

The Classical Islamic Model of Revelation: A Critique

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KEY WORDS

| Divine Revelation | Inspiration | Scripture |
| Infallibility | Qur'an | Islamic Classical Position |

ABSTRACT

The classical Islamic position of divine revelation considers the Qur'an inerrant because Allah dictated his speech, word for word, to prophet Mohammad through angel Jibril. Mohammad's followers, in their turn, memorized the spoken Qur'an until the caliph 'Uthman decided to compile the written Qur'an and send it to the other Islamic regions. The first part of the paper shall explain the classical position of divine revelation by following Noor Adin 'Atir's model of revelation. It shall also study the historical situation of the divine inspiration during and after the life of Mohammad. The second part of the paper shall focus on the weaknesses of the classical position of divine revelation and conclude that the classical position does not guarantee the inerrancy of the Qur'an.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic revelation in Arabic language is called *wahy*. Muslims believe that Allah revealed the Qur'an to Mohammad through his angel Jibril (Gabriel). Allah dictated to his prophet the exact words of the Qur'an. "The content of the Qur'an is wholly divine," says Shabbir Akhtar, "it constitutes formulations of exclusively divine beliefs about man, the Creator, and the created order. The Qur'an's Arabic segments 'descend' on one particular individual, an Arab called Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah, but he has no role to play in the production of the Qur'anic materials."¹ This position is called the dictation theory model of revelation, which most Sunni scholars around the world follow.

Different Islamic denominations might differ in their views and positions on the *wahy*, however, this paper shall focus on the Islamic Sunni classical position, represented by the Syrian scholar Noor Ad-Din 'Atir, who is a follower and a teacher of the dictation theory model.² 'Atir is also a professor of *Tafsir* (exegesis) and *Hadith* (The accumulated commands and sayings of prophet Mohammad) in the universities of Damascus and Aleppo in Syria. In addition to authoring numerous Arabic language publications, he directs the Science of Qur'an and Sunnah (Islamic laws) department in Damascus University.³ The aim of this paper is to examine the logical outcomes of 'Atir's

1 Shabbir Akhtar, "An Islamic Model of Revelation," *Islamic and Christian-Muslim Relation*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1991, 96.

2 It is pronounced as Etir.

3 Noor Ad-Din 'Atir, "Biography," *Shamela Library*, access date July 9, 2019, retrieved from <https://shamela.ws/index.php/author/1637>.

dictation theory model, and provide a critique of it.

NOOR AD-DIN 'ATIR'S TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC MODEL OF REVELATION

'Atir follows the traditional Islamic model of revelation. He believes that the Qur'an is the supernatural revelation of Allah that was dictated to prophet Muhammad, and is written in the Qur'an/*mushaf*.⁴ While 'Atir discusses the several modes or ways of revelation that Allah used to reveal his message to Muhammad, which in his opinion, leads to the infallibility of the Qur'an, he equates between revelation, inspiration, and transmission. 'Atir's states that the Qur'an is "Allah's speech that descended on prophet Muhammad—peace be upon him—the written words in *Masahif* [the plural of *mushaf*, and it means the written word of Allah], transmitted frequently, worshiped by recitation, and it is supernatural in nature, even with one Surah [Qur'anic chapter]."⁵ 'Atir considers every word of the Qur'an (inspired, transmitted, and written, as we have it today) a supernatural revelation of Allah that was dictated to prophet Muhammad and written in the Qur'an/*mushaf*.

Modes of Revelation

According to 'Atir, Allah used several modes of revelation to declare his message to Muhammad:

4 An important note should be mentioned here, which is the case of Allah's previous revelations to his prophets, especially in the Old Testament and New Testament. 'Atir mentions that none of those previous revelations should be called Qur'an. It is only the ones that Muhammad received.

5 Noor Ad-Din 'Atir, *Oloom Al-Qur'an Al-Karim* (Damascus, Syria: Al-Sabah Publishing, 1993), 11. The original Arabic renders this way (emphasis added):

«كلام القرآن هو كلام الله المنزل على النبي محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم المكتوب في المصاحف، المنقول بالتواتر، المتعبد بتلاوته، المعجز ولو بسورة منه».

1) Mohammad received the revelation through visions while he was sleeping. 2) The angel came to him and put on his heart a spirit of fear, without being seen.⁶ 3) The angel appeared in an image of man speaking with Mohammad. 4) The angel came in a royal appearance and revealed Allah's words to him. 5) The revelation came like ringing bells sounds. 6) Angel Jibril appeared in his royal image and revealed to Mohammad what Allah asked him to reveal.⁷ These different modes do not include any human intervention, which, in 'Atir's opinion, guarantee the authenticity of the *wahy*.

