

# Islamic Studies and the Problematic of Methodology in the Thought of Nasr

Hamid Abu Zayd

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## ABSTRACT

The modernist reading of Islamic studies in the contemporary era has been characterized by a specific methodology in interpreting the two Revelations. Among those who stood out in this field and who stirred widespread controversy within the Islamic religious sphere is the Egyptian thinker Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, particularly through his book that caused a major intellectual and media uproar and attracted broad criticism from specialists. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd sought to present an epistemological model through which he attempted to renew the religious methodology and, from his point of view, to liberate it from the hermeneutical theory that had dominated the sciences of exegesis since the early centuries. In this research paper, we will attempt to untangle the problematic and dialectical relationship between the text and reality by discussing the methodology employed by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd in establishing his conclusions, focusing on a single aspect of understanding the Qur'anic text, namely, the issue of abrogation (*naskh*).

**Keywords:** Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, concept of text, modernity, historicism, Qur'anic sciences, abrogation (*naskh*).

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of understanding the Qur'anic text is considered the cornerstone of contemporary modernist thought. After the fall of the Christian clerical system in Europe and the triumph of experimental science, Europeans managed to free themselves from the grips of ignorance and backwardness. As a result of the Arab researchers' exposure to Western civilization, for various reasons, they believed that the cause of Muslims' backwardness was the same as that of the Europeans, namely religion.

However, since Arab Muslims knew that European Christianity was a distorted form of the true religion brought by Jesus which differs from Muslims' correct belief concerning their sacred book, the Qur'an they directed their criticism toward the understandings of the Qur'anic text by the scholars of the Ummah. They claimed that the cause of backwardness lay in the understanding, not in the text itself.

They adopted a specific methodology to support their views and ideas. Among these thinkers was the Egyptian intellectual Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, who attempted to free the modern interpretive vision from the traditional method, which, in his view, relied on pre-existing foundations and knowledge that controlled the hermeneutical process.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd attributed this to two main schools:

- **The first school, which relies on rational foundations, represented by the Mu'tazilites.**
- **The second school, which relies on intuitive foundations, represented by the Sufis.<sup>1</sup>**

Perhaps Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's reliance on modern linguistic methodologies illuminated the path for him to take a different direction: eliciting the text independently from external influences. This approach is what became known among advocates of modern methodologies as the structuralist method, which spread and, if we may say, became a fashion among literary scholars in the 1980s.

It undoubtedly had a clear impact on Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's writings, as he states: "Therefore, it was necessary for this study to focus on the aspect of the text itself, in an attempt to discover its components, its particular mechanisms, and its active role in the hermeneutical process."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, he grants the text absolute authority while excluding the reader and the interpreter from the hermeneutical process. Based on this principle, the title of his study, *The Concept of the Text*, emerged as a reflection of modern linguistic concepts.

### **I. The Intellectual Methodology of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd:**

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's goal in his engagement with the interpretation of religious texts stems from his being influenced by Western civilization. In his view, once the West succeeded in freeing itself from the grip of the Church, it witnessed scientific and civilizational progress and development.

He, like many modernists, believed that the cause of the Islamic nation's backwardness lies in the problem of understanding the text, due to their faith-based belief that acts as a barrier to the process of understanding and critiquing the Qur'anic text.

Thus, they began to delve into and criticize the interpretations of Qur'anic scholars. Since the Islamic nation, according to Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, is a nation of the text, and because this

text represents its essential axis and the foundation upon which Islamic civilization was built, it became necessary to focus on the hermeneutical process accompanying social change across its various economic, social, and political structures.

This process relies on two variables or two principles:

### **1. The Epistemological Domain:**

It refers to the knowledge through which the text is addressed and its methods of interpretation are defined.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd sees that literary studies are capable of achieving the scientific awareness that transcends ideological orientations, along with a re-reading of the sciences of the Qur'an in an examined manner<sup>3</sup>.

This is the goal he pursued through his book *The Concept of the Text*, when he said: "This study aims to achieve two objectives, the first of which is to re-establish the connection between Qur'anic studies and the field of literary and critical studies"<sup>4</sup>.

