"New" Hermeneutics in Modern Arab Muslim Thought?
The paradigm of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abu Zayd[1]

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1. Introduction

The "postmodern tendency in the West to pluralize hermeneutic models concerning both holy scriptures and mundane texts" has definitely not spared

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the realm of 'Muslim hermeneutics'[2]. Recently, in 2007, Asma Barlas published an article "*Still Quarelling over the Quran / Five Interventions*", which sought to address several crucial issues concerning 'Muslim Hermeneutics': subjectivity, language and interpretation, translation of the Quran, authority, the individual in tandem with community, and, finally, practice[3]. In fact, her voice comes to grips with three constituents of 'Muslim hermeneutics': the Quran, the tradition of its interpretation, and the relationship between tradition and interpreter. Thus Barlas has encroached on a very sensitive subject, which cannot but trigger growing debates.

Of much greater scale and resonance in the Islamic world, however, were the hermeneutic undertakings of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abu Zayd[4]. He set the stage for a more detailed discussion of the subject matter of 'Muslim hermeneutics' and its crucial role in setting new standards for the present historical circumstances; circumstances in which the Muslim world has proved itself to be unprepared for confronting fresh challenges. The fundamental idea running through the whole of his work is that the 'Muslim hermeneutics' is a veritable treasure trove, which has been exploited for political and religious ends for many centuries. As a result, many species of progressive thought in Islam have been truncated of their Islamic roots; in this aftermath, any progressive thought has been branded as

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as indicative of human individual, while from social psychology I borrowed control and corporate experience as suggesting human group. This way I tried to let the reader *see* most significant, in my view, aspects of Muslim hermeneutics. Louis Mink. "History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension." *History and Theory.* Ed. Brian Fay, Philip Pomper, Richard T. Vann. 1ˢᵗ ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, 112-136, Print.

2. Ждановский А. П., Введение в постклассическую философию: Учеб.-метод. комплекс для студентов отд-ния философии фак. философии и соц. наук / А. П. Ждановский. – Мн.: БГУ, 2005. Р. 70

3. Barlas Asma, 'Still Quarrelling over the Quran / Five Interventions', *ISIM Review* 20 (Autumn 2007): 32-33. Dr. Asma Barlas is Professor at the Department of Politics and Director of the Center for the Study of Culture, Religion, and Ethnicity, Ithaca College.

4. Kilian Bälz, "Submitting Faith to Judicial Scrutiny through the Family Trial: The "Abu Zayd Case", *Die Welt des Islams*, New Ser., 37.2 (July1997): 135-155. See also, Moussavi, Ahmad Kazemi, 'The Reception of Modern Hermeneutics in South East Asia', in *Religions and Cultures in Southeast Asia*, Indonesian Philosophical Studies I, ed. Gadis Arivia and Donny Gahral Adian, Cultural and Contemporary Change Series IID, South East Asia, 6 vol, gen. ed. George F. McLean, Washington, D.C.: 2009; Yusup Rahman, *The Hermeneutical Theory of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abu Zayd,* Montreal: McGill University, unpublished dissertation, 2001.

alien admixtures and later iconoclastic revisionism. This is why modern Muslim conservative intellectual currents fitted him into the theory of modern Western intellectual aggression against Islam[5]. These currents militated against a hermeneutic tendency, which pretended, for its part, to be rooted in Islam. Abu Zayd has been said to have introduced a reprehensible *innovation* into 'Muslim hermeneutics'. Thus, in his case one might contemplate an outright confrontation over the efficiency of this religion in ensuring "new" standards from within its own potential. Abu Zayd seems to have believed in this *innovative* potential, whereas for his opponents these standards had already been set once and forever in the first centuries of Islam.

In terms of defining the theoretical confines of this study, it should be immediately noted that it is the idea of an Islam possessing the potential to provide "new" hermeneutic templates *from within its own* richness that will be discussed here. Furthermore, if Islam is able to provide "new" hermeneutic approaches from within its own domain, then it is highly debatable to *what extent* such hermeneutic approaches ought to be termed "*new*" as such. To be sure, such a research could be thoroughly accomplished in the event that one provides a clear definition of the 'Muslim hermeneutics' and a comprehensive view of its distinct constituents—'traditional and alternative Muslim hermeneutics'.

The major works that will inform this undertaking comprise Muslim scholars operating in both the West and the Muslim world, so that a balanced representation of moderate and conservative thinkers will be maintained. Naturally, Abu Zayd's works relevant to his hermeneutic situatedness within Islam will be carefully considered.

This study will seek to answer the question of whether Abu Zayd's interpretative model rehabilitated alternative Muslim hermeneutics or imported "new" interpretative templates purveyed by the Western thought. It suffices here to state that *the whole issue suggests positive ideas, susceptible to clear-cut proof, that Naṣr Ḥāmid Abu Zayd has adopted an interpretative model entrenched within certain of Islamic theological, philosophical and anthropological traditions.*

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5. Reuven Snir, 'Modern Arabic Literature and Islamist Discourse', *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies 5* (2003-2004): 80-90 —http://www.lancs.ac.uk/jais/volume/docs/vol5/5_Snir.pdf. Accessed on 01.04.2012

The following sections will provide an argumentative line buttressing the foregoing suggestion. The paper starts with a concise contextualization of the recent debates over hermeneutics in the West. Departing from this general background of hermeneutics, it then attempts to provide a clear definition of 'Muslim hermeneutics' as well as its notional ramifications. Next, a concise and accurate reconstruction of Abu Zayd's hermeneutic model is given. Of major concern here are the Quran, the tradition of its interpretation, and the relationship between tradition and interpreter. Finally, this research paper culminates in attempting to thrash out the theoretical underpinnings of Abu Zayd's paradigm.

2. Evolving the Pattern of 'Muslim Hermeneutics': *"ancient vs. modern"*

The "etymology of the word 'hermeneutics' might be traced back to the name of the ancient Greek hero (Hermes), who, allegedly, both conveyed the message of gods to the people and interpreted it" (Ждановский 45). Besides this etymological insight, a good working definition of 'Muslim hermeneutics' requires unambiguous theoretical data from modern literary studies and the philosophy of language suggesting the basic meaning behind the very notion 'hermeneutics'. Yet seeking for basic meaning entails providing one level of meaning, in the sense of "determining a notion through enumerating its features and distinguishing their specificities"[6]. Enumerating the particular features of physical objects and establishing their distinctions should not bring much difficulty, because they are inferable from the cause-effect context. Contrariwise, defining abstract notions like 'hermeneutics' brings methodological drawbacks, because the diversity of *philosophical intuitions* and the variability in categorization resources make any explanation in phenomenological matters a complex task indeed (Ждановский 24); consequently, setting a multi-level meaning as a starting point for the discussion here seems almost unavoidable.

The development of a variety of levels of meaning behind the notion 'hermeneutics' has been stimulated by two basic conflicting perspectives on the

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6. WAIBL, ELMAR, und RAINER, FRANZ JOSEF, *Basiswissen Philosophie in 1000 Fragen und Antworten.* Wien: Facultas Verlags, 2007. 260

relationship between its four fundamental features: text (*écrit*), writing process (*écriture*), author and reader[7,8]. The perception that the text along with the writing process takes precedence over the reader represents the paradigm of the '*critique créatrice*'. The opposite perception, shifting the emphasis away from text onto the reader, constitutes the paradigm of reception (Jurt 111). The origin of this difference of perceptions goes back to two distinct anthropological traditions—the French and the German[9]—which reflect on texts in terms of "un consensus social" (the French tradition) as opposed to "individualité du sujet interprète" (the German tradition) (qtd. Jurt 111). In the former, of "utmost importance is the cultural production—the canonic interpretation, vulgate—to which the subjectivity must submit" (Jurt 111); in the latter, conversely, it is the alterity/otherness of the text—in the sense of various readings and meanings (literary vs. allegoric) alike—that redefines 'hermeneutics' in terms of an event of understanding. Additionally, concerning historical periods and their developments, the alterity of the text becomes, according to the German paradigm, much more manifest in view of the horizon (level of understanding) changing over time (Jurt 110-125). Thus, arriving at a certain "relegation" of the text as an old source of values, and a resolute "promotion" of the interpreter as new source of their application, the divergence between both paradigms reached its apex in the juxtaposition of two hermeneutic models:

1) the one—aesthetic of reception—imparts knowledge by departing from "a conceptualization of hermeneutic act as carried out by a *human* due to his/her position of authority in generating, interpreting and changing the meaning" (Jurt 114);

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7. These four elements provide a basis for a linguistic disquisition; for a philosophical one, however, it is—language vs. subject, and being vs. self—that may be in order. THOLEN, TONI, *Erfahrung und Interpretation. Der Streit zwischen Hermeneutik und Dekonstruktion,* Heidelberg: Winter Universitätsverlag, 1999. 6-7

8. JURT, JOSEPH, 2003., *Die Innovation der Rezeptionsforschung und ihre Folgen für das Literaturverständnis'.* Studien des Frankreich-Zentrums, Band 12. Berlin, Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 109-125.

9. As much as this statement intends to lay out a well marked visionary field which should put forth the main features of the notion 'hermeneutics' necessary for reconstructing the 'Muslim hermeneutics', it does not intend to suppress existing exceptions [as when Habermas remonstrates with Gadamer's (both Germans) explanation of understanding as an act of the subject who has no 'force of reflection' to repel at times the claims of tradition but merges (Einrücken) in the long process of transmitting the knowledge of previous generations] (THOLEN, 1999: 5).

2) whereas for the other hermeneutic model—structuralism/neo-structuralism—the understanding is outside the remit of individual subject (who understands in hindsight, i.e. passively) and, therefore, it is only the tradition of previous interpretations—the *discourse structure* (which determines the understanding in foresight, i.e. actively)—that increases knowledge (Jurt 115). Assuredly, both theoretical templates epitomize the modern debate raging over the nature of hermeneutics in the West[10].

