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## **The Qur' an: God and Man in Communication**

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# **The Qur'an: God and Man in Communication**

Rede uitgesproken door

**Prof. Dr. Nasr Abu Zayd**

bij aanvaarding van het ambt van Cleveringa-hoogleraar  
op het vakgebied van de vraagstukken van recht,  
vrijheid en verantwoordelijkheden, in het bijzonder  
godsdienstvrijheid en gewetensvrijheid,  
aan de Universiteit Leiden op 27 november 2000.

Mijnheer de rector magnificus, dames en heren leden van het curatorium van de Cleveringa-leerstoel, your excellencies Ambassadors, dames en heren bestuurderen van de universiteit, dames en heren leden van het wetenschappelijk personeel en van het ondersteunend en beheerspersoneel, dames en heren studenten, en voorts gij allen die door uw aanwezigheid blijk geeft van uw belangstelling.

This is one of the greatest moments in my entire life. Words can hardly express how I feel, neither can they reveal what I want to say. Sixty years ago, Professor Cleveringa, a man of integrity and honor, deeply concerned with what is right and wrong, stood in this same auditorium and denounced courageously the unjust action undertaken by the Nazi occupation forces dismissing the Dutch Jewish citizens from their jobs. Having been honored by the chair that carries his name and symbolizes the human and academic ethics he stood for I feel I should begin my lecture by invoking his vision and situating myself in relation to his brave stance.

‘Justice’, based on unconditional human freedom and equality, is, in my opinion, the essence of his lecture. But is it possible to speak about justice without addressing the world situation today where injustice is prevailing? I refer here, as an example, to the daily shooting and bombing of the Palestinian cities and villages by the Israeli’s military forces. Unarmed people, including children are killed daily. The crime of the Palestinians is that they simply want to have their own independent state, their own secure homes, schools, hospitals. Sixty years ago, Cleveringa could not have passively watched other people being dismissed because of their own ascribed identity. I wonder what would he have said, if he were in my place today? Would he have hesitated defending openly and courageously the right of the Palestinian people to establish their own independent state on the territories occupied by Israel in 1967?

Allow me to quote Cleveringa’s description of the Nazis’ behaviour since it is applicable to the present situation, in his own words, a “violation of the international law,” Israel’s “actions are beneath contempt; power based on nothing but force. All I ask,” continues Cleveringa, “is that we may dismiss them from our sight, and gaze instead on the heights, up to that radiant.” And I add ‘Book of God, the Holy Qur’an. Is it a coincidence that I have been awarded the Cleveringa Chair this year? Is it a coincidence that the day commemorating his values and ethics is the first day of Ramadân, the sacred month for Muslims, which witnessed the beginning of the Qur’an revelation? Let me try to unfold the significance of today by taking you up to the heights, to the radiant Holy Qur’an, without neglecting the reality of man on earth. I mean the Qur’an as a sphere of existence, or a channel of communication, where God and man meet without being one. I mean without God being humanized, neither man being divined.’

## **1 The Word of God humanized:**

Let me start with the basic question, ‘What is the Qur’an?’ In order to be able to define the nature of the Qur’an properly we have to start from scratch. I mean to start,

firstly, by elucidating the meaning and the connotation of the proper name given to the phenomenon.

### 1.1.

Philologists suggest that the word Qur'an is derived either from *qarana* (to bring together or to collect) or from *qara'a* (to recite).<sup>2</sup> Here I favour the second lexical meaning for the very obvious fact that the Qur'an was originally transmitted to the Prophet Muhammad in an oral form. It is explained everywhere in Islamic literature that the Holy Spirit first used to convey or inspire some verses to the Prophet during each session of revelation, whereas the Prophet used to recite them afterwards to his companions.

These verses, or passages, were integrated into chapters and were partially committed to some sort of written form, according to Islamic sources. It was after the Prophet's death that these chapters were collected then arranged and finally written down in a book, *al-Mushaf*. But in spite of being committed to written form, the Qur'an has never been dealt with as a written text in the daily life of the early Muslim community. It had to wait till the age of printing in order to be considered as such. Even now with the Qur'an being a printed text, what is important for every Muslim is the memorisation of the Qur'an by heart and the capability of reciting it according to the classical principles of recitation *tajwid*.

Lastly, the aesthetic characteristics of the Qur'anic language that affect the daily life of Muslims are mainly related to its verbal recitation and chanting. One of its major aesthetic effects is that generated by its poetic language when recited privately or collectively. That is why the recitation of the Qur'an is a very important practice in the communal as well as in the individual life. At almost every occasion passages of the Qur'an are recited: at marriages, funerals and at the inauguration of festivals or celebrations not to mention rituals, regular prayers or other religious occasions.<sup>3</sup> Recitation of verses of the Qur'an is always performed in the opening of a project, a meeting, a celebration, etc. Recitation of the Qur'an is also an essential part of all the funeral processions, i.e., the body-washing ceremony, *ghusl*, the funeral-prayer, *salât 'l-janâza*, and at the condolence-receiving ceremony, *'azâ'*, where two professional reciters are hired to recite either at the house of the deceased or at the neighborhood mosque.

### 1.2.

The second step is to analyze the definition of the Qur'an accepted by all Muslims and try to uncover the various dimensions of that definition. The Qur'an is the word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in plain Arabic language in the span of 23 years. This is the undisputed definition accepted by all Muslims through the history of Islamic thought, regardless of their theological and cultural differences. In this definition we can distinguish three aspects, i.e., '*kalâm Allâh*' the word of God, the Qur'an and '*wahy*', i.e., revelation or inspiration. Are these three concepts

lexically and semantically identical? Do they denote or connote the same meaning? It seems that they have been dealt with as synonyms in modern Islamic discourse, while in classical theology there was a certain awareness of the different meaning of each that is also reflected in the Qur'anic usage.

### 1.2-1

First, what is the Word of God? Is it the content of the message expressed in human language? Or does it include language as an essential component? The most obvious Qur'anic expression is mentioned in chapter 18:109 and 31:27 where it is emphasised that the Words of Allah are infinite and non-exhaustible. Even if all the trees on earth were pens, all the oceans ink, with seven oceans behind them to add to its supply, the Word of God could not possibly be exhausted. Therefore, if the Word of God is impossible to be confined whereas the Qur'an as a text is limited in space, the Qur'an should only represent a specific manifestation of the Word of God.

But the Qur'an refers to itself in many passages as *Kalâm Allâh*, the speech of God, which seems to confirm the identification of the Word of God and the Qur'an.

Perceiving of God as a speaker raises many complicated theological difficulties, which in fact have been lively discussed twelve centuries ago. The issue was discussed and debated extensively by Muslim theologians and led to 'the inquisition of the creation of the Qur'an', *'mihnat khalq al-Qur'an'*.

The Qur'an is the Word of God. About this doctrine there has never been disagreement among Muslims throughout the centuries. The discussion, however, centered upon the question whether the Qur'an was eternal or created. The Mu'tazilites in general insisted on the createdness of the Qur'an in order to save the eternal unity of God from having an eternal existence besides it. But the Hanblites rejected to ascribe the attribute 'createdness' to the Word of God. The political authority favored the doctrine of the 'created Qur'an' at the beginning. So, the followers of the 'eternal Qur'an' doctrine were persecuted. When the ideology of the Caliph changed and favored the Hanblite trend the adherents of the Created Qur'an had to suffer. The dispute was politically dissolved in favor of the "Orthodoxy" against the "Heterodoxy".<sup>4</sup> The Ash'arites developed later on a theory that differentiated between the eternal Word of God on one hand and its manifestation on the other hand, between the verbal 'recitation' and the 'recited' content. They ascribed eternity to the Word of God itself, whereas createdness was ascribed to its human verbal vocalization.<sup>5</sup> But the doctrine of the 'eternity of the Qur'an' has been the dominant doctrine in Islamic theology. The parallel issue in the history of Christian theology took another direction. The reason, according to Van Ess, is that the notion of the eternal speech, was an extremist doctrine in Christianity, "where theology worked on the basis of four translated Gospels."<sup>6</sup>

### 1.2-2

The second aspect is the process of communication, or the channel through which

the Word of God was revealed to Muhammad, i.e., the concept of *Wahy*. Etymologically the root means a form of 'mysterious non-verbal communication'. Its usage in pre-Islamic literature, as well as in the Qur'an, demonstrates a form of 'mysterious non-verbal' communicative pattern in which two beings of different grades of existence are involved.<sup>7</sup> In the process of revealing the Qur'an, however, three are involved, i.e., God, the Archangel as mediator, and the Prophet as recipient. Although the connotation of 'mysterious non-verbal communication' is not absolutely removed, the existence of a mediator put the concept of non-verbal communication under theological challenge.

