Maria Pakkala

Take not Jews and Christians as Intimates!

Depictions of Jews and Christians in Modern Shīʿi Qurʿānic Exegesis

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by due permission of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki, in lecture room 5, on the 25th of January, 2019 at 14 o’clock.
Maria Pakkala

_Take not Jews and Christians as Intimates! Depictions of Jews and Christians in Modern Shi`i Qur`anic Exegesis_

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To the loving memory of Hanna Koivistö and Timo Liene.

To Prof. Eirlys Davies. You left a tremendous mark on my life.
Abstract

Modern Shīʿī commentaries on the Qurʾān are understudied in comparison with their classical or Sunni counterparts. This dissertation attempts to fill in some of this academic lacuna by shedding light on one of the major Shīʿī Qurʾānic commentators of our times. The topic of my research is the perception of Jews and Christians in the thought of the Lebanese Shīʿī scholar Grand Ayatollah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh (1935-2010). The main intention of my work is to present Fadlallah’s views on Jews and Christians as well as his perception of engagement with them through the examination of his twenty-five-volume commentary on the Qurʾān, Tafsīr Min Wahy al-Qurʾān, as well as his other exegetical works. To do this, I use Systematic Analysis as a research method which aims at exploring the inner world of the texts by examining their key concepts, arguments, allegations and backgrounds. Possible inconsistencies or contradictions in the texts under study are equally taken into consideration. The views and arguments are then presented under a coherent structure which enables the outlining of Fadlallah’s perception of the People of the Book.

This study presents the three main tenets of the Ayatollah’s perception of Jews and Christians. The first tenet is the supersession of Islam over Judaism and Christianity according to which pre-Islamic monotheistic religions are part of the progressive divine revelation and are a source of divine guidance but only until the advent of the next one. The Qurʾān is thus a continuity to the Torah and the Gospel but it is, first and foremost, an updated, and final scripture which constitutes a revelatory closure. The second tenet is the partial validity of pre-Qurʾānic Scriptures on the grounds that they were either partially or greatly misrepresented through additions, omissions or misinterpretations. The third tenet is the Qurʾānic regulations of engagements with Jews and Christians in theory and in practice. Fadlallah argues that Islam calls for peaceful and courteous relationships with the People of the Book. The exception to this is their injustice against Muslims in which case aggression against them is justified and maintaining amicable relationships with them is either undesirable or forbidden. This study concludes that Fadlallah’s more lenient attitude towards the Christians and blatant criticism of the Jews has a sociopolitical aspect. The first are called to dialogue while the latter are excluded as long as Israel exists and are depicted as rebellious and inherently resistant to divine guidance. These depictions are mixed with Western anti-Semitic motifs and Quṭbīst anti-Jewish views.
Acknowledgements

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Notes on translation and transliteration

The English translation of the Qur’ānic verses are taken from the Sahih international with modifications in most cases. Otherwise, the translations of the texts from Arabic, Hebrew, French, Finnish and German are mine. In translations of passages from Fadlallah’s commentary, the forms of divine eulogies or honorifics for prophets have been omitted to preserve the flow of the English text.

The transliteration system used in this work is that of the Encyclopedia of Islam III.

Case endings and assimilation rules are not included. Hence, al-tafsīr not at-tafsīr and Min wahy al-Qur’ān and not Min wahyi_l-Qur‘āni.

The Arabic names ‘Fadlallah’ and ‘Hizbullah’ are written the way they are pronounced in spoken Lebanese Arabic instead of the forms Fadlullah, Fadl Allah; Hizbullah, Hizbollah, and Hizb Allah.
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## Glossary

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<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ahl al-Bayt</td>
<td>Literarily ‘people of the house’, members of the Prophet Muhammad’s household.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahl al-Kitāb</td>
<td>Literarily ‘people of the book’, the people who possess a scripture i.e., Jews and Christians. Sometimes Sabeans and Zoroastrians are included in this category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asbāb al-Nuzūl</td>
<td>Occasions of revelation: contexts of the revelation of the Qurʾān.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayatollah</td>
<td>Literarily ‘God’s miraculous sign.’ A title that refers to a religious scholar who is able to practice independent derivation of religious laws (ijtihād).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bāṭin</td>
<td>Inner, or esoteric as opposed to zāhir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daʿwa</td>
<td>Call to Islam; Muslim mission work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhimma</td>
<td>Pact; covenant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhimmi</td>
<td>A Protégé. A Jew or a Christian (some scholars include other religious groups too) who lives under Islamic rule and who is entitled to security, protection and freedom of cult and worship. A Protégé has certain obligations such as paying the Jizya.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faqīh, pl. fuqahāʾ</td>
<td>Jurist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatwā, pl. fatāwā</td>
<td>The legal opinion of a jurist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḥākimiyya</td>
<td>Governance and authority; Primacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḥawza</td>
<td>Shīʿi theological seminary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ḥukm, pl. aḥkām</td>
<td>Legal ruling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iḥtiyāṭ</td>
<td>Recommended precaution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ʿIṣma</td>
<td>Infallibility: immunity from sin and error.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isnād</td>
<td>Chain of transmission of a Hadith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jizya</td>
<td>Literally, a compensation. A poll-tax paid by some religious minorities living under Islamic authority in return for their protection.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Khums (Lit. one-fifth) a religious tax, which is paid by Shi‘i Muslims to the Marja’ al-Taqlīd whom they emulate or to his representative (wakīl).

Marja’ al-Taqlīd (Lit. source of emulation) Shi‘i jurist whose legal judgments are imitated by Shi‘i believers.

Marja‘iya / Marji‘iya The institution of the source of emulation.

Al-Mashhūr Or ‘al-ma ‘rāf’: Well-known opinion (in ḥadīth classification).

Maṣlaḥa Public interest, best interest.

Mufassir Exegete.

Mujaddid Reformer; reviver.

Mujtahid A scholar who has the qualification to exercise independent derivation of religious laws (ijtihād).

Muqallid Emulator.

Kitābīs Scriptuaries; the People of the Book; Jews and Christians.

Qarīna, pl. Qarā‘in Indications; proofs.

Al-Sayyid A title used for people who are believed to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

Taḥsīr Explication; Qur’ānic exegesis.

Taqiyya Dissimulation: Concealing one’s beliefs if showing them would lead to endangering one’s safety or security.

‘ālim, pl. ‘ulamā’ Scholar.

Uṣūlī Rationalist Twelver Shi‘i school of thought which emphasizes the use of reason (‘aql) and independent derivation of religious laws (ijtihād).

Wahhābī Radical Sunni movement established by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792) in today’s Saudi Arabia.

Waḥy Revelation.

Wilāyat al-Faqīh Guardianship of the jurist.

Zāhir Exoteric as opposed to bāṭin.
1. Introduction

*Tafsīr* studies is a young discipline but it has developed considerably during the last four decades. New texts are edited year after year and more commentaries are being studied and published either in individual monographs or as part of larger studies.¹ Several exegetical corpora were unavailable to researchers until a few decades ago and thus were not included in major exegetical studies of the twentieth century.² Accordingly, an ocean of *tafsīr* literature remains unexplored by all schools of thought. Shīʿī commentaries on the Qurʾān in particular are understudied and are overshadowed by Sunni ones.³ A case in point is Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh’s Qurʾānic commentary “*Min Wahy al-Qurʾān*” (hereafter MWQ), which has not enjoyed the scholarly interest it deserves despite its influence in the Shīʿī world. There is, as yet, no comprehensive study of Fadlallah’s commentary. Likewise lacking is an adequate systematic study of Fadlallah’s thought or theology. There are only a few studies that deal with specific subjects in Fadlallah’s thought, and most of them concentrate on its political or legal aspect. This highlights the importance of this research as a supplement to the limited pool of current academic literature on the Ayatollah’s thought and theology.

The Ayatollah Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh⁴ (1935–2010) is one of the Shīʿī world’s prominent jurisconsults. He was also an exegete, a prolific writer, an articulate orator, a diligent poet, and an influential public figure. Even after his death, Fadlallah continues to be one of the most influential personalities in Lebanon and the Shīʿī world. He is also one of the rare Shīʿī scholars to have been in close discourse with Sunni scholars and to have called for rapprochement and dialogue with the Sunni world. He is known for his open-mindedness and his contribution to the Muslim-Christian dialogue in Lebanon. In the West, however, Fadlallah is not considered a voice of moderation. On the contrary, he was

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³ The field of Shīʿī Islam became an attractive academic field in the 1980s with the Iranian revolution, the war in Iraq and the civil war in Lebanon. Gradually, the importance of Shīʿī studies began to grow, and more and more academic studies on different aspects of the discipline of Shīʿī Islam were published.

accused of supporting the Iranian-backed Shi‘ite militants who kidnapped Westerners and bombed the U.S. Embassy and Marine base in Lebanon. He was barred from entering the United States from the 1980s on,5 and because of his assumed connection with Hizballah, he was classified as a terrorist leader.6

Fadlallah is important for many reasons. He is considered an important thinker and a reviver (mujaddid) both within his own community and outside it. As a key Shi‘i religious scholar, he has had a major impact on Lebanese Shi‘ism in particular, but his influence on the whole of Arab Shi‘ism is apparent as well.7 His political, social and religious activism gives his theology an additional importance especially because of his impact on Hizballah and the Lebanese resistance movement. The understanding of this theologico-political impact is crucial for understanding the inter-religious relationships inside Lebanon and outside it from a Shi‘i point of view. Hence, understanding the Ayatollah’s perception of the People of the Book is pivotal to fully understand the Shi‘i-Christian relations in present-day Lebanon or the Lebanese Shi‘i attitudes towards Israel and the Jews in general. A comprehensive grasp of Fadlallah’s writings on these subjects, and “Min Wahy al-Qur‘ān” in particular, provides new light on the Lebanese Shi‘i context and increases our understanding of how the theological, ideological, social and political backgrounds are all mixed together in the interpretation and the application of the Qur‘ān.

1.1. Aim and significance of the study

This work sets out to examine the modern Shi‘i conception of Jews and Christians through the analysis of the “Tafsīr Min Wahy al-Qur‘ān” commentary on the Qur‘ān by the Lebanese Shi‘i scholar Grand Ayatollah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍlallāh (1935–2010). Although the main focus of the present study is Fadlallah’s commentary on the Qur‘ān, it also takes into consideration his other writings, lectures, sermons and interviews which have exegetical content of thematic relevance to this study. Because the MWQ builds on other classical and modern tafsīr literature, as is typical of later commentaries, I will also examine how Fadlallah uses and reinterprets these sources, how he readapts them

5 Sankari, Fadlallah, 9.
6 Senior Middle East editor Octavia Nasr was fired by CNN over a tweet in which she praised the late Ayatollah. The TV station explained that the journalist’s credibility was compromised. Nasr had tweeted: “Sad to hear of the passing of Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah. One of Hezbollah’s giants I respect a lot.” See for example, The Guardian article published on 8 October 2010 and consulted online on 2 September 2012: www.theguardian.com/media/2010/jul/08/octavia-nasr-cnn-tweet-fired.
and uses them in his contemporary context whenever it applies to the questions of the study. My aim is to disclose Fadlallah’s complex and multilayered conceptualization of Jews and Christians by outlining the main tenets of his thought concerning them. The first tenet of Fadlallah’s perception of the Jews is Islam’s theological attitude vis-à-vis Judaism and Christianity; the second tenet is his theory of the un/corruptibility (taḥrīf) of pre-Qurʾānic scriptures; and the third tenet is the Qurʾānic regulation of Muslim–non-Muslim relationships in theory and in practice—especially in regard to the present day. Furthermore, I shall show how religious and political ideas are generated or justified by exegesis to serve the exigencies of the sociopolitical life in his contemporary context in Lebanon. Clearly, there are many political, social, and strategic elements which have shaped Lebanese Shiʿi thought in general and that of Fadlallah in particular. However, since this study concentrates on the theological aspect of Fadlallah’s thought, the other elements will only be discussed when pertaining to the central aspects of this investigation.

From a broader perspective, this study’s main contribution is twofold. First, it sheds light on unexplored ground by studying one of the major contemporary commentaries in the Arab Shiʿi world which remains understudied up to today despite its importance and impact on millions of Muslims all over the world. Second, it takes into consideration all Fadlallah’s relevant works—sermons, articles and interviews—and scrutinizes the changes or fluctuations in the Ayatollah’s thought concerning the theme at hand. This is especially important considering that the few studies which deal with Fadlallah’s works have achieved partial results because they have overlooked MWQ or other important sources. A very often neglected factor is Fadlallah’s use of a double discourse, which only becomes apparent when all his works are taken into consideration. This is of particular importance since some of the Ayatollah’s ideas and/or focal points change depending on his audience, and therefore an investigation into his theology and ideology from one perspective may give only an incomplete picture of his thought. Additionally, because of different circumstances as well as societal and political factors, Fadlallah’s thought evolved during his lifetime. This should also be taken into consideration in order to reach a fuller and more complete picture of his thought. This work seeks to fill these gaps in the field of modern Qurʾānic exegesis and to contribute to the scholarly understanding of the Islamic perception of Kitābīs in a multi-religious Middle-East—a subject which is as relevant today as ever before.

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8 See 5.2.8. for an example of this change.
1.2. Methodological note

The research methodology used in this study is Jari Jolkkonen’s Systematic Analysis. This analytical method aims at the exploration of the inner world of the studied text such as concepts, arguments, allegations and backgrounds. The research results are then presented under a coherent structure. Systematic Analysis also aims at revealing any inconsistencies or contradictions in the texts under study. This method is thus very suitable for disclosing Fadlallah’s perceptions of Jews and Christians, defining the relevant key concepts that are used as well as finding the connections linking them. The ideas that Fadlallah explicitly expresses are given as much attention as those that he only implies or leaves unsaid.

In practical terms, key texts dealing with Christians and Jews in MWQ on the one hand and in Fadlallah’s other writings on the other, will be scrutinized, compared and juxtaposed to one another in order to gain a well-structured overview of Fadlallah’s perceptions of the People of the Book. Any development, change or contradiction in Fadlallah’s perception or interpretation will be documented and subsequently analyzed. Additionally, the background and context of the exegete is also taken into consideration and all relevant historical, social and political elements that might have affected his argumentation or conceptions will be explored with the aim of considering possible causes, motives or reasons for these conceptions.

To maintain this work at a reasonable size, I shall limit it to the major themes around which Fadlallah’s views on the People of the Book revolve and which are pivotal to a good understanding of these views. These themes are organized around the three tenets of the Ayatollah’s thought concerning Muslim-Kitābī relationships. I deal with each of these tenets in a separate chapter (chapters three, four and five respectively).

The first chapter is divided into two parts. The first part is devoted to introductory and methodological questions as well as to the review and discussion of the major academic works related to the study of Fadlallah’s thought. In addition to demonstrating that Fadlallah’s exegetical literature is understudied from a scientific perspective, this chapter also provides the background for the present work by highlighting the relevant previous studies and the lacunas concerning research on Fadlallah and his work. The second part of

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10 Jolkkonen, Systemaattinen Analyysi, 46–47.

11 See Appendix A for the main historical and political events that influenced Fadlallah.
this chapter offers a biography of Fadlallah with the aim of shedding light on his background as well as his intellectual and political development. To do this, I will take into consideration the now available works about his life and his thought as well as the information provided by the Ayatollah himself through interviews and articles published in various books, media sources, and on his official website. I also take into consideration the accounts of his critics and his political foes.

The second chapter offers a descriptive account of Fadlallah’s MWQ commentary and an examination of his exegetical method. This will enable a contextualization of MWQ within the classical and modern Shi'i *tafsīr* literature as well as its comparison with some relevant Sunni commentaries. The academic contribution of this section is that it offers an overview of what makes MWQ stand out from other commentaries and shows the degree of the Ayatollah’s intellectual and theological independence from his predecessors. The subsequent three chapters are devoted to the core tenets of the Ayatollah’s thought related to his perception of Jews and Christians.

The third chapter examines Fadlallah’s understanding of the position of Islam as the last of the three monotheistic missions and his conception of salvation—the first tenet of his thought. I examine the Ayatollah’s conception of *islām*, abrogation and salvation in his commentary and I compare it with that found in his other works. This will shed light on Fadlallah’s interpretation of the verses traditionally used to argue for the abrogation (*naskh*) of Judaism and Christianity and the supersession of Islam over them, namely Q3:19, Q3:85, and Q5:3. This is followed by a discussion of the concepts of monotheism, unbelief (*kufr*), and pre-Qurʾānic holy books as these concepts are closely related to salvation. This chapter reveals the complex argumentation for the supremacy and supersession of Islam over Judaism and Christianity, on the one hand, but also for the un-abrogability of pre-Islamic monotheistic religions and their possible salvific nature on the other.

In the fourth chapter, I examine the Ayatollah’s understanding of the concept of scriptural misrepresentation (*taḥrīf*) and its effect on the un/validity of pre-Qurʾānic Scriptures—the second tenet of his thought. This is done through the analysis of Fadlallah’s interpretation of the key Qurʾānic verses which accuse the People of the Book of having committed some kind of scriptural misrepresentation. Another important question this chapter attempts to answer is the degree of corruption of the present-day Bible in Fadlallah’s thought as well as its usability and usefulness to its respective followers.

In the fifth chapter, I shed light on the Ayatollah’s perception of the Muslim-Christian and the Muslim-Jewish relationships as regulated by the Qurʾān—the third tenet of his thought. I show how Fadlallah utilizes particular Qurʾānic verses intertextually in order to come up with a regulative system to manage these relationships. In this chapter, I devote more space
to describing practical regulations of Muslim-Christian engagements on the one hand and Muslim-Jewish encounters on the other. I pay special attention to the impact of the internal and external political factors as well as the establishment of the Jewish State on these regulations.

1.3. Literature review

As stated above, there is up to now no comprehensive academic study of Fadlallah’s commentary on the Qur’ān. The first reference to MWQ came in one of Olivier Carré’s articles (1995).\(^{12}\) Clearly unimpressed, he describes the first edition of this commentary in passing as “brief commentaries on the Qur’ān.” Carré certainly did not expect the then short commentary lectures to become as influential as they became later.\(^{13}\) To the best of my knowledge, there are only two studies that touch upon Fadlallah’s commentary directly, though only partially. The closest among them to my study theme-wise, and also the most recent (2013), is Brunner’s article “Two modern Shi‘i scholars on relations between Muslims and Non-Muslims.”\(^{14}\) In this article, Brunner deals with Fadlallah’s perception of Muslim–non-Muslim relations and dialogue through the analysis of the Ayatollah’s interpretation of three Qur’ānic passages\(^{15}\) as well as the comparison of these views with those of al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī’s (d. 1981). Brunner rightly stops at some of the key concepts in Fadlallah’s interpretation of these verses—one of which is Da‘wat. Fadlallah urges Da‘wat workers to do their best to help non-Muslims conclude that Islam is the only true religion.\(^{16}\) As far as subjugating non-Muslims to the sovereignty of Islam, Brunner reveals only the theoretical part of Fadlallah’s view because the political side of the argument is to be found in his other works. Even if Brunner missed Fadlallah’s constant attack on Israel and Zionism when he says that the man “nowhere mentions the state of Israel or the Middle East conflict,”\(^ {17}\) he rightly concludes that the Sayyid’s exclusion of the Jews from interreligious dialogue has a political character\(^ {18}\) and spotted Fadlallah’s


\(^{13}\) See Chapter II for more on the development of Fadlallah’s commentary on the Qur’ān to its present-day format.


\(^{15}\) Q2:256, Q3:61–78, and Q9:29.

\(^{16}\) Brunner, “Two Modern Shi‘ite Scholars,” 148–149.

\(^{17}\) Brunner, “Two Modern Shi‘ite Scholars,” 151.

\(^{18}\) In principle, Fadlallah only excludes Israeli Jews—not the Jews in general.
tendency of “generally paint[ing] them in much darker colours.” Despite the limited portion of Qur’anic texts examined for this study, Brunner hits the core of Fadlallah’s thought by pointing out two important issues. The first is the similarity of the Ayatollah’s arguments to those of other modern Islamists such as Quṭb (d. 1966) in equating Freedom of religion in Islam with the freedom to practice Da‘wa and the second is the fact that MWQ is neither particularly modern nor particularly Shi‘i despite its modern terminology and its Shi‘i authorship. The limitedness of the number of verses chosen for this study makes the results Brunner comes to only partially true. For example, when Brunner says that Fadlallah echoes the traditional Muslim view that Ibrahim was actually a Muslim, he misses the more complicated picture of Fadlallah’s understanding of the term “islām” as will be demonstrated in Chapter III.

The second collection where Fadlallah’s commentary is included is the valuable *An Anthology of Qur’anic Commentaries I* (2008) which is a heterogeneous selection of twenty hermeneutical works related to six Qur’anic passages. These twenty commentaries cover thirteen centuries of exegetical tradition, from the eighth century to the present day, represented by a wide spectrum of sectarian affiliations with the aim of showing “the richness of the genre of Qur’anic commentary.” The breadth and depth of this study demonstrates that the goal of this research was reached successfully. The most recent commentary in this selection is Fadlallah’s MWQ. The researchers behind this study decided to include Fadlallah’s commentary over that of al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s al-Mīzān on the grounds that Fadlallah’s “approach, idiosyncratic and unique as it is, could not be represented at all by resorting to any other commentaries.” Among this impressive anthology’s several strong points, I would like to mention the fact that it provides an introduction for each of the six chapters in which the different commentaries are compared to each other as well as a short summary of each commentary’s main points and general tendencies. Thematically speaking, the verses chosen for this anthology are not related to the theme of my study. However, the selection of the MWQ commentary for this valuable

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19 Brunner, “Two Modern Shi‘ite Scholars,” 151.
21 Brunner, “Two Modern Shi‘ite Scholars,” 152–153. For more on the Shi‘i aspect in Fadlallah’s commentary, see 2.16 below.
22 Brunner, “Two Modern Shi‘ite Scholars,” 149–150.
24 The six verses presented in this anthology are Q2:115 on God’s omnipresence, Q2:255 on God’s throne, Q6:12 on God’s mercy, Q24:35 on God’s light, and Q112:1–4 on God’s Oneness.
27 Although the last chapter on God’s oneness could be related to my research considering that Fadlallah briefly summarizes Sūra 112 as a reference to Islam as the religion of instinct (dīn al-fitrā). Also, 112:3 could
work is a strong argument for its importance as one of the major modern commentaries. In fact, the editors of this work mention Fadlallah’s engagement in the Islamic-Christian dialogue, his discourse which “is noticeably ecumenical in comparison to other Muslim positions” as well as “his apparent liberalism in traditional legal matters that explains his position today as one of the foremost Arab Shi’i leaders.”

There is yet one study whose title suggests the examination of Fadlallah’s commentary but on closer examination proves to be the contrary. Marie-Claude Thomas’s study Women in Lebanon living with Christianity, Islam, and Multiculturalism (2013) attempts to study the “Personal status Laws in Islam in Fadlallah’s new taṣfīr,” the pretentious title of a chapter that leaves much to be desired. Rather than studying Fadlallah’s commentary as one would expect from the title, she studies fragments of two books by Fadlallah and nowhere explains what the new taṣfīr actually refers to. Additionally, the fact that Thomas intermingles a subjective autobiography and an objective scientific method is problematic and disturbs the book’s general tone. Hence, this book is not relevant to the study of Fadlallah’s commentary on the Qurʾān and thus will not be further considered in this study.

Taking into consideration Fadlallah’s prolificity and his tendency to keep up with the changing times through participation in political and theological discussions and the issuance of legal judgments, among other means, it is understandable that an analysis of one or even some of his works could come up to slightly different conclusions than a more comprehensive study of his works. Although partially correct, some of these studies have missed the Ayatollah’s different, double-sided, sometimes even contradictory, views on the same subject in his other works.

Unlike MWQ, some of Fadlallah’s other works and his thought in general have interested several researchers. The studies which have dealt with the Ayatollah’s production and ideas are mostly related to his impact on religious, legal and political issues. For some

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28 Hamza, An Anthology of Qurʾānic Commentaries, 52.


31 This was pointed out by Talib Aziz, for example, “Fadlallah and the Remaking of the Marjaʿiya,” in The Most Learned of the Shiʿa, Linda S. Walbridge, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 206.
researchers, he is a modernizer,\textsuperscript{32} a progressive thinker,\textsuperscript{33} a liberation theologian,\textsuperscript{34} an advocate of women’s rights and even a feminist.\textsuperscript{35} For others, he is one of the fundamentalist leaders of the Middle East and has ties to terrorist organizations.\textsuperscript{36} These researches can be divided into three major issues: 1. Fadlallah’s views of interfaith relations and his contribution to the Muslim-Christian dialogue in particular; 2. his political thought, especially his influence on the Lebanese Shi‘i Islamist political and militant party Hizballah; 3. his modernization of Arab Shi‘ism through a number of celebrated novel and relatively progressist legal opinions, especially concerning the legality of profiting from new scientific solutions such as IVF, surrogacy, and human cloning.\textsuperscript{37}

1.3.1. Interfaith relations and dialogue

Fadlallah’s perspectives of dialogue are well examined in Heidi Hirvonen’s work, which focuses on seven of the Sayyid’s books.\textsuperscript{38} Hirvonen compares the Ayatollah’s views on dialogue with those of three other modern Lebanese thinkers, two Christians and one Muslim,\textsuperscript{39} and concludes that his theoretical suggestions are the least useful among the


\textsuperscript{39} Mouchir Aoun, Georges Khodr and Mahmoud Ayoub.
four studied thinkers for the Muslim-Christian dialogue. This is owing to the fact that Fadlallah’s idea of dialogue is based on intellectual debates, which has been proven to be of no avail in interfaith dialogue, as Hirvonen rightly argues. Hirvonen makes the important observation that Fadlallah’s approach to dialogue makes it too close to Da’wa. The Sayyid is convinced that the trueness of Islam would definitely lead anyone introduced to this religion to embrace it if he is on an honest quest for the truth. However, to me it seems she is partially right when she argues that Fadlallah “represents unreflective traditionalism that regards Islam as the only way of guidance in the hereafter.” Although the works Hirvonen studied for her research suggest this exclusivist theology of religion, a more comprehensive study of the concepts of islām and hidāya/khalāṣ (guidance/salvation) among other crucial concepts as they occur in his commentary and his other seminary lectures and interviews would suggest a more multifaceted understanding of guidance and salvation in the Ayatollah’s thought. Combined, these works suggest that Fadlallah seems to leave the door ajar concerning the salvation of the People of the Book either because of his own uncertainty about the matter or because of a double rhetoric that aims at keeping his Christian audience at ease.

Another comparative study related to Fadlallah’s approach to Muslim-Christian dialogue is found in Hassab Allah’s “Le Christianisme et les Chrétiens vus par Deux Auteurs Arabes Musulmans.” In this study, Hassab Allah compares Fadlallah’s views to those of the Egyptian journalist Fahmi Huwaydi, which is a rather peculiar choice in view of the difference in status and professional career between the two men. Although Hassab Allah concentrates on Fadlallah’s book “Fī Āfaq al-Ḥiwār al-Islāmī al-Masīḥī” (On the Horizons of the Islamic-Christian Dialogue), he does not miss the contradictions in the Ayatollah’s perceptions on dialogue, Da’wa, and the use of violence. Although Fadlallah opposes the use of violence and claims it is un-Islamic, he does not mind using it as a last legitimate resort to achieve justice. Additionally, Fadlallah on the one hand insists on the equality between the People of the Book and the Muslims but on the other hand shows a discriminatory attitude towards them by insisting that, under the Islamic state, they should

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41 FAHIM, 8 and Hirvonen, Christian-Muslim Dialogue, 271.
43 See Chapter III for more on this argument.
pay the Jizya (poll-tax) and by arguing they should not occupy any decision-making position—these are restricted to Muslims only. Hassab Allah also notes the key concept in Fadlallah’s thought: cooperation between Muslims and Christians is desired in order to fight together the powers of arrogance and eventually reach justice and independence.48

On the other hand, Fadlallah’s perceptions of the Jews and Zionism are studied in Gidon Windecker’s doctoral thesis.49 This dissertation is an in-depth study of the development of Lebanese Shi‘i perceptions of Jews and Zionism during the historical span between 1909 and 2009. Although this doctoral dissertation focuses on the examination of the Lebanese al-‘Irfān Shi‘i magazine,50 Windecker dedicates a sub-chapter to Fadlallah’s perceptions of Zionism and deals briefly with his interpretation of verse Q5:82 about the enmity of the Jews as compared to the amity of the Christians. Windecker correctly considers this verse the synopsis of Fadlallah’s perceptions of the Jews and concludes that the man’s call for interreligious dialogue is “overshadowed by his theological discourse of the Jews of Medina. Combining classical Muslim with Western anti-Jewish thought, he projects the ‘misbehavior’, the ‘treachery’ and the ‘deception’ of ‘the Jews’ on Jews worldwide at all times.”51 Another important observation Windecker makes in his research is that the ideological content, which later on found its way into the al-‘Irfān Shi‘i magazine to which Fadlallah contributed, did not come from Lebanese sources but rather from Qom and Najaf as well as from the works of some Egyptian and Syrian scholars and politicians.52 It was only after the Nakba53 that writers started using Muslim sources to back their new pejorative views of the Jews; hence, the accusations of Bible distortion, killing of the prophets, and so forth were introduced into the Shi‘i writings.54 In contrast to Carré, who stresses Fadlallah’s lack of novelty, Windecker points to the man’s independence from al-Khū‘ī (d. 1992), Khomeini (d. 1989) and other classical Shi‘i scholars. The legal judgments


51 Windecker, Lebanese Shi‘i Perceptions, xvi.

52 Windecker, Lebanese Shi‘i Perceptions, 60.

53 Al-Nakha means disaster in Arabic and is used to refer to the 1948 Palestine war during which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were forced to flee their homes.

54 Windecker, Lebanese Shi‘i Perceptions, 330–331.
he issued clearly diverge from theirs. Windecker also notes the strong link Fadlallah makes between the Palestinian cause and the injustice felt by Muslims. Indeed, Fadlallah presents the liberation of Palestine as the Islamic cause *par excellence* and links the occupation of this land with the injustice done by “the inherently evil” Jews to the Muslims. Despite its merits, Windecker’s study has an unfortunate weak spot. Some of the arguments presented as Fadlallah’s views on the invalidity of Judaism are not his. Windecker misread the author’s name of one of the articles about Judaism on Fadlallah’s website and ended up referring to the ideas included in it as the Ayatollah’s, thus leading to some erroneous conclusions. The style, the wording, and the ideas of the article reveal a different authorship because Fadlallah never engages in detailed argumentation. What Windecker refers to as Fadlallah’s “main treatise on Judaism” based on the article entitled *al-diyyāna al-yahūdiyya* (Judaism), has very little to do with the Ayatollah’s views.

1.3.2. Political thought

There is no satisfactory systematic study of Fadlallah’s thought or theology and there is no comprehensive research of his writings. However, an exhaustive general study on Fadlallah’s background, ideology, and contributions to Lebanon’s Shi‘i Islamism is presented by Jamal Sankari in his book *Fadlallah: The Making of a radical Shi‘i leader*. Sankari’s study is based on a rich variety of Fadlallah’s works and interviews, most of which he conducted himself. Through this insightful book, Sankari offers a good background to the Shi‘i political context in Iraq and in Lebanon and examines the development of the Da‘wa party in Lebanon as well as the role of Fadlallah in Shi‘i politics in both countries.

57 Windecker, *Lebanese Shi‘i Perceptions*, 296–307. The article which Windecker retrieved from Fadlallah’s website in October 2008 and on which he based some of his major theories about the Ayatollah’s views on Judaism is no longer available on Fadlallah’s website but is widely circulated on the internet. Fadlallah’s website states straightforwardly that “The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views of the site, but rather the views of its author.” This disclaimer is linked to articles written by third parties. However, Fadlallah’s own articles are headed by his name and his interviews are affixed with the signature of the Ayatollah’s office “The Office of His Eminence Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah” followed by a date. In his discussions, Fadlallah never goes into details and never presents information as absolute truth as is the case in this long article.
58 This information was confirmed for me by Mr. Muhammad Tarraf, the director of Fadlallah’s Islamic Cultural Institute in Beirut, in personal correspondence on 5 March 2018.
Even if Sankari writes from the perspective of political science, one would expect him to dedicate some space to Fadlallah’s exegetical activity. It is thus rather strange that he does not mention Fadlallah’s Qur'anic commentary at all. The importance of Sankari’s work is multifaceted. It helps in understanding the complexity of the political situation in Lebanon and Iraq as well as Fadlallah’s role in the development of the Da’wa party and Hizballah as well as in the changes in the Lebanese political arena. Sankari concludes that even though the Ayatollah never held a formal position in either one, his teachings and his thought influenced the followers of both. Sankari stresses that Fadlallah crucially influenced Hizballah, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, and changed the party’s line, made it reconcile with Amal and with the Maronite Christians, and convinced its leaders to enter the political arena. The Ayatollah’s realism led Hizballah to give up its idea of the Islamic state and embrace a more realistic line which is to seek the long-term goal gradually. The study summarizes well Fadlallah’s most important attributes as “a rational thinker, realist leader, and pragmatic activist” as well as one who is able to fine-tune “his intellectual and political discourse to accommodate” any developments or changes. The fact that there are changes in the rhetoric and the verbiage of the Ayatollah over time is emphasized in Casebeer’s study as well.

As mentioned earlier, Olivier Carré studied some of Fadlallah’s works but was not impressed by the Ayatollah’s thought. In one of his articles, Carré expresses his disappointment in the references to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion “in a man as educated and cultivated as Fadlallah, such uncritical naïveté is disappointing.” In yet another article, Carré reiterates his disappointment in Fadlallah’s anti-Semitism and stresses his lack of originality compared to Quṭb. Carré’s disappointment in Fadlallah’s use of the Protocols is surprising. It is common knowledge that the Protocols of the Elders

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of Zion are considered authentic all over the Middle East. Several translations into Arabic are available and the book is required reading in different universities in the Middle East. Furthermore, several talk shows and TV series present them together with the Blood Libel allegation and the Jewish conspiracy against Muslims as established facts. Moreover, the convenience of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as a widespread and efficient source to keep tension between Arabs and their Israeli arch-enemy has yet to go away. Additionally, it goes without saying that there are similarities between Fadlallah and Quṭb (d. 1966) in several views and perceptions, but at the same time, there are also many differences between them. Even when Fadlallah makes use of Quṭbist views, he contextualizes them to serve the needs of his country and his time. Occasionally, Carré seems to misinterpret Fadlallah’s writings. For example, Carré must have misunderstood a portion of Fadlallah’s text in one of his articles on freedom of speech. In reference to Fadlallah’s *Maḥām Islāmiyya ‘āmma*, Carré argues that according to Fadlallah non-Muslims’ freedom of speech and action should only be respected when it serves the general interest as defined by Islam. What Fadlallah actually says is that “… Muslims could try to change some of the provisions and laws incompatible with Islam if they could. [...] In some cases, unbelieving or aberrant groups rebel against this article of law claiming it is incompatible with the progressive presentation of the state or incompatible with the general rights of non-Muslim citizens.” It is true that Fadlallah’s narrative seeks the best interests of

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69 An example of such a TV series is the Jordanian al-Shatat (the diaspora) which attracted a large audience in the Arab world and which starts as follows “A thousand years ago, Jewish scholars established a world government which aims at controlling the world, subordinating it to Talmudic teachings and isolating [the Jews] from the rest of the world. They then applied themselves to fire up wars and create divisions. Hence, the countries [where they lived] were against them. As a reaction to that, the Jews pretended they were persecuted, claimed they were waiting for their Savior the Mesiah who will finish what their God Yahveh had started and would revenge against the “Goei” (Gentiles). In the beginning of the 19th Century, the [Jewish] Global Government considered the intensification of plots so it dissolved itself and created a secret Jewish world government led by Amschel Rothschild. This series is based on more than 250 historical sources and references as well as on Jewish and Zionist documents other than Protocols of the Elders of Zion.”

70 Fadlallah criticizes modern-day Islamic society for abandoning the Qur’ān and not living according to its teachings but he does not consider society un-Islamic let alone jāhil as does Quṭb. Second, While Quṭb thinks that partially stepping out of the Islamic path/teachings means de facto stepping out completely from it, Fadlallah argues that belief is relative and that not believing in part does not necessarily make one step away from monotheism. See Quṭb’s *Fī Žilāl al-Qurʿān* 2:825. For a brief discussion of Quṭb’s ideas on the matter, see Yaser Ellethy, *Islam, Context, Pluralism and Democracy: Classical and Modern Interpretations*. Routledge, 2014, 71–76.


Muslims but at the same time, the Ayatollah argues that the rights of minorities should be respected as long as they do not harm the best interests of Muslims. In addition, Carré claims that both Fadlallah and Quṭb fight present-day paganism. In my opinion, this is far from being accurate as Fadlallah does not see a pagan aspect in modern Muslim societies and, on the contrary, was realistic enough to take into consideration the constraints of modernity in several theological matters.

Most researchers agree that there is a link between Fadlallah and Hizballah but they disagree about the nature and the strength of this link. The instrumentality of Fadlallah in the establishment and development of Hizballah in Lebanon is pointed out in most studies.\(^{75}\) Carré stresses that Fadlallah paved the way for Hizballah’s violent activism through his lectures. After all, Hizballah’s men were students of his.\(^{76}\) Likewise, Kramer argues that “Fadlallah’s words interpreted and justified Hizballah’s deeds, transforming resentment into resistance.”\(^{77}\) Joseph al-Agha argues that even if Fadlallah did not participate in the establishment of the party, he might have influenced it at least through his rhetoric of oppression.\(^{78}\) However, he points out in another study that the path of Fadlallah diverged from that of Hizballah in the 1980s, as the Sayyid was against kidnappings, excessive rituality, and irrationality.\(^{79}\) Furthermore, the Ayatollah disagreed with the party about \textit{wilāyat al-faqīh} and argued that the establishment of the Islamic state in Lebanon in the present time is not realistic.

Despite their disagreement and the divergence of their paths, the influence of Fadlallah on the political path of Hizballah is pointed out in Judith Harik’s book, \textit{The Changing Face of Terrorism}. Harik argues that Fadlallah was realistic enough to maintain that “\textit{change does not happen only through revolution. It could be achieved by penetrating democratic institutions to promote Islamic ideas.}”\(^{80}\) It was Fadlallah who convinced Hizballah to run for parliament and to take part in the Lebanese political arena. Bashir Saade finds

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\(^{76}\) Olivier Carré, “\textit{Khomeinisme Libanais},” 190–191.

\(^{77}\) Kramer, “The Oracle of Hizbullah,” 84.


\(^{79}\) Joseph Elie Alagha, \textit{The shifts in Hizbullah’s ideology: religious ideology, political ideology, and political program}. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012, 96.

Fadlallah’s influence on Hizballah rather evident. Saade examined Hizballah’s ideological production especially its underground newspaper al-‘Ahd as well as the intellectual development of the party from the early stages of its emergence on the political scene to this day and concluded that the Ayatollah clearly shaped the ideology of the party. “A proof of the cultural influence of Fadlallah on the early ideological production of Hizballah is his Friday sermon, which was published weekly in the pages of al-‘Ahd.” This view is shared by Michaele Browers as well.

Fadlallah himself denied any role in the party throughout his life. In his article “Aspects of Shī‘i Thought from the South of Lebanon,” Chibli Mallat convincingly explains some of the possible reasons behind Fadlallah’s denial of his relationship with Hizballah. First, such a relationship would chase away emulators who do not adhere to Hizballah. Second, this kind of affiliation would endanger him, taking into consideration how adherents of the Da’wa party were persecuted in Iraq. A further reason is that enthusiast members may not be controlled. For his part, Shanahan has a different explanation for Fadlallah’s denial of connections with the party. Although he argues that the reason might indeed have been fear of being the target of assassination attempts, as was the case with other Shī‘i leaders, the reason could also have been a reluctance to enter into any kind of competition with Ayatollah Khameneī, as some of the members of the party follow the latter’s marjaʿiya. Another explanation for why Fadlallah distanced himself from any formal role in the party in Browers’ opinion is that the Ayatollah would thus be able to play a larger role.

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82 Saade is not alone in arguing so. See, for example, Aziz, “Fadlallah and the Remaking of the Marjaʿiya,” 207.
87 Michaele Browers has suggested the same in her “Fadlallah and the Passing of Lebanon’s Last Najafi Generation,” 28.
90 Browers, “Fadlallah and the Passing of Lebanon’s Last Najafi Generation,” 29–30
In a recent study, Bianka Speidl examined Fadlallah’s conceptualization of power in the Ayatollah’s book *al-Islām wa Manṭiq al-Quwwa* (Islam and the Logic of Power).91 In this study, Speidl finds that Fadlallah’s concept of power revolves around turning Islam into a tool of empowerment.92 Islam in Fadlallah’s writing is a just system in which faith and power are interconnected.93 Theology becomes hence a transformative doctrine which is translated into practice. Fadlallah inspired Hizballah to commit itself to change and to be pragmatic in doing so. Even more, Speidl considers Hizballah “a proto-movement of Islamic power as Fadlallah imagined it.”94 Speidl rightly argues that Fadlallah’s theory of power has also transformed the modern Shīʿī political thought. At the same time, Fadlallah’s perception of social thought, according to which social power is translated into political action, is echoed through Hizballah’s activism.95 Speidl comes to yet another important conclusion concerning the evolution of the Ayatollah’s thought concerning the feasibility of the establishment of the Islamic state in Lebanon. Stating it briefly, Speidl writes that Fadlallah shifted from a discourse of *Dhimmitude* in his *al-Islām wa Manṭiq al-Quwwa* to a discourse of *muwātana* (citizenship) by the end of his career.96 This dissertation stresses and supports what some other researches have concluded: Fadlallah shows a high degree of flexibility and pragmatism on different levels.97

1.3.3. Legal issues

This flexibility has been pointed out by several researchers who examined the Ayatollah’s legal judgments. The progressiveness of Fadlallah’s legal views, as well as his reactiveness to current affairs and to the needs of his community, has repeatedly been celebrated in these studies. In his article “Fadlallah and the Remaking of the Marjaʿiyya,” Talib Aziz emphasized Fadlallah’s independent thinking and offered several examples which demonstrate this independence. A major example is his ruling on the purity of all human beings (*ṭahārat al-Insān*).98 The importance of this legal ruling is also stressed by Lara Deeb who explains that without such a ruling she herself would not have been able to

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92 Speidl, *Conceptualisation of power*, 50–51.

93 Speidl, *Conceptualisation of power*, 236.

94 Speidl, *Conceptualisation of power*, 240.

95 Speidl, *Conceptualisation of power*, 237.

96 Speidl, *Conceptualisation of power*, 50–51.


98 Aziz, “Fadlallah and the Remaking of the Marjaʿiyya,” 211.
conduct her research. She argues in another study that “this particular fatwa has larger ramifications ranging from the acceptability of non-Muslims in sacred spaces like mosques to coexistence in Lebanon.”

Additionally, several researchers have pointed out Fadlallah’s role in the enhancement of women’s rights and in their empowerment. Maria Holt argues that the Ayatollah contributed significantly to changing negative and backward perceptions of women, advocated a ‘new gender discourse,’ and promoted a new reformist narrative concerning women. Similarly, Browsers argues that Fadlallah held relatively progressive views on women compared to other Shi’i clerics. He voiced their right to work, to sexuality, to a decent marital life, as well as their right to political and religious leadership. Browsers finds in some of the Ayatollah’s works a good example of the breadth and modernity of his thinking. For her part, Rola El-Husseini joins Browsers in highlighting the Ayatollah’s contribution in creating a new “reformist” narrative of women’s empowerment although she criticizes the fact that this narrative comes “from a position of authority” as a religious scholar and that it can be considered critical only “in the context of Islamic tradition.” She mentions that Fadlallah rejects the Western gender equality discourse and argues that the gender debate should be looked at from the point of view of a humanistic paradigm. El-Husseini maintains that Fadlallah promotes the full political rights of women including holding decision-making positions. However, some other researchers critical of Fadlallah’s work do not share this opinion. For example, Lamia

99 Deeb, An Enchanted Modern, 71.
101 Some of Fadlallah’s views on women are mentioned in Talib Aziz’s article quoted above. Aziz discusses the Ayatollah’s critical reception of some traditionalist understandings of religious texts concerning women and calls for their re-examination. To him, “unchecked dominance of men over women” must stop and the way the marriage institution is organized at the moment makes it a kind of prison for women. See “Fadlallah and the Remaking of the Marjaʿiya,” 209–212.
Rustum Shehadeh argues in her *The Idea of Women in Fundamentalist Islam*, which deals with the perception of women in the Ayatollah’s thought, that “one cannot but be struck by the dichotomy in Fadlallah’s thought.” Furthermore, she criticizes the Ayatollah’s traditionalist views and argues that “when a liberal interpretation of a verse is possible with regard to women’s issues, the most conservative and strict alternative is adopted instead.” Shehadeh goes as far as arguing that “contradictions abound not only in his ideology and view of humanity but also within his argument regarding the role and condition of women in an Islamic society.” Shehadeh’s harsh criticism of Fadlallah’s perceptions of women reduces him to nothing but a conservative in disguise. By contrast, Sophie Chamas praises Fadlallah’s advocacy of women’s rights and considers him an Islamic feminist. Likewise, Moulouk Berry maintains that the Ayatollah had a significant impact on women’s position in Lebanon and that “his reformulation of gender shook some old gender constructs predominant in Shi’i cultural and religious circles and created space for some Shi’i women to legitimize their social and political activities.”

As noted from the works reviewed above, most studies on Fadlallah focus either on his views of interfaith dialogue, his political thought, or his contribution to the modernization of Arab Shi’i thought. However, his commentary on the Qur’ān, despite its influence amongst Shi’i Muslims around the world, has not been the subject of any comprehensive scholarly study until now. Hence, my work can help provide a better understanding of the Ayatollah’s exegetical contribution to Shi’i Qur’anic tafsīr, especially concerning his perception of the People of the Book.

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1.4. Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah

_Tafsīr_ literature is always closely related to the commentator’s historical, political, and social background, and in fact, many issues may only be understood in light of this background. Failing to take the context in which the Qur’ānic commentary was written or the elements that influenced the exegete and contributed to his personal and intellectual development may lead to partial or erroneous understanding of his thought. For these reasons, a review of Fadlallah’s personal, intellectual, and political background is a necessary starting point for the current investigation.

Al-Sayyid114 Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah is a small-framed man of a wan complexion who wears a black turban as a proud declaration of his _ahl al-bayt_ descent115 and speaks Modern Standard Arabic with a Najafi accent that tells of his upbringing and educational milieu. He is a charismatic orator, a prolific writer, a sensitive poet, and an active Islamist whose articles appear in magazines, journals and newspapers. With a rather calm and gentle voice, he starts his speeches and sermons with endearing phrases such as “_my beloved_” or “_sons and loved ones_”116 but he can be provoked occasionally, especially when his own followers question the orthodoxy of his Shīʿism.117 His ability to answer all kinds of questions impromptu, to quote the Qur’ān and the tradition from memory, his excellent Modern Standard Arabic from which he rarely switches to colloquial,118 these characteristics and many more contribute toward his intriguing personality. The politically,

114 “Al-Sayyid” is a title used for people who are descendants of the Prophet. Fadlallah’s family tree goes back to al-Hasan son of Ali unlike most Shīʿis who trace their family tree to al-Husain. See Sankari, _Fadlallah_, 40 and Fadlallah’s biography on his official website http://arabic.bayynat.org.lb/sira/nacha.htm# Retrieved 8 July 2011.

115 If the scholar is a descendent of _ahl al-bayt_, he wears a black turban and has the title al-Sayyid. If he is not, he wears a white turban and is called Sheikh. For more on this, see Liyakat Takim. “Black or White: The Turbanization of Shi ‘i Islam.” _The Muslim World_ 108.3 (2018): 548–563.

116 “_Ayyuha al-ʾaḥibba_” and “_yāʾ aḥibbatī wa ẓāʾaʾ ʾabnāʾī._” He even has a book called _Ayyuha al-ʾAḥibba_ (2010) which _al-Saffir_ newspaper published posthumously and distributed to its readers for free. The book contains Fadlallah’s last commandments to his followers.

117 In a lecture entitled “Fatima al-Zahra, Women’s Universal Example” in Beirut on 22 December 1997, one of Fadlallah’s followers asked if he believed al-Zahra was infallible, which annoyed him. He answered: “_I am not accountable to you but to God._” The lecture was published in Fadlallah, _al-Zahra al-Maṣṣama - Unmūḏaj al-Marʿa al-ʿĀlamīyya_, Beirut: Dār al-Malāk, 1997, 3–60.

118 In a personal conversation in March 2018 with Mr. Muhammad Tarraf, the director of Fadlallah’s Islamic Cultural Institute in Beirut, he informed me that the Ayatollah always spoke Modern Standard Arabic because he did not speak Colloquial Lebanese. He switched to Najafi Arabic only in his closest circles.
Religiously and socially eventful conditions in which he lived in Iraq and in Lebanon contributed to shaping his personality, to refining his thought and to making him the prominent Islamist thinker he later became.

1.4.1. Childhood and Education

Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah was born on November 16, 1935 in Iraq’s Najaf, one of the main bastions of Shi’i religiosity where most Shi’i leaders have studied or taught. Fadlallah was a long prayed-for son to parents who had lost one baby boy before him. Understandably, he was surrounded with special care, especially from his uneducated mother. His religious and scholastic family had moved to this major Shi’i city a few years earlier so that his father al-Sayyid Abdulraouf Fadlallah could continue his religious studies there. By the time Muhammad Hussein was born, his father had reached a prestigious position as a respected Ayatollah known for his piety. Both his grandfather and his uncle were Ayatollahs as well. Growing up in a scholarly atmosphere offered Fadlallah the opportunity and the tools to develop his thought and to pursue religious scholarship himself. Furthermore, most of his highly educated relatives were open-minded which served as a model for his own thinking.

In contrast to this scholar-wealthy environment, Fadlallah grew up in especially challenging conditions. Too proud to ask for help from religious authorities, whose aid required agreement in opinion, his father barely made both ends meet. Muhammad Hussein was raised in extreme poverty. He recalls that his parents did not have the means even to take him to the physician when he fell ill. Poverty was so extreme that young Fadlallah

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121 Sankari, Fadlallah, 37.
124 Surūr, Tahaddī al-Mannū, 25–26
felt it was this misery \textsuperscript{127} that eventually led to his Islamist activism.\textsuperscript{128} Together with poverty, Najaf’s harsh climate as well as the constant presence of death, burial, and wailing around him marked him deeply. The living and the dead were side by side as the graveyards start where the neighborhoods ended. He got used to the atmosphere of agony and mourning emphasized by scenes of \textit{ʿĀshūrā} rituals but he felt aversion for these exaggerated rituals. He was deeply affected by the joyful and sorrowful Shīʿi celebrations and was disgusted by the blood in them.\textsuperscript{129} On another level, his bad experiences in Qur’ānic preschools (\textit{kuttāb}) made him disinclined to this type of education. He often criticized it for its un-pedagogical approach, the incompatibility of the educational tools used with the child’s age and maturity level, the unfairness and violence of the teachers towards children in addition to favoring some over others depending on their socio-economic background.\textsuperscript{130} Until the end of his life, Fadlallah spoke against the traditional violent education system because he was convinced that it destroys the child’s psyche.\textsuperscript{131}

These experiences deeply marked the young Fadlallah and made him dislike extravagance and sympathize with the needy.\textsuperscript{132} When he was in the third grade, he got the chance to be transferred from a traditional religious school to “one of Najaf’s newly established modern religious schools formed by a group of modern reform-minded Shīʿi ‘ulamā’.”\textsuperscript{133} Fadlallah noted the difference between the two educational systems. To his disappointment, he soon had to go back to the traditional school probably because his family could not afford the new school.\textsuperscript{134} However, this one year marked Fadlallah and made him a spokesperson for modernization and educational equality. Later on, when he returned to Lebanon, he strived to establish modern schooling systems in which corporal punishment is forbidden.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{128} Naʿūm, \textit{al-ʿallāma}, 16.
\textsuperscript{129} Naʿūm, \textit{al-ʿallāma}, 12.
\textsuperscript{133} Sankari, \textit{Fadlallah}, 46.
\textsuperscript{134} Al-Ḥilw, \textit{Asʿila wa-Rudūd min al-Ḳalb}, 12–13 and Naʿūm, \textit{al-ʿallāma}, 25.
\textsuperscript{135} This restriction should be understood within a certain cultural framework. The Ayatollah did not forbid corporal punishment categorically. The unacceptable corporal punishment is that which leaves severe physical or emotional marks. See \textit{Dunyā al-Shabāb}, 138–239, and \textit{Dunyā al-Ṭifl}, 90, and 215–220.
1.4.2. The Seminary

Fadlallah’s family expected a lot from him and already when he was a child treated him like an adult. He used to sit with scholars and writers from an early age. It was obvious to him that he would follow the path of the several prominent scholars in his family. He started his studies at the seminary of Najaf (Hawza) at the age of eleven and proved to be a gifted, diligent, and ambitious student. The lower levels of studies (muqaddimāt and suṭūḥ) were under the supervision of his father who was an open-minded person that allowed any kind of question, even those considered improper by traditionalist scholars. Fadlallah thinks that his father played a major role in his own open-mindedness and his rejection of corporal punishment. During his post-graduate studies (bahth al-khārijī), he was trained by some of the most prominent Shīʿī jurists of the time such as al-Sayyid Muḥsin al-Ḥakīm (d. 1970), al-Sayyid Maḥmūd al-Shāhrūdī (d. 1974), Sheikh Ḥussein al-Hillī (d. 1974) and al-Sayyid Abu al-Qāsim al-Khūʾī (d. 1992). In addition to these prominent teachers, Fadlallah enjoyed the friendship of equally talented school mates such as Muhammad Baqir al-Ṣadr (d. 1980), Muhammad Mahdi al-Hakim (d. 1988), and

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136 Naʿūm, al-ʿallāma, 22.
137 In Shīʿī seminaries, students start by attending the basic level of education called muqaddimāt (introductions). This level usually lasts 4–6 years and introduces students to Arabic grammar, fiqh, history, ethics, etc. Then, students start their midlevel studies called suṭūḥ (surfaces) which usually lasts 3–4 years. In this level, students go deeper into what they learned in the previous level and study additional subjects such as tafsīr, history, philosophy and ʿilm al-rijāl.
140 The highest level in the seminary is Bahth al-Khārijī (also called Dars al-Khārijī) which takes 8–10 years to complete. In this level, the student has to demonstrate his ability to practice ijtiḥād and to tackle issues of interest to Muslims in the present era. For more on these levels, see Aziz, “Baqr al-Sadr’s Quest for the Marjaʿiya,” in The Most Learned of the Shiʿa, Walbridge, ed., 142. For a detailed description of Hawza studies as described by Fadlallah, see Surūr, Taḥaddī al-Mannūʿ, 43–45.
141 Surūr, Taḥaddī al-Mannūʿ, 33.
142 Al-Hakim was Fadlallah’s aunt’s husband and a prominent Shīʿī marjiʿ. He influenced him on different levels through his open-mindedness and involvement in politics as well as his views on the Palestinian issue. With him, he discussed politics and learned self-respect. Surūr, Taḥaddī al-Mannūʿ, 38–39.
143 Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr is the most remarkable of modern Islamic philosophers. He was executed in 1980 by the regime of Saddam Hussein. Fadlallah knows the work of his friend very well and agrees with most of it. He was influenced by al-Sadr’s thought and has built upon it. John Walbridge, “Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr: The Search for New Foundations,” in The Most Learned of the Shiʿa: The Institution of the Marjaʿ Taqlid, Elizabeth Walbridge ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, 132.
144 Al-Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi al-Hakim was his maternal cousin. Together, they issued a handwritten literary magazine which they called “al-adab” in 1945—when Fadlallah was ten years old. Naʿūm, al-ʿallāma, 17.
Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din (d. 2001) among other names who later became prominent Shi'i figures. Together with these friends and other seminarians, Fadlallah organized a number of literary, religious, and political activities. Altogether, he studied in the Ḥawza around 22 years from 1944 to 1965. The teaching style of the Ḥawza encouraged the students to develop their independent reasoning and argumentation skills. Indeed, although Fadlallah was surrounded by prominent Shi'i scholars in his personal and educational space, he developed into an independent thinker whose theological and political views sometimes differed from those of his teachers and influencers.

1.4.3. Literary interests

Fadlallah grew up with a great affinity for reading and with an encyclopedic thirst for knowledge. He enjoyed reading the works of the main Lebanese, Syrian and Egyptian writers and poets of the time, the compilations of major Western writers such as Tolstoy, Shakespeare, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Alphonse de Lamartine, Anatole France, Frantz Fanon, and Paolo Freire. On the political level, Fadlallah read the works of the major Sunni Islamist ideologues and intellectuals such as Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), Hassan al-Banna (d. 1949), and Abu al-Ala al-Mawdudi (d. 1979) because at that time Shi'i Islamists did not yet have “a corpus of contemporary ideological and intellectual writings” of their own. Furthermore, he was keen to follow the al-'Irfān Shi'i magazine which was sent to him from Lebanon and to which he became a major contributor later. Fadlallah himself thought that the works he grew up reading played a major role in

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145 Fadlallah encouraged Sheikh Shams al-Dīn to move to Lebanon and helped him find followers there. The latter became the director of the Supreme Islamic Shīʿa Council since 1978, the year Imam Musa Sadr disappeared in Libya. The man clashed with Hizballah because of their different political worldviews because Shams al-Dīn was pan-Islamic while the party was pro-Iranian. Shams al-Dīn clashed with Fadlallah as well because of other misunderstandings that the Lebanese intelligence services might have created. Naʿūm, al-ʿallāma, 26–28.
146 Surūr, Taḥaddī al-Mannāʾ, 43–45.
147 Al-Ḥilw, Asʿila wa-Rudūd min al-Qalb, 19–20.
149 Al-Ḥilw, Asʿila wa-Rudūd min al-Qalb, 10 and Ḥiwrār Shāmīl, 93.
150 Ḥiwrār Shāmīl, 93 and al-Ḥilw, Asʿila wa-Rudūd min al-Qalb, 16–21.
151 Sankari, Fadlallah, 52.
152 Sankari, Fadlallah, 69.
153 Naʿūm, al-ʿallāma, 23.
broadening his thought and in making him “dream of becoming an untraditional religious scholar.”

Not only was Fadlallah a voracious reader of different literary releases and translations but he was also a prolific writer starting from an early age. Together with some of his schoolmates, he issued a handwritten literary magazine named al-Adab already when he was ten—although it appeared only four or five times. Furthermore, Fadlallah also wrote in a number of Middle Eastern magazines in the 1940s and 1950s and contributed, since the 1960s, along with a number of scholars in Najaf, to the publication of al-Aḍwā’ magazine, for which he wrote the second editorial, entitled Kalimatunā (our word), while Muhammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr wrote its first editorial, entitled Risālatunā (our mission). In addition to prose, he also wrote poetry in free verse using pseudonyms to avoid the criticism of the advocates of the Shi‘i traditional school. Fadlallah attributes his love of poetry partially to life in the Najaf, the land of poets where “one breaths poetry” and unconsciously stores it in one’s memory. He was described by his teachers as “the most intelligent among teens, and the most poetic of them.” His childhood poems reflect his suffering from misery and hardship as well as an interest in Islamic Da‘wa. Unsurprisingly, Qur‘ānic vocabulary and style are used abundantly in his writings and poems. Although some of his verse composition describe his love and reverence of his loved ones, most of his poetic output is strongly political. From an early age, Fadlallah saw in colonialism, communism, Marxism, and Zionism a real threat to Islam and Muslims. He was also deeply influenced by the Nakba and the independence declaration.
of the State of Israel. At the age of eleven, he penned his anger in verse calling for the rescue of Palestine:

*Defend our usurped right in Palestine with sharpened swords*
*Remember how Šalāḥ al-Dīn rushed to expel the outsider.*

At the age of 17, during his first visit to Lebanon in 1952, he contributed to the memorial of al-Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin (d. 1952) with an elegiac poem in which he also discussed political issues such as the French occupation and Islamic unity.

