THE DEBATES OF THE CREATEDNESS OF THE QUR'AN AND ITS IMPACT TO THE METHODOLOGY OF QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION

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Abstract: The status of the Qur'an as the verbatim words of God has become undisputed belief among Muslims. However, beyond the agreement on this fundamental doctrine, they differed from interpreting the nature of "the Qur'an" whether it is eternal and co-existent with God or created by God like other beings in this world? Throughout Islamic history, there are at least two major trends in interpreting the nature of the Qur'an as God words, i.e. scholars who believe in the eternity of the Qur'an and those who believe in the createdness of the Qur'an. A number of Muslim thinkers since three decades ago have adopted the concept of the createdness of the Qur'an to support their methodological principles developed in interpreting the Qur'an. This paper will explore further the origin of the doctrine of eternity and the createdness of the Qur'an, the debate on this issue in classical and contemporary Islamic thoughts and its methodological implications on the interpretation of the Holy Scripture.

Keywords: the Qur'an, the debates, the createdness, methodology, Qur'anic Interpretation

Introduction

THE QUR'AN for Muslims is the word of Allah that has been stated in *Lawḥ Maḥfūẓ* (Literally means a preserved tablet). Furthermore, from *lawḥ maḥfūẓ*, the angel of revelation dictated verbally to chosen one, i.e. the Prophet Muhammad. In addition, the Qur'an asserted itself as a guidance for mankind, *hudan li al-nās*. As a "hudan", it certainly shows the commands and prohibitions, *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*, good and bad, and also contains the stories of people in the past time. So, what has been stated in Al-Qur'an is essential teachings that must be restrained by Muslims.[1] However, all the teachings could not be understood as long as there is no reader, i.e. people. Imam 'Ali said, the Qur'an is just a hardback book. People themselves who read, understand, and apply it. the Qur'an is a text, and it mediates between Author and readers. The origin of the divine text requires mediation and human readability to ensure its dynamism.

Background of the Problem

The status of the Qur'an as the verbatim words of God has become the undisputed belief among Muslim. Almost all schools, sects and theological streams among Muslim agree and believe that the Qur'an is reveale by God to Prophet Muhammad and then conveyed to his followers. They also agree that some verses of the Qur'an have been revealed in order to respond to the needs of Muslim at that time on the issues of their daily lives. God's words were then recorded through a delicate process in the form of scripture and printed in the form of manuscripts (*al-Muṣḥaf al-'Uthmānī*). However, beyond the agreement on this fundamental doctrine, they differ from interpreting the nature of "the Qur'an" whether it is eternal and co-existent with God or created by God like other beings in this world? Throughout Islamic history, there are at least two major trends in interpreting the nature of the Qur'an as God Words: *First*, scholars who believe in the eternity of the Qur'an because they believe that it is a manifestation of God speaking attribute

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[1] M. Yunan Yusuf, "Karakteristik Tafsir Al-Quran di Indonesia Abad Keduapuluh", *'Ulūm al-Quran* 3, no. 4 (1992): 50.

that co-existent with God Essence. *Second*, scholars who believe in the createdness of the Qur'an because it is a phenomenal being for it is composed of letters and sound which are arranged alternately.

The debate between two aforementioned tendencies has evolved since the early days of Islam and continues until today. Nevertheless, between these two tendencies, the idea of the createdness of the Qur'an has been adopted and developed intensively by contemporary Muslim thinkers. A number of Muslim thinkers since three decades ago have adopted the concept of the createdness of the Qur'an to support their methodological principles which they developed in interpreting the Qur'an. This paper will explore further the origin of the doctrine of eternity and the createdness of the Qur'an, the discussion on this issue in classical and contemporary Islamic thoughts and its methodological implications on interpreting the Muslim Holy Scripture.

The Doctrine of the Createdness of the Qur'an: Its Origins

The origin of the polemics on the doctrine of createdness and uncreatedness of the Qur'an has been disputed among Western and Muslim scholars. J.R.T.M. Peters in his book "God's Created Speech" stated that the very origin of the discussion remain wrapped in darkness. We can not know for certain why exactly this question became so central a topic in later disputes. However, based on his historical pursuit, he concluded that at the beginning of the 3rd century AH, two schools of thought that believed the createdness and uncreatedness of the Qur'an was growing among Muslims at that time. The uncreatedness doctrine of the Qur'an can be found in *waṣiyat* Abū Ḥanīfah written about 210 AH/ 825AD. In this *waṣiyat*, Abū Ḥanīfah mentioned that the Qur'an is the Word of God and is eternal, although the writing and the letters used to write the Qur'an is created. Meanwhile, the idea that supported the uncreatedness of the Qur'an could be found in a letter written by al-Ma'mun in 218 AH/833 AD. In a letter that became the beginning of this *Miḥnah* (inquisition) event, Al-Ma'mun ordered that the belief in the createdness of the Qur'an

should be used as a standard of orthodoxy for the scholars and judges who worked under his administration.[2]

On the other hand, Richard C. Martin states that based on his search on the works of orthodox Muslim scholars, he finds that the polemic on the Qur'an actually can be traced back to the end of the 2nd century AH, during the reign of the Umayyad.[3] Islam during the first hundred years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad evolved into a global cosmopolitan culture which has diversity and extraordinary wealth. Its struggle with new religious pluralistic environment in the Near East region had inspired the development of *kalām* (speculative theology) in which Muslim philosophers had to face their counterparts from the Christian and Jewish theologians.[4] One of the issues that had discussed was the problem of nature of the Qur'an as logos of God (*Kalām al-Lāh*). The beginning of the polemic has been raised by Yuhanna ad-Dimasyqi (John of Damascus), who worked as a chief administrator in Bani Umayya reign.[5] In a number of its verses, the Qur'an criticizes the Christian concept of the Trinity, who raised Jesus Christ as one of the three God persons, and therefore he was believed as having the attribute of eternity. Facing these criticisms, John of Damascus responded by asking the beliefs of Muslim about their Qur'an. If the Qur'an states in one verse that Jesus Christ is the word (logos) of God,[6] and the Qur'an also affirms the

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[2]J.R.T.M. Peters, *God's Created Speech: A Study in the Speculative Theology of the Mu'tazili Qadi l-Qudat Abu l-Hasan 'Abd al-Jabbar ibn Ahmad al-Hamadani* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 2-3.

[3]Richard C. Martin, "Createdness of the Qur'an" in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen Mc Auliff (Leiden: Brill, 2001). See also Aḥmad Amīn, *Ḍuḥā al-Islām* (Mesir: al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyah, 1936), 162.

[4]The existence of Judeo-Christian influence in the nature of the Qur'an can be found in article written by Aḥmad Shalabī, *al-Yahūdiyyah*, which states that the doctrine of the Qur'an eternity cannot be separated from the influence of Jewish and Christian teachings which believes in the eternity of Torah and Jesus Christ. See Aḥmad Shalabī, *al-Yahūdiyyah* (Cairo: Maktabah an-Nahḍah al-Maṣriyyah, 1988), 222.

[5]Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *Tārīkh al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabī, n.d.), 148.