The method of *wahy* is called *tanzil*, which is an expressional method for something "came down," "descended," and "sent down." Arab Muslim scholars use it to refer to the method of the Qur'anic revelation. Allah descended the verses of the Qur'an from heaven to Mohammad through the intermediary of Jibril.

The Islamic *wahy* was intermittent on a period of twenty-three years. 'Atir argues that the Qur'an descended in *Laylat al-Qadr* (the night of decree) and in the months of Ramadan, Shawal, Thi-Qi'da, Thi-Hija, Mahram, and Rabi' (Hijri calendar).⁸ Muslim scholars, however, are not in agreement whether the Qur'an was revealed as a whole or in parts because Mohammad recalls several different occasions when the Qur'an was revealed to him. He mentions that the Qur'an was descended in *Laylat al-Qadr*, (Surah 97:1; 44:3; 25:32) and in the Month of Ramadan (Surah 2:185), in Makkah and in Medina.⁹ 'Atir takes the position

6 Musnad Shihab mentions this mode of revelation in vol. 2, 185. He says, "The Holy spirit breathed the spirit of fear in me: no spirit would die until it completes its livelihood ..."

7 'Atir, *Oloom Al-Qur'an Al-Karim*, 17-18.

8 Ibid., 25. Al-Qadr night means the grand night when Allah decrees every matter of ordainment.

9 Unless otherwise noted, all qur'anic passages referenced are in Translation of the Meaning of the *Noble*

that the Qur’an was revealed gradually, which is consistent with many verses of the Qur’an. He believes that the revelation came down gradually to Mohammad on a duration of twenty-three years.

The best example that can support the intermittent *wahy* position is the background story of the battle of *Badr*. Mohammad had a long history of enmity with his tribe. He chose to conduct his first incursion against his own people, the tribe of Quraysh, after he claimed to receive *wahy* from Allah. His followers were supplicating with him for a while to fight the tribe of Quraysh, but his answer was, “Be steadfast, for I have not been commanded to fight.”¹⁰ However, the command of Allah was given later on in Surah 22:39, when he became a strong warrior and had numerous companions. This example supports the intermittent *wahy* position that ‘Atir follows.

‘Atir believes that there were three different descensions of the verses of the Qur’an: the first one is when the Qur’an descended to *Al-Lawh Al-Mahfouz* (the Book of Decrees/the Preserved Tablet) (Surah 57:22; 85:22). *Al-Lawh Al-Mahfouz* is a tablet that God had saved in the highest heaven, where everything that has happened and will happen is kept forever. The second descension was when the Qur’an descended as a whole to *Beit Al-Iza* (the House of Glory). Little information is known about *Beit Al-Iza* because it is not mentioned in the Qur’an. As Rateb Al-Nabulsi explains in his encyclopedia, *Beit Al-Iza* is a heavenly place that is equivalent to *Al-Ka’ba* (the black

stone in Makkah).¹¹ It is the holy place where angel Jibril dwells. Finally, the third descension happened when the verses of the Qur’an came down to the heart/mind of Mohammad. While the Qur’an was descended as a whole to *Al-Lawh Al-Mahfouz* and to Jibril in *Beith Al-Iza*, it partially and gradually came down to Mohammad.¹²

Qur’anic Inspiration

‘Atir believes that the Qur’an is the compilation of the speech and the words of Allah. Angel Jibril dictated the exact words and their meanings directly to Mohammad without anyone tampering them (Surah 10:37; 27:6; 11:1). The book is not inspired or influenced by Allah, and it is not written under the guidance or the influence of his spirit. Rather, it is Allah’s direct speech.¹³ As ‘Atir explains, Qur’anic inspiration means “Allah’s revelation to whom he had chosen from his servants, in a mysterious and quick way.”¹⁴ In other words, the prophet of Islam passively received the sacred text and pass it verbatim to his scribe for recording. Thus, the Qur’an is not co-authored in any way. As Akhtar states, “The scripture simply passes through ‘the Muhammadan mind’ much as a grain of corn will pass undigested through the body of a bird.”¹⁵ Mohammad is a passive transmitter of the divine will, an instrument through which Allah’s literary endeavors in

Qur’an in English Language (Madinah, KSA: King Fahed Complex, 1984).

