

**THE CONCEPT OF *KHILĀFAH* ACCORDING TO
SELECTED SUNNĪ AND SHĪCĪ QUR'ANIC COMMENTARIES**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit
has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Dedicated to

My parents

and

my wife, Marhana

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In the name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful.

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the Qur'anic conception of *khilāfah* from selected Sunnī and Shī'ī points of view, in both the classical and modern periods. The term *khilāfah*, widely used by the Sunnīs, is inseparable from *imāmah*, the term which the Shī'īs prefer. The concept arose very early in Islam and has continued to provoke discussion into the modern period. Yet, while the thought of Muslim political theorists on the subject has received much scholarly attention, far less notice has been taken of the ideas of Qur'anic exegetes. For this reason it has been judged worthwhile to seek to throw light on some relatively neglected interpretations of *khilāfah* by examining the views of certain major commentators on the Qur'an. These are principally scholars of the 9th–14th centuries who are regarded as having made substantial contributions to thought on this issue. However, some consideration is also given to the ideas of three modern writers who have adapted and revised the concept of *khilāfah* to a considerable extent.

The thesis begins with a discussion of the historical development and nature of the *khilāfah* in Islam, providing a general overview of the concept of the *khilāfah*, its necessity, functional role and duties, from many Muslim scholars' viewpoints. As the main discussion concerns the Qur'anic interpretation, the commentators' approaches to exegesis and their backgrounds, which may have influenced their interpretation of the concept, are examined in the second chapter. The main discussion and argument are presented in chapters three to six. These chapters provide a close textual analysis of selected Qur'anic verses, which contain various terms relevant to the concept of *khilāfah* (*imāmah* for the Shī'īs) as interpreted by commentators from the two major Muslim communities, the Sunnī and Shī'ī, particularly the Ithnā 'ashariyyah (the Twelver). Some modern interpretations of the *khilāfah* and the influence on them of the classical works are discussed in the seventh chapter. This is of great importance, since some aspects of classical teaching have been changed in response to twentieth-century conditions. The conclusion brings together and clarifies the arguments and findings of the previous chapters in order to explain the significant contributions of the various Qur'anic interpretations considered in the main part of the study.

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List of Abbreviations

CE	common era
b.	date of birth
d.	date of death
AH.	Anno Hijrae, the year of Hijra
n.d.	no date
n.p.	no place
pbuh	peace be upon him
<i>EI¹</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1st edition, Leiden and London, 1913-36.</i>
<i>EI²</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition, Leiden, 1960-.</i>
<i>IQ</i>	<i>The Islamic Quarterly: A Review of Islamic Culture</i>
<i>IS</i>	<i>Islamic Studies: Journal of the Central Institute of Islamic Research.</i>
<i>AJISS</i>	<i>American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences</i>
<i>OEMIW</i>	<i>The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World</i>
<i>IJIA</i>	<i>Iranian Journal of International Affairs</i>
<i>HI</i>	<i>Hamdard Islamicus: Quarterly Journal of Studies and Research in Islam</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>IJMES</i>	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JSAMES</i>	<i>Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JSAI</i>	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam: Institute of Asian and African Studies.</i>

Note on Translation and Transliteration

The translations from the Qur'an are based substantially on 'Abdullāh Yūsuf 'Alī's *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an: New Edition with Revised Translation and Commentary* (Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1992). The system for numbering the Qur'anic verses is that of writing the sūrah's name first, with its number in brackets, followed by the number of the verse, e.g. sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30.

The transliteration system used in this thesis is based on the standard *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new edition, 1960-) transliteration from Arabic. The exceptions are the use of the letter J for the Arabic letter *jim* and the letter Q for *qāf*. Other modifications include the rendering of *tā' marbūṭah* as *ah*, not *a*, thus giving 'sūrah', not 'sūra' and *at* when in construct state.

The diphthongs are written: *ay* and *aw*.

The three short vowels are represented by *a* for *fathah*, *i* for *kasrah* and *u* for *ḍammah*.

The long vowels are represented by *ā*, *ū*, *ī*.

TRANSLITERATION

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Transliteration</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Transliteration</i>
ا	ʾ	ل	l
ب	b	م	m
ت	t	ن	n
ث	th	و	w
ج	j	ه	h
ح	ḥ	ي	y
خ	kh	ة	ah
د	d		<i>Long Vowels</i>
ذ	dh	ا	ā
ر	r	و	ū
ز	z	ى	ī
س	s		<i>Short Vowels</i>
ش	sh	ا	a
ص	ṣ	و	u
ض	ḍ	ي	i
ط	ṭ		
ظ	ẓ		
ع	ʿ		
غ	gh		
ف	f		
ق	q		
ك	k		

Glossary

<i>‘ahd</i>	promise
<i>ahl al-bayt</i>	family of the Prophet
<i>ahl al-ḥall wa ‘l-‘aql</i>	the people who loose and bind
<i>ahl al-‘ilm wa ‘l-fiqh</i>	the learned and the jurists
<i>al-amān</i>	peace, safety
<i>amānah</i>	trust
<i>al-Amīn</i>	the trustworthy
<i>amīr</i>	chief, leader or commander
<i>amīr al-mu‘minīn</i>	leader of the believers
<i>‘aql</i>	reason or rational thinking
<i>aqwāl al-‘ulamā’</i>	the opinions of learned Muslim scholars
<i>al-arḍ</i>	the earth
<i>asbāb al-nuzūl</i>	reasons of the revelation
<i>aṣḥāb Muḥammad</i>	the Companions of the Prophet
<i>aṣḥāb al-sarāyā</i>	members of the expedition
<i>āthār</i>	examples shown by the Companions
<i>bay‘ah</i>	pledge of allegiance
<i>bid‘ah</i>	heresy, innovation
<i>dīn Allāh</i>	the religion of Allah
<i>fāsiq</i>	a category of persistently sinful people
<i>fiqh</i>	Islamic jurisprudence
<i>fitnah</i>	sedition
<i>fuqahā’</i>	jurisconsults or jurists
<i>ḥadīth</i>	tradition
<i>ḥudūd</i>	Islamic legal penalties
<i>ḥukūmah</i>	a form of Government
<i>‘ibādah</i>	acts of worship
<i>‘id al-aḍḥā</i>	the Sacrifice Festival
<i>ījāz</i>	the miracle or inimitability of the Qur’an
<i>ijmā‘ al-ṣaḥābah</i>	the consensus of the Companions of the Prophet

<i>imāmah</i>	imāmate
<i>ʿiṣmah</i>	infallibility of the <i>imām</i>
<i>isnād</i>	chain of transmission
<i>al-jabābirah</i>	a kind of sovereignty exercised by tyrants
<i>jihād</i>	Holy war
<i>khalīfah</i>	caliph
<i>khalīfat Allāh</i>	God's caliph
<i>khalīfat rasūl Allāh</i>	caliph of God's Messenger
<i>khilāfah</i>	caliphate
<i>kitāb al-ʿamal</i>	record book
<i>luṭf</i>	God's mercy
<i>al-Mahdī</i>	the guided one
<i>al-Mansūr</i>	the victorious
<i>maṣlaḥah</i>	public interest
<i>matn</i>	content
<i>mubham</i>	indefinite
<i>mudabbir</i>	administrator
<i>mufassir ūn</i>	Qur'anic commentators
<i>mujtahid</i>	a person who delivers an independent judgement in the interpretation of Islamic law
<i>mulk</i>	kingship
<i>mulūk</i>	kings
<i>munāfiq ūn</i>	the hypocrites
<i>mustakhlif</i>	succeeding or appointing as <i>khalīfah</i>
<i>nabī</i>	prophet
<i>nā'ib</i>	representative
<i>naṣṣ</i>	Divine source
<i>nubuwwah</i>	prophethood
<i>qādah</i>	chiefs or leaders
<i>qādīs</i>	judges
<i>qarn</i>	generation
<i>riyāṣah</i>	also means leadership

<i>ru'asā'</i>	heads or leaders
<i>sharī'ah</i>	Islamic law
<i>shūrā</i>	consultation
<i>sulṭān</i>	the title for Muslim ruler, the one with power
<i>al-sulṭān al-ʿaẓam</i>	the supreme ruler
<i>al-tābiʿūn</i>	the followers of the Companions
<i>tafsīr</i>	Qur'anic commentaries
<i>tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr</i>	traditional commentary
<i>taqiyyah</i>	prudential dissimulation when in danger
<i>taqlīd</i>	imitation without assessment
<i>ʿulamā'</i>	those learned in religious knowledge
<i>ulū 'l-amr</i>	those charged with authority
<i>al-umarā'</i>	military commanders or leaders
<i>umarā' al-ḥaqq</i>	the true and pious leaders or rulers
<i>umarā' al-sarāyā</i>	leaders of a military expedition
<i>ummah</i>	Muslim community
<i>wājib</i>	obligatory
<i>walāyah</i>	governance of the <i>faqīh</i>
<i>waṣīyyah</i>	designation or legacy
<i>wulāh</i>	plural of <i>walī</i> , leaders
<i>zakāt</i>	alms tax
<i>ẓālim</i>	a sinful and evil-doing person
<i>ẓulm</i>	injustice

INTRODUCTION

On the basis of teachings found in the Qur'an and in certain *ḥadīths*, many traditional Muslims have claimed that Islam provides guidelines for the formation and propagation of the caliphate (*khilāfah*). This claim, however, remains a matter of some contention and the issue has provoked much argument and debate among Muslim communities. From the beginning of the Islamic *khilāfah* to the present day (excluding the *khilāfah* of the Prophet, which Muslims accept as the most perfect model), Muslims' understanding and application of the concept has been overshadowed by uncertainty and dispute. This study intends to arrive at a more precise understanding of the guidelines for the caliphate and to clarify the uncertainties surrounding the subject. However, it does not intend to decide which interpretation is the best or the most suited to the original teaching. Rather it will investigate the differences and agreements to be found among Sunnī and Shī'ī Muslims, and especially between the Sunnī and the Imāmiyyah Ithnā 'ashariyyah (hereafter Imāmiyyah), from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries and in the twentieth century.

The concept of the *khilāfah* is an aspect of Islamic political thought, which has been extensively debated within Muslim society. Muslims have referred to the divine source (*naṣṣ*), the Prophet's *ḥadīths* and several other valid pieces of evidence in order to prove the fundamental need for a *khalīfah* in the *ummah*. Unfortunately, the Muslim *ummah* is divided into several sects, of which the Sunnīs and the Shī'īs are the two most famous and the largest, and their separation has caused differences and arguments to arise in justifying the concept of *khilāfah*. The argument includes the question of who is legally entitled to hold the office of *khalīfah*, the possibility of having more than one caliph and the functions of the caliph. All these matters constitute a very wide topic, and all are pertinent to the basic concept of *khilāfah*.

Since the *khilāfah* has been a subject of much argument, many theological works have been produced to deal with the relevant issues. The available literature goes back to the eleventh century to the time of the ʿAbbāsīd caliphate although the matter was bitterly disputed before the beginning of the first Muslim dynasty, the Umayyads (41/661-132/750). Significant classical works such as *al-Aḥkām al-sulṭāniyyah* of al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* of al-Ghazālī¹ (d. 505/1111), and *Sirāj al-Mulūk* of Muḥammad b. al-Walīd al-Ṭurtūshī (d. 520/1126) have been considered as particularly important contributions to the debate. These works, however, are merely comments and advice on the qualifications relating to the caliph (*khalīfah*), but do not offer an exploration from a Qurʾanic perspective. Modern scholars have also produced works on the *khilāfah*, on the sectarian doctrine, and on more general aspects of Islamic political thought. Significant among these scholars are Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (*al-Khilāfah aw 'l-imāmat al-ʿuḏmā*, 1922-3), ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Rāziq, (*al-Islām wa uṣūl al-ḥukm*, 1925) and al-Mawdūdī (*al-Khilāfah wa 'l-mulk*, 1966).

Muslim and non-Muslim scholars in both the West and Islamic countries, particularly in the modern period, have examined the various areas relating to the concept of *khilāfah*. Historical description, the divisions of Muslim sectarianism, Qurʾanic analysis, and its dogmatic and doctrinal theology have all been considered in their discussions. Consequently, works such as *The Caliphate* by Sir Thomas Arnold (1925), *Introduction to the Qurʾan* by Richard Bell (1953), *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* by Albert Hourani (1962), *God's Caliph* by Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds (1986),

¹ It has been argued that the treatise, *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*, which consists of two parts, may not be al-Ghazālī's. There is no doubt that the first part, comprising an exposition of the faith written for a prince, is his own work. However, Patricia Crone argues over the authenticity of the second part, which pays special attention to the art of government. She maintains that its presentation is arguably characteristic of al-Ghazālī. The reference to al-Ghazālī as the author of the treatise is therefore a general perception and not necessarily a legitimate claim. See Patricia Crone, 'Did al-Ghazālī Write a Mirror for Princes? On the Authorship of *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk*', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam (JSAI)*, 10 (1987): 168.

Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis by Jane Dammen McAuliffe (1991) and many more have appeared and contributed to the development of the subject.

As many works have been published on the *khilāfah* and *imāmah*, which have employed both theological and Qur'anic analyses, this research attempts to fill some gaps, considering especially those areas that have been somewhat neglected or that have not been examined in detail. Although this study outlines the historical development of the *khilāfah* and briefly discusses its nature and basic concept, its significant contribution is, firstly, that it combines the analyses of both Sunnī and Imāmiyyah Shī'ī Qur'anic interpretations of the *khilafah*- and *imāmah*-verses. Consequently the similarities and differences of interpretation between these two sects are clearly presented. Secondly, and somewhat more importantly, the analysis covers both the classical and modern commentaries, examining the differences of method and approach and the influence of the classical interpretations on the modern. To achieve its aims, the study considers a broad range of terms relevant to *khilāfah* and *imāmah*, such as *khalīfah*, *khulafā'*, *khalā'if*, *yastakhlif*, *istakhlafa*, *yakhluf*, *imām*, *a'imma* and *ulū 'l-amr*.

In conducting this research, two methods are used: descriptive and analytical. The former is essentially found in the first two chapters, whereas the remaining chapters are mostly based on a close textual analysis of the Sunnī and the Imāmiyyah Shī'ī interpretations. Due to the practice of these two methods, the main sources are the Qur'an, selected classical and modern commentaries of both Muslim communities, and relevant works comprising theological discussions.

Qur'anic commentaries, which are the main references for this study, can be divided into two categories, traditional (*tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr*) and rational (*tafsīr bi 'l-ra'y*). The

sources of traditional *tafsīr* are normally the Qur'anic verses under consideration and other verses of similar meaning, supported by *ḥadīths* of the Prophet and, sometimes, by the opinions (*ijmāʿ*) of the Companions and scholars. On the other hand, rational *tafsīr* employs reason as an essential component of the method of interpretation.² The work of an outstanding exponent of rational *tafsīr*, al-Zamakhsharī, will be extensively discussed.

Classical commentaries were basically written for a small group, mostly scholars. Modern *tafsīr*, however, tends to address a much wider audience, which incorporates the common people. This is because many modern scholars, including those examined in this study, have sought to engage with the political movements of their time and promote the revitalisation of Islam. In addition, unlike classical *tafsīr*, the modern works that will be considered in this study have been translated for the benefit of those unfamiliar with the languages in which they were originally written. It is in order to communicate directly with this wider audience that some modern commentators have abandoned certain aspects of classical *tafsīr*, such as grammar, rhetoric, and theology.³ They have preferred to emphasise the discussion of social problems, concentrating on the interpretation of verses that bear on issues in the economic, social, moral and political spheres.⁴ This has sometimes led to a rigid and strongly ideological stance. Mawdūdī, for example, does not admit the possibility that more than one reading – his own – could be acceptable.

² Mustansir Mir, 'Tafsīr', in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World (OEMIW)*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford University Press: New York, Oxford, 1995), 4: 171-172.

³ Norman Calder, '*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathir: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham', in *Approaches to the Qur'an*, eds. G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (Routledge: London and New York: 1993): 105.

⁴ *Ibid*, 174.

The selection of the classical and modern Qur'anic commentaries is based on the principle that they have been generally the most widely read and highly esteemed by Muslims through the ages. Having myself originated from a Malaysian Sunnī background - the majority of Muslim countries in Southeast Asia are Sunnī and follow the Shāfi'ī school of law - the process of selecting the Sunnī materials was fairly straightforward. On the other hand, until I went to university in Malaysia, I had been exposed to very little Shi'ī literature. Works written by radical Shi'īs are much more accessible in the West than in Malaysia, where many are banned. In fact, Malaysians are forbidden to hold to Shi'ī doctrines. My early education led me to view these doctrines as deviating from the original teachings of Islam, but my subsequent researches have brought about a moderation of my former opinion. The selection of *tafsīr* from both Sunnī and Imāmiyyah Shi'ī communities is based on the same criteria: all the commentaries are major works of reference which have maintained their reputation in the Muslim community until now. The classical commentaries are:

- i- *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923).
- ii- *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl* by Jār Allāh Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144).
- iii- *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* by Abū 'l-Fidā' Ismā'īl b. 'Umar b. Kathīr (d. 774/1373).
- iv- *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1056).
- v- *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Abu 'l-Faḍl Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153).

Apart from the classical interpretations, which are of the primary concern to our analysis, reference will also be made to modern commentaries, although this group is limited to two Sunnī and one Shi'ī.

- i- *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* (Towards Understanding the Qur'an) by Abū A'ālā al-Mawdūdī (d. 1979)
- ii- *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* by Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966)
- iii- *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981).

Moreover, the research also makes reference to other commentators, such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), known as *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, and to scholars of Islamic law such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), al-Māwardī, al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406).

As this research mainly concerns the classical and modern Qur'anic interpretations of the *khilāfah* and *imāmah*-verses by the Sunnīs and Shī'īs, especially the Imāmiyyah, the main aim is to discover to what extent their interpretations reflect their doctrinal beliefs. In doing so, any similarities and differences between them will be clearly emphasised. In the case that no detailed elaboration can be obtained from the Qur'anic sources, the study will analyse and clarify their use of other elements and sources to support their arguments. Moreover, it is also the purpose of this research that, by comparing the interpretations of the classical Sunnīs with those of the Shī'īs and the classical opinions and method with those of the moderns, the influence of the earlier on the later commentators will be made clear, as will the impact of religious and socio-political factors on Islamic interpretations of the concept of *khilāfah*.

Structure of the Study

The thesis begins with a discussion of the importance, scope and political history of the *khilāfah* in the context of Islam. The thesis is divided into seven chapters, the first of which briefly elaborates the concept of *khilāfah*. It is mainly concerned with the classical scholars' views, but also considers those of modern scholars, regarding the

necessity of the *khilāfah* and its function within the Muslim community. The last section of the chapter discusses the selected Qur'anic verses and terms in relation to the *khilāfah*.

Chapter two also deals with historical background, mainly as it concerns the classical Sunnī and Shī'ī, particularly the Imāmiyyah, Qur'anic commentators and their respective *tafāsīr* (commentaries). In order to ensure the usefulness of the analysis, the two Muslim communities will be represented by their most famous scholars of Qur'anic exegesis. The significance of this discussion lies partly in giving some idea of their development in terms of education, writing and involvement in political affairs and events, but mainly in pointing out the differences and similarities in their approach to the interpretation of each Qur'anic verse.

The next four chapters (third to sixth chapters) explore any agreements and disagreements that might exist between the classical Sunnī and Imāmiyyah Shī'ī commentators and how differently or similarly they interpret the Qur'anic verses relevant to the concept of *khilāfah*. The analysis is divided in order to discuss these communities separately, and each division is further divided into sections: those discussing the *khalīfah*-verses and those discussing the *imām*- and *ulū 'l-amr*-verses.

The seventh chapter shows the impact of the classical interpretations on three modern commentators - two Sunnīs and one Shī'ī - and discusses their views concerning the *khilāfah*. The brief accounts of their biographies and the analysis of their interpretations of the verses are similar to those found in the chapters dealing with the classical exegetes.

The conclusion presents the findings of the whole study. This chapter discusses any agreements and disagreements found as a result of the analysis of the Sunnī and Shī'ī

interpretations, and thoroughly examines several major arguments that reveal their understanding of the concept of *khilāfah*.

A Brief Political History of the *Khilāfah*

Our study on the concept of the *khilāfah* opens with a brief historical account of the *khilāfah* itself. These preliminary sections will avoid discussing the nature and meaning of the Islamic caliphate, although the matter became problematic immediately after the death of the Prophet. The discussion is divided into four different periods, each of which is significant for a better understanding of the concept of *khilāfah*.

The *Khilāfah* in the Early Period of Islam

The early Muslim community believed that it benefited from ideal leadership under the divine guidance given to the Prophet Muhammad. But the organisation of Muslim society became problematic with the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 11/632: some Muslims apostatised and others refused to pay *zakāt* (alms tax). However, stability was restored by the appointment of Abū Bakr (11/632-13/634), the first of the four rightly-guided caliphs in 11/632 as the *khalīfat rasūl Allāh*⁵ at a general meeting held in Saqīfah Banī Sā'idah. After Abū Bakr's death, another three caliphs, ʿUmar (13/634-23/644), ʿUthmān (23/644-35/656) and ʿAlī (35/656-40/661) were given the

⁵ Abū Bakr and ʿUmar b. al-Khattāb refused the title of '*khalīfat Allāh*' (God's caliph), but accepted the title '*khalīfat rasūl Allāh*' (caliph of the Messenger of God). They believed that the former title could no longer be used after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, as he was the last prophet to be sent by Allah. Meanwhile, the former title was widely used by most of the Umayyads and ʿAbbāsids. Qur'anic interpretation also reflects some discussions on this issue, which will be dealt later in Chapter Three. See Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne and Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 4-23.

responsibility to lead the Muslim community. The *khilāfah* of these four caliphs was based on several procedures such as designation, *shūrā* (consultation) and *bay'ah* (pledge of allegiance).

Although the majority agreed their appointments, the last two caliphs faced opposition within the Muslim community. Many opposed the way ʿUthmān (d. 35/656), a member of the Umayyad clan, administered the office of *khilāfah*, and it was alleged that the genesis of hereditary succession in Islam can be traced to his perpetuation of the *khilāfah* within his family.⁶ The next caliph, ʿAlī (d. 40/661) the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, also faced opposition from Muslim groups, and civil wars broke out. The strongest challenge came from the governor of Syria, Muʿāwiyah b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680), who refused to acknowledge the leadership of ʿAlī; this enmity eventually led to military confrontation and the assassination of ʿAlī in 661 C.E.⁷

From the Shīʿī point of view, the right to become the *khalīfah*, after the death of the Prophet, was vested in ʿAlī. They believe that this claim is based on the Prophet's designation, derived from a divine ordinance (*naṣṣ*) promulgated at Ghadīr Khumm, and on some other *ḥadīths*.⁸ Ṭabāṭabāʾī, a modern Iranian Shīʿī scholar, supported the

⁶ It has also been reported that ʿUthmān favoured his relatives with public offices, even though there were others who were more suitable and eligible. However, we find it difficult to accept this allegation since no concrete proof has been found and ʿUthmān never nominated any of his kinsmen to succeed him. See W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973): 10. See also Yahya Oyewole Imam, 'Hereditary Succession in Islamic Polity', *Islamic Quarterly (IQ)*, 37. 2 (1993): 148-49

⁷ Fred M. Donner, 'Muhammad and the Caliphate: Political History of the Islamic Empire up to the Mongol Conquest', in *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 16. For further discussion on the historical background of the first four rightly-guided caliphs, see Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (London and New York: Longman, 1986): 50-81.

⁸ The famous *ḥadīth* of Ghadīr Khumm was related on the authority of al-Barā' b. ʿAzīb b. al-Ḥārith al-Awsī al-Anṣārī (d. 72/691-2), a Companion of the Prophet. He was too young to take part in the Battle of

validity of the sources and further believed that the designation was the turning point of the dispute between the Sunnīs and the Shi'īs over the *khilāfah*.⁹

Even though the Shi'īs believed that 'Alī should have been designated as *imam* and was the best-qualified person for the position, Abū Bakr (d. 13/ 634) was appointed for the sake of public interest (*maṣlaḥah*). Those who took 'Alī's part, however, continue to believe that the leadership of the community was the right of 'Alī and his descendants. Moreover, 'Alī himself possessed all the necessary qualities, and was also of noble lineage: he was of the Hāshimite clan, the Prophet's own clan which was highly respected among the Quraysh (the only tribe to be considered eligible for the *khilāfah*). 'Alī's supporters, however, kept silence; they did not acclaim 'Alī, and this resulted in

Badr, but he accompanied the Prophet on numerous other expeditions, and later took part in the wars of conquest. He later espoused the cause of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and fought under his banner at the Battle of the Camel (*al-Jamal*), at Ṣiffin and at al-Nahrawān. The *ḥadīth* reads: "I was in the company of the Prophet during the farewell pilgrimage. When we reached Ghadīr Khumm, he ordered that place to be cleaned. Then he took 'Alī's hand and placed him on his right side. Then he said, 'Am I the authority whom you obey?' They answered, 'We obey your directions.' Then he said, 'For whomever I am his master (*maulā*) and the authority, whom he obeys, 'Alī will be his master. Oh God! Be friendly with the friends of 'Alī and enemy of the enemies of 'Alī.' Then 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb said to 'Alī, 'May this position be pleasing to you, for now you are my master and the master of all the believers.' The above tradition, however, is the subject of disagreement among the *Muḥaddithīn*, and none of the Sunnī *Muḥaddithīn* interpreted it in the way it is understood by the Shi'ī scholars. Some other *ḥadīths* which the Shi'īs claimed to be the proof of the designation of 'Alī as the immediate successor of the Prophet are: 'My household is like the ship of Noah; whoever embarks upon it will be saved and whoever turns away from it will be drowned', 'It seems that God has called me unto Himself and I must obey his call. But I leave two great and precious things among you: the Book of God and My Household. Be careful as to how you behave toward them. These two will never be separated from each other until they encounter me at *kawthar* (in paradise).' and 'Umm Salmah has said, 'I heard from the Prophet of God who said, 'Alī is with the Truth (*ḥaqq*) and the *Qur'an*, and the Truth and the *Qur'an* are also with 'Alī, and they will be inseparable until they come upon me at *kawthar*'. See 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'i, *Shi'ite Islam*, trans. and ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Houston: Free Islamic Literatures, Inc., 1979): 180. See also C. L. Huart, 'Imām', *Encyclopaedia of Islam (EI²)*, 3 (1987): 473.

⁹ See Ṭabāṭabā'i, *Shi'ite Islam*, trans. and ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 180.

a critical political situation at a later period, particularly after the establishment of the Umayyad and ʿAbbāsīd dynasties.¹⁰

As the Shīʿīs' claim of the *imāmah* transferred to ʿAlī's descendants after his death and the number of their supporters increased, they were divided into several divisions, mainly the Imāmiyyah and the Ismāʿīliyyah or the Seveners. Other divisions were also of great importance, such as a group of more radical Shīʿīs, al-Kaysāniyyah, and the most moderate and the closest to the Sunnī teachings, al-Zaydiyyah. The existence of these divisions was the outcome of disagreement in claiming their own candidate to the *imāmah* and argued over the total number of the appointed *imāms*. Moreover, their dogmatic doctrines, such as the belief in the return of the Mahdī, were also among subjects of their argument.¹¹ Therefore, it should bear in mind that the analysis of the classical Shīʿī commentaries is mainly drawn from the Imāmiyyah, with additional remarks occasionally from other divisions.

The Development of the *Khilāfah* in the Umayyad Period

The Umayyad dynasty started with the appointment of Muʿāwiyah b. Abī Sufyān as *khalīfah* 41/661 and ended in 132/750. The followers of ʿAlī attempted to obtain the *khilāfah* for his descendants, starting with his son Ḥasan (d. 41/662), who, however, renounced his claim. Consequently Muʿāwiyah became the caliph almost without opposition and transferred the capital to Damascus. It is generally accepted that this period was the starting point of the hereditary succession to the *khilāfah*.

¹⁰ Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shīʿī Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985): 18-22.

¹¹ AbdulAziz Sachedina, 'Imām', in *OEMIW*, 2 (1995): 184.

However, it is reported that those Companions of the Prophet still living in Medina had opposed Mu'āwiyah's new and ruthlessly achieved policy of appointing his son, Yazīd (d. 64/683) as his successor and they dissociated themselves from it. They knew that the situation under the first two caliphs had been very different from that introduced by Mu'āwiyah, since neither Abū Bakr nor 'Umar (d. 23/644) had named his kinsman as his successor.¹²

With the appointment of Yazīd in 60/680 CE, the trend of Islamic political history changed to that of a son succeeding his father, or a dying *khalīfah* being succeeded by his brother, cousins or other members of his family, thus narrowing the *khilāfah* down to a particular family. After Yazīd, there were another twelve Umayyad caliphs. The normal pattern was for the ruling caliph to nominate his successor during his lifetime and to have him acclaimed by representatives of the main groups of Muslims, thereby preserving the fiction that he was chosen by consensus.¹³

'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (99/717-101/720) played an important role in the development of Islamic knowledge, its teachings and practices during the Umayyad dynasty. He is generally considered by Sunnī historians to have checked most of his predecessors' excesses. For example, property which was unjustly confiscated was returned to the owners. He is also credited with having compiled the sūrah of the Qur'an into a single volume. He has been described as the fifth orthodox caliph of Islam.¹⁴ Even the

¹² Some of the companions who opposed this policy were 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr, 'Abd Allāh b. Zubayr, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar and others. See Syed Mahmudannasir, *Islam: Its Concepts and History* (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1981): 154.

¹³ Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*., 88-89.

¹⁴ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 63-64. For a complete list of the Umayyad caliphs, see C. E. Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties: A Chronological and Genealogical Manual* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996): 3-5.

Khārijites, who were notorious for their opposition to the *khilāfah* and the most familiar opponents of Umayyad rule, were reported to have co-operated with him, although they held that the Umayyads had no particular right to the *khilāfah*, which they felt belonged to any righteous Muslim chosen by the community.¹⁵

The Umayyads facilitated the extension of the *khilāfah*'s frontiers. Their conquests, commencing from Mu'āwiyah through his able successors with the aid of their unrivalled lieutenants such as Muḥammad b. Amr b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. 65/684), al-Mughirah b. Shu'bah (d. 50/670) and others, expanded the Umayyad Empire westwards to incorporate North Africa and Spain, and eastwards as far as the Indus valley.¹⁶

The Development of the *Khilāfah* in the ʿAbbāsīd Period

The Umayyad dynasty was violently overthrown by another clan of Quraysh, the Hāshimites, led by Banū al-ʿAbbās, who founded the ʿAbbāsīd dynasty (750-1258 CE). The overthrow of the Umayyad dynasty came as a result of a revolution that began in Khurasan (Eastern Persia). This was successfully achieved with the help of non-Arab peoples in the conquered territories and the followers of ʿAlī's descendants.¹⁷ With the overthrow of the Umayyads, the political unity of the Muslim world came to an end and a variety of Muslim empires emerged, such as the Buyids (945-1055), Samanids

¹⁵ Ira M. Lapidus, 'The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of Early Islamic Society', *International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES)*, 6 (1975): 366.

¹⁶ Laura Veccia Vaglieri, 'The Patriarchal and Umayyad Caliphates' in *The Cambridge History of Islam: The Central Islamic Lands from Pre-Islamic Times to the First World War*, eds. P.M. Holt, Ann K.S. Lambton and Bernard Lewis, 1A (Cambridge, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne and Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1970): 78-80. See also Rom Landau, *Islam and the Arabs* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958): 45-47.

¹⁷ Tayeb el-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Harun al-Rashid and the Narrative of the Abbasid Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 2. See also M. A. Shaban, *The Abbasid Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970): 138-139.

(261/874-999), Seljuks (1055-1157), Fāṭimids (969-1171) and the Umayyads of Spain. All these empires had begun to expand their control of various Islamic territories during the decline of the ʿAbbāsids. This development was an important factor in the decline and fall of the dynasty.¹⁸

The second ʿAbbāsīd caliph, al-Manṣūr (136/754-158/775) moved the capital city of the dynasty from Damascus to Baghdad in 762.¹⁹ The ʿAbbāsīd *khilāfah* was renowned for its cultural achievements: learning and culture were patronised, schools were built and academies were established. Scholars of note in different disciplines were attracted to the courts of these caliphs and were rewarded substantially.²⁰ This period produced many Qurʾānic commentators and Muslim jurists. Sunnī scholars such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and Ibn Kathīr, who was born just after the fall of the ʿAbbāsīds, profited from the development of Islamic knowledge. But, like the Umayyads, the ʿAbbāsīds also practised hereditary succession, thus establishing the concept of divine kingship. In this regard, the ʿAbbāsīd caliphs assumed titles such as al-Mahdī (the guided one), al-Manṣūr (The victorious), al-Amīn (the trustworthy) and others.²¹

By the middle of the tenth century, political fragmentation and weakening of the ʿAbbāsīd Caliphate was setting in and the real power was in the hands of others. The impotent caliphs first came under the control of Iranian Shīʿī *amīrs*, the Buyids and later, in the eleventh century, their new masters were Turkish Sunnī *amīrs*, the Seljuks (431/1040-590/1194). Other territories under the Seljuks' control were Iran, Mesopotamia and Anatolia. At the same time, the Iranian provinces had broken away from the empire, the Fatimids (297/909-567/1171), a Shīʿī and rival of the ʿAbbāsīd,

¹⁸ Mahmud A. Faksh, 'The Islamic State System: A Paradigm For Diversity', *IQ*, 28. 1 (1984): 12.

¹⁹ El-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography*, 4.

²⁰ Oyewole Imam, 'Hereditary Succession in Islamic Polity', 151.

²¹ Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 13-14.

ruled over Egypt and Syria with their own claims to the caliphate, and Spain remained independent under a rival dynasty of Umayyad caliphs. Thus, the caliphate had become an empty shell with no real power, and was finally destroyed by the Mongols in 1258. However, the invasion of the Mongols did not entirely put an end to the ʿAbbāsids, as the Mamlūks (648/1250-922/1517) in Egypt crowned a survivor of the ʿAbbāsīd family as their caliph.²²

The decline and final phase of the ʿAbbāsīd caliphate also witnessed the emergence of some other Muslim dynasties. The Buyids, within a few years of 320/932, had risen to greater importance until they managed to conquer Iraq, western Iran and occupied Baghdad in 334/945. Although they managed to install a new caliph, al-Muṭīʿ, real Buyid authority existed only under ʿAḍud al-Dawla from 366/976 to 372/983. Meanwhile, the Samanids had risen to power as early as 261/874 on the Persian plateau, in eastern Iran and Transoxania, on the break-up of the Tahirids (259/873) and the Saffarids (287/900). They were the descendants of a Zoroastrian priestly family from Sāmān in the district of Balkh and considered themselves convinced Sunnīs. The Samanid state collapsed in the years 389-94/999-1004 and the dynasty perished. Due to the collapse of the Samanids, the Ghaznavid Sunnīs, who were descended from a Turkish mercenary leader, took over south of the river Oxus. During that time, the Ghaznavid dynasty was represented by Maḥmūd of Ghazna (388-421/998-1030). Their provinces includes Khurasan (999-1040) and Afghanistan (961-1186).

The Development of the *Khilāfah* in the Ottoman Dynasty, its Abolition and the Contemporary Situation

Another dynasty of the Islamic caliphate came into existence with the establishment of the Ottoman empire (1281-1924). This was the longest-lasting and most powerful of

²² Faksh, 'The Islamic State System': 13.

Muslim empires, as it attained the greatest success in the expansion of Islam and posed the biggest threat to the European powers. The origin of the Ottoman empire was basically derived from the two great trends of earlier centuries, namely the Turkish migrations and the post-^cAbbāsīd reconstruction of state and society, which provided the institutional and cultural precedents for latter Ottoman society.²³

In the thirteenth century, during the decline of the Seljuks and the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols, the early Ottomans were forced to move to north-western Anatolia. They managed to strengthen their power and consequently took Bursa from the Byzantines in 1326. Bursa was then made the first capital of the Ottoman Empire. The most significant success for the Ottomans in Europe was the capture of Constantinople, the Byzantine capital, in 1453, after which its name was changed to Istanbul.²⁴

The Ottomans entered their golden era in the sixteenth century, as they managed to conquer Egypt and Syria from the Mamlūks. Their empire also expanded to Hungary and Iraq. In addition, the Ottomans captured many parts of North Africa including Libya, Tunisia and Algeria.²⁵ At that time, another two great Muslim dynasties came into existence: the Safavids (1501-1732) and the Mughals (1526-1858).

However, the golden age of the Ottoman Empire began to wane in the late sixteenth century, starting with their defeat in the Eastern Mediterranean by a European coalition at Lepanto in 1571.²⁶ The Ottoman decline continued from the seventeenth to early

²³ Ira M. Lapidus, 'Sultanates and Gunpowder Empires', in *The Oxford History of Islam*, 371. For detailed information on the development of the Ottoman Empire, see Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1961).

²⁴ *Ibid*, 373-374.

²⁵ Rom Landau, *Islam and the Arabs*, 61.

²⁶ Halil Inalcik, 'The Heyday and the Decline of the Ottoman Empire', in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, eds P.M. Holt, Ann K.S. Lambton and Bernard Lewis, 1A: 336-337

twentieth centuries and culminated in the abolition of the caliphate in 1924. The abolition was the result of two crucial events: the Ottomans' defeat in the First World War by the European allies and the effort of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), the founder of modern Turkey, to establish a secular state. His effort was successful since he associated himself with the foreign invaders of Turkey and internal reactionary forces.²⁷

In the modern and contemporary situation, particularly after the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate, there have been many attempts by Muslim countries to re-establish the Islamic state. Muslim revivalists have been in the forefront of these movements, the majority of them being against the ruling governments. In Egypt, the key figures were Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935) and the Muslim Brotherhood's leaders, Ḥasan al-Bannā' (1906-1949), 'Abd al-Qādir 'Awdah (d. 1954) and Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966). In the Indian sub-continent, this effort was focused partly on creating and establishing their own independent state, Pakistan, in 1947, but subsequently on implementing the Islamic state according to the *sharī'ah*. The most successful influence was that of the Jama'at-i Islami's leader, Abū A'ḷā Mawḍūdī (1903-1979) and Pakistan's Prime Minister, Zia 'ul-Ḥaq, who, after a military coup, ruled and formed an Islamic state between 1977 and 1988. Another attempt to establish an Islamic state occurred in Sudan: Ja'far Nimeri's regime (1969-1985) ruled with the support of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood leader, Ḥasan al-Turabī. A similar situation exists in Libya, where its leader, Mu'ammār al-Qaddāfi, has reduced the conception of the Islamic system to the simple notion of rule by *al-Jamaheeriyah* (rule of the masses or command of the people).²⁸

²⁷ Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought: The Response of the Shī'i and Sunni Muslims to the Twentieth Century* (London and Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1982): 53. See also Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 604.

²⁸ Faksh, 'The Islamic State System': 15-20. See also Nazih N. Ayubi, 'Islamic State', in *OEMIW*, 2 (1995): 321-324.

The Shi'is have also attempted to build the Islamic state according to their belief, teaching and practice, eventually succeeding in 1979, when the Iranian Revolution, under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989) drove out the Shah. No Islamic state, however, has managed to become an Islamic superpower. Although many Muslim countries are now ruled by their own independent governments, they are either controlled or dominated by Western superpowers or influenced by secularism. Moreover, it is doubtful that any of these governments rule in full conformity with the real principles of Islamic *khilāfah*.

CHAPTER 1 THE NATURE AND BASIC CONCEPT OF THE *KHILĀFAH*

1.1 Introduction

While Muslims are in agreement about some aspects of the *khilāfah*, there are deep-seated differences of opinion about others. The most fundamental principle of the *khilāfah*, which concerns the need for a caliph, has been unanimously accepted; but although Muslims have generally agreed that a caliph is necessary, there has been a debate about the possibility of having more than one caliph. Although the majority of Muslims seem to reject the idea, there have been some that permit this situation in special circumstances. More significantly, the issue of who might be the most suitable and qualified candidate for the position has also been debated. The Sunnī and Shī'ī Muslims have supported their own candidate and at the same time have denied the claims of others.

It should be noted that a detailed discussion of the dogmatic doctrines relating to the concept of *khilāfah* such as the *bay'ah* (pledge of allegiance), *shūrā* (consultation), *taqiyyah* (prudential dissimulation when in danger), *'iṣmah* (infallibility of the *imām*) and so forth, is not our primary objective in this chapter. Rather it is concerned with clarifying the basic concept of *khilāfah* from both Sunnī and Shī'ī points of view, particularly dealing with its functions and duties. In addition, the qualities and characteristics of the *khalīfah* will also be examined. Another matter for discussion is that of the various Qur'anic terms relating to the concept of *khilāfah*. The Qur'an contains not only the term '*khalīfah*' itself, but also some others closely related in meaning, such as *imām*, *mulk*, *sulṭān*, *amīr* and *ulū 'l-amr*. However, analysis of the selected Qur'anic commentaries will be restricted to those verses that are clearly

relevant to the study. In other words, not every single verse that contains the term *imām*, for instance, will be analysed, since this would not add significantly to the study.

1.2 The Nature of the *Khilāfah*

The *khilāfah* is an essential element in the teaching of Islamic political thought and the formation of the Islamic State. Historically, its importance has been proved by the *khilāfah* of the Prophet himself in Medina and of some others such as the four rightly-guided caliphs, the Umayyads, the ʿAbbāsids and the Ottomans. It has been the nature of the Sunnī conception of *khilāfah* that it closely relates to the *sharīʿah* (Islamic law), *bayʿah*, *shūrā* and *ahl al-ḥall wa 'l-ʿaqd* (the people who loose and bind). Moreover, the Sunnīs also consider their caliphs as heirs to the Prophet. On the other hand, the Shīʿīs promote the principles of *ʿiṣmah*, *taqiyyah* and *walāyah* (governance of the *faqīh*).

There has been no argument between the Sunnīs and Shīʿīs about the obligation to have only one *imām* in the community; they argue, however, over the matter of who is the most appropriate person to be appointed. The Sunnī opinion is that the *khalīfah* is essentially a temporal leadership and he should be selected from the Quraysh, whereas the Shīʿīs give a further specification that the *khalīfah* should be chosen from among the descendants of ʿAlī.¹ Unlike the Sunnīs, who stress that sinlessness is one of the conditions of prophethood, the Imāmiyyah and other subdivisions of Shīʿī also believe in the principle of the sinless (*maʿṣūm*) *imām*. The early Zaydis do not initially endorse the doctrine of sinlessness, although later Zaydī scholars significantly hold the same

¹ Hamid Behzadi, 'The Principle of Legitimacy and Its Influence Upon the Muslim Political Theory,' *Islamic Studies (IS)*, 10. 4 (1971): 283-84. See also Khalid M. Ishaque, 'Al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyah: Laws of Government in Islam,' *IS*, 4. 3 (1965): 282.

opinion. However, only three *imāms* - ʿAlī and his two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn - are free from sin and error. Although these divisions are not in agreement regarding the total number of *imāms*, they are of the opinion that their respected *imāms* are infallible. Moreover, the Sunnīs believe that the nature of a person’s appointment as *imām* is different from that of the Prophethood, whereas the Imāmiyyah Shīʿīs regard the position of their twelve *imāms* as similar to that of the Prophet and therefore, they are sinless because they fulfil the same appointment.²

The Sunnīs claim that the *khilāfah* should be established either through designation or election by the community. The latter procedure is very important, since the caliph’s authority is legitimated thereby. The Shīʿīs, on the other hand, accept the first procedure, by which the *imām* is appointed through designation, but totally reject election.³ In addition, both sects have laid down the qualities required by their *imāms* in order to make them eligible for the post. It is unnecessary to go into the details of these qualifications; it is sufficient to say that a caliph is expected to be free from physical infirmities, profoundly knowledgeable both in theology and statecraft, courageous and, above all, indisputably pious and dedicated to the service of the *ummah* according to the injunctions of the Qur’an and the *sunnah* of the Prophet.

1.2.1 The Necessity of the *Khilāfah*

The election of a leader was seen as essential after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad in order to continue his work of preserving the religion and administering the temporal

² Meir M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1999): 168-170. See also Aḥmad Ḥasan, ‘The Concept of Infallibility in Islam’, *IS*, 2.1(1972): 7-8.

³ Behzadi, ‘The Principle of Legitimacy’, 284.

affairs of the Muslim community. Both Sunnis and Shī'īs insist that it is necessary to have a leader or *khalīfah* for the maintenance of justice and the preservation of society. However, each sect differs in defining the source for this imperative.

The majority of Sunnī scholars believe that the maintenance of the *khilāfah* is a social task and permanently obligatory (*wājib*) on the community. This obligation is claimed to have been established by the *sharī'ah* (revelation); at the same time, the scholars deny that it is based on rational grounds.⁴ This idea is widely accepted by the majority of both classical and modern Muslim scholars and even by most Muslim political theorists, including such figures as al-Māwardī,⁵ al-Ghazālī,⁶ Ibn Taymiyyah,⁷ Ibn Jamā'ah (d. 732/1333)⁸ and Ibn Khaldūn.⁹

⁴ Abdulaziz Sachedina, 'Imāmah', in *OEMIW*, ed. John L. Esposito, 2 (1995): 184.

⁵ Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb Al-Māwardī, was a Shāfi'ī *faqīh*. He was born in Baṣra in 364/974 and died in Baghdad in 450/1058 at 86 years of age. He wrote many books in different fields; his *tafsīr* is known as *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, and also as *al-Nukāt wa 'l-'Uyūn*. His writings include works on the legal system of the Imām al-Shāfi'ī such as *Kitāb al-Iqnā'* and on the political and social nature of mankind such as *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah*, which is considered his major work. This last treatise was written in an attempt to assert the authority of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs against the Buyid (Buwayhid) emirs, who were in effective control of their state. See E. I. J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985): 27.

⁶ Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī Al-Ghazālī, was born at Ṭūs in Khurasan in 450/1058 and died in 505/1111. He was an outstanding theologian, jurist, mystic and religious reformer. He wrote many books covering questions of esotericism, autobiography, law, philosophy and logic, dogmatic theology, polemics and sufistic practice and theory, his major work being *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*.

⁷ Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyyah was born at Ḥarrān in 661/1263 and died at Damascus in 728/1328. He was a Ḥanbalī theologian and jurist-consult, and possessed a very sound knowledge of all the great works of his school. His major works are *Majmū'at al-Rasā'il al-Kubrā* and *Kitāb Majmū'at al-Fatāwā*.

⁸ Badr al-Dīn Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Jamā'ah (639/1241-333/1333) was a distinguished Shāfi'ī jurist of the Mamlūk regime.

⁹ Walī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan Ibn Khaldūn was born in Tunis in 732/1332 and was a Muslim historian, sociologist and philosopher. Among his famous books are *Ta'rīf* and *Muqaddimah*.

Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855)¹⁰ emphasised the importance of the *khilāfah* in the Muslim community. He cited the first dispute over electing the *khalīfah*; this took place at Saqifah Banī Sā'idah, where, from the death of the Prophet onwards, various Muslim tribes argued with one another. Perhaps this argument would not have arisen if the Prophet, before his death, had designated a particular person to hold the position of *khalīfah*. The argument, however, was resolved by the agreement to choose Abū Bakr as the first caliph, and he managed to overcome all sorts of quarrels and disagreements among the Muslim community. Abū Bakr's achievement demonstrates the vital role of a *khalīfah* in preventing arguments or disputes, which can lead to civil war. Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal supported the importance of having a *khalīfah*, which he believed to be a means of avoiding *fitnah* (sedition) in society.¹¹

Mu'tazilite scholars, such as 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), also provided the Qur'anic justification for the necessity of the *khilāfah* in the Muslim community. The reason for its necessity, according to him, was that the implementation of *ḥudūd* punishments (Islamic legal penalties) was vested in the *khalīfah*. The absence of a caliph in the community indicated the absence of the implementation of Islamic *shar'ah*. He quoted two verses that formulate the *ḥudūd*; the first from sūrat al-Mā'idah (5): 38, 'As to the thief, male or female, cut off his or her hands...' and the second, in sūrat al-Nūr (24): 2, 'The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication, flog each of them with a hundred stripes:...'

¹⁰ He was 'the Imām of Baghdad', a celebrated theologian, jurist and traditionist. He was born in 164/780 and died in 241/855 at the age of 75. He was the founder of one of the four major Sunnī schools, the Ḥanbalī.

¹¹ Muḥammad Abū Ya'ālā b. Ḥusayn al-Farrā', *Al-Aḥkam al-Sulṭāniyyah* (Surabaya: Maktabah Aḥmad ibn Sa'ad ibn Naban, n.d.): 19; quoted in Ziauddin Ahmed, 'Some Aspects of the Political Theology of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal', *IS*, 12. 1 (1973): 55.

These two verses, regarding the *ḥudūd* punishments for thieves and adulterers, are the basis for the institution of the *khilāfah*. The observance of the *ḥudūd* and therefore the implementation of the *sharḥah*, according to al-Jabbār, is consequently the task of the caliph. In order to ensure the successfulness of its implementation, the office of *khilāfah* must be instituted. In other words, the caliph is the right person to fulfil the task, and since he holds the post, he must possess a comprehensive knowledge of the *sharḥah*.¹² Moreover, the possession of this knowledge is one of the basic qualifications a *khalīfah* must have.

Al-Māwardī also insisted on the necessity of the *khilāfah* because of the revelation of the divine law (*sharḥah*). His justification of its necessity and attempts to define it further took place at a time when the Seljuk Turks had taken Baghdad from the pro-Shiʿī Buyids in 447/1055 and freed the caliphate from Shiʿī control.¹³ The establishment of the office of *imām*, al-Māwardī believed, is fundamental in order to replace and resume the role of the Prophet and previous caliphs in upholding the Islamic faith and administering Muslim affairs.¹⁴ He quoted a verse from sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 59 that provided this justification:

¹² Muḥsin ʿAbd. al-Nazir, *Mas'alat al-Imāmiyyah wa 'l-Wa'd fī 'l-Ḥadīth 'inda 'l-Firaq al-Islāmiyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-ʿArabiyyah al-Kuttāb, 1983): 116-17.

¹³ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 47-48. See also B. Spuler, 'The Disintegration of the Caliphate in the East', in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, 1A, eds. P.M. Holt, A. K. S. Lambton and Bernard Lewis, 149.

¹⁴ Al-Mawardi, *The Ordinances of Government: A Translation of Al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyya wa 'l-Wilāyāt al-Diniyya*, trans. Wafaa H. Wahba (Reading: Garnet Publishing Ltd, 1996): 3.

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي
الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ

O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you.¹⁵

Owing the fact that caliph and *imām* are both leaders in the Muslim communities, I will briefly discuss leadership (*qiyādah*) within the *khilāfah* context. Responding to this issue, al-Māwardī further argued that while the need for leadership is based on revelation (*sharḥah*), it is also quite compatible with rational thinking. The rationale of having a leader, according to him, is that it is the nature of reasonable men to entrust themselves to a leader who will prevent them from committing injustice towards one another and who may at the same time adjudicate their arguments. Without a leader, men would live in anarchy and dispute.¹⁶

Al-Ghazālī contributed to the debate by arguing that the primary justification for leadership is that it is for the benefit of the Muslim *ummah*, who need to live in order and unity and ignore the difference of religious sects. Without the existence of the *khilāfah* this goal cannot be achieved. Al-Ghazālī stressed that even the tyranny of an usurping leader is better than having none at all, which is likely to lead to chaos and dispute. The function of leadership is:

...to see that justice is done, send the armies to the battle field, distribute allowances among the soldiers and appoint commanders to them...¹⁷

¹⁵ ʿAbdullāh Yūsuf ʿAlī, , *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an: New Edition with Revised Translation and Commentary* (Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1992): 203.

¹⁶ ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Māwardī, *Al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah wa 'l-Wilāyat al-Dīniyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1983): 5.

¹⁷ Abū Ḥamīd Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Al-Iqtisād fī 'l-Fitiqād* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1988): 148; quoted in H.K. Sherwani, 'El-Ghazali on the Theory and Practice of Politics', *Islamic Culture*, 9 (1935): 451.

