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THE METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS AND CONTROLS OF THE INTERPRETATION OF THE REVEALED TEXTS IN IMĀM AL-MĀTURĪDĪ

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Abstract. *This study treats the method of Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī in the interpretation (taʾwīl) of the revealed texts through his work «Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān», with particular attention to the methodological controls he adopted in combining transmission (riwāya) with independent understanding (dirāya), and the requirements of the text with the demands of rational consideration. The importance of the subject lies in the fact that al-Māturīdī did not treat interpretation as a matter of personal taste or as a departure from the apparent sense of the text, but made of it a disciplined scholarly act resting upon regard for the Qurʾānic context, upon consideration of the parallels of the expressions and upon recourse to the Prophetic Sunna, without abolishing the role of reason and of independent reasoning. The study aims to bring out the features of this method and to demonstrate its capacity to achieve a balance between preserving the sanctity of the revealed text and remaining open to its possible significations under recognised controls. It further shows that al-Māturīdī's method represents a moderate epistemic model from which benefit may be drawn in treating the problems of contemporary religious understanding, and in particular in confronting literalist rigidity on the one hand and arbitrary interpretation on the other.*

Keywords: *Imām al-Māturīdī, Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān, taʾwīl, transmission and independent understanding, interpreting the Qurʾān by the Qurʾān, interpretation by the Sunna, the method of kalām.*

INTRODUCTION

Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds, and blessings and peace upon our master Muhammad, the seal of the prophets and messengers, and upon his family and all his Companions.

The legacy of Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī represents one of the great pillars in the construction of moderate Sunnī thought, for he brought together in his scholarly project purity of creed, depth of theological consideration, precision of juridical reasoning and breadth of exegetical treatment. His school was distinguished by its capacity to establish

a balance between text and reason, and between the requirements of transmission and the fields of independent understanding, which made it one of the most prominent schools to have contributed to the consolidation of the method of moderation in Islamic thought (al-Nasafī, 1993:I/469-470; Abū Zahra, 1977:112).

The work «Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān» is among the most important scholarly remains that disclose the personality of Imām al-Māturīdī and his method in understanding the revealed texts. It is neither a purely transmitted exegesis nor a merely rational work, but a scholarly model in which the instruments of exegesis, of kalām, of jurisprudence, of the principles of jurisprudence and of language interpenetrate. Hence the importance of studying this book not merely as an exegetical source, but as a witness to an integrated method of dealing with the revealed text (al-Damanhūrī, 2018a; al-Māturīdī, 2004).

Interpretation in Imām al-Māturīdī does not mean turning the text away from its meaning without evidence, nor subjecting it to the desire of the interpreter or to his particular taste; it is rather a disciplined scholarly process whose aim is to make clear what is intended by the revealed discourse in the light of language, of context, of the Qurʾānic parallels, of the Prophetic Sunna and of the rules of rational consideration. Interpretation was therefore for him not a departure from the text but a means of understanding it more precisely, and of preserving it from literalist rigidity on the one hand and from arbitrary interpretation on the other (al-Damanhūrī, 2015:44).

The importance of this subject increases in the present age, in which extreme readings of the revealed texts multiply between a tendency that contents itself with the outward sense of the expression without regard for context and purposes, and another tendency that opens the door of interpretation without any recognised scholarly control. In this setting the method of Imām al-Māturīdī offers a sound epistemic model that joins respect for the revealed text with the activation of the instruments of understanding and of independent reasoning, in a manner consonant with the spirit of the sharīʿa and with its universal purposes (al-Ghālī, 1989:97; Oqilov, 2017:28).

This study aims to set out the methodological foundations and controls upon which the interpretation of the revealed texts in Imām al-Māturīdī rests, through an analysis of certain features of his method in «Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān», and in particular the combination of exegesis by transmission with exegesis by independent understanding, the interpretation of the Qurʾān by the Qurʾān, the refusal to interpret a Qurʾānic word in

isolation from its parallels and its context, and the regulation of the use of the Prophetic Sunna in understanding the verses.

The problem of the study rests upon the following question: what are the methodological controls that Imām al-Māturīdī adopted in the interpretation of the revealed texts, and how was he able through them to achieve a balance between transmission and independent understanding in the exegesis of the Noble Qurʾān? In answering this question the study relies upon the analytical method in examining the exegetical texts and upon the inductive method in tracing the scattered methodological rules in «Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān», with recourse to the comparative method where it is necessary to set out the particularity of the Māturīdī method over against certain other exegetical and theological tendencies (al-Dhahabī, n.d.:I/43-44; al-Ṭabarī, 2001:I/32).

MAIN PART

The interpretation of the revealed texts in al-Māturīdī was not an arbitrary practice issuing in whatever the interpreter desires, but a disciplined act governed by firm methodological foundations in which the considerations of language, of reason and of the Qurʾānic context are interwoven together. An understanding of these foundations is the key to understanding why al-Māturīdī arrived in many questions at results differing from those of his predecessors or of his contemporaries, while remaining within the circle of the Sunna and the Community whose limits he observed (al-Damanhūrī, 2018a:17).

The importance of studying the methodological foundations and controls of interpretation in al-Māturīdī lies in their disclosing an integrated epistemic model that balances the requirements of reason with the demands of transmission, and that joins the preservation of the outward senses of the texts with openness to the preponderant meanings they may bear - a model that has not received its sufficient share of study and research in comparison with what the methods of other scholars have enjoyed. Moreover, an understanding of this method contributes greatly to a more precise and comprehensive grasp of the theological heritage of the people of the Sunna and the Community, particularly in the light of the present age's pressing need for methodological controls governing the process of interpretation and preserving it from sliding into arbitrariness (Abū Zahra, 1977:9; Ziyadov, 2009:15).

