Article

Islamic Hermeneutics of Nonviolence: Key Concepts and Methodological Steps

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Abstract: The article traces the key concepts and methodological steps that make an Islamic theology of nonviolence plausible. It offers the tools for a critical reading of classical texts, "sacred" history, and globalized modernity. The article deals with the theology of nonviolence as part of modern and contemporary theologies: those of religious pluralism, feminism and liberation, which are interconnected and share the same hermeneutical knots and challenges. Nonviolence theology can be considered the big umbrella that includes all these aspects. It is a postcolonial approach, nurtured by Sufism, that aims to liberate theology from past and present power claims and build the bases for radical reform.

Keywords: nonviolence; Islamic theology; hermeneutics; Tafsīr; Qurʾānic exegesis; Islamic reform; modernity; history

1. In Search of the Lasting Good Things

Contemporary Muslims find themselves between two eras that are increasingly becoming distant from each other: the time of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions and modern time with its questions and challenges. According to Islamic doctrine, Muḥammad is not the founder of Islam but a reformer, just as other Prophets before him were. The "Seal of the Prophets", (Q 33, 40), did not seal the bond between Earth and Heaven, which continues to exist through the religious experience and the exegesis, the renewed understanding of God's Word and Will. To move from one period to another using a renovated translation is a vital need for faith. To guarantee an exegetical process faithful to the necessities of the two epochs, the believer needs to take recourse to an ensemble of subjective and objective conditions, which are the focus of this article. Let us first take an example from the Qurʾān concerning one historical gap:

> Do not marry [women] who associate [partners with God] until they believe: a believing slave woman is certainly better than a woman who associates, even though she may please you. And do not give your women in marriage to [men] who associate until they believe: a believing slave is certainly better than [a man] who associates, even though he may please you. (Q 2, 221)[1]

The verse raises a problem that contemporary Muslims encounter when confronted with the challenge of modernity. They are faced with a text revealed fifteen centuries ago in linguistic, cultural, social, economic and political contexts that differ substantially from the current circumstances. Slavery, for example, is no longer acceptable today. It is seen as one of the worst historical tragedies, even though our world still contains hidden forms of enslavement. Religions and Scriptures, including the Bible and the Qurʾān, did not eliminate slavery, but, at best, they prepared the path towards liberation, leaving the final decision to man and his economic development and culture; however, historical attempts to justify and defend slavery in the name of God existed.

Anyone who takes modernity seriously is aware of the challenges caused by the time gap. As for the traditional or conservative believer, whoever contents himself with the pre-modern interpretations considers the historical forms to be the true guarantee of the Scripture's value, without which it would hold no sense. Or he might prefer to be selective, avoiding the prickly topics, given that they are "exceptional", in this way refuting slavery and accepting polygamy (Q 4, 3) and a non-egalitarian inheritance (Q 4, 11, 176).

Slavery is a clear example that concerns the gap between past and present. The urgent question is: How can this verse speak to me here and now? Is the text definitively obsolete and caduc? In this case, its value today would be merely historical. Perhaps this would be a particularly extreme modernist perspective, selecting those elements of the text that are still "valuable" and rejecting those elements that go against the grain of the march of time. A more coherent approach would rather pay attention to the entire text than be selective. From the religious point of view, we have no access to a *revised* edition of the Qurʾān. It is entirely the "Word of God", even if not all the verses have the same value. The Qurʾān itself criticizes selective reading:

Do you then believe in one part of the book and reject the rest? (Q 2, 85)

It is inevitable to have to make a distinction between the value itself and the historical form in which the value was revealed for the first time in order to avoid an arbitrary selection or a literalist reading. In other terms, the distinction between the essential and the accidental is the first condition for modern faithfulness. This distinction itself is an act of interpretation that should not be merely a compromise of adaptation to the pressure of modernity.

(Q 2, 221) could tell us today that the value of the human being does not depend on his or her social class but on what he or she has in the heart and conscience. The text used the social categories of the time as an illustrative example that conveys the idea. The holistic liberation of the human being is a moral finality and a hermeneutical horizon that will be gradually discovered in the course of history, despite regressions.

2. New Hermeneutics for New Theologies

The key challenge for new Islamic theologies is mainly hermeneutical, that is to say, by creating new Islamic theologies that try to resolve the problems that have emerged from modernity, such as the theology of religious pluralism, nonviolence theology, feminist theology and liberation theology. They can be considered a single theology having different facets. Religious exclusivism can be transformed into violence, as violence against women is at the heart of feminist theology, which offers new tools for the theology of religious pluralism (cf. Tanner 2014). The integral theology of religious diversity is nonviolent, ecological, feminist, and interreligious at the same time. Those who accept diversity are reconciled with themselves and the social and natural environment in which they live.

Nonviolence cannot be reduced to political activism in resisting colonialism or dictatorship. Instead, it is an all-inclusive way of thinking and living that requires disarming theology. Theology can be an expression or an instrument of power. Nonviolent theology aims to liberate theology from power ambitions and to orient it to the service of all humanity, in particular the poor and the oppressed. In this case, religion's mission is seen as an act of humanization and liberation from all forms of violence. Nonviolent liberation is not a mere social movement of external change: it departs first of all from an inner transformation and conversion. This means that all these theologies require a mystical dimension. Mystical theology and hermeneutics are an essential part of this project for reform.

As mentioned above, theologians are interested in the theological meaning of the Qurʾān, which goes beyond the historical forms. The text speaks not only to its original audience but to the present and it opens horizons for the future. It is meaningful for me in my new historical context. The theologian is interested precisely in the historical *passage* of meaningfulness between the past generations and the current ones, as cultural mediation and translation. This constructive mediation is the theologian's challenging function and mission. The Qurʾānic text, historically and currently, is interpreted in different, even conflictual ways. "Qurʾānic interpretation takes place in power fields" (Pink 2019, p. 7) and is used to justify contradictory tendencies and ideologies:

<div align="center">

Violent verses/Nonviolent verses

Pluralistic verses/Exclusivist verses

Egalitarian verses/Patriarchal verses

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3. Faith Assumptions and General Principles

Before discussing the attempts to resolve the hermeneutical contradictions mentioned, let us consider some presuppositions and principles from the believer's point of view. They are fundamental principles highlighting the text's status and function.