### **2. The Epistemological Horizon:**

It is the starting point from which the specialist or researcher explores the missing dimension that forms the scientific awareness of heritage. From this standpoint, the calls of the modernists, led by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, rose, and the title of his book reflected this meaning: the search for the concept of the text according to a purely modernist methodology, different from what our early scholars such as Al-Suyuti and Al-Zarkashi undertook, as the works of these scholars, according to Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, were a response to a specific reality imposed by the Arab mind, which made them retreat and stop at the limits of the text<sup>5</sup>, due to the weakness and decline that afflicted the Islamic nation, causing these scholars to focus on classifying and authoring everything related to the text in order to protect the heritage from loss.<sup>6</sup>

From this perspective, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd directed his criticism at the Salafi thought, which, according to him, is ignorant of the purposes of revelation, the objectives of Shari'ah, and the contemporary reality. With the same harshness, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd also criticized those who called for renewal and the sifting of heritage, selecting from it what suits the present and discarding what time has surpassed, as the problem for him does not lie solely in renewal but in the heritage itself.

All the interpretations of Shari'ah rulings transmitted to us are merely theories and opinions of a certain group in a certain time and place, and thus, adopting any particular interpretation from the

heritage would mean supporting one orientation over another, which he considers sometimes more dangerous than imitation <sup>7</sup>.

Therefore, he emphasized what he called the scientific awareness of heritage, which requires courage and boldness to penetrate the historical depth of this heritage by ignoring all ready-made answers that could confuse the researcher's work and by posing the essential question about the nature of Islam through the search for the concept of the text.

Taking into account, as a methodological starting point in Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's thought, that the text is a cultural product, known as historicism or "arkhana," meaning that the Qur'anic text was formed in a specific environment, influenced by certain conditions that were fundamental to its formation.<sup>8</sup>

This idea, for Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, is an unquestionable axiom. Accordingly, the matter of the transcendent existence of the Qur'an before its revelation, for Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, is a metaphysical issue that disturbs the clarity of the truth believed in by most modernists<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's entire methodology and thought are based on the dialectic and the relationship between the text and reality. Therefore, to understand this text, it was necessary for him to use linguistic methodologies and linguistics in reading the Qur'anic text.

## **II. Practical Application of the Methodology:**

The issue of abrogation (naskh) constitutes one of the most important sources for advocates of contemporary readings to establish the historicity of the Qur'anic text and to link it to cultural and social conditions.

It is one of the thorny topics addressed by various Islamic schools of theology, jurisprudence, and legal theory, and it has also posed a challenge to Orientalists and Arab modernists, who have raised wide-ranging debates and numerous suspicions around it.

They differed regarding the establishment of the concept of abrogation: some viewed it as a fabricated notion to manipulate religion, while others saw in it a divine wisdom that accompanies people and gradually legislates for them.

The summary of the modernist employment of the issue of abrogation is condensed into two important points:

- The first issue: their use of abrogation as a weapon to attack the scholars of the Ummah, accusing them of falsification and distortion for the benefit of political authority at that time.

- The second issue: providing themselves with a religious justification by claiming the historicity of the Qur'an, asserting that the Qur'an responded to the needs of the people of its time; thus, when a verse no longer aligned with the needs of society, it was abrogated and replaced.

With this logic, they created for themselves a fertile ground to manipulate legislative rulings as they wished.

### **1. Abrogation as a Tool to Undermine the Transmission Chain and the Scholars of the Ummah:**

One of the fundamentals and axioms from which the proponents of contemporary readings proceed is the questioning of all transmitted reports from the first generation.

What we observe throughout their writings is the undermining of statements and individuals for various reasons.

Among the topics that stimulate their eagerness to criticize is the issue of abrogation. Modernists trace the reasons for the existence of abrogation in the Qur'an to several causes: Some consider that after the compilation of the Mushaf, many contradictions and complex discussions remained, requiring clarification and the removal of ambiguity.

Since it was not possible to add to or subtract from the Mushaf, some Islamic scholars resorted to inventing the issue of abrogation to fulfill the role of justification and to resolve contradictions. Others view abrogation as a political justificatory function by which caliphs preserved their positions through various manipulations of Qur'anic texts.

A third group attributes abrogation to an effort by the early generation to establish judicial laws and legislative rules.

As they differed in determining the purpose of abrogation, they also differed regarding its source: Some believe that abrogation was a prophetic act, attributing abrogation to the Prophet himself, claiming that he would abrogate certain rulings once it became clear to him that a particular verse no longer responded adequately to specific circumstances, and that such abrogation was then accorded a Qur'anic and legal status.

