that he speaks in very favourable terms of Christians as a whole,[407] which is similar to the discussion we find in the *Manār* commentary. While I would advocate against reading too much into Riḍā's discussion on Jews and Christians here—it is, after all,

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written a useful article about the main stages of his life as well as his exegetical approach (McAuliffe, 'Ibn al-Jawzī').

[406] McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, p. 222.

[407] McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, pp. 224-25.

largely a summary of many of the surah's own verses—the stark contrast shown by the author's selection of verses is nevertheless somewhat surprising as Riḍā, in particular, is known to have voiced harsh criticisms of Christians in his work from time to time. Specifically, he more often than not equated them with corrupt colonial exploiters, in addition to accusing them, along with the Jews, of introducing untrustworthy traditions into Islam.[408] Indeed, Riḍā is said to have referred to Christians as 'the worst people of earth, arrogant, greedy and manipulative of the world's destinies'.[409] His teacher's view on the matter appears to have been more ambiguous. Thus, it has been remarked by several scholars that ʿAbduh, too, was somewhat critical of European Christianity as both a religion and a civilisation, while at the same time cultivating a constructive engagement with European civilisation. In this context, Yvonne Haddad, for instance, notes that, while Muslims understood that the true message of the Gospel was to tell 'Christians to separate themselves from the world and be ascetic', he felt that modern Christian civilisation was 'one of power and conquest, a civilisation of gold and silver of ostentation and pleasure'.[410] However, despite all speculations to which this passage arguably gives rise, it may perhaps be wisest to conclude that, in his discussion of Jews and Christians, Riḍā is actually

[408] Pink, 'Riḍā, Rashīd'. Specifically, Pink notes that Riḍā 'drew extensively on Ibn Taymiyya (661–728/1263–1328) and his disciple Ibn Kathīr (c. 700–74/1300–73) in order to bring up the polemical notion of *isrā'īliyyāt*: untrustworthy traditions that were introduced into Muslim scholarship by Jews, Christians, or non-Muslim Persians, possibly with subversive intent'.

[409] McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, p. 113.

[410] Haddad, Y, 'Pioneer', p. 38.

simply doing what he, as well as his teacher, have promised their readers on so many other occasions, both within the *Manār* commentary, and without: to interpret the Qur'an through the Qur'an itself and, above all, not to distort its own clear message.[411]

The conclusion ends in a fashion that one might describe as being rather traditional. The first reason for this is that the reader is presented with a *ḥadīth* report that describes the merits of the surah, which, as pointed out earlier, is a classical technique. Specifically, we are presented with an account that also features in the introduction to Ibn Kathīr's commentary:

> Aḥmad[412], al-Nasā'ī,[413] al-Hākim,[414] al-Bayhaqī[415] and some other narrators have narrated on the authority of Jubayr ibn Nufayr[416]: I performed the Hajj, and then I entered upon ʿĀ'īsha, and she said to me: 'O Jubayr, do you recite al-

[411] The remainder of this passage on Jews and Christians ends with what the authors entitle 'the surah's rulings (*aḥkām*) that are particular to the People of the Scripture'. In this very short paragraph, the reader is reminded of the Qur'an's kindness in regards to Jews and Christians. Specifically, we are informed that, if the Qur'an had been written by a human being, Jews and Christians would be treated harshly, especially to those who show open hostility to it. However, since the Qur'an is from God, they are treated with justice, which is something that God explicitly commanded in this surah. Since this, too, is essentially a summary of the Qur'an's own words, I have decided to leave it out in the main text. *TM* VII, p. 282, l.17-p.283, l.1.

[412] Most likely Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855), who was an important Sunni theologian and founder of the *Ḥanbalī* school, one of the four major Sunni schools. Henri Laoust notes that 'he was, through his disciple Ibn Taymiyyah, the distant progenitor of Wahhābism, and has inspired also in a certain degree the conservative reform movement of the Salafiyya'. See Laoust, 'Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal'.

[413] Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Shuʿayb b. Baḥr b. Sinān (d. 915?) was a Sunni traditionist, one of whose collections, *al-Mujtabā,* is traditionally counted among the six *ḥadīth* collections recognised by Sunnis. Very little is known about his life, but see Wensinck, 'al-Nasāʾī' for some biographical information.

[414] Likely Al-Ḥākim al-Nīshāpūrī (d. 1014), the teacher of al-Bayhaqī. See Footnote 371.

[415] Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn Kātib al-Bayhaqī, famous Persian historian of the 11th century, born in 995. See Said Naficy 'Bayhaḳī ' for more background information on this scholar.

[416] Likely Jubayr Ibn Nufayr (d. 699 f).

> Mā'ida?' I said: 'Yes.' She said: 'Indeed, it is the last chapter that was revealed, so whatever permitted things you find in it, then make it lawful, and whatever forbidden things you find in it, then make it unlawful.

In addition to the classical technique of including *ḥadīth* reports with a chain of transmitters, Riḍā demonstrates a desire to establish the report's authenticity by drawing upon well-known traditional figures: thus, we read that Aḥmad and al-Tirmidhī[417] have declared it as authentic, as have al-Ḥākim and al-Bayhaqī on the authority of ʿAbd Allah Ibn ʿAmr.[418] In addition to this *ḥadīth*, the fact that Riḍā ends his conclusion with the words 'God knows best' is another very classical technique. Traditional mainstream commentaries are generally never too decisive and even slightly cautious in their assessment of views. In al-Qurṭubī's commentary, for example, one continuously finds concessions like these at the end of his verse-by-verse exegesis.[419] Instances like these thus serve as a further indicator of how, despite, his repetitive claims of breaking with the tradition of classical *tafsīr*, the author of the *Manār* commentary remains nevertheless embedded in it—or, at the very least, seeks to demonstrate his familiarity with it for a purpose.[420]

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[417] Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā b. Sawra Al-Tirmidhī (d. 892), a collector of *ḥadīth* and the author of one of the Six Books (*al-kutub al-sitta)*. He was among others a pupil of al-Bukhārī (Juynboll, 'Al-Tirmidhī'). Also see Ballanfat's article on him for further background (Ballanfat, 'Tirmidhī').

[418] Likely ʿAbd Allāh ʿAmr b. al- ʿĀṣ, a companion of the Prophet and son of a military commander ʿAmr b. al- ʿĀṣ. See Wensinck and Sadan's article on his father, as well as *TM* VII, p. 283, ll. 5-6.

[419] See Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jamiʿ*, vols. 5-6, p. 41, l, 13; p. 43, l. 22; and p. 49, l. 14, for example.

[420] As Nicolai Sinai notes, '[t]rotz dieser programmatischen Traditionsschelte ist Riḍā jedoch sichtlich daran gelegen, sich als kompetenten Diskussionspartner der vormodernen Schriftauslegung zu präsentieren' (Sinai, *Der Koran*, p. 28).

4. Chapter Conclusion

Similar to my observations in the previous chapter, the above two passages provide us with another good insight into both the continuity and change that marks Riḍā's work as a modern commentator on the Qur'an. In many ways, the introduction and conclusion to *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* are reminiscent of traditional works of exegesis as their author frequently picks up familiar exegetical topics, references well-known figures and sources from the Muslim tradition, and does so in a writing style that is often characteristic of that of pre-modern *mufassirūn*. In so doing, Riḍā not only shows his reader in a concise fashion that he is well-versed in and familiar with this long-standing genre, but arguably also provides some evidence of his ability to take up the main focus of his work, which is the verse-by-verse exegesis of surah 5. Although this exegesis, too, does not present a drastic and complete overhaul of the *tafsīr* genre, we shall see in the next chapter of this thesis that Riḍā nevertheless effectuates a number of significant breaks with it. In addition, the author's use and, indeed, manipulation of tradition, as I see it, will become more discernible. Further, the concluding remarks, in which, for many pages, Riḍā does nothing but let the Qur'an speak for itself, demonstrate that the author is indeed true to his promise that the *Manār* commentary, unlike many before it, places a stronger focus on the Qur'an itself as its primary source of exegesis. As a consequence, although the *Manār* commentary—as witnessed through these two texts—may not constitute a radical break with tradition

at all levels, it nevertheless appears to offer a fresh approach to the genre in several ways. This dichotomy between the *Manār* commentary's modernising tendencies and its continued embeddedness in and engagement with tradition, as foreshadowed above, will be the focus of the next chapter. Specifically, I will look at Riḍā's interpretation of Q 5:44–50, but also discuss other passages that are indicative of his exegetical methods and outlook.

Chapter IV: An Analysis of the Content and Literary Features of the *Manār* Commentary's Exegesis of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*

1. Chapter Introduction

The overarching aim of this chapter is to provide a closer reading of the *Manār* commentary's exegesis of *Sūrat Al-Mā'ida* in order to further investigate the relationship between this commentary's modernising tendencies—as well as its self-proclaimed mission to constitute a break with or departure from pre-modern works of *tafsīr* literature (see Chapters I and II)—and its embeddedness in a tradition that the author of this text often appears to denigrate. In so doing, this chapter pays particular attention to Riḍā's interpretation of Q 5:44–50.

This passage is of interest due to its explicit focus on Jews and Christians—to whom God is said to have revealed the Torah and the Bible as a 'guidance and light' (Q 5:44 and Q 5:46: *hudan wa-nūrun*)—and due to its repeated instruction to 'judge according to that which God has revealed'.[421] In particular, these verses admonish those who fail to do so, calling them variously 'unbelievers' (Q 5:44: *kāfirūna*), 'wrongdoers' (Q 5:45: *ẓālimūna*), and 'trespassers' (Q 5:47: *fāsiqūna*) whom God will 'punish' for 'some of their sins' (Q 5:49: *yuṣībahum bi-baʿḍi dhunūbihim*). It appears that

[421] Specifically, the instruction to 'judge according to that which God has revealed', as well as a warning about the consequences of failing to do so, appears six times in Q 5:44–49. For example, Q 5:45 states that 'those who do not judge according to what God has revealed are unbelievers (*wa-man lam yaḥkum bi-mā anzala allāhu fa-awlā'ika hum al-kāfirūna)*'.

the majority of pre-modern Sunni Arab commentators on the Qur'an understood the verb *ḥakama*, as used in the context of these verses, in the sense of 'to judge' or 'to pass judgement'.[422] More specifically, the works of these authors suggest that the verb *ḥakama* refers to judgements or acts of arbitration passed by the Prophet Muḥammad in response to legal disputes and/or tribal issues occurring either within the early Muslim community itself, or between Muslims and the People of the Book.[423] Accordingly, Ibn Kathīr informs his reader that Q 5:47 was revealed following a disagreement between two Jewish groups over the payment of blood money.[424] Similarly, one of the examples provided in the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* in relation to Q 5:48—a verse which discusses the Qur'an's status as confirming the true elements of the Torah and the Bible—concerns the Prophet Muḥammad's application of God's judgement in matters of arbitration concerning 'the People of the Book, if they take their cases before you' (*bayna ahl al-kitāb idhā tarāfaʿū ilayka*).[425] Furthermore, the 12th-century exegete al-Zamakhsharī equates not judging according to the Qur'an with

[422] This meaning also seems to be the understanding found in mainstream translations of the Qur'an. For example, both Yusuf Ali and Marmaduke Pickthall's render this verb as in the sense of 'judging' into English. Similarly, Muhammad Hamidullah uses the verb 'juger' in his French translation while the majority of German translations use the words 'richten'.

[423] For example, in *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an*, Michel Cuypers summarises the content of these verses in relation to the People of the Book as follows: 'Authority is given to the Prophet to arbitrate in conflicts between Jews and Christians, an arbitration which they refuse, based on their Scriptures and their own legal bodies, which are enough for them. In reply, they are told that they have altered their Scriptures—it is conceded that judgment is based on the law of retaliation in their Scriptures, which they do not observe.' Cuypers, *The Banquet*, p. 52.

[424] Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p 61, l. 26–p. 64, l. 21.

[425] Maḥallī, *Al-Jalālayn*, p. 125, l. 13.

'not judging according to the signs [of God]' as well as 'denying the regulations of God'.[426]

However, a number of contemporary scholars such as Ronald L. Nettler have observed that certain 'modern politically minded exegetes'—most prominent among them the Egyptian Sayyid Quṭb (1906-66)—have read this verb in the meaning of 'to govern'. More specifically, Nettler argues that some of these thinkers have applied these verses to what they consider 'the modern situation of "Islamically-weak" "Muslim" rulers and regimes' who, by governing according to 'human teachings rather than God's word' are distorting the Qur'an's 'true' message.[427] Discussing the evolution of the lexical meaning of this verb in *Sharia: Islamic Law in the Contemporary Context*, Frank Griffel notes that

> [it] is, in fact, among the many small changes in the Arabic language over the past centuries that the verb *ḥakama* also assumed the meaning 'to rule'. The active participle 'he who passes judgment' or 'a judge', *ḥākim* in classical Arabic, may in modern standard Arabic also mean 'he who rules' or 'a ruler'. Yet this meaning is not known to have applied to the Arabic of the Qur'an, and none of the classical commentators of the Qur'an reads it that way. For them, the verses that use *ḥakama* refer to God's judgement about human deeds, and not to God's rule on earth.[428]

[426] Gätje, *Exegesis,* p. 135.
[427] Nettler, 'Guidelines', p. 187.
[428] Griffel, *Shari'a*, p. 15.

In view of the fact that Riḍā routinely discusses the socio-political happenings of his time in both the *Manār* commentary and his journal—and, in so doing, laments what he perceives to be a weakened Muslim empire—it is worthwhile to take a more detailed look at his interpretation of this passage. As we shall see later on in this chapter, to the author of the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, the meaning of *ḥakama* does indeed have some connection to governance, although he appears to draw different conclusions than those drawn by Quṭb a few decades later. Specifically, Riḍā uses these very verses as the basis for a lengthy discussion of British rule in India in order to answer the question whether Muslims should be allowed to serve in the local British government there.

An additional, although not primary, reason to concentrate on these verses stems from the influence the *Manār* commentary is presumed to have had on Quṭb's work. Indeed, several scholars, including Aḥmad Rā'if, who edited the *Manār* commentary in the early 1990s, have remarked that the '*Tafsīr al-Manār* [...] had a great impact on Sayyid Quṭb, and he made it a major reference in writing his everlasting work, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*.'[429] While I shall not provide an in-depth analysis of Quṭb's thought, I shall, however, assess to what extent Riḍā's interpretation of these verses might not only have shaped his thinking, but also provided the first basis for Quṭb's subsequent

[429] Rā'if, Aḥmad, 'Tafsīr al-Manār', pp. 7-8.

departure from the traditional understanding of the verb *ḥakama*, as it appears in this context.