3.1. The Author's Wisdom and the Text's Unity

Faith in God's Unity is reflected in the assumption of text's unity, as this verse indicates:

Will they not think about this Qurʾān? If it had been from anyone other than God, they would have found much inconsistency in it. (Q 4, 82)

The pressing question is: What is it that permits the belief in the existence of the pearl within the shell? How can Muslims believe in a meaning that transcends historical and cultural limits? It is the faith in the Author's Wisdom and Guidance. It is an act of faith that makes the believer both a worshipper and a seeker of knowledge. Behind the words lie the Creator's Word that the believer intends to understand and follow in order to become an active tool of it in life and history, the living word on Earth. This faith requires that the believing reader does not content himself or herself with a fragmentary reading, given that the Will of God is diffused throughout the entire text, albeit to differing degrees. The principle of "hermeneutical charity" tends to harmonize what seems contradictory. The bridge between the first historical moment of revelation and the present day is the faith that the text is "the Word of God" and that this Word concerns living persons, here and now. If this were not so, the importance of the text would be enclosed in a literal, aesthetic, or historical value. It would lose its religious significance as a force that transforms human beings and deepens their humanity.

Literary masterpieces of profound humanity possess something of that contagious and stimulating power. Literature can be a liberating force when faced with the hegemony of totalitarian thought. The treasures of world literature retain their power of influence over all sorts of readers from vastly different eras and cultures. Hence, the Scripture impacts uniquely and durably more than all other texts; however, it is legitimate to ask: to what degree is the holy text an instrument of liberation and a tool for intensifying our conception of humanity, or is it an obstacle to freedom? Freedom can be a hermeneutical criterion when divine guidance is understood as liberation, not manipulation or subjugation. The interpretation cannot be identified with divine guidance. It is simply a human attempt to understand it, an effort that can be improved and modified. Identifying one's interpretation with God's guidance is the first step towards fundamentalism and religious authoritarianism.

3.2. The Text's Nature and Function

Ambiguities that have deviated from the text's spiritual function as a nourisher of religious experience are often linked to definitions of the text and the ideas conceived of its aim. The Qurʾān is not a book of legislation or history, or philosophy, even if it does contain historical, legislative, and philosophical elements, amongst others. It is fundamentally a book of guidance, according to how the Qurʾān describes itself:

> This is the Book in which there is no doubt, a guide for the righteous. (Q 2, 2)

Guidance is at once its identity and function. It plays a directing and educational role in clarifying the path to God; however, this light does not replace the path of the believer. It cannot in any way replace the believer's spiritual experience and ethical consciousness in his or her individual way of being and living in the presence of God.

Khaled Abou El Fadl problematizes the question in ethical terms:

> If by the standards of age and place, or the standards of human moral development, traditions lead to *wakhz al-ḍamīr* (the unsettling or disturbing of the conscience), the least a Muslim can do is to pause to reflect about the place and implications of these traditions. If we assume that the human *fiṭrah* (intuition) is socially and historically limited, it will necessarily be changing and evolving. Consequently, what will disturb the conscience in one context will not necessarily do the same in another. Nevertheless, if a Muslim's conscience is disturbed, the least that would be theologically expected from thinking beings who carry the burden of free will, accountability and God's trust is to take a reflective pause [...] The duties of honesty, self-restraint, diligence, comprehensiveness, and reasonableness demand that a Muslim make a serious inquiry into the origin, structure, and symbolism of the authorial enterprise that produced the tradition before simply waiving it away and proceeding on his merry way. (Abou El Fadl 2003, p. 213).[2]

Abou El Fadl's reflection concerning the Sunna is extendible to the Qurʾān itself, as the historical and ethical challenges are the same. He is aware of conservative Muslims' objections that see a sign of the anarchic and antireligious in this critical attitude. "This is not an invitation to the exercise of whimsy and feel-good determinations" (Abou El Fadl 2003, p. 213), he said. The core of the question is the understanding of religious obedience, as mentioned by this verse:

> When God and His Messenger have decided on a matter that concerns them, it is not fitting for any believing man or woman to claim freedom of choice in that matter: whoever disobeys God and His Messenger is far astray. (Q 33, 36)

The question is not obeying God and His messenger, a shared fundamental doctrine, but rather understanding the divine Will and interpreting the revelation. A mechanical and literalist understanding can be a betrayal of this sublime Will, and above all, God's Will cannot be reduced to practical and juridical commands. It is more than orthopraxis; it is a question of inner transformation that makes the believer have no other will than that of God. Guidance cannot be reduced to "what to do". Instead, it is primarily "how to be", an existential conversion and the purification and change of the heart. Apparent deeds and actions are only the external expression of the inner state. Historically, Islamic law, *fiqh*, holds a dominant position in Islamic knowledge, which is still present and influential in Islamic institutions and religious public opinion today. The situation has become more complex with the interference of political and ideological factors, which see in the Qurʾān a political program or the "constitution" of a desired or effective "Islamic" state.

In the Qurʾānic text, which is composed of 6235 verses, there are no more than 500 juridical verses, and the most accurate number is around 350 (Kamali 2008, p. 19). The boundaries between the moral and juridical are not always clear. The principal aspect of the Qurʾān, the stories of the Prophets, represents instead almost a quarter of the Qurʾān, 1453 verses (Gilliot 2003). Their function is often seen as consolidating the Prophet, educating children, or an abrogated history of pre-Islamic generations. The reconsideration of the Qurʾānic narratives enhances the awareness of the unity of the text and its function. Narration is an essential tool in transforming minds and souls from inside through creative imagination.

Sufism had the privilege of reconsidering the stories of the Prophets, noting that they contained a rich symbolic discourse, a mystical theology, rather than simply being decorative annexes. The juridical approach, in its extreme form, transforms life into a series of commands that cover life in all its aspects and details, from birth to death. Without a holistic meaning or a spiritual experience, the juridical hegemony constitutes a risk for a healthy religious life, precisely due to its lack of freedom and imagination.

