
Theorizing About the Divine Meaning in the Holy Books: A Case Study of the Problematic Interpretation of the Forms of *Az-Zann* in the Qur'an (2)

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ABSTRACT: *The study is the second part of the analysis of the forms of *Az-Zann* (i.e., conjecture) in the Qur'an. In part one, the study covers the analysis of the salient meaning of 'conjecture' under the heading of "A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Traditionalist-Modernist Controversy Over the Renewal of Religious Discourse: A Case Study of the Forms of "Az-Zann" in the Qur'an (1)." It deals with the salient meaning which is admitted once reading the forms of conjecture concluding that the fifty cases under analysis have no relation with relativism of belief. Rather, they have been used for developing a diversity of discourses such as the futility of the unbelievers' thought, the psychology of human nature, and the limited human knowledge. The present paper tackles the most problematic interpretive cases of the forms of conjecture. It attempts to formulate a theory on the divine meaning that explains why the forms of conjecture are used in these contexts and what are their true meanings. In addition to the situational aspects of the speaker, addressee, place, and time of the utterance, there is the principle of holiness that regulates God-Man relationship, on one hand, and Man-Man relationship, on the other hand. Primarily, this principle encompasses many maxims which could not be counted. It is assumed that the believers share the basics of the principle of holiness in a way that helps in decoding the subtle shades of meanings of the divine language. Furthermore, it enables the speaker to encode her/his message in a way that fits the Glory of God. So, the speaker should select his words carefully when he speaks about God aiming at showing sacrosanctity to Him and placing emphasis upon the human nature. When God speaks to man, He speaks whatever He wants in a language that fits his glory. In the same vein, when a man comes to interpret God's message, he should be familiar with the features of glorification. Otherwise, the interpreter fails in grasping the intended meaning in a way that results in delivering an inappropriate message. The study concludes that the exegetes of the Qur'an do not grasp the basics of the divine meaning theory regarding the forms of *Az-Zann*. Therefore, they do not manage in interpreting the meanings of these forms. Their interpretations sound injudicious because they imply imposition upon God. Similarly, modernists fail in attaining the authentic meaning providing an interpretation that could undermine faith by opening the door for relative truth.*

KEYWORDS: divine meaning, exegetes, modernists, pragma-semantic, problematic interpretation, theorizing

INTRODUCTION

The study tackles the problematic interpretation of the forms of *Az-Zann* with a view to solving the controversy between traditionalists and modernists. To solve these issues, the present paper

theorizes about the divine meaning. Knowing the basics of the divine meaning helps in showing the features of God-Man holy relationship and Man-Man relationship. Also, they help in arriving at the authentic meaning of the forms under analysis. It aims at revealing whether the earlier exegetes' interpretations are true or not. In addition, it evaluates the interpretations given by modernists regarding the meaning of relative truth. The study uses a complementary pragma-semantic approach in the process of analysis concluding that the earlier exegetes and modernists have gone away regarding the interpretation of the forms of conjecture in the Qur'an. The former assumes that conjecture is used instead of certainty which is in contradiction with the true creed of absolute faith. Moreover, the interpretation of conjecture in terms of certainty implies impoliteness since it conveys imposition upon God which is in contradiction with the principle of holiness. Also, the latter's interpretation undermines faith because the interpretation of conjecture in terms of relative truth is at variance with the creed of absolute faith.

Objectives of the Study

In addition to the objectives of the study in part one, there are more general and specific goals of the analysis of the problematic interpretation of the cases at hand. The study aims at providing answers for the questions below:

- a. Is there any systematic meaning shift from "doubt" into "certitude" as the earlier exegetes claim?
- b. Is there any form of *Az-Zann* that means 'doubting' in faith as modernists assume?
- c. What are the basics of the divine meaning theory?
- d. Is it true that the linguistic forms of *Az-Zann* mean "doubt/incertitude" whenever they are attributed to the unbelievers? And is it true that they mean "certitude" whenever they are attributed to the believers?

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In the first paper entitled 'A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Traditionalist-Modernist Controversy Over the Renewal of Religious Discourse: A Case Study of the Salient Meaning of the Forms of "*Az-Zann*" in the Qur'an (1)', the study checks the default interpretation that comes into mind once reading the forms of conjecture. It is an interpretation which is determined at the literal level away from the context according to Jaszczolt (2005, p.6). When it comes to the analysis of the present ninety cases, they represent a problematic interpretation for the exegetes, modernists, and even an ordinary reader may find it difficult to interpret them. Herein lies the problem that the process of analysis aims at solving. It is a process that consists of two stages: (a) the stage of checking the salient meaning using the heuristic strategy for testing the meaning. As leech (1983, p. 41) states 'if a test fails, a new hypothesis is formed. This hypothesis process is cyclically repeated until a solution is arrived at. It starts with spotting the problem with the interpretation given by the earlier scholars or modernists, if any. The second step is the rejection of this interpretation. The third step is searching for a new interpretation that goes in line with the authentic religious discourse. Finally, finding a new interpretation, and checking that it goes in line with the established religious discourse. Therefore, the process of interpretation is a matter of guesswork as Leech (p. 30) points out in his theory of the hypothesis formation. To apply this strategy in a proper way, the process of analysis moves on from the literal meaning to the utterance meaning in which the situational

aspects are considered. Therefore, to arrive at an authentic interpretation of the problematic forms of conjecture, the study develops the theory of divine meaning which represents the second stage. It digs for the subtle shades of meaning that these forms do have. Arriving at the true meanings requires being familiar with the basics of the background knowledge of the principle of holiness that represent an intrinsic feature of the divine language. The believers share that background knowledge which is stored in their minds. So, having any communicative interaction about any matter that belongs to God triggers specific words about the principle of holiness.

Data of the Study

The primary data is the nineteen forms of *Az-Zann* in the Qur'an. They are divided into three groups: (a) Seven cases that are attributed to the unbelievers. They are realized by the infinitive form in two cases and the verbal process in five cases. (b) Seven cases that are attributed to the believers. (c) Five cases that are attributed to the prophets. In addition, there are the four exegetic interpretations of the Qur'an: al-Wahidy (1995), an-Nasafy (1998), ibn Kathīr (2001), and at-Tabary (2000).

Contextual Association and Situational Aspects of the Study

To arrive at the true meaning of the controversial forms of *Az-Zann*, the situational elements of time, place, participants of the utterance are taken into consideration. For a start, to decipher the meaning of the formal units of *Az-Zann*, it is imperative to identify the intrinsic features of determinacy in the Qur'an. These features function as a proof against which the precise meaning of the data under analysis is checked. Furthermore, identifying the meanings of these units requires the analysis of the linguistic context such as "*al-liqā*" (i.e., meeting) and "*ar-rajā*" (i.e., hope). Yule (2006, p. 114) states that the surrounding co-text plays a major role in identifying the proper meaning of the word. In the lines below, there is an overview on the definition of *Az-Zann*, *al-Qatṣyyah*, its main features, then there is a detailed contextual analysis of the cases at hand. Furthermore, the contextual association is used in the analysis of the data. By the term 'contextual association', I mean investigating the surrounding words in the whole text under analysis. Therefore, it is necessary to trace the meanings of these forms in the whole Qur'anic text to reach an authentic interpretation. Moreover, the process of analysis requires investigating the meaning of the surrounding words such as '*al-liqā*' in the Qur'an which, in turn, leads to examine the meaning of the two processes "*raja*" (i.e., hope) and '*anthara*' (i.e., warn) in the Qur'an as illustrated in the process of analysis.