The Qur'an always indicates that *wahy* has been the channel through which previous scriptures were revealed. *Wahy*, therefore, cannot be considered identical with the Qur'an as is claimed by Izutsu<sup>8</sup>; it is the channel through which the Word of God in general is revealed to humans. The Qur'an clearly indicates that there are only three possible channels of communication between God and man: Either "by inspiration, or from behind a veil or by sending a messenger to reveal (by inspiration) by God's permission what He wills" <42:51>.<sup>9</sup>

The first channel, inspiration, is obviously a form of non-verbal communication. The second channel, from behind a veil, is the channel through which God spoke to Moses from behind the ambush and/or behind the mountain. But again, the question about 'how' God spoke to Moses raised similar difficulties and was present at the heart of the discussion about the Qur'an, already referred to. The third channel is believed to be the channel of the Qur'an revelation, where the mission of the mediator *rasûl*, Gabriel, is to communicate God's speech, *kalâm Allâh*, to Muhammad by *wahy*, non-verbal communication. The conclusion then should be that *wahy* is not semantically synonymous in the Qur'anic usage to God's speech.

### 1.2-3

Thirdly, what does it signify when the Qur'an repeatedly emphasises that it is revealed in plain Arabic, *bi-lisânin `Arabiyyin mubîn*? According to the Qur'an, God has chosen Prophet Muhammad to be His messenger in order to convey His message to the people, which introduces the concept of *risâla*, message, obviously denoting the 'content' of the Qur'an as separate from its linguistic expression. As a Message, Islam, according to the Qur'an, is not a new religion brought down to Muhammad to preach to the Arabs, but essentially it is the same message preached by all the prophets since the creation of the world. "The religion God has established for you is the same religion as that which He enjoined on Noah, as it is also the same We enjoined on Abraham Moses and Jesus" <42:13>. "We have revealed to you the same We sent to Noah and the Messengers after him; We revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms" <4:163-164>. It is, therefore, inferred that all the prophets are considered as Muslims in the Qur'an. <See 6:163; 7:143; 10:72, 84, 90; 27:31, 38, 42, 91; 39:12; 46:15 etc.> In accordance with the lexical meaning of the word, Islam is the absolute

self-submission to God, the Lord of the universe. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes, "whoever submits his whole self to God and is a doer of good he will get his reward with his Lord; on such shall be no fear nor shall they grieve." <2:112>

Though universal and for all humans as it is claimed, the Qur'anic message is expressed in plain Arabic language, simply because God always considers the language of the people to whom a messenger is sent. "We never sent a messenger but with the language of his people, that he might make it clear for them" <14:4>. It is then not likely to assume that the Qur'an presents literally and exclusively the word of God.

According to this assumption the word of God would be limited to the Qur'an only, thus excluding previous scriptures from the same right of presenting the Word of God in their own original languages. This will automatically lead to hold Arabic, as has been in fact done by the Arab Muslims at least, as a sacred language, a development in Islamic thought Izutsu was unable to understand or to explain.<sup>10</sup>

The Qur'an is then one manifestation of the Word of God inspired to the Prophet Muhammad through the mediation of the archangel Gabriel. Thus, we can safely distinguish between three aspects of the Qur'an, namely its content, its language and its structure. There should not be any disagreement that the divinity of the Qur'an is confined to its source. The content, however, is strongly correlated with the linguistic structure, which is culturally and historically determined. In other words, if the divine content of God's Word has been expressed in human language, it is the domain of language that represents the essential human dimension of all scriptures in general and the Qur'an in particular.

#### 1.2-4

What about the Qur'an's structure? The human dimension is more obvious when we take into consideration two facts. First, the Qur'an was revealed in instalments, *munajjam*, and, second, the process of the canonisation of the Qur'an depended on human manoeuvre.

Being revealed portion by portion, *munajjam*, the Qur'an corresponded to the community needs and demands. Demands of Muslims are reflected in the Qur'an by the frequent occurrence of the phrase, "they ask you" (Muhammad), *yas'alûnaka* <attested 15 times>. These questions to which the Qur'an responded cover different areas of interest. Questions were raised about wine and gambling, *al-khamr wa 'l-maysir* <2:219>, about the orphan females, *al-yatâmâ* <2:220>, menstruation, *al-mahid* <2:222>, dietary law <5:4>, charity, *al-infâq* <2:215,219>, prohibition of fighting during the sacred month <2:217>, and spoils of ware, *al-anfâl*. <8:1> Providing answers to such questions, much of the legal aspect of the Qur'an was gradually articulated, thus reflecting the dialectical relationship between God's word and human interest.

Quite a number of the Sciences of the Qur'an, *'ulûm al-Qur'ân*<sup>1</sup> clearly indicate the dialectical relationship between the Qur'an and the reality of the early Muslim community. There is no need to elaborate on this point; I have already devoted a

whole book to analyze the various aspects and the significance of the sciences of the Qur'an for modern time.<sup>12</sup>

Another aspect of the human impact on God's word can be seen through the process of canonisation, which was not limited to the application of the diacritical points and the vowel sign to the originally unreadable `Uthmanic text. Canonisation of the Qur'an included also the rearrangement of the Qur'anic verses and chapters in their present order, which is not the same of chronological order. The present order is called *tartīb al-tilāwa* (order of recitation), while the chronological order is called *tartīb al-nuzūl*. It is important here to refer to the impact of such rearrangement in partially demolishing the historical and occasional context of every portion of revelation, thus elevating the semantic structure of it above the original reality from which it emerged. Nevertheless, the original content of the Word of God in its unknown absoluteness, I mean before it became expressed in Arabic, is divine and sacred while its manifested expression is neither sacred nor divine. Whether one follows the Mu`tazilite doctrine of the 'creation of the Qur'an', or prefers the Ash`arite doctrine, the conclusion is the same: the Qur'an we read and interpret is by no means identical with the eternal word of God.

### 1.3

There is another aspect that should not be neglected in investigating the nature of the Qur'anic language, i.e., its peculiarity as a discourse which enabled it to perform its influence. The language of the Qur'an represents, in fact, a specific 'parole' (*kalām*) of the Arabic 'language' (*lisān*), and like any 'parole' it is subject to the lexical, grammatical, syntactic, semantic as well as rhetoric rules of Arabic. Nevertheless, paroles could influence their own language through the special dynamics they develop in presenting their own discourse. The special linguistic dynamics through which the Qur'anic language influenced Arabic have transformed the linguistic signs, vocabulary, into semiotic signs. In other words, the Qur'anic language transfers a lot of Arabic vocabulary to the sphere of semiotics where they refer only to one absolute reality which is God. The function of such transformation is to evade the seen reality in order to establish the unseen Divine Reality of God; that is why everything in the whole seen reality, according to the Qur'an, is nothing but 'signs', *āyât*, referring to God. Not only natural phenomena, animated and non-animated, are semiotic signs but human history is also presented in the Qur'an as a series of 'signs'.<sup>13</sup> The everlasting struggle between 'truth' and 'non-truth', *al-haqq wa 'l-bâtil*, or between the oppressed and the oppressor, *al-mustad`afîn wa 'l-mustakbirîn*, is presented in the Qur'an as signs of God's Sunna.

The Qur'anic language, though human as it is, has captured the imagination of the Arabs from the very moment of its revelation due to the linguistic transformation of meaning into semiotics. The reports about the influence of the Qur'an recitation over individuals are abundant. Many stories are preserved in Islamic literature according to which even the unbelievers were fascinated by the overwhelming poetic



effect of the Qur'anic language, an effect incomparable to that of poetry. Of importance in this context is the report mentioned about one of the scribes of the Qur'an who enjoyed what was dictated to him by the Prophet so much that he reached the point of spiritual unification with the text. Being able to anticipate the final wording of the verse under dictation he thought he attained the state of prophet-hood.<sup>14</sup> Although the protagonist of the story thought he could produce something like the Qur'an, and accordingly claimed that the Qur'an has been invented by Muhammad, we can find deeper significance beyond the surface of the story.<sup>15</sup> The language of the text could capture the scribe's imagination and could inspire him to anticipate what comes after because of its poetic structure. Another significant indication is the fact that the divinity of the Qur'an as revelation does not contradict its humanity as vocalization.

Through such dynamics the Qur'anic language affected almost every field of knowledge in the history of Islamic culture, namely theology, philosophy, mysticism, linguistics, literature, literary criticism, and visual art. The comprehensive employment of the word *âyah* and its plural form *âyât* in the Qur'an in reference to both the universe and the Qur'an made it possible for philosophers and Sufis to develop an Islamic theory of 'logos', in which the Qur'an represents the universe.<sup>16</sup> This was very possible also because of the re-construction of the Qur'anic verses, *âyât* and chapters in the present *mushaf* form. By such semantic as well as structure transformation Arabic language became gradually indoctrinated by the Qur'anic language; the dynamics of the 'parole', *kalâm*, was able to dominate its language, *lisân*. This is, in fact, the basic ground on which the discussion about *'ijâz al-Qur'ân*, incompatibility, is established.