This chapter will therefore provide an in-depth analysis of the *Manār* commentary's exegesis of these verses, read not only in the wider context of Riḍā and ʿAbduh's thought, but also in comparison to pre-modern works of *tafsīr* and, where and if appropriate, Quṭb's commentary.[430] I shall pay close attention to the Riḍā's use of traditional exegetical material and scholarship—including his use of *ḥadīth* literature and named authorities—as well as the linguistic peculiarities of his *tafsīr*. As this chapter will demonstrate, the latter in particular seem closely tied to the specific topics under discussion, with the author often adopting a more passionate and stronger 20th-century tone as he moves from abstract considerations to more concrete social, political, and cultural issues. Finally, although also not the primary concern of this chapter, I examine a number of passages from other parts of the *Manār* commentary in an attempt to draw broader conclusions regarding Riḍā's methods as a modern exegete. As we shall see, certain exegetical techniques and, in particular, the author's skilful engagement with traditional thought and scholarship in order to create his own narrative, are not exclusive to Riḍā's commentary on *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*.

[430] A comparison with Quṭb's work chiefly serves the purpose of providing the reader with a trajectory outlining the development of the understanding of these verses in later Sunni Arabic thought. It is, however, not a key concern of this chapter and will only be conducted in passing.

2. *Sūrat Al-Mā'ida*: Its Position in the Qur'anic Corpus and its Significance in Sunni Arabic Commentaries on the Qur'an

2.1 *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*: An Introduction

Sūrat al-Mā'ida, which appears as the fifth in the Qur'an following *Sūrat Al-Nisā'* and preceding *Sūrat Al-Anʿām*, is traditionally classed as a Medinan surah and consists of 120 verses. In addition to providing a series of laws and regulations—such as a code of ceremonial rulings and restrictions, chiefly on hunting during the Muslim pilgrimage (e.g. Q 5:2 and Q 5:95-96); ablution before prayer (e.g. Q 5:6-7); hunting laws (e.g. Q 5:4); marriage regulations (e.g. Q 5:5); regulations regarding lawful and unlawful food (e.g. Q 5:1, Q 5:4-5, Q: 5:87-88, Q 5:96); as well as a prohibition on intoxicating substances and gambling (e.g. Q 5:90-92)—the surah dedicates considerable space to admonitory statements not only aimed at the early Muslim community and the Prophet Muḥammad, but also at Jews and Christians—often referred to as 'People of the Book' (*ahl al-kitāb*).[431]

Accordingly, several passages, such as Q 5:44-46, remind the reader that, when the Jewish Torah and the Christian Gospel were originally revealed to mankind, there was within them 'guidance and light' (*hudan wa-nūrun*). However, although previous prophets such as Moses and Jesus preserved this divine guidance, 'curses were

[431] According to Cuypers, *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*'s themes include 'the theme of paraenesis (exhortations and threats); that of legislation (rules and prescriptions); the narrative thread, which sometimes seems very developed and sometimes barely outlined; and the polemical theme (mainly towards Jews and Christians)' (Cuypers, The *Banquet*, p. 51).

pronounced on the unbelievers among the Israelites by the tongue of David and Jesus the son of Mary [...] because they disobeyed and transgressed' (Q 5:78: *ʿaṣaw wa-kānū yaʿtadūna)*. Specifically, the text accuses the Jews of breaching their 'covenant' (*mithāq*) with God, while the Christians are said to have 'forgotten part of what they had been reminded of' (*wa-nasū ḥaẓẓan mimmā dhukkirū bihi*), resulting in 'enmity and hatred' (*al-ʿadāwata wa-l-baghḍāʾa*) among them (Q 5:12-14).

As for the Muslim community, the text routinely admonishes them—generally using the phrase 'O you who believe' (*yā-ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū*)—to be just (*aʿdilū)* and to be fearful of God (*wa-ttaqū allāha*) (e.g. Q 5:8-11), to be wary of 'taking Jews and Christians as your allies' (Q 5:51: *awlīyāʾ*), and instead turn to the 'party of God' (Q 5:56: *ḥizb allāh*), i.e. God, the Prophet Muḥammad, and those who believe.[432] According to the text, those are the Muslim community's 'allies' (sg.: *walīkum*), which shall be victorious (*fa-inna ḥizba allāhi hum al-ghālibūna*) (Q 5:55-56).

In addition, this surah contains a number of statements directly addressed to the Prophet Muḥammad himself, usually introduced by the imperative *qul* (e.g., Q 5:17, Q 5:68) or the vocative exclamation *yā-ayyuhā l-rasūlu* (e.g., Q 5:41). These encourage him to beware of the hypocrites (Q 5:41); to 'make known all that is

[432] In total, the phrase 'O you who believe' occurs a total of 16 times in *Sūrat al-Māʾida*. Another sequence of verses in this surah which arguably contains even more exhortations as well as regulations to the Muslim community can be found in Q 5:87-108. Specifically, the phrase 'O you who believe' occurs eight times in these verses, with exhortations including a ban on intoxicants and gambling (Q 5:90: *al-khamru wa-l-maysiru);* a ban on hunting while in the sacred precincts or in pilgrim garb (Q 5:95: *lā taqtulū al-ṣayd wa-antum ḥurumun*); and a reminder that believers are themselves responsible to follow the Qur'an's guidance (Q 5:105: *ʿalaykum anfusukum lā yaḍurrukum man ḍalla idhā ihtadaytum ilā allāhi*).

revealed to you', in the knowledge that God will protect him (Q 5:67-69); and to warn the Muslim community not to 'exceed the limits [of that which is proper] in [their] religion' (Q 5:77: *lā taghlū fī dīnikum ghayra al-ḥaqqi*).

In general, it appears that *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*'s significance to the vast majority of pre-modern Sunni Arabic exegetes lies in its perceived role of being the last divine revelation and thus consolidating the early Muslim community, both in terms of ritual matters as well as legal provisions.[433] Specifically, it is often said to have continued and elaborated on some of the laws and instructions given in earlier surahs. Furthermore, *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*'s verses are also said to have warned future Muslim rulers against the corruption of power and directed them to observe the guidance provided by the Qur'an. In addition, the surah's significance is also considered to lie in the lessons it teaches Muslims from the failings of their predecessors, the Jews and the Christians, who, in their turn, have been admonished to give up their infelicitous deviations and accept the guidance taught by the Prophet Muhammad. Such views are expressed, for instance, in the introductory remarks to surah 5 which occur in a number of classical works of *tafsīr*. For example, in *Al-Kashf wa-l-bayān ʿan tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, al-Thaʿlabī includes three *ḥadīth* reports that state the surah's thematic emphases. In the case of surah 5, this concerns, among other things, the surah's bringing definitive laws to the Muslim community and its concern with Jews and

[433] For other examples regarding this surah's perceived significance, as found above all in the introductory remarks preceding some classical commentaries on the Qur'an, see Chapter III of this thesis.

Christians.[434] Similarly, Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) begins the verse-by-verse exegesis of surah 5 with a selection of *ḥadīth* reports that emphasise *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*'s being the last surah revealed to Muḥammad, as well as its specific qualities, which include its role in establishing what is 'permissible' and what is 'impermissible'.[435] In view of the fact that I have already discussed several of these passages in the previous chapter of this thesis, I shall not reiterate them here. Instead, in the following subsections I will discuss the way that the author of the *Manār* commentary deals with this surah.

[434] Al-Thaʿlabī, *Al-Kashf*, vol. 4, p. 5, ll. 1-10. Specifically, this author's introduction reproduces a *ḥadīth* report attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad which tells its audience to 'abide by [the surah's] permissions and prohibitions' (*fa-aḥillū ḥalālahā wa-ḥarrimū ḥarāmahā).*

[435] Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 2, ll. 4–17.

2.2 *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* in the *Manār* Commentary – Preliminary Observations

In *Mysticism and Politics: A Critical Reading of* Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān *by Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966)*, the French sociologist Olivier Carré observes that Riḍā, in his commentary, 'insisted clearly [...] on sura 7 (*Al-Aʿrāf*, The Heights), 3 (*Āl ʿImrān*, The Family of ʿImrān) and 5 (*Al-Mā'ida*, The Table spread)' as well as 'on sura 9 and 6'.[436] And indeed, excluding the chapter introductions and conclusions, the *Manār* commentary's exegesis of the 120 verses of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*, which is contained in volumes VI and VII, comprises 649 pages. In proportional terms, this means that Riḍā dedicated approximately 10.5 per cent of his unfinished commentary to the discussion of surah 5. Similarly, his exegesis of surah 6 covers almost 11 per cent of his *tafsīr*. In contrast, his attention to surah 2—despite its containing nearly 2.4 times more verses—is restricted to a mere 16.7 per cent of the overall opus.[437] Although one should not ignore the fact that the *Tafsīr al-Manār* does not cover the entire Qur'anic corpus,[438] *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* arguably occupies a prominent position in the *Manār* commentary. This is despite the fact that this surah only makes up 3.51 per cent of the Qur'anic text itself.[439] The surah's position in the *Manār* commentary also stands out when compared to its position in the vast majority

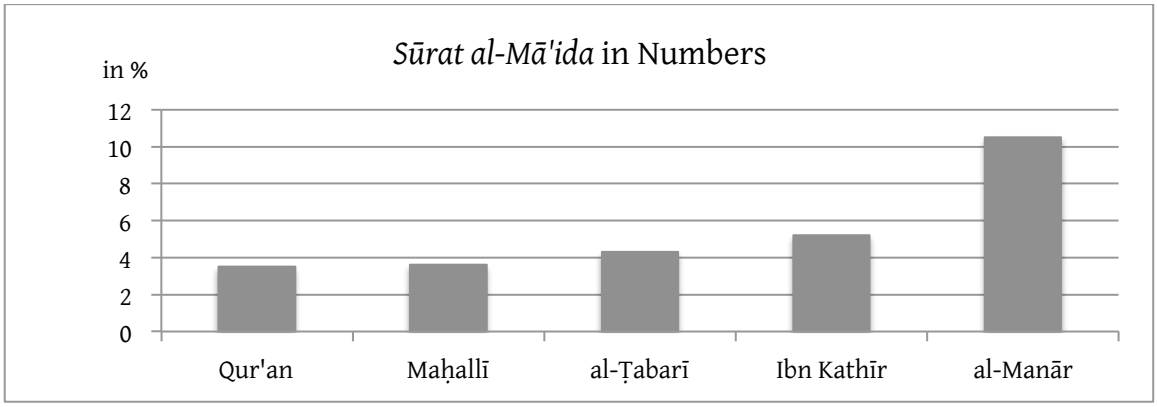
[436] Carré, *Mysticism and Politics*, p. 19.

[437] All of the percentages presented in this sub-chapter, which I have calculated myself, take into consideration the various editions with which I have been working. For example, the percentages pertaining to the *Manār* commentary are based on the fact that, out of the 6,201 pages comprising the second edition of the overall opus, 1,037 pages are dedicated to surah 2; 649 to surah 5; and 681 to surah 6.

[438] As mentioned elsewhere, their exegesis ends with surah 12. See Chapter I for more detail.

[439] Ambros and Procházka, *Dictionary*, p. 369.

of classical *tafāsīr* on the Qur'an. For example, al-Ṭabarī's commentary dedicates approximately 4.3 per cent to surah 5; similarly, the authors of the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* pay just about 3.6 per cent of their attention to this surah. Ibn Kathīr's commentary somewhat constitutes an exception, with 5.2 per cent of his commentary focusing on *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*.



At a deeper level, a comparison between some of the above commentaries and the *Tafsīr al-Manār* reveals even more differences, both in terms of structure, content, and language. To provide but one example: classical commentators on the Qur'an such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī generally follow a strict format that displays what Norman Calder has described as 'definable formal characteristics'. These can be summarised as follows:

1. A work of *tafsīr* literature deals with the entire Qur'anic text, which is segmented for the purpose of comment and dealt with in canonical order;
2. It contains named authorities and offers polyvalent readings;
3. And it approaches the Qur'anic text from different angles, both instrumental and ideological.[440]

Accordingly, al-Ṭabarī generally introduces his exegesis of the verse at hand, or a segment thereof, using the expression *al-qawl fī ta'wīl qawlihi jalla thanā'uhu* (lit.: the interpretation of the word of God, glorified be His praise). He then either provides a short explanation of the verse—which he clearly marks as his own via statements such as 'Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr, may God have mercy upon him (*raḥimahu allāhu*), said'—or immediately informs his reader that there exists a debate regarding the verse under discussion. In either scenario, al-Ṭabarī virtually always proceeds to provide polyvalent readings, usually introduced by the phrase *wa-ikhtalafa ahl al-ta'wīl fī...* (lit.: 'the exegetes differed regarding ...'). This is then followed by a list of reports containing named authorities that support the first view. Stylistically, this is marked via the phrase *qāla baʿḍuhum* (lit.: 'some of them said'), followed by the phrase *dhikr man qāla dhālik* (lit.: 'a mention of those who said this'). As for Q 5:1, for instance, the

[440] Calder, 'Tafsīr', pp. 101–6.

list provided by al-Ṭabarī spans over twelve pages.[441] Having presented proponents of the first interpretation, al-Ṭabarī then generally introduces a second view, often preceded by the phrase *wa-qāla ākharūna* (lit.: 'others said'), which, in turn, is also supported by a lengthy list of reports containing named authorities. At the end of their discussion of a given verse, some traditional exegetes may even shy away from providing their own opinion in a clear or direct fashion altogether, instead opting for phrases such as *allāh aʿlam* (lit.: God knows best).[442] In such instances, readers of classical works of *tafsīr* might at most be able to infer the author's preference for a specific reading based on the way he organises his material and the amount of traditions he includes in support of a given view.[443]

Although the author of the *Manār* commentary, too, follows the order of the canonical text and, in offering his explanations of each verse, resorts to a number of classical features including *ḥadīth* reports and quotations from traditional scholars and/or schools of thought that acknowledge the existence of polyvalent readings,[444] Riḍā routinely expands this traditional format. In particular, after his initial verse-by-

[441] Al-Tabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, vol. 8, p. 5, l. 12 – p. 16, l. 12.

[442] However, as numerous scholars including Karen Bauer have observed, al-Ṭabarī's own commentary is not void of instances in which the author gives his personal opinion, although he himself may not have labelled such occurrences as his providing an 'opinion' (*raʾy*) *per se*, particularly in light of the negative connotations this term carried to him (Bauer, 'Introductions', p. 44).

[443] See Calder, 'Tafsīr', pp. 101–139 for a more comprehensive overview of the characteristics of classical *tafsīr*. In addition, Nicolai Sinai notes that, 'even when a given commentator makes clear his own opinion, which is not always the case, he will at least not ascribe to it an exclusive correctness ('alleinige Richtigkeit') but a higher probability at most' (Sinai, *Der Koran*, p. 32).