With the preceding reflections in mind, it is necessary to take full note of the theoretical repercussions these debates could have on the eventual infiltration of alien admixtures into the modern interpretation of 'Muslim hermeneutics'. Doing full justice to the nature of this exploratory fixation on *objective* definition of 'Muslim hermeneutics', there is a delicate important distinction to make between 'Muslim hermeneutics' and 'Muslim traditional hermeneutics', namely their relationship: of general to particular, or of a hypernym to a hyponym. In the same way that Islam is much more than merely Sunnī or Shī'ite Islam, so, too, 'Muslim hermeneutics' is much more than 'Muslim traditional hermeneutics'. But more on this point later.

Moving forward with the definition of 'Muslim hermeneutics', the following questions arise here:

• Do the four basic features of the notion 'hermeneutics'—text (écrit), writing process (écriture), author and reader in linguistic terms, or, philosophically speaking, the language vs. subject, and being vs. self—constitute the backbone of 'Muslim hermeneutics' as it is the case of Western hermeneutics?

• What kind of relationship exists between these four features?

2.1. Outlining the definition of 'Muslim hermeneutics'

Technically speaking, hermeneutics is "the science of exegetical rules, whereby the exegesis is the interpretation of a particular text or total of signs which

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10. Deconstructivism was not mentioned here because it is generally assumed that its position is basically anti-hermeneutic (Cf. JURT: *Die Innovation der Rezeptionsforschung und ihre Folgen für das Literaturverständnis,* in: Dorothee Kimmich, Bernd Stiegler, *Zur Rezeption der Rezeptionstheorie,* Studien des Frankreich-Zentrums der Freiburg: Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, 2003, pp.110-125).

are susceptible to be considered as text"[11]. In terms of the phenomenology of religion, hermeneutics puts an interpretation on the messages that are "considered as revelations of something sacred, an interpretation which is perceived as recollection/restoration of sense" (Ricœur 17, 19, 36). In other words, hermeneutics defines: how and under which conditions the interpreted message might be perceived as an experience of authentic understanding, as sharing with the author the sense of message, as converging with his intention. Clearly, the "how and under which conditions" have a bearing on method, which being misapplied results in the misunderstanding or missing the intention of the author[12].

The implication of these reflections for broaching the notion of 'Muslim hermeneutics' would be the advised attribution of the revelation of the sacred to the subject matter of 'Muslim hermeneutics' (message), and of a set of rules restoring the sense of this subject matter to its exegetical apparatus (methodology). It is noteworthy that this methodology makes for a twofold structure: doctrinal and rational methodology[13]. The former notion comes to refer to the notion of *tafsīr* (interpretation), whereas rationale methodology comes down to the methods of rational inference and interpretation (*ijtihad*). This clear-cut differentiation corresponds to the basic understanding of Islam as a divine revelation of the Quran through the Prophet Muχammad, with the "ultimate aim to introduce to the Muslims the divine law (*Sharīʿa*), which is susceptible to further elaboration and extension"[14].

With the legal thrust of the Quran ("500 verses of legal content")[15], it is this Book that represents the subject matter of 'Muslim hermeneutics'. The Quran represents the first and most authoritative paradigm of how and under which conditions the interpreted verse might be perceived as an experience of authentic understanding. Abdullah Saeed calls it "interpretation of the Quran by the Quran" (Saeed 43). He distinguishes here: "the absolute verses (*muṭlaq*), the

11. RIQΕUR, PAUL, *De l'interprétation. Essais sur Freud.* Paris : Seuil, 1965. 35

12. BRANDT, REINHARDT, *Die Interpretation philosophischer Werke. Eine Einführung in das Studium antiker und neuzeitlicher Philosophie.* Stuttgart: Bad Cannstatt, 1984.

13. SAEED, ABDULLAH, *Interpreting the Quran: towards a contemporary approach.* New York: Routledge, 2006, Print. 26-57

14. CLARKE, L., 'The Shīʿī Construction of Taqlīd', *Journal of Islamic Studies,* 12.1 (2001): 40-64.

15. HALLAQ W., *A History of Islamic Legal Theories,* Cambridge: University Press, 1997. p. 3.

qualified (*muqayyad*), the abrogating (*nāsikh*) or abrogated (*mansūkh*) and the aggregated (*mujmal*) or explained ones (*mubayyan*)" (Saeed 43). While this interpretation was preferred, it, too, has definitely been "not enough for developing an all-encompassing system of law" (Halaq 5). Therefore the hermeneutical engagement of the Prophet, who provided an extension to the core Quranic legislation, is perfectly comprehensible. Accordingly, the Prophet's sayings and conduct of life amounted to a canon of faith and behavior (*ḥadīth* texts), which is better known under the term '*Sunna*'. This represents the next step in the doctrinal methodology (*tafsīr*) of expounding the divine law—"interpretation of the Quran by the Prophet" (Saeed 44). However, the relationship between the Sunna and the Quran is one of subordination, whereby "the Sunna merely explains, supplements or particularizes the Quran" (Halaq 25). These two sources of the *Sharīʿa* constitute the core of the Muslim "textual authoritative basis" (Halaq 23).

In truth, all Muslims would agree on the above conceptual sketch as basis for defining 'Muslim hermeneutics'[16]. The divergence, however, emerges when it comes to the further elaboration of this textual authoritative basis in view of expounding the divine law; particularly, it is about the *fiqh*—a term referring to Muslim jurisprudence[17], a "product of human intellect as distinct from the product of divine revelation, which is the *Sharīʿa*"[18]. The germ of the divergence stems from the fact that there are different standards regarding the extent to which one can rely on reason (*ijtihad*) in view of delivering answers for the contradictions, and explicating allusive statements within the authoritative texts[19] (Halaq 20-30). As a result, it is very much in tilting the balance between doctrinal and rational methodology that the varieties within 'Muslim hermeneutics' originate.

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16. Quite clearly, the split between Sunni and Shiʿī Islam concerns also the divergence with reference to the *textus receptus* of the whole corpus of ḥadīth texts.

17. HOFFMANN, MURAD WILFRED, "Review: Western Muslims and the Future of Islam Tariq Ramadan." *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam, Journal of Islamic Studies* 15.3 (2004): 386-391.

18. SCHRÖTER, HILTRUD, *Das Gesetz Allahs. Menschenrechte, Geschlecht, Islam und Christentum.* Frankfurt am Main: Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 2007, 17.

19. Cf. also, LOWRY, JOSEPH E. *Early Islamic Legal Theory: The Risala of Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i.* Leiden: Brill, 2007, 88.

In terms of Western hermeneutics, one may subsume this interaction of two methodologies under the rubric of cooperation between text and reader, cooperation which might turn passive for the reader in the former case (in sense of perpetuating the doctrine without questioning it), and active in the latter (in sense of questioning certain incoherencies and incomprehensibilities). With relation to the Western notion of writing process (écriture), in Islam one could identify an analogous phenomenon in expounding the divine Islamic law. All in all, Muslim hermeneutics is a science comprising doctrinal and rational exegetical methodology that aims at tracing the sense of the Muslim authoritative texts and at experiencing their authentic understanding. This science, however, may exhibit certain interpretative varieties due to the emphasis that the interpreter places on either the doctrinal or rational methodology.

2.2. Distinguishing 'Muslim traditional hermeneutics'

Two strands prevail within Muslim hermeneutics: 1) one which unquestionably perpetuates both previous *legal* interpretation of divine law (in the sense of *fiqh*) and previous theological interpretation of the Quran and Sunna; and 2) another which resists established legal and *theological* tradition (in the sense of *taqlūīd* as distinct from *ma'thūr*[20]). Importantly, caution must be exercised against serious misunderstanding: questioning previous legal and theological traditions does not mean to invert the venerable for any Muslim order of things—the authority of divine revelation (the Quran), the last Prophet in conjunction with his Sunna, the *tawḥīd* (the belief in One God) and the guiding principles of Islam (*al-maqāṣid*). These things stake out the doctrinal position common to all Muslims, without distinction[21]. In the present study, both strands within Muslim hermeneutics are termed traditional and liberal, but with a non-conventional perception of both terms as *staid* and *innovative*. The perception of traditional strand as staid owes to the fact that perpetuation of previous patterns sustains and ordinarily reinforces *repetitiveness*, whereas the innovativeness of the liberal strand is prompted by the ability to initiate *changes*.

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20. *taqlīd*- immitation; *ma'thūr*- heritage
21. RAMADAN, TARIQ, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, Print.

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Prior to undertaking the task of defining 'Muslim traditional hermeneutics', important evidence suggests that one should not merely identify the term 'traditional' with particular theological doctrines, particular branches of Islam, or distinct historical periods. Specifically with reference to theological doctrines, the orthodox circles have indulged al-Ghazali—glorious exponent of Ashʻarite orthodoxy—in matters of incorporating *Aristotelian logic* in the theoretical and philosophical foundation of Islamic law[22]. Meanwhile they, too, have rejected the contributing *rationalism* of the famous propugnator of Muʻtazila—Qadi ʻAbd al-Jabbar[23]. Hence, it is a complicated task to decide which side (Ashʻarites or Muʻtazilas) might represent the tradition, because both schools have resorted to the liberal interpretative approach. Next, if someone is to decide whether the Sunnī 'school' of Islam or the *Shīite* is the traditional one, then one must recall that *ijtihad*—delivering new understanding of the Quranic verses—was not an ability exclusive to *Shīite* scholars any more than anti-rationalism was practiced exclusively by Sunn? scholars[24] (Clarke 40-64). Consequently, the use of the term 'traditional' here requires prudence and qualifications. Finally, but importantly, to identify certain historical periods as more traditional than others would still require qualification. For instance, traditionalism might become inert at societal level, while at the level of particular individuals it would reign supreme; to put it another way, just as liberalism is much more than mere states of mind and ethical attitudes[25], so too is traditionalism likely to be much more than mere historical features of doctrine perpetuated in time. In the same way that liberalism can imprison *individual* states of mind and ethical attitudes in the

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22. Being the "important source for the eighteenth and nineteenth century Wahhābī movement in Arabia and modernist reformers such as Rashīd Riḍā, Ibn Taymiyya is also known because he articulated a best-of-all-possible-worlds theodicy over against traditional Ashʻarism and Muʻtazilism that follows in the line of Ibn Sīnā, Ibn ʻArabī and al-Ghazālī, whatever his differences with these renowned figures on other counts" JON. HOOVER, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism.* Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2007. 4-5). Thus we find the ultra-orthodox Ibn Taymiyya opposing the traditional view on theodicy.