## 2 God and Man in Contact:

The encounter between Muhammad and the archangel Gabriel, through which the first five verses of chapter 96 were revealed, establishes the model of communication between man and God, a model encapsulated in different forms of rituals as will be demonstrated. It is reported that the archangel Gabriel ordered Muhammad to 'recite' (*iqra'*). Muhammad immediately responded, "no, I am not going to recite" '*mâ ana bi-qâri'*.<sup>17</sup> Gabriel's command was ambiguous to Muhammad, as it was not clear to him what he was supposed to recite. After threefold repetition of the same episode of command and response it was understood that Muhammad had to recite what Gabriel inspired to him, or to repeat by recitation what was said to him.<sup>18</sup>

In this situation, we, first, acknowledge the presence of Gabriel, the speaker or the inspirer on one hand, and the addressee Muhammad on the other hand. Second, we note that the message, which is transmitted and then recited, is about the Lord, or more accurately is introducing to Muhammad the Lord who creates and teaches. It is not mentioned in the verses what is to be recited. The grammatical 'object' of the imperative verb 'recite', which is repeated twice, is omitted. This indicates that the verses focus on the importance of the act of 'recitation', which is to be performed

‘in the name of your Lord, who creates man from a clot etc. It is through Muhammad’s act of ‘recitation’ that the implicit becomes explicit, the mysterious is uncovered. Because it is only the addressee voice which is recognised, we can conclude that it is through the human act of *qirâ’a* that the Word of God is humanised. *Qirâ’a*, recitation, stands thus as the human action which presents the existential domain, or the middle sphere of existence where God and man meet. In heading 4 we will elaborate on the importance of *qirâ’at al-Qur’ân* as a discipline. It suffices now to indicate that both ‘inspiration’ and ‘recitation’, the two inseparable aspects of the Qur’an, embody this middle sphere of existence where God and man meet. Entering into this middle sphere is a time-bound action, where the encounter has its beginning and its end.

## 2.1

*Wahy* then represents a temporary channel of communication between God and man where only the voice of man is explicit externalising God’s message. Could the *salât* be taken as representing daily channel of communication between the believer and God? This is possible if we recognise another aspect of *wahy*, i.e., the aural and oral dimension present in the first encounter between Muhammad and Gabriel. Before reciting, *qirâ’a*, Muhammad had to listen. In a later revelation the Prophet was advised not to recite hastily what was inspired to him <75:18>, which means that he should first attentively listen to the Angel and then recite. Listening attentively, *insât*, to Qur’anic recitation is, according to the Qur’an, an avenue for a believer to receive God’s mercy <7:204>. Listening is not merely a passive action, it rather represents the internal, intimate and heart-felt act of comprehension. It was through listening to the Qur’an recited by the Prophet that some of the jinn, according to the Qur’an, converted to Islam <46:29,30; 72:1>. Being so important as the other inseparable side of recitation the connotation of the word ‘listening’, *samâ`*, was developed later in the sufi terminology to denote ‘poetic hermeneutics’, whereas the word *ta’wil* was saved to mean the hermeneutics of the Qur’an. This intrinsic correlation of *qirâ’a* and *samâ`* made Muslims develop alongside the ethics of recitation, *adab al-tilâwa*, the ethics of listening, *adab al-samâ`*. According to a prophetic *hadîth*, the reciter has to recite the Qur’an as if it were revealed onto his heart. The listener has, consequently, to be aware of the fact that he or she is listening to God’s revelation. It is in prayers that the believer is the reciter and the listener, thus acting as the speaker and the recipient in the meantime.

While the first command to the Prophet during his first experience with the process of revelation was to recite, *iqra`*, <96:1> the following commands were intended to prepare him spiritually for the heavy mission that was about to be charged on him. He was ordered to remain awake during part of the night in order to pray, recite the Qur’an, and repeat the name of his Lord <73:2-5> Recitation of the Qur’an thus became the very heart of all kinds of prayers -whether *du`â`* or the obligatory rite, *salât*. The Qur’an also speaks of the dawn prayer as *Qur’ân al-fajr* <17:78>. The

repeating of God's name, *dhikr*, was also identified with recitation of the Qur'an; it is repeatedly mentioned that the Qur'an is for *dhikr* <45:17,22>. The Qur'an is, in fact, *dhikr*, and consequently the word *al-dhikr* became like '*al-Qur'ân*' and '*al-kitâb*' one of the proper names of the Qur'an. Muslims are supposed to remember and mention the name of God every second regardless of their position whether they are standing, sitting or laying down <3:191>. Only the infidels and the hypocrites abstain from doing this <4:142; 37:13>. Like *dhikr* and praying, *tasbîh*, glorification of God by saying *subhân Allâh*, is a repeated demand addressed to the Prophet as well as to all believers. It is through *tasbîh* that the believers join the whole universe in a cosmic prayer. Everything and every being on earth and heaven glorify God <13:13; 17:44; 24:36,41 etc>, so the Qur'an attests. Glorification has to be performed day and night, early and late, before sunrise and before sunset <3:41; 5:98; 20:130; 25:58; 33:42 etc>. Remembrance, glorification and prayer represent, in fact, different dimensions of the essential relationship between the Creator and His creatures, which is a continuous act of communication through worshipping, *ibâda*. Jinns and humans are created only to worship God, so does the Qur'an emphasize <51:56>. Strongly related to *dhikr* and *tasbîh* is *takbîr*, to say *Allâhu Akbar* (God is the Greatest.) The Qur'an speaks of God as *al-Kabîr al-Muta`âl*, the Great most Transcendent <13:9> and *al-`Aliyy al-Kabîr*, the Great most Exalted <4:34; 22:62; 31:30; 34:23; 40:12>. So, Muslims are ordered to exalt God over any other deities. The order was first directed to the Prophet within his first assignment as a prophet to 'get up and warn' (his people), *qum fa-andhir*, and 'to exalt his Lord', *wa-rabbaka fa-kabbir* <74:3>. The same *takbîr* order is directed to Muslims, once in the fasting context <2:185> and another within the *hajj* context <22:37>. We will see how most of these Qur'anic phrases and vocabularies became part of the fabric of everyday language as well as the essential components of rituals.

## 2.2

The *salât* was introduced during the Prophet's ascension journey to the highest horizon. According to Islamic sources, it was introduced via direct communication between God and Muhammad through this journey called *mi`râj* alluded to in sura 53 called *al-Najm*. In the first 18 verses of this sura we can comprehend a cosmic encounter in which Muhammad, Gabriel and God are present. The verses are obviously addressing the people of Mecca; both Muhammad and Gabriel are referred to by adjectives, Muhammad as *sâhibikum*, your fellow <2>, and Gabriel as 'mighty in Power, and endowed with Wisdom <5-6>. The oath by 'the falling star' in the first verse reflects a movement down opposite to Muhammad's moving up to the highest horizon, *al-ufuq al-a`lâ*, where he will receive direct *wahy*. Gabriel is presented as occupying already the highest horizon. The pronouns referring to Muhammad, Gabriel, and God are poetically ambiguous in verses eight and thirteen. The whole cosmic journey is concluded by the indication that Muhammad had truly seen some of the Greatest Signs of his Lord, a clear reference to the night journey, *isrâ'* <17:1-2>.

It was during this cosmic journey, *mi`râj*, and via direct *wahy*, that the *salât* was introduced as an obligatory rite to be performed five times everyday, so Islamic sources tell us. This gives the *salât* a very unique status compared to other rites; it is the very foundation of religion, *`imâd al-dîn*, according to the prophetic tradition.

This importance of *salât* is further emphasised by a prophetic *hadîth* in which the Prophet is reported to have said, "God is present in the *qibla* of praying" (*Allâh fî qiblat al-musallî*), which indicates clearly the communicative function of praying. It is also reported in another tradition that the Prophet -distinguishing between *îmân* and *ihsân*- said, "*al-ihsân huwa an ta`bud Allâha ka-anna-ka trâh, fa-in lam takun trâhu fa-innahu yarâk*," (the *ihsân* is that you worship God as if you see Him; if you don't, [and in fact you do not literally see Him], He sees you). The significance of the simile particle *ka-anna* is the allusion to the faculty of 'imagination' by which it is possible to perceive an image of God that facilitates the process of communication. The meaning is to persuade the believer to fully recognise that he is directly addressing God and receiving God's response.