He clarified his opinion as follows:

...it is impossible to have a permanent organisation in worldly affairs without a ruler or a *sulṭān*, and an office without such an organisation would be impossible to act according to divine commandments with peace and order.¹⁸

Ibn Jamā'ah held the same opinion regarding the necessity of leadership and adduced several Qur'anic verses in its support. He quoted two verses from the Qur'an, Ṣād (38): 26 and al-Ḥajj (22): 42 that justify its necessity. Apart from these, he also accepted the *sunnah* of the Prophet, the examples shown by the Companions (*āthār*) and the opinions of learned Muslim scholars (*aqwāl al-ʿulamā'*) as the secondary sources that clarified it as obligatory.¹⁹ For example, he cited the saying of Muslim jurists:

Forty years of tyranny of a *sulṭān* are better than the abandonment of his subjects for one hour.²⁰

Just as it is necessary to have a *sulṭān* (the one with power), it is equally important to have an *imām* or caliph in order to ensure the implementation of the *sharʿah*. The positions of *sulṭān* and *imām* are both positions of authority and leadership. Moreover, Ibn Jamā'ah emphasised the obligation of the leader to perform his functions and duties. As the *imām* is chosen from among the most suitable and qualified persons, the role of implementing Islamic *sharʿah* is one of his main duties. Ibn Jamā'ah summarised some other important duties as follows:

The defence of *dīn* (religion), the warding off of offenders, granting compensation to those wronged, and establishing right. For herein

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā'ah, 'Taḥrīr al-Aḥkām fī Tadbīr Ahl al-Islām', *Islamica*, ed. and trans. Hans Kofler, 7. 1 (1938): 36.

²⁰ There is one *ḥadīth* that indicates a similar meaning to this saying but is phrased slightly differently: 'sixty years of an unjust ruler (*imām*) are better than one night without a *sulṭān*'. See E. I. J Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, 242.

consists the welfare of the lands, the security of the subjects, and the stemming of the tide of corruption (and decay). The affairs of mankind are in good order only if a sultan devotes himself to their administration (*siyāsah*) and to their protection exclusively.²¹

The importance of the *khilāfah*, which is based on religious law (Islamic *sharḥah*), was also supported by Ibn Taymiyyah. He underlined this view by referring to a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, narrated on the authority of Abū Hurayrah,²² which elaborated the need to have one leader on any journey:

If three of them were on a journey, they should choose one of them as a leader.²³

Regarding this *ḥadīth*, he explained that the Prophet insisted that someone should be chosen to lead even the smallest group of travellers. It was also given as a forewarning to Muslims that if even the smallest group needs a leader, then it is essential that a bigger group should be led by a qualified and properly selected person. Ibn Taymiyyah's view seems to be consistent with the political situation of his time, where the authority of the leader and the unity of the community ceased to be intact and political and social unity were no longer obtainable. His insistence of the importance to appoint a leader based on the *sharḥah*, is therefore a solution for ideological unity.

²¹ Ibn Jamā'ah, 'Taḥrīr al-Aḥkām fī Tadbīr Ahl al-Islām'; quoted in Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*, 43. See also E.I.J. Rosenthal, 'The Role of the State in Islam', *Der Islam*, 50 (1973): 16.

²² Abū Hurayrah al-Dawsī al-Yamanī, a Companion of the Prophet. His name 'Abd Shams was changed to 'Abd Allāh or 'Abd al-Raḥmān when he became Muslim. He was called Abū Hurayrah because when he herded his people's goats, he kept a kitten to play with. He is noted as a prolific narrator of traditions from the Prophet, the number of which is estimated at 3500. He is said to have died in 57, 58 or 59, but most historians used the year 58/678.

²³ Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Siyāsah al-Sharḥiyyah fī Iḥlāl al-Ra'iyah*, ed. Muḥammad al-Mubārak (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, n.d.): 169; Quoted in Tamara Sonn, 'Political Authority in Classical Islamic Thought', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences (AJISS)*, 13. 3 (1996): 323-324.

Ibn Khaldūn, as Arnold pointed out, also argued for the necessity of leadership, which he insisted is based on divine revelation: according to him, the revelation is absolute evidence for this necessity.²⁴ Moreover, the pledge of allegiance (*bay'ah*) given by the majority of the Companions of the Prophet after his death should be considered as strong evidence of the need to have a leader in the Muslim community. Although Ibn Khaldūn opposed the view that rational thinking provided a basis for the need for an *imām*, he recognised that it is in the nature of human beings to designate a leader to manage the government:

All society must have a moderator (*wāsil*) who governs it and who constitutes a source of appeal.²⁵

More significantly, Ibn Khaldūn was very much concerned about the quality and function of the *khalīfah*. The objectives of the Islamic State, from his point of view, will be achieved only as long as the *khalīfah* performs his tasks. Otherwise, society will become more disorganised and, at worst, fail to form the Islamic State according to the basic principles of Islam. The function of the *khalīfah* is to resume the established duties of the Prophet Muḥammad even if he cannot perform them as perfectly. Among his major duties are the preservation of religion and the exercise of political leadership.²⁶

The need for a *khalīfah* is also based on the *ḥadīths* of the Prophet, who on several occasions expressed his thought on the matter. One clear example of these *ḥadīths*, as quoted earlier, narrates the need to elect one person as the leader when three or more people are on a journey.²⁷ In another *ḥadīth*, narrated on the authority of Ibn 'Umar (d. 73/693), the Prophet insisted that Muslims should give a pledge of allegiance to the

²⁴ Thomas W. Arnold, *The Caliphate* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924): 75.

²⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. F. Rosenthal (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1958): 156.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 155.

²⁷ For a consideration of the *ḥadīth* in the Arabic text, see Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Musnad*, ed. Muḥammad Shākir, 2 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.): 1776-77.

khalīfah and those who refused to do so were classified among the unbelievers. There are also several *ḥadīths* that insisted that Muslims should obey and be loyal to the caliph as long as he himself obeyed and implemented the *sharḥah* of Allah. The obedience to the caliph is an obligation equalling that of obedience to the Prophet himself.²⁸

The necessity of the *khilāfah* is not only based on the Qur'anic revelation and the *ḥadīths* of the Prophet, it is also justified by the *ijmāʿ al-ṣaḥābah* (the consensus of the Companions of the Prophet).²⁹ The appointments of Abū Bakr and ʿUthmān were two clear examples of this method. The dispute over the right to the caliphate at Saqīfah Banī Sāʿidah was finally sorted by the consensus of the Companions, who agreed on the appointment of Abū Bakr as the first caliph. The appointment of the latter also employed the same method, as ʿUthmān was elected to be the third caliph from the list of six recommended Companions. These two appointments, based on the consensus of the Companions, indicate that the Muslim community recognised and accepted that method of electing the *khalīfah*. Moreover, it also implied the necessity of appointing a person as a leader, to rule the state and administer the affairs of the Muslim community.

The Shīʿīs, on the contrary, assert its necessity by *naṣṣ* (divine decree) through the Prophet and according to *ʿaql* (reason).³⁰ In addition, the two main Shīʿī divisions, the Imāmiyyah and Ismāʿīliyyah believed that the need for an *imām* in the Muslim community is based not only on *sharḥah* and *ʿaql*, but that the *imām* is also decisively appointed by Allah's grace (*lutf*), providing that he guides human beings to the right

²⁸ Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 62.

²⁹ Muḥammad al-Khālīdī, *Maʿālim al-Khilāfah fī 'l-Fikr al-Siyāsī al-Islāmī* (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1984): 59-62.

³⁰ Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Shīʿite Islam*, trans. and ed. S. H. Nasr, 10-11. See also Momen, *An Introduction to Shīʿi Islam*, 159.

path and warns them against evils.³¹ In other words, the *imām* is designated by the grace of God through the intermediary of His emissary. In elaborating this view, they referred to a statement reported on the authority of the sixth *imām* of Imāmiyyah Shī'ī, Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 140/757), who attributed it to the Prophet, who received it from Allah:

Allah says: "I have not left the earth except there being an *‘ālim* (*imām*), guiding men to obey and follow God's guidance, And I have not left (the earth) for *iblis* to misguide the people....³²

However, some exponents of the Shī'ī view asserted that the need for a *khalīfah* or *imām* (the title which the Shī'īs use to refer to a caliph) is justified by *‘aql* (reason). They argued that it is necessary for Allah to provide an *imām* in order to maintain social justice and order.³³ They further argued that no community can dispense with the delegation of authority and that *wilāyah* (leadership) is an immutable law of nature. This natural law demands the existence of *wilāyah* in every community for the preservation of its interests.³⁴ The best example, which supports the necessity of the *imāmah* according to God's mercy (*lutf*), divine source and rational thinking (*‘aql*), comes from the medieval Shī'ī scholar, *‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī*³⁵ (d. 726/1325), who is quoted as saying:

The imāmate is a universal leadership (*riyāsa*) by a single individual in religious and secular matters. It is a matter which is incumbent upon

³¹ Mehdi Mozaffari, *Authority in Islam: From Muhammad to Khomeini* (New York, London: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1987): 35.

³² Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, 147.

³³ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Talkhīs al-Shāfi* (Qumm, 1974): 7: 58.

³⁴ Ghulām Ḥākīm al-Dihlawī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Tuḥfah al-Ithnā‘ashariyyah*, trans. Muḥammad b. Muḥyi 'l-Dīn b. ‘Umar al-Aslamī (Istanbul: Maktabat al-Ḥaḥiqah, 1988): 116-18.

³⁵ *‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī*'s full name was Jamāl al-Dīn Ḥasan b. Yūsuf. ‘Alī b. al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325).

God, for it is a divine mercy (*lutf*), and every divine mercy is incumbent upon Him, so the imāmate is incumbent upon Him.³⁶

Shi'ī political doctrine is based on the recognition of 'Alī as the legitimate *imām* after the death of the Prophet, which they believe derives from the *ḥadīth* of Ghadīr Khumm. Therefore, according to the Shi'ī doctrine of leadership, the necessity of the *imāmah* is based on both divine ordinance and reason. This doctrine is believed to establish a hereditary right among the descendants of 'Alī.³⁷

In contrast, the Khawārij/Khārijites had a totally different view from that of the Sunnis and Shi'īs regarding the need for a *khalīfah* in the Muslim community. They believed that the appointment of a caliph is not necessary for the community, the reason being that Muslims themselves can fulfil all the obligations imposed upon them by their religion. Moreover, contrary to the assertions of both Sunnis and Shi'īs, the legitimate form of civil administration, according to the Khārijites, can be implemented without the need to appoint a caliph.³⁸ However, under certain circumstances, a caliph may be elected, not necessarily from the Quraysh, if it is found necessary to have one. For example, a total breakdown of law and order, and the absence of peace and harmony in society would require the appointment of a caliph.³⁹ Mehdi Mozaffari, a former professor and head of the Department of International Relations at the University of Tehran, explains the Khārijites' view of this matter as follows:

The ideal community is a community of just men, which therefore has no need of political leaders. It is only the injustice of men that obliges

³⁶ Jamāl al-Dīn Ḥasan b. Yūsuf al-Ḥillī, 'Allāma al-Ḥillī on the Imāmate and *Ijtihād*', trans. and ed John Cooper, in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988): 240-41.

³⁷ 'Abd al-Naẓīr, *Mas'alat al-Imāmiyyah wa 'l-Wa'd fī 'l-Ḥadīth 'inda 'l-Firaq al-Islāmiyyah*, 151-70.

³⁸ Abū Muslim Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa 'l-Nihal*, trans. A. K. Kazi and J. G. Flynn (London: Kegan Paul Int., 1984): 99-100.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 100.

them to give themselves, or to accept, a leader. Persons who refrain from destroying one another have no need of an *imām*.⁴⁰

1.2.2 The Argument Concerning the Permissibility of Having More Than One Caliph

The foregoing discussion has provided us with some understanding of the doctrine of the necessity of the *khilāfah* in Muslim society. Both the Sunnīs and Shīʿīs concur on this point, although there has been disagreement concerning the sources of the teaching. Now we come to the question of whether it is permissible to have two caliphs. The general view of both Sunnīs and Shīʿīs was that there should be only one *imām* at any time. Other religious sects, such as the Muʿtazilites and the Khārijites, also accepted this view, even though some individuals, including Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm⁴¹ of the Muʿtazilites, totally rejected the idea that a caliph should be appointed to rule over the society.

The majority of Sunnīs are of the opinion that there can be only a single caliph at any time. Nevertheless, it might be possible, in certain exceptional circumstances, to have two caliphs in two different countries. It is believed that this exceptional situation may be permitted in the case where a sea separates these two countries, thus preventing mutual military aid. Therefore, the idea of simultaneously accepting both ʿAlī and Muʿāwiyah as legitimate caliphs was rejected by the Sunnīs, since no sea separated their territories and indeed Muʿāwiyah's right to be the *khalīfah* was legitimated only after the assassination of ʿAlī.⁴²

⁴⁰ Mozaffari, *Authority in Islam*, 30.

⁴¹ Al-Aṣamm was a conspicuous figure among the early Muʿtazilites, and lived ca. 800.

⁴² W. Madelung, 'Imāma', *EI*², 3 (1971): 1165.

It would be useful here to clarify the view of Ibn Khaldūn, who rejected the appointment of two men to the position of caliph at the same time. In his famous book, *al-Muqaddimah*, he pointed out that religious scholars generally are of this opinion, on the basis of certain traditions in the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (kitāb al-imārah)*⁴³. The discussion is complicated, however, by the existence of another view, which Ibn Khaldūn mentions in his book, namely that the prohibition against two caliphs applies only to two caliphs in the same locality, or living fairly close to each other. When great distances separate them and the caliph is unable to control the farther region, it is permissible to set up another caliph there to take care of the public interest.

The appointment of two caliphs in the above situation seems to be realistic and acceptable in accordance with one *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, given when he appointed Muʿādh b. Jabal (d. 32/653) as Governor of Yemen. Because of the difficulty of communication, if any dispute arises which needed an urgent solution, the Prophet allowed his messenger to act on his behalf. Moreover, such permission might also be considered to accord with rational thinking, as the delay in contacting the caliph might lead to religious and social disagreement. Therefore, it would be reasonable to appoint another caliph to take care of the interests of that particular region. Another situation justifying the appointment of two or more caliphs would be where local problems arose, unique to one area, resulting in the need for a local caliph who would be more familiar with the situation.

Among the famous authorities who are reported to have held this opinion was the leading speculative theologian, Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī. The Imām al-Ḥaramayn, al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085)⁴⁴ also showed himself inclined towards it in his *Kitāb al-Irshād*.

⁴³ For example: 'If the oath of allegiance has been rendered to two caliphs, kill one of them', and 'The oath of allegiance to caliphs should be rendered to one at a time.'

⁴⁴ Abu 'l-Maʿālī ʿAbd al-Mālik b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Juwaynī, 419/1028-478/1085.

On the other hand, some scholars have rejected the possibility of more than one caliph by reference to the general consensus. However, there is no evidence of the existence of this consensus, for if it had existed, neither Abū Ishāq nor the Imām al-Ḥaramayn would have opposed it. They knew better than any one else what the consensus meant. Therefore, Ibn Khaldūn rejected the idea that the general consensus prohibited two caliphs. In addition, the Imām al-Mazārī⁴⁵ and al-Nawawī⁴⁶ were also inclined to admit two caliphs under certain circumstances, although their basic understanding was that there should be only one caliph. Their opposition to the permissibility of more than one caliph, however, did not mean that they accepted the existence of a consensus, but rather based that view on certain traditions found in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*.⁴⁷

As mentioned earlier, the Khārijites supported the conditional appointment of a caliph in exceptional circumstances. But it is not our intention to discuss further whether the conditions of this permission, from the Khārijites' point of view, are similar to those accepted by the Sunnis or not. Somewhat more importantly, there were also some Khārijite splinter groups that thoroughly approved the possibility of having two or more caliphs even when the situation was not exceptional enough to demand it. This argument has been considered a matter of considerable importance by the Khārijites and their doctrinal opinion on the matter is easily found. For instance, Madelung, discussing their view, explains:

There can be only a single *imām* at any time according to the prevalent view, though some splinter groups admitted the legitimacy of more than one contemporary *imām* ...Against the doctrine of the splinter group

⁴⁵ The Mālikī Muḥammad b. ʿAlī, who was born in 453/1061 and died in 536/1141.

⁴⁶ Muḥyi 'l-Dīn Yaḥyā b. Sharaf, who was born in 631/1233 and died in 676/1277.

⁴⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. F. Rosenthal, 1 (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1958): 392-94.

Khalafiyya, the common doctrine affirms that there cannot be more than one *imām* belonging to the same “way” at any time.⁴⁸

The Mu‘tazilites, in agreement with the doctrine of the majority of Khārijites, emphasised the need for one caliph, who should be just. Significantly, they further stressed the obligation of the community to remove an unjust leader, if necessary by force.⁴⁹ On the other hand, Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm asserted that because of the wide expansion of Islam, it was preferable for each town to choose its own caliph.⁵⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, however, discussing al-Aṣamm’s view, presented it in quite a different light. According to his interpretation, al-Aṣamm opposed the need for a *khalīfah* in Muslim society. Considering that two such different versions exist, it is obvious that no consistent opinion has been established regarding al-Aṣamm’s opinion on the permissibility of having more than one caliph.

If al-Aṣamm did indeed reject the need for a *khalīfah*, then he would also have been unlikely to permit the appointment of more than one caliph. Perhaps what he meant here was that when Muslim society is in agreement regarding justice and the observance of the divine laws, no caliph is needed and, therefore, the position of caliph is superfluous. Otherwise, it is important to appoint a caliph to maintain observance of the religious laws and as the Muslim territory widened it became permissible to appoint a caliph for every region.

A similar opinion has been held by the Zaydī Shī‘īs. According to their doctrine, only a single caliph is to be appointed at any time; however, like other Muslim sects, they accepted the possibility of having more than one caliph in certain circumstances. For

⁴⁸ Madelung, ‘Imāma’, 1168.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 1165.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 1166.

instance, the existence of two separate Zaydī communities in the southern coastal areas: the Caspian Sea and in the Yemen led in some instances to a later recognition of two contemporary claimants as caliphs, but the formal admission of the legitimacy of two contemporary caliphs was exceptional.⁵¹

1.3 The Basic Concept of *Khilāfah* and its Functions

The above discussion implies the necessity of having one particular leader in the Muslim community. Both Sunnī and Shī'ī scholars have agreed on this principle, except that they have argued over who should have been elected after the death of the Prophet. In spite of this theoretical disagreement, they have generally justified the necessity of leadership based on its functional importance: leadership is necessary in order to implement the *shar'ah* of Allah and preserve justice and order in the Muslim community. In other words, the *khilāfah* is certainly essential and is an outgrowth of the phenomenon of the community and its dynamism and complexity. It was both natural and logical that the establishment of the Muslim community should necessitate some form of leadership, as has been argued by Manzooruddin Aḥmad:

Once the moral and psychological foundations of the *ummah* are laid on the primordial covenant between man and God, the next step in developing the *ummah* is the emergence of organised authority.⁵²

The function of this organised authority is to facilitate the further development of the *ummah* and to achieve various goals and objectives. The Prophet and his Companions succeeded in effectively fulfilling this role and therefore it follows that later generations should do the same for the benefit of the Muslim community.

⁵¹ Ibid, 1166.

⁵² Manzooruddin Aḥmed, 'Key Political Concepts in the Qur'an', *IS*, 10.2 (1971): 85.

1.3.1 The Functions of the *Khalīfah/Imām* According to Classical Muslim Scholars

A number of classical Muslim scholars have explored the functions of the *khalīfah*. The existence of a *khalīfah* or *imām* in the Muslim community certainly facilitated the implementation of various functions. Without these functions, the position of *imām* is superfluous. Although the functions may vary according to the situation and condition of the society itself, the implementation of certain religious functions, such as the practice of justice and observance of the divine laws, is considered one of the fundamental duties of the caliph.

According to historical evidence, the first two *khalīfahs* were persons who exercised wide authority in matters of war and peace. They are believed to have had the final say in the interpretation of the revealed text of the Qur'an, and the practice of the Messenger of Allah. In addition, they successfully implemented the right and duty to lead and establish prayer and to settle disputes. In other words, they were responsible for all legislative, executive, judicial and military authority. While the caliph was absent, the implementation of these functions was vested in his representative. However, only the *khalīfah* could delegate some of these functions to commanders of armies or *qādīs*, and any authority not derived from him was invalid.⁵³

According to the common doctrine of the Sunnis, the duties of the *imām* were defined as:

Guarding the faith against heterodoxy, enforcing law and justice between disputing parties, dispensing legal punishments (*ḥudūd*), protection of peace in the territory of Islam and its defence against external enemies, conducting the *jihād* against those resisting the supremacy of Islam, receiving the legal alms, taxes and the fifth of

⁵³ Ishaque, '*Al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah: Laws of Government in Islam*', 278.

booty, distributing the revenue in accordance with the law, and the appointment of reliable and sincere men in delegating authority.⁵⁴

The majority of Sunnī scholars acknowledged these functions; there were also several other duties, which for the purpose of space, have not been discussed here. In order to show the agreement of the majority of Sunnī scholars, we will cite and discuss their observations regarding the functions of the *khilāfah*. One of those scholars is al-Māwardī, who defined the establishment of the *khilāfah* as being for the purpose of replacing prophecy in the defence of the faith and the administration of the world.⁵⁵ He further underlined the functions of the *khalīfah* as:

the defence and maintenance of religion, the decision of legal disputes, the protection of the territory of Islam, the punishment of wrong-doers, the provision of troops for guarding the frontiers, the waging of *jihād* against those who refused to accept Islam or submit to Muslim rule, the organisation and collection of taxes, the payment of salaries and the administration of public funds, the appointment of competent officials and lastly, personal attention to the details of government.⁵⁶

Al-Ghazālī also stressed the fundamental function of the *khalīfah* in the Muslim *ummah*, claiming that, unfortunately, the justification of its function was being misused during his time and the legitimisation of rights was acquired by force. In general, al-Ghazālī held that the caliphate system at that time was merely based on military power,

⁵⁴ Arnold, *The Caliphate*, 72. These essential duties of the *imām* are also highlighted by Madelung; see Madelung, 'Imāma', 1165.

⁵⁵ Rosenthal, 'The Role of the State in Islam:', 12.

⁵⁶ Al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah*; quoted in Behzadi, 'The Principles of Legitimacy and Its Influence Upon the Muslim Political Theory', 284. See also Sonn, 'Political Authority in Classical Islamic Thought', 315-16.

due to the fact that the ruling caliph decided the function according to his own interests:

We consider that the function of the caliphate is contractually assumed by that person of the °Abbāsīd house who is charged with it, and that the function of government in the various lands is carried out by means of sultans, who owe allegiance to the caliphate. Government in these days is a consequence solely of military power, and whosoever he may be to whom the possessor of military power gives his allegiance, that person is the caliph.⁵⁷

Ibn Khaldūn went further, as he assumed that the main function of the *khalīfah* was to represent the Prophet, but as he would not receive revelation, his prime duty was to maintain the practices instituted by the Prophet. This view is in accordance with the perception of the title ‘*khalīfat rasūl Allāh*’ (the caliph of the Messenger of Allah) used by the first four *khalīfahs* of Islam. In addition, he must perform other relevant duties of the Prophet. Regarding this view of the caliph, Ibn Khaldūn noted:

The *khalīfa* is the representative (*nā’ib*) of the Prophet, the exponent of the divinely inspired law (*sharīah*), and his functions are the protection of religion and government of the world; he must belong to the tribe of the Kuraysh, and possess the other personal qualifications laid down by al-Māwardī.⁵⁸

Moreover, he clarified the caliph’s function in terms of the implementation of religious law:

⁵⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Iqtisād fī ‘l-’tiqād* (Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyyah, 1988): 150; quoted in Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 11. This statement is originally quoted in H. A. R. Gibb, *Studies in the Civilization of Islam* (London, 1962): 142-43.

⁵⁸ T. W. Arnold, ‘Khalīfa’, *EF*, 4 (1987): 885.

It should be known that all the religious functions of the religious law, such as prayer, the office of judge, the office of mufti, the holy war and market supervision (*ḥisbah*) fall under the “great imāmate”, which is the caliphate.⁵⁹

In fact, the functions of the caliph between the 2nd/8th and the 4th/10th centuries, that is, during the golden age of the ʿAbbāsids, are easily determined using information found in the classical records. The caliph was then seen as the guardian of dogma, and in this capacity opposed any action leading towards *bidʿah* (heresy). He was thus permitted to play a part in the formulation of doctrine, but did not participate in the formulation of law.⁶⁰ Many examples of this situation may be cited from historical events of that time, such as al-Mahdī’s (d. 785) order to persecute the atheists (*zindīqs*). Another example is that of al-Maʿmūn’s (d. 833) preference and enforcement of the Muʿtazilite doctrines. In 833, the caliph instituted the *miḥna* (inquisition) partly in order to enforce his claim to legal absolutism. Moreover, the *miḥna* was also used by the caliph to promote his dogma of the ‘created’ Qur’an. Only the supporters of this dogma were permitted to official positions.⁶¹

Theoretically, the caliph should be an excellent individual, worthy to conduct the Friday Prayers. In the same way, the caliph was expected to lead the military expeditions against infidelity, as personally performed by Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 809) and al-Maʿmūn. He is also responsible to lead campaigns against rebels; but normally delegated this task to an effective regent when it had to deal with particularly forceful enemies. The maintenance of order was in fact one of the normal obligations of the caliph, who was obliged to defend the community against all types of subversion. It was also the caliph who was obliged eventually to deal with those governors who

⁵⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. F Rosenthal, 1: 449.

⁶⁰ D. Sourdel, ‘*Khalīfa: The History of the Institution of the Caliphate*’, *EI*², 4 (1978): 940.

⁶¹ Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, 94.

demanded financial autonomy and the hereditary status of their office. Furthermore, it was his duty to ensure the nomination of his successor, as the practice had been established since the start of the Umayyad caliphate. Finally, the caliph ensured the wellbeing of the state, though this concept was to some extent ignored in the middle period of Islam.⁶²

The Shī'īs, on the other hand, did not discuss the functions of the *imām* in detail. As has been noted in the first section of this chapter, the Shī'īs were mainly inclined to the imāmate of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and his descendants, of which they were held to have been deprived by the Umayyads.⁶³ To conclude the discussion, we can say that the majority of Muslim sects agree on the importance of the caliph's or *imām*'s functions in society. Although there have been disagreements about some particular aspects, it should be noted that none of these differences deny the essential function of the caliph. The Shī'īs, as well as the Sunnīs, acknowledge these functions although they do not discuss this matter thoroughly in their examination of the concept of *imāmah*.

1.3.2 The Functions of the *Khalīfah/Imām* According to Modern Muslim Scholars

Compared with the classical justifications of the functions of a *khalīfah*, the moderns' views seem to be more simple and easily predicted, but they tend to be influenced by the spirit of the re-emergence of the Islamic caliphate. Consequently, the modern scholars particularly stress the importance of the *khalīfah*'s functions and duties in the Muslim *ummah*. Among these scholars was Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), who totally agreed with the classical justification of the necessity of the *khilāfah* according to divine source (*naṣṣ*), *ḥadīth*, *ijmāʿ* of the Companions and rational consideration. He

⁶² Sourdel, 'Khalīfa: The History of the Institution of the Caliphate', 4: 940-41.

⁶³ Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*, 15.

believed that without the office of *khilāfah*, the law cannot be enforced and the welfare of the community will not be protected.⁶⁴ Moreover, he was firmly convinced that, through the restoration of the *khilāfah*, the unity and identity of Islam as well as its defence against its enemies would be preserved. Riḍā shared the opinion of his master, Muḥammad ʿAbdūh, and of the classical scholars, that the *khilāfah* was the substitution for the prophethood (*nubuwwah*). Leading the people, protecting them and guiding them towards their eternal destiny are among the *khalīfah*'s functions,⁶⁵ as he underlined:

It is his function to protect Islam from innovation and to promote its law and beliefs, with the aid of the community, which is given through the process of consultation.⁶⁶

Believing that it was essential to re-institute a form of Islamic *khilāfah*, Riḍā proposed a plan for the reform of the caliphate during the turbulent first quarter of the twentieth century. Following this call by him and other intellectuals, a caliphal congress was held in Cairo and Mecca in 1925, the year after the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate. However, it was an unsuccessful effort since the congress decided to drop the matter until circumstances became more favourable. This decision caused the initial rejection of a plan presented to the congress recommending the full restoration of the caliphate.⁶⁷

Abū Aʿlā al-Mawdūdī, the founder of Jamaʿat-i Islami in the Indian sub-continent, was another important figure concerned with the significance of the *khalīfah*'s duty and

⁶⁴ Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muḥammad ʿAbdūh and Rashīd Riḍā* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966): 159.

⁶⁵ Yusuf H. R. Seferta, 'The Concept of Religious Authority According to Muḥammad ʿAbdūh and Rashīd Riḍā', *IS*, 30. 3 (1986): 162.

⁶⁶ Yusuf H. R. Seferta, 'Rashīd Riḍā's Quest for an Islamic Government', *Hamdard Islamicus (HI)*, 8.4 (1985): 40.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 35-36.

function in the Muslim *ummah*. His real role, according to al-Mawdūdī, is to protect the religion and the territory of the Islamic state, and to put an end to all evils; his more basic function is to foster a balanced system of social justice and encourage every kind of virtuous deed.⁶⁸ Al-Mawdūdī also promoted the theory of the ‘great man’, whereby the notion of the necessity of leadership is a logical outgrowth of the theory of social change. According to this theory, the character of a social order flows entirely from the top down to the bottom.⁶⁹ This indicates that the establishment of the society and the achievement of its goals are determined according to the credibility of its leaders. Therefore, the moral and religious qualities of a leader are more important than socio-economic, political and institutional considerations in ensuring the achievement of the goals of the society.

It seemed obvious to al-Mawdūdī that the existence of inequality and injustice in a society is a result of the leader’s lack of religious and moral orientation. If this situation occurs in a society, al-Mawdūdī recommends that the inadequate leader should be replaced by a better one. The need for a good and religiously oriented leader who can fulfil his responsibilities is strongly emphasised by al-Mawdūdī.⁷⁰

‘Alī Shari‘atī (1933-77), a prominent and distinguished modern Iranian Shī‘ī scholar, also supported the idea of the importance of leadership. In addition, he argued that the Muslim community has its special goals, which are only achievable under the supervision of an elected leader. However, the achievement of the goals of the *ummah* can be ensured by a harmonious and peaceful administration, and so the leader must produce a clear vision and practical strategies. For their part, the followers must give

⁶⁸ J. Charles Adams, ‘Mawdūdī and the Islamic State’, in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. J. L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983): 119.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 102.

⁷⁰ Abū A‘lā Mawdūdī, *Islamic Law and Constitution*, trans. Khurshīd Aḥmad (Lahore: Islamic Publication, 1967): 126.

him their full support and unequivocal obedience, as had been done by the first generation of Muslims. Shari'atī justified this idea by saying:

imāmah is the leadership of the *ummah* towards its common goals. Hence, the necessity of the *imām* is one hundred percent implicit in the notion of *ummah*.⁷¹

Accordingly, he reinterpreted the functions of the *imām*, in radically modernistic fashion, as:

a committed and revolutionary leadership, responsible for the movement and growth of society on the basis of its worldview and ideology, and for the realisation of the divine destiny of man in the plan of creation.⁷²

Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-89), the leading figure in the Iranian Revolution of 1979, asserted that the appointed *imām* is vested with particular duties and functions. First of all, he is the person who administers the office of *imāmah*, and thus determines the smoothness of its functioning. Furthermore, the implementation of the divine laws (*shar'ah*) is also one of his main duties. In fact, Khomeini stresses that no community could manage to undertake the practice of *shar'ah* without the existence of an *imām*. Consequently, the development of Islam as a religion and the expansion of its empire could not take place. In other words, the implementation of the *shar'ah* and the dissemination of Islam can only be preserved by a securely established *imāmah*. With regard to some of the functions and duties shouldered by an *imām*, Khomeini states:

The just *imāms* and jurisconsults (*fuqahā'*) are under the obligation to utilise the organisation and the formation of the government to apply

⁷¹ 'Alī Shari'atī, *Ummat va Imamat, Ja-al-hagh*, the collection of speeches (The Union of Islamic Societies in Europe, America and Canada, n.d), 242; quoted in Mehran Tamodonfar, *The Islamic Polity and Political Leadership: A Theoretical and Conceptual Assessment* (Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Colorado, 1986): 242.

⁷² Hamid Algar, 'Imām', in *OEMIW*, ed. John L. Esposito, 2 (1995): 183.

divine prescriptions, establish the equitable regime of Islam, and serve the people.⁷³

Khomeini believed that his right to the title of *imām* was entirely based on the fulfilment of the above duties.⁷⁴ While leading the revolution from his exile, Khomeini broke sharply with Shī'ī traditions and sometimes borrowed radical rhetoric from foreign sources, including Marxism. He also presented a bold appeal to the public based not on theological themes, but on real economic, social and political grievances. In other words, he transformed Shi'ism from a conservative, quietist faith into a militant political ideology that challenged both the imperial powers and the country's upper class.⁷⁵

Despite many views that support the need for the *khalīfah* and his office, modelled upon the ideal caliphate of the four rightly-guided caliphs, its necessity is sometimes completely denied. A very controversial view is that advanced by the Egyptian, 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq (1888-1966) in his treatise *al-Islām wa uṣūl al-ḥukm* (Islam and the Principles of Government) published in 1925, asserting the separation between religion and political power. He took full advantage of the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate in Turkey to launch a forceful attack on the entire traditional school of Islamic political thought. He contests the views of not only the orthodox 'ulamā', but also modernists like Rashīd Riḍā.⁷⁶ 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq's central argument is that the caliphate has no

⁷³ Mozaffari, *Authority in Islam*, 50.

⁷⁴ Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations*, trans. and annotated Hamid Algar (London: KPI Ltd., 1985): 14.

⁷⁵ Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd. Publishers, 1993): 3.

⁷⁶ 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq, 'The Caliphate as a Political Institution', in *Contemporary Arab Political Thought*, ed. Anouar Abdel-Malek, trans. Michael Pallis (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1983): 41. For detailed information on al-Rāziq's arguments, see 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq, *Al-Islām wa Uṣūl al-ḥukm: Baḥth fī 'l-Khilāfah wa 'l-Ḥukūmah fī 'l-Islām*, ed. Mamdūḥ Ḥaqqī, (Beirut: Dār Maktabah bi 'l-Ḥayāh, 1966).

basis, whether in the Qur'an, the traditions or the consensus (*ijmā'*). He argues that the Qur'an nowhere makes any mention of the *khilāfah* in the specific sense of the political institution known in history and, therefore, Muslims are not bound to accept its establishment. In presenting his argument, he deals in detail with the major pieces of evidence, which are normally drawn from these three sources to establish the obligatory nature of the caliphate.

1.4-Some Qur'anic Terms of Relevance to the *Khilāfah*

The Qur'an has laid down some basic principles regarding the political aspect of social life. The aim of the establishment of a political system in the Muslim community is to preserve the *shar'ah* and to maintain social justice. This objective is achievable through the formation of a leadership which is based on the essential guidelines contained in the Qur'an and the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet. There are a number of Qur'anic verses relevant to the concept of *khilāfah*. Some of them use the term *khalīfah* directly, while others mention terms such as *imām*, *mulk*, *sulṭān*, *amīr*, *ulū 'l-amr* and so on, which are very closely related in meaning. Thus, this study, which considers in some detail the terms related to *khilāfah*, is important for the understanding of the concept of *khilāfah* in the Qur'an.

The first term directly concerned with this concept is the word *khalīfah*. It is derived from the root *khalafa*, which means 'to come after, to be followed, succeeded, or to remain after another that had perished or died'.⁷⁷ Its informative noun is *khalf*, which means 'back, near, or behind'.⁷⁸ The term *khalīfah* occurs in the Qur'an twice in the

⁷⁷ Muḥammad Mukram Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 9 (Beirut: Dār Beirut li 'l-Ṭibā'ah wa 'l-Nashr, 1968): 83-84.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 83-84.

singular (2: 30 and 38: 26), and seven times in the plural, four of them in the form *khalā'if* (6: 165, 10: 14, 10: 73 and 35:39) and three in the form *khulafā'* (7: 69, 7: 74 and 27: 62). Moreover, the term *istakhlafa*, in most instances, refers to the act of appointing someone as one's successor,⁷⁹ and is found in five places (6: 133, 7: 129, 11: 57 and twice in 24: 55).

In all these instances, it should be noted that the term has one or more of three contextual characteristics: the word is connected in the various verses with some form of the verb *ja'ala* (to make); with the word *al-ard* (the earth) or the prepositional phrase *fi 'l-ard* (on earth); and sometimes with the expression *min ba'd* (thereafter).⁸⁰ These verses have many meanings; not all of them are related to the word *khalifah* and hence not all are relevant to this discussion.

As there are some irrelevant aspects of the interpretation of the term *khalifah*, we will limit the discussion to the related verses only. Therefore, two verses, sūrahs 2: 30 and 38: 26, the first being the commandment of Allah appointing the prophet Adam as His vicegerent on earth and the second referring to the appointment of the prophet David as 'prophet-ruler', will be thoroughly examined. In addition, seven verses that contain two forms of the plural (*khalā'if* and *khulafā'*) and five others using the term *istakhlafa* will be analysed individually. However, there are two other forms of the term *khalifah* that have the same meaning. The first is mentioned in sūrah 7: 142, which uses the form *ukhluf*, and the second occurs in surah 43: 60, using the form *yakhluf*.

The second important term that is relevant to the concept of *khilāfah* is *imām* and its form *a'immah*. *Imām* is derived from the Arabic *amma*, which means 'to precede or to

⁷⁹ Ibid, 85.

⁸⁰ Wadād Al-Qādī, 'The Term 'Khalifa' in Early Exegetical Literature', *Die Welt des Islams* 28 (1988): 393.

lead'.⁸¹ In the Qur'an, the word is found with the meaning of example, leader, pattern, model or prototype. Therefore, *imām* is a title indicating leadership, governance or rule, which is used in a variety of contexts by both Sunnī and Shī'ī Muslims. The most common contemporary use of the word is to designate the leader of congregational prayers, this being justified by the etymological sense of *imām* as "one who stands in front".⁸²

The word *imām* occurs in the Qur'an as an attribute not only of prophets, such as Abraham, but also of the revelation entrusted to Moses, as well as serving as a designation for the record of deeds with which man will be presented in the hereafter. However, numerous traditions of the Prophet Muhammad refer to the leader or ruler of the Muslim community as the *imām*, and the term came to be recognised, by both Sunnis and Shī'īs, as meaning the one exercising general leadership in both religious and political affairs.⁸³ The use of this singular form appears in seven places, but we will focus our discussion only on the relevant verses, which are sūrahs 2: 124, 36: 12 and 46: 12.

The study also examines the interpretation of the plural form *a'immaḥ*; this form occurs in five different places, in sūrahs 9: 12, 21: 73, 28: 5, 28: 41 and 32: 24, and, as was noted in the case of the term *khalīfah*, not all of them are related to this discussion. The verses that are irrelevant to this topic will not be analysed. They are sūrahs 9: 12 and 28: 41. The term *a'immaḥ* in surah 21: 73 refers to the prophets Abraham (Ibrāhīm), Isaac (Ishāq) and Jacob (Ya'qūb). It is also found in sūrah 28: 5; al-Ṭabarī interprets it in the sense of *umarā'*, *wulāh* (those charged with authority) and *mulūk*

⁸¹ Huart, 'Imām', 473.

⁸² Algar, 'Imām', 2: 182

⁸³ Ibid., 182.

(kings).⁸⁴ The last verse in this category related to the concept of *khilāfah* to be included in this study is sūrah 32: 23, which concerns the appointment of leaders among the children of Israel.

It is clear from a brief examination of the occurrences of the term *imām* in the Qur'anic perspective that none of them indicate an absolute meaning of the concept of *khilāfah*, but rather imply various meanings depending on the context of each verse. Even though some of these meanings and interpretations have only a slight bearing on this concept, it would be an insufficient and ambiguous argument to consider the term *imām* as reflecting the modern implications of political leadership. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the related meanings and interpretations as constituting a step towards the better understanding of Islamic political thought, specifically concerning the concept of *khilāfah*.

The third term that might have a meaning similar to *khalīfah* and *imām* is *mulk*. This term is derived from the Arabic root *malaka*, which means 'to take into possession', 'to dominate', 'to rule, reign, exercise power or authority'. Therefore, *mulk* itself means kingship, sovereignty or supreme authority.⁸⁵ *Mulk* and its various forms occur frequently in the Qur'an to indicate exclusively Allah the Almighty. However, there are a few Qur'anic verses that refer to the prophet-ruler. For instance, the term *mulk* in sūrah 2: 102 refers to the prophet Solomon (Sulaymān), while sūrah 2: 247 concerns the prophet Saul. The reference in sūrah 2: 251 is to the prophet David, who was appointed by Allah as temporal ruler and messenger.

⁸⁴ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 13, 16 & 19 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997).

⁸⁵ Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (London: Mac Donald and Evans Ltd., 1974): 921-22.

Other verses that contain this term are not relevant to the concept of *khilāfah*, as they refer to Allah the Almighty. Therefore, the usage of the title *mulk* to mean leader has no basis in the Qur'an, but is rather based on historical occurrences in ancient civilisation. However, a careful study of these irrelevant verses indicates that the term is used consistently to indicate the sovereignty of Allah over His creatures and, because of this, they provide us with some basic principles of Islamic political theology, especially regarding the appointment of human beings as His vicegerents on earth.

Another term that is of some relevance to the concept of *khilāfah* is *amīr*. The importance of this term can be noted in several *ḥadīths* of the Prophet, particularly the *ḥadīth* that deals with the order to give obedience to the ruler. The term *amīr* is derived from the Arabic root *amara*, which means 'to order, command, bid, instruct someone to do something'.⁸⁶ It produces several forms, which are *amr* and its plural *umūr* or *awāmir*, *umarā'*, *imrah*, and *imārah*. These forms occur in some Qur'anic verses, but the word *amīr* itself does not appear at all. However, most of these forms of *amīr* will be excluded from the discussion of the concept of *khilāfah*, as their interpretation does not aid the explanation of the concept.

The only one to be considered is the form *ulū 'l-amr*, which is a combination of two words, namely *ulū* and *al-amr*. The word *ulū* refers to owners, possessors or people of, while *al-amr* has the meaning of 'the matter, affair, concern, business and authority'.⁸⁷ The combination appears twice in the Qur'an, both times in sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 59 and 83. Qur'anic commentators have differed in interpreting the full term *ulū 'l-amr*: some of them have regarded it as referring to rulers (*al-salāṭīn*), while others have defined it as having the meaning of *al-umarā'*, which means commanders or tribal chiefs. On the

⁸⁶ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 26-27.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 96.

other hand, it might also indicate the meaning of *ulū 'l-fiqh wa 'l-ilm* (jurists and learned).⁸⁸

There are numerous Qur'anic verses containing the term *sulṭān* and its derivative forms. *Sulṭān* is derived from the root *salata*, which means 'prevailed', or 'predominated'.⁸⁹ With respect to the Qur'anic usage of this term, several forms appear, namely *sulṭān*, *sulṭāniyyah* and *sallaṭa*. However, none of the *sulṭān*-verses will be discussed in this study, as they tend to indicate either the evidence, proof and power of Allah, or the power, kingship and miracle of a particular ruler.

In conclusion, we suggest that the study of the term *khalīfah* and other related terms is vital for a better understanding of the concept of *khilāfah*. Although numerous Qur'anic verses contain these terms, the discussion will be limited to the significant *khilāfah* - terms and verses only. It is unnecessary to examine in detail verses that may make passing reference to the meaning of *khilāfah* but are not particularly relevant. Therefore, the analysis of the concept of *khilāfah*, as interpreted in Sunnī and Shī'ī Qur'anic commentaries, will be concentrated only on the *khilāfah*-verses that have been mentioned above.

⁸⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 8: 497-503, 570-73

⁸⁹ E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, part 4 (Beirut: Librarie Du Liban, 1968): 1405-06.

1.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter's discussion of the concept of *khilāfah*, particularly dealing with its nature, definition and functions, has produced several significant conclusions, which inevitably reflect the underlying principles of the Islamic political thought, particularly the understanding of the concept of *khilāfah*. The most fundamental principle is the obligation to establish the office of the *khalīfah* in the Muslim community. There is no doubt that the majority of Muslim communities have accepted this idea. They also agree on the need to designate one *imām* only and the possibility of having two or more *imāms* is widely rejected, except in certain circumstances. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that differences of view are unavoidable and that there has never been one universally accepted doctrine of the caliphate either among Sunnis or Shī'is.

The necessity of the *khilāfah* in the community is based on several sources, and justified mainly by reference to the *shar'ah*, to *naṣṣ* (divine decree) and to the *ḥadīths* of the Prophet. In addition to that, *ijmā'* (the consensus of the scholars) and rational thinking have also been considered important contributions. In this regard, the Shī'is have differed significantly from the Sunnis, since they have stressed its justification through *lutf* (God's mercy) and refused to accept *ijmā'* as a source. But whatever the source used to justify their opinion, both sects agree that the existence of the *khilāfah* is undeniably vital for the *ummah*. Moreover, the function of the caliphs' appointment has been regarded as a replacement and continuation of the Prophet's duties. Therefore, they must continue some of the duties undertaken by him in order to ensure the implementation of *shar'ah* and the interests of the Muslims. This does not mean, however, that a ruler's fulfilment of these basic duties entitles him to adopt the title *khalīfat Allāh*, as the Umayyad and the 'Abbāsīd caliphs did.

The discussions and arguments that have helped formulate the Sunnī and Shī'ī theories of the caliphate, and which have been examined in this chapter, are mostly based on the foundations laid down in the Qur'an and *sunnah* of the Prophet. Although neither of these two sources contains direct statements of principle, much may be deduced from them of relevance to this issue. More significantly, there are many terms in the Qur'an that may be connected with the concept of *khilāfah*. While some, as has been shown, are not relevant, most are very useful for this study.

CHAPTER 2 CLASSICAL SUNNĪ AND SHĪ'Ī COMMENTATORS: BIOGRAPHIES AND APPROACHES TO QUR'ANIC COMMENTARY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Before analysing the relevant *khilāfah*-verses in the next five chapters, we have undertaken to investigate the historical backgrounds and approaches of the classical Qur'anic commentators, both Sunnī and Shī'ī. This study is of some importance, as it may shed light on their interpretations at a later stage. Of course, a commentator's background cannot be the only factor influencing an interpretation, but it might provide valuable information concerning his situation at the time of writing. In addition, it may show us that the conditions of these scholars' lifetimes, which fall during the golden period of the Islamic dynasties (seventh-fourteenth centuries CE), had considerable impact on their interpretations of certain *khilāfah*-verses.

The study of these commentators' backgrounds should help us to gain a better understanding of how their ideas and perceptions affected their approaches to the concept of *khilāfah*. Its significance is very similar to the understanding of the historical background of the *khilāfah* itself, which we have attempted to provide in the introduction and previous chapter. Furthermore, we suggest that the influence, even if limited, of their backgrounds in education, social interaction and political thought had an impact not only on their approaches to the interpretation of some *khilāfah*-verses in the Qur'an but also on their methodology. Therefore, this chapter will deal with these

aspects in as full and detailed a manner as possible. It is necessary, however, to bear in mind that the main objective in exploring the backgrounds of these figures is to provide some introductory reflections before embarking on the primary analysis of the interpretations of the *khilafah*- and *imāmah*-verses by both Sunnīs and Shī'īs, which will be undertaken in the next five chapters.

2.2 SUNNĪ QUR'ANIC COMMENTATORS

In this section, we will concentrate on the biographies of three famous Sunnī Qur'anic commentators, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/924), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), presenting their method, style and approaches to Qur'anic commentaries. These commentators are widely considered to be the most reliable of their time, since later generations as well as modern commentators have been heavily dependent on their works. Although there have been other famous commentaries written during this period, these are among the most frequently cited. These three commentators and their commentaries will be discussed separately.

2.2.1 Al-Ṭabarī (224/839-310/923)

i. Biography, Educational Background and Socio-political Life

The investigation of the backgrounds and approaches of the Sunnī *mufassirūn* (Qur'anic commentators) begins with Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, who is well known simply as al-Ṭabarī. His full name was Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd b.

Kathīr b. Ghālib. Sometimes al-Ṭabarī has been called by his *kunya*, Abū Jaʿfar (father of Jaʿfar). However, this title, since as far as is known he never married nor had a son, appears to be of an honorary nature.¹

With regard to the *nisbah* al-Ṭabarī, this refers to the district where he was born, Tabaristan. This is his most famous title and is the one most commonly used in his works. He has another two titles, al-Āmulī and al-Baghdādī, which are less well known and rarely appear in any of his works. Al-Ṭabarī was probably born in 224/839² at Āmul in the one-time Sassanian province of Tabaristan. He grew up in Āmul under his father's care. From childhood, he showed great intelligence, even genius, and a strong desire for knowledge. As is said concerning other gifted Muslim children, he is reported to have memorised the Qur'an by the age of seven.³

During his early education, al-Ṭabarī became closely acquainted with the teachings of the Shāfiʿī legal school, but, determined to analyse critically the legal dogma prescribed by others, he studied their sources of law. Consequently, he came to be recognised as an independent *mujtahid* (a person who delivers an independent judgement in the interpretation of Islamic law). After completing his education, which

¹ Muḥammad al-Zuḥaylī, *Al-Imām al-Ṭabarī: Shaykh al-Mufasssīrīn wa 'Umdat al-Mu'arrikhīn wa Muqaddam al-Fuqahā' 'l-Muḥaddithīn*, (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1990): 27.

² Some historians have argued as to the exact year of al-Ṭabarī's birth. Probably he was born at the end of 224 or in the beginning of 225 A. H. but the date most commonly mentioned is 224 A. H. See Yāqūt b. 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-Udabā'*, 18 (Cairo: Matba'at al-Ma'mūn, 1938): 40, 48.

³ Al-Ṭabarī's childhood intelligence is acknowledged by Paret: 'He (al-Ṭabarī) began to devote himself to study at a precociously early age, and is said to have known the Qur'an by heart by the time he was seven'. See Rudi Paret, 'al-Ṭabarī, Abu Djaʿfar Muhammad B. Djarir', *Encyclopaedia of Islam Ist ed. (EI^I)*, 7 (1987): 578

covered the study of various schools of thought, he later chose to establish his own legal school, the *Jarīriyyah*, which differed slightly from that of the Shāfi'ī.⁴ It seems that this project aroused the anger of the partisans of the Ḥanbalī school of thought in Baghdad, and al-Ṭabarī came under their severe criticism. Moreover, he was strongly condemned by the Ḥanbalīs as a result of his readiness to classify Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) as a traditionist, not a scholar of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). He was also criticised by the Rāfiḍiyyah, a group of more radical Shī'ī, who were apparently incensed by his extreme praise and promotion of the first caliph, Abū Bakr (d. 13/634).⁵

Very surprisingly, al-Ṭabarī seems never to have married. The reason for this is not certain, but is probably that he was devoted to seeking knowledge from his childhood until his old age. It is evident that he travelled all over the Muslim world throughout his life in search of knowledge, never settling down in one place. At the end of his life, he took up residence in Baghdad, then the capital of the ʿAbbāsīd dynasty and one of the world's most brilliant centres of civilisation and learning.

Al-Ṭabarī is generally acknowledged to be one of the great minds of his era. The extent and depth of his erudition and the magnitude of his written works have impressed all his biographers. His is not a case of unmerited praise or of admiration without any clear evidence; as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071), the eleventh-century historian and jurist-consult noted:

⁴ Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (Richmond, Curzon Press, 2000): 121

He had a degree of erudition shared by no one of his era.⁶

Al-Ṭabarī made use of all the knowledge he possessed by passing it on to his students and those who solicited his legal opinions. He obviously was not a materialistic opportunist, since he never gained any high position in the government and even refused to accept any offer that came to him. In general, he devoted his life entirely to the development of knowledge, dedicated teaching and prolific writing. Al-Ṭabarī died in the city of Baghdad, where the Islamic State was ruled by the ʿAbbāsīd al-Muqtadir bi ʿllāh (/296/908-320/932), on 26 Shawwāl in the year 310/923.⁷

ii. Major Works and Approaches to Qurʾanic Commentary

Al-Ṭabarī produced several famous books on Qurʾanic studies, Islamic jurisprudence, history, *ḥadīth*, *uṣūl al-dīn* and some other subjects. He was also the author of one of the most reliable works of *tafsīr* in Islamic history, which is called *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān* (Collection of Explanations for the Interpretation of the Qurʾan). His *tafsīr* has been regarded by the majority of scholars as the ‘father’ of Qurʾanic

⁵ Jane I. Smith, *An Historical Study of the Term ‘Islam’ As Seen in a Sequence of Qurʾan Commentaries*, (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975): 58.