[6]Qs. Al-Nisā'/4: 171.

createdness of Jesus Christ like other creatures,[7] then what will Muslim say about the status of the Quran, which is believed to be the Word of God, whether it was created like other beings or eternal as Jesus Christ in Christian theology.[8]

Muslim's response to this question gave birth to two main schools—with their variants of each. Some Muslim theologians choose the answer that the Qur'an--in its position as the word of God--is eternal (*qadīm*) and uncreated (*gayr makhlūq*). This view is believed by people who are often referred to as *Ahl al-ḥadīth* founded by Aḥmad ibn Hanbal and then developed with a number of modifications by Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari, the founder of Asharites school. Other Muslim theologians choose the other view that the Qur'an is created or *makhlūq*. This view was first put forward by al-Ja'd ibn Dirham and al-Jahm ibn Safwan, which later developed a more systematically by Mu'tazila theologians and serve as the official school of the Abbasid state by Al-Ma'mun. The encounter between the two theological

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[7]Qs. Al-Mā'idah/5: 175

[8]The linkage between the issue of the nature of the Qur'an and the Judeo-Christian theological view was reaffirmed in the contemporary Muslim thought. According to Arkoun, the Christians refuse to align the Torah and the Gospel on the one hand, and Jesus Christ, on the other hand, because they believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, not in the sense of biological meaning as criticized by the Qur'an, but in the sense that Jesus is the physical incarnation of God, the Logos and the Spirit of God on earth. The same rejection was shown by Muslim, their rejection to the divine status of Jesus Christ is also caused by the same light, namely enforcing the evidence of misalignment between the divine status of the Qur'an and the human status of Jesus Christ. In Muslim view, the fact that the Qur'an was revealed in verbatim to the Prophet Muhammad make them believe that the Qur'an is a physical incarnation of the eternal word of God. Therefore, they gave divine status to this scripture, just as Christians give divine nature to Jesus Christ. See M. Arkoun, *Min al-Tafsīr al-Mawruthila Tahlīl al-Khiṭab al-Dīnī*, trans. Hasyim Shalih (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭali'ah li al-Ṭiba'ah wa al-Nashr, 2001), 23. Here we see that Abu Zayd criticizes the proponent of the eternity of the Qur'an. According to him, if they reject the Christian concept that assumes the existence of a dual nature in Jesus Christ himself, and insisted on human nature alone, then adamant stance to hold dual character of Qur'anic text may be considered as trapped in the same assumption. See Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb al-Dīnī* (Cairo: Sina li al-Nashr, 1994), 204-206.

school above lasted in very long time and has drained the energy of early Muslim thinkers, to the extent that the science of Islamic theology is called *'Ilm al-Kalām* because the longest and the most frequent discussed problem is the problem of *Kalām* Allah, whether it is eternal or created.[9]

In a note of Abu Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 324 AH / 936 AD), the doctrine of Jahm teachings about God can be found in his statement that only God Who is Eternal. Every being other than God, such as heaven and hell—even a prototype of the Qur'an preserved in the *lawḥ maḥfūẓ* or *Umm al-Kitāb*—is a created.[10] He built the argument by rejecting all forms of anthropomorphism (equating God with His creatures). According to him, God does not have a physical body like His creatures. Therefore, God must create words (the Qur'an) which are different from the speech of God that can be heard by the human ear. As part of the debate on God attributes among rationalist theologians on one side, and Hanbali and Asy'arite traditionalists on the other side, Jahm disseminated some kind of "*theologian egativa*" by stating that human beings can only say something about God what He is not. (It is possible for humans to say of God only

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[9]There are at least three names used to name Islamic theology, i.e. *'Ilm al-Tawḥid wa al-Ṣifat*, *'Ilm Uṣūl al-dīn*, and *'Ilm al-Kalām* itself. It is called as *'Ilm at-Tawḥīd* because the discussions of the monotheism of God is the most popular themes comparing to other themes. It called *'Ilm Uṣūl al-dīn* because it discusses the fundamental principles underlying religious beliefs. *Finally*, it called *'Ilm Kalām* because of three reasons: *First*, it is to distinguish between the science of Logic (*'Ilm al-Manṭiq*) used by philosophers and the science of *Kalām* used by theologians (*Mutakallimun*). *Second*, it called *'Ilm Kalām* because the organization of the chapters in *'Ilm al-Kalām* began with *Kalām* or talk about this or that problem. *Third*, the problem of *Kalām* Allah (God Word) whether it is eternal (*qadim*) or created (*ḥadīth*) is a problem that seized attention of most Muslim theologians. Therefore, Islamic theology called as science of *Kalām* (*'Ilm al-kalām*) because of intense debate in the study of Islamic theology is a debate about the nature of God Word, whether it is eternal or temporal. Saʿd al-Dīn Masʿūd ibn ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-Lāh al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid fī 'Ilm al-Kalām* (Pakistan: Dār al-Maʿārif al-Nuʿmaniyyah, 1401), 163-166, See also ʿAdd al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Aḥmad al-Iji, *Kitāb al-Mawāqif* (Beirut: Dār al-Jail, 1997), 46.

[10]Abū Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Ashʿari, *Maqālat al-Islāmiyyin wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallin* (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1980), 270-280.

what he is not). He continued that God's attributes such as God's speech should be different from the nature of the speech of His creatures.[11]

After the era of Jahm, the idea of the createdness of the Qur'an then adopted and developed by a rationalist sect called Mu'tazila. This school of thought became the most important supporter of the doctrine and through their hands, the idea reached the peak of its development, after in the reign of al-Ma'mun (198 AH /813-833 AD), their religious beliefs became the official state schools. During his reign, al-Ma'mun applied a *Miḥnah* policies (inquisition) to the *qadlis* (judges), jurists and Islamic scholars in general. The policy of inquisition lasted up to 16 years after finally revoked by the Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r.232-47/847-61), two years after he came to power.[12]

Between the judges and clerks who worked for the Caliph and the provincial government, only two who rejected the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Muḥammad ibn Nūh. The second died in his way to the prison, while Ibn Ḥanbal had to face imprisonment, beatings, interrogation and theological questions and examinations. The brother and successor of al-Ma'mun, the caliph al-Mu'taṣim (r.218-27 / 833-42), took a softer stance in disseminating the idea of the createdness of the Qur'an and worried about public reaction that gathered outside the prison in Baghdad where Aḥmad ibn Hanbal detained. Until then, Aḥmad ibn Hanbal refused to support the idea. Once out of prison, he chose to stay away from public life and did not use the issue when he raised again under aggressive policy of inquisition imposed by the son of al-Mu'taṣim, the caliph al-Wathiq (r. 227-32 / 842-7). However, Aḥmad ibn Hanbal finally became a winner in his fight against the Mu'tazila doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an after passing three reigns that imposed the policy on behalf of the state.[13]

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[11]Martin, "Createdness of the Qur'an, 469.

[12]Abū Ja'far Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Mulūk* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'arif, 1976), 645.

[13]Martin, "Createdness of the Qur'an, 269.

The abolition of *Miḥna* policies and the failure of state authority in imposing the ideology of the createdness of the Qur'an brought the Mu'tazila as a school of theology has come through fluctuated situations in the period there after until finally disappeared in Islamic history. But as a way of thinking, Mu'tazila's thoughts attracted the attention of the leaders of the Islamic awakening like Jamaluddinal-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Ahmad Amin in early 19th century. Furthermore, the idea of the createdness of the Qur'an has been widely adopted and developed by contemporary Muslim thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman, Mohammed Arkoun, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, M. Amin Abdullah and Ulil Abshar Abdalla.

The doctrine of the Createdness of the Quran in Classical Islamic Thought

The debate on the createdness of the Qur'an stemmed from an attempt to reconcile two conflicting syllogistic conclusion. *First*, the syllogism extracted from the texts of the Qur'an and *ḥadīth* which states that God speaks (*mutakallim*) to man through channel of revelation, not only the Qur'an but also the scriptures of other divine religions. Such a given authoritative texts which attributed the speech nature to God gave birth to the principle of the following syllogism: "*Kalām* (the Logos of) Allah (i.e. the Qur'an) is a product of the nature of speech inherent in the God's Essence, and all that become the attributes of God's Essence are eternal as the eternity of God. Thus, the Word of God is eternal. *Second*, in the phenomenal realm, the Word of God is manifest in the texts of the Scriptures (i.e. the Qur'an and other religious scriptures), and these texts are composed of letters and sounds that are embodied alternately. All things that have such nature are created. In conclusion, the Qur'an that is the embodiment of God's factual speech (*Kalām*) is created.[14]

	I	Major Premise	*Kalām* (the Logos of) Allah is a product of the speech nature which is inherent in the God's Essence

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[14]Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd ibn 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Lāh al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* (Beirut: 'Alam al-Kutub, 1998), 164.