Faith and al-Qatṣyyah (Determinacy): Definition and Some Features

Lexically, "*al-qatṣyyah*" is derived from the verb "*qataṣa*" which conveys the meaning of decisiveness. According to Masḥūd (1992, p. 638), "*qataṣa fil-qawl taṣny al-jazm*" i.e., the condition of being defined and fixed. In *ṣilm al-Usūl* (The Science of the Principles of Jurisprudence) *al-qatṣyyah* means "*al-ḥukm al-qalby al-jāzim*" i.e., a firm and well-defined judgement' as stated by al-Khun (2007, p.58). The Qur'anic text abounds with many verses which are decisive and definite with respect to absolute faith. These verses convey the discourse of determinacy. They indicate that faith in God and the hereafter is firmly established and fixed. Above all else, they indicate that absolute truth is an intrinsic property of faith so there is no room for relative truth. Accordingly, Muslims believe firmly in the Oneness of God

and the hereafter. The evidence against which the meaning of the forms of conjecture is tested and checked consists of two bare facts: The Oneness of God and the certitude of faith.

The Discourse of the Oneness of God

The Qur'an abounds with many verses that convey the discourse of the Oneness of God such as the one that reads: (2:163) "وَالْهَيْكُمُ إِلَهُ وَاحِدٌ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ". [... And your Illāh is (God) is one Illāh (God-Allah), Lā ilāha illa Huwa (there is none who has the right to be worshipped but He), the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful]. (*al-Baqarah* 2:163). Here is another verse that emphasizes the discourse of Oneness: (2:255) ... اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ. [Allāh (God-Allah), Lā ilāha illa Huwa (none has the right to be worshipped but He), AL-Hayyul-Qayyūm (the Ever Living, the One who sustains and protects all that exists)]. (*al-Baqarah* 2:255). A third verse reads: (112:1) قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ. [Say (O Muhammad): He is Allah, the One]. (*al-Ikhlāṣ* 112:1).

Belief in God: Absolute Truth

The Qur'an abounds with the verses that places emphasis on the principle of absolute truth as the verse that reads: (2:4) وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ. [And who believe in (the Qur'an and the Sunnah) which has been sent down (revealed) to you (Muhammad) and in that which was sent down before you [Torah and Gospel] and they believe with certainty in the hereafter]. (*al-Baqarah* 2:4).

Interestingly, absolute truth is realized by verbs of certitude in the Qur'an. When Allah gives signs of His Oneness, He instructs the believers to have an absolute belief in Him. There are many verses of which are the one that reads: (45:4) وَفِي خَلْقِكُمْ وَمَا يَبُتُّ مِنْ دَابَّةٍ آيَاتٌ لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ. [And in your creation, and what He scattered (through the earth) of moving (living) creatures are signs for people who have faith with certainty]. (*al-Jāthiyah* 45:4).

al-Liqā: Lexical Definition

By and large, "al-liqā" has received many interpretations by the exegetes of the Qur'an. The nominal form "liqā" is derived from the root verb "l-q-y". It has been mentioned in the Qur'an about twenty-five times in the nominal form and seven times in the present participle form. Also, it has been used in the verbal form about thirty times. So, the total number of the root "l-q-y" is mentioned about sixty-two times. Some forms convey the meaning of the reality of the existence of God. The other cases convey the meaning of receiving God's reward and meeting Him in the hereafter. ẓumar (2008, p. 2033) states that the expression "liqā 'Allāhi" means 'meeting God'. It is the reality in which the believer believes and which the unbeliever denies. Therefore, it is a reward for believers and a punishment for non-believers who deny the existence of God and the hereafter. The lexical form "liqā" in the genitive case for nouns is mentioned seventeen times in the Qur'an. For example, it is used for nouns such as 'liqā 'i rabbihim' (i.e., meeting their Lord) and 'liqā 'Illāh' (i.e., meeting God). Additionally, it is used in the genitive case for pronouns about seven times such as "liqā'ih" (i.e., meeting Him) and "liqā'inā" (i.e., Our meeting). Moreover, the active participle "mulaqū" (i.e., they are going to meet their Lord) is mentioned seven times. Sometimes, the term "liqā" (i.e., meeting) stands alone by itself. Other times, it is used in the genitive form for pronouns three times. The form "at-talāq" is mentioned one time. Thus, 'liqā 'Illāh' means meeting God in the hereafter. It stands for God's reward for the believers and His punishment for the unbelievers. This meaning is supported by the two verbal processes "yarjū" (i.e., hope) and "yunthir"

(i.e., warn). The nominal form “*al-liqā*” is used with the verbal process “*yarjū*” in different situations. It has been used in three situations in which the addressees are the believers, the nonbelievers, and both believers and non-believers. The present study interprets “*al-liqā*” in terms of reception and reward in the case of the believers who wait for it too long while it conveys the meaning of meeting and punishment in the case of the unbelievers who deny this reality their whole life.

ar-Rajā: Lexical Definition

The nominal form “*ar-Rajā*” means ‘wishing for something which is possible to attain in the future’. The verbal process ‘*yarjū*’ is a transitive verb that requires a direct object. According to Reda (1985, pp. 559-60), the verb “*raja*” (i.e., hope) means “*ṭamaṣa fī ḥuṣūli mā fihī masarrah*” i.e., hoping and looking for a pleasing future event”. The negative form “*ma rajāhū wala irtajāhū*” (i.e., s/he does not hope for something) i.e., “*taṣny ma khafahū wala iktaratha lahū*” (i.e., s/he is indifferent to something). Therefore, “*ar-rajā*” is used for anticipating “*liqā*’ Allah” (i.e., meeting God) which is the highest reward for the believers. For instance, the verbal process “*yarjū*” is used in the affirmative mode as in the verse that reads: *فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا*. (110:18). [So, whoever hopes for the Meeting with his Lord, let him work righteousness and associate none as a partner in the worship of his Lord]. (*al-Kahf* 18: 110).

The verbal process “*yarjū*” means anticipating God’s meeting. According to the exegetes of the Qur’an, “*yarjū*” means hoping for God’s reward. ash-Shaṣṣrāwy (1991, p. 9014) states that the verse presents that meeting and seeing God are the believers’ hope and anticipation. The believers are not looking for the Paradise, but they are anticipating that they can see God. Contrary to this, the unbelievers deny the existence of God, so they do not anticipate/hope for meeting God. They were indifferent to the meeting of God showing no feelings of fear. Being so, they do not hope for it as the verse tells: *إِنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا وَرَضُوا بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاطْمَأَنَّنُوا بِهَا*. (10:7). [Verily, those who hope not for their meeting with Us, but are pleased and satisfied with the life of the present world, those who are heedless of Our Ayat (proofs, evidence, verses, lessons, revelations, etc.)]. (*Yūnus* 10: 7).