Such claims attack the Prophet by attributing to him alteration and modification, even though Allah says: ﴿إِذَا تَنَزَّلَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا نَبَّاتٍ ۖ قَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا إِنَّمَا يَنْتَظِرُونَ غَيْرَ هَذَا أَوْ بَدَّلَهُ ۗ أَفَلَا مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أُبَدِّلَهُ مِنْ تَلْقَاءِ ﴿[Surah Yunus: 15].

Others acknowledge that abrogation is a divine wisdom responding to societal needs, a view adopted by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd when he said: "It is worthy of reflection and contemplation in

the matter that emerged, particularly during that early stage of Islam—the Meccan phase—under the name of 'abrogation (naskh).'

This matter, which became entrenched as a Qur'anic direction, involved nullifying the effect of one Qur'anic verse through another verse considered to be more responsive to the newly emerging realities of the changing and increasingly complex reality, that is, to the conditions of the audience addressed by Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, thereby achieving a line of transition from the general to the particular, and back again, with increasing interweaving between them in an ever-expanding and deepening spiral motion" <sup>10</sup>.

In this text, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd establishes a new concept of abrogation:

After acknowledging that abrogation is a Qur'anic method, he illustrated it through the linkage between the ruling of the abrogating verse and the ruling of the abrogated verse, indicating the possibility of shifting between the two according to the demands of circumstances and events.

Thus, the coexistence of both verses is necessary and cannot be annulled from the text.

This is further affirmed in his statement: "If the function of abrogation is gradualism in legislation and facilitation, there is no doubt that the retention of the abrogated texts alongside the abrogating texts is necessary, because the ruling of the abrogated text might once again be imposed by the reality.

Scholars realized this when they discussed the position of the text between commanding Muslims to be patient with the harm of the disbelievers and commanding them to fight, and they said: patience was among the deferred commands, the implementation of which was postponed or temporarily canceled due to changed circumstances; if the circumstances returned to their previous state, the original ruling would be reinstated" <sup>11</sup>.

The problem in Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's discourse does not lie in the compliance with rulings at different times and their change according to the change of their causes, because if we count the rulings intended by abrogation as determined by Imam Al-Suyuti, they do not exceed twenty verses.

Before following the instances of abrogation mentioned by Imam Al-Suyuti, we point out that most of the proponents of contemporary readings who consider abrogation a divine wisdom agree that abrogation is a method of facilitation, which is what Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd commends when he says: "The scholars of the Qur'an have approached this understanding, even if they expressed it in the language of their time and through their concepts," then he quotes the phrase of Imam Al-Zarkashi: "Abrogation is among what Allah has exclusively granted this Ummah in the ruling of facilitation." <sup>12</sup>

Based on the principle of facilitation, if we track the verses mentioned by Imam Al-Suyuti, we find that we must exclude those where Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's principle regarding the change of rulings with the change of causes cannot be applied, because we cannot move from facilitation to hardship.

Thus, the following abrogated verses are excluded because they were abrogated by verses that are less burdensome and more facilitating: ﴿اتقوا الله حق تقاته﴾, ﴿والذين يتوفون منكم ويذرون﴾, ﴿كتب عليكم الصيام﴾, ﴿إن تبدا ما في أنفسكم أو تخفوه يحاسبكم به الله﴾, ﴿إن يكن منكم عشرون صابرون يغلبوا مائتين﴾, ﴿انفروا خفافاً وثقالاً﴾, ﴿يا أيها المزمّل قم الليل﴾.

These are seven instances where the ruling cannot be shifted as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd claimed by applying the principle of facilitation.

Then, by examining the remaining instances, we find some that are specific to the Prophet alone, and they are added to the previous seven: ﴿لا يحل لك النساء من بعد﴾ and ﴿فقدّموا بين يدي نجواكم صدقة﴾. Adding these, we have nine instances, and adding the verse of the change of Qibla makes ten complete instances.

Thus, we are left with ten other instances, regarding which the commentators differed between considering them abrogation or clarification, restriction of the absolute, specification of the general, or elucidation of the ambiguous.

The verses that can be said to carry an apparent problematic aspect and can be discussed with the proponents of the modernist school are the verse of bequest, the verse of the punishment for adultery, and the verse of the expiation for those who are capable of fasting, making them three instances out of the twenty that can be discussed with Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, based on his statement: "Every command that is to be obeyed at a certain time for a certain cause requiring that ruling, then moves to another ruling with the change of that cause, is not abrogation. Rather, abrogation is the removal such that it is no longer permissible to act upon it at all" <sup>13</sup>.