### 3 *Salât* and *Hajj*: Micro and Macro Communication Channels:

The prayer entails the obligatory recitation of the first chapter of the Qur'an, *al-Fâtiha*, in every single unit, *rak`a*, of its rite. The five obligatory prayers contain 17 *rak`as* in all.<sup>19</sup> This means that every Muslim has to recite the *Fâtiha* seventeen times a day. The number will naturally increase if a Muslim performs the non-obligatory prayers called *nawâfil* as well. A brief analysis of a single *raka'a* would prove that the *salât* represents a channel of communication parallel to the prototypical communicative pattern through which the Qur'an was revealed.

It starts by the *takbîr* formula, i.e., exalting God, the Greatest, which is the rite of passage for entering the *salât*. The *takbîr* formula is followed by the *isti`âdha* formula, seeking protection in God against the cursed Satan, then follows the *basmala* formula, in the name of God, the Compassionate, and the Merciful. Then follows the recitation of *al-Fâtiha*. Furthermore, as every *rak`a* includes *takbîr*, *dhikr*, *hamd*, *tasbîh* and *du`â'*, the *salât* is, in fact, built on Qur'anic recitation, *qir`a*, thus emphasizing its uniqueness as a channel of communication between man and God. The *taslîm* formula, *al-salâmu `alaykum wa-rahmatu `llâhi wa-barakâtuh*, is the rite of passage ending the communication as *takbîr* is the entrance passage rite.

#### 3.1

According to a very well-known report attributed to the Prophet as a Divine Tradition, *hadîth Qudsî*, and figuring in all collections of *hadîth*, the *salât* is identified with the recitation of *al-Fâtiha*, which presents in its turn a supplication and answer, *du`â' - istijâba*, between the believer and his Lord.<sup>20</sup> It is in reciting the *Fâtiha* that the believer is addressing God whereas God is responding. It is man's voice which is obviously heard, nevertheless, what is recited is a Qur'anic chapter.

In addition to its importance as a communicating channel between God and man,

*al-Fâtiha*, the very heart of the *salât*, encapsulates in its short seven verses, according to al-Ghazâlî (d. 505/1111,) all the topics covered in details through the whole Qur'an.<sup>21</sup> Thus encapsulated in the *salât*, a form of micro Qur'an is presented. Occupying the highest and most dominant religious position, in addition to being not confined to individualistic performance but strongly recommended to be performed collectively, *salât* represents, in fact, the domain of the daily encounter between divinity and humanity.

The aural and oral dimension we found in the structure of *wahy* can be also recognised in the *salât*. The Prophet, and accordingly all believers, is instructed neither to perform prayer aloud nor to perform it in a low tone. A medium tone is preferred. <17:110> To perform the *salât* in a loud tone will be at the expense of the aural aspect, *insât*, while performing it in a low tone will negatively affect the oral aspect, *qirâ'a or tartîl*. It would not be an exaggeration to conclude that in the *salât* the Qur'an is encapsulated, thus providing daily semi-*wahy* situation, in which the believer is the reciter and the listener, thus acting as the speaker and the recipient in the meantime.

### 3.2

The *hajj*, pilgrimage to the holy shrine at Mecca *al-Ka`ba* represents a macro prayer in itself. Compared to the micro *salât*, it is the Muslim annual occasion combining the divine and the secular. It is mentioned in the Qur'an that *hajj* is meant for Muslims to realise their life welfare, *manâfi`*, as well as to mention God' Name on specific days. <22:28><sup>22</sup> An important element of *hajj* as macro *salât*, is the supplication, *du`â' al-talbiya*, enchanted at approaching Mecca, the sanctuary place for the Muslim world.<sup>23</sup> Another part is the circumambulation around the *ka`ba*, which is to be performed three times: at the arrival (*tawâf al qudûm*), at the departure (*twâf al-wadâ`*), and right after the completion of *Hajj* (*tawâf al-ifâda*). Both the initial and the final circumambulations correspond to the *takbîr* formula marking the beginning of the *salat* and *taslîm* formula marking its end. Although the *du`â' al-talbiya* is not literally a Qur'anic quotation, its vocabulary are Qur'anic.

In between the daily *salât* and the annual occasion of *hajj* exists the sacred month of *Ramadân*, in which the first Qur'anic verses were revealed <2:185>. In addition to the fasting during the day a night-prayer, *salât 'l-qiyâm*, is recommended as *sunna* to be collectively performed every night. During the last ten days of the month *i'tikâf* -- staying at the mosque day and night committed absolutely to devotion -- is also recommended as *sunna*. One of the last ten nights of *Ramadân*, *laylat al-qadr*, is considered the most important night. It was the night in which the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed. It is better than one thousand months <97:1>, which means that devotion on that specific night is evaluated and will be awarded as equal to a period of one thousand-month of devotion.<sup>24</sup> It was *Ramadân* that brought the importance of the oral dimension of the Qur'an to the attention of some non-Muslim scholars; it is "the month of months in the Muslim calendar"<sup>25</sup>

If we add the weekly Friday prayer, which is obligatorily collective, with its sermon, *khutba*, the Qur'an recitation presents a regular sphere of communication for every individual Muslim, every Muslim community as well as the whole Muslim world.<sup>26</sup> Through the collective aspect of the *salât*, both the micro and the macro, the Qur'anic formulae spread beyond the sanctuary limits to infiltrate everyday speech in almost every spoken language in the Muslim World as will be explained.

#### 4 Qur'an Recitation as a Discipline:

*Qirâ'at al-Qur'ân*, the very heart of both the micro and macro *salât*, and accordingly the medium of man-God communication, developed as an independent discipline with rules and methods of its own. A professional reciter, *qâri'*, would recite the Qur'an in a rather embellished way known as *tartil*, a term used twice in the Qur'an for 'recitation' <25:33; 73:4> It is reported that the Prophet said, "Embellish the Qur'an with your voices." It is also reported that he said, "He who does not recite the Qur'an melodiously is not one of us."<sup>27</sup> To such precepts the Prophet added his personal example, when on the day of his victorious entry into Mecca he was seen on the back of his she-camel vibrantly chanting verses from the Sura of the conquest, *Surat 'l-fath*.<sup>28</sup> The rules of recitation with embellishment *tartil* became a discipline called *tajwid*. It is an inter-disciplinary field of knowledge entailing linguistics, mastering the art of performance related to music as well as *qirâ'ât*, various vocalizations of the Qur'an.

Qur'an recitation and memorization have been essential components of traditional education for Muslims. The first step in a Muslim child education is to memorize some of the Qur'anic short suras such as *al-Fâtiha*, *al-Ikhlâs*, and *al-Mu`awwidhatayn*, chapters 1, 112, 113 and 114 respectively. This first step is followed by others till the child memorizes the whole Qur'an by the age of ten or twelve. Traditional Islamic educational system, whether in classical *madrasas* or by private learning, usually starts by assimilating the Qur'an. Memorizing the whole Qur'an was for a long time a pre-requisite for a student to be permitted for higher education, the so called *al-`âlimiyya* level, at al-Azhar University in Cairo. The importance of this tradition for Muslims could not be best explained except by quoting Graham: "The very act of learning a text 'by heart' internalizes the text in a way that familiarity with even an often-read book does not. Memorization is a particularly intimate appropriation of a text, and the capacity to quote or recite a text from memory is a spiritual resource that is tapped automatically in every act of reflection, worship prayer, or moral deliberation, as well as in times of personal and communal decision or crisis."<sup>29</sup> Within the introduction of modern secular educational system the teaching of the Qur'an continued to be an essential course in the curriculum of all school levels, a fact that holds true for all Muslim countries. Within the fever of introducing mass education in every Muslim country during the post-colonial era, learning the Qur'an became an even more widespread phenomenon that can hardly remain unnoticed. Even Muslim communities in Diaspora, whether living in Western or non-Western

countries, are determined to have their own schools where they can teach Islam and Qur'an to their children.<sup>30</sup>

There is no doubt now about 'the correlation between highly oral use of scripture and religious reform movements' because the 'internalizing' of important texts through memorization and recitation "can serve as an effective educational or indoctrination discipline."<sup>31</sup> The recent radical islamist movements, which introduce themselves as the best substitute for the current political regimes, make a very good use of the recitation of the Qur'an, among other things, to spread their ideologies. Governments in Muslim countries did not hesitate to use the same method by encouraging memorization and recitation of the Qur'an by spending large sums of money for 'recitation competitions' and 'memorization competitions. In Egypt, for example, the highest competition for the recitation and memorization of the Qur'an is sponsored by the Ministry of Endowment, *wizârat al-awqâf*. The prizes are presented to the winners by the President or the Prime Minister on the eve of *laylat 'l-qadr* every year.