⁶ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ‘Qurʾanic Hermeneutics: The View of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr’, in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾan*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988): 47-48.

⁷ Al-Zuḥaylī, *Al-Imām al-Ṭabarī*, 33-34. Some historians believe that al-Ṭabarī died in either the year 311 A.H. or 316, but this opinion is weak and rejected by the majority of ʿulamāʾ. There has also been some argument over the exact date of his death. Some scholars, including Ibn Kathīr, are of the opinion that al-Ṭabarī died on 27 Shawwāl 310 A.H. Nevertheless, the solution is quite simple: he died on the 26th, as is accepted by most historians, and was buried the next day, the 27th. Therefore, the confusion has simply been caused by the existence of two different dates, the date of his death and the date of his burial. See Abū ʿl-Fidāʾ Ismāʿīl ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa ʿl-Nihāyah*, 11 (Beirut: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1966): 146. See also al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ*, 18: 40.

commentaries and the representative of the earliest documented *tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr* (traditional commentary). In other words, the work is an encyclopaedia of *tafsīr* comments and opinions from their beginnings up to his own time. It is a very extensive work, containing a large number of traditions handed down by authoritative chains of transmitters (*isnād*).⁸ Furthermore, it is considered to be the first of its kind and therefore of particular interest and value; as al-Qifī (d. 646/1248) commented:

One will never find a book more voluminous and beneficial than *tafsīr* al-Ṭabarī.⁹

An industrious writer, al-Ṭabarī never imitated anyone in his methods of Qur'anic commentary. In most of his Qur'anic interpretation, he drew upon the entire breadth of the materials of traditional *tafsīr* extant in his time. His *tafsīr* is an indispensable source of traditionist *tafsīr*, consisting as it does of reports transmitted from early authorities. He also endeavoured to cite the material of the standard authorities as completely as possible for every verse of the Qur'an and also noted even insignificant variants. He meticulously reproduced the exact chain of transmission (*isnād*) and on some occasions placed materials having the same content (*matn*) but received through different chains of authority side by side.¹⁰ For example, in interpreting the word '*khalīfah*' in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30, he produced three *ḥadīths* indicating a similar meaning, that is, a reference to the children of Adam, but narrated on different chains of authority: Ibn

⁸ Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam*, 125. See also B. Carra De Vaux, 'Tafsīr', *El'*, 7: 603-604.

⁹ Abd al-Ḥalim Maḥmud, *Manāḥij al-Mufasssīrīn*, (Cairo, Dār al-Kitāb al-Miṣrī, 1987): 46.

¹⁰ Helmut Gätje, *The Qur'an and Its Exegesis: Selected Texts with Classical and Modern Muslim Interpretations*, trans. and ed. Alford T. Welch (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976): 34.

Thābit (d. 45/665), Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), and Ibn Zayd (d. 181/798).¹¹ Ibn Khuzaymah considered al-Ṭabarī's method as being in a class of its own, and his presentation, from the beginning of the *tafsīr* to the end, is clear.¹²

In addition, whenever he had reservations concerning the validity of certain materials, he openly expressed them. In order to illustrate the text, he sometimes provided simple paraphrases and lexical references including numerous poems. He aimed at being comprehensive rather than selective, even though in some cases he did cite his preferences. An example of this can be seen in his treatment of the term *imām* in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 124. In interpreting the word ‘*ahd*’ (promise) in this verse, he presents five possible meanings, every one of which is supported by a *ḥadīth*. At the end of the discussion, however, he clearly states his two preferences, which deliver the meanings *al-nubuwwah* (the Prophethood) and *al-imāmah* (the office of *imām*).¹³ In this way, he made his book a treasure house of information, enabling later commentators to select data on their own principles. He also provided the names of authorities for the reports he cited, but generally did not evaluate the chains of transmission, although he often gave his opinion on the reports themselves, without putting any constraints on the reader. In this too he helped later scholars to form their own judgements.¹⁴

On the other hand, his failure to evaluate the chains of transmission made his work a relatively uncritical encyclopaedia of traditional commentary, in which weak and

¹¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1997): 237.

¹² McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, 42.

¹³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 1: 578-580.

¹⁴ Mustansir Mir, ‘Tafsīr’, in *OEMIW*, 4: 172.

trustworthy views, rigid and flexible opinions about religion, and traditional and intellectual concepts of those days, could be seen side by side. Rashīd Aḥmad, a modern researcher in Qur'anic commentary, mentions that some of al-Ṭabarī's authorities, such as al-Suddī (d. 127/744) and Juwaybar (d. 150/767), are considered weak.¹⁵ These weak authorities derived much of their information from the People of the Book, and were, therefore, rejected by the majority of scholars. Al-Ṭabarī himself sometimes acknowledged this, but above all, his own critical observations were very valuable and represented an important contribution.

Furthermore, in this work, al-Ṭabarī collected for the first time the ample material of traditional exegesis and thus created a standard work upon which later Qur'anic commentators drew; it is still a mine of information for historical and critical research by Western scholars. Al-Ṭabarī's own position with regard to the traditions collected by him is mainly defined by linguistic criteria, either lexicographical or grammatical.¹⁶ In other words, al-Ṭabarī's commentary covers a comprehensive characteristic of *tafsīr* and provides a large range of interpretations from many earlier commentators and *muḥaddithūn*.

¹⁵ Rashīd Aḥmad, 'Qur'anic Exegesis and Classical *Tafsīr*', *IS*, 12. 1 (1968): 84.

¹⁶ Paret, 'Al-Ṭabarī', 7: 578.

2.2.2 Al-Zamakhsharī (467/1075-538/1144)

i. Biography, Educational Background and Socio-political Life

The second Sunnī Qur'anic commentator to be considered is the Mu'tazilite Abū 'l-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, who was born at Zamakhshar, a village in Khwarazm, on 27 Rajab 467/8 March 1075.¹⁷ He was a Persian by birth but became one of the great Arabic scholars, theologians and philologists. He was a man of exceptional talents and profound learning. He studied at many places including Bukhara and Samarqand, and at one time was closely associated with the jurists of Baghdad. Among his famous teachers, and probably his greatest intellectual influence, was Maḥmūd b. Jarīr al-Ḍabbī al-Iṣbahānī, better known as Abū Muḍar (d. 507/1113).¹⁸ In the course of his travels in Khwarazm, he lost one of his feet. After this loss, he always carried with him the written testimony of eyewitnesses to prove that it had been accidental, and that he had not been maimed as a punishment for some crimes.¹⁹

¹⁷ C. Brockelmann, 'Al-Zamakhsharī, Abū 'l-Kāsim Maḥmūd b. 'Umar', *El'*, 8: 1205. By the eleventh century, Zamakhshar had become an influential centre of Sunnī 'orthodoxy' and scholarship. At the time of al-Zamakhsharī's birth, Khwarazm had already passed from Ghaznavid to Seljuk domination. He spent the first eighteen years of his life as a subject of the great Seljuk *sulṭān*, Mālik Shah I. See McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, 49. See also C. E. Bosworth, 'Khwarazm', *El'*, 4: 1063.

¹⁸ McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, 51.

¹⁹ Dionisius A. Agius, 'Some Bio-Bibliographical Notes on Abū 'l-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī', *Al-ʿArabiyya*, 15. 1 & 2 (1982): 108. Ibn Khallikān, in introducing the story of al-Zamakhsharī's accident, states that during a bitter winter in Khwarazm, he lost his foot through frostbite.

From his native city, al-Zamakhsharī travelled to Baghdad. The city's glory was beginning to fade. The golden days of the Seljuk vizier, Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092) had ended, and the empire was feeling the strains of internecine rivalry. However, its intellectual and scholarly reputation remained high, and many students were attracted to the study centres and mosques. Seizing his opportunity, al-Zamakhsharī gained certificates in *ḥadīth* and literary studies from some of the leading scholars of that time. Later, he went to Mecca, where he spent the greatest portion of his life as a pupil of Ibn Wahhās and received the title of *Jār Allāh* (neighbour of God). He must, however, have achieved a literary reputation before this, as he was warmly welcomed by the learned ʿAlīd Ḥibāt Allāh b. al-Shajarī when he passed through Baghdad on the pilgrimage.²⁰ His commentary on the Qur'an, entitled *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl wa ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-taʾwīl*, took two years and was completed in 528/1133, on his second visit to Mecca.

Al-Zamakhsharī was a Ḥanafī as regards *fiqh*, but as a theologian he followed the teachings of the Muʿtazilites. It is quite surprising that he was a Muʿtazilite at this late date, since this school of thought had largely faded out by this time. It had first appeared about a century after the Prophet Muḥammad's death (second century of *hijrah*), but did not really have an influence in terms of political thought and movement until the next century (third century of *hijrah*). Muʿtazilism continued as a force well into the fifth/eleventh century, especially under the Buyids in Iran. However, its influence seems to have waned after the death of its prominent scholar, ʿAbd al-Jabbār

See Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān wa Anbāʾ Abnāʾ al-Zamān*, ed. Iḥsan ʿAbbās, 5 (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1968): 170.

²⁰ Brockelmann, 'Al-Zamakhsharī', 1205.

(d. 415/1025). During the time of al-Zamakhsharī, late fifth and early sixth century *hijrī*, this school of thought had ceased to be an influential movement. In terms of Muʿtazilite principles, which al-Zamakhsharī practised, reason is a fundamental source of knowledge. Moreover, they believed that human beings are free to act according to their will. Because of this particular belief, the Muʿtazilites are sometimes classified as freethinkers.²¹

It is interesting that as a philologist, in spite of his Persian descent, al-Zamakhsharī championed the absolute superiority of Arabic and used his mother tongue only in instructing beginners. He was a great scholar proficient in many fields of knowledge such as Qurʾanic studies, *ḥadīth*, Arabic literature, grammar and philosophy. He was a very prolific author and his writings covered various branches of knowledge. He died on the day of ʿArafah 538/14 June 1144, at the age of seventy-one, at Jurjāniyyah in Khwarazm after his return from Mecca.²²

ii. Major Works and Approaches to Qurʾanic Commentary

Al-Zamakhsharī's principal work, completed ten years before his death in 528/1134, is his commentary on the Qurʾan, *al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tanzīl*. As it was the fruit of mature years, this work fully represents his thought in the field of *tafsīr*. In spite of this commentary's Muʿtazilite bias, it was widely read in 'orthodox' Sunnī circles. Nevertheless, his works differ in some ways from early commentaries such as those of

²¹ Aḥmad, 'Qurʾanic Exegesis and Classical *Tafsīr*', 86. See also Mazher-ud-Din Siddiqī, 'Some Aspects of the Muʿtazili Interpretation of the Qurʾan', *IS*, 2. 1 (1963): 97.

²² Brockelmann, 'Al-Zamakhsharī', 1205; see also al-Dhahabī, *Tafsīr wa 'l-Mufasssīrūn*, 430.

al-Ṭabarī and al-Baghāwī (d. 516/1122) because these were traditional in nature. It should be noted that these early commentaries had very little influence on his writing.

Al-Zamakhsharī devoted most attention to dogmatic exegesis of a philosophical nature and paid only slight attention to tradition. Besides engaging in purely grammatical exposition, he devoted special attention to pointing out rhetorical beauties. In other words, he tried to produce the commentary in which the doctrine of the miracle or inimitability of the Qur'an (*i'jāz*) is clearly expounded and displayed. He gave particular care to the lexicographical side of his work, going fully into the readings and supporting his explanations with ample extracts from ancient poetry.²³ His work still retained its place in literature when al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286 or 692/1293) produced his own 'orthodox' counterpart and tried to surpass him in the accuracy of his grammatical exposition and in quoting variant readings.

Though al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* was not a purely traditional commentary in the true sense of the word, nevertheless it has been generally considered an outstanding traditional commentary because it incorporated traditions concerning Qur'anic subjects. Unlike that of al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī's *tafsīr* was in the category of rational commentary (*tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr*). Apart from the reference to other Qur'anic verses and the *ḥadīths*, reason played the major role in interpretation. In commenting on the punishment of a major sinner in sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 116, for instance, he concentrated on the phrase 'whomever He wants to (pardon)'. He asserted that the phrase expresses Allah's promise to forgive a person who practises *shirk* (polytheism) if he shows

²³ Gätje, *The Qur'an and Its Exegesis*, 35.

repentance. Denial of forgiveness for the same offence is applied to those who do not repent.²⁴ In this interpretation, the use of reason is clear and is typical of Mu'tazilite Qur'anic interpretation. As a Mu'tazilite, al-Zamakhsharī regarded reason as a fundamental source of knowledge rather than as detrimental to human dignity. Reason and tradition were both essential to the development of knowledge, he maintained:

Knowledge is a city, which has two doors for entry, one reason, the other tradition.²⁵

In addition, he refused to accept that imitation might be a virtue in Qur'anic commentary. At the same time, he condemned the attitude of those traditionists who relied heavily on the traditions quoted by the earlier commentaries without making any effort to evaluate their authenticity. He attacked such intellectual laziness in strong terms:

A man with proof is more honourable than a lion in its lair. An imitator is more despicable than a mangy goat.²⁶

As a result of his attack on the traditionists, however, al-Zamakhsharī's commentary has had considerably less influence than al-Ṭabarī's. Although its excellence in the linguistic-rhetorical sphere is undeniable, it is still not widely read in Sunnī circles due

²⁴ Maḥmūd Ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl*, 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.): 272-273.

²⁵ Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Udabā'*, 7: 150; quoted in Ahmad, 'Qur'anic Exegesis and Classical *Tafsīr*', 87.

²⁶ M. S. Al-Juwaynī, *Manhaj al-Zamakhsharī fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān wa Bayān f'jāzihi*, (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1959): 93; quoted in Smith, *An Historical Study of the Term 'Islam'*, 89.

to his omission of some traditional material and his inclusions only of what he himself considered important.²⁷

Having a firm command of the Arabic language, al-Zamakhsharī knew how to employ his outstanding philological skills in the interpretation of the Qur'an. In addition, he laid down the criterion of intellect as the main source of his argumentation. This is due to the fact that he was a freethinker as well as a Mu'tazilite, who constantly sought solutions to intellectual problems and stood firmly by his ideas.²⁸ Consequently, his *tafsīr* appealed more to reason than any other commentary of his time.

Although al-Zamakhsharī was best known for his rational interpretation and mastery in the linguistic-rhetorical sphere, his commentary accommodated all other major trends. In other words, it should be noted that his *al-Kashshāf* would fit into more than one category, as it dealt not only with the rhetorical aspects of the Qur'an but also with theological issues.²⁹ Nonetheless, he brought the characteristic themes of Mu'tazilite theology, such as the doctrine of the unity and justice of Allah, the recognition of the intellect as the source of understanding the faith and the advancement of freedom and free will, into his discussion of the verses.

²⁷ Gätje, *The Qur'an and Its Exegesis*, 36.

²⁸ Al-Dhahabī, *Tafsīr wa 'l-Mufasssīrūn*, 445-47.

²⁹ Mir, 'Tafsīr', 4: 173.

2.2.3 Ibn Kathīr (700/1300-774/1373)

i. Biography, Educational Background and Socio-political Life

The last Sunnī Qur'anic commentator to be analysed in this section is one of the most famous figures in the field of *tafsīr*. Ibn Kathīr's full name was ʿImād al-Dīn Ismāʿīl Ibn ʿUmar Ibn Kathīr. He was born in the citadel town of Baṣra in Southeast of Damascus, which was under the Mamlūk control, in 700/1300. He spent his early childhood there until his father's death. He then moved to Damascus at the age of six as the ward of his brother. As a Sunnī stronghold, Damascus offered the young Ibn Kathīr a wealth of organised educational opportunity. His teachers ranked among the leading intellectuals of that era and they found in him an eager student of the Islamic sciences, and particularly of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* (jurisprudence).³⁰

Almost four centuries separate the death of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and the birth of Ibn Kathīr. This was, of course, a momentous period in the history of Islamic culture and society. As regards the socio-political situation, Ibn Kathīr lived in a very unstable and disruptive period, since the Mongols had already invaded and conquered Central Asia, Iran and Iraq. The ultimate disruption was to come with their capture of the capital of the ʿAbbāsids, Baghdad, in 750/1258. From the point of view of Qur'anic studies, however, the world into which Ibn Kathīr entered in the first years of the eighth/fourteenth century had seen the maturation of the major forms of Qur'anic commentary. The works of such figures as al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), al-Zamakhsharī (d.

³⁰ McAuliffe, 'Qur'anic Hermeneutics:', 55.

538/1144), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) and Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) had left their mark. These early works, to some extent, reflected his thought, either in contributing to Qurʾanic commentary or *fiqh*.

In *fiqh*, Ibn Kathīr studied under a great teacher and leading Shāfiʿī jurist-consult, Burhān al-Dīn al-Fazārī (d. 729/1329). Moreover, he furthered his acquisition of Islamic knowledge in *ḥadīth* under the *ḥāfiẓ* Jamāl al-Dīn al-Mizzī (d. 742/1341). Later, his own students would praise him as having ‘the best memory, of those with whom we studied, for the *matns* (contents) of *ḥadīth* and being the most knowledgeable in expounding them, in ranking their transmitters and rating their soundness or faultiness’.³¹

One of Ibn Kathīr’s illustrious teachers, and perhaps the one who influenced him most, was the Ḥanbalī theologian and jurist-consult, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328). Ibn Kathīr was about twenty-eight when his teacher died and it was, therefore, during the last ten years of Ibn Taymiyyah’s life that he knew him. Ibn Kathīr’s own career developed quietly in the years following Ibn Taymiyyah’s death, but gradually his reputation spread as a scholar of *fiqh*, a teacher of *ḥadīth* and a prominent *khaṭīb*.³² Although Ibn Kathīr was a Shāfiʿī, his closeness to Ibn Taymiyyah, a Ḥanbalī, was due to their shared views on the traditionalist approach. As a conservative Ḥanbalī, Ibn Taymiyyah opposed innovation and rationalism and promoted traditionalism. The Shāfiʿī legal school also regarded the traditionalist viewpoint as the dominant and continuing mode. Therefore, the impact of Ibn

³¹ Ibid, 55. See also H. Laoust, ‘Ibn Kathīr’, *EP*, 3 (1971): 817.

³² McAuliffe, ‘Qurʾanic Hermeneutics:’, 55.

Taymiyyah's teaching and thoughts on Ibn Kathīr was significant, since the latter shared and used a similar approach to the former.³³ Ibn Kathīr died in 774/1373 and was buried near his teacher, Ibn Taymiyyah.

ii. Major Works and Approaches to Qur'anic Commentary

Ibn Kathīr's commentary, which is entitled *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*, is solidly in the class of *tafsīr bi' l-ma'thūr* (traditional commentary). In fact, it is generally considered one of the soundest of *tafsīr bi' l-ma'thūr*, if not absolutely the soundest. It might be considered merely an abridgement of al-Ṭabari's work, except that it is much more selective, evaluates the chains of transmission and pronounces on the authenticity of reports.³⁴ Ibn Kathīr was essentially a *muḥaddith* (traditionist), however, and his approach to the subject reflected the viewpoint of one determined to advance the established 'orthodox' viewpoint.

Ibn Kathīr introduced his work of *tafsīr* with a clear and careful analysis of correct hermeneutical procedure as he saw it, presenting a brief but sound historical background describing the early development of Qur'anic *tafsīr*. The introduction also outlined his systematic approach to *tafsīr*, in which references to the Qur'an itself, prophetic *ḥadīths*, the traditions related from the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad and the sayings of the followers (*al-tābiʿūn*) were extensively used.³⁵ Nevertheless, he referred to the sayings of the followers only when it was clear that

³³ Smith, *An Historical Study of the Term 'Islam'*, 129.

³⁴ Mir, 'Tafsīr', 4: 173.

³⁵ McAuliffe, 'Qur'anic Hermeneutics:' 56-58.

they had been in complete agreement in any particular discussion. If there had been conflicts among them, Ibn Kathīr believed that these sayings could not be considered an authoritative source.

Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr*, according to Henri Laoust, one of his Western biographers, should be regarded as an essentially philological work written in a very elementary style.³⁶ Furthermore, his commentary is very largely devoted to *ḥadīth* and traditions related from the Companions, although on a few occasions, he adds some explanatory comments and judgements of his own. But while Ibn Kathīr rarely put forward his own views, he was willing to refer to and cite the views of previous commentators. However, any reference made to others is not accepted without full evaluation and a detailed assessment, following which he expressed his opinion, either confirming or rejecting the view under discussion.³⁷

This approach shows his intellectual ability to judge the authenticity of every source and strictly reject any incorrect opinion. Consequently, his commentary has been less subject to individual interpretation than that of al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286).³⁸ For this reason, his *tafsīr* has been much appreciated by Muslims even though it has been much less attractive to Western scholars.

³⁶ Laoust, 'Ibn Kathīr', 3: 818.

³⁷ McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, 75.

³⁸ Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term 'Islam'*, 128. Ibn Kathīr's method of stating his own views is considered by Qāsim al-Qaysī, the Iraqi scholar, to be a good 'indication of the power of his intellectual ability'. He adds: 'Ibn Kathīr did not accept any statement even from al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī blindly, without assessing its validity. Whenever he thought it correct, he confirmed it, otherwise, he rejected and criticised it.' See McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, 75.

2.3 SHĪʿĪ QUR'ANIC COMMENTATORS

While this study has considered three Sunnī commentators, the discussion on the backgrounds of the Shīʿī Qur'anic commentators will be limited to two, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī, since between them they represent sufficiently well the ideas and viewpoints of the majority of Shīʿī believers. Later classical Shīʿī commentators as well as the modern have relied on them in formulating their own interpretations. In other words, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī provided the guidelines for later commentaries.

2.3.1 Al-Ṭūsī (385/995-460/1067)

i. Biography, Educational Background and Socio-political Life

The third generation of Shīʿī commentators extended over a very long period, well into the sixteenth century CE. One of them was al-Ṭūsī, who was also known as Shaykh al-Ṭāʾifāh. His full name was Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Ṭūsī. He was born in Ṭūs during Ramaḍān 385/995. Generally, the Shīʿīs consider him as a great *faqīh* (jurist), a pre-eminent jurist of the Jaʿfarī rite, a *muḥaddith* (traditionist) and a *mujtahid* (a jurist formulating independent decisions in legal questions on theological matters).

After receiving his early education in his native place, al-Ṭūsī travelled to Baghdad in 408/1017 at the age of twenty-three. Baghdad at that time was under the authority of the Shīʿī Buyid dynasty and the flourishing centre of Shīʿī intellectual life. While there,

he studied under the Shāfiʿī al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022).³⁹ Following al-Mufīd's death, he is reported to have continued his studies under a great Shīʿī jurist, al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā (436/1044)⁴⁰, whose views on the Qur'an he represented. After the death of this great scholar, he stayed on in Baghdad for another twelve years and tried his utmost to spread his influence as an Imāmiyyah Shīʿī to his students. He assumed the leading intellectual position in the Baghdad Shīʿī community, where his reputation drew students from far and wide to come to learn from him.

Al-Ṭūsī is noted as having strained relations with the caliph, al-Qā'im (422/1031-467/1075). Following his attack on the first three Sunnī orthodox caliphs, he faced a severe reaction from the authorities and the public in Baghdad.⁴¹ As a result of continuous hostility from the public, he moved to Najaf, a major centre of Shīʿī learning in Iraq, where he passed the rest of his life. Al-Ṭūsī dedicated himself to

³⁹ Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Nuʿmān al-Baghdādī (d. 413/1022). He was the most noted Shīʿī scholar and jurist-consult (*faqīh*) of his day. Al-Mufīd is identified as a Shāfiʿī and it is noted that al-Ṭūsī issued *fatwās* in accord with this *madhhab* (school of thought). See McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, 46.

⁴⁰ Al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā's real name was Abū 'l-Qāsim 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 436/1044). It is said that al-Ṭūsī associated himself with al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā and was his companion and student for about twenty-three years. See M. Hidayet Hosain, 'Al-Ṭūsī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī Abū Dja'far', *Et'*, 8: 982.

⁴¹ It is known that his house was burned down, a result of the work of opponents who had complained against him to the caliph. Their complaint had been that in one of his books he had cursed the Companions of the Prophet in a passage he had written about 'the early oppressors being accursed'. He escaped the caliph's punishment by denying that this had ever been his intention. See Dwight M. Donaldson, *The Shī'ite Religion: A History of Islam in Persia and Irak* (London: Luzac & Company, 1933): 287.

learning and writing throughout his lifetime, and is considered the greatest doctor of the Shī'a. He died in Najaf in the year 460/1067 at seventy-five years of age.⁴²

ii. Major Works and Approaches to Qur'anic Commentary

The most important work produced by al-Ṭūsī was his commentary on the Qur'an, *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (The Elucidation of the Interpretation of the Qur'an). He also wrote many books in various fields including *ḥadīth* (*Kitāb tahdhīb al-aḥkām* and *al-istibṣār fī makhtulifa fihī min al-akhbār*), *fiqh* (*Uddat al-uṣūl*) and others. Two of his works, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* and *al-Istibṣār*, are among the four Shī'i canonical books (*al-kutub al-arba'ah*),⁴³ which are held in the highest veneration by the sect.

While al-Ṭabarī's commentary is considered to be the earliest documented *tafsīr* produced for the Sunnis, the Shī'is, especially the Imāmiyyah, regard al-Ṭūsī's commentary as their earliest completed *tafsīr*. Its significance is obvious because it represents an important approach in Shī'i *tafsīr*. The Shī'is classify al-Ṭūsī's commentary as *tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr* (traditional commentary), in which they take *al-ma'thūr* to mean the explanation of the Qur'an by reference to other Qur'anic verses,

⁴² There is some doubt about the year of al-Ṭūsī's death. 460/1067 is accepted by most biographers, while others believe that 458/1065 is the right year. See Hosain, 'al-Ṭūsī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī Abū Dja'far', 8: 982. See also Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term 'Islam'*, 81.

⁴³ The other two books of the four Shī'i canonical books are *al-Kāfī* by Muḥammad bin Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 328/939) and *Man lā Yaḥḍuruḥu 'l-Faqīh* by Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991). See Ali Davani, 'Al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī's Life and Time', in *Message of Thaḡalayn*, trans. Dr. A. Pazargadi, 2. 2 (Tehran: Ahl al-Bayt ('a) World Assembly, 1995): 127. See also Heinz Halm, *Shiism*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991): 54.

or to the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, or to the opinions of the twelve *imāms*.⁴⁴ His *tafsīr* was the first of its kind among the Shī'īs, since no such book as *al-Tibyān* and no commentators of his like existed before him. Even the theme of another famous *tafsīr*, al-Ṭabarsī's *Majma' al-Bayān*, was adopted from al-Ṭūsī's commentary.

Al-Ṭūsī's *al-Tibyān* is a large work whose value is attested by al-Baḥrānī in the succinct tribute, "*lam yu'mal mithluhu* (nothing like it has ever been produced). However, many modern commentators have challenged this opinion since al-Ṭūsī undoubtedly copied phrases and sometimes, whole sections of interpretation from al-Ṭabarsī's commentary.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, *al-Tibyān* is a comprehensive work, comparable to that of al-Ṭabarsī in terms of its breadth. Al-Ṭūsī, however, arranges his material in a somewhat different way from other commentators. He begins by mentioning any variant readings and next addresses issues of etymology and word signification. He then moves to a discussion of the meaning of particular words and phrases as they are used in the verse under examination. In addition, matters of syntax are also analysed, while in certain situations, the elaboration of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (reasons of the revelation) is easily noted.⁴⁶

Although al-Ṭūsī was a Shī'ī commentator, he was quite liberal in his references to

⁴⁴ Maḥmūd Baṣūnī Fawḍah, *al-Tafsīr wa manāhijuh*, trans. H. M. Mochtar, A. Q. Hamid, (Pustaka Bandung, 1987): 148-49.

⁴⁵ Jane I. Smith endorses this argument: 'Indicative of the high esteem in which the *tafsīr* was held by many, this statement is nonetheless open to some questions as al-Ṭūsī not only echoed many of the phrases of al-Ṭabarsī, but in several places apparently copied whole sections.' See Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term 'Islam'*, 82.

⁴⁶ McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, 48.

Sunni materials. Occasionally, he quoted *ḥadīths* from non-Shīʿī sources, but this liberality was limited to non-doctrinal issues; he held strictly to Shīʿī ideas on doctrinal issues and refused to accept any other source. His approach may have been influenced by his historical circumstances; his *tafsīr* emerged during the rise to power of the pro-Shīʿī Buyid dynasty (334/945-447/1055) at the centre of the ʿAbbāsīd state, the development from which the Imāmiyyah Shīʿī (the Twelver) exegesis benefited most. The changes occurring in the political and social position of Shīʿism began to be reflected in al-Ṭūsī's commentary.⁴⁷

2.3.2 Al-Ṭabarsī (468/1075-548/1153)

i. Biography, Educational Background and Socio-political Life

Another important Imāmiyyah Qurʾanic commentator, and almost the only twelfth-century Shīʿī theologian of importance, was Shaykh al-Ṭabarsī. His full name was Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Faḍl al-Ṭabarsī Amīn al-Dīn Thiḡat al-Islām.⁴⁸ His importance does not lie in his being a Shīʿī, but in his being an eminent theologian and scholar. He was born in the year 468/1075 in Tabaristan. His early life was occupied with the study of religion, literature and language. Al-Ṭabarsī lived in Mashhad al-Riḍā for such a long time that some writers add to his *nisbah* that of al-Mashhadī. He engaged himself in public teaching until the year 523/1129, when he moved to the

⁴⁷ Meir M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmi Shīʿism* (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1999): 72.

⁴⁸ Musa O. A. Abdul, 'The Unnoticed *Mufassir*: Shaykh Ṭabarsī', *IS*, 15. 2 & 3 (1971): 98.

quiet town of Sabzawar in Khurasan; here, at the advanced age of over sixty, he wrote his famous commentary on the Qur'an, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*.⁴⁹

Al-Ṭabarsī's life falls within the Sunnī Seljuk period in Iran (431/1040-590/1194). The Muslim world had been torn by political and religious dissension into several autonomous states by the eleventh century. Each of these states was now ruled by different groups holding to different 'orthodoxies'. The Shī'ī Fatimid caliphate (365/975-567/1171) controlled Egypt and maintained vassal states in the Maghrib, Syria, Sicily and Western Arabia, whereas the Ziyadids and the Najahids ruled the Yemen.⁵⁰

The existence of these various ruling groups indicates the rapid emergence and development of an internal decay in both state and society. This situation had been worsened by a series of simultaneous attacks by internal and external enemies. The Sunnī Turkish Seljuks had reached Baghdad in 447/1055 and wrested power from the last Shī'ī Buyid ruler. They had extended their kingdom to Syria, Palestine and Anatolia by the year 470/1079, a few years after al-Ṭabarsī's birth. By the end of the eleventh century, they controlled a united empire including almost all the lands possessed by the 'Abbāsīd caliphate.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid, 98-99. See also Donaldson, *The Shi'ite Religion: A History of Islam in Persia and Irak*, 292.

⁵⁰ Abdul, 'The Unnoticed *Mufassir*: Shaykh Ṭabarsī', 15: 96.

⁵¹ Ibid., 97.

Al-Ṭabarsī spent the last twenty-five years of his life in Sabzawar, where he died at the age of about eighty, on the night of *ʿid al-aḍḥā* (the Sacrifice Festival), in the year 548/1153.⁵²

ii. Major works and Approaches to Qur'anic Commentary

There is no dispute that al-Ṭabarsī's *Majmaʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* is his principal work in Qur'anic commentary, since he himself refers to it as '*kitābī al-kabīr fī 'l-tafsīr*' (my major work in Qur'anic commentary). This indicates the existence of some other works, although they are not as famous; but one in particular is noteworthy, not least for the manner of its inception; it was his response to al-Zamakhsharī's great commentary, *al-Kashshāf*:

When I had finished my major book on *tafsīr* which bears the title *Majmaʿ al-bayān li ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*, I came by chance across the book *al-Kashshāf li ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl* of *jār Allāh al-ʿAllāmah*. I prepared an extract from the wonders of its meaning and the marvels of its expressions and constructions, (an extract) the like of which is not to be found in a book combining many aspects (of knowledge). I considered (the matter of) its title and entitled it *al-Kāfī al-Shāfī*. Thus the two books came into existence.⁵³

⁵² Various dates have been cited for al-Ṭabarsī's death. 502, 509, 518, 533 and 548 are among the years. But the most commonly cited is 548. See Abdul, 'The Unnoticed *Mufassir*': 15: 104.

⁵³ Abdul, 'The Unnoticed *Mufassir*', 15: 99.

Al-Ṭabarsī clarifies the methodology used in writing *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* in the preface of this work. It seems to be a combination of two early *tafsīr* works, al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān* and al-Ṭūsī's *al-Tibyān*. A comparative reading of al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī reveals a great similarity and it seems plausible that the former had greatly influenced him.⁵⁴ Al-Ṭabarsī did not restrict his interest to these two commentaries; he sometimes combined certain aspects of the interpretations of some other well-known commentaries. As regards the organisation of this work, the literary aspects, mode of revelation and meanings of the verses were all dealt with in a systematic and classical way. It contains so many good and previously unheeded points that several later commentators, for example al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1403/1982), have at times explicitly referred to it.⁵⁵

In dealing with the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the causes of revelations), al-Ṭabarsī employed the traditionist method and entirely relied on the chains of authorities. This approach might have been due to the strong influence of al-Ṭabarī's commentary, which had impressed him most while completing his own work. In some circumstances, however, he accepted reports and traditions narrated by weak or untrustworthy *ḥadīth* transmitters, such as Ubayy b. Kaʿb (d. 29/649).⁵⁶ Al-Ṭabarsī also employed philological manipulation in his *tafsīr* and what he is likely to ascribe to the passage may be easily predicted by referring to the way he deals with the linguistic aspect.

⁵⁴ Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmi Shīʿism*, 75-76.

⁵⁵ 'Approaches to the Exegesis of the Holy Qur'an: An Interview with Ayatullah Saeni', in *Message of Thaqalayn* 2. 2 (Tehran: Ahl al-Bayt ('a) World Assembly, 1995): 140.

⁵⁶ Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ, *Mabāḥith fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li 'l-Malāyīn, 1965): 290.

Al-Ṭabarsī's *tafsīr* also dealt with reading problems by giving variant readings, quoting several authorities, and citing classical and pre-Islamic Arabic usage in order to support his choice. He also occasionally quoted statements from Shi'ī *imāms* such as Abū Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 140/747). This method of producing variant views on a single matter provides his readers with the opportunity to make their own judgements and evaluations. In this way, he showed that he was one of the moderate followers of Shi'ism, as al-Dhahabī points out:

Ṭabarsī is moderate in his (following) Shi'ism; unlike others among the Shi'ite Imāmites, he is not extravagant in his Shi'ism. We have read his *tafsīr*; we do not find against him much fanaticism, nor can we reproach him for cursing any of the companions or for accusing them of anything that nullifies their trustworthiness and piety.⁵⁷

However, a study of al-Ṭabarsī's *tafsīr* shows that his moderation in interpreting Qur'anic verses is limited to non-doctrinal matters. Otherwise, he seems to be a very strong adherent of the Imāmiyyah Shi'ī. In interpreting the term *ahl al-bayt* (family of the Prophet) in sūrah 33: 33, for instance, al-Ṭabarsī regards it as referring conclusively to five persons, namely the Prophet himself, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the Prophet's daughter (Fāṭimah), and the Prophet's two grandsons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.⁵⁸

Therefore, it is clear that al-Ṭabarsī's employment of a moderate method of Qur'anic commentary is exclusively confined to non-doctrinal aspects. Otherwise, his views are

⁵⁷ Musa O. A. Abdul, 'The *Majma' al-Bayān* of Ṭabarsī', *IS*, 15. 2 & 3 (1971): 108.

⁵⁸ Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Faḍl al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 8 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997): 119.

accordingly presented as a means of supporting the Imāmiyyah Shī'ī's teachings and belief. In doing so, he occasionally incorporates evidence that is hardly accepted by the Sunni Muslims.

2.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, we suggest that the biographies of the above Qur'anic commentators influenced and were reflected in their approaches to producing *tafsīr*. Every commentary has had its importance for the Muslim *ummah*, particularly among those people who lived shortly after its production. The Shī'ī commentaries, for instance, have had a great impact within their circles, since they represent their own concepts regarding belief in the Qur'an. While some among the Shī'īs recognise the major part of the religious tradition (*ḥadīth*), they sanction and supplement it by means of the doctrinal authority of the *imāms*, who are claimed to have inherited the 'genuine' Qur'an edited by 'Alī. Thus, when exegetical traditions arose which reflected current notions concerning the imāmate and the *khilāfah*, Shī'ī exegesis bore a more direct relationship to post-Qur'anic events, because of the historic ties of the *imāms*. Therefore, whenever positive statements in the Qur'an concerning leadership and authority were indefinite (*mubham*) and general, they have been interpreted as referring to 'Alī, the *imāms* and their community, with a series evidence presented as a support. On the other hand, negative statements were interpreted as referring to their opponents, as well as to the first three caliphs.⁵⁹ Similarly, the background of the Sunni have also

⁵⁹ Gätje, *The Qur'an and Its Exegesis*, 38.

influenced and reflected the underlining of their interpretations in conformity with their belief and teachings.

It can be said that these commentators lived in turbulent times both politically and socially (from the ninth to the fourteenth centuries). During this period, the authority of the caliphate diminished considerably, to the point of disappearance. Several commentators witnessed a change of dynasty, which had a great impact on their writings and was a factor in differentiating one commentary from another. Differences and arguments on certain matters of importance became, and still remain, unavoidable. Considering the fact that they came from different backgrounds and produced different interpretations, both Sunnī and Shī'ī communities have not directly rejected one another's approaches. Indeed, as we will see in the following chapters, their interpretations have been very similar on numerous occasions.

CHAPTER 3 THE INTERPRETATION OF THE *KHILĀFAH*- VERSES IN CLASSICAL SUNNĪ QUR'ANIC COMMENTARIES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Having compared the Sunnī and the Imāmiyyah Shī'ī commentators' historical backgrounds and approaches to Qur'anic interpretation, which has provided the basic preliminary information necessary to undertake the analysis of the concept of *khilāfah*, the next four chapters generally deal with the main discussion of the research. This will be divided into two separate sections, namely the Sunnī and Shī'ī interpretations of the relevant verses. Therefore, this chapter in particular seeks to examine in some detail the Sunnī interpretations of the selected verses related to the *khilāfah* and *imāmah*, found in the Qur'an, which reveal their perceptions of the concept.

The discussion will concern the three Sunnī Qur'anic commentators discussed previously: al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn Kathīr. In order to make the discussion clear and well structured, this chapter will undertake the interpretation of the *khilāfah*-verses only, such as those containing the terms *khalīfah*, *khulafā'*, *khalā'if*, *yastakhlif* and *yakhluf*. The verses containing the terms *imāmah* and *ulū 'l-amr* will be dealt with in Chapter Four.

The analysis will be structured according to the classification of the terms, starting with the *khalīfah*-verses and concluding with the term *ukhluf*, rather than by following the

order of the ‘Uthmānic text. This method is preferred because a certain term may appear once at the beginning of the Qur’an, and not recur until the middle or end of the text. Therefore, the discussion will proceed from one verse to another according to the classification of terms. Consequently, some early Qur’anic verses may be discussed at a late stage in this chapter whereas some verses that come later may be analysed in the first part. Every verse will be discussed according to the interpretation provided by the selected Sunnī commentators. It is intended that our analysis will show that these commentators’ interpretations of the relevant verses will reflect Sunnī thought, particularly regarding the concept of *khilāfah*.

3.2 THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM *KHALĪFAH*.

The term *khilāfah*, literally defined as leader or, more precisely in this context, caliph, is found twice in the Qur’an, in sūrat al-Baqarah and in sūrah Ṣād. The first instance is recorded in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30, which reads:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنۡزِيۡنَاۤ اِلَيْكُمۡ فِيۡهَاۤ اٰرۡضًا خٰلِیۡفَةً
 قَالُوۡۤا اَنْتَجَعَلُۡ فِيۡهَا مَنۡ یُّفۡسِدُ فِيۡهَا وَیَسۡفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ وَنَحۡسُنُ سۡبِیۡحَ
 یَحۡمَدُکَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَکَ قَالَ اِنۡزِیۡنَاۤ اِلَیۡنَاۤ اَعۡلَمُ مَا لَا تَعۡلَمُوۡنَ

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: “I will create a vicegerent on earth.”

They said: “Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?-Whilst we do celebrate Thy praises And glorify Thy

holy (name)?” He said: “I know what ye know not”.¹

¹ ‘Abdullāh Yūsuf ‘Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an: New Edition with Revised Translation and Commentaries*, (Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1992): 24.

Before considering the interpretation of the word *khalīfah*, it would seem desirable to examine the meaning of the word *jāʿil* (will create). This term is derived from the Arabic root '*jaʿala*', which means 'to make, to create or to appoint'. Qur'anic commentators have argued whether it corresponds more closely to the meaning of *fāʿil* (doing) or of *khāliq* (creating). Al-Ṭabarī, in his commentary, notes that al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) and Qatādah (d. 118/736) prefer *fāʿil* (doing, acting, performing some activity), whereas al-Ḍahhāk (d. 105/723) favours *khāliq* (creating).² After examining these two possibilities, al-Ṭabarī's inclination is to accept the reports of al-Ḥasan and Qatādah. However, he does not interpret the term as they did, but rather gives a close definition of it, which is *mustakhlif* (succeeding or appointing as *khalīfah*).³ Wadād al-Qādī asserts that due to al-Ṭabarī's dogmatism on the philological level, defining *jāʿil* as *fāʿil*, the notion of the *khilāfah* here means 'to succeed'.⁴ Ibn Kathīr agrees with al-Ṭabarī's opinion, as he cites the same reports in his commentary. Moreover, he quotes many opinions from al-Ṭabarī and sometimes from al-Zamakhsharī as guidelines before delivering his own interpretation.⁵

Both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr explain that *khalīfah* is a form of *faʿīlah*, derived from the Arabic root *khalafa*. Thus, the meaning is to take someone's place in a particular situation. Al-Ṭabarī quotes another verse, sūrah Yūnus (10): 14,⁶ which means that Allah appointed Prophet Adam to be His vicegerent on earth to see how he would

² Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Taʿwīl al-Qurʾān*, 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1997): 235-236.

³ Ibid, 236.

⁴ Al-Qādī, 'The Term '*Khalīfa*' in Early Exegetical Literature': 396.

⁵ Abū 'l-Fidā' Ismāʿīl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, 1 (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1998): 226-228.

⁶ Verse 10: 14 reads: '*Then We made you heirs In the land after them, To see how ye would behave!*'.

behave, in order to show its similarity to the above verse. Taking this interpretation into account, al-Ṭabarī argues that the supreme ruler (*al-sulṭān al-ʿaẓam*) is to be considered a *khalīfah* because he replaces the previous ruler and takes on the responsibility for his administrative duties.⁷ This view, in some respects, indicates his support for the Sunni authority, particularly practised by the Umayyad and ʿAbbāsīd caliphates. As we see in the historical background of the emergence of the *khilāfah*, the process of succession had been determined by appointment of the current ruler, which started after Yazīd inherited the post from his father, Muʿāwiyah.⁸ Although the caliphate was no longer decided by an election but had become a hereditary process, the recognition of the supreme ruler as *khalīfah*, because he takes the responsibility from his predecessor, shows his acceptance of their authority.

Ibn Kathīr interprets this verse in the same sense as al-Ṭabarī, since he sees it as referring to the *khilāfah* of a group of people that succeed one another decade by decade and generation by generation. To support this view, he quotes another four verses in the Qurʾān that indicate a similar meaning to this interpretation. They are in sūrahs al-Anʿām (6): 165, al-Naml (27): 62, al-Zukhruf (43): 60 and al-Aʿrāf (7): 169.⁹

A similar interpretation is offered by al-Zamakhsharī, who sees in the *khalīfah* a reference to the appointment of Prophet Adam and his children. Moreover, the word *khalīfah* in this verse means one who replaces or succeeds the previous caliph and this

⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān*, 1: 236.

⁸ Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*:, 88-89

⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, 1: 226.

process is achieved through continuous succession from one to another.¹⁰ One question, however, arises, if the interpretation does indeed refer to Adam and his children: why is the singular word *khalīfah* used in this verse if a plural meaning is intended? In responding to this question, al-Zamakhsharī, whose approach is based largely on philological and lexicographical interpretation, makes it very clear that the answer is to be found in the nature of the Arabic language, where some singular words indicate a plural meaning: The name of a tribal leader, for instance, might well refer to his people. This example can be seen in the usage of the word *Hāshim*, which also implies the people of *Hāshim* clan (*Banī Hāshim*).¹¹ Al-Zamakhsharī's explanation is noted by Lambton, who observes that the singular '*khalīfah*', in certain circumstances, has the meaning of a plural, and therefore in this case can be held to designate Adam, the prophets and, by extension, all mankind.¹²

Al-Ṭabarī varies the way in which he offers his interpretation, particularly in presenting certain traditions. Sometimes, he gives various explanations for a single verse, even though he rejects some of them, and supports his opinion with different reports. For example, he quotes Ibn Ishāq's report (d. 151/768-9), which Montgomery Watt defines as meaning that Allah will appoint 'someone who settles in or inhabits' (*sākinan* and *āmīran*) on the earth as a successor.¹³ However, he does not agree with this

¹⁰ Maḥmūd Ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl*, 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rīfah, n.d.): 271.

¹¹ Ibid, 271.

¹² A. K. S. Lambton, '*Khalīfa*: in Political Theory', *EL*², 4 (1978): 947.

¹³ For a further detail of Watt's comment on al-Ṭabarī's interpretation, see W. Montgomery Watt, 'God's Caliph: Qur'anic Interpretations and Umayyad Claims', in *Iran and Islam*, ed. C.E. Bosworth, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971): 566.

interpretation: he puts forward his own view, which he supports by quoting a report from Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 86/687). The report narrates that the first inhabitants on this earth were the *jinn*, who were later succeeded by *iblis* because they had spread corruption, shed blood and killed one another. Then Allah created Adam and appointed him to succeed the *iblis*. This is why Allah says: “I am about to place a vicegerent on earth”.¹⁴

Furthermore, al-Ṭabarī quotes another report from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī to support the view that regards *khalīfah* as a reference to the children of Adam. They succeed their father Adam and each subsequent generation (*qarn*) succeeds the generation before it.¹⁵

He also notes a similar opinion reported on the authority of other narrators, Ibn Sābiṭ (d. 118/736) and Ibn Zayd (d. 145/762). However, the latter explicitly holds that no resident on the earth existed before the creation of Adam, who was the first creature to reside on the earth.¹⁶ If we combine all the views above, the conclusion is that the *khalīfah* refers to Adam and to every single person that takes his place. Another significant point concerns the process of succession, which is understood to begin only with the creation of Adam.

Ibn Kathīr definitely agrees with al-Ṭabarī’s view that *khalīfah* refers not only to Adam, as claimed by some commentators, but also to those who take his place to obey Allah and rule justly among their people. On the other hand, those who spread corruption and shed blood are not classified in this category.¹⁷ In other words, they

¹⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān*, 1: 236-237.

¹⁵ Ibid, 237.

¹⁶ Ibid, 237.

¹⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīm*, 1: 229.

cannot represent the real qualities of the Islamic *khalīfah* as outlined by most of the Qur'anic commentators even though they hold the office and rulership.

Discussing the matter further, al-Ṭabarī quotes several reports narrated on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687), Ibn Masʿūd (d 32/853 or 33/854) and other Companions of the Prophet, who reported the dialogue between God and the angels: God said to the angels: “I am about to place a *khalīfah* on earth”. They said: “Our Lord, what/who will this *khalīfah* be? He said: “He will have offspring who will work corruption on earth, and envy each other and kill each other”.¹⁸

Basing his view on these reports, al-Ṭabarī comments:

‘Thus *khalīfah* is My vicegerent who shall represent Me in judging among My creatures’. That representation was bestowed on Adam and whoever (of his descendants) occupies his place in obedience to Allah, judging justly among His creatures. As for the shedding of blood and corruption, they were not committed by the representatives of Allah such as Adam and those who followed his example in obedience to and true worship of Allah. This is because the angels did not attribute the shedding of blood and corruption to the vicegerent of God Himself, but rather said, “Would you place therein one who will spread corruption?”.¹⁹

¹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān*, 1: 238.

¹⁹ Ibid, 237.

Al-Ṭabarī attempts to reconcile the reports of al-Ḥasan, Ibn Mas‘ūd and Ibn ‘Abbās by claiming that although the reports of Ibn Mas‘ūd and Ibn ‘Abbās contradict the meaning of *khalīfah* as related by al-Ḥasan in one respect, in another respect, they agree with it: they do not attribute corruption and the shedding of blood on earth to Adam, although others have been guilty of these offences. The difference between them occurs when Ibn Mas‘ūd and Ibn ‘Abbās limit the meaning of *khalīfah* to Adam alone, in the sense that Allah directly appointed him as His vicegerent on earth. Al-Ḥasan, however, takes it to mean his offspring, since they are each other’s successors, each generation succeeding the position of the one before it, and therefore attributes corruption and the shedding of blood to the *khalīfah*.²⁰

Al-Ṭabarī suggests that the reason for al-Ḥasan’s interpretation is as follows: when the angels said to their Lord, “Will you place therein one who will work corruption and shed blood?”, they were speaking of the vicegerent whom Allah had said He was placing on earth, and not of anyone else, because the exchange (dialogue) between the angels and their Lord concerned only him (the *khalīfah*). They believed that, if this was the case, Allah had purified Adam from corruption on earth and shedding of blood, and it was clear that whoever might be corrupt and shed blood was not Adam, but certain of his offspring. Furthermore, al-Ṭabarī argues that when the angels said to their Lord, “Will you place someone on earth who will corrupt the world and shed blood?”, they were not attributing those characteristics to the *khalīfah* on earth that is, Adam; Rather

²⁰ Ibid, 237-238.

they said: “Will you place therein one (someone, not necessarily Adam) who will work corruption there?”²¹

Another argument that might be interesting to consider regards the angels’ reasons behind their questioning the appointment of Adam and his children. As stated in al-Ṭabarī’s, al-Zamakhsharī’s and Ibn Kathīr’s commentaries, the term *khalīfah* is accepted as referring not only to Adam, but also to his children. Therefore, the angels appear to be questioning God’s judgement when they ask, “Will you place therein one who will work corruption and shed blood...?”.

Ibn Kathīr explains that all the angels are trying to point out is the possibility of Prophet Adam’s descendants acting corruptly and shedding blood upon the earth, as had happened in the case of the creatures before them. Their prediction of this disaster might be based on their special ability to foresee future events or on their understanding of human nature. Or, it may be that they understand that it is in the power of Allah alone either to allow human beings to commit disorder and violence or to prevent them from acting sinfully. Or, the angels may be thinking of what had happened to the previous creatures, who were guilty of corruption and bloodshed.²²

According to Ibn Kathīr, the angels’ question is neither for the purpose of disobeying Allah nor is it due to a feeling of jealousy for the descendants of Adam, as has been claimed by some Qur’anic commentators. The truth is that the angels will not ask

²¹ Ibid, 238.

²² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, 1: 230.

anything which is forbidden by Allah. The reason for their question, as Ibn Kathīr states with reference to the report from Qatādah (d. 118/736), is that, acknowledging God’s intention to place a vicegerent on the earth, the angels recall that corruption and bloodshed had occurred before, owing to the actions of the beings created before Adam. Therefore, they say to their Lord out of simple curiosity: “Will you place therein one who will work corruption and shed blood?”²³

According to Ibn Kathīr, the angels ask this question to acquire knowledge and receive an explanation from Allah of what would be the benefit from this creation, even though it seems certain that human beings will be corrupt and shed blood. If Allah desires loyal and faithful servants, then the angels are the ones who continually celebrate His praises and glorify His holy name. However, Allah answers this question by saying: “I know what ye know not”.²⁴ In other words, Allah alone knows the beneficial purpose of this creation even though disaster and violence will inevitably spread among mankind. In addition, Allah mentions that He will appoint many more prophets, messengers and even *khalīfahs* from among the children of Adam, and all of them will possess many excellent qualities and characteristics.²⁵

Ibn Kathīr finds another possible reason, cited in al-Rāzī’s commentary. He notes that this phrase may be God’s response to the angels’ claim, “Whilst we do celebrate thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)”.²⁶ In other words, Allah has certain unknown

²³ Ibid, 230.

²⁴ Ibid, 230.

²⁵ Ibid, 230.

²⁶ Ibid, 230.

purposes and benefits in mind in creating Adam to be the *khalīfah* on earth. It implies that mankind's creation and appointment as *khalīfahs* will not lead to the problems that occurred in the case of the *iblis*. The angels, on the other hand, cannot understand the secret behind this creation. Another possible meaning is the angels' implied wish to replace the descendants of Adam as *khalīfahs* on the earth.²⁷ Allah, however, replies, "I know what ye know not": Allah alone knows the secret of appointing Adam and his descendants to be *khalīfahs*; He also knows that it is much better for the angels to remain in their appointed place.

In defining the precise meaning of the word *arḍ* (earth), al-Ṭabarī asserts that some Qur'anic commentators see it as referring specifically to Mecca, as in the narration from Ibn Sābiṭ. However, most commentators, and al-Ṭabarī himself, believe that its meaning is more general and that probably this word refers to any place where the process of *khilāfah* occurs.²⁸ Ibn Kathīr mentions the report narrated on the authority of Ibn Sābiṭ, but considers it to be weak in terms of *sanad* (chain of transmission) and therefore, holds that the real meaning is much more extensive.²⁹

The second appearance of the word *khalīfah* can be found in sūrah Ṣād (38): 26, which reads:

يٰۤاٰدٰمُ اٰمُرُكَ اِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيْفَةً فِى الْاَرْضِ فَاخْرُجْ مِنْهَا بِرَبِّكَ وَيَاۤاٰدَمُ اسْكُنْ اِيْتٰنَ مَعِ زَوْجِكَ وَلَا تَخْرُجْ مِنْهُمَا حٰمِلًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعِ الْهَوٰى فَيُضِلَّكَ عَنْ سَبِيْلِ اللّٰهِ اِنَّ الَّذِيْنَ يَخْتَلِعُوْنَ عَنْ سَبِيْلِ اللّٰهِ لَهُمْ عَذٰبٌ شَدِيْدٌۢ بِمَا كَفَرُوْۤا يَوْمَ الْحِسَابِ

²⁷ Ibid, 230.

²⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 1: 236.

²⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*, 1: 228.

O David! We did indeed make thee a vicegerent on earth: so judge thou between men in Truth (and justice): nor follow thou the lusts (of thy heart), for they will mislead thee from the Path of Allah: for those who wander astray from the Path of Allah, is a Penalty Grievous, for that they forget the Day of Account.”

In terms of the story, the dialogue in this verse relates to the prophet David, as Allah specifically mentions his name at the beginning of this verse. The conversation takes place without any intermediary, whereas on the word’s first appearance, in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30, even though the meaning refers to Adam, the dialogue is between Allah and the angels.

If we examine the content of this verse, it seems to refer specifically to David’s selection as the *khalīfah*. According to al-Ṭabarī, its main idea is the appointment of David as a replacement for the prophet before him in ruling and leading the people.³⁰ This view is supported by al-Zamakhsharī, but Lambton asserts that al-Zamakhsharī’s opinion in this case has a different emphasis from that concerning the appointment of Adam in the previous discussion, claiming that the appointment of David was to the dual role of king and prophet.³¹ Ibn Kathīr’s interpretation goes further: he does not consider *khalīfah* as referring directly to David, as al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī did; rather he believes that this verse is to be considered a commandment to all leaders to

³⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān fī Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān*, 10: 575.

³¹ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf‘an Ḥaqā’iq al-Tanzīl*, 3: 371-372. Lambton asserts this view as a result of her analysis of al-Zamakhsharī’s commentary on sūrah Ṣād (38): 26. See Lambton, ‘Khalīfa:’, 947.

administer the office properly and prevent any kind of injustice among the people.³² A leader's appointment as *khalīfah* applies not to a specific place only but to every corner of the world. The significance of this idea is that the system of replacing one *khalīfah* by another has taken place since the appointment of the first human being. Furthermore, it might have already occurred before that, if the report, which mentions that the *khilāfah* started with the replacement of the *jinn* by the *iblis* is accepted.

This verse also gives some fundamental guidelines that are necessary in order that the *khalīfah* performs his duty perfectly. In al-Ṭabarī's view, justice and self-awareness are the two defining qualities of the word *al-ḥaqq* (literally means 'the true', 'the real').³³ Both are very important elements, alongside others, in ensuring the implementation of truth in the community. Besides, Allah warns David not to follow the lusts of his heart, which will lead him and his people to stray from justice and self-awareness. Consequently, truth will not exist among the people and they will be numbered among the annihilated. Furthermore, argues al-Māwardī, the establishment of justice and truth, as stated in this verse, was completed when Allah granted David power and authority.³⁴ In other words, the *khalīfah* is allowed to possess some kinds of power while exercising his responsibility, as long as his powers are used in the right way.

³² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAzīm*, 7: 3010.

³³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 10: 575.

³⁴ For al-Māwardī's views on the concept of *khilāfah* as they relate to sūrah Ṣād (38): 26, refer to his main work, Abū 'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad Al-Māwardī, *Al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1985), 18. See also Muhammad Yusuf Faruqi, 'Early *Fuqahā*' on the Significance and Role of the *Khilāfah*', *HI*, 14. 1 (1991): 9.

3.3 The Plural (*Khalā'if* and *Khulafā'*)

Two plural forms of *khalīfah* can be found in the Qur'an, namely *khalā'if* and *khulafā'*. The first occurs four times; once in sūrat al-An'ām (6): 165, once in Fāṭir (35): 39, and twice in sūrah Yūnus (10): 14 and 73. *Khulafā'* appears three times: twice in sūrat al-A'rāf (7): 69 and 74 and on a single occasion in sūrah Hūd (11): 57. The analysis of these verses will be carried out in two separate discussions, as mentioned above.

3.3.1 *Khalā'if*

The first plural form of the word *khalīfah* to be considered is *khalā'if*, which al-Ṭabarī defines as 'to replace someone in charge to rule in a particular place'.³⁵ This term appears four times and every single appearance indicates the meaning of the concept of *khilāfah*. The first one is found in sūrat al-An'ām: 165 (6: 165), which reads:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَائِفَ الْأَرْضِ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ
لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ سَرِيعُ الْعِقَابِ وَإِنَّهُ لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

It is He Who hath made you (His) agents, inheritors of the earth: He hath raised you in ranks, some above others: that He may try you in the gifts He hath given you: for thy Lord is quick in punishment: yet He is indeed Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

According to al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī, this verse is particularly regarded as the reminder to the Prophet Muḥammad and his people that Allah is the one who has made

³⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 5: 422.

them *khalīfahs* on the earth. It is in His power to create human beings, as well as to destroy them, and confer power and responsibility on whoever He chooses. Without His consent, the changing of the *khalīfah* will not take place.³⁶ The appointment of the Prophet Muḥammad and his people to dwell on and rule the earth is the beginning of the *khilāfah* of the last prophet in this world. Therefore, Prophet Muḥammad's followers take all the benefits of being the last *ummah* to hold the position as *khalā'if*; they inherit, and succeed all previous generations.³⁷

Ibn Kathīr's interpretation of this verse seems to be similar to those of al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī in most ways, but he differs in two respects. Firstly, his approach to the concept of the *khilāfah* is in total contradiction to that of al-Ṭabarī. It is evident that he does not see the *khilāfah* as specifically that of Prophet Muḥammad and his people but extends the notion to apply to human beings in general.³⁸ The eligibility to be the *khalīfah* is open to every human being as long as he possesses the right qualifications and fulfils all the required conditions. In other words, appointment to the *khilāfah* is not necessarily limited to the Prophet Muḥammad or his people.

Secondly, Ibn Kathīr tries to make his readers understand the precise meaning of this verse, for example by citing four other verses that may be interpreted similarly.³⁹ In this way, the readers are led to examine and compare the interpretation of all five.

³⁶ Ibid, 422.

³⁷ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf^c an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 2: 65.

³⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-^cAzīm*, 3: 1404.

³⁹ The other four verses are al-Zukhruf (43): 60, al-Naml (27): 62, al-Baqarah (2): 30 and al-A'rāf (7): 129. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-^cAzīm*, 3: 1404.

Al-Ṭabarī is not so thorough in his comparisons, though he quotes one report from al-Suddī (d. 127/744) that delivers the meaning of this verse.⁴⁰ On the other hand, al-Zamakhsharī's style of interpretation rarely makes use of these two methods and therefore it is very hard to find any parallels in his Qur'anic commentary.

The next two verses that contain the word *khalā'if* are found in sūrah Yūnus (10). The first one, which is the second appearance of the word *khalā'if* in the Qur'an, can be seen in verse 14 (10: 14), which reads:

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ خَلَائِفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ لِنَنْظُرَ
كَيْفَ تَقْعَمُونَ

Then We made you heirs in the land after them, to see how ye would behave!.

As in their comments on the previous verse, there are also slight differences between al-Ṭabarī's and Ibn Kathīr's style of interpretation of this one. By contrast, al-Zamakhsharī does not elaborate on this verse in detail, simply noting that *khalā'if* is a reference to the Prophet Muḥammad's followers who succeed the previous generations.⁴¹ However, al-Ṭabarī interprets it as referring to Allah's power to appoint human beings as *khalīfahs* (*khalā'if*). This time he ascribes to *khalā'if* a general meaning without specifically referring to any particular people or generation as he did regarding the previous verse. Nevertheless, the significance of this verse derives from the notion of the appointment of human beings as *khalā'if* and the process of succession from one generation to another.⁴² This replacement occurs because the

⁴⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 5: 422.

⁴¹ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 2: 228.

⁴² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 6: 539.

previous generation has failed to follow the right rules and is unable to implement fundamental principles. Consequently, oppression and injustice arise within the community, and a new leadership is needed in order to put things right.

Ibn Kathir explains this verse in a very short and precise interpretation. Because many previous generations rejected the appointed prophets, another group of people came into existence and replaced them. As Ibn Kathir remarks, they were led by a new prophet, implying Muḥammad, who was sent as the *khalīfah* for this new generation. This people and their Prophet (Muḥammad) are considered by Ibn Kathir as those really referred to by the term *khalā'if* in this verse. God's primary purpose in bringing this about is to evaluate the degree of their obedience to their *khalīfah*.⁴³ If they fully obey and follow him in every right path, the purpose will be fulfilled and they will receive every blessing from Allah. But if they fail, they will deserve an appalling punishment.

The second verse of sūrah Yūnus (10), which is the third in the Qur'an to contain the plural *khalā'if* is found in verse 73 (10: 73). The verse reads:

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَتَبْجَيْتَنَّهُ وَمَنْ مَّعَهُ فِي الْفُلْكِ وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ خَلَائِفَ وَأَغْرَقْنَا
الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَذَابَ الْمُنذَرِينَ

They rejected him, but We delivered him, and those with him, in the Ark and We made them inherit (the earth), while We overwhelmed in the Flood those who rejected Our Signs, Then see what was the end of those who were warned (but heeded not)!

⁴³ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, 4: 1739-1740.

According to al-Ṭabarī, this verse concerns the Qur'anic narrative of the story of the prophet Noah and his people. The significant point, which is relevant to the concept of *khilāfah*, is the commandment to obey Allah and the messenger or, in other words, the *khalīfah* in this world. The example given in this verse shows how important it is for the people to obey and follow the *khalīfah*. There have been many examples in the Qur'an mentioning the severe punishment of unbelievers. Therefore, this verse is revealed and directed to Prophet Muḥammad and his people explicitly to warn them not to follow this wrong path. In addition, other *khalīfahs* will be appointed to replace the unbelievers, as through Allah's will Noah and those who survived in the ark replaced the people who refused to accept the message and were drowned.⁴⁴

In comparison with al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn Kathīr do not elaborate their interpretations of this verse. The former explains the meaning of the term *khalā'if* very briefly,⁴⁵ while the latter gives a direct definition in a few words without explaining the story behind this revelation.⁴⁶ It is generally accepted that their lack of elaboration does not necessarily imply their rejection of al-Ṭabarī's commentary, but nor is it suggested that they fully accept and agree with al-Ṭabarī's point of view.

The fourth and last verse containing the word *khalā'if* appears in sūrah Fāṭir (35): 39, which reads:

⁴⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 6: 587.

⁴⁵ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 2: 246. He connects *khalā'if* to the followers in Noah's ark who succeeded the drowned unbelievers.

⁴⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAzīm*, 4: 1763.

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَائِفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَعَلَيْهِ كُفْرُهُ وَلَا يَزِيدُ
 الْكَافِرِينَ كُفْرَهُمْ إِلَّا مَقْتًا وَلَا يَزِيدُ الْكَافِرِينَ كُفْرَهُمْ
 إِلَّا خَسَارًا

He it is that has made you inheritors in the earth: if, then, any do reject (Allah), their rejection (works) against themselves: their rejection but adds to the odium for the Unbelievers in the sight of their Lord: their rejection but adds to (their own) undoing.

There is little to be added concerning this verse by al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī or even Ibn Kathīr because it is the last verse of the four in terms of the Qur'anic order, and they have already discussed the interpretation of the term *khalā'if* in some detail in commenting on the first three verses. However, their brief explanations still imply the continuance of the *khilāfah* system. For example, al-Ṭabarī mentions the *khilāfah* of the people who succeeded those of 'Ād and Thamūd and who took up the duty to rule.⁴⁷ Moreover, this system of replacement continues from one nation to another and from one period to another.

This interpretation is very similar to Ibn Kathīr's point of view. Another essential idea that he briefly mentions concerns Allah's warning against disobedience.⁴⁸ It is not the first time in the Qur'an that Allah gives an example of predecessors who did not follow their *khalīfah*, in order to help later generations avoid His severe punishment. Nevertheless, human beings are fallible, and generation after generation continues to

⁴⁷ See Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 10: 419.

⁴⁸ See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAzīm*, 6: 2924.

disobey this commandment and those holding the office of *khalīfah* continue to be replaced.

3.3.2 *Khulafā'*

Another plural form of *khalīfah* is the term *khulafā'*. It appears three times in the Qur'an, twice in sūrat al-A'raf and once in sūrat al-Naml. The first occurrence of this term is in sūrat al-A'raf (7): 69, where the text reads:

أَوَعَجِبْتُمْ أَنْ جَاءَكُمْ ذِكْرٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ عَلَى رَجُلٍ مِّنكُمْ لِيُنذِرَكُمْ
وَأَذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ مِن بَعْدِ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَزَادَكُمْ فِي
الْخَلْقِ بَصْرَةً فَأَذْكُرُوا لآلَاءِ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

Do ye wonder that there hath come to you a message from your Lord through a man of your own People, to warn you? Call in remembrance that He made you inheritors after the people of Noah, and gave you a stature tall among the nations. Call in remembrance the benefits (ye have received) from Allah: that so ye may prosper.⁴⁹

This verse deals mainly with 'salvation history'⁵⁰ in which a certain motif recurs: God installs a group of people on earth (Noah's); they go astray and refuse to heed the words of the messenger sent to them; consequently, Allah destroys them and replaces

⁴⁹ 'Abdullāh Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 363.

⁵⁰ There are numerous verses in the Qur'an that emphasise the salvation history of the earlier people. These stories, in general, relate to the concept of *khilāfah* by describing how the changing of peoples and their *khulafā'* (*khalīfahs*) takes place. Historically, it occurs in the *khilāfah* of almost every prophet sent among human beings. See David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999).

them with other people. These substitutes and successors are called their *khalā'if* or *khulafā'*, as the people they succeed and replace have been destroyed.

In al-Ṭabarī's opinion, the term *khulafā'* in this story refers to the people of Prophet Hūd (ʿĀd).⁵¹ They were elected to replace the people of Noah, who, according to the Qur'anic narration, refused to accept the message delivered to them by Allah. Considering another aspect, al-Ṭabarī highlights the punishment that this people received as the result of their ignorance and rejection of the divine message. Allah mentions the story of this punishment with the purpose of reminding the next chosen people, ʿĀd, to comprehend and obey the message sent to them. Any refusal and disobedience will lead them to the same fate as their predecessor.⁵²

This detailed explanation is not found in al-Zamakhsharī's and Ibn Kathīr's Qur'anic commentaries because neither of them elaborate as much on this verse as al-Ṭabarī does. They follow his interpretation regarding the meaning of the term *khulafā'* only, where he refers to the *khilāfah* of ʿĀd (the people of Hūd).⁵³ Ibn Kathīr, however, concentrates on the interpretation of other aspects and seems to ignore al-Ṭabarī's discussion of the meaning of the term *khulafā'*. Nevertheless, he notes one essential idea, that concerning the blessings and graces of Allah to the people of Hūd (ʿĀd), whom He has chosen to succeed the annihilated people of Noah.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 5: 523.

⁵² Ibid, 523.

⁵³ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 2: 87.

⁵⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAzīm*, 3: 1444.

The second verse that uses the term *khulafā'* occurs in the same sūrah as the first one, al-A^ʿrāf (7): 74, where the text reads:

وَأَذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ مِنْ بَعْدِ عَادٍ وَبَوَّأْنَاكُمْ
فِي الْأَرْضِ مَقَامًا وَمَنْ شِئْتُمْ مِنْ شَهْوَاهَا فَضُورًا وَتَنْجِثُونَ الْجِبَالَ بَيْوتًا
فَاذْكُرُوا آيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْتُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ

And remember how He made you inheritors after the 'Ad people and gave you habitations in the land: ye build for yourselves palaces and castles in (open) plains, and carve out homes in the mountains; so bring to remembrance the benefits (ye have received) from Allah, and refrain from evil and mischief on the earth.⁵⁵

If the first verse refers to the people of Hūd (ʿĀd), verse 74 concerns the vicegerency of the prophet Ṣāliḥ and of the next generation (Thamūd). The process of succession is narrated as being continuous from one generation to another. The main reason for these changes, as pointed out in the Qur'an, is the result of a people's ignorance and disobedience to the messengers of Allah. Moreover, Allah has given various examples of the earlier people who had received appalling punishments, as a means to remind Ṣāliḥ and his people (Thamūd) not to follow the same direction.

Al-Ṭabarī brings this understanding to his interpretation of this verse. The people of Prophet Ṣāliḥ (Thamūd) were appointed as *khulafā'* as they were chosen from among mankind to replace and succeed the people of Hūd (ʿĀd).⁵⁶ This appointment is described as Allah's true and real blessing; therefore, they should react in the right way

⁵⁵ ʿAbdullāh Yūsuf ʿAlī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 365.

⁵⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 5: 537.

and make every effort to perform this task successfully. Otherwise, they will face a situation similar to that of their predecessors and another chosen people will be appointed as their successors.

Surprisingly perhaps, al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn Kathīr give no explanation at all concerning the term *khulafā'* in this verse. They may have thought that their explanations of sūrat al-A^ʿrāf (7): 69 were sufficient, even though they devote only a few sentences to its elucidation. Another possibility is that they think the meaning of *khulafā'* is easily understood from the 'salvation story' of the people of Noah, Hūd and Ṣāliḥ which is narrated in numerous verses in this sūrah.⁵⁷ Even so, al-Zamakhsharī does interpret other phrases in this verse, and Ibn Kathīr uses a similar method, as he ignores the interpretation of *khulafā'*, but elaborates on the historical story of the people of Thamūd, which is fairly relevant to the concept of *khilāfah* but not so important as to warrant interpretation in detail.⁵⁸

The last verse that mentions the term *khulafā'* appears in sūrat al-Naml (27): 62. The text reads:

أَمَّنْ يُجِيبُ الْمُضْطَرَّ إِذَا دَعَاهُ وَيَكْشِفُ السُّوءَ وَيَجْعَلُكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ الْأَرْضِ
أَمَلْتُمْ مَعَ اللَّهِ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَذَكَّرُونَ

Or, who listens to the (soul) distressed when it calls on Him, and who relieves its suffering, and makes you (mankind) inheritors of the earth?

(Can there be another) god besides Allah? Little it is that ye heed!.

⁵⁷ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf^ʿan Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 2: 90.

⁵⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAzīm*, 3: 1448-1452.

Considering the style presented in this verse, it is clear that the inquiry and question method has been adopted. However, it is not used to explain the meaning of the term *khulafā'*, but to clarify the meaning of the first phrase, 'Or, who listens to the (soul) distressed when it calls on Him...'. Al-Ṭabarī spends little time interpreting the term *khulafā'*, but he asserts that the question or inquiry form of this verse is specifically directed to the people of Prophet Muḥammad. Hence, the term *khulafā'* implies the succession of Prophet Muḥammad's generation; a newly elected person has replaced all previous leaders.⁵⁹ Al-Zamakhsharī, however, considers *khulafā'* in a wider and general context that means the successors who inherit from earlier nations or the succession of rulership and kingship (*al-mulk*).⁶⁰

Ibn Kathīr gives a quite lengthy interpretation of this verse but does not merely define the term *khulafā'*. A small part of his discussion, however, seems to be very useful to the interpretation of this term. Generally, he stresses that this verse refers to the changing process of the *khilāfah* among *khulafā'* (plural of *khalīfah*), from one generation to the next. His interpretation is very close to al-Ṭabarī's and al-Zamakhsharī's points of view. Moreover, he considers that the term *khulafā'* in this verse has a similar meaning to those found in sūrat al-An'ām (6): 133 and 165 and, sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30.⁶¹

After examining the three verses that use the term *khulafā'*, we suggest that the significant point concerns the existence of a process of succession among human

⁵⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 10: 6.

⁶⁰ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 3: 155.

⁶¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAzīm*, 6: 2634.

beings. This process could be said to start with the appointment of Adam, but in the above three verses, *khulafā'* refers to different addressees; Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Muḥammad with their respective people. It then continues from one person to another, from one generation to another and from one period to another until it reaches the last descendants in this world, the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad. In one respect, this interpretation seems to support the Sunnīs' perception of the dynastic *khilāfah*. Since all three commentators are of the opinion that the process does not stop at the end of Muḥammad's appointment (*nubuwwah*), it could be that their view of the succession related to dynastic concerns of their own day, and particularly to the ʿAbbāsids, and that their opinion influenced their interpretation of the term *khulafā'*. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether this was really their intention, considering that not even a single sentence exists which unequivocally refers to the dynastic succession of their own day.

3.4 The Interpretation of Some Other Derivative Forms of *Khalīfah*

Apart from the term *khalīfah*, there are a number of other terms that indicate the concept of *khilāfah* such as *yastakhlif*, *istakhlafa*, *ukhluf* and *yakhluf*. In some instances, the use of these terms provides a detailed and deep explanation of the basic concept of *khilāfah*. On the other hand, they sometimes refer to the general meaning only and are thus not very useful. The relevant verses to be examined will be divided according to the several derivative forms of the original term, *khalafa*.

3.4.1 *Yastakhlif* and *Istakhlafa*

Another derivative form of the term *khalīfah* is *yastakhlif*, which functions as a verb, the meaning of which in every instance, is ‘to appoint a successor’, ‘to make someone an inheritor’ or ‘to succeed’. It appears in four different sūrahs of the Qur’an. The first occurrence is found in sūrat al-An‘ām (6): 133, where the text reads:

وَرَبُّكَ الْغَنِيُّ ذُو الرَّحْمَةِ إِنْ يَشَاءُ يُذْهِبْكُمْ وَيَسْتَبْخِلِفَ مِنْ
بَعْدِكُمْ مَا يَشَاءُ كَمَا أَنْشَأَكُمْ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّةِ قَوْمٍ آخَرِينَ

Thy Lord is Self-sufficient, Full of Mercy: if it were His Will, He could destroy you, and in your place appoint whom He will as your successors, even as He raised you up from the posterity of other people.

This verse obviously contains ideas pertaining to the concept of *khilāfah*. Al-Ṭabari stresses that the power to create, to destroy or to replace the *khalīfah* in this world belongs to Allah alone (the concept of sovereignty). He can choose anybody to hold the position of *khalīfah* and can also choose to replace him with somebody else. Al-Ṭabari gives the example of the succession of Adam’s descendants, where the *khilāfah* transferred from one person to another because of the destruction they caused during their period of rule. Therefore, this verse acts as a reminder to the Prophet Muḥammad and his generation that Allah might have reason to replace them with another creature.⁶² Their committing unacceptable and ruthless destruction would be the main cause. It should be emphasised that this is neither a mere possibility nor an idle threat, but is Allah’s promise to make it a reality if this generation were to fail. This can be

⁶² Al-Ṭabari, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān fī Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān*, 5: 347-348.

seen in the examples of the many previous generations that had been destroyed, as narrated in many Qur'anic verses and traditions of the Prophet. More significantly, it might be the case that al-Ṭabarī offers this explanation knowing what might be the political implications in his own period, that of the ʿAbbāsids, during which some *khalīfahs* had not ruled according to the ideal expectations and had judged according to their own self-interest, and dealing unjustly with the people.

Al-Zamakhsharī, in a similar way, interprets this verse to mean that it is Allah's decision alone to replace the disobedient with the pious and faithful. The survivors of the flood (Noah's companions) according to him, are to be classified as among the pious and faithful.⁶³ Ibn Kathīr's interpretation is much closer to al-Ṭabarī's in that he highlights the power of Allah to replace the disobedient with the pious, who will submit in true loyalty to Him. In fact, this process has happened many times to previous generations.⁶⁴ Therefore, this verse seems to be a reminder to the Prophet Muḥammad and his people, given by Allah in order to prevent them from receiving the punishment suffered by the disobedient and disloyal generations.

The second verse containing this term occurs in sūrat al-Aʿrāf (7): 129, where the text reads:

قَالُوا أُوذِينَا مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَأْتِيَنَا وَمِنْ بَعْدِ
مَا جِئْتَنَا قَالَ عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَنْ يُهْلِكَ عَدُوَّكُمْ وَيَسْتَخْلِقَ لَكُمْ
فِي الْأَرْضِ قَبِيضًا كَيْفَ تَعْمَلُونَ

⁶³ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tanzīl*, 2: 52.

⁶⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, 3: 1368.

They said: "We have had (nothing but) trouble, both before and after thou camest to us." He said: "It may be that your Lord will destroy your enemy and make you inheritors in the earth; that so He may try you by your deeds".

The story of this verse is an extension of the first two verses that we have considered in the discussion concerning the term *khulafā'*. It narrates the story of Pharaoh (Fir^ʿaun), Prophet Moses and his descendants, the Israelites. The Pharaoh at that time intended to kill every son born to the Israelites in order to prevent one of them from taking his place. Al-Ṭabarī points out that the term *yastakhlif* here refers to the people of Prophet Moses; they succeed Pharaoh after his destruction.⁶⁵ Al-Ṭabarī does not elaborate this point, but he must have been aware that the Israelites did not succeed Pharaoh as rulers of Egypt. His meaning is probably that the *khilāfah* passed to the Israelites as a people or that it passed to Moses as the messenger of Allah.

Al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation of this verse is very similar to al-Ṭabarī's except that al-Ṭabarī quotes two traditions, both on the authority of Mujāhid (d. 104/721), to support his view. Nevertheless, there is no reason to discuss these traditions, since they are not used to interpret the term *yastakhlif*, but as a means to explain the initial phrase 'They said; "We have had (nothing but), both before and after thou camest to us." ...'. Al-Zamakhsharī gives a fairly detailed interpretation of the text without citing any reports.⁶⁶ Therefore, al-Ṭabarī's commentary, in comparison to that of al-

⁶⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 6: 28-29. For a detailed information on the Qur'anic narratives of Pharaoh and the Israelites, see Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, 71-73 and 106.

⁶⁶ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 2: 105.

Zamakhsharī, is much more detailed and gives a deeper understanding of the meaning of *khilāfah*.

While both al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī give some explanations of the term *yastakhlif* as used in this verse, nothing pertinent can be found in Ibn Kathīr's commentary. He interprets other phrases in this verse without any mention of the meaning of *khilāfah*, perhaps because he has already done so in regard to the previous two verses (7: 69 and 74) and thinks that it is not necessary to repeat the same explanation.

Another verse that contains the term *yastakhlif*, and an important one for this analysis is found in sūrah Hūd (11): 57, which reads:

فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ مَا أُرْسِلْتُ بِهِ إِلَىٰ إِلَيْكُمْ وَيَسْتَخْلِفُ رَبِّي قَوْمًا
غَيْرَكُمْ وَلَا تَضُرُّوهُ شَيْئًا إِنْ رَبِّي عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَفِيظٌ

‘If ye turn away, I (at least) have conveyed the Message with which I was sent to you. My Lord will make another People to succeed you, and you will not harm Him in the least. For my Lord hath care and watch over all things’.

The story in this verse refers to the Prophet Hūd and his people; Allah warns them of the outcome of their disobedience and refusal to worship Him. Al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn Kathīr describe *yastakhlif* as having the meaning of replacing Hūd's people with another nation after Allah destroys them. This new people will do

their utmost to obey Him and carry out all His commands.⁶⁷ All three commentators are generally agreed concerning this verse and there are no substantial differences between them.

The last verse containing the term *yastakhlif* appears in sūrat al-Nūr (24): 55, whose text reads:

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي
الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي
ارْتَضَى لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُم مِّن بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي
شَيْئًا وَمَن كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

Allah has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will, of a surety, grant them in the land, inheritance (of power), as He granted it to those before them; that He will establish in authority their religion, the one which He has chosen for them; and that He will change (their state), after the fear in which they (lived), to one of security and peace: 'They will worship Me (alone) and not associate aught with Me.' If any do reject Faith after this, they are rebellious and wicked.

The term appears twice in this verse, once in the form *yastakhlif* and another in the form *istakhlafa*. All three exegetes provide a fairly long elaboration on this verse, perhaps because of the existence of two terms in one sūrah, which seems to call for an extended explanation. Nevertheless, they all agree that this verse refers to the Prophet Muḥammad and his people.

⁶⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān*, 7: 60; Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tanzīl*, 2: 277; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, 4: 1797.

Al-Ṭabarī explains that this verse is a promise from Allah to the people of Prophet Muḥammad, especially to the believers and righteous people, that they will be the *khalīfahs* and succeed their predecessors. Moreover, he provides an example of a previous generation, the Israelites, from whom *khalīfahs* were chosen to replace the people before them.⁶⁸ Al-Zamakhsharī, by contrast, interprets it in a more convincing way, as expressing Allah's solemn promise to make the people of the Prophet Muḥammad *khalīfahs* on this earth. In addition, he also points out the promise to make Islam prevail over all other religions. While al-Ṭabarī sees it as referring to Prophet Muḥammad's people in general, the indication of al-Zamakhsharī's commentary is that it is more specifically applied to the four rightly-guided Caliphs of the Prophet Muḥammad's people. This is apparent from his quotation of one *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, which gives the meaning that the period of the *khilāfah* will last for only thirty years.⁶⁹ This *ḥadīth*, however, is not mentioned in al-Ṭabarī's commentary on this verse. Indirectly, this period of thirty years is taken to imply the period of the first four caliphs of Islam. If this report is accepted, whoever comes to power after them is not to be considered as *khalīfah*.

The acceptance of this *ḥadīth* inevitably affects the status of the later caliphates, particularly the Umayyads, ʿAbbāsids and Ottomans. Basically, their periods of rule cannot be regarded as true caliphates, like those of the Prophet and the other four caliphs, but must be seen as merely another form of monarchy. The rulers of the first of these two dynasties claimed the title of *khalīfat Allāh* (caliph of Allah), but if the

⁶⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān*, 9: 342-343.

⁶⁹ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tanzīl*, 3: 73.

khilāfah is restricted to some thirty years only, the usage of this title, after the caliphate of the four rightly-guided, seems to contradict the meaning of the *ḥadīth*.⁷⁰ Although *khalīfat Allāh* was an official title of the Umayyads, ʿAbbāsids and even of the third rightly-guided caliph, ʿUthmān, this title, as viewed by Crone and Hinds, was not commonly used for the purpose of individual reference and address to the caliph. In this situation, they normally adopted *amīr al-muʿminīn* (leader of the believers).⁷¹ Similarly, the majority of Shīʿī divisions also assumed the same title. For example, the Ismāʿīlīs proclaimed ʿAlī to have been *khalīfat Allāh* and the Fāṭimid dynasty was officially proclaimed *khalīfat Allāh ʿala ʿl-ʿālamīn*. In contradiction, the Zaydī Shīʿī has never been recorded of adopting the same title.⁷²

Ibn Kathīr’s commentary on this verse, in contradiction to that of al-Zamakhsharī, is much closer to al-Ṭabarī’s point of view. He also connects the appointment of the *khalīfah* to the people of the Prophet Muḥammad without restricting it to the first four caliphs. Nonetheless, he gives a long description of the historical background of the periods in which the Prophet, Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān and ʿAlī were the *khalīfahs*. His similarity with al-Zamakhsharī lies in that, even though he does not specifically refer it to the *khilāfah* of the first four, he quotes the same *ḥadīth*, describing the period of the *khilāfah* as only thirty years.⁷³ After analysing the various interpretations of this verse, Sir Thomas Arnold apparently agreed with the interpretations of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr according to which the term refers in a general way to the people of Prophet Muḥammad and rejects its limitation to the four caliphs only (al-Zamakhsharī’s view).

⁷⁰ Ahmed, ‘Some Aspects of the Political Theology of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’, 58.

⁷¹ Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, 11.

⁷² Ibid, 17-18.

Arnold's preference was based on the fact that nowhere in the Qur'an can any such limitation be found.⁷⁴

Another significant point concerns Ibn Kathir's citation of one *ḥadīth*, restricting the number of the earliest *khalīfahs* to only twelve people. It is surprising that this *ḥadīth* is never cited by the other two commentators. The explanation of this *ḥadīth*, according to Ibn Kathir, is that the rule of the twelve *khalīfahs* was not necessarily to be continuous from one person to another, but they were rather chosen at random (except for the first four caliphs). Moreover, these twelve caliphs were selected only from among the Quraysh, which is considered one of the most respected tribes in the early Islamic community. Nonetheless, they are not the twelve *imāms*, as has been claimed by the Imāmiyyah Shī'ī.⁷⁵

Regarding the privilege of membership of the Quraysh as one of the qualifications to be *khalīfah*, the majority of Muslim scholars claim that this is due to the great number of reported sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad affirming the excellence of the Quraysh.⁷⁶ While it is not our intention to dispute the authenticity of these utterances of the Prophet, it should be borne in mind that their privileges arose under specific circumstances and, therefore, they do not reflect their excellence at all times.

⁷³ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, 6: 2525.

⁷⁴ Arnold, *The Caliphate*, 42-43.

⁷⁵ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, 6: 2525.

⁷⁶ Some sayings of the Prophet that express the excellence of the Quraysh are, 'The caliphate will remain among the Quraysh even if only two persons are left (on the earth)'. 'People are subservient to the Quraysh; the Muslims among them being subservient to the Muslims among them and the disbelievers among the people being subservient to the disbelievers among them'. 'Leadership should come from the Quraysh'. Quoted in Oyewale Imam, 'Hereditary Succession', 153-154 and 146.

Moreover, some other sayings of the Prophet opened the *khilāfah* to every Muslim, irrespective of his race or clan, which is more or less the Khārijite position.⁷⁷ It is also recorded that the Prophet, during his expeditions or other journeys, appointed many different deputies without restricting these appointments to a particular race or tribe; and, it is claimed that the restriction of the *khilāfah* to only the Quraysh indicates tribal and racial favouritism and prejudice, which is totally contradictory to the teaching of Islam.

Considering the sayings of the Prophet and the above argument, it is apparent that these divisions of view arose as a result of the Arab cultural practice giving each tribe a different status. Some were considered to be above the others, which afforded them a greater opportunity. On the other hand, the lower-class tribes, realising that their chances of producing a *khalīfah* was very slim, attempted to use different sources, which usually indicated a general meaning. In addition, the existence of contradictions among the *ḥadīths* also contributed to this division, as each group usually selected the meaning closest to its own opinion.

⁷⁷ The *ḥadīth* that allows other tribes or clans to hold the office of *khilāfah* is 'Hear and obey even though your Amir be an Abyssinian slave...'. Quoted in Oyewale Imam, 'Hereditary Succession', 154 and 146. This *ḥadīth* provided the justification for the opinion of the Khārijites concerning appointment to the *khilāfah*. They believed that the Quraysh hold no special and exceptional status which would uniquely qualify them for the post. This opinion is, however, understandable for another reason: the majority of the Khārijites were non-Quraysh. Therefore, narrowing the selection of the *khalīfah* to the Quraysh alone would have greatly diminished the chances of appointing the caliph from their group.

3.4.2 *Ukhluf* and *Yakhluf*

The fourth term to appear in the Qur'an that offers some further interpretations of the meaning of the *khilāfah*, is *ukhluf*, which is a verb, derived from the root *khalafa*. This term occurs only once in the Qur'an, in sūrat al-A'rāf (7): 142; the text reads:

﴿وَوَاعَدْنَا مُوسَىٰ ثَلَاثِينَ لَيْلَةً وَأَتَمَمْتَنَاهَا بِعَشْرِ فِتْمٍ مِيقَاتٍ رَبِّهِ
 أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِأَخِيهِ هَارُونَ أَخْلُفْنِي فِي قَوْمِي وَأَصْلِحْ وَلَا
 تَتَّبِعْ سَبِيلَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ﴾

We appointed for Moses thirty nights, and completed (the period) with ten (more): thus was completed the term (of communion) with his Lord, forty nights. And Moses had charged his brother Aaron (before he went up): "Act for me amongst my people: do right, and follow not the way of those who do mischief".

Regarding the term *ukhlufni* in this verse, both al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī give the meaning *kun khalīfatī*, or, in other words, 'be my deputy' (or 'representative').⁷⁸ Here we have a dialogue between Moses and Aaron, which takes place during the appointment of Aaron as Moses' deputy during his absence; Aaron is ordered to look after the affairs of his people. Giving a similar interpretation to those of his fellow exegetes, Ibn Kathīr points out that Moses' appointment of Aaron serves as a reminder and warning that he should practise good deeds and avoid any disastrous actions.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ See Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 6: 49; Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 2: 111.

⁷⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, 3: 1471.

The most significant point of this interpretation concerns the necessity of appointing another leader or person who will take charge of the office during the absence of the usual leader. It is compulsory in the Muslim community to have someone to take charge of its affairs at all times. The necessity of having a leader, even in a small group of three, is one of the basic principles underpinning the concept of *khilāfah*. A fuller discussion on the necessity of the *khilāfah* has already been presented in the first chapter.

Another derivative form of *khalīfah* is *yakhluf*. This particular term appears in sūrat al-Zukhruf: 60 (43: 60), which is the last verse found in ‘Uthmān’s Qur’anic order that indicates the meaning of *khalīfah*. Here, however, it is used in the plural form, *yakhlufūn*, as the text reads:

وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَجَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ مَلَائِكَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ يَخْلُفُونَ

And if it were Our Will, We could make angels from amongst you, succeeding each other on the earth.

Al-Ṭabarī remarks that this verse is Allah’s warning to the descendants of Adam that the angels might be appointed to replace them as *khalīfahs* on this earth. If this eventuality were to occur, their existence and role as the chosen and Adam’s successors would at last come to an end. This is very possible if Allah so wills it, ultimately the angels will be the beneficiary as their successors.⁸⁰ A similar interpretation can be found in al-Zamakhsharī’s and Ibn Kathīr’s commentaries, except that al-Zamakhsharī

⁸⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān fī Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān*, 11: 204.

regards the warning in this verse as referring specifically to the Israelites, and not generally to the descendants of Adam, as interpreted previously by al-Ṭabarī.⁸¹

Perhaps this verse has the deliberate purpose of reminding the descendants of Adam not to repeat the disastrous actions that occurred during the appointment of the *jinn* and *iblis*. Whatever the reason, it is essential to admit the possibility of this becoming a reality, even though it is understood from several Qur'anic verses and traditions of the Prophet that human beings are the best of Allah's creatures and the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad are the best among them.

In order to produce a clear interpretation of this verse, al-Ṭabarī cites two more verses that indicate a similar meaning: the first is sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 133 and the second, which has been discussed earlier, is sūrat al-An'ām (6): 133.⁸² The method of producing another verse to emphasise the meaning of the one under discussion is rarely found in al-Zamakhsharī's style of interpretation.⁸³ Even, Ibn Kathīr seldom uses this method of making the interpretation more effective.

Al-Ṭabarī also introduces five complete reports into his elaboration of the meaning of this verse. Every report indicates the possibility that the angels may replace human beings as the *khalīfahs* in this world and that, if so, they will succeed one another, as in

⁸¹ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 3: 494; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*, 7: 3153.

⁸² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 11: 204.

⁸³ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 3: 494.

the process of succession among human beings.⁸⁴ This method, very common in al-Ṭabarī, is again rarely found in al-Zamakhsharī, but Ibn Kathīr's commentary often makes use of it. On most occasions, however, he does not quote the report's complete original text, but points out its general meaning only.

3.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The concluding remarks for this chapter will be placed at the end of the next (fourth) chapter, thus combining the conclusions regarding the Sunnī analyses of both the *khilafah*- and *imāmah*-verses.

⁸⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 11: 204.

CHAPTER 4 CLASSICAL SUNNĪ QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION OF THE *IMĀMAH* AND *ULŪ 'L-AMR*-VERSES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Using the same methodology as in the previous discussion of the *khilāfah*-verses in Chapter Three, this chapter will deal with the analysis of the *imāmah*- and *ulū 'l-amr*-verses. The same three Sunnī commentaries - those of al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn Kathīr - will be examined. The analysis is divided into two different sections: the first concentrates on the *imāmah*-verses, covering the singular and plural forms, while the second examines the two *ulū 'l-amr*-verses.

4.2 THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM *IMĀM* AND ITS PLURAL FORM (*A'IMMAH*)

Having analysed those terms having the same root as *khilāfah*, the study will now concentrate on the analysis of a different root word, which is *imām*. In the Qur'an, *imām* and its plural *a'immaḥ* appear on many different occasions, each appearance indicating a different meaning. In addition, the reference of these verses is addressed to different groups of people. The discussion will be confined to two forms of the term, the singular *imām* and the plural *a'immaḥ*. The structure of the analysis is divided into two subsections; the first covers the analysis of the verses containing the singular *imām* and the second part examines the plural *a'immaḥ*.

4.2.1 *Imām*

The term *imām*, which literally means leader, only appears twice in the Qur'an, and in each case it refers to a different group of people or audience. Nevertheless, it is important to see these verses in their context according to different commentaries. Even though the term itself does not literally have the meaning of *khalīfah*, it is quite reasonable to explore it in some depth, as it might be useful in order to understand the concept of *khilāfah* more fully.

The first instance occurs in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 124, describing the appointment of Prophet Abraham as an *imām*, whose text reads:

﴿ وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا
قَالَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ لَا يَتَنَا عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled: he said: "I will make thee an *imām* to the Nations." He pleaded: "And also (*imāms*) from my offspring!" He answered: "But My Promise is not within the reach of evil-doers".

According to al-Ṭabarī, the phrase 'I will make thee an *imām* to the nations (literally peoples or humankind)' means 'Allah shall make Abraham an *imām* (leader) of those who shall come after him, from the people who have faith in Allah and His messengers; he shall be the first among them. Then they shall follow the guidance sent to him and follow the *sunnah* (way), which he practises through the command and

revelations of Allah.’¹ The leadership that Allah promises is not only addressed to Abraham’s own people but also extends to the generations after him as long as they become true believers. On the other hand, al-Ṭabarī asserts that this promise is not applicable to the people who practise evils even though they are descendants of Abraham.²

Al-Zamakhsharī seems to agree with al-Ṭabarī’s definition of this term since he defines it in the same way. Furthermore, this verse implies that a *ẓālim* (a sinful and evil-doing person) cannot be appointed as an *imām*. Besides being refused the position of *imām*, evildoers are also prohibited from witnessing testimony, delivering judgement, reporting *ḥadīth* and leading the congregational prayer.³ This shows how the appointment of a person to be a qualified *imām* involves a very strict and detailed selection process. Only a competent and qualified *imām* can manage to rule justly and avoid corruption and the shedding of blood.

According to the majority of Muslim scholars, it is necessary that at all times there should be an *imām* to represent the role of the Prophet. Consequently, he should perform the duties of the Prophet, such as guiding the people and showing them the way of goodness and prosperity in this world. Since he holds the highest position of public authority, regulating all aspects of people’s lives, it is compulsory for him to ensure justice in the community, eliminate enmity between believers and, at the same

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān*, 1: 577.

² Ibid, 577.

³ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaqā’iq al-Tanzīl*, 1: 309.

time, alleviate oppression. Therefore, Allah promises that only those of the faithful will occupy the office of the *khilāfah*.

The promise to make only believers entitled to carry out the task is understood from the interpretation of the term *‘ahd* (promise), which reads:

He answered: “But My Promise is not within the reach of evil-doers.

In determining the precise reference of the term *‘ahd* (promise), al-Ṭabarī underlines some arguments between the commentators. Some scholars were of the opinion that it refers to *al-nubuwwah* (prophethood). Since unbelievers are not to be considered for the position of *imām*, it is obvious that prophethood is not within their reach. It further implies that the last prophet was indeed the last, and that no further prophets will arise even among the pious and righteous, because the prophetic mission came to an end with the death of the Prophet Muḥammad. Devout and virtuous men will, however, lead and govern the people under the title *khalīfah* or *imām*. Al-Ṭabarī supports this view by citing a report narrated on the authority of al-Suddī (d. 127/744), who interprets *‘ahd* as referring to *al-nubuwwah*.⁴

Al-Ṭabarī also presents another definition, given by some *ḥadīth* reporters, who consider *‘ahd* as referring to *al-imāmah* (leadership or imāmate), which implies that the promise of leadership applies only to believers with a merciful attitude and clement personality. Brutal and inhumane people, on the other hand, are completely unacceptable as *imām*. This view is supported by the reports narrated on the authority of Mujāhid (d. 104/721) and ‘Ikrimah (d.105/723), who defines *‘ahd* in this verse as

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān*, 1: 578.

referring to *imāmah*.⁵ Given this interpretation, it is obvious that the appointment to the *khilāfah* by Allah (or in this context, to the *imāmah*), is only applicable to qualified and capable people. Moreover, the Qur'an and the Prophet Muḥammad, from the very beginning, have already clarified the criteria and characteristics of the *khalīfah* and *imām*.

The third meaning, by contrast, relates to the followers of the *imām* rather than to the *imām* himself. In this regard, it is not obligatory for a Muslim to obey and follow a wicked or impious leader. Al-Ṭabarī supports this definition with a report related on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687-88), which explains that the obedience to a leader is subject to his being obedient to Allah.⁶ Nevertheless, the term can also be connected to *al-amān* (peace, safety) and *dīn Allāh* (the religion of Allah), views which are supported by the reports of Qatādah (d. 118/736), al-Rabīʿ and al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 105/723).⁷ With all these possible meanings of the term *ʿahd*, al-Ṭabarī prefers the first two, which are concerned with *al-nubuwwah* and *al-imāmah*.⁸

In offering the above interpretation, it is possible that al-Ṭabarī was influenced by the reprehensible acts of the ʿAbbāsīd caliph, al-Muqtadir (295/908-320/932), which he himself witnessed. The period of al-Muqtadir was infamous; for its brutality, corruption and exploitation by the ruling power. For example, his extortion of taxes led to the amassing of huge fortunes by the political elite. Moreover, his court was

⁵ Ibid, 578-579.

⁶ Ibid, 579.

⁷ Ibid, 579-580.

⁸ Ibid, 580.

wastefully extravagant and financially mismanaged, finally becoming bankrupt.⁹ Although al-Ṭabarī does not explicitly address the political corruption of his time, his interpretation can in part be read as a condemnation of this notorious figure.

Ibn Kathīr, in this regard, interprets the phrase which appoints Abraham as the *imām* to mean that this appointment is the result of his success in performing the duty to promote good deeds and prevent prohibited actions.¹⁰ For that reason, Allah makes him the *imām* of the people, whom they will follow and perceive as a role model in every aspect of their lives. This interpretation yields the same meaning as the first two, since Ibn Kathīr lived later than al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī, who have already used most of the *ḥadīths* that he quotes in his commentary. Therefore, since he is in agreement with them, although he tries to define *imām* in a slightly different way, the meaning is the same; that is, the *imām* can only be appointed from a qualified, competent and hence limited group of people in order to secure the implementation of the *sharʿah* and, at the same time, to uphold the dignity of Islam itself.

If a *ẓālim* (an evildoer) is not permitted to be a *khalīfah* or *imām*, as interpreted by both al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī, then what can be said about the position of *fāsiq*¹¹ (a category of persistently sinful people). Are they allowed to hold the title? Or are they to be considered among those to whom Allah denies the post? This is answerable from

⁹ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 1 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974): 493.

¹⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, 1: 382.

¹¹ A *fāsiq* is classified as a Muslim but disobeys Allah's commandments. He keeps doing evil deeds and calling others to do the same. In certain circumstances, *fāsiq* is also defined as *ẓālim*.

the exclusion of an evildoer from the *‘ahd* (promise) in the last phrase of this verse. According to al-Ṭabarī, this term indicates that Allah prohibits the appointment of an unbeliever, including *ẓālim* and *fāsiq*, as *imām*. He also concurs with al-Zamakhsharī’s point of view mentioned earlier, maintaining that to be a *khalīfah* or *imām* one has to possess certain qualities and characteristics; otherwise, he will not qualify for the position, since his primary duty is to uphold the sovereignty of Islam. The performance and attitude of the *khalīfah* himself crucially determine the first impression of the nature of Islam. If he fulfils all the criteria, and embodies the characteristics, of a good leader, his qualities and actions will win respect from other religions and help to present the true face of Islam. Therefore, the *khalīfah* or *imām*, in al-Ṭabarī’s opinion, cannot be appointed from among the sinful and evildoers (*ẓālimīn*).¹²

After all, it is believed that the exclusion of a sinful and evildoer person from the *khilāfah* gives one clear indication and explanation. It is not necessary for them to commit the most serious sins in order to be disqualified, but persistent milder offences are sufficient grounds for their being rejected. Therefore, the prohibition of a sinful evildoer indicates that the same result applies to the *fāsiq*. In other words, how can they be fit to be a *khalīfah* or *imām* if they cannot protect society from brutality and evil? Their own actions may influence and lead other people in the wrong direction, although one of their duties is to put an end to sinful behaviour.

The refusal by these three commentators to accept the *khilāfah* of evildoers is supported by another prominent Qur’anic exegete, al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981), who strongly

¹² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān*, 1: 577.

emphasised that an evildoer (in this context, *fāsiq*) should not be recognised as a ruler. Therefore, the community is not bound to obey his orders.¹³ However, examples from the history of the early Muslim dynasties, both the Umayyads and the ʿAbbāsids, show that opposition to this kind of ruler usually resulted in severe punishment and even execution. For example, Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767) refused outright to accept a post offered first by the Umayyad officials and later by the ʿAbbāsids. He disobeyed on the ground that they were evil rulers, and his refusal of the latter incurred a heavy penalty of being imprisoned and tortured by caliph al-Manṣūr (136/754-158/775).

