



We breathed into it out of Our Spirit...) (Qur'ân, 66:12). For him, the naming of Jesus as the soul of God is due to the fact that He resurrects the dead through him. Thus, God calls the Qur'ân as a "spirit" in the verse "وَكَذَلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ رُوحًا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا مَا كُنْتَ تَدْرِي مَا الْكِتَابُ وَلَا الْإِيمَانُ وَلَكِنْ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُورًا نَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ نَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا وَإِنَّكَ لَتَهْدَى إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ" (And thus have We inspired in you (Muhammad) a Spirit of Our command. You did not know what the Scripture was, nor what the Faith. But We have made it a light whereby We guide whom We will of Our servants. And you verily do guide unto a right path.) (Qur'ân, 42:52); because God resurrects the dead hearts by it (al-Mâturidî, 2004, I, 530-531).

In his interpretation of the verse "And also Mary, the daughter of 'Imran, who kept herself chaste, so We breathed into it out of Our Spirit, and who affirmed the truth of the words of her Lord, and His Books, and she was of those devoutly obedient to God." (Qur'ân, 66:12), he addresses the issue of how Mary protected her chastity. According to him, the Virgin Mary, drew a curtain between herself and people to prevent them from seeing each other. Thus, she did not see the people, while also the people did not see her. For al-Mâturidî, this is related to the verse "Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: and Allah is well acquainted with all that they do." (Qur'ân, 24:30). For him, if people avoid looking at others, they can manage to preserve their chastities. Moreover, he relates this verse to the chosenness and chastity of Mary which are mentioned in the verse "And when the angels said: "Mary, God has chosen you and made you pure, and exalted you above all the women in the world." (Qur'ân, 3:42). He says that God made her pure from exorbitance and adultery. In the first verse, God attributes "being protected" to Mary, and in this one, "making pure" to Himself. Therefore, Mary fulfilled the requirements of protection, and then God made her pure (al-Mâturidî, 2004, V, 185-186).

References to the occasions of revelations

In the time of Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh), some verses were revealed after or as a response to some events. And as such, there were certain relations between these events and verses so these special historical events are called "asbâb al-nuzûl" (occasions of revelations). Such narratives are very important because they show us the historical context of the verses. Therefore, making use of these narratives in the commentary of the Qur'ân is one of the methods of interpretation. Al-Mâturidî uses this method in his commentary. Following are some examples:

According to Al-Mâturidî, when the verse "You and all the things you deify and worship apart from God are but firewood for Hell. You are bound to arrive in it" (Qur'ân, 21:98) was revealed, Meccan pagans began to talk improperly about Jesus. They claimed that Jesus, Ezra (pbuh), and the angels are also in hell, putting forward that they were worshipped apart from God. And they further said "if they are in hell, we are willing to be there with them". As a result of this, the following verse was revealed "And when (Jesus) the son of Mary has been presented as an example, your people turn from it in disdain" (Qur'ân, 43:57). Indeed, in the next verse, it is stated that Meccan pagans claimed that their gods were better than Jesus: "And they say, "Are our deities better or is he?" They put it to you only for disputation. Indeed, they are a people addicted to contentiousness" (Qur'ân, 43:58). According to al-Mâturidî, they argued this as a proof of the fact that they would never have to suffer punishment in the hereafter (al-Mâturidî, 2004, IV, 440-441).

References to Variant Readings

Al-Mâturidî, occasionally refers to variant readings of the Qur'ân in his commentary while examining the issue of Mary and Jesus. For him, these variants contribute to the understanding of the text. This method, also, is frequently used by commentators. Some examples would be:

In his interpretation of the verse "قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَنَا رَسُولُ رَبِّكِ لِأَهَبَ لَكِ غُلَامًا زَكِيًّا" (He said: I am only a messenger of your Lord: That I will give you a pure boy.) (Qur'ân, 19:19), al-Mâturidî, indicates that there is a certain vagueness in this expression. For him, the gift (i.e. pure boy) belongs to God, not to Gabriel. Thus, he offers a variant reading from Ibn Mas'ud as an evidence. The word (لأهب) (for I give) in the verse, is replaced by (ليهب) (for He gives) in the recitation of Ibn Mas'ud. The word "zekî" as an attribute of Jesus, in this verse, means a righteous man and one who is free from all kinds of evil (al-Mâturidî, 2004, III, 262). Thus al-Mâturidî draws attention to the miracle of God in the creation of Jesus. Such that, even Gabriel, is nothing other than a reporter messenger.

In the verse "وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَصَدَّقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُتِبَ عَلَيْهَا مِنِ الْقَانِينِ" (And also Mary, the daughter of 'Imran, who kept herself chaste, so We breathed into it out of Our Spirit, and who affirmed the truth of the words of her Lord, and His Books, and she was of those devoutly obedient to God.) (Qur'ân, 66:12), God



says that Mary had confirmed the divine books. Al-Māturīdī says that the word (كتبه) “kutubihi” (his books), is also recited as (كتابه) “kitābihi” (his book). According to him, both recitations imply a similar meaning because someone who confirmed one of the books, also would have confirmed the others since the divine books are in agreement with one another. Therefore, both words require each other in meaning. If the word is recited as “kitābihi”, it means the Gospel. And the word “kutubihi” means the Gospel and the books which were previously sent by God (al-Māturīdī, 2004, V, 185-186). Apparently, al-Māturīdī interprets here that Mary verbally affirms divine books. Nevertheless there is no information here about whether the prophecies of the Old Testament was actually confirmed by Mary, as in example “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah, 7:14).