Thus being an essential element of the Muslim daily religious life, *tartîl al-Qur'ân* became not only a profession but also an institution. Qur'an recitation is broadcast everyday from all the radio and television channels in all Muslim countries. It is at least broadcast twice a day, at the beginning and at the end of the daily broadcasting. In addition, religious programs, where Qur'anic verses are quoted and explained, amount to about 25% of the broadcasting time everyday. The Egyptian government also established a special radio station in the sixties –*idhâ`at al-Qur'ân al-Karîm*– only for broadcasting Qur'an recitation and relevant Qur'anic programs.

## 5 Everyday Language:

How much influence does the Qur'an have on everyday language? It is only possible within the limited space to give some examples indicating how much the Qur'anic phrases, expressions, formulae and vocabulary became essential components of the fabric not only of the Arabic language but of all the spoken languages in Muslim countries as well.<sup>32</sup> Non-Arab Muslims have to learn how to pray in Arabic. Every Muslim should at least memorise *al-Fâtiha* and some short *suras* in order to be able to perform praying in a religiously accepted manner. As it became obligatory for the non-Arab Muslims to recite the Arabic Qur'an in prayers<sup>33</sup>, languages such as Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Malay etc., became heavily influenced by the Qur'an, or at least carry the Qur'anic imprint. This was, and still is, possible because of the oral/aural characteristic of the Qur'an alone. Some Qur'anic phrases and sentences or verses to be found in almost every Muslim spoken language are the following.

1 The name of God, Allah, is present in almost every speech act. In Arabic, especially in the Egyptian dialect, its frequency in everyday speech with multiple connotations is remarkable. It could express deep appreciation or admiration of a beautiful face, voice, song, poem, a scent, a scene, a drink, a meal etc., if it is

pronounced with a very long vowel and quite closed end. But it could express anger and dissatisfaction if pronounced with a higher tune stressing the double *lâm* ending with the intonation of a rhetoric question. In such a context the word ‘Allah’ acts as a “marker” of the particular state of mind and has nothing to do with its religious connotation. It carries no religious significance and can even be used in situations not condoned by religion. A gambler, for example, can use the word to express his dissatisfaction with his opponent’s way of gambling.<sup>34</sup> It could, thirdly, connote teasing or mocking if it is repeated several times with an open ending.

2 The first part of the *shahâda*, *lâ ilâha illâ ’llâh*, is frequently used to convey different connotations in different situations. It usually expresses sadness on hearing bad news about someone known. Reacting to the news about the death of a person it is always followed by the Qur’anic expression *innâ li-llâhi wa-innâ ilayhi raji`ûn*, we are surely in the hands of God, and surely we will return to Him <2:156; also 3:83; 6:36; 19:4; 24:64; 28:39; 40:77 and 96:8>. It could also convey a sense of anger or displeasure when facing certain unexpected dilemma.

3 *Allâhu Akbar* is the marker of, first, entering into the praying mood, called then *takbirat al-ihrâm*. Secondly, it indicates -within the *salât*- moving from one praying position to another. It is always followed by the *isti`âdha* formula *a`ûdhu bi-’llâhi mina ’sh-shaytâni ’r-rajîm*’ and then by the *basmala* formula *’bi-’smi ’llâhi ’r-Rahmâni ’r-Rahîm*’ before reciting *al-Fâtiha*. The *takbîr* formula is also used in everyday language to express dissatisfaction in a situation where someone behaves or acts arrogantly.

4 The *isti`âdha* formula is to seek God’s protection against the cursed devil especially before Qur’an recitation <16:98>. Besides its usage in religious and devotional situations <3:36; 7:200; 19:18; 23:97 for example>, it expresses, in everyday language usage, the speaker’s intention not to be involved in matters or affairs he or she disapproves or resents.

5 The *istighfâr* formula *astaghfiru ’llâha ’l-`Azîm*’, which is mentioned and recommended by the Qur’an more than 50 times, is always present in everyday language associated most of the time with *isti`âdha* formula, either to express apologies for being angry or to persuade an angry person to calm down. Like the greeting formula, *salâm*, its usage in everyday language is not limited to the Arab Muslims.

6 The *basmala* formula, *bi-’smi ’llâhi ’r-Rahmâni ’r-Rahîm*, by the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful- is to be recited also before reciting *al-Fâtiha*. With the exception of *sura* nine, it is at the opening of every *sura* in the *mushaf*. It also exists as an internal verse <27:30>. Whereas the *isti`âdha* formula is to seek protection



against the devil, a negative dimension, the *basmla* formula represents the positive dimension of seeking *baraka*, or blessing. For its positive connotation the *basmla* formula is more often present in various activities of everyday life. It is reported as a well known prophetic *hadīth* that any speech and/or any considerable action or behaviour is incomplete, if executed without being preceded by the mentioning of God's name (*kullu kalāmin aw amrin dhī ballin la yuftatahu bi-dhikri llāhi `azza wa jalla fa-huwa abtar*).<sup>35</sup>

*Basmala* should be recited on entering a room or a house, opening a book, starting to eat, and nowadays it became common behaviour on television's talk shows that the guest starts his or here speech by *basmla* whatever the subject matter is. It is very normal for students of all ages to whisper the *basmla* before exams, oral or written. Airlines companies, such as Gulf-Air, Saudi-Air, Pakistani and sometimes Egypt-Air, started recently to play an audiotaped *basmla* before takeoff. It is followed on the same tape by another verse of the Qur'an, '*subhāna man sakhkhara la-nā hādhā wa-mā kunnā lahū muqrinīn*' (Glory is to God who tamed this for our disposal, which we otherwise were unable to control <43:13>). The verse, which is meant to glorify God whose power makes it possible for man to travel on water and to ride on the back of animals, is applied to modern technology. It has been also sort of a general practice for many Muslims to recite the *basmla* formula followed by the same verse when one starts a car. The *basmla* formula has certain magic powers according to some mystics who believe in the magic power of language in general and in the sacred power of Arabic, the language of the holy Qur'an, in specific.<sup>36</sup>

7 The Islamic greeting, *al-salāmu `alaykum wa-rahmatu 'llāhi wa-barakātuh* (will peace, the mercy of God, as well His blessing, be upon you,) has its foundation in the Qur'an: It is the reception greeting given by the angels to those who deserved paradise <6:54; 7:46; 10:10; 13:24; 14:23; 15:46; 19:62; 56:26>. It is also the obligatory greeting for the prophets <19:15, 23>. As the word Islam itself is derived from the same root, s.l.m, and as *al-Salām* is one of the Most Beautiful Names of God, '*asmā'u 'llāhi `l-husnā*', it is understandable that the greeting of Muslims is *salām*.

It is also part of a formula used to greet the souls of the ancestors when arriving at the graveyard, whether for visiting or participating in a funeral. The formula is: *Al-Salāmu `alaykum dāra qawmin mu'minin, antum al-sābiqūn wa-nahmu in shā' a 'llāh bi-kum lāhiqūn*, peace be upon you residence of people of faith, you preceded us and we will join you if God wills. Here we came across '*in shā' a 'llāh*', a very common expression used by Muslims occasionally.

8 The expression '*lā hawla wa-lā quwwata illā bi-'llāhi 'l-'Aliyyi 'l-'Azīm*' contains three of God's names -*Allāh*, *al-'Aliyy* and *al-'Azīm* <11: 66; 22:40,74; 33:25; 40:22; 42:19; 57:25; 58:21>. The expression is used in everyday language to express a reaction in a situation where a sense of power or strong authority is displayed. However, everyday language is not only full of Qur'anic phrases, expressions and

idioms, certain short *suras* have a strong presence in it as well.

9 The two suras called *al-mu`awwidhatân*, 113 and 114, are mostly recited before sleeping, preceded as a matter of course by both the *isti`âdhâ* and the *basmala* formulae. They are also recited by mothers to calm down a crying baby.

10 The recitation of *al-Fâtiha*, *qirâ`t al-Fâtiha*, is an expression used often to donate different things. If it is recited in the context of 'condolence', graveyard visitation, or mentioning the name of a deceased person, the recitation donates, then, the asking for God's mercy and the blessing for the soul of the deceased. If it is mentioned during visiting or while passing-by a saint's shrine, its recitation is to gain *baraka* from the *walî*. It could also mean that someone has been, or going to be, engaged. Betrothal is traditionally associated with recitation of *al-Fâtiha* by some family members of the future groom and bride. It is also recited before the wedding contract session, *katb al-kitâb*, and at the wedding night. Its recitation is surely meant to add a sacred spirit to the marriage institution.