[444] See *TM* VI, p. 213ff. for a quotation by al-Shāfiʿī on the topic of marrying Jews and Christians. Similarly, see *TM* VII p. 146ff. for a lengthy list of *ḥadīth* reports collected by al-Bukhārī on the issue of *karāhat al-suʾāl*, followed by 'that which the scholars had to say on the issue'.

verse exegesis, Riḍā often includes exposés which feature discussions on social, cultural, and political topics pertaining to his day and age. These essays tend to be highlighted by separate headlines and are written in a language that reflects the time in which the author lived.

For example, as part of his discussion of Q 5:46-50, Riḍā dedicates nearly four pages to the topic of 'judging according to English laws in India' (*al-ḥukm bi-l-qawānīn al-injlīzīya fī al-hind*)—a discussion that appears to have been prompted by a question submitted by a reader of the *Manār* journal, and which will be examined in more detail later on in this chapter. Similarly, in the context of Q 5:33-34,[445] two verses that discuss God's punishment for those who 'strive to spread corruption on earth' (*wa-yasʿawna fī al-arḍi fasādan*)—the author of the *Manār* commentary mentions the Dinshaway incident, a violent confrontation that occurred between British soldiers and the inhabitants of the Egyptian village of Dinshaway in 1906.[446] In so doing, he muses about the nature of politics in general and, in particular, the habit of modern

[445] Q 5:33-34 can be rendered into English as follows: 'The punishment of those who wage war against God and his Messenger, and strive to spread corruption on earth is: execution, or crucifixion or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land: that is their disgrace in this world, and a heavy punishment is theirs in the hereafter. Except for those who repent before they fall into your power: in that case, know that God is forgiving, most merciful.'

[446] *TM* VI, p. 355, ll. 5–23. In *The Arabs: A History*, Eugene Rogan argues that the Dinshaway incident constituted a turning point in the relationship between the British occupants and local Egyptian population. Specifically, he explains that 'while Egyptians did not like being under British rule, the British had [until the Dinshaway incident of 1906] done nothing to provoke them out of a complacent acceptance of colonial rule'. Following the event, however, '[n]ewspapers conveyed the tragedy to people from village to village with the songs they composed, recounting the tragedy of Dinshaway and the injustice of British rule'. (Rogan, *The Arabs*, pp. 147–148). Similar observations have been made by Fahmy, who notes that the 'newly emerging mass culture [...] effectively reified [the Dinshaway incident] into a functional national myth' (Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, p. 93)

governments to 'close loopholes' (*sadd al-dharā'iʿ*). Hereby borrowing a well-known term from Islamic law,[447] Riḍā seems to intend the practice of closing off the means that might lead to evil or a greater injustice—in this specific case, the overly harsh punishment of local Egyptians by British soldiers following the accidental death of an English soldier:

> A strong focus on closing loopholes (*al-tashdīd fī sadd al-dharā'iʿ*) is one of the pillars of politics (*rukn min arkān al-siyāsa*), with every state continuing to preserve [this principle] even though some might go so far as to let delusion rule in this (*ḥattā anna baʿḍahum yaḥkum al-wahm fīhi*). What England did with this intent in Egypt was horrible, when members of the English army passed through the village of Dinshayway a few years ago, hunting pigeons in the [village's] cloister. So they quarrelled with the owners of the pigeons and began beating each other [...]. [The English] set up a court martial (*al-maḥkama al-ʿurfīya*) to try those peasants under the chairmanship of Boutros Pasha Ghali, with [the court] ruling that some of those peasants would be crucified and punished by whipping (*an yuṣallabū wa-yuʿadhdhabū bi-l-ḍarb bi-l-siyāṭ*) [...] until their flesh was scattered all around (*ḥattā tatanāthar luḥūmuhum*).'[448]

[447] Mawil Y. Izzi Dien explains that this 'concept is based on the Sharīʿa's tendency to prevent evil (*darʾ al-mafāsid*)', which, according to her, 'has preference over achieving good (*djalb al-maṣāliḥ*). In other words, the likelihood of an 'evil' outcome sometimes justifies the prohibition of an action that could lead to it. See Izzi Dien, 'Sadd al-Dharā'i" for more examples.

[448] *TM* VI, p. 355, ll.5–12. It is worth highlighting that, in his description of the event, Riḍā is somewhat bending the truth: although the punishment was disproportionately harsh—indeed, 21 out of 52 villagers were sentenced by a court, with many receiving lengthy prison terms—no villagers were crucified. Specifically, Ziad Fahmy notes that '[f]our were sentenced to death by hanging, two to life imprisonment, one to fifteen years' imprisonment, six to seven years' imprisonment, three to one year's imprisonment and fifty lashes, and five to fifty lashes'. (Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, p. 92).

As part of his discussion, the author of the *Manār* commentary not only resorts to modern Arabic vocabulary, references to contemporary leaders and institutions, but also to a style that reveals engagement with and, indeed, passion for the topic under discussion. For example, the reader is presented with modern concepts and terms such as 'states' (*duwal*), the 'court martial' (*al-maḥkama al-ʿurfīya*), and, as we shall see below, 'newspapers' (*al-jarā'id*), and even the British House of Commons (*majlis al-nuwwāb*). In addition, the reader is informed that the peasants' trial took place under the chairmanship of Boutros Ghali (*bi-ri'āsat Buṭrus Bāshā Ghālī*), Egypt's then foreign minister who would go on to become the country's prime minister two years later. As for the specific issue of the English 'closing loopholes' (*sadd al-dharā'iʿ*) in order to justify their harsh treatment of the Egyptian peasants, Riḍā goes on to inform his reader that

> People, including even some of the English freemen (*ḥattā baʿḍ al-aḥrār al-inklīz*) in their country, criticised this cruelty and called it abominable (*qad ankara hādhihī al-qaswa wa-istafẓaʿahā*), with some denouncing it in newspapers and in the House of Commons (*wa-shannaʿū ʿalayhā fī al-jarā'id wa-fī majlis al-nuwwāb*). [They said that] such an incident cannot be considered a rebellion against power (*lā tuʿadd min al-khurūj ʿalā dhī al-sulṭān*), nor [evidence of] corruption in the land. However, by [resorting to] cruelty in [this incidence] the English

intended to achieve that nobody would resist an English soldier, even if that person is being attacked.[449]

In other words, although the English had subjected local Egyptian peasants to what even the British public at the time viewed as an abominable cruelty, they had arguably averted a greater evil—that is, opposition to its deployed soldiers in the region. In so doing, the English had seemingly acted in accordance with a long-standing principle of Islamic law itself. However, the passage that follows sheds light on Riḍā's earlier cautionary statement that 'delusion [might] rule in this' (*yaḥkumu al-wahm fīhi*) and more, significantly, makes it clear that the author of the *Manār* commentary by no means endorses the actions of the British:

> But where is this justice of Islam which Caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb applied (*ʿadl al-islām alladhī sāwā khalīfatuhu*[450] *ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb*) between the son of the conqueror of Egypt, [who was also] the leader and general ruler of its army (ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ) and a Coptic boy? As the two were trying to get ahead of each other, the Coptic [boy] got ahead of the ruler's son, whereupon the [ruler's son] slapped him saying: '[How dare] you get ahead of me when I am the son of noble men (*a-tasbiqnī wa-anā ibn al-akramīn*)?' When the matter was brought forward (*rufiʿa al-amr*) to ʿUmar (peace be upon him) he was not satisfied until the Coptic boy had slapped the ruler's son just like the latter had previously slapped him (*lam yarḍa illā an yaṣfaʿ al-qubṭī ibn al-ḥākim kamā ṣafaʿahu*). [The

[449] *TM* VI, p. 355, ll. 13–17.

[450] It appears the suffix *-hu* refers back to the word 'Islam'.

ruler's son] then said to ʿUmar the famous golden words: 'O ʿUmar, since when do you enslave those people whose mothers had given birth to them as freemen (*qad waladathum ummahātuhum aḥrāran)*?'[451]

In addition to providing the reader with an example of Riḍā's strong interest in the socio-political realities of his time, this passage is also significant in that it gives us a better understanding of his methods as a commentator on the Qur'an. On the one hand, it underscores the author's belief that the Islam practiced by the early Muslim community—which he elsewhere describes as 'true' Islam—not only continues to bear relevance to the present context, but also that this Islam is intrinsically just—certainly more so than the English legal system.[452] It is in this light that the somewhat mocking statement immediately following the above narrative is to be understood: 'however, once they had left the judgement of Islam (*lammā tarakū ḥukm al-islām)*, Muslims began asking the English, and only the English, to teach them justice and its laws (*an-yuʿallimūhum al-ʿadl wa-qawānīnahu*)!!'.[453] On the other hand, the above passage is also indicative of Riḍā's use of traditional sources. Although he, too, resorts to various traditional materials in his *tafsīr* from time to time, he generally does so with a purpose in mind. More specifically, to Riḍā, tradition appears to serve as a tool that

[451] *TM* VI, p. 355 ll. 17–22.

[452] See Chapters I and II for more detail.

[453] *TM* VI, p. 355 ll. 22–23. The authors' use of two quotation marks following this statement is also indicative of their more novel linguistic style.

not only permits him to demonstrate his familiarity with the long-standing *tafsīr* discipline, but which also allows him to advance his own views.

Similar instances that display the author's keen interest in the concrete socio-political realities of his time—as well as his skilful manipulation of traditional sources in the context of other topics—occur throughout the *Manār* commentary's exegesis of surah 5. While I shall discuss a few more examples later on in this chapter, a detailed examination of each one of them would go beyond the constraints of this thesis. In addition, the key focus of this chapter is to take a more thorough look at Riḍā 's exegesis of Q 5:44-50. However, for the sake of completeness, I shall include a brief overview of the amount of attention the author of this commentary pays to surah 5's other topics. Specifically, in the table below I provide an overview of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* as it is treated in the *Manār* commentary. In addition to its potential of facilitating future research on the same surah, this outline provides a glimpse into some of the thematic emphases given by the author of this *tafsīr* to certain topics. Accordingly, it becomes apparent that—perhaps as to be expected from a surah that spends a significant amount of time talking about regulations—approximately 251 pages (38.7 per cent) are dedicated to discussions of laws, regulations, ritual, and, oaths (e.g., the commentary on Q 5:1–5, 6–7, 87–89, 90–93, 94–100), with 53 pages (8.2 per cent) alone on guidelines pertaining to ablution before prayer. This is possibly an indicator that the author of this text, too, was, to some extent, preoccupied with topics pertaining to

ritual, despite his often-repeated declarations to the contrary.[454] Equally, Q 5:101 ('O you who believe! Ask not of things which, if they were made known unto you, would trouble you; but if you ask of them when the Qur'an is being revealed, they will be made known unto you. God will pardon this, for God is forgiving, clement') emerges as a verse to which the author accords significant attention, given that he dedicates more than 70 (10. 8 per cent) pages to its exegesis alone.[455]

Section[456]	Key Themes	Location in the *Manār* Commentary and Volume
Section 1 (verses 1–5)	Fulfilling God's obligations; regulations on lawful and unlawful food, hunting, and marriage.	Preceded by chapter introduction; p. 117, l. 19 – p. 219, l. 6 (15.7 per cent / 102 pages)
Section 2 (verses 6–7)	Guidelines on ablution before prayer.	P. 219, l. 7 – p. 272, l. 12. (8.2 per cent / 53 pages)
Section 3 (verses 8–11)	God's command to abide by justice, to avoid partiality, and to keep one's duty to God.	P. 272, l. 13 – 278, l. 25 (0.9 per cent / 6 pages)
Section 4 (verses 12–14)	The Israelites' breaking of	P. 279, l. 1 – p.302, l. 24

[454] See *TM* VII, p. 278, ll. 19-21, for example, where the authors lament some of their exegetical predecessors' seeming preoccupation with ritual matters.

[455] See *TM* VII, pp. 124–202.

[456] The divisions as presented in this table were created by myself.

	their covenant with God.	(3.5 per cent / 23 pages)
Section 5 (verses 15–19)	Further shortcomings of Jews and Christians; God's admonition of Jews and Christians through the Prophet.	P. 303, l. 1 – 320, l.25 (2.6 per cent / 17 pages)
Section 6 (verses 20–34)	Further admonition of Jews and Christians; the story of Moses and how the Israelites lacked devotion to fight in the way of God; the permissibility of killing only in self-defence, narrated through the story of Adam and his two sons; further warnings about the humiliation faced by those who fight against God and his messenger.	P. 321, l. 1 – 368, l. 5 (7.2 per cent / 47 pages)
Section 7 (verses 35–40)	Admonition of believers that success is only possible through fear of God; fear of God outweighs material possessions; the punishment for stealing and God's command to forgive those who sincerely repent.	P. 368, l. 6 – p. 384, l. 24 (2.5 per cent / 16 pages)

Section 8 (verses 41–43)	Call to the Prophet Muhammad to beware of the hypocrites; God's revelation of the Torah as a guidance in accordance with which the prophets are to judge.	p. 385, l. 1 – p. 396, l. 16 (1.7 per cent / 11 pages)
Section 9 (verses 44–50)	God's revelation of the Torah and the Gospels as a light and guidance in accordance with which prophets and learned people are to judge.	P. 396, l. 17 – p. 423, l. 2 (4.2 per cent / 27 pages)
Section 10 (verses 51–63)	A series of warnings to Muslims, including the repeated admonition that they should not seek protectors from outside their own ranks as those might 'mock' their religion; the importance of seeking piety, purification, and a connection with God.	P. 423, l. 3 – p. 451, l. 21 (4.3 per cent / 28 pages)
Section 11 (verses 64–66)	Further admonitions to Jews and Christians—including their scholars—for their insufficiently advances views and behaviour; discussion of hypocrisy; God's command	P. 451, l. 22 – p. 463, l. 4 (1.8 per cent / 12 pages)

	to charitable acts.	
Section 12 (verses 67–86)	A call to Muhammad to spread God's revelation in the knowledge that he is protected by God; an explanation that the criterion for afterlife is not tied to a specific religion but to a core set of beliefs; the mortality of Jesus Christ; a warning to Muslims to avoid 'excess' in religion.	P. 463, l. 5 – vol. 7, p. 17, l. 13 (7.7 per cent / 50 pages)
Section 13 (verses 87–89)	Muslims should not avoid things made lawful for them; a discussion of the nature of oaths.	P. 17, l. 14 – p.48, l. 25 (4.8 per cent / 31 pages)
Section 14 (verses 90–93)	God's prohibition of intoxicating substances and gambling; an exhortation to Muslims to obey the Prophet Muhammad.	P. 49, l. 1 – p. 99 l. 15 (7.7 per cent / 50 pages)
Section 15 (verses 94–100)	Regulations on hunting during the forbidden months; the significance of the Kaʿba.	P. 99, l. 16 – p. 124, l. 23 (2.3 per cent / 15 pages)
Section 17 (verses 101–	An admonition to believers	P. 124, l. 24 – p. 240, l. 7

108)	not to ask about things they have no knowledge of; individual accountability; wills.	NB.: The authors' exegesis of Q 5:101 ('O you who believe! Ask not of things which, if they were made known unto you, would trouble you; but if you ask of them when the Qur'an is being revealed, they will be made known unto you. God will pardon this, for God is forgiving and clement. (101)') occupies a significant amount of space in this surah, up until p. 202. (17.9 per cent / 116 pages)
Section 18 (verses 110–120)	The corruption of Jesus' teachings following his death.	P. 240, l. 9 – p. 276, l. 6 (followed by chapter conclusion) (5.5 per cent / 36 pages)

3. The *Manār* Commentary's Discussion of Q 5:44–50

In terms of structure, the author of the *Manār* commentary presents his exegesis of Q 5:44–60 in two parts. First, Riḍā dedicates an approximate thirteen pages to Q 5:44–47, before discussing Q 5:48–50 over the space of a further thirteen pages.[457] Within the first section the reader can observe yet another subdivision. The first subsection could be described as more 'classical' or 'traditional', as it primarily features a running commentary on each verse, reminiscent of pre-modern commentaries, during which a verse or part thereof is taken, briefly explained and sometimes analysed for its linguistic or thematic peculiarities. For example, in reference to the statement 'We revealed the Torah and in it there is guidance and light', Riḍā explains that the Torah contains 'law specific to [the Jews] (*li-annahā sharī'a khaṣṣa bihim*)'.[458] Similarly, when explaining the statement 'therefore fear not men, but fear Me', the reader is simply presented with a short paraphrasis of the Qur'an's admonition that believers should fear not men, but God.[459] In addition—and also reminiscent of pre-modern Sunni Arabic commentaries on the Qur'an—the first half of this section contains a handful of *ḥadīth* reports as well as extended quotations from and references to classical exegetes.[460]

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[457] *TM* VI, pp. 409-423.