10 Al-Wahidi, *Asbab Al-Nuzul*, Mokrane Guezzou, trans., accessed December 7, 2019, retrieved from: <https://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=86&tSoraNo=22&tAyahNo=39&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=2>

11 Mohammad Rateb Al-Nabulsi, “Miscellaneous,” *Al-Nabulsi Encyclopedia*, 1995, access date July 10, 2019, <http://nabulsi.com/web/article/6387/>

12 ‘Atir, *Oloom Al-Qur’an Al-Karim*, 26.

13 Farid Esack, *Qur’an, Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Inter religious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford, Oneworld, 1998), 53.

14 ‘Atir, *Oloom Al-Qur’an Al-Karim*, 16. The original “الوحي هو اعلام الله تعالى لمن اصطفاه من عباده بطريقة خفية سريعة”

15 Akhtar, “An Islamic Model of Revelation,” 96.

Arabic to reach the human world.¹⁶ Thus, Mohammad was obligated to give all the credit to God.

Like many Muslim scholars, 'Atir equates between Allah's revelation and Qur'anic inspiration for several reasons: 1) Mohammad did not write the Qur'an himself; he received the sacred text and repeats its verbatim to his scribes. 2) There is no point of separating Allah's revelation from his inspiration because the written words are the exact revealed words. Islamic orthodoxy considers it blasphemous to attribute the Qur'anic authorship to Mohammad, even as a kind of literary convention because he was just a receiver and a transmitter. That is to say, while Allah was the author of the divine text, Jibril was the first recipient, and Mohammad was the sole transmitter to his people. As Akhtar states, "God's message on Muhammad's lips in God's Arabic in God's own book: that is the Qur'an in Muslim devotion and memory."¹⁷

The Inerrancy of the Qur'an

The dictation theory model leads most Muslim scholars to believe that the Qur'an is fully an inerrant book. James White explains that "most Muslims believe the Arabic Qur'an reflects the 'Mother of the Book,' the heavenly copy, of which the earthly version is a perfectly accurate rendition."¹⁸ The inerrancy of the Qur'an is related to the theological, ethical, historical, geographical, and economical, and scientific subjects of its data. Its verbal inerrancy implies that Allah's truth inheres in every words of the Qur'an, and not merely in the concepts and thoughts of Mohammad. Since the divine verbal revelation is anchored upon the entire

content of the Qur'an, the inerrancy means that the Qur'an is error free.

Classic Muslims and 'Atir both deny that Qur'anic inerrancy are limited to spiritual or religious themes. On the contrary, they believe that every word in the Qur'an abides historically, geographically, scientifically, and theologically because every word is the word of Allah's himself. Allah gave it directly to Mohammad through angel Jibril, and no word was changed or tampered with during the process of the Qur'an's reception and transmission. Mohammad faithfully provided a carbon copy of what has been dictated to him in Arabic language, without any addition or alteration (Surah 36:69; 39:28).

'Atir believes that Mohammad had an extra ordinary memory, which enabled him to perfectly memorize and precisely recite every word that was dictated to him. Upon his analysis of the *Hadith* books,¹⁹ 'Atir states that "the prophet was one of the greatest people who memorized the Qur'an, he used to recite this Qur'an by heart. He was never tired, especially at night, he would read while praying several long Surahs."²⁰ In accordance to *Sahih Bukhari*, he states that "Gabriel [Jibril] used to meet him [prophet Mohammad] every night during Ramadan to revise the Qur'an with him."²¹ 'Atir does not discuss the details of the

19 The most authoritative books are *Sahih Muslim* and *Sahih Bukhari*. They are the second major official books in Islamic literature after the Qur'an, according to the Sunni sect of Islam. Any Hadith (collective talks based on Prophet Mohammad's words and acts) is treated as authentic and authoritative as the Qur'an.

20 Atir, 'Oloom Al-Qur'an Al-Karim, 161. The Arabic translation renders this way:

“كان النبي اعظم العالم حفظا للقران، وكان يتلو هذا القران عن ظهر قلب لايفتر لاسيما في الليل، حتى انه يقرأ في الركعة الواحدة العدد من السور الطول.”

21 *Sahih Bukhari*, Hadith no. 3554, access date July 10, 2019, retrieved from: <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/61>

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 James White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Qur'an*, (Grand Rapids: Bethany House Publishers, 2013), 53.

nature of these meetings, but this information is available in the books of *Sira* (the biography of Mohammad), which 'Atir frequently references in his book. According to Muhammad Moher Ali, prophet Mohammad and his companions "had the immediate need to do so [memorize the Qur'an] because they had to recite the passages in the prayer which was made incumbent on them from the very beginning of Islam."²² Ali adds that "Arabs were specially gifted with the skill of memorization," and it was during Mohammad's life-time that he arranged the passages of the Qur'an into Surahs and sections in their present form.²³ This all happened according to the divine guidance that was received through Jibril to insure the accuracy of the Qur'an.