In his rhetorical question for his readership ‘why the unbelievers were indifferent to God’s meeting?!’, ash-Shaṣṣrāwy (1991, p. 5750) states that they did not hope for such a day because they did not do good deeds that made them up for receiving the divine reward.

Participants’ Identity and Time of Attribution

One of the steps of analysing the text is getting familiar with the identity of the participants to whom the process of conjecture is attributed. The second step is considering the time of attribution. The analysis of the fifty cases in the first paper proves that neither the time nor the identity of the participants poses a problem for the exegetes. They are only used in the process of checking the meaning. However, the analysis of the ninety cases at hand poses a problem for the exegetes when the time of attribution to the unbeliever is the hereafter. As for the believers, the attribution of conjecture to the believers proves more problematic whether the time of attribution is the worldly life or the hereafter. Under the pragmatic meaning, the infinitive form is used in the context of unbelief in two cases. The verbal process “*zanna*” has the illocutionary functions in seventeen cases. Five cases are attributed to the unbelievers and

twelve cases are attributed to the believers if the verse (2: 230) in chapter two is categorized under this group. So, the total number of the cases is nineteen cases. The lines below provide an evaluation of the earlier exegetes' interpretations of the forms. Afterwards, a detailed account is given for the pragmatic functions which these cases do have considering the identity of the participants. Indeed, it plays a major role in identifying the intended meaning.

The Pragmatic Aspects of the Divine Meaning

It is taken for granted that there are situations in which the salient meaning is admitted. But there are other situations in which such default interpretations do not work as the cases at hand. If so, a pragmatic interpretation is required. The exegetes do not admit the salient meaning of conjecture assuming that it is at variance with the true creed of the absolute truth. This drives them to find a way out for such a problematic issue. They make a systematic meaning shift from doubt into certainty whenever they face the form of *Az-Zann*. On the contrary, modernists admit the default interpretation postulating their hypotheses of the epistemic relativism. According to their interpretation, there is no absolute fact regarding faith. The misinterpretation of that kind is a result of failing to grasp the pragmatic aspects of the divine meaning. Thus, the lines below deal with these cases aiming at arriving at an authentic interpretation. First, there is an analysis of the cases which are attributed to the unbelievers. Second, there is the analysis of the cases which are attributed to the Prophets and believers.

Unbelievers: Irony

The forms of *Az-Zann* receive a default interpretation in sixteen cases which report the stance of the unbelievers in their worldly life. The Qur'an reports their frequent denial of the existence of God and the hereafter. It rebukes them for that type of thinking. In addition to the linguistic aspects of the face-value meaning, there are other pragmatic aspects which are realized by the process 'zanna'. These cases depict vividly the state of the unbelievers in the hereafter.

Irony

The default interpretation cannot be admitted in the verse below. If so, a pragmatic meaning should be arrived at. One of the pragmatic meanings is the ironical one which means invoking an absent or a hidden sense according to Colebrook (2004, p. 3). Unlike the traditional definition of irony, he [Colebrook] states that irony is not a matter of saying something and intending the opposite. However, it aims at achieving a moral meaning as in the case under analysis. It has the function of saying that it is not of ethics to deny the Oneness of God on the pretext of doubts. Moreover, this type of irony has a pedagogical function for the unbelievers now. It vividly depicts a future event for the unbelievers in the hereafter in a way that prompts them to appeal to reason when it comes to faith before it is too late. This type of irony is called Socratic irony by which Colebrook (p. 26) means that it is not a matter of saying the opposite but suggesting another moral meaning. Moreover, it is linked to ethical pedagogy because Socrates does not offer another meaning; rather he prompts his interlocutors to ask for themselves what the speaker does mean. Thereby, this style of speech leads to reasoned rather than received definitions. Accordingly, the use of the form of 'conjecture' in the Qur'anic discourse has a pedagogical function. It aims at switching the unbelievers' mindset into what benefits them in their earthly life as well as their life in the hereafter. Furthermore, ironical structures aim at reshaping the unbelievers' cognition. They prove the truth that belief in the Oneness of God is the only reality and that there is nothing else behind this bare fact.

Dramatic Irony

Dramatic irony applies to the Pharaoh-Moses case. After a long argument with Moses, the Pharaoh accuses Moses of sorcery. The verse reports the Pharaoh's words as saying I think that you, Moses, are bewitched. It reads: (17:101) إِنْ يَظُنُّكَ يَا مُوسَىٰ مَسْحُورًا. [..., then Fir'aun (Pharaoh) said to him: "O Musa (Moses)! I think you are indeed bewitched]. (*al-Isrā* 17:101). The exegetes do not recognize the illocutionary function of the mental process 'conjecture' in the verse. Their interpretation only reflects the literal meaning of conjecture (al-Wahidy, 1995, p. 650, at-Tabary, 2000, p. 108, an-Nasafy, 1998, p. 281, & ibn Kathīr, 2000, p. 89). So, their explanation is rejected, and a new interpretation is given. The Pharaoh is held in contempt by both his audience and the present readership of the Qur'an since there is incongruity between what he claims on one hand, and what he speaks, on the other hand. Being unaware of what he says proves the falsehood of claiming himself as god. The use of such lexeme functions as a dramatic irony. Hearing him saying so, the listeners ridicule him and make contemptuous of him. How can he claim himself as god and say, 'I think' that Moses is bewitched?! The literal meaning proves his human limited knowledge that he is not god. Therefore, the mention of the verbal process has the illocutionary function of contemning and ridiculing the Pharaoh for his unawareness of the state of Moses.

Verbal and Situational Irony

The use of the verbal process 'zanna' in the cases below represents a different type of irony. It could be interpreted in two ways: literally and pragmatically. The literal interpretation conveys the meaning of dreadfulness and shock when the unbeliever faces death. However, to interpret the verse, the exegete must put in mind the background of the unbeliever's stance in his earthly life regarding faith. Also, it could be interpreted in terms of irony that the use of the item of conjecture brings into mind the unbeliever's repetition of the same item. The use of this lexical unit constitutes their argument which they repeated all their life. So, it has the rhetorical anecdote of mocking the unbeliever as if it says, 'what is about your 'thinking' of naturalism which you adopt in your worldly life?' Is it true now? These contextual elements should be taken into consideration at interpreting the cases below. The first verse reads: وَظَنَّ أَنَّهُ الْفِرَاقُ. (75:28). [And he (the dying person) will conclude that it was (the time) of parting (death). (*al-Qiyāmah* 75:28).