[458] *TM* VI, p. 397, l. 22.

[459] *TM* VI, p. 399, ll. 15-22.

[460] For example, the late Norman Calder has identified the citation of named authorities as well as the inclusion of *ḥadīth* reports as one of the key features found in classical commentaries on the Qur'an. See Calder, 'Midrash', pp. 81-108.

Thus, as part of a brief review of the concepts[461] of *kufr* (commonly translated as 'unbelief' or 'blasphemy'), *ẓulm* (injustice), and *fisq* (sinfulness) in the context of Q 5:44–47[462]—and, more specifically, how these terms can be applied in describing the failure of Jews and Christians in not following God's revelation[463]— Riḍā provides two traditions attributed to the seventh-century companion Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 687),[464] as well as Abū ʿAmr ʿĀmir ibn Sharāḥīl al-Shaʿbī (d. 721?),[465] a well-known early legal expert and transmitter of *ḥadīth*s.[466] Similarly, the author briefly refers to another

[461] One might be tempted to argue that, at this point, the first sub-section ends. Specifically, the discussion of these concepts comes after the initial running commentary and is highlighted by its sub-chapter headline. However, in view of the fact that the thematic emphasis of this passage—it is essentially a theoretical exposé that heavily relies on the exegetical tradition—differs vastly from the one that follows it, I have decided to count it as part of the first sub-section.

[462] For a more comprehensive overview of these three terms, as well as their understanding in traditional Sunni thought, see Björkman, 'Kāfir'; Badry and Lewis 'Ẓulm', and Hallaq, 'Apostasy'. In addition, Adang provides a useful general introduction to various traditional conception belief and unbelief in Islam. See Adang, 'Belief and Unbelief'.

[463] Specifically, the text reads that 'the three verses are specific to the Jews and don't pertain to the people of Islam at all (*al-āyāt al-thalāth fī al-yahūd khaṣṣa laysa fī ahl al-islām minhā shay'*)'. *TM* VI, p. 403, ll. 12–13.

[464] ʿAbd Allāh b. al- ʿAbbās, one of the most revered figures from the time of the first generation of Muslims. Sometimes dubbed as the 'father of Qur'anic exegesis', he is said to have been one of the first to interpret the Qur'an to his contemporaries 'at a time when it was necessary to bring [the Qur'an] into accord with the new demands of a society which had undergone a profound transformation' (Vaglieri, 'ʿAbd Allāh b. al-ʿAbbās'). Ibn ʿAbbās is a recurring character in this section—and indeed, the *Tafsīr al-Manār* in general—and is, for example, also quoted for his views on the stoning of adulterers. See *TM* VI, p. 397, l. 17.

[465] G.H.A. Juynboll observes that al-Shaʿbī is presumed to have 'died sometime between 103/721 and 110/728'. Juynboll, 'al-Shaʿbī'.

[466] *TM* VI, p. 403, ll. 11–14. The tradition attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās is, in fact, a prominent quotation also found in Ibn Taymīya's *Kitāb al-Imām*. Specifically, in the context of Q 5:44, Ibn Taymīya cites this verse as an example of something called 'unbelief that is less than unbelief'. This concept is based on the saying of Ibn ʿAbbās, who, after reciting Q 5:44-47, says that this is 'unbelief that is less than unbelief, injustice that is less than injustice, and sinfulness that is less than sinfulness (*kufr dūna kufr, wa-ẓulm dūna ẓulm, wa-fisq dūna fisq)*'. Ibn Taymīya, *Majmūʿat al-fatāwā*, vol 7., p.375.

companion, ʿAbdullāh ibn Salām (d. 663),[467] when discussing the appropriateness of stoning 'those who have broken the covenant'.[468] Equally, when making the argument that the Qur'an's universal message applies to Jews and Christians, too, Riḍā provides a chain of transmitters containing the names of ʿAbd ibn Ḥāmid (d. 1012),[469] Ḥakīm ibn Jubayr (d. ?) and Saʿīd ibn Jubayr (d. 712?).[470] Other prominent figures from the Sunni Arabic tradition whom the author of the *Manār* commentary routinely engages with and/or mentions in this passage are the prominent Arab philologist al-Kisā'ī (d. 805?)[471]—in the context of the Biblical law of retaliation 'an eye for an eye'[472]—the Shāfiʿī scholar Ibn al-Mundhir (d. 930),[473] as well as the *ḥadīth* collector Ibn Mardawayh (d. 1020).[474] The latter, for example, also appears, along with several other prominent

[467] Former rabbi and early convert to Islam. Hartwig Hirschfeld describes ibn Salām as 'one of the most important Jewish personages in the history of Mohammed's career at Medina'. Hirschfeld, 'Abdallah Ibn Salam'.

[468] *TM* VI, p. 399, p. 399, l. 3.

[469] Likely Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥasan ibn Ḥāmid, a prominent Ḥanbalī scholar in Baghad under the Buyids. Henri Laoust notes that he was killed by Bedouins when returning from the pilgrimage in Mecca. Laoust, 'Ibn Ḥāmid'.

[470] *TM* VI, p. 403, ll. 22–23: 'It was narrated that ʿAbd ibn Ḥamīd narrated that Ḥakīm Ibn Jubayr said that he had asked Saʿīd Ibn Jubayr about the verse: "He who did not rule ... and whoever did not rule.' Also known as 'Abū Muḥammad; Saʿīd Ibn Jubayr was one of the early *tābiʿūn* (lit.: 'followers') of the Prophet (see Motzki, 'Saʿīd b. Djubayr').

[471] Sellheim, 'al-Kisā'ī'.

[472] *TM* VI, p. 400, p. 400, l. 9 ff. See

[473] *TM* VI, p. 403, l. 20. Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Mundhir was a jurist, 'absolute *mujtahid*', and commentator on the Qur'an. Although little is known about his life, references to his commentary are routinely found in the works of his contemporaries, such as al-Ṭabarī (Lucas, 'Ibn al-Mundhir').

[474] Likely Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Mūsā Ibn Mardawayh a famous medieval collector of prophetic traditions. Although he reportedly 'spared no effort to collect traditions on ʿAlī's virtues', both Sunni and Shia scholars generally agreed that he was Sunni (Kohlberg, A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work, pp. 248–249).

figures from the Sunni tradition, such as Ibn ʿAbbās, in the context of an extended discussion on whether it is permissible for Muslims to follow English law in India.[475]

The second sub-division not only presents a departure from pre-modern methods of Qur'anic exegesis at a stylistic level, but also provides some insight into Riḍā's understanding of the root *ḥakama* and its derived verbs and nouns in the meaning of 'to govern'.[476] Interestingly, the discussion that follows, to some extent, seems in complete contradiction to a brief statement made by the author as part of the initial verse-by-verse exegesis of Q 5:44—a statement which some scholars have taken as an indicator that Riḍā did indeed precede some of the later Islamists such as Sayyid Quṭb in calling for the establishment of an Islamic state, particularly due to its seeming call for action:[477]

> Anyone who dislikes judging in accordance with the fair and just rules which God has sent down (*wa-kull man raghiba ʿan al-ḥukm bi-mā anzala allāh min aḥkām al-ḥaqq wa-l-ʿadl*), and does not rule by them because [these rules] infringe on his pleasure or his worldly interests (*li-mukhālafatihā li-hawāhu aw li-manfaʿatihi al-dunyawīya)*; according to these verses, such people [lit. 'those': *ulā'ika*) are unbelievers. [This is] because true faith requires obedience, obedience requires

[475] *TM* VI, p. 406ff.

[476] For the sake of consistency I shall generally translate this root in its verbal form with 'to judge' unless otherwise necessary.

[477] See Janseri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, p. 39, for example.

action (*al-idhʿān yastalzim al-ʿamal*), and is not compatible with omission and neglect (*al-istiqbāḥ wa-l-tark*).[478]

In what can be characterised as a new literary feature of Riḍā's *tafsīr*, the passage, which is entitled 'Judging according to English laws in India' (*al-ḥukm bi-l-qawānīn al-inklīzīya fī al-hind*), begins with a question from a reader.[479] Stylistically, this is made clear by the fact that the text explicitly marks the question as 'question 77' (abbreviated in the Arabic original text by the letter *sīn*, followed by the number 77), while the author's answer is introduced by the letter *jīm*, presumably an abbreviation for *jawāb*, i.e., 'answer'. The passage itself can be subdivided into six distinct thematic sections:

1. The reader's question (p. 406, ll. 2–3);
2. An exposé of the issue at hand (p. 406, ll. 4–11);
3. A review of the Qur'anic statement 'judge according to that which God has revealed' in classical exegetical discourse (p. 406, l. 12 – p. 407, l. 12);
4. The duty to work in foreign governments for the overall benefit of Muslim society (p. 407, ll. 12–22);

[478] *TM* VI, p. 399, l. 23 – p. 400, l. 1.

[479] Johanna Pink notes that such 'excurses exemplify a significant change in form and style, not only in content', adding that [t]he mass medial form in which [the Tafsīr al-Manār] was originally published, as part of the journal al-Manār, lies at the root of its narrative style, the lengthy excursuses, exhortations, an attempts to provide the readers with guidance' (Pink, 'Striving for a New Exegesis').

5. Two different types of Qur'anic judgements (p. 407, l. 23 – p. 408, l. 23);

6. ʿAbduh and Riḍā's conclusion (p. 408, ll. 24–28).

Specifically, the reader asks whether it is 'permissible for a Muslim who is employed by the English to judge according to English laws, including those that were not revealed by God (*wa-fīhā al- al-ḥukm bi-ghayr mā anzala allāh*)'.[480] The author begins with an exposition of the dilemma at hand and, in so doing, emphasises the relevance of the reader's question to Muslims in India, as well as its wider implications for Muslim society as a whole. Indeed, according to Riḍā, this particular question is linked to 'some of the greatest issues of this day and age' (*yataḍamman masā'il min akbar mushkilāt hādhā al-ʿaṣr*).[481] It soon becomes apparent that the answer that the author is about to provide is not going to be a straightforward one. Rather, it seems that this question requires complex considerations as well as a deeper look into not only the linguistic meaning of the phrase 'judging according to that which God has revealed', but also its understanding in classical Sunni Arabic thought.

What follows is an excursion into the traditional scholarly discourse surrounding the phrase 'judging according to that which God has revealed'. Riḍā begins his discussion by stating that this verse should not be taken literally, saying that 'none of the famous jurisprudents have ever been a proponent of the literal

[480] *TM* VI, p. 406, ll.2-3.