The Infallibility of the Copies of Qur'anic Scripture

The doctrine of the infallibility of the prophets plays a major role in assuring the infallibility of the original and the copies of the Qur'anic text. In other words, the main streams of Muslim Sunni scholars believe that Mohammad was infallible, and, therefore, he could not have committed a mistake in memorizing and transmitting the Qur'an. While this topic is more relevant to the subject of the Qur'an's transmission, it is also important to the topic of revelation, especially that Muslims do not differentiate between transmission and revelation, but they integrate the two doctrines. To Muslims, Allah did not reveal his words to Mohammad directly, nor through his own spirit, but through his angel Jibril. That is to say that the angel is a reliable medium to transmit the sacred text without

running into the risk of changing it. In the same manner, Mohammad's transmission of the words of Jibril to the Muslims are reliable, especially that Mohammad was infallible (like all prophets) and Allah did not count any sin against him. However, the Islamic explanation of the authenticity of the Qur'an's transmission has several weaknesses because it requires, not only the infallibility of Mohammad, but also the infallibility of his human subsequent transmitters. If the suggestion that Mohammad did not make any mistake in his transmission because of his infallibility is true, then the infallibility of the posterior memorizers, copyists, and divine message carriers is not guaranteed. The rest of this section shall seek to shed more light on the Islamic history of the Qur'an's transmission and what happened after the death of Mohammad to show the weakness of this position.

While many *ṣah̄bis* (Mohammad's companions) memorized the Qur'an during the days of Mohammad, few of them started writing the recited texts. Mohammad named four men that Muslims should learn the Qur'an from: "Ibn Mas'ud, Salim, the ally of Abu Hudhaifa, Ubayy b. Ka'b, Mu'adh b. Jabal."²⁴ 'Atir believes that the reliance on "memorization in the hearts and the chests of men, rather than transmitting the Qur'an and save it in *Masahif* and books, is a greater characteristic that Allah gave to this nation [Arabic nation]."²⁵ In other words, 'Atir is convinced that memorization

22 Muhammad Moher Ali, *Sirat Al-Nabi and the Orientalists*, vol. 1A (Riyad, Saudi Arabi: King Fahed Complex, 1997), 4.

23 Ibid.

24 *Sahih Bukhari*, Hadith no. 4999. *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith no. 2464. Access date July 10, 2019, retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/muslim/44/168>

25 'Atir, *Oloom Al-Qur'an Al-Karim*, 166. The original Arabic renders as:

«الاعتماد في نقل القرآن على حفظ القلوب والصدور لا على حفظ المصاحف والكتب أشرف خصيصة من الله تعالى لهذه الأمة»

is an effective and efficient way to save all the verses of the Qur'an.

As stated earlier, the writing process of the Qur'an started during Mohammad's days and continued until the third *caliph* (Mohammad's successor), 'Uthman. After the death of Mohammad, there were several attempts to accumulate the Qur'an. 'Atir quotes the story from *Sahih Bukhari* when 'Umar bin Al-Khatab (the second *caliph*) was with Abu Bakr (the first *caliph*) and asked Zaid bin Thabit to collect the Qur'an. He accepted their offer and started to collect

palm stalks, thin white stones and also from the men who knew it by heart, till I found the last Verse of Surat at-Tauba (Repentance) [Surah 9] with Abi Khuzaima Al-Ansari, and I did not find it with anybody other than him... Then the complete manuscripts (copy) of the Qur'an remained with Abu Bakr till he died, then with 'Umar till the end of his life, and then with Hafsa, the daughter of 'Umar.²⁶

Even though the process of collecting the Qur'an started early in the Islamic history, this *Hadith* shows that the Qur'an was not widely spread, but it was separated in bits and pieces among several people. While this was the condition in Medina, the situation was not better in lands far from Medina. "Several Companions had each compiled a personal mus-haf," says Munir Shaikh, "and were using them to study and memorize the Qur'an and to teach others. Often, the sequence of chapters in these compilations was not the same as the order determined by Muhammad for oral recitation."²⁷ If a person starts at the beginning

26 *Sahih Bukhari*, Hadith no. 4986, access date July 10, 2019, retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/66/8>

27 Munir A. Shaikh, "One Qur'an," *Calliope: Cricket Media*, vol. 14, issue 4 (2003), accessed December 23, 2019, https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ps/i.do?p=ITOF&u=vic_liberty&id=GALE%7CA112538859&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon

of the current *mushaf* and read on to the end, he or she will be jumping back and forth between different periods of Mohammad's life. Thus, obtaining a meaningful background without any extra help is next to impossible. So, imagine the confusion that these people had during these days.