	Minor Premise	All that become the attributes of God's Essence are eternal as the eternity of God
	Conclusion	the Word of God is eternal
II	Major Premise	in the phenomenal realm, the Word of God is manifest in the texts of the Scriptures (i.e. the Qur'an and other religious scriptures)
	Minor Premise	these texts are composed of letters and sounds that are embodied alternately
	Conclusion	the Qur'an that is the embodiment of God's factual speech (*Kalām)* is created

In resolving these two principles of syllogism, Muslim theologians at least divided into four mainstreams: *First*, the conservative *Salaf* theologian known as *al-Hanabilah* or the followers of Aḥmad ibn Hanbal. They receive the first syllogistic principles and rejected the minor premise of the second syllogism which states that all beings that are arranged sequentially are created. The group says that the sounds and the letters which form the word of God, although arranged sequentially and alternately, is eternal and exists eternally in the God's Essence. Likewise, the sound heard from a reader of the Qur'an, the letter written in Manuscripts, even manuscripts printed in book form, is the word of God and it resembles the eternal Word of God. This view is based on various statements of the Qur'an itself which assert that God has a speech attribute and one of the product of this attribute is the Qur'an. These Qur'anic statements according to this school should not be interpreted beyond its literal meaning and any attempt to interpret such verses is seen as an act of heresy.[15]

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[15]The principle held by the *al-Ḥanabilah* is that all the attributes mentioned in the Qur'an (which was then called to the narrated attributes or *khabariyyah*) and attached to God, then God must be attributed with such attributes, without *ta'wīl* (metaphorical interpretation) or *ta'ṭil* (denial these attributes in God's Essence). See the comment of Ibn Taimiyya in Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Radd 'alā al-Zanādiqah wa al-Jahmiyyah* (Kuwait: Gheras, 2005), 206.

Second, almost all sects of Mu'tazila accepted the principle of a second syllogism and rejected the first major premise (which states the word of God is a product of speech attribute that is inherent in the God's Essence). This group argued that Qur'anic statements which confirm the existence of God speech attribute does not refer to the attribute of God's Essence, but rather on the actual attribute (*sifāt afʿāl*) of God with which God created everything exists in this world. In addition, they also agree that the Word of God is composed of sounds and letters, and therefore is created. In their opinion, the word of God is inevitably composed of sounds and letters that are arranged sequentially and alternately, and all such beings are created. All created beings is not possibly fused with the Essence of God. In addition, if the Word of God is believed to be eternal, it will imply that there would be two or more eternal beings (*Taʿaddud al-Qudamāʾ*), and this is impossible for God.[16]

Third, the sect of Karramites who seek a middle path between Mu'tazila—who refused the attachment of real speech attribute to the God's essence—and Hanbilites—who believed the eternity of composed and lettered word of God—by accepting the principle of a second syllogism and rejecting the premise of the first minor premise—which states that all of God attributes are eternal as the eternity of God. The group said that the word of God which is composed sequently of sounds and letters, although it is created, but it is inherent in the Essence of God. In other words, God does not always to be attributed with eternal attributes. To support this argument, they then differentiate between *kalām* with *qawl*. *Kalām* is a potential speech attribute of God, while *Qawl* is the actual embodiment of potential speech attribute of God. With this distinction, they said that the Word of God is eternal, while the actual embodiment of the word of God (which they called *Qawl*) is a created.[17]

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[16]Ibrāhīm ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Khalīfah, *Munat al-Manan fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿah Fajr al-Jadīd, 1992), 98.

[17]Shihāb al-Dīn al-Sayyin Maḥmūd al-Alūsī al-Bagdādī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm wa al-Sabʿ al-Mathānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1997), 37.

Fourth, a group of Muslim theologians who accept the principle of first syllogism and reject the second major premise stating that (*kalām* Allah which is composed of letters and sounds are transformed alternately). The group spearheaded by Imam al-Ash'ari and al-Maturudi, and whose followers were known as *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* resist the premise that the Word of God is always made up of sounds and letters arranged consecutively to each other. Not standing with the mistakes made by the *al-Karramiyyah* who allow the union of the eternal and temporal in the God's Essence, this group tried to distinguish the word of God in two levels, namely (1) the level of *kalām nafsī* and (2) the level of *kalām lafdhī*, both in the sense of potential speech attribute (*al-ma'na al-maṣdar*) or the actual manifestation of that attribute (*al-hasil bi al-maṣdar*). The classification of *kalām nafsī* and *kalām lafdhī* is built on the following analogy: "When a person utters a sentence, it will impose two models of speech inside that person: *First*, the meanings exist in the mind of the speaker. *Second*, the actual words spoken by the speaker. Likewise, when God reveals His Word, then there will be two form of speech, the meaning in the mind of God, and the actual words which express these meanings.[18]

	Al-maṣdar	God's potential speech attribute, opposites (antonyms) of mutism in humans.
Kalām nafsī (God's Psychical World)	*Al-Hashil bi al-Maṣdar (al-Mutakallambih/ the spoken words)*	Abstract words (unseen), not lettered and sounded, not sequential, and come into being in its eternal

[18]The division of God speech into *Kalām Nafsī* and *Kalām Lafdhī* developed by the proponents of recent Asharite schools such as al-Taftāzānī in *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣīd*, 73-74; al-Alūsī al-Bagdādī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, 37. Then it was elaborated by Shaikh Muḥammad Bakhit al-Muthi'i in *Sullam al-Wuṣul li Sharḥ Nihayat al-Sul* ('Alam al-Kutub, n.d.), 5-13. And 'Abd al-Wahhāb 'Abd al-Majīd Gazlān, *al-Bayān fi Mabāḥith min 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dar at-Ta'lif, n.d.), 28-29.

		form simultaneously. The word of God in this levels is then divided into orders, prohibitions, news, request information, call, promise, threat, and so on. The word of God in the level of *kalām nafsī* with both variants of meaning is eternal (*qadīm*).
Kalām lafdhī (God's Uttered Word)	*Al-maṣdar*	Sentences exist in the minds of Qur'an readers and reciters.
	Al-Hasil bi Al-Maṣdar (The spoken word)	The spoken and written words from the initial chapter of al-Fātiḥah to the end chapter of al-Nās. *kalām lafdhī* with these two levels of meaning is created.[19]

Nevertheless, the division between *Kalām nafsī* and *Kalām lafdhī* is seen problematic by the supporters of the uncreatedness of the Quran. *First*, the assumption of the existence of the real word inherent in God Essence will imply an appeal to something that does not exist (*khitab al-ma'dum or zero speech*) or before anything is created, and this speech continued to appeal after the dissolution of the connection between the speech and the address. In term of al-Qadi Abd al-Jabbar, "If in the Qur'an

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[19] The Qur'an has four connotations of meaning: *First*, the nature of speech (*sifāt al-takallum*) that is on the Essence of God in terms which indicates the *kalām nafsī* (*psych word*) inherent in God Essence from the initial verse of *al-Fātiḥah* to the verse of *an-Nas*. *Second*, psych words (*al-kalām al-nafsiyyah*) from the initial verse of *al-Fātiḥah* until the end of the verse *al-Nās*. The Qur'an with both meanings refers to the meanings co-exists with the Essence of God and the eternal nature. *Third*, the verbal words (sounds and voices) which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. *Fourth*, engraved writings that refer to the revealed verbal words. 'Abd al-Majīd Gazlān, *al-Bayān*, 28-29.

there are orders and prohibitions, as well as the promises and threats, then the real position of the command itself always requires an object of the governed. For example, the verses about prayer command is impossible to have existed eternally and before the creation of human being, because it is impossible to devote the order to something that does not exist (*ma'dum*). So it can be conclude that God's command is not eternal.[20]