On facing death, the unbeliever realizes with certitude the reality which he has denied before. Here are two interpretations: (a) The salient interpretation of being filled with overwhelming shock of what he sees. (b) The ironical function that the mental process of 'conjecture' reminds the dying person of his denial of the reality of the hereafter. Intertextually, the unbeliever uses frequently the form of 'conjecture' to express his views regarding the hereafter. Therefore, the same word is used as a means to mock him for his denial of the hereafter. On the contrary, the exegetes interpret the form of conjecture in terms of 'certitude' (al-Wahidy, p. 1155, and an-Nasafy, p. 573, at-Tabary, p. 515). Moreover, at-Tabary's interpretation wavers between 'conjecture' and 'certainty'. To endorse his interpretation of certainty, he adopts the received style of interpretation. So, he quotes Qatada, one of the great followers of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH), as saying that 'zanna' means 'certainty'. Endorsing the meaning of doubt, at-Tabary quotes ibn Zayd, one of the early interpreters of the Qur'an, that "zanna" means 'doubt'. As for ibn Kathīr (p. 201, 14), he does not give an interpretation of the form of conjecture. Mostly, whenever ibn Kathīr finds it problematic, he adopts an evasive approach

leaving the item out without explanation. The third case reads: (75:25) *تَظُنُّ أَنْ يُفْعَلَ بِهَا فَاقِرَةٌ*. [Thinking that some calamity is about to fall on them]. (*al-Qiyāmah* 75: 25).

The verse gives a vivid report of the tragic end that await the unbelievers in the hereafter. The use of the mental process ‘*tazunnū*’ is a means of flashforward for the unbelievers now. It depicts the gloomy destiny that awaits anyone who does not believe in God. Therefore, it is an ironic remark conveying that there is an incongruity between what is said and what actually is. It aims at mocking him for the lack of ethics when he denies the reality of the existence of God. Unlike the ordinary style of irony, the ironical structure in the verse represents a different style depending on the device of intertextuality. Allen (2000, p.1) states that ‘intertextuality’ is a process of moving between texts in a way that makes the text becomes intertext. Indeed, the use of the mental process ‘*tazunnū*’ (i.e., conjecture) brings into the reader’s mind the unbeliever’s frequent repetition of the same item for denying the hereafter. Thus, it has the rhetorical function of mocking him for his linguistic behaviour because he does not expect such a tragic end. In addition to the rhetorical function of irony, it keeps the principle of quality by telling the truth and upholding the interpersonal principle of politeness.

Once looking at the form of ‘*Az-Zann*’, the reader has two interlinked images of the unbeliever’s repetition of the lexeme of conjecture in the worldly life and the reality of facing the Fire in the hereafter which he denies. Having the two images in mind, the reader knows that the use of the mental process ‘conjecture’ aims at rebuking him for the stance he maintained in the worldly life. Therefore, such a style of speech upholds the principle of politeness and quantity by telling the truth. Telling the truth depends on the remote level of the image of reality while the principle of politeness depends on indirectness. To put it in a nutshell, the ironical structure consists of three main elements: (a) the verbal irony that brings into mind the unbeliever’s words in the earthly life, (b) the situational irony which takes the form of tragic irony that the unbeliever does not expect the bad end, and (c) the reality of the situation against which the two previous elements are checked.

The question raised is ‘do the exegetes manage in reflecting these images?’ On one hand, al-Wahidy (p. 1156), at-Tabary (p. 511), and ibn Kathīr (p. 200) interpret the verbal process ‘*zanna*’ in terms of ‘certainty’ and ‘knowledge’. On the other hand, an-Nasafy (p. 573) interprets it literally giving the meaning of expectation without giving any explanation for the ironical function. They state that the use of ‘conjecture’ refers to the bad end which they will face. The same analysis applies to the verse that reads: *وَرَأَى الْمُجْرِمُونَ النَّارَ فَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ مُوَاقِعُوهَا وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُمْ مَوْاقِعُوهَا وَلَمْ يَجِدُوا عَنْهَا مَصْرِفًا*. (18:53). [And the mujrimun (criminals, polytheists, sinners) shall see the Fire and apprehend that they have to fall therein. And they will find no way of escape from there]. (*al-Kahf* 18: 53).

Again, al-Wahidy (p. 665), an-Nasafy (p. 306), ibn Kathīr (p. 53), and at-Tabary (p. 299) interpret ‘conjecture’ in terms of certainty, knowledge, and realization. Their interpretation depends on the aspect of reality that they realize that they will be tormented in the Fire. They do not grasp the other end of the stick of the ironical anecdote. Ibn Kathīr adds that the linguistic form of conjecture has the rhetorical function of hastening sadness and perturbation because expecting torment and fear is a torment itself. The exegetes’ interpretation depends highly on external sources quoting the early companions of the Prophet (PBUH). In the same vein, the

same interpretation of certainty and knowledge is given to the form “*zanna*” in the verse below according to al-Wahidy (p. 958), an-Nasafy (p. 241), ibn Kathīr (p. 249), and at-Tabary (p. 457). It reads: (41:48) *وَضَلَّ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَظُنُّوا مَا لَهُمْ مِنْ مَّحِيصٍ*. [And those whom they used to invoke before (in this world) shall disappear from them, and they will perceive that they have no place of refuge (from Allah’s punishment)]. (*Fuṣṣilat 41: 48*).

In all the cases above, the exegetes interpret the forms of “*Az-Zann*” in terms of certainty without giving any rational justification. Being asked about the use of ‘*Az-Zann*’ in this verse, they state that it is Arabic usage that counts in these cases. They mean that Arabic native speakers are accustomed to use the form of conjecture instead of the form of certainty. The heuristic strategy reveals that the interpretation of certainty is not acceptable in these cases.

Menacing and Warning

The infinitive form ‘*Az-Zann*’ is used twice with the function of menacing and warning. The intended addressees in the two cases are the unbelievers. The two forms have been used for the rhetorical effect that there is something more in addition to what is said. The speaker may use this type of rhetorical forms to perform an action according to Yule (2006, p. 118). Therefore, the verse conveys another illocution with a different propositional content (Searle, p. 30). In addition to the apparent function of the rhetorical question of the utterance, it has the illocutionary function of warning and menacing the liars of the bad end that awaits them in the hereafter. The first verse reads: *وَمَا ظَنُّ الَّذِينَ يَفْتَرُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ*. (10:60). [And what think those who invent a lie against Allah, on the Day of resurrection? [i.e., Do they think that they will be forgiven and excused! Nay, they will have an eternal punishment in the Fire of Hell]]. (*Yūnus 10: 60*).

Some exegetes such as at-Tabary (p.114, v. 15) and an-Nasafy (p.29) manage in reflecting the illocutionary function of menacing and warning in their explanation even if they express this idea indirectly. Other exegetes such as al-Wahidy (p. 502) and ibn Kathīr (p. 373) interpret it literally without mentioning that illocutionary function. The second form is used in the verse that reads: (37:87) *فَمَا ظَنُّكُمْ بِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ*. [Then what think you about the Lord of the ‘Alamin (mankind, jinn, and all that exists)?]. (*aṣ-ṣāffāt 37: 87*).

al-Wahidy (p. 911) and ibn Kathīr (p. 33) adopt an admonishing style that revolves about the illocutionary function of warning and menacing. Their explanation reads as follows: Ibrāhīm says to his people ‘what are you thinking of your Lord as you worship other than him?’ One way or another, their preaching style reflects the illocutionary function of menacing. an-Nasafy (p. 128) and at-Tabary (p. 566) beat around the bush adding the word “punishment” in their interpretations.