As for the verse concerning the confinement of the adulteress: ﴿فأمسكوهنّ في البيوت حتى يتوفاهن الموت﴾, it is abrogated by His saying: ﴿فاجلدوا كل واحد منهما مائة جلدة﴾, and there is no doubt that flogging is a lighter punishment than confinement in houses until death.

Thus, this instance is added to the previously mentioned cases that inherently imply facilitation. However, the meaning of alleviation may differ from one society to another: confinement in houses might be considered a form of alleviation in societies that impose strict restrictions on women leaving their homes, while the execution of the punishment for adultery and liberation from it may be seen as alleviation in societies where women's movement is more common, and confinement would be considered a form of severity.

As for the verse regarding the obligatory bequest in His saying: ﴿كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ إِنْ تَرَكَ خَيْرًا الْوَصِيَّةُ لِلْوَالِدَيْنِ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۗ حَقًّا عَلَى الْمُتَّقِينَ﴾, this verse is among those over which scholars differed between considering it abrogated or still in effect.

What we see is what Al-Tabari mentioned, that this verse was revealed at a time when the fixed shares (inheritance laws) had not yet been prescribed, so it was obligatory for every Muslim to leave a bequest specifying the shares of the parents and close relatives.

When the verse in Surah Al-Nisa' was revealed and the shares were specified, the obligation of the bequest for heirs was abrogated, while it remained for non-heir relatives within the limits of one-third.

What further clarified and explained this ruling is the saying of the Prophet, peace be upon him: "There is no bequest for an heir."

As for the verse regarding the expiation for those capable of fasting, which is His saying: ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ (183) أَيَّامًا مَعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ ۗ وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامِ مِسْكِينٍ فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ وَأَنْ تَصُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ﴾, the modernists claimed that this verse implies that fasting is not obligatory for those capable of fasting, and that they are given the choice between fasting and paying an expiation for themselves.

The response to this is based on several points:

- First, it is the same response as in the case of the bequest verse: these verses were initially revealed at a time when fasting was optional, and then the ruling was abrogated by the following verse, which is His saying: ﴿شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ ۚ فَمَنْ شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ ۗ وَمَنْ كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَاكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ﴾ (فليصمه). His saying transferred the ruling from being optional to being obligatory.

In order to prevent any misunderstanding or misinterpretation that the second ruling imposed fasting on the capable, the traveler, and the sick, the second verse confirmed the first ruling related to the sick and the traveler while abrogating the ruling concerning the capable.

- Second, interpreting the term "يُطِيقُونَهُ": this verb refers to performing an act with hardship and difficulty, which is the highest level of endurance. A person says "I can endure this work" if he can do it with effort and difficulty; if it becomes more difficult, it would no longer be endurable.

- Third, examining the verb form in the Qur'an "يُطِيفُونَهُ" with a ḍammah on the first letter: it is known to scholars of Arabic that any past verb when converted into the present tense will have its first letter opened, whether it is trilateral, quintuple, or sextuple, except for quadrilateral verbs, where the first letter is given a ḍammah.

Since the verb in this verse has a ḍammah at the beginning, its past tense must be a quadrilateral verb "أطاق", unlike "طاق - يطوق".

Thus, the verb "أطاق" means inability, the opposite of "طاق", which means ability. Accordingly, the meaning of the verse is: "And upon those who are unable to fast is an expiation of feeding a poor person."

This is frequent in the Qur'an, such as the verb "قسط" meaning "injustice" and the verb "أقسط" meaning "justice", as in His saying: (وَأَنَا مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَمِنَّا الْقَاسِطُونَ فَمَنْ أَسْلَمَ فَأُولَئِكَ تَحَرَّوْا رَشَدًا (14) وَأَمَّا (15) الْقَاسِطُونَ فَكَانُوا لِجَهَنَّمَ حَطَبًا {[Surah Al-Jinn], and also the verb "خفى" meaning "hidden" and its opposite "أخفى" meaning "revealed," as in His saying: "أكاد أخفيها," which interpreters explained as meaning "I almost reveal it."

Upon examining the above, we find that the verse of the bequest and the verse regarding the expiation for those capable of fasting are definitive verses into which abrogation entered according to the terminology of the early scholars, carrying within it the general meaning that is subject to specification.