Second, it will imply the inevitable falsity of the information about the past before they occurred and also in the future after their occurrence. The awareness that space and time should not be part of God's attribute is in line with the fact that the meaning is the perfectness of its implications, and time is part of the meaning of language. A number of vocabularies are deliberately created to designate the time connotation, such as day, month, year, time, and so on. Ahmad Hijazi al-Saqi in his introduction to the book of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Khalq al-Qur'ān al-Mu'tazilah bayna wa Ahl al-Sunnah*, clarifies Mu'tazila views on this issue by adding the examples of the historical events described in the Qur'an after the event occurred, such as the battle of *Badr*, the complaints of women to the Prophet about her husband (*al-Mujadila*) and others. These examples prove that the Qur'an is created. Because how could the event of war and the subject of complaint has been existing since eternal time?[21]

Third, the doctrine of the eternality of the Qur'an will cancel abrogation (*nasakh*) concept—especially the abrogation of Qur'anic legal contents without its recitations (*naskh al-ḥukm dūn al-tilāwah*)—because there will be presupposed mutual relationship between Qur'anic verses and their legal contents. If these verses are eternal, and the appeal of these verses is eternal too, then the eternal nature of these verses may not disappear, so their legal content will not disappear too because the legal contents and its texts mutually exist. This legal content should

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[20]Al-Qāḍi 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mugnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa al-'Adl* (Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah, n.d.), 63.

[21]Aḥmad Ḥijazi al-Saqi in Fakhr al-Dīn ar-Rāzī, *Khalq al-Qur'ān al-Mu'tazilah bayna wa Ahl al-Sunnah* (Beirut: Dār al-Jail, 1992), 11.

not be limited by time and place, because if they are limited, there will be no abrogation."[22]

If we look at the arguments above, we can see that disagreements between Muslim theologians occur because of their differences in interpreting God's attributes mentioned in texts of the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*. The defenders of the uncreatedness of the Qur'an—being aware of the fact that a number of the Qur'anic verses explicitly attaches the speech attribute to God—they felt obliged to build a rational argument that is feasible to support the statements of those Qur'anic texts. Because in their view, the idea that Qur'an is created would imply the loss of the God's speech attribute and deny the truth of the Qur'an as the word of God. Meanwhile, Mu'tazila who insist the principle of *Tawḥīd*, which culminates on sanctification of God from any similarity—both in Essence and His attributes—with His creatures, felt obliged to reject any understanding leads to symbolizing God to His creatures. Therefore, they rejected any existence of speech attribute in the Essence of God, because the "Word of God" in the form of the Qur'an and other scriptures cannot be separated from the nature of createdness. The two perspectives have implications to the approach they used in interpreting the Qu'ran. The Asharites school who believes in the eternity of the Qur'an is likely to interpreting the Qur'an with the textual approach, both in interpreting God's attributes or in other issues. The closer an interpretation to the textual sounds of the Qur'an is, the closer this interpretation to the correct interpretation. While the second, the Mu'tazila who believes in the createdness of the Qur'an, tend to interpret metaphorically any verses which

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[22]The point of this argument is that The Eternal is not limited in space and time, therefore it should not be exposed to legal limitation of time. However, as agreed by most scholars of the Qur'an—except a small number of them—they believe in existence of abrogation concept, i.e. the cancellation of a verse, either its text or its legal implications, with another verse that comes later. This theory attest that the Qur'an is created because some of its verses affected by the limitation of time and place indicated by theory of abrogation. See Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afgānī and Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh, *al-Ta'liqāt 'alā al-Sharḥ al-'Aqā'id al-'Adudiyyah* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Shuruq al-Dawliyyah, 2002), 488.

implies the attribution of human characteristics or behavior to God.

The Doctrine of the Createdness of the Qur'an in the Contemporary Debates

The discussion on the nature of the Qur'an continued to be discussed in contemporary Islamic discourse. Nevertheless it seems that the idea of the createdness of the Qur'an get more attention from a number of contemporary Muslim thinkers. The idea of the createdness of the Qur'an is raised again in the discourse on the revelation, but by adding new insights about the concept of createdness. As we will see later, the discussion on the createdness of the Qur'an has been shifted from ontological-theological realm into the idea of historicity and contextuality of the Qur'an. This awareness appeared in a number of the writings of contemporary Muslim thinkers like Fazlur Rahman, Mohammed Arkoun, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd.

The first Muslim thinker who raised the idea of the createdness of the Qur'an was Fazlur Rahman. His idea about the nature of the Qur'an can be seen in his statement that the Qur'an is both the word of God and the words of the Prophet Muhammad. In his work entitled "Islam" Rahman explains the character of the Qur'anic revelation that is different from other religious scriptures. According to him, the Qur'an is the verbatim word of God as revealed by the spiritual agent named Gabriel and delivered to the Prophet Muhammad. The relationship between the verbatim words of God on the one hand, with the role played by Muhammad on the other hand, is a unique relationship. *First*, the Qur'an confirms its otherness, objectivity, and verbal character of Qur'anic revelation (i.e. the Qur'an is the verbatim word of Allah and no Muhammad's role in the process revelation except as passive recipient). *Second*, Rahman rejects the Qur'anic otherness vis-à-vis the Prophet Muhammad. The orthodox Muslim (even the whole of Islamic thought in the middle period) lack an intellectual analysis tool to combine—in a formula—between the dogma of Qur'anic otherness and verbal character of this scripture in one hand, and

a very intimate relationship with the revelation and the role of religious personality of Muhammad on the other hand. They do not have the intellectual capacity to explain that the Qur'an is the word of God and in a general sense also the words of the Prophet Muhammad. (... That the Qur'an is entirely the Word of God and in an ordinary sense, entirely Also the word of Muhammad).[23] Rahman said:

> "I defended the idea of the verbal revelation of the Qur'an, which is the universal belief. However, it seemed to me that the standard orthodox accounts of revelation and externalism give a mechanical picture of the relationship between Muhammad and the Quran-Gabriel coming and delivering God's messages to him almost like a postman delivering letters. He stated that the Qur'an is entirely the Word of God in so far as it is in fallible and absolutely free from falsehood, but, in so far as it comes to the Prophet's heart and then his tongue, he was entirely his word."[24]

Interestingly, Rahman's idea of the indivisibility of the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad has been declared to oppose the dogma of the eternity of the Qur'an espoused by Asharite and Hanbalite who claim that the Qur'anis not just the word of God, but it is also eternal (not created). According to Rahman, this view confirms the "otherness" of the Qur'an and exclude Muhammad's role in the process of revelation, which both do not provide a role for the Prophet Muhammad in this process of revelation. Here Rahman appears to support the Mu'tazila idea that confirmed Muhammad's involvement in the process of the revelation.[25]

Based on the concept of revelation described above, Rahman builds his interpretive methodology. Rahman approached the Qur'an through an attempt to understand it through the socio-historical setting. According to him, any

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[23]Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), 31-32

[24]Fazlur Rahman, "Some Islamic Issues in the Ayyub Khan Era," quoted in Yusuf Rahman, *The Hermeneutical Theory of Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid: An Analytical Study of His Method of Interpreting the Qur'an* (Montreal Canada: McGill University, 2001), 176.

[25]Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1-2

statement of the Qur'an on political, moral, political and economic issues has to be rooted in history. The goal of this historical approach is to define the world view or Weltanschauung of the Qur'an, which according to Rahman more ethical than legal character. By applying this method, it will be possible to distinguish between Qur'anic prescription and description, between the legal rulings of the Qur'an and their objectives, and between the historical situation and its essential principles.[26]

Rahman's approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an was known as the theory of double movement. The first is a movement from the current situation to the period in which the Qur'an was revealed. This movement allows the interpreter to evaluate the text in the socio-historical context, and give him a chance to capture the purpose and intention of text. The second movement is an attempt to interpret the text in the socio-cultural situation today.[27] The first motion of the second movement contains two steps: *First*, to understand the meaning of a verse, an interpreter must examine the historical circumstances surrounding the revelation. This shows the absolute necessity to understand the social and religious life, traditions and institutions in the Islamic Arab societies. In light of this socio-historical background, it is possible for the second step, i.e. to formulate socio-moral objectives of certain verses. After formulating common goals, an interpreter is ready to move from the general view obtained from the first movement to apply the principles of the Qur'an in the contemporary socio-historical situation.[28]

The theory of the createdness of the Qur'an can also be found in Muhammad Arkoun's thought. In a number of his works, Arkoun states that the word of God can be divided into two levels. *First*, the metaphysical level of God's words, i.e. prototypes of all revealed Holy Scriptures, including Torah,

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[26]Fazlur Rahman, "Islam: Legacy and Contemporary Challenge," in *Islam in the Contemporary World*, ed. Cyriac K. Pullapilly (Notre Dame: Crossroad Books, 1980), 409.