The Divine Meaning

For a start, As Goffman (1959) theorizes about the social interaction or exchanges, and Brown, and Levinson (1987) theorize for politeness, the study attempts to formulate a theory about the divine meaning digging for the intrinsic features of the language of God in His Holy Books. It is taken for granted that God is the Creator of the whole universe and He encompasses all great attributes. So, whenever God speaks, He speaks in a language that reflects His glory. But when it comes to man’s interactional process with or about any affair related to God, the principle of

holiness should feature the whole communication process. God instructs man to address Him using that style of the divine language observing the principle of holiness. For example, the mental process ‘*zanna*’ in the cases at hand is attributed to the Prophets and the believers. The use of ‘conjecture’ aims at showing holiness to God. In addition, it is a means of showing tentativeness and avoiding imposition upon God. Therefore, there are specific forms that reflect the discourse of holiness of which is the mental process of conjecture. That mental process functions as a hedging device. Using certainty in the cases below is harmful to God while the use of ‘conjecture’ is beneficial to Him. Above all, the attribution aims at instructing the believers to emulate the linguistic behavior of the prophets and the believers in the Qur’an. Attribution has the function of endorsing the linguistic behavior of that type. The principle of holiness applies to all interactional processes such as the future, man’s destiny, and repentance. Also, it extends to cover man’s response to God’s test of man and the Prophet-People relationship. Understanding the basics of holiness helps in arriving at the true meaning of the forms of *Az-Zann* in the cases below. In their interpretations, the exegetes reject the salient meaning interpretation searching for a new interpretation that ‘conjecture’ and ‘certainty’ are exchanged in Arabic usage. Rejection of the default interpretation is based on the assumption that it is not in line with the true creed of absolute faith. Nowadays, modernists acknowledge the common interpretation opening the door for relative truth. At the same time, they reject the interpretation which is given by the earlier exegetes. So, which of the two interpretations are true? And is there a systemic meaning shift from ‘doubt’ into ‘certainty’ or not?

God’s Ultimate Knowledge of the Future

It is taken for granted that it is God only who knows the Future. It is one of the maxims of the principle of holiness that God knows what took place, what takes place and what will happen. As for man, knowing the future is beyond his own limits. Accordingly, speaking about any future event, man should adopt a specific style of speech such as the device of hedging. The Qur’anic use of the mental process “*zanna*” sets an example for the proper communication process with God. The principle of holiness is realized on record in a verse that reads: [And do not say of anything: I will do it tomorrow unless Allah pleases]. (18: 23-24). The underlined clause functions as a hedging style to avoid imposition upon God. In the same way, the mental process of ‘conjecture’ is used in the two cases below regarding future events. In the first case, the verbal process is attributed to Prophet Joseph (Peace be upon him). The second is attributed to believers as demonstrated in the following lines.

Joseph-Cell mate Case

When Prophet Joseph (Peace be upon him) was put into prison, his two cell mates asked him to interpret their dreams. Depending on his interpretation of the cupbearer’s dream, Joseph told the cupbearer that he will get out from prison soon. His interpretation is a matter of guesswork because he does not know the future. So, the degree of conjecture is attributed to him to show politeness to God. If the verbal process of certainty is used, it is considered an injudicious and impolite style of speech. It is impolite because it conveys an interference in God’s affairs. Thusly, the use of the verbal process ‘conjecture’ is a judicious style of speech by which Joseph (Peace be upon him) aims at showing politeness to God. The verse reads: وَقَالَ لِلَّذِي ظَنَّ أَنَّهُ نَاجٍ مِّنْهُمَا اذْكُرْنِي عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ فَأَنَسَاءَ الشَّيْطَانُ ذِكْرَ رَبِّهِ فَلَبِثَ فِي السِّجْنِ بِضْعَ سِنِينَ. (12:42) [And he said to the one whom he knew to be saved: “Mention me to your lord (i.e., your king, so as to get me out of the prison)]. (*Yūsuf* 12: 42).

As for the exegetes' interpretation, al-Wāḥidī (p. 547), an-Nasafy (p. 113), and at-Ṭabary (p. 169) interpret the process of conjecture in terms of knowledge and certitude. ibn Kathīr (p. 44) interprets it literally without any explanation. Their interpretation results from their incompetence to grasp the rhetorical function of holiness. Interpreting the mental process of conjecture in terms of certainty is at variance with the established principle of God's ultimate knowledge of the future. Hence, talking about man's future is beyond man's knowledge. Therefore, the exegetes did not manage in providing an authentic interpretation for this case.

Hope and Expectation

The second case talks about the future of a husband and wife who want to reunite after divorce. It encourages them to reunite if they think that they will observe the limits of God. The use of conjecture goes in line with the principle of God's ultimate knowledge of the future. No one else knows the future except God. So, the use of conjecture has the illocutionary function of hope and expectation. Man has nothing except hoping for a better future and feeling that things will turn well. Moreover, the use of the mental process of conjecture implies that having the least degree of certitude is enough for initiating good deeds. Therefore, the face-value meaning is taken for granted. Despite this fact, the exegetes differ over the interpretation of the form of conjecture. Some manage in grasping the illocutionary function of hope and expectation, but others fail in their attempt to arrive at the true meaning. The verse reads: (2:230) *فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا أَنْ يَتَرَاجَعَا إِنْ ظَنَّا أَنْ يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ*. [And if he has divorced her (the third time), then she is not lawful unto him thereafter until she has married another husband. Then, if the other husband divorces her, it is no sin on both of them that they reunite, provided they feel that they can keep the limits ordained by Allah]. (*al-Baqarah 1: 230*).

al-Wāḥidī (p. 230) states that the meaning of the mental process 'zanna' is knowledge and certainty that they are sure of giving one's dues for being devout believers. an-Nasafy (p. 192), at-Ṭabary (p. 176), and ibn Kathīr (p. 230) interpret it in terms of conjecture. an-Nasafy says that 'conjecture' is used instead of certainty because certainty is beyond human knowledge. Comprehensive knowledge is confined to God only. This interpretation reflects the principle of holiness without demonstrating it. at-Ṭabary goes further underlining the illocutionary function of hope and expectation.

Divine Reward and Punishment

One of the fundamental principles of belief in God is that man's destiny is at the hands of God. It is a fact that winning God's reward is a favour and grace of God. God promises believers the Paradise in the hereafter. But it is not obligatory upon Him to do so. Similarly, as punishment is out of His justice and fairness, it is up to Him to torment or forgive whomever He wants. Therefore, when delivering a speech on this issue, the principle of holiness must be in place. It is realized via the mental process of conjecture aiming at avoiding imposition upon God in the four cases below.