Proceeding from this importance, sound scholarly method requires that we should first pause over an introduction to this eminent imām who laid the foundations of

this method and raised its pillars, since his method of interpretation cannot be rightly understood without a grasp of his scholarly personality, of his intellectual environment and of the historical setting in which he grew up.

As to his name, titles and lineage, he is Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd, Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī al-Samarqandī, named after Māturīd or Māturīt, a quarter in Samarqand in the lands of Transoxiana, now belonging to the Republic of Uzbekistan. Imām al-Māturīdī was given several titles indicative of his learning and standing: he is one of the luminaries of religion and one of the shaykhs of the Muslims, an imām whose knowledge all the world follows and by whose path it is guided; he was one of the imāms of the world in jurisprudence, learning, scrupulousness, religion and goodness, accepted by those who agreed with him and by those who differed from him, and it is agreed that he was without equal; he is the sword of the Sunna and the suppressor of the people of deviation and innovation, the master and the imām and the ascetic, the imām of right guidance, the head of the generality of the Ḥanafī shaykhs, the imām of the theologians of his age and the one who consolidated the creeds of the Muslims (al-Damanhūrī, 2018b:102-103; al-Māturīdī, n.d.:15).

As to his birth and death, none of the sources mentions a date for the birth of Imām al-Māturīdī; we are able, however, to deduce an approximate date from our knowledge of the dates of death of his teachers, his shaykhs and his contemporaries. Among his shaykhs was Muḥammad b. Muqātil al-Rāzī, who died in the year 248 AH, and Nuṣayr b. Yaḥyā al-Balkhī, who died in the year 268 AH; among his contemporaries was Muḥammad b. Aslam al-Azdī, who died in the year 268 AH. The birth of Imām al-Māturīdī must therefore have been before these dates, and his birth may accordingly have fallen in the fourth decade of the third century, that is, between the years 230 and 240 AH at the lowest estimate, during the caliphate of al-Mutawakkil (232-247 AH) - and God knows best. As to his death, most of those who give an account of al-Māturīdī mention that it occurred in the year 333 AH, and any statement to the contrary is anomalous; accordingly he died at the age of ninety years or more, may God have mercy upon him and grant him an ample reward (al-Māturīdī, n.d.:16; al-Damanhūrī, 2018b:104).

As to the place of his grave, it is in the cemetery of Chākardīza, a quarter among the quarters of Samarqand, in which there is a large and celebrated cemetery of scholars and eminent men; there were buried Qutham b. ʿAbbās and Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī.

Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥakīm al-Samarqandī ordered that there should be written upon his grave when he died: «This is the grave of one who was generous to the sciences with his every breath and who exhausted his capacity in spreading them and in kindling them from one another; his traces were praised in religion and the fruits of his life were gathered.» His grave is known and visited to this day. It should be noted that this cemetery is known as the «Muḥammadiyya burial ground», since more than four hundred scholars bearing the name Muḥammad were buried in it, and the competent authorities are at present endeavouring to determine the site of his grave precisely and to revive this ancient Islamic civilisational heritage (al-Māturīdī, n.d.:16-17; al-Samʿānī, n.d.:II/12; al-Qurashī, n.d.:II/553).

Among the most eminent and prominent of the shaykhs of Imām al-Māturīdī was his shaykh Abū Naṣr Aḥmad b. al-ʿIyāḍī, who died shortly before 301 AH. He was the most eminent of al-Māturīdī's shaykhs; Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī and al-Zabīdī mention him, and al-Nasafī recorded something of his excellent reports in the course of mentioning those who affirm the attribute of takwīn. He was of the progeny of Saʿd b. ʿUbāda al-Anṣārī and was martyred in the lands of the Turks in the days of Aḥmad b. Naṣr the Elder, who died in 301 AH. He was among the bravest men of his time, the most steadfast in spirit and the most resolute; in learning he was an ocean whose depth could not be reached, an imām in the branches and the principles alike. It is related that when he was martyred he left behind forty men who were among the contemporaries of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (al-Māturīdī, n.d.:32; al-Nasafī, 1993:I/469-470).

Imām al-Māturīdī left a rich scholarly legacy reflecting the breadth of his learning and the variety of his interests in kalām, in exegesis, in jurisprudence and in its principles. Among the most prominent of his works that have reached us, in kalām and creed, is «Kitāb al-Tawḥīd», the mainstay of the theologians of the people of the Sunna in the science of kalām, in which he establishes the principles of belief upon the method of rational argument disciplined by transmission, and which is among the most precious things written in this field (al-Māturīdī, 1970). There is also «Kitāb al-Maqālāt», among the first books to have surveyed the theological sects and to have discussed their opinions and doctrines in a sound scholarly manner; Abū al-Yusr al-Bazdawī took from him the meanings of «Kitāb al-Tawḥīd» and of «Kitāb al-Taʾwīlāt», as he himself states (al-Bazdawī, 2003:14).

There is further his great exegesis entitled «Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān», or «Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna», among the most eminent of his works and the greatest in its effect upon the history of exegesis among the people of the Sunna and the Community; Professor Aḥmad Saʿd al-Damanhūrī al-Māturīdī, may God preserve him, has rendered a noble service to this book and to the Islamic library by editing it and bringing it out in the finest scholarly form (al-Māturīdī, 2023). There is also his «Treatise on What It Is Not Permissible to Pause Upon in the Qurʾān», still a manuscript that has not been printed, preserved in the Egyptian National Library under the number 354 (Majāmīʿ) and under the number 940 (Majmūʿ Ṭalʿat), with further copies in the libraries of the world. There is finally «Kitāb Maʾkhadh al-sharāʾiʿ» on the principles of jurisprudence, which al-Nasafī mentions and from which al-Lāmishī al-Māturīdī quotes in his own work on the principles of jurisprudence (al-Māturīdī, n.d.:40).