Commentary with Ḥadīth

One of the methods used in the science of exegesis is to consult the ḥadīth. As it is well known, while the Qur’ān was revealed, Prophet Muḥammad was explaining the meanings of the verses. In addition, reports from the Prophet, although not intended for any specific verses, were used as materials for exegesis. Some significant ḥadīth sources have special chapters about Prophet’s commentary on the Qur’ān. On the other hand, there are commentary books which collect the narratives from the Prophet Muḥammad and the first generations of Islam. So, al-Māturīdī uses the ḥadīth of Prophet in his commentary. Some examples related to our topic would be:

Concerning the verse about the chosenness of Mary “*And when the angels said: "Mary, God has chosen you and made you pure, and exalted you above all the women in the world."* (Qur’ān, 3:42), al-Māturīdī quotes the following two ḥadīths: Ibn ‘Abbās says, Messenger of God drew four lines on the ground and asked: Do you know what these are? The people there said, God and His Messenger know better. There upon he said: These are the virtuous women of Paradise who are Khadijah, Fāṭimah, Mary and Āsiya, wife of Pharaoh (al-Nisābūrī, 1990, II, 539). A similar ḥadīth which is narrated from Anas, is as follows: “The most benevolent women of the Worlds are four: Mary, the daughter of ‘Imrān; Āsiya, the daughter of Mazāhim; Khadijah, the daughter of Huwaylid and Fāṭimah, the daughter of Muḥammad.” (al-Tirmidhī, 1975, V, 703).

In another verse about Mary’s aunt’s husband Prophet Zachariah and his son John the Baptist “*O Zachariah! We give you the glad tidings of a son whose name will be Yahya (John). We have not given this name to anyone before.*” (Qur’ān, 19:7), al-Māturīdī quotes various interpretations. One of them is that nobody has been created in John’s virtue before him. Thus, the Prophet Muḥammad says: There is nobody among the children of Ādam (pbuh), who did not err, did not intend ever to, except John, son of Zachariah. John, however, neither had the intent nor did he actually commit an error (Ibn Ḥanbal, 1994, IV, 400).

In the commentary of the verse “*Had there not been a previous decree from God, a tremendous punishment would surely have touched you because of what you took*” (Qur’ān, 8:68), al-Māturīdī quotes the consultation of the Prophet Muḥammad about the prisoners of war after the battle of Badr and what to do about them. After people share their opinions, Prophet Muḥammad says: Indeed, Almighty Allah softens the hearts of some people, so that their hearts would be softer than milk. However, the God Almighty, hardens the hearts of some people. Thus, they become more rigid than stone. O Abū Bakr, you’re like Jesus. Because he said: “*If You punish them, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are the All-Glorious with irresistible might, the All-Wise*” (Qur’ān, 5:118). In the same ḥadīth, ‘Umar is likened to Prophet Moses (pbuh) and Prophet Noah (pbuh). In this ḥadīth, Jesus is described as someone whose heart is softer than milk. At the end, the Prophet Muḥammad prefers the opinion of Abū Bakr, whom he likened to Jesus (al-Māturīdī, 2004, II, 371-372).

In the commentary of the verse “*If You punish them, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are the All-Glorious with irresistible might, the All-Wise.*” (Qur’ān, 5:118), al-Māturīdī quotes the following narrative: The Prophet Muḥammad has spent a whole night with this verse. He stood in his prayer reciting this verse, then prostrated reciting it, then sat reciting it (Ibn Ḥanbal, 1994, XXXV, 256). And al-Māturīdī adds the following comment: He was supplicating to God as if he was saying: If You abandon them, who could help them? Who can protect them except You? They are your servants. If you give them your blessings, who can prevent this from happening? (al-Māturīdī, 2004, II, 94).

Linguistic Analysis of the terms:

The analysis of the terms and words from a linguistic point of view is one of the methods which al-Māturīdī uses it in his commentary. While analyzing the words, al-Māturīdī provides different opinions and sometimes also mentions his own opinion. Some examples:



The term “mesih” (messiah): The meaning of word “messiah” is same both Arabic and Hebrew languages: “One who has been anointed”. In the commentary of the verse “Assuredly they have disbelieved who say: God is the Messiah, son of Mary, whereas the Messiah himself proclaimed: “O Children of Israel! Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.” Whoever associates partners with God, God has surely made Paradise forbidden to him, and his refuge is the Fire. And the wrongdoers will have no helpers.” (Qur’ān, 5:72), al-Māturīdī says that the word “messiah” can both have an active and a passive meaning. He quotes Ḥasān al-Baṣrī as an evidence for the passive meaning of it: Jesus was called Messiah, because he was anointed with abundance. Similarly, Anti-Christ was called Messiah, because he was anointed with curse. The word “messiah” has also an active meaning but this time it means “someone who anoints”. So, Jesus was named “messiah” because, he was anointing the blind and lepers so that they would be healed; and he was anointing the dead to raise them (al-Māturīdī, 2004, IV, 279-280). Al-Māturīdī reports another meaning of “messiah”: which is great or exalted. But, for him, this meaning is in the language of people of Jesus (al-Māturīdī, 2004, I, 269). The last meaning recorded by al-Māturīdī was probably used to indicate the position of Jesus. As it is known, the kings and prophets were being anointing in ancient Israel (McGrath, 2007, 276-277).