The second verse incorporating the term *imām* is found in sūrat al-Isrā' (17): 71. The text reads:

يَوْمَ نَدْعُوا كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمامِهِمْ فَمَنْ أُوْتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ
يَتَرَاءُونَ كِتَابَهُمْ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا

One day We shall call together all human beings with their (respective) *imāms*: those who are given their record in their right hand will read it (with pleasure) and they will not be dealt with unjustly in the least.

In interpreting the term *imām* in this verse, al-Ṭabarī highlights three different opinions given by commentators. Firstly, it has the meaning of *nabī* (prophet) and the leaders who have been followed in this world.¹⁴ According to this view, Allah informs us in this verse that on the Day of Judgement, all people will be called together with their

¹³ Aḥmad, 'Qur'anic Exegesis and Classical *Tafsīr*', 12. 1: 90.

¹⁴ Ibid, 8: 115-116.

leaders. This interpretation is supported by reports related on the authority of Mujāhid and Qatādah, which narrate that men will be called in the hereafter together with their leaders, either good or bad, whom they have glorified and honoured in this world.¹⁵

Secondly, al-Ṭabarī considers the definition of the term as the *kitāb al-ʿamal* (record book) that records both the good and bad actions done during a person's time on earth. This view is supported by reports related on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), Qatādah, al-Ḍaḥḥāk and Abū 'l-ʿĀliyah.¹⁶ The tenor of these reports is that the term *imām* means the *kitāb al-ʿamal*, which will be given to every individual on the Day of Judgement. Thirdly, the term indicates the meaning of *kitāb* (Holy book), those texts revealed by Allah to His messengers, such as the Torah, Zabūr (Psalms), Injil (Gospels of the New Testament) and the Qur'an. He supports this view with reports narrated on the authority of Yaḥyā b. Zayd and Mujāhid.¹⁷

Of these three possible interpretations of the term *imām*, al-Ṭabarī shows his preference for the first, the one that defines it as leader. He further claims that his choice is determined by his understanding of Arabic linguistic usage, where the term *imām* usually has the meaning of leader.¹⁸

Al-Zamakhsharī produces only two possible meanings of the term. Just like al-Ṭabarī, he interprets it either to give the meaning of *nabī* (prophet) or record book.¹⁹ However,

¹⁵ Ibid, 115-116.

¹⁶ Ibid, 116.

¹⁷ Ibid, 116.

¹⁸ Ibid, 116.

¹⁹ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 2: 459.

nowhere in his commentary is *imām* given the meaning of *kitāb* (Holy book), the third definition of the term according to al-Ṭabarī 's commentary.

Ibn Kathīr's interpretation of the term is very similar to al-Ṭabarī's; he also produces the three possible meanings with support from various reports. In addition, he tries to extend the interpretation by comparing this verse to some other relevant Qur'anic verses.²⁰ Nevertheless, he differs from al-Ṭabarī as regards his preference for the meaning of the term. While al-Ṭabarī favours the definition of *nabī* or leader, Ibn Kathīr is inclined to accept *kitāb al-ʿamal* (record book). He claims that this choice is consistent with the meaning of two other verses, sūrah Yūnus (36): 12 and al-Kahf (18): 49.²¹

4.2.2 The Plural (*A'immaḥ*)

A'immaḥ, the plural form of *imām*, appears in four verses. The first appearance can be found in sūrat al-Anbiyā' (21): 73, where the text reads:

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَيْمَّةً يَهْتَدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرَاتِ وَإِقَامَ
الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءَ الزَّكَاةِ وَكَانُوا لَنَا عَبِيدِينَ

And We made them leaders, guiding (men) by Our Command, and We sent them inspiration to do good deeds, to establish regular prayers, and to practise regular charity; and they constantly served Us (and Us only).

²⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*, 5: 2111.

²¹ Ibid, 2112.

The term *a'immaḥ* in the above verse has the meaning of *ru'asā'* (heads or leaders) of the believers. These leaders guide the people to obey Allah and practise good deeds. Both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr interpret the term in this way in their commentaries, but on this occasion Ibn Kathīr does not rely on the support of other Qur'anic verses, and his interpretation is neither as long nor as profound as al-Ṭabarī's.²² By contrast, al-Zamakhsharī is not at all concerned to interpret the meaning of *a'immaḥ*.²³ Perhaps he considers that the meaning of the term in the context of the verse is clear enough not to need further elaboration. Whatever his reason might have been, the meaning of the term is obvious and there is no argument between al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr.

Perhaps more importantly, al-Ṭabarī sees the verse as referring specifically to the prophets Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as their names are mentioned in the previous verse.²⁴ Allah chooses them as the messengers who will guide the people to the right path and submission to Him. Their duty to perform this special task is included in Allah's commands, which are passed down through the revelation that enjoins the encouragement of good actions and the prohibition of evil.

Two further verses that include the term *a'immaḥ* occur in sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (28). The first one occurs in verse 5, whose text reads:

²² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 9: 47-48; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, 5: 2326.

²³ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 2: 578-579.

²⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 9: 47.

وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضِعُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً
وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ

And We wished to be gracious to those who were being depressed on
the land, to make them leaders (in faith) and make them heirs,

The term is also found in verse 41 of the same sūrah, where the text reads:

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ لَا
يُنصَرُونَ

And We made them (but) leaders inviting to the Fire; and on the Day of
Judgment no help shall they find.

According to al-Ṭabarī's commentary, the term *a'immaḥ* in verse 5 refers to the children of Israel. The story behind this verse is that of the inhumanity and cruelty of the Egyptian Pharaoh, who kills every single male child born in their community in order to prevent the fulfilment of the prophecy that a man of the children of Israel would assume his kingship. As a result of his barbarity, Allah promises to appoint *a'immaḥ* from among the people of Israel. In giving the exact interpretation of the term *a'immaḥ*, al-Ṭabarī inclines to the meanings of *wulāḥ* (leaders) and *mulūk* (kings).²⁵ In other words, Allah elects the people of Israel to rule in the place of Pharaoh. In addition to the authority to rule the community, they inherit everything that used to belong to Pharaoh. Al-Ṭabarī's analytical interpretation of the words *a'immaḥ* and *wāriṭhūn* does much to clarify the concept of Islamic leadership.

²⁵ Ibid, 10: 28. This verse is connected to the punishment narratives in the Qur'an. For additional discussion, see Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, 27-116.

Al-Zamakhsharī, in the same way, starts his commentary on this verse with an account of the story of Pharaoh's cruelty to the people of Israel. He then interprets the term *a'immaḥ* to give the meaning of leaders who are in charge of both religious and social matters.²⁶ In order to prove his point, he cites another three definitions that indicate a similar meaning, supporting each definition with an accurate and valid report. The first report is from Ibn ʿAbbās, which defines *a'immaḥ* as *qāḍah* (chiefs), whom people follow in good deeds only. The second defines the term as callers to the good deeds (*duʿāḥ*), which is narrated in a report related on the authority of Mujāhid. The last definition gives the meaning of leaders (*wulāḥ*), which is supported by a report from Qatāḍah and is the most accurate from al-Zamakhsharī's point of view.²⁷

Ibn Kathīr's style of presenting this verse is rather different from al-Ṭabarī's and al-Zamakhsharī's. In order to understand its meaning, he compares it with two other verses: from sūrat al-Aʿrāf (7): 137 and sūrat al-Shuʿarā' (26): 59. Both indicate a similar meaning. Yet all three verses are interpreted in the same way: Ibn Kathīr highlights the story of Pharaoh's inhumanity to the people of Israel and neglects the definition of the term *a'immaḥ*.²⁸

While sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (28): 5 is concerned with the children of Israel, verse 41 refers to the wicked leaders. Al-Ṭabarī points out that this verse, which pertains to the fate of Pharaoh and his committed followers are to be seen as a lesson and warning to the

²⁶ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 3: 165.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 3: 165.

²⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAzīm*, 6: 2647.

followers of the Prophet Muḥammad. Allah condemns Pharaoh's inhumanity: he is the leader of unbelievers, calling society to darkness and infidelity.²⁹

Al-Zamakhsharī tries to elaborate the term in a more general way and give a deeper interpretation. He defines it similarly to al-Ṭabarī, but he extends the meaning of the term: if the term *a'immaḥ* in the previous verse means the leaders of the truth, who invite to good deeds and thus to paradise, al-Zamakhsharī is very confident that here it refers to the wicked leaders, who exhort society to commit actions leading to hellfire and darkness.³⁰ In contrast to his two predecessors, Ibn Kathīr interprets this verse in only a single sentence, which mostly concerns the qualities of those who are to be classified as wicked leaders.³¹

The last verse that incorporates the term *a'immaḥ* is found in sūrat al-Sajdah (32): 24, whose text reads:

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ آيْمَةً يَهْتَدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُوا وَكَانُوا بِعَايِنِنَا
يُوقِنُونَ

And We appointed, from among them, Leaders, giving guidance under
Our Command, so long as they persevered with patience and continued
to have faith in Our Signs.

It is clear that the use of this term is linked with the story of Pharaoh and the people of Israel, which lies behind not only this verse but also the three verses discussed above. Therefore it would not be surprising if the interpretation of this verse were similar to

²⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wil al-Qur'ān*, 10: 75.

³⁰ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 3: 180.

³¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAzīm*, 6: 2662.

that of sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (28): 5. For example, while al-Ṭabarī believes that *a'immaḥ* can either refer to good or wicked leaders, his inclination regarding this verse, is to accept the meaning of good leaders.³² The meaning of the verse is, then, that Allah has appointed many good leaders from among the people of Israel; they were chosen to guide people to the right path and invite them to practise good deeds. Furthermore, they were considered as role models by their followers.

There is a great deal of agreement between al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī in interpreting this verse in particular, and the *a'immaḥ*-verses in general. The only difference, but not disagreement, lies in what they choose to emphasise. Sometimes the detail of al-Ṭabarī's explanation cannot be found in al-Zamakhsharī or Ibn Kathīr, but in some other respects, al-Zamakhsharī's or Ibn Kathīr's interpretation reveals a wider and deeper understanding than al-Ṭabarī's. For instance, al-Zamakhsharī, elaborates on this verse by focusing on the roles of the *a'immaḥ* themselves rather than on the definition of the term. Their roles, according to him, are to guide people, to invite them to submit to the religion of Allah and to bring them to the implementation of the *sharfaḥ* in accordance with the holy book, the Torah, which was revealed to Moses.³³

In the same way, Ibn Kathīr's interpretation is concerned with the leaders' roles: these are to guide people to the truth with guidance from Allah and to invite them to do good by practising right actions and preventing evils.³⁴ So it is evident that their

³² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 10: 250.

³³ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 3: 246.

³⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, 6: 2775-2776.

interpretations are congruent and that almost no major disagreement occurs in their clarifications of the meaning of each verse.

4.3 THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM *ULŪ'L-AMR*

The language and style of Qur'anic verses vary according to the occasion and the meaning of the verses themselves. Sometimes, various indirect and apparently distinct terms are used, but the indication is the same as that of the direct term. The usage of indirect terms can be seen on numerous occasions in the Qur'an. One essential term related to the concept of *khilāfah*, is *ulū 'l-amr*, which consists of two words, *ulū* and *al-amr*. The word that has implications for the meaning of *khilāfah* is the second, *al-amr*. It is derived from the root *amara*, which means 'command' or 'the command of Allah'.³⁵ One straightforward form of *amara*, *amīr*, which definitely means leader, unfortunately occurs nowhere in the Qur'an. However, other derivative forms appear frequently, such as *amara*, *ya'muru*, *amr*, and the compound, *ulū 'l-amr*, which is the term under discussion in this section.

The notion of leadership is reflected in the term *ulū 'l-amr* (those charged with authority), which occurs twice in the Qur'an, both in *sūrat al-Nisā'* (4): 59 and 83. Both verses are significant for the understanding of leadership since, for the first time, a very general meaning (those charged with authority) is indicated. The first appearance of this term occurs in 4: 59, which reads:

³⁵ Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 4: 26-27. See also Lane, *Lexicon*, 1. 1: 95-96.

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي
 الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ فَإِن تَنَزَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِن
 كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا

O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if ye do believe in Allah and the Last Day: that is best, and most suitable for final determination.

In this verse Allah stresses the concept of *amānah* (trust), which it is the obligation of all people to fulfil. Furthermore, Allah emphasises the term *ulū 'l-amr* and thus the prerogatives of those appointed as leaders of the Muslims. Al-Ṭabarī cites different interpretations from various *ḥadīths* regarding the term *ulū 'l-amr*, some of which indicate that it has the meaning *al-umarā'* (leaders),³⁶ but the usage of this term is too general to be of much use. However, there are many types of leader: for example leaders of expeditions and of administrations. These possibilities are mentioned in several *ḥadīths*, which are reported by Abū Hurayrah (d. 58/678), Ibn ʿAbbās, Layth, Ibn Zayd and al-Suddī (d. 127/744). None of these reports, however, give a direct interpretation of the meaning of the term *ulū 'l-amr*. Nevertheless, the first one interprets it very clearly, giving the meaning *umarā'*. Two reports narrated on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, however, indicate that the verse specifically refers to ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥudhayfah, who was appointed as chief of the army by the Prophet on one of his expeditions. This opinion is also shared to some extent by Layth, who gives the term the meaning of *aṣḥāb al-sarāyā* (members of the expedition).³⁷

³⁶ Plural of *amīr*, which originally means a military commander. Used for commander, ruler or prince.

³⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl al-Qurʾān*, 4: 150-151.

Al-Ṭabarī also interprets the term as *ahl al-‘ilm wa ‘l-fiqh* (the learned and the jurists). These, therefore, are the people that must be consulted in any dispute. His interpretation might also indicate that the *khalīfah* should be elected from this group. Indeed, this view seems to accord with a principle of the Sunnī doctrine regarding the concept of *khilāfah* that the *khalīfah* should be selected from among the *ahl al-ḥall wa ‘l-‘aql* (the people who loose and bind). Al-Ṭabarī, in offering this opinion, refers to reports narrated on the authority of Mujāhid, Ibn Abī Najīb, Ibn ‘Abbās, ‘Aṭṭā’ b. Sā’ib, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Abū ‘l-‘Āliyah.³⁸ Yet, another group holds the view that *ulū ‘l-amr* refers to *aṣḥāb Muḥammad* (the Companions of the Prophet). This interpretation is supported by a report on the authority of Mujāhid.³⁹ A report from ‘Ikrimah, on the other hand, regards *ulū ‘l-amr* as referring specifically to Abū Bakr and ‘Umar only,⁴⁰ the first two caliphs after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad. This interpretation is, of course, unacceptable to al-Ṭabarī as it entails the rejection of all other caliphs.

Of the several possible interpretations provided above, al-Ṭabarī seems to be inclined to the view of those who interpret *ulū ‘l-amr* as *al-umarā’* and *al-wulāh* (military commanders and leaders). He argues that this interpretation is in accordance with the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet narrated on the authority of Abū Hurayrah, who reported that the Prophet had said:

There will come to you leaders who are good and bad, the good will command the good deeds, while the wicked will enjoy the evil deeds.

³⁸ Ibid, 151-152.

³⁹ Ibid, 152.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 153.

You must obey them if they are on the right path. And follow them, if they do good, because the reward is for them and for you, but if they act wickedly, the punishment is for them alone.⁴¹

In another *ḥadīth* reported on the authority of ^ʿAbd Allāh, the Prophet has said:

A Muslim has to listen to and obey (his ruler) whether he likes it or not as long as his order involves not one in disobedience (to Allah), but if an act of disobedience (to Allah) is imposed, one should not listen to it.⁴²

From the above and other related *ḥadīths*, al-Ṭabarī concludes that the obedience of a Muslim to his fellow Muslim is deserved only when this is in the cause of Allah and His messengers. Therefore, obedience and loyalty to a leader is compulsory as long as he obeys Allah and the Prophet, and rules the community according to Islamic *sharʿah*.

Thus al-Ṭabarī's favoured interpretation suggests that the appointed ruler or leader is not necessarily the most knowledgeable person in the community. The reason for this argument is quite clear: *ulū 'l-amr*, his preferred view, has the meaning of a military leader rather than a scholarly individual learned in various branches of Islamic knowledge. However, it may be that he gives *umarā'* and *wulāh* a broader definition than is usual. In other words, it is desirable that the *ulū 'l-amr* should possess not only qualities of military leadership but should also be righteous, pious and knowledgeable in religious matters.

⁴¹ As quoted in al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 4: 153.

⁴² Ibid, 153.

The question arises whether al-Ṭabarī restricts his interpretation only to *umarā'*, *wulāh* or another similar definition, or whether the term *ulū 'l-amr*, in a wider context, includes the meaning of caliph or *imām* as the authority vested by the community. Most probably what al-Ṭabarī intends here is to note the most suitable and accurate interpretation of the term, which in one way indicates a limited meaning, while recognising that it may also have the meaning of caliph or *imām*. This can be seen by referring to various *ḥadīths* mentioned in his commentary, which are mostly acceptable and are clearly interpreted to give such a meaning.

A Shāfi'ī scholar, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) interprets the order to obey God, His Messenger and those in authority, as commanded in this verse, to mean 'you should obey God and the prophets and your *amīrs*'.⁴³ It means that the obligation of obedience to the caliph, whether good or bad, is incumbent upon all Muslims because it is Allah's will to give him kingship and the divine light (*farr-i izadi*). This is in total contradiction to al-Ṭabarī's understanding. However, Lambton points out that this difference arises from al-Ghazālī's adherence to Sasanian tradition, which draws most of its main inspiration from Persian cultural and social aspects rather than from the original Islamic teaching.⁴⁴

Al-Zamakhsharī, in his interpretation of the term *ulū 'l-amr*, agrees with al-Ṭabarī's point of view, as he considers that it has the meaning of *umarā' al-ḥaqq* (the true and pious leaders or rulers). These kinds of leaders, in all situations, are responsible for

⁴³ A. K. S. Lambton, 'The Theory of Kingship in the *Naṣīḥat ul-Mulūk* of Ghazālī', *IS*, 1. 1 (1954): 52.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 51.

guiding the people to submit to Allah.⁴⁵ Moreover, they should not only concern themselves with the material fulfilment of their people, but also their spiritual needs, so that a balance can be established in their worldly life.

However, al-Zamakhsharī notes one *ḥadīth*, which is reported on the authority of ʿAbd al-Malik, which gives the meaning of *umarāʾ al-sarāyā* (leaders of a military expedition).⁴⁶ He also, however, mentions its meaning ʿulamāʾ (those learned in religious knowledge), who take the responsibility of teaching Islam to the community, promoting good actions and preventing all sorts of evils.⁴⁷ Combining these three possible meanings, Hamid Enayat states that al-Zamakhsharī’s concern is that those eligible to be *ulūʾ l-amr* should have good characteristics and the required qualifications. These criteria are usually possessed by the ʿulamāʾ, to whom al-Zamakhsharī refers as one possible definition of the term.⁴⁸

Commenting on al-Zamakhsharī’s interpretation of this verse, Mazher-ud-Dīn Ṣiddīqī, a modern analyst on the Muʿtazilites, asserts that his preferred view (*umarāʾ al-sarāyā*) was greatly influenced by the Muʿtazilites’ political theory of obedience, which encourages Muslims, if they have sufficient means, not only to fight to uphold justice but also to resort to armed conflict for the purpose of removing injustice. If we take this theory into account, then according to al-Zamakhsharī, the commandment contained in this verse to obey the rulers does not necessarily signify absolute obedience, since the rulers have been enjoined to discharge their trusts faithfully and observe strict justice in

⁴⁵ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tanzīl*, 1: 535.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 535.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 535.

deciding matters. If they fail to perform their obligations, they automatically lose the qualities that bring them within the meaning of the term *ulū 'l-amr* (those charged with authority). Moreover, a leader's failure to turn to God and His Prophet for guidance in solving their differences with the people is also considered another reason for permitting disobedience.⁴⁹

Ibn Kathīr's interpretation of the term *ulū 'l-amr* is basically similar to those of al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī. He also mentions the same *ḥadīths* as those cited by al-Ṭabarī, while noting a few mentioned by al-Zamakhsharī. These *ḥadīths* are related on the authority of Ibn. ʿAbbās, ʿAbd Allāh Ibn ʿUmar (d.73/693), Abū Hurayrah, and al-Suddī.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, there are some *ḥadīths* not mentioned by al-Ṭabarī, which Ibn Kathīr uses as valid and authentic references, showing that he does not totally rely on al-Ṭabarī's commentary in making his own and that he is attempting to enlarge and widen the debate by quoting a variety of *ḥadīths* as authentic references.

Ibn Kathīr is not much concerned with detailed differences of interpretation, focusing rather on explaining the general meaning of *ulū 'l-amr*. However, he does consider various opinions, mostly derived from *ḥadīths* such as those narrated by al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), Imām Aḥmad and Abū Dā'ud (d. 275/888-9). In other words, he does not try to indicate clearly its specific meaning as al-Ṭabarī does, but provides a general understanding of what kinds of people are to be regarded as *ulū 'l-amr*. The only argument that he brings forward is concerned with the interpretation of the term as *ahl*

⁴⁸ Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, 62.

⁴⁹ Siddiqi, 'Some Aspects of the Mu'tazili Interpretation of the Qur'an', 2. 1: 115.

⁵⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*, 2: 955-958.

al-fiqh wa 'l-dīn and *'ulamā'* (the jurists and those learned in religious knowledge).⁵¹

Whereas al-Ṭabarī points out various possible meanings and al-Zamakhsharī tries to elaborate the characteristics of *ulū 'l-amr*, Ibn Kathīr, asserts that the real meaning is much more general and cannot be stated definitively; but according to numerous *ḥadīths*, the most suitable and acceptable meaning might be the learned people, or those who have a deep understanding in various areas of Islamic knowledge.

While they may disagree on minor matters, Ibn Kathīr and the other two exegetes concur on the required characteristics of *ulū 'l-amr*. A leader (whose more global title is *khalīfah* or *imām*) must, in any circumstances, promote good deeds and strive to eradicate any evil actions, starting with himself as the model for the Muslim community. The community must obey and give their loyalty to him as long as he does not stray from the right path. But if he should cease to obey God's commandment, they must not follow him, as there are several *ḥadīths* that mention this situation, including one which is reported on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.⁵²

The Sunnī interpretations of this verse seem to indicate that each commentator has his own approach and method, but it is obvious that they agree with each other's interpretation and explanation. The only difference lies in their use of different *ḥadīths* to support their view, but whichever *ḥadīths* are used, their interpretations remain compatible. Sometimes al-Ṭabarī gives his own preference, which is more specific than those of the other two. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether any general interpretation provided by Ibn Kathīr indicates rejection of a specific one.

⁵¹ Ibid, 957.

⁵² Ibid, 958.

The second appearance of the term *ulū 'l-amr*, which is related to the concept of *khilāfah*, can also be found in sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 83. The verse reads:

وَإِذَا جَاءَهُمْ أَمْرٌ مِنَ الْأَمْنِ أَوْ الْخَوْفِ أَذَاعُوا بِهِ تَوَلَّوْا
رَدُّوهُ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ وَإِلَى أُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْهُمْ لَعَلِمَهُ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَنبِطُونَهُ
مِنْهُمْ تَوَلَّوْا فَضْلَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتَهُ لَا تَتَّبِعُوا الشَّيْطَانَ إِلَّا
قَلِيلًا

When there comes to them some matter touching (public) safety or fear, they divulge it. If they had only referred it to the Messenger or to those charged with authority among them, the proper investigators would have tested it from them (direct). Were it not for the Grace and Mercy of Allah unto you, all but a few of you would have followed Satan.

The significant point of this verse is seen in the phrase ‘...if they had only referred it to the Messenger or to those charged with authority among them,...’. Al-Ṭabarī, in the context of this verse, provides four definitions of *ulū 'l-amr*; referring to the religious scholars (*‘ulamā’*), the learned in religion and thought (*al-fiqh fī 'l-dīn wa 'l-‘aql*), the knowledgeable (*al-‘ilm*) and the leaders of war (*wulāh fī 'l-ḥarb*). It seems that he offers the same possible definitions regarding this verse as expounded in his previous discussion of al-Nisā' (4): 59. In presenting these various definitions, al-Ṭabarī mentions a variety of reports narrated on the authority of Qatādah, Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767), Abū 'l-‘Āliyah and Ibn Zayd (d. 181/798).⁵³ Whichever definition suits the context of this verse, it still indicates the meaning of those authorised to lead in the community. Regarding a different aspect, al-Ṭabarī underlines some significant roles of *ulū 'l-amr* in the Muslim community. They are considered to be the third most

⁵³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān*, 4: 184

fundamental source to be consulted, after the Qur'an and the Prophet Muḥammad, in the case of any question or dispute arising. Also any news, good or bad, should be reported to them before all others because of their knowledge, learning and judgement.

Al-Zamakhsharī interprets this verse in the same way by suggesting that any doubtful matter should first be referred to the authorised person.⁵⁴ A similar explanation is found in Ibn Kathīr's commentary, but he also cites several reports that emphasise the characteristics of the *munāfiqūn*, the hypocrites who spread news deliberately to harm the people.⁵⁵ Therefore his interpretation of this verse emphasises the need to cautiously treat any news brought by the *munāfiqūn*, who spread news, particularly bad news, for the purpose of establishing chaos and dispute in the community, without examining its accuracy. Another important point, which is particularly relevant to the concept of *khilāfah*, concerns the crucial functions and roles of a leader of the community, whose members depend very much on him regarding almost every aspect of their lives.

Moreover, after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the authority in ruling the state, implementing the *sharḥah* and making decisions has been vested in *ulū 'l-amr*, who must be consulted whenever an important decision is to be taken, whether it concerns religious or social matters. Considering all these interpretations, it is obvious that *ulū 'l-amr* in this verse indicates the person who holds the position of ruler or who, in other words, is known as *khalīfah*.

⁵⁴ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, 1: 547.

⁵⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAzīm*, 2: 974.

4.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Sunnīs' analysis of the relevant *khilāfah*-verses, covering the terms *khalīfah*, *imām* and *ulū 'l-amr*, allows us to draw some interesting conclusions. The three commentators' interpretations are generally consistent with the Sunnī theory of the *khilāfah*, and do not seek to question the power of the dynastic rulers of their time. According to Sunnī principle, the *khalīfah* replaces and takes over the duties and responsibilities of the previous one. These commentators all subscribe to this view, as seen in the interpretation of sūrah al-Baqarah (2): 30, and apparently regard the supreme ruler (*sulṭān al-ʿaḳẓām*) as a legitimate *khalīfah*. By adopting this definition, the Sunnī commentators indirectly support the hereditary succession practised by their own dynastic rulers and seek to perpetuate the unbroken line of succession.

The nature of the Sunnī discussion of the *khilāfah* is basically concerned with the features and characteristics of the *khalīfah* himself. This principle appears to be an important point in the scholars' interpretation because two characteristics – to seek the truth and practise justice - are frequently mentioned. This can be seen in the Sunnī interpretation of sūrah Ṣād (38): 26, in which both features are essential to the *khalīfah* and more importantly to the wider society. Mutual understanding and the practice of truth and justice are seen as essential to a peaceful and united Muslim *ummah*, which is the main objective of the institution of the *khilāfah*. However, this goal is only achievable through the implementation of the *sharīfah*, as has been emphasised by many scholars of jurisprudence such as al-Māwardī and Ibn Taymiyyah (as discussed in the sections on the necessity and functions of the *khilāfah*). This matter will be further developed in the general conclusion.

The Sunnī commentators, despite their attempts to maintain the line of hereditary succession and avoid its rupture, are of the opinion that evil and brutality should not be imposed by the *khalīfah*. Their view is seen in the interpretation of sūrah al-Baqarah (2): 30, which excludes evildoers from the *imāmah*. Thus these commentators are firm in their opposition to oppressive and evil acts committed by the *khalīfah*. However, their interpretations make no attempt to undermine the Sunnī conception of the *khilāfah* because nowhere do they mention the obligation to depose and replace the evil ruler.

On the other hand, in the analysis of the Qur'anic narrative-verses (the interpretation of the *khalā'if* and *khulafā'* verses), these three Sunnī commentators emphasise the changing nature of the process of the *khilāfah*, which is due to the *khalīfahs'* failure to perform the duties entrusted to them. But their interpretations do not draw on historical examples in order to comment on the weaknesses and crimes of their own rulers. For example, as we noted earlier in the section dealing with the biography of al-Ṭabarī (section 2.1 in chapter two), he lived under the regime of the ʿAbbāsīd, al-Muqtadir, who was notorious for his brutality and evil acts. Yet his interpretation, as well as those of his two successors, seems not to depart from the Sunnī theory: the evil *khalīfah*, though he may be opposed, cannot be deposed. The Sunnī commentators' reason for holding to this principle is based on the *ḥadīth* concerning tyranny and the sayings of the Sunnī jurists, as has been discussed in chapter one (the necessity of the *khilāfah*).

There is sometimes a difference of emphasis among the Sunnī commentators. The discussion of the limitation of the *khilāfah* to the four rightly-guided caliphs is based on the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (the *ḥadīth* that limits the *khilāfah* to thirty years and states that authority after this period would be based on *mulk* (kingship)). This theory, which

influences al-Zamakhsharī's and Ibn Kathīr's interpretations of sūrah al-Nūr (24): 55 (Sunni analyses of the term *yastakhlif*), entails a negative view of the later *khalīfahs*, especially the Umayyads, since, according to the *ḥadīth*, after the death of the fourth caliph, ʿAlī, no ruler would be justified in adopting the title of *khalīfah*. It is not known why al-Ṭabarī makes no mention of the above *ḥadīth*. Another example of the difference between the Sunni scholars' commentaries can be found in Ibn Kathīr's quotation of a *ḥadīth*, not cited by the other two commentators, restricting the *khilāfah* to twelve people. Although, in Ibn Kathīr's view, they are not the twelve Imāmiyyah Shīʿī *imāms*, the mere citation of this *ḥadīth*, from the Sunni perspective, might give rise to misinterpretation, because its general meaning is very close to the Shīʿīs' notion of the twelve *imāms*, which we will discuss in chapter six.

Although all three Sunni Qur'anic commentators are in agreement on the nature of the *khilāfah*, they do not offer an extensive commentary on its meaning. This may be because the term was not controversial in Sunni circles. It may be that the three commentators took the meaning of the term so much for granted that they did not comment on it. For example, when they examine the singular form of the term, they sometimes neglect it and concentrate on other words or expressions in the same verse. This sometimes leads to a lack of clarity in their discussion of the main term.

It is also apparent that the main method used by al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn Kathīr for commentary and interpretation is that of philological analysis. However, since the root *khalafa* is very rich and has a large number of meanings, they are faced with a daunting challenge. In the event, they accept different meanings of *khalafa* and hence come to different conclusions. For instance, al-Ṭabarī's argument rests partly on

the meaning of *jā'il*, which inevitably affects the meaning of *khalīfah*: either 'to succeed' or 'to replace'. But it can be argued that the Sunni commentators' divergences of opinion are usually due to the richness of the root *khalafa* and to the methods they adopt rather than to any substantial disagreement.

As the *khilāfah* is closely related to the establishment of truth and justice through the implementation of the *shar'ah* and the relations between the *khalīfah* and the community, the notion of obedience is very important. The exhortation to obedience is essentially laid down in the Sunnī interpretation of sūrah al-Nisā' (4): 59 and 83 (the analysis of *ulū 'l-amr*-verses in chapter four). The Sunnī commentators are in agreement on the demand to give obedience to *ulū 'l-amr*, but differ in defining the meaning of the term. Military commanders and 'ulamā' are two very different possibilities indicated by the phrase 'those charged with authority'. According to Ibn Kathīr, the term refers to the 'ulamā', whereas the other two commentators prefer the meaning of military commanders. This difference of opinion reflects the divergent view to be found among the Sunnis. It is likely that al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī viewed the military virtues as particularly important, given the political reality of their time, and would have approved the *khalīfahs*' main concern: to preserve, defend and extend their power and territories.

In conclusion, it can be argued that a number of classical Sunnī scholars - these three Qur'anic commentators in particular and also scholars in other fields, such as al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) - attempted to legitimise both the hereditary caliphate and the usurpation of power by military dynasties through their scholarly interpretations and their promulgation of

certain political theories. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that their efforts were, in large part, an attempt to palliate the evil effects of a situation they saw no hope of changing. What is indisputable is that the influence of these theories has far outlived the circumstances that produced them. This influence continues to affect the political attitudes of Sunnī Muslims, although it is now diminishing.

CHAPTER 5 THE INTERPRETATION OF THE *KHILĀFAH*- VERSES IN THE CLASSICAL SHĪ'Ī COMMENTARIES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will follow the same procedure as the previous chapter except that the analysis will concentrate on the Shī'ī Qur'anic commentators. In order to specify the discussion, two famous exegetes, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī, have been chosen. The main reason for this choice is that both commentaries are considered major references among the Shī'īs, particularly the followers of the Imāmiyyah Ithnā 'ashariyyah (the Twelver). Moreover, al-Ṭūsī lived and worked between two of the Sunnī commentators examined in this study, al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī. Thus, it is very important to discover whether there are any significant agreements and differences between them. Al-Ṭabarsī has been chosen because, besides being an eminent Shī'ī commentator, he was born in the same year as al-Zamakhsharī, and therefore provides a very good comparison between the Sunnis and the Shī'īs.

The main objective of the analysis is to highlight the Shī'ī view of the Qur'anic statements concerning the concept of *khilāfah*. At the same time, the study also tries to discover any differences of interpretation between the Shī'ī commentators and the reasons that might lie behind them. In addition, any disagreement with the Sunnī interpretations will also be pointed out.

The analytical structure of this chapter is very similar to that of the discussion of the Sunnī interpretations in the previous two chapters. The relevant verses are therefore divided between two chapters. This chapter, the fifth, will examine those verses that contain *khalīfah* and its other forms, while the next, the sixth, will analyse the *imāmah* and *ulū 'l-amr*-verses. This method is used for the sake of clear organisation and sound structure. Moreover, it will facilitate the reader's understanding of the discussion of every term and at the same time will clarify any distinction of the Imāmiyyah Shī'ī ideas from those of the Sunnīs. Since the full Arabic text and translation of the verses has been presented in the previous two chapters (the Sunnī interpretations), it is not considered necessary to repeat the text in this chapter.

5.2 THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM *KHALĪFAH*

Any analysis of the Qur'anic scripture from the Shī'ī point of view might be expected to reveal very strong disagreements and detailed arguments with their counterparts the Sunnīs. However, it is worth noting, before discussing the verses relevant to the concept of *imāmah*, that one of the early causes of dispute between them was due to the argument raised by the Shī'īs over the validity of the ʿUthmānic Codex. While the Sunnīs have fully accepted and referred to this version, the Shī'īs, particularly the Imāmiyyah, have refused to accept this version. They believe that the fourth caliph,

‘Alī, owned the original and completed version, which was allegedly three times longer than the present text.¹

The concept of the *khilāfah*, which is regarded as the office of a Muslim ruler, has been a topic of scholastic argument among both sects and individuals. It is connected with some basic principles that have been debated by the Sunnis and the Imāmiyyah Shī‘is. After thoroughly examining the Sunnī interpretations of the concept in the previous two chapters, we are now in a position to grasp not only the similarities and differences among the Shī‘is but also, perhaps more significantly between them and the Sunnis.

A very concise summary of the concept of the *imāmah*, as a basic guideline, has been presented by Ade Shitu-Agbetola, referring to al-Ṭabarsī’s point of view. He defines the position of a caliph as that of a judge who, with God’s authorisation, manages the affairs of people. It involves the calling to one Supreme God, the maintenance of justice and the teaching of the religion of Islam.²

¹ It has been noted in Goldziher’s discussion of the ‘Uthmānic Codex, revised by Eliash, that many verses which supported the Shī‘is’ claims had been omitted and the original order of the sūrahs had been altered. Their original text had been lost with the disappearance of the Twelfth *imām* and, until his return, they are required to follow the ‘Uthmānic text. Most of their claims, however, particularly those supporting their concept of *imāmah*, are derived from the omitted verses, which are not found in the ‘Uthmānic Qur’an. A detailed discussion of this matter can be seen in Joseph Eliash, ‘The Shī‘ite Qur’an: A Reconsideration of Goldziher’s Interpretation’, *Arabica* 16 (1969): 15-24. A further discussion can also be seen in Etan Kohlberg, ‘Some Notes on the Imāmi Attitude to the Qur’an’, in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: Essays Presented to R. Walzer*, eds. S. M. Stern, A. Hourani and Y. Brown (Oxford: Cassirer, 1972): 209-224. For a brief discussion of this argument, see, B. Todd Lawson, ‘Note For the Study of a ‘Shī‘i Qur’an’,’ *Journal of Semitic Studies (JSS)*, 36. 2 (1991): 279-281.

² According to Shitu-Egbetola, the *khalīfah* is referred to by three different titles. Firstly, he is a caliph in conformity with his appointment as successor to the previous authority. Secondly, he is *amīr al-*

Adopting the same structure as that of the Sunnī commentaries, we find that the term *khalīfah* first occurs in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30. Before going directly to the interpretation of the term, it is very important to consider the literal definition of the word *jā'il*. Like the Sunnīs, al-Ṭūsī believes that it can either give the meaning of *fā'il* (doing, acting, performing some activities) or *khāliq* (creating)³. Both definitions, however, according to him, are identical and therefore, either one can be used in the context of this verse without affecting its meaning. Al-Ṭabarsī, on the other hand, mentions only one possible definition of the word *jā'il*, which is *khāliq*.⁴

Regarding the general meaning of the term *khalīfah*, al-Ṭūsī interprets it as 'to succeed or replace someone in authority and take his place.'⁵ He remarks that this verse has a similar meaning to another verse, sūrah Yūnus (10): 14. According to this interpretation, the elected person is called a *khalīfah* because he replaces the one before him and takes on his responsibilities. More specifically, al-Ṭūsī interprets this verse as referring to the *khilāfah* of Adam and his descendants, basing his view on several

mu'minīn (leader of the believers) when it comes to civil administration. Another role included in the latter title is that of military commander of the faithful and head of the organisation which administers public affairs. Finally, he is also the *imām*, who is regarded as the spiritual leader of the state's religious functions. The Shī'īs' preferred title for their leader is *imām*; he is the divinely appointed ruler and teacher of the Muslims. They believe in his infallibility and he cannot be deposed for any reason, whether religious or political. For a further discussion, see Ade Shitu-Agbetola, 'Theory of *al-Khilāfah* in the Religio-Political View of Sayyid Qutb', *HI*, 14. 2 (1991): 26.

³ Abū Ja'far Muhammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1 (Beirut: Dar Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d): 131.

⁴ Abū 'Alī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1997): 106.

⁵ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 131.

reports narrated on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Ibn Masʿūd.⁶ An almost identical explanation is given by al-Ṭabarsī in interpreting the meaning of this verse. He also uses the reports cited in al-Ṭūsī to support his opinion.⁷ Ironically, the Sunnī commentators also use the same reports, which were narrated on the same authorities, in justifying the meaning of *khalīfah* in this verse. Thus, the idea that *khalīfah* refers not only to Adam but also to any person among his descendants, who is charged with taking on the responsibility, is accepted by Shiʿī and Sunnī alike.

In response to the question whom or what kind of creature Adam succeeded, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī provide a very clear explanation. Again, both of them use the same report as the Sunnīs, narrated on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, emphasising that Adam is believed to have succeeded the *jinn* after they had spread corruption on the earth and shed blood among themselves. Nevertheless, both commentators mention one group who claim that Adam and his descendants succeeded the angels, and not the *jinn* as claimed by Ibn ʿAbbās, because the angels inhabited the earth before Adam.⁸ Despite this apparent contradiction, which neither approve, the main concern of al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī regarding this verse is to highlight the process of unbroken succession, which started with the appointment of Adam and has ever since applied to his descendants. Moreover, the acceptance of the Prophet Muḥammad as the last prophet to be identified as the *khalīfah* of Allah does not indicate that this process came to an end with his death. It continues through the *khilāfah* of non-prophets, who are identified as

⁶ Ibid, 131.

⁷ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majmaʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 1: 106.

⁸ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 1: 131; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majmaʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 1: 106.

the *khalīfahs* of the Messenger of Allah, the title preferred by the first non-prophet caliph, Abū Bakr.

The history of the Muslim dynasties, however, shows that many early Muslim rulers, the Umayyads and the ʿAbbāsids in particular, believed their appointments represented a continuation of the *khilāfah* from the Prophet and the first four rightly guided caliphs. Although one *ḥadīth* of the Prophet mentioned that the *khilāfah* would last for only thirty years, the period of the first four caliphs, they maintained that they were continuing the duty of the Prophet and so deserved to be known as *khalīfat Allāh*, the title of the Prophet and the four caliphs. The Shīʿis, despite using a different title, *imām*, had a similar perception except that their main concern was the right to the *imāmah* of the *ahl-al-bayt* (the family of the Prophet), particularly the descendants of ʿAlī. In supporting this argument, the Imāmiyyah Shīʿis, for example, regarded their *imāms* as *khulafāʾ Allāh fī arḍihi* (caliphs of Allah on His earth) and the Ismāʿīlis claimed ʿAlī as *khalīfat Allāh* (the caliph of Allah).⁹

One question arises of importance to this analysis concerning the possibility of Adam's descendants being *khalīfah*. Is the *khilāfah* limited to a particular group, those divinely elected to be prophets after the prophet Adam, or does it signify every descendant of Adam who succeeds to the office, even though he is not a prophet? This argument, however, is not controversially debated, and in any case it is apparently resolved by the reports of Ibn ʿAbbās, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Ibn Masʿūd, which al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī use as deliberately referring the *khilāfah* not just to Adam and other prophets, but also to

⁹ Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, 11-17.

any person among his descendants that takes his place.¹⁰ Their interpretation suggests that they generally acknowledge and accept the inclusion of non-prophet rulers in the meaning of *khalīfah* in this verse.

Having said that, the appointment of non-prophet rulers, according to the Shī'ī view, is bound by a special condition. It can only be accomplished by divine designation through the Prophet or through the previous *imām*. It is therefore believed, by reference to the *ḥadīth* of Ghadīr Khumm, that the appointment of 'Alī had followed this procedure. While claiming the authenticity of their *imāms*, they deny that an *imām* can achieve the office through public election, which was the method of appointment of Abū Bakr, since they believe that the people have neither the authority to choose their *imām* nor to depose him.¹¹

Concerning the angels' question 'Will you place therein one who will work corruption and shed blood?', al-Ṭūsī points out that it is asked out of astonishment, wonderment and the simple desire for an explanation.¹² This view is very similar to the Sunnī interpretation, which stresses that the angels certainly have no intention of disobeying Allah, but rather wish to ascertain the benefit of and secret motive behind the appointment of this *khalīfah*. Furthermore, both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī insist that the reference to the corrupt and the shedders of blood cannot be to either the prophets or

¹⁰ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 131; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 106.

¹¹ Muhammad Rida al-Muzaffar, *The Faith of Shī'a Islam* (Cambridge: Muhammadi Trust, 1982): 32.

¹² Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 132-133.

the infallible *imāms*. Only those descendants of Adam who are not appointed to the *khilāfah* are considered to be capable of performing such inhumane and evil actions.¹³

There is a crucial doctrinal difference between the Shī'īs and the Sunnīs with regard to this issue. The Sunnīs do not concern themselves with the sinlessness or otherwise of the *imāms*. They do not consider them incapable of sin, but nor do they accuse them of intentionally becoming involved in corruption and bloodshed. Their view seems to be that the *imāms*, unlike the prophets, are not infallible, since they have never been proven in the Qur'an, *ḥadīth* or any other sources to be so. The Shī'ī interpretation, however, denies that the *imāms* can be guilty of sinful actions, probably with the purpose of emphasising one of the principles of the concept of *imāmah*, the doctrine of infallibility (*ʿiṣmah*).¹⁴ According to this doctrine, an *imām* must be free from all error and sin, either intentional or unintentional, during his life. Moreover, the *imām*'s position is regarded as the same as that of the Prophet. Thus the infallibility of the Prophet prefigures and reflects the infallibility of the *imām*.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid, 134; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majmaʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 1: 107.

¹⁴ According to Shī'ī belief, the *imām* is a perfect man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), whose appointment is based on divine decree and is restricted to the members of the Prophet's household (his daughter Fāṭimah, and the twelve *imāms*). Therefore, their appointment, which is gifted with spiritual kingship, is construed as the guardianship of genesis (*al-wilāyah al-takwīnī*), similarly to those of the prophets. In other words, their *imāms* are free from committing sin. For a study on the Shī'ī concept of *imāmah*, see 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Shīʿa*, trans. S. H. Nasr, (Qom, Iran: Ansariyan Publications, 1989): 174-189; Henry Corbin, 'The Meaning of the *Imām* for Shī'ī Spirituality', in *Shīʿism: Doctrines, Thought and Spirituality*, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Hamid Dabashi and Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988): 167-187.

¹⁵ Al-Muzaffar, *The Faith of Shīʿa Islam*, 32.

Regarding the second verse, sūrah Ṣād (38): 26, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī define the meaning of the term *khalīfah* as *mudabbir* (administrator), who inherits responsibility for the affairs of the people from the previous administrator.¹⁶ According to their interpretation, when Allah appointed David to perform the prophetic role (*nubuwwah*) in administering the affairs of the Israelites, He also simultaneously appointed him as the *khalīfah*. This process can also be applied to the non-prophet administrators who came after David and particularly after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, since the *khilāfah* of non-prophets began immediately after that event. Nevertheless, their appointment is only to the *khilāfah*, not to prophethood (*nubuwwah*), which is restricted to divinely selected individuals (such as the Prophet). The implication of this view seems to be in accord with their interpretation of the previous verse and with the interpretation provided by a Sunnī commentator, Ibn Kathīr.¹⁷ Since the word *mudabbir* (administrator) has a very general and wide-ranging meaning, it can be applied to various situations and conditions, as is suggested by the interpretation given by al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī.

Two important functions of the *imām* are also mentioned in this verse, which are to judge and rule the community in the right way (with justice) and to avoid any involvement in evil actions. As the importance of these duties is clear from the phrase ‘so judge thou between men in Truth (and justice): nor follow thou lusts (of thy

¹⁶ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 8: 556; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma’ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 8: 274.

¹⁷ For a detailed analysis of this verse from Ibn Kathīr’s viewpoint, particularly outlining his preferred interpretation, refer to the Sunnī discussion of the *khalīfah*-verses in chapter three. Alternatively, see Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, 7: 3010-3011.

heart)' it is not difficult for both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī to comment on it. It is also worth noting that these two obligations are also emphasised in the Sunnis' interpretation. In other words, there is agreement between the Shi'is and the Sunnis on the matter of the basic roles and functions of the appointed *imām*.

5.3 The Plural (*Khalā'if* and *Khulafā'*)

As with the discussion presented in the chapter on the Sunnis' interpretations, analysis of two plural forms of *khalīfah*, *khalā'if* and *khulafā'*, as seen from the Shi'i perspective, is now divided into two sections. The first covers the *khalā'if*-verses; the second examines the interpretation of the *khulafā'*-verses. Every verse that contains these two plural forms will be examined.

5.3.1 *Khalā'if*

In interpreting the first verse containing the term *khalā'if*, sūrat al-An'ām (6): 165, al-Ṭūsī produces three possible meanings. The first interpretation, which he, al-Ṭabarsī and even one Sunnī commentator, Ibn Kathīr, prefer, is regarded as having the meaning of continuous succession among human beings from one generation to another. Both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī support this view by quoting reports narrated on the authority of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and al-Suddī. These emphasise that the later *khalīfah* takes his

predecessor's place because the latter's period of rule has ended.¹⁸ Moreover, this process of succession will continue to take place and therefore many *khalīfahs* (*khalā'if*) will succeed and be replaced. This process will not stop until the Day of Judgement, when the last *khalīfah* to hold the office will have no successor.

Giving a second possible interpretation, al-Ṭūsī quotes the opinion of one group that the term *khalā'if* in this verse refers to the succession of Adam and his descendants after the *jinn*, who were appointed before Adam's appointment as *khalīfah*.¹⁹ Al-Ṭūsī also notes another possible meaning, that *khalā'if* refers to the people of the Prophet Muḥammad, who have been chosen by Allah to succeed all previous peoples. This interpretation is based on the assertion that they (the people of the Prophet) are led by the most perfect *khalīfah* and that Allah has helped them and given them victory over all other creatures on this earth.²⁰

Of the three interpretations offered by al-Ṭūsī, the third, which narrows the reference to the Prophet Muḥammad's descendants, is the one that the Sunnīs, especially al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī, believe to be the most suitable. Al-Ṭūsī, however, refuses to accept the last two interpretations as appropriate and so indirectly rejects the Sunnīs' preference. The same view is held by al-Ṭabarsī, who does not mention the second interpretation, and, although he includes the third meaning, it seems to be merely for the sake of showing that more than one is possible. He endorses the first interpretation without further discussion and seems unwilling to accept any other view.

¹⁸ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4: 338; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, 4: 164.

¹⁹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4: 338.

²⁰ Ibid, 338; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4: 164.

The term *khalā'if* in sūrah Yūnus (10): 14, from al-Ṭabarsī's point of view, refers to the people of the Prophet Muḥammad, whom Allah appoints to succeed the previous generation.²¹ He further emphasises that the process of this appointment is subject to strict conditions and requirements. Moreover, theirs is not an easy task, since they are entrusted with heavy duties and responsibilities. They may choose either to successfully perform it by obeying all Allah's commands or to ignorantly abandon it. However, both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī point out that whichever path they choose, Allah will be the judge of the actions: their faith and obedience will bring all benefits and rewards in both this world and the Hereafter, but a terrible punishment will await them if they choose the evil way. In addition, Allah reminds them that He will destroy them, just as He did the previous generations, if they persist in their disobedience.²² Then a new *imām* from the next generation will be appointed to face similar responsibilities. It is clearly expected that this newly elected *imām* will manage to perform the task, otherwise another person will replace him.

In contrast to the previous verse, the general meaning of sūrah Yūnus (10): 73 emphasises the fate of the unbelievers, who eventually receive Allah's punishment. In terms of historical reference, this verse highlights the story of the people of Noah, who reject the message revealed by their prophet. Moreover, they claim that he brings a false message in order to throw them into chaos and disputation. As with verse 14, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī are in agreement in interpreting this verse. They state that some of the believers in Noah's message, said to be eighty souls, were chosen to be the *khalā'if*

²¹ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 5: 121.

²² Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Ṭibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 5: 349; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 5: 122.

to replace the drowned unbelievers.²³ Both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī also quote al-Balkhī's view (d. 194/810) that there were *ru'asā'* (leaders), but not *khalā'if*, among these saved people.²⁴ It is clear, however, that the use of a different term, *ru'asā'* instead of *khalā'if*, is just a matter of substituting one term for another without changing the original meaning of the verse.

Regarding the fate of the drowned unbelievers, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī highlight another significant point, which concerns the awful consequences of unfaithfulness to Allah and failure to obey the *khalīfah*. With regard to this verse, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī emphasise the way in which these ignorant people met their punishment, which is described as one of the most horrible ways of being destroyed, that of being drowned in a flood of water. This would have been avoided if they had believed and accepted the messages delivered by Noah.

In the last *khalā'if*-verse, sūrah Fāṭir (35): 39, the interpretation of both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī is somewhat different from that of the Sunnī commentators, even though all refer to the same report from Qatādah. The Shī'ī commentators interpret it to mean that the appointment of the *khalīfah* may take place in a society of the unbelievers, and that the succession from one generation to another may continue for many decades.²⁵ The Sunnis, however, emphasise the succession of various groups of people in general, as

²³ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 5: 411; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān*, 5: 157.

²⁴ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 5: 411; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 5: 157.

²⁵ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 8: 434; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 8: 189.

shown by previous examples such as the people of ʿĀd and Thamūd, without mentioning the society of the unbelievers.

In offering this interpretation, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī may intend to refer to the Sunnī rulers of the ʿAbbāsīd dynasty, in whose time they lived in fear. Al-Ṭūsī himself, for instance, experienced the dangers of living under an evil overlord when his house was burned down by the Sunnī Seljuk ruler, who had taken Baghdad from the Shīʿī Buyid in 447/1055.²⁶ Since many Shīʿī scholars and adherents were brutally oppressed by some ʿAbbāsīd *khalīfahs*, the possibility of succession occurring in an unbelieving society was an idea based on traumatic personal experience.