The Islamic story about the Qur'an's compilation, according to *Sahih Bukhari*, which 'Atir fully accepts, began because of the different readings that started to circulate among Muslims, and because some verses in Iraq and Syria were differing from the ones that were in Arabia. While the people of Al-Sham (Syria) and Iraq waged a war against Armenia and Azerbaijan, they found differences among their recitations of the Qur'an. In order to prevent this problem, the army leader, Hudhaifa, asked 'Uthman (third *caliph*), "O chief of the Believers! Save this nation before they differ about the Book (Qur'an) as Jews and the Christians did before."²⁸ 'Uthman asked Hafsa (the daughter of 'Umar) to send him the manuscripts of the Qur'an that she had. Then 'Uthman ordered four people to re-write the Qur'an. These people are: Zaid bin Thabit, 'Abdullah bin Az-Zubair, Sa'id bin Al-'As and 'AbdurRahman bin Al-Harith bin Hisham. 'Uthman asked the three Qurayshi men (from the tribe of *Quraysh*, the tribe of prophet Mohammad), "If you differ with Zaid bin Thabit on any point of the Qur'an, then write it in the language of *Quraysh*, as the Qur'an was revealed in their language."²⁹

What is interesting is that none of these men were from the ones that prophet Mohammad named earlier. 'Uthman gave them direct instruction to write the manuscript of the

28 *Sahih Bukhari*, Hadith no. 4987, access date July 11, 2019, retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/66/9>

29 *Ibid.*, Hadith no. 3506, access date July 15, 2019, retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/61/16>

Qur’an in the form of a book and to make several copies. Furthermore, the ‘Uthmanic method seems to have several weaknesses: 1) The ‘Uthmanic method does not include the four men that prophet Mohammad named. 2) It does not include ‘aisha’s *mushaf* (the late wife of the prophet), who had her copy of the Qur’an.³⁰ 3) Zaid bin Thabit was an *Ansari* (faithful follower of Mohammad) and not from *Quraysh*. He did not know the language of *Quraysh*, yet he was trusted with the most verses of the Qur’an. 4) Zaid bin Thabit did not have the whole parts of the Qur’an. For while he was copying the Qur’an, he missed *Aya* (verse) from Surah thirty-three and found it later on.³¹ The difficulty with the infallibility of the copies of the Qur’an lies with the idea of ‘Uthman trusting someone who does not know the language of *Quraysh* nor has all the Qur’anic verses to participate in the process of compiling and writing the Qur’an. He also did not use other resources that were available to him, such as ‘aisha’s *mushaf*. The previous analysis shows that the compilation of the Qur’an was not as smooth as Muslims claim. By the testimony of the Islamic literature, the Qur’an’s earliest compilation had a rough start and the claim that the companions of Mohammad memorized it in their breasts is not a strong argument.

As stated earlier, Islamic dictation theorists claim that they have strong reasons to believe in the accuracy of the Qur’an. They believe that the Islamic spoken revelation that was dictated by Allah to Mohammad (through Jibril) does not leave any room for people to think that the Qur’anic words might have been altered or twisted. Also, the early Islamic composition of the Qur’an, which started during the days

of Mohammad and continued until ‘Uthman’s days, assures the written inspiration of the Qur’an because the Qur’anic copy that Muslims read today is the ‘Uthmanic one. However, this view has a weakness. Muslim scholars who follow ‘Atir’s traditional Islamic model of revelation do not recognize that after the process of collecting and copying the Qur’an ended, ‘Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy, and “ordered that all the other Qur’anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, to be burned.”³² In ‘Atir’s opinion, what ‘Uthman did, was very essential to save the Qur’an from corruption. However, other scholars, such as Keith Small, views that “‘Uthman’s action, while providing one text, destroyed access to more original versions of the Qur’an, both the official versions of the companions, and the loose body of material from within the lifetime of Muhammad.”³³ This is to say that what ‘Uthman did was an evidence that the Qur’an was not unified, if not already corrupted.