[481] *TM* VI, p. 406, l. 4.

meaning of the verse' (*ammā ẓāhir al-āya fa-lam yaqul bihi aḥad min a'immat al-fiqh al-mashhūrīn*).[482] More specifically, the author explains that, taken literally, this verse would be directed at those who do not 'judge according to that which God has revealed at all (*muṭlaqan*)' rather than those who judge in accordance with *parts* of a different legal system and, in this process, do not abandon the Qur'anic message entirely.[483] Indeed, according to the author, a literal reading of this verse is so absurd that 'not even the Kharijites [...] would declare this to be unbelief.'[484]

Riḍā goes on to seek support for his views by pointing to the existence of diverging views and providing chains of transmitters in a fashion typical of pre-modern commentaries on the Qur'an. Accordingly, the reader is informed that 'the Sunnis have disagreed regarding the interpretation of the verse' (*ikhtalafa ahl al-sunna fī al-āya*)', with some suggesting that the verse was revealed in specific reference to Jewish transgressions rather than addressing the Muslim community.[485] Similarly, other exegetes are said to have provided even more nuance, suggesting that only parts of this verse group are directed at Muslims, while others are a judgement concerning the 'injustice of the Jews' (*ẓulm al-yahūd*) or the 'sinfullness' of the Christians' (*fisq al-naṣārā*).[486] Moreover, Riḍā explains that there has even been disagreement regarding the very meaning of the words disbelief (*kufr*) and

[482] TM VI, p. 406, l. 12.
[483] TM VI, p. 406, ll.13-14.
[484] TM VI, p. 406, ll14.
[485] TM VI, p. 406, l. 15 ff.
[486] TM VI, p. 406, l. 21.

disbelievers (*kuffār*) in the context of this verse, suggesting that disbelief as used in this verse may not be understood in the legal sense of a Muslim 'leaving the religious community' (*al-khurūj min al-milla*), but rather in the sense of 'cursing' (*taghlīẓ*).[487]

Throughout this process of contextualisation, Riḍā draws upon prominent earlier exegetes and, in so doing, demonstrates his embeddednenss in this longstanding literary genre. For example, the reader is informed that the verse's assumed reference to the Jews was narrated by Saʿīd ibn Manṣūr (d. 842?), Abū al-Shaykh (d. ?), and Ibn Mardawayh (d. 1020) on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.[488] As for his discussion of disbelief, the author of the *Manār* commentary invokes well-known figures such as Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) and ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 827), a prominent Yemeni *ḥadīth* scholar of Persian descent.[489] It is worth emphasising that, although Riḍā seemingly provides a range of diverse opinions, he does not mention any individuals from the Sunni exegetical tradition who may have considered it impermissible for Muslims to judge according to any laws other than those revealed by God. And indeed, those do exist. For example, in his commentary, the 14th-century exegete Ibn Kathīr provides an overview of the classical debate on this matter and although he, too, explains that some scholars believe that the *kufr*

[487] *TM* VI, p. 406, l. 26 ff. The literal meaning of this word, as suggested by Wehr and Lane, is 'to render something thick' or 'strong', from which the notion of 'making an oath strong' or 'forcible' is derived.
[488] *TM* VI, p. 406, l. 16.
[489] ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām b. Nāfiʿ al-Ṣanʿānī was a Yemeni scholar and traditonist. Harald Motzki argues that ʿAbd al-Razzāq's writings are 'extremely important for the study of early jurisprudence, *ḥadīth*, and Qur'ānic exegesis because they contain older sources or materials otherwise lost' (Motzki, ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī').

mentioned in these verses is not the kind that 'annuls one's religion', he allocates significant space in his exegesis to other scholars who took a drastically different view. These include scholars who not only were of the opinion that not judging according to God's revelation is indeed a sin, but who also believed that these verses are directed at the Muslim community:

> 'Al-Barā' ibn ʿĀzib,[490] Hudhayfa ibn al-Yamān, Ibn ʿAbbas, Abū Mijlaz, Abū Rajā' al-ʿUṭāridī, ʿIkrima, ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAbd Allāh, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and others said that this verse was revealed about the People of the Book (*nazalat fī ahl al-kitāb*). Al- Ḥasan al-Baṣrī added that this verse also applies to us. ʿAbd al-Razzāq reported that al-Thawrī said that Manṣūr said that Ibrahīm said that these verses were revealed about the Israelites, and God accepted them for his *umma'*.[491]

More significantly, Ibn Kathīr quotes another Prophetic companion, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalḥa (d. 656)[492] who reportedly quoted Ibn ʿAbbās saying that 'whoever rejects what God has revealed, will have committed *kufr* (*man jaḥada mā anzala allāh fa-qad kafara*), and whoever accepts what God has revealed, but did not rule by it, is unjust and a sinner (*ẓālim fāsiq*).' [493] As mentioned elsewhere, instances like these confirm observations made by other scholars such as Ahmad Dallal concerning not just Riḍā's

[490] A companion of the Prophet who accompanied him on various expeditions and later participated in the wars of conquest. He is presumed to have died around the year 691-2. Zetterstéen, 'Al-Barā'.
[491] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, p. 230, ll. 3–8.
[492] Likely Ṭalḥa b. ʿUbaydallāh, a prominent early Companion (Madelung, 'Ṭalḥa b. ʿUbaydallāh').
[493] Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr*, vol 5., p. 230, ll. 15–16.

reinterpretation, but, indeed, his manipulation of classical sources in order to bolster his own opinions.

Although the seeming support of tradition continues to play a role in the passages that follow, Riḍā's own voice, as well as the concrete social and political conditions of their current context, increasinglys take centre stage. Specifically, the author asks a question that bears relevance not only to India, but also to his own geographical setting:

> If the enemy takes possession (*idhā ghalaba al-ʿadūw*) of certain Muslim countries, and if emigration proves impossible to Muslims (*wa-imtanaʿat ʿalayhim al-hijra*) [living there], is it right for Muslims to leave [to the enemy] all judgements (*fa-hal al-ṣawāb an yatrakū lahu jamīʿ al-aḥkām)* and can [Muslims] take up a job [in the government of non-Muslims] or not? Some people believe that working for an unbeliever is not permissible under any circumstance (*al-ʿamal li-l-kāfir lā yaḥill bi-ḥāl).*[494]

Before providing an answer to this question, the author of the *Manār* commentary—seemingly in a pre-emptive strike against potential criticism of his arguably unconventional opinion on the matter—emphasises that, in an ideal world, 'only a Muslim should judge another Muslim', that 'all judgements should be in accordance with God's law (*muwāfaqa li-sharīʿatihi)*', and that Muslims should

[494] *TM* VI, p. 407, ll14-16.

endeavour that God's rulings should 'be established in every place'.[495] And indeed, pursuing these goals should be the Muslim community's prime intention. However, Riḍā goes on to state that, with this intention, it is not only permissible for Muslims to assume work in the governments of non-Muslim states, but that, in fact, Muslims 'must accept to work in the House of War unless they know that their work would harm or not benefit [the Muslim community] (*yaḍurr al-muslimīn wa-lā yanfaʿuhum*)'.[496] This passage thus again confirms a central observation already made regarding Riḍā's thought in other sections of this thesis. In particular, it not only shows the author from his pragmatic side as a citizen aware of the socio-political realities of their time, but even more significantly, vividly displays his conviction that Muslims had to take charge of their own welfare rather than passively accepting foreign domination. As such, Muslims have indeed a duty to engage with their foreign occupiers rather than passively accept their fate.

What follows can be described as an exercise in the author engaging with religious doctrine in order to not only drive home his conviction that Muslims have a duty to engage in the process of governance, but also to make these views more palatable to his readers. Specifically, Riḍā explains that the Qur'an contains two kinds of judgements: first, those that 'concern religion itself'—for example, statements pertaining to ritual matters (*aḥkām al-ʿibādāt*), marriage (*al-nikāḥ*), and divorce (*al-*

[495] *TM* VI, p. 407, ll16-18.
[496] *TM* VI, p. 407, l. 19 ff.

ṭalāq) —and second those that 'concern the material world', such as civil transactions (*al-muʿāmalāt al-madanīya*) and punishment (*al-ʿuqūbāt*). While judgements from the first group 'must not be violated in any way', the author argues that 'God has revealed very little' as far as judgements from the second group go, with most of them being 'derived from *ijtihād*'.[497]

More significantly, the discussion increasingly focuses on the fact that Muslims are finding themselves in the House of War. According to Riḍā, 'the sunna mentions that it is forbidden to execute liminal punishments (*al-ḥudūd*) in the lands of the enemy'. In other words, even if Muslims break certain rulings by taking up government work, these offences could not legally incur punishment as they occurred in the House of War. In so doing, the author draws upon a variety of examples from early Muslim history and cites traditional sources to defend his views. For example, the reader is informed that the Persian legal scholar Abū al Qāsim al-Kharakī (d. 945)[498] stated that 'no liminal punishments shall be executed in the lands of the enemy' (*lā yuqām al-ḥadd ʿalā muslim fī arḍ al-ʿadū*).[499] Similarly, Riḍā reports that the Prophet himself had forbidden that the hands of a young thief be cut off at the time of an invasion. To Riḍā, these examples from tradition, some of which reportedly go back to the Prophet himself, are all but confirmation that 'the judicial rulings revealed

[497] *TM* VI, p. 407, l. 23 ff.
[498] El Hareir, *Spread of Islam*, p. 505.
[499] *TM* VI, p. 408, l. 6.

by God are very few' (*al-aḥkām al-qaḍā'īya allatī anzalahā allāh taʿālā qalīla jiddan*).[500] More significantly, though, the author make sclear that it is not only permissible but, indeed, imperative for a Muslim to rule according to non-Muslim laws while in a state of occupation 'for the sake of the benefit of Muslims'. This point is further reinforced by that fact that 'the House of War is not a place for establishing the judgements of Islam'. After all, Muslims are not in charge and should therefore focus their energies on improving existing conditions by cooperating with the ruling forces rather than fighting them. Indeed, according to Rashīd Riḍā this is an effective way for Muslims to 'strengthen the influence of Islam and preserving its judgements' (*yuqawwī aḥkām al-islām bi-qadr istiṭāʿatihi)*.[501]

The remainder of the passage is peculiar and possibly reflects the influence of Muḥammad ʿAbduh on Riḍā's thought. To some degree, it might be viewed as confirmation of the views of scholars such as Elie Kedourie, who have portrayed ʿAbduh not only as a political pragmatist who primarily saw religion as a means to an end, but also as an opportunist who tended to side with and flatter those in charge.[502] Accordingly, Riḍā concludes that assuming government work in India is especially viable since it is for the British government, a government that is 'tolerant and the most just among any other nations and religious communities' (*mutasāhila qarība min*

[500] *TM* VI, p. 408, l. 16.

[501] *TM* VI, p. 408, l. 26.

[502] See Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam*, for more detail.

al-ʿadl bayān jamīʿ al-umam wa-l-milal).[503] Indeed, the author states that, in fact, British law is 'closest to Islamic law' (*aqrab ilā al-sharīʿa al-islāmīya*) as '[the British] confer most things to the *ijtihād* of judges'.[504] Whether or whether not this is in fact an attempt to flatter the English and thus protect the authors' image and status in the public sphere is impossible to ascertain fully.

What is significant, though, is that through this passage, Riḍā succeeds in demonstrating that, in many ways, he is taking the *tafsīr* discipline to a new level. First, his discussion of the *ḥakama* verses reveals that, to him, these verses are indeed closely tied to aspects of governance and that he understands them to apply to a context that goes beyond the simple arbitration of disputes. In addition to clearly linking these verses to action—as demonstrated in his initial verse-by-verse exegesis—Riḍā uses them to encourage Muslims living in India to become active participants in the local British administration there. However, unlike later exegetes such as Sayyid Quṭb, he does not go so far as to call for the exclusive establishment of Islamic law, although one might see how some of Riḍā's considerations may have influenced Quṭb.[505] Furthermore, although many traditional techniques—such as the use of traditional sources and authorities—remain, passages like above vividly demonstrate that, to Riḍā, *tafsīr* is more than dry scholarly exercise. Rather, it is a platform that

[503] *TM* VI, p. 408, l. 28.

[504] *TM* VI, p. 409, ll. 1–2.

[505] I specifically intend their association with these verses to action, as seen in their initial exegesis of Q 5:44.

does and must engage with contemporary realities. It is particularly discussions like the above that reveal his techniques as a modern exegete. Although Riḍā undoubtedly demonstrates familiarity with tradition, he does so in a way that effectively turns traditional wisdom upside down. In a sense, one could argue that Riḍā's engagement with tradition is a technique in itself, not least in order to pre-empt criticism: having first reaffirmed the importance of the classical understanding of these verses—i.e. that Muslims should always judge according to God's revelation—he increasingly creates loopholes as to why, despite God's clear command, an opposite path should be taken in the present context, which effectively allows him to ignore the traditional consensus on the issue.

4. Modernising Tendencies in *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* and Beyond

As mentioned earlier on in this chapter, there are more instances in surah 5 that reveal Riḍā's modernising tendencies than those analysed above. Furthermore, some of the exegetical techniques and thematic emphases which the author of the *Tafsīr al-Manār* displays in his discussion of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* can also be found in other parts of the *Manār* commentary. The goal of this sub-chapter is therefore to provide further examples that illustrate Riḍā's—and where this is possible, ʿAbduh's—methods as a modern commentator on the Qur'an as they appear both in *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* and other parts of their *tafsīr*.

To a large extent, it seems that both the level and register of the language employed by Riḍā often reflects the specific topics with which he is dealing at a given point. For instance, whereas the author's initial verse-by-verse exegesis of Q 5:44-50 is presented in an overwhelmingly scholarly and theoretical fashion, his ensuing two exposés adopt a much different tone. Accordingly, when discussing the terms *kufr*, *ẓulm*, and *fisq*, the author occasionally addresses his reader by appealing to his or her common sense, using expressions such as 'if you give even the slightest thought to these verses, it will become clear to you that [...]' (*wa-idhā ta'ammalta al-ayāt adnā ta'ammul taẓhar laka*).[506] Similarly, when Riḍā concludes his discussion of the

[506] *TM* VI, p. 404, l. 18.

Dinshaway incident, he not only lends additional emphasis to his final remark by adding two exclamation marks, but also does so in an arguably mocking tone:

> However, once they had left the judgement of Islam (*lammā tarakū ḥukm al-islām)*, Muslims began asking the English, and only the English, to teach them justice and its laws (*an-yuʿallimūhum al-ʿadl wa-qawānīnahu)*!!'[507]

Similar instances that reveal the author's use of provocative and, at times, dismissive language, particularly as part of lengthier exposés, can be found in other parts of the *Manār* commentary. For example, following the initial verse-by-verse exegesis of Q 3:1–7—verses which deal with the question regarding who has the ability to interpret the Qur'an's obscure or ambiguous statements, known as the *mutashābihāt al-Qur'ān*— Riḍā informs his reader that 'it is sensational (*min al-ʿaẓīm*) that it is said that God would have revealed to His messenger a word whose meaning neither he nor Gabriel understood'.[508] Discussing the same verse group, the author of the *Manār* commentary also contends that it would be 'one of the greatest slanders of atheism' (lit.: 'one of the greatest slanders of the atheists', *min aʿẓam qadḥ al-malāḥida*) to suggest that the meaning of the Qur'an's obscure letters was not known to anybody but God at the time of their revelation.[509] In addition, it appears that the occasional inclusion of questions submitted by readers of the *Manār* journal is also not limited to

[507] *TM* VI, p. 355, ll 22–23. A similar instance can be found *TM* VI, p. 301, l.2.
[508] *TM* III, p. 179, l. 5.
[509] *TM* III, p. 180, ll. 19–20.

the *Tafsīr al-Manār*'s exegesis of surah 5. For example, in the context of a broader discussion of the permissibility of polygamy (Q 4:3), Riḍā includes a question submitted by a man called Najīb Āfandī Qanawī, whom he identifies as a 'a student in America'. In addition, the author states that the 'legal opinion (*fatwa*) concerning the wisdom of polygamy' (*ḥikmat taʿaddud al-zawjāt*) included in the section was first published 'in the seventh volume of the al-*Manār* [journal]'.[510]

A rather elaborate example that is not only indicative of the author's engaging his reader, but also of his exegetical techniques at a larger level, can be found in the context of his exegesis of Q 5:5,[511] which features an approximately 10-page-long exposé entitled 'Chapter on the Food of the Pagans and Intermarriage with their Women' (*faṣl fī ṭaʿām al-wathanīyīn wa-nikāḥ nisāʾihim*). Effectively speaking out in favour of allowing marriages between Muslim men and pagan women,[512] something which had generally been considered unacceptable in Islamic law,[513] Riḍā argues that

> If intermarriage between Muslims and polytheists (*al-izdiwāj bayna al-muslimīn wa-l-mushrikīn*) is incompatible with a policy that is extremely fundamental (*al-*

[510] *TM* IV, p. 351, ll. 3–5.