The term “Injil”: In the commentary of the verse “نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنزَلَ التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ” “He sends down on you the Book in parts with the truth, confirming the Revelations prior to it; and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel” (Qur’ān, 3:3), al-Māturīdī says, the word “Injil” comes from the Arabic word “yujellī” (يَجْلِي) which means, something which reveals and demonstrates (al-Māturīdī, 2004, I, 246). Thus it appears that for him the word “Injil”, is a word of Arabic origin. He does not refer to any relationship between the word “Injil” and the Greek word “evangelion” (McKim, 1996, 96) which means “good news”. His comments on these two terms (mesih and injil) are based on the assumption that these are words of Arabic origin. Although al-Māturīdī, while explaining the word “mesih”, notes the possibility that this word could have come from the language of Jesus; he does not take account that it is the case for the word “Injil”.

The term “khalq” (creation): In the verse “وَرَسُولًا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنِّي قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ أَنِّي أَخْلُقُ لَكُمْ مِنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنْفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَهَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأَنْتَبِئُكُمْ بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدَّخِرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ” ((And God will make him) a Messenger to the Children of Israel (saying to them): “Assuredly, I have come to you with a clear proof from your Lord: I create for you out of clay something in the shape of a bird, then I breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by God’s leave. And I heal the blind from birth and the leper, and I revive the dead, by God’s leave. And I inform you of what things you eat, and what you store up in your houses. Surely in this is a clear proof for you, if you are sincere believers) (Qur’ān, 3:49), Jesus says “I create for you”. According to al-Māturīdī, this expression is metaphorical, not real. The act of khalq (خلق) (creation) does not belong to the creatures. Because, creation means “bringing out from absence to presence”. However, this is only within the power of God. Therefore, this expression is “metaphorical” when it is used about human beings. The next verse is like this one too: “And confirming (the truth contained in) the Torah that was revealed before me, and to make lawful for you certain things that had been forbidden to you.” (Qur’ān, 3:50). Because, making something lawful or unlawful belongs to God. So the expression “I create for you out of clay something in the shape of a bird” means that “I show you a statue of bird which God created in my hand.” Such miracles are not acts of the prophets. They only appear in the hands of the prophets. As such, it is not permissible to attribute the creation to the creatures. According to al-Māturīdī, the general term for creation (khalq) is a word that can be used in a metaphorical and real meaning. But the technical term for creation (takhlīq) refers only to the real meaning. The miracles of prophets, which are extraordinary, are created by God in the hands of prophets. And this is only so that these miracles would be proofs for the truthfulness of prophets. Healing blind and leper is also among the signs of prophethood due to its extraordinary nature. Furthermore, according to him, the word creation is used in the sense of “to fashion” (taṣwīr) and “to make something” (ṣun’) in Arabic language (al-Māturīdī, 2004, II, 90-91; III, 395-397). These explanations of al-Māturīdī are based on the idea of theological impossibility and capabilities of Arabic language. This method is often used by theologians. Linguistic capabilities become sources of theological explanations, while at the same time they are restricted by theological assumptions.

Narratives Outside of Ḥadīth

Al-Māturīdī, refers to the views of the Companions of Muḥammad and the following generations, when he explains the historical stories of the Qur’an. There are some authorities of interpretation among these people, like Ibn ‘Abbās, ‘Ubeyy b. Ka’b, Ḥasān al-Baṣrī, Mujāhid etc. Other than that, there are also opinions which al-Māturīdī anonymously quoted. He also quotes from scholars and members of different



theological schools, like Abū Bakr al-‘Asamm (from Mu‘tazila) and Ibn al-Rawāndī (from Shi‘a). He sometimes cites current debates in these narratives. Al-Māturīdī does not criticize all these opinions, but only some of them. He usually restricts himself to narrate them. Some examples:

The Qur‘ān informs that the people slandered Mary when she became pregnant with Jesus, by the verse “*And because of their unbelief and speaking against Mary a tremendous calumny.*” Al-Māturīdī attributes the information about the slander to the opinion of Ibn ‘Abbās, and says that it was “adultery” (al-Māturīdī, 2004, I, 524).

When al-Māturīdī comments on the verse “*فَلَمَّا أَحَسَّ عِيسَى مِنْهُمُ الْكُفْرَ قَالَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَاشْهَدْ بِأَنَا مُسْلِمُونَ (on this way) to God?*” (Qur‘ān, 3:52), he says that there has been a dispute about the meaning of the word “ḥavāriyyūn” (apostles). The apostles, according to a narrative of Ibn ‘Abbās, are named “ḥavāriyyūn” because their clothes are white. Also, they were fishermen. In another narrative from Ibn ‘Abbās, they are called this name, due to the cleanliness of their hearts. They are the closest friends of Jesus (al-Māturīdī, 2004, I, 272).

For the commentary of the following verse “*But those who had been granted (true) knowledge said: "Woe to you! God's reward for any who believes and does good, righteous deeds is better by far. But none save the patient (who persevere through adversities, in obedience to God and avoidance of sins) can ever attain to it."* (Qur‘ān, 28:80), he cites the ascetic nature of Jesus, citing someone from earlier generations. According to this narrative, Jesus was such a great ascetic that he had no place to reside in. He also had no job to provide his needs and did not engage in such a thing. Therefore, God Almighty raised him to heaven, and provided for him livelihood and shelter there, in His own neighborhood and favor (al-Māturīdī, 2004, III, 616-617).