### 1.4.4. Political background

Fadlallah’s environment was religiously, politically and socially eventful both in his birth country Iraq and in the country of his parents. The 1936 *coup d’état* in Iraq signaled the beginning of a long period of political unrest. In addition to the violent transfers of power in Iraq, different parts of the Arab World went through major political changes. In the late 1940s, there was an increasingly fervent nationalist sentiment amongst the intelligentsia in Iraq, and especially after the signing of the Portsmouth Treaty of 1948. This same year, the Nakba transformed Arab society in general. Soon, a pan-Arab nationalist atmosphere dominated the Arab countries and a strong animosity toward Britain spread as the latter was considered not only an occupation force but also the main player in the making of Palestine into a Jewish homeland. The general malaise felt by the Arab

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166 Al-Ḥilw, *As ʾila wa-Ruḍūd min al-Quḥb*, 49.
171 Egypt’s Gamal Abd al-Nasser succeeded in toppling the monarchy in 1952 and became Egypt’s president a few years later. In 1958, he formed a political union with Syria but the Syrian *coup d’état* ended it in 1961.
172 Sankari, *Fadlallah*, 50.
society contributed to the maturing of Fadlallah’s political and social awareness from a young age. Palestine became a focal issue in Fadlallah’s thought.\(^\text{174}\)

Until the 1950s, the Hawza in Iraq did not engage in any political activities.\(^\text{175}\) In fact, the seminary etiquette forbade any relationship between Shīʿi scholars and the people in power because such relationships undermined the scholar’s credibility. However, with the emergence of communism, Baʿthism, secularism, and Arab nationalism on the one hand, and the British occupation of Iraq and the 1948 Nakba on the other, the Najafi seminary had to react.\(^\text{176}\) Hence, “Ḥizb al-reative” (the Call to Islam Party) was founded in 1958\(^\text{177}\) by Najafi seminarians headed by Muhammad Baqir al-Ṣadr.\(^\text{178}\) Despite his active role in the party as one of its ideologues, Fadlallah never adhered officially to it, among other reasons, because of the persecution of political activists in Iraq at that time.\(^\text{179}\) However, the Sayyid was never aloof from politics. His family’s, especially his maternal uncle Muḥsin al-Amīn’s,\(^\text{180}\) political involvement increased his interest and his endeavors to bring about change.\(^\text{181}\) This atmosphere influenced him both consciously and unconsciously and made him dream of becoming an Islamist reformer.\(^\text{182}\) Unlike his teacher al-Khūʾī (d. 1992), Fadlallah believed in the necessity of active political participation as a force for change.\(^\text{183}\) Together with Muhammad Baqir al-Ṣadr, he was a pioneer in Iraq’s Shīʿi Islamic movement at a time when these movements were mainly Sunni as is the case of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Liberation Party. In addition to the Islamic movements around him, he was influenced by the secular ideologies of the time.\(^\text{184}\)

Fadlallah’s early writings in the 1960s, while he was still in Najaf, reflect his concern with Islamic Daʿwa, the defense of Islam against its enemies, and the establishing of the Islamic state. These three major concerns remained his priority until the end of his life. His first

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\(^{174}\) See 1.4.7. below.

\(^{175}\) Naʿūm, *al-ʿallāma*, 16–17.

\(^{176}\) A TV-interview with Fadlallah on NBN, 11 April 2004.

\(^{177}\) Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014, 31–32. This was an eventful time in Iraq and the Arab World: Among other major events, a third coup d’état just took place in Iraq and Egypt and Syria were forming a political union.


\(^{179}\) Sankari, *Fadlallah*, 87 and 100.


\(^{181}\) A TV-interview with Fadlallah on NBN, 11 April 2004.


\(^{183}\) Carré, “Fadlallah Muhammad Hussein,” 453.

attempt to put these views to paper was his “Uṣlūb al-Daʿwa fi al-Qurʾān” (The method of Call to Islam in the Qurʾān) in which he defended the feasibility and the justice of the Islamic state. In this book, he speaks of Islam as a peaceful religion that should be promulgated through peaceful means. He argues that the depiction of Islam as a violent jihadi religion is an erroneous Orientalist view. Jihad, he explains, to which some Qurʾānic verses call the believers to wage against unbelievers, should be understood as a last resort measure that takes place only in two cases: either in self-defense if attacked or to prevent an imminent threat to Muslims. The style, the language, and the tone of this book have almost no Shīʿī aspect, which shows that Fadlallah’s interest in intra-Islamic rapprochement had started at an early stage. Indeed, he was an advocate of Islamic ecumenism and saw in it a solution to fight the dangers of Western imperialism, global arrogance, and Zionism. His efforts towards a universalist perception of Islam were relatively fruitful and the Azhar declared Twelver Shīʿism (al-maḏhab al-jaʿfari) to be Islam’s fifth school of thought which is “neither superior nor inferior to Sunni schools.”

At the same time, especially when he returned to sectarian Lebanon, he became interested in inter-faith dialogue—an interest that lasted the rest of his life. Fadlallah tried to convince the Lebanese Christians that Islam and Christianity had more in common than they could imagine. He called on them to build on this common ground to achieve peaceful coexistence. His mottos “Come to a common word” and “No question is trivial or embarrassing. The truth is the daughter of dialogue” appeared in all his dialogue-oriented books, articles, and lectures. Together with Daʿwa, interfaith dialogue is also a central theme in his commentary on the Qurʾān.

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185 Surūr, Taḥaddī al-Mamnūʿ, 49–50.
187 This relatively “ecumenical” style remained in all Fadlallah’s books except in those intended for the Shīʿī audience in particular such as Muhammad Husayn Fadlallāh, Min Wahy ‘Āshūrā’, Beirut: Dār al-Malāk, 1996 and al-Zahra al-Maṣūma. He also contributed to al-Adwāʾ magazine from 1960 and published yet another book while still in Najaf: Qadāyānā ‘alā Ẓaw’ al-Islām, which is a collection of the editorials he wrote in al-Adwāʾ magazine. The same concerns of Islamic unity are repeated in these early writings. See Taḥaddī al-Mamnūʿ, 49–50.
190 In an interview he accorded to the Lebanese Sayyād magazine on 11 May 2000, retrieved on 13 August 2015, Fadlallah said that there is an 80% agreement between Muslims and Christians. http://arabic.bayynat.org/ListingByCatPage.aspx?id=1050
191 Surūr, Taḥaddī al-Mamnūʿ, 60–63; passim.
1.4.5. Return to Lebanon

In addition to his Lebanese roots, Fadlallah kept an eye on the literary and political life in Lebanon. He read the output of major Lebanese writers and poets and read the Lebanese Shi‘i magazines such as al-‘Irifān. Although he used to visit Lebanon with his family and meet important figures from different ideological backgrounds, he only got to know the Lebanese political arena with its sectarian complications and challenges as well as foreign interferences when he moved permanently to Lebanon in 1966 upon an invitation from the Usrat al-Ta’akhī (The Fraternity Home) association in Nab‘a, southern Beirut. There, he actively organized lectures, symposiums, religious events, and discussions. Soon after he settled down in Beirut, he established a theological seminary by the name of al-Ma‘ḥad al-Sharī‘ī al-Islāmī (the Islamic Legal Institute). Fadlallah built a three-story house for his seminary and added yet another story later for women’s meetings which made the building go by the name of “the beehive.” Like Muhammad Baqir al-Ṣadr, Fadlallah believed in the necessity of getting rid of the archaic methods of teaching and of modernizing the Ḥawza in general; thus, he introduced new measures and methods. In traditional seminaries men could enter the Hawza with primary school knowledge only, but in Fadlallah’s newly established institute students were required to have a high school diploma as was the case for universities.

The Shi‘i community Fadlallah returned to was poor, undereducated, and underprivileged. Neglected by the Lebanese state, the Shi‘ is had the lowest literacy rate

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192 Na‘ūm, al-‘allāma, 21–22.
194 Surūr, Tahaddī al-Mamnū‘, 53–54; Sankari, Fadlallah, 52.
195 Abisaab et al., The Shi‘ites of Lebanon, 198–199.
197 Na‘ūm, al-‘allāma, 61.
200 Mūsa al-Ṣadr had arrived in Lebanon six years before Fadlallah upon an invitation to succeed the former Shi‘i leader Shara‘f al-Din. He then founded the “Movement of the Deprived” (Ḥarakat al-Mahrūmīn) and tried to give the community a voice and an opportunity to develop. For more on his work, see Fouad Ajami, The Vanished Imam – Imam Musa al-Sadr and the Shi‘a of Lebanon, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986. Although both Musa al-Sadr and Fadlallah were concerned with the fragility of the Shi‘i community in Lebanon, they never cooperated. See also Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, Constructing Lebanese Shi‘ite Nationalism: Transnationalism, Shi‘ism, and the Lebanese State, PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2005, for a general idea of the underprivileged situation of Lebanon’s Shi‘ is during this period.
in the country—17 percent only. Their children had to go to fee-charging Christian-run schools in which they did not have access to religious education. One year after the return of Fadlallah to Lebanon, the whole Arab world was struck with the 1967 Naksa which added to the general malaise of Arab society, increased the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to 1.3 million, and contributed to worsening the social conditions in the country. Fadlallah was convinced that the solution to the predicament of the Shi‘i community lay in the Islamic solidarity model through the collection of the different types of alms—a model to which Fadlallah had dedicated several chapters of his thesis. In 1976, al-Khū‘ī (d. 1992) appointed Fadlallah his representative (wakil) in Lebanon which meant that he could collect the khums from al-Khū‘ī’s emulators (muqallids) and thus have the necessary funding for his charity projects. The different alms are paid to special agencies and representatives who then redistribute them to the community in the form of services. This same year, already three years before the Iranian revolution and one year into the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), Fadlallah came into violent contact with the Maronite Christians in a way that changed him radically.

1.4.6. Encounter with the Maronite Christians

Fadlallah’s opinions of the Maronite militias reflect his bitter encounters with them. He refers to them using similar attributes as those he uses for the Jews: They are racist and have a superiority complex. He describes their sectarianism and their hostility as beastliness and backwardness as he describes the poisonous atmosphere they created in the Nab’a neighborhood where he lived at that time. The Maronite militias violently expelled Fadlallah and his fellow Shi‘i Nab’a people, making of them the first Lebanese civil war.

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202 Literally, “the Setback”—the Arab-Israeli war of 1967.
205 Elvire Corboz, Guardians of Shi‘ism: Sacred Authority and Transnational Family Networks, Edinburgh University Press, 2015, 63.
refugees—people barely had enough to eat. This calamity deeply marked Fadlallah personally and professionally. While Musa al-Ṣadr went arming Shīʿis in what later became the Amal movement, Fadlallah was busy perfecting his scholarship and mobilizing the masses through his fiery Friday sermons. It is under these circumstances that he developed his concepts of power: under the shelling, the long siege, and the merciless treatment by the Maronite Phalangists (Ḥizb al-Katāʿib al-Lubnānīya). He wrote his treatise al-Ӏslām wa Manṭiq al-Quwwa (Islam and the Logic of Power), in which he criticizes the West and argues for the indispensability of power for the Islamic entity, in order to gain influence. This was the start of his radicalization.

Fadlallah had yet another ill-fated encounter with the Maronites in 1982, the year Israel invaded Lebanon. The Ayatollah heard the news of the invasion while in Iran. He returned hastily to Lebanon but “found out that all the entrances of Beirut were closed by the Israeli army and its allies.” Fadlallah, his son, and companions were abducted by the Maronite Phalangists and were treated badly. Apparently traumatized by this experience, he became an opponent of the use of abduction as a tool of resistance or “as a tool of political protest neither against the Westerners nor against the Lebanese” because it would tarnish the image of Islam. On the other hand, this abduction widened the gap between him and the Maronites, who in his opinion are sworn enemies of Muslims and Islam. Moreover, in his interviews Fadlallah depicts the Lebanese Maronites as traitors who fight their co-citizens instead of fighting the occupiers. “They cooperated with Israel to protect their interests. They thought they could benefit more from Israel but the latter was cleverer.”

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211 Fadlallah, al-Ӏslām wa Manṭiq al-Quwwa, 9 and Sankari, Fadlallah, 157–158.
212 Ajami, The Vanished Imam, 214–215.
213 Naʿūm, al-ʿallāmah, 71.
216 Naʿūm, Bauḥ Walākin, 164–167. For the discussion within Hizballah on the abduction of foreigners, see Kramer, The Moral Logic of Hizballah.
217 Naʿūm, al-ʿallāmah, 62–64.
1.4.7. Intellectual development

Fadlallah excelled in theological scholarship and developed the idea of dynamic Islam through which he mainly sought to spread Islam all over the world and to fight against the “laziness, apathy and loss of dynamism [which] have been embedded in the Muslim psyche for many centuries.”\(^{219}\) To do this, he strived to make of Islam an empowering and changing force—not merely a faith Muslims adhere to.\(^{220}\) His thought was not rigid, he was open to learning and was aware of his own intellectual development.\(^{221}\) Fadlallah himself says that he has had a revolutionist spirit since his early youth and admits that it might have been “naïve and superficial” in the beginning.\(^{222}\) Back in 1995, a researcher asked him which of his books reflects his political thought the best at the moment. The answer was that “Islam and the Logic of Power” should be read against the conditions and period in which it was written\(^{223}\) and that his “al-Ḥaraka al-Islāmiyya: Humūm wa Qaḍāyā” (the Islamic movement: Concerns and Issues) is the book that reflects his present political thinking.\(^{224}\) In this book, the Ayatollah develops his conception of power more thoroughly and shows more pragmatism and flexibility. However, some of his views expressed in his Islam and the Logic of Power remained the same, especially concerning the indispensability of Da`wa to enlarge the Islamic entity and the comprehensiveness of Islam as a faith, a Sharīʿa, a system, a way of life, and a method of political rule.\(^{225}\)

Expectedly enough, his conception of the Jews and the Islamic-Jewish relationship did not change either.\(^{226}\) Nevertheless, Fadlallah’s thought matured the most concerning his idea of the Islamic state. In the 1960s, he offered this idea as the ultimate solution. With time, he finetuned its theory and linked its feasibility with a successful Da`wa arguing that “the political conditions to establish an Islamic state would be suitable when we convince the majority to embrace Islam.”\(^{227}\) By the end of the 1990s, Fadlallah became all the more

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\(^{219}\) Abu Rabi’, Intellectual Origins, 221.


\(^{221}\) Fadlallah explained in a lecture broadcast on Al-Iman Television on 22 May 1996 that it is normal for a scholar to develop, to change his opinions, and to amend his Fatwas.

\(^{222}\) Naʿūm, al-ʿallāma, 80.


\(^{225}\) Faḍlallāh, al-Ḥaraka al-Islāmiyya: Humūm wa-Qaḍāyā, 342.

\(^{226}\) HIHQ, 132–133.

aware that the establishment of the Islamic state was not possible at least in the near future, and towards the end of his life, he was not sure anymore if it was achievable at all.228

The constant development of Fadlallah’s thought might also explain the uncategorical approach he takes to some issues. Several scholars have pointed out the ambiguity of his rhetoric,229 the double-sidedness,230 double stances or even contradiction of his views.231 Nevertheless, there is one issue about which Fadlallah has always been clear and straightforward: his stance about the Palestinian cause and his dislike of Israel. In his discourse on behalf of the Palestinian cause, Fadlallah combined a number of rhetorics: the Arab-nationalists’ and the Islamists’.232 At the time when al-Ṣadr, despite his sympathy with the Palestinians, thought the Shi‘is alone were paying the price for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Fadlallah preached that the Palestinian cause is an Islamic cause. 233 To him, the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are a Jewish-Muslim conflict. He believed there was an Israeli-Western plan to subjugate the Muslim world. The West helped the inherently expansionist Israel take over Arab lands. 234 He also believed the Zionists aimed at destroying not only the Palestinian or the Arab culture but Muslim identity and culture altogether. 235 With the help of the arrogant Western powers, global Zionism would attempt to distort the picture of Islam and to destroy Muslims.236

228 Sankari, Fadlallah, 221–228 and Surūr, Taḥaddī al-Mannā‘, 95–97.
232 Kramer, The Oracle of Hizbullah, 93.

See also the two statements he issued on 30 March 2008 and on 31 May 2009 about the plots of Global Zionism against Islam retrieved from Fadlallah’s website on 7 June 2013.

his view, global Zionism is also responsible for the spread of Islamophobia in Europe, the alleged Islamic threat in America as well as the anti-Islamic media content.\(^{237}\)

1.4.8. Influentiality and popularity

Despite the fact that he did not hold any political position officially, various elements contributed to Fadlallah’s ascent to local and international prominence.\(^{238}\) Although Fadlallah preferred to have only an advisory role in the establishment of both Amal and Hizballah, he played a major de facto political role when Hizballah was founded in the eighties as a political and military entity, the main aim of which was (and is) to fight Israel. The Ayatollah is generally presented in the Western Media and Academia as Hizballah’s spiritual leader—a role that he has vehemently denied on multiple occasions.\(^{239}\) It is apparent that he had at least indirect influence on Hizballah through his teachings, writings and sermons. In addition to being Hizballah’s main theological and political ideologue, he contributed to the development of the party’s path in several other ways. For example, Fadlallah did Hizballah a big favor when he “dissolved the Muslim Student Union and asked its members to join Hizballah.”\(^{240}\) Furthermore, he supported the resistance and inspired a generation of militants and Islamists through his writings, fatwas, preaching, and teaching. The party’s first and second rank leaders have all been his seminary students. A case in point is that this includes all of the party’s secretaries-general, Hassan Nasrallah and his predecessors Abbas al-Musawi\(^{241}\) and Subhi al-Tufayli, as well as Hizballah’s political bureau chief, Sayyed Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyed,\(^{242}\) and Hizballah’s senior member Imad Mughniyya who was Fadlallah’s bodyguard.\(^{243}\) Fadlallah fueled the resistance and called on it to fight fiercely in his fiery and well-attended Friday sermons, not only in

\(^{237}\) Fadlallah’s statement issued on 31 May 2009 retrieved from Fadlallah’s website on 7 June 2013.

\(^{238}\) Sankari, Fadlallah, 187–191; Na’ūm, al-‘allāma, 37.


\(^{240}\) Abisaab et al., The Shi‘ites of Lebanon, 200.

\(^{241}\) Abbas al-Musawi was assassinated by the IDF in 1992.


Lebanon but also elsewhere. In addition to his lectures in Lebanon, he held weekly lectures in the Sayyida Zeinab area in Damascus and in different parts of Syria.²⁴⁴ The students who attended these lectures were from Syria, Iraq, and the Gulf countries.

As noted by Sophie Chamas, “*Fadlallah’s influence is most noticeable among the pious Shi‘ite community in Lebanon,*”²⁴⁵ but it extends to Asian and Western countries as well. His liberal theological views gained him popularity among Shi‘i living in the West to whom his attractiveness is very much related to pragmatism and practicality. For some, it was finally finding the middle way between the Islamic faith and living the modern Western lifestyle. For Shi‘i youth in general, Fadlallah represents progressive Islam.²⁴⁶ In America, he is more popular than other Shi‘i marja’s because of his pragmatic and lenient legal opinions (*fatwas*). To give but a few examples, Fadlallah does not require his followers to grow their beards, he allows wearing the tie and playing chess.²⁴⁷ He goes as far as to allow masturbation provided it does not lead to ejaculation.²⁴⁸

On another level, the Ayatollah acted as the Imām of al-Imām al-Ridā mosque in the Dāḥye²⁴⁹ thus remaining close to his followers and students. His Friday sermons were widely propagated in written and audio forms. His active and devoted followers run several websites in many languages and keep those interested in Fadlallah’s thought informed. Fadlallah’s books are digitalized and some of his books have been translated into the main languages of Muslims, and into some major European languages as well. The Ayatollah is also an advocate of women’s rights, to the limits accepted within Islam.²⁵⁰ In principle, he opened the door of Qur’ānic interpretation and issuing legal opinions to anyone regardless of their sex provided that they attain the required level of theological education. A Ḥawza for females was also opened providing an opportunity for women to become acquainted with their faith and to pursue a theological education and even jurisconsultship—at least theoretically. In practice, social and cultural constraints hinder Shi‘i women from reaching an educational level that would allow them to act as clerics. In addition to defending the right of women to education, he also spoke for their rights to choose their spouses and to

²⁴⁴ Na‘ūm, *al-‘allāma*, 93–95. These lectures are edited and published in the twenty-volume *Nadwa* Damascene lectures.


²⁴⁷ Nadwa 1:811–812.


²⁴⁹ A predominately Shi‘i suburb south of Beirut.

be treated with dignity by their families, among other issues. He also defended the rights of the child, challenged societal stereotypes, and devoted several books to Islamic upbringing which takes into consideration the child’s psyche and wellbeing.

One of Fadlallah’s major contributions is reaching out to the needy and the disadvantaged, especially in peripheral areas and in refugee camps. In 1978, the Ayatollah established a charity organization called “Jamʿiyat al-Mabarrat al-Khairiya” (the Benevolent Charity Society) which started as an orphan-oriented activity but soon expanded to include facilities for children with special needs, schools, cultural centers, libraries, nursing homes, hospitals, etc. His charity networks became massive and their work affected almost every aspect of the Shīʿi community’s daily life. Furthermore, Fadlallah spent all his life criticizing the “decline, backwardness, laziness, apathy and loss of dynamism” embedded in Muslims for long centuries. He never ceased to point out the relevance of education to correct the deplorable contemporary Islamic situation as well as the role scholars should play in this change. With its missionary, financial and educational wings, the Fadlallah institution is almost self-sufficient to the extent that it owns its own radio station, TV-channel, and its own publishing house.


253 Surūr, Taḥaddī al-Mannūḥ, 56.

254 Corboz, Guardians of Shiʿism, 63.


256 Corboz, Guardians of Shiʿism, 101.

257 Abu Rabiʿ, Intellectual Origins, 221.

258 Abu Rabiʿ, Intellectual Origins, 222.

259 Fadlallah’s institution’s network owns the al-Bashāʾir radio station, the Dār al-Malāk publishing house and the al-Iman TV-Channel, all based in Beirut. For more on this see Morgan Clarke, Islam and Law in Lebanon: Sharia within and without the State. Cambridge University Press, 2018 especially 237–243.
1.4.9. A controversial personality

Fadlallah’s views and efforts have gained him popularity but also hostility both from within the Shi‘i community and outside it.260 He made headlines after the 1983 bombing which targeted the Multinational Force in Beirut.261 Not only did these bombings make a prominent figure of the Ayatollah internationally, especially considering that Western Media linked him directly to the operations, but they also made him the target of a series of assassination attempts.262 For the CIA, Fadlallah was behind the bombings of the three American facilities in Beirut, but for Fadlallah his alleged relationship with the attack and the attackers was ridiculous.263 In an interview,264 Fadlallah explained that William Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, met Prince Bandar bin-Sultan, the then Saudi Ambassador to the United State and the two decided to join efforts to get rid of Fadlallah.265 Apparently, after the failure of the assassination operation which cost the Saudis three million dollars,266 the latter tried to bribe the Ayatollah during a pilgrimage trip with a large amount of money but Fadlallah turned them down.267

He then stirred controversy within the Shi‘i community in 1995 when he declared himself a source of emulation (marja‘ taqlīd).268 Opposition came from all directions and many


262 In 1985, Fadlallah escaped the fourth and most famous assassination attempt, a car bomb which left 80 dead and 200 wounded in Bir el-'Abed. Na‘ūm, al-‘allāma, 69–70.


Ayatollahs issued fatwas delegitimizing him. Fadlallah’s theological reading of the Shīʿi hagiography has stirred up an especially big controversy. Efforts to discredit and silence Fadlallah came from some of the prestigious Shīʿi seminaries in Najaf and in Qom. He was referred to as “al-dīl al-muḍīl” (the deviant deceiver), a nickname that was widely circulated in booklets and on the Internet. Moreover, his compatriot, cleric Jaʿfar al-ʿĀmilī, backed by the high-ranking Shīʿi clerics and with their blessing, published a book called “Maʾsūṭ al-Zahrāʾ” (the tragedy of al-Zahrāʾ) in which he criticized Fadlallah’s views on the Prophet’s daughter. Even after Fadlallah’s death, his thought is still considered dangerously modernist in some Shīʿi circles to the extent that the General Secretariat of Imam Ali Holy Shrine banned the books of Fadlallah from the ninth Najaf International Book Fair in 2017.

1.4.10. Fadlallah and the West

Fadlallah’s alleged role in the bombing of the Multinational Force in Beirut and in numerous other bombings and kidnappings in the 1980s and 1990s together with his ambivalent relationship with Hizballah made him figure on the West’s terrorist and no-fly lists. During his life, Fadlallah equated the West with arrogance, expansionism and pro-Zionism. The terrorism discourse after the 11th of September made him revisit “the Islam-West binarism that had distinguished his previous political discussions” as well as that of the “clash of civilizations.” He shifted back and forth between a rhetoric of the enemy-West and the necessity of distinguishing between the Western governments and the peacefulness of the Westerners. He also called on Muslims living in the West to be good


270 A fatwa by Mirza Jawad al-Tabrizi among many others.

271 Muhammad Ali al-Hashimi al-Mashhadi published a book titled al-Hawza al-ʿIlmiyya Ṭudīna al-ʿInḥārīf (The Seminary Condemns Deviation), Beirut: Dār al-Husseini, 2001, which criticized Fadlallah’s theology, gave 70 cases where, according to the author, Fadlallah departed from mainstream Shīʿism, and included a large selection of fatwas and statements of important Shīʿi figures against Fadlallah.


275 Abisaab et al., The Shīʿites of Lebanon, 202.
representatives of their faith to be able to play the role of the “missionary migrant.”

America received the lion’s share in the Ayatollah’s criticism of the West. Fadlallah spent his whole life preaching loathing of America as Israel’s major ally and as Islam’s bitter enemy. He depicts America as a barbarian terrorist state for which he has no respect. In an interview, Fadlallah defiantly declared that “the more barbarian the arrogant becomes, the more active and challenging” he becomes.

**1.4.11. Conclusion**

A review of Fadlallah’s background has shown several important factors that essentially contribute to and influence his interpretation of the Qur’ān. The factors that occupied and even anguished him from an early age, namely the sluggishness of Muslims, the stagnation of the Arab world, the “Western arrogance” and interference in Arab internal affairs as well as the “Zionist threat” are reoccurring themes in his works. He has contemplated these issues already since the start of his literary activity in 1948, in the aftermath of the Arab defeat by Israel and the declaration of the establishment of the state of Israel. The twenty years during which Fadlallah taught tafsīr and wrote his commentary, from the early 1970s to the late 1990s, were challenging politically and socially. Lebanon, and the Shīʿ community in particular, suffered from the repeated Israeli attacks and invasions of Lebanon, the Lebanese Civil War, and the sectarian clashes. Interestingly enough, although the Ayatollah’s violent encounter with the Maronite Christians was just as traumatic as his encounter with the Israelis, his perception of the latter seems to have been much more negative. An apparent reason for this may be the Ayatollah’s pragmatism. Fadlallah knew that he could not carry out his Islamic state project without the Christians, and therefore hostility towards them would not have been an option. The Christians were also needed to fight the Israelis, he thus had to win them to his side if he was to implement his long-term goals: the Islamic state and the expulsion of the Jews. Although by the end of his life he was no longer sure the first goal was at all achievable, he clung to the second goal till his last breath. On July 4th 2010, on his death bed in the hospital he expressed his

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277 Fadlallah, al-Islāmiyyūn wa al-Taḥaddiyāt al-Mu ᣋṣīra, 173–177

278 Surūr, Taḥaddī al-Mammū’, 91.


280 For more on Fadlallah’s conception of the Islamic state, see 5.2.8. below.
last wish as follows: “all I want is the end of the Zionist entity”281 which is the same wish he expressed in his childhood poem at the very beginning of his ‘career.’ 282 This seems to have been an overarching motif that can be seen in his writings and speeches throughout his life.

Fadlallah’s mixed legacy divides opinions. At home, he is applauded as an advocate of interfaith dialogue and as a promoter of peaceful coexistence, but in the West he is often seen as a terrorist leader and a promulgater of anti-Semitism and anti-West sentiments. Likewise, inside Islamic circles, some praise his rationality and modernity while others, especially in the Shi‘i community, point to his heretic views which lean towards Sunni Islam at the expense of Shi‘ism. The death of Fadlallah is unlikely to make him sink into oblivion. The strong heritage he left behind will most likely remain. 283 His sons Ali and Jaafar have inherited the mantle of their father and have been trying to carry on his mission, each in his own way.


282 At the age of ten, he wrote a mourning poem, in which he called for “expulsion of the foreigner” from Palestine. See 1.4.3. Literary interests above.

2. Fadlallah’s commentary on the Qurʾān

The Min Waḥy al-Qurʾān commentary on the Qurʾān284 (Inspired by the Qurʾān hereinafter referred to as MWQ) by the Lebanese Ayatollah Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah is arguably one of the most widely read contemporary Shīʿī commentaries in Arabic.285 The prominent Shīʿī scholar Ayatollah Muhammad Hādī Maʿrifat applauded this work as “one of the finest [...] comprehensive, educational and social commentaries”286 of our times. Maʿrifat argues that the dynamism of this commentary makes it equatable to Sayyid Quṭb’s Fi Zilāl al-Qurʾān and that the Shīʿī touch in MWQ is a welcome added value. However, some of Fadlallah’s Shīʿī critics dismissed it for the exact same reasons as being too Sunni-oriented and mainly too influenced by Quṭb’s views.287 The harsh criticism directed at MWQ hardly undermined its position and its influence among modern day Shīʿīs, which is seen, for example, in the number of editions and formats in which it has appeared.288

Like al-Manār,289 MWQ started as a series of Qurʾān exegesis lectures that Fadlallah held for a quarter of a century beginning in the late 1960s at the Islamic Legal Institute (al-

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288 See 2.1. below for more on these different editions and formats.
Ma’had al-Sharʿī al-ʾIslamī,\textsuperscript{290} in the Hāret Hreik neighborhood in Beirut.\textsuperscript{291} The seminarians recorded these lectures on audiotapes, wrote them down and brought them back to him for possible emendations.\textsuperscript{292} Substantive changes were made to these lectures before they ended up in the first edition of the commentary which appeared in 1979 in twenty-five volumes.\textsuperscript{293} The first edition of the commentary was enhanced further and was developed into the second edition which appeared almost twenty years later in 1998, also in twenty-five volumes.\textsuperscript{294} Three reprints of this edition were all sold out. In relation to the first edition, the changes and additions concerned the first ten volumes (1-10) and reached Sūra 7 (Sūrat al-a ṭāf).\textsuperscript{295} This is rather obvious content-wise because Fadlallah’s exegetical treatment of the subsequent Sūras is rather abridged.

Aware of the abundance of tafsīr literature, Fadlallah starts the introduction to the first edition with a question “Is this a commentary on the Qurʾān? Do we need a new commentary to add to the multitude of commentaries which have not left out any aspect of Qurʾānic knowledge?”\textsuperscript{296} First, Fadlallah explains that what started as a series of lectures that aimed at “creating a Qurʾānic awareness” gradually became a commentary on the Qurʾān—although it was not his intention to compile yet another one. He emphasizes that “these exegetical attempts do not represent something new in tafsīr” but are rather a compilation of “the contributions of the exegetes and researchers of the field.”\textsuperscript{297} Second, his main goal behind this commentary was to invigorate the Qurʾānic message, i.e., making of the Qurʾān a changing force, a core constituent of any Islamic activity, and looking inside it for solutions to the contemporary challenges of the ‘Islamic nation.’\textsuperscript{298} Fadlallah’s starting point is that the Qurʾān is not an abstract literary text, “the Qurʾān is a life, that moves, gives, inspires, and leads to the right path.”\textsuperscript{299} For him it is a book of dynamism

\textsuperscript{290} Fadlallah established the Islamic Legal Institute, a Seminary for Sharʿa and Islamic studies in 1966. The institute offers its students different services such as full board, books, health insurance, and a monthly scholarship. Female students are offered free transportation and babysitting services. Upon graduation, seminarians can receive a university degree thanks to an academic cooperation with the Islamic University of Lebanon.

\textsuperscript{291} MWQ1:18, MWQ1:23–24. Fadlallah’s tafsīr lectures continued till the end of his life.

\textsuperscript{292} MWQ1:28.

\textsuperscript{293} Nadwa 1:241.

\textsuperscript{294} A total of 9771 pages in 24 volumes in addition to an index volume of themes, keywords, and Sūras.

\textsuperscript{295} MWQ1:20. The second edition of the MWQ commentary chosen for this research is not different in terms of content but only in terms of length. The exegetical treatment of the first ten Sūras in the first edition is abridged but does not contain any differences or contradictions content-wise.

\textsuperscript{296} MWQ1:23.

\textsuperscript{297} MWQ1:27.

\textsuperscript{298} IBAMAM, 295–297.

\textsuperscript{299} IBAMAM, 295.
and Da’wa, and it should be understood as such.\textsuperscript{300} This is emphasized several times in MWQ:

\begin{quote}
I tried, in this commentary, to live the Qurʾān in my mind, my heart, and my life to understand its verses, to be inspired by its ideas, [...] in order for us to feel that the Qurʾān, indeed, deals with all the aspects of our lives. This way, we could be Qurʾānians in our thoughts and acts, exactly like the early Muslims.\textsuperscript{301}
\end{quote}

In the introduction to the second edition, Fadlallah asks “the readers, the scholars, and the thinkers to give him scientific feedback” on his work. Instead, waves of open criticism were directed at him.\textsuperscript{302} Although he is generally a man of humility, his pride appears to come to the fore when he speaks about this war launched against him and against his exegetical views. In an interview with Abu Dhabi TV, Fadlallah said he had “compiled one of the best commentaries on the Qurʾān”\textsuperscript{303} and explained that none of the criticism he earned was related to his work’s exegetical content but to him personally because his critics have not read and have not understood his commentary.\textsuperscript{304} However, when asked, a decade earlier, what was the most important task he wished to accomplish before his death, Fadlallah answered that his main concern was enhancing his commentary on the Qurʾān so that it would be “a comprehensive commentary which can give people a bright picture about the Qurʾān.”\textsuperscript{305} Fadlallah had been aware that his commentary was slightly unbalanced because he had managed to revise the second edition and augment only its first ten volumes. He constantly revised his commentary and expanded it hoping for it to be as large and comprehensive as al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s (d. 1981) commentary al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.\textsuperscript{306} Fadlallah continued editing it until the last days of his life.\textsuperscript{307} Indeed, shortly before his death, Fadlallah managed to finish the revisions and additions he planned to publish in the third edition. All in all, the changes Fadlallah introduced were mainly concerned with language, circumstances of revelation, and riwāyāt.\textsuperscript{308} The third edition,

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{300} IBAMAM, 296.
\item\textsuperscript{301} MWQ1:19. For more on Fadlallah’s use of the term Qurʾānian, see 2.5.1. Vocabulary below.
\item\textsuperscript{302} MWQ1:21.
\item\textsuperscript{303} Rafiq Nasrallah, \textit{Bidūn muqaddimāt}, Abu Dhabi TV, 2000.
\item\textsuperscript{304} IBAMAM, 303–304.
\item\textsuperscript{305} Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, \textit{Ayyuhā al-Aḥibba}, Beirut: Dār al-Malāk, 2010, 27.
\item\textsuperscript{306} Nadwa 1:236.
\item\textsuperscript{307} Jihād Farḥāt, \textit{Manhaj al-Tafsīr al-Qurʾānī ‘inda al-Sayyid Muhammad Ḥussein Fadlallāh} (The exegetical approach of M. H. Fadlallah), lecture held at the Islamic Legal Institute, Beirut, 13 May 2015.
\item\textsuperscript{308} Personal correspondence with Mr. Muhammad Tarraf, the director of Fadlallah’s Islamic Cultural Center. Beirut, on 12 January 2017.
\end{itemize}
estimated to appear in thirty volumes, was being edited and finalized by Fadlallah’s assistants at the time of this study.\(^{309}\)

### 2.1. MWQ’s different formats

In addition to the twenty-five-volume printed commentary, there are several digital and online versions of MWQ on Fadlallah’s official website as well as a mobile phone application available for free download.\(^{310}\) The content of the online and other digital versions is identical to the paper format and is arranged according to Sūras.\(^{311}\) Additionally, with the permission of Fadlallah, a two-volume abridged version of the twenty-five-volume commentary was compiled and published in 2008.\(^{312}\) This exegetical compendium aimed at summarizing the content of MWQ relevant to Daʿwa work into a manageable size. Fadlallah’s text was not changed or shortened. However, the occasions of revelation narratives (\(\text{Asbāḥ al-Nuzūl}\)) were neglected in most cases.\(^{313}\) This work is used by Daʿwa workers as a guidebook for the promulgation of Islam according to Fadlallah’s teachings.\(^{314}\) The availability of such an abridged form of Fadlallah’s commentary as well as the appearance of some partial translations into different languages further highlight its importance. Indeed, four volumes of Fadlallah’s commentary were translated into Persian\(^{315}\) and a partial translation of the commentary into Turkish was in progress during the time of this research.\(^{316}\) This is what Chibli Mallat predicted when he wrote that

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\(^{309}\) Personal correspondence with the director of Fadlallah’s Islamic Cultural Center, Beirut on 12 January 2017.


\(^{311}\) Both introductions to the first and second editions were omitted from the online and digital versions of the commentary. Also, while the phone application allows the user to search by verse, none of the versions allow searching within the entire commentary. Until 2012, there existed a searchable version that no longer works.


\(^{313}\) Ghalloum, \textit{Mafāhīm Harākiyya}, 6–7.


\(^{315}\) Translated by Aqiqi Bakhshayshi and published by al-Tawḥīd publishing house, Tehran. Unknown publication date.

\(^{316}\) In a personal conversation on 29 November 2017 with the Ayatollah’s son al-Sayyid Jaafar Fadlallah as well as with Mr. Muhammad Tarraf, the director of Fadlallah’s Islamic Cultural Institute in Beirut, both confirmed that the Ayatollah had indeed given permission for a Turkish translation but that they had not yet received further information as to where it has been or would be published.
Fadlallah’s exegetical work on the Qurʾān “might better survive Middle Eastern storms than the forays into institutional and strategic theories.”

2.2. Fadlallah’s exegetical activity

Exegetical content is not limited to the genre of tafsīr. In addition to his MWQ commentary, Fadlallah’s exegetical activity is found in some of his other books such as The way of Daʿwa in the Qurʾān, and Dialogue in the Qurʾān, both of which take a topic-based approach to the Qurʾān. The first of these thematic exegetical works studies the Qurʾānic perception of Daʿwa and the second the Qurʾānic understanding of dialogue. Fadlallah has another exegetical book by the title “The movement of prophethood against deviation,” which takes the approach of verse by verse commentary and which interprets Sūras 10, 11, and 12. Like MWQ, this book also started as weekly lectures at al-Riḍā Mosque in Beirut. While MWQ lectures addressed seminarians, these Tuesday afternoon lectures addressed the common people in a simpler style which is free of all scientific words or references to circumstances of revelation. Fadlallah held another exegetical lecture series dedicating to teaching al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s commentary, al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān, which he considers one of the best Qurʾānic commentaries available and which was one of his main references throughout his life together with Tafsīr al-Bayān. An additional lecture series worth mentioning is the “weekly seminars series in Damascus” usually shortened as al-Nadwa (the seminar) which appeared as a twenty-volume book from 1997 to 2009. This series, which addressed seminarians from different countries, has an important exegetical content. Because Fadlallah often backs his arguments with Qurʾānic verses, his interpretation of the Qurʾān is found in almost all of his non-exegetical works as well as in his lectures, articles, and sermons. His Question and Answer sessions, which were later published in a fifty-nine-volume series, devote some space to the tafsīr of some Qurʾānic verses as well as to the discussion of their practical application in

317 Mallat, “Aspects of Shiʿi Thought.”
321 MWQ1:20.
322 Hani Abdallah, Fadlallah’s office’s political and media advisor in “ʿAlā Khutā al-Sayyid,” a documentary film about the Ayatollah’s life broadcast on al-Imān TV on 4 July 2013.
An analyzing the Qurʾān and commenting on it is almost a way of life for Fadlallah.

2.3. Structure of MWQ

Unlike the brief and humble introduction to the first edition, the introduction to the second edition is lengthy and thorough. This introduction serves as an outline of Fadlallah’s exegetical approach and summarizes his deductive method (al-manhaj al-īstidlālī). Most of the introduction was published later as a chapter in one of Fadlallah’s most quoted books, al-Ijtihād Bayna ’asri al-Māḍī wa-Āfāq al-Mustaqbal (Independent legal reasoning between the captivity of the past and the horizons of the future). Directly after the introductions to the second and the first editions, the first Sūra is introduced in the middle of the page headed by the basmala phrase and followed by a thorough discussion of the meaning of the phrase in an educational style. This marks the start of the explication of the Qurʾān proper in this commentary.

Qurʾānic interpretation, as Hanafi notes “has proceeded till now from the beginning to the end, from Sūrat al-Fātiha to Sūrat al-Nās, Sūrah after Sūrah, verse following verse, from right to left, according to the written order of surahs.” Fadlallah’s commentary takes this same traditional linear-atomistic methodology on the entire Qurʾān. He starts with the name of the Sūra, states whether it is Meccan or Medinan, and tells the number of verses it contains—all this written in a calligraphic style in three lines in the center of the page. Occasionally, he explains the reason behind the naming of the Sūra before he moves on to speak of its main goals, context, and themes. This is done systematically only from Sūra 1 to Sūra 11. In addition to the above, some of the Sūras have a “general introduction” in which the main ideas of the Sūra and its general message are set out.

After the commentator has introduced the reader to the general atmosphere of the Sūra, the interpretative exercise proper starts. A selected list of Qurʾānic terms with their explanation

325 This is elaborated further in 2.7.
326 MWQ1:15–16, MWQ8:20.
is introduced before the exegetical treatment of every pericope. The lists sometimes contain easy or common words that exist in Modern Standard Arabic as well and sometimes the meaning given in the vocabulary list is not used in the explanation of the verse. Occasionally, Fadlallah starts with the literal meaning of the word followed by its theological one, if applicable, but in other instances he only offers the theological meaning of the term or comments on the verse without explaining its vocabulary.\footnote{For example, MWQ1:125 and MWQ1:198.} The choice of terms to include in the vocabulary list is not always logical or useful. Some difficult words are left out while some very easy ones are included.\footnote{For example, the term \textit{ḏurriyya} which has the same meaning in Qur’ānic Arabic, MSA, and most spoken Arabic variants is explained in MWQ10:281.} Some terms are explained more than once while others are not included at all.\footnote{For example, \textit{al-Mann} and \textit{al-Salwā} are explained in MWQ2:55 and in MWQ10:268. The first is explained differently while the second’s explanation is more abridged in the second occurrence.} Sporadically, Fadlallah explains difficult terms quoted from other exegetical works in footnotes.\footnote{MWQ8:83 and MWQ8:182.} Additionally, the Ayatollah does not always provide definitions for the terms the first time they appear in the commentary. For example, the term \textit{tahřīf} is neither defined in the vocabulary lists nor in the commentary when it first appears in Q2:75 and Q4:46 but is only explained in Q5:13 and 5:41 although these come later in MWQ as far as the order of the Sūras is concerned.\footnote{MWQ3:74–75.} Furthermore, it is not uncommon for Fadlallah to give one meaning in the glossary and a totally different one in the interpretation. In the context of Q2:62 for example, the term \textit{sābiʿīn} (Sabians) is explained in the glossary as converts but then in the interpretation itself as “\textit{the Mandaens who are a Jewish-Christian sect.}”\footnote{MWQ2:68–72.} Such ambivalence of understanding suggests a disinterest in the identification of this group.

Right after the vocabulary list, Fadlallah divides the Sūra into pericopes according to themes. The length of these pericopes ranges from one verse to forty-seven verses.\footnote{As is the case for Q55:31–78.} In some cases, the whole Sūra is commented on as an entity.\footnote{For example: Q1, Q91, Q94, Q100.} In doing so, Fadlallah follows the same approach as most other modern exegetes. Every interpreted pericope forms a separate chapter, which in its turn consists of clearly separated sections. Each of these chapters starts with a general introduction preparing the way for the theme at hand. In addition, each of the sections has a title which summarizes its theme. The titles are either a phrase taken from the verse such as “\textit{those who are astray}”\footnote{A phrase taken from Q1:7.} or one that summarizes...
the following paragraph such as “the role of prayers”\textsuperscript{338} or a regularly asked dogmatic question to which he provides an answer such as “Is there intercession in doomsday?”\textsuperscript{339} The commentary is thus highly organized and reader friendly. In addition to the indexes at the end of each volume, there is a separate index volume (Volume XXV) which is also very helpful as it allows the reader to search in the commentary by verse, theme, or keyword.

At this stage, Fadlallah examines the verses at hand and interprets them. He discusses the circumstances of revelation (\textit{Asbāb al-Nuzūl}) related to them as well as their authority.\textsuperscript{340} He first refers to the opinions of other exegetes and to their understanding before introducing his own opinion. Very often he devotes a few paragraphs to commenting on the interpretation of al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981) under the title ‘\textit{a stop with the writer of al-Mīzān}’. The exegetical views of al-Khūʾī (d. 1992), Fadlallah’s teacher, are also discussed fairly often. Fadlallah ends each Sūra with a conclusion in which he explains the lessons to be drawn from it. More often than not, Fadlallah brings forth his contemporary exegetical voice which takes into consideration the realities and challenges of the Muslim community today and which very often has a political aspect.

In many ways, Fadlallah takes a pragmatic approach in his commentary. He does not overcrowd it with exegetical opinions but includes only the ones that he considers most important for the discussion he wishes to highlight. He briefly discusses their strengths and weaknesses, backs them with arguments and often adds his own opinion at the end of the discussion. Fadlallah’s pragmatism is seen not only on the methodological level but also on the level of content. When the knowledge of a certain matter is not considered important, Fadlallah briefly says so and moves on.

\section*{2.4. Fadlallah’s Sources}

Commentaries on the Qurʾān do not emerge in a vacuum. Their compilers build on the rich \textit{tafsīr} literature before them. Hence, contemporary and older commentaries on the Qurʾān form a continuity. As McAuliffe notes “\textit{classical and modern tafsīr represent, to a large extent, a coherent and internally consistent body of literature.}”\textsuperscript{341} The contemporary

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{338} MWQ1:91.
\item \textsuperscript{339} MWQ2:30.
\item \textsuperscript{340} Instead of the occasions of revelation (\textit{Asbāb al-Nuzūl}), sometimes Fadlallah writes an introductory description of the context of the verses before interpreting them. For example, MWQ3:64–67.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
commentators are “fully conversant with their tenth-, twelfth-, and fourteenth-century counterparts.” In addition to commenting on the Qurʾān, most commentaries comment on other commentaries as well. The literature is in a constant process of re-evaluation and interaction—MWQ is no exception. Fadlallah stresses on several occasions that his commentary is a discussion of and an interaction with the exegetical views of several exegetes and researchers. Hence, the commentary offers several layers of exegetical voices and provides the reader with different, sometimes even contradictory, interpretations of verses. The anthological nature of Fadlallah’s commentary is clear from the abundance of the sources he has used. These sources range from early and modern commentaries, to Ḥadīth, rhetorical and non-exegetical works, which is not untypical of other modern commentaries.

Fadlallah’s primary sources are mainly Shī‘i, the most used of which is al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s (d. 1981) Tafsīr al-Mīzān which is seminal to MWQ. Fadlallah started his commentary as a discussion with al-Mīzān; thus he quotes from it abundantly, argues with it, and occasionally disagrees with it. The second important source is expectedly Fadlallah’s teacher Abū al-Qāsim al-Khū’ī’s (d. 1992) Tafsīr al-Qurʾān. Despite Fadlallah’s evident reverence for these two exegetes, one notices that he, nevertheless, does not shy from expressing his disagreement with them. However, this disagreement is often expressed tactfully through honorific titles such as al-ʿallāma, al-ʿallāma al-kabīr, ustāḏu’nā, al-ustāḏ, or expressed through stylistic delicateness. Fadlallah also quotes some other major Shī‘i commentaries such as Muhammad ibn Masʿūd al-ʿAyyāshī’s (d. 932/3) Tafsīr al-ʿAyāshī, ʿAli ibn Ibrāhim al-Qummī’s (d. 919) Tafsīr al-Qummī, Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī’s (d. 941) al-Kāfī,349 al-Ṭabrisī’s (d. 1153) Majmaʿ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, Hāshim ibn Sulaymān al-Baḥrānī’s (d. 1693/7) al-Burhān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, al-Majlisī’s (d. 1698) two books Mirʿāt al-ʿuqūl and Bihār al-Anwār, Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya’s (d. 1979) Tafsīr al-Kāshif as well as Nāṣir Makārim al-Shīrāzī’s (b.1926-) al-Amāl fī Tafsīr Kitāb Allāh al-Munzal. Furthermore, MWQ cites other works such as al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq’s (d. 991) four books Ḥal al-Sharāʾiʿ, Maʿānī al-Akhbār, Amāli al-Ṣadūq, and ʿUyūn ʾakhbār al-Riḍā. He also

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342 McAuliffe, Qurʾānic Christians, 28.
343 MWQ1:27.
344 He even quotes women’s magazines: MWQ4:297. The list of sources mentioned here is not all-inclusive.
345 MWQ1:20.
346 MWQ1:232.
347 The connoisseur, the great connoisseur, our professor, the professor, etc.
348 MWQ1:255.
350 Fadlallah often refers to some narratives in al-Kāfī as quoted in Tafsīr al-Mīzān.
cites al-Sharīf al-Raḍi’s (d. 1015) Nahj al-Balāgha and Abu al-Ḥasan ibn Ahmad al-Wāḥidī al-Nisābūrī’s (d.1076) Ṣabāḥ al-Nuzūl. Moreover, he very often uses al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī’s (d.1108/9) alphabetical lexicon of Qur’ānic vocabulary Mufradāt Alfāẓ al-Qur’ān as well as Muḥammad Muḥammad al-Zabīdī’s (d. 1791) Tāj al-‘Arūs.

In addition to these Shī‘i sources, Fadlallah also refers to some Sunni, Sufi and Mu‘tazili commentaries. He quotes, for example, al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 923) Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī; Sayyid Qūṭb’s Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur’ān; Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā’s (d. 1935) Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Ḥakīm known as Tafsīr al-Manār; Sheikh Mahmoud Shaltūt’s (d. 1963) Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Karīm;351 al-Zamakhsharī’s (d. 1143/4) al-Kashshāf; al-Suyūṭī’s (d.1505) al-Durr al-Manṭūr Fī al-Tafsīr bi al-Maṭūr as well as ibn ‘Arabī’s Tafsīr Ibn ‘Arabī. Besides exegetical sources, Fadlallah discusses the works of some Western scholars such as Ignaz Goldziher’s Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung352 and Gustave Le Bon’s Crowd psychology, and refers to Abraham Cressy Morrison’s353 Man Does Not Stand Alone among others. Additionally, he quotes the Arabic translation of Encyclopaedia Britannica (Dā’īrat al-Maʿārif al-Brittaniyya),354 the Encyclopaedia of Islam,355 the Dictionary of the Holy Bible, the Hebrew Bible,356 and the New Testament.357

2.4.1. Fadlallah’s use of sources

Fadlallah’s use of sources and his quoting style can be characterized as unsystematic. At times, he seems to record the sources he consulted meticulously and explains their significance or the reason why he opted to refer to them in particular. Despite the considerable notes and references, there are several points at which documentation, or

351 Sheikh Mahmoud Shaltūt (d. 1963) was a prominent Egyptian Sunni scholar best known for his tolerance towards the different Islamic schools of thought. He is the first Sunni scholar to have issued a Fatwa permitting Muslims to choose or to convert to any school of thought they please, be it Sunni or Shi‘i. He also, like Fadlallah, called for Sunni-Shī‘i rapprochement. He called for the introduction of Islamic schools of thought (al-maḏāhib) to the Azhar. He is famous for considering Shi‘ism Islam’s fifth school of thought.


353 Abraham Cressy Morrison (d. 1951) was an American chemist and president of the New York Academy of Sciences.

354 MWQ4:20–21.

355 MWQ2:73.

356 MWQ4:20–21.

357 See 2.3.2 below for more on the way Fadlallah makes use of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.
substantiation, is lacking.\textsuperscript{358} Now and again, there is no reference to the source, regardless of whether he copied either verbatim or liberally without a reference.\textsuperscript{359} For example, although the Ayatollah occasionally refers to \textit{Tafsīr al-Amīj} with proper referencing, he sometimes copies a passage from it word for word without any reference.\textsuperscript{360} In several instances, the list of vocabulary offered is copied verbatim from Mughniyya’s \textit{al-Kāshif} but also without a reference.\textsuperscript{361} Additionally, Mughniyya’s ideas and arguments are copied every now and then without a reference. For example, Fadlallah’s discussion of Q3:71 seems to follows Mughniyya’s order of thought and vocabulary to a great extent.\textsuperscript{362} Mughniyya’s commentary, which is quoted both directly and indirectly, clearly influences Fadlallah’s interpretation and thought.\textsuperscript{363} Another interesting example of unreferenced quoting in MWQ is related to Ayatollah Muhammad Jawad al-Balāghī’s work. Fadlallah discusses his ideas on different occasions but never refers to him or to his books by name. For example, Fadlallah’s discussion of Qur’ānic inimitability (\textit{al-iʿjāz}) seems to be a response to al-Balāghī’s arguments on the matter.\textsuperscript{364}

Apart from a variable use of references, more details on Fadlallah’s attitude towards his sources should be noted. For example, most references to \textit{Tafsīr al-Ṭabarā} are attempts to prove him wrong,\textsuperscript{365} useless\textsuperscript{366} or even senseless.\textsuperscript{367} Fadlallah even accuses him of propagating views which defame the Prophet.\textsuperscript{368} As for Sayyid Qūṭb’s \textit{Fi Žilāl al-Qur’ān},

\textsuperscript{358} This is something Fadlallah was aware of and tried to correct towards the end of his life through an editing committee who were still working on the issue at the time of this study. The third edition will cover these lacunae before it is published \textit{post mortem auctoris}.

\textsuperscript{359} Occasionally, one runs into texts that are put between quotation marks without mentioning their sources. For example, in the context of his commentary on Q2:35–39, Fadlallah seems to have copied a text from Muhammad Jawad al-Balāghī’s \textit{al-Hudā Īllā Dīn al-Mustafā}, Qom: al-Markaz al-ʿāli li al-ʿulūm wa al-Ṭaqāfā al-Islāmiyya, 1985, 1:348–349. The copied text is put between quotation marks but no footnote or other reference is given. It is worth noting that this two-volume work analyzes some Protestant publications and attempts to refute their ideas.

\textsuperscript{360} Fadlallah copied most of pages 431–432 into his commentary MWQ4:20–21.

\textsuperscript{361} Compare the definition of \textit{yahūd} and \textit{naṣārā} in MWQ2:68 with that in al-Kashīf 1:116–117 or the definition of \textit{qarāṭīs} in MWQ9:214 with \textit{Tafsīr al-Kāshīf} 3:222. Furthermore, if we compare MWQ8:90 with \textit{Tafsīr al-Kāshīf} 3:32, we note that Fadlallah seems to ignore Mughniyya by referring directly to Riḍā whom Mughniyya cites.

\textsuperscript{362} See 4.1.6. below for more on this.

\textsuperscript{363} Mughniyya’s influence on Fadlallah was suggested by Lynda Clarke, “‘Aql (Reason) in Modern Shīʿī Thought: The Example of Muhammad Jawād Mughniyya (1904–79),” in Mahdavi Damghani Commemorative Volume. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016, 308f.


\textsuperscript{365} MWQ1:231, MWQ2:282.

\textsuperscript{366} MWQ10:148–149.

\textsuperscript{367} MWQ1:232.

\textsuperscript{368} MWQ8:81.
Fadlallah quotes it directly around thirty times, of which fifteen references are related to the scientific findings Ḥudaib used as arguments to explain the Qurʾān. His attitude towards Ḥudaib’s views varies according to the ideas that the latter puts forward. Ḥudaib’s influence on Fadlallah is clear but the latter disagrees with the former especially on some issues related to the use of science as an exegetical device, the perception of Christians, and the attitude towards Shi‘ism. When it comes to the opinions of previous exegetes and scholars, Fadlallah’s position can be characterized as critical and straightforward. He argues that scholars are not sacred and that this generation does not have to follow their opinions when they are not convincing.

2.4.2. Fadlallah’s use of Biblical texts

While the New Testament seems to be quoted directly and rather accurately, the Hebrew Bible is less often quoted, and when it is quoted, it does not enjoy the same kind of careful treatment. On the contrary, Fadlallah seems to, more often than not, quote it through other works such as the *Tafsīr al-Amjat* or al-‘Aqqād’s *ʿAbqariyyat Muḥammad*. When Fadlallah appears to quote the Hebrew Bible without referring to other works or through them, he often refers to the wrong text or to the wrong verse. For example, Fadlallah seems to have copied Deuteronomy 9:9 from al-Balaghi’s book *al-Hudā Ilā Din al-Mustafā* but, not knowing where the verse ended and what exactly it included, he mixed the biblical quotation with some of the text of the exegete that he copied. This implies unfamiliarity with the Biblical text and/or disinterest in confirming its exact form. Moreover, in his commentary on Q6:151-153, he refers to the ten commandments but situates them in Exodus 30:2-17 instead of 20:2-17. This also happens in his commentary on Q5:44-50.

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369 Q79:29, Q89:1-10, Q87:3, Q82:7, Q81:6, Q80:25, Q75:4, Q56:75, Q55:5, Q55:23, Q51:7, Q39:5, Q34:46, Q18:86, Q16:97.
370 On the first two views, see 5.1.1. Christianity vs. Jewish Christianity and on the last one, see 2.16. Shi‘i aspects.
372 MWQ5:203, MWQ2: 221, and MWQ8:99–100.
373 MWQ4:20–21.
375 MWQ4:20–21. Deut. 9:9: “I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water.” The verse above as well as the two additional sentences seem to be copied from al-Balaghi’s *al-Hudā Ilā Din al-Mustafā*, 1:348–349.
376 MWQ9:378.
where he refers to Exodus 21:23-25 but situates the verses in Exodus 21:33-35. These mistakes might be due to the fact that the Arabic–Indic numerals ٢ and ٣ are similar but it nevertheless reflects a carelessness that cannot be observed when he quotes the New Testament. The difference in how he relates to the two testaments might suggest that Fadlallah does not give the same importance to the Hebrew Bible as to the New Testament. The quotations evoke the question of whether Fadlallah ever even directly consulted the Hebrew Bible, whereas in the case of the New Testament this seems rather probable as we will see in the next chapter.

To sum up Fadlallah’s overall use of sources, it is clear that he is well acquainted with the major classical and contemporary commentaries. The diversity of his exegetical and literary sources shows both a good knowledge and a great appreciation of the tradition. The works cited often serve a purpose: Fadlallah discusses the most prevailing views and presents his arguments behind his agreement or disagreement. At the same time, these sources serve as a bridge that links tradition with modernity and translates the solutions of the past into solutions to the challenges of the present and the future.

2.5. Style and Vocabulary

Fadlallah’s literary background has expectedly left its traces in his mode of expression. In some instances, the commentary becomes more contemplative than exegetical. A case in point is his interpretation of Q2:17:

"Imagine we were in a pitch-dark desert, without a single glimmer of light, without the moon’s gentle transparent glow which spills in serenity on the sand in the extended airspace ... without the planets which shine from afar to decorate the hems of darkness..."

377 MWQ8:189.
378 For Fadlallah’s views on the Hebrew Bible as compared to the New Testament, see 3.5 and 4.2 below.
379 This idea is clarified further in 3.5. The Torah and the Gospel below.
380 Q2:17: “Their example is that of one who kindled a fire, but when it illuminated what was around him, God took away their light and left them in darkness and they could not see.” The commentary takes a literary form, for example, in MWQ1:51, MWQ1:76–8, MWQ3:62, among many other places.
381 MWQ1:160.
Citing poetry to explicate Qur’ānic lexica is common in both the classical and the contemporary commentaries on the Qurʾān. Poetry shawāhid are used in MWQ too, an expected feature especially when we take into consideration that Fadlallah is a poet himself. However, the commentator’s rich literary background is not always utilized when it comes to commenting the literary tools and the stylistic features of the Qurʾān—not even when such discussion is desired or when the grammatical ending might affect the meaning. For example, Fadlallah, unlike most commentators, does not explain why the first word in verse Q18:2 “qayyīman” is in the accusative case. The educational and missionary aspect is clearly more important for him than the literary one.

Like most commentaries on the Qurʾān, when different exegetical views are discussed, one of them is often presented as more correct (aṣaḥḥ), thus not entirely dismissing the other views. It is also commonplace for Fadlallah to lighten his views by resorting to the phrase ‘God knows best’ (Allāhu a’lam) used by all exegetes. He usually does not present his views as absolute truths but mitigates them through hesitant phrases such as “may be,” “in principle,” or “it seems that.”

In addition to abandoning “the scholastic language of philology and high theology,” Fadlallah also abandons any kind of detailing or speculation. When the Qurʾānic text does not offer explicit information on the matter at hand, he resorts to phrases such as “I do not wish to elaborate on this any further,” or “the details are useless.” Furthermore, the exegetical device taʾyīn al-mubham (defining the indefinite) is mostly absent from MWQ. In his interpretation of Q5:12 “God sent them twelve naqīb,” Fadlallah mentions that exegetes are of different minds, as usual, about the identity of these naqīb but their

384 MWQ1:266.
388 Hamza, An Anthology of Qurʾānic Commentaries, 283.
389 This is also the methodology of al-Ṭabarī: He did not elaborate on details which did not affect theological matters.
“identification might not be of much use.” This is Fadlallah’s general line concerning the Qur’ānic indefinite (mubham). He, generally speaking, does not try to identify matters which are not clearly stated in the Qur’ān but which do not add to the meaning of verses or which, as he puts it, are not of much use. To explain the reason behind refraining from speculation, Fadlallah relies on rationalism in several contexts. Another important feature in Fadlallah’s style is its oral aspect. Taking into consideration that MWQ started as a lecture series, some of its text reflects this orality. Hence, the clarity and the smooth flow of the text vary—especially when ideas are expressed in long sentences that amount to half a page.