[27]Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 6.

[28]Ibid., 8.

Bible and Qur'an. The Qur'an called this level as *Umm al-Kitab* (Qs. 43: 3) which was still kept on a preserved tablet or *lawḥ maḥfūẓ* (Qs. 85:22). At this level, the revelation is eternal, not bound by space and time, and contains the highest truth. However, according to Arkoun, the absolute truth of this revelation is beyond human reach, because it is still secured in the *lawḥ mahfūẓ* and co-exists with the God Himself. *Second*, the worldly edition of God's words (or what he called "Editions Terrestres"), i.e. when God's words was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in oral transmission. The Qur'anic revelation in this level, which is called as "Prophetic Discourse" (*al-Khiṭāb al-Nabawī*) covers the discourse between the three main actors: God as a speaker, Prophet as the first recipient, and the human beings as a second recipients. The latter are the companions who accompanied the Prophet and witnessed the revelation directly from Muhammad.[29] The second level of revelation is called "worldly edition" (*edition sterrestres*).[30]

From the distinction between the two levels of revelations, it can be seen that Arkoun idea actually has similarities with the Asharites view which classified the word of God into two level, i.e. *Kalām nafsī* and *Kalām lafdhī*. In Ash'arite theology, the formless *Kalām nafsī* which co-exists with God's Essence is eternal, more or less commensurate with Arkoun's view stating that the word of God in the heavenly edition preserved in *lawḥ mahfūẓ*, is eternal, not bound by space and time, and contains the highest truth and untouched by human understanding.[31] This idea contrast to Mu'tazila doctrine which believed that God's word both in the heavenly and worldly edition with its three levels—in Arkonian terms—was created.[32] However, Arkoun

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[29]M. Arkoun, *al-Fikr al-Uṣūli wa Istiḥalat al-Ta'sil: Naḥw Tārīkh Ākhar li al-Fikr al-Islāmī*, trans. Hasyim Salih (London: Dar as-Saqi, 1999), 30.

[30]M. Arkoun, *Min al-Tafsīr al-Mawruthila Taḥlīl al-Khiṭab al-Dīnī*, trans. Hasyim Shalih (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭali'ah li al-Ṭiba'ah wa al-Nashr, 2001), 22.

[31]Ibid., 22

[32]Abu al-Hudhail al-Allaf (131H-226H), one of the *Mu'tazila* figures believe that God created the Qur'an on the Preserved Tablet in a prototype (*'aradl*), and then displayed through three places; the place where it was kept, the place where it was written and the place where it was read and heard. See Abd al-RahmanBadawi, *Madhahib al-Islāmiyyin* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li al-

differs from Asharite in determining the relationship between *kalām nafsī* (heavenly edition) and *kalām lafdhī* (worldy edition). The Asharites—especially Hanbalites—equalize the level of truth between *Othmani* manuscript (worldly edition) with the trancendent words of God (heavenly edition), by ignoring the processes of oral transmission and standardization in text form.[33] Instead, as already mentioned before, Arkoun insists that the heavenly edition of God words contains the ultimate truth— and probably not touched by human understanding— meanwhile, the world edition of God words has been reduced through three phases:

First, the phase of *Prophetic Discourse* which took place during the period of revelation (610-632 H). In this phase, the Qur'an still took form in oral tradition and was transmitted orally. The second phase is the standardization of the Qur'an in a *Closed Official Corpus* (12-324 AH / 632-936 AD). The third phase took place during the time of orthodoxy (324 AH / 936 AD). According to Arkoun, in period of prophetic discourse, the Qur'an is more sacred, more authentic, and more reliable than its position in written form. Therefore, the Qur'an was open to all meanings when it was in the oral form. Arkoun believes that the status of the Qur'an in its writing form has been reduced from the a Revealed Book (*al-Kitab al-Muha*) into a regular book (*al-kitab al-'adi*). Arkoun insisted that *Uthman* manuscripts do not

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Malayin), 164-168 and 300. This idea is reinforced by the Caliph al-Ma'mun (d. 218 AH) by interpreting the chapter of al-Buruj: 21-22 (*In fact, he is a noble Qur'an, which is stored in the lawḥ maḥfuz*) that the actual words *lawḥ* which preserve the Qur'an implies "*khalq*" (temporal) meaning, because an object is not preserved except with something that is created. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Muluk*, vol. XI, 1125-1131.

[33]In Ahlus Sunnah opinion, the *Kalām Nafsī* which is in God's Essence has acquired its shape in the form words spoken in the world. These words are the exact copy of *Kalām Nafsī* that is in the Essence of God. This principle is also applied to other holy books such as the Torah, the Gospel and the *suḥuf* of Abraham and Moses. Although the heavenly edition of the Qur'an is incarnated in the world edition of the Qur'an, but this incarnation does not change the heavenly edition of the Qur'an to be temporal or created, because this embodiment does not imply the merging of the two.

deserve divine status, but orthodox Muslim exalt this corpus into a status as God's word.[34]

By differentiating the degrees of truth between the three levels of the Qur'an in worldy edition, it seem that Arkoun wants to underline the historicity of al-Ottoman Manuscript and asserts the concept of human and historical text. Here, we can see that he supports the concept the createdness of the Qur'an in Mu'tazila view. According to him, the historicity of the Qur'an actually can be found in Islamic tradition itself, i.e. the Mu'tazila concept of the createdness of the Qur'an. According to Arkoun, this concept shows that the Qur'an as a God's words requires human mediation (*wisaṭah bashariyyah*). By stating that the Qur'an is a creature, it asserts that the Qur'an manifested itself in human languages, namely Arabic, and it is human duty to understand and interpret it. To understand the content of the Qur'an deeply, and to disarm the ideological and theological understanding, an interpreter can't ignore the historical aspect. Therefore, Arkoun said: "*This is extremely important; it refers to many historical facts depending on social and political agents, not on God. Let us elaborate it more clearly*"[35]

Arkoun elaborated more his historical approach in his project called "the anthropology of the past" (*antrubulukiyyah li al-madli*), which involves linguistic and anthropological analysis to the Qur'an, this approach began with archaeological excavations (*al-hafr al-arkiyulujiyyah*) of the meaning of a word, its origin, and genealogy throughout history from the past to the present, and then followed by analyzing the use of this word in the Qur'an itself, while linking it with the socio-political context of seventh century Arabia. The word analysis is expanded by involving the tradition, such as annals or chronicles, collections of hadiths of the Prophet, a biography of the Prophet and the Companions, compendia of Israiliyyat and tradition of Qur'anic interpretation, which discusses the words being studied.[36] The

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[34]Arkoun, *al-Fikr*, 25.

[35]St. Sunardi, "Membaca Qur'an Bersama Mohammed Arkoun", in *Membaca Qur'an Bersama Mohammed Arkoun*, ed. Johan Hendrik Meuleman (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2012), 92.