The Believer's Stance in Worldly Life

The first two cases are mentioned in the chapter of *al-Baqarah* (2: 46). The first case is a divine description of the characteristics of the believers in the verse number forty-six in *al-Baqarah chapter* (i.e., The Cow). The second is a reported speech of what the believers do say in their battle against the unbelievers in the same chapter of *al-Baqarah* (2: 249). The verbal process

‘yazunūn’ is attributed to the relative pronoun ‘*al-lazīna*’ which designates a specific referent i.e., devout believers. The verse reads: (2:46). الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُلَاقُوا رَبِّهِمْ وَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ. [The ones who think that they are to meet their Lord and to Him they shall return]. (*al-Baqarah* 2:46). All the exegetes as al-Wahidy, (p. 103), and an-Nasafy, (p. 86), at-Tabary, (pp. 624-5), and ibn Kathīr, (p. 391) explain the verbal process ‘yazunūn’ in terms of ‘certainty’. They state that the believers are confident that they will receive their reward in the hereafter. The meaning of the present participle form ‘mulāqū’ in the genitive form ‘mulāqū Rabbihim’ is ‘meeting the Lord and seeing Him in a way that fits His glory. at-Tabary (pp. 624-5) states that *Az-Zann* means certainty. Before going ahead to analyze the meaning of the mental process ‘yazunūn’, it is important to point out that the failure to arrive at a true understanding results in a dispute between secularists and moderate reformers. Herein lies the problem that whenever the case of ‘*Az-Zann*’ is attributed to the believers regarding the divine reward in the hereafter, it represents a problem for the exegetes. Being asked, ‘it is known that *Az-Zann* means doubt; therefore, whoever harbors suspicions over meeting God is considered an unbeliever in your school of thought, what do you say? at-Tabary (p. 623) states that Arabic native speakers use *Az-Zann* with the meaning of ‘certitude’. He reports that Mujahid, one of the main interpreters of the Qur’an, states that *every form of az-zann in the Qur’an means certainty* giving examples of the verse in al-ḥāqqah chapter (69: 20) reading: ‘‘*inny zanantu ’anny mulaqin...*’. [I thought that I will win my reward]. The other verse is in Fuṣṣilat chapter (41:22): ‘‘*wazanannntum anna ’Allāha la yaḥṣalamu kathiran mimma kuntum taḥmalūn*’. [i.e., But you thought that God did not know much of what you were doing].

Their interpretation is rejected because they are not in line with the principle of holiness. The use of the form of ‘conjecture’ is intended to regulate man’s interactional process. The matter of rewarding a believer is totally up to God. Accordingly, the form of doubt is used for avoiding imposition upon God and showing tentativeness. Apparently, the believers sacrifice the maxim of quantity ‘i.e., certitude’ for upholding the principle of holiness. Contrary to what the exegetes state, there is a meaning shift from ‘certainty’ into ‘doubt’ for the rhetorical purpose of holiness. Moreover, it stresses the idea of tentativeness and optionality. Thus, the verse has nothing to do with the degree of faith which the believer does have in God. It asserts that man’s destiny is at the hands of God. Thereby, it is not incumbent upon Him to reward anyone. In the same way, the case below receives the same interpretation of certainty according to al-Wahidy (p. 180), an-Nasafy (p. 206), at-Tabary (495), and ibn Kathīr (p. 225). It reads: قَالَ الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُلَاقُوا رَبِّهِمْ وَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ. (2:249). [But those who knew with certainty that they were going to meet Allah, said: "How often a small group overcame a mighty host by Allah's Leave?" And Allah is with As-Sabirin (the patient)]. (*al-Baqarah* 1: 249).

The Stance of the Believers in the hereafter

Interestingly, the stance of the believers in the hereafter is the same as the one stated above in their worldly life. Even when a believer receives his reward, he uses the same process ‘*zanna*’ regarding his stance on the divine reward. The verse reads: (69:20). إِنِّي ظَنَنْتُ أَنِّي مُلَاقٌ حِسَابِيهِ. [Surely, I did believe that I shall meet my Account!]. (*al-ḥāqqah* 69: 20). The verse tells that once a believer receives his reward in the hereafter, he says that he thought that he would win it. Again, at-Tabary (p. 414), ibn Kathīr (p. 118), al-Wahidy (p. 1128), and an-Nasafy interpret it in terms of certainty. Their interpretation is at variance with the principle of holiness. Saying

that 'I am sure that I will receive my divine reward' is an impolite style of speech. The use of certainty conveys imposition upon God whose divine reward is freely granted.

al-Jinn and Their Limited Power

In this section, the study analyses one of the controversial cases which al-Khosht, Cairo university president, repeats thrice defending his claim of the relative truth of faith. He assumes that faith is built on indeterminant proof using the verse that reads: وَأَنَّا لَا نَدْرِي أَشَرُّ أَرِيدَ يَمْنُ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَمْ أَرَادَ بِهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ رَشَدًا. (72:10). [And we know not whether evil is intended for those on earth, or whether their Lord intends for them a Right Path]. (*al-Jinn* 72:10).

The verse talks about the prevention of al-Jinn from knowing the future after the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was sent. So, they did not know whether the matter of prevention is good for humans or not. Why do they say that? The answer is that it is God only who knows the destiny of everything. It is a fact that neither al-Jinn nor man knows anything about man's future. Knowing this, al-Jinn use the conjunction 'aw' (i.e., or) to indicate that they do not know anything about the destiny of man. al-Wahidy (p. 1140) and an-Nasafy (p.550), at-Tabary (p. 329), and ibn Kathīr (p. 150) state that the meaning is that al-Jinn do not know whether the prevention is something bad for humans or not. Moreover, ibn Kathīr (p. 150) points out that it sounds judicious of al-Jinn to attribute goodness to God and passivize the case of evil.

Repentance

The acceptance of one's repentance is at the hands of God. So, a man should avoid any form of imposition upon Him. God says (9:27) "Again will Allah, after this, turn (in mercy) to whom He will: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful". The Qur'anic verse below sets an example for the best judicious style of speech for supplicating God for forgiveness. It instructs man how to seek forgiveness. This is realized by the attribution of the degree of conjecture to God. It happens that three of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) stay behind at the battle of Tabūk for no reason. When they supplicated God for forgiveness, their thought occupied the degree of conjecture considering a Prophetic tradition that reads: "It is desirable that none of you die unless he has a positive attitude towards God" (Muslim, 2006, p. 1316). Considering this reality, the linguistic behavior of conjecture is attributed to the believers with a view to showing tentativeness and avoiding imposition. The verse reads: وَعَلَى الثَّلَاثَةِ الَّذِينَ خَلَفُوا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا ضَاقَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الْأَرْضُ بِمَا رَحُبَتْ وَضَاقَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ أَنْفُسُهُمْ وَظَنُّوا أَنْ لَا مَلْجَأَ مِنَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ تَابَ عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَتُوبُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ. (9:118). [And they perceived that there is no fleeing from Allah, and no refuge but with Him. Then, He forgave them (accepted their repentance), that they might beg for His pardon [repent (unto Him)]. Verily, Allah is the One Who forgives and accepts repentance, Most Merciful]. (*at-Tawbah* 9: 118).