23. Cf. R. MARTIN, M. WOODWARD, D. ATMAJA, *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Muʻtazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol.* Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997. Cf. also, GIMARET, D. 'Les Uṣul al- Ḥamsa du Qadi ʻAbd al-Jabar et leurs commentaires', *Annales Islamologiques* 15 (1979): 47–96.

24. ABU ISKHĀQ IBRĀHĪM AL-SHĀṬIBĪ, Al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām. Al-Qāhira: dār al-Fikr. Vol.1&2.

25. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberalism/ (accessed on 26th January 2012).

rigidness of historical setting, developing them to a prevailing *social* doctrine, traditionalism can enable doctrinal interpretations unpopular in particular historical periods, which (unpopularity) would render the affiliation with these *doctrinal* interpretations a matter of *individual* choice[26]. Thus, tradition could operate on the level of state of mind, while liberalism might support the dictatorship of a certain social discourse[27]. With all the aforementioned difficulties in defining the term 'traditional' as regards Muslim hermeneutics, a tentative proposal of working definition for this term here would be the idea of a social/individual mindset (collective discourse as distinct from deliberate resolution):

1) subverting reason *without any legitimate metaphysical excuse*

2) freezing the delivery of new understanding out of the authoritative written sources *without considering viable strategies for challenges of the moment*

3) *enforcing* the doctrinal templates of social structures/individual understanding *rather than rendering* these doctrinal templates/understanding a *matter of individual choice*

To take the issues one by one, the subversion of human reason is justified, according to Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, by the traditional understanding that humans are fallible in perceiving God's will[28]; Shāfi'ī attributed infallibility only to the Muslim community as whole (Halaq 28). To justify the anthropological view of consensus, Shāfi'ī found allegedly ample evidence in the Quranic verse:

And whoever acts hostilely to the Messenger after that guidance has become manifest to him, and follows other than the way of the believers,

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26. Witness the following example from "the Egyptian Law of Testamentary Disposition and the Sudanese Judicial Circular No. 53": whereby the reformers resorted to the so-called *talfīq* according to which part of doctrine of one school (here Sunn?,—my remark) is combined with a part from another (in those cases, Sh'iite law,—my remark) (HALAQ 210). This measure was very unpopular among certain modern Muslim intellectuals, who have protested against it.

27. An example from the Muslim legal tradition to consider here: 'one fundamental role played by legal theories was to position a highly qualified jurist mastering the apparatus of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (the principles of Islamic jurisprudence) in a confrontation with the primary sources of the law, a confrontation whose purpose is to discover rulings for unprecedented cases' (HALLAQ IX). Yet, the confrontation of an *individual* (particular) jurist with primary sources of *social* law could also be perceived as a precedent of escaping, even if for a fleeting moment, from the rigidness of historical setting. An escape from tradition occurring on the individual level enables, thus, the enhancement of tradition on the social one.

28. BAYHAQĪ, ABU BAKR AḤMAD IBN AL- ḤUSAYN, *Aḥkām al-Qur'an.* 2 Vol. Beyrut: Dār al-Kutub al'Ilmiyya. 1975, 39.

We will turn him to that to which he has (himself) turned and make him
enter hell; and it is an evil resort (An-Nisa 115)

It is, however, a disappointing surprise to realize that the "argument—that
the majority do not fall into error, but the individual does"—conflicts with an-
other Islamic view directed against the Christian doctrine of original sin, which
espouses that the entire human race has become corrupt[29]. The Islamic theolog-
ical thought puts forward the idea that "it is prior to espousing common Islam-
ic core beliefs and to making the resolution to follow the divine law (*Shariʿa*)"—
not after—that the human mind is enthralled by "darkness (*al-ghāshiyyah*), ig-
norance (*al-jahālāt*), and delusion (*al-ḍalālāt*)"[30]. Because, otherwise, it would
be impossible for an unenlightened mind to live up to the "Islamic vocation" (*al-
daʿuwat al-islāmiyyah*), which operates under the divine expectation that each
Muslim should take not only a contemplating stance (*al-naẓar al-haʾīm al-ḥālim*)
on the world and its mysteries, but also an examining one (*al-naẓar al-muta-
faḥḥaṣ*) (al-Khaṭīb 110). Contemplation is very much a passive action, whereas
examination requires an active interference in matters. In addition, if it were al-
lowable, according to this logic, to get a comprehensive religious view of the
world and its mysteries by means of an unenlightened mind, then the illumina-
tion afforded by Islam would be superfluous. Thus, the human mind must be
firstly illuminated by the Islamic faith, and, only afterwards, this mind might be
able to examine the mysteries of life; consequently, the one who has espoused
the Islamic faith is expected to be free of the corruption of human nature, and
he should be considered potentially infallible.

Interestingly, al-Ghazālī too expresses this idea when specifying the rela-
tionship between transmission (*al-naql*) and human reason (*al-ʿaql*). The trans-
mission (in the sense of tradition) foregoes (*muqaddam ʿlā al-ʿaql*) reason, be-
cause the latter may either err (*iakhṭī*) or strike home (*iuṣib*) (reason is unsta-
ble)[31]. Notwithstanding this instability of reason, the knowledge acquired
through it is a condition (*sharṭ*), according to al-Ghazālī, for understanding the

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29. SHĀMAH, MUḤAMMAD, ʿADNĀN ZARZŪR, BAKR ZAKĪY ʿAWWAḌ AND MUḤAMMAD AL-JALĪ
ND, *ʿAqāʾid wa taiyarat fikrīya muʿāṣira'*. Ad-Dūḥa : dar qaṭariy Ibn-al-Fujaʿa, 1993, 123-5.

30. AL-KHAṬĪB, ʿABD AL-KARĪM, *Al-taʿrīf bi-'l-ʾIslām fī muājaha al-ʿaṣr al-ḥadīth wa taḥad-
diyyah.* n.d., al-qāhira, 108-10.

31. AL-JUNDI, ANWAR, *Aṣālat al-fikr al-islāmī fī muwāǧahat at-taǧrīb wa-'l-almānīya wa-'t-
tanwīr al-ǧarbī al-qāhira: dar al-faḍīla,* 1996, 150.

divine law; however, this holds true after this reason has been illuminated by the revelation (*waḥīy*) (Al-Jundi 150). Arguably, the same argument should be quite legitimate in the sphere of expounding the law and elaborating on theology[32]. To claim the opposite would detract from the very fact that Sunnī Islam alone has at least four legal (Ḥānafī, Mālikī, Shāfi'ī and Hanbalī) and theological (Ash'arī, Imami, Māturīdiyy, Murji'ah and Mu'tazilī) schools[33]. Reflecting on these arguments, one may feel uncertain about eventual metaphysical grounds which enable the subversion of human rationalism in certain Islamic circles; this subversion finds, seemingly, little favor with Islamic anthropology.

For reasons of space, the other two features of the term "traditional" (1. freezing the delivery of new understanding out of authoritative texts, 2. enforcement of the established understanding) will be discussed in tandem with the liberal strand in Muslim hermeneutics in order to understand their basic differences and similarities. Importantly, however, alert readers may have gained the illuminating insight, from all the evidence discussed above concerning the term "traditional", that this term points to a kind of the *selective* relationship between the social / individual mindset and alternate ideas within Islam.

2.3. Identifying the origins of an alternative approach to Muslim traditional hermeneutics

It is in paradoxical co-existence with the untenable subversion of reason, the undue delay in delivering new understanding out of authoritative texts, and the visceral enforcement of the established understanding that the alternative liberal strand within Muslim hermeneutics came to be known from the very beginning of Islam. After all, the divine law was revealed in an *embryonic* fashion, so that issuing new rulings necessarily invited *rational reasoning* (Halaq 5-7). A developed theology, necessary for "restructuring and rehabilitating legal ideas", was *hardly available*, which meant that elaborating theological concepts was *in order* (Halaq 212). Furthermore, *total conviction* about an exclusive sufficiency

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32. "The Qur'anic injunction that Muslims, wherever they are, must turn toward the Ka'ba when they pray, even when it is out of their sight, is tantamount to the obligation to find out God's ruling without it being explicitly stated in any text" (HALLAQ 28).

33. BERGER, Lutz, *Islamische Theologie.* Wien: Facultas, 2010.

of the authentic textual sources (Quran and Sunna) to deal with new legal and theological challenges has evidently *never* been *shared* by all Muslims, with the result that a recourse to human *reason* has been *certain* throughout[34]. However, the enforcement of established understandings to the dismissal of *alternative views* was already, at the time of the Umayyads (661-750 AC) an evident paradigm of no choice in matters of interpretative affiliations, so that the pattern of *only-one-valid-tradition* entered the Muslim discourse (Berger 53-72).

Any attempt to put forth an exhaustive line of argumentation in order to support these statements would run far beyond the purview of the aims of this analysis. Therefore the following line of reasoning will bolster the main intention here, which is—to attempt to indicate that staid and innovative interpretative tendencies have been present, in point of fact, throughout the whole history of Muslim hermeneutics from the very beginning of Islam; and that innovative interpretative tendencies are too represented in Islamic tradition. Consequently, it is not sufficient to explain the hermeneutic strategies as strictly linked to, and determined by their historical contexts, without positing that both tendencies pertain to the very essence of Islam.