These works taken together disclose an imām who combined exegesis, kalām, jurisprudence and its principles, which makes his method in the interpretation of the revealed texts an integrated method deserving of study and reflection, particularly in the light of what Professor Aḥmad Saʿd al-Damanhūrī al-Māturīdī has made available to us through his sound scholarly editions and through his valuable book «Imām al-Māturīdī and the Method of the People of the Sunna in Exegesis» (al-Damanhūrī, 2023).

As to the scholarly environment of Imām al-Māturīdī, he grew up in Samarqand, one of the most deeply rooted centres of civilisation in the lands of Transoxiana, which in his age abounded in scholars, teemed with learning and was thronged with circles of study and instruction. The distinguishing character of society in those lands lay in the dominance of the class of landowners, who enjoyed a powerful influence through their alliance with the men of religion; matters improved gradually, however, with the entry of Islam, and the condition of the mass of the people improved markedly in the period of the Sāmānids owing to the establishment of security and the flourishing of trade and industry, the inhabitants of Transoxiana possessing everything in abundance (al-Māturīdī, n.d.:21; Ovatov, 2000:34).

Those lands were an urban environment differing in their customs and in the tastes of their people from the bedouin environment of the desert, in respect of the ease of life, the variety of cultures and the presence of letters; indeed they were highly urbane, so that al-Muqaddasī said: «There is no land more pleasant than three spots: Samarqand,

the Ghūṭa of Damascus and the river of al-Ubulla.» It was likewise a noble and proud environment in which there was a sense of dignity and self-respect and a refusal of injustice and oppression. There occurs in al-Māturīdī's exegesis what indicates that his taste accorded with the tastes of the people of the towns (al-Māturīdī, n.d.:21).

That encyclopaedic culture bore fruit in a number of works, most of them in the religious sciences - kalām, the principles of jurisprudence and exegesis; he naturally employed, however, all his learning in his works, and we have found al-Māturīdī drawing upon many sciences, such as Arab and Islamic history, the biography of the Prophet, the doctrines of the philosophers, the study of religions, the science of foodstuffs, the science of the earth, the science of the stars and others besides (al-Māturīdī, n.d.:36).

Imām al-Māturīdī was distinguished by a number of lofty qualities and noble traits of character that are clearly reflected in his scholarly method and in his exegesis of the Noble Qurʾān. The most prominent of these qualities is asceticism: the most prominent of al-Māturīdī's qualities, by which he was known and on account of which he was given the title «the Ascetic», was asceticism, which may indeed be reckoned the key to his personality, since all the traits and qualities of Imām al-Māturīdī return to this quality, the remaining qualities spreading out around it and then returning to it again. There occurs in his exegesis what discloses this feature of his character, so that the reader sometimes supposes himself to be in the presence of a great devotee; for this trait is built upon a knowledge of the reality of this world, that it was created for perishing and that the abode of the hereafter is the true life, and the believer's regard ought therefore to be within this framework (al-Māturīdī, n.d.:25).

Secondly, he took no payment for teaching knowledge, and this is among the marks and the fruits of his asceticism, for he did not permit the taking of a wage for teaching knowledge or for the memorisation of the Qurʾān, since the dependence of knowledge upon the taking of a wage is a destruction of knowledge and an abrogation of the sharīʿa (al-Māturīdī, n.d.:26). Thirdly, he spoke the truth and feared no reproach, being among those of whom the saying of God Most High is true: «Rather, be godly scholars» (Qurʾān 3:79); he desired by his words and his deeds nothing but the face of God Most High, and was among those who deliver the messages of God and fear Him and fear none but God. Among the manifestations of this is that he offered criticisms in his exegesis of the Umayyads and of the ʿAbbāsid caliphs who were his contemporaries (al-Māturīdī, n.d.:26).

As to his students, Imām al-Māturīdī was the head of the people of the Sunna in Samarqand, and he must therefore have had innumerable students who received his learning from him. Abū al-Yusr al-Bazdawī mentions this, saying: «Our grandfather had taken the meanings of the books of our masters, and of 'Kitāb al-Tawḥīd' and of 'Kitāb al-Taʾwīlāt' concerning the createdness of the Qurʾān, from Shaykh Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, may God have mercy upon him.» The books of biography, however, have confined themselves to the most prominent and celebrated of them (al-Bazdawī, 2003:14).

The first is al-Ḥakīm al-Samarqandī, who died in the year 342 AH; his name is Isḥāq b. Muḥammad, Abū al-Qāsim al-Samarqandī, and he was called al-Ḥakīm (the Sage) for the abundance of his wisdom and his exhortation. He kept the company of Abū Bakr al-Warrāq and of the shaykhs of Balkh and took Sufism from them; he was among the righteous servants of God and among those who are cited as a proverb for wisdom and for excellence of company. He held the judgeship of Samarqand for many days and his conduct was praised; he has several works, all of them in the science of kalām, among them «al-Ḥikma al-nabawiyya», «Mukhtaṣar al-Ḥikma al-nabawiyya» and «al-Sawād al-aʿẓam» (al-Māturīdī, n.d.:33-34).

The second is ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Bazdawī, who died in the year 390 AH; he is Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Mūsā b. ʿĪsā al-Bazdawī, the grandfather of Fakhr al-Islām al-Bazdawī. He took knowledge from Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī; he was an ascetic and a muftī, and the people of Samarqand transmitted from him. He left a righteous progeny who served both the Ḥanafī and the Māturīdī schools; his grandson Fakhr al-Islām ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Bazdawī, who died in the year 493 AH, is the great imām who gathered together the various sciences, the imām of the world in the branches and the principles, who has many esteemed works, among them «al-Mabsūṭ» (al-Māturīdī, n.d.:35). The third is Imām Ibn Abī al-Layth al-Bukhārī, whose date of death is unknown; he is Abū ʿIṣma b. Abī al-Layth al-Bukhārī, a contemporary of the judge Isḥāq al-Ḥakīm al-Samarqandī, who took kalām and jurisprudence from Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (al-Māturīdī, n.d.:35).