On occasion, Fadlallah resorts to cross reference to avoid dealing with parallel verses again. For example, in his interpretation of Q5:72, he refers the reader to the parallel verse which he had already discussed in Q5:17. This does not mean, however, that Fadlallah avoids repetition in general. A closer look at the passages where he opts for cross reference shows that he only does this when it serves a purpose—emphasizing the idea at hand. For example, when it comes to enumerating the deviations of the Israelites or the faults of the Jews in general, he repeats them with gusto.

Although some of the terms which reoccur time and again in MWQ are shared by other modern and contemporary Muslim exegetes and thinkers, Fadlallah also gives entirely new meanings or connotations to some words. One good example of these different denotational aspects is the term Qur’ānian which means adherents of Qur’ānism in Modern Standard Arabic but which, in Fadlallah’s jargon, means people who live according to the Qur’ān’s teachings in practice. Another example is the verb ‘istanţaga ‘to interrogate/to question’ which Fadlallah uses often with the Qur’ān to mean ‘to derive meaning from.’ Additionally, we find in MWQ a heavy use of some Qur’ānic terms which are given a Modern Standard Arabic usage such as istikbār (arrogance), mustad’afūn (oppressed) hizb Allah (the party of God) among many others. On another level, it is worth mentioning that Fadlallah’s choice of words depends on the audience he addresses.

391 MWQ8:84.
392 MWQ10:132 and MWQ4:28 among several examples.
393 MWQ8:277.
394 MWQ8:98–101 and MWQ8:284–258. The same is true for most parallel verses such as Q2:62 and Q5:69 or parallel verses Q2:57–59 and Q7:161–162. MWQ10:269
395 For more on Fadlallah’s use of repetition, see 2.6. Persuasive devices below.
396 Such as Sayyid Quṭb’s use of social justice, global Zionism, and global Crusades.
397 Qur’ānians, i.e., adherents of Qur’ānism are those who think the Qur’ān alone is the source of guidance and law in Islam. For more, see Aisha Y. Musa, “The Qur’anists,” Religion compass 4.1 (2010): 12–21. Fadlallah might be influenced by Quṭb’s idea of the Qur’ānic approach and by his use of the term in the singular form as he refers to the Sahāba “a Qur’ānian generation” (jīl Qur’ānī) in his Ma‘ālim fī al-Tārīq (Milestones), Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1979, 11–19.
example, he uses the terms ṭsā (Jesus), Naṣrāniyya (Christianity) and Naṣārā (Christians) in his books intended for Muslim readership but al-Masīḥ (Christ), al-Masīḥīyya (Christianity) and Masīḥīyyūn (Christians) in his books intended for Christian readership. This reflects Fadlallah’s sensitivity and awareness of the negative connotation of the first set of words for Arabic speaking Christians.

2.6. Use of persuasive devices

Rather than stating his arguments directly, Fadlallah uses a double-voiced discourse in his commentary as well as in his writings in general. This is done in order to lessen the perceived potential severity of the issue under consideration. The two voices evaluate the issue at hand in a divergent manner through rhetorical questions which, being Fadlallah’s predominant persuasive device, serve as a tool to arouse the audience’s interest and retain their attention. This device is congruent with the teaching methods used in the Shi‘i seminary lectures which situate the lecturer and the student in a kind of quasi-dialogue in which the questions are answered for the audience. Rhetorical questions open up a hermeneutical space and also serve as a shield of self-defense against adversaries. Through them, Fadlallah tackles the questions non-believers or skeptics are likely to ask and provides the answers to them beforehand. Some of the questions he poses are answered immediately after, but some are asked with other intentions in mind, such as setting a humorous, sarcastic, dramatic or reflective mood. Besides the persuasive utility of rhetorical questions, they can also serve, among other things, as a tool of elaboration. Through rhetorical questions, Fadlallah implies a familiarity and a possible understanding of others’ views and explicitly presents his individual answer.

To persuade his audience, Fadlallah uses some other persuasive devices such as repetition, Qur’anic parables, simile, contrast, and elucidating examples. He uses repetition extensively both on the lexical and the thematic levels of his writings to the extent of occasional circumlocution. This feature is seen in his prose and verse alike. Similarly, some of his arguments, sentences, and phrases are repeated almost verbatim on different

398 For example, FAHIM, 177, 197–198, compared to MWQ where Fadlallah uses the terms Masīḥīyya (Christianity) and al-dīn al-Masīḥī (the Christian faith) only once in the context of Q2:178 in MWQ3:221–222.


occasions. Another form of repetition in Fadlallah’s style is repetition through paraphrasing or summarizing. For example, after the Qur’ānic text has been presented, he paraphrases it in his own words using elucidating examples and parallel sentences. At the end of each section of verses, Fadlallah makes a summary of its main points and of the lessons to be learned from it. Besides, like Fadlallah’s other writings, MWQ teems with antinomies such as virtuous/wicked, justice/injustice, belief/unbelief, strength/weakness, guidance/misguidance, good/evil, arrogant/deprived, etc. The same is true for terms with social and political implications such as arrogance (ʿistikbār); dynamism (ḥaraka), justice (ʿadl), injustice (ẓulm), and deviation (inḥirāf) which are repeated over 2000 to 3000 times each in the commentary alone.

Furthermore, Fadlallah draws on the Qur’ānic stories to teach his audience through parables by comparing his Muslim audience to the protagonists of the Qur’ānic stories. This thought-provoking device, known as “equivalence of contexts,” is used to persuade or subtly influence the audience to learn from previous people in order to escape a similar fate. It also serves to relate the past to the present and to give a stronger contemporary meaning to the Qur’ānic message by drawing the similarities between the experience of the Qur’ān’s primary audience with the experience of the contemporary one.

2.7. Fadlallah’s exegetical approach

Fadlallah outlines the guidelines of his exegetical approach in the introduction to the second edition of MWQ, but he also depicts its principles and implementation throughout the commentary and in his other books and interviews. What follows here

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401 Speidl, Conceptualisation of power, 223–226.
402 MWQ23:156. passim.
403 MWQ23:158. passim.
406 MWQ3:196. passim.
408 MWQ20:53. passim.
411 MWQ1:5–21.
takes into consideration the major points of Fadlallah’s exegetical approach as explained on different occasions and in his various works. Fadlallah’s hermeneutical approach is based on a number of rules and principles he follows. This approach is strongly related to the way he conceives the Qur’ān itself and to the goal behind the exegetical enterprise. The Qur’ān, Fadlallah repeatedly states, is not to be read as a text which conveys “a certain linguistic meaning,” but ought to be read from the perspective of Islamic dynamism and ought to be understood in a dynamic way. The literalists, those who rely on the literal meaning of the text, cannot understand the Qur’ān. Only dynamic Muslims (al-Ḥarakiyyūn) who live the meaning of Islamic dynamism (al-Ḥarakiyya al-ʾIslāmiyya) can understand the Qur’ān. A dynamic Muslim understands the Qur’ān differently from the linguist, the psychologist, or the anthropologist. Those who do not live the spirit of the Qur’ān in the dynamism of life cannot understand it because they live in stagnation.

Fadlallah’s commentary uses the terms Ḥarakiyya and Ḥarakiyyūn about five thousand times in reference to the applicability of the Qur’ān socially and politically. A dynamic understanding and application of the Qur’ān is, thus, the core of Fadlallah’s exegetical approach, and therefore he summarizes the goal behind the compilation of MWQ as “an attempt to draw inspiration from the Qur’ān dynamic-wise [to build upon] in the present and in the future.” Fadlallah conceives of the Qur’ān as a Da’wa guidebook and as the constitution for a sound Islamic life.

413 Nadwa 1:235–236.
414 Nadwa 1:240.
415 Nadwa 1:235–236; IBAMAM, 296.
417 As well as other words derived from the same root ḤRK such as the adverb Ḥarakiyyan, i.e., “dynamically,” etc.
418 Nadwa 1:236.
2.8. The Qurʾān’s Arabic identity

The starting point of the exegetical activity, Fadlallah explains, is the Qurʾān’s Arabic identity\(^{420}\) as emphasized in several Qurʾānic verses.\(^ {421}\) The sound understanding of the Qurʾānic message depends on the understanding of its Arabicness which is set by a number of rules. This Arabic identity, however, is not limited only to its language but also to other aspects which go beyond the literal meaning of the terms such as its style, context, and artistic features.\(^ {422}\) The Arabic language uses literary devices and rhetorical features including figurative speech, and so does the Qurʾānic language.\(^ {423}\) When dealing with the Qurʾānic terms, one should take into consideration that the term is not just a dictionary entry but is loaded with connotations. Thus, the Qurʾānic text should not be understood through the dictionary because that would make it lifeless.\(^ {424}\) The more one lets the Qurʾān “move in reality,” i.e., put it into practice, the more one elevates it.\(^ {425}\) Fadlallah argues that understanding the Qurʾānic text through the dynamism of life is desirable because its meaning can have a larger scope which can be determined through customary understanding (\textit{al-fahm al-ʿurfī}) or customary taste (\textit{al-dawq al-ʿurfī}).\(^ {426}\) For this reason, interpreting the Qurʾān requires a broad linguistic background and an open-minded, rich literary knowledge\(^ {427}\) which enables the commentator to decide when to interpret the term literally and when to interpret it rhetorically.\(^ {428}\) The problem of many commentators, Fadlallah thinks, is that they understand “the Qurʾānic terms literally without considering the rhetorical, the allegorical and the metaphorical style which can be determined from the general context.”\(^ {429}\) These commentators, Fadlallah argues, freeze or limit the Qurʾān into one meaning.\(^ {430}\) It is the customary understanding (\textit{ʿurfī})\(^ {431}\) rather than the literal

\(^{420}\) MWQ1:6–8; Nadwa 1:239.

\(^{421}\) Q12:2, Q26:195, Q39:28, and Q41:3.

\(^{422}\) MWQ1:7; IBAMAM, 140.

\(^{423}\) MWQ3:117.


\(^{426}\) IBAMAM, 140.

\(^{427}\) Nadwa 3:482.

\(^{428}\) MWQ5:331.

\(^{429}\) MWQ10:28–29; IBAMAM, 131.

\(^{430}\) IBAMAM, 90–91.

(harfī) understanding of the Qurʾān that allows us to bring the ends into agreement with the means.432

The Arabic identity of the Qurʾān is tightly related to its clarity. The Qurʾān contains a message from God to all His people (al-ʾāmma)—not only to the elite (al-khāṣṣa).433 The Qurʾān does not contain even small portions that are symbolic or meant to be understood by the Prophet only,434 because “the Qurʾān is not a private letter from God to His Prophet containing concealed symbols which can be understood by the addressee only, as if the matter was about a private correspondence. The Qurʾān is a book of guidance for all people.”435 The Qurʾān is meant to be understood by every society and in all times. It is not an abstract436 nor a symbolic book that only a selected group of people can understand.437 Because God does not address people in words they do not apprehend, Fadlallah never tires of repeating, the Qurʾānic message is clear and understandable by anyone who has a good knowledge of the Arabic language, fine literary wellversedness438 and a “Qurʾānic culture.”439 These are prerequisites for the understanding and the interpretation of the Qurʾān in Fadlallah’s opinion. If these conditions are met in a person, the Qurʾān would be clear to him.

2.9. The clarity ambiguity dichotomy

The Qurʾān is the Islamic base which sets the concepts, terms, methods, means, and ends.440 Hence, any misunderstanding of its message will affect all of these matters.441 The clarity of the Qurʾānic message, stated in several of its verses,442 is thus of high

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433 MWQ1:9.
434 Fadlallah refers to al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s view that the Qurʾān can be understood independently from any other text but some of it is meant to be understood by the Prophet only.
435 MWQ20:139.
436 MWQ17:241.
437 MWQ1:6–8.
438 Nadwa 1:244.
439 Fadlallah, IBAMWM, 128.
440 Nadwa 1:149.
441 MWQ1:6.
442 Q4:26, Q6:55, Q24:46, Q2:219, Q2:242, Q2:187, Q2:221.
importance. Although Arabic terms can be polysemic, the Arabic term, in its context, can only have one meaning—that which comes first to people’s minds when they hear it, otherwise, understanding would be hindered. Furthermore, the multiplicity of meanings is contradictory to the general Arab atmosphere in which people spoke to be understood.

It is with this in mind that Fadlallah rejects the view that the Qurʾān has two strata of meaning, an apparent/exoteric (zahr/zāhir) meaning for lay people and a hidden/esoteric (baṭn/bāṭin) meaning for the elite. The Qurʾān, Fadlallah argues, speaks of all people when it refers to the revelations God has made clear for people (Q2:118), and urges all people to reflect upon it with phrases such as yataḍakkarūna, yatafakkarūna and yaʿqilūna. These verses do not limit the invitation to contemplate God’s Word to a specified group of people. However, what Fadlallah understands by the Qurʾān’s zahr/zāhir as juxtaposed to the Qurʾān’s baṭn/bāṭin is that the first refers to the meaning at the time of revelation in its specific audience while the second refers to its general meaning for the present and the future. Fadlallah argues that the exoteric meaning is specific while the esoteric meaning is general. For further specification, Fadlallah resorts to the Imāmi Ḥadīth of al-jary concerning the interpretation of the Qurʾān: “The Qurʾān flows in the life of people like the sun and the moon flow in the cosmos and like the night and the day.” In other words, the Qurʾānic text starts from a concrete meaning to reach an abstract one like in the exegetical example of Q5:32 “whoever saves a soul is as if he had saved mankind entirely.” In addition to the apparent meaning of the verse which is the importance of saving the life of a human being from death, the verse can have an additional connotation as well which is, as Fadlallah quotes the fifth Imam, al-Imām al-Bāqir’s, interpretation of the verse, saving the life of someone in the spiritual sense by guiding that person to the right path. The first interpretation takes the apparent denotation of the term

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443 MWQ1:7–8, 23.
444 Nadwa 1:239.
446 IBAMAM, 144.
447 MWQ1:12–17.
448 Q2:221, Q14:25, Q28:43, Q28:81, Q39:28, Q44:58.
449 Q7:176, Q10:24, Q13:3, Q16:11, Q16:44, Q16:69, Q30:21, Q39:42, Q45:13, etc.
450 Q2:164, Q2:170, Q2:171, Q5:58, Q5:103, Q8:22, Q10:42, Q10:100, Q13:4, etc.
451 MWQ1:9–10; IBAMAM, 143.
452 IBAMAM, 72 and 146–147.
454 Nadwa 1:240; IBAMAM, 146–147.
455 IBAMAM, 233–334.
‘save’ while the second one takes its moral connotation. On different occasions, Fadlallah stresses that the apparent meaning of the Qurʾān (ẓāhir al-Qurʾān) is always to be favored and that other interpretations should be considered only if “there is conclusive evidence from reason or from the prophetic narratives, and only if the interpretation is consistent with the norms of the Arabic language.”

2.10. Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihāt

The exegetical distinction between self-evident or unequivocal verses (muḥkamāt) and ambiguous or equivocal verses (mutashābihāt) is probably as old as the tafsīr activity itself. All Muslim schools of thought have taken part in the discussion of this distinction referred to in Q3:7. According to this verse, the Qurʾān contains both clear and ambiguous verses. This became the subject of fierce disagreements between scholars. As Abu Zayd notes, “what the Muʿtazilites consider as clear is considered as ambiguous by their opponents, and vice versa.” For Fadlallah, the fact that there are two categories of Qurʾānic verses, muḥkamāt and mutashābihāt, does not mean that the Qurʾān contains symbolism. In his interpretation of Q3:7, however, he states that the muḥkamāt verses are so clear in both terminology and meaning in a way that leaves no space for doubt while the mutashābihāt verses contain “some kind of ambiguity concerning the meanings that the terms might convey. This is because they are likely to convey a meaning different than the linguistically perceived from them. This might create some hesitation in regards to a number of perceptions.” However, the ambiguity of the mutashābihāt verses is clarified through muḥkamāt verses because the Qurʾān explains itself. Hence, Fadlallah’s exegetical principle is in conformity with all exegetes in all times. Like them, the

456 Nadwa 1:239.
458 MWQ1:18, MWQ2:45, MWQ 4:377.
461 MWQ1:9–10; IBAMAM, 143.
462 MWQ5:218.
463 Nadwa 1:245.
464 Jane McAuliffe presents the translation of Ibn Taymiyya’s opinion on the matter: “If someone asks, ‘What is the best method of interpretation?’ the answer is that the soundest method is that whereby the Qur’an is interpreted through the Qur’an. For what is summarily expressed in one place is expatiated upon in another. What is abridged in one place is elaborated upon in another.” Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “Ibn Taymiya: Treatise on the Principles of Tafsīr,” in Windows on the House of Islam: Muslim Sources on Spirituality and
Ayatollah holds explaining the Qurʾān through the Qurʾān (tafsīr al-Qurʾān bi al-Qurʾān) as the best of all interpretation methods because verses clarify and complement each other. For this reason, Fadlallah argues that the Qurʾānic verses should not be read as separate entities but as a unity in which each verse is part and parcel of the others in a perfect harmony. The Qurʾān might state one ruling in a particular verse and provide more details in another verse. In conformity with the general exegetical line, Fadlallah argues that sometimes the Qurʾān offers general views while the details are found in the Ḥadīth.

Because Fadlallah emphasizes the clarity of the Qurʾān on several occasions, one expects his interpretation of the Qurʾān to reflect this clarity and straightforwardness. However, he sometimes fails to meet this expectation especially when he enumerates different interpretations without taking a stand or when he combines two or more different reports and accepts both of them or makes the two become a seemingly coherent report. He also does not meet this expectation when he gives more than one possible interpretation for the verse leaving the decision to the reader with statements such as “one cannot assert authoritatively which of the possible meanings is the most correct. This term is loaded with connotations [...] Let us leave it to God!” In one particular case, after enumerating some of the explanations given by different exegetes, Fadlallah concluded: “in any case, God has made these words ambiguous [...] so let us be general in instances where God has been general, and stop at details when we have enough evidence to discuss the details because interpreting the Word of God is a major matter in which we should not be too lax to lean on a single opinion.”

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467 Kitāb al-Jihād, 218. Compare to Ibn Taymiyya’s “If that [finding more in other verses] defeats your efforts, then you should resort to the Sunna, for the Sunna is what explains the Qurʾān and elucidates it.” See McAuliffe, “Ibn Taymiyya: Treatise on the Principles of Tafsīr,” 36.
468 MWQ1:256.
469 MWQ6:52, MWQ6:77.
470 MWQ3:176.
471 MWQ2:240.
2.11. Intra- and extra-Qurʾānic context

As noted above, it is rather usual for the exegete to call for the help of other verses which contain similar terms or deal with the same theme. This way, more meanings or details are generated through intertextuality or through references to Ḥadīth.\textsuperscript{472} In addition to intertextuality, the context of verses or the “Qurʾānic atmosphere,”\textsuperscript{473} as Fadlallah calls it, is another key element in the exegetical activity.\textsuperscript{474} The Ayatollah argues that sticking to the context of the text at hand and making sure the interpretation is congruent with the context of the story protects the commentator from imposing his views or projecting his personal background on the Qurʾānic text because the starting point should always be the Qurʾān.\textsuperscript{475} The exegete, Fadlallah explains, “should not lead the Qurʾān but rather should let the Qurʾān lead him”\textsuperscript{476} because dogma should be taken from the Qurʾān, not the other way around.\textsuperscript{477} The Qurʾānic atmosphere is mainly the context provided by the Qurʾānic text itself, i.e., the setting that surrounds the words and the verses and the ideas discussed in the preceding and following passages.

2.12. Circumstances of revelation

While the intra-Qurʾānic context is highly pertinent to the interpretation of the verses, circumstances of revelation are not. In fact, Fadlallah argues that if one has the linguistic and literary knowledge required, one can understand the Qurʾān without the help of extra-Qurʾānic texts.\textsuperscript{478} Not every verse, Fadlallah highlights, has a circumstance or a reason for which it was revealed.\textsuperscript{479} The relationship between revelation and circumstances of revelation (\textit{Asbāb al-muzūl}) is not that of interdependency. Even the existence of circumstances of revelation does not mean that these verses depend on those given events

\textsuperscript{472} IBAMAM, 219.
\textsuperscript{473} Nadwa 1:302; MWQ5:305, MWQ19:270, \textit{passim}.
\textsuperscript{474} Fadlallah uses different Arabic terms in reference to the intra-Qurʾānic context such as (\textit{sīyāq}), (\textit{al-Jaww al-Qurʾānī}), and (\textit{ajwāʾ al-ʾāyāt}).
\textsuperscript{475} MWQ10:238.
\textsuperscript{477} IBAMAM, 234–236.
\textsuperscript{478} MWQ1:18.
\textsuperscript{479} Nadwa 1:316.
or that they would not have been revealed if those events had not happened. Because the Word of God is not rigid, its meaning does not remain confined “within the so called Asbāb al-Nuzūl.” Just as in the case of Ḥadīth, Fadlallah does not consider the circumstances of revelation narratives a trustworthy source of information for several reasons: either because their chain of transmission (isnad) is weak or because they represent a cultural perception or a personal opinion. Sometimes, their actual text (matn) contains pejorative accounts of the Prophet which Fadlallah finds unacceptable. Hence, Fadlallah usually scrutinizes these narratives and discusses them before deciding whether to use them or reject them. He compares the narratives with the Qurʾān and takes only those he considers in harmony with its message. Thus, it is safe to argue for the superiority of matn over isnād in Fadlallah’s exegetical work. One should not hasten to quote the narratives, Fadlallah clarifies, but should contemplate not only the sanad but also the matn of the narrative in order not to turn the halāl into harām or vice versa and in order not to falsely attribute an account to the Prophet. Fadlallah notes that it is very important for the activity of tafsīr to differentiate between “what is correct and what is corrupt” and between “what is sensible and what is preposterous.”

Fadlallah summarizes his conception of the exegetical function of Asbāb al-Nuzūl as follows:

Knowing the meaning of the verse does not depend on knowing its occasions of revelation. [...] Often, the occasions of revelation do not add to the clarity of the idea. Hence, in the understanding of the Qurʾān, one should emphasize the examination of the rhetorical concepts independently without all the other narratives. After that, one should attempt to study the occasions of revelation for their exegetical connotations. [...] This way, one gets rid of many of the conceptional problems which impose themselves on the Islamic thought through the Isrāʿīliyyāt. [Whoever inserted these details into the tradition] aimed

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480 Nadwa 1:318–320.
481 MWQ1:26; IBAMAM, 77.
482 MWQ6:100–116.
483 MWQ6:116.
484 MWQ7:336.
485 MWQ8:80–81, MWQ8:324.
486 MWQ1:24.
487 For more on matn and isnād in tafsīr, see Herbert Berg, The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period, Routledge, 2013.
489 MWQ4:377.
at subjecting the Qurʾān to the main lines of the Isrāʾīliyyāt-related thought."\(^{490}\)

Fadlallah shares the same skepticism towards the Isrāʾīliyyāt and Asbāb al-Nuzūl with other modern exegetes such as his compatriot Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyya\(^{491}\) and the Egyptian Muḥammad Rashīd Reḍā.\(^{492}\) Like Mughniyya, Fadlallah also thinks that one cannot be sure of the authenticity of Asbāb al-Nuzūl.\(^{493}\) He elaborates further that they are not properly documented and that some of their content is implausible. Furthermore, “they might be merely personal opinions (iḥtīāḥ shakhṣī) presented as a narrative.”\(^{494}\) The Ayatollah clarifies further that he does not base his Qurʾānic exegesis on these narratives but examines them for reference only to gain knowledge of the way early exegetes understood or analyzed the Qurʾān.\(^{495}\)

2.13. Primacy of the Qurʾān over other sources

Fadlallah criticizes the scholars who think that the Qurʾān can only be understood through Ḥadīth\(^{496}\) and those who interpret the Qurʾān in order to back up Ḥadīth, giving the latter primacy over the former.\(^{497}\) Unlike them, Fadlallah gives the Qurʾān primacy over Ḥadīth\(^{498}\) because the former is immutable and incorruptible\(^{499}\) unlike the latter.\(^{500}\) The prophetic tradition is the second source for the understanding of the Qurʾān but, despite all


\(^{491}\) Al-Kāshīf 1:14: “I consider the Isrāʾīliyyāt included in some commentaries to be myths and legends. The mere attribution to “Israel” is a proof about its falsehood.” Muhammad Jawad Mughniyya, al-Tafsīr al-Kāshīf, Volumes 1–7, Beirut: Dār al-Anwār, 2009.

\(^{492}\) Al-Manār 1:7: “… the excessive use of narratives mixed with the Isrāʾīliyyāt myths …”

\(^{493}\) Al-Manār 1:7: “… the excessive use of narratives mixed with the Isrāʾīliyyāt myths …”


\(^{495}\) IBAMAM, 138.


\(^{497}\) IBAMAM, 138.


\(^{499}\) IBAMAM, 129.

\(^{500}\) MWQ1:24.
the tremendous efforts of Muslim scholars to clean it of unauthentic materials, the authenticity of prophetic and Imāmi narratives remains a major problem.\textsuperscript{501} The primacy of the Qurʾān above the other sources does not mean the relegation of Ḥadīth. However, Fadlallah scrutinizes every narrative and tests it against the Qurʾān even if it is included in the Šahīḥ collections.\textsuperscript{502} If a Ḥadīth contradicts or disagrees with the Qurʾān, it is deemed unauthentic.\textsuperscript{503} Fadlallah backs this view with the Ḥadīth transmitted from Ali according to which “Above every truth there is a greater verity, and above every correctness there is a light. Thus, whatever agrees with the Book of God, adopt it, and whatever contradicts the Book of God, discard it.”\textsuperscript{504} Another issue, Fadlallah worries about, is that narratives can sometimes impact the reading and the understanding\textsuperscript{505} of the Qurʾān or limit it.\textsuperscript{506} The meaning of a Qurʾānic verse, Fadlallah explains, should not be constrained with one narrative especially if it is directed to one person because the message of the Qurʾān is directed to all humankind. There is also no need to use the narratives to find out more knowledge about certain verses unless there is enough evidence of their authenticity.\textsuperscript{507} Fadlallah specifies that assessing the authenticity of narratives is highly important both in terms of the text (matn) and the transmission chain (sanad).\textsuperscript{508}

### 2.14. Reason and rationality

Throughout his works, Fadlallah emphasizes the importance of reason, which he considers “the foundation on which one conceives God and discovers His oneness.”\textsuperscript{509} Indeed, reason and common sense are just as important a criterion for a good grasp of the Qurʾānic text in Fadlallah’s theology.\textsuperscript{510} If a narrative or an interpretation does not seem sensible or

\textsuperscript{501} IBAMAM, 132.
\textsuperscript{502} IBAMAM, 132.
\textsuperscript{504} IBAMAM, 305–306.
\textsuperscript{505} MWQ7:336.
\textsuperscript{506} IBAMAM, 75.
\textsuperscript{507} IBAMAM, 76.
\textsuperscript{508} See 2.12 above for more on the supremacy of matn over sanad.
\textsuperscript{509} FAHIM, 29.
\textsuperscript{510} IBAMAM, 220–225. Fadlallah adheres to Shiʿism’s Uṣūlī school (rationalist) which emphasizes the use of reason (ʿaql) and deductive reasoning (ijtihad). See Moojan Momen, An introduction to Shiʿi Islam: the
logical, it should be discarded.\textsuperscript{511} Reason to him cannot be in disagreement with the Qur’ān, because the Qur’ān came to address reason and because reason is the way that leads to knowing God.\textsuperscript{512} Moreover, Fadlallah suggests reason can also play a role in assessing the heritage and cleansing it of all the mistakes and inaccuracies it is likely to contain; otherwise one will fall into imitation (\textit{taqlīd}) and submission to a past which might have gained a false sacredness.\textsuperscript{513} Quoting Abu Ḥanīfa al-Nu’mān, Fadlallah says about earlier exegetes and scholars: “\textit{They are humans, and so are we!}”\textsuperscript{514} In another context, he argues that “\textit{history should be read as if no one has read it before}” and without underestimating previous works, texts should be read independently without sanctifying what is not sacred.\textsuperscript{515} Reason to him cannot be in disagreement with the Qur’ān, because the Qur’ān came to address reason and because reason is the way that leads to knowing God. In fact, reason is the way that leads to God.\textsuperscript{519} Additionally, Fadlallah argues that the deduction of meaning should seek the spirit rather than the letter of the Islamic law. He also stresses the importance of the best interest (\textit{maṣlaḥa}) of Muslims and the respect of \textit{maqāṣid} \textit{al-shari'a} (objectives of Islamic law) in the exegetical exercise.\textsuperscript{520}


\textsuperscript{511} MWQ10:87. Fadlallah rejects a narrative which states that people are created believers and unbelievers. He thinks this narrative cannot be authentic because it is not logical: If people’s belief and unbelief was chosen for them beforehand, what is the use of sending prophets, he asks.

\textsuperscript{512} Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, Bayna al-‘aql wa al-Naṣṣ, Rawāfid, \textit{Al-Arabiyya} TV channel, 9 July 2004.

\textsuperscript{513} IBAMAM, 180–181.

\textsuperscript{514} In another context, he says about earlier exegetes and scholars: “\textit{They are humans, and so are we!}”


\textsuperscript{519} In Arabic: “\textit{Inṭarimū ‘uṣālakum!}”

\textsuperscript{520} The general rule of \textit{fiqh} \textit{al-maqāṣid} is that in the event of a conflict arising between benefits and harms (\textit{al-maṣāliḥa} \textit{wa-al-maṣāliḥ}) preventing evil should be given priority over attracting benefits (\textit{dar’} \textit{al-mafāṣid} \textit{awla} min \textit{jalb} \textit{al-maṣāliḥ}). IBAMAM, 82–83.
Even though he sometimes arrives at different exegetical outcomes, Fadlallah’s exegetical approach does not differ theoretically from mainstream Shi‘ism. Indeed, Fadlallah’s approach, as Miqdaad Versi puts it, “amounts to an alternative application of the common legal principles rather than an approach which is fundamentally different.”521 Additionally, Fadlallah does not go against the traditional legal principles but thinks within them without “the authority or the mentality of the past. [...] He is a traditionalist who adds a brick here and takes off a brick there,”522 as al-Husseini puts it. His innovation is in his realism and peerless attention to contemporary issues and his endeavor to suggest solutions to the problems of present day Islamic society which are in accordance with the Qur’ān and the tradition but, at the same time, take into consideration the conditions and needs of today.523 Fadlallah also takes scientific and technical developments into consideration, forms his opinions and changes them accordingly.524 He repeatedly tries to demonstrate the liveliness, rationality, applicability, and actuality of the Qur’ānic message and maintains that “the Qur’ān is part of a gradual intellectual, political, social and jihadist movement. [...] Qur’ānic verses reflect society and offer solutions to current issues.”525

2.15. Linguistic and Scientific approaches to the interpretation of the Qur’ān

Fadlallah followed some of the discussions about the use of linguistic theories in the interpretation of the Qur’ān but was not impressed by them.526 He, for example, thinks that the use of De Saussure’s signified and signifier theory by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd527 makes the interpreter impose his subjectivity on the text. Fadlallah also disagrees with the “syncretistic school” (al-Madrasa al-Tawfīqiyya) of interpretation led by Muhammad

524 For example, Fadlallah issued a fatwa stating the sinfulness of smoking based on the scientific findings that smoking is harmful to health and leads to death.
526 IBAMAM, 170–180, 231.
Abduh and Rashid Reda which blends different ideas and theories together.\textsuperscript{528} He finds their emphasis on the metaphysical content of the Qur’an unscientific and their hermeneutical understanding unfounded.\textsuperscript{529} Fadlallah rejects the interpretation of the Qur’an using methods that are not Islamic or based on Western philosophy.\textsuperscript{530} As for the scientific and numerical inimitability (al-i’jāz al-’ilmī & al-i’jāz al-’adadī) of the Qur’an,\textsuperscript{531} Fadlallah finds them amusing (tārīfā) but thinks the inimitability of the Qur’an is related to its high eloquence not to numbers or scientific findings God’s Word might allude to.\textsuperscript{532} Fadlallah argues that the Qur’an’s miraculousness lies in its rhetorical inimitability (al-i’jāz al-bayānī) which gives it a life-changing power.\textsuperscript{533} He also disagrees with the interpretation of the Qur’an based on scientific theories because these theories, unlike the Qur’an, change.\textsuperscript{534} Trying to impose modern scientific findings on the Qur’an is a bad idea because many scientific theories which were considered scientific certainties proved to be false later on. The exegete might not be able to check these scientific perceptions, hence, should not subjugate the Qur’anic content to them.\textsuperscript{535} This approach is also wrong, Fadlallah adds, because exegesis is about finding out the meaning of the Qur’anic text through the Qur’an’s own linguistic and cultural content and within the scope of certain rules such as allegory, metaphor, and so forth, and not through interpretational artificiality. Although some of the Qur’anic content might be related to natural, social or psychological concepts, Fadlallah admits, exegetes should base their interpretation firmly

\textsuperscript{528} MWQ24:422–423.
\textsuperscript{529} IBAMAM, 178.
\textsuperscript{530} MWQ9:382.
\textsuperscript{531} MWQ9:382.
\textsuperscript{532} Some Muslim researchers try to prove that the Qur’an has predicted several scientific findings before human civilization found them out. Others think that the Qur’an contains numerical miracles. For example, that the word day (yām) occurs 365 times in the Qur’an which is the number of days in a year and that the word month (shahr) occurs 12 times. Another example of this supposed miraculousness is that both the words dunyā and ākhārā occur 115 times. The list of examples is long. Among the many works devoted to scientific exegesis of the Qur’an: ʿAbd al-Razzaq Nawfal, \textit{Min al-ʾāyat al-ʾIlmiyya fi al-Qurʾān al-Karīm} (Some of the Scientific Verses), Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1989; Ahmad Ḥanafi, \textit{Ma jizat al-Qurʾān fi Wasf al-Kāʾināt: al-Tafsīr al-ʾIlmi ʾl-ʾāyat al-Kawnīyya} (Scientific Exegesis of the Cosmic Verses), Cairo: Matbaʿat al-ʿArabī, 1954; ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ismāʿīl, \textit{al-ʾIsla m wa al-Ṭibb al-Hadīth} (Islam and the Modern Medicine), Cairo: Matbaʿat al-ʿArabī, 1938. See also Raḥf Abū al-Suʿūd, \textit{Iʾjāz Ḥadīthah ʾIlmiyya wa Raqamiyya fī al-Qurʾān} (Modern Scientific and Numerical Miraculousness in the Qur’an), Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifā, 1991.
\textsuperscript{533} MWQ1:176–177. Aisha Abd al-Rahman (best known as Bint al-Shāṭi’), for example, has dedicated some of her work to this idea. See, for example, her \textit{al-Iʾjāz al-Bayānī ʾl-ʾāyat al-Qurʾān wa Masāʾil Nāfīʿ b. al-Azraq} (The Qur’an’s Rhetorical Inimitability and the Questions of Nāfiʿ b. al-Azraq), Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1971.
\textsuperscript{534} IBAMAM, 47.
\textsuperscript{535} MWQ24:76.
on the nature of both the Arabic language and the understanding of the content.\textsuperscript{536} This, however, does not mean closing the door on new possibilities of understanding.\textsuperscript{537}

Fadlallah argues that a good knowledge of the Arabic language should allow a good understanding of the Qurʾān. However, it seems that such an understanding requires much more than a decent education. In reference to Shahrur’s modern views on the interpretation of the Qurʾān,\textsuperscript{538} Fadlallah states: “the problem of Muhammad Shahrur is that he is not Qurʾānically or juristically cultured neither is he well versed in the Arabic language.”\textsuperscript{539} With such a statement, Fadlallah implies that, for any attempt to understand and interpret the Qurʾān, a religious education and an excellent linguistic background is required.

Although Fadlallah speaks against scientific inimitability (\textit{al-i\textsuperscript{2}jāz}), he still refers to it occasionally. Sometimes, without giving a reference to the study itself, Fadlallah refers to some “\textit{scientific findings}” which prove that the Islamic ban of certain products is closely linked to their damage to human health. For example, the Qurʾānic ban on the consumption of blood and pork is explained by the health issues they cause. This argument is backed with some “\textit{scientific data}” which is repeated in several commentaries and Islamic books. According to these works, consuming blood causes anaemia, nausea, fever, diarrhea, joint pain, nervous tension, itching, grease gathering inside the body, and fatigue, as well as difficulty in chewing, swallowing and breathing.\textsuperscript{540} In reference to the Quranic ban on pork meat consumption, Fadlallah draws on “\textit{scientific proof}” that it contains 400 worms (\textit{Trichinella spiralis}) which harm human health and cause “\textit{moral decadence and sexual dissolution}.”\textsuperscript{541}

\textsuperscript{536} Even some of the critics of scientific exegesis occasionally refer to scientific information in the Qurʾān. See, for example, Qutb’s \textit{Fi Zilāl al-Qurʾān} 5:3095 and 6:3878). Even Fadlallah himself refers to some of these scientific findings which explain some verses, for example, in his interpretation of the following verses: Q79:29, Q89:1–10, Q87:3, Q82:7, Q81:6, Q80:25, Q75:4, Q56:75, Q55:5, Q55:23, Q51:7, Q39:5, Q34:46, Q18:86, Q16:97.

\textsuperscript{537} IBAMAM, 130–132


\textsuperscript{539} Fadlallah, IBAMAM, 315.

\textsuperscript{540} MWQ3:190.

\textsuperscript{541} MWQ3:190–191.
Several researchers have pointed out the comparatively ecumenical nature of Fadlallah’s commentary. Sankari expands this ecumenism to all of the Ayatollah’s works and goes as far as to argue that “The thrust of his discussion, and the nature of his language and tone, leave the impression of a work that was written by an objective Islamic writer, rather than by a Shī‘ī in the particularistic sense.” In MWQ, Fadlallah does not explicitly emphasize the Shī‘ī identity of the commentary, its compiler or its audience. The exegete shows an interest in intra-Islamic rapprochement, does not attack Sunni Islam and does not use particularly strong Shī‘ī jargon. This does not mean, however, that the Shī‘ī aspect is absent from this commentary. On the contrary, it is present especially when Fadlallah discusses issues pivotal to Shī‘ism such as infallibility (ʿisma) or dissimulation (taqiyya) and when he defends Shī‘ī thought against Sunni criticism. Already in his interpretation of the first Sūra, Fadlallah refers to the misunderstanding of and the misinformation about Shī‘ism in the writings of Sunni Muslims. Fadlallah mostly refutes Sunni accusations against Shī‘ī Muslims discreetly through phrases such as “some people” and “many writers” in reference to Sunni scholars and “a given Islamic school of thought” in reference to Shī‘ism. However, Fadlallah explicitly criticizes the Salafi school of thought, Wahhabism in particular, for the misconceptions it spreads about Shī‘ism and does not hide his discontent with Quṭb’s interpretation of Q5:90 and reference to ‘Ali’s misciting of the Qur’ān under the influence of wine: “If it was not that Sayyid Quṭb had included

543 Sankari, Fadlallah, 102. It should be noted that this is not true of all Fadlallah’s works—the works intended for his Shī‘ī audience naturally carry a clear Shī‘ī aspect. On the other hand, the Ayatollah’s works intended for a broader audience are not particularly Shī‘ī.
544 MWQ20:218.
546 MWQ8:326.
548 MWQ13:146–147.
549 MWQ1:59–60.
such a narrative in his Fī Ẓilāl al-Qurʾān, I would not have mentioned it for it is too ridiculous to be discussed.”

Expectedly, and echoing his teacher al-Khūʾī (d. 1992), Fadlallah tackles some of the problematic issues related to the intra-Islamic polemics and accusations concerning the falsification of the Qurʾān and the variant readings (qirāʾāt) which are normally discussed in several Shīʿi commentaries on the Qurʾān. Keeping with Q15:9 “We have sent down the Qurʾān and We will surely guard it,” the Ayatollah argues at length that the Qurʾān has not been distorted and is incorruptible. Fadlallah defends the integrity of the Qurʾān to the degree of equating such allegations with unbelief. He also denies the existence of Mushaf al-Zahrāʾ, a supposedly Shīʿi version of the Qurʾān, and argues that this accusation is part of an agenda against Shīʿi Muslims and that such a book does not exist anywhere in the World. He even accuses the USA of spreading such an allegation: “America must be for something! Did not America use so many people to keep Muslims in a state of animosity and discord?” It has to be noted that although Fadlallah follows al-Ṭūsī’s (d. 1067) and al-Ṭabrisī’s (1153) views about the integrity of the Qurʾān, he is different from them in that he does not discuss whether the Qurʾān, as it is today, is complete or not.

Sometimes Fadlallah finds himself caught between a Shīʿi audience which insists on emphasizing these Shīʿi aspects and between his more conciliatory ecumenical interpretations. He explains, for instance, that some of the Shīʿi additions to the Qurʾānic text serve as exegetical tools and are not to be read as part of the Qurʾānic text itself nor

550 MWQ8:326.
551 Mahmoud Ayoub explains that, for example, al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067), who compiled his commentary at a time of stability, denied the idea of falsification of the Qurʾān while al-Kāshānī (d. 1429), who compiled his commentary during rough times, did the reverse, although he also concluded “by way of respect of the tradition” that the Qurʾān as it is now is the Word of God if interpreted correctly. Ayoub, The Speaking Qurʾān and the Silent Qurʾān, 189–191. Meir Bar-Asher summarizes the fluctuations in the views expressed in Shīʿi exegesis back and forth between arguing for the tahrīf of the Qurʾān and against it in the pre-Būyid period, the Būyid, and the late Saʿfvid periods. Meir Bar-Asher, Introduction, 85. See also Rainer Brunner, “The Dispute About the Falsification of the Qurʾān Between Sunnīs and Shīʿīs in the 20th Century,” In Studies in Arabic and Islam. S. Leder with H. Kilpatrick, B. Martel-Thoumian and H. Schonig, eds, Leuven: Peeters, 2002, 437–446.
555 MWQ13:146.
be considered a different Shīʿi version of the holy book. “When people say: ‘Those who do wrong [to Muhammad’s family] will soon know how terrible their end will be,’ or when they say ‘God sufficed the believers in fighting [with Ἄλη] it does not mean that the words between brackets have been inserted into the verses.”558

The variant readings (qirāʾāt) are used by many Shīʿi exegetes as an argument that the Qurʾān was falsified.559 The essential idea in early Twelver Shīʿism is that some changes have been introduced to the “original Qurʾān” such as the alteration of some words and the deletion of others. The variant readings are also discussed in most Twelver Shīʿi commentaries especially in verses thought to have originally had Imāma-backing content.560 Hence, certain variants are favored above others. Fadlallah uses qirāʾāt sparingly and takes a clear stand in defense of the textus receptus.561 On the other hand, some of the verses that are considered important to Shīʿis are simply left uncommented. For example, in the case of the twelve “naqībs” of the Children of Israel mentioned in Q5:12 and equated with the twelve Imams of the Shīʿa in classical Shīʿi exegesis, Fadlallah keeps his interpretation of the verse brief and alludes to the exegetes’ disagreement about its meaning but does not find attempting to identify these groups of great use.562

Fadlallah’s commentary on a number of verses of high importance to Shīʿi thought and theology seems to follow al-Khūʾī’s (d. 1992) interpretation to a great extent.563 However, the Ayatollah is criticized for his prudence vis-à-vis the use of ahl al-bayt narratives in his MWQ especially in cases which are conventionally given a Shīʿite aspect in Shīʿi exegesis.564 A good example of this is his interpretation of Q13:43 ﴾وَمَنْ عِيْبَةَ عَلَّمَ الْكِتَابِ﴿ “and

558 Nadwa 1:271.
561 Fadlallah refers to the qirāʾ āt in the context of verse Q3:110 ʿUmma/ aʾimma; in the context of Q6:74–79 liʾabīhi/ abun lāhum; and Q5:6 arjulakum/arjulikum.
562 MWQ8:84.
563 The most important examples are: Q13:43: “And he who has knowledge of the Scripture.”; Q3:110: “You are the best nation produced for mankind.”; and Q3:7: “And no one knows its interpretation except God and those firm in knowledge say, ‘We believe in it. All is from our God.’ And no one will be reminded except those of understanding.”
564 IBAMAM, 74.
whoever has knowledge of the Scripture” which is understood by many Shi‘i exegetes to refer to Ali\textsuperscript{565} or to the Imams.\textsuperscript{566} This meaning, Fadlallah argues, is impossible because the context does not allow it. Moreover, such symbolic interpretations change the meaning of the Qur’ānic text totally or make it a book that can be understood by a closed circle only.\textsuperscript{567} To him, these types of interpretations throw perplexity into the artistic level of the Qur’ānic text.\textsuperscript{568} In his exegetical treatment of the Qur’ānic phrase “whoever has knowledge of the Scripture,” Fadlallah explains that it refers to the People of the Book leaving the opinions of other Shi‘i scholars unmentioned.\textsuperscript{569}

In the case of Q3:110 “You are the best nation produced for mankind,” Fadlallah resorts to grammatical argumentation against the variant reading suggested by Shī‘i scholars who prefer to read the word Umma (أُمَّةٌ), i.e., community, as a’imma (أَئِمَّة), i.e., Imams.\textsuperscript{570} Fadlallah argues that this reading would cause the sentence to be grammatically incorrect because in such a reading, the verb should not be in the third person feminine singular but in the third person masculine plural like so: (أَفْتَرَى مُحَرَّكَتَ أَئِمَّةٍ لِّلَّدَاسِ). Grammar, eloquence and good style should always be taken into consideration in the exegetical exercise, Fadlallah argues.\textsuperscript{571} In another context, Fadlallah argues against the claim that the verse above was distorted and emphasizes that Shi‘i Muslims have circulated the same Mushaf as Sunni Muslims and, if there were any distortions at all, they concerned interpretation (tafsīr) not revelation (tanzīl).\textsuperscript{572} Furthermore, the Ayatollah dedicates a few pages to discussing Goldziher’s ideas on how Shī‘a changed the word Umma into a’imma.\textsuperscript{573} He refutes his views and hints at his malicious intention, calling him “the Jewish orientalist.”\textsuperscript{574} The Ayatollah argues that this reading is not widespread among the Shī‘a and that there are only one or two narratives in this direction. Despite these narratives, Shi‘i Muslims did not change the words in their Mushaf and none of them believe that the Qur’ān was distorted.\textsuperscript{575}

\textsuperscript{565} For example, al-Qummī (d. 919), al-Ṭabrīsī (d. 1154), and al-Kāshānī (d. 1429).
\textsuperscript{566} Al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067), for example.
\textsuperscript{567} IBAMAM, 134.
\textsuperscript{568} IBAMAM, 233.
\textsuperscript{569} MWQ13:71.
\textsuperscript{570} On the variant readings of this verse by classical Imāmī exegetes, see Meir Bar-Asher, Scripture and Exegesis, 101–102 and idem, “Variant Readings and Additions of the Imāmī-Shī‘a to the Qur’ān,” 39–74.
\textsuperscript{571} MWQ6:215–216 and IBAMAM, 220–225.
\textsuperscript{572} MWQ6:217.
\textsuperscript{573} MWQ6:217–221.
\textsuperscript{574} The terms orientalism and orientalist have negative connotations in all Fadlallah’s writings. Combining the terms Jewish and orientalist emphasizes this negative charge.
\textsuperscript{575} MWQ6:217.
The third example is Q3:7, a verse where scholars disagree about both its reading\textsuperscript{576} and its meaning. Some think the verse should be read with a pause after the word “God” and start a new sentence from “and those firm in knowledge” like so: “And no one knows its interpretation except God. And those firm in knowledge say, ‘We believe in it.’” In this case, the verse means that no one knows the interpretation of the Qurʾān except God. The second sentence just states that ‘those firm in knowledge’ believe in the Qurʾān but they do not know the meanings of its ambiguous parts. The other exegetical view, that of Mujāhid (d. 722), for example, is that the pause should be put after ‘those firm in knowledge’ like so: “And no one knows its interpretation except God and those firm in knowledge. They say, ‘We believe in it.’” In this reading, the verse means that both God and those firm in knowledge know the interpretation of the Qurʾān. In this case, the waw in (wa al-rāṣikhūna) ‘And those firm in knowledge’ is considered a coordinating conjunction (حَرْفُ عَلَى) while it is considered presumptive (لاً اَتَّبَعَ) in the first case. Fadlallah leans towards the second reading variant which ends the first sentence of Q3:7 at ‘We believe in it’ but he expresses this opinion in a rather ambiguous way. He thinks that if the first variant reading is the correct one, then the verse speaks about the unseen which only God knows.\textsuperscript{577} In his commentary on this verse,\textsuperscript{578} Fadlallah states that the interpretation of the Qurʾān cannot be known to God only\textsuperscript{579} and wonders in another context “what is the benefit from limiting the understanding of the Qurʾān to ‘those firm in knowledge’?”\textsuperscript{580}

2.17. Conclusion

Like other commentators, Fadlallah presents his interpretation “against the backdrop of the consensually accepted tradition”\textsuperscript{581} of Qurʾānic exegesis but adds his own voice to it—or sometimes just a finely different tone. More often than not, Fadlallah does not mind accumulating different accounts and exegetical voices together thereby leaving the door open to multiple possibilities of interpretation or understanding. At the same time, he does not hesitate ruling out some occasions of revelation as mere personal opinions of the

\textsuperscript{576} For a concise overview of the variant readings of this verse, see Hussein Abdul-Raouf, Theological Approaches to Qurʾānic Exegesis: A Practical Comparative-Contrastive Analysis, London: Routledge, 2012, 125–126.

\textsuperscript{577} Nadwa 1:244.

\textsuperscript{578} MWQ5:215–242.

\textsuperscript{579} MWQ5:220–221.

\textsuperscript{580} IBAMAM, 144–145.

\textsuperscript{581} McAuliffe, Qurʾānic Christians, 291.
exegetes. As Massimo Campanini states, one of the major aspects in modern commentaries is the practical dimension of interpreting the Qurʾān in its relationship with society and human relations.582 Fadlallah’s commentary on the Qurʾān is a case in point, as it emphasizes this aspect and holds the Qurʾān to be a guidebook for life and for politics.

Fadlallah’s aim behind compiling this commentary was changing a situation in which the Qurʾān had become merely a talisman or an item for good omen for contemporary Muslim societies.583 He strived to restore it to its original function as “the [guide]book of civilization, the handbook of progress and the starting point of innovation.”584 With this in mind, Fadlallah stresses the importance of understanding the Qurʾānic message as well as the importance of putting it to practice in everyday life. He insists that the understanding and application of its message are in fact correlated matters. Indeed, Fadlallah argues that the main goal of the exegetical activity is to find in the Qurʾān solutions to the problems and challenges of modern-day Muslim societies. Although the Qurʾān addressed issues related to events in the time of the Prophet, the same verses hold a general message for all times and are, hence, applicable to the present and the future.585 Fadlallah insists that the current context should be taken into consideration when undertaking exegetical activity. An exegete who is not well informed about his nation’s challenges and difficulties cannot interpret the Qurʾān for he will not understand it to begin with. Engaging in the interpretation of the Qurʾān requires a deep knowledge of the Arabic language, Qurʾānic sciences, as well as an interest and understanding of modern sciences and the political situation of the Islamic society. Fadlallah himself could show through his MWQ that he is philologically, scientifically, and politically well versed and well read. Like most modern exegetes, the Ayatollah takes part in the discussion of a wide range of contemporary subjects from scientific discoveries to social crises and political issues.

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583 IBAMAM, 4. Fadlallah uses almost the same words as Qutb in his *Maʿrakatunā Maʿ a al-Yahūd*, 38–42.
585 IBAMAM, 79.
3. The Last Testament and the Last Religion

The Qur’ānic attitude towards other monotheistic religions and their scriptures is rather ambivalent which sets the stage for an even greater ambivalence in the *tafsīr* literature. Some of the Qur’ānic references to the People of the Book and to their scriptures are sometimes conflicting. Several verses in the Qur’ān claim a conformity of its message with that of its predecessors but there are also other verses which allude to differences, to deviations, and to distortions. Likewise, some verses praise the People of the Book while others criticize them or even condemn them.

What the Qur’ān and the *tafsīr* literature seem to be clear and unanimous about is the link between the Qur’ān and the previous scriptures. The Qur’ān presents itself as a continuity to the Torah and the Gospel, but also as a more updated, perfect and final scripture which constitutes a revelatory closure. This is where clarity and unanimity end because Muslim exegetes are not of one mind concerning the remaining issues such as the salvation of Kitābīs or the validity of their scriptures after the advent of the Qur’ān. Hence, we cannot find straightforward answers to these issues either in the Qur’ān or in the *tafsīr* literature. In fact, there are disagreements starting with the Qur’ānic term *islām* itself. The root of this term *s-l-m* designates both submission and the religious system itself known today as Islam which partially explains the disagreement between exegetes and scholars in its interpretation. For the sake of clarity, the Arabic term *islām* is preferred to *Islam* in the following discussion. The gerundial term ‘*islām*’ occurs eight times in the Qur’ān three of which, namely Q3:19, 3:85 and 5:3 have been central in Muslim exegetes’ discussion of the attainment of salvation through other monotheistic religions as well as in the discussion of the supersession of Islam over Judaism and Christianity. While these verses

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586 Q2:41, 3:3, 4:47, 5:48 etc.
587 Q3:50.
seem to limit salvation to \textit{islām}, we find passages in the Qurʾān which extend the salvific promise to the adherents of different religions such as Q2:62 and Q5:69.\footnote{While Q2:62 and Q5:69 are almost exact parallels, Q22:17 is equally important despite its ambivalence or perhaps because of it. In the first two verses, the terms ‘Christians’ and ‘Sabians’ are placed in a different order while the third case has a different ending.} In the following, I will discuss how Fadlallah interprets these Qurʾānic texts and how he uses them to approach salvation, abrogation, and supersession. These concepts are intertwined and interrelated but I attempt to discuss them separately for the sake of clarity.

3.1. \textbf{Islām}

Verily the right religion with God is \textit{islām}. Those to whom the Book had been revealed differed among themselves only after Knowledge had come to them, competing in rivalry with one another. Whoso blasphemes against God’s revelations, God is swift at reckoning. \textbf{Q3:19}

Whoever desires a religion other than \textit{islām}, it shall not be accepted from him; and in the afterlife, he will be among the losers. \textbf{Q3:85}

Today I have perfected your religion; and I have completed My favor upon you; and I have approved for you \textit{islām} as a religion. \textbf{Q5:3}

The \textit{islām} mentioned in the verses above as ‘\textit{the only religion acceptable in the sight of God}’ and as ‘\textit{the religion God has approved for people}’ has been the subject of long discussions in exegetical works throughout the history of the field.\footnote{A thorough study of the term \textit{islām} can be found in Jane Idleman Smith, \textit{An Historical and Semantic Study of the Term ‘Islām’ as Seen in a Sequence of Qurʾān Commentaries}, Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975, as well as al-Faruqi’s intermittently harsh and unfair critique of W. C. Smith’s interpretation of Islam: Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, “The Essence of Religious Experience in Islam,” \textit{Numen}, Vol XX, no. 3, Dec 1973, 186–201.} Through his study of several Muslim exegetes’ interpretation of Q3:85,\footnote{Mahmoud Ayoub, \textit{The Qurʾān and Its Interpreters}, New York: State University of New York Press, 1984, 2:241–243.} Mahmoud Ayoub concludes that early exegetes understood the term \textit{islām} as a reference to “\textit{ritualistic or juristic observance and identity}” while contemporary commentators “have used the verse to argue}
for the finality and supersession of Islam over all other religions.” The case of Fadlallah is a combination of both.

Unlike most major modern exegetes such as Quṭb or Riḍā who explicitly and straightforwardly interpret the term ‘islām’ as the religious system we now know as Islam, Fadlallah chooses a rather evasive style in his MWQ commentary. He starts by explaining that the word Islām in Q3:19 means total submission to God, devoting one’s life to Him, and obeying Him in everything. He then maintains that the term does not refer to Islam as the institutionalized religion but rather to all the [monotheistic] religions revealed by God through his prophets. Fadlallah’s perception of other religions is rather traditionalist. He is in agreement with most classical and modern exegetes in arguing that God’s divine guidance was contemporaneous with creation and that, since the creation of Adam and Eve, God has offered his divine guidance first to Adam, being His first prophet, and continued with the other prophets until Muhammad, the last prophet and the bearer of the final divine message. God’s divine message was revealed progressively and has not changed in its essence although it was different in its details according to the exigencies of each period and the needs of each nation. Prophets, Fadlallah explains, believe in and complement each other’s missions because they work within the framework of divine revelation progress. Within this framework, the monotheistic religions represent one form of islām. Men, thus, should open up to all divine messages and believe in every one of them. Hence, Fadlallah argues, the Qurʾān uses the term islām to refer to and summarize all [heavenly] religions. Islām is a line that started with Abraham who said to God “I have submitted myself to the Will of the Lord of the universe.” Likewise, the term is used in the Qurʾān in reference to the disciples of Jesus who declared their islām, i.e., their

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596 Ayoub, The Qurʾān and Its Interpreters, 2:241.
597 Fī Zilāl al-Qurʾān 3:423: “There is no way to interpret the reality of islām, twist or distort the [Qurʾānic] texts in order to define [the term] islām otherwise than the definition God gave: islām, the religion in which the whole universe believes in […] islām is not about pronouncing the Shahādas without putting it [i.e. islām] into practice.”
598 Fadlallah is more straightforward concerning this matter in his Friday sermons and in some of his other works, especially those in which he answers the questions of a Muslim audience such as his Damascus Seminary weekly lecture series al-Nadwa for instance.
599 MWQ5:274.
603 FAHIM, 377.
submission to God. \(^{605}\) “Iṣlām is God’s religion throughout the prophetic movement along history.” \(^{606}\) From here, the Ayatollah continues to suggest that the term should be understood in its general meaning \(^{607}\) because “submission to God is a humane religion.” \(^{608}\) These views, which are repeated several times in Fadlallah’s works, are in line with other exegetes.

### 3.1.1. To each time its ʿIslām

Although Fadlallah insists that each monotheistic religion is a form of ʿislām and that when the term occurs in the Qurʾān, it refers to all these forms and not to the religious system Muhammad brought, this is to be taken as an introductory argumentation the main point of which is to give the impression of an inclusivist theology because the interpretation Fadlallah provides in the contexts of Q3:19 and Q3:85, for instance, is neither his only interpretation nor the whole picture of it. First, his interpretation of ʿislām as any monotheistic form of submission is applicable only before the advent of Muhammad as each form of ʿislām ceases to be so once the next form is revealed.

\textit{Every time has its [form of] ʿislām. In Noah’s and Abraham’s time, their message i.e., what was revealed to them from God was [the form of] ʿislām. The law of Moses represents the ʿislām of Moses’ time, Jesus’s law represents the ʿislām of his time, and the ʿislām of Prophet Muhammad’s time is represented by this religion, which is the summary of all divine messages.} \(^{609}\)

Moreover, Fadlallah presents us elsewhere with “two inseparable meanings” of the term ʿislām, one generic, the other specific. \(^{610}\) He does not specify what he means by the latter but stresses in his “generic meaning” of the term the importance of believing in the mission of the Prophet Muhammad as an established truth necessary to be Muslim because “one

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\(^{605}\) MWQ6:43–44.

\(^{606}\) MWQ3:53. This idea is shared by other modern exegetes too. Al-Shaʿrāwy argues that “the people of the [monotheistic] religions are also Muslims by description.” Their submission to God makes them so. See Tafsīr al-Shaʿrāwy 3:1356.

\(^{607}\) MWQ6:138.

\(^{608}\) MWQ6:138.


\(^{610}\) MWQ6:139.
cannot be Muslim if one denies this established truth (hāḏihi al-ḥaqiqā al-ṭābita).”  Here, one notices a lack in constancy and consistency in Fadlallah’s interpretation of the term islām. He does not interpret the term islām, which occurs in Q5:3 according to the above-mentioned “generic meaning” but as the religious system brought by Muhammad. The Ayatollah considers it the last station through which God showed His favor upon Muslims. “It is the best of all favors because it is the way to salvation (najāt) in this world and in the Hereafter. Hence, God approved islām as the [acceptable] religion for Muslims.”

In line with the majority of Muslim exegetes, Fadlallah says that a Muslim’s belief is complete only if one believes in all the prophets and in all the divine missions because the prophets are all equal and one cannot choose to believe in some but not in others. All in all, Fadlallah’s reasoning leads to the conclusion that each form of islām is good until the advent of a subsequent one: Judaism is valid until the promulgation of Christianity and Christianity is valid until the advent of Islam which is the final and only valid religion. Islam supersedes its predecessors and becomes, hence, the only way to salvation. Fadlallah takes from classical exegetes their generalizing definition of the term islām, which at first glance gives the impression of arguing for an inclusivist theology but the cumulative approach he uses leads, de facto, to the same conclusion as modern ones that Islam, the religious system brought by Muhammad, is the only applicable version of islām which makes the term islām synonymous to the term Islam. These views raise two important questions: 1. If Islam is the only applicable form of monotheistic submission to God, does that mean that the precedent monotheistic religions were abrogated? 2. If so, is salvation attainable through Judaism and Christianity?