[511] In addition to talking about foot regulations, this verse informs Muslims that, in general, it is permitted for Muslim men to marry Jewish or Christian women.

[512] It is interesting to observe that the above discussion occurs in the context of a verse that does not specifically talk about the issue of marrying polytheists—indeed, Q 5:5 merely states that 'chaste women among those who have been given the Book' (*al-muḥṣanātu min alladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*) are lawful marriage partners to Muslim men.

[513] To provide some background: although Islamic marriage law permits intermarriages between Muslim men and Jewish or Christian women—as stated in Q 5:5—the consensus has been that polytheists are generally forbidden (see Q 2:221 and Q 60:10). See Motzki, 'Marriage and Divorce'.

> *aṣl al-aṣīl*) to the spread of Islam, and if the marriage of Muslim men to Chinese women is a determining cause (*maḍʿāh*) of these women's conversion to Islam—as is currently happening in China—then the explanation of the verse [as meaning that it is forbidden for Chinese women to marry Muslim men] would not apply to them (*lā takūn taʿlīl al-āya li-l-ḥurma ṣādiqan ʿalayhinna*), for how could denying this give you a legitimate rejection [of this policy]?! (*wa-kayfa yuʿṭī al-ḍidd ḥukm al-ḍidd*)?![514]

This passage is remarkable for two reasons: first, the final question—intensified by the Riḍā's use of punctuation—can be viewed as another instance of his engagement with his reader by appealing to the latter's common sense or, indeed, reason. Second, and perhaps more significantly, this passage not only provides us with a better insight into the author's wider thought, but also reveals an exegetical technique similar to those encountered in other parts of the *Manār* commentary. The 'policy' referred to in the passage, according to Riḍā, concerns the fact that the Arabian Peninsula is considered the 'protected sanctuary of Islam' (*ḥaram al-islām al-maḥmī*), with the Prophet having recommended that there 'should not remain any two religions in it' (*an lā yabqā fīhā dīnān*).[515] According to the author, this policy, which is reported in numerous transmitted *ḥadīth*s,[516] has been an argument adduced by jurists

[514] *TM* VI, p. 193, ll. 8–11. This final statement is somewhat obscure in the original Arabic, with a more literal translation being 'for how could the opposite be a judgement for the opposite'. However, in the wider context of this passage it becomes clear that this statement is designed to appeal to the reader's common sense. Perhaps a more loose English translation might be: 'how can anybody not see this?!'.

[515] *TM* VI, p. 192, l. 25 – p. 193, l. 5.

[516] *TM* VI, p. 193, ll. 5–7.

to consider marriage between Muslim men and polytheistic women unlawful. However, Riḍā continues, intermarriage with between Muslims and pagan women also appears to have been—and continues to be—a contributing factor to the spread of Islam: indeed, he informs his reader that it is happening in China at the very moment. The author of the *Manār* commentary thus concludes that this verse's apparent prohibition of Muslims marrying women that are not Jews or Christians does, in fact, not apply to pagan women after all. In other words, he is suggesting that this verse could not possibly be prohibiting something that complements conversion and spread. In so doing, Riḍā is effectively not only creating a precedent but also a loophole: by arguing in this rather sophistic fashion—as opposed to clearly saying what he means, which is that, in his opinion, it is indeed permissible for a Muslim man to marry a pagan woman—the author seemingly averts potential criticism over something he could be berated for—namely, contradicting Islamic law. Finally, this passage, similar to the one that discussed the permissibility of judging according to English laws in India, also reveals another core element of Riḍā's techniques: although he do not explicitly say so, the ideas expressed as part of this discussion conform to his self-declared emphasis on promoting the welfare of the Muslim community and, in the process, allow him to show his side as a pragmatist. After all, Muslims are finding themselves in a state of decline, so the only reasonable way of strengthening Islam is by promoting conversion through intermarriage.

The topic of marriage and, more specifically, the issue of polygamy is also one that occupies the author of the *Manār* commentary in the context of a lengthy discussion of Q 4:3.[517] The passage is interesting for two reasons. First, it provides the reader with a good example of Riḍā as an exegete who discusses contemporary socio-politcal matters as part of his exegesis. Second, Riḍā attributes part of the passage to Muḥammad ʿAbduh and, in fact, reaches a different conclsion than his teacher on the same issue. Thus, the reader is able to witness an instance of Riḍā disagreeing with and, arguably, somewhat sidelineing his teacher's opinion—a process during which Riḍā not only demonstrates stronger apologetic tendencies than ʿAbduh, but also aligns more closely with the traditional interpretation of the verse. The Qur'anic verse itself reads as follows:

> If you fear that you will not be able to act justly towards orphans, marry two, three, or four of such women as seem good to you. But if you fear that you will not be equitable, then [marry] only one, or what your right hands own. Thus it will be more likely that you will not do injustice.

In general, it appears that the majority of pre-modern Sunni Arabic commentators on the Qur'an understood this verse in the sense that it granted permission for a man to take up to four wives. In particular, Joseph Schacht remarks

[517] I should mention that the passage on polygamy discussed below has partly been translated by Helmut Gätje (see Gätje, *Exegesis*, pp. 252–261).

that traditional exegetes focused above all on the 'positive enactments regulating' polygamy that came with this verse: after all, it reduced the number of wives a husband could marry to four, thus not only ensuring better treatment of women but also strengthening cohesion.[518] Accordingly, the authors of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* inform their reader that 'by marrying only four, or only one, or resorting to slave girls, it is likelier [...] that you will not be unjust'.[519] Similarly, al-Thaʿlabī provides a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet is reported to have advised a man with eight women to divorce four of them and keep those that have given birth to children (*fa-ṭalliq arbaʿan wa-amsik arbaʿan*).[520]

In their own interpretation of this verse, ʿAbduh and Riḍā provide their reader with a nuanced line of argument, which, as Johanna Pink has observed, 'is primarily concerned with the logic behind Qur'ānic prescriptions as well as their applicability to modern societies'.[521] The section begins with several passages attributed to ʿAbduh, in which the reader is informed that 'permission for polygamy in Islam comes with the most severe restrictions' (*ibāḥat taʿddud al-zawjāt amr muḍayyaq fīhi ashadd al-taḍyīq*).[522] Although ʿAbduh, similar to his exegetical predecessors, does acknowledge that 'polygamy had advantages in the early period of Islam' (*kāna li-l-tʿaddud fī ṣadr al-islām*

[518] Schacht et al., 'Nikāḥ'. However, Schacht also observes that 'although sūra IV, 3, contains no such precise regulation, this interpretation of it must have predominated very early, as in the traditions it is assumed rather than expressly demanded.'
[519] Maḥallī, *Al-Jalālayn*, p. 83.
[520] Al- Thaʿlabī, *Al-Kashhaf*, vol. 3.p. 247, ll. 4-8.
[521] Pink, 'Modern and Contemporary Interpretation', p. 483.
[522] *TM* IV, p. 349, ll. 2–3.

fawā'id)—chiefly, as it 'brought about the bond of blood relationship and of relationship by marriage (*ṣilat al-nasab wa-ṣihr*)', thus strengthening tribal cohesion (*al-ʿaṣabīya*)[523]—he argues that this is no longer the case for a number of reasons.[524] The first key difference, according to ʿAbduh, lies in the fact that, at the time of the verse's revelation, polygamy 'did not lead to the same harm as it does today since, at that time, religion was firmly rooted in the souls of women and men (*mutamakkinan fī nufūs al-nisā' wa-l-rijāl*)'.[525] In modern times, however, 'the harm of every [additional] wife carries over (*al-ḍarār yantaqil min kull ḍarra ilā*) to her child, its father, and its other relatives', leading to 'theft and adultery, lies and deceit, cowardice and deception, and indeed even murder' (*al-sariqa wa-l-zinā' wa-l-kidhb wa-l-khiyāna wa-l-jubn wa-l-tazwīr bal minhā al-qatl*).[526] In drawing this stark comparison between Muslims from the early *umma* and contemporary believers, ʿAbduh is, in fact, reiterating one of the key elements of his thought: Muslims had, in the course of time, strayed away from what he considered 'true' Islam, which has lead to 'weakness, decay, and barbarism'.[527] The idea that Muslims, and especially Muslim women, are ignorant of true Islam is elaborated further in the section that follows:

[523] This term is very prominent in the thought of the 14th-15th century historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), as found particularly in his *Muqaddima*, with which the authors of the *Manār* commentary were undoubtedly familiar.

[524] *TM* IV, p. 349, ll. 10–11.

[525] *TM* IV, p. 349, ll. 11–12.

[526] *TM* IV, p. 349, ll. 12–17.

[527] See Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, pp. 227-8 as well as Chapter I of this thesis.

> It may suffice here to refer to the [poor] education of the [modern] woman (*nāhīk bi-tarbiyat al-mar'a),* who knows neither the worth of the husband nor that of the child (*allatī lā taʿrif qīmat al-zawj wa-lā qīmat al-walad*) and who is ignorant (*jāhila*) concerning herself and her religion, knowing of religion only superstitions and errors (*khurāfāt wa-ḍalālāt*) which she has snatched up from others like herself and which are not found in the scriptures or the sayings of the prophets who have been sent.[528]

This passage, which Riḍā again identifies as containing the words of his teacher,[529] is significant as it vividly demonstrates ʿAbduh's strong interest in educational reform and, particularly, the kind of reform that takes into consideration both what he deemed to be Islamic principles and the needs of different members of society. As Nabeel A. Khoury notes, ''Abduh's primary concerns [sic!] seems to have been with the reinstatement of Islamic values through education, legislation, and reform'[530] Specifically, he observes that he called for a programme of religious education that would 'meet the needs of very different people'.[531] And indeed, in the subsequent passage ʿAbduh argues that 'if women were to receive proper religious education (*tarbīya dīnīya ṣaḥīḥa*), so that religion had the highest power over their hearts and would prevail over jealousy (*al-ḥākim ʿalā al-ghayra*), then no harm would

[528] *TM* IV, p. 349, ll. 18–21.

[529] Specifically, Riḍā marks this by introducing the passage with *qāla* (he said) in brackets, as opposed to *aqūl* (I say). This is a common technique employed by Riḍā to distinguish between his own words and those of his master. However, see Chapter II of this thesis for a more elaborate discussion on the issue of authorship.

[530] Khoury, 'Muḥammad ʿAbduh', p. 50

[531] Khoury, 'Muḥammad ʿAbduh', p. 45.

grow out of polygamy for the Muslim community (*al-umma*) [today]'.[532] In the lines that follow, the reader is once again presented with an instance in which the *Manār* commentary—in this instance, via ʿAbduh's input—seemingly creates loopholes in order to present a view that, in essence, presents a considerable break with Islamic tradition. Specifically, ʿAbduh argues that,

> since the matter now stands as we see and hear it (*ammā wa-l-amr ʿalā mā narā wa-nasmaʿ*), there is no possibility of educating the Muslim community so long as polygamy is widespread among it (*lā sabīl ilā tarbīyat al-umma maʿ fashw taʿaddud al-zawjāt*). Thus, it is the duty of the scholars to investigate this problem, especially the Hanafite scholars (*khuṣūṣan al-ḥanafīya*), in whose hand the matter lies, and whose opinion is determinative.[533] They do not deny that religion was sent down for the benefit and good of mankind (*li-maṣlaḥat al-nās wa-khayrihim*) and that it is one of its principles to prevent harm and injury (*manʿ al-ḍarar wa-l-ḍarār*). Now if at a certain time, corruption results from something that was not connected with it earlier, it is without doubt necessary to alter the judgement and to adapt it to the actual situation (*taghyīr al-ḥukm wa-taṭbīqihi ʿalā al-ḥāl al-ḥāḍir)*, that is, according to the principle that one must prevent the deterioration beforehand in order to then bring about [the *umma*'s] well-being. [...] Hence, it is recognised that polygamy is strictly forbidden (*muḥarram qaṭʿan)* when the fear exists that one cannot act fairly.[534]

[532] *TM* IV, p. 349, ll. 21–23.

[533] The Hanafite school was the most influential in the Ottoman Empire during the time in which the commentary was written. Schacht notes that the Hanafite *madhhab* 'enjoyed the constant favour of the dynasty and exclusive official recognition in the whole of the Ottoman Empire'. See Schacht, 'Ḥanafiyya'.

[534] *TM* IV, p. 349, l. 23 – p. 350, l. 5.

It would be hard to ignore that ʿAbduh is applying a form of reverse logic here. Having initially made a case against polygamy based on the Muslim community's perceived lack of education regarding true Islam, he has now skilfully turned the tables: educating Muslims, according to ʿAbduh, is not even possible so long as polygamy is tolerated. Although he does not explicitly say so, he somewhat ironically justifies these views resorting to the Islamic principle of 'closing loopholes'—i.e. the idea that a certain action should be prohibited in order to prevent a worse outcome, and which Riḍā had incidentally criticised earlier in the context of the Dinshaway incident.[535]

The following section, which is introduced by the words 'I say (*aqūl*)',[536] provides Riḍā's stance on the issue. The discussion takes as its point-of-departure a question asked by a Muslim student living in America, and had, according to Riḍā, originally appeared in the seventh volume of the *Manār* journal.[537] As Johanna Pink has observed, it 'reveals a much more ambivalent stance to the issue of polygamy than ʿAbduh', [538] and, even more significantly, shows Riḍā reaching a very different conclusion than his teacher. In so doing, Riḍā also displays a markedly stronger concern than ʿAbduh with not only defending this long-standing Islamic practice in

[535] I should, however, also remind the reader that Riḍā has, as we have seen been happy to employ this tactic himself on those occasions where it benefits his argument.
[536] *TM* IV, p. 350, l. 21.
[537] *TM* IV, p. 351, l. 3ff.
[538] Pink, 'Modern and Contemporary Interpretation', p. 483.

light of Western criticisms, but also, as Pink rightly notes, with demonstrating its seeming biological and social advantages.[539]

Riḍā's starting point is, similar to his teacher's conclusion, a concession that monogamy is the ideal form of marriage. However, he does not elaborate greatly on this initial observation and instead turns his attention to making a multi-layerd case in favour of polygamy, which he subdivides into seven 'premises' (sg.: *muqaddima*). In summary, these revolve around two distinct yet inter-connected areas: the different biological needs and capacity of men and women, as well as social cohesion. Thus, the reader is informed that 'the procreative instinct (*dāʿīya al-nasl*) is stronger in the man than in the woman'.[540] According to Riḍā, however, this difference in sexual appetite between the two sexes is only one factor jeopardising procreation: indeed, other issues can arise, for example, 'if they marry older [women]'[541] or if 'illness, premature old age, or death befall men before the attainment of the natural age',[542] leading to a loss in 'part of his time [for procreation]'.[543] In addition, Riḍā points to the issue of birth rates. According to him, 'female births are more numerous than male ones in most regions of the earth'—a particularly serious problem in view of the fact that men 'are, despite being fewer in number than women, exposed to death and obstacles to marriage to a greater degree than women, which above all includes military service,