Accordingly, the statement of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, in which he interprets abrogation as the replacement of rulings and not texts, carries within it two meanings: one correct, which we agree with, and the other false, which must be pointed out.

As for the correct meaning, it is his statement: "In defining the function of abrogation as facilitation, easing, and gradual progression in legislation, all the abrogated matters are considered of the type of deferment (mansū'), and the meaning of replacement in the verses we previously discussed is the replacement of rulings, not the alteration of texts by canceling the old with a new one both in wording and ruling.

Understanding abrogation as the complete removal of the text contradicts the wisdom of facilitation and gradual progression in legislation" <sup>14</sup>.

As for his statement: "Had the scholars adhered to the principle that abrogation does not involve the cancellation of texts, but rather merely the suspension of their rulings, and that it occurs only within the same text, whether Qur'an or Sunnah, they would have relied on an important principle that would protect them from these intertwined confusions and purposes in the transmitted reports"<sup>15</sup>, this is false, because describing the ruling as suspended means, according to him, that

we suspend the ruling whenever social necessity demands it, and return to applying it whenever the circumstances require it again.

The idea of the obligated person moving between rulings and selecting from them according to the changing circumstances and reality is clearly present in the writings of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, who seeks to establish it by employing the concept of abrogation to subject the text to reality. Thus, we find him saying: "Change is a constant characteristic of reality, inherent to it as it is a continuous, flowing, and dynamic movement, and as long as the text is directed toward reality, it must take into account the conditions of reality" <sup>16</sup>.

If it was a condition of the text at the beginning of legislation to consider reality and to gradually lead people to higher ranks of faith, this is one of the characteristics of divine revelation alone, with no role for the Prophet in changing or altering it, as Allah says: ﴿قُلْ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أُبَدِّلَهُ مِنْ تَلْقَاءِ نَفْسِي إِنْ أَتَّبِعُ إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ إِنِّي أَخَافُ إِنْ عَصَيْتُ رَبِّي عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ﴾

How then can anyone other than the Prophet be allowed to change it?

If it is said to us: Abrogation is the replacement of the rulings brought by the Shari'ah, not of the texts themselves, we say to them: The rulings in the legislation progressed from hardship to facilitation, according to your view, and we cannot imagine anyone moving from facilitation to hardship according to the principles of your methodology.

This renders the application of the suspension rule invalid, for all the previously mentioned verses transferred people from hardship to facilitation.

As for the verses whose meaning is general but into which specification has entered, they do not fall under abrogation; they are definitive and it is not permissible to move from the specific to the general within them.

## 2. Suspicions Raised by the Deniers of Abrogation:

Most of the suspicions mentioned regarding abrogation are old doubts that have been reformulated. We find that the Qur'an responded to the disbelievers of Quraysh during the Meccan period regarding the possibility of abrogation in His saying: ﴿وَإِذَا بَدَّلْنَا آيَةً مَكَانَ آيَةٍ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يُنزِّلُ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُفْتَرٍ ۚ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾ and we also find that the Jews of Madinah expressed astonishment and objection after the change of the Qiblah from Bayt al-Maqdis to the Ka'bah, as Allah says: ﴿سَيَقُولُ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَ النَّاسِ مَا وَلَاهُمْ عَن قِبَلَتِهِمُ الَّتِي كَانُوا عَلَيْهَا قُلْ لِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ﴾

The summary of the suspicions raised by the contemporary school is the same as the doubts that Islamic scholars addressed in the past in responding to the Jews, Christians, and other sects, and we summarize them in the following points:

- **The First Suspicion: Contradiction.**

The Jews and some who followed their path among the proponents of contemporary readings<sup>17</sup> claimed that abrogation carries within it the meaning of contradiction, combining opposites, between good and evil, and between obedience and disobedience.

They argue that abrogation necessitates the coexistence of opposites:

How could Allah command something on the basis that it is good and an act of obedience, then later prohibit it on the basis that it is evil and an act of disobedience? This act, they claim, entails the combination of contradictory attributes—command and prohibition, goodness and evilness—in the same matter.

This argument was pointed to by Saadia, who said: "If this were the case, there would always be contradiction and opposition in the second law"<sup>18</sup>.

The response to this suspicion is that goodness and evil are determined by the Shari'ah, not by reason.