### 3.2. Abrogation

Muslim exegetes generally consider Judaism and Christianity previous phases of Islam’s own history. Consequently, verse Q3:85 for example has raised a legal question in the tafsīr literature concerning the abrogation (naskh) of Judaism and Christianity and the

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611 MWQ6:139.
612 MWQ8:45. Fadlallah also speaks of Islam as God’s favor elsewhere, such as in MWQ6:192 in the context of Q3:103.
supersession of Islam over these two religions. It must be noted that there is no verse in
the Qurʾān which refers directly and explicitly to the abrogation of the pre-Islamic
monotheistic religions. Fadlallah argues that Islam supersedes its predecessors but does
not abrogate them—at least not entirely. In Fadlallah’s reasoning, the new prophethood
does not abrogate the previous one because the starting point of each divine mission is not
the personality of the prophet but the divine inspiration which legislates for the entire life
and for the entirety of humankind within a general line in which divine revelations
complete one another and each has its role. Hence, Jesus believed in Moses’ Torah
“because the rulings (ahkām) of the Torah were – most probably – not abrogated and
because its perceptions were not outdated, thus, they did not need to be renewed.” Jesus’
message did not amend the perceptions and rulings that the Israelites believed in. Jesus left
them unchanged with the exception of some rulings concerning some prohibitions that God
had imposed on the Jews as a punishment for their rebellion. God meant to make the life
of the Israelites hard in order to discipline them before He took the hardship away through
Jesus, who was sent to them as a sign of divine blessing and mercy.

Fadlallah refers to some other grounds that explain the changes in the divine rulings
depending on phases. He criticizes the exegetes who argue for the abrogation of religions
(naskh al-Sharāʾiʿ) and says that “abrogation does not concern the general concepts which
constitute the basic principles of the revealed messages such as faith and life but concerns
the details which vary depending on time and place.” He explains, for example, that
marrying siblings was allowed during the time of Adam because there was no other option,
but God forbade it later when the situation changed. In another place, Fadlallah
emphasizes this argument against the abrogation of Islam’s preceding religions explaining
that divine messages simply cannot be abrogated. What can be abrogated are certain
rulings (ahkām) which change depending on the exigencies of the different phases. “If
there is room for it at all, abrogation does not concern the divine message in its entirety
but concerns only some of its rulings.” Religious concepts, on the other hand, cannot be

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615 For a discussion of Islam’s supersession over previous monotheistic religions, see Abdulaziz Sachedina’s
works: The Islamic roots of democratic pluralism, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, and “Is Islamic
Revelation an Abrogation of Judeo-Christian Revelation? Islamic Self-Identification in the Classical and
616 MWQ6:36.
617 MWQ6:36.
618 MWQ8:258.
619 MWQ8:258.
620 Friday sermon held on 17 October 2003, retrieved from Fadlallah’s official website 5 January 2017
621 MWQ8:200.
622 MWQ8:200.
abrogated because they constitute the same monotheistic doctrinal facts.\textsuperscript{623} For example, Fadlallah elaborates, the direction of prayer (qibla) was abrogated (Q2:144) and some of the rulings in Judaism were abrogated (Q3:50).\textsuperscript{624} The Ayatollah unequivocally emphasizes that none of the Abrahamic religions came to dismiss the previous religions or to abrogate them. Each of these religions came to complete the subsequent one.\textsuperscript{625} Likewise, the Qur’ān was not revealed to abrogate the books revealed to the previous prophets but to recognize them, confirm them, and complement them\textsuperscript{626} because these books are the same in essence, they come from the same source, and there is no contradiction between them.\textsuperscript{627}

The Ayatollah argues that the pre-Qur’ānic holy books are God’s revelation and are all equally a source of guidance (hudā).\textsuperscript{628} Furthermore, since guidance cannot become misguidance (dalāl), they cannot be abrogated.\textsuperscript{629} Henceforth, he rejects the exegetical views which maintain that Islam abrogated its precedent religions or that the Qur’ān abrogated its preceding holy books\textsuperscript{630} on the grounds that the Gospel did not abrogate or change the Torah. Moreover, Fadlallah also disagrees with al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, for example, that the revelation of the Gospel ends the rule of the Torah and forbids it.\textsuperscript{631} In addition to coming from the same source, these two scriptures also have different natures: The first is a book of Law and the second is a book of general principles of spirituality so they complement each other.\textsuperscript{632} Accordingly, Fadlallah also sticks to this view in the case of the verses which most exegetes deem abrogated. For example, verse 5:47, which calls the Christians to judge according to what God has revealed in the Gospel, is interpreted by most exegetes as a reference to the pre-Qur’ānic period only because Islam has abrogated Christianity.\textsuperscript{633} Fadlallah rejects this view on the grounds that this verse affirms the common truths between Islam and Christianity:

\textit{It is not known to us that the Gospel was abrogated especially that it does not contain detailed Law (Sharīʿa mufaṣṣala) but contains

\textsuperscript{623} Nadwa 7:548–549.
\textsuperscript{624} MWQ22:186.
\textsuperscript{625} MWQ2:125–127, MWQ8:200.
\textsuperscript{626} MWQ2:133, MWQ5:217, passim.
\textsuperscript{627} MWQ6:135.
\textsuperscript{628} MWQ8:186–187; 192–193.
\textsuperscript{629} MWQ8:192–193.
\textsuperscript{631} MWQ8:194.
\textsuperscript{632} MWQ8:200.
\textsuperscript{633} MWQ8:194.
morals, general principles and values in the spiritual and human dimension. Hence, there is no problem in the fact that the Qurʾān asks the Christians to rule according to the Gospel, because it is in congruence with the rulings of the Qurʾān which draws them to the common ground, i.e., to what is in the Qurʾān ...\(^{634}\)

Based on the aforementioned argument, believing Jews are required to believe in and follow both the Torah and the Gospel except for the few laws Jesus abrogated. The same is true for the Christians who too should believe in and abide by both holy books except for the abrogated parts which they should no longer follow.\(^{635}\) However, once the Qurʾān was revealed, true Jews and true Christians would believe in it and abide by it. Surprisingly enough, the Ayatollah argues, nonetheless, that there is no problem for the Christians to use their holy book even after the revelation of the Qurʾān. Still, one should not mistake this for an inclusivist theology—there is a pragmatic approach behind this understanding. The reason the Ayatollah goes against the mainstream exegetical view that the Gospel is no longer usable after the revelation of the Qurʾān is that he thinks that God asks the Christians to "judge by what God has revealed in" the Gospel,\(^{636}\) in order to hold them accountable because their Gospel has the same concepts as the Qurʾān and would lead them to recognize the prophethood of Muhammad which Jesus foretold.\(^{637}\)

However, occasionally one finds texts where Fadlallah seems to say something else about the abrogability and replaceability of religions. For example, in his interpretation of Q2:106,\(^{638}\) a verse that is traditionally understood to refer to intra-Qurʾānic abrogation, Fadlallah explains that the abrogation referred to here might concern earlier religions. The verses in question are those whose role has ended because their content was valid for an earlier period in terms of legislation and guidance\(^{639}\) and God abrogated them and replaced them with new ones—the Qurʾān. The circumstances of revelation (Ashbāb al-Nuzūl) of Q2:106, Fadlallah continues, is that the Jews denied the possibility of the abrogation of previous heavenly revelations altogether. The Jews reject the idea that a new holy book and a new dispensation can replace a previous one such as the case of Jesus’ Gospel or Muhammad’s Qurʾān.\(^{640}\) "The Jews claim that abrogation is impossible because it would suggest the lack of Divine wisdom [...] or suggest God’s ignorance." Consequently, this verse affirms that divine dispensations are provisional and depend on the necessities and

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\(^{634}\) MWQ8:195.

\(^{635}\) MWQ8:193–194.

\(^{636}\) Qurʾān 5:74.


\(^{638}\) "For whatever verse We abrogate or cast into oblivion, We bring forth a better or the like of it.”

\(^{639}\) MWQ2:156.

\(^{640}\) MWQ2:156.
needs of each period. What Fadlallah is actually arguing for here is that the previous religions are not abrogated in their entirety or replaced by completely new ones. The progressive nature of the divine revelation necessitates partial abrogation of rulings. It is part and parcel of the nature of divine revelation to accommodate the needs of each time and each phase.

All in all, Fadlallah thinks that the divine religions complete one another, do not entirely abrogate one another but supersede one another. Islām is one religion with varied dimensions because Judaism and Christianity are part of the Muhammadan mission. Truly believing in one leads automatically to believing in the next one and failing to do so is either due to a personal complex or to stubbornness and willful disobedience because both the Torah and the Gospel foretell the coming of Muhammad and exhort the believers to follow him as the bearer of the last divine message—the only one that leads to Salvation. This is because:

Choosing one truth and rejecting another is inacceptable. This is the case of the people who believed in Moses but refused to believe in Jesus and Muhammad and it is also the case of the Christians who believed in Moses and Jesus but refused to believe in Muhammad.

Although Fadlallah thinks there is no problem for the Kitābīs to use their own holy books, this remains true only as far as it is a way of leading them to finding the prediction about the Arab prophet God would send, whom they are asked to follow and believe in—at which point they will disregard their own books. These older Testaments function as proofs and predictions for the coming of Muhammad but once this function is completed they are no longer needed. If the Hebrew Bible also remained in use for the Christians as an older form of God’s Testament and part of His New Testament, the People of the Book do not need either Testament anymore because they now have the Qurʾān—the last and only Testament.

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641 MWQ2:156.
644 MWQ6:138–139.
3.3. Islām is prerequisite of salvation

The American Islamicist Frederick Denny rightly states that “unlike Christianity, Islam does not possess a strong rhetoric of salvation, whether in the Qurʾān or later. Instead, it has a prominent rhetoric of submission and obedience under an utterly transcendent and just God.”646 Rahman goes as far as to say “for Islam, there is no particular ‘salvation’: there is only ‘success [falāḥ]’ or ‘failure [khusrān].’”647 Salvation is indeed neither a key term nor a key doctrine in Islam but that does not mean that human destiny in the hereafter is not a prominent issue.648 While the exact term for ‘deliverance’ (najāt) occurs only once in the Qurʾān,649 there are several more terms and phrases that can be rendered as ‘deliverance’ such as fāwz650 or falāḥ651 which literally mean ‘success.’ Success in the hereafter is equated with the escape from Hellfire,652 the felicity of entering paradise,653 attaining the ultimate joy of God’s satisfaction and is reached through submission and obedience.654 The idea can also be expressed negatively as follows: not achieving salvation would mean loss (khusrān), misguidance (dalāl), and perishing (halāk) in Hellfire. In between the two, there is a path of guidance (ṭarīq al-hudā), the right path (al-sirāṭ al-mustaqīm) which is the path that leads to success and to God’s reward, i.e., entering heaven.655 In addition to the above-mentioned terms, Fadlallah also refers to salvation using, among others, the term safety (amn)656 by which he refers to being safe from torture in Hellfire and enjoying the serenity of God’s satisfaction. Although Fadlallah emphasizes that “salvation (najāt) is achieved only through [good] deeds and falling into perdition


647 Rahman, Major Themes of the Qurʾān, 63.

648 In the Islamic context, the concept of salvation is much less discussed than in Christianity for example. For a discussion of salvation in islām see, for example, Denny, “The Problem of salvation in the Qurʾān,” 196–210.

649 In Q40:41. There are other occurrences in verbal forms but they refer to deliverance from a particular situation. See Denny, “The problem of salvation in the Qurʾān,” 205–207 for more.

650 In the Qurʾān we find the great success (al-fawz al-‘azīm/al-kabīr), e.g., in Q4:13, 22:71, and Q85:11 respectively or the manifest success (al-fawz al-mubīn) as in Q6:16.

651 The root appears in verbal forms only in Q3:185, 4:13, and 33:71 for instance.

652 MWQ24:171 for example.

653 MWQ21:185.


655 MWQ3:55.

656 For example, MWQ8:70.
halāk) is caused by [evil] deeds" he emphasizes even more that the only way to salvation is true monotheistic belief combined with good deeds.

Fadlallah highlights that monotheism is God’s core message throughout the line of prophethood and can be reached, in the case of those who have not received or who did not hear about a divine message, by nature (fiṭra) because of the God-given inbuilt ability in humans to do so. Moreover, Fadlallah argues, using reason and contemplating on God’s creation would lead to monotheistic belief in God as well. Even more, Fadlallah believes that if one thought carefully and honestly and if one sincerely opened up his heart, he would eventually find out that the ultimate truth is Islam because the problem in religious conflicts is mostly spiritual and psychological rather than intellectual or scientific. Finding the truth is, according to Fadlallah, a matter of will and obedience while “unbelief comes from ignorance, transgression and stubbornness which together push one to reject the revelation sent from God through His prophets.” An example of this, Fadlallah cites, is Jews and Christians who concealed the truth about the coming of Muhammad out of jealousy, transgression and desire to preserve their status and privileges. However, a sincere quest for the truth is also salvific and if one exhausts all his powers and his efforts to reach the truth, he is excused if he does not reach it because of circumstances beyond his control.

Fadlallah is in line with the general Islamic doctrine that sees Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as variations of the same religion of which Islam is the reformed and perfected version. This is what Fadlallah terms the unity of divine missions (waḥdat al-risālāt) according to which all the post-Abrahamic revelations are an extension of Abraham’s mission whose essential message is monotheism. All three religions represent “the line of truth God has drawn for His people, and the source of justice He made for life so that

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657 MWQ10:245.
659 Naʿūm, Bauh Walākin, 183.
662 MWQ5:277.
663 MWQ5:277.
665 MWQ3:140 in the context of Q2:170.
666 MWQ2:133, MWQ5:217, passim.
667 MWQ6:137–139.
668 MWQ9:380.
people would open up to just and realistic solutions to their problems.” In their pure form, the three Abrahamic religions come from the same God, expound His guidance, and share the same main values. However, Fadlallah strongly rejects the idea of unity of religion (waḥdat al-diyyānāt) which he finds in disagreement with reason and which is used in his opinion by some “to justify the clear deviation of some missions (risālāt) and to liquefy the intellectual stands which aim at putting issues in their right places. One should rather raise the issue using the Qur’ānic method which comprises the faith altogether through interconnected [divine] missions. The facts of these missions are inseparable and differ only in terms of the nature of each phase.” In a reference to Muhammad’s nocturnal journey, Fadlallah uses the al-Isrāʾ and al-Miʿrāj narrative to argue that Muhammad combines “all the vital elements” of the divine missions. Islam is “the new-old divine mission” and Muhammad is the prophet who summarizes all the previous religions into one complete perfect universal religion. However, Judaism and Christianity represent the history of Islam. They are outdated, imperfect and corrupt versions of the divine message and are no longer needed since the advent of Islam which is the updated, incorruptible final divine message, and most importantly the only way to salvation.

Several Qur’ānic passages such as Q2:135 and 2:111-113 criticize Jews and Christians for their exclusivist claims to salvation. For Fadlallah, these verses are a Qur’ānic attempt to uncover these groups’ “naïve delusion and uncover their unfounded claims concerning their own destiny as opposed to the destiny of others. They think that Paradise is reserved for them.” Fadlallah exclaims ironically and affirms that the only way to salvation is islām. On the other hand, and in parallel to the verses which state that the only acceptable religion in the sight of God is islām, one finds in the Qur’ān verses which imply that
adherents of Judaism and Christianity can reach salvation through their own faiths such as Q2:62; and Q5:69. 680

Those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans, those who believed in God 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. Q2:62

Those who believed and those who were Jews or Sabeans or Christians, those who believed in God 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. Q5:69

Based on the above-mentioned verses, most Muslim commentators consider Judaism and Christianity a path of Guidance (hidāya/hudan) but only until the advent of Islam which supersedes them. It is safe to say that the preponderant view among Muslim exegetes, no matter what argumentation they used, is that Islam is the only way to salvation. Fadlallah is no exception although his interpretation of Q2:62 could mislead the reader, at first glance, to assume that he preaches an inclusivist theology. He says: “The meaning of this verse is clear. It affirms that the religious groups mentioned in it reach success (najāḥ) in the hereafter provided they believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds.” 681

However, Fadlallah continues:

We may face the following issue: The [above]mentioned approach to the verse means waiving Islam, Muhammad’s message, as a condition of salvation (najāt) in the Hereafter and as a condition of obtaining the satisfaction of God (riḍā Allah) because the verse confirms the sustainability of the distinctive characteristic of each group as long as the condition is still holding. 682

Before addressing this issue, Fadlallah moves on to another one that occupied commentators of all denominations: “Was this verse abrogated?” 683 Many exegetes think that this verse was abrogated by Q3:85 684—an idea Fadlallah disagrees with “because the two verses do not contradict each other so that one of them would abrogate the other. It is apparent that

680 As stated before, Q22:17 is equally important despite its ambivalence or perhaps because of it.
681 MWQ2:69.
682 MWQ2:69.
683 MWQ2:69.
684 Al-Nāṣikh wa al-Mansūkh, 35. See 3.1 above.
what is meant here by [the term] islām is islām in its generic meaning, i.e., all heavenly religions and not the religion [called] Islam.\textsuperscript{685} The Ayatollah argues that verse Q3:85 should be read in the context of the previous verse,\textsuperscript{686} as the two verses together emphasize the unity of the divine message.\textsuperscript{687} Fadlallah is not the only exegete who rejects the abrogation of verse Q2:62 by Q3:85 but he is, to the best of my knowledge, the only one who rejects the abrogation on the basis that the two verses do not contradict each other.\textsuperscript{688}

At the end of his commentary on this verse, Fadlallah reiterates his view that salvation is extended to the groups mentioned in Q2:62 provided they are true believers because “the matter is not about names, titles or religious affiliations but rather a matter of dogmatic depth [...] and practical righteousness.”\textsuperscript{689}

To him the verse emphasizes the basic elements on which the three religions meet, and which are necessary to gain God’s satisfaction and reward. However, this verse deals only with one aspect of faith and should not be taken to have a comprehensive meaning. A more complete understanding of the verse is reached, Fadlallah continues, by taking into consideration other Qur’ānic verses because believing in Muhammad is a necessary pillar of faith and not believing in him uncovers the lack of the elements of strong faith.\textsuperscript{690} This is how one can see an agreement of this verse with the other verses which speak of “the deviation of Jews and Christians from the right path intellectually and practically.”\textsuperscript{691} Fadlallah concludes. In reference to Q3:19, he says:

\textit{Because religion in the sight of God is islām, religion in the time of Moses is the form of islām [acceptable] and anyone who deviates from it is not Muslim. The same is true for the time of Jesus and Muhammad. Hence, we think that those Kitābīs who did not enter islām are not Muslims because islām requires from them to follow God’s messenger Muhammad and to follow the Qur’ān which encompasses both the Torah and the Gospel [...]. Just as those who desired as religion another than Moses’ and Jesus’ in their respective times will not be accepted from them, so is the case...}

\textsuperscript{685} MWQ2:69.
\textsuperscript{686} Q3:84 “Say, ‘We have believed in God and in what was revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Descendants, and in what was given to Moses and Jesus and to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims/submitting (muslimūn) to Him.’”
\textsuperscript{687} MWQ6:137–138.
\textsuperscript{688} MWQ2:69.
\textsuperscript{689} MWQ2:74.
\textsuperscript{690} MWQ2:70.
\textsuperscript{691} MWQ2:70.
for those who desire as religion another than that of Muhammad’s.
It will not be accepted from them.\textsuperscript{692}

Like most exegetes, Fadlallah’s treatment of the parallel verse Q5:69 is short and refers the reader to the interpretation of Q2:62. He does not find it necessary to comment on the different word order in the two verses or speculate on the reasons behind it like many exegetes have done.\textsuperscript{693} However, he wishes to make:

\begin{quote}
\textit{a simple clarification that the verse speaks of the measure according to which salvation (\textit{amn}) is measured on the Day of Judgment. This measure is not to belong to one of these groups in name only. The measure is belief in God and the Last Day and doing good deeds as defined in details in another part of God’s book. [The verse seeks also to] emphasize the monotheistic line which links islam doctrinally to the monotheistic belief in the Lordship of the One God. This requires obedience and accountability in the Last Day.}\textsuperscript{694}
\end{quote}

Fadlallah moves on to further stress the importance of believing in Muhammad as a condition of salvation, linking the above-mentioned defined matters to Muhammad because he is the one who defines belief in God and defines what are the good deeds required from believers.\textsuperscript{695} We do not find in the Qur’ān an explicit reference to the necessity of belief in Muhammad as a salvific condition but it is explicitly so in most exegetical works. Even if it is not stated explicitly in the Qur’ān, Fadlallah explains, the recognition of Muhammad as the Prophet of God is part of Islam and is a prerequisite of salvation based on all the other Qur’ānic texts which imply this.\textsuperscript{696} Thus, in Fadlallah’s reasoning the verse does not neglect mentioning belief in Muhammad as one of the foundations of faith.\textsuperscript{697}

\textsuperscript{692} Bayyinat:346–347; Friday sermon 10 September 2004, retrieved from Fadlallah’s official website on 5 January 2017 http://arabic.bayynat.org.lb/ListingByCatPage.aspx?id=1048; \textit{passim}.

\textsuperscript{693} See, for example, McAuliffe’s short analysis of some of these exegetical speculations in Qur’ānic Christians 110–111. As for the use of the accusative case (\textit{al-ṣābi ‘īna}) in Q2:62 and the nominative case (\textit{al-ṣābi ‘īna}) in Q5:69, Fadlallah mentions the issue briefly without a convincing explanation.

\textsuperscript{694} MWQ8:277.

\textsuperscript{695} MWQ8:278.

\textsuperscript{696} MWQ2:70.

\textsuperscript{697} MWQ8:278.
The most straightforward statements about whether or not Islam is a prerequisite of salvation is found in his commentary on Q3:19 where he explains that *islām* means “to follow the line of the new phase. Staying in the line of the previous phase would contradict *islām* spiritually and practically. *Islām* is the attribute of all [heavenly] religions but only during their respective phases.”698 This exclusivist interpretation puts Fadlallah in line with most exegetes who think that salvation is attained only through Islam.699

In a slightly polemical tone, Fadlallah concludes his exegetical treatment of Q2:62 by stating that this verse is a Qur'ānic answer which takes a stand against the *Kitābīs* who mistakenly assume that mere creedal affiliation, i.e., being Jew or Christian in name only, is enough to attain salvation. Fadlallah explains, using almost the same phrasing as Rashīd Riḍā,700 that creedal affiliation (*intimāʾat dīniyya*)701 alone is not enough to achieve salvation and that true faith and good deeds are necessary regardless of the monotheistic faith. Both Muslims and non-Muslim monotheists should follow their faiths fully in order to be saved through them. Like major Shīʿī exegetes such as al-Qummi (d. 919), al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1153) and al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981)702 he backs up his argument with ‘ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib’s eloquent description of *islām* as follows:703

> I will define *islām* as no one has defined it before me: *islām* is submission (*taslīm*), submission is conviction (*yaqīn*), conviction is affirmation (*taṣdīq*), affirmation is acknowledgement (*iqrār*), acknowledgement is performance of obligations, and the performance of obligations is good deeds.704

Based on this definition and in line with most modern exegetes, Fadlallah explains that Islam is not only about mechanical submission to God but rather about conviction and understanding of Islam’s doctrine.705 Islam is neither a rigid word nor a rigid work,

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698 MWQ5:274–275 Compare this to the same idea as expressed more clearly by Ṭabīḥ in his *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān* 3:421 “If someone rejects *islām*, he has rejected God’s religion altogether.”

699 Fadlallah raises the polemical tone in his interpretation of Q22:17 whose context, according to him, is the interfaith disputes between the adherents of the different religious groups mentioned in the verse. These disputes are because of stubbornness, fanaticism, and disinterest in the truth. This verse is “an implied threat directed to those who purposely deviated from the truth” and is a proof that the adherents of religions other than Islam will regret their intransigence and will rue their clinging to false religions. MWQ16:34–36.

700 In Al-Manār 1:334–336 Riḍā uses the phrase ‘religious nationalities’ (*jinsiyyāt dīniyya*) and Fadlallah uses ‘religious affiliations’ (*intimāʾat dīniyya*) as well as ‘religious titles’ (*asmāʾ / ‘anāwīn dīniyya*).


704 MWQ5:275.
Fadlallah continues, but rather a confession out of conviction and “a position in the line of commitment to responsibility and action.” As for the non-Muslim monotheists, i.e., the people of the book, Fadlallah divides them, much in the footsteps of most commentators, into two groups: believing Kitābīs and Kitābīs in name only.

As previously noted, Fadlallah’s views are not systematic. Hence, although his interpretations of these verses are exclusivist, Fadlallah states elsewhere that only God knows people’s destiny in the hereafter and argues that one should not engage in such a discussion altogether. For example, backing his argument on Q4:48 “God does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills.” Fadlallah states that, unlike the unbelievers and the polytheists whom God will punish for their unbelief, God is likely to forgive the monotheists amongst the Kitābīs and others for the deviations in the doctrinal details. Fadlallah adds that the matter of salvation should be left to God because it is up to Him to decide who enters heaven and who does not. People should refrain, he continues, from making judgments about those who belong to other juristic schools of thought or other religions. People should know that, although any deviation in the doctrinal details that leads to unbelief renders the person susceptible to God’s punishment, if the person is not a polytheist, however, God is merciful.

To conclude, the parallel verses Q2:62 and Q5:69 which seem to promise salvation to Jews and Christians provided they believe in God and in the Last Day and do good deeds are not interpreted that way by most exegetes. While Fadlallah deviates from the main exegetical line which explicitly restricts this promise to those among them who believed in Muhammad and embraced his new religion, Islam, the Ayatollah makes it clear that being a true Kitābī means embracing Islam which is to him the only truth and the only way that leads to Heaven if combined with obedience and good deeds. The Kitābīs who act against the prophecies they should find in their holy books about the coming of Muhammad and deliberately reject him and his message are not saved. Among the reasons behind this stand are abrogation (naskh) and distortion (tahrīf). Islam’s

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706 MWQ5:276.
707 McAuliffe, Qur'anic Christians, 288–289.
712 See 2:3 above.
713 See chapter III.
supersession over previous religions makes Judaism and Christianity transitory forms of Islam and the accusation of *tahrīf* makes them defective and partially distorted. Salvation is not attained through these deviated religions but through Abraham’s monotheistic path which has been explained in detail in the later divine missions God revealed through his prophets.714 However, although the door of salvation in Fadlallah’s thought is not wide open, it is not totally closed either. The Ayatollah argues that people should refrain from discussing the salvific destiny of *Kitābīs* because it is a matter that only God knows about and because the Qurʾān treats them differently from the unbelievers and the polytheists. While God promises the latter Hellfire for their unbelief, He is likely to forgive the monotheists amongst the *Kitābīs*;715 thus, the matter of salvation, Fadlallah exhorts, should be left to God as it is up to Him alone to decide who enters Heaven and who does not and His mercy and forgiveness might be extended to non-Muslim monotheists.716

3.4. Believing and unbelieving Scriptuaries

Because the Qurʾān is the guidebook which shows how to deal with people in general and with the *Kitābīs* in particular, the trueness of *Kitābīs*’ faith is measured against the Qurʾānic perception of them and of their faith as a whole.717 In another context, Fadlallah explains that the correctness of the *Kitābīs*’ faith and behavior is also measured against their harmony with the Abrahamic message by which he seems to mean absolute monotheism.718 True believers amongst the *Kitābīs* are monotheistic, obedient, and abiding by their holy books which foretell the coming of Prophet Muhammad and require them to believe in him; hence, true believing *Kitābīs* would eventually embrace Islam. The second group, the unbelieving *Kitābīs*, consists of disobedient, deceiving, deliberate concealers of the truth, and of those who deliberately choose not to believe in the trueness of Muhammad’s message out of jealousy or obstinacy.719 True believers, termed ‘*muʾminūn*’

714 MWQ3:52. Furthermore, when asked in a Shi‘i audience whether the People of the Book were Muslims, Fadlallah quoted Q3:85 and stated straightforwardly that Judaism and Christianity are true forms of submission to God only during their respective times. Once Jesus was sent with a new revelation, Judaism was to be considered a penultimate truth and Christianity the ultimate one. The arrival of Muhammad makes Christianity in its turn a penultimate truth and Islam the perfect and final divine revelation which is the only acceptable way to attain God’s satisfaction. See Bayyināt, 346–347.


716 A lecture in Damascus on 6 January 2007, retrieved from Fadlallah’s official website on 13 July 2016.

717 MWQ5:200.

718 MWQ3:48.

or ‘muslimūn’ are those who preserved the message of their prophets “from doctrinal
degeneration. With the advent of Muhammad, those who had held fast to the “true”
message [...] welcomed him and readily submitted to the final divine disclosure of which
he was the bearer.”720 Those who believed in Muhammad and embraced his message are
considered authentic Kitābīs, thus, true believers, ‘muʾminūn’ or ‘muslimūn.’ That is to
say, true Kitābīs are former Kitābīs who understood that their form of islām is a transitory
one and that Muhammad’s islām is the final most complete one. Those who did not convert
to Islam are no longer ‘muslimūn’ and, consequently, are no longer considered true Kitābīs.

Likewise, the authenticity of Judaism and Christianity is measured by their similarity to
Islam and to the Qurʾānic depiction of them. Without always explicitly recognizing it,
Fadlallah differentiates between the Qurʾānic perception of Judaism and Christianity and
the Judaism and Christianity known to us now and the way common people live their
Judaism and their Christianity in reality. While there should be no differences between
Islam and the Qurʾānic Judaism and Christianity except in some rulings as discussed
above, there are several differences between Islam and the modern form of these religions
as well as between the Qurʾān and their scriptures mostly because of distortion but also
because of the schism that happened within these two religions leading to the formation
of different schools of thought. The Ayatollah often refers to modern-day Christianity in
juxtaposition with the Qurʾānic image of it and sometimes even compares this Qurʾānic
perception with that of Christian scholars now.721 Modern-day Christianity, for example,
has different schools of thought and each of them has a different understanding of
Christianity. “Hence, we cannot say that the current Christianity with all its denominations
and schools of thought represents Jesus, for example, because each of them understands
Jesus in a different way and believes in him in a different way.”722 Likewise, although the
Jews believe in the One Transcendent God, modern-day Judaism contains “many concepts
that are incompatible with the teachings of Prophet Moses and with the teachings of the
Torah. We also think that the Torah has been greatly distorted.”723 Furthermore, Fadlallah
stresses that Muslims are not the only ones to believe that the current form of Judaism is
different from the Qurʾānic version—the Christians believe so too. In the same context,
Fadlallah says that even if Christians “believe in the Hebrew Bible, they still do not believe
in the official Judaism in which the Jews believe today. On the contrary, they disagree with

720 McAuliffe, Qurʾānic Christians, 288.
721 FAHIM, 294–295.
722 Interview with Fadlallah in Fikr magazine on 31 December 2009, retrieved from Fadlallah’s official
723 Interview with Fadlallah in Fikr magazine on 31 December 2009, retrieved from Fadlallah’s official
These examples, among many others, show Fadlallah’s differentiation between what he deems to be the true form of Judaism and Christianity and the original Torah and the original Gospel revealed from God on the one hand and the modern forms of these religions, both the official and popular ones as well as the modern forms of their holy books on the other. This leads us to an important question: Are the followers of distorted forms of Judaism and Christianity considered believers or unbelievers? Fadlallah was presented with this question both in the Shīʿi and the Christian contexts several times and his answers are not exactly identical. We have already referred to Fadlallah’s double-sided discourse in Chapter II concerning a number of issues. Also, the man’s tendency to shed light on different aspects in different contexts adds to the inextricability of his ideas. In what follows, I will present three examples of the Ayatollah’s discussion of the Kitābīs’ dogmatic deviations in his MWQ commentary as opposed to that in his dialogue-oriented works and interviews. Although the Ayatollah does not necessarily give contradictory accounts, his statements intended for the Christian audience focus on different parts of the discussion and are more lenient than those found in his commentary on the Qurʾān for example. The three examples I shall discuss are the perceptions of unbelief, the Trinity, and incarnation.

### 3.4.1. Fadlallah’s audience-tailored discourse of unbelief (kufr)

In Fadlallah’s reasoning, unbelief is not just about denying the existence of God. Unbelief may also take place when deviating from orthodox monotheistic doctrine—such as adopting the doctrine of incarnation. It is worth mentioning that most of Fadlallah’s discussions related to Kitābīs’ doctrinal deviations are about Christianity and Christians, and very little of it is about Judaism and the Jews. While his discussions of Christianity take into consideration the Qurʾānic perception, the Christians’ self-definition, and popular religiosity, when it comes to the Jews and Judaism, he discusses them mostly from a Qurʾānic point of view with a clear political bent.

In his commentary, Fadlallah emphasizes that both Jews and Christians have deviated from the orthodox forms of their respective religions, introduced foreign aspects to them, distorted their scriptures and erroneously interpreted them. This has led them to unbelief and distanced them from pure monotheism. Fadlallah explains that God attributed unbelief

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725 See 1.4.7. above.

726 MWQ8:98–99.

727 See Chapter V for more on the politically loaded understanding of Jews-related verses.
to those who claimed that God has a son, and this pertains to Jews and Christians alike (Q9:30). Unbelief is attributed also to Trinitarians (Q4:171 and 5:73) because the doctrine of the Trinity (tathlīth) is a deviant thought which, unless corrected, would lead to painful punishment in Hellfire. Fadlallah argues that the doctrine of the Trinity has no biblical basis and that Christians wrongly deduce it from their erroneous interpretation of John 1:1. Trinitarian belief, criticized in Q5:72, practically leads to worshipping a deity other than God. Thus, the adherents of such belief are forbidden Heaven and thereby lose salvation. Fadlallah emphasizes the unbelief of Trinitarian Christians further in his interpretation of the parallel verse Q5:72 where he considers the Trinity a deviation from monotheism and declares:

_The Qurʾān calls the Christians who said “God is Christ, the son of Mary” unbelievers regardless of the methods they used in the formulation of this doctrine. The Qurʾān debated with them in a simple and spontaneous way: if Christ is God, how cannot he defend himself [against death], bearing in mind that the nature of divinity imposes absolute power?!_

Furthermore, The Qurʾān refers to the Christians with the attribute ‘unbelievers’ because God cannot assume a human nature no matter what the qualities of this human being are and no matter how we depict this unity between God and Jesus which became a comprehensive Christian doctrine in the contemporary expressions which the Christians use, for example in saying ‘our Lord (rabbunā) Jesus Christ’ even if they do not consider the Trinity a material one. The Trinitarian belief also leads to unbelief because it is “incompatible with the meaning of the Oneness of the Divine Self who cannot incarnate or assume the nature of any being; the Qurʾān considered it to be unbelief in the divine truth exactly like believing in a deity other than God.” In his MWQ commentary, Fadlallah criticizes and accentuates the unbelief of Trinitarian Christians whom he equates with the Shiʿis who believe in the divinity of ‘Ali and who are consequently considered as unbelievers and idol worshippers.

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728 MWQ11:87–91
730 MWQ8:99–100. John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
732 MWQ8:285.
733 MWQ8:99.
734 MWQ8:99–100.
735 MWQ8:98–100.
In contrast with the conceptions portrayed here, readers of Fadlallah’s writings on dialogue and the wider audience of his media interviews receive a more conciliatory impression of his position and attitude towards the Christians. This is due to Fadlallah’s use of different rhetoric in contexts of dialogue where he appears to give a more inclusive and tolerant interpretation of the relevant verses discussed above. Fadlallah does not consider the Jews and Christians unbelievers or polytheists when he addresses larger mixed audiences. In an interview,736 Fadlallah was asked whether Islam accuses Kitābīs of unbelief, to which he offered a summary of the points of common ground and the points of disagreement between Muslims and Kitābīs. The Qurʾān, he explains, emphasizes that the Islamic doctrine has three basic foundations.737 These foundations are 1) monotheism which is the essence of the messages of all prophets, 2) belief in Muhammad, and 3) belief in the Last day. Jews and Christians agree with Islam on the first and third foundations but disagree with them on the second. Christians are not unbelievers, Fadlallah adds, because the Qurʾān emphasizes their belief and their monotheism when calling them to dialogue—or to a common word (kalima sawā) as he usually formulates it.738 Fadlallah explains that Islam does not consider Kitābīs polytheists either because the Qurʾān differentiates between polytheists and Kitābīs in terms of rulings, i.e., legal regulations (aḥkām). Moreover, the Qurʾān puts the People of the Book in a different category from the polytheists.739 For example, verse Q98:1 “Those who disbelieved among the People of the Scripture and the polytheists were not to be parted [from misbelief] until there came to them clear evidence,” marks a difference in taxonomy by placing the word ‘polytheists’ after a conjunction. Even if Fadlallah finds it difficult to understand the Christian dogmas, he still shows a considerable flexibility towards them in the Islamic-Christian context. He even forged new expressions to describe the unorthodox monotheism they might slip into because of some of their dogmas: philosophical polytheism (shirk falsafī) and relative unbelief (kufr nisbi).740 The first is caused by the doctrine of the Trinity and the second by rejecting Muhammad and his mission. Fadlallah thinks that the Trinitarian doctrine and the


737 Fadlallah speaks of two foundations one of which has a branch foundation. I opted to translate him this way for the sake of clarity.

738 The phrase (kalima sawā) occurs in Q3:64: “Say, ‘O People of the Scripture, come to a common word between us and you – that we will not worship except God and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of God.’ But if they turn away, then say, ‘Bear witness that we are muslimūn [submitting to Him].’ ” Coming to a common word in Fadlallah’s work is linked to the invitation to dialogue and refers to concentrating on what the three monotheistic religions have in common: monotheism is the point of agreement between Kitābīs and Muslims. Fadlallah repeatedly refers to this idea in his work. See for example MWQ6:78; FAHIM, 27, 293–295, 321, 423–424; Nadwa 1:548 as well as Sarkīs Naʿūm, Bauh Walākin, Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, 2014, 183.

739 FAHIM, 295.

740 Naʿūm, Bauh Walākin, 182. In other places, Fadlallah speaks about a philosophical unbelief or philosophical polytheism. FAHIM, 294–295, 321.
concept of plurality within God might lead to a philosophical polytheism (*shirk falsafī*) but not to a direct polytheism. Fadlallah is faced with this question in many contexts but he always changes its focus to emphasize the common ground between the three Abrahamic religions avoiding the issue of salvation altogether, and limiting unbelief to the denial of Muhammad and the Islamic mission. In an interview accorded to a Christian journalist who presented him with the same question, Fadlallah tried to downplay the negative connotation of the word ‘unbelief’ (*kufr*) by explaining that the term simply means denying something—the Kitābīs deny the prophethood of Muhammad, hence their unbelief. In the same context, Fadlallah equates this philosophical polytheism that he attributes to the Christians with any believer’s disobedience of God. If as a person disobeys God despite the fact that he believes in Him, this person is considered a polytheist. However, theologically speaking, these expressions should not be understood literally because unbelief is relative. “When the Qurʾān calls the People of the Book unbelievers, it does not mean an unbelief that takes them out of monotheistic belief in God but it rather refers to their unbelief in the Prophet because both Jews and Christians do not believe in Muhammad’s prophethood.” Fadlallah explains, however, that theologically speaking, this polytheism or unbelief is metaphorical and does not make Scriptuaries polytheists. Their unbelief is restricted to disbelieving in the prophethood of Muhammad but they are still monotheists. Fadlallah concludes that despite the philosophical disagreement in the matter of the Trinity between Christians and Muslims, there is still a general agreement about the oneness of God especially that Christian scholars deny belief in the pluralism of deities through and outside of the Trinity. In another context, Fadlallah argues that if Christian scholars say that the Trinity does not mean polytheism, then they deny the matter in its apparent nature. This means that there is an agreement between Islam and Christianity and if there is a philosophical disagreement, it should be left to researchers of philosophy and theology. The Kitābīs believe in monotheism even if they disagree with Muslims in the interpretation of this

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741 FAHIM, 293.
742 FAHIM, 100–101.
743 FAHIM, 293–294. In another context, he says “The Trinity may lead to polytheism according to philosophical scrutiny but not in the literal meaning of polytheism.” Naʿūm, Bawālākin, 183.
746 Naʿūm, Bawālākin, 183–184.
747 FAHIM, 27 and 294.
748 FAHIM, 295.
749 Naʿūm, Bawālākin, 185; FAHIM, 294–295.
According to Fadlallah, some studies say that these concepts are beyond reason’s grasp and that this should be spiritually felt and experienced rather than grasped which means that these matters cannot be discussed, he explains. This is typical of Fadlallah’s pragmatism. He does not wish to waste time in discussing matters of diversion and often takes these types of exits.

It has to be noted however that although Fadlallah does not use his neologisms ‘philosophical polytheism’ and ‘philosophical unbelief’ in his commentary, he implicitly considers Kitābīs monotheistic, believers in the Last day and only relatively unbelievers because of their rejection of Muhammad in the context of Q2:221 where he discusses the difference between the People of the Book and the polytheists. He argues:

_Those whose polytheism invites to Hellfire are those who do not believe in the Last day which is not the case of Jews and Christians who do not believe in Muhammad. […] regardless of whether God will or will not accept their call._

Although he casts doubt on the validity of their faith, Fadlallah explicitly states that the Kitābīs are not the ones meant by the term polytheists here. “_Those who believe in the deity of Jesus or who say that God is one of three but in a way that does not contradict monotheism as they claim_” are not considered polytheists.

### 3.4.2. The Trinity

For most Muslim exegetes, the perception of Jews and Christians, as McAuliffe accurately puts it in her _Qur’ānic Christians_, “remains at the level of theoretical construct, largely divorced from the realities of time and place yet subject to judgment on theological and

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751 Naʿūm, _Bauh Walākin_, 184–185; FAHIM, 294–295. Fadlallah is not precise about what studies are in question.

752 In MWQ11:79–80, he briefly distinguishes between theoretical and practical unbelief as opposed to al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī who argues that the People of the Book who did not believe in Muhammad are truly unbelievers. See _Tafsīr al-Mizān_ 9:238–239.

753 Q2:221: “Do not marry polytheistic women until they believe. A believing slave woman is better than a polytheist, even though she might please you. And do not marry polytheistic men until they believe. A believing slave is better than a polytheist, even though he might please you. Those invite to the Fire, but God invites to Paradise and to forgiveness, by His permission.”

754 MWQ4:242.

moral grounds.” Unlike their classical counterparts, modern exegetes seem to “demonstrate somewhat more awareness of particularity and historical specificity” in their depiction of Scripturaries. However, even if Fadlallah, like most modern exegetes, shows more familiarity with historical specificity, his depiction remains mostly unsystematic and audience-oriented as demonstrated above with the example of kufr. Although his understanding, at least of Christianity, is clearly more informed compared to Judaism, he tends to fluctuate inconsistently between the Qur’ānic and the contemporary perceptions of Judaism and Christianity. Another good example of this fluctuation is the Qur’ānic Trinitarian accusation in Q5:116 which presents Mary as the third person of the holy Trinity. While he demonstrates, for his Christian audience, an awareness of the irrelevance of this accusation to modern day Christianity, the interpretation he offers his Muslim audience comes from a different angle and accentuates different elements.

It has to be noted that Fadlallah is no different from the other Muslim exegetes in rejecting both Jesus’ and Mary’s divinity as well as in finding the concept of plurality within God a contradiction to monotheism and a deviation from it. However, he stands out by showing, at least occasionally, a more developed understanding of the Trinity in which modern day Christianity believes. Fadlallah differentiates between the Qur’ānic perception of the Trinity (The Father, the Son, the Virgin Mary) and the one of Orthodox Christianity (The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit) and explains this difference. When the Qur’ānic verse 5:116 states that some Christians held Mary as a deity, the verse should not, as some Christian scholars think, be taken literally to mean that there was a Christian group who believed in the divinity of Mary but rather as a criticism of the excessive devotion to Jesus and the immoderate veneration of Mary which led to treating her like a divinity either through praying to her, asking for her help, or through any other form of behavior that gives her a divinity-like status. The Ayatollah differentiates between official Christianity and popular religiosity, i.e., how the common people practice their piety and live their religion. Quoting Riḍā’s commentary, Fadlallah argues that pre-Protestantism Christians worshipped Mary in both Eastern and Western churches in the form of prayers, praise, and appeal as well as requests for intercession; and that although no Christian sect is known for calling her a deity, Christians do call her “the mother of God.” However, Fadlallah does not think it is important whether the accusations against the Christians found in the Qur’ān were directed at a group of Christians in particular or not and argues that what should be discussed and focused on are in fact the theological and dogmatic

756 McAuliffe, Qur’ānic Christians, 288.
757 McAuliffe, Qur’ānic Christians, 288.
758 “O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, ‘Take me and my mother as deities besides God?’”
759 FAHIM,100–103; MWQ8:404.
760 FAHIM,102–103. I find it rather surprising that Fadlallah elaborates on these verses elsewhere more than in his MWQ commentary.
perceptions held by modern day Christians. Because modern day Christians say they are not concerned with these accusations as they do not consider Mary one of the trinity’s persons as in Q5:116, they should not be made to bear such a burden.

The above-mentioned interpretation of Q5:116 is not offered in the MWQ commentary. In MWQ, Fadlallah argues instead that the verse above, although presented as a dialogue between God and Jesus, is a reference to the deviations of Christians after the death of Jesus and their alienation from his teachings. The Ayatollah elaborates that after the death of Jesus, Christians started worshiping him, sanctifying him, and considering him a deity. They also humbled themselves before Mary and worshiped her statues as if they took her as a deity alongside God. The verse, hence, foresees the future of Christians and their aberrations from Jesus’ true message after his death. Fadlallah adds in one of his Friday sermons that verse Q5:116 refers to a certain Christian denomination who believed in the divinity of Jesus and Mary.

We cannot tell whether Fadlallah’s audience-tailored arguments serve tactical purposes or reflect older layers of his exegetical exercise. Either way, the readers of his MWQ would find him more conservative and in conformity with mainstream Qur’ānic exegesis, especially when it comes to whether Jews and Christians are to be considered believers or unbelievers and polytheistic or monotheistic. Those who read the Ayatollah’s dialogue-oriented works will find him keen to show tolerance and inclusivism.

3.4.3. Incarnation

The Trinitarian belief is not the only case of deviation in dogmatic perception where Christianity has distanced itself from its true teachings, earning its adherents the title of polytheists. The concept of incarnation is another case in point because it leads to assuming that God can take a human nature and because when one thinks of God incarnate, he actually has in mind another being other than God. Hence, believing in this other being leads de facto to polytheism. Fadlallah strongly argues against the soundness of such doctrine and equates it with idol worship. In addition, Fadlallah finds incarnation

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761 FAHIM, 102.
762 FAHIM, 100.
763 MWQ8:404.
764 MWQ8:404.
766 MWQ8:98–99.
unrealistic and incorrect because the nature of divinity is contradictory to the idea of incarnation. “Why would God need to incarnate while everything is in His hand and He can send His message via humans?” he wonders. Fadlallah also finds incarnation contradictory to the nature of divinity because incarnation requires limiting the absolute—limiting God. Islam rejects the idea of Jesus as an incarnation of God because God cannot be incarnated and considers such a doctrine a contradiction of monotheism.

Once again, Fadlallah mitigates this accusation in the Islamic-Christian dialogue context with the same neologism he resorted to in the case of the Trinity. Because the Qur’ānic perception rejects any form of divine incarnation or transfiguration, it considers such a theology to be a *philosophical unbelief*. Fadlallah mitigates the accusation further, explaining:

> As for the discussion of a son through incarnation and of a father through incarnation, most Christian schools of thought do not believe in a physical incarnation in which the son is [physically] separate from the father, but rather [of an incarnation] that is exactly like a word is incarnated in a book, it can be incarnated in a person.

Fadlallah then emphasizes the complexity of the incarnation doctrine and relies on the fact that Christian theologians say it is beyond the grasp of human reason. Furthermore, philosophical disagreement on the matter should be left to philosophical and theological studies. Pragmatic as he is, Fadlallah ends the discussion on the grounds that it would be a waste of time since the Qur’ān does not accuse Christians of polytheism when it speaks of them as a different group from the polytheists as in Q98:1.

These are not the only cases where a fluctuation between different conceptions is noted in Fadlallah’s thought. Also, on the level of terminology, Fadlallah tends to use different terms for different audiences, accentuates one meaning over another or shifts between the Christian and the Islamic understanding of terms and principles used in both religions. Sometimes he seems to purposely use these terms to emphasize similarities even if his understanding of them is not the same as the Christians’ as seen in his other works. For example, when Fadlallah speaks of Jesus as ‘the Word of God,’ he knows that the Islamic understanding of this phrase is different from the Christian one but he uses it in some of

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768 FAHIM, 246.


his writings intended for the Christian readership to emphasize the common ground between Islam and Christianity. The different understanding, however, is recognized in his Qur’ānic commentary and in the lectures intended for the Muslim audience for example. Furthermore, Fadlallah is much more direct in his emphasis on the humanity of Jesus in his MWQ commentary than in his dialogue-oriented books. While he presents Jesus as a human being, the prophet of God according to the traditional Islamic view in the first, he is keen to emphasize the Qur’ānic terms of exaltation in the latter where he even uses terminology common in both Islam and Christianity such as “the Word of God” or “the spirit of God” or “the Virgin lady.” Besides, while he emphasizes Jesus’ miraculous birth in the Islamic-Christian dialogue context, he downplays the miraculousness of the virgin birth by equating it with the creation of Adam from clay in his works written for a Muslim audience. True to his consistently inconsistent style, he, however, criticizes those who “use the verses about Jesus as the Spirit of God and the Word of God” to confuse simple people.

This shows clearly not only the unsystematic thought of Fadlallah but the double rhetoric he has as well. He emphasizes different issues for different audiences: while his MWQ lays greater stress on the wrongdoing of the People of the Book, his dialogue-oriented books emphasize the common ground between Islam and its predecessors. When it comes to Judaism, Fadlallah does not show any interest in emphasizing common ground except within the framework of “unity of divine missions.” Fadlallah is more systematic in his views of the Jews because of the historical and political background of the Arab World since the establishment of the state of Israel but is much less consistent in his perception of Christians and Christianity.

3.5. The Torah and the Gospel

In principle, Fadlallah gives an equal status to the Scriptures of the three Abrahamic religions as coming from the same God, calling for the same principles, and not contradicting each other. The holy books of the three heavenly missions (al-risālāt al-
samāwiya) are all equally called ‘light’ (nūr) and a source of guidance (hudā/hidāya)776 among other terms the Qurʾān uses about itself, about the Torah, and about the Gospel alike.777

Say, ‘We believe in God and in what was revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and their Descendants, and in what was given to Moses and Jesus and to the prophets from their Lord.’ Q3:84

According to verse Q3:84 above, a number of prophets have received scriptures: Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and their Descendants (al-Asbāṭ) have received scriptures; Abraham received scrolls (Ṣuhuf Ibrāhīm); Moses was given (ūtiya) the Torah (Taurāt) Jesus received a Gospel (Injīl); and David received Psalms (zābūr). Fadlallah does not comment on why the Qurʾān names only the Scrolls of Abraham, the Psalms, the Torah, and the Gospel but does not name the holy books revealed to Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and their Descendants and does not give us further information about the form of revelation each prophet received. He only explains that comprehensive belief means believing in all the scriptures revealed by God.

Although Fadlallah shows some interest in the self-definition of other monotheistic religions, he seems to mostly side with the Qurʾānic perception of these religions. For example, when he speaks of the Gospel in his MWQ commentary, he tends to stick to the Qurʾānic conception of a single book which was revealed at once to Jesus even if he shows a rather good knowledge of the New Testament known to us now and even gives a description of it. Although faulty, this description shows Fadlallah’s relative awareness of the difference between the two perceptions (Qurʾānic versus Judeo-Christian) and, thus, puts him ahead of most modern exegetes. However, Fadlallah does not offer a systematic perception of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament as was the case with other issues discussed above. In his vocabulary list explaining verse Q3:4, Fadlallah stands out from most modern exegetes in two ways, despite the occasional imprecisions such as dropping two books from the New Testament. First, because he refers to the Bible as we know it now, and second because he uses some Christian terminology. He indirectly identifies the Torah and the Gospel with the Bible currently in use when he defines the Qurʾānic terms as follows:

778 MWQ6:138.
779 Q3:4 “He has revealed to you the Scripture with truth, confirming that which was revealed before it, even as He revealed the Torah and the Gospel”
The Torah (al-Tawrāt) is a Hebrew word, they say, which means law (Sharī’a). It contains the five following books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Torah is called “the Old Testament” in Christians’ terminology, and it contains the stories of the prophets and the history of the Israelites before Jesus.

The Gospel is a Greek word that means the new teaching or the good news and it is called the “New Testament.” It contains the biography of the Messiah and some of his teachings distributed over four gospels which are: Matthew, John, Mark, and Luke. It also consists of the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of Paul, Peter, John, James, and Revelation. It was written a century or two after the death of Jesus. No chain of narrators (sanad) is mentioned concerning their writer (kātibihā).

Although the list mentions other books of the New Testament, Fadlallah fails to mention the Epistle of Jude (risālat Yahūdhā) and the Epistle to the Hebrews (ar-risāla ilā al’ibrāniyyīn). It is unclear whether this was done purposely or accidentally, but it would not be surprising that the strong hint at Jewishness in the names Jude and Hebrews could have motivated him to skip over these New Testament books. Although Fadlallah defines both the Torah (the Pentateuch) and the New Testament the way these two books are known to us in modern times, he is inconsistent in describing the way these two books were revealed: on the one hand, he sticks to the Qur’ānic perception according to which the Gospel and the Torah were revealed on one occasion but, at the same time, he says on the next page that the Gospels were written a century or two after the death of Jesus without any further elaboration on these two different views. Additionally, Fadlallah first gives the classical explanation given by most Muslim exegetes about the difference

780 Muslim exegetes are not of one mind concerning the origin of the word ‘Torah.’ Some think it is an Arabic word. While others, such as al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī, think it is not. See Arthur Jeffery’s The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’ān, Leiden: Brill, 2007, 95–96.

781 MWQ5:203. This seems to be a hint at the lack of reliable transmission (tawātur) of the Bible. Fadlallah does not come back to this argument anywhere else. See Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism, 41–47 for more on this concept.

782 Although the Epistle to the Hebrews was regarded in some traditions as belonging to Paul’s letters, the book itself does not mention it and it is also not mentioned in Arabic Bibles. The Epistle is mostly regarded as an independent work of an unknown author.

783 MWQ5:202.

784 MWQ5:203.

785 To name but a few, al-Baghawī (d. 1122), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) Ṭabriṣī (d. 1153), al-Razī (d. 1209), al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273), al-Baydāwī (d. 1286), al-Fairūzabādī (d. 1415) al-Shawkānī (d. 1839), and al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981).
in meaning behind the use of the different Arabic verb forms II nazzala and IV anzala\textsuperscript{786} which both mean to send down or to reveal. The first is used for the Qurʾān because it was revealed piecemeal (munajjaman) and the second is used for the Torah and the Gospel which were revealed on a single occasion (dufʿatan wāḥidatan).\textsuperscript{787} At the same time, Fadlallah combines this common perception of the Bible with the modern one without commenting on the contradiction between the two perceptions. Fadlallah clearly does not feel the need to reconcile his contradictory interpretations to his Muslim audience probably because he thinks these matters are irrelevant to them. Another contradiction is that even if Fadlallah makes the above-mentioned lexicographical distinction between nazzala and anzala, he uses only the form IV anzala throughout his commentary in reference to the revelation of both the Qurʾān and the Bible.

Generally speaking, Fadlallah is more interested in Christianity and its holy book than in Judaism and its holy book. In his commentary on Q53:36, which refers to the scrolls of Moses, Fadlallah briefly explains that these scrolls together represent the Torah of Moses but does not comment on the form or the fact that the Qurʾān speaks in other places about tablets—not scrolls.\textsuperscript{788} In fact, the Ayatollah also identifies the tablets (alwāḥ) with the Torah which was revealed to Moses on the Mount.\textsuperscript{789} As opposed to his treatment of the New Testament, Fadlallah’s approach to the Torah demonstrates a lack of precision as well as a lack of interest in the subject compared to classical exegetes, for example, who discuss the form of the Tables of the Law, their number, what they were made of, and what was written on them.\textsuperscript{790} The tablets (alwāḥ) given to Moses occur three times in the Qurʾān in the same context (Q7:145, 7:150, 7:154) the first of which announces the following: “we wrote for him [Moses] on the tablets of everything as an admonition (mawʾiẓatan) and as a detailed explanation (tafṣīlān) for everything.” Fadlallah concentrates on the spirituality of Moses’ meeting with God at the expense of the interpretation of the verse because what is more important for him is the spiritual lesson to be drawn from such an event and how modern-day Muslim mission workers (duʿāt) can benefit from these lessons.\textsuperscript{791} On the one hand, he says that “the Tablets were descended on Moses”\textsuperscript{792} but on the other hand he says that God promised Moses to reveal a Scripture to him which “he has to understand [it] in his heart first before he writes it on the Tablets” hence clearly suggesting that it was Moses who wrote the Law in a contradiction with the apparent meaning of the verse and with

\textsuperscript{786} MWQ5:202 in the context of Q3:3.
\textsuperscript{787} MWQ5:202, and Nadwa 4:407.
\textsuperscript{788} MWQ21:265.
\textsuperscript{789} MWQ10:241–242.
\textsuperscript{790} See, for example, al-Qurtubi’s al-Jāmi ʿ7:179, al-Ṭabrisi’s Majmaʿ al-Bayān 2:476, al-Rāzī’s al-Kashshāf 2:508, and al-Masʿūdī’s Murūj 1:49.
\textsuperscript{791} MWQ10:241–242.
\textsuperscript{792} MWQ10:234.
what he said earlier. The lack of precision is also seen in equating the Tablets with the Torah, which he explains in another place as containing the entire Pentateuch. Unlike most exegetes, Fadlallah does not show any interest in speculating on the number of these Tablets but he clearly alludes to numerous Tablets when he says that Moses “organized the Tablets to carry them to his people.” Moreover, he sticks to the Qur’ānic version of the story and does not refer to breaking the Tablets—Moses simply picks them up once his anger has subsided.

Fadlallah’s lack of preciseness continues in his discussion of the Torah as a holy book as well as its content. On the one hand, we learn that “the Torah was the first comprehensive revealed heavenly book which contains creed and law. It is the separator between truth and falsehood and the light which illuminates the path of those who walk in the movement of thought and life.” However, our exegete tells us elsewhere that the commandments revealed to Moses were revealed to the previous prophets. Additionally, these commandments contain the same broad lines in all the heavenly religions. God had revealed them to Abraham in his scrolls and to other prophets as well but in a general form. He then quotes al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1153) who says that “these verses are decisive (muḥkamāt) and have not been abrogated in any [holy] book.” The difference between what was revealed earlier and what is given to Moses, as Fadlallah lessens his contradiction, is the fact that previous prophets only had the general rules while God gave them to Moses in detail.

There is yet another aspect of impreciseness in claiming the completeness of the Torah, which is “flawless (lā nuqṣāna fīhi), contains all that people need [to take care of] their affairs, and is probably the first detailed holy book, revealed in the best way and in the most optimal style” as Fadlallah quickly downgrades this completeness by limiting it to the time of Moses in disagreement with the outer meaning of the verse and what he said previously. The context of the verse, he adds, shows that the perfectness and the value of each Scripture is measured against the movement of divine messages and their gradual completion.

793 MWQ10:235.
794 MWQ10:241.
795 MWQ10:247.
796 MWQ10:253.
797 MWQ15:231. Also in MWQ12:43.
799 MWQ9:380.
800 Al-Ṭabrisī’s Majmaʻ al-Bayān 4:477.
801 MWQ9:380.
802 MWQ9:381.
nature “depending on each phase of the intellectual development of [the form of] islām.”

In this, he is in line with his teacher al-Ṭabāṭabāʿī (d. 1981) who states that the differences between the dispensations of the three monotheistic religions are in accordance with the [degree of] readiness (istiʿḍād) of their respective communities.

Hence, it does not come as a surprise that Fadlallah deems verse Q6:154 a comparison between the Torah and the Qurʾān in favor of the latter. The verse, “Then We gave Moses the Scripture, making complete in the best way (ʿalā allaḏī aḥsana) and as a detailed explanation of all things and as guidance and mercy that perhaps in the matter of meeting with their Lord they would believe,” he then explains, is linked to the previous verses Q6:151-153 which contain the Decalogue revealed through Moses to the Jews and before him in Abraham’s scrolls. Like most classical exegetes, Fadlallah emphasizes the universality of these commandments and although he alludes to their similarity to the Biblical Decalogue, he does not particularly stress it. Besides, like Rashid Riḍā, Fadlallah thinks that these three verses contain the ten commandments which are mentioned in “Exodus 30:2-17 [sic].”

Fadlallah disagrees with the view that the material aspect is predominant in the Torah and the spiritual aspect is predominant in the Gospel on the grounds that such an idea is contradictory to the Qurʾānic and the Ḥadith perceptions of these two books in their respective times, in that each of them legislated for both the material and the spiritual needs of people.

Here too we note a contradiction because Fadlallah says elsewhere that the Gospel “does not contain detailed Law (Sharīʿa mufaṣṣalah) but contains morals, general principles and values in the spiritual and human dimension.” This is a contradiction with the above as well as with his view that states that the Gospel abrogated some of the Torah’s laws, which God had imposed on the Jews as a chastisement for their stubbornness.