5.3.2 *Khulafāʾ*

The first occurrence of the term *khulafāʾ* appears in sūrat al-Aʿrāf (7): 69. The Shīʿī and even the Sunnī commentators provide only brief interpretations of this verse. Al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī discuss the appointment of a new generation, that of Prophet Hūd and his people, to be the *khulafāʾ* after the destruction of Noah’s people.²⁷ Although they are very fortunate and privileged in this appointment, their selection is subject to the successful performance of certain tasks. Otherwise it is possible that they will meet the same doom as the people of Noah. This explanation is short because the two Shīʿī commentators and also the Sunnīs probably consider that the literal meaning of this

²⁶ McAuliffe, *Qurʾanic Christians*:, 48.

²⁷ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 4: 444; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majmaʿ al-Bayān Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 4: 223.

verse is clear enough not to need any further elaboration, and that the analysis of some earlier verses, which has discussed the terms *khalīfah* and *khalā'if*, has already provided an adequate explanation.

The second occurrence, which is found in verse 74 of sūrat al-A^ʿrāf (7), emphasises the same kind of succession, but with reference to a different group of people. If the previous verse concerns the replacement of the people of Noah, this one refers to the people of the prophet Ṣāliḥ, whom Allah appoints to succeed the ʿĀd. Both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī briefly note this interpretation in their commentaries and further elaborate that these people should accept it as one of the greatest blessings received from Allah.²⁸

The significant point regarding the appointment of Ṣāliḥ, and which has been emphasised in many earlier verses, concerns the ʿĀd's failure to obey Allah's commandment and their continuously practising evil actions, even though they have received many warnings and reminders instructing them to desist.

Regarding the last *khulafā'*-verse, sūrat al-Naml (27): 62, no view or explanation can be found that might make either al-Ṭūsī's or al-Ṭabarsī's interpretation substantially different to those of the Sunnis. They apparently agree with the Sunnis' opinion of this verse, that it is a reminder to the Prophet Muḥammad and his descendants that only Allah has absolute power to act and create.²⁹ Thus, the supremacy of His power is applied to the appointment of the Prophet and his descendants as the *khulafā'*,

²⁸ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4: 450; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4: 227.

²⁹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 8: 110; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 7: 314.

replacing the previous generation because of its disobedience and unfaithfulness.

The analysis of these three *khulafā'*-verses as interpreted in the two Shī'ī commentaries indicates several important results. First of all, it is clear that the process of succession or *khilāfah* is continuous; it did not end with the death of the last prophet, but it will continue until the last day of this world. Secondly, whenever one particular generation is removed from the office of *khilāfah*, another group, who are expected to fulfil their responsibilities, will be appointed. Finally, there is only one reason for these substitutions: the previous generation's disobedience and failure to perform their duty.

5.4 The Interpretation of Some Other Forms of the Term *Khalīfah*

There are some other forms, derived from the same root word '*khalafa*', that give rise to significant interpretations of the concept of *khilāfah* (*imāmah*). Terms such as *yastakhlif*, *istakhlafa*, *ukhluf* and *yakhluf* are occasionally found in the Qur'an and, as their analysis will contribute to the study, every verse in which they appear will be discussed.

5.4.1 *Yastakhlif* and *Istakhlafa*

The same four verses as were examined in the Sunnī discussion, containing the terms *yastakhlif* and *istakhlafa*, will be analysed in this section. The first verse, sūrat al-An'ām (6): 133, generally highlights the absolute power (sovereignty) of Allah over

His creatures. According to al-Ṭūsī's interpretation, this absolute power includes the ability to replace any creature by destroying them and appointing a newly selected creature. Furthermore, he shows that many previous examples illustrate this process, which culminates with the people of the last prophet, Muḥammad.³⁰ Al-Ṭabarsī also produces this kind of interpretation, but he elaborates at greater length than al-Ṭūsī, suggesting that this verse is a reminder to the people of the Prophet Muḥammad that this situation may well happen again. It depends on Allah's will and, if He wishes it, a similar circumstance will occur, either through the appointment of another *khalīfah* of the same kind or the appointment of a new creature, just as the *jinn* were succeeded by Adam.³¹ However, this will not occur for no discernible reason. In other words, the changing of *khulafā'*, as seen in many previous examples, is always the result of disobedience, unfaithfulness and failure to implement Allah's command.

These additional remarks offered by al-Ṭabarsī, reminding the ruling authorities of the possibility of being deposed as a result of their oppressive brutality and evil actions, may be read as similar to the strictures of his Shī'ī predecessor and even the Sunnī commentators. They also suggest his dissatisfaction with the kind of rule exercised by the *khalīfahs* of that particular period, particularly the Sunnīs, who governed according to their own interests. Given the circumstances, in which he interpreted this verse, he would have had to disguise his anger towards the Sunnī caliphate and therefore makes no direct reference to the Sunnī rulers.

³⁰ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4: 280.

³¹ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4: 132.

Regarding the interpretation of sūrat al-A^crāf (7): 129, Allah again demonstrates His absolute power by destroying the wicked and replacing them with a good and obedient nation. As time passes, however, this new nation will sooner or later act in the same way as the one that was destroyed, resulting in their role being taken by another group of people. This is what al-Ṭūsī mainly tries to emphasise when interpreting this verse, as he cites the story of Pharaoh and his followers, who were destroyed by Allah in order to make way for the people of the prophet Moses. In order to support this interpretation, he quotes Abū ^cAlī al-Fārisī's opinion that the people of Moses were appointed as successors in the land of Egypt (*Miṣr*).³² Al-Ṭabarsī's interpretation is not as detailed as that provided by his predecessor, but its meaning is clearly similar to that of al-Ṭūsī's since nowhere does he express his disagreement.³³

The view of al-Ṭūsī discussed above, which seems to sanction the overthrowing of an evil ruler and the appointing of a replacement by reference to the example of Pharaoh and his people, is important in that it shows his rejection of the Sunnī authorities. It suggests that al-Ṭūsī is symbolically equating Allah's appointment of Moses and his people to replace the annihilated Pharaoh and his forces with the plight of the Shī'īs under their Sunnī rulers, the Seljuks in particular, who took Baghdad in 447/1055 and freed the caliph from the supremacy of the Shī'ī Buyid dynasty (334/945-447/1055). Subsequently, civil disorder between the Sunnīs and the Shī'īs erupted and many Shī'īs were killed by the new caliphate.³⁴ In addition, as we have seen, al-Ṭūsī's own house

³² Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4: 515.

³³ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4: 259-260.

³⁴ Spuler, 'The Disintegration of the Caliphate in the East', in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, 1A, eds. P.M. Holt, Ann K.S. Lambton and Bernard Lewis, 149.

was burned, forcing him to leave Baghdad. In order to avoid persecution, he might have resorted to symbolism, to the example of Pharaoh and his people, rather than risk mentioning current rulers when discussing Allah's punishment of evil and oppression. This use of symbolism appears to be closely linked with the method used by al-Ṭabarsī in his interpretation of the previous verse.

The use of symbolism to indicate opposition to the ruling authorities seems to be very common among oppressed groups. The majority of the Shī'īs were indeed oppressed by the Sunnī authorities. Except during the period when the Shī'ī Buyids were in control in Baghdad (408/1055), the Shī'īs lived in fear and had to make every effort to avoid Sunnī persecution. Another example of this use of symbolism may be seen in the way that critics of the Shah before the Iranian Revolution of 1979 referred to the *khilāfah* of Yazīd, the second Umayyad caliph, who was accused by the Shī'īs of seizing power illegally from Ḥusayn, rather than attacking the Shah directly. Although the reason for resorting to symbolism is to avoid persecution, this is not always successful. Despite their use of this method, which was expected to protect them from the Shah's punishment, Khomeini and another fourteen clerics were arrested in Qom, Mashhad and Shiraz as a result of his sermon, delivered on 2nd June 1963, which alluded to the Shah as the 'Yazīd' of his time.³⁵

In the next verse, sūrah Hūd (11): 57, the main theme concerns the series of parables and stories of the ancient nations narrated by the Qur'an. Al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī produce an interpretation of this verse similar to that of the previous one. The only

³⁵ Halm, *Shiism*, 123.

difference is that this verse, containing the term *yastakhlif*, specifically refers to the people of Hūd, while the previous one pertains to the people of Moses. Al-Ṭūsī defines the nature of succession (*istikhlāf*) in this verse by the way Allah appoints one person to replace another due to the latter's failure to perform the task required by his office, which results in the selection of another *khalīfah* to complete it.³⁶

Al-Ṭabarsī's interpretation has an emphasis similar to that of his predecessor; in presenting the interpretation of the term *yastakhlif* in this verse, he briefly highlights the reason for succession (*istikhlāf*) and the duty of a new *khalīfah*. The main reason for this replacement, according to al-Ṭabarsī, is the disobedience of the deposed *khalīfah*.³⁷ As a result of this infidelity, Allah appoints another *khalīfah* who will promote His sovereignty and obey all His commands.

The series of parables and stories of the ancient nations continues in the interpretation of sūrat al-Nūr (24): 55, where two relevant terms appear in a single verse. Al-Ṭūsī interprets the first succession-term, *yastakhlif*, in this sūrah as referring to a typical form of succession applying to the early Companions of the Prophet and those who practise good deeds. In other words, it is Allah's promise to award the right of succession to the people of the Prophet Muḥammad in general as long as they promote the commandments of Allah. Moreover, their obedience will bring them great benefit, since they will take possession not just of the lands of the Arabs but also of the lands of non-Arab unbelievers.³⁸

³⁶ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 6: 13.

³⁷ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 5: 220.

³⁸ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 7: 454-455.

Al-Ṭūsī interprets the second term, *istakhlafa*, as meaning the succession of the ancient examples, with particular reference to the people of Israel in the land of Shām (Syria) after the abolition of *al-jabābirah* (a kind of sovereignty exercised by tyrants).³⁹ Presenting a variety of interpretations, al-Ṭūsī also quotes the opinion of al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915) who considers that this term (*istakhlafa*) relates to the period of two prophets, David and Solomon; but al-Ṭūsī refrains from explicitly approving it. A very similar interpretation is found in al-Ṭabarsī's commentary, but he uses a different reference, that of Muqātil, in clarifying this meaning.⁴⁰

In addition, al-Ṭūsī brings forward another argument by al-Jubbā'ī, who deduces that the term *yastakhlif* implies that the *khilāfah* includes only the first four rightly guided *khulafā'*. In discussing this term from the Sunnī viewpoint, al-Zamakhsharī interprets this term in the same way, but the rest of the Sunnīs, al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr in particular, do not accept this opinion. Despite being a Shī'ī, al-Ṭūsī also rejects al-Zamakhshari's view because, according to his conviction, the term cannot be defined as the *imārah* and *khilāfah* of these four caliphs, but rather has the usual, more general, meaning. In support of his argument, he quotes four verses: 35: 39, 7: 29, 6: 133 and 25: 62.⁴¹

Although al-Ṭūsī dismisses the notion that this verse refers to the first four caliphs, perhaps due to the Shī'ī doctrinal principle that 'Alī should have been appointed after the Prophet's death, it seems that he and later generations of Shī'ī commentators are

³⁹ Ibid, 455.

⁴⁰ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 7: 212.

⁴¹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 7: 456.

prepared to mention an opinion which connects the term *khalīfah* to all four caliphs instead of ʿAlī alone. On the other hand, the majority of Shīʿī proponents, including the Imāmī Shīʿī, do not accept that *khilāfah* may apply to the first three, whose validity they deny and, are known to have cursed Abū Bakr and ʿUmar.⁴²

Regarding another aspect, al-Ṭūsī denies that the interpretation of al-Jubbāʿī has been unanimously approved by the majority of *ḥadīth* reporters. For instance, he states that Mujāhid interprets it as meaning the people of Muḥammad (*ummah Muḥammad*) and even Ibn ʿAbbās and some others produce a similar definition. In addition, the term is also interpreted as the Mahdī, who is claimed to have descended from the family of the Prophet Muḥammad, without restriction to ʿAlī's descendants. Nevertheless, the report from al-ʿAyyāshī transmitted on the authority of ʿAlī, which al-Ṭūsī mentions in his commentary of this verse, has been understood by the Shīʿīs, especially the Imāmiyyah to indicate that the Mahdī is further narrowed to a descendant of ʿAlī only.⁴³ In fact, the belief in the return of the Mahdī (*rajaʿah*) is a controversial doctrine even among the mainstream Shīʿīs. According to this belief, the messianic reappearance of the Mahdī will take place at the end of the world.

⁴² Etan Kohlberg, 'Some Imāmī Shīʿī Views on the *Ṣaḥāba*', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam (JSAL)*, 5 (1984): 146-147.

⁴³ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʿān*, 7: 457. The return of the Mahdī or the Messianic tendency (*rajaʿah*) is one of the Shīʿī doctrines. However, the Shīʿīs, which are divided into many divisions, have argued over the matter of who is the real Mahdī. For the Imāmiyyah Ithnā ʿashariyyah Shīʿīs, the Mahdī will be the twelfth *imām*, Muḥammad al-Mahdī, who disappeared in 260/873-4, returning. A small group of Shīʿī, the Nawūsiyyah, named after their leader, ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Nawūs, refused to believe in the death of the sixth *imām*, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, and awaited his reappearance as the Mahdī. The Ismāʿīli Shīʿīs, however, believed in the return of their seventh *imām*, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, since Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar to them was the sixth *imām*, See Halm, *Shiism*, 38. See also Farhad Daftary, 'The Earliest Ismāʿīlis', *Arabica*, 38 (1991): 219-221 and W. Madelung, 'Shīʿa', *EI*², 9 (1997): 423.

A variety of interpretations are also offered by al-Ṭabarsī in his commentary on this verse. Unlike al-Ṭūsī, he does not specify which opinion he is most inclined to accept, but emphasises Allah's promise to make the believers successors to the previous generations. He does give considerable space to the view that the Mahdī is the person referred to in this verse.⁴⁴ Perhaps, as a Shi'ī, he cannot bring himself to reject this interpretation. Although it is not clear which interpretation he prefers, nowhere does he disagree with his predecessor.

Considering all the above opinions, al-Ṭūsī seems to provide a more satisfactory interpretation and one much closer to the Sunnī interpretations. There are clear reasons for this, such as the uncertainty of the commentators as to the exact meaning and his presentation of various closely related verses in order to prove that the term has a general rather than a specific meaning. Therefore, it seems reasonable to agree with al-Ṭūsī's interpretation that *yastakhlif* in this verse has the meaning of succession generally rather than referring to any particular group or person, as claimed by some commentators.

5.4.2 *Ukhluf*

The term *ukhluf* in sūrat al-A'rāf (7): 142 implies a quite different type of *khilāfah*, which is delegation or deputisation. According to al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī, the general reference of this verse is to the prophet Moses' request to his brother Aaron to be his deputy while he is away meeting Allah; this responsibility is to be temporary-on his

⁴⁴ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 7: 212-213.

return, Moses will resume this duty himself.⁴⁵ Since Moses has been appointed as *khalīfah* to the nation and even to Aaron, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī believe that it is not possible for the latter to request the same thing. This form of delegation during the absence of the appointed *khalīfah* reflects one of the Shiʿī doctrines of *imāmah*, which permits the *imāmah* to be assumed by the deputy *imām* (*imāmat al-mafḍūl*) in the presence of the appointed one, as long as he accepts and agrees with the arrangement.

Another significant point concerns the position and status of *imāmah*, which is definitely separate from and lower than the category of prophethood (*nubuwwah*). In this case, however, *khilāfah* is included in the category of *nubuwwah* because both Moses and Aaron have already been appointed as prophets before their appointment as *khalīfah*. In other words, their appointments indicate both *nubuwwah* and *khilāfah*. This circumstance is not possible in the case of non-prophet *khulafā'* since their appointment is restricted to the status of *khalīfah* of the people.⁴⁶

5.4.3 *Yakhluf*

The general interpretation of the term *yakhlufūn* in sūrat al-Zukhruf (43): 60 is, in one aspect, very much like that of sūrah 6: 133, where Allah's omnipotence is the main subject. According to al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī, Allah's intention in this verse is to

⁴⁵ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4: 532; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4: 269.

⁴⁶ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4: 532; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4: 269.

emphasise His power and right to appoint a new generation from among similar creatures or even from among quite different creatures in order to replace those who have proved sinful and unfaithful. In this regard, both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī agree that Allah gives a warning and reminder concerning the possibility that He will put an end to the human succession and appoint the angels as their successors. Moreover, this might come to pass if human beings do not maintain the purity of their role as *khalīfahs* and instead persistently follow the example of their evil predecessors, and it is very simple for Allah to make this warning a reality because He has already done so on many previous occasions.⁴⁷

If these evil circumstances do occur, it seems that another type of creature, the angels, will be trusted to assume and maintain the duty of the *khalīfah*.⁴⁸ This suggests that the status of the person to be *khalīfah* is not the most important criterion, but rather obedience, piety and faithfulness are considered to be the principal characteristics of the *khalīfah*. This opinion has much in common with another significant perception of the *khilāfah*, which is closely related to the Khārijite view: since obedience and piety are far more important than the status of the person to be appointed as *khalīfah*, it is possible that a lower-class person who possesses those qualities may take on the duty,

⁴⁷ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 9: 211; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 9: 27.

⁴⁸ Many Sunnī and Shi'ī scholars have argued over the question whether the angels are superior to the prophets. According to some Sunnī scholars, like al-Bayḍāwī, the prophets are far superior to the angels. However, the majority of the Mu'tazilites, including al-Zamakhsharī, believe in the superiority of the angels. Although al-Zamakhsharī was a Mu'tazilite, his view does not represent the view of that group as a whole because others assert that only the sinless angels are considered more excellent than the prophets, whereas those angels who commit even the slightest sin, such as Hārūt and Mārūt, are inferior to the prophets. See Lutpi Ibrahim, 'The Questions of the Superiority of Angels and Prophets between al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī', *Arabica*, 28 (1981): 65-66.

if they can fulfil their responsibilities better than a person of higher class. Although this view would be unlikely to be endorsed by al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī, since the Shī'is propose that an *imām* can only be chosen from a certain group of people - the family of ʿAlī - their interpretation may be seen as unintentionally supporting the Khārijites.

5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The conclusion of this chapter will be placed at the end of the next (sixth) chapter. Since both fifth and sixth chapters concern the analysis of the concepts of *khilāfah* and *imāmah* by the same two individuals, combining their conclusions into one section seems well suited to the propose of the study. It is hoped that some significant conclusions will be reached, particularly those deriving from a comparison between the Shī'ī and Sunnī interpretations.

CHAPTER 6 CLASSICAL SHĪ'Ī QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE *IMĀMAH* AND *ULŪ 'L-AMR*-VERSES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter continues the previous chapter's focus on the Shī'ī interpretation of the concept of *khilāfah*. The scope of the discussion covers the verses containing the terms *imām* and *ulū 'l-amr*. Other related terms such as *mulk*, *walī* and *sulṭān* however, will not be examined, since their inclusion would make the study too long. Nevertheless, some verses containing these terms are occasionally mentioned, particularly when presenting the interpretation of the *khilāfah*, *imāmah* or *ulū 'l-amr*-verses. This chapter is divided into two major sections in order to separate the analyses of the *imāmah* and *ulū 'l-amr*-verses.

6.2 THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM *IMĀM* AND ITS PLURAL

The analysis of the term *imām* as seen from the Shī'ī viewpoint will be divided into two sub-sections. The first of these covers the examination of two verses containing the singular form *imām*, while the second considers the interpretation of the plural form *a'immah*, which appears in four verses.

6.2.1 *Imām*

As has been done with the analysis of the Sunni interpretations, two verses, which use the term *imām*, will be examined in detail. The first, sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 124, is significant for the understanding of the Shī'is' conception of *imāmah*. Compared to the analysis of some previous terms, their interpretation of this verse is very critical and appears to clarify its meanings, ideas and principles in a way opposed to those of the Sunnis. Regarding the literal meaning, the Shī'is emphasise that the *imāmah* referred to in this verse was conferred on ʿAlī and his designated successors in the same way as it had been on Abraham, and that ʿAlī and his successors' status is therefore similar to that of the Prophet. This idea may be seen in Shī'i translations of the phrase that retain the Arabic word *imām* and give it an initial capital. Two examples of such translations are the versions of Mir Aḥmed ʿAlī ('Verily I make thee *Imām* for mankind') and Shākir ('Surely I will make you an *Imām* of men').¹

The commentators' analysis of this verse can be divided into discussions of three different, but interrelated subjects. The first subject considered by al-Ṭūsī is the nature of the *ibtālā'* (test or trial) undergone by Abraham. Many possible answers have been offered, but the most important one, in al-Ṭūsī's view, is the opinion of Mujāhid, who believes that the key may be found in the next phrase of the verse, '*I shall make you an*

¹ Mir Aḥmed ʿAlī and Shākir are two well-known Twelver Shī'i Qur'anic translators. Their translations are: S. V. Mir Aḥmed ʿAlī, *The Holy Qur'an: Text Translation and Commentary* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1988) and M. H. Shākir, *The Qur'an* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1988). See Neal Robinson, 'Sectarian and Ideological Bias in Muslim Translation of the Qur'an', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 8. 3 (1997): 261.

imām to mankind'.² Al-Ṭabarsī provides a similar interpretation, with the difference that he does not mention Mujāhid, referring instead to the report from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.³ Nevertheless, the interpretation of the phrase clearly indicates the appointment of Abraham and his descendants as *imāms*, and therefore from the Shi'ī point of view exemplified by al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī implies and justifies the Shi'ī *imāmah*.

Another possible meaning of the trial (*ibtilā'*) can be derived from two different reports that al-Ṭūsī relates on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās and Qatādah.⁴ Referring to a report with a similar meaning, but narrated on the authority of Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 140/757), al-Ṭabarsī states that the report mentions that the testing of Abraham by Allah was 'what He showed him in his dream concerning the slaying of his son, and which he successfully fulfilled. Because of this fulfilment, Allah said to him, 'I shall make you an *imām* to mankind'. This *imām* was to be revealed through a purification (*ḥanīfiyah*), which consists of ten actions: five of them performed on the head and another five on the body."⁵ Both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī enumerate these ten acts in their commentaries.⁶ Some other possible meanings of the trial, which both of them

² Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 445-446.

³ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 293.

⁴ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 445-446.

⁵ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 293.

⁶ The five actions regarding the head are trimming the moustache, rinsing the mouth and nostrils, cleaning the teeth and parting the hair. Another five in the body are clipping the finger and toe nails, shaving the pubic hair, circumcision, plucking the hair under the arms and washing off traces of urine and faeces with water.

point out, are the thirty acts of Islamic law that have never applied to anybody apart from Abraham, and the way of performing pilgrimage (*manāsik al-ḥajj*).⁷

Moving to the second subject, al-Ṭūsī considers the meaning of the fulfilment and completion of the trial. He quotes al-Balkhī's opinion that the phrase 'I will make thee an *imām* to the Nations', which announces the appointment of Abraham as the *imām* indicates the real meaning of this fulfilment. This is due to al-Balkhī's definition of the word *kalimāt* as *imāmah*, a definition supported by a report narrated on the authority of Mujāhid.⁸ Therefore, the essential meaning here is that Allah tests Abraham and his descendants by appointing them to the *imāmah*.

Al-Ṭabarsī seems to agree with al-Ṭūsī since he also produces the same kind of interpretation and quotes similar reports. Furthermore, he relates another report on the authority of al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar⁹, who asked Ja'far al-Ṣādiq the real meaning of the *kalimāt*. The latter said, 'These are the words of inspiration which Adam learns from his Lord, and He turns toward him. The words are what Adam says: 'My Lord, I beg you, for the sake of Muḥammad, Fāṭimah, 'Alī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn to turn toward me', and then Allah does turn toward him for He is oft-returning, most merciful'.¹⁰ Al-Mufaḍḍal asks further, 'O son of the apostle of Allah, what means the phrase 'which he

⁷ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 445-446; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 293.

⁸ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 446.

⁹ Al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar was among the former followers of Abū 'l-Khaṭṭāb, the founder of the radical Shi'ī sect, the Khaṭṭābiyyah, who had repented and reverted to a moderate view of the *imāmah*.

¹⁰ *Al-Qur'an*, al-Baqarah (2): 37.

fulfilled'? He answered, 'He fulfils with the appointment of twelve *imāms*; nine of them from Ḥusayn's descendants...'.¹¹

This report seems to indicate two significant principles held by the Shī'ī. Firstly, it suggests that the reference of *khalīfah* to 'Alī and his descendants is consistent with al-Ṭabarsī's sectarian background as a Shī'ī. As has been emphasised on several occasions in the study's earlier chapters, the Shī'īs claim that the right to the *imāmah* after the death of the Prophet should have been given to the *ahl al-bayt* (people of the House, meaning the family of the Prophet), particularly to 'Alī, and that it should have been inherited by his two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. The right of 'Alī as the legitimate *imām* instead of Abū Bakr is believed to derive from divine guidance, awarded by the Prophet through his *waṣiyyah* (designation or legacy). This method is considered the only way to legitimate the transfer of the *imāmah* to the next *imām*. From the Shī'īs' viewpoint, the *imāmah* after 'Alī should be conferred on the *ahl al-bayt* and particularly on the descendants of 'Alī.¹² However, the history of Muslim dynasties ran counter to the Shī'īs' claim, since the *khalīfah* was controlled by the three first caliphs and by Mu'āwiyah and his descendants, who later formed the Sunnī Umayyad dynasty. This circumstance eventually negated the Shī'īs claim and effectively prevented their growth, since they were living under Sunnī oppression.

Secondly, the report underlines the doctrinal concept of the twelve *imāms*, starting with 'Alī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn and continuing with nine others. The citation of this report,

¹¹ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 294.

¹² Momen, *An Introduction to Shī'ī Islam*, 19-22.

intending either to support the Shī'īs' belief or to deny the Sunnīs' interpretation, reflects al-Ṭabarsī's inclination to restrict the *imāmah* to 'Alī and his descendants. This view is consistent with al-Ṭabarsī's background as an Imāmī Shī'ī, which led him to promote the series of twelve *imāms*. Al-Ṭūsī, although he does not cite this report, also considered himself to be an Imāmīyyah Shī'ī and, as such would have adhered to the doctrine of the twelve *imāms*.

The final subject is the interpretation of the word “*‘ahd*” (promise), which was made to Abraham and his descendants. Al-Ṭūsī points out that here *‘ahd* might indicate the promise of *nubuwwah* (prophethood), a view put forward by al-Suddī and al-Jubbā'ī.¹³ On the other hand, both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī incline to the view that it is more likely to refer to the *imāmah*; this is the opinion of Mujāhid, who refers to the report narrated on the authority of Abū Ja'far and Abū 'Abd Allāh.¹⁴ Generally, this report emphasises Allah's promise to make Abraham's descendants *imāms*. However, the phrase afterwards ‘but My promise is not within the reach of evil-doers’ explicitly excludes evil people from this promise. Therefore, this phrase is regarded as the specification of the general meaning of *imām*, whereby only the just, pious and obedient are entitled to hold the office.

In connecting the interpretation of this verse to the Shī'ī concept of *imāmah*, three important principles may be identified. First of all, the permission to give the *imāmah* to those of Abraham's descendants who are just, pious and obedient indicates that it is

¹³ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 448.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 1: 448; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 295.

permissible for any Shī'ī *imām* to hand on the *imāmah* to his own chosen descendants. This concept is very close to the meaning of a report, which is found in al-Ṭabarsī's commentary and narrated on the authority of al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar.¹⁵ Secondly, the Shī'īs' interpretation of the evildoers' exclusion from the *imāmah* supports their doctrine of *'iṣmah* (infallibility of the *imām*).¹⁶ A wrongdoer, according to the interpretation of this verse, cannot be an *imām*. In other words, all the appointed *imāms* are free from any sin, or, to be more specific, the twelve Shī'ī *imāms* are infallible (*ma'ṣūm*), because Allah has already excluded all sinful people (*ẓālim*) from this post. Finally, Abraham's appointment as a prophet and an *imām* indicates that the *imāmah* and the prophethood are different from each other. These two tasks are not applicable in the *imāmah* of mankind, since they are specially given to some selected individuals, the prophets.

The second verse containing the term *imām* is sūrat al-Isrā' (17): 71. Similarly to the Sunnī commentators, when treating this verse both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī also produce various possible definitions of the term *imām*. Thus, according to al-Ṭūsī, *imām* might have the meaning of prophet (*nabī*), as understood by Mujāhid and Qatādah, or it might, as in the opinion of Ibn 'Abbās, al-Ḥasan and Abū 'l-'Āliyah, be defined as a book of knowledge (*kitāb 'ilm*). In addition to these possibilities, al-Ṭūsī mentions another report from Ibn 'Abbās which takes it to mean the Holy Books, such as the Qur'an and the Torah, which Allah revealed to human beings and which contain

¹⁵ This tradition regards the appointment of the twelve *imāms*, nine of whom are the descendants of Ḥusayn.

¹⁶ For a further discussion on the concept of infallibility from the Shī'ī point of view, see Aḥmad Ḥasan, 'The Concept of Infallibility in Islam', *IS*, 2. 1 (1972).

Islamic laws.¹⁷ Al-Ṭabarsī provides a similar interpretation, but does not accept the authority of the report that interprets it as Holy Books, which he believes to be narrated on the authority of Ibn Zayd and al-Ḍaḥḥāk, whereas al-Ṭūsī refers to a *ḥadīth* with similar meaning, which is, however, from Ibn ʿAbbās.¹⁸

Another definition considered by al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī equates *imām* with men of religious knowledge (*ʿulamāʾ*), whom the people follow and accept as their *imāms*. Al-Ṭūsī bases this interpretation on the opinion of al-Balkhī, Abū ʿUbayd, Abū Jaʿfar and Abū Abd Allāh.¹⁹ Although the same opinion is put forward by al-Ṭabarsī, he refers to different sources: al-Jubbāʾī and Abū ʿUbaydah (d. 210/825).²⁰ Whichever is the best of all these definitions from the Shīʿī perspective, this verse undoubtedly has implications for the basic and general meaning of *imām*, even though al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī do not indicate that any of their interpretations support directly the Shīʿī doctrines of the *imāmah*. For example, the possibility that the term *imām* may refer to the *ʿulamāʾ* reflects the application of the doctrine of knowledge to the *imāms*. This doctrine affirms the excellence of the Shīʿī *imāms* in every aspect of human knowledge. They receive this knowledge from the Prophet or from the previous *imām*. Possessing this knowledge, the *imām* is capable of answering any question, deriving from his wisdom and divine inspiration through the pure mind that Allah has given him.²¹

¹⁷ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 6: 504.

¹⁸ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majmaʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 6: 217-218.

¹⁹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 6: 504.

²⁰ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majmaʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 6: 217.

²¹ Abdulaziz AbdulHussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdī in Twelver Shīʿism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981): 28.

It should however be noted that the Shī'īs' interpretation of this verse is little different from that of the Sunnīs, since both suggest a variety of choices, giving the same possible meanings and using almost the same sources. This close similarity between al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī and between themselves and the Sunnīs is possibly due to the fact that they refer to reports that emphasise the same meanings. Although the Shi'ī commentators offer different elaborations from those of the Sunnīs, these do not imply any substantial doctrinal disagreement. Moreover, the earlier commentators like al-Ṭabarī of the Sunnīs and al-Ṭūsī of the Shī'īs compiled an extensive array of possible interpretations for this term, thus discouraging later commentators from further elaboration and discovery of new possible meanings.

6.2.2 The Plural (*A'immaḥ*)

The plural form of *imām*, *a'immaḥ*, can be categorised as having two opposite meanings; good leaders and wicked leaders. The first meaning is indicated in sūrahs 21: 73, 28: 5 and 32: 24, while the second is noted in sūrah 28: 41. The term *a'immaḥ* in sūrat al-Anbiyā'(21): 73 signifies that the leadership and prophetic role assumed by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was in accordance with the command of Allah. According to al-Ṭūsī, their major duty was to guide people of their time to the truth of Islam by setting a good example in all their actions.²² Therefore, followers will imitate and practise only the good examples while, at the same time, desisting from evil actions, which have been strictly prohibited. In addition, al-Ṭabarsī suggests that another way

²² Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 7: 265.

for a person carrying the role of leadership to fulfil this duty is through the utterance of kind words at all times, whether in the presence or the absence of his people.²³ In other words, he implies that through the exercise of gentleness, piety and decency in both actions and words, instead of rudeness and insensitivity, the leader will have a positive effect on his people and inspire them to accept the teaching of Islam.

In sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (28): 5, Allah promises the followers of Moses that they will be appointed as leaders and inherit all the power and property of Pharaoh, who has been drowned in the sea together with his followers. Al-Ṭabarsī defines the exact meaning of the term *a'immaḥ* to be *qāḍah* or *ru'asā'*, as interpreted by Ibn 'Abbās.²⁴ Furthermore, he produces another two possible definitions, *wulāḥ* (rulers) or *mulūk* (kings) which he derives from the report of Qatāḍah.²⁵ Considering these two categories, *a'immaḥ* or *ru'asā'* (leaders) and *wulāḥ* or *mulūk*, al-Ṭabarsī states that both have a similar meaning and each implies the other. Therefore, *wulāḥ* and *mulūk* are interpreted to mean leaders, in the same way as *qāḍah* and *ru'asā'*, which literally mean leaders.

Al-Ṭūsī is not much concerned with the literal definition of the term, but rather produces an interpretation of the phrase itself, which in his opinion refers to the selection of the people of Israel as leaders.²⁶ This appointment is a result of the destruction of the kingdom of Pharaoh, who had been the oppressor of the people of Israel. Like al-Ṭabarī before him, al-Ṭūsī cannot have thought that the Israelites became

²³ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 7: 80.

²⁴ Ibid, 7: 328

²⁵ Ibid, 7: 328.

²⁶ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 8: 129.

the rulers of Egypt, but his reluctance to elaborate points to a probable lack of awareness of ancient Egyptian history. Giving a quite different interpretation from that of al-Ṭabarsī, al-Ṭūsī asserts that this verse is revealed to refer to the twelfth *imām*, Muḥammad al-Mahdī, who will reappear in the distant future before the Day of Judgement.²⁷ The function of the promised Mahdī is to strengthen the spirit of Islam, which, according to this verse, will be in a weakened state; as the appointed leader, he will destroy all the causes of darkness and error.

This is another verse that the Shīʿīs relate to the figure of the Mahdī, but while they have agreed that it may refer to Imām al-Mahdī, they have argued about who the promised Mahdī really is. Many Shīʿī groups have formulated their view in responding to this question. One of the early radical Shīʿīs, the Kaysāniyyah believes in the return of another son of ʿAlī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyyah. The Imāmiyyah believes in the occultation of the twelfth *imām*, Muḥammad al-Mahdī in 260/873-4 (the lesser occultation) and in his future reappearance, whereas the Ismāʿīlīs look forward to the return of their seventh *imām*, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl.²⁸ Despite this disagreement, both believe that when their Mahdī reappears, he will help Muslims, particularly the Shīʿīs, defeat all their enemies.²⁹

In contrast to the previous verse, the term *aʾimmah* in sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (28): 41 has the

²⁷ Ibid, 129.

²⁸ Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, despite being regarded as the seventh *imām* among the Ismāʿīlīs, was not one of the twelve Imāmiyyah *imāms*.

²⁹ Halm, *Shīʿism*, ed. Carole Hillenbrand, 38. For a detailed discussion on the doctrine of the Mahdī, see Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*., 8-9.

meaning of wicked leaders, specifically Pharaoh and his people, who lead the people to darkness and evil. Allah characterises these leaders as those who exhort others to commit actions that will lead to hell fire. Basically, the word *imām*, according to al-Ṭūsī's interpretation, is the person whom people follow and obey. Therefore, anyone who promotes the wrong path or calls others to any kind of action that leads to hell fire is classified as an evil leader, which al-Ṭūsī defines as *ru'asā' al-ḍalālah*.³⁰

From the general viewpoint of the Shī'īs, evil leaders are denied the right to be *imāms*. They consider the legitimate holder of authority to be only those *imāms* who act on their behalf; all other *imāms* are illegitimate and their rights are denied, just as much as those of evil leaders. This belief has been expressed throughout history in Shī'ī uprisings against different authorities. For example, the uprising of the Iranian people against the Pahlavi dynasty, which was indeed accused by the Iranians of practising evil, was held to be an Islamic duty. Many Sunnīs, however, regard this kind of rebellion against oppressive authority as incompatible with Islam. For instance, the committee of the Azhar, the foremost institution of religious learning in Egypt, opposed the Iranian Revolution and condemned the Iranian people. The committee believed that even an oppressive ruler must be obeyed, and their belief was based on the Sunnī Qur'anic interpretation concerning the concept of obedience.³¹ The Azhar's pronouncements, however, were not prompted only by scholarship and piety; President Sadat (1970-1981) had not been hostile to the Shah, and had even invited him and his family to Egypt. Both rulers looked for support to the United States.

³⁰ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 8: 155.

³¹ Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations*, trans. and annotated Hamid Algar, 327.

In fact, the root of the matter is the question of who actually wields power and authority. In those places where Sunnis form the majority of the population, they tend to believe in the principle of obeying their ruler however oppressive and evil, whereas the Shi'is, living mainly under Sunni rulers, have sometimes rebelled against such evil rulers, but in other circumstances, have kept silent.

Al-Ṭabarsī produces a similar interpretation to that of al-Ṭūsī, but emphasises the contrast between the prophets, who invite to paradise and the leaders of evil, who entice to hell fire. It is the nature of the latter type of leader, personified by Pharaoh and his followers in this verse, to perform and practise every kind of iniquity; indeed, the figure of Pharaoh has become a popular symbol of wickedness.³² One clear implication of this interpretation is that there is a possibility that two opposing types of *imām*, the prophet, representing the good *imām* and the wicked ruler (Pharaoh) representing evil, will emerge. If the *imāmah* of an *imām* is classified in the prophetic category, even though he himself is not a prophet, the people that follow and obey him will enjoy prosperity under his leadership and pass through death into paradise. On the other hand, if the leader is of the other type, the people that accept his commands blindly will be condemned to hell fire according to Allah's promise in this verse.

In the last verse containing the term *a'immaḥ*, sūrat al-Sajdah (32): 24, both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī seem to offer a similar interpretation. They believe that *a'immaḥ* in this verse indicates those leaders who urge the practice of good deeds. Not only do they agree in their interpretation, they refer to the same source for verification, which is the

³² Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 7: 348.

report from Qatādah.³³ Nevertheless, al-Ṭabarsī adds a further possible interpretation, which cannot be found in al-Ṭūsī's commentary: he specifically emphasises that *a'immaḥ* is a reference to the prophets, not just leaders in general as stated by al-Ṭūsī, who fulfil the command of Allah to guide people to the right path.³⁴ Apart from this additional remark, there is no other striking explanation to be found in al-Ṭabarsī's commentary.

6.3 THE INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM *ULŪ 'L-AMR*

The discussion of the term *ulū 'l-amr* in the Shī'ī commentaries puts forward a controversial and critical view of the concept of *imāmah*. The Qur'anic use of this term is one of the main sources they call on to support the criteria and characteristics of their *imāms*. As the term *ulū 'l-amr*, which is found twice in the Qur'an, has a general meaning, it provides a golden opportunity for various interpretations. Thus we find that the Shī'īs' commentaries present a totally different interpretation from that of the Sunnīs.

The first occurrence of the term is in sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 59. This verse is regarded by al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 246/860)³⁵, who was influenced to a large extent by

³³ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 8: 307; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 8: 85.

³⁴ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 8: 85.

³⁵ Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm was born in 169/785. Little information exists regarding his life. Whatever definition of the term *ulū 'l-amr* he provides, one important intention is to indicate the meaning that the men of power are the *imāms*. He refers to only one tradition as proof that the *imāmah* is obligatory, which is: 'Whoever dies without having an *imām*, dies like an idolater'. For a detailed discussion on his

Muʿtazilism, as the most obvious proof and the most illuminating revelation concerning the obligation of the *imāmah*. Perhaps somewhat more importantly, it highlights the responsibilities of the people towards Allah, His Messenger and those charged with authority (*ulū 'l-amr*). Among these responsibilities is the trust (*amānah*) that Allah emphasises in the previous verse. In the first stage, leaders are charged with the implementation of trust in administering public affairs.³⁶ In the next stage, it is the people's obligation, in response to the completion of their leaders' duties, to obey their leaders in the same way as they owe obedience to Allah and His Prophet.

It is in connection with the meaning of 'obey those charged with authority' that the Shīʿī interpretation of this verse becomes critical and controversial. According to al-Ṭūsī, *ulū 'l-amr* in general can reflect two essential meanings. Firstly, it means leaders (*al-umarā'*), as mentioned by a number of *ḥadīth* reporters including Abū Hurayrah, Ibn ʿAbbās, Maymūn b. Mahrān and al-Suddī. In addition, al-Ṭūsī observes that this interpretation is the one preferred by al-Jubbā'ī, al-Balkhī and al-Ṭabarī.³⁷ There are clear differences between the Shīʿī and the Sunnī commentators in producing the chain of transmission for this *ḥadīth*, which defines *ulū 'l-amr* as *al-umarā'*. In the Sunnī sources, Maymūn b. Mahrān is never mentioned, and the Shīʿīs do not cite Layth and Ibn Zayd, who are named in the Sunnīs' interpretation of this verse as the transmitters of this *ḥadīth*. Yet there is no clear explanation for this difference and neither party has ever directly denied the validity of the other's choice.

theory of the *imāmah*, see Binyamin Abrahamov, 'Al-Kāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm's Theory of the Imāmate', *Arabica*, 34 (1987): 87.

³⁶ Refer to the Qur'an in sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 58.

³⁷ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3: 236.

Nevertheless, one possible reason for this discrepancy, even though it has not been claimed by the Shī'īs as the main cause, may be the Shī'īs' and the Sunnīs' reference to different collections of traditions. The Shī'īs base their discussion of the doctrinal aspects of Qur'anic commentary on their four canonical *ḥadīth* books, which are *al-Kāfī fī 'ilm al-dīn* (What Suffices in the Knowledge of Religion) by al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941), *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu 'l-faqīh* (He Who Has no Jurist at his Disposal) by Sheikh Ṣaḍūq b. Babuya (d. 381/991), *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* (The Correction of Doctrines) by al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) and *al-Istibṣār fī ma ikhtalafa fīhi min al-akhbār* (The Clear-Sighted View of the Divergences of Tradition) also by al-Ṭūsī.³⁸ On the other hand, the Sunnīs mainly refer to their six books on the collection of *ḥadīth*, which are by Bukhārī (d. 256/870) Muslim (d. 261/875), Ibn Mājah (d. 273/887), Abū Dā'ud (d. 275/ 889), al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) and al-Nasā'ī (d. 303/915).

Secondly, al-Ṭūsī suggests that *ulū 'l-amr* may be taken to mean *al-'ulamā'*, as claimed by Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh, Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid, al-Ḥasan, 'Aṭṭā' and Abū 'l-'Āliyah.³⁹ They argue that the *'ulamā'*, rather than the *wulāh* (rulers) are consulted in any case of Islamic jurisprudence regarding disputes arising in the community.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī clearly reject this interpretation because, in their view, the term can never be defined to mean *'ulamā'*. According to al-Ṭūsī, the verse commands the people to give obedience to *ulū 'l-amr*, which is definitely to be interpreted as

³⁸ Yann Richard, *Shī'ite Islam: Polity, Ideology and Creed*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Cambridge and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995): 6-7.

³⁹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3: 236.

⁴⁰ Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3: 86.

obedience to a person who has or holds *al-amr* (power/authority).⁴¹ The *‘ulamā’*, whatever their virtues, are not the ones who hold that kind of power in their hands.

Al-Ṭūsī further argues that the Sunnis’ view, that the *‘ulamā’* are to be considered as *ulū ‘l-amr* only if they practise truth and justice, whereas if they do not, there should be no obligation to give obedience to them, has no basis at all in this context. In order to deny this opinion, al-Ṭūsī claims that the commandment to give obedience to ‘those charged with authority’ has a general scope and does not specify any particular people. Therefore he refutes the Sunnis’ interpretation in an effort to narrow the general reference of obedience to a much more specific addressee, and argues that they provide no concrete evidence to support their definition of the term as *‘ulamā’*.⁴²

Al-Ṭūsī’s and al-Ṭabarsī’s rejection of the Sunnis’ interpretation of *ulū ‘l-amr* as *‘ulamā’* reflects their promotion of the Shi‘ī view. They argue that the term is most appropriately defined as *al-a‘immah min āl Muḥammad* (*imāms* or leaders descended from the Prophet Muḥammad), referring to a report narrated on the authority of Abū Ja‘far and Abū ‘Abd Allāh.⁴³ This is an instance of their attempts to show that their preferred interpretation of a term is consistent with the Shi‘īs’ claim concerning the legitimate right of the *ahl al-bayt*, particularly Ali and his descendants, to the *imāmah*. In other words, two objectives are simultaneously attempted; their definition is a means of rejecting the Sunnis’ preference for *‘ulamā’* and of supporting the right of Shi‘ī *imāms* to the *imāmah*.

⁴¹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*, 3: 236.

⁴² Ibid, 236

⁴³ Ibid, 236; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma‘ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*, 3: 86-87.

Al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī further emphasise that it is compulsory for the public to obey these *imāms* in the same way they obey Allah and the Prophet. In one respect, this view suggests that their *imāms* have the same status as that of the Prophet except as regards the degree of their appointment, which is slightly lower than that of the prophets. In another context, it indicates the position of their *imāms* as divinely guided and designated through the Prophet. This they try to prove by arguing that the commandment of obedience to the *imāms* is no different from that enjoining obedience to the prophets, who were divinely and directly appointed by Allah; and therefore, the appointment of the *imāms* is also divine, even though transmitted through the *waṣiyyah* (designation or legacy) of the Prophet Muḥammad.

It seems that the main reason behind al-Ṭūsī's and al-Ṭabarsī's interpretation is that they wish to support the important Shī'ī doctrine of the infallibility of the *imām* (*ʿiṣmah*).⁴⁴ This can be seen in the way that they demand the same degree of obedience to their *imāms* as that given to Allah and the Prophet. Their argument is that if the position of the *imāms* is on the same level as that of the prophets, who are appointed by Allah and free from any sin, the same condition must apply to the *imāms*.

In the next phrase of this verse, Allah commands the people to refer to His book and the Prophet in the case of any dispute, as it reads: 'If ye differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His messenger'. The reference in this phrase is clearly limited to the two primary sources without any mention of the role of the *imām*. Nevertheless, al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī stress another possibility, which is that the *imām* is

⁴⁴ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Ṭibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3: 236; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3: 87.

also to be consulted. In their opinion the situation is similar to the case of entitlement to public obedience, which the *imām* fully merits. Therefore, the *imāms* are also to be considered as adjudicators of public affairs even though the term *ulū 'l-amr* is not included in this phrase. In addition, the possession of an exceptional criterion by the *imāms* themselves, which is their supposed infallibility, implies their ability to produce the right decision at all times.⁴⁵

Ulū 'l-amr appears again in sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 83, and is used to give further support to the previous interpretation. The Shi'īs take the opportunity to elaborate this verse in accordance with their concept of *imāmah*, since this is the second verse in the Qur'an that seems to have a bearing on the meaning of *imām* in general. In their view the most significant phrase of this verse is '...if they had only referred it to the Messenger or to those charged with authority among them,...'.

Both al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī interpret the term *ulū 'l-amr* to mean either the leaders of expeditions (*umarā' al-sarāyā, wulāh*) or the knowledgeable and learned men who were close to the Prophet Muḥammad (*ahl al-'ilm* and *al-fiqh*).⁴⁶ The former interpretation is referred to the opinion of Ibn Zayd, al-Suddī and Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī, while the latter is quoted from al-Ḥasan, Qatādah, Ibn Jurayj, Ibn Abī Najih and al-Zujāj.⁴⁷ Analysing these two interpretations with their references, the variety of

⁴⁵ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3: 237; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3: 87.

⁴⁶ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3: 273; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3: 108.

⁴⁷ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3: 273; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3: 108.

possible meanings presented by these two Shī'ī commentators is very much alike with the Sunnīs.

Although al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī does offer this possibility, they provide and prefer another interpretation, quoted from Abū Ja'far, that it rather means the infallible leaders.⁴⁸ Al-Ṭūsī gives his reason for this preference by emphasising that the term *ulū 'l-amr* should not be defined as leaders of expeditions or '*ulamā'*', since these leaders will undoubtedly make mistakes, even though not in every judgement, in delivering decisions on the matters on which they are consulted. On the other hand, the infallible *imams*, he and al-Ṭabarsī believe, are free from all error and sin, and will produce only truth and justice, thus ensuring the establishment of peace and the ideal community.⁴⁹

6.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The analysis of the *khilafah*- or, more accurately, *imāmah*-verses, in these two Imāmiyyah Qur'anic commentaries, raises some important issues. Al-Ṭūsī's and al-Ṭabarsī's exposition of the dogmatic doctrines of the *imāmah* have their basis in the Qur'anic perspective although they devote little space to the development of the concept. As with the Sunnīs, the writings of the classical Imāmiyyah '*ulamā'*', particularly in the fields of jurisprudence and theology, offer a wide range of discussion and provide a detailed examination of the concept of the *imāmah*, which

⁴⁸ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3: 273; Al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3: 108.

⁴⁹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 3: 273.

cannot be found in the Qur'anic commentaries. For example, the doctrines of the infallibility of the *imāms* and the return of the twelfth *imām* (the Mahdī) are exhaustively analysed in the Imāmiyyah works of theology and jurisprudence, but are simply and directly dealt with in the Qur'anic commentaries.

Interestingly, the Qur'anic treatment and interpretation of certain relevant verses indicate a marked similarity between the Shī'īs and the Sunnīs. On most occasions this similarity can be found in the discussion of non-doctrinal issues such as the reference to *khalīfah* as a person appointed from the descendants of the Prophet (the interpretation of sūrah al-Baqarah (2): 30). This similarity makes both commentaries, particularly that of al-Ṭūsī, acceptable to some degree in 'orthodox' Sunnī circles. Also, such moderation (from a Sunnī point of view) has brought about Sunnī recognition of certain aspects of their commentaries.

Examining the methods and styles used by al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabarsī in presenting their interpretations, we find that they are almost identical. Al-Ṭabarsī's style of interpretation is so similar to al-Ṭūsī's that on some occasions it seems to border on plagiarism. It was, however, normal practice in medieval scholarship to draw upon earlier scholars' knowledge, as we have seen in the interpretation of sūrahs Fāṭir (35): 39, al-Baqarah (2): 124 and al-Nisā' (4): 59. More importantly, their main concern was to discover the correct meaning of the verses they were interpreting and therefore, they had little cause to challenge the interpretations of their predecessors: and indeed, differences of opinion are rarely encountered. A similar reliance on an earlier commentary can be seen in Ibn Kathīr's indebtedness to his predecessor, al-Ṭabari.

The early part of the analysis, which concerns the terms *khalīfah*, *khalā'if* and *khulafā'*, has considered several doctrinal issues in which the views and interpretations of the Imāmiyyah Shi'īs and the Sunnīs are notably different. For example, both the Shi'īs' preferred interpretation of the phrase '*Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?*', from sūrah al-Baqarah (2): 30 (analysis of the term *khalīfah* in chapter five) seems to differ from that of the Sunnīs, since both hold to the doctrine that the *imāmah* is immune from the power of evil. It is suggested that this interpretation has been underlined by these commentators to implicitly support the doctrine of infallibility regarding the twelve Imāmiyyah *imāms*, which is also briefly mentioned in chapter one (The nature of the *Khilāfah*).

This doctrine asserts that it is impossible for the *imāms* to be prone to evil, although their people or communities may be. In other words, people are fallible and do not hold authority in the manner of the *imāmah*. In contrast, the Sunnīs stress the essential role of the *ummah* - particularly *ahl al-'ilm wa 'l-'aql* (the people who loose and bind) - as well as the *khalīfah* in resolving any argument concerning the *khilāfah*. The Sunnī interpretation of this verse, as we have noted in chapter three and the concluding remarks of chapter four, supports the continuation and propagation of the form of hereditary succession practised by their dynastic rulers.