This rich scholarly biography discloses an extraordinary personality that combined asceticism, scrupulousness, learning and boldness in speaking the truth, and that qualified him to be a fundamental authority for the people of the Sunna and the Community in the method of interpretation and exegesis (al-Māturīdī, n.d.:25-36; al-Damanhūrī, 2018b:104).

The first foundation is the combination of exegesis by transmission with exegesis by independent understanding. Imām al-Māturīdī is among the imāms of the people of the Sunna, and it is known that the basis of the people of the Sunna in exegesis is the transmitted and then opinion. This fact is what we discern in his exegesis when he confined the ways of arriving at the clarification of the Qurʾān to three, in his comment upon the saying of God Most High: «Would any of you wish to have a garden…» (Qurʾān 2:266). He said: the address of God Most High issues in three modes: an address whose intent is understood at the time of hearing; an address whose intent is understood only after consideration, reflection and pondering, as in His saying «Do they not then ponder the Qurʾān?» (Qurʾān 4:82) and in His saying «And these similitudes We strike for the people, that haply they may reflect» (Qurʾān 59:21); and an address whose intent is understood only by asking the Messenger of God (may God bless him and grant him peace) or one who has knowledge of it, as in His saying «So ask the people of remembrance if you do not know» (Qurʾān 16:43). The first is that of which no one is excused in ignorance; the second is exegesis by opinion or independent reasoning; and the third is exegesis by what is transmitted from the Messenger of God or from those who have knowledge among the people of remembrance, foremost among them the Companions and the Successors (al-Māturīdī, 2004:I/28).

Four motives led Imām al-Māturīdī to choose this middle position. The first is an epistemic motive, consisting in his regarding both report and reason as sources of knowledge that are trusted and relied upon, which was translated into the adoption of both the transmitted and opinion in exegesis. The second is a doctrinal motive, consisting in confidence in reason and in its capacities and judgements, which God has bestowed upon it; among these is Imām al-Māturīdī's belief that God Most High is the creator of inferential knowledge. Thus in Sūrat al-Fatḥ, upon the saying of God Most High «He it is who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the believers» (Qurʾān 48:4), he says, in reply to the Muʿtazila: this indicates that the creator of inferential knowledge and its originator is God Most High, whereas they say that its creator is the one who infers, so that it is an argument against them (al-Māturīdī, 2004:IX/312).

The third is a juridical motive, consisting in the Ḥanafīs' adoption of the authority of the Qurʾān, the Sunna and the sayings of the Companions, which was translated into reliance upon the transmitted in exegesis, together with an inclination towards reason

in a number of principles, such as the recognition of juristic preference (istiḥsān) as an argument and as an accepted source among the sources of jurisprudence, which is an operation of independent reasoning and of preponderant opinion (al-Sarakhsī, 1993:II/200). The fourth is a factual motive, consisting in the fact that the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) did not interpret the whole of the Qurʾān directly, so that his silence concerning clarification is to be reckoned a permission for independent reasoning in that wherein such reasoning is sound; and it is he who said that the Qurʾān does not wear out through frequent repetition (al-Tirmidhī, 1998:V/22, no. 2906).

The methodological foundations of interpretation in al-Māturīdī rest upon a fundamental rule that precedes all the other rules and governs them, namely recourse to the Qurʾān itself as the first authority in the clarification of its intent; for he holds that the one revelation does not contradict itself, that what is left general in one place is expounded in another, and that what is left absolute here is restricted there (al-Damanhūrī, 2018a:17; al-Dhahabī, n.d.:I/43-44).

The first rule is the interpretation of the Qurʾān by the Qurʾān as an act of independent reasoning. There is no doubt that opinion and independent reasoning enter into the interpretation of the Qurʾān by the Qurʾān, since, as the scholar al-Dhahabī has established, it is not a mechanical operation but rests upon reflection and intellection, and is accordingly an exercise of independent reasoning that may err and may hit the mark (al-Dhahabī, n.d.:I/43-44).

Imām al-Māturīdī followed several ways in his exegesis of expressing his lack of certainty concerning the soundness of what he adduces by way of interpreting the Qurʾān by the Qurʾān, the most prominent of them three. The first is an explicit statement of the probability of the interpretation of the verse by the Qurʾān that he is about to mention, as in Sūrat al-Kahf: his saying «And if they call for relief, they are relieved with water like molten metal» (Qurʾān 18:29) may bear the sense that their calling for relief is what is mentioned in the verse «Pour upon us some water» (Qurʾān 7:50), so that they are relieved «with water like molten metal»; and it may bear the sense that they ask for water in the Fire after they have been given to eat therein (al-Māturīdī, 2004:VII/149). At times he expresses this probability by the term «it is permissible», as in his saying in Sūrat Ibrāhīm: it is permissible that His saying «And they set up rivals to God in order

to lead astray from His way» (Qurʾān 14:30) should be the interpretation of what was mentioned concerning the exchange of the favour of God for ingratitude.

The second is that he mentions a number of probable senses, the interpretation by the Qurʾān being one of them, as in Sūrat Yūnus: his saying «Judgement will be given between them in equity» (Qurʾān 10:54) may bear the sense of what wisdom requires, or the interpretation of His saying «in equity» may be what He mentioned in «and they shall not be wronged»; and it may bear the sense of what He mentioned in «Read your book: your own soul suffices this day as a reckoner against you» (Qurʾān 17:14) - equity being justice (al-Māturīdī, 2004:VI/298).