Of primary interest here is to understand whether the Quran and *ḥadīth* texts (in the sense of the thought of the Prophet himself) suggest a legal and theological autarchy, or rather prompt the further development of revealed divine law and Islamic theology. As a matter of fact, to gain an authentic historical understanding of this issue is difficult, because *ḥadīth* texts were definitively constituted in the period after the demise of the Prophet and his Companions (Saeed 50-55; Halaq 5-20). With relation to the Quran, it remains unclear as to whether its understanding was pre-determined for the Muslims in the ensuing centuries. In such a case—they would share passively the religious knowledge forwarded by previous generations (*tafsīr bi al-riwāyah or tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*) by transmitting in uncorrupted form; if it were not pre-determined, then—they would have a certain share in developing (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y and ta'wīl*) this knowledge (Al-Dhahabī 255-270; Saeed 57-67). This ambiguity becomes evident from the discussions about the scope of the Prophet's hermeneutic interference; did he really explain everything? Al-Dhahabī establishes the quintessence of these debates as three contradictory views:

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34. AL-DHAHABĪ, MUḤAMMAD ḤUSEYN, *Al-tafsīr wa al-mufassirūn*. 1vol. al-qāhira: Dār al-Kutub al-ḥadītha, 1961, 48-57.

1) The Prophet has communicated to his companions not only the words of the Quran, but also all its meaning,—a view propounded by Ibn Taymiyya;

2) Contrary to this, the Prophet interpreted only a scintilla of the entire meaning,—a view voiced by al-Suyūty and al-Khawīy;

3) Or, the intricate modern views advocated by al-Azhar scholars, like al-Dhahabī, hold that the Prophet left little uninterpreted, but that the very nature of the Quran conceals within itself divine knowledge comprehensible only to God (Al-Dhahabī 49-53).

Undoubtedly, the ramifications of these views could simply be construed in terms of the posterior theological division between rational and traditional schools, which might not pretend to reflect the reality of Companions time, with its characteristic consensus of doctrine (Halaq 215). Consequently, because of the difficulty of establishing exactly the Prophet's view (historical aspect of the argument) with regard to the role human reason played in developing religious knowledge, one may easily consider the liberal strand within Muslim hermeneutics as a later admixture, and not as a constitutive part of Islamic religion. The unique possibility to check the soundness of this idea (that the liberal strand within Muslim hermeneutics pertains to the very essence of Islam) is to encroach upon the Islamic juridical anthropology, in its understanding of *taqlīd*. "*Taqlīd* in Islamic jurisprudence means emulation of another in matters of the law (imitation without knowledge of the validity of the act). It complements the principle of ijtihγd or independent juristic reasoning; the believer who cannot gain firsthand knowledge of legal matters by performing *ijtihād* instead 'emulates' those who can" (Clarke 40). The intention of *taqlīd* was to provide the *jāhil* (ignorant one) with knowledge of divine law concerning particular situations in life, in order to protect him from the impending punishment preserved for transgressors in the hereafter (Clarke 44). However, in both the Sunnī and Shī'ite tradition "*taqlīd* is limited solely to the laws of the sharī'a called the "branches" or *furū'* (this kind of *taqlīd* is compulsory in traditional Sunnī Islam, because it is established by *ijmā'* or consensus)" (Clarke 40-64). Emulation without knowledge in matters of fundamental belief (called the *uṣūl* or "roots") is not permitted. The reason is that in the articles of creed—the authority of divine revelation (the Quran), the last Prophet in conjunction with his Sunna, the *tawḥīd* (the belief in One God) and the guiding principles of Islam (*al-maqāṣid*)—each layperson must comprehend what he believes. Any mistake here may be catastrophic in terms of personal liabilities in the afterlife (Clarke

40-64). Thus, establishing the core Islamic beliefs as foundational to religious knowledge comes under the purview of one's *reasonable* choice; here, the liberal strand within Muslim hermeneutics (in the sense of the primordial act of sharing the sense of revealed texts) operates for the first time.

To conclude this section, Muslim hermeneutics embraces within itself two distinct interpretative strands: one passively forwarding previous religious knowledge, and the other actively partaking in its elaboration. After tracing the relationship between both strands, it goes without saying that the pattern *old vs. new* is not to be taken in chronological terms (one following another) but rather in a dialectical (always persisting) ones. Both strands share the Islamic tradition (in the sense of *ma'thūr*). Both, too, are mutually contradictory. As a result, the terms staid and innovative express *conjointly* the interpretative conundrum entrenched within Islam. To be sure, this fragmentation of Islam might be interpreted here as a kind of concurrence with the interpretative polyvalence of postmodernism. It suffices to state, however, that expanding on this issue goes beyond the limits of this study. The foregoing thoughts ought to have provided here the preparatory groundwork for delineating the argument that, contrary to the notions currently prevalent among many "*traditional*" Muslim scholars, the "*new*" paradigm introduced in Muslim hermeneutics by Naṣr Ḥāmid Abu Zayd is by no means an alien admixture, but a conundrum entrenched within the very essence of Islam.

3. -Exhibiting the "New" Pattern through the Paradigm of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abu Zayd

There is no better way to present a controversial person than by providing information from his opponents about concepts, ideas, and intentions at work in his thought. In this way one does not run the risk of being accused of biased judgment. For instance, Abdullah Saeed takes issue with Abu Zayd due to the latter's attempt to question the traditional understanding of revelation; Abu Zayd is, specifically, said to espouse the idea of construing the Quran not as a divine but as a prophetic word (Saeed 27; Al-Jundī 150). Arguably, Abu Zayd "sought to rethink some aspects of *tafsīr* methodology but without much success, rather with a tragic end—having been branded apostate and forced into exile" (Saeed 147). Saeed reckons that Abu Zayd's works have had limited impact in the Islamic world.

The mounting critiques against Abu Zayd center around three particular unorthodox persuasions: 1) theological, 2) confessional, and 3) ideological (Al-Jundī 146). In terms of theology, Abu Zayd has denied the authority of the textual canon (Quran, Sunna) incumbent upon Muslims. Further, Abu Zayd has allegedly declared that faith is built upon an unknown transcendental premise that might allow admixture of mythological stories and fairy tales (Al-Jundī 146). The last theological allegation directed against Abu Zayd concerns one of his statements that there are contradictions between the Quranic text and reason. He has stated that the Quranic textual word is, allegedly, irrational since no reasonable text would leave room for such contradictions. In confessional terms, Abu Zayd would have repeated particular ultra-Shīʿite (*al-Shīʿat al-ghulāh*), as distinct from those of the imamits (*al-imāmiyyah*), arguments with reference to early removals (*al-muḥū*) made to the original text of the Quran. Hereby he sought allegedly to argue that certain verses alluding to the imam ʿAlī would have been deliberately erased at the time of the first Caliphs (Al-Jundī 147). Abu Zayd, too, was as well arraigned on charges of revitalizing the Muʿtazilism, being allegedly in line with the other four modern neo-Muʿtazilits: Muḥammad Abduh, Ṭaha Ḥuseyn, Amīn al-Khawlī and Khalf Allah (Al-Jundī 148). Finally, the most significant of Abu Zayd's most deviant positions pitting him against the traditionalists, and actually against all conservative Muslims, is his ideological collusion with the intellectual and cultural aggression carried out by the West against Islam (Al-Jundī 146-53). It is stated that Abu Zayd has appropriated Marxist and secular ideas, which guided his methodological preferences (he emphasized the historical dimension of Islam and its textual sources above, to the detriment of the divine one) (Al-Jundī 149-53). In this context, he has been ranked with such would-be "renegade" Muslim intellectuals as: Jābar ʿAṣfūr, Ḥuseyn Aḥmad Amīn, Faraj Faudah, al- ʿAshmāwīy, Maḥmūd Amīn al-ʿĀlam (Al-Jundī 153).

Summarizing, Abu Zayd has been divested of his Islamic credentials; he has been declared: 1) a heretic—which meant derogating the importance of his work, 2) a pseudo-radical *Shīʿite*, with its effect of confessional marginalization, and 3) most significantly, a proponent of the West's most destructive ideas, resulting in the exposure to political and social ostracism. Yet, how true are all these accusations? This study will not sort through all the imputations on account of space limits allotted here. However, it will attempt to re-construct the interpretative model at work in his thought, in conjunction with basic theologi-

cal, philosophical, and anthropological strands within his above all global under-
standing of Islam.

3.1 Reconstructing Abu Zayd's concept of Quran /discourse vs. text

It is in distinguishing between the notion of discourse and text (*mushaf*) that
one might appropriately enunciate Abu Zayd's concept of the Quran. The no-
tion of *mushaf* introduces the idea of "the canonized scriptures arranged in ac-
cordance with the recitation order, as distinct from the chronological order,
which imply the revelation of the Quran—in the form of verses, passages, short
chapters—to the Prophet Muχammad over a period of 20 years"[35]. The idea of
chronological order, for its part, introduces the notion of discourse (Abu Zayd,
Rethinking 9-10). This distinction is of utmost importance, according to Abu
Zayd, for modern Muslim hermeneutics, because only in this way will the Mus-
lim world be able to successfully counter the challenge of isolation (Abu Zayd,
Rethinking). The issue of why the challenge of isolation remains constant for
the Muslim world when emphasizing the textual, as opposed to the discursive,
nature of the Quran will be discussed later.