THE WEAKNESSES OF THE DICTATION THEORY MODEL

The dictation theory model for the Quran should be rejected because it does not solve the accuracy of the Qur’anic copies as Muslim scholars claim. The next sections shall explain these points in more detail.

Dictation Theory Distorts the Doctrine of Tawḥīd

As noted previously, the dictation model eliminates any human role in the genesis

30 Ibid., Hadith no. 4994, access date July 15, 2019, retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/66/15>

31 Ibid., Hadith no. 4784, access date July 15, 2019, retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/urn/181190>

32 *Sahih Bukhari*. Hadith no. 4986, access date July 10, 2019, retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/66/8>

33 Keith E. Small, *Holy Books Have a History: Textual Histories of the New Testament & the Qur’an*, (Monument, CO: Snowfall Press, 2009), 25.

of the Qur'an. On the contrary, it reduces Mohammad's role to a mere transmitter and elevates his authority to an equal divine authority. This elevation stems from transcendent authorization which is inherent in the dictation theory model.³⁴ Muslims around the world have high view of Mohammad. They respect him remarkably because they believe he is the last prophet and the only one who received the Qur'an. While Mohammad claims to be a mere messenger (Surah 18:110), he taught with great authority, as if the words were his own personal teachings. In fact, what he taught in the Qur'an and the Hadiths are integrated with Allah's commands to the degree that they become inseparably amalgamated. For instance, Muslims equate between Allah and Mohammad when they pray. They mention his name every time they mention the name of Allah during prayer. They say "Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest; I testify that there is no god but Allah, I testify that there is no god but Allah; I testify that Mohammad is the Messenger of Allah, I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and it should be again repeated."³⁵ The Imam who calls people to pray has to state these words five times a day and people should repeat the exact words after him. While prayer should be directed only to Allah, repeating and equating between the name of Allah and Mohammad equal number of times during the day indicate that Mohammad has high if not equal authority with Allah. The Islamic view about Mohammad's authority among his own people contradicts the idea that Mohammad was a mere transmitter, and exceeds the level of his mere humanity.

34 Carl F. H. Henry, *God Revelation and Authority: God who Speaks and Shows* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976), (4:27).

35 *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith no. 379, access date July 13, 2019, retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/muslim/4/6>.

Non-traditional Muslims may answer this objection by explaining that the repetition is just a metaphor to remind people to believe in Mohammad and the Qur'an. However, classical Muslims, which are the majority, do not believe that Mohammad is a metaphor, but he is a real historical person who lived in Makkah and Medina, and called people of the Arabic peninsula to believe in Allah and in him as his prophet. It is true that Mohammad did not ascribe divinity to himself; however, by asking Muslims to call upon his name at least five times a day elevates his nature to the level of the divine because this addition connotes that no prayer will be answered unless Mohammad is mentioned, and no Muslim will enter heaven unless he or she believes in Mohammad in addition to Allah.

Additionally, the Qur'an mentions numerous times that Muslims should obey "Allah and his prophet" (Surah 24:48, 51-52, 62; 33:22; 29, 36; 58:4...etc). Those who obey Allah and his prophet will enter heaven (Surah 48:17), their sins will be forgiven (Surah 49:14), and those who do not obey them will be burned forever in hell (Surah 72:23). Despite the fact that Mohammad is a mere man, his authority indicates that salvation is gained through both: Allah and himself. However, this idea is inconsistent with the doctrine of *Tawhid* (absolute onenes), the core of Islamic religion, because it elevates the status of Mohammad from a mere man to the divine. It makes Mohammad a partner with Allah in salvation, and not a mere transmitter of his revelation as the Qur'an claims. Elevating the status of Mohammad makes believing in his authority a requirement for people to get to heaven. In other words, the Islamic dictation theory model makes believing and obeying Allah, and doing good deeds not enough for obtaining eternal

salvation. Adding Mohammad to the believing system is a requirement. Therefore, the Islamic view that perceives Mohammad as a mere messenger of Allah seems to be contradictory to the position that Muslims hold about the authority of Mohammad.