They are related to Allah's command and prohibition.

Even the Mu'tazilites, who held that goodness and evil are rational, differentiated between persons and times:

An act that is evil and reprehensible for a certain person at a particular time may be good and desirable at another time.

An example of this is medicine: it is beneficial and good when taken by a sick person, but it becomes harmful and prohibited at other times.

Accordingly, an act is considered good as long as the Lawgiver commands it, and the same act is considered evil and reprehensible as long as there is a prohibition against it.

- **The second suspicion: Badā' (alteration of divine knowledge) and Futility<sup>19</sup>.**

They said: If it were possible for Allah, Blessed and Exalted be He, to abrogate a ruling from His rulings, it would either be because a wisdom appeared to Him after it had not been apparent, or without any wisdom, and both are invalid.

The first necessitates the possibility of badā' and ignorance of outcomes on the part of Allah, while He is the Knower of the unseen.

The second necessitates the possibility of futility from the Wise, the All-Knowing. Both badā' and futility are impossible for Him, Glorified and Exalted, both rationally and by transmission.<sup>20</sup>

As for the response to this suspicion, it can be summarized in the following points:

Allah eternally knows that the ruling to be abrogated would end by abrogation, and the abrogating ruling fulfills what is in His knowledge.

The abrogation by Allah of some of His rulings does not necessitate futility or *badā'*.

The wisdom of Allah requires that He does what He wills and does what He wants.

The interests of the servants differ from one period to another, and their rulings, purposes, and secrets are known only to Allah.

- **The third suspicion: Ignorance and Redundancy.**

They say: If abrogation were to occur, it would entail one of two meanings: either the abrogated ruling was meant to be permanent and then was abrogated, which would imply ignorance after knowledge; or the abrogated ruling was meant to be temporary and then was abrogated, which would be redundancy, since the time of the ruling would have ended without the need for an abrogator.

Ibn Hazm responded to this suspicion by explaining that there is no obligation upon Allah to inform His servants beforehand of what He wants to command them with before the time comes when He wills to obligate them with that legislation <sup>21</sup>.

Thus, the limitation of the ruling by time and place belongs to the knowledge of Allah; He may reveal it or conceal it for a wisdom known only to Him.

- **The fourth suspicion: Abrogation contradicts the eternity of the Qur'an.**

The eternity of Allah's Speech is considered one of the points through which the modernists attempt to enter, despite their lack of belief in it.

We find Arkoun saying: "We know that the entire discussion surrounding the problem of abrogation revolves around the assumption that it is possible to determine with certainty the true chronological order of the revelation of Qur'anic verses.

Added to this is another problem that some of the great classical authors pointed out, particularly Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, namely: the acceptance of the principle that one verse can abrogate another leads to raising a theological issue neglected by the jurists.

By this, we mean that the abrogation of a specific Qur'anic verse implies the existence of contradiction in the source, as each verse constitutes the Speech of Allah.

Thus, such action should be avoided as much as possible, since the Speech of Allah should not be invalidated" <sup>22</sup>.

The connection between the issue of abrogation and the knowledge of the reasons for revelation is undeniable, and this is affirmed by Islamic scholars, since one of the conditions of abrogation is that the abrogating verse must come after the abrogated one, and the way to know this sequence is through the knowledge of the reasons for revelation. As for the matter that Arkoun attributes to Al-Razi, we do not know in which source he found it, since Al-Razi, in his commentary on the verse ﴿مَا نَنْسَخُ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِئَهَا﴾, mentioned in the fifth issue that abrogation, according to him, is rationally possible and textually established. In the seventh issue, he explained the types of abrogated matters, saying: "The abrogated is either the ruling only, the recitation only, or both together"<sup>23</sup>. He then clarified that this is what he established in his book *Al-Mahsul* on the principles of jurisprudence. In Arkoun's previous statement, we find that he selects one meaning of abrogation—namely, nullification—and applies it to the attribute of Allah's Speech, in order to claim that abrogation is a human construct that contradicts the eternal nature of divine speech. This assertion contradicts Arkoun's own belief regarding the attribute of Allah's Speech, so how can he defend something he himself believes to be historical? The same idea is repeated by Tayyib Tizini, who still harbors some doubts about whether abrogation actually occurred, indicating that his statements and theories are not based on certainty. He says, questioning: "If 'abrogation' actually occurred, involving the replacement and cancellation of verses, how can it be said that there is a 'fixed and eternal text' that lives above events and occurrences and has its eternal existence in the 'Preserved Tablet'?"<sup>24</sup>.