[539] Pink, 'Modern and Contemporary Interpretation', p. 483.
[540] *TM* IV, p. 352, ll. 13–14.
[541] *TM* IV, p. 352, l. 23.
[542] *TM* IV, p. 352 l. 25 – p. 353, l. 1.
[543] *TM* IV, p. 352, l. 24.

wars, and the inability to bear the burdens and expenses of marriage (*al-ijbārīya wa-l-ḥurūb wa-fī al-ʿajz ʿan al-qiyām bi-aʿbā' al-zawāj wa-nafaqatihi*)'.[544]

Riḍā then turns his attention to the social benefits of polygamy as he sees them. Broadly speaking, these are two-fold. The first concerns his view that having more wives will lead to a larger household comprising more children, which, in turn, will lead to a larger workforce able to support and sustain the family—particularly necessary when the man is in any way incapacitated.[545] Second comes the, according to Riḍā, very biological dilemma that 'among no people is the man content (*yaktafī*) with a single woman, as is also the case with most animals'.[546] He uses this point—which to some degree links back to his initial observation concerning the differences in sexual urges between men and women—to argue that, in the absence of polygamy, men's stronger desire for sexual intercourse would drive them towards infidelity, as so often witnessed in Western society:

> Can [Westerners] report to us that the men among any people are pleased with this restriction (*al-ikhtiṣāṣ*) and are satisfied with monogamy (*wa-qaniʿū bi-l-zawāj al-fardī*) until today? Is there in Europe among a hundred thousand men a single one who does not commit adultery (*lā yaznī*)? Certainly not, since, in accordance with his nature and hereditary disposition (*bi-muqtaḍā ṭabīʿatihi wa-malakātihi al-wārithīya)*, the man cannot be satisfied with a single woman as the

[544] *TM* IV, p. 352, ll. 8–10.
[545] *TM* IV, p. 354, l. 4 – p. 355, l. 2.
[546] TM VI, p. 354, ll. 4–5.

> woman is not disposed to it every time the man wishes to cover her (*ghashayān*), just as she is not disposed every time to fertility and natural gain from this cohabitation, which is offspring (*musta'idda li-thamrat hādhā al-ghashayān wa-fā'idatihi wa-huwa al-nasl*).[547]

In other words, in those societies that forbid polygamy, sexual promiscuity is the result, which, according to Riḍā, 'signifies a greater evil for the wife than when [the man] adds to her another [wife] and at the same time treats them justly (*ma'a al-'adl*)'.[548] To Riḍā, thus, these perceived negative side effects outweigh the reservations ʿAbduh had on the matter.

It is worth mentioning that, throughout his defence of polygamy—which, somewhat in line with the pre-modern views outlined at the beginning of this section and unlike those of ʿAbduh, places a stronger emphasis on the benefits of polygamy rather than its possible dangers—Riḍā does not shy away from highlighting the negative implications the prohibition of polygamy has had in Western society. This would conform to the observation made by scholars such as Johanna Pink that, unlike his master, Riḍā's views appear to have been 'dinstinctly more political, anti-European, and socially conservative than ʿAbduh's'.[549] Thus, Riḍā informs his reader when discussing the detrimental effects of lower male birth rates that 'these cases of misfortune (*maṣa'ib*) are in fact so widespread in Western countries that people have

[547] *TM* IV, p. 355, ll. 15–19.
[548] *TM* VI, p. 357, ll. 17–17.
[549] Pink, 'Modern and Contemporary Interpretation', p. 483.

thereby been incapacitated (*qad aʿyā al-nās*)'.[550] Similarly, Riḍā's above allegation that infidelity is more prevalent in Western nations can also be interpreted as an instance of his anti-European attitude. Arguably even more indiciative of the more political nature of Riḍā's views is a short at the very beginning of the passage, when he informs his reader that polygamy is particularly necessary among 'warlike peoples (*al-umam al-ḥarbīya*) like the Islamic community'.[551]

A final observation can be made in regards to Riḍā's exegetical techniques. Despite his accusations, Riḍā routinely recruits allies from the West in order to support his own views, just as he does in other parts of the *Manār* commentary. Thus, we read that the above 'cases of misfortune' have prompted some of 'England's female authors' (*kātibāt al-inklīz*) to view the sanctioning of polygamy as the 'only remedy' (*al-ʿilaj al-waḥīd*) to cure this dilemma.[552] Similarly, Riḍā backs up his assessment of the biological differences between men and women by referring to a 'Western scholar'.[553] Likewise, Riḍā's knowledge of geneology is reportedly based on the findings of 'some recent scholars from Germany and England'.[554]

I would like to conclude this section with three brief observations. The first relates to Johanna Pink's assessment that both ʿAbduh and Riḍā's respective discussions of the topic of polygamy display a strong concern for the 'logic behind

[550] *TM* IV, p. 353, ll. 17–19.
[551] *TM* IV, p. 350, ll. 22–23.
[552] *TM* IV, p. 353, ll. 19–20.
[553] *TM* IV, p. 353, l. 2.
[554] *TM* VI, p. 353, ll. 12–13.

Qur'ānic prescriptions as well as their applicability to modern societies'—even though they ultimately reach different conclusions. The presence of such a concern, I believe, is hard to deny as both exegetes are ultimately worried about the harmful effect that the permission or, in Riḍā's case, the restriction of polygamy might have on Muslims in their day and age. In so doing, both thinkers resort strongly to common-sense arguments. Second, ʿAbduh and Riḍā both present themselves from their very pragmatic sides in their exegesis of the topic and, in so doing, seem to resort to tradition and other sources chiefly in those instances when those support their own views. Finally, the fact that Riḍā decided to include his teacher's view—even though it condradicts his own—might be taken as further evidence that, as an editor, Riḍā does indeed faithfully distinguish between his own opinions and those of ʿAbduh.

5. Chapter Conclusion

In many ways, the above analysis paints the picture of a Qur'anic commentary that finds itself caught in a hybrid state between the old and the new. Traditional elements are undoubtedly present in the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, as seen in these passages, with its author routinely providing *ḥadīth* reports as well as named authorities. In addition, Riḍā, too, divides the Qur'anic text into smaller units, which he then initially analyses verse-by-verse, often in a dry and matter-of-fact fashion. In so doing, he demonstrates a deep familiarity with scholarly terminology and thought. However, as these passages have shown, there are numerous elements, both conspicuous and subtle, that not only reveal the author's modernising tendencies but which also justify the claim that this commentary does indeed represent a turning point in Qur'anic exegesis. Thus, although Riḍā, unlike Sayyid Quṭb, do not use the *ḥakama* verses a basis to call for the establishment of an Islamic state, the fact that his discussion of these verses is closely tied to aspects of governance nevertheless suggests that he understands them to apply to a context that goes beyond the simple arbitration of disputes. Indeed, he uses these verses to encourage Muslims living in India to become active participants in the local British administration there. The language employed by Riḍā in his discussion of surah 5—especially whenever he has finished his initial verse-by-verse exegesis—also reveals significant departures from that found in classical works of *tafsīr*. For example, we not only find the author resorting to

modern-day concepts and vocabulary, but also witness him directly engaging the reader by appealing to his or her common sense. The arguably most notable departure from classical commentaries on the Qur'an, however, is Riḍā's strong interest in the socio-political realities of his time, which is often accompanied by calls for reform. As we have seen, the author of this commentary displays a consistent attempt to connect the Qur'an's message to the conditions and issues faced by Muslims living in the early 20th century. It is particularly those instances that reveal his techniques as a modern exegete. Although in those discussions, too, Riḍā demonstrates familiarity with tradition, he nevertheless does so in a way that is in many ways manipulative and, based on the conclusions he often draws, seemingly turns traditional Islamic thought and methods upside down.

Chapter V: Fresh Woods and Pastures New

1. Summary of Key Findings

The goal of this thesis has been to draw broader conclusions regarding the style, exegetical methods, and ideas contained in Rashīd Riḍā's *Tafsīr al-Manār*. In particular, I contrasted this commentary to a number of traditional works of *tafsīr* in order to identify specific elements in Riḍā's work that justify the widely accepted claim that his *tafsīr* constitutes a certain turning point in, or, indeed, break with classical Qur'anic exegesis. In so doing, I paid close attention to the ways in which the author of the *Tafsīr al-Manār* stays true to his self-declared mission of applying the Qur'an's guidance to the concrete needs of the Muslim community. Arguably, a recurring observation throughout the various chapters of this thesis has been that, although the existence of traditional material and exegetical techniques in the *Tafsīr al-Manār* is hard to deny, this commentary nevertheless features a number of new elements.

One of these new elements is Riḍā's consistent effort to establish a meaningful connection between scripture and the concrete socio-political realities of his time. As the previous chapters have shown, in his *tafsīr*, Riḍā routinely links the Qur'an's verses to actual issues and events experienced by early 20th-century Muslims living in the Arab world and beyond. Accordingly, his exegesis of the *ḥakama* verses (Q 5:44–50) forms the basis for an extended discussion of British rule in India, in the course of which Riḍā urges his readers to assume an active role in the process of governance in

order to promote the welfare of the local Muslim population. Similarly, the verses dealing with Qur'an's recommended punishment of those who 'strive to spread corruption on earth' (Q 5:33–34) prompt the author of the *Manār* commentary to question the appropriateness of this punishment—namely, execution and, as he falsely claims, crucifixion—in the very specific context of events that had recently occurred in the Egyptian village of Dinshaway. Equally, the core argument of Riḍā's defence of polygamy (Q 4:3)—which, on this particular occasion, stands in opposition to ʿAbduh's opinion on the same matter—is tied to his perception that abandoning this practice would cause harm to the Muslim community, as it might lead, among other things, to adultery and thus ultimately weaken cohesion within the family. In other words, throughout this commentary, there is a consistent attempt on the part of the author to demonstrate to his reader the relevance of the Qur'an's message to present-day realities and the welfare of the Muslim community as a whole.

The second new element, which, to a certain extent, is related to the first, concerns Riḍā's use of language. Although the author of the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, too, resorts to a number of technical terms in his exegesis—this is hardly surprising: he is, after all, writing a work of *tafsīr*—his commentary is full of modern expressions and concepts and is written in a style that can be described as simpler and more accessible

to ordinary readers.[555] At the same time, he occasionally uses terms in a way that lends them a different connotation. For example, the concept of *taqlīd*—the well-established practice among classical scholars to make legal decisions based on precedent—carries an exclusively negative undertone in the *Manār* commentary, whose author views it as the core reason for cultural and intellectual stagnation in the Muslim world. More significantly, however, it appears that, to Rashīd Riḍā, language serves as a tool aimed at engaging his reader and at drawing him or her into his discussion. This becomes particularly visible in those instances in which the author appeals to the reader's common sense or reason by asking rhetorical questions, using specific punctuation, and adopting a more mocking or, indeed, harsh tone when discrediting the viewpoints of others. Riḍā's use of language is also indicative of a key element of his thought, which is closely tied to the audience at which his work is directed. While classical commentators on the Qur'an generally wrote for an audience of other scholars, the author of the *Tafsīr al-Manār* aimed to reach an increasingly literate public that consisted predominantly of ordinary Muslims. And indeed, the goal that his commentary 'would be understood by ordinary people' is so central to Riḍā's thought that he reminds his reader of it in the introductory remarks preceding each volume of his commentary.

[555] Some of the modern words and concepts identified in this thesis include but are not limited to 'nationality' (*al-jinsīya*); 'state' (*al-dawla*); newspaper (*al-jarīda*); court martial (*al-maḥkama al-ʿurfīya*); and 'House of Commons' (*majlis al-nuwwāb*).

The ideas contained in the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, too, constitute a certain ideological shift from those found not only in classical commentaries on the Qur'an, but also from mainstream Sunni Islamic thought. The first shift concerns Riḍā's views on the *tafsīr* discipline itself. According to the author of the *Manār* commentary, as well as his teacher, *tafsīr* had, over the course of many centuries, turned into an out-dated discipline which, through a seeming obsession on what he considers technicalities, irrelevant linguistic discussions, and superstitious narratives, no longer aids Muslims in their understanding of the Qur'an. In fact, it actually represents an obstacle to it by 'distracting (*yashghal*) its reader from [the Qur'an's] high purposes (*al-maqāṣid al-'ālīya*) and from its sublime guidance (*al-hidāya al-sāmīya*)'.[556] To Riḍā, *tafsīr* must bear relevance: it must show Muslims how the Qur'an's guidance applies to their concrete needs and issues and how it can enhance the Muslim community's overall wellbeing. According to Riḍā, *tafsīr* should therefore rid itself from these distractions and instead focus on the Qur'an itself rather than the 'opinions of [scholars]. [557] Accordingly, the uninterrupted string of Qur'anic quotations at the beginning of the *Fātiḥa*, which takes up nearly three pages, can be interpreted as the author shifting the traditional exegetical focus on demonstrating loyalty to tradition towards demonstrating loyalty to the Qur'an itself. Whether or not this is what he actually achieves—that is, simply let the Qur'an speak for itself—remains open to debate. While Riḍā certainly signals to

[556] *TM* I, p. 7, ll. 9–10.
[557] *TM* I, ll. p. 6, l. 5.

his reader a certain shift of loyalty, instances such as the pastiche technique may also be viewed as an intelligent move on the part of the author to camouflage his own interests behind the text of scripture—the voice of the author is seemingly drowned out by God's word, but by selecting specific verses it is still Riḍā who gets to set the agenda. More importantly, this technique also allows him to justify some of his more radical views regarding the *tafsīr* discipline, which, in many ways, is an attack of the very toolbox of tradition itself.