Regardless of the traditional perception of the Quran as text (*mushaf*) there
are numerous features within the Quranic structure that points, according to
Abu Zayd, to its nature as discourse. These features include the following: 1)
the multi-semantic structure of the Quran, 2) polyphony (the presence of speak-
er and hearer), 3) dialogue, and 4) negotiation (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 18-35).
To begin with, the multi-semantic structure of the Quran is a term that in Abu
Zayd's use refers to the Sufi hermeneutic approach. Accordingly, for those fol-
lowing the tradition of Ibn ʿArabī there are "four semantic levels applicable to
every verse: the outward (*ẓāhir*), the inward (*bāṭin*), the limitation (*ḥadd*), and
the upward (*maṭlaʿ*)" (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 17). According to Abu Zayd, the
advantage of this hermeneutic approach consists in accentuating the inclusive
nature of the Quran whereby its message "stays accessible to all the believers re-
gardless of their education or their intellectual capacity" (Abu Zayd, *Rethink-*

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35. ABU ZAYD, NAṢR ḤĀMID, *Rethinking the Quran: Towards a humanistic hermeneutics.*
Utrecht: Humanistics University Press, 2004, 8-9.

ing 17). Next, the term polyphony marshals a list of communicative particularities that constitute the discourse structure of the Quran; the latter "reveals a multiplicity of voices" articulated in the form of various personal pronouns being used not only to identify different speakers, but also to imply hearers (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 19). The roles of speaker and hearer are interchanged between divinity and human agent, so that the communication—still perpetuated in the act of recitation—becomes a living phenomenon, as opposed to the silence of text (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 18-35). With regard to the term of dialogicity, Abu Zayd distinguishes between several types of dialogue: 1) polemic / apologetic, 2) inclusive / exclusive, and 3) productive / destructive (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 22). Specifically, he speaks of dialogues in which "God addresses His word to the unbelievers, Jew along with Christians, and the believers" (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 22). The importance allotted by Abu Zayd to the dialogicity comes down to the idea of a multi-faceted approach to the same issues in the Quran. This approach, however, appears to sometimes be contradictory; and therefore this ostensible contradictoriness has been predominantly solved by way of abrogation in the Muslim jurisprudence; thus useful semantic potential enclosed within the Quranic discourse has been divested of its power. In particular, Abu Zayd recalls the fact that 'in the Quranic chapter *Al-Maeda* 5 Muslims are allowed to marry non-Muslim females, such permission seems, however, to be revoked in chapter *Al-Baqara* 221. On account of this, two positions were held by jurists towards the issue: one of permitting such a marriage as an exception to the rule, and another of prohibiting such marriage on the base of abrogation, whereby the verse *Al-Baqara* 221 abrogated the verse *Al-Maeda* 5 (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 25). If the discourse dimension, with its idea of chronological order of revelation, holds true, then, according to Abu Zayd, both verses refer to very different contexts; *Al-Baqara* 221 addresses the context of early polytheists of Arabia, whereas *Al-Maeda* 5 emphasizes the "togetherness" in social life when Islam acquired numerous adepts. Accordingly, it is about "making good things lawful"[36]; "togetherness" starts with "food" indicating not only that the "the food of the people of the book" is lawful to Muslims but that "the food of Muslims is lawful to the people of the book as well" (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking*

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36. "This day are (all) things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them" (*Al-Maeda* 5).

25). Abu Zayd continues this idea by saying that 'intermarriage is introduced here as part of parcel of "good things" which emphasizes the implicit call for social "togetherness" ' (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 26). The potential of this verse is much greater than the Muslim intellectuals are predisposed to admit, because it could on an equal footing imply equality in intermarriage for the Muslim women as well (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 26). "At stake here is not the intermarriage; it is rather the individual freedom that entails freedom of religion and belief" (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 27). Finally, for sorting through the Quranic discourse with the people of the Book (the Jews and the Christians) Abu Zayd uses the analytical notion of negotiation (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 28). Although Abu Zayd conceives this notion as an instrument for analytical interpretation, he uses it synthetically. It means that he does not lead the reader gradually to a growing conviction that the Quran unfolds a negotiation discourse with the Jews and Christians. Such steady growth in conviction would effectively reflect an analytical interpretation. However, against all expectations, he opens up a contextual field (he gives definitions of what seems to represent negotiation) by way of providing either biographical data about Muḥammad's association with Christians or appropriate verses within the Quran. Further, these Quranic verses should, according to Abu Zayd, point to issues of doctrinal differentiation that are either solved in favor of Christians (when Jews declare the birth of Jesus from a virgin untrue) or in favor of Jews (when the Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus is repudiated) (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 29-32). Without such pre-established contextual field the negotiation discourse would remain an artificial (forced) idea within the Quranic discourse; such methodological proceedings might make the knowledgeable reader think that he is dealing with a subjective interpretation here (Brandt, 1984). Notwithstanding all these reservations, Abu Zayd evokes negotiation discourse in order to dismiss the universal character of the present confrontation between Muslims, Jews and Christians. In our confrontationist times these instances of "togetherness" within the Quran are of crucial significance (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 30).

Yet, why does Abu Zayd so arduously endeavor to prevent his reader from perpetuating the understanding of the Quran as text? He realizes that the notion of text, too, allows multi-level meaning, since the history indicates that different currents in Islam have applied various paradigms of meaning (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 10). A problem, however, raises when these meanings prove to be contradictory. In such cases, the Muslim scholars used either to abrogate the un-

desirable meanings or to hierarchize them (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 14-6). To execute such differentiation (when deciding what is to abrogate and what is to subordinate) requires particular skills; and acquiring these skills contains within itself the potentiality of elitism for those scholars. Elitism, for its part, always provided the ideal circumstances for manipulating interpretation for political reasons[37]. Thus the idea of "Quranic text" promoted abrogation of certain undesirable meanings or their subordination to other acceptable verses, whereas the idea of "Quranic discourse" puts these semantic contradictions as a plurality of differences (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 5-20). The difference between abrogation /subordination and plurality of differences consists in the fact that the first set is compulsory whereas the second optional. Moving from speculation to concrete instances, Abu Zayd indicates several Quranic verses in which the Jews are addressed with hostility (*Al-Baqara* 2) (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 30).

Yet, is it the Quran's intention to universalize this hostility to the point of averring that it refers to all the Jews up to the present time? Abu Zayd propounds the idea that the hostility discourse against the Jews should be understood, unless one wishes to run counter to the Quranic global meaning of "togetherness", only within particular contexts, which have momentary, not universal, significance (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking* 30-33). Effectively, in failing to do full justice to the nature of Quranic message of "togetherness" the Muslim world dooms itself to isolation and crisis. In this respect, Abu Zayd comes to articulate the idea that "togetherness" is not an imported idea, but pertains to the very essence of the Quranic message. The threat of isolation is not, therefore, a rhetoric contrivance invented by the West to make the Muslims give up their confrontationist stance, but rather an inherent rationale of the Quranic inclusiveness. By way of conclusion, Abu Zayd puts forward a concept of the Quran in accordance with the notion of discourse rather than text. In this way he is able to accentuate the interpretative polyvalence of the Quran; here tolerance and intolerance, togetherness and alienation, negotiation and confrontation co-occur. Against this apparent lack of semantic dominance, Abu Zayd attempts to emphasize positive ideas, suggesting that it is these ideas that represent the core of the Quranic intention.

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37. ABU ZAYD, NAṢR ḤĀMID, "Literature and Heresy – *Literature and Justice: The critical potential of enlightened religion*". *Literatur, Medienfreiheit, Menschenrechte in islamischen Geselschaften und Staaten.* Hrsg. Sybille Fritsch–Oppermann, *Loccumer Protokolle* 22/96, 1998, 18-32. pp. 24-7.

All these reflections on the Quran as a living phenomenon make sense only in tandem with the appropriate paradigm of interpreter, because it is he, after all, who recites, understands, interprets, and applies the plurality of the Quranic semantic differences with the purpose of providing viable strategies for confronting fresh challenges. In this way one necessarily comes to face Abu Zayd's concept of interpreter.

3.2 Reconstructing Abu Zayd's concept of interpreter

Abu Zayd's concept of interpreter can be reconstructed by juxtaposing two interpretative approaches to the Quran highlighted in his works: 1) the traditionalist (the instances from early Islam), and 2) the modernist (exemplified by several modern Muslim thinkers—Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, Fazrlur Raḥman, Muḥammad ʿAbdū, and Abu ʿAʾlā Mawdūdī) (Abu Zayd, *Rethinking*). The object of both interpretative approaches is the Quran. But how do they differ in understanding this holy text? Admittedly, the Quran is defined as divine message, which was codified in terms of a contemporary (to Muḥammad) linguistic system (Quraish dialect of the Arabic). Yet what is divine within the Quran: the spirit along with the letter[38] or the spirit alone? The answers provided by both interpretive approaches are of great importance for understanding the definition of the interpreter. In one case, the interpreter perceives the Quranic message as universal, because both spirit and letter are divine, leaving no room for reinterpretation of religious law. In the other case, the interpreter perceives the Quranic message contextually, because only its spirit is divine, while the letter is a human product. Under this perception, there is the demand for further reinterpretation and accommodation of the Quranic message to new historical contexts (Abu Zayd, "Literature" 18-33). Therefore, according to the modernist interpretive approach, the understanding of the Quran by the first Muslim generations, and subsequent ones, ought not to purport to be the final and absolute one (Abu Zayd, "Literature" 25). Due to its linguistic codification in the context of existing cultural data, the Quran must and can be reinterpreted, since hu-

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38. Under 'letter' I mean here "the exact words of a law or rule rather than its general meaning" (Turnbull, J., ed. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. 8th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, Print.

man culture evolves, and "the specific linguistic dynamics of the Quranic text, too, allows always an endless process of decoding" (Abu Zayd, "Literature" 26-27). Abu Zayd says it as follows:

In the process of decoding the contextual socio-cultural meaning should not be ignored or simplified, because this 'meaning' is so vital to indicate the direction of the 'new' message of the text. Having the direction would facilitate moving from the 'meaning' to its 'significance' in the present socio-cultural context. It will also enable the interpreter to correctly and efficiently extract the 'historical' and 'temporal', which carry no significance in the present context. As interpretation is the other inseparable side of the text, the Quran, being decoded in the light of its historical, cultural, and linguistic context, has to be recoded into the code of the cultural and linguistic context of the interpreter. In other words, the deep structure of the Quran must be reconstructed from the surface structure. Subsequently, the deep structure must be rewritten in another surface structure, which is that of to-day. ("Literature" 26)

Thus, Abu Zayd's interpreter is entitled by the nature of the Quran, viewed as divine message enveloped in human words and aligned with the contemporary socio-cultural realities, to pick up its eternal meaning and apply it to the new contexts of life. In this approach, reason is of considerable value, by virtue of its ability to notice differences between previous and emerging contexts. Reason suggests new solutions, dictated by the spirit of divine message. Yet, what is immutable and what changes in the process of reinterpretation? Is it really necessary to consign the understandings of the divine message by previous generations to the dustbin only because new contexts emerge? These questions subtend the essence of the discussions encroached upon at the beginning of this paper— whether the knowledge imparted through the interpretation of texts by an interpreter is his own product or the result of the previous tradition which predetermines the interpreter's interpretations? This issue leads us to the way Abu Zayd has tackled the problem of interaction between tradition and interpreter.