[36]Arkoun, *al-Fikr*, 52-55.

purpose of this archaeological analysis according to Arkoun, is not to determine the truth or falsity of the narrations, but rather for the deconstructing of social imagination (*social imaginaire*) that have been constructed and shaped by the phenomenon of manuscripts.[37]

The theory of the createdness of the Qur'an can also be found in the thinking Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, one of the Egyptian Muslim thinker. If we compared his thinking with the idea of Fazlur Rahman and Arkoun, we will find that Abu Zayd is more persistent in reviving the rational thinking of Mu'tazila, including their concept of the Qur'anic revelation. In the case of the Qur'an, for example, Abu Zayd criticizes the inconsistency of Muslim attitude—especially Asyarites and Hanbalites—in addressing the status of Jesus Christ and the Qur'an. If they reject the Christian dogma that assumes the existence of a dual nature in Jesus Christ, and insisted only on his human nature, then adamant stance of Muslim in holding the belief of dual character of the Qur'an may be considered as trapped on the same assumption. Furthermore, if in the Christian tradition, the belief in the dual nature of Jesus Christ has led them to the worship of human, then the belief in dual nature of the Qur'an in Islamic tradition has also led to the deification of the text in the form of belief in the eternity of God words.[38]

Therefore, we can see that if Arkoun still recognize the existence of the metaphysical revelation preserved in the *lawḥ mahfūz,* Abu Zayd to some extent rejects the concept of metaphysical being of the Qur'an. According to him, the belief in metaphysical prototype of the Qur'an written in the Preserved Tablet has ignored the dialectical relationship between Qur'anic texts and the cultural reality of Arab society. This dialectical relationship is confirmed by a number of evidences discussed in *'Ulum Qur'an*, such as the study of *asbāb al-nuzūl, nasikh-mansukh, makki-madani,* and so on. In this metaphysical being, the Qur'an was recorded in the Preserved Tablet, and was written in Arabic

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[37]M. Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam Today* (Washington D.C.: George Town University, 1987), 21.

[38]Abu Zaid, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb*, 204-206.

letters whose size is as big as Mount *Qaf*, an imaginary mountain that surrounds the earth.[39]

Additionally, Abu Zayd also said that the belief in metaphysical being of the Qur'an resulted at two implications: *First*, it implicates an excessive Muslim attitude in sanctifying the text and converting the text from a linguistic text to the imaginary text. *Second*, the belief in the eternal written text of the Qur'an in *lawḥ maḥfūẓ* will give rise to the belief that the Qur'an has a depth and a plural meaning, and consequently give rise to the belief among Muslim that the meanings of the Qur'an are beyond human understanding, because the meaning of this interpretation must be in line with the meaning of the *Kalām nafsī*.[40]

On the basis of previous arguments, Abu Zayd fully supported the idea of the createdness of the Qur'an offered by Mu'tazila. According to him, without asserting the createdness of the Qur'an, then it will be a holy book which can't be interrogated by a scientific approach. Therefore, the only way to interpret the Qur'an is to affirm the historicity of this Holy Book. Historicity means that "something happening in a space of time" (*al-ḥuduth fi al-ẓamān*). Following the Mu'tazila belief, Abu Zayd argues that the Qur'an is the Word of God, and therefore is believed to be one of His Actual Attribute (*sifāt af'al*). Every being that manifest from this attribute is created (*muḥdath*), which means that it was created in the span of history. This principle is also applied in the historicity of God's revelation in *Lawḥ maḥfūẓ* edition, which is believed to contain the prototype of the Qur'an. For if it is eternal (*qadīm*), it will be a lot of or two beings that co-exist with Allah. The gradually revealed Qur'an—in a long period—occasions of the revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), and the concept abrogation (*nasakh*), become the evidence of the historicity of this Scripture.[41]

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[39]Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah fi ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* (Casablanca-Beirut: al-Markaz as-Saqafi al-ʿArabī, 2000), 42.

[40]Ibid., 43.

[41]Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Al-*Naṣṣ al-Ṣulṭah, al-Haqīqah: al-Fikr al-Dīni bayna Irādat al-Maʿrifah wa Irādat al-Haymanah* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-ʿArabī, 1995), 71-72.

Although supporting the idea of Mu'tazila, but Abu Zayd underlined that it is not adequate enough to adopt the Mu'tazila doctrine of the Qur'an to build the historical approach to the revealed text. The reason is that the idea of the createdness of the Qur'an is no longer sufficient to develop a scientific awareness of the historical religious texts, because by imitating Mu'tazila perspective, it means that we occupy the same place with the religious thought dominated by dogmatic-sectarian outlook. As a solution, Abu Zayd proposes, besides confirming the createdness of the Qur'an, we have to study the Qur'an with a historical approach which refers to the linguistic analysis as the center of meaning in a civilization.[42]

Based on the previous theological views, Abu Zayd formulates his approach in interpreting the Qur'an, which is to some extent combines the historical and critical approach and is equipped with a variety of methods including the historical and textual interpretation, the theory literature, such as hermeneutics, discourse analysis and semiotics.[43] According to Abu Zayd, the purpose of the interpretation is not to search for the author intended meaning. Because in the case of the Qur'an, the author of the text is metaphysical God and the Qur'anic prototype in *lawḥ maḥfūẓ* is a question beyond the limits of human reason. Therefore, it is not possible to investigate the meaning of the text as the author intended meaning. In other side, Abu Zayd also stated that the text can't convey its own meaning. He also disagrees with the view that the meaning of text is created by the reader *ansich*. In the process of interpretation, the text is not a silence objects that can be taken anywhere by active reader. The relationship between the reader and the text is not an *ikhda'* relationship (text submission to the desire of the reader) on the side of the reader, nor *khuḍu'* (reader submission to the text). The relationship between the two is dialectical (*'alaqah jadaliyyah*).[44]

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[42]Abu Zayd, *Naqd al-Khiṭāb,* 200-202.

[43]Yusuf Rahman, *The Hermeneutical Theory of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd: An Analytical Study of His Method of Interpreting the Qur'an* (Montreal Canada: McGill University, 2001), 147-148.

[44]Ibid., 151.

Abu Zayd argues that understanding the historical significance (*dalālah tārikhiyyah*) of the text is an important preliminary step. He is aware on the historical dimension of the text and historical distance (*al-bu'du al-tārīkhī*) from the contemporary reader, but the contemporary reader can't make the leap to contextualize the text without understanding the original meaning of the text. Only through a diachronic approach, by examining how the first generation understanding the text, the historical meaning of the text can be revealed. But the historical meaning is not the end meaning for Abu Zayd, it must be followed by other step, i.e. finding significance (*magzā*) of the texts for the contemporary context.[45] Therefore, he stressed that the process of contextual interpretation (*al-qirā'ah al-siyaqiyyah*) must be applied on two stages: *First*, restore the meaning to the historical context and cultural meaning (*tārīkhiyat al-dalālah*). *Second*, bring the significance (*magzā*) of the text to the contemporary context. The historical meaning is fixed, while its significance could change depending on the context. Significance (*magzā*) should be based on the historical meaning and are closely related to it.[46]

In Indonesian context, the rational thinking of Mu'tazila has been introduced by Harun Nasution. Through his works, he tried to elaborated Mu'tazila doctrines and analyzed the causes of the decline of Muslim society especially in Indonesia. According to him, the decline of Muslim world is partly due to the dominance of fatalistic theological doctrine of Asharites. Therefore, Harun Nasution directs his most intellectual activity to change that fatalistic-deterministic view by introducing the Mu'tazilas thought which is more rational and dynamic.[47] However, if we further examined his works, he did not offer his personal views about the concept of the createdness of the

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[45]Ibid., 152.

[46]Abu Zaid, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, 230; *Naqd al-Khiṭāb*, 115; *Isykaliyat al-Qirā'ah wa Aliyat al-Ta'wil* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 1994), 6.

[47]See Harun Nasution, "The Mu'tazila and Rational Philosophy", in *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mutazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol,* eds. Richard C. Martin, Mark R. Woodward, and Dwi S. Atmaja (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 191-192.

Qur'an.[48] This tendency seems to be influenced by his awareness that if he exposed this issue, it will evoke the polemics among Indonesian Muslim who largely embraced Asy'arite thought.[49] We can find the idea of the createdness of the Qur'an in later generation after Harun Nasution, among them are M. Amin Abdullah and Ulil Ashar Abdalla.