A second ideological shift concerns some of the author's views on Islam and society. Even in the passages analysed as part of this thesis, one is able to observe that Riḍā presents a number of novel ideas that arguably break with conventional thought and wisdom. Accordingly, the support he expresses for permitting intermarriage between Muslim men and pagan women not only differs from the interpretation found in pre-modern commentaries, but, in fact, represents a rejection of the mainstream legal stance on this matter. Similarly, Riḍā's exegesis of the *ḥakama* verses contains an expansion of traditional thought in that it more explicitly links these verses to a governance context as opposed to the mere arbitration of disputes. A further example, which I only touched in passing in the previous chapter but which I have discussed at length elsewhere, concerns Q 3:7, a verse that deals with the issue of who has the ability to understand the Qur'an's obscure statements (*mutashābihāt al-Qur'ān*). While the vast majority of classical exegetes agreed that only God knows the

meaning of these verses, Riḍā not only argues that the opposite is true but further claims that it is, in fact, every Muslim's duty to endeavour to understand the *mutashābihāt*.[558] In all of this, one can once again observe the author's strong interest in the concrete socio-political realities of his time as well as his ambitions as a social reformer: the reason why he supports intermarriage is because of the social advantages he sees in this practice for Muslims; the reason why endorses polygamy is because abolishing this practice would, in his view, weaken the Muslim community; the reason why he encourages Muslims to 'judge according to English laws' in India—and not Islamic ones—is because, in view of existing realities, it would be beneficial for Muslims to take a more active role in the affairs of their countries; the reason why Muslims should strive to understand the *mutashābihāt*—as opposed to simply believing in them—is because serious engagement with 'true' Islam is the only way to achieve a dynamic and advanced Islam.

Traditional methods and techniques do, of course, not disappear entirely in the *Tafsīr al-Manār*. Accordingly, Riḍā approaches the Qur'anic text in canonical order; segments it into smaller verse units; and occasionally offers polyvalent readings when discussing a given issue. In so doing, the author of the *Manār* commentary, too, will occasionally discuss technical terms, provide *ḥadīth* reports and identify well-known authorities from the Islamic tradition. However, these apparent similarities to

[558] Brandl, 'The Clear and the Ambiguous', pp. 26–42.

classical works of *tafsīr* are in many ways superficial. Whereas, in classical commentaries on the Qur'an, 'the process of citing authorities and providing multiple readings is in part a declaration of loyalty' as it 'defines the tradition in which one works'[559], such methods appear to serve a very different purpose in the *Tafsīr al-Manār*. Indeed, tradition on the whole arguably serves a different purpose in this commentary, which is predominantly to legitimise the author's new and, at times, unconventional ideas. On the one hand, Riḍā is able to show his scholarly credentials to participate in this long-standing discipline whenever he demonstrates his familiarity with traditional techniques and applies them. This process is coupled with, as we have seen, an effort made by Riḍā aimed at positing a continuous line of Islamic reform that may or may not have existed in the way that he himself makes it out to be. On the other hand, his use of traditional methods—and specifically the inclusion of named authorities—seemingly helps him justify some of his more radical ideas as it allows him to signal to his audience that these ideas are not far-fetched at all but have actually already been advocated by prominent figures in Islamic history. In other words, Riḍā's use of tradition is, to some extent, a process of recruiting allies that allows him to pursue his own dogmatic agenda. It is in this sense that one should understand the function of the *ḥadīth* attributed to ʿUmar in the context of Q 5:5 (Chapter 4). Similarly, his inclusion of various named authorities in the context of the

[559] Calder, 'Tafsīr', p. 103.

ḥakama verses, too, serves the purpose of advancing the author's own ideas on the issue rather than to provide an array of differing opinions. And indeed, as we have seen, the author of the *Manār* commentary happily ignores tradition altogether in those instances when he may not have found an appropriate ally. Accordingly, his discussion on intermarriage as found in the context of Q 5:3 appears predominantly based on common-sense arguments alone.

I would like to conclude this section by relating a brief conversation I recently had with a friend who shares my interest in Qur'anic exegesis and, in particular, modern Islamic thought. Discussing some of the conclusions I had drawn having spent years working on the *Manār* commentary—a conversation which naturally featured *that* age-old question on whether Riḍā's work can be described as a fundamentally 'modern' piece of *tafsīr* literature—my friend asked me to imagine an 18th-century *tafsīr* student reading this commentary for the first time. What would go through his mind when presented with the *Tafsīr al-Manār* and, more importantly, would he simply view it as yet another title on the long list of Sunni Arabic commentaries on the Qur'an? Almost spontaneously, I told my friend that that student would certainly be confused and, depending on what passage he would be presented with, might not always even readily identify the text before them as a work of *tafsīr*—especially if that passage begins with a question from a reader of a certain journal who is wondering whether he or she might be allowed to apply for a job in the British administration in

India. As for those passages that feature more traditional elements such as named authorities and *ḥadīth* reports, our student might also quickly wonder whether those similarities are actually there or whether they merely exist on the surface—a kind of strategy employed by the author to 'tick certain boxes' in order to pre-empt criticism that his work is, in fact, not a *tafsīr* at all. And indeed, the conclusions drawn above vividly demonstrate that, although the author of the *Manār* commentary does undoubtedly use traditional techniques, he does so in a different way and, above all, for a different purpose. Wrapped up in the guise of a centuries-old format, the *Tafsīr al-Manār* does indeed constitute a significant turning point in the genre of Qur'anic exegesis. Nevertheless, it was also written at a time where modern Islamic thought was only beginning to take shape; as such, it is hardly surprising that Riḍā's commentary continues to show more traditional features than those of later exegetes such as Sayyid Quṭb.

2. Suggestions for Future Research

It goes without saying that the possible ways in which a scholar could or *should* analyse a work of *tafsīr*—especially one as complex and diverse as the *Manār* commentary—are numerous. It also goes without saying that the possible ways in which a (hopefully) budding academic could or *should* analyse a work of *tafsīr* as part of his doctoral thesis are numerous, too. The approach I chose for the purpose of this thesis was to examine the *Tafsīr al-Manār* in contrast to a number of traditional *tafāsīr* as well as classical Sunni Muslim doctrine in general. In so doing, I looked at numerous passages throughout the *Manār* commentary, albeit with a strong focus on *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*. This final subsection therefore discusses a number of suggestions for future research projects on the *Manār* commentary, many of which could take the findings of this thesis as their starting point.

2.1 The *Manār* Commentary's Editorial History and the Question of Authorship

It has been noted by one scholar that '(t)he complex genesis of the *Tafsīr al-Manār* and Riḍā's editorial strategies are patently in need of an in-depth study, which would have to undertake systematic textual comparisons between (i) the exegetical material in the *Manār* journal, (ii) the independent exegetical publications that have appeared under the name of Muḥammad ʿAbduh, and (iii) the first and second editions of the

Tafsīr al-Manār itself.'[560] And indeed, the textual history of the *Manār* commentary is, to date, uncertain, with the limited existing scholarship on this work largely ignoring the issue.[561] Considering that the *Tafsīr al-Manār* was published over a period of twenty years, from 1910 to 1930, as well as the fact that even the short introductory remarks preceding each volume differ not only between volumes but also between the different editions of the same volume, it is fair to assume that the text underwent certain changes over time. These changes might be particularly apparent whenever the text addresses critical issues, such as the relationship between Islam and the West. The early 20th century was a period of fundamental, and in some cases even traumatising, political changes for the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, a parallel reading of the *Manār* journal, the first and the second editions of the commentary, and some of ʿAbduh's own publications could shed light not only on how Riḍā's theological opinions on a given matter evolved over time, but also on the extent of ʿAbduh's contribution to the commentary.[562] Such an endeavour appears

[560] See Sinai, 'Reading Sūrat al-Anʿām', p. 157.

[561] See C. C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism*, and J.J. Jomier, *Commentaire*, for example. It appears that the customary practice has thus far been to use the second edition of the commentary or to use both indiscriminately, as Jomier did. See Jomier, *Commentaire*, p. XVI.

[562] The contents of the commentary were published in one form or the other over a period of nearly 30 years, a period during which a lot of significant political events occurred. (1897: First Zionist Congress, 1905: 2nd Aliyah, 1917: Balfour Declaration, 1924: Abolition of the Ottoman Empire). Jomier seems to ignore the editorial issue completely, permanently switching between the editions he 'happens to lay his hands on'. For surah 5, for example, which appears in tomes VI and VII, he uses the first edition (1911) for *juz'* VI and the second edition (1927) for *juz'* VII. Thus, he would have been completely unaware of any potential changes (see Jomier, *Commentaire*, p. XVI). However, there are strong indications to believe that changes must have occurred, especially since even the introductory remarks to each tome differ to some extent between the first and second edition (See *TM*, vols. VI and VII).

particularly rewarding since most of the claims surrounding the increased 'radicalisation' and 'conservatism' of Riḍā's thought during that period have primarily been based on scattered statements and actions and not on what he himself has to say in this highly influential piece of *tafsīr* literature.

2.2 A Comparison between the *Manār* Commentary and Other Modern Commentaries on the Qur'an

Although the number of early 20th-century Sunni Arabic *tafāsīr* that emerged in the same geographical region as the *Manār* commentary is limited, at least two important works come to mind. Both appear equally suitable for comparative studies aimed at deepening our appreciation of both the exegetical techniques employed in modern works of *tafsīr* and some of the intellectual debates that occurred among Egypt's Islamic reformers at the time. The first is *al-Jawāhir fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm al-mushtamil ʿalā ʿajā'ib badā'iʿ al-mukawwināt wa-gharā'ib al-āyāt al-bāhirāt*, a 26-volume scientific commentary on the Qur'an written by the Egyptian exegete Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī (d. 1940). Described by some scholars as 'the most important exegesis of the Qur'ān after Shaykh ʿAbduh',[563] Majid Daneshgar notes that Jawharī pursued similar reformist goals to those of ʿAbduh, in addition to demonstrating a keen desire to show Islam's compatibility with the modern world and, in particular, scientific progress—topics that regularly feature in the *Manār* commentary. A second *tafsīr* produced around the

[563] Majid Daneshgar, 'Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī'.

same time is *Maḥāsin al-ta'wīl*, penned by the Syrian exegete Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914). Strongly influenced by the ideas of ʿAbduh—in fact, he reportedly travelled to Egypt in 1903 to meet with ʿAbduh and Riḍā in person—this commentary claims, in a fashion similar to the *Tafsīr al-Manār*, to be of particular relevance to the needs of contemporary Muslims.[564] In addition, Johanna Pink has observed that this commentator, too, often resorts to the writings of Ibn Taymīya in his commentary, making al-Qāsimī's *tafsīr* a potentially fruitful object of comparison not only in terms of thought but possibly also in terms of exegetical techniques and the use of pre-modern sources.

What's more, just as a comparison between ʿAbduh and Riḍā's work and pre-modern commentaries on the Qur'an aids our understanding of the evolution of Sunni exegesis, so would a comparison with commentaries produced just before and after the *Tafsīr al-Manār* help us gain a better idea of this commentary's place within the history of the *tafsīr* genre. For example, the 19th-century Iraqi scholar and former Mufti of Baghdad Maḥmūd al-Alūsī (d. 1854) produced a 30-volume commentary on the Qur'an called *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, whose exegetical techniques and ideas could be

[564] Pink, *Sunnitischer Tafsīr*, pp. 43–44. Specifically, Johanna Pink makes the following remarks in reference to al-Qāsimī's commentary: 'Zwar ist es stark durch al-Ālūsī und die Ideen ʿAbduhs beeinflusst, doch ist es ein durchaus eigenständiges Werk. Es ist primär mit sozialethischen, moralischen und rechtlichen Fragen befasst, interessiert sich demgegenüber nicht für philologische oder philosophische Anliegen und erhebt den Anspruch, von Relevanz für die Muslime seiner Zeit zu sein.' Pink, *Sunnitischer Tafsīr*, p. 44.

contrasted with those of the *Tafsīr al-Manār*.[565] Doing so would have the potential of shedding more light on whether the *Manār* commentary was indeed the first of its kind or whether certain techniques or methods might already be found in the *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*—arguably, a commentary with which learned scholars such as ʿAbduh and Riḍā would have been familiar.[566] Similarly, it would be a worthwhile endeavour to juxtapose the *Tafsīr al-Manār* with some of the commentaries written in later decades, both within the Arab world and beyond. This would have the double benefit of not only enabling us to make more general statements about the *Manār* commentary's position within the evolution of Sunni exegesis, but it would also enhance our understanding of its presumed impact on later Sunni thought. Examples of commentaries include but are not limited to Sayyid Quṭb's (d. 1966) *Fi Ẓilāl al-Qurʾān*; Abul-Aʿla Mawdūdī's (d. 1979) *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*; as well as *Risale-i Nur*, a multi-volume commentary written by the Turkish-Kurdish scholar Said Nursi (d.1960).

2.3 Pursuing One Central Theme Across the *Manār* Commentary

Finally, a future research project could endeavour to explore how one specific Qur'anic theme is treated across the *Tafsīr al-Manār*. A possible theme could, for example, be marriage—treated in several verses of *Sūrat al-Nisā'* (Q 4:21–25), but also at

[565] It is worth emphasising that this commentary is in dire need of scholarly attention. Basheer Nafi has produced a short but useful article on al-Alūsī's life (Nafi, 'Abu Al-Thana Al-Alusi', pp. 465–495). Similarly, Mustansir Mir has provided a brief characterisation of his exegesis (Mir, *Coherence*, pp. 18–19).

[566] Nicolai Sinai, for example, has observed that this exegete is 'explicitly mentioned in the *Tafsīr al-Manār*' (Sinai, 'Reading Sūrat al-Anʿām', p. 143).

other places in the Qur'an such as Q 5:5 and Q 24:32. A facilitating factor in such a project would be the fact that each volume of Riḍā's commentary contains comprehensive indices at the end. These would be particularly useful in order to ensure that key discussions are not overlooked—arguably a justified concern, considering that the author of the *Manār* commentary does not necessarily limit his discussion to a given verse's main topic, as vividly demonstrated in his exegesis of Q 5:5. The benefit of such an endeavour would be two-fold: on the one hand, the reader would gain a fuller and more nuanced picture of Riḍā's views on a particular topic and, at the same time, his thought and exegetical techniques. On the other hand—provided such a project is coupled with a parallel reading of other editions of the *Manār* commentary and some of the other works attributed to ʿAbduh and Riḍā—the reader might get a better idea of the evolution of not only the authors' thought over time, but also the editorial process the *Tafsīr al-Manār* underwent over time.

The above are but some of the ideas that have repeatedly stood out to me over the years that I have worked on this largely unexplored yet influential commentary on the Qur'an. It goes without saying that there exist considerably more opportunities for future research on the *Tafsīr al-Manār*. As such, a project could examine more closely the *Manār* commentary's influence on the thought of intellectuals in Southeast Asia, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia. Similarly, more attention could be devoted to an in-depth analysis of Riḍā's use of tradition. Yet another project could

focus exclusively on the thought contained in the *Tafsīr al-Manār* and juxtapose it with other writings from the *Nahḍa* period as well as European philosophy. In a sense, it seems that the opportunities for future research are almost as inexhaustible as the inexhaustibility Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā saw in the Qur'an's meaning.[567]

[567] Credit goes to Walid. A. Saleh, who first came up with a similar expression in the context of *tafsīr* in general (Saleh, *The Formation of Classical Tafsīr*, p. 1).

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