The third is that he interprets the verse by a number of probable senses, all of them resting upon the Qurʾān, as in Sūrat al-Taḥrīm: his saying «and she confirmed the words of her Lord» (Qurʾān 66:12) - it is permissible that the words with which Mary was given good tidings should be His saying «O Mary, God gives you good tidings of a Word from Him whose name is the Messiah» (Qurʾān 3:45); or «and she confirmed the words of her Lord» may mean His proofs and demonstrations, as in His saying «And God establishes the truth by His words» (Qurʾān 10:82), that is, by His proofs and evidences; and the proofs may then be the proofs of the resurrection, or of the message, or of the divine unity (al-Māturīdī, 2004:X/51).

The second rule is that the Qurʾānic word is not to be interpreted in isolation from its parallels in the Qurʾān. Precise knowledge of the meanings of the single words of the Qurʾān is attained only by tracing the occurrences of the Qurʾānic expression throughout the Noble Book in order to determine its meaning, and Imām al-Māturīdī proceeded upon this principle in his exegesis. Thus in Sūrat al-Ḥijr he explains the meaning of naslukuhu, saying: «Thus do We insert it» (Qurʾān 15:13), that is, We cause it to enter; and this is confirmed by His saying «Thus have We inserted it into the hearts of the criminals» (Qurʾān 26:200) and by His saying «Insert your hand into your bosom» (Qurʾān 28:32), that is, cause it to enter (al-Māturīdī, 2004:VII/22).

In Sūrat al-Aḥzāb he explains the meaning of nafs: his saying «The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves» (Qurʾān 33:6) - some have said that the Prophet is closer to them than they are to one another, as in His saying «And do not kill yourselves» (Qurʾān 4:29), that is, let not one of you kill another, and His saying «So greet yourselves» (Qurʾān 24:61), that is, let one of you greet another (al-Māturīdī, 2004:VIII/368).

The third rule is that the Qurʾānic word is not to be interpreted in isolation from the context in which it occurred. This rule completes the one before it, since the parallels of a word in the Qurʾān do not dispense with the context in which it occurred, because the context may change the meaning. Al-Māturīdī expressed this by saying: agreement in names is not agreement in realities and meanings; agreement in realities and meanings occurs only with agreement in the occasions (al-Māturīdī, 2004:VIII/412).

Thus the context determines the meaning of an expression shared among several meanings. He stated this explicitly upon His saying «And those who injure believing men and believing women for something other than what they have earned» (Qurʾān 33:58), where he said: there is no doubt that what is understood of this injury is other than what is understood of the wrong of which Adam and Eve said «Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves» (Qurʾān 7:23); and what is understood of the straying of which Moses said «and I was then of those who strayed» (Qurʾān 26:20) is other than what is understood of the straying of Pharaoh and of the rest of the unbelievers. Of this sort there is much, and we must not understand one single thing from the like of these, even though the expression is one, but rather according to the difference of the position (al-Māturīdī, 2004:VIII/412).

Of the same kind is what occurs concerning the meaning of «permission» (idhn) in Sūrat Ibrāhīm: the permission mentioned in the Qurʾān is not all of one mode, but is directed in each place and borne upon what befits it, as in His saying «and they routed them by the permission of God» (Qurʾān 14:11), that is, by the help of God, and His saying «and I revive the dead by the permission of God» (Qurʾān 2:251), that is, if God wills; and the permission mentioned in the Qurʾān is borne upon what is fitting and befitting to what has preceded (al-Māturīdī, 2004:VI/412).

The context likewise favours some meanings over others. This is made clear by al-Māturīdī's exegesis of the meaning of «decreeing» (qaḍāʾ) in Sūrat al-Anʿām: his saying «then He decreed a term, and a term is named with Him» (Qurʾān 6:2) - decreeing is directed to several aspects, all of which return to the sense of the cessation of a thing and its completion. It may be used for the beginning of an act and its origination; and it may be in the sense of command, as God Most High said «And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him» (Qurʾān 17:23), that is, your Lord has commanded; and it may be in the sense of informing, as He said «And We decreed to the Children of Israel»

(Qurʾān 17:4), that is, We informed them with a decisive informing. He then said: this bears all of these senses save that of command (al-Māturīdī, 2004:IV/122).

Of the same kind is the meaning of «revelation» (waḥy): revelation was so called for the swiftness of its casting into hearts and of its falling upon them. For this reason the whisperings of Satan were called revelation in His saying «And the devils do indeed reveal to their friends» (Qurʾān 6:121); and inspiration likewise was called revelation, as He said «And your Lord revealed to the bee» (Qurʾān 16:68); and God Most High said «And it is not for any mortal that God should speak to him save by revelation» (Qurʾān 42:51). Al-Māturīdī therefore contented himself with setting out the shared lexical meaning of the word revelation, and then mentioned the particularity of each place according to its context, so that revelation to the prophets differs from revelation to the bee or to the mother of Moses (al-Māturīdī, 2004:IV/285).

If the interpretation of the Qurʾān by the Qurʾān is the first foundation in the exegetical method of Imām al-Māturīdī, the interpretation of the Qurʾān by the Prophetic Sunna comes in the second rank as an indispensable basis in understanding what God Most High intends by His noble Book. For the Prophetic Sunna is the first expository source of the Noble Qurʾān, and the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is the first expositor of the Book of God by his word, his deed and his tacit approval. Imām al-Māturīdī grasped this fact profoundly and gave the interpretation of the Qurʾān by the Sunna the utmost attention in his exegesis; he did not, however, content himself with merely adducing the ḥadīths and employing them in exegesis, but laid down for this precise methodological foundations that regulate and govern this employment and distinguish what is certain in signification from what is a probable matter of independent reasoning (al-Damanhūrī, 2018a:65).