We find that Tayyib Tizini, in an attempt to establish the historicity of the Qur'anic text, uses the concept of abrogation in the sense of nullification, which, in his view, contradicts the eternity of the Qur'an. Before responding to Muhammad Arkoun and Tayyib Tizini, we add another statement from Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, who relies on the same suspicion, as he says: "The scholars did not discuss the consequences of the phenomenon of abrogation of recitation, or the deletion of texts, whether their rulings remained or were also abrogated, and how this completely undermines their previous conception of the eternal existence of the text in the Preserved Tablet (*al-Lawh al-Mahfuz*). If what was revealed of the revelation in stages is all in the Mother of the Book, which is the Preserved Tablet, as stated: ﴿فِي كِتَابٍ مَكْنُونٍ لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ﴾, then the revelation of verses fixed in the Preserved Tablet and then their abrogation and removal from the recited Qur'an negates this supposed, illusory eternity, and we must understand the verses indicating this in a non-literal manner"<sup>25</sup>. In response to these claims, we say: all the scholars of Islam, regardless of their schools and sects, including those who deny the occurrence of abrogation within the Qur'anic text, affirm that the Muhammadan Sharia abrogates previous legislations. There is no difference between the attribute of the Speech of Allah revealed to Moses, peace be upon him, which was abrogated by the Gospel according to Allah's saying: ﴿وَمُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَلَا جِلَّ لَكُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي حُرِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَجِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا﴾, and the Speech of Allah revealed to Jesus. Both the Torah and the Gospel were abrogated by the Holy Qur'an.

Therefore, if we accept abrogation in the previous legislations related to the Speech of Allah, how can we deny it within the Qur'an itself?

The application of Arkoun's methodology in reading the text necessitates his assertion of the impossibility of the existence of a divine science called abrogation (naskh and mansukh) in order to avoid falling into contradiction, because one of the outcomes of applying the contemporary reading according to Arkoun is the assertion of the unity of religions. His acknowledgment of the abrogation of previous legislations would contradict his call for humanization and the new religion he advocates. Therefore, he chose to deny the issue of abrogation in the Book of Allah, the Almighty.

What Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd or Tayyib Tizini claim, that the assertion of abrogation contradicts the eternity of the Qur'an, we say: abrogation has no connection to the eternity of the Speech of Allah, the Almighty, because Allah knew eternally that those rulings and legislations would end at a specified term. Allah says: *(لِكُلِّ أَجَلٍ كِتَابٌ (38) يَمْحُو اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَيُنْبِئُ طَوَّ عِنْدَهُ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ)*. As a result of this belief held by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, many thinkers assumed that the modernists share the same view with the Mu'tazilites regarding the doctrine of the Speech of Allah. The Mu'tazilites believe that the Speech of Allah is created, and that when Allah wills to speak, He creates it in the Preserved Tablet, or in the Prophet himself, or in the angel, because the Qur'an was revealed in stages according to events and circumstances. This idea was the foundation upon which the modernists built their theories: that the Qur'an was revealed in response to reality. And since the Eternal God is not subject to occurrences, and speaking about His attributes is like speaking about His essence, His attributes are eternal and unaffected by events. Since the Qur'an was revealed at different times, it is thus subjected to time, and accordingly, the modernists concluded with the Mu'tazilite belief that the Qur'an is created, governed by human circumstances in understanding and application. Here, we point out a major difference between the Mu'tazilites and the modernists regarding sanctity: the Mu'tazilites said that the Qur'an is created out of reverence and exaltation of the Divine Essence, whereas the modernists adopted this belief with the goal of placing the Qur'anic text within the human sphere and stripping it of sanctity, so that every person could understand the text with purely human mechanisms, which is known as the principle of humanization. In response to them, we say that all religions, despite their different beliefs, agree that the deity is characterized by speech, because speech is an attribute of perfection, and it is not permissible to describe the deity with its opposite, which is muteness, an attribute of deficiency. While they agree on this principle, they differ regarding the attribute of speech how the deity speaks. In answer to this, the modernists echoed the Mu'tazilite view that Allah creates speech. Based on the principle of abrogation, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd asserted the idea of the creation of speech, arguing that abrogation entails removal, and an eternal attribute cannot be removed. We say to Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd that the belief of the majority of the Islamic Ummah is that the eternal,