11 The first verse of *al-Fâtiha* after the *basmalla*, i.e., '*al-hamdu li-'llâhi rabbi 'l-`âlamîn*', is also part of everyday language. At the beginning of a meal the *basmalla* formula is recited, at the end the *hamd* is its conclusion. The *hamd* formula is not to be confined to thanking God for the blessing provided, but should always be the response of a Muslim to whatever God bestows on him, as confirmed by the statement '*al-hamdu li-'llâhi 'lladhi lâ yuhmadu `alâ makrûhin siwâh*, thanks to God, He alone is to be thanked for unpleasant things.' This explains why the answer given by a Muslim to the casual question 'how are you' always starts by the *hamd* formula, regardless of how he or she really is.

12 Like the *hamd* formula, the *tasbîh* expression is also part of everyday language, but it could have different connotations like the *Fâtiha* recitation. It could express different levels of excitement.

13 A *du`â'* formula composed of most of the above explained elements is frequently recited as follow: *Subhâna Allâh; wa 'l-hamdu li 'llâh; wa lâ ilâh illâ Allâh, wa-'llâhu akbar; wa-lâ hawla wa-lâ quwwata illâ bi-'llâhi al-'Alliyy al-'Azîm.*

### **Conclusion:**

It is basically through recitation, as we have seen, that the Qur'an represents a domain of communication where both God and man meet. The language which is used in this act of communication is the Qur'anic language. Through ritual recitation the language of the Qur'an infiltrates everyday language, thus, returning to its original human nature. As also has been explained, the Qur'anic language has been indoctrinated in the history of Islamic thought, and Arabic at large has been

considered the sacred language. It was Al-Shâfi`i, Muhammad b. Idris (150-204/775-832) who explicitly advanced the view that the Qur'an entails everything and contains, whether explicitly or implicitly, solutions to all the problems of human life at present and in the future.<sup>37</sup> He was also the one who explicitly indoctrinated Arabic language. In the context of rejecting the existence of any foreign vocabulary in the Qur'an he claimed that Arabic is far beyond total comprehension. Only the Prophet is capable of absolute attainment of comprehensive knowledge.<sup>38</sup> The view that dominates Muslim discourse all over the Muslim world, however, is clearly expressed as follows: -I am not quoting here a radical islamist or a member of any political group, but a general statement that could be found everywhere- "As a word from God, the Koran is the foundation of the Muslim life. It provides for him the way to fulfilment in the world beyond and to happiness in the present one. There is for him no situation imaginable for which it does not afford guidance, a problem for which it does not have a solution. It is the ultimate source of all truth, the final vindication of all right, the primary criterion of all values, and the original basis of all authority. Both public and private affairs, religious and secular fall under its jurisdiction."<sup>39</sup>

This dominant view is probably one major cause of the obvious conflict witnessed in almost every Muslim country. The internal political, social, ideological and intellectual conflict in most of the Muslim countries is currently almost polarised between the secularists and the islamists. While the secularists propagate the absolute separation of Islam from life at large, thus following the footprint of the Western secularism, the islamists are busy trying to indoctrinate all the secular spheres of everyday life. Their slogans, ranging from 'Islam is the solution' to 'the scientific supremacy of the Qur'an' and the 'islamization of knowledge'<sup>40</sup>, appeal to the ill-informed populace. In such dominant discourse it is impossible to think rationally or act reasonably. It is very possible to preach from supposedly an academic position that the Qur'an allows the husband to beat his wife to discipline her. If everything mentioned in the Qur'an is to be literally followed as a divine law, Muslims should re-institute 'slavery' as socio-economic system. It is mentioned in the Qur'an, Isn't it?

What the Qur'an presents to Muslims is neither the islamization of life nor the absolute separation of religion from life. Separating religion from the state is essential, but it does not mean relegating religion to the background of social life. The Qur'an as a mode of communication between God and man teaches us something more beyond 'law' and 'politics' in the narrow sense of the two terms. It teaches us that the literal interpretation means that we lock the Word of God in the moment of its historical annunciation. Put differently, we are taught to limit the meaning of the Qur'an to the first phase of its historical construction, whereas we have to be aware of the other phase in order to grasp the dynamics, according to which the Qur'an has been able to form and shape the life of Muslims. Awareness of the essential characteristic of the religious language in general could protect us from being totally immersed in its indoctrinated atmosphere and thus lose our human

identity. On the other hand, we have to be aware that our human identity is not autonomous, or completely dissociated from other forms of life on earth as well as in the whole universe. Our human identity is divine as much as the Divine identity is humanised by our perception. The Qur'anic model I have just briefly tried to present is well presented in the philosophical mystical system of the great Andalusian Sufi Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi (d. 638/1240,) especially in his well-known concept of the Divine Imagination versus the human imagination. There is, unfortunately, neither time nor space to elaborate on this.<sup>41</sup>

### **Acknowledgment:**

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Leiden University in specific and to the Dutch academia in general. The unconditional support and the atmosphere of intimate friendship, they willingly provided both my wife and me with, made us at home. Forgive me, because the list of names is too long; I don't want to hold you on your seats for another hour, neither do I want to forget any name. Colleagues of Islamic Studies, Arabic Studies, and the Projects Division as well as IIAS and ISIM, how can I ever thank you all.

Allow me, ladies and gentlemen, to address the students whom during the last five years have taught me much more than they think I have taught them. Without your willingness to listen and without your creative responses, how could I have ever survived? Being deprived of watching the growth of my students in Egypt, you consoled my desperate soul and strengthened my heart.

Lastly, allow me to thank my friends who came all the way from Cairo to be with me today. Counselor Mona Dhu 'l-Faqâr, who committed herself voluntarily to our case; professor Ahmad Mursî, chairman of the Dep. of Arabic language and Literature, Faculty of Letters, Cairo University and most important my best loyal friend for more than thirty years; Dr. Muhammad Abu al-Ghâr Emeritus Professor of the Faculty of Medicine, Cairo University, who is a second self to me, and my daughter Shereen.

In this moment of my life how I dare forget two women: my mother, God bless her soul, the illiterate, helpless widow, who found herself by the sudden death of the husband responsible for five children, the oldest was fourteen. She had to face a patriarchal world. She did not follow the expected course determined in advance; she decided to fight her own battle. She did, and she won.

I am a son of this brave woman, and I am very proud of being disciplined by here. I hope your soul my dear mother is watching me right now and is pleased. I will never ever forget the basic lesson you taught me, not by preaching but by your life example. 'Whoever lives realizing only his individualistic interests does not deserve the gift of life'. The other woman is my wife, Ebtihâl Yûnus, who stood by me and shared every bit of our life crisis. She provided warmth, support, love, and most important belief in my struggle. Finally, I'd like to thank you all for coming, listening, and sharing my thoughts and feelings. Some of you are fasting; it is time

to break your fast. Ik heb gezegd.

- 1 I would like to express my debt to all those who took the pain of reading the initial draft of this lecture/paper and readily provided me with their valuable comments and even corrections. Special thanks and gratitude are to my colleagues and friends of Leiden University Prof. P. S. Koningsveld, Prof. R. Kruk and Dr. N. Kaptein. For editing my English I am deeply grateful to my dear friend Prof. F. Ghazoul of the American University of Cairo and to my dear daughter Dr. Shereen Abu al-Naga of Cairo University.
- 2 The verb *qar'a* occurs in the Qur'an 17 times, in most of them meaning „recite“. It is always the Qur'an that is recited, usually by Muhammad <16:98;17:45, etc.>. But in one of the earliest contexts it is God who recited the revelation to Muhammad: „When we recite it, follow its recitation“ <75:18>, and in one of the latest contexts <73:20> it is the believers. The verb also means „read“ in four or five verses, always with „book“ (*kitâb*). In 17:93, Muhammad is challenged by some unbelievers to ascend to heaven and bring down a book they can read for themselves. Three passages <17:14, 71, and 69:19> refer to the record books to be read at the Last Judgment, and one <10:94> refers to some of Muhammad's contemporaries, probably Jews and Christians, as „those who have been reciting [or reading] the Book“ before him. Cf., El, second edition, v, p. 400 ff.
- 3 cf. William A. Graham, *Beyond the written word: oral aspects of scripture in the history of religion*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, especially part three.
- 4 Cf. J. R. T. M. Peters, *God's Created Speech*, Brill, Leiden, 1976, pp. 1-3.
- 5 Cf. J. Van Ess, „Verbal Inspiration? Language and Revelation in Classical Islamic Theology“ in Stefan Wild (Ed.) *The Qur'an as Text*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1996, p. 182.
- 6 Ibid., p. 192.
- 7 Cf. Izutsu, Toshihiko, Revelation as a Linguistic Concept in Islam, in „Studies in Medieval Thought“, The Japanese Society of Medieval philosophy, Tokyo, vol. V 1962, pp. 122-167.
- 8 Ibid., p. 138. He starts by identifying 'revelation' with the concrete speech behavior (*kalâm*) as an essential condition for his analysis, thus, confusing different Qur'anic terms.
- 9 Reference to Qur'anic citations are indicated always in this paper by the chapter's number according to Cairo edition followed by the verse or verses' number. For translation, Yusuf `Ali's is used as only guiding reference.
- 10 Op cit., p. 166.
- 11 such as the *`ilm al-makkî wa 'l-madânî* (the science that discerns between the parts of the Qur'an revealed respectively in Mecca and Medina,) the *`ilm asbâb al-nuzûl* (the science of the occasions of the revelation of the various parts of the Qur'an,) the *`ilm al-nâsikh wa 'l-mansûkh* (the science of the abrogate and the abrogated) etc.
- 12 *Mafhûm al-Nass: Dirâsa fî `Ulûm al-Qur'ân* (The Concept of the Text: A Study