Al-Māturīdī does not equate what is established as interpretation from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) with what belongs to the independent reasoning of the exegetes in connecting a verse with a ḥadīth. From an inductive survey of the occurrences of the interpretation of the Qurʾān by the Sunna in the exegesis of Imām al-Māturīdī it may be said that the principle upon which interpretation by the Sunna turns in his work is that every connection between a verse and a ḥadīth is reckoned in the first instance a matter of independent reasoning, unless the interpretation is established from the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him). This comprehensive principle includes a number of matters.

The first matter is the distinction between Prophetic exegesis and exegesis by means of a Prophetic ḥadīth. Imām al-Māturīdī's distinction between Prophetic exegesis on the one hand and exegesis by means of a Prophetic ḥadīth on the other is evident and prominent in his exegesis. The difference between them is that the first is the Prophet's own interpretation when he interprets a Qurʾānic verse directly, whereas the second is the interpretation of someone other than the Prophet when he connects a verse with a ḥadīth. Al-Māturīdī reckons the first as entering certainly into the meaning of the verse, while he reckons the second a probable matter of independent reasoning concerning which no certainty is attained.

As to Prophetic exegesis, Imām al-Māturīdī states explicitly that the interpretation of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), if it is established, is the authority that needs no other. Of this is what occurs in Sūrat Hūd upon His saying «save what your Lord wills» (Qurʾān 11:107): some have said that certain people of the divine unity are punished in the Fire according to the measure of their sins and their offences and then come forth from it; and it is related in this connection from Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī and from Abū Hurayra, from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), that he said: as for those whom God wishes to bring forth from the Fire, they are caused to die a death (Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-īmān, no. 306, I/172). If this is established, it is the authority to be relied upon.

In Sūrat al-Nūr, upon His saying «then contract with them if you know any good in them» (Qurʾān 24:33), he said: some have said that «good» means a trade, and they forged in this connection a ḥadīth from the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) as interpreted from Yaḥyā b. Abī Kathīr: if you know a trade in them, do not send them out as dogs upon the people. If this is established, no other interpretation is needed (Abū Dāwūd, al-Marāsīl, no. 185; Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, 1997:III/79).

As to exegesis by means of a Prophetic ḥadīth, this kind occurs in al-Māturīdī's exegesis in a number of forms. Among them is the case in which the ḥadīth is equivalent to the meaning of the verse, in which case its adduction is by way of confirmation. Of this is what occurs in Sūrat al-Aʿrāf: his saying «Say: O people, I am the Messenger of God to you all» (Qurʾān 7:158) contains an indication that the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) was sent to all people, and likewise it is related that he said: I was sent to the red and the black, whereas the rest of the prophets were sent to particular

peoples and to known and delimited lands and villages (Aḥmad, Musnad, no. 14264, XXII/165).

Of this also is what occurs in Sūrat Hūd: his saying «So We delivered Hūd and those who believed with him by a mercy from Us» (Qurʾān 11:58) indicates that whoever is delivered is delivered only by a mercy from Him. And to this effect it is related in the report that the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) said: none shall enter the Garden by his deed; it was said: not even you, O Messenger of God? He said: not even I, unless God should envelop me in His mercy (ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Muntakhab, no. 890, II/78; al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, no. 5673).

Among them is the case in which there is in the ḥadīth an additional clarification and elucidation of the meaning of the verse. The ḥadīth may serve to clarify a word in the verse, as in Sūrat al-Naḥl upon His saying «Then We revealed to you: follow the creed of Abraham, the upright» (Qurʾān 16:123), where he says: the root of milla is religion - and God knows best - as in his saying (peace and blessings be upon him): the people of two creeds do not inherit from one another, that is, the people of two religions (Abū Dāwūd, Sunan, no. 2911, IV/537; al-Tirmidhī, Sunan, no. 2108, IV/424).

The ḥadīth may likewise serve to clarify a mode of expression or a sentence, as in Sūrat al-Ṭūr: his saying «they contend with one another therein over a cup» (Qurʾān 52:23), that is, they pass it to one another therein and take it one from another, as happens in this world when each person has a cup of his own. This is as it is related in the report that the Prophet of God (peace and blessings be upon him) used to bathe together with one of his wives, and sometimes their hands would contend with one another (Abū Yūsuf, al-Āthār; al-Shaybānī, al-Āthār).

Among them is the case in which the ḥadīth serves to confirm a meaning not directly connected with the verse but adding clarity to the general sense, as in Sūrat al-Insān: it is said that «and they give food out of love for Him» (Qurʾān 76:8) means out of their love for life and their eagerness for it, and not that they give food when they have despaired of life - as it is related from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) that he said: the best of charity is that you give in charity while you are healthy and covetous, hoping for life and fearing poverty (al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, no. 1412, II/110; Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, no. 1032, II/716; al-Nasāʾī, Sunan, no. 2542, V/68).

The second matter is that some exegesis by means of a Prophetic ḥadīth may be rejected. If the connection between the verse and the ḥadīth issues from the independent

reasoning of someone other than the Prophet, then it may without doubt be correct and may be otherwise; it will accordingly be one of a number of probable senses of which none is certain. An example of this is what occurs in Sūrat al-Isrāʾ, where he states the probability: in His saying «and do not approach fornication» (Qurʾān 17:32) there may be a prohibition of fornication itself, and there may be a prohibition of the occasions of fornication, such as kissing, touching and the like, according to what the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) mentioned: the two eyes and the two hands commit fornication, and the private part confirms all that or belies it (Aḥmad, Musnad, no. 8539, XIV/218).