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803 MWQ9:381; the term islām here is used as the generic one referring to all the Abrahamic religions as discussed in 3.1 above.
806 I opted for this translation because of Fadlallah’s interpretation of the verse as such in MWQ9:381.
808 MWQ9:378. Fadlallah must have confused the Arabic–Indic numerals (٣) because the right verses he refers to are Exodus 20:2–17. See also 2.4.2 for more on Fadlallah’s use of Biblical texts and the carelessness observed in Fadlallah’s quotations of the Hebrew Bible compared to the New Testament.
809 MWQ9:381–382.
810 MWQ8:195.
and disobedience,\textsuperscript{811} because that would suggest that the Gospel contains some legal rulings as well.

Moreover, Fadlallah stresses the importance of belief in the Judgment Day and links it with committing to godliness and righteousness, and hence he refuses the idea that the Torah does not speak of the resurrection day except for some hints to it here and there. The Ayatollah argues that the Qurʾān affirms through Q6:154, for example, that the Torah contains detailed aspects of everything related to dogma, dispensations, men, and life,\textsuperscript{812} hence, the fact that the Torah does not contain clear references to Judgment Day means that “some kind of distortion must have occurred in the Torah books available to us nowadays. This distortion must be because of the materialistic complexes in the Jewish reality.”\textsuperscript{813}

It is not surprising that Fadlallah shows much more interest in discussing Christianity and the Gospel compared to his interest in discussing Judaism and the Torah. It is also expected of him to reserve a gloomy perception for the Torah which “has been greatly distorted”\textsuperscript{814} while presenting the Gospel in a less gloomy style as “most of it at least is God’s Word.”\textsuperscript{815} The way in which he distributes his interest and time on these two religions can be explained by the Ayatollah’s political and societal background as well as by his pragmatism. His attitude towards the two religions and the two holy books is equally unsurprising. To conclude, it is safe to say that Fadlallah does not have a well-structured theology; on the contrary, it seems that his interpretations are mostly reactive and that he does not show any interest in reconciling exegetical differences and contradictions. Also, Fadlallah seems to override the fact that the Qurʾānic understanding is not necessarily in agreement with the other parties’ self-definition. He repeatedly calls for concentration on the common issues and the disregard of points of dispute. This is also seen in the way he describes the common history of the three religions. He does not discuss the differences in the way scripture, prophethood, or salvation are viewed in the three religions because, to him, these are minor details that should not be emphasized.\textsuperscript{816}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{811} MWQ6:36.
  \item \textsuperscript{812} MWQ9:383–384.
  \item \textsuperscript{813} MWQ9:384.
  \item \textsuperscript{814} Interview with Fadlallah in \textit{Fikr} magazine on 31 December 2009, retrieved from Fadlallah’s official website on 11 September 2016 http://arabic.bayynat.org/ListingByCatPage.aspx?id=1050.
  \item \textsuperscript{816} FAHIM, 245–249. These views are expressed in the context of dialogue with \textit{Kitābīs}.
\end{itemize}
3.6. The superiority and supersession of Islam over other religions

Islam by nature, Fadlallah argues, not only stresses the meeting points linking it with the previous monotheistic religions but considers them all part of it. This is clear, Fadlallah continues, from the treaties Muhammad signed with the Jews when he came to Medina making of them associates on the basis of their common ground in terms of dogma and legislation.

Fadlallah very often presents the overarching nature of divine missions or the unity of divine missions (waḥdat al-risālāt) as an argument for Islam’s openness towards the other monotheistic religions, thereby considering Islam a superior and a more tolerant religion than its precedents. The Jews have a complex towards both Christianity and Islam; Christians have a complex towards Islam while Muslims do not have any complex towards them because they consider them part of their own religion.

In accordance with the general Islamic views, Fadlallah explains that to be Muslim means “to believe in God, His prophets, His holy books, and His angels.”

Fadlallah considers this distinguishing feature in Islam an advantage over Judaism and Christianity and builds some of his theological rules on it. Muslims consider the Christians as Kitābis even if they do not believe in Prophet Muhammad, or even if they do not comply with the monotheistic thought God speaks about in the Qurʾān. For him, the equation is unbalanced because Muslims believe in the holy books and the prophets of Kitābis while the reverse is not true.

Although the Islamic openness to Christianity is limited to the common ground, Fadlallah does not see a problem in this restricted acceptance. To the contrary, he finds it a generous position on the Islamic side because at least islām accepts the general principles of Christianity as well as the Gospel, Jesus and Mary while Christians do not treat the Qurʾān as a divine book.

Moreover, while Muslims think the Gospel was partially distorted, Christians do not recognize the Qurʾān at all. And while a Muslim cannot disrespect any prophet because his Islam requires believing in all the previous prophets, Jews and

818 A lecture Fadlallah held in Damascus on 29 January 2000.
820 FAHIM, 49–95, 197, 400.
821 FAHIM, 378.
822 FAHIM, 172, 378.
823 FAHIM, 378.
824 FAHIM, 378.
Christians might disrespect Muhammad and do not consider him a prophet. If a Muslim man marries a Kitābī woman, he would always respect her faith and her holies in general because the holies (muqaddasāt) of Judaism and Christianity are considered holies for Muslims as well while the reverse is not true. Indeed, he often criticizes Judaism and Christianity for not having a mutual attitude towards Islam.

Fadlallah declares that the greatness of Islam lies in the respect it teaches its adherents towards all revelations. On more than one occasion, Fadlallah emphasizes that Muslims’ knowledge of Judaism and Christianity is part of their own faith. “We believe that Jesus and Moses are our prophets, we revere (nuqdisu) the Virgin Mary just as we revere Fāṭima al-Zahrā’, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad. We consider the Virgin Mary the greatest of all women (sayyidat nisā’ al-ʿālamīn), hence, we do not feel any alienation with Christianity because its sanctities are also ours,” he proudly tells a group of Western priests and theologians.

To Fadlallah, the revelation of the Qurʾān not only put Muslims on the same level with Jews and Christians, but even more, puts them in a better position. The Muslims are privileged over the adherents of the previous revelations whom God punished for their sins and deviations with harsh religious obligations. Now, these groups no longer need to read their own holy books, which are either partially or greatly distorted, since they now have the Qurʾān which summarizes all the previous messages. Furthermore, unlike its transitory predecessors, the Qurʾān does not leave any legislative vacuum: its vitality lies in its ability to form new rulings through independent legal reasoning (ijtiḥād), which allows future generations to deduce new understandings from its texts. This means that the Muslim mind does not freeze because the content of the divine text is dynamic. In line

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825 FAHIM, 172, 378.
828 It is noteworthy that the title “sayyidat nisā’ al-ʿālamīn” is used for Fāṭima al-Zahrā’ as well.
829 FAHIM, 137.
830 MWQ5:188.
831 MWQ9:385.
832 FAHIM, 59.
833 Ijtiḥād, in its legal sense, means making an effort to issue a legal judgment on an issue concerning which there is no direct Qurʾānic or Hadith texts. For more on ijtiḥād, see J. Schacht, and D.B. MacDonald, “Ijtiḥād,” in Encyclopaedia of Islam 2. Consulted online on 23 January 2018.
with most exegetes, Fadlallah preaches the superiority of Islam being the perfect and ultimate divine message and the only truth.

3.7. Conclusion

Although Fadlallah uses different argumentation tools than most exegetes, he still ends up coming to the same classical conclusions. While he does not interpret the term *islām* as the religious system brought by Muhammad, he still argues that the only acceptable form of *islām* is Islam, which makes the two synonymous in practice. Also, even if he argues that heavenly religions cannot be abrogated, he revokes his argument when he says that the pre-Islamic religions are less complete than Islam and that salvation is achieved only through Islam which puts him in line with most exegetes who argue for the abrogation of previous heavenly messages. Furthermore, Fadlallah echoes other classical and modern exegetes in emphasizing that accepting Muhammad as the messenger of God and following his teachings are prerequisites of salvation.835

Fadlallah generally concentrates on the centrality and finality of *islām* in the works intended for Muslim audiences but he goes a step further in works and interviews intended for larger audiences where he emphasizes the common ground between Muslims and *Kitābīs* and softens some of the Qurʾānic accusations against them. The ‘common word’ the Qurʾān speaks about, Fadlallah explains, is monotheism in which Jews and Christians believe.836 It is safe to say that Fadlallah’s most quoted verse, in the various contexts of interreligious dialogue, is Q3:64 which stresses the monotheism of *Kitābīs*; the openness, albeit the superiority, of Islam; and interreligious mutual respect. Fadlallah exhibits, although mostly in the context of Islamic-Christian dialogue, a willingness to overlook several dogmatic issues that have traditionally constituted a major problem in the exegetical discussions in favor of interfaith dialogue and rapprochement.

It is true that Fadlallah’s neologisms “*philosophical unbelief*” and “*relative unbelief*” make him stand out among most exegetes who find Trinitarian belief polytheistic by nature, but the Ayatollah’s inconsistency and double rhetoric weakens his argument as well as his contribution to interfaith dialogue. Another point of weakness is Fadlallah’s pragmatic political approach which leaves the Jews out of the discussion and of dialogue in practice. Fadlallah dedicates more space to the Christian faith than he does to Judaism and is more sensitive to the feelings of the Christian community while he criticizes Judaism and the

835 Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr for instance.
Jews almost throughout his works. Even when it comes to the holy books of the two communities, Fadlallah speaks more harshly about the Torah than about the Gospel to the extent that he thinks that some of the detailed laws in the Torah were imposed on the Jews as a punishment for their stubbornness and disobedience but were then abrogated with the advent of Jesus, whose coming was an act of God’s mercy and blessing towards them.\textsuperscript{837} Hence, Judaism is a castigatory form of islām which aimed at reprimanding the Jews for their wrongdoing while Christianity is an act of mercy from God which aimed at showing mercy to the Jews as well as at filling the gaps dictated by the needs of the new era. These two religions remain imperfect, however, until the advent of Muhammad and Islam which is the final perfect form of God’s message. Additionally, even when discussing the distortions of the holy books, he does that more harshly for the Torah, which, he argues, "has been greatly distorted,"\textsuperscript{838} while he speaks in a more positive way about the distortion of the Gospel, considering most of it at least as God’s Word.\textsuperscript{839} On top of that, the same verses invoked to support the supersession of Islam over Judaism and Christianity are also used to support the accusation of scriptural falsification against these monotheistic religions which is one of the gravest accusations against Kitābīs and is the subject of our next chapter.

\textsuperscript{837} MWQ6:36.

\textsuperscript{838} Interview with Fadlallah in Fikr magazine on 31 December 2009, retrieved from Fadlallah’s official website on 11 September 2016 http://arabic.bayynat.org/ListingByCatPage.aspx?id=1050.

\textsuperscript{839} FAHIM, 285.
4. Misrepresentation of Scriptures

The Qurʾān values the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures, mentions them by name, affirms that they were revealed by the same divine source which revealed the Qurʾān, and considers them to be a source of wisdom, guidance, and light. They are part of a revelatory progression in which the Qurʾān is the last Testament and Muhammad is the last of a prophetic line. The progressive nature of divine revelation allows for a certain stream of revelation on the one hand, but also for a partial repetition and re-revelation of the same truths as a reminder, as a completion, and as a correction of the precedent revelations. Thereby, Islam is a reformulation and an update of Judaism and Christianity and the Qurʾān is the Scripture which completes and closes the revelatory progression. While each nation received a prophet which spoke its own language and dealt with the specific needs of its phase, the Qurʾān, albeit in Arabic, is a universal divine message intended for all human beings (li al-ʾālamīn) and contains all that people need to know about God and life. All these missions came from the same God and had the same message—at least in their pure form. From an Islamic point of view, Judaism and Christianity are no longer in their pure form because their Scriptures were tampered with. Because of their intermediateness on the one hand and their corruption on the other, the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures are rendered otiose. These intermediate and corrupt versions of Scriptures are no longer needed now that the perfect Scripture, the Qurʾān, is revealed. These two elements, i.e., the intermediateness and the corruption of pre-Qurʾānic Scriptures are the main arguments for the supersession of Islam over Judaism and Christianity as we have seen in the previous chapter.

However, if the question of supersession was complex and unagreed upon among Muslim exegetes, the question of scriptural corruption (tahrīf) is even more complex. Academic

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840 For more on this, see Arthur Jeffery, “The Qurʾān as Scripture,” *The Muslim World* 40.1 (1950): 41–55 as well as Nickel’s exhaustive list of Qurʾānic references to other Scriptures in his *Narratives of Tampering*, 39–50.


842 Q21:107 and 7:158.

843 For the sake of clarity, the more general term ‘misrepresentation’ is preferred to terms such as corruption, distortion, falsification, or tampering. Hence, any kind of scriptural change is referred to as
scholars and Muslim jurisconsults agree that the Qurʾān accuses Kitābūs of some kind of scriptural misrepresentation but disagree about the details of this misrepresentation.\(^{844}\) While some scholars find in the Qurʾān itself verses which accuse Jews and Christians of misrepresenting their Scriptures, other scholars think that the accusation of tahrīf started and developed with the Muslim encounters with Jews and Christians. Scholars agree that this charge was not invented by Muslims because the Christians before them also accused the Jews of tampering with their Scriptures well before Islam.\(^{845}\) What scholars disagree about, however, is whether this accusation stems from the Qurʾān. Some scholars limit this accusation to physically hiding some texts by laying hands on them while others argue that the biblical text itself was changed, thus is corrupt.\(^{846}\) The verses which speak of tahrīf or concealing of the truth/revelation according to Montgomery Watt,\(^{847}\) for example, do not amount to textual distortion. Di Matteo agrees with this explanation and thinks that the Qurʾān does not accuse the People of the Book of textual alteration but rather of scriptural


misinterpretation. A number of scholars argue that the *taḥrīf* accusations were born in the exegetical literature later. Scholars interested in interfaith understanding sometimes are too involved in spreading thoughts of peace, leading them to neglect major scholarship in favor of a less polemical interpretation of the Qur’ānic texts. Both Gordon Nickel and Mahmoud Ayoub, for example, have gone in this direction. In his *Narratives of Tampering*, Nickel chose to stress only the views of the scholars who think the Qur’ān does not make such accusations. It is rather unfortunate that Nickel chose to emphasize the studies which serve his viewpoint, reducing major scholarly discussions of opposing opinions into a footnote, because it was done at the expense of a sturdy discussion of the subject. Furthermore, Nickel merely touches upon verse Q2:79 which he includes as one of the verses “containing expressions of action,” even though he tells us that it is an oft-cited verse. It seems that his quest for harmonious interfaith coexistence weakened an otherwise good work which is perhaps the most thorough study about the theme and semantic field of scriptural corruption. Likewise, Ayoub argues that the Qur’ān does not accuse the People of the Book of altering the text of the Torah and the Gospel but rather of “altering the truth which those Scriptures contain” through misinterpretation rather than “actual addition or deletion of words from the sacred books.” Ayoub does not discuss the verse (Q2:79) which accuses the People of the Book rather explicitly of writing “the book with their hands.”

However, the majority of Qur’ānic scholars agree that the accusation of tampering with Scriptures is above all Qur’ānic. The scholarly consensus is that the Qur’ān accuses particularly the Jews of tampering with Scriptures. In his “Über muhammedanische

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851 Ayoub, “ʿUzayr in the Qurʾān and Muslim Tradition,” 3–18.

852 Nickel does not shy from showing his enthusiasm towards answering the accusations of falsification which he heard from his Muslim “friends in South Asia” as he refers to them in his Foreword, ix.


854 Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering*, 100. This verse has direct bearing on the accusation of textual misrepresentation because it accuses the People of the Book of writing texts with their own hands and claiming them to be part of Scripture. Nickel compiles a useful list of scholarly works which have discussed the verses usually linked with the accusation of *Taḥrīf*. See *Narratives of Tampering*, 26–29.

855 Ayoub, “ʿUzayr in the Qurʾān and Muslim Tradition,” 5.

Goldziher says that the Qurʾān accuses Jews and Christians of actual alteration and distortion of the text of their Scriptures. Likewise, Lazarus-Yafeh links the accusation of textual alteration with “altering words from their proper meaning, changing words in form or substituting words or letters for others.”

Aware of the intricacy of the accusation of taḥrīf, McAuliffe deliberately formulates it in an ambiguous way stating that “the Qurʾān and the early biographical materials on Muhammad, both ḥadīth and sīra, charge Jews and Christians with the possession and/or conveyance of corrupted Scriptures.” Moreover, Muslim exegetes have developed two main theories about this misrepresentation. The first concerns the alteration of the text of Scripture itself (taḥrīf al-naṣṣ), and the second concerns the alteration of its sense, i.e., misinterpreting it (taḥrīf al-maʿnā). Having examined eighth- and ninth-century Muslim and Christian polemical literature, Ryan Schaffner concluded that the taḥrīf al-maʿnā and taḥrīf al-naṣṣ dichotomy prevalent in previous scholarship, according to which the first was earlier and the second came later, is an erroneous dichotomy. In his research, he concludes that “Muslims were advancing accusations of the Bible’s misinterpretation and textual corruption” simultaneously.

Whether Qurʾānic or not, and whether the taḥrīf al-maʿnā and taḥrīf al-naṣṣ developed separately or simultaneously, the accusation of scriptural misrepresentation (taḥrīf) remains the primary Islamic accusation against Jews and Christians, as Goldziher puts it. The tone of this accusation differed from harsh to soft but it never ceased to exist, especially in the Muslim-Kitābī polemical discussions. Lazarus-Yafeh argues that “in the first centuries of Islam, taḥrīf was not a central theme, though well-known. Ḥadīth and early commentaries filled out the gaps left by the relevant Qurʾānic verses.” Until the

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859 McAuliffe, “The Quranic context of Muslim biblical scholarship,” 144.
861 Ryan P. Schaffner, The Bible Through a Qurʾānic Filter: Scripture Falsification (Tahrīf) in 8th- and 9th-Century Muslim Disputational Literature, Diss. The Ohio State University, 2016, 362–363.
862 I keep this discussion short because it is beyond the scope of this study and also because Fadlallah equates tahrīf al-maʿnā and tahrīf al-naṣṣ in terms of harmfulness as we shall see in 4.1.3.
eleventh century, Muslim scholars quoted the Bible to prove the correctness of their faith and to unpolemically discuss the Christian doctrinal mistakes.866 Similarly, Adang demonstrates through her study of nine medieval Muslim writers that earlier Muslim scholars limited their accusations to misinterpretation and that only al-Maqdisi (d. 966) and Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) argued that the text itself was distorted.867 The polemical accusation of scriptural misrepresentation per se started with Ibn Ḥazm, the author of Kitāb al-fisal fī al-milal wa al-ahwā’ wa al-nihal, who sought to demonstrate that the Bible was falsified using arguments from both the Qurʾān and the Bible.868 Ibn Ḥazm was the most vociferous and systematic among polemical authors and his arguments marked a departure from prevailing opinions.869 The accusation of tahrīf still constitutes an important argument in modern-day interfaith and polemical discussions. Although some Muslim exegetes and thinkers argue that the Bible was not distorted, the vast majority of Muslims nowadays believe that it was indeed distorted.870 Now, with the Internet and the digital developments, Muslims engaged in interfaith polemics try to point out these alterations in the biblical texts or its interpretation through the use of manuscripts in an attempt to prove the supremacy of the Qurʾān over its precedent Scriptures.871

In the previous chapter, we discussed the issue of abrogation and how it is used, together with scriptural corruption, to argue for the supersession of Islam over previous monotheistic religions. The purpose of the present chapter is to explore Fadlallah’s views on tahrīf through the analysis of his interpretation of the Qurʾānic verses traditionally quoted in arguing for the misrepresentation of pre-Qurʾānic Scriptures. In what follows, a composite account will be given of Fadlallah’s treatment of scriptural misrepresentation, using the whole gamut of Qurʾānic terms by which the Qurʾān refers to this accusation and a discussion of how Fadlallah understands these terms and interprets them.872 In addition to the semantic field of misrepresentation, I shall study any other verses or texts in which Fadlallah deals with this accusation for a picture as complete as possible of his views on the matter because unless one scrutinizes the Ayatollah’s writings in general for any further

866 Accad, “Corruption and/or Misinterpretation of the Bible,” 95.
870 Accad, Martin. “Corruption and/or Misinterpretation of the Bible,” 67.
clarifications, one would miss some of the exegete’s views. Indeed, Fadlallah seems to deal with the subject in other contexts in ways that are sometimes more intriguing than he does in the traditional contexts of his commentary.

4.1. *Taḥrīf* and its alternative expressions

When speaking of the accusation of scriptural misrepresentation leveled by Muslims against Jews and Christians, the most used Arabic term related to it is *taḥrīf*, but it is not the only one. Muslim exegetes refer to several Qur’ānic terms and phrases to argue for the corruption of pre-Qur’ānic Scriptures. In addition to the widely used term *taḥrīf* (shifting or altering), the other relevant Qur’ānic terms include *tabdīl* (substituting); *labs* (confounding); *layy al-’alsina* (twisting tongues); *kilmān*; *ikhfāʾ*; *isrāʾ* (concealing); *nisyān* (forgetting), as well as the expressions *yaktubūna biʾaydīhim* (writing with their hands) and *iftirāʾ/qawl al-kaḏib ‘alā Allāh* (fabricating lies about God). Ways of misrepresentation do not always stand aloof from other ways in these verses. They sometimes intertwine as some verses contain more than one of these terms or phrases, hence the challenge to systematically focus on each one of them separately. Thus, some repetition is inescapable.

4.1.1. *Taḥrīf*

The charge of scriptural misrepresentation, mostly known in Arabic by the verbal noun *taḥrīf*, was originally leveled against the Jews and only later against the Christians as

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874 Q2:59, 7:162.
875 Q2:42, 3:71.
876 Q3:78, 4:46.
878 Q5:15, 6:91.
879 Q2:77.
880 Q5:14.
881 Q2:79.
882 Q3:75, 3:78, 3:94 among others.
Although Kitābīs face it together, this accusation is to a great extent related to the Jews. In fact, the four verses in which the Qurʾān uses the root “ḥrf” are all against the Jews. Early exegetes interpreted these verses in different ways but agreed that the Jews tampered with their Scriptures one way or another. The misrepresentation of Scriptures aimed at two main goals: making lawful what God made unlawful or vice versa, or concealing the foretelling of the coming of Prophet Muhammad.

As already mentioned above, the most oft-discussed Qurʾānic term in the context of scriptural misrepresentation is the concept of tahrīf which appears in the Qurʾān in four verses (Q2:75, Q4:46, Q5:13, and Q5:41). In the first occurrence, Fadlallah groups together verse Q2:75 with both the previous and following verses (Q2:74-82). This allows him to start by enumerating a number of demerits the Qurʾān attributes to the Jews such as hardheartedness, unyieldingness, unwillingness to accept Muhammad’s message, hypocrisy, and blasphemy among many other faults, the most serious of which is the tahrīf of Scriptures.

Do you covet [the hope], that they would believe for you while a party of them used to hear the words of God and then yuḥarrifūnahu after they had understood it while they were knowing? Q2:75

Fadlallah seems to follow his role model al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981) in keeping the commentary on this verse disappointingly brief. Just like al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, he does not explain the term “yuḥarrifūnahu” and does not offer us a gloss on the term “ḥarrafa” either. Instead, he uses the phrase as part of his own sentence like so:

{a party of them used to hear the words of God} and understand its meanings and implications which lead them to know that the new religion is the religion of the truth, and that the prophet sent [to them] is truthful {then they yuḥarrifūnahu} and they misinterpret it in a way that has nothing to do with the dogmatic

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885 Q2:75, 4:46, 5:13, and 5:41.
886 *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* 2:59.
887 *Tafsīr Muqātil* 1:118.
888 As noted in Chapter II, Fadlallah usually groups the Qurʾānic verse under study with its surrounding verses in order to discuss their context. See chapter II for more on how Fadlallah distributes Qurʾānic units.
889 The curly {} braces indicate the Qurʾānic phrases integrated into Fadlallah’s own interpretative text.
More important than explaining the act of *tahrīf* itself, Fadlallah devotes more attention to explaining the reason why God tells us about the Jewish demerits. God wanted to explain that these people are stingy, merciless, exploiters of religion, persecutors and prophet murderers in order to teach believers to take heed of them.891 These people are hopeless and one should not waste time hoping for their belief—they have deliberately chosen unbelief and are willing to use any means to destroy believers even if that means misrepresenting their own Scriptures and hiding the truth about Muhammad and his message.892 The main message, Fadlallah concludes, is to warn believers about the Jews whose demerits and sins are the same through the ages.893

Although Fadlallah expresses it only briefly, he does not find all the Jews guilty of *tahrīf*.894 He clearly differentiates between, on the one hand, medieval Jewish scholars who seem to have played a major role in concealing the truth—fabricating lies as well as misleading lay Jews into believing this misrepresented Scripture895—and, on the other hand, some Jews, contemporaneous with Muhammad, who imagined they knew their Scriptures but the truth being that they did not. The Qurʾān describes the latter in Q2:78 as “*unlettered ones* (ummīyyūn) who do not know the Scripture except in wishful thinking (īllā amāniyya).” Although Fadlallah glosses the term “*ummīyyūn*” in the vocabulary list here as ‘illiterate,’896 his interpretation of the term as it occurs in Q2:78 is different from his interpretation elsewhere. For example, in the context of Q62:2, he explains the term “*ummīyyūn*” as illiterate or as what the Jews categorize as “*goyīm*” (גויים) in Hebrew, i.e., pagans in contraposition to them—the chosen people.897 Here, he first explains in a micro introduction that the “*ummīyyūn*” are a group of Kitābīs contemporaneous with the Islamic Daʿwa who knew very little about their Scripture except for their wishful thinking that made them feel superior and made them “consider themselves ‘God’s chosen people’"
without any true knowledge." After this introductory statement, the exegete engages in interpreting the verse adding to the above that these “ummīyyūn” among the Jews “do not have a deep understanding nor an awareness of the truths contained in their Scriptures because they stop at the naïve meanings of words and do not go deeper into them.” The Ayatollah moves on to explain the Jews’ limited knowledge of their Scripture suggested by the Qur’ānic phrase “īlā ṣamāniyya.” He offers three alternative understandings of the phrase without giving primacy to one over another:

1) The above-mentioned Qur’ānic phrase might suggest that the Jews’ knowledge of Scripture is limited to recitation without proper understanding of it. 2) Alternatively, the phrase might refer to the “fabricated content which undertook misrepresentation (taḥrīf). When one says “tamannā hāḏā al-qawla,” it means he fabricated it. Hence, what is meant is that their knowledge of Scripture is limited because they know it only through misrepresentation (īlā binaḥwī al-taḥrīf) which is a set of lies presented as real meanings to the words [of Scripture].” 3) The third possible meaning of the Qur’ānic phrase is that their wishful thinking makes them hope for a special treatment from God which they do not deserve. Although Fadlallah does not choose one exegetical possibility over the others, he concludes that all of the above alternative explanations suggest that the Jews do not possess the truth and that their knowledge is based on fabricated lies and on surmise (takharrusāt wa takhmīnāt) only. However, other than misrepresenting the scriptural passages about Muhammad, Fadlallah does not explain to the reader what these lies might have included, how they ended up as Scripture or when misrepresentation took place. What he seems to offer us is a hint that those who introduced these lies are some Jewish religious scholars. Also, despite the brief reference elsewhere that the Qur’ānic accusation of scriptural misrepresentation concerns “only a party of them, not all of them,” which he skips in this context despite the Qur’ānic phrase “a party of them” in Q2:75, the Ayatollah presents us, here and elsewhere, with a generalization about the Jews according to which they care very little for faith or Scripture. What is important for them is the material profit and the social status they can reach through it. If their Scriptures do not allow them to achieve these profits, they alter them and interpret them according to the needs of each phase in a way that allows them to reach what they aim for.

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898 MWQ2:100.
899 MWQ2:100.
901 MWQ2:100.
902 MWQ6:121.
904 MWQ2:96–98.
The Prophet Muhammad and those who believed in him exhausted all means to convince the Jews to embrace Islam because they have Scriptures which contain law, dogmatic facts and the prophecy about Muhammad and above all because their acceptance of Islam would be “a huge leap in favor of the Islamic force.” Over and over again, Fadlallah emphasizes the aspect of deliberate misrepresentation of Scriptures by the Jews. The Jews have decided to close their minds against the truth because they deal with the truth “with the mindset of the merchant who seeks bumper profit. If he does not find a way to achieve such profit, he resorts to taḥrīf. [...] and that is what they did.”

Another occurrence of our key term “ḥarṭaṭaṭaṭaṭ’ is at Q4:46 which Fadlallah links with the two preceding verses. The aim of grouping these verses together is to put them in a context where the Jews are presented as a people who have preferred misguidance over guidance and who are hostile to believers. The context provided by these previous verses prepares the reader to better accept the scriptural misrepresentation as yet another negative trait of the Jews and at the same time offers hope that God will help the believers and protect them from their animosity. Here also, Fadlallah spends more time warning believers of the Jews than he spends on the idea of taḥrīf itself. He briefly describes the atmosphere in which Muslims lived because of the Jews:

They were given the Book—the Torah—which they have shifted (ḥaṭratųhu) from its true meanings, stood against Muhammad and his followers and declared war against them both secretly and openly. Among other things, they used the Torah as a religious weapon in an attempt to deceive Muslims and create an atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty. Through this, they aimed at destroying the inner foundation of Islam within the Islamic community.

Here, Fadlallah explains, in accordance with verse Q4:44, that the Jews were given only “a portion of the Scripture,” they have not lived according to it and to its spiritual meanings but took it “on the tips of their tongues in order to use it for the sake of their ambitions and their lusts.” Here, Fadlallah does not link the first part of the Qur’ānic verse “those who were given a portion of the Scripture” with scriptural misrepresentation as he does in his commentary on Q3:23. In both cases, he seems to follow al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981) in

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905 MWQ2:96.
906 MWQ2:96–98.
907 MWQ2:98.
908 MWQ7:285.
considering this verse an indication that the Jews do not have the whole truth because they tampered with their book.  

At verse Q4:45, before speaking of their gravest sin stated in verse Q4:46: “shifting the word from its places,” Fadlallah presents the Jews as the bitter enemy of Muslims and as a dishonest group who deliberately chose misguidance over guidance and who are willing to do anything to destroy the believers. Fadlallah uses a cross-reference to Q5:82 in order to emphasize the link between the accusation of shifting words from their places and Jewish enmity explaining that:

> these are the [same] Jews who are [described as] the most vehement in enmity toward the believers. God tells us that they do not deal with matters through their true meanings honestly and clearly. They do not deal honestly with principles, people, and words. They rather apply themselves to misrepresentation—especially [to the misrepresentation of] the words that reveal the correct principles—from their places in accordance with their interests and their goals.

The aim behind this verse, like Q2:75, is to warn the believers to take heed of the Jews who take advantage of their reputation as people of the Torah and use it to mislead people. Hence, according to Fadlallah, the Qurʾān urges the believers “to study the nature of people as well as their history, affiliation, relationships, and stands before listening to them in order to determine the methods they use […] and in order to be wary if needed.” This is the lesson to be drawn from the experience of early Muslims with the Jews.

The interpretation of the two verses discussed above allows us to link Fadlallah’s perception of tahrīf in his commentary with misinterpreting Scripture, fabricating some of its content, and shifting some of its words from their places. However, it remains unclear whether the shifting of words was done orally, physically, or both ways. It also remains unclear to us what exactly the act of tahrīf included because the Ayatollah does not offer an explicit, let alone an inclusive, explanation of the term in his exegetical analysis of these two verses. Illogical as it may seem, although Q2:75 and Q4:46 come before Q5:13 and Q5:41 in the Qurʾān and in MWQ, as far as the order of the Sūras in the Mushaf is

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909 MWQ5:288.
910 MWQ7:286–287.
911 MWQ7:287.
912 MWQ7:287.
concerned, it is only in his interpretation of the fifth Sūra that Fadlallah offers a glossing for the term taḥrīf:

Taḥrīf means shifting a matter from its place to another. An example of this—here—is the Jews who altered the words (kalām) of the Torah from their places, where God placed them, and interpreted them otherwise than the way they were revealed or changed them into a different state.913

In addition to the above-mentioned interpretation linking taḥrīf with misinterpretation and alteration of scriptural words, the Ayatollah also adds omission to his brief glossing of yuḥarrifūna in Q5:41 as follows: “they shift it and omit it.”914 Prior to commenting on verse units Q5:12-13 and Q5:41-43, an introduction sets the mood of the Qur’ānic accusation and links it to the Jews.

Here too, Fadlallah groups Q5:13 with the previous verse which speaks of the Israelites’ covenant with God and starts with an enumeration of their sins, among which is taḥrīf.915 “The Israelites broke the[ir] covenant [with God], altered the Words from their places thus forging (fazayyafū) the truth and deviating intellectually from the natural path of God’s revelation.”916 In the second verse unit (Q5:41-43), Fadlallah also starts with an introduction in which he describes the Jews as “causers of problems and crisis in the Islamic community”917 because of their complex towards the Muslim community and because of their hypocrisy and hatred of Islam and Muslims. Once again, Fadlallah equates the Israelites with the Jews contemporaneous with Muhammad as in the following statement: “The Jews who lived a gloomy history overshadowed with crime and conspiracy against God’s messages and prophets are the [same] people who have formed a caliginous alliance against the Prophet and his message.”918 Fadlallah does not discuss al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s (d. 1981) view of the verse but he seems to follow him in citing the oft-told

913 MWQ8:83.
914 MWQ8:172.
915 MWQ8:83–86.
916 MWQ8:85.
917 MWQ8:173.
918 MWQ8:174. Fadlallah almost consistently equates the Israelites with the Jews of Medina and also often with modern-day Jews. In MWQ6:426–427, he says that “the Jews stir up suspicions and doubts in every era. […] This has become their political style in our present era.” On yet another occasion, IBAMAM, 298, he says “when we read the stories of the Children of Israel in the Qur’ān and learn that their hearts were hard ’like stones or even harder’ Q2:74, we can see in all their ways and their behavior nowadays this picture depicted in the Qur’ān.”
story of the Jews who came to Muhammad for a judgment related to adultery.\textsuperscript{919} According to this narrative, the Jews of Medina brought to Muhammad the case of a Jewish man and a woman who belong to the nobles and who had committed adultery. The Jews hid from Muhammad the Torah verse about stoning adulterous Jews and asked him to give his judgment concerning the couple. This narrative also suggests that the Jews applied the rulings of the Mosaic Law to laymen but not to their nobles and elites and sought a way to avoid the stoning punishment of an adulterous well-born Jewish couple. This behavior is linked with exegetical misrepresentation in both Fadlallah’s and al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s understanding although the first emphasizes seeking personal interest more than the second.\textsuperscript{920}

Fadlallah also echoes al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī in arguing that the \textit{taḥrīf} which affected the Jewish and Christian Scriptures comprises omissions, additions, and misinterpretation and in that this misrepresentation has affected these Scriptures only partially—they still contain guidance and truth.\textsuperscript{921} In other words, like abrogation, \textit{taḥrīf} makes these Scriptures crippled as they are no longer sufficient for guidance or for seeking the way to salvation on the one hand, but they still contain some truth including the prediction of Muhammad’s coming on the other.\textsuperscript{922}

However, in the midst of this discussion, Fadlallah shows an awareness of the contradiction between the Qur’ānic verses of affirmation (\textit{taṣdīq}) and the accusation of misrepresentation. Hence, he, on a couple of occasions, tries to harmonize this by stating that there is no contradiction in essence between the Qur’ān and its predecessors:

\textit{The Qur’ān tells us that the Torah was altered by its people, by those who claim to belong to it (yantasibūna ilayhā). However, this is true in some specific issues. Other than that, the Qur’ān announces that the Torah is the book with which the Qur’ān meets in most rulings and concepts. Moreover, the prophet used to challenge the Jews using the Torah in order to prove God’s true

\textsuperscript{919} MWQ8:175–177; cf. al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s \textit{Tafsīr al-Mizān} 5:356–358, and al-Ṭabrisī’s \textit{Majma’ al-Bayān} 3:242–244.

\textsuperscript{920} MWQ8:178, and \textit{Tafsīr al-Mizān} 5:340.

\textsuperscript{921} Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s \textit{Tafsīr al-Mizān} 6:342. Fadlallah does not quote al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s views in this context but he does elsewhere. He states in MWQ5:212, for example, that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures contain some truth. Fadlallah quotes al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s “the present version of the Torah available to them [the Jews] today contains some of the original Torah revealed to Moses” in one of his Damascene lectures held on 7 June 2008. http://arabic.bayynat.org/ArticlePage.aspx?id=18813. Consulted on 1 January 2015.

\textsuperscript{922} Compare Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s \textit{Tafsīr al-Mizān} 6:342 with Fadlallah’s MWQ5:212, for example. See the Quest for Muhammad below for more on the idea of the prediction of Muhammad’s coming in the misrepresented Scripture.
judgment on which the Qurʾān meets with the Torah.\textsuperscript{923}

Fadlallah’s reasoning leads to having two different categories by the name People of the Book: Those who received the book, valued it and lived by it, thus, deserving the Qurʾānic designation People of the Book and those who did not, those who pretended to be the People of the Book, whom I take the liberty of naming “the People of the misrepresented Book.” Fadlallah refers to this group using the Arabic verb “\textit{yantasib}” (to belong) in his own way. Although this verb means simply ‘to belong to’ or ‘to be affiliated with,’ Fadlallah often uses it to mean “those who claim to belong” to the Torah or to the Gospel. Thus, he often differentiates between true Kitābīs, on the one hand, and those who claim their affiliation to the Torah or the Gospel but whose affiliation in reality is in name only, on the other. This is seen more clearly elsewhere where he uses this term followed by phrases such as “not really” or “not truly.”\textsuperscript{924} For example, in his interpretation of verse Q5:14: “Of those who say, ‘We are Christians,’ he says “this might suggest that they do not represent Christianity but rather claim to belong to it but do not really belong to it (yantasibūna ilayhā qawlan lā fiʿlan).”\textsuperscript{925} However, and although Fadlallah does not explicitly and directly tackle the subject of scriptural misrepresentation, he implies briefly that the Bible was tampered with by untrue Kitābīs—who only claim to be Jews or Christians but are not really so when he states, for example, that “the Torah was altered by its people, those who [only] claim to belong to it.”\textsuperscript{926} Another hint is found in calling the corrupters of the Scriptures “traitors” which suggests that they are not true Jews because they betrayed their own Scriptures.\textsuperscript{927}

4.1.2. Tabdīl

The Qurʾān accentuates several times that nobody can change (baddala, tabdīl) the words (kalimat) of God\textsuperscript{928} but it accuses the People of the Book of doing exactly so in Q2:59 and Q7:162. The root (bdl) occurs thirty-three times in the Qurʾān and it refers to substituting something for another. However, only two Qurʾānic verses are directly relevant to the

\textsuperscript{923} MWQ8:180.

\textsuperscript{924} MWQ8:89, MWQ8:403–404, MWQ9:221, and Nadwa 1:253. In MWQ11:77–78, Fadlallah argues that true believers would follow the teachings of their prophets.

\textsuperscript{925} MWQ8:89; also in MWQ6:220 where he explicitly differentiates between Scripturaries who “truly believe in God and those who commit to the Bible as a title and affiliation only but do not commit to its teachings.”

\textsuperscript{926} MWQ8:180.

\textsuperscript{927} MWQ8:179.

\textsuperscript{928} Q6:34; Q6:115; 10:65; 18:27 and 50:29.
accusation of scriptural misrepresentation we are dealing with here (Q2:59 and Q7:162). In what follows, we shall examine how Fadlallah conceives of the two Qur’ānic verses and their surrounding contexts (Q2:58-59 and Q7:161-162) traditionally understood as an accusation of oral misrepresentation by the Jews alone—not the Christians.

When We said, “Enter this town and eat freely from it in abundance, and enter the gate prostrate and say, 'ḥiṭṭa,' We will forgive your sins, and We will increase the reward for doers of good.” But those who wronged changed the word for another than that which had been said to them, so We sent down upon those who wronged a punishment from the sky because they were defiantly disobeying. Q2:58-59

Fadlallah groups these two verses inside a five-verse unit (Q2:57-61) which starts with a series of blessings God bestowed upon the Israelites juxtaposed to their ungrateful, rebellious reaction. By doing so, Fadlallah offers this as yet another instance of the Israelites’ deliberate rebellion against God and ungratefulness to Him despite all the numerous blessings He bestowed upon them. In addition, the Israelites had been disrespectful towards prophets and their messages and, thus, deserved God’s punishment. They are a people who have deliberately chosen deviation (inḥirāf) from God’s right path. The term inḥirāf (deviation) is central in Fadlallah’s writings. It occurs over two thousand times in his commentary alone and is used just as often in his other works and sermons to refer to anything that is against God’s commands. Sometimes this term is used to describe scriptural misrepresentation (taḥrīf) which happens to come from the same root as inḥirāf (ḥrf). Indeed, taḥrīf is perceived as a form and a consequence of inḥirāf.

Although Fadlallah argues against identifying the unidentified (taʾyīn al-mubham) in the Qurʾān, he identifies the town God ordered the Israelites to enter as Jerusalem but mitigates his statement using the adverb “apparently” without offering further information to back his view. Unlike him, Riḍā (d. 1935), for example, refrains from identifying the town in the verse and says straightforwardly: “just as the Qurʾān did not identify the town, we shall

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929 For example, Q10:15 which tells the story of unbelievers who ask Muḥammad to substitute (baddilhu) the Qurʾān with something else to which he answers: “It is not for me to substitute it (ubaddiluhā) . . .” Fadlallah does not relate this verse to the People of the Book but to unidentified unbelievers in MWQ11:282–285.

930 These two verses come in the middle of a long narrative about the Israelites (Q2:49–74).

931 MWQ2:56–59. He repeats this idea time after time, for example, later on in MWQ2:59–67 and elsewhere.

932 MWQ2:57.

933 Compare with al-Ṭabriṣī, for instance, who uses a cross-reference to Q2:21 to back this same view, saying “commentators are unanimous that what is meant by ‘the town’ here is Jerusalem”; see Al-Ṭabriṣī’s Majma’ al-Bayān 1:161
not identify it either.”934 Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981), for instance, groups together a large scriptural unit which comprises verses Q2:49-61 but leaves most of the verses uncommented including the verses of oral misrepresentation above.935 Like Fadlallah, he emphasizes the rebellious and ungrateful nature of the Israelites and backs his emphasis with several Qur’ānic cross-references on the numerous demerits of the Jews.

Fadlallah glosses the term ḥiṭṭa936 in Q2:58 as ‘descent’ (muzūl, hubūṭ) and explains that God commanded the Jews to ask for the unloading of their sins.937 He explains further that God asks the Israelites to pray to Him in an honest confession of sins and repentance and to say ‘ḥiṭṭa’ which means to say ‘God, unload our sins’ (ḥuṭṭa ‘annā khaṭāyānā).938 This perception is repeated in most tafsīr books and the explanation Fadlallah gives occurs verbatim in several tafsīr books such as those of al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), al-Māturīdī (d. 944), and al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067).939

Instead of doing as asked, the Israelites changed the word ḥiṭṭa for something else. Unlike some other exegetes who provide the reader with the word which the Israelites changed ḥiṭṭa for, Fadlallah leaves the discussion out altogether.940 Fadlallah does not comment on the action of oral misrepresentation, does not elaborate on the tabdīl which took place here and does not stop at the Qur’ānic phrase ‘those who wronged’ either. Additionally, the exegete does not tell us whether all the Israelites are considered wrongdoers because of the act of substitution or just some of them. Some exegetes, such as Muqātil (d. 767), explain that some of the Israelites did as they were told but the wrongdoers among them did
otherwise.\textsuperscript{941} What Fadlallah emphasizes instead is the Israelites’ deliberate disobedience and arrogance which is repeated time after time in Fadlallah’s writings:

\textbf{Those who wronged themselves through deviation (inhīrāf) from the right path changed the word for another than that which had been said to them. Instead of praying for forgiveness of sins, they declared their persistence to rebel against God. Instead of humbling themselves before the truth, they expressed arrogance and instead of showing respect towards the prophet and the divine message they showed ridicule (sukhriyya) and mockery (istikhāzā’).} \textsuperscript{942}

Interestingly enough, several Shīʿi exegetes left both verses undealt with. Al-Qummī (d. 919) quietly ignores these verses completely while al-Ṭabāṭabāʿī (d. 1981) skips Q2:59\textsuperscript{943} but makes a cross-reference to it in the context of 7:162 as if he dealt with it earlier, asking the reader to see his non-existent interpretation of Q2:58-59.\textsuperscript{944} Like most exegetes who comment on the replacement of the term ḥiṭṭa, for Fadlallah, the Qurʾānic accusation against the Israelites of saying a word (qawl) other than that requested from them does not seem to amount to scriptural misrepresentation as much as it is a reminder of the stubborn nature of the Israelites. Also, the aspect of intentional mockery associated with this verbal substitution emphasized by Fadlallah occurs in several tafsīr books such as Muqātil’s (d. 767) and al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 923).\textsuperscript{945} The same idea is repeated in verses Q7:160-162 below almost verbatim but Fadlallah treats the two verses only briefly and refers the reader to his previous interpretation of Q2:58-59.\textsuperscript{946}

\textit{When We said, “Dwell in this town and eat freely from it in abundance, and say, ‘ḥiṭṭa,’ We will forgive your sins, and enter the gate prostrate and We will increase the reward for doers of good." But those who wronged changed the word for another than that which had been said to them, so We sent down upon those who wronged a punishment from the sky for their evil-doing. Q7:161-162}

\textsuperscript{941} Tafsīr Muqātil 1:110.
\textsuperscript{942} MWQ2:58.
\textsuperscript{944} Tafsīr al-Mīzān 9:299. Even those who commented on the verse were brief and concentrated on the aspect of mockery in not doing as asked. See, for example, al-Ṭabrisī’s Majmaʿ al-Bayān 1:162.
\textsuperscript{945} Tafsīr Muqātil 1:110 and al-Ṭabarī’s Jāmiʿ al-Bayān 2:114 among others.
\textsuperscript{946} MWQ10:269.
The idea of deliberate oral change of a word which God requested the Israelites to say is emphasized explicitly in Fadlallah’s interpretation of *tabdīl*. In both occurrences (Q2:59 and 7:162), it is connected in Fadlallah’s reasoning with the Israelites’ evil doing and defiant disobedience and with the evil nature of the Jews and their ancestors the Israelites. This is also repeated in the interpretation of the verses accusing the People of the Book of twisting their tongues below.

### 4.1.3. Twisting tongues

Another instance of Qur’ānic phrases associated with scriptural misrepresentation is the twisting of tongues, which some exegetes link with textual misrepresentation of Scriptures while others argue it is more related to their misinterpretation. Among the five Qur’ānic verses which speak of twisting, only two are relevant to our study. The first instance, as far as the written order of the Sūras in the *Musḥaf* is concerned, is Q3:78, which has the verbal form (*lawā*), and the second is Q4:46, which has the verbal noun (*layy*).

> Indeed, there is among them a party who twist the Scripture with their tongues (yalwūna alsinatahum bi al-kitāb) so you may think it is from the Scripture, but it is not from the Scripture. They say, “This is from God,” but it is not from God. And they speak untruth (al-kaḍīb) about God while they know. Q3:78

Quoting his favorite dictionary of Qur’ānic terms, *Mufradāt al-Rāḡhib*, Fadlallah starts with the glossing of some of the terms which occur in the verse above. The explanation of the verbal phrase “yalwūna” means: “they diverge from uprightness towards twistedness through taḥrīf in exegesis [and through] addition and omission.” The glossing of the verb *ḥasiba* in its turn is quoted from al-Ṭabrisī’s *Majma’ al-Bayān* according to which this verb never refers to something that can truly materialize.

The Ayatollah does not suggest the circumstances of revelation of the above-mentioned verse but starts commenting on it immediately after the glossing. Fadlallah then quickly

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947 Fadlallah used to consult *Mufradāt al-Rāḡhib* on a daily basis according to his office’s political and media advisor Hani Abdallah in “ʿAlā Khūṭā al-Sayyid,” a documentary film about the Ayatollah’s life broadcast on al-Imān TV on 4 July 2013.

948 MWQ6:120. The quotation is from *Mufradāt al-Rāḡhib*, 477.

949 MWQ6:121.

950 Al-Ṭabrisī’s *Majma’ al-Bayān* 2:780.
states that the verse speaks about a group of Kitābīs who “twist the Scripture with their tongues so you may think it is from the Scripture. They attempt to find some elements of resemblance in wording (al-lafẓ) and in meaning (al-ma‘nā).” The ambiguity of this explanation unfolds one paragraph later as Fadlallah argues that the verse speaks of one aspect of the practical deviation of Kitābīs namely applying themselves to the taḥrīf of the word (kalām) of God. “Twisting means diverging from uprightness towards twistedness and is an example of taḥrīf.” The exegete further elaborates slightly the tools used in the twisting. The Kitābīs implicated by this accusation seem to master some technical tools through which “they give the misrepresented word (al-kalima al-muḥarrafa)—through addition or omission—a mood which resembles the Torah’s so that they would lure the listener into thinking that it is part of Scripture because it resembles Scripture in terms of its words and mood.” Here one notes that our exegete repeats some of al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s views concerning presenting the invented Scripture in a mood (ajwāʾ) as Fadlallah calls it or in a tone (laḥn) as his master prefers to call it.

According to the above, we understand that Fadlallah indeed links the twisting of tongues to deliberate misrepresentation of Scripture through omission and addition. He argues, however, that contemplating believers can tell when a text is not part of God’s Book from its style, content and objectives (maqāṣid). Having said that, he moves on to compare this with the question of the corruptibility of the Qurʾān. Only those who have switched their brains off can believe the possibility of corrupting the Qurʾān, he argues. Anyone who uses his intellect can differentiate between the true and the untrue (zayf). Fadlallah then goes back to the original discussion in Q7:78 and adds that the second part of the verse is a confirmation of the first part. “They say, ‘This is from God,’ but it is not from God.” The exegete, once again, links this to the very nature of those accused here: “the verse moves on to attacking the mendacious personality who hides behind the disguise of the truth.” The Ayatollah disagrees with the exegetes who argue that the scriptural misrepresentation meant by this verse is related to exegetical misinterpretation. “This is not the apparent meaning of the verse. [However,] even if the countenance (wajh) itself was authentic, exegetical misrepresentation (al-taḥrīf fī al-tafsīr) and distancing the word from its meaning and from its countenance is no less dangerous than the misrepresentation

951 MWQ6:121.  
952 MWQ6:121.  
953 MWQ6:121.  
954 Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s Tafsīr al-Mīzān 3:266.  
955 MWQ6:121.  
956 MWQ6:121–122.  
957 MWQ6:122.  
958 MWQ6:122.
of the term itself because the result is the same.” The Ayatollah emphasizes this danger further by explaining the consequences of the work of the wrongdoing corrupters of divine Scriptures. “These corrupters (muharrifin) have shifted words from their places, they harm religion through spoiling the purity of its true meanings. They misinterpret the words (lafẓ) and add to the word [of God] content that was not revealed by God.”

Unlike textual misrepresentation which has affected the Bible but cannot affect the Qur’ān, scriptural misinterpretation has affected all Scriptures, including the Qur’ān. Each religious group has tried to base its own thought on its Scripture “using deceptive methods which exploit the ambiguity of some words and its susceptibility to multiple interpretations.” Although Fadlallah does not quote Tafsīr al-Manār here, there is a clear echoing of its views, especially concerning the applicability of these verses to some modern-day Muslims who misinterpret the Qur’ān to serve their own interests.

On another level, we note that, unlike Q4:46, this verse does not specify the group twisting their tongues with Scriptures. We do not know if it speaks about the Jews only or about both Jews and Christians. Fadlallah does not take a stand in the context of this verse but he does in the previous one, Q3:77, “those who exchange the covenant of God and their oaths for a small price will have no share in the Hereafter, and God will not speak to them or look at them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them; and they will have a painful punishment.” In his commentary on this verse, Fadlallah refers to three different narratives which occur in al-Wāḥidī’s (d. 1076) Asbāb al-Nuzūl, believed to be the verse’s circumstances of revelation. All three narratives link the verse to the Jews but our exegete deems only two of them plausible—both of these narratives are related to concealing the prophecy of Muhammad’s coming through the addition of passages which the Jews wrote themselves. The first of these two plausible narratives concern some Jewish scholars who came to Medina to seek Ka’b b. al-Ashraf’s help because they suffered severe poverty. Ka’b asked them if they found the description of Muhammad in their Scripture to which they answered yes and declared him as God’s messenger which infuriated Ka’b. The latter told the Jewish leaders that their answer just denied them abundant offerings. The men rushed to their Scriptures, wrote a different description of Muhammad, returned to Ka’b and said: We thought he was God’s messenger but when we checked we realized it is not him and his description was different from that which was given to us. They then showed the text they had themselves written. Having read it, Ka’b rejoiced and gave

959 MWQ6:122.
960 MWQ6:122.
961 MWQ6:123.
963 Al-Wāḥidī’s Asbāb al-Nuzūl, 60–62.
liberally to them as an expression of his great content.\textsuperscript{964} The second narrative which Fadlallah deems plausible is shorter but is similar to the previous one in that it skips the story telling and offers the core of it: Some Jewish leaders concealed the Torah’s original description of Muhammad and replaced it with one they wrote with their own hands.\textsuperscript{965} Faithful to his style, and although he clearly states that the circumstances of revelation narratives are not necessarily authoritative, Fadlallah uses them anyway to conclude that the verse at hand is about the Jews’ denial that Muhammad’s description (ṣifah) is found in the Torah and about their attempt to hide all that information about him in it because of their rebellion against God and their clinging to worldly interests.\textsuperscript{966}

In comparison with the other modern exegetes whom Fadlallah quotes in his commentary, the Ayatollah stands out mainly because of his accumulative exegetical style.\textsuperscript{967} However, although he is often willing to combine two different exegetical possibilities, he very seldom discusses issues deeply and diversely. In the example discussed above, we see how he first argues that the twisting of tongues means a textual misrepresentation and how he straightforwardly rejects the exegetical view according to which the twisting of tongues means the misinterpretation of Scripture, but he then embraces both options and simply moves on. He justifies this accumulative approach by saying that exegetical misrepresentation is as severe as textual misrepresentation because both lead to the same results. Fadlallah does not deem the discussion of scriptural misrepresentation important on a deeper level. The second relevant verse concerning the accusation of twisting tongues is found in Q4:46, which contains other accusations as well, among which is the tahřīf of words from their places discussed above.

\begin{quote}
Among the Jews are those who shift words from their places and say, “We hear and disobey” and “Hear but be not heard” and “Rā′inā,” twisting their tongues and defaming the religion. And if they had said [instead], “We hear and obey” and “Wait for us [to understand],” it would have been better for them and more suitable. But God has cursed them for their disbelief, so they believe not, except for a few. Q4:46
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{964} MWQ6:115 quoted from al-Wāḥidī’s Ashbāb al-Nuzūl, 62.
\textsuperscript{965} MWQ6:115 also quoted from al-Wāḥidī’s Ashbāb al-Nuzūl, 62.
\textsuperscript{966} MWQ6:116.
\textsuperscript{967} See also how he combines the different exegetical views about the meaning of the Qur’ānic term islām referred to in the previous chapter.
The Ayatollah briefly refers to the circumstances of revelation mentioned in al-Majlisī’s *Biḥār al-Anwār* according to which two seemingly Jewish men used to twist their tongues and mock the prophet whenever he spoke. The Jews used to say to Muhammad:

_We have heard you, we now know what you say but we will not obey you. They tried to stir an atmosphere of mockery by stating that they indeed heard him. They add: “Listen, may you become deaf!” that is the meaning of “Rāʾinā” in their language; they used it as a kind of camouflage (tamwīh) because they meant by it the meaning it has in their language while Muslims understand the word as “unẓurnā” which means “consider us until we understand what you say.” They used to twist their tongues to pass off falsehood as truth._

In his interpretation of the verse above, Fadlallah does not give much attention to the term “Rāʾinā” except for noting the negative connotation it has in the Hebrew language and the purposefully demeaning attitude of the Jews behind its use. The Jews’ derisive use of “Rāʾinā” is also emphasized in Fadlallah’s interpretation of Q2:104 without referring to scriptural misrepresentation. Generally speaking, Muslim exegetes’ examination of the phrase “Rāʾinā” has considered it either 1. an act of mockery and disrespect of the prophet by the Jews as is the case with Fadlallah, or 2. considered it an instance of *tahrīf* as is the case with al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981). Uncharacteristically, Fadlallah does not stop to discuss his master’s view on this verse, apparently because he disagrees with his interpretation. For al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, when the Jews said “Rāʾinā,” they shifted words from their places, misrepresented the word of God, and committed a terrible act of mockery out of mischief and disobedience. However, al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī cannot make up his mind about the type of misrepresentation the Jews are accused of in this verse—textual or exegetical. He thinks both options are possible. As for the last phrase of the verse “but they believe not, except for a few,” Fadlallah, like most exegetes, offers two alternative meanings.

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968 Al-Majlisī’s *Biḥār al-Anwār* volume 4, 9:37.
969 MWQ7:287.
972 MWQ2:149–150. The verse Q2:104 says “*O you who have believed, say not ‘rāʾinā’ and say ‘unẓurnā.’”
973 Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s *Tafsīr al-Mizān* 4:364.
975 Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s *Tafsīr al-Mizān* 4:364.
without opting for either one: 1) Only a few of the Jews believe or 2) they have only a little belief in their hearts.976

Although tahřif, tabdīl, and twisting of tongues are important terms in the discussion of the Islamic accusation of scriptural misrepresentation, the accusation of concealing is just as important. The latter is in fact more often encountered in the Qurʾān than the three previous ones.

4.1.4. Concealing

The Qurʾānic accusation of concealing is tantamount to scriptural misrepresentation according to several exegetes, including Fadlallah. This accusation includes concealing the truth (al-haqq), concealing revealed Scriptures (māʾ anzalnāʾ/anzalaʾ/ʿātāhum Allāh), concealing a testimony (shahāda), and concealing God’s revealed clear proofs (bayyināt) and guidance (hudā). The Qurʾān refers to the action of scriptural concealing using the verbs (katama, akhfā, and asarra). In several verses where the terms referring to the accusation of scriptural concealing occur, we find one or more accusations leveled against the People of the Book. For instance, two occurrences of concealing using the verb (katama) are found together with the accusation of confounding the truth with falsehood (Q2:42 and Q3:71) and two other occurrences are combined with the accusation of selling Scripture for a small price in two verses (Q2:174 and 3:187). These verses are dealt with separately in 4.1.6 and 4.1.7 below.

4.1.5. Kitmān

The main verb used in the Qurʾān to refer to the charge of concealing is (katama) which occurs twenty-one times, but only eight of these occurrences are relevant to this research.977 Indeed, as is the case in most exegetical works, the accusation of concealing is central in Fadlallah’s thought, as it is often linked with concealing the biblical passages which predict the advent of Muhammad. This is repeated in every reference to concealing as well as in relation to the other ways of scriptural misrepresentation. In what follows, we note that the

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976 MWQ7:288. These alternatives are offered by, for example, al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067), al-Ṭabrisī (d. 1153), al-Kāshānī (d. 1429), Riddā (d. 1935), and al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981) among many others.

analysis of Fadlallah’s interpretation of these relevant verses shows that, in most cases, the object of concealment is the biblical prediction of Muhammad.

It is not uncommon for Fadlallah to leave terms unexplained when they first appear and to gloss them only later—as was the case with the term tahrīf referred to above among many other cases. Here too, the Ayatollah does not offer a gloss to the verb “katama” when he interprets its first occurrences according to the ordering of the Sūras in the Mushaf (i.e., Q2:42, 2:140, and 2:146) but waits until the forth occurrence, in the context of Q2:159, to explain it:

Concealing (al-kitmān) is leaving unrevealed a matter despite the need and the reason to unravel it. Otherwise, [not revealing a matter] is not considered [an act of] concealing. 978

The next relevant occurrence is verse Q2:140 which is in the form of a rhetorical question:

Who is more unjust than one who conceals a testimony (katama shahādatan) that has come to him from God? Q2:140

Fadlallah puts this verse in the context of Q2:135-141 which explains how the path of truth and guidance is not limited to Jews and Christians as these two groups respectively claim.979 Even more, these passages confront Jews and Christians with the fact that Abraham was not an adherent of their religions. “The joke is that Jews and Christians consider Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and their tribes, Jews and Christians,” goes Fadlallah.980 Abraham is claimed for Islam because these two religions have deviated from the Abrahamic path.