3.3. The Centrality of the Religious Experience

Another religious principle guides one's interpretation: the religious experience, the intimate relationship between the believer and God. The spiritual experience nourishes the reading of the text, which reciprocally raises the spiritual experience. The text should nourish and orient the religious experience, but it cannot take its place, as is affirmed in these verses:

> This is truly a noble Qurʾān, in a protected Record that only the purified can touch. (Q 56, 77–79)

The expression "only the purified can touch" is often written or stamped on the Qurʾān's cover. It has been interpreted in liturgical terms to mean that the believer cannot touch the book of the Qurʾān without performing the ritual purification, *wuḍūʾ*. Paradoxically, when the verse was revealed, the Qurʾān did not exist physically as a book. Therefore, it is impossible for the first meaning to be a condition of physical purification. The verse aims at another form of purification, in the figurative sense, that of the heart, purification from prejudices, vain thoughts, and personal or group motivations. It is an invitation to enter the text through the door of religious experience, not through political use or a justification of power. Cognitive humility means listening and understanding without prejudices, projections, or projects. One cannot listen to the Word of God disseminated throughout the text without emptying one's soul, leaving room for its reception, otherwise, we repeat ourselves, finding only the reflection of our sick souls and what we seek to obtain. In this case, reading is only an opportunistic selection and an alteration of the meaning.

However, the purity of the heart when facing the text remains relative. It is more a matter of a movement in progress than a final state obtained once and for all; it is a state of faith, and faith increases and decreases. Purity of the heart does not mean a loss of memory or approaching the text as a blank page. We carry all the questions of our time, its needs, and challenges. We have our worries, expectations, hopes, and frustrations. Our humanity has its brightness and misery, ups and downs, intelligence and stupidity. We cannot strip ourselves of our human condition. We need, instead, to be aware of these predispositions and how they influence us. These conditions are not necessarily harmful; they are sometimes essential for a renewed reading. Asking new questions affords new interpretations about which our predecessors had not thought, for the simple reason that they did not have the same provocations. The answers are new because the questions themselves were unknown before. In this way, the text remains alive and can surprise us, just as living beings surprise one another with what they do not expect: "The Lord said, Call me, and I will answer you" (Q 40, 60).

3.4. The Text Exceeds Itself

The text is not a goal in itself, it has a divine origin, but it is not God. It guides human beings in their journey to God, indicating the way and opening their eyes to the divine signs:

> On Earth, there are signs for those with sure faith and in yourselves too, do you not see? (Q 51, 20–21)

The word "signs", *āyāt* (sing. *āya*), is applied to the Qurʾānic verses, just as it is to the cosmic signs "on Earth", and to the psychological and human signs "in yourselves". It is a call to meditate on the exterior signs surrounding us, and the interior signs in the depths of our hearts, within and among us. The human being is an admirable sign. The role of the Scriptural signs is to open our eyes to see all the signs around us and engage in a dialogue with them, discovering their sense and message. The Qurʾān helps to see God with the eye of the heart everywhere and in everything.

The concept of "sign" is linked to that of revelation, *waḥy*, which initially means a hidden communication and which leads to the meaning without ever exhausting it or putting it in a conceptual box. It is a movement towards an ever-renewed meaning. The believer is not a literalist scribe or bibliophile but a cosmic reader and a meditator in his/her soul. In this way, Qurʾānic reading takes place in a vast spectrum of human knowledge, encompassing all creatures and cultures, engaging in dialogue with all, nourishing from each. Qurʾānic hermeneutics is a part of cosmic and existential hermeneutics. The complementarity and unity of the divine signs are well expressed in the prayer of the universal human being, *al-insān al-kāmil*, symbolically represented by David, called in verse (Q 38, 26) the representative of God, *ḫalīfat Allāh*:

> We graced David with Our favour. We said: "You mountains, echo God's praises together with him, and you birds, too". We softened iron for him. (Q 34, 10)

The universal human being prays with the mountains and the birds, making the iron malleable without harming creation. It is the best illustration of the believer's presence in the universe. The Qurʾān is part of the infinite Words of God, and all creatures are God's Words:

> Say, If the ocean were ink for the Words of my Lord, the ocean would run out, before the Words of my Lord run out, even if We were to bring the like of it in addition to it. (Q 18, 109)

> If all the trees on earth were pens, filled by the ocean, with seven more oceans besides, the Words of God would not run out. God is Majestic and Wise. (Q 31, 27)

The Words of God cannot be locked away in a golden box or the pages of a book. They are overflowing with life, a life without limits that cannot be contained. Among the Words of God are the Qurʾānic words. They are not dead letters; they are a permanent breath of life renewed in the souls of the believers and the movement of history.

3.5. History as Revelation

The historical signs are among the divine signs spread throughout creation. The Qurʾān, on several occasions, calls to meditate and interpret them. The expression "Travel the Earth and observe" is repeated 13 times: (Q 3, 137), (6, 11), (12, 109), (16, 36), (22, 46), (27, 69), (29, 20), (30, 9, 42), (35, 44), (40, 21, 82), (47, 10). The term *sunan* (sing. *sunna*) is used to describe the movement of history (Q 3, 137), which is not chaotic or casual. *Sunan*, can be understood as norms and stable ways of doing or being, usually related to God's way of creating (Abdel Haleem and Badawi 2008, p. 460).

3.5.1. The Gandhian Moment

The contemporary Syrian theologian Jawdat Saʿīd (d. 2022) considers history a criterion of truth, citing the following verse:

> In this way does God set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: the scum disappears; but what is of benefit to man abides on Earth. In this way does God set forth the parables. (Q 13, 17)

Saʿīd defines this verse as "the law of abrogation", *qānūn al-nash*, and "the law of history", shifting the concept of abrogation from the Qurʾānic signs to the historical ones:

> This is the law of history. The goal that history has never ceased pursuing: what is of benefit to the humans, and not only to some of them, must remain on earth. This law is the decisive and categorical authority with no mercy towards what does not progress: it will abolish it and turn it into useless garbage, whether technology or mental representations. What benefits humans abrogates the least useful. It is a law that the Qurʾān reiterates when it states: "As soon as we abrogate a sign or make it oblivious, we replace it with a better or similar one" (Q 2, 106) (Saʿīd 1998, p. 70).[3]

> Today, after so much history, the signs of God in the world and souls are beginning to show that the position of the son of Adam is correct, even if it would lead to death . . . [Abel, the son of Adam, is saying] "If you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise mine to kill you" [Q 5, 28]. Indeed, the force of arms has reached such a level that, by using them, neither of the opposing parties would be saved" (Saʿīd 1997b, p. 184).[4]

> History is oriented towards [the method of the son of Adam]; the whole creation will get there! (Saʿīd 1997a, p. 290)

This modern awareness of the absurdity and cruelty of war is not possible without the "Gandhian moment" in the twentieth century. Previously, humanity had known nonviolent precursors, exemplified by the behavior of individuals and groups who favored nonviolence as a way of life; however, modernity has given the issue a systematic and political character. The "peaceful resistance", *satyagraha*, of Mahatma Gandhi (d. 1948), was rooted in ancient beliefs, such as the principle of *ahimsa* in Hinduism and Jainism. Nevertheless, the new dimension that this idea took on in the twentieth century would not have been possible without a series of circumstances that enriched human awareness with a radical and inclusive nonviolent vision.