Dictation Theory Leads to Fideism

According to Carl F. H. Henry, the dictation theory model makes the writers “unhistorical phantoms whom the divine Spirit controls like mechanical robots.”³⁶ Henry’s point applies to the Islamic dictation theory model because of the lack of proof to the divine *wahy*. The only source of *wahy* that Muslims have is the person of Mohammad and his claim of seeing Jibril. There is no other people, events, or miracles that can support his claim. Therefore, this model requires a fideistic belief in the person of Mohammad that cannot be evidentially proven. According to the Qur’an, Mohammad did not perform any miracle to prove that he is a prophet of Allah, and when people demanded a proof, he suggested that the Qur’an is the proof because no one can come with a book like it (Surah 52:34; 17:88; 2:23). This circular reasoning forced Mohammad to invent an ambiguous person by the name of Dihyah Al-Kalbi to give people the impression that he is truly seeing Jibril, who looks like Dihyah.³⁷ This invention is necessary to gain the trust of the people; however, it requires a fideistic belief in anonymousities instead of evidences or testified miracles.

36 Henry, *God Revelation and Authority*, (4:135).

37 Dihya al-Kalbi is an ambiguous person, and not much information written about him or about his conversion to Islam. *Sahih Bukhari*, Hadith no. 3634, access date July 16, 2019, retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/61/137>. *Sunan an-Nasa’i*, Hadith no. 4991, accessed May 11, 2020, <https://sunnah.com/nasai/47/7>.

Dictation Theory Comprises Language Difficulties

The Islamic dictation theory model presents limitation regarding Arabic language. Mohammad states that the Qur’an was descended in Arabic clear tongue (Surah 26:195), as if the language of Allah is Arabic only. This claim creates a problem to non-Arabic speaking Muslims because they either pray and recite the Qur’an without understanding it, or they have to learn Arabic first in order to pray and read without being passive. The English translation of the Qur’an is just a translation; it is not the actual inspired words of Allah. In *Ulum Al Qur’an: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur’an*, Abu Ammar Yasir Qadhi addresses the orthodox classical view by explaining that “the Qur’an is the Arabic speech (kalam) of Allah, which he revealed to Muhammad in wording and meaning, and which has been preserved in the *mushafs*, and has reached us by mutawaatir [unchallengeable] transmissions, and is a challenge to mankind to produce something similar to it.”³⁸ Although the majority of Muslims rely on different translations, they would still believe that the Qur’anic text is untranslatable. “While Arabic can be translated into any other language, the Qur’an’s essence as Allah’s very words is tied to the Arabic tongue.”³⁹ Describing the Qur’an as a challenge to mankind is problematic because it makes Allah unapproachable, especially to those who do not know Arabic language. When Allah speaks a language that is different from the person’s spoken tongue, he makes communication very difficult, if not impossible. This approach makes Allah passive in his

38 Abu Ammaar Yasir Qadhi, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur’an* (Birmingham, UK: Al-Hidaayah, 2003), 25.

39 White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Qur’an*, 55.

relationship with his own people because he is not making any effort to reach the people at their own level, but he is waiting for them to make all the travails to approach him. Supposedly, Allah created all tongues and languages, it would be much easier and practical for him to communicate using the person's spoken/written language than expect every non-Arab Muslim to learn a foreign language in order to communicate with him.

Christian scholar, Henry, denies the dictation theory model because of its language quandary. He states, "G. Vaeotius and V. Polanus were patently mistaken in their extreme notion that divine inspiration must have extended even to the vowel points because of Christ's declaration that not a jot or tittle would pass away until all is fulfilled (Matt 5:17-19)."⁴⁰ Muslims believe the same thing regarding the Qur'an when they claim that the copies that we have today are not corrupted, and they are as similar as the earliest available copies. They ignore the fact that the earliest copies did not include the vowel pointings—like the earliest Hebrew and Greek manuscript. However, reading Arabic without the pointing system is much harder than Hebrew or Greek, if not impossible. Most Muslims believe that the current Qur'an is similar to the 'Uthmanic copy, not knowing or ignoring the different readings that the Arabic Qur'an holds.⁴¹ *Sahih Bukhari* as well as *Sahih Muslim* recount a *Hadith* by Mohammad telling his followers that there are seven different readings of the Qur'an, and people can read the way that is easy for them.⁴² Nevertheless,

40 Henry, *God Revelation and Authority*, (4:139).

41 Saqib Hakak, Amirrudin Kamsin, Omar Tayan, Mohd. Yamani Idna Idris, Abdullah Gani, And Saber Zerdoumi, "Preserving Content Integrity Of Digital Holy Quran: Survey And Open Challenges," *IEEE Journal*, vol.5, 2017, 7305.

42 *Sahih Bukhari*, *Hadith* no. 2419, accessed December 23, 2019, retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/44/9>.

this is another reason to believe that dictation theory does not strengthen the authenticity of the Qur'an. Actually, it works against it.