3.3 Representing Abu Zayd's view of the relationship between tradition and interpreter

The foregoing discussions about the discursive nature of the Quran and the active inference process of the interpreter in actualizing contextually the divine

message invites the question as to whether Abu Zayd's interpretative model can be located in any particular Muslim hermeneutic tradition. To be sure, there is a particular hermeneutic tradition that credits Abu Zayd's interpretative model as Islamic; as a matter of fact, he draws upon the Sūfi hermeneutic tradition, and it is, especially, Ibn ʿArabī's interpretive tack that informs Abu Zayd's hermeneutics, philosophy and theology[39]. Yet, what still keeps this tradition current for the 21ˢᵗ Century Muslim Arab world? Is it not obvious that the difference between the modern Muslim context and that of Ibn ʿArabī, seven centuries ago, calls for a paradigm change (change of tradition)? And if changes occur, are they the interpreter's own product or not?

The most important characteristic of the Sfi hermeneutic tradition, as distinct from the legal and theological ones, is its emphasis on "the personal spiritual experience of human being as a sole fundament of the religious knowledge" (*iaʿtabiru al-mutaṣawwifah anna "al-tajrībat" al-rūḥiyyat al-shakhṣiyyat al-dhātiyyat hīya ʾasās al-maʿarifat al-dīniyyah*) (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 22). This personal spiritual experience, according to Abu Zayd's reading of the Sūfī hermeneutic tradition, represents a "resumption of the experience of 'prophethood'" (*istiʿādat al-tajrībat al-nabawiyyah*) by way of "interpreting" (*tāʾwīl*) the "law of the Prophe"t (*al-sharīʿat al-nabawiyyah*) (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 22). In accordance with "the Sufī hermeneutic tradition, the personal spiritual experience re-establishes liaison with the source of knowledge, with the experience of prophetic 'revelation', since it is the experience of prophethood that represents the beginning of the revelation expressed in the texts" (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 23, 139). Abu Zayd's claim regarding the universality of this hermeneutic approach is justified, thus, by a certain parallelism between two experiences—the Sūfī and the Prophetic. Both experiences draw upon original sources. Moreover, they claim the possibility of establishing a link with the source of knowledge. However, there is also a subtle difference, which consists in the fact that for the Prophetic experience this source of knowledge implies divinity, whereas for the Sūfī experience connection with the Prophet represents the task of 'cognizing' (*al-ʿarif*) (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 138-9).[40] In fact, the priority in both experiences

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39. ABU ZAYD, NAṢR ḤĀMID. HAKADHA TAKALLAMA IBN ʿARABĪ, Miṣr: al-hīʾia al-miṣriyya al-ʿāma li-ʾl-kitāb, 2002.

40. *Min al-ṭabīʾī an tumathil al-tajrībat al-ṣūfiyyah tajrībah mūāziyyat li- tajrībat al-"waḥī" al-nabawiy. Al-fāriq baīna tajrībat "al-nabiy" wa tarībat "al-ṣūfī" anna al-tajrībat al-ūlā tataḍam-*

is the spirit, as opposed to literal expression and its interpretation (*al-taʿabīr*). Because "the spirit [defined here as the inner sense (*al-maʿanā al-bāṭinī*)] is susceptible to the opening towards new meanings in time and space" (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 139). Alternatively, by dwelling upon literal expression, as Muslim jurists, theologians and philosophers have, doctrinal differences arise, splitting Muslim society (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 22-4).

Thus, the source of religious knowledge represents the immutable constituent within this tradition. This source might be conceptualized as a spiritual ascension of interpreter, by way of personal spiritual experience, to the experience of prophetic "revelation". This model would not allow for doctrinal changes. So far, there is no valid reason to consider Abu Zayd as straying from Islamic tradition.

The discourse of change is recognizable in the Sūfi hermeneutic tradition as well; accordingly, in making clear and fixed the terms and concepts, popularized by the previous generations of Muslim thinkers, one can realize implicit changes (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 24). In particular, in his letter to Kaykāwūs (the Seljuk prince of Ikonia), Ibn ʿArabī crystallizes the ideas of the "*al-shurūṭ al-ʿUmariyya*" (the Provisions of ʿUmar)[41] about how to treat Christians. Here, he reproaches his friend for reducing the oppression against Christians of Antakia (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 68-73). Having mentioned all this, Abu Zayd does not grapple, however, with the flow of consequent questions as to how to explain this change in Ibn ʿArabi's interpretive approach (from inclusiveness to exclu-

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man al-itīān bi-tashrīʿi jadīda, baīnamā iakūn fahm al-wahī al-nabawiy bil-itiṣāl bi-nafs al-maṣdar hūa muhimmat ul-"ʿārif" fī al-tajrībat al- ṣūfiyyah (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 139).

41. Of considerable interest here is G. Scattolin's commentary on this source: "Many researchers doubt the authenticity of the "Provisions of Umar", claiming that it should be considered a late apocrypha written in the second period of the history of Omeyyade's dynasty when the policy towards the non-Muslim minorities, especially Christians, became more rigorous. What is of great interest here is the fact that Muslim tradition has accepted these "Provisions" as authentic, and consequently they became a point of reference for the posterior Islamic legislation. As a result, all Muslim rulers made automatic reference to this text whenever they intended to treat the 'protected subjects' (*ahl al-dhimma*) according to Islamic law... Ibn 'Arabi, too, referred to these "Provisions of ʿUmar" when addressing his friend, the prince of Konya, his letter". (My translation from French). Scattolin Giuseppe, Soufisme et Loi dans l'Islam: un texte de Ibn 'Arabi sur le sujets protégés (*ahl-al-dhimma*). In COLL., L'Orient chrétien dans l'empire musulman. Hommage au professeure GERARD TROUPEAU, coll. *Studia Arabica* n°3, Versailles, ed. de Paris, 2005, 200-235.

siveness). Because, for Abu Zayd, one has to see the Sūfī hermeneutic tradition from two perspectives: one, that of all-embracing spirituality (*al-tajrībat al-rūḥiyyat al-kawniyyah*) and the other, of historical reality (*al-tajrībat al-tārī khiyyah*) (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 74-5). Ibn ʿArabī treats other religions inclusively, admitting their share of the one source of knowledge. In his view, there are no obstacles to this source on the level of spiritual experience[42]. But, he too allowed intolerance towards heterodoxy, living in a historical context in which war, bloodshed and sufferings (of the Crusades particularly) were key factors in determining the relations between Muslims and Christians in Andalusia and the Middle East (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 68-74). It might be said that this adoption of the perspective of historical reality consents to the discourse of change within Sτfi hermeneutic tradition.

To sum up, the general contour of Abu Zayd's view of the relationship between tradition and interpreter is that the source of spiritual knowledge is immutable, while the application of religious knowledge in varying historical contexts changes. This change may transpire by displaying new attitudes: from tolerance to intolerance, from inclusiveness to exclusiveness, etc., and vice versa. Particularly, the events of Crusades made it clear that the reasonable right of self-preservation supersedes the principle of tolerance and inclusiveness.

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42. 'Everyone holds a distinct idea of Lord. He turns to God, imagining him only in a particular way, and seeing him the way he wants. If the true One would stand before him accordingly to his particular view, he would recognize Him, if He, though, were otherwise, then this person would deny him and flee away, avoiding him: see how he acts in a disrespectful way towards his God, while deeming himself to behaved virtuously. Each believer thus thinks that God is only whatever he has defined as God. The well-defined notion of God in religions entails regulations; consequently, these religions see only themselves and whatever regulation they fixed. I have explained to you the reason for it, therefore beware of binding yourself with credos and negating the rest, lest the great boon should leave you out and the knowledge of the world should bypass you. May this not happen to you; let your soul be the prime substance for all the cults without exception: the Most Highest is so great and omnipresent that you cannot enclose him in only one credo. He himself says so: "Wherever you turn your eyes, everywhere is the face of God". ... turning towards the Meccan mosque is one of these (directions), and therefore the face of God is there as well. Do not say, though, that He is only there, be faithful to the wisdom we have acquired and observe the decencies both towards the Meccan mosque and the truth that God is not only in "this place", because this "place" is only one among others whereto the all-seeing Eye turns his face. After all, you have understood that, in truth, the One Supreme God is everywhere and within everything, and only the beliefs are varying' (Ibn 'Arabi, fuṣūṣ al-ḥukm. Beirut: 1980, 98-99). (My translation from Arabic).

4. Articulating the Theoretical Underpinnings of Abu Zayd's Paradigm

The opponents of Abu Zayd's paradigm find it difficult to acknowledge that his hermeneutic model is firmly embedded in certain Islamic philosophical, anthropological and theological traditions. With the advent of modernity and the consequent "values of autonomy, rights, and democratic egalitarianism", this tradition has merely broadened the scope of its general concerns and discourse[43]. But it was not invented by modernity; it has its own continuity within Islamic thought. The rest of this study will focus on gaining a comprehensive view of the theological, philosophical, and anthropological ideas at work in Abu Zayd's paradigm, so that his affiliation with Islamic tradition becomes cogent.