Failing to recognize the aspects of the meaning above, al-Wahidy (p.485), an-Nasafy (p. 715), and ibn Kathīr (p.307), and at-Tabary (p.543) explain Az-Zann in terms of certitude. They reject the default interpretation of conjecture which should be admitted here. Similarly, the same process of analysis applies to the case below that the believers of al-Jinn, whom the Qur'an depicts their case, use the same style of speech in the verse that reads: وَأَنَّا ظَنَنَّا أَنْ لَنْ نُعْجِزَ اللَّهَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَنْ نُعْجِزَهُ هَرَبًا. (72:12). [And we think that we cannot escape (the punishment of) Allah in the earth, nor can we escape Him by flight]. (*al-Jinn* 72: 12).

The use of the mental process ‘conjecture’ in the verse is attributed to al-Jinn. It depicts their degree of thought before they believe in God. Despite their disbelief in God, they show holiness and politeness to God because they know that they have no power over anything. at-Tabary (p. 331), ibn Kathīr (p. 150), and al-Wahidy (p. 1141) interpret it in terms of knowledge. an-Nasafy (p. 551) interprets it in terms of certainty which does not reflect the accurate meaning. Despite their certain knowledge, they make a meaning shift from certainty into conjecture to show veneration and holiness to God.

Prophet-Nation relationship

As for God, He chooses whomever He wants for preaching the Message of the Oneness of God. Also, the time and place of delivering His message is up to Him. With respect to the prophets, they must preach the Message of God as it is verbatim. They have not the right to cancel or withhold anything of the Message. Moreover, they have not the right to change the time or place of preaching the Message except by God’s will. As for the prophet-nation relationship, it is incumbent upon the prophets to convey God’s Message to their people. On the contrary, it is up to their people’s free will to accept their Message or decline it. They are to respond according to their own will at the time and place which they like. Henceforward, the prophets have not the right to hasten their response sooner than otherwise would be the case. When a prophet or a believer does not take into consideration such background, they violate the principle of holiness.

Yūnus’s (Jonah) Reaction to His Nation’s Rejection of the Message

The case below examines an aspect of the relationship between the prophets and their peoples. Finding that his nation not responding to the divine message that he preaches, Prophet Jonah goes angry and leaves his people thinking that he will not be held accountable for his reaction towards his people. Before going on to address the verbal process, it is important to tackle the basics of the God-Prophets relationship. They have not the right to interfere in their peoples’ freewill nor to impose anything upon them. Also, they are not allowed to take any action regarding their people’s response whatever it is. It is well-established that people have the freewill to respond as ever they like. The verse reads: *وَذَا النُّونِ إِذْ ذَهَبَ مُغَاضِبًا فَظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ نَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ فَنَادَى فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ.* (21:87). [And (remember) Dhanun (Jonah), when he went off in anger, and imagined that We shall not punish him (i.e., the calamities which had befallen him)! But he cried through the darkness (saying): La Ilāha Illa Anta [none has the right to be worshipped but You (O, Allah)], Glorified (and Exalted) be You [above all that (evil) they associate with You]! Truly, I have been of the wrong doers]. (*al-Anbiyā* 21: 87).

al-Wahidy (p. 722), an-Nasafy (p. 417), ibn Kathīr (p. 82), and at-Tabary (p. 379) interpret it literally stating that Jonah thinks that God will not constrain his life. He thinks that God will not punish or test him for his wrath and annoyance at his people. However, they do not grasp the rhetorical function governing the use of ‘conjecture’ in this context. Was Jonah punished for his guesswork or for his response towards his people? Indeed, he was punished for showing the reaction of annoyance against his people. The attribution of conjecture to the Prophet Jonah aims at avoiding imposition upon God. Doing this, he shows due respect and veneration to God. It is normal that a prophet feels sad when his nation rejects his message as in the case below. Such feelings reflect the human nature of the prophets. Anyway, claiming responsibility

and taking an action are considered an interference in God's rights since a prophet's job ends at preaching. Knowing this, the prophets in the case below use the mental process of conjecture as a hedging device as illustrated below.

Prophets: No Reaction to Their People's Stance of Rejection

Contrary to the case of Jonah above, the prophets in the verse manage in showing due respect and veneration to God. They did not take any action against their people as Jonah did. As a human nature, they only surmise that their people will not respond to their message. Entertaining such mental behavior is a hedging style with a view to avoiding interference in God's affairs. One of the most controversial interpretations is the form of conjecture in the verse that reads:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا اسْتَيْسَسَ الرُّسُلُ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ قَدْ كُذِّبُوا جَاءَهُمْ نَصْرُنَا فَنُجِّيَ مَنْ نَشَاءُ ۚ وَلَا يُرَدُّ بَأْسُنَا عَنِ الْقَوْمِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ. (12:110).
 [(They were reprieved) until, when the Messengers gave up hope and thought that they were denied (by their people), then came to them Our Help, and whomsoever We willed were rescued. And Our punishment cannot be warded off from the people who are Mujrimīn (criminals, sinners, disbelievers, polytheists)]. (*Yūsuf* 12: 110).

Despite the background given in the preceding lines, the exegetes find it impossible to attribute the mental process 'zanna' to the Prophets. For them, ascribing the process to them means that they are doubting faith in a way that opens the door for relative faith. Therefore, they give different interpretations of which is the explanation of 'conjecture' in terms of 'certainty'. According to this explanation, it means that the believers realize for certitude that their people will never ever respond to their message (al-Wahidy, p. 563 & an-Nasafy, p. 140). The other interpretation is the attribution of conjecture to the prophets' nations. According to this interpretation, the meaning is that the prophets' nations think that their prophets lied to them. Contrary to this, ibn ʿabbās, the Prophet's cousin, and a brilliant exegete of the Qur'an, admits the attribution of conjecture to the prophets on the grounds of humanity. He says that they were humans making use of the verse that reads: حَتَّىٰ يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَىٰ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ ۚ أَلَا إِنَّ نَصْرَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ. (2:214). [Or think you that you will enter Paradise without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you? They were afflicted with severe poverty and ailments and were so shaken that even the Messenger and those who believed along with him said, "When (will come) the Help of Allah?" Yes! Certainly, the Help of Allah is near!]. (*al-Baqarah* 2: 214).

On citing the verse, ibn ʿabbās states that the prophets may find God's victory slow. As a human nature, they entertain such feelings. On the contrary, the great Lady ʿa'isha, the mother of believers, rejects the interpretation of ibn ʿabbās stating that the Prophet (PBUH) has a complete trust in God. However, the dispute over the meaning of the form of *Az-Zann* is a result of being not familiar with the rhetorical function of the use of the mental process of conjecture. Both ibn ʿabbās and ʿa'isha are right as for their justifications. It is true that the prophets entertain human feelings. Similarly, it is true that the prophets have absolute trust in God. However, using conjecture has nothing to do with the creed of absolute faith. 'Conjecture' is used as a hedging device to show holiness and politeness to God. It is God only who knows whether man will believe in Him or not. Therefore, the prophets are not responsible for their nations' acceptance or rejection of the Message of the Oneness of God. Above all else, they

have not the right to stop preaching their message whatever the case is. They even have not the right to form their mind or say that their people will not respond. As a general rule, the whole affair and decision rest in God's hands. It applies to the case of Jonah above as well as the case of David below.