Studies of the earlier Qur'anic manuscripts, such as San'a (OI-20.4) and Marcel II at the national Library of Russian in St. Petersburg, show that Henry's view about the dictation theory model is correct because early available Islamic manuscripts do not match 100% with the 'Uthmanic *mushaf* that we have today. This is a great problem for Islamic dictation theorists who believe that the Qur'an that Mohammad received is not being altered, corrupted, or tampered with. If the dictation theory is accurate, and none of the previous transmissions, whether spoken or written, were altered, then the earliest available copies of the Qur'an should reflect this claim. However, closer study to the differences among the earliest available Islamic manuscript show that there are variants in the texts, and, consequently, the dictation model proposes a weakness to the Islamic revelation model in general. Two of the earliest available Qur'anic manuscripts illustrate the discrepancies between them and *mushaf* 'Uthman. Because of the limited space in this paper, I will give few examples of these differences. The Qur'anic manuscripts have diacritical variants leading to different meanings. Surah 14:41, for instance, has a meaning variation. Manuscript Sana'a 01-29.1 includes the word تقوم (when you reckon), but the standard reading is يقوم (when it or he reckoned).⁴³ Moreover, Daniel Alan Brubaker documents several insertions of the word الله Allah in Surah 9:78 in Sana'a manuscript, in Surah 33:11 in NLR Marcel, and in Surah 33:24 in NLR Marcel II, 8r.⁴⁴

See also *Sahih Muslim*, *Hadith* no. 818 a, accessed December 23, 2019, retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/muslim/6/327>.

43 Small, *Holy Books Have a History*, 41.

44 Daniel Alan Brubaker, *Corrections in Early Qur'an*

Brubaker includes several pictures in his book to document the erasure that he finds in the early manuscripts that he examined. For instance, he inspected the manuscript Marcel II, in the National Library of Russia, on folio 30v. He says, “these pages are written in the script style C.Ia, and this is probably an early 8th century manuscript. I’ve noted 26 corrections in this manuscript. The correction in this case is a simple erasure; nothing has been written to replace what was erased.”⁴⁵ He explains further that there is a missing or erased space in the middle of verse 30:9. The verse ends in the middle of the line with the word عِقْبَةَ (the fate). The erased space follows this word, and it is obvious to the reader. Then the verse resumes in the next line with the word الَّذِينَ (those). After this correction, the verse matches the ‘Uthmanic *mushaf*.⁴⁶ Brubaker’s concludes that “what was erased cannot at this time be discerned, but the length and continuity of the erasure indicates a likely single word of 4-6 letters, all linked.”⁴⁷ Burbaker suggests several possibilities to what could that erasure be. He states, “the first would be an expression of proportion such as *Kullu min*, ‘all of,’ or *kathiran min*, ‘most of,’ to render ‘what was the fate of all those who preceded them,’ or ‘what was the fate of most of those who preceded them,’ or ‘what was the fate of most of those who preceded them,’ respectively.” Another possibility would be a noun such as, *al-yahud* (the Jews) or *al-nas* (the people).⁴⁸ If Brubaker analysis is true, then textual criticism creates a deeper problem for the dictation theory model. For if

Allah has dictated every word to Mohammad, then these erasures and additions to the early manuscripts require serious explanations from Islamic scholars. If Allah dictated every word to Mohammad and all those who memorized the Qur’an were perfectly faithful to his words, then why and how did the changes occurred?

CONCLUSION

‘Atir’s Classical view of Islamic divine revelation considers the Qur’an the compilation of the speech and the words of Allah, who transmitted word for word to his prophet Mohammad. The previous analysis presents several weaknesses to the Islamic dictation theory model of divine revelation that are related to the authority of Mohammad, language, fideism, and the infallibility of the current copies of the Qur’an. The authority of Mohammad threatens the doctrine of *tawhid*, language difficulty leaves non-Arabic speaking Muslims with no option but to learn Arabic in order to communicate with Allah, fideism is inevitable because Muslims have to rely on the claim that “the Qur’an was perfectly preserved in the chests of Mohammad’s followers,” while early Islamic history shows different readings with the current Qur’an. The difficulties of the dictation theory model are fundamental because if the *wahy* of the Qur’an is not accurate, then the Qur’an is not the words of Allah and the authority and the prophecy of Mohammad is compromised.

Manuscripts: Twenty Examples (Lovettville: Think and Tell Press, 2019), 36.

45 Ibid., 45.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

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