Al-Māturīdī quotes a narrative from Ibn ‘Abbās that the verse “*When We first sent them two (Messengers) and they denied them, We reinforced them with a third, and they said: "Surely we are Messengers sent to."* (Qur‘ān, 36:14) refers to Jesus. According to this narrative, Jesus was first sent to them as a Messenger, to invite the people to believe in the unity of God. He brought them the proofs and evidence about this. But they rejected him, and said, “We do not know what you are talking about.” And then, two other messengers were sent to them. The first messenger (Jesus) said to the latter ones: “They will deny you, as they denied me before.” When you invite them to the unity of God, they will tell you “What do you do well?” If you answer them saying “we heal the blind and leper”, they will say “There is someone among us who is good at it.” If you say “we heal the sick”, they will answer “There is someone among us, who is good at it.” So, tell them “we resurrect the dead”, then I will tell them “I can do it too.” Here, the verse “*We reinforced them with a third*” has to do with this story (al-Māturīdī, 2004, IV, 195-196).

Al-Māturīdī also mentions an anonymous narrative about this story. The community, to whom these two messengers were sent, was in Antioch. And Jesus was the one who had sent them there. But al-Māturīdī says that “we do not know if this is true, and we do not need to know it.” (al-Māturīdī, 2004, IV, 196). For him, to suggest such details that are not included in the Qur‘ān may raise doubts about the Qur‘ān's miraculous formation. Because, it is unclear that the narratives which outside the Qur‘ān are correct or not.

al-Māturīdī quotes a narration from Ubay b. Ka‘b about the word “rūḥ” (spirit) which occurs in the verse “*فَاتَّخَذَتْ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ حِجَابًا فَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا (Thus she kept herself in seclusion from people. Then We sent to her Our spirit, and it appeared before her in the form of a perfect man)* (Qur‘ān, 19:17). He says that the word “rūḥ” in this verse, means the spirit of Jesus which was sent to Mary in the form of a perfect man (al-Māturīdī, 2004, III, 261).

Al-Māturīdī talks about some controversial commentaries about the verse “*Zachariah said: "My Lord! How shall I have a son when my wife is barren and I have already reached infirmity in old age?"* (Qur‘ān, 19:8). In this story, Zachariah had wanted a sign from God, after the good news came: “(Zachariah) prayed: “*My Lord, appoint a sign for me.*” “*Your sign,*” God said, “*is that you will not speak to people for three nights.*” (Qur‘ān, 19:10). Some commentators have seen Zachariah’s demand from his Lord as a fault. Then they considered that he was not able to talk for three days, as a punishment.³ But Ḥasān al-Baṣrī disagrees with this opinion. According to him, his Lord did not reprove him, or rebuke him, on the contrary He showed mercy on him.

³ This interpretation shows that the Gospel version of the story about Zachariah at that time was well known. see. Luke, 1:19-20.



Zachariah's phrase "How shall I have a son" is not a rejection of such good news, but it is his attempt to understand how this would happen, out of wondering and asking to know (al-Māturīdī, 2004, III, 258-259).⁴

References to The Discussions Among Theological Schools:

When al-Māturīdī comments on the verses about Jesus, he sometimes, expresses other topics which may appear irrelevant, particularly the topics which are contentious among Islamic theological schools, like Mu'tazila and Mushabbiha. He asserts that these verses disprove the opinions of opposing schools. Some examples:

When al-Māturīdī interprets the verse about God's adoption of a son "And they claim that God has taken to Him a son. All-Glorified He is. Rather, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth; all are subservient to Him. The Originator of the heavens and the earth with nothing preceding Him to imitate. When He decrees a thing, He does but say to it "Be!" and it is." (Qur'ān, 2:116-117), on the one hand, he explains that to take a son is impossible for God, and on the other hand, he cites the discussions about the attribute of God "takwīn" (fashioning) on the word "kun" (be) in the verse. Al-Māturīdī, with his comments on this issue, laid the foundations of the theological debates on the attribute of takwīn which would take place between Ash'arīs and Māturīdīs in the later centuries.

The discussion of the prophethood of Mary: a. About the word "siddīqā" (upright) in the verse "The Messiah, son of Mary, was but a Messenger; Messengers had passed away before him; and his mother was an upright one wholly devoted to God; both of them ate food. Look, how We make the truths clear to them, then look how they are turned away from the truth and make false claims!" (Qur'ān, 5:75), al-Māturīdī says that she was cleansed from all dirt. Also according to him, there is an analogy to the prophets in this phrase because when Gabriel came to her, she confirmed him, like the other prophets did. Other creatures confirm the angels, through the report of prophets whereas Mary approved Gabriel, with news, given to her by Gabriel (al-Māturīdī, 2004, II, 87). In the story of Moses, al-Māturīdī evaluates the revelation to the mother of Moses, from the standpoint of prophecy. This issue, also contains some similarities regarding the status of Mary. In this verse, God says "We revealed the mother of Moses, saying: "Suckle him, then when you have cause to fear for him, put him in the river, and do not fear or grieve. We will surely return him to you and make him one of our Messengers." (Qur'ān, 28:7). Al-Māturīdī says that majority of commentators agree on the fact that the term "revelation" in this verse does not mean the specific concept of revelation which is required to be a Messenger of God; but it means "inspiration" which is knowledge placed in the heart. However, according to him, this is not true. It is also possible that this revelation is like the revelation that is sent to the prophets. Because, here there are exact expressions and commands, unlike an inspiration. However, it is not necessary that someone becomes a prophet through this revelation. According to him, the case of Mary -when the angel came to her- is also similar (al-Māturīdī, 2004, III, 584-585). On the other hand, al-Māturīdī evaluates the supernatural events that took place during Mary's pregnancy, from this perspective. When he comments on the verse "And shake the trunk of the date-palm towards you: it will drop fresh, ripe dates upon you" (Qur'ān, 19:25) he asserts that the miracles, normally given to the prophets, can also be given to the people who are not prophets (al-Māturīdī, 2004, III, 263-264). His commentaries, about this issue, refers, on the one hand, to the debate about the possibility of being a prophet for women, between Ash'arīs and Māturīdīs, on the other hand, to the discussion on miracles which are seen on non-prophetic people, between Ahl al-Sunnah and Mu'tazila. Therefore, historical stories in the Qur'an can also become arguments for debates in Islamic theology. In other words, according to al-Māturīdī, historical narratives in the Qur'an have also some meanings beyond "historical knowledge". Therefore, it is possible to see many similar examples in Islamic sciences such as Kalam and Fiqh.