At first glance, Abu Zayd's views of the Quran as discourse rather than text, and of his idea that the interpreter is an individual entitled to recast the Quranic spirit in the language of the current epoch and not of Muḥammad's time, could be construed as a kind of relativisation of tradition. However, the relationship between tradition and interpreter, discussed above, serves the purpose of strengthening tradition, because the immutability of the source of religious knowledge is fixed. Thus, Abu Zayd combines both interpretative approaches: he assertively challenges the unquestionable perpetuation of tradition, and he perseveres enough to maintain close links with tradition. Human reason plays a key role here. This should become clear from the thoughts which follow. The emergence of the divine message in a particular historical period, with its peculiar horizon of understanding, could mean, in Abu Zayd's view, not only the contextualization of transcendental information (something it is possible to change), but also its continuity within history (its perpetuation) (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 82-90). He explains this idea by interpreting the parallelism Ibn ʿArabī' traces between the re-conquering of Mecca by the first generation of Muslims in the 7th Century (AD) and the recovery of Jerusalem by Saladin from the Crusaders (Abu Zayd specifies them as *Rūm*—Byzantinians) in the 12th Century (AD) (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 75-76). The verse, which describes the bringing of Mecca under the control of Muslims, is cited in the Quranic Sura '*al-Rūm*',

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43. WOLIN, RICHARD, ed. *The Heidegger Controversy : A critical reader.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993, 295.

which depicts the standing animosities and wars between 'Fars' (Persians) and 'Rūm' (Byzantinians). For Ibn ʿArabī's, what commonalities are there between these two events that differ in time by almost five Centuries? For Abu Zayd, the answer to this question resides in the fact that the 'Rūm' (Byzantinians) continued to maintain inimical relations with the newly emerged Islamic state as well (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha*: 76). By virtue of the continuation of this historical actor (Byzantinians), Ibn ʿArabī's *reason* draws upon previous history to find answers for the current issues. Yet this could also mean that the transcendental information may run unchangeably through history. Reaching the point of the unchangeability of transcendental information, these thoughts set the stage for the next discussion initiated by the question: what theological, philosophical, and anthropological background within Abu Zayd's tradition enabled him to maintain the *Islamic character* of his interpretative model?

4.1 Theological strand

According to Abu Zayd's interpretative tradition, there is a body of Quranic evidence suggesting the idea that "all religions share the "same content of credo": faith in God, doomsday, rewards and punishments which assure the restoration of justice"[44] (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 207). Yet "religions, too, differ from each other with relation to the canons of individual and collective life, and the organization of worship"[45] (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 207). This differentiation is

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44. He has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Noah and that which We have revealed to you, [O Muḥammad], and what We enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus - to establish the religion and not be divided therein (*Ash-Shura* 13); Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans —those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness—will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve (*Al-Baqara* 62); Indeed, those who have believed and those who were Jews or Sabeans or Christians—those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness—no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve (*Al-Maeda* 69).

45. And We have revealed to you, [O Muḥammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth. To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all

further conceptualized in view of establishing the kind of interrelation between religions: Are they to be treated equally? Or, does each of them deliver the same spiritual results for its followers? By uncritically buttressing Ibn ʿArabī's argument, Abu Zayd proposes the theological idea of disproportionality, or even gap, between religions[46], whereby the Islamic spiritual experience takes precedence over the spiritual experiences within other religions. This condition of being more important relies on the fact that only in Islam the experience of "tasting" (*al-dhawq*) the divinity is possible (*al-faīḍa al-rūḥāniyya al-iʾlahiyya*), while the others simply experience the "epiphanies of a spiritual world" (*al-faī ḍa al-rūḥāniyya faqaṭ*) (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 210-1). All true, yet such tendencies to create hierarchies might easily result in discarding non-Islamic experiences as expendable, or at least, not worthy to learn from. This observation becomes more important when a Muslim interpreter, like Abu Zayd, confronts the dilemma of whether to establish a dialogue with modernity and its achievements. Does Abu Zayd's theological thought allow openness towards modernity, or, alternatively, towards *heterodoxy*? Analyzing Abu Zayd's works one come to the conclusion that his openness towards *heterodoxy* is considerably influenced by the important differentiation made by Ibn ʿArabī's between faith (*al-iʾmān*) and non-faith/disbelief (*al-kufr*) (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 77-87). For Ibn ʿArabī, there is indeed no unfaith/disbelief (*al-kufr*) in the world. However, the necessity of coining the term *al-kufr* resided in the fact that there were people who believed in the message of Muḥammad and those who disavowed it (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 78). Following Ibn ʿArabī's idea, every human partakes of faith in God in his inner life (*fīl-bāṭin*), even if he worships Him, by looking at the countenance of a stone, a celestial body or a human person. In this line of thought it is the sincerity of faith that counts. Because "Almighty God Himself says: I have created the spirits and humans only for the purpose that they would worship me; and how is it possible to imagine that they might worship someone else?" The distinction between unbelievers (*al-kuffār*) and believers (*al-*

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that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ (*Al-Maeda* 48).

46. *lakin al-ishtirāk fī baʿaḍ natāiʾj al-tajrībat al-rūḥiyyah lia iaʿanī ʿadam al-faṣl wa al-tamyīz baīna al-tajrībat al-rūḥiyyat al-mabniyyah ʿalā al-qurāʾn al-karīm wa al-sunnat al-nabawiyyah wa tajrībat rūḥiyyat lil-rahbān al-masīḥyyīn am al-falāsifat al-ʿaqlyīn* (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 210).

mūʾminūn) refers to the congruence between the hidden (*al-bāṭin*) and manifest (*al-ẓāhir*) aspects of faith, or between conscience and reality (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 79). When the natural longing for a dimension 'beyond' (*al-fiṭra*) overlaps with the knowledge of conscience confessing the "faith in One God" (*al-tawḥīd*), the result is a participation in monotheistic discourse, and the people are called "monotheists" (*al-mūahidīn*), conversely, they are called "believers" (*al-mūʾminūn*) (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 79-80). This important distinction was, according to Abu Zayd, very useful for explaining the reason behind the military fiascos the Muslim world underwent at the time of Crusades. Accordingly, Muslims suffered defamation not because their faith was not true, while that of their enemies was, but due to the fact that their enemies manifested allegiance to their credo, while Muslims did not (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 80). Muslim theological tradition does not deny existential value (in the sense of *existential* relationship with divinity) behind heterodoxy; it denies, however, true knowledge (in the sense of *conscious* relationship with divinity). This flexibility in approaching other religions allows Abu Zayd's interpretative model to advance the positive ideas of tolerance and togetherness towards heterodox ideas. But it too does not allow for the obscuring of the clear-cut distinctions.

4.2 Philosophical strand

The legacy of European postclassical philosophical thought (second half of XIX Century until present time) provides the contextual framework for situating Abu Zayd's philosophical preferences. The main features of postclassical thought include its emphasis on the historical development of existence as opposed to the universal, which is common to everything (Ждановский 15). The "European postclassical philosophical thought, too, tends to overcome the subject-object opposition of the classical thought, which argued the existence of an autonomous subject separated from the world with its socio-economical rapports and dependencies" (Ждановский 15). For the former, the "subject is ontologically rooted, by way of his epistemological and practical activities, in the structures of the historical and cultural traditions, to the extent that subject even ceases sometimes to exist in its own name" (Ждановский 15). The important point to make here is that the European postclassical philosophical thought attempted to introduce a new understanding of the relationship between tradition

and individual person (interpreter). This conceptual soil strongly favored the tradition *at the expense of the interpreter.*

This relativization of the subject *to the advantage of tradition* occurs partially in Abu Zayd's interpretative model as well. Particularly, he states that there "is no such a possibility for the interpreter to attain an objective knowledge about past events, because there is an unbridgeable gap between interpreter's epistemological and axiological horizon and the historical reality of research object" (Abu Zayd, Hakadha 64). Despite this difficulty to acquire objective knowledge of the past, the interpreter "should enter the dialectical relationship with his subject matter in order to create something '*new*'" (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 64). How then does an understanding of past events occur? After all, people constantly experience the feeling that they understand the past. These considerations suggest the substantial presence of Gadamer's philosophical thought in Abu Zayd interpretative model. According to Gadamer[47], the problem of historical understanding has to find its solution in this creative dialectics between pre-judgment (prior hermeneutical situatedness) and the particular horizon of the interpreter's understanding; this dialectic results in the specific event of understanding[48]. On the other side, the preceding discussion made it clear that Abu Zayd's interpretative model does not cease to accentuate the significance of interpreter in delivering new understanding by way of either reason or mystical experience. In this manner, the philosophical intuition that strengthens Abu Zayd's affiliation to his tradition *stems* from the *Western hermeneutic legacy,* while his emancipation of the interpreter hails from both the Sūfī and, especially, Muʿtazilite hermeneutic tradition. This accent on the human interpreter takes one to the anthropological views reflected in Abu Zayd's interpretative model.