Man's Destiny: Moses-Pharaoh Case

Moses held a dialogue with the Pharaoh in which the former invited the latter to believe in the Oneness of God. However, the Pharaoh denied the existence of God claiming himself as god. So, Moses told him that he thought that the Pharaoh would meet a bad end in the hereafter. The Question raised is 'why does Moses use 'think' instead of 'believe' even though the destiny of the Pharaoh is apparently known since he claims himself as god?! Indeed, the Pharaoh's destiny is apparently well-known for his audience at the time. However, man's destiny, by and large, is at the hands of God only. In a nutshell, when it comes to the Pharaoh's destiny, Moses uses the verbal process 'conjecture' to show holiness and veneration to God and to avoid imposition upon Him. In addition, it aims at avoiding hegemony upon man. The verse reads: قَالَ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ هَؤُلَاءِ إِلَّا رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ بِصَآئِرٍ وَإِنِّي لَأَظُنُّكَ يَا فِرْعَوْنُ مَثْبُورًا. (17:102). [And I think you are, indeed, O Fir'aun (Pharaoh) doomed to destruction (away from all good)!]. (*al-Isrā* 17:102). Failing to grasp the background knowledge above, the exegetes did not manage in explaining the mental process "azunnū" (i.e., I conjecture) giving different interpretations. al-Wahidy (p. 649) interprets it in terms of knowledge. an-Nasafy (p. 280) and at-Tabary (p. 108) interpret it in terms of doubt without referring to the rhetorical function in the preceding lines. ibn Kathīr did not tackle it as usual.

God's Test of David

Man has not the right to show any sign of objection to God's acts. The verse reads: ...وَضَنَّ... دَاوُودُ أَنَّمَا فَتَنَّاهُ فَاسْتَغْفَرَ رَبَّهُ وَخَرَّ رَاكِعًا وَأَنَابَ. (38:24). [And Dawud (David) guessed that We have tried him, and he sought Forgiveness of his Lord, and he fell down prostrate and turned (to Allah) in repentance]. (*Sād* 38: 24).

As usual, al-Wahidy (p. 923), an-Nasafy (153, v. 3), at-Tabary (2001, p.71) interpret it in terms of knowledge and certainty which is at variance with the true creed. Furthermore, they justify the use of conjecture instead of 'certainty' stating that the former is close to the degree of knowledge. If David was blamed for thinking that the act of judging was intended, how do the exegetes interpret it in terms of certainty? David was initially aware of his limited knowledge regarding the hidden knowledge of testing. The use of conjecture aims at showing holiness and politeness to God which, in turn, leads to avoiding interference in God's affairs.

Menacing and Intimidation

Some forms of "conjecture" are used in the context of menacing and warning. It is one of the problematic cases even though some exegetes identify its illocutionary function. The function of menacing and warning is realized by the nominal form in two cases which are analysed in section [4.1.5.]. How do the exegetes interpret this form? To reach a true interpretation of the verbal process below, it is necessary to know the context in which it was revealed. When the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions went to al-Madinah, he found that the citizens of al-Medina at the time commit fraud in measure and weight. The Prophet (PBUH) warned them not to do so. Therefore, the verse was revealed menacing the ones who decrease or increase in

measure. It reads: (83:4). *أَلَا يَظُنُّ أُولَٰئِكَ أَنَّهُمْ مَبْعُوثُونَ*. Do they not think that they will be resurrected (for reckoning), On a Great Day? (*al-Mutaffifin* 83: 4).

The interpretation of the exegetes takes a preaching style as at-Tabary (p. 187) and ibn Kathīr (p. 281) whose interpretations run as follows: “do not those who fraud in measure and weight think that they are resurrected in a great day?! Do not they think that they will be resurrected in a great day?! Are not they afraid of a day of resurrection and standing in front of God who knows the most inner feelings in a day of great horror?! Linguistically, the structure has the illocutionary function of menacing and warning the addressees that they should not do such a heinous act. The use of the mental process ‘conjecture’ in this structure conveys that those who have the lowest degree of certainty will not commit such crimes. So, it points out that a man who believes in resurrection will not increase or decrease in the measure and weight.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the legacy of religious discourse, namely the exegesis of the Qur’an is in an urgent need for re-evaluation. The present generation must have their own contribution in the field of religious discourse. In addition, the job of the renewal should be conducted by those who have expertise in the field of religious discourse. None of the forms of conjecture has to do with the idea of relative truth of faith. As for the earlier exegetes, one of the findings of the study is that they do not conduct a thematic study of the forms of *Az-Zann* in the Qur’an. However, they make an invalid generalization claiming that each form of ‘conjecture’ means ‘certainty’ which makes their interpretations sound injudicious. Of course, their interpretations are not intended to cause such an injudiciousness because they pursued noble goals to achieve. Contrary to their claim of the exchange of ‘doubt’ and ‘certainty’, there is a meaning shift from certainty into ‘conjecture’. Such a systematic meaning shift has its own rhetorical purposes. It stresses the principle of holiness and veneration for God. As for modernists, their interpretation disagrees with the true creed of absolute faith. It undermines faith by opening the door for relative truth. Therefore, both interpretations are rejected because they are in direct contradiction with the authentic religious discourse. So, the study search for a new interpretation that goes in line with the authentic religious discourse. These results lead to the development of the theory of the divine meaning. An intrinsic feature of the divine meaning theory is the principle of holiness that features God-Man relationship. Understanding the basics of the divine language helps in understanding the Holy Books in general. It helps in revealing the intrinsic features of the language of God and regulates man’s communicational process with God. In accordance with this theory, the broad implication is that the principle of holiness must be considered whenever a man delivers views about the future, the divine reward and punishment, God’s test, and man’s destiny. Also, this principle should be taken into consideration when it comes to the prophet-man relationship. In addition to the rhetorical function of holiness, the use of the mental process of conjecture aims at emphasizing the human nature of man whether he is a believer or a prophet. So, it is normal for both to entertain all feelings of the human nature such as doubt, certainty, joy, and sadness, *etc.* They also convey that the least degree of good thought is sufficient for the initiation of a good deed. The repetition of the form of conjecture in different contexts implies that even when it comes to brainwork, a believer should show holiness and veneration to God using the lowest degree of guesswork. Under menacing and warning, the attribution of conjecture to the unbelievers has the ironical function of rebuking them for their

unethical behavior of denying the hereafter. In the case of belief, the use of conjecture aims at getting the believers away from unethical practices. It is noteworthy that the earlier exegetes of the Qur'an are influenced by each other. In other words, the interpretations of some of exegetes echo the interpretations of their predecessors. For example, ibn Kathīr quotes at-Tabary verbatim in many cases. In addition, ibn Kathīr adopts an evasive approach in his explanation of Az-Zann. More generally, these findings support the urgent call for the renewal of religious discourse.

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