The meaning of war today is different, despite the use of the same word. Modern technology has made war more destructive than any previous war. The emergence of weapons of mass destruction, and even conventional weapons, have become so deadly that so-called "collateral damage" cannot be avoided. Large numbers of victims are often unarmed civilians. The ferocious and criminal aspect of war is more evident than ever, and for the first time in history it is actually possible to destroy our planet.

One cannot but note that the semantic shift caused by the movement of history is a well-known phenomenon that can cause significant damage on the theological and practical levels. I mentioned earlier the term "war," but one can also add the word "state". The modern state is very different from the institution that bore the same name in the past. They are incomparable at the level of structure and the control of society. This observation is also valid at the Qurʾānic semantic level. A term like *islām* has an inclusive sense in the Qurʾān as a religious attitude of submission to the divine Will, which is the message of all the Prophets, but even at the cosmic level, all creatures submit themselves to God. This term later, especially with the emergence of Islamic theology, *Kalām*, assumed the meaning of an identity designating the community of Muḥammad, considered distinct and superior. Modern Muslim theologians of religious pluralism, aware of this semantic shift, seek to return to the original Qurʾānic meaning in order to overcome theological exclusivism.[5] The

history factor is crucial in theological criticism and reform, without reducing theology to history.

3.5.2. De-Dogmatizing History

Considering history as a source of religious knowledge does not transform it into a myth or a hagiography. The theological reading of history is different from the "secular" one. The religious view is oriented towards the future, learning from history the "lesson" whereon a reform project may be built or from which some ethical, even doctrinal, conclusions and revisions can be drawn.

The founding moment in Islamic historical narratives is the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad, *Sīra*, and his Tradition, *Sunna*, as found in classical sources. They are an essential reference in order to understand Islam as a religion and to verify the application of Qurʾānic principles and values based on historical reality, or what is thought to be real. History includes what factually happened in the past and what we think happened, as a collective historical *imaginaire*. In this context, it is necessary to equip oneself with a critical vision to identify the narratives that contradict and betray the Qurʾānic principles and values. The Qurʾān represents the supreme reference on the theological level.

Partly, but significantly, the history of Islam is forged and modelled by empires, conquests, and expansions. Classical theology and Islamic knowledge still bear traces of past imperialism, even after the last empire's fall. The Islamic theology of nonviolence, just like theologies of women and pluralism, are an opportunity to purify theology from ideologies and justifications of power.

Criticizing the past is not complete without criticizing the present. The critique of modernity and its ideologies prevents reform from being a mere adaptation of, or even worse, surrendering to the dictates of globalization. An old dogmatism cannot be replaced by a new one, even if it is masked by a secular appearance. This critical character of the new theologies makes them a prophetic voice in a time of crisis.

3.6. Thinking Inter-Disciplinarily and Inter-Religiously

We previously discussed the importance of Qurʾānic narration as an essential part of discourse and not as a purely decorative addition. Reconsidering this aspect implies reconsidering the biblical heritage, overcoming the gap between the legacies of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, created by the theory of *taḥrīf*, falsification, and elaborated in the context of religious polemics.[6] The result is a feeling of superiority towards the sacred texts that preceded the Qurʾān. There is also an equivalent feeling of superiority on the other side concerning Islam and its Scripture. This reciprocal exclusivism must cease in order to find a means of dialogue and collaboration. The Qurʾān describes the Torah and the Gospel as "a guide and a light" (Q 5, 44, 46), (Q 6, 91), terms applied to the Qurʾān itself (Q 42, 52). The Qurʾān invites Jews and Christians to embrace the values existing in their own Scriptures (Q 5, 45, 47). It is a rare invitation in the history of religions, as each religion usually invites for itself while excluding others. The Qurʾān came "to confirm the Book that was there before it and to prevail over it" (Q 5, 48). To prevail, to be *muhaymin*, means here to be the exegetical authority; the previous Books must be read in the light of the Qurʾān as far as Muslims are concerned. The confirmation refutes the accusation of falsification and a loss of authenticity circulating in polemical writings. It is worth mentioning that the early commentaries, such as the Tafsīr of Ibn Ǧarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), attributed an important place to the so-called *isrāʾīliyyāt*, information from the biblical, Talmudic, or Midrashic heritage. This heritage was gradually marginalized in Islamic thought (cf. Saleh 2008, 2016).

Thinking on a truly global level, so that Islam is not just a local belief claiming universality, requires an openness to human heritage. It is a matter of restoring biblical heritage to its place and activating its role in a new style, in a profound dialogue with the human, historical and linguistic sciences and methods applied to biblical studies.[7] It is crucial to focus on the unity and complementarity of human knowledge, based on the concept of a "heritage of humanity", considering knowledge to be a "common good".

This interdisciplinary and interfaith approach permits one to see Islam's position in the historical landscape of world religions and to develop a more inclusive theology of religions. René Girard's mimetic theory, for example, assists the discussion of the relationship between religion and violence and the role of faith in pacifying human beings or increasing violence. In point of fact, Girard focused on Greek mythology and the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. Later, the mimetic theory became the center of a more extensive interreligious debate. Various researchers applied the theory to Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and other religious traditions (cf. Palaver and Schenk 2017; Collins 2014; Goodhart 2014). It is now time to see the complex relationship between Islam and mimetic theory as part of a new Islamic theology of nonviolence. This theory offers new tools for analysis that allow Islamic theology to understand itself better and participate in global discussions.[8]

4. Tracing a New Methodology

4.1. Facing the Difficult Texts

After this general survey, let us address the complicated knots of interpretation, revisiting and criticizing the different methodologies in classical and modern thought.

The classical abrogation theory (cf. Burton 1990) cannot solve what seem to be contradictory texts. Instead, it is part of the problem, which is the fragmented reading of the Qurʾān. Abrogation, a classical tool used to solve contradictory juridical and practical verses, cannot be a theological method. God's promises cannot be abrogated. Sunni theology strongly condemned the so-called *badāʾ*, changing the divine mind, seen as an anthropomorphist deviation.[9] Another problem is that abrogation is based on an uncertain chronological order of the Qurʾānic verses.