4.3 Anthropological strand

Abu Zayd's hermeneutic model shares an understanding of the human being much disputed in the history of Islamic thought. According to Abu Zayd's glob-

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47. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gadamer/#HerFou Accessed on 19.03.2012.
48. GADAMER, HANS-GEORG, *Truth and Method*, 2ⁿᵈ rev. ed. Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1989, 453-60, 471-85.

al perception of Islamic anthropology, the human will is free. In order to understand whether it concerns an absolute or limited freedom one must come to grips with the nature of this dispute in the history of Islam. This issue arises from two standpoints: 1) of total faith in God's absolute will, and 2) of total faith in God's justice. The first standpoint begins with the basic Islamic tenet of al-*tawūīd* (One God) along with the assumption that "God is not like humans" (*lā mushābaha il-llah lil-bashar*)[49]. Hence, divine "characteristics" (*al-ṣifāt*) do not apply to humans and human characteristics are not to be attributed to divinity. Accordingly, divine characteristics of power and acting hold true only with relation to God, and therefore everything else is "predetermined" (*jabariyy*) (Abu Zayd, *Al-ʾitijāh* 22). However, there is a distinction to make between the "fatalism" (*al-qawl bil-jabar*) of the Umayyad and that of Ash?arites; the latter did not reject the ability of humans to act on their own will, at least in resisting trespasses (Abu Zayd, *Al-ʾitijāh* 22, 245). Thereafter, the Ash?arites had an enormous impact upon the anthropology of the Sτfi hermeneutic tradition, emphasizing an understanding of the freedom of the human will but only in overcoming evil (Abu Zayd, *Hakadha* 140). The second standpoint—of total faith in God's justice—develops its basic reasoning about the freedom of the human will and, consequently, the responsibility of each one for his/her deeds by virtue of the Quranic discourse of "promise" (*al-waʿd*) and "warning" (*al-waʿīd*) (Abu Zayd, *Al-ʾitijāh* 28). Correspondingly, the Muslim pious believers have always admitted the idea of "rewards" (*al-thawāb*) and "vindicatory punishment" (*al-ʿiqāb*) for their deeds in the afterlife. Yet, rewards and punishments make sense only when there is responsibility afforded by the freedom of the human will, otherwise all this would be in a flagrant contradiction to the total faith in God's "justice" (*al-ʿadl*) (Abu Zayd, *Al-ʾitijāh* 28-33). The attempts to find an optimal solution for this anthropological issue become more complicated due to the fact that, as Abu Zayd acknowledges, the unimpeachable source of Islam—the Quran itself—allows both understandings of *qadr* (free will determining human actions) and *jabar* (the necessity of human actions) (Abu Zayd, *Al-ʾitijāh* 32). Abu Zayd invokes this contradiction by explaining the reason why al-Ḥasan al-

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49. Abu Zayd, Naṣr Ḥāmid. *Al-ʾitijāh al-ʿaqlīy fi al-tafsīr: dirāsa fi qaḍiyya al-majāz fi al-Qurʾan ʿind al-muʿtazil*, 4th ed.Bayrūt: al-markaz al-thaqāfī al-ʿarabīy, 1998 (a), 19.

Baṣrī [50] had recourse to the two basic ways of Quranic interpretation: "direct/literal" (*ʿan ṭarīq al-istishhād*) and / "allegoric" (*taʾwīl*) (Abu Zayd, *Al-ʾitijāh* 32). In al-Baṣrī's view, this way (by emphasizing through literal interpretation the verses supporting the free will, and disguising through allegoric interpretation the verses supporting the necessity of human actions) one maintains the fundamental credo of the previous generation of Companions that in committing sins the human will is free (Abu Zayd, *Al-ʾitijāh* 32). The Ashʿarite anthropological understanding of the functionality of human freedom restricted only to abstaining from sins, received considerable extension in the Muʿtazilite theology.

The considerable difference between both theological schools lies in the fact that for the Ashʿarites human beings can contemplate God; while for the Muʿtazilites this is impossible (Abu Zayd, *Al-ʾitijāh* 245). The Ashʿarites do not identify a fundamental difference between divine "Self" (*al-dhāt*) and divine "characteristics" (*al-ṣifāt*)—God exists in both His Self and divine characteristics. On the other hand, the Muʿtazilites take the view that this non-differentiation between divine Self and divine characteristics contradicts the principle of *al-tawḥīd*, because God is only one, and dwelling somewhere else outside His Self violates this principle (Abu Zayd, *Al-ʾitijāh* 244-245). As a result, these anthropological perspectives legitimate two distinct epistemological approaches—mystical as distinct from rational. In both instances there is room for the concept of the freedom of the human will, but the cognition (of the Divine message) occurs in one of two distinct domains: either existential experience, or the rational event of understanding. The mystical approach depends essentially on divine revelations to individuals (element of compulsion), while rational actions require intellectual effort (active engagement). Yet, would it not be judicious to justify the perpetuation of tradition on the basis of humanity's dependence on divine revelations for the cognition of truth?

Turning to Abu Zayd's interpretative model, one can see the difference when a Muslim interpreter reads, understands and applies the sense of the text *actively* (in the sense of making free intellectual efforts) and not *passively* (in the sense of implementing compulsory divine disclosures). Intellectual efforts

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50. Although al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) was one of the most prominent advocate of the *qadar* teaching (the freedom of human will), this has been not considered as a definitive obstacle for him being declared by the Sunnites to their *Stammvätern* (Berger 62).

are not only free but also susceptible to critiques on the ground that these efforts might err. Alternatively, the implementation of divine revelations might resist the natural inclination of the interpreter to criticize because the authority of divine source is unimpeachable. Yet, what would happen if it were not thirst for truth, but the logic of self-preserving power that guarded the accuracy of the divine message? This issue is particularly important when the ideological bias of the societal or political circumstances make the potential interpreter freeze any new understanding of the authoritative sources (be it texts or mystical revelations) because this might entail repression by the religious leaders, the theocratic states, etc. Repression is then exerted in the name of the tradition of divine revelation. This preeminence of tradition becomes a matter of fact in the event that the cognition of truth depends on divine disclosure alone, and not on human *mental effort.* The result is that the Muslim interpreter, who should interpret modern inconsistencies concerning domestic and foreign affairs, propounds an interpretation attuned to the prevailing bias of his milieu (established tradition), instead of meeting the universal requirement for interpreters to be honest, objective and *cognizant* of viable strategies for facing contemporary challenges. The interpreter's reason remains indifferent to eventual challenges, because he performs repetitions (staid strand of tradition) and not changes (innovative strand of tradition). In this context, Abu Zayd situates his virtual interpreter within the confines of a model, which asserts that the human mind and will driven by the thirst for truth and not by self-preserving power[51], initiate the utmost effort in suggesting solutions and answers derived from the divine message. In such a case, the spiritual experience of divine revelation operates along with human mental effort, whereby the possibility for the interpreter to undertake this mental effort burdens him with responsibility for the ineffectiveness of divine revelation. Thus, he joins Mu?tazilite anthropology with its idea that humans are responsible for both their sins and their moral victories (Abu Zayd, *Al-'itijāh* 245).

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51. ABU ZAYD, NAṢR ḤĀMID. *Naqd al-khiṭāb al-dīnīy.* 2nd ed. Al-qāhira: sīnā li-'l-nashir, 1994. Also, ———. *Al-naṣ, al-sulṭa, al-ḥaqīqa: al-fikr al-dīnīy baīna 'irāda al-ma'arifa wa 'irāda al-haymana.* Bayrūt: al-markaz al-thaqāfī al-'arabīy, 1995.

5. Conclusion

Within the context of the postmodernist tendency to legitimize the interpretative polyvalence and the pluralism of competing worldviews, the Muslim reader has been mystified by Abu Zayd's interpretative model. Interestingly, voices taken to represent the Muslim "tradition" claim that this model has nothing to do with Islam, because it allegedly destroys Islam by way of introducing uncertainty into the Quran, the tradition of its interpretation, and the relationship between tradition and interpreter. This study has sought to explore this mystification. Abu Zayd's interpretative model has shown major characteristics that pretend to ensure continuity between his thought and certain Islamic alternative hermeneutic traditions. *Within this framework, it is up for debate as to whether his interpretative model should be qualified as new.* Abu Zayd professes the fundamental things of Islam—the authority of divine revelation (the Quran), the last Prophet in conjunction with his Sunna, the *tawīḥd* (the belief in One God) and the guiding principles of Islam (*al-maqṣāid*). But he, too, stresses the importance of reason for setting in motion the innovative potential of Islam. Without awakening this potential, no changes in the Muslim world are to be expected. To awake this potential, Abu Zayd additionally refers to the idea of the freedom of the human will. Within this idea there is a hidden dynamism that can bring new changes to Muslim society. According to his paradigm, both interpretative strands—the would-be traditional and the liberal—belong to Islam. Islam, from this perspective, may be repetitive; however, it, too, has innovative power. Both interpretative strands represent, finally, two competing hermeneutic tendencies within Islam. To be sure, it is not yet clear which interpretative tendency will ultimately dominate. This issue is significant for the West, Russia, and anywhere where Islam is adequately represented at the societal level. Does not the current negative image of Islam in the West persist because of the tendency to impede the innovative interpretative voice within the Muslim tradition? Whatever the answer may be, Abu Zayd believes that Islam can find common causes with both Judaism and Christianity concerning many issues. However, he does not eschew the fundamental differences between these religions.

By reason of space limitation several aspects of the argument developed in this study have received inadequate treatment. Accordingly, with relation to "traditional" Muslim hermeneutics two mentioned features—freezing the delivery of new understanding of authoritative texts and the enforcement of the es-

tablished understandings—here have not been discussed enough. Little has been said about the impact of Marxist thought on Abu Zayd's philosophical thought, as well as the definition of the type of this thought—Marxist, neo-Marxist or post-Marxist. Abu Zayd's methodological measures against the infiltration of subjectivity, to the detriment of objectivity, in his hermeneutic approach require an extensive research. Finally, the insight concerning Abu Zayd's dependence on the Mu'tazilite concept of absolute freedom in preference to its limited understanding provided by the Sūfīs needs further elaboration.

Truly, in promoting the interpreter as new source of application of Islamic values, the legacy of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abu Zayd's hermeneutic thought represents *nothing* new to Islam. Yet, his engagement in the rehabilitation of the Muslim alternative hermeneutic traditions and their struggle for present hermeneutic dominance in the modern Arab Muslim discourse by way of Western analytical tools has paved a new way for the realization of the innovative potential of the Islamic tradition.