The correctness of their behavior is measured against their harmony with the religion of Abraham because the messages of Moses and Jesus were in harmony with the religion of Abraham. However, any deviation from the Abrahamic path means that the two [religions] have deviated from the path of Judaism and Christianity.981

This deviation is due to the Jews’ perception of themselves as God’s chosen people and their conviction that Abraham was a Jew. The Christians share this conviction with the Jews but the Qur’ān refutes the claim of both groups and suggests that they know the truth

978 MWQ3:133.
979 MWQ3:48.
980 MWQ3:54.
981 MWQ3:48.
about Abraham and advertently conceal it. Fadlallah’s comment on Q2:140 is very brief. He barely touches on concealing in one sentence the first half of which is the verse itself: “Who is more unjust than one who conceals a testimony that has come to him from God of what he knows about the prophets and the divine messages because that would lead into distorting (tashwīh) the truth and forging facts, and misleading people. That is the worst injustice because it deprives one of his right to know the revelatory truth upon which his integrity depends.” This vague statement allows for Fadlallah’s interpretation to suggest two different possibilities. The first is that the Jews and the Christians conceal the truth they know about Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and their Descendants and the second is that they conceal the truth about the advent of Muhammad. This is clarified for the reader in Fadlallah’s exegetical treatment of Q2:146 below.

Those to whom We have given the book, they recognize it/him (ya’rifūnuḥu) as they recognize their sons. But a party of them knowingly conceal (yaktumūna) the truth. Q2:146

Fadlallah puts this verse too in a larger context (Q2:142-152) whose main theme is the change of the direction of prayer (qibla). Similar to the previous case, Q2:146 is related to the challenges Muslims face from the People of the Book, especially from the Jews who used to stir up doubt in the correctness of Muslims’ doctrine after the change of the direction of prayer. The Ayatollah quotes different narratives which enumerate the insults of the Jews to the Prophet and their animosity against him. He makes it clear that the people referred to in this verse are God’s enemies before they are the Prophet’s or the Muslims’ enemies, emphasizing the evilness and the hostility of the Jews in particular. Then, he moves on to link the Qur’ānic narrative with modern-day challenges and calls on Muslim Da’wa workers to draw a lesson from the Qur’ānic way of dealing with these people.

Exegetes disagree about the object in the sentence ‘they recognize it/him’ (ya’rifūnahu) which occurs in verse Q2:146. Some think that it refers to the Book while the majority, including Fadlallah, think it means Muhammad. Fadlallah first emphasizes that the Jews

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982 MWQ3:49–56.
983 MWQ3:57–58.
985 MWQ3:82–84.
986 MWQ3:102–103.
987 MWQ3:102–103.
988 MWQ3:90–91. Fadlallah thinks the analogy between knowing a book as one knows his own children would not make sense. However, knowing someone, i.e., the Prophet, as one knows his own children is more logical in this context.
deliberately concealed the truth about Muhammad even if they knew it very well from the Torah’s description of him. The reason behind concealing this truth is their stubbornness, rebellion and deviation. Until now, the reader gets the impression that only the Jews are the object of this accusation but our exegete soon specifies in a short paragraph that the group meant by this verse is the Kitābī scholars who know the truth about Muhammad from the Torah and the Gospel, basing his argument on Qur’ānic cross-references (Q7:157 and 61:6). Besides, the first part of verse Q2:146 is repeated verbatim in the parallel verse Q6:20: “Those to whom We have given the book recognize it/him (ya’rifūnahu) as they recognize their sons.” Here too, Fadlallah reiterates that the Jews deliberately conceal the description of Muhammad in the Torah although they mentioned it to Arabia’s polytheists before the advent of the Prophet. Their concealing of the truth does not occur out of ignorance but out of deliberate disbelief and out of avarice to protect their material interests. The difference in Fadlallah’s exegetical treatment of these parallel verses is that he vaguely includes both Jews and Christians in the rebuke in the first case while he accuses only the Jews in the second. These views are also repeated in his interpretation of the following relevant verse Q2:159.

*Those who conceal (yaktumūna) what We sent down of clear proofs and guidance after We made it clear for the people in the Scripture—those are cursed by God and cursed by those who curse.*

**Q2:159**

This is the first context where Fadlallah offers a gloss to the verb (*katama*). The explanation he offers seems to be quoted from al-Rāzī’s (d. 1209) *tafsīr* verbatim although he does not give a reference. In addition to echoing al-Rāzī’s gloss, Fadlallah echoes his interpretation too before he resorts to his usual accumulative style and suggests that this verse accuses the People of the Book, the Jews in particular, of concealing what God has revealed but can be taken to have a broader meaning which is any act of concealing an important religious matter from those who do not know it. Fadlallah then takes the verse a step further and argues that concealing the truth from those who do not know it is considered a betrayal of Islam and Muslims. The concealers in Q2:159 are identified as the Jewish scholars who apparently were contemporaneous with Mohammad, and the object of concealment referred to with the term (*bayyīnāt*) in the verse seems to be, in this

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989 MWQ3:89–90.
990 MWQ3:90.
991 MWQ9:55.
994 MWQ3:134.
995 MWQ3:135.
context too, the advent of Muhammad and his message. The People of the Book were not given revelation to keep it for themselves but to uncover it for others because knowledge is a responsibility, not a privilege. Purposely betraying this responsibility is strongly linked with the Jews here and also in the following verse discussed hereafter.

Those who are stingy and enjoin stinginess upon others and conceal (yaktumūna) what God has given them of His bounty—and We have prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating punishment.

Q4:37

Fadlallah is brief and unclear in his interpretation of this verse. He offers different narratives as to its circumstances of revelation but does not give primacy to any of them over the others. All these narratives, quoted from al-Wāḥidī’s (d. 1076) Ashāb al-Nuzūl, identify the concealers as the Jews. According to the first narrative, the Jews concealed the description of Muhammad which they find in their Torah; according to the second, they resentfully refused to believe in what their Torah says about Muhammad; and according to the third, some Jews came to the Ḥanṣār and prompted them not to spend their money lest they become poor. The Ayatollah explains that the first two narratives are in concord with the second half of the verse which speaks about concealment while the third narrative comports with the first part of the verse about stinginess. However, Fadlallah is not certain about any of these narratives, as they could all be a result of the exegetes’ personal assessment, and thus leaves the matter undecided. As was the case with the previous verse (Q2:159), and although Fadlallah briefly mentions that, in case the occasions of revelation mentioned above were true, the concealers in this verse are the Jews and the object of concealment is the favor God bestowed on them. This favor is their knowledge about the Prophet Muhammad as well as the signs about his advent. However, typical of modern exegetes, Fadlallah argues that the verse can be taken to have a broader context too. This verse might refer to all the negative examples of people who conceal God’s favor such as the religious scholars who do not fight against theological deviations in society at any price. Fadlallah also presents similar views in his exegetical treatment of

996 MWQ3:135. Fadlallah does not specify which Jewish scholars, but the context suggests that he means those who were contemporaneous with Muhammad.
997 MWQ3:138.
998 MWQ7:256.
999 Al-Wāḥidī’s Ashāb al-Nuzūl, 84–85.
1000 MWQ7:256.
1001 MWQ7:256–257.
1002 MWQ7:266.
1003 MWQ7:266 cf. MWQ3:134.
1004 MWQ7:266–267.
the two verses which combine the accusation of concealing the truth with that of confounding it with falsehood (Q2:42 and 3:71).

4.1.6. Concealing and confounding

Both verses where the accusation of confounding (labasa, labs) the truth with falsehood appears in the Qur’ān (Q2:42 and 3:71) relate it to the accusation of concealing the truth purposely:

Do not confound (talbisū) truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal (taktumū) the truth. Q2:42

Why do you confound (talbisīna) truth with falsehood and knowingly conceal (taktumūna) the truth? Q3:71

Fadlallah’s treatment of these verses does not provide any new insights. Faithful to his verse division style, he groups verses Q2:40-44 together in order to introduce their context which he defines as the Jewish hostile stand against Muhammad and his mission. He emphasizes the purposeful animosity of the Jews and their aim “to stir up confusion and perplexity in the minds of Muslims in order to shake their faith and convictions.”

This is also seen in the way he glosses the phrase talbisū: in the first case he explains it as mixing and at the second occurrence as mixing and deceiving by clothing the truth with falsehood in order to conceal the truth and deceive the believers.

Fadlallah stops to contemplate on the abundant attention paid to the Jews in the Qur’ān. The frequency of Qur’ānic narratives about the Jews, compared to those about the Christians, can be ascribed to the fact that they comprised an important religious force in the birthplace of Islam as well as to the fact that they have stood against Islam since its birth. The Christians on the other hand did not play a big role in fighting Islam. On the contrary, they had a positive role through the Ethiopian king’s reception of persecuted Muslims who took refuge with him, let alone the king’s positive reception of the Qur’ānic verses read to him about Mary.

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1005 MWQ2:8.
1006 MWQ2:8.
1007 MWQ6:94.
1008 MWQ2:9.
1009 MWQ2:9.
4.1.6.1. From the Israelites to the Israelis

Fadlallah not only links the Jews contemporaneous with Muhammad to “their ancestors,”\(^{1016}\) the Israelites, but also to modern-day Jews of whom Muslims should be wary because they will inevitably make a move:

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\text{in the future and represent a political, social, cultural and security danger for Muslims because of their ambitions to take over the Muslims’ land and wealth. Their perception and their maneuvers will lead to several serious problems for the Muslim world. This in its turn forces Muslims to think about the elements of the arrogant Jewish nature and its aggressive plans.}^{1011}\]

Equating the Israelites with the Jews in general and with modern-day Israelis is not uncommon in modern Qur’ānic exegesis. The Lebanese exegete Muhammad Jawad Mughniyya (d. 1979), for instance, explicitly links the Jews with Israelis and openly comments on current affairs related to them.\(^ {1012}\) This is also the case in the exegetical work of Muhammad Metwally al-Shaarawy (d. 1998) who was clearly affected by the then-developing but unpopular Egyptian-Israeli relationship and who often used Qur’ānic verses to prove the evilness of the Israelis.\(^ {1013}\) In his MWQ, Fadlallah often uses the terms Jews, Israeli and Israelites interchangeably.\(^ {1014}\) He sometimes uses the phrase ‘Children of Israel’ in reference to the Jews contemporaneous with Muhammad and often uses the term ‘Jews’ to refer to Israelis.\(^ {1015}\)

In an introduction that aims at preparing the reader to accept the interpretation of the verses at hand, Fadlallah presents the Jews as a nation who have constantly used twisted means against the Prophet and his message;\(^ {1016}\) who have always been ungrateful to God, and who have been vicious to the Prophet despite the latter’s kindness and patience with them. The

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\(^{1010}\) MWQ2:8, MWQ2:16, and MWQ8:174 for example.

\(^{1011}\) MWQ2:9.

\(^{1012}\) Mughniyya’s Tafsīr al-Kāshif 2:339.

\(^{1013}\) Tafsīr al-Sha‘rāwy, 3194–3196, 8360–8375, and 8786–8789, passim. Al-Shaarawy held oral exegetical lectures which were broadcast on Egyptian TV. These lectures were very popular, especially because they were mostly in a simple listener-friendly style that mixed simplified Standard Arabic with Egyptian colloquial.

\(^{1014}\) Although the Arabic term al-Isrā’īlī can refer to both ‘the Israeli’ and ‘the Israelite,’ it is strongly linked in the Modern Arab mind with the nationals of Israel and hence more often than not has a negative connotation related to the injustice generally felt by Arabs because of the occupation.

\(^{1015}\) MWQ2:13. This equation is made both explicitly and implicitly in all his works.

\(^{1016}\) MWQ2:12–13
Jews have done nothing new but repeat their history: They have treated Muhammad with the same rebellion and deviation with which they treated the previous prophets because of their rebellious nature and because of their complexes.\(^{1017}\) In their struggle against Islam, the Jews use two methods: the first is confounding the truth with falsehood in order to make it impossible for people to know what is the truth and what is not. The Jews, according to Fadlallah, have used these twisted methods through the ages: “They have practiced this in the past and they are still practicing it in the present with their different means.”\(^{1018}\) The second method is concealing the truth altogether. By truth Fadlallah refers to the pool of information the Jews had about Muhammad and his message which they concealed because they do not wish Islam “to take its natural place as a divine power” out of jealousy.\(^{1019}\) Having presented these two twisted methods used by the Jews, Fadlallah proceeds to explain the difference between concealing the truth and mixing it with falsehood. The difference between them is that matters are, depending on their denotations, either confoundable or non-confoundable. If a matter allows for confounding, they confound it until people are mixed up and until the confounders (i.e., the Jews) achieve whatever profits they will. If not, they conceal it altogether.\(^{1020}\) Second, people did not have access to the Torah for two reasons. 1. The Jewish leaders hid parts of it and kept them out of people’s reach.\(^{1021}\) 2. It was not available in Arabic (\textit{lam takun mu’arrabatan}), and thus, they could not read it for themselves. The only way for people to know the content of their holy book was by asking their religious leaders.\(^{1022}\) These Jewish religious leaders were supposed to safeguard their Scriptures but they betrayed this responsibility.\(^{1023}\) Having concentrated on the Jewish concealing and confounding nature down the ages in his exegetical treatment of Q2:42, Fadlallah takes this a step forward in the parallel verse Q3:71 through which he links the past with modern-day history including, this time, the Christians too in the confounders-category.

To do that, Fadlallah groups Q3:71 in a larger verse unit Q3:69-71 and links these verses with the previous verse unit Q3:65-68 to bring up the larger context. Here too, echoing most exegetes, Sunni and Shī‘i alike, he associates concealing the truth with concealing the information about the advent of Muhammad which is supposed to be predicted in the Torah and the Gospel.\(^{1024}\) However, this time and although he briefly refers to al-Wāḥidī’s

\(^{1017}\) MWQ2:12–13. Emphasizing the evilness of the Jewish nature is repeated elsewhere in MWQ6:122 and MWQ8:174, for example.
\(^{1018}\) MWQ2:16.
\(^{1019}\) MWQ2:16–17.
\(^{1020}\) MWQ2:17.
\(^{1021}\) See more on this in 4.1.4 and 4.1.5.
\(^{1022}\) MWQ2:17.
\(^{1023}\) MWQ2:18.
\(^{1024}\) MWQ6:95 and MWQ6:97.
(d. 1076) Asbāb al-Nuzūl according to which the verse was revealed about the Jews who tried to convert two companions of the prophets to Judaism, the subject of this Qurʾānic accusation of concealing the truth and confounding it with falsehood is both Jews and Christians. Echoing al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981), Fadlallah notes that concealing the truth and confounding it with falsehood includes presenting corrupted Torah and corrupted Gospel, claiming they are God’s revealed Scripture, and occasionally keeping the “original character of the verse” or shifting the Torah’s or the Gospel’s “words from their places, changing their original places or misinterpreting them.”

As usual, the Ayatollah broadens his interpretation of confounding the truth with falsehood to modern-day life and seems to follow Mughniyya (d. 1979) to a great extent in his argumentation. Not only does he use the same vocabulary and the same order of thoughts as Mughniyya but also almost the same arguments. Both exegetes start with the first part of verse Q3:69 ‘some of the People of the Book’ which they both explain as the Christian missionaries who use deceptive (taḍlīl) thoughts to stir up doubts (tashkīk) in Muslim minds about their religion. Also, both muḥaffaz link concealing the truth with denying the prediction of Muhammad in the pre-Qurʾānic Scriptures as well as with the Kitābīs’ attempt to mislead Muslims and lead them out of their faith. The only difference between the two is that while Mughniyya speaks only of the Christians’ role in the above-mentioned accusations, Fadlallah emphasizes the Jews’ role without sparing the Christians. The first refers explicitly to some particular events organized in the USA to ridicule and insult Islam while the second keeps a high degree of implicitness and speaks generally of some “people’s complexed and malevolent” hostility toward Islam. However, on another occasion, he returns to this idea and explicitly speaks of the methods used by orientalists, missionaries and by the Jews since the period of western occupation of Muslim lands to mislead Muslims through the spreading of lies about Islam. Among these methods, he mentions exploiting Muslims’ miserable conditions and tempting them financially as well as, in the case of orientalists, profiting from their scientific authority, distorting truths using scientific research as a disguise to confound Muslims.

In the context of Q3:71, and in line with most exegetes, both classical and modern, Fadlallah accuses Jews and Christians of wittingly misinterpreting their Scriptures: hiding

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1025 MWQ6:94 refers to al-Wāḥidī’s Asbāb al-Nuzūl, 60.
1026 MWQ6:95. Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī is of the same opinion. See al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s Tafsīr al-Mīzān 3:256.
1030 MWQ6:97–98. The danger of Christian missionary work is highlighted in his other works as well such as Mafāhim Islāmiyya ‘Āmna, 489–490 as well in several Friday sermons such as the one held 28 December 2002, retrieved on 13 March 2017. http://arabic.bayynat.org.lb/ListingByCatPage.aspx?id=1048.
portions of them, presenting as God’s Word texts that are not, and altering the places of words here and there. Furthermore, both Kitābīs are accused of concealing the passages which predict the coming of Muhammad because of their complexes, their jealousy and their enmity towards the Muslims.  

4.1.7. Concealing and selling for a small price

Our last two relevant occurrences of concealing in the Qurʾān are found combined with the accusation of selling Scripture for a small price in two Qurʾānic verses (Q2:174 and 3:187).

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\text{Those who conceal (yaktumūna) what God has sent down of the Book and exchange it for a small price—those consume not into their bellies except the Fire. And God will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them. And they will have a painful punishment. Q2:174}
\]

\[
\text{God took a covenant from those who were given the Scripture, ‘You must make it clear to the people and not conceal it (taktumūnahu).’ But they cast it behind their backs and exchanged it for a small price. And wretched is that which they purchased. Q3:187}
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As usual, Fadlallah starts by setting up the larger context of these verses by linking them to the previous Qurʾānic unit (Q2:172-176) and presenting their main themes—lawful and unlawful foods, especially meat. After a rather oratorical introduction, he starts his exegetical analysis of verses Q2:174-176 proper, using them to enumerate the different ways in which the People of the Book have deviated from the right path, detached themselves from the truth, and focused only on worldly material interests. Then, he reminds the reader of the severe well-deserved divine punishment that awaits the Jews in the hereafter.

In his interpretation of Q2:174, Fadlallah briefly identifies the culprits as the Jews but quickly moves on to tackle their exploitation of religion for their own interests. He seems to focus more on the selling of Scripture because he considers it the reason behind the act

\[1031\text{ MWQ6:95–96.} \]
\[1032\text{ The verses are dealt with in MWQ3:185–193.} \]
\[1033\text{ MWQ3:195–197.} \]
of concealing it—and he seems to link this act here with the Jews alone. He stresses the supremacist tendency of the Jews who:

*told people that the Torah contains a prophecy about the coming of Muhammad but then pulled back their narrative and changed it once the Prophet came from another nation—not from amongst themselves.*

However, he quickly moves on to broaden the exegetical sphere of the verse, as he did with Q2:159 above, and argues that even if the verse was revealed about these Jews, it can also be taken to mean any other people who conceal the truth found in the Torah, the Gospel or the Qurʾān. Furthermore, any people who take advantage of Scripture to advance their own personal interests are meant by this verse as well. The next two verses are also related to the accusation of tahrīf as well as to the consequences of such an act. The Ayatollah considers verse Q2:176 “those who differ over the Book are in extreme dissension” a reference to the dissension within the different Jewish groups, who despite their agreement over the distortion of Scriptures, its misinterpretation as well as its exploitation according to the dictates of their desires and interests, still have less than harmonious relationships.

The same ideas Fadlallah has expressed in the contexts of Q2:174 and Q2:159 above are also presented in the context of Q3:187. The Ayatollah once again repeats that the People of the Book concealed the truth revealed by God because they wanted to advance their personal material interests and hence, God has cursed them eternally. Although Fadlallah does not specify explicitly which group of the Kitābīs is concerned with the accusations of scriptural concealment and selling for a small price, it is rather obvious from the vocabulary he very often uses in reference to the Torah’s people (being cursed, seeking material interests, etc.) that he refers to the Jews. Faithful to his exegetical line concerning the use of the occasions of revelation (Asbāb al-Nuzūl), even in the cases in which he accepts a narrative as a possible occasion of revelation, that occasion does not limit the meaning of the verse to that particular case

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1035 See 4.1.5 above and MWQ3:134.
1036 MWQ3:197.
1037 MWQ3:199.
1038 See MWQ3:134 and MWQ3:197.
1040 As mentioned in chapter II, Fadlallah is often skeptical about these narratives and uses them sparingly and relatively critically.
about which it could have been revealed—a broader meaning can still be concluded from it. Hence, here too concealing the truth about divine Scripture is a great sin whether the concealment concerns the Torah, the Gospel or the Qurʾān because the matter here is about a responsibility that should not be betrayed through distortion, concealment, or deception.\textsuperscript{1041}

As previously stated, although the verb “\textit{katama}” is the most common verb the Qurʾān uses to refer to the accusation of concealment leveled against Kitābīs, there are two other verbs, “\textit{asarra}” and “\textit{akhfā},” which are used in the same way and which are equally important to our study.

\subsection*{4.1.8. Isrāʾ}

Among the twenty Qurʾānic occurrences of the verb (\textit{asarra}), only verse Q2:77 is relevant to the discussion of scriptural misrepresentation in Fadlallah’s case. This verse comes in the proximity of two \textit{tahrīf} verses, namely Q2:75 studied in \textbf{4.1.1} above and Q2:79 studied in \textbf{4.1.11} below.\textsuperscript{1042}

\begin{quote}
\textit{Do they not know that God knows what they conceal} (\textit{yusīrūna}) \textbf{and} what they declare? Q2:77
\end{quote}

Fadlallah does not offer any new insight into this verse other than what he has offered us so far. He briefly quotes a narrative from al-Ṭabrisī’s \textit{Majmaʿ al-Bayān} according to which a group of Jews, not among “the obstinate conspirators,” told Muslims that their Torah prophesizes about Muhammad’s coming and has a description of him. However, when this group met with their religious scholars, the latter blamed them and asked them to stop unveiling these truths to Muslims lest God hold them as an argument against them.\textsuperscript{1043} Thus, here too, Fadlallah links concealing with deliberately hiding the description of Muhammad which is supposed to be in the Torah. Furthermore, the culprits are identified as the religious scholars of the Jews—not the Jews in general.\textsuperscript{1044}

\begin{footnotes}
\item 1041 MWQ6:444–445.
\item 1042 Fadlallah deals with this accusation in one Qurʾānic unit Q2:74–82 in MWQ2:91–107.
\item 1043 Al-Ṭabrisī’s \textit{Majmaʿ al-Bayān} 1:286.
\item 1044 MWQ2:110.
\end{footnotes}
4.1.9. *Ikhfāʾ*

There are two relevant Qur’ānic occurrences of scriptural concealment using the verb *akhfāʾ* in Q5:15 and 6:91; both cases seem to clearly refer to the Book as the object of concealment. As is the case with *asarra*, here too we note that the surrounding verses deal with the accusation of *tahrīf* in verse Q5:13 and the accusation of fabricating lies about God in Q6:93 studied in 4.1.8 above.

*O People of the Scripture, there has come to you Our Messenger making clear to you much of what you used to conceal (tukhfūna) of the Scripture and overlooking much.* Q5:15

Fadlallah considers this verse “*a kind call*” to the People of the Book, and “*a peaceful reproach.*” This verse attempts to “*calmly state*” some remarks about the Jews’ behavior as well as teaching present-day believers the Prophet’s style in criticizing the Jews and facing their deviation.1045

*The Jews used to conceal some scriptural facts revealed in the Torah and the Gospel, especially the facts related to the prophethood of Muhammad. The Prophet used to warn the Muslims about that and used to demonstrate to them that he was knowledgeable about the distortive and deceptive (tajhīliyya)1046 game of some of the People of the Book by exposing their malicious tactics...* 1047

Fadlallah does not find a problem in accusing the Jews of concealing facts in both the Torah and the Gospel although he repeatedly argues that the Jews did not believe in the Gospel, hence, one raises the question of how did the Jews not only have access to Christian Scriptures but also the opportunity and authority to conceal portions of them.1048 This peculiar statement is not explained to the reader at any stage but is repeated in some other contexts outside the commentary such as his Fatwa about the trueness of the Gospel.1049

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1045 MWQ8:93.
1046 Fadlallah has invented this word which I translate here as “*deceptive*” but it can also be rendered “*causing to be ignorant.*”
1047 MWQ8:93.
1048 MWQ8:93.
1049 See 4.2.1 below for more on the content of this Fatwa.
The Ayatollah continues enumerating the negative features of the Jews in two full pages before he turns to the interpretation of the first part of the verse. The concealers in this verse are identified as both Jews and Christians and the object of concealment as the prophecy concerning Muhammad’s coming once again. It seems that the only object of concealment both Jews and Christians share is hiding the parts of the Scriptures which speak of Muhammad. Otherwise, the description of the concealers mainly seems to suit only the Jews, as the following quotation demonstrates:

{Making clear to you much of what you used to conceal} which you kept for yourself, did not bring it on for the people to read it and get acquainted with it. Hence, people knew only the parts of it that you allowed them to know. You concealed some of its facts which did not serve your positions and your interests [...] The Prophet’s description was written in your Torah and your Gospel; thus, you know him as well as you know your own children but you rejected his message and you fought his mission. The Scriptures contained [matters] about the purity of the prophets, about the prohibition of wine and usury but you made them lawful.\textsuperscript{1050}

Fadlallah does not accuse all Jews and Christians of concealing the Word of God here either but only their scholars or leaders; although he does not use these terms, this is rather obvious from the context.\textsuperscript{1051} Concealment seems to take different forms. Sometimes one concludes from Fadlallah’s reasoning that what is concealed is not part of the Scriptures but rather the whole Scripture.\textsuperscript{1052} This happened when religious scholars held Scripture so that laypeople did not have access to it and could not read it or get to know it except for what their scholars told them. The latter told them what suited them and concealed what did not. Amongst these concealed facts, Fadlallah mentions the prophethood of Muhammad which was mentioned in both the Torah and the Gospel and which these scholars knew well but intentionally concealed. Another way of concealing was making the unlawful lawful: they made drinking wine and usury lawful although God forbade them in His Revealed Scriptures.\textsuperscript{1053} Nowhere in Fadlallah’s interpretation of this verse does one find a word about concealing as a form of scriptural misrepresentation \textit{per se}. The matter is more about leaving out laymen and preventing them from having access to their holy books as well as some kind of misinterpretation of some scriptural verses. In his interpretation of verse Q6:91, Fadlallah explains how these scholars managed to show of

\textsuperscript{1050} MWQ8:95.

\textsuperscript{1051} The Jewish leaders, rather than all the Jews, are accused in several places in MWQ such as in MWQ2:100–102, MWQ2:110, MWQ3:134–135, MWQ5:8, and MWQ8:95, for example.

\textsuperscript{1052} MWQ8:95.

\textsuperscript{1053} MWQ8:95.
the Scriptures what they pleased and conceal what they pleased in practice: They wrote
them in separate “qarāṭīs.”

Say, 'Who revealed the Scripture that Moses brought as light and
guidance to the people? You make it into scrolls (qarāṭīsā).

disclosing [some of] them and concealing (tukhfūna) much. And
you were taught that which you knew not—neither you nor your
fathers.' Q6:91

The gloss Fadlallah offers us of qarāṭīs is “what one uses to write on such as paper or
leather and the like.”1054 This definition seems to be copied verbatim from Mughniyya’s
(d. 1979) Tafsīr al-Kāshīf but without a reference.1055 Here too, Fadlallah does not hide his
skepticism towards the occasions of revelation suggested for this verse because he finds
some of them illogical and because they are too different from each other. Some of these
narratives identify those who denied that God ever revealed anything with the Jews while
the other identify them with the polytheists, thus, Fadlallah rejects all of them on the
grounds that they must stem from the exegetes’ personal assessments.1056 Here, Fadlallah
seems to stand out from some other exegetes such as al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī and Mughniyya who
tried to find a way to make some sense of this Qur’ānic claim of scriptural denial. Al-
Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s solution was that only some of the People of the Book, not all of them, said
so while Mughniyya’s way out is attributing the denial to the obstinacy of the Jews, for
even if they knew well that Muhammad’s message was true, they tenaciously denied the
possibility of divine revelation to humans altogether.1057

However, although Fadlallah rejects the narratives offered in the above-mentioned
occasions of revelation, he still identifies the object of the discussion in the verse as the
Jews but specifies that they might not be true believing Jews but rather a group who falsely
claim to be so.1058 He then seizes the occasion to differentiate between the Qur’ānic
position towards the Torah and its position towards the Gospel:

This might be the reason why the verse emphasizes this book [i.e.,
the Torah] here but not the Gospel in which the Jews do not believe.
Alternatively, the reason might be that Christianity which adheres
to the Gospel did not affect the Arab mentality in the land of Da’wa.

1054 MWQ9:214.
1055 MWQ9:214. Cf. Mughniyya’s Tafsīr al-Kāshīf 3:222. I have noted elsewhere that Fadlallah tends to
copy liberally or verbatim from different sources without reference. See 2.4.1 on Fadlallah’s use of sources.
1056 MWQ9:216–217. For more on Fadlallah’s use of the exegetical device of the occasions of revelation
(Ashāb al-Naẓūl), see Chapter II.
1058 MWQ9:221.
The Qurʾān wanted to break through this land in order to change its way of thinking.\textsuperscript{1059}

Fadlallah then once again repeats that the Torah of Moses was a source of light and guidance but the Jews adhere to it (yantasibūna ilayhā) in name only.\textsuperscript{1060} This merely cultural adherence is not enough as it does not affect the Jewish personality; for the Jews, the Scriptures are merely a means to advance their personal interests.\textsuperscript{1061} This utilitarian approach to their Scriptures made them write them on separate scrolls (qarāṭīs) so that they could conveniently disclose whatever serves their interests and conceal what proves the trueness of Muhammad’s prophethood or whatever hampered their interests.\textsuperscript{1062} The Ayatollah explains that the Qurʾān does not blame the Jews for writing the Scriptures on scrolls but for keeping them separated instead of making them into a single book. What the Qurʾān reproaches here is that they resorted to this type of distribution in order to be able to conceal whatever they wished to conceal, especially the matters people ask them to show—here, once again, Fadlallah seems to be hinting at the prophecy of Muhammad’s advent.\textsuperscript{1063}

In addition to the explicit accusations of scriptural concealment discussed above, this accusation is sometimes implied in the Qurʾān or understood as being so in the tafsīr. For example, verse Q3:93 challenges the Jews to “bring the Torah and recite it” implying that the Jews are concealing some of it.\textsuperscript{1064} Fadlallah does not go deeper into discussing whether this request is realistic or sarcastic, as the Torah would be in Hebrew and the Qurʾān is in an Arabic-speaking milieu. Fadlallah, as we noted earlier, argues, among other reasons, that the fact that the Torah was not available in Arabic prevented lay Jews from reading it, so this raises the question of how the Arabs of Medina were supposed to read this Torah even if the Jews did bring it forth.\textsuperscript{1065} It is not uncommon for Fadlallah to remain on a shallow level of the discussion. His style also remains vague when he says that most of the gospel is the Word of God or when he says that the main corruption that occurred in the Gospel concerns the prophecy about the advent of Muhammad.\textsuperscript{1066}

\textsuperscript{1059} MWQ9:221.
\textsuperscript{1060} See 4.1.1 above for more on Fadlallah’s use of “yantasibūna” to differentiate between true Kitābīs on the one hand and Kitābīs in name only on the other.
\textsuperscript{1061} MWQ9:221.
\textsuperscript{1062} MWQ9:221–222.
\textsuperscript{1063} MWQ9:222.
\textsuperscript{1065} Fadlallah refers to the unavailability of the Torah in Arabic in MWQ5:212.
\textsuperscript{1066} FAHIM, 285 and 378.
I think that we can safely conclude that concealment in Fadlallah’s perception is associated mainly with the prophecy about Muhammad which is supposed to be in both the Torah and the Gospel had Jews and Christians not concealed it from their Scriptures. This accusation is leveled against the Jews in the first place—their scholars and leaders in particular—although the Christians are not totally spared from it, especially when the broader meaning of the verses is sought and Christian mission work is taken into consideration. The exegetical treatment of the three different Qur’anic terms of concealment is the same linguistically speaking. Fadlallah, like al-Ṭabarī for instance, does not seem to differentiate between katama, asarra and akhřā. They are all taken to mean an act of deliberate concealing of the truth about the advent of Muhammad. This aspect of deliberateness is also present in the case of the Qur’ānic accusation of forgetting or neglecting (nisyān) the Scriptures as we shall discuss in the following subsection.

4.1.10. Forgetting/neglecting

If the three accusations of tahrīf, tabdīl, and twisting of tongues are leveled against the Jews alone, the accusation of forgetting/neglecting (nasiya, nisyān) portions of Scripture is directed at both Jews and Christians. The Israelites forgot a portion of Scripture according to both Q7:165 and 5:13 but so too did the Christians according to Q5:14. In addition, although Q7:53 accuses a group of people of forgetting the Scripture which God revealed to them through prophets, it is not clear from the surrounding context of the verse who is meant by this accusation or by the reprehension of those “who took their religion as distraction and amusement and whom the worldly life deluded.”

Although the most important Qur’ānic texts relevant to this research are in Sūras 5 and 7, the accusation of forgetting occurs in other verses too, but they do not offer any additional insight to the verses mentioned above. For example, in his treatment of verse Q2:42, Fadlallah equates the forgetting in it with dereliction of responsibility and of scriptural misrepresentation but very briefly. He merely states that Jewish religious leaders were supposed to safeguard their Scriptures but they betrayed this responsibility. For this reason, my focus will be on the most relevant verses.

1067 MWQ6:97–98.
1069 Because it is not in one’s power to forget or not to forget (i.e., forgetting is not a conscious act like ignoring or neglecting are), the English rendering of (nisyān) as ‘forgetting’ does not work.
1070 MWQ2:18.
Do they await except its ta‘wil? The Day its ta‘wil comes those who had forgot/neglected it (nasūhu) before will say, “The messengers of our Lord had come with the truth, so are there [now] any intercessors to intercede for us or could we be sent back to do other than we used to do?” They will have lost themselves and lost from them is what they used to invent. Q7:53

When they forgot/neglected (nasū) that by which they had been reminded, We saved those who had forbidden evil and seized those who wronged, with a wretched punishment, because they were defiantly disobeying. Q7:165

To borrow Uri Rubin’s terminology, the Qur’ān speaks of two types of Israelites: the “virtuous Israelites” and the “sinful Israelites.”1071 In Q7:165, we see these two categories side by side, and we get to listen to a discussion among the virtuous Israelites about the uselessness of trying to convince the sinful Israelites to repent. Here too, Fadlallah does not emphasize the forgetting of Scripture, does not analyze what forgetting Scripture can possibly have meant in practice, but emphasizes the disobedience of the Israelites which went beyond all limits and caused God’s wrath. Hence, there is no use in preaching repentance to them because God will inevitably destroy them and afflict them with a great torment for their awful sins.1072 The accusation of forgetting Scripture is buried behind their stubborn closing of hearts, their indifference, and their irresponsibility.1073

Fadlallah defines the term nisyān as follows: “to leave; to neglect, not to care about.”1074 He argues that the Jews are accused in Q7:165 of neglecting their Scripture, not caring about it, and not thinking thoroughly about its meaning. Instead of making of the revealed Scripture a guidebook for their lives, they attacked it and stirred up doubt about it. They also disbelieved in its divine source, attacked the prophets either out of ignorance or out of arrogance.1075 Hence, they will be punished for their wrongdoing on Doomsday and will wonder how they could be saved from Hellfire but it would be too late then.1076 Faithful to

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1071 Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur’ān*, especially part I and II.
1072 MWQ10:173. The idea, that wishing for the Jews to repent is a waste of time is expressed elsewhere too. See, for example, MWQ2:98: “There is no room for thinking or hoping to offer the Jews guidance because their souls are submerged in misguidance.”
1073 MWQ10:174.
1074 MWQ10:129. Also implicitly in MWQ10:135. Fadlallah does not explain the verb “nasiya” (to forget) when it occurs in Sūras 2 and 5. The first time he explains it is in the next-to-last relevant occurrence, according to the canonical order of the Sūras in the Mushaf which is Q7:53.
1075 MWQ10:136–137.
1076 MWQ10:137.
his line, Fadlallah does not miss this occasion to link the Israelites with the Israelis. The latter are tempted by their self-claimed position as God’s chosen people to

plot offensively against the peoples among whom they live using their subtle and secret tools which allow them to control the facilities of political, social and economic life. This in its turn enables them to attack the freedom and progress of these peoples in all spheres. It is only natural that such schemes would inevitably engender immense counter-hatred, cause a reactive reciprocal treatment to confront aggression with aggression as well as negative feelings against the Jews. This hidden feeling of hostility seeks a way out [...] Thus, this psychological conflict turns into a sharp struggle which moves towards the elimination of this racist and hateful spirit as long as its conspiration and hostility continue...1077

Furthermore, Fadlallah explains that the “complexed upbringing,” among other things, makes “the Jewish personality” and prevents the Jews from changing.1078 In another context he portrays the Jews as a people who stand

against the peoples who seek justice, truth, and freedom. They persecute them, kill them, displace, imprison and torture them [...] Thus, the Israeli history which the Qurʾān tells us, is no longer merely a stage of the past, but becomes—in our consciousness—a living image of the cruel man in every time and place.1079

These are not the only cases where the reader senses the projection of modern-day politics on the exegetical exercise or the equation of the sins of the Israelites with the aggression felt by the Arab peoples from the state of Israel.1080 On another level, modern-day Lebanese reality seems to affect Fadlallah’s treatment of the Qurʾānic verses positively as well. His interpretation of verse Q5:14, for example, shows this clearly. Even the way he divides verse units departs from the way most modern exegetes divided them. Both al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981) and Riḍā (d. 1935) group verses Q5:12-14 together and deal with

1077 MWQ10:275.
1079 MWQ2:95.
1080 Fadlallah is not alone in projecting modern-day politics on his reading of the Qurʾān. His compatriot Mughniyya is even more explicit in doing so. The latter refers to the Israeli refusal to abide by the UN resolution to withdraw from the territories it occupied on 5 June1967. He also argues that Israel misinterpreted this resolution to mean the necessity of entering into negotiations with Arabs. See Mughniyya’s Tafsīr al-Kāshīf 2:339.
Jews and Christians as one group while Fadlallah chooses to gather up the first two verses together (Q5:12-13) and keeps the third verse (Q5:14) about the Christians in a separate unit.

Because they broke their covenant [with God]. We cursed them and made their hearts hard. They distort words from their places and have forgotten a portion of that of which they were reminded. You will still observe deceit among them, except a few of them. But pardon them and overlook [their misdeeds]. Indeed, God loves those who are kind to others. Among those who say, “We are Christians” We took their covenant; but they forgot a portion of that of which they were reminded. So, We caused among them animosity and hatred until the Day of Resurrection. And God is going to inform them about what they used to do. Q5:13-14

In the verses above, forgetting or neglecting (nisyān) is used in reference to both the Jews (Q5:13) and the Christians (Q5:14). However, the tone used for the Jews is harsher than the one used for the Christians and Fadlallah does not miss that. According to Q5:13-14, both the Israelites and the Christians are accused of forgetting or neglecting their Scripture. In addition to forgetting Scriptures, the first party is also accused of breaking God’s covenant and of scriptural misrepresentation as well as of deceit on the part of the majority, all of which brought on them God’s curse and led to the hardening of their hearts. Despite these harsh accusations, the verse asks the Prophet to pardon them and overlook their misdeeds because God loves those who are kind to others. However, Fadlallah limits this tolerance to: “a certain phase, and within the line of Da’wa which extends until a certain limit. Once there is no possibility to extend, [this tolerance ends] and the time of confrontation comes.”

As for the second part of the verse, “God loves those who are kind to others,” Fadlallah, unlike most exegetes, does not discuss the abrogation of this verse, sticks to its apparent meaning but explains that Muhammad was indeed very kind to the Jews in Medina. Muhammad offered them the opportunity to live in peace and safety among several other privileges. The Jews, however, betrayed him, violated their treaties with him and deserved, hence, to be expelled from the Arabian Peninsula.

Fadlallah, once again, links the Israelites to their descendants the Jews of Medina and argues that the same wrongdoing of their ancestors continues through the Jews who lived

1081 MWQ8:85.
1082 MWQ8:85–86.
at the time of Muhammad. The first broke God’s covenant, forged the truth, and deviated from God’s path. As a result, God cursed them and “their hearts were hardened to the extent that they had no space [in their hearts] for mercy, goodness nor peace.” Here too, Fadlallah uses their mercilessness and hostility as features intimately inseparable from the Jews, just like being “eternally cursed by God.”

The Ayatollah diverges from his general line according to which he stops to discuss the views of al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1981). In this case, he does not mention al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s exegetical opinion about these verses, apparently because he disagrees with him. Instead, he chooses to refer in passing to Riḍā’s views which he refutes briefly and vaguely. Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī treats the two groups the same way and presents both Jews and Christians as guilty of forgetting God’s covenant. For him, both groups will suffer severe consequences for their wrongdoings: The first are cursed and the second are doomed with continuous schism and eternal Hellfire. As for Riḍā, these verses are an occasion to enumerate different deviations committed by both Kitābīs and to focus on scriptural misrepresentation in particular.

Aware of Riḍā’s lengthy exegetical treatment of the verses at hand and his careful discussion of the issue of tahrīf in it, Fadlallah refers to him rather hastily, sums up his argumentation in one paragraph, relegating Riḍā’s exegetical views to insignificance:

Some may think that this verse is about the misrepresentation (tahrīf) of the Gospel on the grounds that forgetting is tantamount to misrepresentation out of intolerance towards the thought of the other. This in its turn may lead to the misinterpretation of verses, their omission or their misrepresentation lest they are used against them. [This argument is given] on the grounds that the compilation history of the Gospels known to us now suggests that they were not written at Jesus’s time but a long time later at the hands of some Christians. Church leaders disagree with each other about who wrote the Gospel[s], when were they written, in what language, how the original copies were lost, among other things which the compiler of Tafsīr al-Manār has copied from La Grande

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1083 MWQ8:85.
1084 MWQ8:85.
1086 See Chapter II for more on Fadlallah’s attitude towards al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s exegetical views and on how MWQ started as an exegetical discussion with Tafsīr al-Mizān.
Although Fadlallah refers to what Riḍā (d. 1935) “had copied in Tafsīr al-Manār from La Grande Encyclopédie,” he does not quote him directly but seems to have copied Mughniyya’s (d. 1979) Tafsīr al-Kāshīf on the matter almost verbatim. This is clear from the unusual grammatical mistake he makes when he refers to the singular form “injīl” using the third person singular feminine “kutibat” instead of the third person singular masculine “kutiba”. Mughniyya uses third person singular feminine “kutibat” because he speaks of the “anājīl” in the plural while Fadlallah seems to prefer to speak about “injīl” in the singular. Moreover, it is worth noting that Fadlallah does not stop here to discuss the widely used argument of the “illogical contents” in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures on which many Muslim exegetes partially base their argumentation that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures were falsified. The Ayatollah contents himself with dismissing Riḍā’s arguments on the matter in a short vague paragraph:

*We note that this is not the apparent meaning of the verse at hand—even if [the above-mentioned views] were true. The verse comes in the context of leading a life in a contrary style to that stated in the Gospel by rejecting some facts and by deviating from the right path of religion.*

Hence, it is not totally clear to us whether Fadlallah says that forgetting is or is not a form of scriptural distortion in this context. What is clear to us though is that, unlike with the Jews, Fadlallah softens the Qur’ānic accusation in favor of the Christians in various instances. Moreover, as previously noted in 4.1.1 above, Fadlallah often differentiates between true Kitābīs and those whose affiliation to the Torah or the Gospel is untrue in reality. This is explicitly articulated in his interpretation of the Qur’ānic phrase ‘*those who say we are Christians*’ which he finds to be a reference to those who affiliate (*yantasibīna*) to Christianity as a claim only, not truly. It is worth noting, however, that the same...
phrase occurs in Q5:82 where ‘*those who say we are Christians*’ are said to be the nearest in amity to those who believe, but Fadlallah does not comment on this at all. 1095

Under the subtitle “*the Christians renounce the covenant,*” Fadlallah simply states that there is nothing new to mention concerning the idea of the covenant—nothing more than what was said in the case of the Israelites. The Ayatollah explains that the Christians received verses which reminded them of God and of how to lead a godly life but they forgot all that and deviated from the right path. 1096 Because Christians competed over worldly possessions, animosity and hatred spread among them and will continue to do so until the Day of Resurrection when they will stand at the hands of God and see the consequences of their “*bad deeds.*” 1097 However, comparing Fadlallah’s exegetical treatment of this verse with that of Q5:12-13, it becomes clear to us that there is something different in his perception of the Israelites’ covenant compared to that of the Christians. In the context of Q5:12-13, Fadlallah expressly equates the Israelites’ breaking of God’s covenant with altering the words of Scripture from their right places as the Qur’ānic passage says. Fadlallah goes on enumerating some more transgressions such as deliberately falsifying the truth and betraying the Prophet among many other misdemeanors. The Christians, however, are spared the accusation of tampering with the Scriptures in the context of Q5:14. 1098 The Ayatollah goes easier on Christians although he equates their neglect of God’s covenant with their deviation from monotheism and with the rejection of Prophet Muhammad and his message. These accusations, however, are softened with a brief implication that they apply only to untrue Christians. 1099 To Fadlallah, the core of verse Q5:14 is that Jesus had predicted the advent of Muhammad in the Gospel, thus, the Christians know that they ought to follow his mission, Islam, which came to perfect the best of conduct, 1100 but they forgot and neglected these truths mentioned in the Gospel at their hands. 1101 The Ayatollah particularizes, however, that the matter for the Christians “*is not about forgetting because God reminded them of what they have heard in the Gospel which is constantly read to them through their traditional belonging to it.*” 1102 These kinds of vague expressions are typical of Fadlallah’s style:

1095 MWQ8:295–308.
1096 MWQ8:88.
1097 MWQ8:88–89.
1098 MWQ8:85 Cf. MWQ8:89.
1099 MWQ8:89.
1100 A reference to the Ḥadīth: “*I have been sent to perfect the best of conduct*” (*Innamā buʾ iḥtu liʾatammima makarim al-akhlāq*).
1101 MWQ8:89.
1102 MWQ8:89.
They forgot a portion of that of which they were reminded; of the Gospel that God revealed which determines the [right] path, shows them how to open up to God out of faith and love, how to believe in a monotheistic way, not to claim that God has a son, and not to take other deities with Him [...] so that the Gospel is the way they take in both their public and personal lives, and in order to know how to receive the divine missions posterior to Jesus, especially the mission of Muhammad whose coming is predicted by Jesus. They should believe in him [i.e., Muhammad], follow the path of his mission which came to perfect the best of conduct.  

I believe what he means here is that even Christians in name only cannot forget the message of the Gospel because they hear it all the time in their ritual-like attendance of the church. Forgetting, hence, is a result of neglect and indifference. However, it is worth noting that forgetting in the example of the Christians seems to include intra-Christianity implications unlike the forgetting of the Jews. While, the forgetting of the Jews is associated with conspiring against Muhammad and Muslims as well as with attempting to destroy Islam and Muslims, forgetting in the case of the Christians has mainly led to schisms within Christendom which turned occasionally into brutal wars that shed more Christian blood than the blood shed by their enemies.

In addition to this, Fadlallah seems to implicitly equate forgetting in the case of the Christians with belief in the divinity of Christ and in the Trinity. These views in Fadlallah’s conception, as we have already noted in the previous chapter, have been introduced to Christianity through the misinterpretation of some New Testament verses, namely John 1:1, and not through additions, omissions, or changes in the text itself. Hence, the accusation of forgetting a portion of Scripture leveled against the Christians in Q5:14, although deliberate, is the result of misinterpretation and not distortion as is the case of the Jews in his interpretation of Q5:13. Also, although Fadlallah mentions twice the necessity to believe in Muhammad in the context of God’s covenant with the Christians, he does not state explicitly in the context of Q5:14 that the Christians have

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1103 MWQ8:89.
1104 MWQ8:90–91.
1105 MWQ8:90–91.
1106 MWQ8:99–100. John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
1107 See 3.4. Believing and unbelieving Scripturaries for more on this.
To conclude, forgetting or neglecting is an accusation directed at both Jews and Christians. Both have neglected their Scriptures but the Jews’ neglect includes scriptural misrepresentation as well as concealing the prediction of Muhammad. However, the Christians are treated less harshly than the Jews. The latter’s scriptural neglect is linked with their evil nature which has harmed the Muslims throughout the ages and keeps doing so. The neglect of the Christians, on the other hand, has harmed the Christians themselves more. In other contexts, Fadlallah seems to combine both groups and accuse them of offending the Muslims through the misrepresentation of their holy books—the Judeo-Christian Scriptures are part and parcel of the Muslims’ stream of revelation and any tampering with them affects the Islamic message as well. While Forgetting is linked to both Jews and Christians, the accusation of trying to pass off human texts as God’s seems to be levelled against the Jews alone.

4.1.11. Writing the Book with their own hands

One of the gravest and most straightforward accusations of scriptural misrepresentation is that of trying to pass off as God’s Word texts that are not revealed by God but are written with human hands. This accusation is found in the Qurʾān in verse Q2:79 which comes after a number of verses about the Children of Israel, hence, for most exegetes, this accusation is levelled against the Jews alone.

Woe to those who write the Book with their own hands, then say, ‘This is from God,’ in order to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn. Q2:79

Fadlallah’s treatment of this verse is rather brief and holds nothing new. This verse accuses the Jews of trying to pass off as God’s Word texts they wrote themselves, taking advantage of people’s ignorance of the Torah. Expectedly enough, Fadlallah equates the writing with their own hands in this verse with scriptural misrepresentation and identifies the culprits as the Jews who use religion to reach their own interests even if that means misrepresenting

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1108 He accuses them of concealing the prophecy about Muhammad elsewhere but not here.
1109 MWQ1:120.
and misinterpreting their own Scriptures. As a punishment for their sins, God will curse them and ruin them.\textsuperscript{1110}

In addition to writing with their own hands texts which they claim to be God’s Word, Fadlallah explains, the Jews “shift God’s Word from its places and make up content which they try to pass off as Scripture. They mix up truth with falsehood in order to mislead people into thinking these texts are from God.”\textsuperscript{1111} After this brief explanation, Fadlallah resorts to his accumulative style and quotes the narrative of al-Bāqir, the fifth Imam of the Imāmī Shīʿa, according to which the Jews changed the description (ṣifah) of Muhammad in the Torah in order to stir up doubt in the minds of lay Jews.\textsuperscript{1112} This brief interpretation is in line with most exegetical opinions. Although the verse itself does not identify what is written with their own hands, most exegetes agree that the Jews either write rulings different from what God had revealed or a description of the expected prophet which is different from the original one.

\textbf{4.1.12. Fabricating lies about God}

The accusation of fabricating lies about God (iftārā/qāla ‘alā allāh al-kaḍīb)\textsuperscript{1113} occurs several times in the Qurʾān but only some of these occurrences are related to scriptural misrepresentation in the MWQ commentary. Contrary to Gordon Nickel’s argument that fabricating lies about God “seldom appears in a tampering context in the Qurʾān,”\textsuperscript{1114} I find that most of these accusations are indeed related to the context of scriptural misrepresentation. Although “scholars of polemic have not connected verses containing this verb with the accusation of altering the earlier scriptures,” as Nickel argues, most of the verses which accuse the People of the book of fabricating lies about God contain another accusation as well and/or are in proximity to verses which accuse the Kitābīs of some kind of scriptural misrepresentation or concealing.\textsuperscript{1115} Moreover, Fadlallah’s exegetical treatment of most of these cases goes in the same direction: the fabricators of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1110} MWQ2:101.
\item \textsuperscript{1111} MWQ2:101–102
\item \textsuperscript{1112} Al-Ṭabrisī’s Majmaʿ al-Bayān 1:292 Cf. Tafsīr Muqāṭil 1:118.
\item \textsuperscript{1113} Q3:75, 3:78, 3:94 among others.
\item \textsuperscript{1114} Nickel, Narratives of Tampering, 112 f.
\item \textsuperscript{1115} For example, Q3:78 combines the accusation of twisting tongues with that of fabricating lies against God (see 4.1.3 above), and Q5:41 combines the accusations of tahrīf with fabricating lies against God (see 4.1.1 above).
\end{itemize}
lies are identified as the Jews and their act is equated with either the misrepresentation of Scriptures or with concealing them.

_Whoever fabricates a lie against God, they are indeed the unjust._

Q3:94

For example, in his treatment of Q3:94, Fadlallah implicitly equates fabricating a lie about God with misrepresentation of Scripture by lying to people about the content of the Torah and making unlawful what God had made lawful or vice versa. The previous verse, Q3:93, challenges the Jews to “bring the Torah and recite it,” implying, according to Fadlallah, that the Jews are concealing some of it as we discussed in the concealing subsection above. Although Fadlallah touches upon the accusation of fabricating lies only briefly, it is still clear from the context that he refers to the Jews’ falsification (tazyīf, zayf) of the truth and falsely claiming that the Torah contains rulings which they have made up themselves through the use of “deceptive methods.” The Jews are said in this context to have changed some dietary rulings and forbidden meats that God had made lawful.

_Those to whom We have given the Scripture recognize it/him as they recognize their own sons. Those who will lose themselves do not believe. Who is more unjust than one who fabricates a lie about God or denies His verses?_ Q6:20-21

In the same way, verse Q6:21 is another instance where we encounter the accusation of fabricating lies about God in the proximity of a concealing occurrence in Q6:20, which is widely used in the tafsīr literature to accuse the Jews of concealing the prediction of Muhammad in their Torah although they know Muhammad as they know their own children. Because of this proximity, verse Q6:21 is taken as accusing the Jews of deliberately and falsely claiming not to have knowledge concerning Muhammad. Fadlallah interprets the severe violation the verse speaks about by pointing out the effect this lie has on the followers of the Jewish scholars or those who depend on the information they were trusted with. Because of their high societal position, the lies they fabricated about Muhammad have a large-scale damaging effect.

_The lies which they fabricated are not just words in the air and their attitudes against God’s rulings are not limited to their own lives. They_

1117 MWQ6:155.
1118 MWQ6:156.
1119 MWQ6:154–156.
become a law (Sharīʿa) in their own right—they become one of the laws of falsehood which people follow as if they were truth [...] because of the religious adherence of the people who fabricated them.\textsuperscript{1120}

Similar views are repeated in a couple of occurrences such as in the Ayatollah’s exegetical treatment of verses Q7:37 and Q61:7 although in a more discreet, vague and brief way. In both cases, Fadlallah adds to the accusation of falsely attributing rulings to God further accusations such as denying God’s messages and rebelling against His messengers.\textsuperscript{1121}

\begin{quote}
Who is more unjust than one who fabricates a lie about God or says, “It has been inspired to me,” while nothing has been inspired to him…
\end{quote}

\textbf{Q6:93}

Likewise, in the context of Q6:93, Fadlallah speaks very briefly of a group of people who passed off as God’s Word texts, rulings and perceptions that are not God’s.\textsuperscript{1122} Fadlallah does not explicitly identify the accused group here but we conclude from the context that he speaks of the Jews because he identified them as the subject of the surrounding verses which are related to the accusation of concealing.\textsuperscript{1123} Fabricating a lie about God is considered the highest degree of injustice and a terrible violation against God.\textsuperscript{1124}

\begin{quote}
Who is more unjust than one who fabricates a lie about God? \textbf{Q11:18}
\end{quote}

Fadlallah also equates fabricating lies about God with scriptural misrepresentation in his treatment of the parallel verse Q11:18 where he insinuates that the verse speaks of the Jews who “\textit{falsely attributed [human-written texts] to God, altered His books, and made up rulings.”}\textsuperscript{1125} The two occurrences in Sūra 11 and 18 are both dealt with in an implicit way in MWQ.\textsuperscript{1126} In the first, Fadlallah explicitly links the fabrication of lies with altering Scriptures and falsely attributing human-made laws to God but identifies the culprits as the Jews only implicitly. In Q18:5, Fadlallah explains the lie as attributing a son to God and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1120] MWQ9:56.
\item[1121] MWQ10:119 and MWQ22:189.
\item[1122] MWQ9:224–225.
\item[1123] See more about Q6:91 in 4.1.4 above.
\item[1124] MWQ9:224–225.
\item[1125] MWQ12:44.
\item[1126] Q18:5 “They have no knowledge of it, nor had their fathers. Grave is the word that comes out of their mouths; they speak not except a lie.”
\end{footnotes}
accuses all of the Jews, the Christians, and the polytheists of committing it. However, in Q18:15, it seems that the culprits are the disbelievers (al-kuffār) in general.\footnote{It is worth mentioning that after Sūra 7, the exegetical analysis of occurrences of lying is rather abridged. MWQ12:44 and MWQ14:287. The reason behind that is that Fadlallah did not finish enhancing the first edition of his commentary. The changes and additions introduced to the second edition of MWQ concerned volumes 1–10 and reached Sūra 7 (al-ārāf) as the Ayatollah himself explains in MWQ1:20.}

I find verse Q5:41 relevant to this study as well even though it uses the phrase samma `ūna li al-khaḍīb and not the phrases iftarā/qāla `alā Allāh al-kaḍīb because it accuses the Jews of being “avid listeners to lies,” on the one hand, and because of Fadlallah’s exegetical treatment of it which links it to tahrīf on the other hand. Additionally, this phrase occurs in the proximity of an explicit accusation of tahrīf in the next part of the verse (yuḥarrifūna al-kalima), which is discussed in 4.1.1 above.

O Messenger, let them not grieve you who hasten into disbelief of those who say, “We believe” with their mouths, but their hearts believe not, and from among those who are Jews; there are avid listeners to lies (sammā `ūna ilkhaḍībi), avid listeners to another people who have not come to you; they alter the words from their places (yuḥarrifūna al-kalima), saying […]. Q5:41

This verse which also combines the tahrīf accusation with the accusation of listening to lies or accepting them is a case in point where the exegete presents the Jews as liars and Scripture shifters by nature.\footnote{MWQ8:173–174.} Fadlallah glosses the phrase (sammā `ūna li al-khaḍīb) as receptive or acceptive (qābilūna) of lies and (sammā `ūna liqawmin ʿākhariṇa) as spies to other Jews—they come to listen to Muhammad for the benefit of other Jews.\footnote{MWQ8:172.} He expressly equates accepting the lies here with scriptural misrepresentation and goes even further to link the falsification of facts (tazyīf) with the very Jewish nature, arguing that the Jews are a people who have a propensity to accept lies:

They practice lying as a profession and they are in harmony with lying as a work style: They listen to lies with the ears of their hearts, they accept every lie because lying represents the tool for the falsification (tazyīf) of perceptions and stances in people’s life.\footnote{MWQ8:174.}

Like tahrīf, tabdīl, and twisting tongues, the accusations of fabricating lies about God are leveled against the Jews.\footnote{Except for the case of Q18:15, which Fadlallah links with the Jews, the Christians, and the polytheists.} Particularly, the occurrences of fabricating a lie about God
(iftarā/qāla `alā Allāh al-kaḍiba) which occur in Sūras 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 are rather explicitly linked with the Jews and with the misrepresentation of Scriptures. Furthermore, misinterpretation of Scriptures is considered a form of tahrīf as well—Fadlallah clearly equates exegetical misrepresentation (al-tahrīf fī al-tafsīr) with textual misrepresentation (tahrīf al-naṣṣ) on the grounds that it “is no less dangerous than the misrepresentation of the term itself because the result is the same.” The two most explicit cases where Fadlallah speaks of misinterpretation as a way of misrepresentation are related to the Christians’ understanding of John1:1 and John 15:26. As far as the first verse is concerned, the Ayatollah accuses the Christians of misinterpreting John1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God” and falsely basing on it the doctrine of the Trinity. As for the second, he accuses the Christians of misinterpreting the Greek term παράκλητος as the Holy Spirit while it actually refers to Muhammad.

4.2. The Bible is corrupt but is still usable

In conformity with most Muslim exegetes, the Ayatollah differentiates between the Judeo-Christian Scriptures revealed by God on the one hand, and the contemporary ones which have been partially misrepresented on the other. Although this misrepresentation cripples these Scriptures, it does not make them totally useless. On the contrary, they are still usable. Although Fadlallah is in line with most exegetes that the Bible has undergone corruption, this does not amount to its total rejection. The Bible still contains some truth. In his commentary on verses Q3:1-6, Fadlallah echoes al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī when he explains:

*When the Qurʾān says that it ‘confirms what was before it,’ we can deduce that it addresses Jews and Christians who keep the Torah and the Gospel so that they would compare between the Qurʾān and between these books and find out in them the trueness of this Daʿwa. If we know that the Books in our hands now are the [same] Books which were in their hands at the time of Daʿwa, we would clearly conclude that the Torah and the Bible were not corrupted to the extent that they would not contain an uncorrupted concept*

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1133 MWQ6:122.
1134 MWQ8:99–100.
1135 See 4.2.1 below for more.
1136 See the previous chapter on the idea of supersession.
or an uncorrupted verse. They indeed contain a great deal of authentic texts and true concepts which can be used to make a comparison between them and the Qurʾān.\textsuperscript{1138}

As far as the New Testament is concerned, Fadlallah emphasizes the above-mentioned views elsewhere too. For example, when asked on another occasion whether the Gospels available to us today were the Word of God, the Ayatollah answered: “\textit{Most of it is the Word of God}.”\textsuperscript{1139} Nevertheless, the Torah does not enjoy the same tolerance from Fadlallah, who argues, for example, that Judaism has changed and is no longer in congruence with the message of Moses and with the teachings of the Torah. He often refers to the Torah more harshly and argues that it “\textit{has been greatly distorted}.”\textsuperscript{1140} In one of his Damascene lectures, Fadlallah quotes al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s \textit{tafsīr} according to which “\textit{the present version of the Torah available to the Jews today contains some of the original Torah revealed to Moses. However, it also contains altered matters either through addition, omission, through the change of a word or of its place or in another way}.”\textsuperscript{1141} Be that as it may, it is worth noting that the usefulness of these partially misrepresented Scriptures should be perceived according to Fadlallah’s context. Even though Fadlallah argues that the Bible is only partially corrupt and is still usable, this usability means searching it for the truth, comparing it with the Qurʾān in order to realize its trueness and eventually accepting it as the Last Testament.\textsuperscript{1142} In practical terms, the \textit{taḥrīf} accusation hamstrings the Bible and renders it ineffectual anyway because only the Qurʾān contains the pure, authentic, and incorruptible divine truth.