- in the Sciences of the Qur'an), first printed in Cairo 1990, second print 1993 and several reprints are published in Beirut and Casablanca, the last is 1998.
- 13 For a more discussion of this process of semantic transformation, see my "Al-Qur'an: al-`Âlam bi-wasfihî `Alâma" (the Qur'an: the universe as a sign,) in my collected papers-book *Al-Nass, al-Sulta, al-Haqq: Al-fikr al-dîni bayn iradat al-ma`rifa wa-iradat al-haymana* (the Text, the Authority, the Truth: religious thought between the search of knowledge and the search of power,) Beirut and Casablanca, 2d print 1997, pp. 213-85.
- 14 The story goes as follow: the Prophet Muhammad was dictating the verses 12-14 of chapter 23 to one of his scribes, verses which explain the gradual process of creating a human being out of sperm. When the Prophet reached the sentence, „and we have constructed him as a unique creation“ (*thumma ansha'nâhu khalqan âkhar*), the man was so deeply impressed that he exclaimed, „So blessed be God, the fairest of creator“ (*fa-tabâraka 'llâhu ahsanu 'l-khâliqîn*). The sentence fits perfectly the rhyming pattern of the verse and closes it. The Prophet was highly surprised, the story tells, because what the man said was exactly what had been revealed to him. See. Al-Tabarî, Muhammad b. Jarîr, *Jâmi` al-Bayân `an Ta'wil Ây al-Qur`ân*, ed. Mahmûd Muhammad Shâkir, Cairo n.d., vol. 1, p. 45, and vol. 2, pp. 533-535.
- 15 In one of its very early chapters (74 *al-Muddathir*) the Qur'an tells us about the reaction of an Arab who was perplexed by the Qur'an and unable to explain why he was so emotionally moved by it. In a late Meccan chapter (69 *al-Hâqqa*) the Qur'an strongly refutes any similarity with any other human discourse, be it poetry or sooth-saying
- 16 According to Amîn al-Khûlî (d. 1966) (c.f. *Manâhij al-Tajdid fi al-Nahw wa al-Balâgha wa al-Tafsîr wa al-Adab*, Cairo 1961, pp. 287-8), Abû Hâmid al-Ghazâlî (d. 505/1111) was the first thinker to propagate in his well known *Ihyâ' `Ulûm al-Dîn* the doctrine that all kinds of knowledge and sciences are implicitly or explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. In his *Jawâhir al-Qur`ân*, he elaborates his thesis more on theosophical grounds based on a mystical interpretation of the Qur'anic verse "Say (Muhammad) if the ocean were a supply for the Words of my Lord, the ocean would vanish before the Words of my Lord even if another ocean is provided". <18:109>. In another verse it is mentioned that even if seven oceans were provided, they would not exhaust the words of God. For an extensive analysis of al-Ghazâlî's hermeneutics, see my *Mafhûm al-Nass*, Beirut and Casablanca 5 ed., 1998, last chapters, pp. 243-297. The components of al-Ghazâlî Sufi system, especially his notion about the said nature of the Qur'an and the multi-semantic levels of its meaning, was developed by the Andalusian Sufi and philosopher Ibn `Arabî (d. 638/1240-1) into a particular form of pantheism. According to him, the Qur'an is a 'logo-cosmos', *kawn mastûr*, that manifests both man (the micro-cosmos) and the universe (the macro-cosmos), which in turn are different manifestations of the divine Reality (*al-Haqq*). Thus the truth

contained in the Qur'an expresses all the facts about the universe from top to bottom. Deciphering these facts is only possible by the mystic who attains the vision of Reality through himself, discovering his nature as the micro-cosmos representing the macro-cosmos. Such an accomplishment leads to the realization of the Divine manifestation reflected in man, i.e. realizing himself as the mirror that reflects Reality in a more comprehensive mode than the universe. This is the state of perfection, and the Perfect Man is the real representative, *khâlifa*, of Reality, who is able to decipher all the cosmic facts in the logo-cosmos, the Qur'an. cf. my *Falsafat al-Ta'wil*: a study of Ibn 'Arabi's hermeneutics of the Qur'an, Beirut 4<sup>th</sup> print 1998, pp. 263ff.

- 17 This response could be interpreted in two different ways, depending on the intonation applied to the statement on one hand, and on the meaning of the imperative 'recite' on the other hand. It could be interpreted as 'I am not going to recite' thus expressing Muhammad's reluctance to follow the order out of fear. In this case the imperative 'recite' means 'repeat'. It could equally be understood as 'how could I; I cannot read', thus expressing Muhammad's inability to read or write, his illiteracy. This second interpretation implies that 'recite' means 'read'. In my *Mafhûm al-Nass*, op. cit., pp. 66, the two possibilities are discussed and the conclusion was the refutation of the second explanation as a later report aiming at emphasizing the miraculous nature of the event, i.e., the illiterate Muhammad was able to read.
- 18 Recite: In the name of your Lord who Creates, Creates man from a clot. Recite: And your Lord is the Most Honorable, Who teaches by the pen, Teaches man which man knew not.
- 19 The daily five prayers include unequal number of *rak'as* in each prayer: 2 (dawn prayer, *al-fajr* or *al-subh*) + 4 (noon prayer, *al-dhuhr*) + 4 (afternoon prayer, *al-'asr*) + 3 (sunset prayer, *al-maghrib*) + 4 (night prayer, *al-'ishâ*) = 17).
- 20 It is related to Abû-Hurayra that the Prophet said, "praying without the recitation of *al-Fâtiha* is unacceptable (*khidâj*), unacceptable, unacceptable." The prophet also said, according to Abû-Hurayra, that God said, „*salât* is divided between Me and My servant into equal shares", (*qasamtu 's-salâta bayni wa bayna 'abdi nisfayn*):  
 When he says, "*al-hamdu li-llâhi rabbi 'l-'âlamîn*", (praise be to God, the Lord of the whole world), I say, "*hamadani 'abdi*", (My servant praised Me);  
 When he says, "*al-Rahmâni 'r-Rahîm*", (The Compassionate The Merciful), I say, "*athnâ 'layya 'abdi*", (My servant exalted me);  
 When he says, "*Mâlik yawmi 'd-dîn*", (the Master of the Day of Judgement), I say, "*majjadani 'abdi*", (My servant glorified me);  
 When he says, "*iyyâka na 'budu wa iyyâka nasta`in*", (It is You whom we worship and it is You from Whom we seek help) I say, "*hâdhihi bayni wa-bayna 'abdi wa li-'abdi mâ sa'al*", (this is between Me and My servant; all what My servant asked for is guaranteed);

When he says, “*ihdînâ ‘s-sirâta ‘l-mustaqîm, sirâta alladhîna an`amta `alayhim ghayri ‘l-maghdûbi `alayhim wa la-‘d-dâllin*”, (guide us to the right course, the course of those whom You blessed, not the course of whom provoked Your anger), I say, “*hâ`ulâ`i li-`abdi wa li-`abdi mâ sa`al*”, (these are for my servant and all are guaranteed for him). See *Al-Muwatta`* by Mâlik b. Anas, kitâb al-nidâ` li-`salât, no. 174; *Sahîh Muslim*, kitâb al-salât, no. 598. All *hadîth* quotations cited in this paper are taken from Sakhr CD program *Mawsû`at al-Hadîth al-Sharif*, Copyright Sakhr Software Co. 1995.