Exegesis (te'wīl): Concerning the Qur'ānic verse about the apostles of Jesus "O you who believe! Be helpers of God, even as Jesus son of Mary said to his disciples: "Who will be my helpers (on this way) to God?" The disciples said: "We are the helpers of God."..." (Qur'ān, 61:14), he expresses that God is too exalted to be helped. However, this statement means to help the religion of God, His prophets and companions to exalt them. Thus, the verse "O you who believe ! if you help Allah, He will help you and make firm your feet" (Qur'ān, 47:7) also, has the same meaning. When they helped the religion of God, His Messenger and companions, Allah attributed it to Himself (al-Māturīdī, 2004, V, 123). This issue is the about the possibility of understanding

⁴ al-Baṣrī's interpretation also points to the difference between a Jewish-Christian and Islamic approaches on perception of prophethood.



some of the Qur'anic phrases outside of their literal meanings. Some groups, such as Salafiyya, defend the approach that such statements should not be interpreted, on the other hand the theologians of Ahl al-Sunnah and Mu'tazila consider that it is necessary because of the principle of "tanzih" (transcendence of God). Thus, the justification of al-Māturīdī for exegesis is this principle.

About the phrase "raise you up to Myself" in the verse "When God said: "Jesus, I will take you back and raise you up to Myself, and will purify you of those who disbelieve, and set your followers above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me you will all return, and I will judge between you concerning all that on which you were used to differ." (Qur'ān, 3:55), al-Māturīdī opposes the interpretation of this phrase in the sense that God has a specific location. According to him this phrase is there to exalt Jesus. So, it is not there to attribute to God a place, as Mushabbiha claimed. If this approach were correct, the inhabitants of Damascus would have been the closest to God. Because, Prophet Abraham (pbuh) said "I will go to my Lord he will surely guide me" (Qur'ān, 37:99), when he was going towards Damascus. When something is attributed to God, it is meant to be exalted (al-Māturīdī, 2004, I, 273-274).⁵ Thus, al-Māturīdī opposes the school of Mushabbiha which likens the characteristics of God to the creatures, within the framework of the principle of "tanzih".

References to The Divine Scriptures and Historical Stories:

Al-Māturīdī, sometimes, without citing any sources speaks about peoples, historical events and places, saying "told in the story", "there has been a narrative that". These explanations probably come from the stories, circulating among the Muslims, but it is also possible that they are transferred from Christians. One should note that these stories are dealt with in accordance with the Islamic faith.

As a basic principle, al-Māturīdī opposes using historical narratives in the commentary of Qur'anic stories, if they do not come from a trusted source. In his commentary on the verse "It is not for God to take to Himself a child. All-Glorified is He. When He decrees a thing, He does but say to it "Be!" and it is" (Qur'ān, 19:35), he quotes some narratives about the blowing of spirit into Mary and says "we cannot trust these narratives".⁶

According to him, the narratives about Qur'anic stories, can be reliable only if they come from God or from whom God reveals to. So, what is mentioned in the Qur'ān is sufficient without any addition or any subtraction. These stories are mentioned in the Qur'ān to prove the prophethood of Muḥammad because these stories were already mentioned in the older books, and some people already knew them. These stories are mentioned the way they are in earlier books so that people can know that Prophet Muḥammad received them from God. So, if there is any addition to or subtraction from these stories, this purpose disappears (al-Māturīdī, 2004, III, 265-266).⁷ This approach of al-Māturīdī differs from the method of the majority of exegetes, who interpret the Qur'anic stories, using Christian and Jewish sources.⁸

Al-Māturīdī depends on some verses for this principle. When he comments on the verse "Those who disbelieves say: "This (Qur'ān) is but a fabrication which he (Muḥammad) himself has invented, and some others have helped him with it, so they have produced a wrong and a falsehood." (Qur'ān, 25:4), he interprets the phrase "some others have helped him" as a group who converted from the people of the Book (Ahl al-Kitāb, Jews and Christians) to Islam. They were finding the characteristics of Muḥammad, and were informing him about these characteristics (al-Māturīdī, 2004, III, 491). So, some people had converted to Islam in the period of Prophet Muḥammad, and supported his prophethood with the knowledge that they had obtained from their old religions.⁹ According to al-Māturīdī, this supports the fact that the people of the Book already knew about the Qur'anic stories and did not deny them. Thus, he interprets the word "muṣaddiq" (confirming) in the verse "Believe in that which I have sent down (the Qur'ān), confirming what you already possess, and do not be the first to disbelieve in it. And do not sell My Revelations for a trifling price; and in Me alone seek refuge through reverence for Me and piety." (Qur'ān, 2:41) that the people of the Book knew that Qur'ān is in congruence with the old divine books. These people, easily, brought them together and saw that they are corresponding to

⁵ The other theological discussions in the commentary of the verses concerning Jesus, see also: About the entitlement of Prophethood (al-Māturīdī, 2004, III, 260); about the validity of faith at the moment of death (I, 525-526); discussions on determining of the death moment (III-260-261); about the situation of who dies as a child in the afterlife (III-260-261); about the relation between the terms of imān and islām (V, 123).