When does Imām al-Māturīdī reject exegesis by means of a Prophetic ḥadīth? Having traced this in the imām's exegesis, we have found that he rejects it in certain cases. The first is when the interpreting ḥadīth is opposed by what is stronger than it. An example is what occurs in Sūrat al-Māʾida: upon His saying «If you stretch out your hand against me to kill me, I shall not stretch out my hand against you to kill you» (Qurʾān 5:28), some people said that it is incumbent upon us to do as those did, but to refrain from it; and they argued in this connection by reports related from Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, who said that the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) used to say: when two Muslims confront one another with their swords and one of them kills his fellow, both are in the Fire. It was said: O Messenger of God, this is the slayer, but what of the slain? He said: he wished to kill his fellow (Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-fitan, no. 2888, IV/2213). They argue by the like of these reports. As for what they adduced of the reports related concerning times of sedition and concerning the fighting of two seditious parties in which there is no imām deserving of the imamate, whether for partisanship or for faction, these are in other circumstances an error; and the correct view in such a case is what has been mentioned of the reports (al-Māturīdī, 2004:III/476).

The second is when the interpreting ḥadīth lacks established authenticity. An example is Imām al-Māturīdī's rejection of the interpretation of al-Aṣamm in Sūrat al-Balad, upon His saying «and you are dwelling freely in this city» (Qurʾān 90:2), where he says: then they differed concerning that which was made lawful to him; some referred it to fighting, and «ḥill» bears the two senses we have mentioned. Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm mentioned that the people of Mecca used to injure the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) so that he was harmed by them, and that it was therefore lawful

for him to depart from among them and lawful for him to hunt at that time. But it is not permissible to turn the interpretation to this, since the like of this is known only by report and transmission (al-Māturīdī, 2004:X/477).

The third is that exegesis by means of a Prophetic ḥadīth may be rejected because the language of the verse does not support the connection between them. An example is what occurs in Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ upon His saying «who sees you when you stand, and your turning about among those who prostrate» (Qurʾān 26:218-219): in the darkness of the night, alone, standing and sitting and in all your states, He sees you, and «your turning about» also «among those who prostrate» in prayer with the people in congregation. It is said: in your turning about among those who prostrate, among those who pray; it is said: he used to see those behind him in the rows as he saw those before him. But this is an interpretation of the verse and is not the speech of the verse itself; for had it been as is mentioned, it would have said yurīka with the nominative and not with the accusative. It is related in some of the reports: I am your imām, so do not precede me in bowing or in prostration or in standing, for I see you behind me as I see you before me; and by Him in whose hand is my soul, had you seen what I have seen, you would have laughed little and wept much. They said: O Messenger of God, and what have you seen? He said: I have seen the Garden and the Fire (al-Māturīdī, 2004:VIII/95).

The third matter is the removal of the supposition of a contradiction between the ḥadīth and the verse. This enters into what I have mentioned above, namely that exegesis by means of a Prophetic ḥadīth must be of a form that does not render the ḥadīth contradictory to the verse; and this is without doubt a matter of independent reasoning. An example is what occurs in Sūrat al-Tawba: they differed concerning the poor and the destitute. Some said that the poor are the emigrants, as in His saying «for the poor emigrants who were expelled from their dwellings» (Qurʾān 59:8), and the destitute are those who did not emigrate. Some said that the poor man is one who has a chronic ailment and the destitute one who has no such ailment but is in need. Some said that the poor are those who restrain themselves and do not go out and do not ask of the people, as in His saying «the ignorant man supposes them rich because of their restraint» (Qurʾān 2:273), and the destitute are those who ask (Qurʾān 9:60).

It is related from the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him), on the authority of Abū Hurayra, that he said: the destitute man is not this one who goes about

among the people and is sent away by a morsel or two and by a date or two. It was said: then who is the destitute, O Messenger of God? He said: the one who does not find what suffices him, and who is not noticed and does not rise and ask of the people (al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-zakāt, no. 1479). Now if this were taken upon its outward sense it would reject the saying of those who said that the destitute man is the one who asks of the people; and although in your estimation he is destitute, yet the one who does not ask is more severely destitute than he. It is not permissible to make the ḥadīth contrary to the verse so long as it is possible for it to be in agreement with it (al-Māturīdī, 2004:VI/374).

The fourth matter is that independent reasoning is sound in the interpretation of a verse which the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) has interpreted, on condition that the exegete's interpretation should not recoil upon the Prophetic interpretation with invalidity. Although Imām al-Māturīdī reckons that Prophetic exegesis, if established, enters certainly into the meaning of the verse, this does not in his view mean the closing of the door of reflection and independent reasoning. In other words, what the Messenger has stated concerning the meaning of a verse is one of the instances or probable senses possible in the interpretation of the verse, such that it is in no case permissible to exclude it from its meaning; as for the other meanings stated by those who exercise independent reasoning and by the exegetes, these may be excluded from the meaning of the verse. Two kinds enter into this.

The first kind is that the Prophetic interpretation should enter under a general name comprising the Prophetic meaning and others besides, in which case the Prophetic interpretation is intended only as an illustration by the mention of one of the individuals or attributes of the general name; and accordingly, if the exegete mentions another attribute or another state, he does not recoil with invalidity upon the noble Prophetic meaning. This is called «interpretation by example». An example is what occurs in Sūrat al-Anfāl: they then differed concerning His saying «and of strength». Some said that strength is archery, and to this effect they related from the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) that upon «And prepare against them whatever force you are able» (Qurʾān 8:60) he said: verily strength is archery - saying this three times (Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-imāra, no. 1917). His saying «whatever force you are able» may bear the sense of that by which you may be strong; some said that strength is weaponry, and others said horses; and it is possible that it should be all the means of war (al-Māturīdī, 2004:V/366). The

statements that al-Māturīdī adduced concerning the meaning of strength therefore do not recoil with invalidity upon the Prophetic meaning, because the Prophetic interpretation enters under a general name and is but one of the instances of that general name.

