

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE METHODOLOGIES OF QUR'ĀNIC EXEGESIS IN EARLY ISLAM

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### *Abstract*

*The development of the methodologies of Qur'ānic exegesis is regarded as the early Muslim scholars' major contribution to the understanding of the Qur'ān. The article presents a brief analysis of the need for exegesis along with lexical and technical definitions of the terms tafsīr and ta'wil and their relationship. It studies the methodologies of al-tafsīr bi'l-ma'thūr, al-tafsīr bi'l-ra'y, and al-tafsīr al-ishārī; their principles underlining the authenticity, and the issue of acceptability of the interpretations, developed in early Islam. Another dimension of the article is the exploration of the prerequisites for exegetes and the conditions to produce exegesis of high quality, regardless of the methodology adopted.*

### *Introduction*

The Qur'ān is not directed towards any one particular nation, such as the Arabs, or to a particular sect of Muslims, but to the entire humanity at large. Reference is made to all kinds of people exhorting all to strive towards understanding of the Qur'ān which serves as the source of knowledge, culture, values, civilization, constitution, and holistic guidance. The uniqueness of the Qur'ān is that it not only sprinkles the knowledge about transcendental and metaphysical realities, but also enshrines comprehensive guidance for temporal life and provides deep insights and inspirations for its adherents. Through its knowledge, life is made

flexible, simple, and practical. It offers a strategic formula to achieve tranquility and unity: an indispensable element to regulate socio-political and spiritual order.

From an Islamic point of view it has been argued that man is engulfed by the darkness of ignorance and is drowned in the ocean of dissolution. The process of globalization gives rise to many issues and challenges, especially in the context of Religion. There are problems at every level of understanding. Thus, the Qur'ān shows the right guidelines for prosperity, success and holistic development, and also stresses the objective of building up a dynamic society that is possible only with a proper understanding of the message of the Qur'ān.

The knowledge of divine objectives can be construed only after unveiling the divine secrecies: exploring esoteric phenomena within the Qur'ān. This knowledge is drawn from the study of the verses, meticulously and elaborately; and is known as *tafsīr* (knowledge of exegesis). Therefore, the key to the treasure of the knowledge of the Qur'ān is its *tafsīr*, and without it, it is impossible to arrive at the door of success; even though the Qur'ān is chanted and recited day in and day out with incantation.<sup>1</sup>

It is believed that reciting and chanting the words of the Qur'ān, melodiously and musically in official ceremonies, festivals, and cemeteries, is quite sufficient.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Qur'ān is regarded as a Book that can be recited as an entertainment or benediction as well as blessing. It is also treated as a psalm. However, the real blessings of the Qur'ān lie in the realization of its true meanings by translating them into practical life.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, this role of the Qur'ān is almost forgotten. The pursuit of this knowledge is made compulsory in the

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<sup>1</sup> Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Cairo: Maṭba'āt al-Fanniyyīn, n.d.), vol. 2, 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*