⁶ See also, Galli, 1982, 9-14.

⁷ al-Māturīdī says that this approach belongs to Abū Bakr al-'Asamm from Mu'tazila; see. (al-Māturīdī, 2004, III, 270).

⁸ For more information see, Na'na'ah, 1970, 214-219.

⁹ For example 'Abdullah b. Salām is the most famous of those who have converted to Islam among Jews.



one another. According to al-Māturīdī, although these earlier books have some differences, their congruence to one another means that they are all sent by God (al-Māturīdī, 2004, I, 46). So for him, the stories in the Qur'ān are examples of such congruence. But he never shows this congruence in a comparative fashion. For him, probably, the Qur'ān's acknowledgment of these stories and the confirmation of the people of the Book, is sufficient to see the agreement of the books. Another reason for this, in my opinion, is that al-Māturīdī does not have the tools to refer to the Torah and the Gospel, directly. I could not see any direct reference to the present Gospels, in the *Ta'wīlāt*. In one place where he refers to the Torah, it is understood that this reference is not directly from the Torah. When al-Māturīdī takes up the phrase "And the moment his Lord manifested His glorious Majesty to the mountain" (Qur'ān, 7:143) in the story of Moses, he mentions a narrative that he says he quoted from the Torah: Allah, the Almighty, has come from side of Mount Sinai, appeared from side of Mount of Sā'ūrā and been viewed from side of Mount of Fārān.¹⁰ In the commentary of this narrative, al-Māturīdī says that: The revelation of God came down to Moses at Mount Sinai, appeared to Jesus at Mount of Sā'ūrā and rose up to Muḥammad at Mount Fārān (al-Māturīdī, 2004, II, 286).¹¹ In another place, he comments on this narrative, saying "if it is true" (al-Māturīdī, 2004, V, 309). So, this shows that he did not directly see the Torah.¹²

On the other hand, al-Māturīdī rejects some commentaries and narratives, because he considers that they are contrary to the Qur'ān. For example, when he comments on the verse "We answered his call, too, and bestowed upon him John, and cured his wife for him" (Qur'ān, 21:90), he touches on some narratives about the wife of Zachariah that she was bad-speaking and immoral whereas they are not lawful to say unless they have been proven. Furthermore, at the end of the same verse, God emphasizes their dignity, saying "Truly, these (three) used to hasten to do good deeds as if competing with each other, and invoke Us in hopeful yearning and fearful anxiety. And they were utterly humble before Us" (Qur'ān, 21:90) (al-Māturīdī, 2004, III, 344-345).

Al-Māturīdī, however, cites some narratives to explain the stories of the Qur'ān. Although these narratives, generally, are about historical events, they seem like the explanations of Muslims, in compliance with the statements of the Qur'an.

In his commentary of the verse "And their saying "We killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God " - whereas they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but the matter was made dubious to them. Those who differ about this matter and about Jesus are indeed confused; they have no definite knowledge thereof, following mere conjecture; and they killed him not of a certainty" (Qur'ān, 4:157), he reminds that the information obtained through observation and "mutawātir" reports which contain undeniable information, may have the possibility of error or falsehood. Even though he does not elaborate on this, we can say that he always keeps in his mind the possibility of "doubt" about the information that is transmitted from the people of the Book.

In his commentary of this last verse, he cites different narratives about the crucifixion of Jesus. One of these stories is the following: Jews want to kill Jesus and they surround him at a house. A group of his companions are with Jesus and it is evening time. The people, who are outside of the house, begin to wait. Meanwhile, God reveals to Jesus that He would take and raise him to His side (Qur'ān, 3:55). Then Jesus says to his friends: "Who wants to look like me, and then be killed. So God will resurrect him with me, in the day of judgment." One of them says "I want, O Messenger of God". Then he is likened to Jesus, and the people kill him and crucify him. Another narrative, when the Jews intend to kill Jesus, he takes refuge in a house. When the people come together to kill Jesus, one of them enters the house. But he takes time to go out. The people who are outside think that he is fighting with Jesus in the house. Then, this person goes out. But, God likens this person to Jesus. So, they kill him. "There was no reason to prevent that this person would look like Jesus" says al-Māturīdī, "although the person whom they saw, was not Jesus in truth."

Al-Māturīdī notes that this story (crucifixion of Jesus) is transmitted as a mutawātir report in that community, but he quotes another opinion which says that it is an "āḥad" report, a report that does not contain undeniable information, because it is transmitted by six or seven people. According to al-Māturīdī,

¹⁰ The verse of Old Testament which al-Māturīdī mentioned is that: "And he said, The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.", Deuteronomy, 33:2.

¹¹ See also. al-Māturīdī, 2004, III, 270; IV, 591-592; V, 485-486. Al-Māturīdī's also interprets the words "appeared" and "rose up" in this narrative, in accordance with God's transcendence.

¹² For brief information about Christian community in Transoxiana at al-Māturīdī's period, see. Atiya, 2005, 287-88.



the fact that someone else that looked like Jesus was killed instead of him, was one of his miracles (al-Māturīdī, 2004, I, 524-525).