4.2.1. The Quest for the truth in unauthentic Scriptures

Although corrupt, Muslim scholars have searched, in different degrees, in these Scriptures for certain issues either to prove the correctness of the Qurʾān or to prove the wrongness of the Bible.\textsuperscript{1143} Compared to the majority of modern and contemporary exegetes, Fadlallah does not seem to be interested in studying the Bible for such proofs. However,

\textsuperscript{1138} MWQ5:212 Cf. al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s \textit{Tafsīr al-Mizān} 6:342.
\textsuperscript{1140} Interview with Fadlallah in \textit{Fikr} magazine on 31 December 2009, retrieved from Fadlallah’s official website on 11 September 2016 http://arabic.bayynat.org/ListingByCatPage.aspx?id=1050.
\textsuperscript{1142} MWQ5:212.
\textsuperscript{1143} Accad, “\textit{Corruption and/or Misinterpretation of the Bible},” 95.
he occasionally refers to some issues that show a relative interest in their contents: the fact that the Torah does not contain clear references to Judgment day means that “some kind of distortion must have occurred in the Torah books available to us today. This distortion must have taken place out of the materialistic complexes in the Jewish reality.”

However, the absence of a biblical text about Muhammad is one of the most common arguments used to prove the corruption of the Bible. Fadlallah’s argument does not differ from the widely held exegetical view among Muslims: Since we do not have an idea of the content of the authentic Torah or the Gospel the Qurʾān speaks of, and since the Qurʾān tells us that both these books predict the coming of Muhammad, the fact that the contemporary versions of these books do not contain such a prophecy means that they must have been tampered with.

Despite holding present day Judeo-Christian Scriptures corrupt, Muslim commentators nonetheless searched them for passages that mention the coming of Muhammad. Some of them thought they found what they were looking for. In his MWQ commentary, Fadlallah contents himself with pointing out, time after time, the fact that the authentic Torah and the Gospel predict the coming of Muhammad and that the People of the Book have concealed these predictions, but he does not claim an ability or a desire to identify the biblical predictions of Muhammad. Unlike Riḍā’s (d. 1935) tafsīr al-Manār, for example, who discusses at length biblical passages which prove the trueness of the Qurʾānic claim that Muhammad is mentioned in the Bible, Fadlallah’s commentary does not. However, the Ayatollah must have found himself compelled to use the Bible card when one of his devout Shiʿi followers asked him if the Bible we have now contains a mention of Muhammad. It is in this fatwa that the Ayatollah identifies John 14:16 and John 15:26 as the verses which predict the coming of Muhammad:

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1144 MWQ9:384.
1145 MWQ2:70 and in the context of almost every verse related to concealing, tabdîl, and taḥrîf.
1146 They searched mainly in the New Testament but scholars such as Ibn Hazm and Ibn al-Jawziyya also referred to the Hebrew Bible. Passages such as Genesis 17:29 and Deuteronomy 18:18 were used as proofs of Muhammad’s prophethood (dalâ’il al-nubuwwa). For more on this, see Adang, Muslim writers, 267–277.
1147 McAuliffe, “The Quranic context of Muslim biblical scholarship,” 141–158. For particular examples of the Biblical verses often used to prove the biblical prediction of the advent of Muhammad, see ibid, 148–153. It is worth pointing out, however, that looking for the “truth” in previous Scriptures is not peculiar to Muslims. The Christians before them also looked in the Hebrew Bible for prophecies about the coming of Jesus, as Reynolds points out, “The devotion of the Syriac Fathers to finding Jesus Christ in the Old Testament led them to write against Jews, who do not find him there.” Reynolds, “On the Qurʾānic Accusation,” 202.
1148 Tafsīr al-Manār, 6:460.
1149 In Sīrat Ibn ʿIṣḥāq, the Syriac word “al-manḥamannā” is identified as Muhammad and in Tafsīr Muqātil 4:316 the word “Ahmad” in Q61:6 is said to be no other than the Syriac “Faraqlūṭū.” See Qurʾānic Christians, 183f on the use of this Greek term. See also Montgomery Watt, “His Name Is Ahmad,” The
We believe that Christ has predicted the coming of Muhammad in accordance with the Qurʾān 61:6 “bringing good tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name is Ahmad.” However, we do not have the true Gospel that God revealed to Jesus because it was distorted. The Holy Qurʾān mentions that the children of Israel used to distort the Word of God and sell it for a small price. However, there are several predictions in the Gospels in our hands today such as John 14:16 “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Paracletos ...” and John 15:26 “But when the Paracletos comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of Truth who comes from the Father, He will testify and bear witness about Me.”

Fadlallah explains that the Greek term “παράκλητος” means ‘the supporter’ or ‘the advocate’ and is a reference to Muhammad. We also note in this fatwa that Fadlallah does not accuse the Christians but the Jews of misrepresenting the Gospel when he blames the Israelites for “distorting the Word of God and selling it for a small price” but does not seem to argue that the Christians have played a role in the misrepresentation of the New Testament. The Ayatollah repeats in different contexts that “the Jews used to conceal some scriptural facts revealed in the Torah and the Gospel especially the facts related to the prophethood of Muhammad.” This is clearly at odds with the above-cited fatwa in which Fadlallah nevertheless argues that the Gospels available to us today contain several predictions of Muhammad.

Another instance of looking for Qurʾānic accounts in the Bible, although perhaps not as illustrative as the previous example, is the story of the banquet in Q5:112-117. Many exegetes, such as Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) and Riḍā (d. 1935) for instance, noted the absence of this narrative from the New Testament as we know it now. While Ibn Kathīr does not elaborate further on this absence, Riḍā offers different possible explanations, one of which is that the story might have been concealed by the Christians during the time of persecution and hence became unknown to their later generations. Unlike Riḍā, Fadlallah does not deem the absence of this narrative from the New Testament as we know...
it now problematic. Although his treatment of Q5:112-117 is rather vague, he seems to only generally allude to the discussions in other exegetical books about the reason why this account is not mentioned in the present day New Testament and not known to the Christians. He dismisses these discussions on the grounds that

*It is possible that this account is among the New Testament verses dropped out or one of the accounts which historians did not mention or did not know as is the case for many of the matters of Ancient History.*

It follows that, despite the fact that most Muslim exegetes deem the Bible in our hands corrupt, they still refer to it, as Kate Zebiri puts it, “either on the basis that some authentic passages have survived, or because some verses can be reinterpreted rather than rejected, or simply in order to put forward a hypothetical argument which is based on premises that one’s opponents can’t reject.”

### 4.3. Motives behind misrepresentation

The misrepresentation of Scripture is a grave accusation and relates closely to an Islamic polemical narrative of Jewish stubbornness and perfidy. For Fadlallah, the accusations of *tahrīf, tabdīl*, twisting tongues, concealing the truth and confounding it with falsehood as well as fabricating lies about God and writing Scripture with one’s own hands all seem to be unambiguously intentional. The main motives behind committing such acts are the jealousy which the Jews feel towards Muslims and the fact that they would not accept a prophet who is not from amongst themselves, but most importantly their ardent pursuit of worldly interests and societal position. Fadlallah’s most often repeated rhetoric is that for the Jews, their interests and ambitions are more important than God’s commands. Their Scripture made clear that Muhammad’s message is the truth but they chose unbelief out of obstinance because religion for them is not a matter of faith but rather a way for self-assertion, material profit, and social status: “they altered their Scripture in order to use it in the service of their ambitions and to satisfy their lusts. They employ their Scripture to serve tyrants and deviants, and they interpret it according to the needs of each phase.”

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1154 MWQ8:398–401.  
1155 MWQ8:401. Unlike Ridā, Fadlallah does not equate the account of the banquet with the Last supper or the feeding of the crowd. Cf. *Tafsīr al-Manār* 7:258.  
1158 MWQ2:97.
In addition to these motives, which the Ayatollah is never tired of repeating, we note that evil intention and the evil nature of the Jews are also used to explain the Qur’ānic negative stand against the Jews and to link these accusations with the Israelis. If the accusation of scriptural misrepresentation is mainly leveled against the Jews, it is only natural that the motives behind misrepresenting Scriptures are also mainly linked with the Jews. However, when dealing with the misrepresentation of the Gospel or concealing the truth on the Christian side, the motives are less harsh. These do not exceed neglect or indifference.1159

4.4. Conclusion

The theme of scriptural misrepresentation appears in different contexts both in Fadlallah’s commentary and in his writings in general but is discussed vaguely and briefly in most cases. Fadlallah does not seem to offer a deep and well-developed systematic theory about tahrīf nor show interest in discussing how, when, and in what way the Kitabīs misrepresented their Scriptures. Besides, the different forms of misrepresentation seem to intertwine in a way that they all mean the concealing of the prophecy about Muhammad. However, we can safely say that Fadlallah is clear about three issues: The first is that this misrepresentation is mainly related to concealing the prophecies of Moses and Jesus about Muhammad and his message, the second is that the act of misrepresentation was intentional, and the third is that the culprits are predominantly the Jews.

In MWQ, as is the case in most tafsīr books, the accusations of tahrīf and tabdīl are both related to altering words of Scripture from their positions. Furthermore, Fadlallah too associates the accusation of concealing in particular with concealing the prophecy about the advent of Muhammad. The accusations of concealing are leveled against both Jews and Christians although the Jews’ role seems to be more emphasized than that of the Christians.1160 Like most Muslim exegetes, Fadlallah thinks that the original unfalsified bible predicted the coming of Muhammad and his last message, but Jews and Christians concealed those verses in particular. Also, the narratives of the occasions of revelation (Ashāb al-Nuzūl) used to study the context of these verses often contain assertions that Muhammad is indeed mentioned in the Torah and that the texts referring to him and to his description have been intentionally deleted, concealed or changed by the Jews. For example, in the oft-mentioned story of the adultery judgment,1161 the most knowledgeable

1159 MWQ8:89–91.
1161 This story is quoted very often as the circumstance of revelation of Q3:23 and 4:43, among others.
of the Jewish scholars testify not only to distorting the Torah to serve the interest of the notorious Jews but also refer to the omission or concealment of the prophecy about Muhammad.\textsuperscript{1162}

Per contra, Fadlallah does not accuse all the Jews and all the Christians of corrupting their Scriptures. In few instances, we note that he mainly accuses some of their leaders who are not true believers. Only these aberrant religious leaders have committed the sin of scriptural misrepresentation. Also, Fadlallah makes a distinction between the religious scholars and the illiterate followers. The latter cannot check for themselves what is authentic and what is not either because they could not read their Scriptures for themselves (they were illiterate and the Scriptures were not Arabized) or because their religious leaders intentionally and mischievously hid them. We also understand from the Ayatollah’s reasoning that some of the Jews and Christians preserved their Scriptures uncorrupted because the Qur’ān says it confirms them. However, we are not told when exactly the Bible was corrupted or if different versions were circulated simultaneously—authentic and non-authentic ones.

The Jews are generally presented in Fadlallah’s writings as inherently resistant to guidance and as a group who deliberately choose to close their hearts to the truth.\textsuperscript{1163} Fadlallah goes even further, arguing that Muslims have to be wary of the Jews even if they convert to Islam lest some of them fake embracing Islam in order to be able to destroy the Muslim community from within.\textsuperscript{1164} The various accusations of scriptural misrepresentation are directed at the Jews ad hominem, while those directed at the Christians are more specifically linked to concealing the foretelling of Muhammad’s advent, forgetting scripture, or misinterpreting certain biblical verses. It is worth mentioning that, on more than one occasion, these accusations are sometimes softened with a brief implication that they apply only to untrue Jews and untrue Christians—especially in the case of the latter.\textsuperscript{1165}

If the Christians’ neglect of God’s covenant is equated with their deviation from monotheism and with the rejection of Prophet Muhammad and his message, the Jews’ neglect of God’s covenant recalls a downpour of accusations ranging from speaking derisively to Muhammad, mocking him, deliberately concealing the Scripture passages which foretell his coming to altering the order of words or texts not only in their own Scriptures but also in those of the Christians.

\textsuperscript{1162} MWQ8:177.
\textsuperscript{1163} MWQ8:174 and MWQ2:98.
\textsuperscript{1164} MWQ2:98–99.
\textsuperscript{1165} MWQ8:174 and MWQ8:89.
There is yet another difference in dealing with Jews and Christians in Fadlallah’s assessment of the consequences of scriptural misrepresentation. While the deviation of the Christians led to problems that primarily harmed their own faction, the deviation of the Jews seems, more often than not, to harm primarily Muslims and Islam. The Ayatollah repeatedly states that unlike Jews and Christians, Muslims do not have any complexes against the previous divine religions which form an important part of Islam’s history except one in matter: Muslims are saddened by the degree of “doctrinal and legislative deviation these two religions have led to.”

Fadlallah is also similar to most modern exegetes in his attempt to contextualize the Qur’ānic accusations and statements to modern-day political concerns and challenges. The lion’s share of scriptural misrepresentation in Fadlallah’s commentary goes to the Jews, who are presented as the paradigm of misguidance and corruption in all times. This is not only the most widely held viewpoint among modern Arab exegetes but is also expected given the fact that Fadlallah lived all his life under the effect of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Ayatollah’s sensitivity towards his Christian compatriots and his aggressiveness towards his neighboring enemy, Israel, is clear. It is not uncommon for him to link the Israelites with the Israelis either implicitly or explicitly and equate them with all the evildoers in the lives of Muslims in all times.

Although the misrepresentation of Scripture is the major accusation of Islam against Jews and Christians, it is by far not the only one. Muslims, from early on, have leveled several accusations against the Kitābīs; some stem from the Qur’ān itself while others developed throughout the history of Islam in the Qur’ānic exegetical traditions as well as in polemical discussions. The Christians are spared most of the accusations directed at the Jews not only concerning the misrepresentation of Scriptures but on other levels too, as we shall see in the next chapter.

1166 MWQ1:119–120.
1167 MWQ2:94–95. This is also found in MWQ2:63 and repeatedly elsewhere in MWQ.
5. The Christians’ amity and the Jews’ enmity

We have concluded in the previous chapters that Fadlallah’s views of the Christians are more lenient compared to his views of the Jews concerning deviation from the true faith or the degree of scriptural misrepresentation and on other levels too. Not only is Fadlallah aware of his more positive attitude towards the Christians but he bases it on the Qurʾān itself. In the Ayatollah’s opinion, the Qurʾān groups the Jews together with the polytheists as the hardest in enmity to the believers in contrast with the Christians who are considered the nearest in amity (Q5:82). Fadlallah resorts to intertextuality (Q3:64, 5:51, 9:28-29, 29:46, 60:8-9) to complete his argument and to build a relatively clear and systematic theory on how Muslims should deal with the Scriptuaries. Based on his understanding of the above-mentioned verses, the Ayatollah draws lines of demarcation between Muslims and Kitābīs.

The Qurʾānic verses which regulate the relationship between Muslims and Kitābīs reflect the ambivalent Islamic perception of the non-Muslim monotheists. However, it is the exegetical treatment of these ambivalent verses that enacts the laws based on which the Muslim-Kitābī relationship is regulated in practice. Depending on the interpretation, the Islamic attitude is either open towards the other or barrier-building. Due to the restrictions of a study of this size, the main focus in this chapter will be the third tenet of Fadlallah’s perception of Kitābīs: the regulation of the practical engagement with them. This is attained through the examination of his understanding of the above-mentioned Qurʾānic verses and the analysis of the way his understanding has practically affected the lives of his followers, of his Christian co-citizens, and of his Jewish neighbors—the Israelis. This is especially important because Fadlallah’s name is generally associated with the promotion of a Muslim-Christian dialogue in Lebanon and an ardent anti-Israel and anti-Western rhetoric which is believed to have strongly inspired Hizballah, the Lebanon based Islamist militant group.


1169 Relevant parallel verses are taken into consideration as well.
5.1. The hardest in enmity and the nearest in amity

You will certainly find that the most violent of people in enmity for those who believe to be the Jews and those who are polytheists, and you will certainly find the nearest in amity to those who believe to be those who say: We are Christians; this is because there are priests and monks among them and because they do not behave proudly. **Q5:82**

Verse Q5:82 is arguably the most relevant and explicit verse in the Qur’ānic differentiation between Jews and Christians in terms of their attitude towards Muslims. In his commentary, and like most exegetes, Fadlallah interprets the verse by linking it to two migration events in early Islam: the migration of the first Muslims to Abyssinia and the Prophet’s migration to Medina. The Ayatollah emphasizes the difference between the Christians and the Jews in terms of their different reception of the Prophet Muhammad at the beginning of his mission. While Fadlallah describes the Muslim-Jewish encounters at Medina as highly polemical and hostile, he praises the Muslim-Christian ones as less polemical and non-aggressive. In reference to the episode found in **Sīrat Ibn Hishām**, the Ayatollah explains that Muhammad’s first encounter with the Christian community was positive when the Prophet’s persecuted followers found refuge in Abyssinia. There, the country’s Christian king protected them and refused to give them back to their tribe—Quraish. The Ayatollah also stresses that both parties, the Muslims and the Christians, noticed the common lines between Islam and Christianity. In contrast, the Jews have been hostile, treacherous and envious since their first encounter with Islam and have never ceased to be so. Fadlallah links this negative behavior to the Jews’ superiority complex and contempt for other nations based on their “chosen people fallacy.” Faithful to his style, Fadlallah moves on to draw some practical lessons from this verse: If there was only one lesson Fadlallah wanted to teach his followers, young and old, even if only one Muslim person remained on earth, it would be verse Q5:82. Indeed, Fadlallah used to ask people to choose for their funerals the Qur’ānic verses which

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1170 For example, al-Ṭūsī’s **Tibyān** 3:616.
1171 MWQ8:299–305. Also in HQ, 139–149. Similar views are also found in Darwaza’s Qur’ānic commentary **al-Tafsīr al-Hadīṯ** 9:44–45. See also Lewis, **The Jews of Islam**, 10–13.
1172 Ibn Isḥāq, **Sīrah** 1:208–221.
1173 MWQ8:299–300.
1174 MWQ8:300–301 and **Hīwār Shāmil**, 68–69.
1176 **Hīwār Shāmil**, 97.
describe the Jews and their character as a means of political opposition and as a constant reminder of the evilness of the Jews. 1177 Fadlallah warns against the calls for religious tolerance towards the Jews “because these calls might aim at alleviating the state of intellectual, spiritual and practical tension which believing Muslims live under in order to maintain their Islamic position.” 1178 This state of tension is necessary because without it Muslims would relax and thus come closer to defeat. Hence, keeping a high level of tension between Muslims and the Jews is in the best interests (maṣlaḥa) of Islam and Muslims, otherwise the latter are going to receive a knockout blow from the enemy. 1179 The Ayatollah emphasizes that the Jews “should be treated as enemies because they plot to weaken Islam and Muslims in order to ultimately eradicate both. [...] Hence, you cannot treat them as friends unless one is naïve and unable to understand matters clearly.” 1180

The Jew is presented as the arch-enemy against whom Fadlallah explicitly warns, fights, and incites. The Ayatollah does not shy from calling explicitly for the eradication of the Jews: “kill your enemy, your arch-enemy, kill an Israeli.” 1181 On the other side, the Christian’s starting point, Fadlallah explains, is the Gospel which is full of spiritual values. It teaches its followers pure spirituality and love of the truth in an innocence that resembles that of children. 1182 The Christians amity towards Muslims stems from this “Gospel-inspired unrestrained modest spirituality” and from their openness to the thought of the other. 1183 For this reason, the Qur’ān refers to the humility of Christians in a time when they “did not have [yet] a complex of conflict towards Islam and Muslims.” 1184

5.1.1. Christianity vs. Jewish Christianity

Even though Fadlallah emphasizes several times that the degree of enmity of the Jews towards the Muslims is higher than that of the Christians, he argues, nevertheless, that Muslims should be vigilant when dealing with both groups to protect themselves from any possible plots they might be preparing for them. 1185 Fadlallah highly praises the Christians’

1178 MWQ8:307. Similar thoughts are also in Fadlallah’s Hīwār Shāmil, 71–72 where he suggests that these calls attempt to “remove the barriers between Zionist Israeli Judaism and between the Muslims and the Christian. These are not innocent calls.”
1179 MWQ8:307. Also in MWQ8:293–294 in the context of Q5:78–81.
1182 MWQ8:303.
1183 MWQ8:305.
1184 MWQ8:302–303.
1185 MWQ2:178.
attitude and spirituality as described in the verse under study; however, he limits the atmosphere of good spirit and the openness of Christianity towards Islam only to a specific group. The Christians intended by the positive description in Q5:82-83 are those who lived at the time of Muhammad. Although Fadlallah explains that this verse teaches modern-day Muslims, Daʿwa workers in particular, to find common ground with Christianity and to build a solid ground between Christians and Muslims for union and mutual understanding, he also warns Muslims to take note of the “complicated historical and political elements which have left profound effects and changed the spirit in reality from that described in this verse.”

He cautions Muslims to differentiate between meek Christians whose spirituality is Gospel-driven and those whose “Christianity is Jewish in terms of hatred and hostility against Islam and Muslims.” Hence Muslims should be realistic, take caution and not “fall into the trap of the deceptive slogans calling for love while it [this Christianity] does its best to conspire [against Muslims] in hatred and hostility.” The Ayatollah refers in another context to Zionist Christianity which believes that God has promised the Land of Palestine to the Jews and which supports Israel more than the Jews themselves. The Christians who follow this type of Christianity are against Palestinians and Muslims in general and paint the latter in dark shades. Both “Jewish” and “Zionist” are attributes which take from Christianity its pure form and turn it into a usurping political movement which does not differ from Zionism itself. Additionally, the Ayatollah also borrows Sayyid Quṭb’s (d. 1966) concepts “Global Zionism” (al-Ṣuḥyūnīyya al-ʿālamiyya) and “Global Crusades” (al-Ṣalībīyya al-ʿālamiyya), according to which the deviation (inḥīrāf) of Judaism and Christianity from their true divine form led to the formation of a political version of them whose main aim is to destroy Islam and Muslims through various means such as lobbying and secret plots. These two political forms constitute the powers of global arrogance (al-İstikbār al-ʿālamī) and are united against the oppressed Muslims (al-mustaḍʿāfūn). However, while Quṭb holds both Jews and Christians responsible for all evil on earth, Fadlallah concentrates his attack on the Jews in particular.

The American policy in the Middle East in general and in the Arab and Lebanese reality in particular is an Israeli policy. The
5.2. Regulated engagements

Fadlallah’s interpretation of Q5:82 as the Qur’ān’s baseline approach to the Scriptuaries leads him to the discussion of the regulations of Muslim-Kitābī engagement. A good picture of the Ayatollah’s perception of how to deal with the Scriptuaries is best attained through the examination of a number of Qur’ānic verses he frequently quotes intertextually as a theological basis for his arguments. This perception has three main aspects which intertwine at some levels: The first aspect is theological-political, the second is rational-pragmatic, and the third is theoretical-speculative. The first two aspects are related to regulating present-time encounters, taking into consideration the sociopolitical challenges and the exigencies of the era, while the third is related to the long-term future and to Fadlallah’s ultimate goal—the establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon.

The theological-political aspect revolves around regulating the Muslims’ engagement with the People of the Book in a way that does not endanger or negatively affect their Islamic identity. Fadlallah has written and spoken extensively about the Muslim-Christian dialogue and about the impossibility of such dialogue with the Jews based on their hostile attitude towards Islam and Muslims. The key Qur’ānic terms in this attitude are injustice (zulm), hostility (ʿadāwa) and wilāya. Peaceful relationships with Scriptuaries are the rule unless Islam and Muslims are threatened or transgressed against. In this case, Muslims are prohibited from engaging in relationships with them either partially or categorically. At the same time, Muslims are called to treat others justly regardless of their religious affiliations. As with most exegetes, so with Fadlallah too, Qur’ānic intertextuality is necessary when building a comprehensive Qur’ānic perception about any issue. Fadlallah’s argument revolves mainly around the three Qur’ānic verses quoted and analyzed below:

190 Hīwār Shāmil, 116.

1193 For example, FAHIM, HQ, Uslāb al-Da’wa fī al-Qurʾān, and al-Hiwār Bilā Shurūṭ: Tamarrud ‘lā Thaqāfāt al-Khawf, Beirut: Dār al-Malāk, 1998 in addition to a large number of articles, talks and interviews on dialogue.

1194 Fadlallah, al-Kalima al-Sawā’ Qā idat al-Taʿāyush, 30.
O People of the Book, come to a common word (kalima sawā’) between us and you—that we will not worship except God and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of God. Q3:64

Do not argue with the People of the Book except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice (allaṭīna ḏalamū) among them. Q29:46

God only forbids you from those who fight you because of religion and expel you from your homes and aid in your expulsion. God forbids that you make allies of them. And whoever makes allies of them (yatawallahum), then it is those who are the wrongdoers. Q60:8-9

5.2.1. A restricted invitation to a common word

Verse Q3:64 quoted above is one of Fadlallah’s most cited verses in the context of Christian-Muslim dialogue and Islamic tolerance. What Fadlallah means by the Qur’ānic phrase ‘a common word’ is the shared monotheistic belief in God regardless of the disagreement about its details.1195 Time after time, Fadlallah goes on singing the praises of the meeting points between Islam and the religions of the Scriptures and stresses that it agrees with them about “monotheism as a general principle but disagrees with them in its terminology.”1196 When the Ayatollah discusses dialogue, he does not mean the exchange of views for the sake of mutual understanding but rather studying the mentality of the other, searching for his ideology’s strong and weak spots before engaging in a struggle of thoughts in order to “desist from the wrong and to open up on the truth.”1197 In other words, dialogue for Fadlallah means the use of soft power to convince the other that his religion is outdated and that Islam is the truth—the only truth.1198 The Ayatollah is convinced that

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1195 MWQ6:78–79. For more on Fadlallah’s understanding of Muslim-Christian dialogue, see Hirvonen, Christian-Muslim Dialogue.
1196 Fadlallah, al-Kalima al-Sawā’ Qā’idat al-Ta’āyush, 37.
1197 MWQ18:63.
1198 MWQ6:79–80 and MWQ18:64 Thus Hirvonen, Christian-Muslim Dialogue, 306–307. For more on the progressiveness of divine revelations in Fadlallah’s thought, see Chapter III.
Islam is the natural religion and that people would embrace it if they just opened up and engaged in dialogue.1199

*Let us study together submission to God [...] to discover through calm objective dialogue whether Judaism or Christianity represent an eternal line or if they stop at a certain phase to give way to the other religion which responds to people’s new requirements.*1200

On several occasions, the Ayatollah specifies that, despite the theological and dogmatic disagreements, dialogue with the Christians is important because it is the way to reach a formula to coexist in Lebanon.1201 Additionally, dialogue with the Christians is motivated by the necessity of cooperating against Israel as well as the hope of establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon in the long-term future. Based on the above, it is safe for us to conclude that dialogue for the Ayatollah is not a goal in itself. Dialogue is a means to either proselytize the Christians or at least gain their trust. If the desired result of conversion could not be reached, establishing trust would allow coexistence with them that would lead to cooperation against Israel and the Western hegemony in Lebanon. Eventually they could be at ease with the idea of living under the professed Islamic state in the long-term.1202 Fadlallah was certain that the Islamic state can be established in Lebanon if the Christians’ fears of it are assuaged.1203

Fadlallah does not have the same enthusiasm for an Islamic-Jewish dialogue because the Jews are deemed hostile and unjust towards Muslims.1204 He is willing, in theory, to engage in dialogue with the Jews as a religious group as long as they are not Israelis, not Zionists and “provided they commit to the Torah the way it was revealed [...] and provided that they conceive of it the same way as the Qurʾān and the same way Christians conceive of the Gospel.”1205 To him, because the core message of the three monotheistic religions in their pure forms is standing for justice and confronting Global arrogance, the injustice of the Zionist Jews makes their Judaism untrue and unjust.1206 This stand is built upon verse

1199 Fadlallah, *Uslūb al-Daʿwa fi al-Qurʾān*, 64, and HQ, 279.
1200 MWQ18:64.
1201 FAHIM, 38.
1206 Ḥīwār Shāmil, 71.
Q29:46 which Fadlallah quotes often to equate “those who commit injustice” with the Israelis and with Zionists.\textsuperscript{1207} Indeed, the Jews are systematically portrayed in Fadlallah’s works as a people who have not stopped sinning and causing Muslims and the whole world problems since the time of Moses up to the present time.\textsuperscript{1208} Even if the Ayatollah insists that his problem is with Zionism and not with Judaism, not only does he link the Israelis with the Medinan and the Israeli Jews but he more often than not uses the terms “Jew” and “Israeli” interchangeably.\textsuperscript{1209} To him, Zionism is a politically motivated deformed Judaism as we can note from the following excerpt which sums up his views of the Muslim-Jewish encounters:

\begin{quote}
The problem is this thing called Israel which represents the manifestation of the Jewish occupation of Muslim lands under the pretext that they lived in it thousands of years ago. Or that their God promised it to them in their holy book. This political thought which they portray as a religious truth to justify for themselves the displacement of thousands of people and the importation of all the Jews of the world to Palestine […] This is what made political Judaism, i.e., Zionism, aggressive towards Muslims. […] The bottom line is that the Jews broke God’s covenant, unjustly killed the prophets, spread mischief in the world, and wrongly mistreated people. They occupied Palestine, expelled and oppressed its people … This behavior does not encourage dialogue with them, but rather makes it impossible unless they stopped their hostility and their cunning plots, gave back the land to its people and returned to their countries of origin, so that only the original inhabitants, Muslims, Christians and Jews, would remain and coexist in Palestine.\textsuperscript{1210}
\end{quote}

Hence, the Ayatollah explicitly excludes from dialogue the unjust Jews (Q29:46) because they do not understand when spoken to “\textit{in the best way}” and, thus, should be stopped using all the possible means.\textsuperscript{1211} In another context, Fadlallah stresses the untrustworthiness of the Jews and describes how they would resort to crooked ways in

\textsuperscript{1207} Fadlallah, \textit{Irādat al-Quwwa}, 246.

\textsuperscript{1208} FAHIM, 32–34 and \textit{Irādat al-Quwwa}, 65–82 and 93–94.

\textsuperscript{1209} Interview in \textit{Fikr} magazine on 31 December 2009, retrieved from Fadlallah’s official website on 11 September 2016 http://arabic.bayynat.org/ListingByCatPage.aspx?id=1050.

\textsuperscript{1210} FAHIM, 32–34. These views are also repeated in \textit{Ḥiwār Shāmil}, 70; \textit{Min Ajl al-Islām}, 327 and 427–428 as well as in different interviews. See for example his \textit{Irādat al-Quwwa}, Beirut: Dār al-Malāk, 2000. This book is dedicated completely to the Arab-Israeli conflict and Western arrogance.

\textsuperscript{1211} FAHIM, 32–33 and \textit{Ḥiwār Shāmil}, 70–71.
order to defy the truth of Islam because they do not care for the truth but only care about their own interests even if it meant the corruption of their own Scripture.\textsuperscript{1212} The Jews have used twisted methods "in the past and they are still doing the same in the present"\textsuperscript{1213} because it is in their inherent evil "Jewish nature."\textsuperscript{1214} Fadlallah sees the Jews through the prism of modern-day politics—particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict. He, on the one hand, projects the Qur'ānic image of the sinful Israelites on the Israelis and projects the Islamic perception of Jewish leadership on the modern-day Jewish clergy on the other. In Fadlallah’s opinion, modern-day Judaism cannot be authentic because its rabbis allow the killing of the Palestinians.\textsuperscript{1215} If these rabbis represented Moses’ Judaism, they would stand against Israel and against the Zionist movement. Fadlallah depicts the Jewish clergy as a justification mechanism for an unjust power which commits acts of aggression against the oppressed Muslims. All these elements make dialogue impossible from an Islamic perspective even with Jewish clergy because racism and hostility are the Jews’ nature and their character.\textsuperscript{1216} Hence, it is this evil nature that stands in the way of Muslim-Jewish dialogue.\textsuperscript{1217} Furthermore, the Qur’ān explicitly forbids believers from having intimate relationships with those who expel them from their homes and aid in their expulsion (Q60:8-9). To Fadlallah, the description of the transgressors in the first part of this verse fits perfectly the Israelis who expel Palestinians from their land.\textsuperscript{1218} As for those who help the transgressors as in the second part of the verse, he points at the arrogant West in general and the USA, Israel’s major ally, in particular.\textsuperscript{1219}

If the above statements were not categorical enough, Fadlallah goes even further and argues that even if the Israeli Jews embraced Islam,\textsuperscript{1220} and even if every Palestinian signed a peace treaty with them, and even if Palestinians willingly sold all their land to them, still, they have to leave Palestine otherwise war should be waged against them to free the Islamic land from their arrogant unjust occupation.\textsuperscript{1221} "Israel is like alcohol, it can never gain legality or lawfulness."\textsuperscript{1222} In a sermon published in Hizballah’s magazine \textit{al-‘Ahd},\textsuperscript{1223}

\textsuperscript{1212} FAHIM, 9–13; HIHQ, 132–133, and HQ, 158–159.
\textsuperscript{1213} MWQ2:16.
\textsuperscript{1214} MWQ2:9 and MWQ7:287 among others.
\textsuperscript{1215} \textit{Ḥiwār Shāmil}, 96–97.
\textsuperscript{1216} FAHIM, 34, and HIHQ, 132–133.
\textsuperscript{1217} \textit{Ḥiwār Shāmil}, 71–72, and HIHQ, 132–133.
\textsuperscript{1219} \textit{Ḥiwār Shāmil}, 57, and 71–72.
\textsuperscript{1220} FAHIM, 34.
\textsuperscript{1221} Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, \textit{Min wahy ’Āshūrā’}, Beirut: Dār al-Malāk, 1996, 8–9.
\textsuperscript{1222} \textit{Ḥiwār Shāmil}, 120.
\textsuperscript{1223} Fadlallah, \textit{al-‘Ahd} magazine number 414, May, 1992.
Fadlallah says that peace with Israel would make the Jews come in droves and corrupt South Lebanon and its people.\textsuperscript{1224} The Ayatollah called for jihad against the inherently expansionist Israel, otherwise “the Jews would proceed to their ultimate objective: the complete subordination and eradication of Islam. The struggle against the Jewish state […] is a continuation of the old struggle of the Muslims against the Jews’ anti-Islamic conspiracy.”\textsuperscript{1225} Dialogue with the Jews means a recognition of the transgressing Jews and a defeat by them allowing them to control Islam and Muslims on all levels.\textsuperscript{1226} This way, the Ayatollah closes the door completely against dialogue with the Jews.

5.2.2. Dealing with the Jews is a sin

Beyond just arguing against dialogue with and tolerance of the Jews, Fadlallah issued a series of legal opinions and judgments (\textit{fatwā, hukm}) which deem any kind of relationship with the Israelis and the Zionists unequivocally sinful on the grounds that Israel is a transgressing country which has confiscated the land of a people and displaced them to the corners of the world.\textsuperscript{1227} He also issued a legal judgment against selling Muslim land to the Jews in Lebanon, in Palestine and in general no matter how severe one’s poverty is because that would be allowing the dominance of the Jews on Muslim lands.\textsuperscript{1228} Fadlallah links all this to taking the side of injustice.\textsuperscript{1229} A Muslim who allows this to happen commits injustice himself towards his religion and his community and contributes to shedding the blood of his Muslim brethren.\textsuperscript{1230} Additionally, anyone who supports the Zionist ideology or the Israeli policies or economy goes into the same category.\textsuperscript{1231} Needless to say, the purchase of Israeli made, owned or financed goods or using the services of any Israeli owned company let alone working for one is sinful.\textsuperscript{1232} Also unlawful is any act that promotes these products or helps them prosper.\textsuperscript{1233} Furthermore,
any company which gives donations to the Jews should be boycotted. The same is true for American goods and American owned facilities because America is the friend of Israel. After all, Israel kills the Palestinians with American weapons and American money. When asked if these views were legal opinions (fatwā) or legal judgments (ḥukm), he answered that they were binding legal judgments based on the prophetical hadith “Whosoever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart—and that is the weakest of faith.” “How can we chant ‘Death to America’ while we buy American goods?” That is because, Fadlallah argues, the powers of arrogance work together with powers of global unbelief and global Zionism in order to destroy Islam and Muslims. In one of his Seminary lectures, Fadlallah reminded his followers that it was on American lands that “Jewish gangs” solicited funds for the eradication of Arabs under the slogan “Pay a dollar, kill an Arab.”

When it comes to fighting the arrogant powers, Israel in particular, the Ayatollah gives the struggle a Shi‘i flavor by equating it with the tragic events of Karbalā‘ and the atrocities which were inflicted on al-Hussain and the other members of ahl al-bayt. To explain this, Fadlallah links Q5:82 to the injustice felt by Muslims from the Israelis and their allies, the Americans.

We learn from this new Karbalā‘ to hold in our hearts that America is the enemy of Arabs and Muslims and that it is America who gave Israel the green light and told the Jews to take their liberty in killing the [Arab] children, women and elderly people. [...] We learn also to teach our children and the coming generations that there could be no peace between the Muslims and the Jews because God says: “You will certainly find that the most violent of people in enmity for those who believe to be the

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1234 Nadwa 4:621.
1235 Ḥiwār Shāmil, 86–87; Nadwa 9:761; Nadwa 9:779; Nadwa 8:114–115. Fadlallah argues that the friend of the Arabs’ enemy is also an enemy.
1236 Nadwa 8:698–699.
1237 Nadwa 8:698–699.
1238 Nadwa 6:717–718.
1239 Nadwa 1:596–597.
1240 Nadwa 4:621. Fadlallah probably hints at the Zionist groups who used this slogan in the United States in the 1940s. This slogan has affected a number of Islamist thinkers such as Qutb for example and is frequently used in Islamist narratives as an argument for the racism and supremacism of the Zionist movement. See for example, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Not quite American? The shaping of Arab and Muslim Identity in the United States, Baylor University Press, 2004, 18–19.
1241 Fadlallah’s works directed at his Shi‘i audience contain more Shi‘i narratives than MWQ.
Moreover, we read in the Qurʾān about the features of the Jews and we see that in the Jews’ reality in Palestine, Lebanon, and elsewhere. Hence, I tell you to learn from all that—the way you learned from Karbalāʾ—all the revolution against injustice and all the possible feelings against those who cause the tragedy.1242

Injustice and hostility are also the reasons why God forbids believers from entering into alliances with people who are against their faith, who fight them because of their faith, or help others do so.1243 As previously stated, Fadlallah explicitly argues that this description of the oppressors applies to the Jews because of their hostility and injustice towards Muslims.1244 On that account, any openness or friendliness towards them would lead to their possible infiltration into the Muslim community in order to harm it from within and eventually destroy it.1245 The aim of these legal judgements is building a barrier between Muslims and hostile Kitābīs, the Jews in particular, as intended by verse Q5:51 for example.1246

5.2.3. Take not Jews and Christians as awliyāʾ

Verse Q5:51 is one of the most quoted verses in the context of the Qurʾān’s regulation of Muslim-Kitābī engagements.1247 In this verse, which explicitly asks that the believers not take Jews and Christians as awliyāʾ, we encounter the third Qurʾānic key term—wilāya. The key term awliyāʾ, which is mostly rendered friends or allies in English, is not taken at face value in the tafsīr literature. For some Muslim exegetes, wilāya, the act of being waliyā, means love and amity while it means help and assistance for others. As for Fadlallah, this

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1244 MWQ6:180.


1246 MWQ11:68–69.

1247 There are a number of Qurʾānic verses which prohibit Muslims from taking different groups as awliyāʾ. In Q3:28, 4:139 and 4:144, the object of this prohibition is the unbelievers, in 60:1 God’s and the believers’ enemy, in Q3:118 “those other than yourselves;” in Q5:57 “those who took your religion in ridicule and amusement among the ones who were given the Scripture;” and in (Q5:51) the Jews and the Christians. Because Fadlallah does not include the Jews and the Christians in the unbelievers’ category, we will focus on the last three occurrences as well as on Q3:100 which prohibits the believers from obeying a party of the People of the Book.
term encompasses all these meanings and many more. While he explains the word *awliyāʾ* in his vocabulary list as “the plural of *waliy* which means helper,” he later on discusses its meanings more precisely without taking a stand from among all the different interpretations he points to. To him, the context of the verse indicates that *wilāya* means “the close relationship which represents a kind of commitment to the group on the basis of subjective factors. Hence, amity and assistance are among the effects of *wilāya*, not among its meanings.” Unlike al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, Fadlallah’s understanding of the term seems to have a political connotation. In the context of the parallel verse Q5:57, Fadlallah defines the *wilāya* of the People of theBook as “opening up on them, listening to them and following them.” In yet another context, he defines it as “openness on the other, spontaneous surrender to their plans and failing to take heed of them ...”

O you who believe, take not Jews and Christians as awliyāʾ; some of them are awliyāʾ of the other. Whoever of you takes them as his friends/intimates/helpers (yatawallahum) is one of them. God guides not the wrongdoing people. Q5:51

This is yet another instance where Fadlallah bases the Qurʾānic reserved attitude towards the People of the Book on their own negative attitude towards Islam hence the necessity of emphasizing the general rules of the relationship with them. Fadlallah stresses that the Qurʾānic command not to take them as *awliyāʾ* comes from the threat this group might represent to Muslims on the intellectual, spiritual, and security levels as has in fact happened in the early history of Islam and later on. Therefore, it was necessary for Islam to draw lines of demarcation in order to protect itself from any possible deviations. Here, Fadlallah seems to echo al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s views about the impact the others might have on the believers. The link between the prohibition of the *muwālāt* of Scripturaries and their threatening hostile attitude is repeatedly made elsewhere too. For

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1248 MWQ8:218.
1249 MWQ8:218.
1251 MWQ8:214–215.
1253 MWQ8:214–215 as well as in the exegetical treatment of all the parallel verses.
1254 Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī’s Tafsīr al-Mizān 3:151.
instance, in his exegetical analysis of the parallel verses Q5:57\textsuperscript{1257} and Q3:118,\textsuperscript{1258} Fadlallah argues, in reference to his earlier discussion of Q5:51, that an intimate relationship with the People of the book might affect the Muslims’ faith negatively on the psychological and the spiritual levels.\textsuperscript{1259} This intimate relationship expressed through the two synonymous Qur’ānic terms \textit{biṭāna} and \textit{awliyāʾ} implies a certain level of trust in the Scripturaries that amounts to identity and security threats.\textsuperscript{1260} Hence, it is necessary for Muslims who respect themselves and their religion to keep their distance from such hostility and refrain from trusting this group and confiding their secrets with them.\textsuperscript{1261}

The Ayatollah identifies the enemies described in this verse as the Jews as they “\textit{do their best to harm the Muslims and stir up different elements of corruption in order to prevent them from seeing clearly.” Even though the verse at hand does not suggest a Qur’ānic differentiation between Jews and Christians, Fadlallah refers to Q5:82 to emphasize the enmity of the first and the amity of the second which confirms the conclusions we came to earlier concerning his more lenient attitude towards the latter as compared to the former.\textsuperscript{1262} Borrowing Quṭb’s words, Fadlallah goes on elaborating at length on the hatred and grudge the Jews hold against Muslims explaining that trusting them or failing to be cautious of them is sheer naïveté.\textsuperscript{1263} Echoing Quṭb’s interpretation of the verse, the Ayatollah argues that since the basis of strong human relationships is the intellectual and spiritual grounds to which they belong, it is these grounds that determine the type of relationships people can have with each other.\textsuperscript{1264}

\textsuperscript{1257} Q5:57: “O you who have believed, take not those who have taken your religion in ridicule and amusement among the ones who were given the Scripture before you nor the unbelievers as awliyāʾ. And fear God, if you should [truly] be believers.”

\textsuperscript{1258} Q3:118: “O you who have believed, do not take as intimates (biṭāna) those other than yourselves, for they will not spare you ruin. They wish you would have hardship. Hatred has already appeared from their mouths, and what their breasts conceal is greater. We have certainly made clear to you the signs, if you will use reason.”

\textsuperscript{1259} MWQ8:234–235.

\textsuperscript{1260} Echoing al-Ṭabrisī, Fadlallah explains the term “biṭāna” as “awliyāʾ” and intimates whom the believers trust and confide their secrets with. MWQ6:232. Cf. al-Ṭabrisī’s \textit{Majmaʿ al-Bayān} 2:819. This is repeated, for example, in Fadlallah’s \textit{Irādat al-Quwwa}, 67–68.

\textsuperscript{1261} MWQ8:235. In his Friday sermon held on 29 December 2006, Fadlallah explained that Muslims should cooperate with the Christians “without assimilating with them (dūna an naqūba fihim).” Retrieved from Fadlallah’s website on 7 June 2013.

\textsuperscript{1262} This idea is expressed more explicitly in his \textit{Irādat al-Quwwa}, 67–68 where he says: “\textit{God did not warn Muslims from Christians the way He warned them from the Jews. God made a difference between the nature of the social and practical relationships between Muslims, Jews, polytheists and Christians in Q5:82.” This book is completely dedicated to the Arab-Israeli conflict and Western arrogance.


\textsuperscript{1264} Cf. Quṭb’s \textit{Fi Zīlāl al-Qurʾān} 2:907–910. Fadlallah also repeats these same ideas using almost the same words in the context of Q3:28, which prohibits believers from taking unbelievers as awliyāʾ, in MWQ5:313–
If their relationships are based on agreement in terms of dogma and spirituality, people can find a way to reach unity and arrangement. However, if these relationships are based on alliances, which are affected by subjective inclinations, then the attitudes should be based on caution [...] because trusting the other when the atmosphere does not inspire trust is mere naïveté. After all, the history which Muslims lived with the Jews was full of problems, plots, deceit, and oppression. [...] Also, the behavior of the Christians suggests something like that in what the future held.\footnote{Faithful to his accumulative style, Fadlallah’s interpretation of the phrase “some of them are awliyā’ of the other” (ba ʿdhum awliyā’ u baʿḍ) does not take a clear stand on whether the wilāya referred to in the verse is intra-Jewish and intra-Christian wilāya only or that Jews and Christians are awliyā’ of each other. The first meaning is suggested based on the historical animosity between them as the Qur’ān portrays it, but the Ayatollah does not rule out the possibility of an alliance between the two groups against Muslims “because, despite their disputes, they might reach an agreement if Muslims become the common goal they unite against.”\footnote{Here, Fadlallah suggests that it is because of this negative atmosphere that Islam warns against taking them as awliyā’ and not because it teaches believers hostility against people from other faiths.} Likewise, what stands in the way of good Muslim-Jewish relationships in the Ayatollah’s opinion is not the Islamic attitude towards the Jews but rather the arrogance and injustice of Zionism.\footnote{In most of the instances where the Qur’ān warns against taking the People of the Book as awliyā’, Fadlallah focuses this warning on the Jews in particular. To back this interpretation, the Ayatollah explains that the Jews are responsible for raising different disputes between Muslims and stirring up tribal, regional and doctrinal schisms.\footnote{Although Fadlallah seems to shed strong light on the Jews only, careful reading between the lines indicates that the Christians are not excluded here either, even if they are not mentioned by name. This is noticed from his instruction to his followers to be vigilant and keep a certain distance from the religiously other.} “Their religious and political life”\footnote{324 as well as in the context of Q60:1 which prohibits believers from taking “My enemy and your enemy” as awliyā’ in MWQ22:145–146.} \footnote{MWQ8:215–216. Fadlallah borrows Quṭb’s words almost verbatim. Cf. Quṭb’s Fī Žilāl al-Qur’ān 2:910.} \footnote{MWQ8:216. These views are found in other modern commentaries too, such as Tafsīr al-Sha’rāwy, 3194–3196 for example.} \footnote{MWQ8:216–217.} \footnote{Ḥiwār Shāmil, 71–72; al-Islāmiyyūn wa al-Taḥaddiyāt al-Mu ʾāṣira, 144–147, and HIHQ, 132–133.} \footnote{MWQ6:179–180.}
background should be carefully studied. One should be cautious when discussing with them [not to] confide one’s secrets or speak of Muslims’ conditions with them ...”

Fadlallah adds that Muslims should not tell those who “belong to the other religion” or those who “do not believe in your Book and do not believe that Muhammad is the messenger of God.” about Muslims’ secrets and inside information, among many other precautionary measures.

In another context, Fadlallah explicitly states that the Qur’an refers to the violent enmity of the Jews but calls the Christians to “a common word.” The meeting point of this “common word,” he adds, is regulated by political conditions and alliance. Fadlallah advises the Muslims to recognize the Jews as their enemies in all times and in all places as well as to take heed of their divisive plots—a statement he repeatedly uses in different contexts to link these attributes to modern-day Jews. It has to be noted, however, that Fadlallah calls on Muslims to open up to peaceful non-Muslims politically and economically and form good international relations. However, Muslims should boycott hostile non-Muslim countries unless the Islamic best interest necessitates the reverse. However, if boycotting harms Muslims more than the enemy or if coexistence is imposed by reality, it should stem from a realistic awareness—which translates into pragmatism.

The pragmatism of Fadlallah’s thought has been referred to in various studies. Dialogue for Fadlallah has a pragmatic approach as it aims at converting the others to Islam or at least making them trust in the justice of its system. Equally important to the Ayatollah is the Christians’ valuable help against Israel. In his meetings with Western Christian delegations, the Ayatollah tries to emphasize the common ground between Islam and

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1270 MWQ6:237.
1271 MWQ6:237.
1275 MWQ6:180 and Hiwār Shāmil, 57.
1276 MWQ22:157–158.
1277 MWQ22:159.
1278 MWQ8:217.
1279 For example, Sankari, Fadlallah, 12–17, and 285–290. See also Speidl, Conceptualization of Power, 235–237.
1280 See 5.2.1 above.
Christianity as religions of peace in contraposition to the injustice of Israeli Judaism. Fadlallah thinks that the Christians should help Muslims against the powers of arrogance who should be expelled just like the thieves that Jesus cast out from the Temple because that is what Jesus would do. 1282 Fadlallah argued on more than one occasion that Christianity and Islam should cooperate to protect the oppressed (mustadʿafūn) from the oppressors (mustakbirūn). 1283 The Sayyid often compares the views and stands of the Christian churches with what he thinks is or is not compatible with the teachings of the Gospel. For example, Fadlallah reacted positively to the Vatican’s objection to the American war against Iraq and considered this stand to be compatible with Jesus’s teachings about peace. 1284 However, in one of his Damascene interfaith dialogue colloquies, Fadlallah expressed his disapproval of the Vatican’s recognition of the state of Israel, arguing that the Vatican is not only a state but also a mission. The Ayatollah asked the Christian priests whether Jesus would side with the Palestinians or with the Israelis and would He recognize the Israeli occupation of Palestine had He been present now, to which Francis Arinze, the then Pro-President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, answered: “Israel is a fait accompli.” Fadlallah was quick to answer back: “Satan is also a fait accompli, should we recognize Satan’s legitimacy?” 1285 The rhetoric of fighting Western hegemony and Israeli occupation is emphasized more in his writings that target the Lebanese Christians. Indeed, one of the main aims behind Fadlallah’s call for interfaith unity and dialogue revolves around fighting Israel together:

In this difficult phase of the history of Lebanon and the region, we would like for everybody to meet on a common word: We call Christians, non-religious and adherents of all political and

1282 FAHIM,135–136, in reference to Matthew 21:12–13: “Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, and said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.” He used the same metaphor to answer a Palestinian Christian who asked him should she love her enemy as Jesus taught. His answer was that “Jesus said 'love your enemies provided that they are not thieves who rob the temple [...] Christ cast out the thieves from the temple.” Fadlallah, al-Islām wa al-Masīhiyya Bayna Dīnmiyyat al-Ṣirāʿ wa ‘Aqliyyat al-Liğā’, 37.


1285 Interview in Majallat al-Shirāʿ, 17 March 2003, retrieved from Fadlallah’s official website on 13 July 2016 http://arabic.bayynat.org/ListingByCatPage.aspx?id=1050. Fadlallah equates Israel with Satan in different contexts one of which is his Irādat al-Qawwā, 251–252.
ideological affiliations to a common word between us not to surrender to Israel who represents a threat to the whole area. In addition to dialogue, Fadlallah encourages Muslims to be good ambassadors of their religion in order to make it appealing to others. “... Practical philanthropy and Islamic justice could be ways of propagating Islam because they embody a bright image of Islam to non-Muslims. Hence, [...] it leads them to ultimately embrace Islam.” Fadlallah also had similar thoughts in mind when he issued a fatwa against killing Christian tourists. In addition to the fact that these tourists do not have hostile intentions towards Muslims, thus, should not be harmed, they might be won to the Muslims’ side if they were treated kindly. Fadlallah’s pragmatism can also be demonstrated through his approach to some focal issues that have affected interfaith relations in practice: 1. the exigencies of living together in a complicated religious-political situation and 2. the demystifying of the Qurʾānic narrative concerning the other.

In a multi-religious country like Lebanon, living together necessitates by definition dealing with the religiously other and sharing the same public space in different contexts. This is not a matter of course when we take into consideration some of the main Shiʿi perceptions of the Scriptuaries related to these matters. The main relevant issues which ought to be discussed here are 1. the impurity of Scriptuaries, 2. the lawfulness of the animals they slaughter, and 3. the lawfulness of marrying their women. It goes without saying that deeming the Kitābīs impure affects dealing with them on a daily basis, working with them, touching them, exchanging visits with them, eating their food, and receiving them in a Muslim’s home or in mosques.

5.2.4. The impurity of the People of the Book

Although a significant minority among Shiʿi religious authorities argue that the People of the Book are pure, the widely held majority opinion in Shiʿism is that non-Muslims are substantively impure (najis). Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1699/1700) for example,

1287 MWQ22:156.
1288 Nadwa 1:810–811.
considers Kitābīs impure while Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989), Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr (d. 1980) and al-Sayyid Mahdi al-Ḥakīm (d. 1970) do not. Those who argue for the legal impurity of Scriptuaries also argue for the contagious nature of their impurity—it can be transmitted through moisture. For this reason, some Shiʿi religious scholars, al-Majlisī for instance, thought that non-Muslims should stay at home on rainy days to prevent their impurity from spreading to others. The two main Qurʾānic verses adduced in the discussions of the impurity of non-Muslims are Q9:28 and 5:5 which provide a textual foundation for several legal judgments and theological disagreements among Muslim religious authorities.

O you who have believed, indeed the polytheists are impure (najas), so let them not approach al-Masjid al-harām after this year. If you fear privation, God will enrich you from His bounty if He wills. Q9:28

Muslim exegetes disagree about the identity of the ‘polytheists’ (mushrikūn) category and about the nature of their impurity. For most Sunni commentators, the term ‘polytheist’ (mushrikūn) means the idolaters of Mecca but for most Shiʿi exegetes it also includes the People of the Book—hence raising the debated question of their impurity. As for the nature of this impurity, 1. some think it is a legal impurity (najāsa sharʿiyya) and thus a physical one, 2. some argue it is an abstract impurity (najāsa maʾnawiyya) as a consequence of their polytheism while 3. some others argue it is both. Although Fadlallah puts the People of the Book in a different category from the polytheists, as discussed in chapter three, the impurity of the Scriptuaries is still a relevant issue to this study because until his declaration of religious authority of emulation (marjaʿ iyya), Fadlallah, who previously followed al-Khūʾī’s frame of reference, practically considered the Scriptuaries impure and instructed his followers to deal with them on this basis. During that time, he instructed his followers to take precautions concerning non-Muslims because everything touched by the latter needs to be cleaned, and because the food they touch becomes unlawful for Muslims. Pragmatic and practical as he is, Fadlallah constantly called upon Shiʿi religious

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1292 It is both a legal and an abstract impurity for some exegetes like al-Majlisī for example. For more on this, see Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, Biḥār al-Anwār, Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmīyya, 1970, 42–45. For a discussion of the different possible grounds of the Scriptuaries’ impurity and its consequences in classical Shiʿi exegesis, see Meir Bar-Asher’s “ʿal Maqām ha-Yehudīm,” 19–21.

1293 Fadlallah declared himself a Marjaʿ Taqlīd on 1995. See chapter I for more on this.
authorities to change their opinion concerning the impurity of non-Muslims because these legal judgments complicated the lives of millions of Shīʿīs who live in multi-religious societies in Lebanon and abroad.\textsuperscript{1294} However, in the absence of such a legal opinion (\textit{fatwā Marjiʿīya}), Fadlallah asked people to avoid eating anything that the \textit{Kitābī} have touched with the exception of dry food such as grains and Legumes.\textsuperscript{1295} Furthermore, a Muslim is allowed to eat food prepared by a \textit{Kitābī} cook who wears hygienic gloves or by a cook whose religious affiliation is unknown.\textsuperscript{1296} In all other cases, it is not lawful for a Muslim to consume food prepared or touched by a \textit{Kitābī}.

Unlike the several Shīʿī scholars who personally believed the Scripturearies to be pure but did not turn their personal opinion into a legal judgment out of recommended precaution (\textit{iḥtiyāṭ}), Fadlallah announced the purity of every human being soon after his declaration of \textit{marjaʿīya}.\textsuperscript{1297} The declaration of the purity of every human being regardless of their religion (\textit{tahārat al-insān}) is one of his most important legal judgments.\textsuperscript{1298} The Ayatollah argued that he does not find in the Islamic sources any proof for the impurity of any human being \textit{qua person}.\textsuperscript{1299} To him, the impurity referred to in verse Q9:29 is an abstract impurity (\textit{naṣṣa maʿnawiyya}) caused by the polytheists’ unbelief. This Qur’ānic declaration serves as a spiritual repulsion between monotheism and idolatry and aims at building a psychological barrier which separates Muslims from the spiritual impurity of idolatrous thought.\textsuperscript{1300} Had the impurity been physical, the Ayatollah argues, the polytheists would have been banned from entering the Holy Mosque (\textit{al-Masjid al-Ḥarām}) since the beginning of Islam which was not the case.\textsuperscript{1301} The ban on entering the Holy Mosque in Q9:29 aimed at keeping unbelievers, not Kitābīs,\textsuperscript{1302} and their idolatrous thought outside the Islamic community and has nothing to do with their impurity.\textsuperscript{1303} Consequently, the Ayatollah disagrees with the views which ban the Scripturearies from entering mosques or from visiting the Mecca and Medina areas altogether.\textsuperscript{1304}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Fadlallah, \textit{Ṭalāqat Ālaf Suʾ al wa Jawāb}, 147.
\item Fadlallah, \textit{Ṭalāqat Ālaf Suʾ al wa Jawāb}, 158.
\item Fadlallah, \textit{Ṭalāqat Ālaf Suʾ al wa Jawāb}, 147–148. Al-Khūʿī, for example, was not categorical about the impurity of People of the Book but he resorted to precaution (\textit{iḥtiyāṭ}).
\item MWQ8:55, Nadwa 1:674–676, passim.
\item Dunyā al-Shabāb, 119–120.
\item MWQ11:68–69.
\item MWQ11:70–71.
\item Friday sermon held on 10 September 2004.
\item MWQ11:70–71.
\item Fadlallah, \textit{Al-Masāʿ il-Fiqhiyya: al-ʿIbādāt} (Jurisprudential Issues: Rituals), Beirut: Dār al-Malāk, 2015, 639, and idem, “\textit{Limāḏā Yubarriru al-Gharb Muʾādāt al-Sūmiyyīn al-ʿArab wa al-Muslimīn wa Lā...
5.2.5. The lawfulness of the Scriptuaries’ food and the animals they slaughter

Mahmoud Ayoub sees in verse Q5:5 a change in the Islamic attitude towards the People of the Book and a removal of two main social barriers separating the three Kitābī communities, namely, “dietary and marriage restrictions.”

Fadlallah reads this verse differently and disagrees with the Shīʿi exegetical view which sees that the time adverbial “this day” in Q5:5 below marks a change in the Islamic theological attitude towards the Kitābīs following the Muslims’ victory in the battle of Khaybar and the emergence of Islam as a significant political power. To the Ayatollah, this verse comes as a confirmation of the lawfulness of the Scriptuaries’ food which must have been a commonplace earlier.

This day good foods have been made lawful [ḥilla], and the food of those who were given the Book is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them. And [lawful in marriage are] chaste women from among the believers and chaste women from among those who were given the Book before you ...