It is undeniable that the Shi'īs were oppressed by the Sunnī dynastic rulers, and it is suggested here that this had a marked influence on their interpretations. The Qur'an's condemnation of the wickedness of Pharaoh (sūrah al-An'ām (6): 133), which has been discussed in chapter five, is used by the Shi'īs to indirectly attack their Sunnī

oppressors. Al-Ṭūsī, as we have already noted in the section containing his biography, personally witnessed the °Abbāsids' persecution of the Shī'īs and had to flee Baghdad after his house had been set ablaze. Therefore, the Shī'īs' interpretation of sūrah Fāṭir (35): 39, that the *khilāfah* can be preserved even in an unbelieving society, was meant to be understood as referring to the injustices of the Sunnī dynastic rulers, while carefully avoiding any overt criticism. The Sunnī commentators' dilemma was in some ways more difficult. Although they were well aware of the vices of their own rulers, nowhere in their interpretations do they imply that moral evil is sufficient grounds for deposing an oppressive ruler.

The two Shī'īs' interpretations of some other terms, such as *imām*, *a'immaḥ* and *ulū 'l-amr*, are notably different from those of the Sunnīs, perhaps because of the general form of the verses themselves. For example, the term *ulū 'l-amr*, discussed earlier in the chapter, is defined by the Imāmiyyah commentators in such a way as to legitimate the appointment of *ahl al-bayt*, especially from the descendants of °Alī, to the *imāmah*. Therefore, obedience to them is fundamental because the status of these *imāms* is similar to that of the Prophet: in other words, the *imāms* are divinely designated just as the Prophet was. This view is clearly incompatible with that held by the Sunnis, who hold that the appointment to the prophethood (*nubuwwah*) is a power vested only in Allah. On the other hand, the appointment of a non-prophet *khalīfah* is to be determined and resolved by the Muslim community, but this process must be consistent with the principal guidelines laid down by the Qur'an and *sunnah* of the Prophet. Viewed in a positive light, the Shī'īs' narrow interpretation of this term seeks to clarify

the meaning of the verse, but the fact remains that its implications are unacceptable to Sunnī opinion.

The differences between the Sunnī and the Shī'ī interpretations of these general verses arise for many reasons. Some result from the difficulty of certifying the validity of sources, or from the existence of various different sources: some are due to the attempt by commentators to produce interpretations that support their own fundamental beliefs. On many occasions, the Imāmiyyah Shī'ī interpretations are notably different from those of the Sunnī counterparts, because their efforts are directed towards defending their basic doctrines, which underlie their concept of the *imāmah*. This can be seen from the two exegetes' interpretation of sūrah al-Baqarah (2): 124, discussed in chapter five, which promotes the doctrine of twelve *imāms*, and of al-Qaṣaṣ (28): 55, examined in chapter six, which provides evidence of their belief in the return of the Mahdī.

In conclusion, then, the analysis of the Imāmiyyah Shī'ī interpretations of the relevant *khilafah*- and *imāmah*-verses has shown that these often serve to underline their doctrines. It has been noted that significant divergences occur only when the terms are in general forms, providing the possibility of variant readings, which is an important characteristic of classical *tafsīr*. Otherwise, the Shī'ī interpretation is little different from the Sunnī, since on most occasions they refer to similar sources. The arguments and disagreements inherent in the interpretation of certain verses stem from the incompatibility of certain essential doctrines, which greatly influence the commentators' understanding of the concept of *imāmah*.

CHAPTER 7 MODERN SUNNĪ AND SHĪ'Ī INTERPRETATIONS OF AND REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCEPT OF *KHILĀFAH*

7.1 INTRODUCTION

After having made a thorough analysis of the classical Sunnī and Shī'ī Qur'anic conceptions of the *khilāfah*, we will in this chapter examine the concept from the modern perspective. The analysis, however, will not be as detailed as the exploration of the classical points of view, but will rather highlight some of the essential interpretations, which have contributed to a very interesting debate in modern times and, in some circumstances, raised very controversial arguments. The objective of this chapter is to point out either similarities or differences of view among modern scholars, and between them and their classical counterparts, concerning the concept of *khilāfah*, which is furthermore, related to broader questions concerning the theory of the Islamic state.

No study of the concept of *khilāfah* would be complete which referred to the classical interpretations only, while neglecting to analyse the modern perspectives. It is undoubtedly accepted that most of the twentieth-century Qur'anic interpreters have adopted their theories and understandings from their early predecessors. They have considered this method to be very important in justifying the principles of their political thought, especially in relation to commentary on the Qur'an. For this particular reason and for the better understanding of each modern commentator, the first part of this chapter will deal with the backgrounds of three of the most significant modern commentators.

Knowing the details of each commentator in terms of their life, educational background and socio-political development makes the analysis of the modern interpretations easier, as it is likely that their views might be influenced by their backgrounds. The analysis of the interpretations of the modern Sunnī and Shī'ī commentators aims to trace the agreements, as well as to clarify the disputes, concerning each particular interpretation.

7.2 BACKGROUND OF MODERN MUSLIM QUR'ANIC COMMENTATORS

The scope of this part of the study is limited to just three modern Qur'anic commentators, two Sunnī and one Shī'ī. Although the number of commentators are less than those discussed in the classical part, more space will be available for a detailed analysis of the concept of *khilāfah* as it has been developed in modern times. The discussion of modern commentators has been limited because the main matter of the whole study is the analysis of the concept of *khilāfah* from the viewpoint of the classical Qur'anic interpretations; however, no account of the classical interpretations would be complete without careful consideration of the work of modern commentators. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that conclusions drawn from the analysis of these three cannot be generalised across the whole range of modern interpretations. Each of these three, however, is a very well known figure in his respective country and has played a major role in the revival of Islam in recent decades.

7.2.1 Abū A'ḷā Mawdūdī (1903-1979)

Sayyid Abū A'ḷā Mawdūdī, one of the chief architects of the contemporary Islamic resurgence, was born in South India on 25 September 1903. His family was deeply involved with the glories of Muslim history in India, having had a long history of service to the Muslim Mughal rulers until the fall of the dynasty in 1858. Therefore his family, unlike many, did not re-establish friendly relations with the British colonialists. In his childhood, Mawdūdī was exposed to a traditional Islamic education. In 1920 he went to Delhi, where he studied English and modern subjects and received a formal religious education, eventually gaining a certificate in religious training.¹

Mawdūdī became an author at the early age of thirteen and started to write on issues of concern to Indian Muslims in a variety of newspapers and journals at the age of sixteen. He was the author of more than one hundred works on Islam, both scholarly and popular, and his writings have been translated into several languages. He began to attract notice with the publication of two books, *al-Jihād fī 'l-Islām* (1926) and *Towards Understanding Islam* (1930). In 1932 he became the editor of a monthly journal called *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* (Exegesis of the Qur'an) and occupied that position for the rest of his life.²

¹ Seyyed Abbas Araghchi, 'Islamic Theo-Democracy: The Political Ideas of Abul A'ḷā Mawdūdī', in *Iranian Journal of International Affairs (IJIA)*, 8 (1997): 773-74. For more detail on his background, life, thought and leadership, see Khurshid Ahmad and Zafar Ishaq Ansari, 'Mawlana Sayyid Abul A'ḷā Mawdūdī: An Introduction to His Vision of Islam and Islamic Revival', in *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honour of Mawlana Sayyid Abul A'ḷā Mawdūdī*, eds. Khurshid Ahmad and Zafar Ishaq Ansari (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1979): 361; Maryam Jameelah, 'An Appraisal of Some Aspects of Mawlana Sayyid Ala Maudoodi's life and Thought', *IS*, 31. 2 (1987): 118-120.

² Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdūdī and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 30. See also Sheila McDonough, *Muslim Ethics and Modernity: A Comparative Study of the Ethical Thought of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Mawlana Mawdūdī* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984): 56.

Mawdūdī was one of the outstanding Islamic thinkers and writers of his time. He devoted his entire life to expounding the meaning and message of Islam and to organising a collective movement to establish the Islamic Order. In this struggle, he had to pass through all kinds of sufferings. In 1941, he founded *Jama'at-i Islami*, of which he remained *amīr* (chief) until 1972 and which has been one of the most prominent Islamic movements of the modern period. Between 1948 and 1967, he was imprisoned on four occasions, spending a total of five years in different prisons in Pakistan. The climax of all these arrests came in 1953, when a Martial Law court sentenced him to death for writing a 'seditious' pamphlet entitled 'The Qadianī Questions',³ which was believed to be instrumental in the agitation against the Aḥmadiyah, but later the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Even though Mawdūdī and his party were not involved directly in the agitation, the military authorities saw them as indirect instigators of anti-Aḥmadi activity. In fact, Mawdūdī acted with the intention of spreading his own constitutional proposals for the Islamic state and to gain political support.⁴

The intention behind the establishment of *Jama'at-i Islami* was to turn Pakistan into an Islamic state based on the *shar'ah*. In this respect the party was similar to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. More significantly, Mawdūdī described in detail the encompassing Islamic order to be realised in the hoped-for Islamic state. In order to achieve it, an Islamic 'revolution', not necessarily of a violent nature, was required, and this would guarantee the fundamental transformation of society, its Islamisation. Even under the regime of Zīā ul-Ḥaḡ (1977-88), who imposed this kind of Islamisation

³ Qadiani is sometimes used as another name for the Aḥmadiyah.

⁴ Adams, 'Mawdūdī and the Islamic State', in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito, 110.

in Pakistan, the hoped-for realisation of *shar'ah* in an Islamic social order did not take place; the various Islamic states apply *shar'ah* in widely differing ways.⁵

Mawdūdī is considered to be the man who began the movement to create an Islamic renaissance, particularly in the contexts of the Indian sub-continent and Pakistan. He continued to encourage the development of the Islamic movement, and occupied a pivotal position in the movement for Islamic rebirth in the twentieth century. The abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate (1924) had extinguished the last apparent hope of the Muslim *ummah* to restore the sovereignty of Islam. Realising the possibility of the demise of Islamic authority, Mawdūdī, together with the members of his party, raised a clarion call for Islamic revival and reassertion. They invited Muslims to return to the real source of their strength, the Qur'an and *sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad. Moreover, it was the party's objective to awaken Muslims to a new goal and mission and at the same time to encourage them to live and die for the sake of Islam.

The *Jama'at-i Islami* movement, which Mawdūdī formed as the foundation of Islamic revivalism in Pakistan, represented an extension of the freedom movements that began as an attempted *jihād* against British colonialism. At that time, this liberation movement brought everything in its power, including the entire intellectual and cultural heritage of the *ummah*, to bear against the enemy, calling Muslims to the glory of the past. Even though it is doubtful that the movement accomplished what it set out to do, the colonialists did leave and national government became securely established. But the national government was not established as a direct result of the *Jama'at-i Islami*'s activities. Indeed, the influence on the Indian Muslims of the Western concepts of nationalism, national government and the exercise of power was overwhelming.⁶

⁵ Jacques Waardenburg, 'Sunni Islam: Modern Sunni Thought', in *OEMIW*, ed. John L. Esposito, 4 (1995): 143.

⁶ Taha J. Al-'Alwani, 'Authority: Divine or Qur'anic?', *AJISS*, 13. 4 (1996): 543.

Mawdūdī detested this influence; writing before the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, he vehemently rejected the very idea of nationalism.

Even a cursory glance at the meaning and the essence of nationalism would convince a person that in their spirit and in their aims Islam and nationalism are diametrically opposed to each other.⁷

Nevertheless, after the creation of Pakistan, Mawdūdī and his party launched a campaign to establish an Islamic state and re-formulated the idea of nationalism. In fact, that move was the starting point for Mawdūdī's acceptance of the principle of nationality. More significantly, the party appeared to be staunch supporters of their national state by 1971, particularly after the secession of Bangladesh. The change in Mawdūdī's position may be clearly understood from his speech:

Since, by God's will, I was born in this particular nation and belong to it, it is natural for me to wish and pray that my nation should have the proud privilege of leading an Islamic revolution in the present age, of being the first of the nations to adopt Islam in its totality, and to set up a model Islamic society, which should serve as an example and a beacon for the rest of mankind.⁸

The *Jama'at-i Islami*'s campaign to establish an Islamic state in Pakistan was based from its foundation upon the *shar'ah*. Nonetheless, the influence of Western ideas was obvious in the way Mawdūdī defined the shape of the Islamic state. He borrowed some valuable elements of Western democracy and combined them with Islamic principles. Consequently, the concept of a theo-democratic Islamic state, which he believed to be

⁷ Sayyid Abu A'la Mawdūdī, 'Nationalism and Islam', in *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*, eds. Donohue and Esposito (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982): 94.

⁸ Sayyid Abu A'la Mawdūdī, *Islam Today* (Karachi: Chiragh-e Rah Publications, 1968): 64. See also Araghchi, 'Islamic Theo-Democracy: The Political Ideas of Abul A'la Mawdūdī', 790-91.

different from both theocracy and Western democracy, appeared to express his political preference:

If I were permitted to coin a new term, I would describe this system of government as a ‘theo-democracy,’ that is to say a divine democratic government, because under it the Muslims have been given a limited popular sovereignty under the suzerainty of God.⁹

The distinction between Mawdūdī’s theo-democracy and Western democracy, in short, rests on the principle that, while in the latter the people’s representatives exert a kind of absolute authority, where political power is relatively free and uncontrollable, sovereignty in the former is specially dedicated to Allah. Given this definition, the authority and power of an Islamic state is dependent on the Divine Laws and must not go beyond the rules and limits prescribed by Allah.¹⁰ This idea is found in most of Mawdūdī’s writings, as the following passage illustrates:

In Western democracy the people are sovereign, in Islam sovereignty is vested in God and the people are His caliphs or representatives. In the former, the people make their own laws; in the latter they have to follow and obey the laws (*shar‘ah*) given by God through His Prophet. In one the government undertakes to fulfil the will of the people; in the other the government and the people alike have to do the will of God. Western democracy is a kind of absolute authority which exercises its power in a free and uncontrolled manner, whereas Islamic democracy is

⁹ Abul A‘lā Mawdūdī, *Political Theory of Islam* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 1968): 22. See also Abu-l-A‘la Mawdūdī, ‘Political Theory of Islam’, in *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*, eds. Donohue and Esposito (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982): 254. See also Nasr, *Mawdūdī and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*, 84.

¹⁰ Abul A‘lā Mawdūdī, *Islamic Way of Life*, trans. Khurshid Ahmad (International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1977): 45.

subservient to the Divine Law and exercises its authority in accordance with the injunctions of God and within the limits prescribed by Him.¹¹

Mawdūdī was a prolific author, producing around 150 books of erudite scholarship and delivering hundreds of speeches and lectures. His most extensive work is the Urdu text of Qur'anic commentary, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, which he began in 1942 and which was finally completed in 1972. The work of translating it into English was begun some years ago and has still not been completed: only six volumes have so far appeared, covering the translation from the second sūrah (al-Baqarah) until the twenty-fourth sūrah (al-Nūr). Mawdūdī's commentary on the Qur'an shows that, in his view, there is usually only one right way to understand the various strands of Qur'anic thought. Therefore, although he occasionally indicates that a variety of views have existed, he explains systematically just how every aspect of the Qur'an is to be understood. In other words, his interpretation makes it clear that his readers are to apprehend the meaning of the Qur'an through his mind only. Some other commentators, by contrast, have believed that the interpretation of the Qur'an should include explanations of the various interpretations of previous scholars with respect to controversial matters, and should give individual Muslims the freedom to accept whatever interpretation they prefer.¹² Mawdūdī also wrote many books, mainly related to Islamic political thought, which were a part of his efforts to encourage Muslims to embrace the real spirit of Islamic revivalism. Mawdūdī died in September 1979.

¹¹ Ibid, 44-45. See also Araghchi, 'Islamic Theo-Democracy: The Political Ideas of Abul A'ālā Mawdūdī', 782.

¹² McDonough, *Muslim Ethics and Modernity*;, 68.

7.2.2 Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966)

Mawdūdī was a key figure in organising the Islamic revival in the Indian subcontinent and, from 1947, in Pakistan; the same role was carried out by Sayyid Quṭb in Egypt. He was one of the foremost Muslim thinkers of the mid-twentieth century. Sayyid Quṭb Ibrāhīm Ḥusayn Shādhilī was born in 1906 in the village of Qaha in Asyut Province. He came from a deeply religious, well-respected and relatively affluent family. His early education started at the age of six when he was sent to a modern primary school (*madrasah*) instead of a traditional Qur'anic school. Like many Qur'anic commentators, Quṭb, at a very early age, managed to master important aspects of traditional Arab Muslim culture such as memorising the Qur'an by the age of ten and acquiring an excellent knowledge of the Arabic language.¹³

At the age of thirteen, Quṭb continued his education in Cairo, where he lived with his maternal uncle, Aḥmad Ḥusayn ʿUthmān. Here Quṭb came under the influence of liberal nationalist forces. At this early stage of his life, he became closely associated with and influenced by the modernist and outspoken Wafdist journalist, ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād (1899-1964).¹⁴ In 1929 he began to attend *Dār al-ʿUlūm*, from which he graduated in 1933. At this point, he became engaged in literary activities and started his career as a literary man. However, his bright reputation as a young literary critic had been firmly established while he was still at *Dār al-ʿUlūm*, when he published '*Muḥimmat al-shāʿir fi'l-ḥayāt wa shiʿr al-jīl al-ḥāḍir*' (The Mission of the Poet in Life and the Poetry of the Present Generation) in 1932. Following his

¹³ Adnan Musallam, 'Sayyid Quṭb's View of Islam, Society and Militancy', in *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (JSAMES)*, 22. 1 (1998): 64-65. For further detail on his biography, see also Yvonne Y. Haddad, 'Sayyid Quṭb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival', in *Voices of Resurgent Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983): 67-98; Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term 'Islam'*, 204-207.

¹⁴ Haddad, 'Sayyid Quṭb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival', 68-69.

graduation, he became a schoolteacher in government schools and was later appointed as inspector of schools for the Ministry of Education. He spent two years in the United States (1948-1950), and while resident there, his book '*al-ʿAdālah al-Ijtimāʿiyyah fī 'l-Islām*. (Social Justice in Islam) appeared in 1949. His sojourn in the United States is considered to mark a stage of transformation in Quṭb's thought. The economic, political and social dislocations resulting from British war policies during World War II were the main causes of the many drastic changes that began to take place in Quṭb's outlook and he became increasingly interested in the study of the Qur'an.¹⁵

On his return to Egypt, Quṭb joined the *Ikhwān al-Muslimīn* (the Muslim Brotherhood). After his formal affiliation with the Brotherhood, he emerged as a leading ideologue of the organisation of the Propagation of Islam section in 1952-1953. He also became a regular contributor to the Muslim Brotherhood circular, mainly concentrating on issues pertaining to the Qur'an and Islamic society. In late 1952, he resigned from the Ministry of Education in protest against what he saw as un-Islamic governmental policies in education. During this period (late 1940s and early 1950s), he was greatly influenced by many writings disseminating the spirit of Islamic revivalism, such as those of Muḥammad Assad and Abū Aʿlā Mawdūdī of Pakistan.¹⁶ Such works were readily available in Egypt in 1951 and inevitably had a special impact on Islamic groups. As for the classical scholar that most influenced him, it is believed that he was deeply inspired by Ibn Taymiyyah.¹⁷

Significantly, Quṭb was arrested with many members of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1954, as a result of an alleged assassination conspiracy against Jamal ʿAbd al-Nasir. He was duly sentenced to fifteen years of hard labour in 1955, but after serving nine years

¹⁵ Ibid, 68-69.

¹⁶ Ibid, 70.

¹⁷ Ayubi, 'Islamic State', in *OEMIW*, ed. John L. Esposito, 322.

he was transferred to the prison hospital due to bad health.¹⁸ It was during his imprisonment that he made use of the time to complete his work on Qur'anic commentary and to develop his controversial work, *Ma'ālim fī 'l-Ṭarīq* (Milestones).

The climax of his troubles began with the publication of this work (Milestones) in 1964. He wrote with a profound sense of conviction, knowing the likely impact of his words on Nasir's regime, of which the book was particularly critical. His most controversial statement was his condemnation of the government as well as of Egyptian society in general as *jāhiliyyah* (total pagan ignorance). Indeed every aspect of the whole system, including the people's beliefs, habits, art and laws were, in his eyes, expressions of *jāhiliyyah*. A famous passage in Milestones is the following:

We are surrounded by *jāhiliyyah* today, which is of the same nature as it was during the first period of Islam, perhaps a little deeper. Our whole environment, people's beliefs and ideas, habits and art, rules and laws, is *jāhiliyyah* even to the extent that what we consider to be Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy and Islamic thought are also constructs of *jāhiliyyah*. Our aim is to change the *jāhili* system at its very roots – this system which is fundamentally at variance with Islam and which, with the help of force and oppression, is keeping us from living the sort of life which is demanded by our Creator. All the existing so-called “Muslim” societies are also *jāhili* societies.¹⁹

Consequently, Quṭb was executed by the Nasir regime in 1966 together with Muḥammad Yūsuf Ḥawwāsh, his friend during his ten-year imprisonment, who became an avid reader and critic of his writings. Without ceasing to be occupied with

¹⁸ Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term 'Islam'*, 205.

¹⁹ Quoted in Musallam, 'Sayyid Quṭb's View of Islam, Society and Militancy', 82.

the definition of *jāhiliyyah* (pre-Islamic paganism), he also discussed at length the concept of authority (*ḥākimiyyah*). In his political thought, *ḥākimiyyah* belongs solely to Allah. Allah possesses all power, and the authority that human beings possess is, without doubt, based on His authority over them. However, the authority of Allah is totally different from that of human beings, as their authority is bestowed on them by Allah, but Allah's authority derives from, or is one with, His possession of power.²⁰

Quṭb wrote more than twenty-five books, of which the longest, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān* (In the Shade of the Qur'an) is regarded as the most important. It is not just another commentary on the Qur'an, but, on the one hand, is a sincere and sober effort to understand man's contemporary achievements and difficulties in the light of the Qur'anic message. On the other hand, it vigorously explores the Qur'an's guidance for an increasingly sophisticated and highly perplexed human society. The work spans the whole of the text of the Qur'an and was largely written over a period of fifteen years, most of which its author spent in prison.²¹ It has been widely recognised as an outstanding contribution to Islamic thought and scholarship, to which students and scholars all over the world owe a great deal. It has been translated into English and has also been published in a monthly Arabic newspaper. This achievement has enabled people all over the world to read and benefit from Quṭb's ideas and knowledge.

²⁰ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, trans. International Islamic Federation of Student Organization (I.I.F.S.O), (1977): 32, 34, 152.

²¹ Musallam, 'Sayyid Quṭb's View of Islam, Society and Militancy', 79.

7.2.3 Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1903-1981)

‘Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī was born in Tabriz in 1903 into a respectable religious family. He lost his mother at the age of five and his father died when he was eight. He then became closely attached to his brother. He received his earliest education in his native city, mastering the elements of Arabic and the religious sciences. At about the age of twenty Ṭabāṭabā'ī and his brother set out for the great Shi'ī University of Najaf, Iraq, to undertake more advanced studies. While he was there, he married a prominent cleric's daughter, which enabled him to enjoy solid domestic serenity.²²

Most students in the *madrāsahs* at that time followed the branch of transmitted sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-naqliyyah*), especially the sciences dealing with the Divine Law, *fiqh* or jurisprudence, and *uṣūl al-fiqh* or the principles of jurisprudence. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, however, sought to master both branches of the traditional sciences: the transmitted and the intellectual. He studied Divine Law and the principles of jurisprudence with two of the famous masters of that day, Mirza Muḥammad Ḥusayn Na'inī and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Isfahānī.²³

Ṭabāṭabā'ī returned to Tabriz in 1934 and spent a few quiet years in that city teaching a small number of disciples. However, he was as yet unknown to the religious circles of Persia at large. It was the devastating events of the Second World War and the Russian

²² Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York, London: New York University Press, 1993): 274. See also ‘Alī al-Ausī, *Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī wa Manhajuhū fī Tafsīrihi 'l-Mizān* (Tehran, n.p., 1985): 45. For further reference on Shi'ī political thought, see Ayatullah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Islamic Teaching in Brief*, trans. Muzhgan Jalali, ed. Sayyid Khadim Husayn Naqavi (Iran: Ansariyan Publications).

²³ ‘Allamah Sayyid Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Shi'ah*, trans. S. H. Nasr (Qumm, 1981): 180. See also Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 289.

occupation of Persia that brought Ṭabāṭabā'ī from Tabriz to Qom in 1945. Qom was then, and continues to be, the centre of religious studies in Persia. In his quiet and unassuming manner he began to teach in this city, concentrating on Qur'anic commentary and traditional Islamic philosophy and theology, which had not been taught in Qom for many years.²⁴

In addition to formal learning, or what the traditional Muslim sources describe as 'acquired science', Ṭabāṭabā'ī sought after the knowledge of Islamic gnosis. He was fortunate in finding a great Shī'ī master of this discipline, Mirza 'Alī al-Qazī (1868-1946), who initiated him into the Divine mysteries and guided him in his journey toward spiritual perfection.²⁵ While resident in Qom, Ṭabāṭabā'ī also made frequent visits to Tehran. After the Second World War, when Marxism was fashionable among some of the youth in Tehran, he was the only religious scholar who took pains to study the philosophical basis of Communism and supply a response to dialectical materialism from the traditional point of view. The fruit of this effort was one of his major works, *The Principles of Philosophy and the Realistic Method*, in which he defended realism in its traditional and medieval sense against all dialectical philosophies.²⁶

In addition to a heavy programme of teaching and guidance, Ṭabāṭabā'ī occupied himself with writing many books and articles, which attest to his remarkable intellectual powers and breadth of learning within the world of the traditional Islamic sciences. His greatest work is probably the monumental Qur'anic commentary, *Tafsīr al-Mizān*. In his *tafsīr*, Ṭabāṭabā'ī approached the verses of the Qur'an from philosophical, sociological and traditional points of view. Moreover, he added a large

²⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 'Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn', in *OEMIW*, ed. John L. Esposito 4 (1995): 161.

²⁵ Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 290-91.

²⁶ Nasr, 'Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn ', 161.

section to each verse or passage commented upon, citing both Shī'ī and Sunnī *ḥadīths*.²⁷ In addition to his *tafsīr*, he also wrote another book on Qur'anic studies entitled *Qur'ān Dār Islām* (The Qur'an in Islam). He devoted his time completely to teaching and writing until he died in Qom in 1981.

7.3 MODERN MUSLIM COMMENTATORS' INTERPRETATIONS OF THE *KHILĀFAH*, *IMĀMAH* AND *ULŪ'L-AMR*-VERSES

The analysis of modern Sunnī and Shī'ī interpretations will be divided according to the classification of terms. However, it should be noted that the analysis will not examine every verse, as was done in the classical part, but will rather focus on certain verses which are particularly relevant to the study.

7.3.1 *Khalīfah*

Sūrat al-Baqārah (2): 30 gives much significant information regarding the concept of the *khilāfah*, highlighting the appointment of human beings as vicegerents on earth. As has been noted in the classical analysis, *khalīfah* in this verse specifically refers to the prophet Adam and his descendants. Mawdūdī, discussing this aspect, interprets it more generally than the classical exegetes. He refers to the *khilāfah* of human beings without connecting the term to Adam or his descendants.²⁸ Although it may be assumed from his interpretation that his view is similar to that of the classical commentators, it is surprising that he should not have used a more direct and specific reference to Adam

²⁷ Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1 (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li 'l-Maṭbū'āt, 1983): 12-13.

²⁸ Sayyid Abū A'ālā Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, trans. and ed. by Zafar Ishaq Ansari, 1 (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1988): 59.

and his descendants, as his predecessors had done. Nevertheless, his interpretation is not intended to refute them, even though he prefers the general interpretation (human beings).

Quṭb's interpretation of this verse is very similar to Mawdūdī's, but although he highlights the story of Adam and his descendants' appointment to the *khilāfah*, when it comes to a detailed elaboration he differs from Mawdūdī. This is due to the fact that he usually starts his commentary on the *khilāfah*-verses, and particularly this verse, with a discussion of *ḥākimiyyah* (divine authority):²⁹ the ultimate power of Allah to create, appoint and replace any *khalīfah* is the overriding idea. His interpretation later moves on to consider the authority of human beings, especially as Allah's vicegerents on this earth.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī, defining the meaning of *khalīfah* in this verse, seems to agree with the two earlier interpretations; he holds that *khalīfah* refers not only to Adam but also to his descendants.³⁰ This indicates his agreement with every commentator who interprets the *khilāfah* in a general way. However, Ṭabāṭabā'ī indicates that the *khilāfah* begins only with the appointment of Adam as the *khalīfah*, and at the same time he denies the *khilāfah* of the beings created before Adam. Although Adam was not the first creature created by Allah, he was the one appointed to the *khilāfah*, and according to

²⁹ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1996): 65-66. From Quṭb's point of view, *ḥākimiyyah* solely belongs to Allah. Allah possesses all power, and the authority that human beings possess is, without doubt, based on His authority over them. Quṭb regards the society as *jāhiliyyah* due to the violation of Allah's rule on earth, caused by the process of deification and aggression among themselves. See Sayyid Quṭb, *Ma'ālim fī 'l-Ṭarīq* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1964): 8.; Ronald L. Nettler, 'Sayyid Quṭb's Qur'anic Views on Islamic Society and Polity', in *Proceedings of the Annual Conference-British Society for Middle Eastern Studies* (1992): 324.

³⁰ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 116.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī, the process of *khilāfah* started with his appointment.³¹ In other words, the early creatures such as *jinn* and *iblis* were not regarded as *khālifah*, even though, according to some authentic *ḥadīths*, they were created earlier than Adam. In order to support his view that the use of *khilāfah* in this verse indicates human beings in general and not Adam alone, Ṭabāṭabā'ī quotes three more verses, which elaborate the *khilāfah* of the prophets after Adam. They are al-A^ḥrāf (7): 69, Yūnus (10): 14 and al-Naml (27): 62.³² Therefore, it is clear that Ṭabāṭabā'ī has no argument either with the modern or classical commentators when discussing the term *khalīfah* in this verse.

The appointment of human beings to the *khilāfah*, as has been agreed by many Qur'anic commentators, is the primary subject of this verse. However, it is not mentioned what type of creature the *khalīfah* is and what sort of characteristics he should possess. The only clear statement that Allah makes concerns His intention to place a vicegerent on earth. There is no indication in this verse whether the earth had already existed before the appointment of this *khalīfah* or whether it was created after the creation of Adam. Mawdūdī and Ṭabāṭabā'ī, and even Quṭb do not, however, deal with this question in their comments on this verse. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Mawdūdī's and Quṭb's interest is focused more on the analysis of political thought and movements, discussing the Islamic state, its form of government and so forth, which was their main purpose in writing their commentaries. Perhaps all three of them considered that all the questions relating to theological knowledge had already been discussed and answered by the majority of the classical scholars, while the issue of the pertinence to political thought of the concept of *khilāfah* was both contemporary and more controversial.

³¹ Ibid, 116.

³² Ibid, 116.

However, Mawdūdī does emphasise the general nature of the term *khalīfah*. In the first place, he defines the meaning of the term itself, which according to him means ‘the one who exercises the authority delegated to him by his principal, and does so in the capacity of his deputy and agent’.³³ This *khalīfah* has not been created to do as he wishes, but rather he carries important responsibilities and duties enjoined by God. On the grounds that God is his creator, a man is bound to serve and obey Him. Moreover, on the basis that God is his master who gives him the task of being His vicegerent on earth, he has to do more than just serve and obey according to his own judgement. It is a compulsory duty for him to serve and obey God within all the guidelines and rules provided by Him.

Discussing a somewhat different aspect, Mawdūdī mentions the importance of the functional concept of *khilāfah* in the Muslim community. Its real role, according to him, is to protect the religion and the territory of the Islamic state and to put an end to all evils, and its even more essential function is to foster a balanced system of social justice and encourage every kind of virtuous deed.³⁴ He considers the theory of the ‘great man’, according to which the necessity of leadership is a logical outgrowth of the theory of social change. According to this theory, the character of a social order flows entirely from the top to the bottom.³⁵ This indicates that the establishment of the society and the achievement of its goals are determined according to the credibility of its leaders. Therefore, the moral and religious qualities of a leader are more important than socio-economic, political and institutional considerations in ensuring the achievement of the goals of the society.

³³ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 1: 59.

³⁴ Adam, ‘Mawdūdī and the Islamic State’, 119.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 102.

The exercise of the *khalīfah*'s obedience to God in accordance with His guidance and instructions is permitted by the limited authority bestowed by Him. The authority vested by God in the *khalīfah* must, according to Mawdūdī, be fairly and rightly manipulated; it is not intended to allow him to do as he pleases and abuse his power, nor should he imagine that he fully owns that authority and can deliver it over to anybody he chooses. Rather it is to be used as a means to achieve God's will, as the *khalīfah* is the intermediary charged with delivering God's message to humankind.³⁶ Moreover, God has set the limits within which the *khalīfah* can use this power, even though it is his free choice whether to go beyond or to keep within them.

Another significant aspect discussed by Mawdūdī concerns the exercise of authority by the *khalīfah*'s deputy or agent. Here Mawdūdī tries to be more explicit and detailed than the classical commentators because they only define the meaning of *khalīfah* as *qādah*, *amīr* or *imām*. Mawdūdī, however, goes further by including the role of the *khalīfah*'s deputy in helping him exercise his responsibilities. Mawdūdī's intention, in including a discussion of the role of the deputy or assistant, may be to show the importance of teamwork to the leadership structure. The fact that the *khalīfah* is the head of the organisation, just as the Prophet Muḥammad was the leader of his people, is undeniable, but his leadership will not be firmly founded without the contribution of his deputy.

Regarding the words addressed to God by the angels, '*Will you place on it one who will spread mischief and shed blood?*', Mawdūdī elucidates that it does not indicate their objection to the appointment of human beings as vicegerents. According to him, it is merely an inquiry and shows curiosity about the hidden reason behind God's

³⁶ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 59-60.

decision.³⁷ In giving this explanation, Mawdūdī produces a similar interpretation to that of the classical commentators. God, at the end of this verse, quickly answers the angels' inquiry and curiosity by replying '*Surely I know what you do not know*', an answer which is more than enough to satisfy the angels, although it does not reveal the real reason for the appointment. Moreover, it is implicit that God alone may judge what is good and bad; therefore, when He says '*Surely I know what you do not know*', it is evident that He has reasons for His appointment of human beings as vicegerents which are not known to any other creatures.

Mawdūdī denies that the phrase '*while we celebrate Your glory and extol Your holiness?*' indicates the angels' intention to claim that they are more suitable than human beings to be the vicegerents. Again Mawdūdī produces an argument similar to that of the classical commentators in interpreting this phrase. He believes that all the angels intend to do is to emphasise their obedience in fulfilling God's orders. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, however, is silent on this matter.

While Mawdūdī does not produce any relevant interpretation of the concept of *khilāfah* as it is found in sūrah Ṣād (38): 26, an almost identical explanation to that given for sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30 is provided by Quṭb and Ṭabāṭabā'ī. But while the reference of 2: 30 is to Adam and his descendants, here *khilāfah* refers not only to the prophet David but also to all *khilāfahs* on the earth.³⁸ To explain further, Ṭabāṭabā'ī outlines two characteristics, justice and fairness, that every *khilāfah* should possess and must practise. A similar interpretation can also be found in Quṭb's commentary.³⁹ A. H. Johns offers a significant contribution to the interpretation of this verse, highlighting the view of the nineteenth-century Malay scholar, Nawawī (d. 1897), which combines

³⁷ Ibid, 60.

³⁸ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 17: 205.

³⁹ Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 5: 3018-3019.

the *khalīfah*'s roles as prophet and king.⁴⁰ In the context of this verse, however, the two roles are applied to David only, since he was appointed as prophet as well as king to the people of Israel.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī also considers that it is the *khalīfah*'s duty to practise justice, as stated in the phrase '*judge between men with justice*'; this is something almost impossible for ordinary *khalīfahs* to perform. Doing perfect justice is a duty, which they will definitely fail to perform due to their lack of one significant criterion of *khilāfah*, namely infallibility (*ʿiṣmah*). *Khalīfahs* may carry out this duty successfully only if Allah grants them protection from all error and sin (*al-maʿṣūm*).⁴¹ Indirectly, Ṭabāṭabā'ī indicates here the doctrine concerning the infallibility that the *imāms* possess during the period of their rule.

Quṭb, in defining the nature of the *khilāfah*, opposes the Shīʿī opinion. A caliph, in his opinion, is the representative of God on earth and must dispense justice among the people while refraining (like the prophets) from following his personal opinion. The modern Muslim rulers, however, are merely *umarā'* (plural of *amīr*), which are equivalent to governors in the early period of Islam. They (*umarā'* or governors) assume the role of caliph in their respective provinces. He further emphasises that the assumption of leadership in structuring the life of the people is related not only to their religious life, but also to their political, social and economic life.⁴²

⁴⁰ Nawawī was one of the important figures in the Malay archipelago. He was born in Banten, West Java in 1813 and died in Mecca in 1897. He was the author of the *tafsīr Marāḥ labīd*, a two-volume Arabic commentary on the Qur'an. His commentary on sūrah Ṣād has been analysed by Johns. For a detailed discussion on the interpretation of the term *khalīfah* in sūrah Ṣād (38): 26, see A. H. Johns, 'On Qur'anic Exegetes and Exegesis: A Case Study in the Transmission of Islamic Learning', in *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science* 28 (1997): 29-30.

⁴¹ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 17: 205.

⁴² Shitu-Agbetola, 'Theory of *al-Khilāfah* in the Religio-Political View of Sayyid Quṭb', 26.

Regarding the qualifications needed to be a caliph, Quṭb takes the position that anyone is eligible provided he is a Muslim. He denies that nobility is a pre-requisite for the caliphate, stressing that the requirement of the Qur'an concerns the caliph's dispensing of justice and refraining from following personal opinion to the neglect of the public interest. Indeed he is very much concerned with the caliph's ability to dispense absolute justice, commenting as follows:

Absolute justice is that which is not swayed by affection or by hatred, and its base cannot be affected by love or by enmity. It is not influenced by any relationship between individuals or by any hatred between people. It is enjoyed by all Muslims without discrimination arising from descent or rank, wealth or influence. It is enjoyed by other people even though there may be hatred between them and the Muslims.⁴³

7.3.2 *Khalā'if*

Commenting on sūrat al-An'ām (6): 165, Mawdūdī and Quṭb again emphasise the ultimate power (sovereignty) of Allah - Quṭb preferring to use the term 'divine authority' (*ḥākimiyyah*)⁴⁴ - in appointing human beings as vicegerents on earth. Similarly to the interpretation of sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30, the issue of the authority and power given to human beings during their appointment as *khalīfahs* is once again the main

⁴³ Ibid, 27.

⁴⁴ The principle of the Sovereignty of Allah is sometimes given another title, which is the *Tawḥīd* (Unity of God). This means that God alone is the Creator, Sustainer and Master of this universe and of all that exists in it. It also means that the sovereignty of this kingdom rests only in Him, as He alone has the right to command or forbid. No creature can claim sovereignty, be it a human being, a family, a class or group of people, or even the human race in the world as a whole. See Mawdūdī, *Islamic Way of Life*, trans. Khurshid Ahmad, 40-41.

topic of discussion.⁴⁵ There is no doubt that the appointment of human beings as *khalā'if* entails the exercise of power, which is one of the greatest responsibilities entrusted by Allah to his creatures. Even the angels, as interpreted earlier in al-Baqarah (2): 30, were curious about the trust awarded to human beings, perhaps simply acknowledging the difficulty inherent in being appointed as vicegerents and that the matter will inevitably be complicated by Allah's entrusting such power to human beings, a decision which could lead to misuse and abuse. Therefore, Mawdūdī believes that this power, which is given together with the appointment of human beings, will produce positive and beneficial results rather than prove destructive to themselves only if they use it in the right and proper manner.⁴⁶

Besides this simple explanation, no further opinion is to be found in either Mawdūdī or Quṭb, perhaps because they have given a similar interpretation regarding the earlier verse. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, on the other hand, gives no interpretation at all for this verse; he apparently believes that its meaning is clear enough to need no further discussion, although he has elucidated a similar verse in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30.⁴⁷

In sūrah Yūnus (10), two verses, 14 and 73, show the usage of the term *khalā'if*. Apart from providing the literal translation of the Qur'anic text, Mawdūdī does not produce a detailed interpretation of these two verses, especially the latter one, although he points out the first verse does give some indications of the ancient concept of *khilāfah*. Regarding this interpretation, he refers to the story of the previous nations to whom Allah had given the opportunity to do well, and which had been destroyed as a result of their decision to participate in wrong-doing and rebellion. Those nations were given the opportunity to succeed but failed as a result of their ignorance. At the end of his

⁴⁵ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 2, 299; Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 3: 1240-1241.

⁴⁶ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 2: 299.

⁴⁷ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 7: 396.

discussion, Mawdūdī highlights the possibility that this calamity might also befall the people of Arabia, who have been given the same task and test, if they do not take their obligation seriously. Moreover, in order to avoid meeting a tragic fate similar to that of the previous nations, they should take those stories as the lessons that will prevent them from committing the same mistakes.⁴⁸

By interpreting sūrah Yūnus (10): 14 in this way, Mawdūdī seems to suggest that the holders of authority should always strive to honour their responsibilities. This condition applies to any Islamic form of government. Failure to excel and act correctly, although warned by the story of the previous nations in this verse, will put them in a critical situation, where the worst thing that they might face is to be removed and replaced with another type of leadership. Not only that; they will also be questioned by Allah about all their deeds and actions while holding the post. The objective of removing and replacing one leadership group with another is to ensure the establishment of the *sharfaḥ* in the Muslim community and the implementation of justice according to the law and guidance of Allah. While this may be only an assumption concerning Mawdūdī's interpretation of sūrah Yūnus (10): 14, if one considers the way he comments on and emphasises the previous nations' failure, this interpretation is probably the most acceptable one.

Taking many past experiences as examples, it is obvious that the existence of inequality and injustice in a society is partly a result of the lack of religious and moral orientation on the leaders' part. If this situation occurs in a society, Mawdūdī recommends that the leader must be changed for a better one. The need for a good and religiously oriented leader who can fulfil his responsibilities is strongly expressed by Mawdūdī:

⁴⁸ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 4: 17-18.

What we need is a group of people...., a leader... imbued with the spirit of Islam and who is determined to establish Islam... We all know that if a building has to be constructed, the objective can be achieved if the architects know the design of the building and have the will to construct it and possess the requisite resources. On the other hand, if they are available, anything can be built, be it a temple, mosque or (any other building).⁴⁹

Quṭb, however, discusses this matter from a different angle in his comments on sūrah Yūnus (10): 14. He points out that the *khilāfah* of one nation takes place as a result of the abolition of the previous one, which has continuously committed sins and engaged in wrongdoing. The newly selected one, therefore, must be aware that the responsibility of being appointed is a test set by Allah, which it may pass or fail. Therefore, the new leadership must abide by all His commandments to perform good deeds and avoid any means that lead to the wrong path. This responsibility is of the greatest importance, as Allah will judge its outcome on the Day of Judgement.⁵⁰

The term *khalā'if* in sūrah Fāṭir: 39 (35: 39) is regarded by Ṭabāṭabā'ī as the basis for the concept of *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyyah* (unity of Lordship). It is easily understood from the phrase 'He who made you successor on earth'. It states that Allah is the only creator of human beings and that he has appointed them to be His *khalā'if*. As He has the power to create or destroy the universe, He can also destroy a people if they stray from the right path. Therefore, obedience must be rendered only to Him and He must not be compared with any other being. Because He has total control over all power, Ṭabāṭabā'ī insists that human beings should rely on and seek help only from Him.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Maudūdī, *Islamic Law and Constitution*, trans. Khurshid Ahmad, 126.

⁵⁰ Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 3: 1770.

⁵¹ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 17: 53.

These are some of the arguments that Ṭabāṭabā'ī uses to justify the concept of *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyyah*.

An almost identical interpretation is found in Quṭb's commentary on sūrah Fāṭir: 39. It also derives the concept of *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyyah*, which entails that there can be no change or limit to the being or power of Allah. All other things inevitably change, including the *khilāfah* of human beings, which Quṭb emphasises, changes from one generation to another; no *khalīfah* can remain on his throne forever. Whether the *khalīfah* practises Allah's commands as ordered or disregards them, he has no excuse for disobedience, which will cause him to be replaced. For only Allah is irreplaceable (*tawḥīd al-rubūbiyyah*), whereas it is the fate of all *khalā'if* to yield their position to another.⁵² Ultimately, the good and the bad *khalā'if*, who are all replaceable, will receive what they deserve.

7.3.3 *Khulafā'*

Mawdūdī does not produce a significant interpretation of the term *khulafā'* in sūrat al-A'rāf (7): 69. The only essential point that he makes, with reference to the concept of the *khilāfah*, concerns the Qur'anic narration of the stories of the prophets. The story describes the appointment of the prophet Hūd to be the leader or, more importantly, as the messenger to the people of 'Ād, replacing Noah, who had been sent to guide and reform his own people; they, the Qur'an narrates, were the first to drift away from the right way of life followed by Adam and his descendants. As a result of their

⁵² Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 5: 2947.

disobedience, Allah totally destroyed them with the flood and only the companions of Noah, who did believe and accept his message, survived.⁵³

While Ṭabāṭabā'ī does not produce a significant interpretation of this verse, Quṭb presents it in a slightly different manner. He does not take the *khilāfah* of the prophets as his main subject, but stresses that the appointment to the *khilāfah* and the consequent award of high status is bestowed solely to make the recipients thankful for Allah's grace. Moreover, they should preserve the grace of being appointed to the *khilāfah* by fulfilling their duty in the best possible way. Only if these two conditions are accomplished will they receive their reward from Allah, which is the ultimate blessing of life in this world and the Hereafter.⁵⁴

The Qur'anic narration of the stories of the prophets continues in verse 74 of sūrat al-A'rāf (7). Here Mawdūdī provides a little more interpretation, compared to his treatment of the previous verse. After the story of the prophet Hūd and the annihilation of 'Ād, it is written that the prophet Ṣāliḥ was next appointed to deliver the message of Islam to his people, the Thamūd. With his appointment, Allah reminded them to act wisely and to learn lessons from the annihilation of previous peoples, like those of Noah and of Hūd. Moreover, Mawdūdī notes that the appointment of Ṣāliḥ to the people of Thamūd did not last long because of their inclination to sin and rebellion. This situation also applies to all other nations who were appointed afterwards. Even the condition of being the nation of the last prophet, Muḥammad, is not an automatic guarantee that the people will escape punishment. Allah has decreed that every single nation have to serve Him and act according to His command. They will receive the same fate if they cross the line laid down by Allah in His *sharḥah*, which is delivered

⁵³ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 3: 37-42.

⁵⁴ Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 3: 1311.

through the channel of the appointed prophets.⁵⁵ In other words, Mawdūdī's reading of this verse is intended to make the people aware of the power of Allah to destroy the *ummah* of the Prophet Muḥammad if they become sinful and disobedient and, according to His will, to appoint another people to carry out His commands.

Since the term *khulafā'* in sūrat al-A^ḥrāf (7): 74 also concerns the *khilāfah* of the prophets, Quṭb produces an interpretation similar to that of the *khalā'if* verse discussed earlier. The responsibility of being appointed as *khalīfah* to replace the previous one and the gratitude felt for being entrusted with the task are again the main substance of this verse.⁵⁶ Other than that, Quṭb raises no further significant issue nor does he discuss any different matter to develop the understanding of the concept of *khilāfah*. A similar situation is also found in Ṭabāṭabā'ī's commentary, since he merely explains this verse in a similar way to the previous one (verse 69).

Regarding sūrat al-Naml (27): 62, unlike Mawdūdī and Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Quṭb makes several important points. They include the ultimate power of Allah, the appointment of human beings as *khalīfah* and the changing process of the *khilāfah*.⁵⁷ Although they are significant issues relating to the concept of *khilāfah*, they have already been emphasised on many occasions in the earlier discussions.

7.3.4 *Yastakhlif*

Of the four verses that use the term *yastakhlif*, Mawdūdī offers interesting interpretations of two only, which are al-An^ḥām (6): 133 and al-Nūr (24): 55. The other two verses, al-A^ḥrāf (7): 129 and Hūd (11): 57, contribute nothing which is not found

⁵⁵ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 3: 47.

⁵⁶ Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 3: 1313.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 5: 2658-59.

in the verses elucidated by Mawdūdī. Starting with the first one, sūrat al-An‘ām (6): 133 Mawdūdī notes that it provides some meanings of the concept of *khilāfah*, mainly highlighting the absolute power (sovereignty) of Allah over His creatures. This power, which Mawdūdī defines from the phrase ‘*Your Lord is Self-Sufficient, full of compassion*’, is capable of appointing another kind of creature as a replacement for those previously destroyed. As with many of the verses of its kind, it is clear that the replacement usually occurs as a result of the failure to obey Allah’s instruction. Therefore, this verse is also a warning to the appointed people not to go beyond the limits prescribed for them. In order to make them fully aware and take Allah’s warning seriously, the verse ends with the reminder of what happened to previous peoples, like those of ‘Ād, Thamūd and so forth.⁵⁸

Quṭb seems to agree with Mawdūdī’s interpretation, as he emphasises that human beings’ appointment to the *khilāfah* is entirely due to Allah’s grace and will.⁵⁹ In this way, the verse highlights the concept of Allah’s sovereignty, whereby ultimate power belongs to Him only. More significantly, the beginning and end of human existence also depends on His will. Therefore, Quṭb states that it is Allah’s choice whether to appoint His chosen *khalīfahs* or to replace them with others.⁶⁰ In fact, the *khilāfah* of human beings, either good or bad, changes and no one can claim an everlasting right to the position. Therefore, it is very important for any *khalīfah*, during the short period of his responsibility, to perform his duties as perfectly as possible and to follow all God’s orders and commandments.

Ṭabāṭabā’ī explains the term *istakhlafa* in sūrat al-An‘ām (6): 133 in a different way. This verse, according to him, shows that Allah does not practise *ẓulm* (injustice), and

⁵⁸ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur’an*, 2: 275-76.

⁵⁹ Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*, 3: 1210.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 1210.

His mercy will be given to all human beings, whether virtuous or wicked. They are then free to choose their own way and, since freedom is granted, whatever their choice, they are answerable for it.⁶¹ Therefore, any particular people who are given this chance should fulfil the responsibility and the failure to do so will not have any effect on Allah, but only on themselves, since Allah can appoint another *khalīfah* to replace them, just as He did in the past.

Regarding sūrat al-A^ḥrāf (7): 129, on the other hand, the only significant interpretation comes from Quṭb; Mawdūdī and Ṭabāṭabā'ī do not contribute any further elaboration. This situation is quite common in any work of *tafsīr*, as there is no need to reinterpret a verse which produces a similar meaning to one that has already been treated. Nevertheless, Quṭb points out that Allah's promise to appoint men to the *khilāfah* is restricted to those who are patient. In this sense, the unbelievers and ungrateful are not the subjects of this promise. He further argues that the appointment of human beings is for one momentous reason only, which is to test and put them on trial, as understood from the phrase '*He may try you by your deeds*'.⁶²

Unlike the interpretations of the previous two verses, which are considered as a warning and reminder to human beings, the meaning of verse 55 in sūrat al-Nūr (24) serves rather as a promise and encouragement to them. Mawdūdī produces a very long discussion on this verse, if not the lengthiest of all. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the term is used twice in the verse. In the first place, Allah makes a promise to place human beings on the earth as vicegerents. On the other hand, the second instance emphasises the examples of the previous peoples to whom Allah had given the *khilāfah*.

⁶¹ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 7: 377-78.

⁶² Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 3: 1356-57.