M. Amin Abdullah in a paper entitled *"Pembaharuan Pemikiran Tafsir al-Qur'an"* (Renewal of Qur'anic Interpretation Thoughts), expressed his support for the Mu'tazila idea of createdness of Qur'an. However, if Mu'tazila built the theory of *khalq al-Qur'ān* to deny the plurality of the Eternal God, Amin Abdullah used the theory to support the historicity of the Qur'an and its causal relationship with the events of revelation. In this article, Amin Abdullah associates the createdness of the Qur'an with the socio-historical factors surrounding it. According to him, the proponents of the eternal Qur'an ignore the causal relationship between the revelation and the socio-cultural-historical context. The revelation was believed as a worldly manifestation of the speech attribute that co-exists with God and God existence is not influenced by the context. Instead, a proponents of *khalq al-Qur'ān* believes that the presence of the Holy Book is not different from God's other creatures. Therefore, the presence of the Qur'an in this world involved the causal relationship between the Qur'an and the events surrounding them. Furthermore, Amin Abdullah questioned.

> "Is the Qur'an revealed as a kind of "God intervention" (so it was created) to the history of mankind in the era of Muhammad PBUH or the Qur'an eternal and ever lasting immortality that is parallel with the attribute of God? In other words, (is) the Qur'an revealed to the earth without having been preceded by natural causes that arise from social-political-economical problems in the Arab society to whom the appeal of the Qur'an was projected at the time? Or the Qur'an is eternal or everlasting so that it's revealed verses during 23-year-old should not

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[48]See for example Harun Nasution, *Teologi Islam: Aliran-aliran Sejarah Analisa Perbandingan* (Jakarta: Penerbit Universitas Indonesia, 1986).

[49]In his works, Harun elaborates theological streams in Islamic Tradition and does not offer a particular view about the nature of the Qur'an. See example Harun Nasution, *Teologi Islam (*1986).

becaused by socio-political and economical events of Arab society at that time?"[50]

It seems that from these two options, Amin Abdullah expressed his support for the second, i.e. the Qur'an is created. He based his opinion on the following two arguments: *First*, the Qur'an was not revealed in a cultural vacuum, but there always be a causal relationship between the revelation and the socio-historical conditions of Arab society at that time. Prophet Muhammad anxiety finding the fragile moral values of *Quraysh* Arab, Persian and Roman society, trade transaction that are not based on moral rules, decreasing of social responsibility sense, all have prompted Muhammad to isolate himself (*taḥannuth*) in the cave of *Hira*. The Muhammad anxiety then was responded by God through the revelation in order to overcome and to treat the social pathology that has penetrated into all aspects of life. Although the social pathologies were in very chronic situation at that time, the Qur'an fixed those values gradually, not at once (*asbāb al-nuzūl*).[51] *Second*, before it was revealed, the Qur'an was preceded by specific events called *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the occasions of revelation). In the contemporary historical approach perspective, the *asbāb al-nuzūl* shows a positive causal relationship between Qur'anic messages or norms and social, economic, political events surrounding them.[52] This historical consciousness gets less attention among Muslim because it is seen to reduce someone's religiosity or to lessen respect to God's will, might, or grace.[53]

Based on the principle of historicity, Amin Abdullah formulate a model of interpretation that he called *al-qirā'ah al-muntijah* (or productive reading), a model of interpretation that

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[50]M. Amin Abdullah, "Pembaharuan Pemikiran terhadap Tafsir Qur'an" in *Islamic Studies di Perguruan Tinggi: Pendekatan Integratif-Interkonektif* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2006), 137-138.

[51]M. Amin Abdullah, "Qur'an dan Tantangan Modernitas: Tinjauan Pergeseran Paradigma Pemahaman Qur'an", in *Falsafah Kalam di Era Postmodernisme* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1995), 229.

[52]M. Amin Abdullah: "Bedakan Antara Agama dan Pemikiran Keagamaan!" in http://islamlib.com/id/artikel/bedakan-antara-agama-dan-pemikiran-keagamaan/, accessed in 1st January 2016.

[53]Amin Abdullah, "Pembaharuan, 138.

further highlight the need to produce new meanings in accordance with the challenge of socio-economical changes and development.[54] This is the only way that always considers the aspect of historicity (*tārikhiyyah*), whether it is social, cultural, economic, or politics. By using Alfin Toffler paradigm, he asserts that there has been a change in the transition process from an agrarian to industrial and information era. The aspects of these changes need to be considered when someone interprets the scriptures. To clarify the concept of this productive reading, Amin Abdullah confronted that concept diametrically with the concept of *al-qirā'ah al-mutakarrirah* (or repetitive reading), which is a model of interpretation that further accentuate the repetition of classical Islamic intellectual tradition considered as a sacred. The Golden Islamic Age was idealized in such a way, so it was read back exactly as it is and has to be applied in the present era. If the readings to an idealized past which is functioned in the present era, it means that the reading has neglected aspect of the historicity of the text.[55]

Other Muslim thinker who adhere the idea of *khalq al-Qur'ān* is Ulil Abshar Abdalla. The idea of the createdness of the Qur'an can be found in his criticism to the theory of metaphysical existence of the Qur'an in *Lawḥ maḥfūz*. According to him, although inferred from the Qur'anic statements itself, but this theory ignores the historical aspects of the Qur'an. This theory assumes as if the Qur'an had been completed as a Book or as a Canon, in a sacred place beyond human history. As a supra-historical truth, the Qur'an is believed to get beyond time and place, its perfection is final. Such belief contradicts the historical facts of the gradual character of revelation. If the Qur'an was completed in its editorial content and in the Preserved Tablet, why it was not revealed at once (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*)? Besides, if the Qur'an had been completed before it's revealed to the Prophet, why there are legal provisions that are gradual? Why there would be *nasakh* or amendment and deletion

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[54]Ibid., 139.

[55]Amin Abdullah, "Bedakan Antara Agama, accessed in 1st January 2016.

of some verses by another verse (if we accept the validity of the abrogation theory in the Qur'an)?[56]

According to Abshar Abdalla, this attitude was rooted in an ultra-theocentric theological beliefs which was convinced that God spoke directly to people via the Prophet, that the Word of God is superior to the human, and that the Word of God has to be understood in literal sense as far as there is no reasons to get out from literal meaning. Therefore, the more literal Muslim understands the Word of God, the closer he/she is to His will. The more liberal person interprets the Qur'an, the farther he or she is from His will. The text is a kind of axis where the entire action of the faithful ranges. The closer to the center of the axis, is the closer to the essence of religion, the further a person from the axis, the further he or she is from the essence of religion. The closeness and distance in this case is measured solely through the literal meaning of the text.[57]

Abshar Abdalla argues that this *ultra-theocentric weltanschauung* has to be changed. Text and context are two things that presuppose the existence of each other. The presence of the text can't be detached from the context and human role in shaping that context. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate an alternative to the theological *weltanschauung* that provides a more equitable place and fairly role for the human agency in interpreting the text. This role can be extracted from the bright, optimistic and progressive Islamic conception about the human's role, i.e. the God caliph (Qs. Al-Baqarah/2:30) and honorable being (*takrim*) (Qs. Al-Isrā'/17:70). Honoring the human being means the recognition of the complexity of human

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[56]Quoted from the article presented by Ulil Abshar Abdalla at Paramadina, February 8th, 2003. This article was published in "Menghindari Bibliolatri Tentang Pentingnya Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam," in http://islamlib.com/id/artikel/tentang-pentingnya-menyegarkan-kembali-pemahaman-islam/, and was published for the second and third time in Zuhairi Misrawi, *Menggugat Tradisi: Pergulatan Pemikiran Anak Muda NU* (Jakarta, Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2004), and Abd Moqsith Ghazali, Luthfiasy-Syaukani and Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, *Metodologi Studi Qur'an* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2009). The data used in this paper refers to the book Metodologi Studi Qur'an, 51.