preexistent Speech of Allah is His internal speech, which is the ancient attribute that is neither abrogated nor removed. As for the physical copies of the Qur'an in our hands, they are created, for our Lord has always been and will always be speaking. Moreover, we affirm that all Islamic sects agree that the Muhammadan Sharia abrogates the previous legislations such as Judaism and Christianity, and no Muslim differs with another on this point. Since Allah revealed books to previous nations, as the Qur'anic text informs us, revealing the Torah, the Gospel, and the Psalms, these books are the Speech of Allah to His prophets to deliver to the people. There is no doubt that the legislation of Jesus, peace be upon him, abrogated the legislation of Moses, peace be upon him, and that the Qur'an abrogated them both. Once this is clarified, it is established that abrogation has occurred among the divine scriptures, and since it has occurred rationally and by revelation in these books, it is also valid within the parts of these books, among their chapters and verses.

## CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of this research, we arrive at the following results:

1. Modernist methodologies are Western approaches that are not suitable for application to Islamic texts.
2. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd is the leading figure of contemporary modernist thought.
3. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's methodology is based on the idea of subjecting the text to reality.
4. The hermeneutical, rational, and linguistic methodology adopted by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd is incomplete.
5. Excluding Islamic heritage in understanding the text is a dangerous gamble with disastrous consequences.
6. Abrogation and the issue of changing rulings are matters established by Shari'ah and transmission.
7. The collective methodologies of Muslims are sufficient and convincing to answer both old and new questions.
8. The thought of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd is a dangerous ideology that should not be underestimated, as it is built upon the foundations of Islamic jurisprudential disagreement, which he skillfully employed to reach his intended conclusions.
9. The Islamic researcher and thinker must search for the intersections and points of deviation within the modernist methodology in order to effectively respond to it.

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2. Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din Muhammad ibn Umar, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, Al-Tawfiqiyya Library
3. Sassi Salem Al-Hajj, *Critique of Orientalist Discourse*
4. Saadia Al-Fayoumi, *Al-Amanat wa Al-I'tiqadat*, edited by Sharif Hamid Salem, 2021
5. Ibn Hazm, *Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Nihal*
6. Mohammed Arkoun, *From Ijtihad to the Critique of Islamic Reason*

## FOOLNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *The Concept of the Text*, p. 5

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 5

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 11

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 18

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 12

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 13

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 17

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 17

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 24

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 217

<sup>11</sup> Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *The Concept of the Text*, p. 122

<sup>12</sup> Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *The Concept of the Text*, p. 12

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 129

<sup>14</sup> Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *The Concept of the Text*, p. 129

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 129

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 120

<sup>17</sup> Sassi Salem Al-Hajj, *Critique of Orientalist Discourse*, p. 388

<sup>18</sup> Saadia Al-Fayoumi, *Al-Amanat wa Al-I'tiqadat*, edited by Sharif Hamid Salem, 2021

<sup>19</sup> Al-Shahrastani, *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, vol. 1, p. 148: "Badā' (alteration) has several meanings: Badā' in knowledge, which is that something becomes apparent to Him that He did not know before, and I do not think that any rational person would attribute this belief to Allah, the Almighty. Badā' in will, which is that something appears correct to Him contrary to what He had willed and judged.

Badā' in command, which is to command something and then command something else contrary to it afterward.

Those who do not permit abrogation think that the differing commands at different times are contradictory."

The difference between abrogation and badā' lies in two aspects:

First: Badā' is to command something without knowing what its outcome would be, whereas abrogation is to command something while knowing that it will be changed at a certain time, and this is already predetermined in His knowledge and decree.

Second: The cause of abrogation does not invalidate the original command's validity, while badā' implies that the cause invalidates the validity of the original command, such as commanding an action to achieve a certain objective, and then it becomes clear that the objective cannot be achieved by that action, prompting a change of command.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Baqillani.

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Hazm, *Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, p. 172

<sup>22</sup> Mohammed Arkoun, *From Ijtihad to the Critique of Islamic Reason*, p. 71

<sup>23</sup> Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din Muhammad ibn Umar, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, Al-Tawfiqiyya Library, vol. 3, p. 217

<sup>24</sup> Tayyib Tizini, previous source, p. 254

<sup>25</sup> Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *The Concept of the Text*