These narratives, quoted by al-Māturīdī, seem compatible with both the convictions of Christians about the crucifixion of Jesus (i.e. it happened) and his theory of knowledge¹³ (the mutawātir report is source of the necessary knowledge). Because, he considers that the information about the crucifixion of Jesus in Christian sources, are formally true. According to him, it is possible to refer to the killing and crucifixion of Jesus, as an historical event. On the other hand, as mentioned in the Qur'ān, the person who was killed, was not Jesus, but someone else whom God has likened to Jesus. So the person that the people saw on the cross, was Jesus. Therefore, the only way to know that this person was not Jesus, is a divine revelation. This is the story of the Qur'ān. So, there is no conflict between historical narratives and Qur'ānic verses about the crucifixion of Jesus.

In general, although al-Māturīdī does not approve using narratives, the sources of which are not known, in the exegesis, he sometimes gives place to them in order to explain the stories of the Qur'ān. He probably thought that these narrations he conveyed were not contrary to his general principle and the goals of the Qur'ān. In doing so, he prefers the opinions of the companions of the Prophet and the scholars of the following generation. Some examples:

Al-Māturīdī quotes a narrative about the phrase "and when I taught you of the Book and Wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel;", in the verse of Qur'ān, 5:110. "If it is true" says al-Māturīdī, "Jesus was sent to a teacher, to learn the book." When the teacher said him "Bismi" (in the name of), he said "bismillah" (in the name of Allah). When the teacher said "Bismillah", he said "al-Raḥmān" (Most Gracious). When the teacher called "al-Raḥmān", he said "al-Raḥīm" (Most Merciful). In the end, the teacher said "How can I teach someone who knows more than me." (al-Māturīdī, 2004, II, 25-26).¹⁴

Another example, when al-Māturīdī comments on the saying of Jesus, in the verse "So peace be upon me on the day I was born and the day of my death, and the day when I will be raised to life." (Qur'ān, 19:33), he draws attention to the close relation between John the Baptist and Jesus. The statements in this verse, had been used for John before. With the difference that Jesus saluted himself, but John was saluted by God, in the verse "So peace on him The day he was born, the day that he dies, and the day that he will be raised up to life" (Qur'ān, 19:15). According to al-Māturīdī, it is quoted in a story that John encounters Jesus someday. John says to him "You are better than me." Jesus answers "On the contrary, you're better than me. Because, God saluted you but I saluted myself." (al-Māturīdī, 2004, III, 265).¹⁵

Another example: Al-Māturīdī explains the reference of Christians to themselves as the "sons of God" in the verse "The Jews and Christians assert, "We are God's children and His beloved ones."..." (Qur'ān, 5:18), with a story coming from Jesus. According to this story, Jesus said "I am calling you to my father and your father, in the heaven" (al-Māturīdī, 2004, II, 90-91).¹⁶ Therefore, according to al-Māturīdī, the expression "child of God" was used metaphorically in the time of Jesus, not in the true meaning.

Theological Polemics

Al-Māturīdī, sometimes, provides some theological speculations when he comments on the responses of the Qur'ān to the allegations of Christians. He exposes his own point of view, particularly, in the issues of the Islamic belief of tawḥīd (unity of God) and the Christian belief of trinity. When he comments on the verse "Jesus in reference to God resembles Adam. He created him from dust, then said He to him, "Be!" and he is" (Qur'ān, 3:59), he mentions the story of the Christian delegation that came to the Prophet Muḥammad from Najran, a city in Central Arabia. This delegation said to him "You are saying bad things about our Lord, Jesus. You are asserting that he was a servant, although he resurrected the dead, healed the leper and blind, and created bird from clay. So, show us someone, among the creatures of God, who does something like that. In his commentary of these words, al-Māturīdī likens this delegation to some Muslim theological schools. For him, Christians, Mushabbiha and Qadariyya, have got a similar point of view. Concerning tashbih (likening God to His creatures), he says that their suppositions are related to the statement of

¹³ See. al-Māturīdī, 2005, 14-15.

¹⁴ The story between Jesus and the teacher is described differently in Infancy Gospel of Thomas; see. Chartrand-Burke, 2008, 130-131. The helplessness of the teacher against Jesus is the common point of two stories.

¹⁵ For this conversation and its origin, see. Tarif Khalidi, 2001, 82.

¹⁶ Cf. "Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven" (Matthew, 23:9).



Abraham "My Lord is He Who gives life and death." (Qur'ân, 2:258). When Jesus said "I create for you out of clay something in the shape of a bird, then I breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by God's leave." (Qur'ân, 3:49), they supposed that he is the Lord and God. Based on this, they named Jesus as the Lord and God. But they saw that Jesus used to eat, drink and sleep. As for Qadariyya, this school claims that the acts of servants belong to themselves, and that God never intervenes in these acts. Therefore, when Christians saw these acts of Jesus, they supposed that he is the Lord. For al-Mâturidî, if they accurately knew God, they would know that the act of Jesus was just forming and imaging, and that it is possible for everyone whereas, giving life can just be done by God, He exercised it in the hands of Jesus. What Jesus did was just to form. The other miracles are also like that. Christians claimed his godness, by virtue of two reasons: his birth without a father and his miracles (al-Mâturidî, 2004, I, 275-276). According to al-Mâturidî, the failure of Christians is that they reached the wrong conclusions when they considered the acts of Jesus. So, this is an error in reasoning. A similar error has occurred among the Muslims. So, for him, with a correct reasoning, people can reach correct conclusions.