The theory of the higher finalities of Islamic law, *Maqāṣid al-Šarīʿa*,[10] is to a certain extent helpful but not sufficient to solve the problem. It is a *Šarīʿa*-oriented theory and does not deal with the more inclusive Qurʾānic finalities.[11] Indeed, violence and exclusivism have juridical aspects; however, theology seeks to understand the philosophical and hermeneutical roots behind the concrete manifestations. To note here that the five general finalities, *al-kuliyyāt al-ḫams*, are aimed to protect: religion, life, reason, family and property. The Tunisian Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀšūr (d. 1973) added a sixth finality: protecting freedom (Ibn Ashur 2006, pp. 154–64). These categories of protection present a basic form of nonviolence compared to the biblical Decalogue; however, the protection itself may either assume violent forms or tolerate some. The finalities are often correlated to the traditional view of *Šarīʿa*, which accepts the defensive war, and sometimes justifies the preventive one. Nevertheless, as seen previously, some Muslim reformists use the finalities theory to overcome some traditional issues such as slavery and corporal punishment (Duderija 2014).

Another modern attempt to resolve the historical–hermeneutical challenge is the theory of the Sudanese Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha (d. 1985)[12] concerning the Meccan and Medinan Qurʾān. The Meccan verses represent, in his view, the universal message, and the Medinan ones represent a historical and contingent application of the Meccan principles (Taha 1987). This theory does not seem helpful because principles and historical applications are present in both periods. Life is not divided into two chapters: first ideal and then practice. In the Medinan Qurʾān, we find fundamental principles of religious pluralism and freedom, such as the well-known verse: "There is no compulsion in religion". (Q 2, 256)

4.2. Recognizing the Text's Limits

There is no radical nonviolent model in the Qurʾān, at least no explicit one. The Gandhian model was unthinkable in the Qurʾānic context; radical nonviolent interpretation comes from a modern necessity in a dialogue with the text's potentials. The historical moment opens new horizons of understanding and makes the unthinkable thinkable. New questions and challenges require new answers. As mentioned above, the "Gandhian moment" is a new cross-religious awareness of the immensely devastating character of modern war. The Qurʾān seems to accept the defensive war:

> Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not commit aggression; God does not love the aggressors. (Q 2, 190)

> Fight them until there is no oppression, and worship becomes devoted to God alone. But if they cease, then let there be no hostility except against the oppressors. The sacred month for the sacred month; and sacrilege calls for retaliation. Who-ever commits aggression against you, retaliate against him in the same measure as he has committed against you. And be conscious of God and know that God is with the righteous. (Q 2, 193–194)

> If they incline towards peace, then incline towards it, and put your trust in God. He is the Hearer, the Knower. If they intend to deceive you, God is sufficient for you. It is He who supported you with His aid, and with the believers. (Q 8, 61–62)

Based on the above mentioned verses, in the case of an aggression or attack on the community, reacting to violence with violence is permitted under certain ethical conditions:

1. To be a legitimate defense.
2. To be proportionate and not exaggerated.
3. To stop at the first sign of peace.
4. Patience and non-immediate reaction are recommended.

What makes the interpretative endeavor more complicated is the existence of some verses that encourage the believers to fight:

> O Prophet! Exhort the believers to fight. (Q 8, 65)

> Fighting is ordained for you, even though you dislike it. (Q 2, 216)

> When you meet the disbelievers in battle, strike them in the neck, and once they are defeated, bind any captives firmly. Later you can release them by grace or by ransom until the toils of war have ended. (Q 47, 4)

The historical background to these verses is a painful transition from a tribal system based on blood alliances, in which man defends his tribe regardless of any consideration, to a system based on a solidarity within a faith. Under the attack of Qurayš, the Prophet's tribe, and its allies, the new community of Medina was obliged to fight as an act of survival, which meant fighting against their families and tribes, a taboo in Arab society at that time. This contextualization is necessary in order to avoid the transformation of these verses into an appeal for perpetual war, also considering the ethical conditions mentioned above. This social transformation is summarized by a Ḥadīṯ narrated by Anas b. Malik:

> God's Messenger said, "Help your brother whether he is an oppressor or an oppressed". A man said, "O God's Messenger! I will help him if he is oppressed, but if he is an oppressor, how shall I help him?" The Prophet said, "By preventing him from oppressing [others], for that is how to help him". (Buḫārī 1980, K. al-ikrāh, ḥ. 6952, vol. 4, p. 287)

The genius of the Prophet is to transform a pre-Islamic proverb that summarizes the "group feeling", *al-ʿaṣabiyya*,[13] changing its meaning radically and endowing it with a moral purpose.

However, recognizing the defensive war in the Qurʾānic text does not necessarily mean its insuperability or dogmatization. Contextualizing these kinds of verses makes it possible to distinguish between principles and historical forms, between theory and historical examples.[14]

A similar problem is faced in feminist hermeneutics in this emblematic verse concerning domestic violence:

> Men are *qawwāmūn* on women, as God has given some of them an advantage over others, and because they spend out of their wealth. The good women are obedient, guarding what God would have them guard. As for those from whom you fear disloyalty, admonish them, and abandon them in their beds, then strike them. But if they obey you, seek no way against them. God is Sublime, Great. (Q 4, 34)

There are extensive modern debates about the meaning of the adjective *qawwāmūn* (sing. *qawwām*)[15] and the noun *qiwāma*, which indicate man as the head and the person responsible for the family. The most sensitive and arguable question in the verse is the permission to beat wives. The primary strategy used by feminist interpretations is to criticize the patriarchal interpretations of the Qurʾān, showing other possible ways of understanding it. The entrance of women into the realm of interpretation can change the situation in a field historically dominated by men; however, changing perspective is necessary but not sufficient to solve the problem. The question concerns not only the dominant patriarchal character of Tafsīr literature, but the Qurʾānic text itself that contains patriarchal elements.[16] The Qurʾān was not only revealed in the Arabic language but also in the Arabic culture of the seventh century, marked and formed by the patriarchal society. It is not a defect but a part of divine communication. God reveals Himself in history and culture, and revelation is not a *sopra*-cultural or an a-historical phenomenon. The Word of God is an active agent running through history that transforms history, people, and cultures. It is necessary to go beyond the patriarchal commentaries and to recognize the text's historicity and patriarchal language and models. The text is not modern, and it cannot be; only our reading is modern.