[57]Ibid., 110.

experience that can't be subjugated to the text which is believed as 'universal'. The *'ultra-theocentric'* theology led to the superiority of the text, thus resulting in alienating the human being from their own experience, and was instructed simply to submit to the sacred text that is believed to overcome and abstract the whole concrete human experience.[58]

Abshar Abdalla then proposed the concept of revelation that he thinks more adequate. Borrowing a term of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, revelation is a process of communication '*amaliyah ittisal*', which presupposes the existence of two parties: Allah who sends the message and the Prophet who receives the message. Because the Prophet was not a person who is isolated from the context, but a person who lives in a concrete community of 'meaning', then in fact revelations is not just a row of dead text, but the living text which lives in a real context.[59]Abshar Abdalla then proposes the concept of' living revelation', namely the revelation that consists of text and its context at once. The text that is read in the Qur'an today is part of a revelation which must be equipped with a concrete understanding of the context of the revelation when it was revealed. Studies on the context of the revelation have been done by Arkoun, who later termed the context with *tajribah al-Medina* or Medina experience.[60]

The implications for the interpretation of the Qur'an

From the discussion on the nature of the Qur'an, we can infer some "continuity and change" elements in Islamic thought. The continuing element can be concluded in the awareness of the proponents of the createdness of the Qur'an in shaping the mutual relationship between text and the reality addressed. In classical Islamic theology, this awareness appeared in a number of arguments which rejects the claims of the eternal Qur'an. The belief of eternity of the Qur'an would presuppose the existence of the text in eternal time (*azali*) which precedes the reality addressed. This belief will lead to the next consequences: an

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[58]Ibid., 112.
[59]Ibid., 119-120.
[60]Ibid., 120.

appealing to nonexistent addressee or 'zero speech' (*khiṭab al-ma'dum*); a cancellation of the abrogation concept, and the inevitable falsity of the news of the past before they occurred and also in the future after their occurrence. Whereas in contemporary discourse, awareness of the mutual relationship between text and reality has given rise to the theory of the historicity of the revelation which means that the revelation was always presupposes the existence of reality. The relationship between the two is the dialectical and mutual relationship.

In the other side, the changing element of the classical and contemporary thought lies on the concept of createdness of the Qur'an. In classical theology, the createdness of the Qur'an is associated with the principles of oneness (*Tawḥīd*) and purification (*tanzīh*), which disclaim any sorts of similarity between God and His creatures. Meanwhile, in contemporary thought, the doctrine of createdness is associated with importance of the human reality as the addressee of text in interpreting religious texts. Both of these views have the same implications in interpreting the Qur'anic text, namely the courage to across the literal meaning of the text. In the classical exegesis tradition, the courage to across the literal meaning is applied by Mu'tazilas especially on anthropomorphism verses, while beyond theological issues, such as criminal law (*aḥkām*) and social-human interaction (*muʿāmalat*), both Mu'tazila and Ashairites applied the same textual approach to the Qur'an. While in the contemporary thinking, the courage to across the literal meaning is not only applied on the anthropomorphism verses *an sich*, but also on ethico-legal verses that contains criminal and civic legislation and social relations between human being. The argument of historicity is used to prove that a number of provisions stated in the Qur'an—as the Islamic criminal and civil law, the system of inheritance and other legal provisions are considered as no longer relevant to be applied in the present time. What we have to apply concerning these provisions is the religio-ethical spirit or moral ideal that underlies these provisions, not these textual provisions.

The theory of historicity offered by contemporary Muslim thinkers at least can provide a solution for the problem of the

conventional methods of interpretation. In classical tradition, ultra-theocentric beliefs in the Qur'an which emphasizes metaphysical origins of the scripture gave birth to the view that the Ottoman manuscript is an exact copy of Qur'an preserved in *lawḥ maḥfūẓ* (*Umm al-Kitāb*). This world view gave birth to ultra-textual approach to the Qur'an, because it is assumed that the will of God is manifested itself in Ottoman manuscripts, and the only way to understand God's will is to interpret the manuscripts textually. The closer an interpreter to textual words of a verse, the closer his interpretation is to the truth. The outcomes of this textual approach is the unavailability of methodological tools which is capable for providing a reasonable role to 'the per formative function of audiences' and the agency of human in producing the meaning of the text",[61] and thus will give great consideration to the changing need of Muslim life.[62]

On the other hand, the application of the theory of the historicity becomes the object of criticism from a number of Muslim thinkers. The excessive application of the theory of historicity tends to ignore the reality of metaphysical origins of the Qur'an. This perspective will put the Qur'an only as a historical phenomenon that was born in a particular historical matrix and can be changed at any time in line with the change of history. The impact of this perspective is that all value concepts contained in the Qur'an whether it is theological-ritual-normative doctrines or ethic-legal laws will be no definite and permanent status, for all these concepts were revealed in historical matrix of Arab societies at 7th century which were very different from the historical matrix of Muslim societies today. Consequently, no moral values are permanent in the Qur'an that can behold down by Muslim. In other words, the excessive

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[61]See M. Amin Abdullah, "Kata Pengantar", *Hermeneutika Pembebasan*, ed. Ilham B. Saenong (Jakarta: Teraju, 2002).

[62]See Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Toward a Contemporary Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 10.

historicity will create an ultra-relativist view that will eventually end in nihilism.[63]

Conclusion

The polemics on the nature of the Qur'an whether it is eternal or temporal arises from theological encounter between Muslim and their Christian counterpart in defining the status of the Quran *vis a vis* Jesus Christ. The problem arises because Muslim believe in the createdness of Jesus Christ, who is stated as the word of God in some Qur'anic verses, and if they are consistent with this belief, they should believe in the createdness of the Qur'an which is also stated as *Kalām* Allah either. In facing this question, at least there are two dominant views in the history of Islamic theology. *First*, it is the belief in the eternity of the Qur'an led by the Hanbilites and Asharites. *Second*, it is the belief in the createdness of the Qur'an promoted by the Mu'tazila. Both views arise from their differences in interpreting the narrated attributes (*sifāt khabariyyah*) of God stated in the Qur'an, especially the speech attribute. The first group of theologians believes in the existence of the independent attribute which is inherent in and different from the Essence of God. Therefore, they characterize the speech attribute as part of the Essence of God. While the second group rejects the existence of any eternal word inherent in or different from the Essence of God and categorize the speech attribute as part of the God's actual attribute.

The two perspectives have implications for the approach used in the interpretation of the Qur'an. The Muslim theologians who believe in the eternity of the Qur'an is likely to interpret the texts with textual approach. They hold the principle "the closer the interpretation to the textual words of the Qur'an,

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[63]Some critics to the theory of historicity has been offered by contemporary Muslim thinkers as follows: Muhammad Imārah, *Qirā'ah an-Naṣṣ al-Dīnī bayn al-Ta'wīl al-Garbī wa al-Ta'wīl al-Islāmī* (Kairo: Dār al-Salām li at-Tibā'ah wa al-Tawzi' wa al-Tarjamah, 2012); *al-Tafsīr al-Marksi li al-Islām* (Cairo: Dār al-Shuruq, 2002). Some Indonesian Muslim thinkers also criticized this theory, see Fahmi Salim, *Kritik terhadap Studi al-Quran Kaum Liberal* (Jakarta: GIP, 2010); and Henri Shalahuddin, *Qur'an Dihujat* (Jakarta: Al-Qalam, 2007).

the closer to the correct interpretation." While Mu'tazila theologians who embrace the createdness of the Qur'an tend to interpret metaphorically the literal meaning of texts, especially the texts that indicates the similarity between God and His creatures in the case of classical theological; or to search religio-ethical spirit behind the provisions of some Qur'anic legislation in the case of contemporary Muslim thinkers. *Wa al-Lāh a'lām bi al-ṣawāb*.

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