Al-Mâturidî handles, in a theological perspective, the claim that God has taken children to himself, a claim attributed to Jews, Christians and Arab pagans, in the Qur'ân. When he comments on the verse "And they claim that God has taken to Him a son. All-Glorified He is. Rather, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth; all are subservient to Him." (Qur'ân, 2:116), he elaborates on the reasons of adopting a child among the people. For him, there are three reasons for this: (i). Strong desire, (ii). The feeling of loneliness, hence, people need someone for friendship, (iii). For protecting himself against superior enemies, therefore, they need his help. Whereas God Almighty never has any of these reasons, and He is exalted above these things, so, what requires him to get a child? (al-Mâturidî, 2004, I, 85-86).¹⁷ As it is seen, for him, any reason, claimed for adopting a child, is related to a deficiency and requirement but these cannot be claimed for God.

On the other hand, for him, if it is claimed that the reason for adopting a child is friendship, this can occur in several ways: (i). Friendship, can only occur between two people who are not of the same essence like the relation between a father and a son. The child, however, is from the essence of his father. (ii) Friendship is based on past acquired acts of help. Due to these acts, the status of the person who helped is heightened and he deserves the friendship. But, the status of a child is completely different. God refuses both claims of acquiring friends and children for Himself with the verse "How can He have a child, when there is for Him no consort" (Qur'ân, 6:101). (iii) Râwandî says that, this claim is either a naming or a real situation. Because, in the friendship, there is a real situation in the friendship which justifies the naming. But in the case of God, there is no reality that invalidates such naming.

Al-Mâturidî explains the phrase "Rather, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth", at the end of the verse, in the following way: Everything, in the earth and heavens, are servants of God. People do not tolerate to adopt their servants as children, even if they greatly need children. Being so, how can you tolerate that God adopt children, and how can you ascribe such a thing to God, although He is greater than all his servants.

He interprets the phrase "all are subservient to Him", in this verse, in the following way: The angels, Jesus and Ezra who are claimed to be God's children, are all obedient to God, and are subjugated to His lordship and they have devoted themselves to his worship (al-Mâturidî, 2004, I, 85-86).¹⁸

In the commentary of the verse "The Originator of the heavens and the earth with nothing preceding Him to imitate. When He decrees a thing, He does but say to it "Be!" and it is." (Qur'ân, 2:117) he notes that: In this verse, there are two proofs against the claim of adopting a child. The first one is saying that how can "someone who has the power to create the heavens and the earth, out of nothing and for no reason, not be able to create Jesus without a father!?" The second one is saying that how can "someone who has the power to create the big and hard things for you, with the smallest letters (kun) (be!), not be able to create Jesus without a father!?" Also, when he comments on the verse of Qur'ân, 3:47, he says that the word "kun" (be!) indicates the swiftness and the efficiency of God's order and will (al-Mâturidî, 2004, I, 85-86).¹⁹ This is, also, the reason why Jesus was called the "kalimatullah" (word of God) (al-Mâturidî, 2004, I, 269, 530-531).

¹⁷ See also, al-Mâturidî, 2004, I, 530-531; II, 491; III, 265-266.

¹⁸ See also, al-Mâturidî, 2004, I, 240.

¹⁹ See also, al-Mâturidî, 2004, III, 265-266.



Al-Māturīdī mentions that there is a connection between “God has no partner” and “God has no child”. According to him, a child is in the shape and genus of his father, just as a partner is in the shape and genus of his partner. According to some, what is meant with the phrase “*They assert that God has taken to Himself a child.*” (Qur’ān, 10:68) is not the real meaning but the position and the place of child are meant. Nevertheless, al-Māturīdī accepts that this opinion should also be refused because the real meaning has been refused for its defect (al-Māturīdī, 2004, II, 491).

The basic approach of al-Māturīdī about this issue is that the divine attributes cannot refer to any creature in their real meanings. And this is mentioned with the tawhīd and tanzīh principles of Islam. Therefore, according to al-Māturīdī, the mention of Jesus' story in the Qur’ān reveals the profound difference between Christianity and Islam about God's imagination. In other words, the Qur’ān does not refer to the story of Jesus to explain some historical events; on the contrary, the main goal is to remind a problem on the conception of God. The dealing of this subject with the beliefs of Christians, Jews or pagans shows that the problem of God's unity is not a speculative thought but it's actual.²⁰

Assessment

In this paper I attempted to examine the methods and the sources that al-Māturīdī, a major Muslim scholar, used in his interpretation of the Qur’ānic verses related to Jesus and his family. We have seen that al-Māturīdī pay attention not to go out of the Islamic knowledge zone while dealing with the subject. In this context, he considers the Qur’ān and the Sunnah as fundamental sources. The information that emerges in the generations after the Prophet Muhammad is partly respected. In this section, we have seen some of the narratives in Christian sources have been properly converted into Islamic beliefs. Al-Māturīdī also takes this approach into consideration as well as other Muslim writers. We can also say, considering his writings, that he has no direct contact with the Christians and the Bible.

It can be said that the main purpose of his interpretation of verses is not to multiply the story of Jesus, but rather to give priority the goals of the Qur’ān on the stories of Prophets. That is why he devoted a great deal of space to theological debates in his commentary of the verses concerning Jesus and his family. As a result, we can say that Jesus, who is depicted by al-Māturīdī, is a Muslim Jesus.

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²⁰ See also, al-Māturīdī, 2005, pp. 332-337.