4.3. Textual Hierarchy

The Qurʾān asserts that its verses are not equal and recognizes an internal textual hierarchy, which is an essential hermeneutical key. Other traditions do the same, considering a part of their Scripture to be the primary reference for interpretation, just like the Johannine and Pauline part of the New Testament for some Christian theologies. In the Qurʾān, the main referential or the theoretical part is not a chapter or a group of chapters or sūras. It is dispersed throughout the entire text, complicating the hermeneutical task. Let us analyze the key verse concerning this question:

> It is He who revealed to you the Book. Some of its verses are *muḥkam*; they are *umm al-kitāb* (the mother/foundation of the Book), and others are *mutašābih*. As for those in whose hearts is deviation, they follow the *mutašābih*, seeking descent, and seeking to derive an interpretation. But none knows its interpretation except God *and* those firmly rooted in knowledge say, "We believe in it; all is from our Lord". But none recollects except those with understanding. (Q 3, 7)

The traditional explanation, which is still more widespread, is that the *muḥkam* verses are clear and explicit with just one meaning. The *mutašābih* verses, instead, are the ambiguous ones that afford different interpretations. This definition is problematic and needs to be revisited. The verse mentioned, (Q 3, 7), seems to be *mutašābih*, applying the standards of ambiguity/clarity. Historically, there is no consensus on what is clear or ambiguous, more or less essential, or even on the meaning of the two terms.[17] The main objections to the traditional definition are the following:

This definition transforms many practical and juridical verses from concrete and historical cases and examples into definitive and "eternal" meanings and instructions that cannot be changed. Because of their practical nature, these verses are clear and explicit, which does not make them doctrinal and ethical principles. At the same time, this definition marginalizes the theological verses; their general character could be considered "ambiguous". This approach is one of the causes of the priority of law over theology, reversing the pyramid, and it might be appropriate when relatively slow change occurs within the same paradigm or system. Nowadays, this conservatism leads to subtle or manifest violence, the violence of old models and patterns in a changing world and totally different contexts. The examples of corporal punishment and the death penalty are eloquent. They became part of the so-called *al-maʿlūm min al-dīn bi al-ḍarūra*, "what is recognized necessarily as part of religion".[18] The same approach is expressed in the juridical rule: *lā iǧtihād maʿa al-naṣṣ*, which means: "there is no *iǧtihād*, interpretation, with an explicit text".[19]

The dogmatization of law, attributing a theological status to certain historical practices, may cause a hermeneutical chaos. The so-called "sword verse", *āyat al-sayf*,[20] is a significant example. Some traditional views declare that this verse abrogates all verses concerning mercy and peace. This abusive use of abrogation theory is none other than an expression of a fragmental reading of the Qurʾān, the bitter fruit of the absence of an inclusive theory that defines the hierarchical values in the text. This arbitrary approach is the sole Qurʾānic justification of the expansionist and imperialistic war.

A more reasonable definition is possible, avoiding risks and inconveniences:

The *muḥkam* verses are the hermeneutical principles, definitions, and criteria. In other terms, the Qurʾānic theory, *umm al-kitāb*, the mother/foundation of the Book, as (Q 3, 7) called them.

The *mutašābih* verses are the contingent and historical applications of the values and principles. These verses are *mutašābih* because they may create confusion when exchanged with the principles. Indeed, absolutizing this category leads to *fitna*, conflict, and violence and prevents radical *iǧtihād*.

In this manner, the doctrinal verses of peace and nonviolence are *muḥkam*, interpretive and theological criteria, and the verses concerning defensive warfare are *mutašābih*, i.e., contingent and historical applications of the ethical and doctrinal principles, as will be explained further below.

The use of the Sunna as the primary reference for interpreting the Qurʾān is a widespread methodology in Tafsīr literature, particularly among traditionalist and Salafi circles.[21] The Sunna is indeed predominant in modelling the Islamic mind. It offers more details and challenging texts, sometimes contradicting the Qurʾān itself. This excessive use risks over-turning the hierarchical textual order, especially in the absence of a Qurʾānic theory and criteria. The correct methodology is to read the Sunna in light of the Qurʾān; then to read both of them in light of clear Qurʾānic principles and values (cf. Ghazali 2009).

4.4. Hierarchy of Values

In this approach, the *muḥkam* is mainly theological bearing ethical doctrines and hermeneutical keys. In this category, the main questions are: Who is God? Who is the human being? What is religion? What are its mission and function? What are the core ethical values of the Qurʾān? These concepts of reference have a tangible impact on life and history; however, this concreteness should be continually contextualized and updated.

The theory that permits an interpretation of the Qurʾān according to fundamental values is not possible without knowing the scale and the hierarchy of these values within the text. The values have a pyramidal structure with priorities and requirements, constituting somehow the "personality" of the text. This holistic and structural vision of the text guarantees avoiding a fragmented reading. The chaos of values is no less dangerous than the lack of distinction among values and their historical forms of application.

However, in searching for this hierarchy, the reader should have the courage and the humility to recognize that his or her priorities are not necessarily identical to the divine intent. It is only a human attempt to understand the text in a systematic way, which can be improved or modified. In other terms, the divine intent is *relatively* manifested in our sincere and limited attempts to understand it in space and time.

Let us consider two examples of the fundamental hermeneutical and ethical principles:

4.4.1. Mercy-Centered Theology

Al-Raḥmān, which means fullness of Mercy and Love, is the only divine Name to have the same value as the proper Name *Allāh*, God, which indicates the divine Mystery:

> Say, call Him God, or call Him the Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*). Whichever name you use, to Him belong the Best Names". (Q 17, 110)

Al-Raḥmān coincides with another Name with the same root, *al-Raḥīm*, the Clement, the Merciful. Both derive from *r.ḥ.m*, from which also derives *raḥim*, maternal womb. The *basmala*, or the Qurʾānic formula *b-ism Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*, often translated as in the Name of God the Clement and the Merciful, is repeated 114 times in the Qurʾān.[22] *Raḥma* is divine Love concretely expressed and realized and fulfilled in creation.[23] Mercy is not only the Truth of the divine Being but also His absolute commitment, as this verse indicates:

> He has inscribed for Himself Mercy. (Q 6, 12)

It is the only time we find this expression in the Qurʾān as the only divine commitment. That means that the truth and the end of every creation is Mercy. Mercy is unquestionably at the heart of divine ethics, the criterion for understanding the divine Will in all its forms and manifestations. Consequently, the unique *raison d'être* of Muḥammad's mission is to convey divine Mercy everywhere:

> [O Muḥammad] We did not send you except as Mercy towards all the worlds. (Q 21, 107)

The meaning and purpose of Muḥammad's mission is Mercy. It is the central value around which the other values are ordered. Under these conditions, one cannot espouse extremist attitudes that adopt the theory of the "sword verse", *āyat al-sayf*, mentioned above.