Q5:5

Verse Q5:5 is the textual foundation on which both Sunni and Shīʿi legal scholars base their views on eating Kitābīs’ food and marrying their daughters. While Sunnis opt for an open approach, most Shīʿi religious authorities tried to find a way out of the lawfulness declared by Q5:5 either by restricting the lawful food to grains, legumes, and the like only or by arguing that the verse was abrogated by Q6:121. For some Sunnis, it is not Q5:5 that was abrogated by Q6:121 but the reverse. The lawfulness of Scriptuaries’ food is restricted, however, to the food lawful to Muslims as detailed in Q5:3. This lawfulness

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1306 See for example, al-Shirazi’ Tafsīr al-Amṭal 3:537 and Darwaza 9:44–45.


1309 Q5:3: “Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than God, and [the animals] killed by strangling or by a violent blow or by a head-long fall or by...
extends to the animals they slaughter for Sunni exegetes but not for Shīʿi ones. All four Sunni schools argue for the lawfulness of the Kitābīs’ food including the meat of animals they slaughter provided they mention the name of God upon slaughter. The case in Shīʿism is the reverse, either based on the impurity of Kitābīs or on the invalidity of their tasmiya—pronouncing the formula of consecration. Fadlallah basically declared the lawfulness of all Kitābī food with the exclusion of the animals they slaughter. The unlawfulness of the meat of the animals slaughtered by Kitābīs is the prevailing view embraced by most Shīʿi exegetes based on the extra condition of tasmiya before proceeding with the slaughtering. For most Shīʿi religious scholars, tasmiya is restricted to Muslims alone. 


1311 With the exception of the al-Shāfiʿī school which does not hold tasmiya a prerequisite of permissibility. See al-Bayḍāwī, Anwār al-Tanzīl 2:180 especially “The animal slaughtered by a Muslim is lawful even if he does not mention the name of God upon slaughter.”

1312 Pronouncing the name of God by saying “Bismillāḥ,” i.e., “I begin in the name of God.” There are other formulations which start the same way but continue differently and the most used is “Bismillāḥ wa ʿIlāhu Akbar,” i.e., “I begin in the name of God. God is great.” For more on Tasmiyya see William A. Graham, “Basmala.” Encyclopaedia of Islam Three, 207–212.

1313 MWQ8:55, Nadwa 1:674–676, passim.

1314 Nadwa 1:829.


1316 Q6:118–119.


jurisprudence (Fiqh).\textsuperscript{1319} It is worthy of mention that al-Ṭūsī invalidates the tasmiya of Scriptuaries on the grounds that the God they mention upon slaughter is not the true God.\textsuperscript{1320} To him, first, Kitābis are impure which renders the slaughtered animal impure thus unlawful; second, pronouncing the name of God upon slaughter is not required in their faiths; and third, if they did, they mean a God who “perpetuated the religion of Moses or that of Jesus or who has Jesus as a son. A God who rejects Muhammad and that is not the true God.”\textsuperscript{1321} Although some Shiʿi religious scholars, such as al-Ṣadr and Fadlallah, personally believe that Kitābis’ tasmiya is valid, thus their meat is lawful for Muslims, this remains a mere personal opinion that was not translated into a legal judgment.\textsuperscript{1322} Hence, out of recommended precaution (iḥtiyāṭ), it is unlawful for Shiʿi Muslims to consume the meat of animals slaughtered by Kitābis even if they pronounced tasmiya.\textsuperscript{1323}

5.2.5.1. The lawfulness of marrying Kitābī women

Ostensibly, verse Q5:5 allows a Muslim man to marry a Jewish or a Christian woman but this is restricted by a number of issues. Unlike Fadlallah, who holds marrying Kitābī women lawful, be it permanently or temporarily, the majority of Shiʿi religious scholars limit this lawfulness to temporary marriage (mutʿa)\textsuperscript{1324} and some of them forbid both forms of marriage totally.\textsuperscript{1325} The lawfulness of marrying Kitābī women in Fadlallah’s opinion is based on the fact that they belong to a different category from the polytheists\textsuperscript{1326} as believers in God, in the Last Day, and in their respective holy books.\textsuperscript{1327} These grounds offer a common base for marital life with a Muslim man.\textsuperscript{1328} It has to be noted that when

\textsuperscript{1319} MWQ9:305. In another context (FAHIM, 295), Fadlallah briefly referred to one of the Imams who was asked if Muslims can eat an animal slaughtered by a Christian who slaughters “in the name of Christ”; the answer of the imam was that when Christians say “in the name of Christ” they mean in the name of God.

\textsuperscript{1320} Al-Ṭūsī’s Tibyān 3:444–445.

\textsuperscript{1321} Al-Ṭūsī’s Tibyān 3:444.

\textsuperscript{1322} FAHIM, 248 and 295. Fadlallah has issued a legal judgment where he declares game hunted by Scriptuaries lawful provided they pronounced tasmiya before hunting it. See Fadlallah, Fiqh al-Sharīʿa II, M#87. However, the game hunted by the dog or the falcon of a Magian is unlawful for Muslims to eat. See MWQ8:51.

\textsuperscript{1323} Nadwa 1:830.

\textsuperscript{1324} For example, al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, Riyāḍ al-Masāʾ il 6:524.

\textsuperscript{1325} See Bar-Asher, “‘al Maqūm ha-Yehudīm,” 22. For a discussion of Sunni views on the lawfullness of marrying Kitābī women, see Tsafrir, “The Attitude of Sunni Islam,” 328–332.

\textsuperscript{1326} MWQ8:57. For more on this issue, see chapter III.

\textsuperscript{1327} MWQ8:54–59.

\textsuperscript{1328} MWQ8:57 and MWQ4:237–239.
Fadlallah speaks of marrying Kitābī women, he in fact means Christian women because he forbids entering into relationships with the Jews as previously noted.1329

There is yet another restriction concerning marrying these women in Fadlallah’s thought: They should be believing Kitābīs. Marrying a Christian in-name-only who does not believe in the Gospel or who does not practice her religion is unlawful.1330 Furthermore, although permissible, marrying Kitābī women is not advisable and should be avoided. Before declaring his marjaʿiya, Fadlallah used to explain that the Christian wife’s impurity would make marital life extremely difficult in practice because the husband would not be able to eat any food she prepares or wear any clothes she washes—both are impure.1331 After the declaration of his marjaʿiya, the question of impurity was no longer an issue but Fadlallah stuck to his opinion this time on the grounds that “it might harm the religious and spiritual balance of the family.”1332 Nevertheless, if a Muslim man wanted to marry a Kitābī woman as a second wife while the first was Muslim, only temporary marriage (mutʿa) is allowed in that case unless the first wife gave him permission to marry permanently. 1333 On the other hand, a Muslim woman cannot marry a Kitābī man on two grounds: First, because the Qurʾān left that issue unstipulated and, second, because while a Muslim husband would respect the holies of a Kitābī wife, the reverse is not necessarily true.1334 If a Muslim woman marries a Kitābī man, their relationship is considered adulterous.1335

Based on the verses studied above, Fadlallah emphasized three major issues. 1. The purity of the People of the Book, 2. the unlawfulness of the animals they slaughter and the [restricted] lawfulness of marrying Kitābī women. Based on Fadlallah’s views on purity and Muslim-Kitābī marriage, we can safely conclude that the Ayatollah shows, to a great extent, a keenness for pragmatism and practicality and an interest in showing Islam as a just and easy religion to follow. Likewise, the Ayatollah attempts to demystify some of the widely propagated narratives concerning Kitābīs. The way tafsīr literature has understood some Qurʾānic statements has shaped the Muslim perception of and relationship with Jews and Christians. Some of these statements largely constitute the basis of some perceptions which are widespread among Muslims nowadays regardless of whether they stem from the

1329 See 5.2.2.
1330 Nadwa 9:745.
1331 Fadlallah, Ṭalāqat Ālāf Suʾāl wa Jawāb, 154–155.
1333 Fadlallah, Fiqh al-Sharīʿa III, M#576.
1335 Nadwa 9:735–735 and Ṭalāqat Ālāf Suʾāl wa Jawāb, 155.
Qurʾān itself. A case in point is the widely held view among Muslims according to which the Jews are the descendants of apes and swine.1336

5.2.6. Demystifying the Qurʾānic Maskh narrative

God imposed the observation of the Sabbath upon the Israelites as one of His ten commandments. The Qurʾān mentions this commandment five times1337 mostly in reference to the Israelites’ failure to observe it thus incurring and deserving God’s wrath, curse, and severe punishment.1338 This punishment meted out to those who transgressed the Sabbath is one of the Islamic tradition’s most intriguing stories of divine chastisement:1339 it consists of punitive transformation (maskh) into apes according to Q2:65 and 7:166 or into apes and swine according to Q5:60.

You had already known about those who transgressed among you concerning the sabbath, and We said to them, “Be apes, despised.” Q2:65

Shall I inform you of what is worse than that as penalty from God? Those whom God has cursed and with whom He became angry and made (jaʿala) of them apes and swine and idol worshipers (ʿabada al-ṭāghūt). Those are worse in position and further astray from the sound way. Q5:60

1336 When said by non-Jewish and non-Christian Arabs, the terms “Jew” and “Christian” in the Arab Muslim world are usually followed by expressions of apology such as “ḥāshāk” normally said after inappropriate words. The expression “ḥāshāk” can roughly be translated as “I apologize for uttering such an inappropriate word in front of you!” However, the most widely used expression about the Jews to the exclusion of the Christians is “the descendants of apes and swine” in reference to the punitive metamorphosis (maskh) which God afflicted on the Israelites who broke the Sabbath.

1337 Q2:65, 4:47, 4:154, 7:163, and 16:124

1338 In the first four occurrences: Q2:65, 4:47, 4:154, and 7:163.

Ask them about the town along the sea—when they transgressed the Sabbath—when their fish came to them openly on their sabbath day, and the day they had no Sabbath they did not come to them. Thus, We gave them trial because they were defiantly disobedient. [...] So, when they were insolent about that which they had been forbidden, We said to them, “Be apes, despised.”

Q7:163 and 166

The most informative Qur’ānic account of Sabbath transgression is found in Q7:163-166 whose preceding verses, namely Q7:160-162, speak about the Israelites’ disobedience and ungratefulness in response to God’s numerous blessings. Verses Q7:163-166 offer us an account of a people who live in a town along the sea and who were punished for transgressing the Sabbath as they could not stand up to the divine test of looking at the schools of fish that arrived only on that day but not during weekdays. Except for the fact that these people failed to observe God’s commandment, verse Q7:166 does not provide any further details. God punished the transgressors by dehumanizing them and transforming them into apes. In his treatment of these verses, Fadlallah gives two contradictory interpretations without any reference to their sources. The first is that the Israelites could not withstand the temptation to fish on the Sabbath once they saw the large numbers of fish in the water. The second is that “some of them, it is said, managed to find a subterfuge to circumvent the prohibition” and to keep the fish confined in ridges which they dug so that they could fish for them on Sunday. As for the punitive transformation itself, the Ayatollah does not pay much attention to its details. He explains the first part of the verse (flammā ʿataw ʾan mā nūḥū ʿanhu) as “they rebelled against God, disobeyed His orders and prohibitions and exaggerated in doing so. Thus, God transformed them (masakhnāhum) and said to them ʿBe apes, despised.” To him, the most important is the moral lesson learned from this account—not its details. What he emphasizes instead is the Jews’ racist and hostile spirit against their neighboring people which he presents as a special feature of the Jewish personality.

The second Qur’ānic occurrence of maskh, the parallel verse Q2:65, addresses the Sabbath transgression as a matter that has already been discussed. Here too, Fadlallah concentrates

1340 In terms of order of revelation, the seventh Sūra is the earliest followed by Sūra 2 and 5 respectively.
1341 MWQ10:269–270.
1342 MWQ10:270.
1343 MWQ10:274.
on the Jewish tendency to disobey God and sin against Him. The Jews have circumvented God’s commands and turned their spiritual goals into meaningless formalities. As a test of faith, the schools of fish arrived on the Sabbath when the Jews were forbidden from fishing (working) but not during the week when they could fish. Faced with this divine test, some Jews thought of a way to circumvent the prohibition of fishing by preparing the nets ahead of the Sabbath and taking them off once the Sabbath was over. As a result of this transgression, which the Ayatollah stresses is a grave sin against God’s covenant, God made them into apes and swine, an exemplary punishment for all other nations—present and future alike.

The third relevant occurrence, verse Q5:60, differs from the two previous ones in two important details: 1. Unlike the other two verses, where the transformation of the sinners is expressed through the imperative form of the verb ‘to be’ (kūnū qiradatan), the transformation of the Israelites is expressed through the verb ‘to make’ (jaʿala). 2. While the maskh in the two occurrences discussed above meant transforming the transgressors into apes, in verse Q5:60 the sinners are transformed into swine as well. Despite these two differences, and unlike other exegetes, Fadlallah does not stop to comment on these issues nor does he offer any new insight to the story. For most classical exegetes, this verse raises several questions because of the extra details it contains. Most of them discuss the object of the transformation and its timing, among other issues. Al-Ṭabrisī, for example, looks at both differences and discusses the possibility that the Jews were transformed into apes and the Christians who requested a banquet from heaven were transformed into swine or that the verse is about the Jews who desecrated the Sabbath and that the youth among them were transformed into apes while the elderly were transformed into swine. Another exegete, Zamakhsharī, takes the difference in the way the transformation is expressed in the third Qur’ānic occurrence into consideration in his analysis to the extent that he offers two different interpretations. The verse which uses the verb (jaʿala) refers to a physical transformation while the two verses which use the verb “to be” do not.

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1345 MWQ2:76–77.
1346 MWQ2:76.
1348 MWQ2:76–77.
1349 For a thorough discussion of al-Zamakhsharī’s views of these verses, see Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and Its Biblical Subtext*, 106–117.
1350 For example, Muqātil 1:519.3, al-Ṭabarī 11:232, al-Rāzī 12:132. For a discussion of these exegetical views, see Cook, “Ibn Qutayba and the monkeys,” 43–74.
1351 Al-Ṭabrisī’s Majmaʿ al-Bayān 3:303.
1352 Al-Zamakhsharī’s al-Kashshāf 1:147.
Instead of commenting on these differences, Fadlallah focuses here too on the deviation of the Jews from the right path and their violation of God’s commandment. He specifies, however, that these transgressors are not true Jews but a group whose affiliation with the Torah is merely formal. These untrue Jews deviated from their Scriptures’ rulings and committed all kinds of sins.\textsuperscript{1353} The Ayatollah equates these Sabbath-breaking Israelites with the Jews contemporaneous with Muhammad who rejected Islam just as they rejected Jesus’ prophethood.\textsuperscript{1354} Even more, he implicitly equates them with Israelis as well with a reference to their plots against Muslims and \textit{“their aggression against the rights of the weak people [who live] around them.”}\textsuperscript{1355}

In addition to the three verses which speak directly about this transformation, verse Q4:47\textsuperscript{1356} refers to the consequence of God’s curse of the people of the Sabbath without mentioning the transformation itself. Many exegetes also equate this verse with the punitive transformation of the Israelites into apes and swine. Expectedly, Fadlallah makes this link too but only in passing.\textsuperscript{1357} Moreover, and faithful to his exegetical method of favoring the outer meaning of the Qur’ān, Fadlallah ignores the link some commentators, Sunni and Shi’i alike, make between \textit{maskh} and the curse of Jews and Christians by both David and Jesus in Q5:78.\textsuperscript{1358} This verse which states that both David and Jesus cursed the unbelievers among the Children of Israel is commonly connected with Q7:166. Several exegetes explain the cursing of David and Jesus as a prayer to God to transform the unbelieving Jews and Christians into apes and swine. Although Fadlallah refers to this verse in passing in the context of Q5:59-63 where he mentions the curse of these two groups, he does not refer to the type of curse inflicted on the Israelites through the prayers of David and Jesus nor does he mention the punitive transformation at all.

In his treatment of verse Q2:65, Fadlallah briefly refers to the commentators’ disagreement about whether this transformation (\textit{maskh}) is a literal (\textit{ḥaqīqiyyun}), i.e., physical, or a figurative, exemplary (\textit{maskh ma navī tamthīlī}) one.\textsuperscript{1359} In a rather vague style, the Ayatollah gives the two different opinions without clearly specifying which stand he finds

\textsuperscript{1353} MWQ8:240 and MWQ10:274.

\textsuperscript{1354} MWQ8:240–241; MWQ8:174 and MWQ10:275. See also 4.1.6.

\textsuperscript{1355} MWQ8:243. This same equation is also found in his analysis of Q7:166 where he refers to the Jews’ racist and hostile spirit against their neighboring people and links that to a special feature in the Jewish personality. See also MWQ10:275–276.

\textsuperscript{1356} Q4:47: \textit{“O you who were given the Scripture, believe in what We have sent down, confirming that which is with you, before We obliterate faces and turn them toward their backs or curse them as We cursed the sabbath-breakers. And ever is the decree of Allah accomplished.”}

\textsuperscript{1357} MWQ7:292.


\textsuperscript{1359} MWQ2:79 echoing \textit{Tafsīr al-Qumnī} 1:245.
more correct.\textsuperscript{1360} The first exegetical opinion, the well-known one (maʾrūf), is that the Jews were physically transformed into apes and swine because this is the outer (zāhīr) meaning of the verse and because there is nothing in it that suggests a different meaning.\textsuperscript{1361} The second opinion, that of the classical exegetes Mujāhid and Ibn Kathīr, for example, is that the metamorphosis is parabolic as in Q62:5 which describes those who were entrusted with the Torah but failed to apply it \textit{“as the likeness of the ass carrying books.”} In some other versions, the verse meant that their hearts were transformed (musikhat) into hearts of apes, i.e., they do not accept any form of admonition and do not fear any rebuke.\textsuperscript{1362}

Classical commentators mostly take the punitive metamorphosis literally while some modern commentators understand it figuratively. In the case of Fadlallah, the literal meaning is preferred although the figurative meaning is not totally ruled out. This is even clearer in the Ayatollah’s seminary lectures where one notes an obvious hesitation to take a stand on the issue. In one instance, he concisely states that the Qurʾān does not offer specific information about the punitive transformation of the sinning Israelites and although some commentators explain that this was a physical transformation, others think it was a moral one, i.e., God lowered their status to that of apes (bimanziilati al-qiradati) and swine.\textsuperscript{1363} Years later, Fadlallah devoted one of his seminary lectures entirely to the further examination of this issue and seemed to lean more towards the figurative interpretation of the \textit{maskh} verses.\textsuperscript{1364} In this lecture, Fadlallah refers briefly to some of the exegetical views about this punitive metamorphosis such as Mujāhid (d. 645) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373) who discuss the possibility of a figurative understanding of the \textit{maskh}.\textsuperscript{1365} Although Fadlallah’s brief analysis gives the impression that Mujāhid and Ibn Kathīr are in favor of a figurative understanding of the punitive metamorphosis, this is not the case as they both lean towards a physical interpretation of the transformation. In parallel, the Ayatollah refers to some other exegetes, such as al-Razī (d. 1209) and Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905) who argue that the transformation was physical\textsuperscript{1366} as well as to the opinion of al-Marāghī (d.1945) who thinks the transformation was figurative. Fadlallah compares the sin of the Israelites with the punishment they received and implies that the physical

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1360] MWQ2:79–80.
\item[1361] MWQ2:79 In line with his method of \textit{tafsīr}, Fadlallah prefers the outer meaning of the Qurʾān unless there is a verbal or a rational presumption (\textit{qarīna}) against it. For more on this, see Chapter II.
\item[1362] MWQ2:79.
\item[1363] Nadwa 13:395–396.
\item[1365] For a full analysis of Ibn Kathīr’s (and other exegetes’) treatment of these verses, see Reynolds, \textit{The Qurʾān and Its Biblical Subtext}, 106–17.
\item[1366] \textit{Tafsīr al-Razī} 3:111 and \textit{Tafsīr al-Marāghī} 1:133–134. It has to be noted that al-Razī does not completely exclude the figurative interpretation of the verse. He suggests that such an interpretation is also possible.
transformation into animals might seem too severe if taken into consideration that breaking
the Sabbath was comparably not the biggest sin the Israelites had committed. After all,
they did not fish during the Sabbath but only found a way to keep the fish until the Sabbath
was over. For example, worshipping the golden calf or demanding to see God are much
graver sins, yet God did not transform them then into apes and swine for this. Fadlallah
resorts to his accumulative style once again by leaving the door open to all possibilities
ending the discussion in a rather complex and unintelligible style:

Our Qur’ānic exegetical method relies on the outer (ẓāhir) meaning of the Qur’ān unless there is a verbal or a rational presumption (qarīna kalāmiyya aw ‘aqliyya) against it. However, some intellectual or potential improbabilities might suggest something that looks like a presumption to deal with the word in a manner other than the one suggested by its outer meaning. But God knows best.

Fadlallah’s treatment of the concept of maskh in the above-mentioned lecture is rather
evasive and emphasizes the figurative understanding more than anywhere else. However,
we cannot deduce clearly whether Fadlallah has changed his stand on the matter, especially
because this lecture is, to my knowledge, the latest occasion on which he dealt with this
issue.

5.2.7. Maskh’s polemical dimension

It is commonly believed in the Arab world that present-day Jews are the descendants of
the punished Israelites and such a reference is quite common in Islamist rhetoric, Friday
sermons, and political speeches, even by Fadlallah’s followers. The question ‘did the
transformed Jews have offspring’ which has preoccupied commentators since the classical
era does not interest the Ayatollah. In his commentary, he concentrates on the theology of
the punitive transformation (maskh) but his seminary students compelled him to discuss
the physics of it. These seminarians wished to know whether the Jews of today were the

1367 Nadwa lecture held on 26 July 2008 retrieved from Fadlallah’s official website on 3 July 2016.
1368 Nadwa lecture held on 26 July 2008 retrieved from Fadlallah’s official website on 3 July 2016.
1369 For example, in Hizballah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah’s speech held and broadcast on al-Manār
TV on 7 May 1998, and Mohamed Morsi, Egypt’s ex-president, called Israelis “descendants of apes and pigs” in a televised interview in 2010.

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descendants of the Israelites that God made into apes and swine.\textsuperscript{1370} Faced with this same question year after year, the Sayyid ended up providing a concise but conclusive answer: The transformed people died and did not reproduce.\textsuperscript{1371} “It seems from some Hadiths and from the Qur’ān that the transformation was physical but the transformed people died. Although they were made into apes, this does not mean that the apes which exist now are their descendants.”\textsuperscript{1372} Moreover, the Ayatollah clarifies, there have always been monkeys and swine in the world. These animals existed before the punitive transformation of the sinning Israelites and continued existing after the maskh.\textsuperscript{1373} Despite his rather hostile discourse regarding the Jews, Fadlallah himself does not use the depiction “the descendants of apes and swine” in reference to them but does not instruct his followers not to use it either.

It has to be noted, however, that although, generally speaking, Fadlallah is an advocate of rationalistic argumentation and of rationalistic interpretation of the Qur’ān,\textsuperscript{1374} he is not all that systematic, especially in the case of the Jews. He does not mind compromising rationalism when it comes to propagating conspiracy theories or even myths created by Western anti-Semitism such as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and the blood libel.\textsuperscript{1375} On one occasion, he expresses the following: “As part of the Jewish traditions and literature, there is the celebration of the Jewish ‘Passover’ according to which the Jews have to eat Passover bread dipped in the blood of a non-Jew—and indeed they eat their bread dipped in the blood of Muslims.”\textsuperscript{1376} He willingly uses all the means possible to keep the barrier between Muslims and the Jews in particular and to ensure that they do not lose sight of the long-term goal—the establishment of the Islamic state.

5.2.8. The Islamic state

Fadlallah presents Islam as a comprehensive system which organizes both the religious and the political affairs of the Islamic Umma. Islam in Fadlallah’s works is described as a


\textsuperscript{1371} Nadwa 16:428.

\textsuperscript{1372} Nadwa 1:371.

\textsuperscript{1373} Nadwa 1:371 and Nadwa 16:428.

\textsuperscript{1374} Sankari, \textit{Fadlallah}, 52–54.

\textsuperscript{1375} See 4.2 for more on these two issues.

religion that came “in order to propagate Daʿwa and to build a state.” Hence, unlike in Judaism and Christianity, separating religion from the state in Islam is like separating a person from himself. Even when Muslims live under a non-Islamic regime, they seek the application of Shariʿa, hence the necessity of establishing an Islamic state in order to put an end to the condition of rupture that Muslims suffer from. Furthermore, living under a non-Islamic state should be avoided because it might negatively influence Muslims’ faith. At the same time, Christians should not have a problem living under the Islamic state since their religion separates the state and the Church. Not only did the Christians find this argument unconvincing but also insulting.

Speaking of the Islamic state leads to discussing the status of non-Muslims under it. While the Qurʾān offers the polytheists the choice between accepting Islam or death, at least theoretically speaking, it offers the Scripturaries the opportunity to keep their faith and live under Islamic rule provided they pay the Jizya. The Qurʾānic term Jizya is a hapax legomenon (Q9:29) which refers to the tax levied on the People of the Book who live under Muslim rule. The Jizya taxpayers thus become dhimmis (protégés)—entitled to the protection of the Muslim state as long as they are not treacherous.

Fight those who do not believe in God or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what God and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Book until they pay the Jizya (ḥattā yuʿṭū al-jizyata) willingly (ʿan yadin) while they are humbled (wa-hum şāghirūn). Q9:29

1377 Fadlallah, Uslīb al-Daʿwa fī al-Qurʾān, 35, and al-Islām wa-Manṭiq al-Quwwa, 260–262. Similar views are also found in FAHIM, 67–72; Mafāhiḥ Islāmiyya ʿĀmma, 487–489; Miʿat Suʿāl wa Jawāb 9:9–18, and Hiwār Shāmil, 60–61. The model of the Islamic state is presented in Fadlallah’s various works especially in Uslīb ad-Daʿwa fī al-Qurʾān and al-Islām wa Manṭiq al-Quwwa.

1378 Hiwār Shāmil, 112–113.

1379 Hiwār Shāmil, 60.

1380 Hiwār Shāmil, 58–61.


1383 Fadlallah, al-Islām wa Manṭiq al-Quwwa, 239–240.

Fadlallah notes that only under an Islamic state where Muslims are the majority can the Jizya taxation system be considered.\textsuperscript{1385} He also points to the difference between the polytheists and the Scripturaries in terms of status. The Qur’an considers the first impure (Q9:28), intolerable within the Islamic society, and thus are given no other option but conversion to Islam or death.\textsuperscript{1386} It is noteworthy, however, that the Ayatollah states elsewhere that the other religious and ethnic minorities can be offered other arrangements, namely the contract or the treaty system (\textit{mīṯāq/muʿāhada}) to live under the Islamic state and enjoy the same protection offered to Kitābīs if the interest of Muslims so requires.\textsuperscript{1388} The Charter of Medina (\textit{sahīfah al-Madīna}), for example, is worth considering as a model of a pact with all the non-Muslim groups on the basis of the principle of citizenship and social contract.\textsuperscript{1389}

In his commentary, he argues for the usefulness and justice of Dhimmitude as a regulative system to manage Muslim–non-Muslim relationships and states that non-Muslims should submit to the sovereignty of Islam.\textsuperscript{1390} However, as a realist, Fadlallah knew that, unlike Iran, the multi-confessional Lebanon does not allow for the establishment of the Islamic state in the foreseeable future.\textsuperscript{1391} In fact, Fadlallah’s views about the Islamic state gradually softened during his career. Fadlallah felt strongly about the Islamic state in the 1960s but by the 1980s, he argued that the way to the Islamic state should be gradual and should be done in different preparatory phases.\textsuperscript{1392} Although he never stopped believing in the perfection of this system on the theoretical level, he still came to realize towards the end of his life that an Islamic state cannot be suggested in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{1393} Thus, he argued that “notions such as the Islamic state and ahl al-dhimma are ideological constructs that do not exist anymore.”\textsuperscript{1394}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{fn} Fadlallah, ‘\textit{an al-Intikhābāt wa Mustaqbal Lubnān wa al-Muqūwama}, 36–50. See also Kramer, \textit{The Oracle of Hizbullah}, 126–127.
\bibitem{fn} MWQ11:73.
\bibitem{fn} MWQ11:74.
\bibitem{fn} Fadlallah, “\textit{al-Kalima al-Sawā’ Qā‘ idat al-Ta‘āyush},” 26.
\bibitem{fn} This idea is also found in his book \textit{al-Islam wa Manṭiq al-Quwwa}, 243–252.
\bibitem{fn} Sankari, \textit{Fadlallah}, 222.
\bibitem{fn} Na‘ūm, \textit{al-‘allāma}, 30.
\bibitem{fn} Alagha, \textit{Hizbullah’s Identity Construction}, 178.
\end{thebibliography}
Not very different from Quṭb (d. 1966), who repeatedly emphasizes the superiority of Islam and its kindness and tolerance towards the Kitābīs expressed through the Dhimmitude system, Fadlallah sings the praise of the justice and tolerance of this model which in his opinion offers equality and privileges that no other system offers. The justice of this system is demonstrated through examples from early Islam as well as from modern history. The Ayatollah argues that during Muhammad’s time, “no Jew suffered ill-treatment [...] despite their concealed conspiracies” against the Muslim society and their alliances with the hypocrites. Muslims did not force them to convert despite their attempts to sow doubt in the minds of Muslims concerning their faith. Furthermore, the spirit of tolerance and comprehensive justice of the early Islamic society was clear as “the wronged, even if he was a Jew, would not feel that Islam takes the side of the wrongdoer even if he was a Muslim.” The Ayatollah compares the conditions in which the Scriptuaries lived under Islam with their conditions under Western states and gives the example of the signs that read “entrance forbidden to dogs and Jews” as an example of the degrading inhumane treatment that the Jews suffered from. Another argument for Islamic tolerance and comprehensive justice is that the Jews, whom the Qur’ān describes as “the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers,” lived in the Islamic society in peace and were allowed to “control the Islamic society’s economy, sciences, medicine and translation.” The Jews were not persecuted because of their religion or expelled from Muslim countries like in the West. However, when violence against non-Muslims was used in Muslim societies, Fadlallah argues, the matter was about some isolated cases only. The proof of this is that there are still Jews, Christians, and adherents of other religions inside present day Muslim societies. These non-Muslims were not forced to embrace Islam either by the state or by Muslims “even if they were in a position of weakness.” In another context, the Ayatollah explains that the treatment of non-Muslims depends on their own attitude. If they opted for peacefulness, they would be called to embrace Islam through “cultural means [...] through arguments, proofs and wisdom” until “they open up their minds and their hearts wholeheartedly.” However, if they waged war against Muslims,
they would be forced to choose between the status of *Dhimmitude* or nominal conversion at least.\footnote{1405}

Fadlallah shows an interest in explaining the feasibility and benefits of the Dhimma system in multi-confessional Lebanon.\footnote{1406} Here, we note that when Fadlallah speaks of Muslim-*Kitābī* coexistence, he actually means the Christians at the exclusion of the Jews. Fadlallah explains that "the reason why Islam approves of Muslim-Christian coexistence"\footnote{1407} is the common ground which the two groups share, especially that they "do not rebel against faith because the [holy] book they believe in stresses faith in God as truth despite its deviation concerning some details such as the nature of God and His attributes etc." However, this coexistence is not the end in itself but the means to propagate Islam. The Ayatollah clarifies further that this interfaith coexistence inside the same society is allowed provided that Islam has the position of power in order to preserve itself and to allow Daʿwa to go on.\footnote{1408} The different religious groups who live under Islamic rule should be subordinate to its authority for the sake of protecting society from schism, weakness and corruption. For these reasons, Islam regulated this subordination of the People of the Book through the legislation of a poll tax—the *Jizya*.\footnote{1409}

The Ayatollah is aware of the pejorative connotation related to the terminology of the *Jizya* verse as well as to subordinating the People of the Book to the sovereignty of the Muslim state through *Dhimmitude*.\footnote{1410} He attempts to alleviate this negativity by putting both Muslims and *Kitābīs* in an equal position in terms of subordination to the Islamic state. The only difference between them is that subordination for Muslims means commitment to the concept of Islam as a ruling system, fighting for its security when needed, and paying the taxes it imposes on them (*zakat* and *khumus*). *Kitābīs* on the other hand are required to pay only the poll tax and are exempt from other higher taxes and from several devotional and defense obligations imposed on Muslims.\footnote{1411} After all, *Jizya* is imposed, in lieu of *zakāt*, to cover the expenses of their protection and does not have an abusive aspect.\footnote{1412}

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\text{1405 Fadlallah, "al-Kalima al-Sawāʿ Qāʿidat al-Taʿāyuṣ," 28–29.}
\text{1406 Compare with Quṭb, who does not discuss Dhimma’s applicability in modern times on the grounds that it is “a historical rather than a realistic issue today.” Quṭb’s *Fī Zilāl al-Qurʿān* 3:1634.}
\text{1407 MWQ11:75.}
\text{1408 MWQ11:75.}
\text{1409 MWQ11:75.}
\text{1412 MWQ11:75–76.}
\end{flushright}
However, instead of Jizya, the Kitābīs are free to voluntarily pay the same taxes as Muslims if they so wish or if they deem paying only Jizya somehow degrading. Moreover, they can also take part in the Islamic state’s wars if they so wish provided that their military involvement does not represent a security threat to the state.

Moreover, the Ayatollah stresses the legal flexibility of such a taxation system and argues that the Ruler can reduce this tax or totally exempt them from it. Furthermore, although Fadlallah explains the term ‘ṣāghirūn’ in his commentary as “consenting to lower status,” he does not think that the phrase (‘an yadīn wa-hum ṣāghirūn) carries any pejorative meaning such as humiliation of Kitābīs or holding them in an inferior position. He briefly explains that this phrase refers to subordination to the Islamic authority only.

Fadlallah tries to play down the pejorative connotation of Dhimmitude in other contexts too. For example, he points out the flexibility of the Islamic state system in practice both in terms of organization and in terms of naming. If Dhimma feels repulsive as a system or sounds pejorative as a title, the Ayatollah suggests it can be called by any other name such as the contract (mīṯāq) or the treaty (muʿāḥada), like the example of the constitution of Madina between Muhammad and the Jews. The Scripturaries under these types of regulatory systems are free to express their opinion on political, economic, and social issues.

Although Fadlallah shows some understanding of the arguments presented by the Christians against the Islamic state, he does not come up with solutions which reflect a true consideration of the Christians’ concerns and reservations. The Christians argue that the Islamic state system would make of them subjugated second class citizens and would deny them participation in legislation and decision making. All that the Ayatollah has

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1413 FAHIM, 106–107, 121.
1414 FAHIM, 304.
1416 MWQ11:73.
1417 See also FAHIM, 119. We have noted in several previous examples that Fadlallah does not bind himself to the meaning of the Qurʾānic vocabulary he offers at the beginning of each treated Qurʾānic pericope. See Chapter II, Vocabulary.
1418 MWQ11:77 and FAHIM, 107.
1420 FAHIM, 108.
1421 FAHIM, 108.
1422 FAHIM, 66–67, and 71–75.
1423 FAHIM, 105–106.
to offer as a counterargument is that the Islamic state does not differentiate between its citizens. He does not find any discrepancy between the comprehensive justice system he thinks Dhimmitude offers and the fact that the Scriptuaries under it cannot occupy the top decision-making positions.\footnote{Fadlallah, “‘an al-Intikhābiq wa Mustaqbal Lubnān wa al-Muqāwama,” \textit{Shu‘ūn al-Awsat} N. 14, (1992): 47–49; \textit{FAHIM}, 121.} To him, it is only natural that only those who believe in the ideology of the Islamic state can have a role in its decision making. The Ayatollah adds that the Scriptuaries are allowed to participate in political, social and economic decisions instead.\footnote{\textit{MWQ11}: 75–76 and \textit{FAHIM}, 106.} As for their status as protégés, Fadlallah thinks it falls under the framework of the state’s duty to protect all its citizens and does not have a degrading connotation.\footnote{\textit{FAHIM}, 106.} 

Realistic as he is, Fadlallah is well aware of the impossibility of establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon at least in the short term.\footnote{\textit{FAHIM}, 121.} He thinks that, in addition to sectarianism and the mistrust between the religious groups, the main obstacle that stands in the way of the establishment of such a state is the Western hegemony.\footnote{\textit{FAHIM}, 106.} What is presently feasible instead is preparing for this long-term goal through several measures.\footnote{\textit{MWQ11}: 75–80 and \textit{FAHIM}, 114–115.} In Lebanon, Muslims should resort to the “libanonization” (labnana) i.e. the localization of the Islamic movement to accommodate the specificity of a Lebanon which is multi-religious and multi-sectarian.\footnote{\textit{MWQ11}: 58–80 and \textit{FAHIM}, 75–80.} That is because “the political conditions to establish an Islamic republic would be suitable when the majority is convinced to embrace Islam.”\footnote{\textit{Nadir}, \textit{Kull Ṭa‘īfa fi Lubnān Dawla}, 43.} The propagation of Islam is not limited to Lebanon alone; the success of Fadlallah’s project is linked to the fruits of a long preparation phase at the end of which a large number of people around the world would convert to Islam.

In one of his Friday sermons that dates back to 1988, Fadlallah introduced a novel idea as a solution for the post-war confessional Lebanese society: “the State of the Human” (\textit{dawlat al-insān}). This idea was celebrated in various contexts and seems to have been carried further than the Ayatollah intended. Fadlallah did not come up with a comprehensive plan for this state model or give any further information about it. When asked in one of his seminary lectures about the signification of this model, Fadlallah answered:

\begin{quote}

\end{quote}
I only advocate ‘the State of Islam.’ When I spoke about the State of the Human in my Friday sermon, I did so on the basis of the restrictions of the Lebanese reality. I said that if we cannot establish an Islamic state in Lebanon, then we should at least meet at the State of the Human. That is to say that human rights and duties should not be subject to sectarian divisions. The person’s humanity represented by his citizenship should be the foundation in reality as a partial solution not as an alternative.1432

Indeed, Fadlallah’s suggested “State of the Human” is not intended as an inclusivist solution but as a provisional one whose long-term goal is still the establishment of the Islamic state.1433 Fadlallah did not present the details of his suggested alternative, probably because it was born out of necessity and pragmatism more than out of principled conviction. Another reason for not elaborating on the details of “the State of the Human” model might be the unwelcoming reception it got from the Muslims and the Christians alike. Fadlallah strived to ease both parties’ skepticism resorting to his double-discourse style emphasizing for his own audience the temporary and pragmatic nature of the solution, which would facilitate the establishment of the Islamic state in the long run, and the impossibility of establishing such a state for the time being. To the Christians and the non-Islamists, he emphasized the aspect of a de-confessionalized society based on freedoms and pluralism.1434 The Ayatollah’s vague interim model could not convince any of the Lebanese—not even the Islamist ones.1435

What becomes rather clear from the study of Fadlallah’s works intended for different audiences is that the Ayatollah engages in a “double discourse,” paying lip service to the priority of the Lebanese as a human being, preaching mutual tolerance and coexistence while at the same time promoting Islamist content to his own audience. In the latter, the tolerated Christians are the Qurʾānic ones and the State of the Human, which in fact means nothing more than mutual respect, is only a phase which will eventually lead to an Islamic state where non-Muslims are second class citizens in reality. The Ayatollah’s lenient views of his Christian co-citizens are forced by present day conditions: The Christians are needed to build Lebanon, to cooperate against Western interference as well as against the Israeli

1432 Nadwa 1:558; Sankari, Fadlallah, 229 and 238–243.
1434 Sankari, Fadlallah, 239.
occupation. \textsuperscript{1436} The same double discourse is also noted in his rhetoric about Jihad, which aims, he argues, only at bringing non-Muslims under the political rule of Islam, freeing them from oppression, and giving them the opportunity to get to know the One True God but by no means aims at coercing them into embracing Islam. \textsuperscript{1437}

5.3. Conclusion

Fadlallah’s perception of the Muslim-\textit{Kitābī} encounter and its regulation revolves around his interpretation of a group of verses used intertextually to form a rather simple stand: Islam emphasizes the importance of coexistence with peaceful non-Muslims, even non-\textit{Kitābīs}, according to a set of rules but forbids any intimate relationships or alliances with the aggressors among them because of the spiritual, security, and political damage that these might include. This perception is affected by two major issues: On the one hand, the Qur’ānic depiction of the People of the Book together with the anti-Jewish sentiment prevalent in the exegetical literature offer a fertile environment from which the Ayatollah scoops up the necessary material to back his arguments for one party or against the other. On the other hand, the political predicament in which the Arab world lives today, especially the Arab-Israeli conflict, is projected on the Qur’ānic and post-Qur’ānic literature. As a result, the Ayatollah presents us with an anti-Israeli thought coated in Qur’ānic narratives, Islamist rhetoric and modern political terminology. Hence, unlike the classical Islamic exegetical literature which presents the Jews as excessively sinning but pathetic, Fadlallah, like most modern exegetes, portrays them as inherently evil and blames them for a worldwide conspiracy against the Islamic Umma.\textsuperscript{1438}

It is hardly surprising that Fadlallah finds in the Qur’ān and the Islamic tradition the needed material to back his views against the Jews. The Qur’ānic narratives about the mischief of the untrustworthy covenant-breaking Israelites are taken to a new dimension by contextualizing them and projecting the Arab-Israeli conflict on them thus giving them an old-new life. The Israelis are portrayed as a continuity of the perfidious Jews contemporaneous with Muhammad and to their mischievous ancestors the Israelites. Hence, modern Jews are no other than Muslims’ historical enemies. Like Quṭb (d. 1966), Fadlallah presents the Jews as a serious threat to Muslims and to Islam unless destroyed.

\textsuperscript{1437} For a detailed treatise on jihad, see Fadlallah’s \textit{Kitāb al-Jihād} as well as Sami Emile Baroudi, “Islamist Perspectives on International Relations: The Discourse of Sayyid Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah (1935–2010),” \textit{Middle Eastern Studies} 49 (2013): 107–33. However, the subject of Jihad is beyond the scope of this research and will be discussed in more detail in a future study.
\textsuperscript{1438} Cf. Quṭb’s \textit{Maʿ rakatun d Maʿ a al-Yahūd}, 20–38.
He purposely keeps his discussions of the verses about the Israelites on a political level and does not offer an in-depth analysis of Judaism or the Jews. He explicitly declares that he aims at keeping up and strengthening the Arab-Israeli tension lest Muslims lose sight of their enemy. Hence, he rejects outright any kind of dialogue with the Jews as long as they still live in Israel. They should give back the land to the Palestinians, go back to wherever they came from first and only then can a dialogue be considered.

The Ayatollah employs *argumentum ad hominem* against the Jews while his arguments against the Christians are more doctrinal. Furthermore, he keeps a very low polemical tone in his exchanges with Lebanese and Western Christians and strives to emphasize the common ground between Islam and Christianity. This does not necessarily mean that Fadlallah does not have polemical writings but these are rather few and far between and are intended for Muslim audiences. Fadlallah’s difference from Quṭb is that he emphasizes the enmity of the Jews in particular and hints at the threat of the Christians only implicitly. Although Fadlallah freely uses Quṭb’s terminology and ideas concerning the Jews, he refrains from doing the same concerning the Christians. This can be explained through the Ayatollah’s pragmatism in dealing with the Scripturaries. While keeping warm relationships with the Christians serves the best interest of Muslims in Lebanon now and prepares for the long-term goal at the same time, keeping hostile attitudes towards the Jews is needed for the sake of mobilizing Muslims against Israel. He combines Qurʾānic, Western, and Quṭbist views to draw the Jews in the darkest shades. Another issue that shows the Ayatollah’s pragmatism is his call for a fair and just treatment for peaceful non-Muslims, not for the sake of philanthropy itself but to serve the best interest (*maṣlaḥa*) of Islam and Muslims. His approach to dialogue and to philanthropy makes them synonymous with Daʿwa whose main function is preparing the ground for the establishment of the Islamic state. In a nutshell, the way Fadlallah presents dialogue and philanthropy makes them both forms and means of Daʿwa which in its term would lead to the establishment of the Islamic state.

Like most Islamists, the Ayatollah argues for the justice and tolerance of Islam and for its esteem for the religions of the Book. Despite the restrictions it sets up on the engagement with the People of the Book, it is clear through the allowance of various relationships with them that they are given a particular position in contrast with non-monotheistic non-Muslims. In his view, if Islam draws lines of demarcation between Muslims and *Kitābīs*, it does so only to protect itself from their hostility. To Fadlallah, the reserved Islamic attitude towards *Kitābīs* does not stem from Islam’s hostility towards them but is related to their own negative attitude. Fadlallah presents Islam as, above all, a religion of peace and dialogue which resorts to violence only as a defensive measure. He is never tired of repeating his mantra according to which *peace in Islam is the starting point, not war*. 

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6. Conclusions and discussion

This dissertation set out to outline Fadlallah’s perceptions of Jews and Christians in his Qur’ānic commentary Min Waḥy al-Qurʾān and in his thought in general. This was achieved through the systematic analysis of his views on the matter in his works and in the MWQ commentary in particular. My analysis of Fadlallah’s exegetical treatment of the Qurʾānic verses traditionally linked with the Islamic perception of the People of the Book aimed at determining the major tenets of his perception concerning them. It goes without saying that the understanding of Fadlallah’s historical, social, and political background is a prerequisite for comprehending his thought. With this in mind, I dedicated the first chapter of this study to contextualizing and highlighting the major events that influenced him as a person, as a scholar, and as a political player. I have shown that Fadlallah was, from an early age, conscious of the challenges facing Muslims and that he was particularly angry about what he perceived as Western hegemony and Zionist arrogance against Muslims. Fadlallah was convinced that the Westerners and the Zionists are responsible for most of Muslims’ sufferings, and that they are behind most of the intra-Islamic divisions. These perceptions and conceptions accompanied the Ayatollah all his life and are clearly present in his works.

Additionally, Fadlallah wrote his commentary in a context where non-Muslims had a practical impact on Muslims’ lives in general and on Lebanese political life in particular. These non-Muslims were Christian citizens of Lebanon, Western (ex-)colonizers, and world powers who, according to Fadlallah, “arrogantly” interfered in the Arab World, as well as the southern neighbor, the “Zionist enemy” lurking in Lebanon’s backyard, against whom Fadlallah warned in every Friday sermon. These influencing factors, which thus have a strong political connection in Lebanon’s political context, are clearly reflected in Fadlallah’s theological perception of Jews and Christians, as shown in the second chapter of this study. Indeed, Fadlallah’s exegetical activity is highly political. I have demonstrated in the next three chapters that Fadlallah’s perception of the People of the Book revolves around three major tenets which, in their turn, are built upon a theological, social, and political background.
The first tenet is the supersession of Islam over Judaism and Christianity. Pre-Islamic monotheistic religions are regarded as part of the progressive divine revelation according to which God’s message was revealed gradually in order to take into consideration the needs and exigencies of each period of time. The three monotheistic religions come from the same source and are equally a path of divine guidance but each is so only until the advent of the next one. Fadlallah does not interpret the Qurʾānic term *islām* as the religious system brought by Muhammad but rather as a monotheistic submission to God that applies to pre-Qurʾānic monotheistic missions as well. Hence, Fadlallah considers Judaism and Christianity to be forms of *islām* during their respective times. Based on this, Islam does not abrogate Judaism and Christianity but supersedes them. However, although guidance can be found through Judaism and Christianity theoretically speaking, the current forms of these two religions have departed from their pure monotheistic origins and introduced erroneous teachings, conceptions, and dogma. These deviations earned the People of the Book the Qurʾānic accusations of unbelief and polytheism. Although Fadlallah insists in his commentary that any deviation from orthodox monotheism leads to polytheism, he seems to depart from this line in the Islamic-Christian dialogue context in which he reduces the above-mentioned Qurʾānic accusations against the People of the Book to *philosophical unbelief* or *philosophical polytheism*. Based on such a categorization, Fadlallah presents the People of the Book as monotheists and sets them apart from the unbelievers (*kuffār*) and the polytheists (*mushrikūn*). Nonetheless, since Judaism and Christianity are assumed to be outdated forms of Islam, they could lead to salvation only if God so willed. By the same token, the Qurʾān is presented as a confirmative reiteration of previous divine messages but also as a corrective one—It is the Last Testament. The Torah and the Gospel are less perfect for two reasons: First, because they were meant to be interim Scriptures and they are no longer needed since God has now revealed the final and perfect holy book that constitutes a revelatory closure. Second, because the earlier revelations are, in their preserved forms, somehow misrepresented. Misrepresentation (*taḥrīf*) makes these books only partially valid.

The partial validity of pre-Qurʾānic Scriptures is the argument upon which Fadlallah’s second tenet is built. Fadlallah’s logic is simple and does not depart from the general exegetical line: The Qurʾān acknowledges the authority of the biblical Scriptures but also refers to some sort of misrepresentation that affected them. Revelations originally brought via Moses and Jesus are, in principle, consistent with the one revealed via Muhammad given the fact that they have the same divine origin and are part of the stream of revelation in which Islam is the final form. Hence, the orthodoxy of any theological doctrine in the other Scriptures is measured against those in the Qurʾān. The inconsistencies of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures with the Qurʾān are explained as a dogmatic aberration and by Scriptural corruption. Furthermore, the accusation of scriptural misrepresentation is closely related to the identity of the Islamic faith which seeks in the Torah and Gospel
attestation of the coming of Muhammad. If such attestations are nowhere to be found in
them, they must have been misrepresented or corrupted, and thereby prophecies about
Muhammad’s coming were concealed or omitted.

The Qurʾān refers to this misrepresentation using different verbs and phrases but Fadlallah
does not delve into the merits of the matter and generally does not speculate on how it was
carried out but rather concentrates on its results. The core idea in Fadlallah’s works is that
the Torah and the Gospel were either partially or greatly misrepresented through additions,
omissions, misinterpretations, and other corruptions. To him, it was irrelevant whether the
scriptural misrepresentation was exegetical (taḥrīf fī al-tafsīr) or textual (taḥrīf al-naṣṣ)
because the consequences are the same in both cases. He generally links all forms of
misrepresentation with two subjects: The first is the dogmatic aberrations that affected
Judaism and Christianity through changing some biblical texts or misinterpreting them;
the second is deliberately concealing the prophecy about the advent of Muhammad.

Most corruption accusations in Fadlallah’s commentary are directed against the Jews but
concealment and misinterpretation are leveled against both Kitābīs. However, Fadlallah
does not accuse all the Jews and all the Christians of corrupting their Scriptures but mainly
accuses some of their leaders who are not true believers. Only these aberrant religious
leaders have intentionally and mischievously committed the sin of scriptural
misrepresentation. Also, Fadlallah makes a distinction between the Kitābīs’ religious
scholars and their illiterate followers. The latter cannot determine what is authentic and
what is not, either because they were illiterate or because the Scriptures were not available
in Arabic. Furthermore, Fadlallah suggests that the Jewish religious leaders kept the Torah
in separate scrolls (qarāṭīs) so that they could conveniently disclose whatever served their
interests and conceal what did not. In the Ayatollah’s reasoning, some of Jews and
Christians preserved their Scriptures uncorrupted because the Qurʾān says it confirms
them. At the same time, the Ayatollah implicitly hints that this authentic Bible was
corrupted at some point during the time of Muhammad, but he is not specific on this and
does not say if different versions, authentic and non-authentic, circulated simultaneously.
Additionally, Fadlallah intriguingly argues that the Jews somehow managed to tamper with
both their Torah and the Christians’ Gospel, but he does not give any further information
on how that could have happened. At any rate, Fadlallah maintains that the scriptural
misrepresentation was unambiguously intentional. It was motivated by the Jews’ jealousy
of Muslims, their obstinance and their ardent pursuit of worldly interests as well as their
racism—after all, they rejected the Prophet because he was not from among them.

Fadlallah fluctuates between the Qurʾānic conception of the Torah and the Gospel as divine
revelations on the one hand and the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament known to us
today as human-written although divinely inspired on the other hand. This fluctuation is
especially apparent when comparing his views as expressed in his commentary with those
he expresses in other contexts. The defectiveness of the Torah and the Gospel is more accentuated in the commentary while the commonality of monotheism is especially highlighted in the context of Islamic-Christian dialogue. In what concerns the Jewish Scripture, Fadlallah argues that it was greatly corrupted and no longer reflects the teachings of Moses, which is to be seen in the injustice, corruption, and atrocities of the Jews today. As for the Gospel, since it only contains spiritualities and does not contain legal rulings, it could not be greatly misrepresented. However, some of its verses were misinterpreted in a way that led to deviation from pure monotheism. What makes Fadlallah stand out from other modern exegetes is his differentiation between the Qur’ānic perception of dogmatic deviations and how modern-day Christianity understands the dogmas in question. As is the case with the accusations of unbelief and polytheism, Fadlallah argues that the Qur’ānic accusations of Divine Sonship, Trinitarianism, and Tritheism do not apply to modern-day Christianity. Therefore, Christians should not be made to bear the burden of such accusations. Nevertheless, these views are relativized by what seems to be an audience-tailored discourse, as they can only be found in his Islamic-Christian dialogue works. His commentary offers a different point of view that is less understanding of the modern-day Christian theological conceptions.

Despite their dogmatic deviations, Fadlallah regards the Kitābīs as monotheists and argues that they should be called to dialogue as long as they do not commit injustices against Muslims. These regulated engagements, in theory and in practice, constitute the third tenet in Fadlallah’s attitude towards Jews and Christians. Courteous relationships with the peaceful Kitābīs is the starting point unless they commit acts of injustice or threaten the safety or the best interests of Muslims. In this case, aggression against them is justified and maintaining amicable relationships with them is forbidden or at least undesirable. In practice, however, Fadlallah calls the Christians to dialogue and mutual understanding but shuts this door in the face of the Jews as long as Israel exists. The reasons for this division have a political dimension.

Although Fadlallah argues that he differentiates between Judaism as a monotheistic religion and Zionism as a political movement, this remains true only on the theoretical level.¹⁴³⁹ In practice, he does not differentiate between the two even in terms of terminology. He, more often than not, uses the terms ‘Jew’ and ‘Zionist’ interchangeably and argues that most Jews are in fact Zionists. Even more, he holds Zionism to be a political form of Judaism that seeks to destroy Islam and Muslims. He believes that “Global Zionism,” a Qutbist borrowing he often uses, controls the world politically, economically, and culturally. The Christians who help the Jews settle down in Israel are put in the same category under the pejorative epithet of “Zionist Christians.” In effect, Fadlallah divides


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the Kitābīs into true and untrue believers, and he further divides the Christians into those who follow Jesus’ Gospel and those who support global Crusades (al-ṣalībiyya al-ʿālamīyya). On the other hand, the Jews are divided into those who follow Moses’ Torah and those who are Zionists.

Fadlallah draws heavily on the Qurʾānic criticism of the Israelites and on the Islamic narratives about the hostile encounters of Muhammad with the Jews of Medina which he mixes together with Western anti-Semitic motifs. This is done in order to paint a picture as dark as possible of the Jews of today. Thus, Fadlallah sees a continuity of all Jews from the ancient Israelites to the modern Israelis. Most of the time, Fadlallah recalls the Jews’ past to explain their present wrongdoing. He reminds his reader that this is a people who have always been stubborn, disobedient, ungrateful, hateful, and deceiving. According to Fadlallah, the Israelis of today kill the Palestinians just as their ancestors killed God’s prophets, and they hate Muslims today just as their ancestors hated Muhammad and his followers. Fadlallah constantly dissolves the chronological division between ancient Israelites and modern Israelis when he links the wrongdoings of the first with the “arrogance” of the latter, which translates into the occupation of Palestine. He often concludes that the Jews are inherently evil and that they will not change.

I have demonstrated that not only is Fadlallah’s criticism of Jews generally harsher than that of Christians but also that Fadlallah employs argumentum ad hominem against the Jews while his arguments against the Christians are more doctrinal. The Judaism which Fadlallah tolerates is the Qurʾānic “pure Judaism” which he does not seem to find in real life. All there is, in practice, is political Judaism, Zionism, and “the thing called Israel.” At the same time, when it comes to the Christians, Fadlallah softens the Qurʾānic accusations which consider the Christian doctrines tantamount to polytheism (shirk) or even unbelief (kufr).

This study concludes that Fadlallah’s more lenient attitude towards the Christians and his blatant criticism of the Jews has a sociopolitical dimension. Although Fadlallah’s encounters with the Maronite Christians were almost as hostile as his encounters with the Israelis, he could still get over the traumas caused by the first but never over those caused by the second. The atrocities committed by the Phalangists were not projected on all the Christians of Lebanon as is the case with Israel and the Jews. Fadlallah’s stand on Israel is categorical. To him, “Israel is like alcohol, it can never gain legality or lawfulness” and the Jews are untrustworthy even if they converted to Islam. To his Shiʿi audience, Fadlallah preached that the Israeli occupation is the new Karbalāʾ and that “there could be no peace between the Muslims and the Jews because God says: ‘You will certainly find that the most violent of people in enmity for those who believe to be the Jews.’” Fadlallah went as far as declaring unequivocally sinful any kind of interaction with the Jews and their allies.
Americans. Likewise, Fadlallah declared suicide operations against the citizens of Israel lawful.

The fact that the Muslims of today are politically, economically, militarily, and culturally weaker than their enemies, Israel and the USA, is unbearable for the Ayatollah. These “arrogant” powers are for Fadlallah a stumbling block to the development of the Islamic world and to the establishment of the Islamic state—the Ayatollah’s ultimate goal. With this in mind, Fadlallah came up with a theory of Islamic empowerment according to which Muslims should use all the tools available to them, both soft power and violence, in order to change their situation. These tools include education, economic empowerment, political participation, re-Islamization of secularized Muslim societies, intra-Islamic rapprochement, interfaith dialogue, and Da’wa on the one hand but also resistance and Jihad on the other hand. After all, the compilation of the MWQ commentary, which saw the light a few years after Fadlallah’s radicalization, was a step towards reaching this goal. The commentary aimed at a dynamic reading of Islam which can be roughly translated into the re-Islamization of the secularized Muslims and making the propagation of Islam and the resistance of the “arrogant powers” a style of life. At the same time, although dialogue is an important theme in MWQ and in Fadlallah’s other exegetical and non-exegetical works, it is not an aim in itself. When Fadlallah speaks of dialogue, he actually means Da’wa. The latter is not an aim in itself either but rather the way to the Islamic state; in Fadlallah’s thought, all roads lead to the Islamic state.

**ALL ROADS LEAD TO THE ISLAMIC STATE**

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**Diagram:**

- **Islamic state**
  - Da’wa
  - Resistance (Israel & USA)
  - Education
  - Economic empowerment
  - Islamic ecumenism
  - Democratic participation

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Appendix A: Main dates in the life of Fadlallah

1935  Fadlallah is born in Iraq’s Najaf.

1936  Coup d’état in Iraq.

1948  Nakba: The establishment of the State of Israel. Waves of Palestinian refugees come to Lebanon at the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war.

Fadlallah’s first poem at the age of 12 in defense of Palestine.

1952  Nasser topples the monarchy in Egypt.

Fadlallah’s first visit to Lebanon.

1958  The establishment of Hizb Da’wa.

Coup d’état in Iraq.

US marines arrive to Lebanon.

1959  Musa al-Ṣadr moves to Lebanon.

1963  Coup d’état in Iraq.

1965  Fadlallah graduates from the Shīʿī seminary.

1966  Moving to Lebanon and settling down in al-Nab’a, East-Beirut.

Fadlallah establishes the Legal Islamic Institute in Beirut.


More Palestinian refugees come to Lebanon.

The establishment of the Supreme Islamic Shīʿīte Council.
1968 Coup d’etat in Iraq.

Israel attacks Lebanon for supporting Palestinians

1975 Phalangists kill Palestinian bus passengers in Beirut in retaliation for an alleged attack on a church carried out by Palestinian guerrillas in Ain al-Rummaneh. This marks the start of the Civil War.


1976 Fadlallah appointed al-Khū’ī’s representative.

1976 Maronites drive Shi‘is out of Nab‘a.

Fadlallah’s radicalization.

1977–1978 Fadlallah settles down in Bir al-Abed (Beirut’s southern suburb).


Israel invades Lebanon.

Musa al-Ṣadr disappears in Libya.

With Muslim Student union issued al-Munṭalaq Magazine.

1979 Iranian revolution.

The first edition of MWQ appeared.

1980 Saddam’s regime attempts Fadlallah’s assassination.

1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

Fadlallah has “an advisory role in the establishment of both Amal and Hizballah.”
1983    Suicide attack on the American embassy in Lebanon.
1985    Fadlallah escapes a Saudi-American assassination attempt which left 85 killed 200 wounded.
1989    The Tāʾif Agreement.
1992    Assassination of Hizballah’s Abbas al-Moussawi by Israel.
1993    Israel attacks Southern Lebanon.
1995    Fadlallah declared himself a Marja’ taqlid.
1996    Israel attacks Hizballah bases in Southern Lebanon.
2000    The end of Israel’s 17 years of occupation in Southern Lebanon.
2005    Assassination of Rafik Hariri in a car bomb in Beirut.
2008    Assassination of Hizballah’s Imad Mughniyeh by Israel. Fadlallah’s reaction: “the resistance has lost one of its essential pillars.”
2010    Fadlallah dies at the age of 75.
## Appendix B: Index of Main Qur’ānic References

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