Into this kind enters what is said in the form «this verse was revealed concerning such and such». An example is what occurs in Sūrat Fuṣṣilat upon His saying «And who is better in speech than one who calls to God and does righteousness» (Qurʾān 41:33), where he says: they then differed concerning it: some said that it is the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him); some said otherwise, and to that effect reports were related that it was revealed concerning the callers to prayer; some said that it refers to every believer who calls creation to the obedience of God Most High by himself. It is related from al-Ḥasan that he recited the saying of God Most High «And who is better in speech than one who calls to God and does righteousness» (Qurʾān 41:33) and said: this is the most beloved of the people of the earth to God, this is the most beloved of creation to God, this is the vicegerent of God Most High (al-Māturīdī, 2004:IX/299).

The second kind is that the exegete should express a meaning in the verse other than the Prophetic meaning, but that this otherness should not fall under the definition of contrariety. An example is what occurs in Sūrat al-Zalzala: His saying «its tidings» issues in several aspects. One of them is what the people of interpretation have said, namely that it will tell and relate what was done upon its surface of good or evil, of obedience or disobedience. But «its tidings» does not bear the sense of report, since it bears witness against them because of the unbelievers' denial of what proceeded from them of unbelief and disobedience; as for the people of the Garden, they acknowledge the good deeds, and God Most High confirms them in that. The second is what some have said, namely that «its tidings» is upon the reality of speech and utterance. The third is what some have said, namely that on that day there will become clear and will come to pass the tidings of which they were informed in this world and which they denied; on that day that will become clear to them, and they will witness with their own eyes the reckoning, the reward and the punishment. It is related in the report from the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) that he said: do you know what its tidings are? They said: God and His Messenger know best. He said: its tidings are that it should bear witness against every servant, male and female, concerning what he did upon its surface (al-Tirmidhī, Sunan, no. 3353, V/446). The second and the third of the statements he

adduced accord entirely with the Prophetic ḥadīth and do not conflict with it - and God knows best (Qurʾān 99:4-5).

It becomes clear from the foregoing that Imām al-Māturīdī was not merely a transmitting exegete but an original methodologist who established interpretative controls that preserve the text from arbitrariness and guard reason from unrestraint, and that the balance between transmission and independent understanding is not for him a methodological luxury but an epistemic necessity required by the nature of the Qurʾānic discourse itself. What truly distinguishes this method is that it did not close the door of independent reasoning upon the plea of the text, nor open it without restriction upon the plea of reason, but made each of them a watcher over the other - which renders his interpretative legacy today the more pertinent in an age pulled between the two extremes of rigidity and excessive interpretation (al-Taftāzānī, 2020:87; Oqilov, 2017:36).

CONCLUSION

It becomes clear from the foregoing that Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī was not merely a transmitting exegete, but the possessor of an integrated scholarly method in the interpretation of the revealed texts, resting upon the combination of transmission with independent understanding and of the requirements of the text with the demands of disciplined rational consideration. This appeared clearly in his book «Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān», where he dealt with the Qurʾānic verses in a manner combining respect for the outward sense of the text, the summoning of context, consideration of the significations of the expressions and recourse to the Prophetic Sunna, while leaving room for recognised independent reasoning (al-Māturīdī, 2004:I/28).

Among the most important results that may be drawn is that interpretation in al-Māturīdī is not an arbitrary practice and is not a departure from the text, but a scholarly instrument for understanding the intent of the revealed discourse where probability exists and the aspects of signification are multiple. He therefore stipulated that interpretation should rest upon a recognised proof, that it should accord with the language of the Qurʾān and with its general context, and that it should not collide with any certain principle among the principles of religion (al-Damanhūrī, 2018a:65).

The study has further shown that the interpretation of the Qurʾān by the Qurʾān represents a central principle in the method of Imām al-Māturīdī; this principle, however, does not operate mechanically but requires independent reasoning and reflection in

connecting the verses and in considering the places of agreement and difference among the expressions and the contexts. Hence al-Māturīdī was careful to employ the terms of probability and permissibility where the meanings are multiple, which indicates his scholarly precision and his caution against certainty where there is no decisive proof (al-Dhahabī, n.d.:I/43-44).

It has likewise become clear that Imām al-Māturīdī accorded the Prophetic Sunna a lofty place in the exegesis of the Qurʾān, but distinguished between the direct Prophetic interpretation of a verse and the independent reasoning of the exegetes in connecting a verse with a ḥadīth. This distinction discloses a precise methodological awareness, since it makes what is established from the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) an authoritative principle, while the field of independent reasoning remains open in that concerning which no direct interpretative text is established.

The contemporary value of this method lies in its capacity to present a moderate vision in dealing with the revealed texts: it neither closes the door of independent reasoning in the name of following, nor opens the door of interpretation without control in the name of reason. The method of Imām al-Māturīdī in interpretation accordingly represents an important scholarly resource from which benefit may be drawn in treating the problems of contemporary religious understanding, and in particular in confronting rigid literalist readings and the strained interpretations that depart from the purposes of the text and from its spirit (Oqilov, 2017:36; Ovatov, 2000:58).

Upon this basis the study recommends the necessity of attending to the book «Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān» by way of study, edition and analysis, of bringing out its methodological aspects in the fields of exegesis, kalām and the principles of jurisprudence, and of connecting this scholarly heritage with the questions of contemporary Islamic thought, so that it may contribute to the consolidation of the method of moderation and of scholarly awareness in the understanding of the revealed texts (Ziyadov, 2009:102).

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