- 21 cf. Ghazâlî, Abû-Hâmid, *Jawâhir al-Qur`ân*, Cairo n.d. , pp. 39-42, where he explains that *al-Fâtîha* includes indications to the essence of God, *al-Dhât*, His attributes, *al-Sifât*, and His actions, *al-Af`âl*, all of which constitute the doctrine of faith. It also refers to the life-after, *al-ma`âd*, reward and punishment, *al-thawâb wa ‘l-`iqâb*, and alludes to the Qur`anic stories concerning both the ‘lost’ and the ‘will-guided’ groups as well as to some legal injunctions, *ahkâm*.
- 22 It was a pre-Islamic ritual institution, but the Qur`an gave it its Islamic significance by planting its root back to the call of Abraham <2:125,126; 9:3; 22:27>. Although it is only obligatory once during lifetime for only those who can afford it, Muslims are very enthusiastic to manage performing *hajj* more than once. With the progress in the technology of travel the number of Muslims who want to go to *hajj* gradually increased to the extent that the Saudi authorities decided for an annual quota for every Muslim country. To avoid the huge crowd during the specific month of the *hajj*, and under the influence of the limitation of numbers demanded by the Saudi authorities, Muslims increasingly adopted the `umra <q. 2:158,196>, a semi-*hajj* visit to the *Ka`ba*. An Islamist writer recently criticised in an article published in *al-Ahrâm* the flood of thousands of Egyptian Muslims heading to Mecca during the month of *Ramadân* to perform `umra. The aim of that criticism is to draw the attention of Muslims to the priority given in Islam to communal and social duties over self-salvation devotion. The angry reaction to such criticism reflects the importance of *hajj* and `umra for ordinary Muslims. See, Fahmî Huwaydî, *al-Ahrâm*, Cairo, in his weekly article: issues of 12, 19 and 26-1-1999.
- 23 It goes like this: “*labbayka Allâhumma labbayk, inna ‘l-hamda wa ‘n-ni`mata, wa ‘l-mulka lak, lâ sharîka laka labbayk, labbayk Allâhumma labbayk*”. (I am here God responding as fast as I could to your call. All the praise, all the blessing, and the whole kingdom of the universe, are only Yours; no partner is associated to You.” *Sahîh al-Bukhârî*, kitâb al-hajj, no. 133; *Sahîh Muslim*, kitâb al-hajj, no. 2137.
- 24 It was during that night that „the angels and the Holy Spirit descend by the permission of their Lord. Peace it is until the break of the morning <97:2-5> There is no agreement concerning the exact night of *laylat al-qadr*. Although ordinary Muslims believe it is the 27th night of Ramdân, scholars of Islam, the `ulamâ` explain that the reason why the exact night is not specified is to encourage



- Muslims to try the best of their devotion during all of the last ten nights where it is expected. The usage of the present form of the verb '*tatanazzalu*' allows believing in the very special award granted to devotion during this specific night as the angels always descend and witness the devotion of Muslims during that night. Cf. *Sahîh al-Bukhârî*, kitâb al-adhân, no. 771.
- 25 See Graham, op cit., p. x, where he says, „I was fortunate to be in Cairo during the month of Ramdan, which fell that year in December. It was there, walking the streets of the old city amidst the animated bustle of the nocturnal crowds of men, women, and children that I first heard at length the compelling chanting of the professional Qur'an reciters. It seemed that wherever I wandered in the old city, from Bab Zuwaylah to Bab al-Futuh, the drawn-out, nuanced cadences of the sacred recitations gave the festive nights a magical air as the reciters' penetrating voices sounded over radio in small, open shops, or wafted into the street from the doorway of mosques and from under the canvas marquees set up specially for this month of months in the Muslim calendar. If it was only an impressionistic introduction to the living tradition of Qur'an recitation, it was also unforgettable one.“
- 26 In the age of modern technology of communication, Friday prayer and the two feasts prayer, *salât al-`idayn*, are fully broadcast, i.e., including the sermons, by both radio and television in almost every Muslim country. With the introduction of the satellites, like Arab-sate and Nile-sate, the broadcasting reaches Muslim communities in non-Muslim countries. This made it also possible for each Muslim country to receive and re-broadcast the whole *hajj* procession from Mecca, thus turning the previously ritualistic privilege for those who could afford it into a publicly shared Islamic experience identifying the watchers with the pilgrims. The actual journey to Mecca, however, bestows upon the pilgrim a spiritual merit that cannot be shared by those watching or listening to the ritual. The month of Ramadân is also enjoying a more widespread publicity in the satellite age. *Salât al-qiyâm*, called also *tarâwîh* or *tahajjud*, also became public experience shared with those who perform it around the *Ka`ba* in Mecca. *Laylat al-qadr* is a special celebratory occasion that some television stations continue to broadcast from Mecca until the dawn prayer is finished.
- 27 Cf. *Sahîh al-Bukhârî*, kitâb al-salât, no. 6973; *Sunan Abî Dawûd*, kitâb al-salât, no. 1257.
- 28 Cf. *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, no. 19635 and 19649.
- 29 See Graham, op cit., p. 160.
- 30 With the technical progress, especially in the field of audio and video taping, learning *tajwid* rules became possible and much easier for ordinary Muslims. Now there is no need anymore to attend to an expert *shaykh* or *qâri'* in order to learn *tajwid*. Cassettes of *al-mushaf al-murattal* by *shaykh* Mahmûd al-Husarî, which appeared for the first time in Egypt in 1960, became an example that encouraged other reciters to record their recitations, *qirâ`ât*. All these *qirâ`at* are

now available on CDs accompanied by *tajwid*-teaching programs. With the spread of the Internet service there are hundreds of web-sites about Islam, each containing the Qur'an in Arabic and its translation to different languages; some sites present video recitation of it.

- 31 See Graham, op cit., p. 161.
- 32 For detailed analysis of the Qur'an in everyday life see my article entry „Everyday, Qur'an in“ in *the Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, forthcoming.
- 33 The question concerning whether it is possible or not for non-Arab Muslims to recite the translated Qur'an in their prayer was, first, addressed by Abû Hanîfa (d. 150/775), the founder of the Hanafî school of jurisprudence. From a Persian family himself, he did not find any religious objection for a Muslim unable to understand or to recite the Arabic Qur'an to perform prayer by means of a translation. He even permitted this to those who learned Arabic but still found some difficulties in reciting the Qur'an in Arabic (Abû Zahra, M., *Abû Hanîfah, Hayâtuh wa Ârâ'uh al Fiqhiyya*, 2d. ed., Cairo 1977, p. 241.) But Al-Shâfi'î insists that it is not valid to pray by means of reciting a Persian translation of the Qur'an. In addition, a recitation in Arabic, according to him, is not valid if the verse sequence is mistakenly not followed. It is not even enough to correct the mistake by returning to the correct sequence, because the reciter should restart the whole chapter (the first chapter of the Qur'an) all over again (*Kitâb al-Umm*, Cairo n. d., v. i, p.94.) The opinion of Shâfi'î became the accepted one by later consensus.
- 34 I owe this remarkable comment and its example to my dear friend Dr. M. Mahmûd of Tufts University.
- 35 *Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal*, no. 8355.
- 36 Cf. Ibn `Arabi's *al-Futûhât al-Makkiyya*, 4 vols, Cairo 1329 H., vol. 1, pp. 58ff, and vol. 2, pp. 395ff. It should be mentioned here that the literature about the magic power of language in Islamic culture is probably derived, at least partially, from the enigmatic letters at the beginning of some Qur'anic suras, *al-hurûf al-muqatta`a*.
- 37 See, *Al-Imâm al-Shafi'î wa Ta'sîs al-Aydyûlûjjiyya al-Wasatiyya* by the writer, Cairo, second enlarged edition 1996, p. 66.
- 38 Shâfi'î, Muhammad b. Idris, *al-Risâla*, ed. Ahmad Muhammad Shâkir, Beirut n.d., p. 20. See also, *Kitâb al-Umm*, op. cit., p. 271.
- 39 Labib, As-said, *The Recited Koran: A history of the first recorded version*, trans. and adopted by Bernard Weiss, M. A. Rauf and Morroe Berger, The Darwin Press, Princeton 1975, P.11.
- 40 The scientific supremacy of the Qur'an (*al-i`jâz al-`ilmî*) is, according to an article published recently in the weekly supplement of *al-Ahrâm* newspaper, October 27, 2000, p. 2, is not meant to convince the Arabs of the authenticity and divinity of the Qur'an. For the Arabs, the writer says, it is sufficiently

enough to establish the Qur'anic inimitability on its rhetorical eloquence; for the non-Arabs this explanation is neither enough nor acceptable. As for the Western culture science is the supreme mode of knowledge. The article is basically written in response to the criticism directed to the notion of 'the scientific supremacy of the Qur'an'. It is claimed that connecting the Qur'an to scientific theory, which is changeable and subject to challenge as human knowledge develops, does in fact cause damage to the divinity and the eternity of the Qur'an, the word of God. Defending the validity of *al-i`ijâz al-`ilmî* the writer distinguishes between scientific facts and scientific theories asserting that the Qur'anic supremacy is built on the former not the later. If such facts are explicitly or implicitly expressed in the Qur'an, it represents the solid and universal proof of its divinity.

- 41 For detailed analysis of Ibn `Arabi's concept of this middle sphere of existence, see my *Falsafat al-Ta'wil*, op. cit., pp. 47-95.