4.4.2. No Compulsion in Religion

We do not find the word "non-violence" in the Qurʾān. Instead, we see the expression "no compulsion":

> There is no compulsion in religion. *Rušd* (good sense, good judgment, correctness, rectitude, wisdom, maturity) stands out clearly from *ġayy* (misguidedness, delusion, error). Whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And God hears and knows all things. (Q 2, 256)

Non-compulsion is more radical than non-violence. It rejects even psychological violence, a hidden one that does not shed blood or leave bruises. Yet it still leads to physical violence by preparing the conditions for it. The verse "No Compulsion in Religion" is not only a fundamental moral principle but is also a definition of religion. Religion cannot be combined with coercion, which ranges from violence by hand and weapons to violence by words and gestures, extending to silence and neglect. Non-compulsion is a categorical rejection of all forms of violence, purification of religion from all impurities that would question or diminish human free choice. Embracing or leaving a religion,[24] practicing or abandoning it, are all possible options for a person as long as he or she is free and responsible. Anyone who thinks that an external authority (a state or law) can make a good believer is wrong. Coercion only creates hypocrites or those fearfully oppressed. Coercion

is a psychological terror that enslaves and does not liberate, is anti-religious and contrary to the essence of belief.

The same verse states the reasons for non-compulsion: "*rušd* (truth, rectitude, wisdom) stands out clearly from *ġayy* (error, ignorance)". This clear distinction can be understood on two levels: the verse affirms the dynamism and autonomy of truth on the intellectual level. Its beauty and authority are enough to move and persuade. It does not need violence, even when it is subtle and hidden. The truth shines like a light in the dark. It does not require a protector or guardian. It runs through peoples and cultures, strong in itself and not because of others, dispensing goodness, beauty and freedom. It uses people, and people do not use it. As far as the practical level is concerned, coercion is oppression and injustice, which are incompatible with reason and wisdom. Non-compulsive religion is nonviolence par excellence.

4.5. Narrative Theology

The Qurʾānic narratives are essential for the theology of nonviolence. The story of the creation of the human being, as in (Q 2, 30–33), the rebellion of Satan, (Q 38, 71–78), and many others, are rich in elements of spiritual anthropology and theology. These stories confirm and develop the nonviolent principles of divine and human mercy and non-compulsion; however, the most nonviolent passage in the Qurʾān is the one that describes the first crime on Earth, the prototype of bloody violence. The protagonists remain anonymous, called "Adam's two sons". We are all the children of Adam, *banū Ādam*:

> [Prophet], tell them the truth about the story of Adam's two sons: each of them offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted from one and not the other. One said, "I will kill you", but the other said, "God only accepts the sacrifice of those who are mindful of Him. If you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise mine to kill you. I fear God, the Lord of all worlds, and I would rather you were burdened with my sins as well as yours and became an inhabitant of the Fire, such is the evildoers' reward". But his soul prompted him to kill his brother: he killed him and became one of the losers. God sent a raven to scratch up the ground and show him how to cover his brother's corpse and he said, "Woe is me! Could I not have been like this raven and covered up my brother's body?" He became remorseful. On account of [his deed], We decreed to the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person– unless in retribution for murder or for spreading corruption in the land– it is as if he kills all mankind, while if any saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind. (Q 5, 27–32)

The human desires and contradictions are manifest in this scene. Yet, strangely enough, Satan is absent. *Al-qurbān*, the sacrifice, comes from the verb *qarraba* that means to come closer. Therefore, *qurbān*, which implies an act of coming closer to God, has become the symbol of discord, sin and distance from God. It has become the reason for jealousy, violence and homicide. It is a metaphor for religion, which is supposed to lead to God, but instead, in former as well as in contemporary times, it is often used to justify war and religious jealousy.

The key phrase: "If you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise mine to kill you", missing in the Bible, means the rejection and condemnation of violence. This sentence could serve as the theological basis for an Islamic theology of nonviolence.[25] Nonviolence does not mean assuming a lax attitude or a weak acceptance of destiny and violence. On the contrary, it is a courageous choice, which bears its fruits in the repentance of the aggressor. The story of the repentant man begins with man's return to the tenderness of nature, when he notices the raven. Man's violence is an imbalance in cosmic harmony, and repentance returns to the initial state of peace and harmony. Violence is blind, but repentance and the return towards God result in a new cosmic awareness. When man reopens his eyes to discover the signs of God, they will indicate the way to peace.

In this story, there are two essential elements: the refusal of the victim to imitate the aggressor, then the imitation of the killer of the innocent victim, who transforms the aggressor. The cure for violence, in this vision, is to cut the chain of reactions of mimetic violence, in Girardian terms, by creating an alternative mimetic model of peace.

The sacrifice of Abraham, (Q 37, 102–113), another important story as far as nonviolence is concerned, can be considered a hermeneutical key: the divine command appears to be one of violence, but the true divine intention is life and peace. To reach this deep understanding, we must sacrifice our egos. The first understanding of Abraham was *iblitā*ʾ, a trial. It is a trial and test to think that God can ask for such an extreme violence as killing our children. The culture of that time accepted it as a "possible" sacrifice. The decisive step that needs to be taken is the awareness of God's peaceful plan. There are not two divine contradictory and separate orders: kill–do not kill. They are, instead, just one order of peace and mercy that only the pure heart can grasp by overcoming appearance. This purification and liberation are realized by eliminating attachment and dispersive desires, an act of *tawḥīd* that unifies human desires in the divine desire. The ego constitutes a veil when reading the Word of God, being the source of violence and disorder.

At the methodological level, the Mystical reading of the Qurʾānic narratives *interiorizes* the meaning, searching for the inner significance concerning our lives. The stories are not seen as *historical* events of the past; they speak instead to us today thanks to their existential and anthropological symbolism.