Mawdūdī asserts that the *khilāfah* (vicegerency), in every case, is only awarded to a selected group of people, who are obviously believers and who practise good deeds in accordance with the prescriptions of Allah.⁶³ In other words, the *khilāfah* is given only to those with good qualifications and characteristics. Seyed Abbas Araghchi, a researcher at the Institute for Political and International Studies in Tehran, agrees that this interpretation is essentially what Mawdūdī means in regard to this verse. His agreement with Mawdūdī's interpretation can be seen from his statement:

God has used the term 'vicegerent' instead of sovereignty. Sovereignty in Islam belongs to God alone...the power to rule over the earth has been promised to 'the whole community of believers'; it has not been stated that any particular person or class among them will be raised to that position. From this it follows that all believers are repositories of the caliphate. The caliphate granted by God to the faithful is "the collective right of all those who accept and admit God's absolute sovereignty over themselves".⁶⁴

Mawdūdī asserts that both the Qur'an and the *ḥadīth* give clear guidance about the criteria of eligibility for the *khilāfah*. He prescribes five conditions which qualify an individual for the *khilāfah*: he should be Muslim, male, sane, adult and a citizen of the Islamic State.⁶⁵ Consequently, these conditions indicate that unbelievers, wrongdoers and unfaithful people are not to be included in this promise. However, the *khilāfah* is not exclusively dedicated to any particular people, but rather to whomever is most worthy, as Mawdūdī points out:

According to the Qur'an, the vicegerency of God is not the exclusive birthright of any individual or clan or class of people; it is the collective

⁶³ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 6: 263-64.

⁶⁴ Araghchi, 'Islamic Theo-Democracy: The Political Ideas of Abul A'la Mawdūdī', 784.

⁶⁵ S. Abul A'la Mawdūdī, *First Principles of the Islamic State*, trans. and ed. Kurshid Ahmad (Lahore: Islamic Publication Limited, 1974): 61.

right of all those who accept and admit God's absolute sovereignty over themselves and adopt the Divine Code, conveyed through the Prophet, as the law above all laws and regulations.⁶⁶

Regarding another aspect, Mawdūdī condemns and rejects the idea of interpreting the *khilāfah*, in any circumstance, as mere power, dominance and hegemony,⁶⁷ the belief that power is all that is needed and is therefore the only prerequisite for the office of *khalīfah*, according to which anyone holding power is considered the real *khalīfah* and well deserving to be included in Allah's promise. According to Mawdūdī, this is a very serious misinterpretation of the term, which confuses and complicates the true understanding of the Islamic *khilāfah*. If anyone accepts it as the real meaning, it indicates his acceptance and recognition of anyone holding power even if he has never qualified for the post and has never possessed the required qualities and characteristics. Therefore this sort of *khilāfah*, which is defined as mere power, like that of Pharaoh over the people of Israel, is not to be included in the promise of this verse

Mawdūdī further argues that exclusion from the *khilāfah* does not apply to unbelievers only, but also to hypocrites. This indicates that Muslims who do not truly practise Islam (*munāfiqūn*) disqualify themselves from the opportunity to be Allah's *khalīfahs*.⁶⁸ If this less sinful group of people, who are recognised as *munāfiqūn*, are refused the *khilāfah* due to their ignorance and failure to fulfil Allah's commands, a far worse category of people in the eyes of Allah are the unbelievers (*kāfirūn*), who are definitely excluded. They are automatically denied the *khilāfah* in its real meaning according to this verse. Moreover, Mawdūdī comments on the existence of some superpowers of this kind in modern times. They dominate through power and have

⁶⁶ Ibid, 25. See also Mawdūdī, *Islamic Way of Life*, 42-44.

⁶⁷ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 6: 264.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 265-266.

total control over their people but they cannot be considered as coming under the real meaning of *khilāfah* given in this verse, since their power is obtained only through invasion and oppression of the weak; they are just like the examples given of the ancient ancestors who failed in their responsibilities.⁶⁹

It is accepted that most of the superpowers possess their power as a result of their invention or control of modern sources of power or the creation of new technology, and Mawdūdī states that they are not to be included in the promise of Allah. The reason for the exclusion is very obvious and obtainable from the verse itself. It is noticeable that any discussion of the nature of the *khilāfah*, such as occurs in this verse, is always connected with the issue of the characteristics and criteria of the *khilāfah* itself. Therefore, the promise of appointment to the *khilāfah* only applies to those that believe and practise good deeds, and this situation has been narrated in many instances in the Qur'an.

In commenting on sūrat al-Nūr (24): 55, Quṭb seems to agree with Mawdūdī's interpretation. In his own style, Quṭb points out two significant issues. Firstly, Allah's promise to make all believing Muslims *khalīfahs* on earth is something every Muslim should accept, since Quṭb stresses that Allah has never broken His promise. Secondly, the promise only applies to those who use good means. In other words, the *khilāfah* of evil and injustice is not what Allah means in this verse. The kind of *khilāfah* which Allah prescribes as the only true way should lead to good deeds and the practice of justice. In order to support his interpretation, Quṭb emphasises that this kind of *khilāfah* may be seen in the deeds of many previous figures, who successfully fulfilled their appointment as *khalīfah*.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Ibid, 265-266.

⁷⁰ Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 4: 2528-29.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī, in defining the term *yastakhlif* in sūrat al-Nūr (24): 55 differs not only from Sunnī but also from many Shī'ī commentators. This is due to his interpretation of the term as the appointment of divinely guided *khilāfah* (*istikhlāf khilāfah al-ilāhiyah*) or, more precisely, the appointed prophets such as Adam in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30, David in sūrah Ṣād (38): 26 and Solomon in sūrat al-Naml (27): 16.⁷¹ In Ṭabāṭabā'ī's interpretation of this verse, the term *yastakhlif* specifically designates the prophets, who were divinely appointed. At the same time, the context of this term implies the denial of non-prophet *khalīfahs*. As for the second term in this verse, "as He empowered those before them", Ṭabāṭabā'ī emphasises the fulfilment of Allah's promise to the previous *khalīfahs*, who were among His prophets and *awliyā'* (friends).⁷²

7.3.5 *Ukhluf*

Progressing to the one and only use of *ukhluf*, in sūrat al-A'raf (7): 142, Mawdūdī notes the importance of the *khalīfah's* characteristics and attitude. It is implicit in the historical story of the prophets that the brothers Moses and Aaron were both appointed to the *khilāfah*. However, Allah did not prefer Aaron to Moses even though he was three years Moses' senior. It is assumed that the characteristics and attitude of Moses suited the situation more than those of Aaron. In this context, therefore, the age of a *khalīfah* is secondary to his eligibility and suitability.⁷³ Nonetheless, one must bear in mind that Mawdūdī does not intend to deny Aaron's suitability as one of Allah's messengers. It is simply that Allah appointed each to a different status according to

⁷¹ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mẓān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 15: 151.

⁷² *Ibid*, 151.

⁷³ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 3: 78.

their qualities, since Moses was appointed as a *rasūl* (a messenger with divine revelation) and Aaron as a *nabī* (a prophet).

In a different context, the appointment of a non-prophet *khalīfah* depends on the same method, whereby the most qualified and eligible candidate, regardless of his age, should be appointed. It is the same method as was used in the appointment of Moses. Choosing the *khalīfah* in this way, even though Mawdūdī does not explicitly endorse it, indicates that anyone with better qualifications and more righteous behaviour is preferable for the *khilāfah*, although he may be much younger than some other candidates in the community.

Quṭb notes two important points from sūrat al-A^ḥrāf (7): 142. The first one deals with the appointment of a new *khalīfah* on the recommendation of the former one. Although it is not clear whether Quṭb accepts this kind of appointment or not, he does highlight this method in his commentary. However, it is only an implication from the example of Aaron's appointment as a result of Moses's recommendation. Perhaps this method can only be applied in this particular circumstance, where the appointment is based on a prophetic mission. The *khilāfah* of rulers such as the Umayyads, ^ḥAbbāsids and so forth, on the other hand, is not based on prophetic mission and therefore may not suit this method.⁷⁴ Secondly, Quṭb also asserts the responsibility of a *khalīfah*, as well as of Muslims in general, to always remind and advise their fellow Muslims. In fact, it is a reciprocal relationship: if a person, whether caliph or not, does wrong, his fellow should remind him of the right way. This is very vital, in Quṭb's opinion, in order to ensure harmony and good relations between the ruler and the ruled.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 3: 1367-68.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 1367-68.

In general, Muslims believe that there is no specific reference explaining the way of choosing the caliph to be found anywhere in the divine sources, except the instruction to the people whose affairs are decided by counsels among themselves.⁷⁶ Therefore, this may lead to many different interpretations, with various commentators arguing for the effectiveness of their own methods. However, Ḥasan al-Bannā (d. 1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*) of Egypt, suggested election through an electoral college (*ahl al-shūrā*) in an effort to prevent his contemporaries reverting to the old, dangerous system of hereditary succession⁷⁷ as adopted by the Umayyads.⁷⁸ ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAwdah (d. 1954), the legal luminary and one of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood agreed with his colleague. However, he went further, emphasising that the election could be in the form of nomination by a previous ruler or by the electoral college, or through selection and acceptance by the electoral college, or by an act of fealty like the *bayʿah* (oath of allegiance).⁷⁹

Quṭb, on the other hand, differs completely from these two scholars. He totally rejects the system of *bayʿah*, as promoted by ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAwdah, because it neither suits the modern age, nor is it in agreement with the political system of Islam. Nevertheless, Quṭb believes that there should be an election even if there is only one unopposed

⁷⁶ Al-Qurʿan, 42: 38. The verse reads: ‘*Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual Consultation; who spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance;*’.

⁷⁷ Under the Umayyads, the system of hereditary succession was a flexible one. In fact, ‘the appointment of a son as heir apparent was not always followed by his accession; for, in the absence of a principle of hereditary succession or of primogeniture and in the face of the legal disapproval of such a principle, it was generally the most powerful member of the royal family who secured the throne for himself’. See Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1962): 282.

⁷⁸ R. P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969): 247.

⁷⁹ *Bayʿah* is a system whereby some leading members of the society or family heads give an oath of allegiance to the new caliph. See Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 247.

candidate. He points out the most proper way to choose the caliph, explaining it in his characteristically radical manner:

The ruler has no religious authority direct from Heaven, as had some rulers in ancient times in the theocratic government; he becomes a ruler in his position only by the completely and absolutely free choice of all Muslims; and they are not bound to elect him by any compact with his predecessor, nor is there any necessity for the position to be hereditary in the family. Thereafter, he must derive his authority from his continual enforcement of the divine law. When the Muslim Community is no longer satisfied with him, his office must lapse; and even if they are satisfied with him any dereliction of the law on his part means that he no longer has the right to obedience.⁸⁰

7.3.6 *Imām and A'immaḥ*

Literally, there is no doubt that *imām* in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 124, which is the only one from the total of six comprising singular and plural terms (*imām* and *a'immaḥ*) that Mawdūdī believes to generate the concept of *khilāfah*, refers to the appointment of the prophet Abraham as the *imām*. It further emphasises God's promise to confer leadership on Abraham's offspring. According to Mawdūdī's interpretation, the promise does not apply to every one of these offspring, but is specifically directed to the righteous and pious.⁸¹ The opportunity of Abraham's offspring to be designated for religious leadership, for whatever reason, does not, however, indicate the exclusive privilege of their blood, but is due to sincere obedience and faith in following God's

⁸⁰ Quoted in Shitu-Agbetola, 'Theory of *al-Khilāfah* in the Religio-Political View of Sayyid Quṭb', 28.

⁸¹ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 2: 111.

orders. While the good among his offspring enjoy the promise of appointment to the leadership, the wrongdoers are obviously excluded. In other words, it is the nature of God's approval to appoint only the righteous and pious to fulfil the sacred responsibilities. Perhaps He does so due to His knowledge that the wrongdoers will abuse abundantly the authority and power given to them if they are approved for the conferment of leadership.

The appointment of Abraham and his descendants to the *imāmah*, according to Quṭb, serves to create a role model for the people: he will lead them to Allah by the practice of good deeds.⁸² Abraham and the *imāms* selected from among his descendants were charged with some important responsibilities during their terms. However, we must remember that in order to perform this great task successfully, an *imām* must possess good qualities and characteristics; these, Quṭb believes, are the vital criteria for every *imām*. More significantly, he argues that the possession of good qualities and characteristics will result in the successful fulfilment of their duty. On the other hand, this view denies the acceptance of evildoers and the unbelievers into the *imāmah*; this, Quṭb explains, is the meaning of the words '*He pleaded: And also (imāms) from my offspring! He answered: 'But my promise is not within the reach of evildoers'.*'⁸³ It is obvious from Quṭb's interpretation of this phrase that Allah, from the beginning, has warned human beings to exclude evil people from the *imāmah*. On the other hand, he emphasises that the *imāmah* is suitable for anybody with the right qualifications. The process of changing the *imāmah* is also one of the issues discussed by Quṭb concerning this verse. He strongly rejects the idea of appointing a new *imām* through the process of hereditary rights and inheritance. The appointment of the *imāmah* has nothing to do with selecting from one's own family, nor can it be inherited as a result of kinship ties,

⁸² Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 1: 152.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 152.

which Quṭb considers as symptomatic of the culture of ignorant people (*jāhiliyyah*). Rather it is closely linked with the religious integrity and state of faith of the *imāms* themselves.

To give a better understanding, Quṭb justifies the minimum standards pertaining to religion and faith, which decide whether a person deserves to be included in the *imāmah*. The exclusion of evildoers seems clear, as Quṭb points out that either committing evil to the soul through polytheism or evil to mankind through iniquity will lead to a total exclusion from the *imāmah*. In fact, he considers that the exclusion applies to all kinds of *imāmah* such as the *imāmah* of prophethood, *khilāfah* and religious rites.⁸⁴ In other words, anything that bears the name of *imāmah* and *khilāfah* is not applicable to those involved in evil actions.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī, in his treatment of sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 124 pays special attention to the term '*imām*'. He observes that whenever Allah speaks of the *imāmah*, He also speaks of guidance (*hidāyah*), as in sūrahs 21: 73 and 32: 24. He therefore concludes that the *imāmah* is guided by Allah and that is subject to His command. The *imāmah* is not merely a source of general guidance, but rather of guidance from which Allah's command is derived. He further claims that the authority of the *imāmah* over mankind is of the same nature as the divine authority (*wilāyah*). The *imām*'s guidance brings humanity to the goal by Allah's command and not simply by showing them the way through wisdom and good counsel, which is the responsibility of the prophet and apostle as well as of every faithful person.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ibid, 153.

⁸⁵ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1: 272.

Furthermore, Ṭabāṭabā'ī stresses that the *imām* must be a man of certainty (*dhā yaqīn*), to whom the celestial Kingdom (*‘ālam al-malakūt*) is unveiled, and his certitude is attained through certain words of Allah. Another verse that reads ‘*they Guide through our command*’ (21: 73) provides clear evidence that both hearts and deeds (emotion and action), are related to guidance; thus both belong to the *imām*. It is therefore the responsibility of the *imām* to lead mankind to Allah, as all will be called on the Day of Judgement together with their own *imām*, as is understood from the verse 17: 71, which reads: “*On the day when we shall call every people by their Imām*”.⁸⁶

In addition, Ṭabāṭabā'ī emphasises that the *imām*, when performing his duty, must be protected (*ma'ṣūm*) from error and disobedience. The concept of the infallibility of the *imām* is of great importance in the Shi'ī perspective, as Ṭabāṭabā'ī concludes that whoever is not infallible can never be an *imām* capable of guiding people to the truth. Thus he explains the last phrase of the verse, which reads: ‘*My covenant shall not include the wrongdoers*’. Therefore, what Ṭabāṭabā'ī intends to imply is that this phrase's exclusion of wrongdoers from the *imāmah* indicates the necessity of infallibility for the *imām*. Moreover, he asserts that even the person who has committed an act of wrongdoing and later repented is also not included in this promise.⁸⁷

From the preceding discussion, Ṭabāṭabā'ī draws the following conclusions:

- i-The *imāmah* is something given by Allah
- ii-The *imām* is safeguarded by divine protection (*‘iṣmah*)
- iii-The earth and its human inhabitants cannot be without its own *imām*
- iv-The *imām* is strengthened by Allah
- v-The deeds of the creatures are not veiled from the knowledge of the *imām*

⁸⁶ Ibid, 273.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 274.

vi-The knowledge of an *imām* should encompass all things which human beings need for their life in this world and in the Hereafter

vii-No person can ever be superior to the *imām*.⁸⁸

7.3.7 *Ulū 'l-Amr*

Of the two instances of the term *ulū 'l-amr*, the first one, in *sūrat al-Nisā'* (4): 59, provides a very significant explanation of the concept of the *khilāfah*. Mawdūdī considers this verse to be the cornerstone and starting point of the entire religious, social and political structure of Islam. Moreover, and remarkably, it lays down the very first clause of the constitution of an Islamic state, which commands obedience to Allah, His prophets and those in authority (*ulū 'l-amr*).⁸⁹

Obedience to the first two, Allah and the prophets, is not the major concern of our discussion. It is the instruction to give obedience to people in authority (*ulū 'l-amr*) that implies the relation of this verse to the concept of the *khilāfah*. Nevertheless, it would not be wise to neglect any discussion on obedience to the first two, since they are very much interrelated. In other words, disobedience has a destructive effect on all aspects of a person's faith. It affects the practice of the other *'ibādah* (acts of worship), depriving all actions of meaning. A similar situation results from failure to obey a prophet: if someone refuses to obey, it is obviously to be regarded as disobedience to Allah Himself. Thus Mawdūdī attempts to explain with the greatest clarity the relationship between obedience to Allah and to the prophets.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ibid, 274-75.

⁸⁹ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 2: 50.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 50.

There are many Qur'anic verses that command Muslims to give their obedience to the prophets. For example, Allah says: '*Each and every Messenger who was sent by Us was sent for the purpose that he should be obeyed under the sanction of Allah*'.⁹¹ In addition, He again states '*He who obeys the Messenger obeys God*'.⁹² Mawdūdī further emphasises that Islam enjoins Muslims to obey the prophets implicitly and without any reservations, since all the divine commandments and instructions come through them. In this connection, Mawdūdī declares:

They are the true agencies through whom the directives and the commands of Allah are communicated to mankind.⁹³

Allah further commands human beings, especially believers, to obey those of their fellow Muslims who are invested with authority and power. As has been emphasised earlier, obedience to the prophets indicates obedience to Allah. A similar principle applies when Allah orders believers to obey their rulers. Mawdūdī believes that it is an obligation to obey those chosen to bear the responsibility of ruling the community, and that it is a very serious duty, as important as obedience to Allah and the prophets.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, Mawdūdī does stress that it should not be a blind obedience, given without assessing and examining the value of each leadership. What he means is that even though the Qur'an itself does not mention what kind of obedience Muslims should render, there have been many *hadīths* of the Prophet explaining this issue. Mawdūdī therefore quotes several *hadīths* which lay stress on two conditions for this obedience. Firstly, those in authority should be believers themselves. Secondly, they

⁹¹ Al-Qur'an, 4: 64.

⁹² Al-Qur'an, 4: 80.

⁹³ Mawdūdī, *First Principles of the Islamic State*, 23.

⁹⁴ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 2: 50-51.

should also submit completely to Allah and His prophets before asking the people to obey them.⁹⁵

In elucidating the term *ulū 'l-amr* in this verse, Mawdūdī defines it in a very general and broad way, arguing that *ulū 'l-amr* covers a very broad context of power, since it does not refer to rulers or *khalīfahs* only, but also includes other categories of people: those who are entrusted with directing the community. Elaborating this interpretation, Mawdūdī states that *ulū 'l-amr* includes intellectual and political leaders, as well as administrative officers, judges of the courts and others. The list is not exhaustive; these professions are cited as examples to show the extensive meaning of *ulū 'l-amr*. In fact, many more might be classified in the category of *ulū 'l-amr*, as long as they involve the responsibility of controlling and directing the people.⁹⁶

As already noted, two conditions are imposed on the rulers in order to legitimise the obedience of the people. The two conditions have been derived from the *ḥadīths* of the Prophet, since the Qur'an is silent on this matter. In order to elaborate this discussion, Mawdūdī produces four *ḥadīths*. The first two outline the significance and conditions of obedience, while the third goes a little further by stating that as long as the rulers perform their prayer, even privately, Muslims should give obedience to them.⁹⁷ No attempt at rebellion must be made in this situation and Mawdūdī even indicates his

⁹⁵ Ibid, 51.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 51.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 51. The first *ḥadīth* is translated as: 'A Muslim is obliged to heed and to obey an order whether he likes it or not, as long as he is not ordered to carry out an act of disobedience to God (*ma'ṣiyah*). When ordered to carry out an act of disobedience to God he need neither heed nor obey'; the second *ḥadīth* states: 'There is no obedience in sin; obedience is only in what is good (*ma'rūf*)'. The third *ḥadīth* declares: 'There will be rulers over you, some of whose actions you will consider good and others abominable. Who even disapproves of their abominable acts will be acquitted of all blame, and whoever resents them he too will remain secure (from all blame); not so one who approves and follows them in their abominable acts. They (i.e. the Companions) asked: 'Should we not fight against them?' The

strong disapproval of such action. This *ḥadīth*, stressing the significance of performing prayer, indeed sets the limit beyond which any *khalīfah* may be expelled from office. At the same time, he also produces another *ḥadīth*, which enunciates the Prophet's disapproval of any kind of rebellion as long as the rulers perform congregational prayer.⁹⁸ In other words, this *ḥadīth* allows and even encourages Muslims to replace their rulers if they have strong proof that either the congregational prayer is no longer being performed or no effort has been made to establish it.

Another substantial principle that can be derived from this verse concerns the instructions to refer any dispute and question to Allah and the Prophet. This instruction applies to every human being, whether he is an ordinary believer or the ruler himself. It is convincingly argued that those entrusted with authority are also likely to be involved in confusion and disagreement, mostly relating to administrating and managing the people. In this circumstance, Allah has laid down a guideline, reiterated by Mawdūdī, that the rulers should refer to the two primary sources, which are the Qur'an and the *sunnah* of the Prophet. Nevertheless, the people should refer to the rulers, who have been entrusted with authority, in any disagreement for which neither the Qur'an nor the *sunnah* of the Prophet has the answer.⁹⁹

Yet there are some who stress that all questions arising should be referred to the two main sources only and not to the rulers. From their point of view, these two sources are complete enough to solve any question and there is no need to refer to the rulers. In

Prophet (peace be on him) said: 'No, not as long as they continue to pray.' Finally, the fourth *ḥadīth* is translated as: *'Your worst leaders are those whom you hate and who hate you; whom you curse and who curse you. We asked: 'O Messenger of God! Should we not rise against them?' The Prophet (peace be on him) said: 'No, not as long as they establish Prayer among you: not as long as they establish Prayer among you.'*

⁹⁸ Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 2: 51.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 52.

debating this issue, Mawdūdī argues that there have been many new and unprecedented questions, occurrences and issues, which definitely need clarification although none of them is mentioned either in the Qur'an or the *sunnah*. Therefore the absence of answers to these new problems is dangerous, as it might lead to disastrous argument and disagreement among the community if they are not quickly solved. In such circumstances it is, in fact, very important to reach clear conclusions and obviously the only resource besides the Qur'an and the *sunnah*, is the appointed rulers.¹⁰⁰ Those in authority will perform this duty in the best possible way according to the guidelines and laws of Allah only as long as they strictly meet the two conditions emphasised earlier.

Quṭb, in interpreting sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 59 seems to agree with Mawdūdī, since he considers this verse to be a concise statement of the basic principle of the Islamic faith (*īmān*). It is the order to give obedience to Allah, His prophets and those entrusted with authority which underlines that principle. The objective of this order is to ensure the implementation of the *shar'ah* and hence of justice in the society.¹⁰¹ Perhaps more importantly, Quṭb lays down several other principles of the Islamic faith derived from this verse: first of all, the principle of divine authority (*ḥākimiyyah*), which is exclusively dedicated to Allah. By accepting this dogmatic principle, he implies that we believe in the sovereignty of Allah, who lays the foundations of the Islamic law (*shar'ah*) through the revelation of Qur'anic verses. In another respect, it also indicates the acceptance of His power in creating human beings to dwell on earth, where some of them are selected to be His messengers and *khalīfahs*.¹⁰² Therefore, it is the obligation of all human beings, and of believers in particular, to accept the fact that obedience to Allah is fundamental.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 52.

¹⁰¹ Quṭb, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān*, 2: 416.

¹⁰² Ibid, 416.

The second principle of Islamic faith found in this verse is obedience to Allah's prophets. In Quṭb's opinion, since Allah sends down the prophets for the benefit of human beings, it is vital that they are obeyed. This is important because Allah has already stressed that obedience to a prophet is similar to obedience to Himself, and that consequently failure to follow this order is the same as disobedience to Him. Even though this connection is not made explicit in the verse, it is basically rational and Quṭb cites several *hadīths* that contribute to a better understanding of this principle.¹⁰³

The order to obey those charged with authority in society is the last principle found in this verse. Quṭb explains this in some detail. He begins with a justification of who should be regarded as *ulū 'l-amr*: only believers are eligible in accordance with the conditions of the Islamic faith (*īmān*) and the boundary of the Islamic definition (*ḥadd al-Islām*).¹⁰⁴ Moreover, Quṭb asserts that the ability to refer to *ulū 'l-amr* is vital in the many situations where disputes occur regarding thought, understanding, and belief, and for which no divine source can be found to settle the matter.

According to Quṭb, the divine sources (*nuṣūṣ*) certify that obedience to Allah and His Messenger is a fundamental obligation, while obedience to *ulū 'l-amr* is of secondary importance. In the context of this verse, Quṭb states, there is no need for a repetition of 'obey' in order to recognise the obligation to obey *ulū 'l-amr*, because obedience to *ulū 'l-amr* flows directly from obedience to Allah and His Messenger.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, it should be noted that this obedience should be rendered only in the practice of good deeds. If evil is inseparable from this obedience, for whatever reason, the instruction is no longer valid and a person may disobey *ulū 'l-amr*. In support of this view, Quṭb

¹⁰³ Ibid, 416.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 416.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 417.

cites three *hadīths*, which state that obedience is only legitimate in the case of good means.

In discussing the term *ulū 'l-amr* in sūrat al-Nisā'(4): 59, Ṭabāṭabā'ī is at pains to refute the argument of al-Rāzī in his *Tafsīr Mafātiḥ*.¹⁰⁶ Generally, the Shī'ī commentators classify this verse as dealing with the concept of obedience, which here can be divided into two categories: firstly, obedience to Allah and secondly, obedience to the Prophet and *ulū 'l-amr*. The command to obey the Prophet and *ulū 'l-amr* is based on the use of the letter *waw* in this verse. The linguistic usage of *waw* implies that obedience to *ulū 'l-amr* also means obedience to the Prophet.¹⁰⁷

Having analysed the interpretation of this verse from both Sunnī and Shī'ī points of view, it may be concluded that *ulū 'l-amr* must be protected from sin. However, the main argument concerns “the object” of infallibility. The Sunnīs claim that the infallible in this case is the *ummah*, or more specifically *ahl al-ḥall wa 'l-ʿaql*, as their *ijmāʿ* (consensus) is binding upon Muslims.¹⁰⁸ The Shī'īs, on the other hand, claim that the verse refers to *ahl al-bayt*, who are protected by Allah from any error and sin. Ṭabāṭabā'ī refuses to accept the Sunnī interpretation of *ahl al-ḥall wa 'l-ʿaql*, as he argues that the meaning of the *ḥadīth*, which reported that the Prophet said, “*My community will not agree in error (al-khaṭā')*”, shows that the exemption from sin applies to the *ummah* only, and therefore the exemption does not include *ahl al-ḥall wa 'l-ʿaql*.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ For the argument of al-Rāzī, see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, (usually known as *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*), 3: 243-45.

¹⁰⁷ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 4: 389.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, 3: 243-245.

¹⁰⁹ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, *Al-Mizan*, 4: 393.

7.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although the ideas concerning the *khilāfah* contained in the modern Sunnī and Shiʿis Qurʾanic commentaries are mostly derived from the classical interpretations, certain areas have clearly been developed. These mostly concerned the reinterpretation of the *khilāfah* in ways consistent with the changes which have taken place in the political landscape of the twentieth century. However, the moderns were also committed to returning to the original teaching regarding the concept, which concerns the establishment and perpetuation of truth and justice through the implementation of the *sharʿah*. On most occasions, they draw examples from the political events of their time as a means of expressing their strong dissatisfaction and awareness of the need for the true Islamic *khilāfah*. Therefore, any verse that can be used for this purpose is dealt with at length by the modern commentators, especially Mawdūdī.

An analysis of the relevant verses has shown that although the moderns are concerned to formulate and develop new ideas, they do not altogether abandon sectarianism. We have found that the commentators are more inclined to adhere to the ideas of their respective schools of thought when trying to interpret the concept of *khilāfah* enunciated in the Qurʾan. This situation can clearly be seen in Ṭabāṭabāʾī's interpretation of sūrah Ṣād (38): 26, in which he emphasises that the *imāms* must be infallible in order to ensure the practice of justice. Ṭabāṭabāʾī also offers a literal interpretation of sūrah al-Baqarah (2): 124, which excludes evildoers from the *imāmah* for the same doctrinal reason.

In general, the modern Sunnī Qurʾanic commentators, Mawdūdī and Quṭb, are found to agree on most occasions with each other's interpretations. They normally define the term *khalīfah*, as it appears in sūrah al-Baqarah (2): 30, to mean 'vicegerent of Allah'

or ‘successor of the previous generation’. Occasionally, they define it as referring to a person appointed supreme authority after the *khilāfah* of the Prophet. It is therefore clear that Mawdūdī and Quṭb offer more or less the same definition of the *khilāfah*. This is not surprising, considering the fact that Quṭb was very much influenced by Mawdūdī, not only in respect of his political thought, but also in his method of interpreting the Qur’an. Mawdūdī, in his interpretation of sūrah Yūnus (10): 14, and Quṭb, when commenting on sūrah al-Baqarah (2): 124, take the opportunity to criticise openly social structures they find unacceptable and to call for the abolition and replacement by a more radically Islamic society.

While Ṭabāṭabā’ī sometimes interprets some of the connotative terms, such as *imām* and *ulū ’l-amr*, as referring to the Shī’īs’ *imāms* and doctrinal principles, the Sunnis offer a wider range of interpretations and provide a bolder and more critical commentary. They were freer than their classical predecessors, whose chief concern, politically speaking, was the preservation of the hereditary succession.

It is also undeniable that the Qur’anic interpretations of all three scholars were used by interests of the cause to which each had devoted himself. The Sunnis and Shī’ī often interpret the same verses differently, according to their own beliefs and ways of thinking, in order to support their particular principles and ideas. Both Sunnis are concerned to condemn and reject the political establishment in their own countries – the Indian subcontinent and Egypt – and to advocate with passion their replacement by a society fundamentally obedient to Islam and the principles of the *shar’ah*. Ṭabāṭabā’ī is also concerned to establish the rule of the *shar’ah*, but he has more in common with his classical predecessors than the modern Sunnis have with theirs, since he is above all determined to justify Shī’ī doctrine concerning the *imāmah*. Despite their differences, each commentator’s interpretation is always supported by other Qur’anic verses and

ḥadīths, and this supporting evidence has also been the subject of argument and disputation leading inevitably to a variety of interpretations.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been to examine the Qur'anic conception of *khilāfah* from the point of view of two Muslim communities, the Sunnis and the Imāmiyyah Ithnā ʿashariyyah Shīʿīs, in both the classical and modern periods. These Muslim communities were chosen because they are the two largest and constitute the overwhelming majority of Muslims. The primary objective in covering these two groups has been to investigate any instances of agreement and disagreement which reflect their beliefs regarding the concept of *khilāfah* or *imāmah*. Although their teachings are exemplified by their interpretation of many Qur'anic verses, the analysis of the study has been limited to verses containing certain important terms, which have a direct bearing on the meaning of the *khilāfah*, since it was considered that the inclusion of some other terms, such as *walī*, *mulk* and *sulṭān* would overextend the discussion. The commentaries selected were chosen because they are still widely read in Muslim circles. They represent a variety of approaches; that of al-Zamakhsharī, for example, being notable for its use of reasoned argument. Also, the early commentaries, especially of al-Ṭabarī and al-Ṭūsī, have been greatly influential on later Muslim scholars. Lastly, narrowing the scope of analysis to these selected exegeses has allowed the discussion to be developed in greater depth.

The protracted argument over the *khilāfah* has been conducted among Muslims for centuries. Despite their disagreements, the majority of Muslim communities, including the Sunnis and the Imāmiyyah Shīʿīs, have been aware of how important and essential the idea of the *khilāfah* or *imāmah* is to Islam. They have acknowledged that doctrinal

disputes do not amount to a denial of the essential functions of the caliph. The Shi'is and the Sunnis claim that these functions derive from the Qur'anic interpretations of their own exegetes. The question arises whether the fulfilment of those functions requires that a caliph should rule. There have of course been groups within Islam – for example the Khārijites – who have denied the necessity of the *khilāfah*, but their arguments have never been accepted by the majority of Muslims.

The study's examination of the relevant *khilāfah*-, *imāmah*- and *ulū 'l-amr*-verses in the classical Sunnī and Shi'ī interpretations, which have been discussed over four chapters (third, fourth, fifth and sixth), has given rise to several noteworthy conclusions. First of all, these commentators are in agreement concerning the existence of a process of succession among human beings, holding that it starts with the appointment of Adam and continues in the *khilāfah* of other prophets. For instance, three *khulafā'*-verses are interpreted as referring to Noah and his people. This process of succession continues from one person to another, from one generation to another and from one period to another until it reaches the last *khalīfah* on earth, who will be a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad.¹ Therefore, the process did not end with the death of the last prophet, but will continue until the Last Day. Moreover, whenever one particular generation is removed from the office of *khilāfah*, another potential group, who are expected to fulfil the divinely ordained responsibilities, will be appointed. The changes of *khalīfah*, seen in the historical examples of early generations given in the Qur'an, are normally caused by wilful disobedience and failure to perform the duties

¹ See Chapter Three, 3.3.2. (The Sunnī Interpretation of the *Khulafā'*-Verses).

inherent in the office. The study has shown that both Sunnis and Shi'is are in agreement that the process of the *khilāfah* is founded upon the Qur'anic message.

Secondly, since both Sunnis and Shi'is agree that the concept of *khilāfah* is essential, it is inevitably a fundamental obligation to have a *khalīfah*, or an *imām* in the Shi'i view, to represent and continue the role and duty of the Prophet. However, the appointment to this task, according to the Sunni perspective, is very different from that of the prophets, who are given the dual roles of prophetic mission (*al-nubuwwah*) and leadership (*khilāfah* or *imāmah*). *Khalīfahs*, on the other hand, have a mission to fulfil and continue the leadership role only.² For this reason, the first four caliphs, while accepting their appointments, refused to use the title caliph of Allah (*khalīfat Allāh*), deeming others, such as 'caliph to the Messenger of Allah' (*khalīfat rasūl Allāh*) and 'commander of the believers' (*amīr al-mu'minīn*), more suitable. Nevertheless, the dynastic rulers who came after them adopted the first title (*khalīfat Allāh*) because their main functions were seen by their subjects as the continuation of the Prophet's duties and the preservation of the religion. Despite being appointed to a lesser role, the *khalīfah* should discharge the duties performed by the Prophet to ensure the implementation of the *shar'ah*, such as guiding the people to truth and justice and showing them the way of goodness and prosperity in this world. Since this role involves the setting of a good example in behaviour, administration, management and communication, the Sunni and Imāmiyyah Shi'i commentators alike agree on the need

² A detailed discussion on the function, role and duty of a *khalīfah* is presented in Chapter One, 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 (The Functions of *Khalīfah/Imām* According to Classical and Modern Perspectives)

to choose the *khalīfah* from among the faithful only, as can be understood from the interpretation of sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 124.³

Another significant conclusion concerns the implication that the evildoer, as well as the *fāsiq* (impious and evil person), is not permitted to be a *khalīfah* or *imām*. In this regard, the Sunnī commentators generally believe that injustice and evil are absolutely incompatible with the concept of the *khilāfah*. But the dilemma inherent in reconciling this principle with practical politics affected particularly the classical Sunnī commentators, whose dynastic rulers wielded absolute authority, abusing their great power and becoming notorious for their misdeeds. As we have noted in the chapters analysing the Sunnī interpretations (third and fourth), they never directly accuse their rulers of failing to meet the challenges of the office of *khalīfah*. This could be said to be the essential problem confronting the classical exegetes: unwillingness or limited freedom to offer critical interpretations that might be seen as a condemnation of their own rulers.

The classical Shī'ī commentators were not faced with this problem, since they did not regard their dynastic overlords as anything other than tyrants, and certainly not as *khalīfah*. They had their own twelve *imāms* who, they claimed, were infallible (*ma'ṣūm*) and free from all sin. This is one of their doctrines concerning the concept of *imāmah*, which, while not disagreeing with that of the Sunnīs regarding the exclusion of evildoers from the *khilāfah*, has always been quite unacceptable to Sunnīs.⁴ It should

³ See Chapter Four, 4.2.1. (Classical Sunnī Interpretations of the Term *Imām*)

⁴ Regarding the Shī'ī interpretations that reflect the doctrine of the infallible *imāms*, see Chapter Five, 5.2 (The Interpretation of the Term *Khalīfah*) in the discussion of sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 30.

be acknowledged, however, that the rulers of the Shī'ī dynasties, such as the Buyids, were not the spiritual leaders of the Shī'īs. The line of the *imāmah* did not pass through them, but through the *imāms*. Therefore, the Shī'ī rulers did not have to confront the problem of reconciling political necessity with spiritual purity.

Regarding the analysis of the relevant *khilāfah*-verses, it has been suggested that the three classical Sunnī Qur'anic commentators, in most cases, reach a consensus as to the correct definition of its meaning although they occasionally bring out other possible meanings. For example, due to their definition of *khalīfah* as one who replaces his predecessor (discussed in chapter three), they are of the opinion that the supreme ruler is therefore a legitimate *khalīfah*. This similarity in their interpretations reflects what was their main concern: that is, a correct interpretation of the material of the verses, which they produced within dangerous and unstable social and political contexts. Their commentaries had to accommodate to the political reality of their time.

Sometimes, these three Sunnī commentators disagree on the interpretation of a particular term, but most of the arguments do not concern matters of doctrine, and are relatively minor. Thus we can say that overall the three exegetes' interpretations are fairly similar. Sometimes al-Ṭabarī, who is the earliest of the three, elaborates in greater depth and points out several possible meanings. The two later commentators seem to rely heavily on his commentary, although on several occasions they provide a wider-ranging interpretation than al-Ṭabarī. This is understandable since, as later commentators, they were able to draw upon all the sources and materials for interpretation which had been discovered and collected by the early exegetes including

al-Ṭabarī. Therefore they tend to take the early interpretations on trust, and if they do encounter any new interpretation that is incompatible with those of the early commentators they do not accept it. It may be that this method of imitation (*taqlīd*) of the early sources is a result of their reluctance to avoid producing a wrong or misleading interpretation. Consequently, the later classical Sunnī commentators as well as their Imāmiyyah counterparts had no reason to adopt an overtly critical stance towards their predecessors, especially al-Ṭabarī who defined the method of interpretation.

The Sunnī commentators, however, on several occasions, neglect to discuss certain issues in their interpretations; for example, the possibility that the term *ulū 'l-amr* may be defined as *al-umarā'* (military commanders or leaders) and as *'ulamā'* (discussed in chapter four). The cause of this neglect is not known, but may be that the political reality of their time, which appeared to necessitate the use of military power as the means of preserving the *khilāfah*, influenced their interpretations of the relevant verses. Moreover, it is possible that they decided that political and military order and stability was more important than adopting a strictly 'correct' position in terms of *shar'ah* and Islamic teachings. But there were probably other reasons: all three had a clear Sunnī identity, and their acceptance and recognition of the Sunnī rulers, particularly the Umayyads and the 'Abbāsids, as the ruling authority may have been based on their fear of political instability and desire to help to ensure the unbroken succession of the *khilāfah*.

Occasionally, the Sunnī commentators covertly attack those among their own rulers who were particularly evil by stressing that an evildoer is prohibited from being appointed as *khalīfah*. However, they fail to call into question the notion of the hereditary succession. This may be because even an implicit criticism of the established system might expose the scholar to persecution. Hence, the emphasis that the *khalīfah* is not to be removed for political reasons, but only for dereliction of his religious duties. Corruption and tyranny are reprehensible but acceptable; therefore the commentators avoid a radical interpretation of the relevant verses. Their silence, which may be taken as an indication of their acceptance of the necessity of an unbroken line of succession, shows that their interpretation is inclined to conservatism. Both the radical and conservative methods of interpreting these verses would have their own impact. An emphasis on the former might well help to bring about political instability and even civil war, since the *ummah* might wish to forcibly replace an evil ruler with a suitably qualified and more beneficent caliph, while the latter method endorses the necessity of accepting unjust, corrupt and violent rulers.

The two classical Imāmiyyah exegetes also show their mutual understanding and agreement in interpreting the relevant verses. Rather than using the word *khilāfah*, they prefer the title of *imāmah*, and their leaders are called *imāms* rather than *khalīfahs*. Generally, their interpretation of each verse is almost identical and it is difficult to find any substantial disagreement between them. Moreover, the style of presenting the discussion is notably similar. This phenomenon is not surprising because the later Sunnīs also adopted the same method towards their predecessors. Since al-Ṭabarsī is the later Shiʿī commentator, he understandably had to rely on the earlier commentary,

as Ibn Kathīr did when he quotes a number of interpretations from his early predecessor, al-Ṭabarī.

Of all the terms analysed, the Shī'ī interpretations of *imām*, *a'immaḥ* and *ulū 'l-amr* depart most from the position articulated by the Sunnīs. This is partly due to the fact that some of these appear in a general form such as 'those charged with authority' (*ulū 'l-amr*), and may thus reflect and give rise to many possible interpretations. This opportunity has been seized by both 'radical' and 'conservative' Shī'īs (that is, those whose views were opposed to the Sunnīs' and those whose views were to some extent compatible with Sunnī opinion) in the search for evidence that would support their beliefs. For instance, the classical Shī'ī commentators, referring to the term *imām* in sūrat al-Baqarah (2): 124, use the prohibition of *imāms* from committing evil actions, and of evildoers from occupying the position of *khalīfah*, to justify the doctrine of the infallibility of their *imāms*.⁵ Furthermore, they claim that the status of the *imāms* is equal to that of the prophets, a view unacceptable to the Sunnīs. This interpretation may also be said to be in conflict with the Sunni view of human creation, which is that only Allah can appoint a person to prophethood (*nubuwwah*), whereas the appointment of a non-prophet *khalīfah* is decided by the human community – a view rejected by the Imāmiyyah Shī'īs.

The study has shown that some of the Shī'īs' interpretations reflect ideas characteristic of their doctrinal convictions. However, it is not intended to reject them and uncritically accept the validity of the Sunnīs' interpretations, since the latter are also

⁵ See Chapter Six, 6.2.1 (The Interpretation of the Term *Imām*).

concerned to support their doctrines. In addition, although the study's analysis of the Shi'is' interpretations of the relevant *khilāfah*-verses has highlighted those issues which differentiate them from the Sunnis, these arise only when the term appears in a general form, such as *ulū 'l-amr*, and reflects the discussion of dogmatic doctrines. Otherwise, the Shi'i interpretations are little different from the Sunnī, since on most occasions they refer to similar sources.

Though the doctrines are not subjected to a detailed and complete elaboration, as they are in theological works, these exegetes' interpretations are consistent with their basic doctrines. We have seen that *shūrā*, *bay'ah* and *ahl al-ḥall wa 'l-'aqd* are among the important doctrines for the Sunnis and *taqiyyah*, *wilāyah*, *'iṣmah* and *raj'ah* (return of the Mahdī) are essentials for the Shi'is. The study has shown that these doctrines are based on the Qur'an as the main source, and later developed with the support of other sources such as reports of the Prophet, *ijmā' al-ṣaḥābah* (consensus of the Companions), *ijtihād* (personal diligence) and the *fatwā* (opinion) of the classical scholars from both communities.

The question remains whether the succession of the *khilāfah* is transmitted by means of the *ummah*, for example the children of Israel (when they were obedient), or through the ruler, such as in the case of Moses (when the people were disobedient). It may be suggested that the classical Sunnī scholars never resolved the tension between the responsibilities of the ruler and the *ummah*. The main concern of the dynasties was to preserve, defend and extend their power in the Islamic world and the classical Sunnī exegetes would not have dissented from this aim. Therefore the question whether the

succession applied to the rulers or the *ummah* was never examined critically, as to do so would have implicitly called the unjust rulers to account and perhaps destabilised the existing Sunnī hegemony. The classical Imāmiyyah Shīʿī exegetes avoided this problem, as their principles were clear: the unbroken succession, divinely sanctioned, passed through their line of infallible *imāms* and the virtues or vices of the *ummah* were relatively unimportant. They saw themselves as oppressed and therefore their interpretations were inevitably different from those of the oppressors.

The study's discussion of the modern perceptions relating to the concept of *khilāfah*, which concerns the formation and establishment of an Islamic state, has produced several interesting conclusions. Firstly, it is noticed that the modern scholars generally define the concept of *khilāfah* in almost the same way as the classical scholars did. However, some differences are unavoidable, since they reinterpreted and developed many aspects of the classical works of theology and *tafsīr* in order to make them relevant to modern society (see for example Mawdūdī's treatment of the *ulū 'l-amr* in 7.3.7). Secondly, most of the famous figures of recent decades, who engaged in comment and analysis, possessed excellent qualifications in various fields of Islamic teaching. They were not merely jurists, but also learned Qur'anic commentators, and their understanding of the matter of the *khilāfah* was comprehensive. Finally, they were greatly influenced by the classical conception of *khilāfah*, which animated and motivated their thinking on the establishment of the Islamic state.⁶

⁶ For a full discussion on the Modern Sunnī and Shīʿī analyses of the *khilāfah*, *imāmah* and *ulū 'l-amr*-verses, see Chapter Seven.

The modern Sunnī and Shīʿī commentators are seen to be more radical than their classical predecessors in the interpretation of the *khilāfah*- and *imāmah*-verses. One likely explanation for this radicalism lies in the nature of their socio-political situation. Unlike in the classical period, where the institution of the *khilāfah* had already been established, the period in which these modern commentators lived was marked by the lack of an established and genuine *khilāfah*. Although, in most countries concerned, Muslims possessed political power and authority (except in the Indian subcontinent before 1947), the original nature of the *khilāfah* had been diluted or abandoned due to the impact of Western secularism. Aware of the significance of practising the authentic form of the *khilāfah*, similar to that of the Prophet and his Companions, the modern commentators based their interpretations on the need for a spiritually and politically revitalised Islam.

Their aims were therefore different from those of the classical commentators, who were concerned to improve and eventually perfect an already existing institution. But since the modern Sunnī and Shīʿī scholars had to deal with the contemporary world, their interpretations could not avoid an intense engagement with their own culture and society, in terms of the politics of their own nation and the broader implications of seeing the *khilāfah* as the only effective solution for the problems besetting the Muslim world.

The important social role the moderns played in their respective countries should not be forgotten. The two Sunnī commentators were leading figures in political movements, fighting for the establishment of what they saw as the ideal Islamic state.

However, Mawdūdī of *Jama'at-i-Islami* and Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood offered guidance to their Muslim movements in different ways. The former was influenced by the spirit of Islamisation, fighting for the formation of the Islamic state and a government independent of both British colonialism and Hindu control. The latter attempted to promote the implementation of justice and the *shar'ah* in every aspect of human life, as instructed by the Qur'an, and to oppose the nationalism and socialism of Nasir's regime in Egypt. We have seen that he attacked the Egyptian way of living according to Islam as *jāhiliyyah* (paganism). Although the Shī'ī commentator, Ṭabāṭabā'ī, did not personally assume a leadership role, his moral support for the Iranian Revolution and his many writings urging his fellow Muslims to emulate that spiritual and political transformation are consistent with his radical interpretation.

It is obvious that the modern commentators and scholars were more politically critical of the so-called Islamic rulers of their time, who, according to them, were un-Islamic. Therefore, these rulers should be removed and the existing Muslim society transformed into a genuinely Islamic state. This radical and critical stance may be seen as the starting point of the spirit of revivalism. For example, Ṭabāṭabā'ī expressed strong support for the Iranian revolution and opposed the Shah, whose dynasty was seen as the enemy of Islam because of his attempt to transform the Islamic system of leadership into a hereditary monarchy. The moderns suggested that the solution to such unacceptable political situations was the abolition of the status quo and its replacement by a society based on the principles of the *shar'ah*.

It appears, then, that both the modern Sunnī and Shīʿī commentators' main concern is the practice of social justice and the implementation of the *sharʿah*; in other words, how should Muslims live and interpret Islam correctly? Their situation was very different from that of the classical commentators, who, as we have noted earlier, attempted, above all, to correctly interpret the material they had to deal with; and for whom therefore a critical attitude to politics was of secondary importance. The modern Shīʿīs, as exemplified by Ṭabāṭabāʾī, still have the same concerns with political engagement as their classical predecessors. It is in this respect that the distinction between the Shīʿīs and the Sunnīs lies. In addition, they as well as the Sunnī commentators seek to emphasise their relevance to the modern world and especially to issues of social justice.

While the scope of this research has specifically concerned the interpretation of some selected verses relevant to the concept of *khilāfah* and *imāmah*, there are other terms such as *walī*, *sulṭān* and *mulk*, which have not been analysed here for reasons of space. However, they could prove to be a valuable focus of further research, since these terms concern the concept of leadership in Muslim society. It is also worth mentioning that only seven volumes of Mawdūdī's *tafsīr* (originally written in Urdu) have yet appeared in English; these cover the first twenty-four sūrah's of the Qur'an. When the remaining volumes appear, the whole work should be of great interest to scholars in many fields, including studies related to the *khilāfah*. Another opportunity that might be considered relates to the Shīʿīs' belief in the superiority of their own Qur'anic text, which is allegedly three times longer than the present ʿUthmānic text. They claim that many verses of great importance have been omitted from the ʿUthmānic codex, mainly

concerning the right of ʿAlī and his descendants to the *imāmah*.⁷ It would be a fruitful area for future research if those omitted verses, which are claimed by the Shiʿis as evidence of their *imāmah*, could be analysed. But until these verses, if indeed they exist, are made accessible by the Shiʿis, such research will remain impossible.

The question whether an ideal Islamic *khilāfah* exists, or is possible, is inevitably a very sensitive matter among Muslims. It is conceded here that there may be no practicable ways to resolve the question on a worldwide basis. However, some grounds for optimism exists. Firstly, the Qurʾanic claims are the most reliable and irrefutable proofs. There are numerous Qurʾanic verses that promise the continuity of the *khilāfah* system. According to Muslim belief, these verses constitute the strongest guarantee of the continuation and propagation of the Islamic *khilāfah*. Secondly there is the matter of the perpetuation of the existence of Islam and the Muslim community in this world. Although the Islamic *khilāfah* remains an ideal at the present time, the status of Islam as one of the world's great religions is still undeniable. Moreover, the spirit of Islamic revivalism and reformation, and the awareness of the reinstatement of the *khilāfah* based on the *sharʿah* proves that Muslims have never abandoned or forgotten the essential idea of the Islamic *khilāfah*. Despite all the problems and difficulties associated with the concept, it is a fundamental requirement of Islamic teaching that every Muslim community should maintain a form of *khilāfah*, which can be simply defined as leadership. Bearing this definition in mind, a *khalīfah*, in my opinion, is needed to lead the community, and not act merely as a final authority in disputes, as a Supreme Court does. More importantly, the *khalīfahs* must defend, protect and extend the influence of

⁷ See Chapter Five, 5.2 (The Interpretation of the Term *Khalīfah*)

Islam through their leadership and example, not through a military conquest as practised by many previous caliphs.

The matter of the *khilāfah* will probably remain an inexhaustible source of discussion, argument and even controversy. However, the re-establishment of the Islamic caliphate and state has, for the time being, failed to materialise. If the true *khilāfah* system allegedly exists in theory, as suggested by many Muslim jurists and Qur'anic exegetes, where is the visible proof of this claim in the present day? Certainly, if the claim is based on the formation of an Islamic state that fully implements the *shar'ah*, it is commonly accepted that at present no such state exists.

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