5. Conclusions

This research does not respond to the modern challenges with a "yes" or "no", in the juridical logic of *ḥalāl* or *ḥarām*, permissible or forbidden. Instead, it fits into a different kind of reasoning: the human conscience makes decisions in difficult and complex situations after long deliberation. The text nourishes the ethical conscience but does not replace it. The believing conscience starts from the text to listen to history and respond to the needs of the time. The hermeneutics of the text is not separate from the interpretation of the signs of the times. Islamic nonviolence theology is a reading oriented towards the higher finalities of the Qurʾān. It touches the heart of religious reform, which can only be interreligious and interdisciplinary.

Inclusive and universal peace, the project of radical nonviolence, is found in many religions as a messianic dream, postponed until the end of history and then to Paradise. It is often seen as a meta-historical and eschatological hope. Today, the prevailing opinion is the theory of a just or defensive war, which many religions consider a challenge to be overcome. We sometimes also see a regression back to a preventive and offensive warfare theory. The theory of permanent warfare is not yet dead, and it is found in the form of great or lesser powers that do not even recognize the minimum moral conditions of war. The debate is still open, but the awareness of nonviolence as a fundamental solution to the tragedies of conflict, killings and displacements has begun to crystallize and present itself as an alternative and a new horizon. Can humanity overcome war and violence in the same way as it has overcome slavery? We need to redefine religion and engage in radical reform or a nonviolent spiritual revolution in order to concretize this hope. At the same time, we need to rethink modernity and the economic and political systems that produce violence. Violence and nonviolence today are questions of life and death concerning the survival of humanity and the planet. This urgency forces us to face our historical and collective responsibility: it is not a dream but a roadmap that we should construct together since there are no separate destinies or ways to salvation.

Notes

[1]　"The lasting good things," in the title, is a Qurʾānic expression (Q 18, 46), (Q 19, 76). The Qurʾānic quotations are a mixture of different translations, mainly (Abdel Haleem 2004) and (Itani 2012), with some modifications. The letter Q indicates the Qurʾān; the first number indicates the sūra number; the second one shows the verse number (Ḥafṣ numeration).

[2]　Abou El Fadl's position is shared by other contemporary theologians, such as Amina Wadud, Farid Esack, Aysha A. Hidayatullah, and Hakan Turan. It is what Johanna Pink calls "post-modern interpretation of the Qurʾān". (Pink 2019, pp. 265–81).

[3]　I am grateful to Paola Pizzi for indicating the quotations, on Saʿīd's thought (cf. Lohlker 2022).

[4]　See below for a more detailed analysis of the Qurʾānic story of Adam's two sons (Q 5, 27–32).

[5]　For the semantic shift of the term *islām* (cf. Donner 2012; Hermansen 2016).

[6]　For the concept of Scriptural falsification (cf. Adang 1996).

[7]　Recently some important studies have appeared attempting to conjugate human sciences with biblical and Qurʾānic studies, for example: (Neuwirth et al. 2009; Reynolds 2007, 2010; Cuypers 2007).

[8]　For more details (cf. Kirwan and Achtar 2019). See also my forthcoming book (Mokrani 2022).

[9]　*Badāʾ* is one of the Twelver Shia doctrines, seen as a sign of divine Freedom. God is free to intervene deliberately in history and life, directing the events towards an end different from what was predestined by Himself; however, the concept is commonly rejected by Sunni theology (cf. Saeedimehr 2018).

[10]　About the higher finalities of *Šarīʿa* (cf. Nassery et al. 2018; Raysuni 2005).

[11]　Mohammed Gamal Abdelnour well formulated the idea in his book's title: *From the Higher Objectives of Islamic Law to the Higher Objectives of Islamic Theology: Towards a Theory of Maqāṣid al-ʿAqīda* (Abdelnour 2022).

[12]　See about him (Thomas 2010).

[13]　Ibn ḫaldūn (d. 808/1406), in his theory concerning "group feeling", ʿaṣabiyya, as a main historical engine, considered that the tribal solidarity returned immediately after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad to be the dominant political and social rule. In this way, he understood the failure of the revolt of al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī (cf. Ibn Khaldūn 1967, vol. I, pp. 443–46).

[14]　On the origin and development of the concept of *ğihād* (cf. Afsaruddin 2013), (Goudie 2019).

[15]　The word *qawwāmūn* is translated in different manners: the protectors and maintainers of women, the managers of women, the protectors and maintainers of women, in charge of women. For the debate about (Q 4, 34), see (Bauer 2017, pp. 211–15), (Ibrahim 2020).

[16]　Aysha A. Hidayatullah, in her criticism of feminist hermeneutical methodologies, reaches the core of this problem: the presence of patriarchal elements in the Qurʾānic text and not only in the commentaries (Hidayatullah 2014, pp. 172–73), (Pink 2019, pp. 265–69, 290–93).

[17]　For the different definitions of *muḥkam* and *mutašābih* (Suyūṭī 2018, pp. 715–18).

[18]　Challenging corporal punishment, in some contexts is difficult, even theoretically; because it refers to explicit verses, although such punishment is no longer applied in many majoritarian Muslim states. Tariq Ramadan's "call for a moratorium on corporal punishment, stoning, and the death penalty" in 2005 sparked a strong protest in the Islamic world, particularly in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to the point of condemning him for apostasy and denying what is necessarily known in religion (Ramadan 2005).

[19]　This rule is well rooted in the history of Islamic juridical thought, see for instance, the Mutazilite jurist and theologian Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1085), (Baṣrī 1982, vol. II, 1403, p. 396).

[20]　There is no consensus among supporters of this opinion on the verse number from sūra 9, *al-Tawba*, because there are at least four eventual verses: 5, 29, 36 or 41. See (Abdel Haleem 2017).

[21]　Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) played a major role in theorizing this methodology in his short treatise: *Muqaddima fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* (Ibn Taymiyya 1980; Saleh 2013).

[22]　The *Basmala* is mentioned at the beginning of every sūra, except sūra 9 (*al-Tawba*); however, it is mentioned twice in sūra 27 (*al-Naml*), in the beginning, then in verse 30.

[23]　Ibn ʿArabī developed philosophically and ontologically the relationship between Mercy and creation (Izutsu 1983, pp. 116–40).

[24]　For an accurate discussion of the question of apostasy in Islam (cf. Alalwani 2011).

[25]　Jawdat Saʿīd was one of the first Muslim contemporary theologians to develop the theology of nonviolence based on the story of Adam's two sons (Saʿīd 1966).

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