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الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية بإسلام آباد  
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# **RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AND INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURE**

**WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO IBN TAYMIYYAH AND  
MARTIN LUTHER**

**IN PARTIAL REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MS ISLAMIC  
STUDIES DEGREE**

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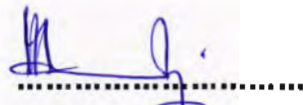
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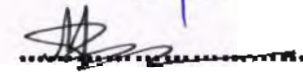
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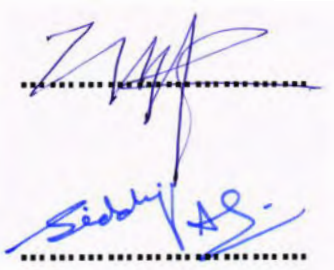


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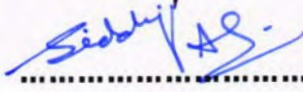
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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## DEDICATION

*"To my beloved parents and family members  
especially my brother Engr. Shahwali Khan  
without whose love and support  
this research work would  
be impossible."*

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own contribution, except where otherwise is acknowledged. No part of this thesis has been previously submitted for any other degree.

Date 01/07/017



Sarzamin Khan

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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I must be grateful to Dr. Edy for helping me in digging into the historical backdrop of Protestantism in Germany. He, moreover, provided me with some important articles and books from Germany, which proved crucial to my study. I am also indebted to Dr. Helmer Christian, Associate teacher at North West University, USA, who helped me in doing research about Martin Luther and gave me one of her books; to Ashak Naz and Adeel of the Bible Corresponding Course Institute, Rawalpindi; and to Madam Mussarat, the book keeper at Christian Study Center, Rawalpindi, who provided me with many sources about the historical backdrop of Christianity.

I am additionally appreciative of the staff of the Islamic Research Institute's library who provided me with a descent environment for my research work. Additionally, I wish to thank my friends Fahim, Ahmad Ali, and Zaib for their numerous remarks and recommendations, which enhanced both the quality and the structure of this research. Finally yet importantly, my thanks go to my family, whose prayers, consolation, help, and adoration made this work possible.

(Sarzamin Khan)

### ABSTRACT

This thesis is an endeavor to look at a typical principle “religious authority and interpretation of the scripture” with special reference to Ibn Taymiyyah (a Muslim theologian) and Martin Luther (a Christian reformer). This work has been divided into an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter is about Ibn Taymiyyah, his intellectual biography, his relations with his contemporaries, both supporters and adversaries, and his essential principles of the interpretation of the scripture. It reveals that as indicated by Ibn Taymiyyah himself the sole religious authority is the Qur’ān and Sunnah of the prophet (peace be on him).

The second chapter is about Martin Luther, his intellectual biography, his social and political commitment to society, his struggle against the authority of the Catholic Church, his rejection of the authority of the Pope and that of the Church, and his influence on the European society. In this chapter, I also talked about his fundamental principles of understanding the scripture. It has been noted that Martin Luther considers the scripture as the sole authority.

Third chapter portrays the similarities and differences between the two. It has been observed that there are many hermeneutical principles, in which the methodologies of Ibn Taymiyyah and Martin Luther are the same. Both accept the scripture as an authority in the interpretation of the scripture. In spite of the fact that the direct impact of Ibn Taymiyyah on Martin Luther has not been discovered yet, their similar approaches to the issues under study might have been the result of the demands of their times, which led them to the same methodologies with respect to the authority and the interpretation of the scripture.



## TRANSLITERATION TABLE

ا	a	ذ	dh	ف	f	ب	bb
ب	b	ر	r	ق	q	پ	ph
پ	p	ڑ	ṛ	ک	k	ت	th
ت	t	ز	z	گ	g	ٹ	ṭh
ٹ	ṭ	ژ	ẓ	ل	l	ث	ṭh
ث	th	س	s	م	m	ج	ch
ج	j	ش	sh	ن	n	ح	dh
ح	ch	ص	ṣ	و	ṣ	خ	ḫ
خ	ḫ	ض	ḍ	و	w/v	ز	rh
ز	rh	ط	ṭ	ہ	h	ک	kh
د	d	ظ	ẓ	ی	y	گ	gh
ڈ	ḍ	ع	ʿ				
		غ	gh				

### LONG VOWELS

ا	ā
ی	ī
و	ū
و	ō (kō, dō)
ے	ē (kē, sē)

### SHORT VOWELS

ا	a
ی	i
و	u

### DIPHTHONGS

اَ اُ	{aw Arabic ( <i>mawlānā</i> )
اَ اُ	{au Persian/Urdu ( <i>nau, naukār</i> )
اَ اُ	ay ( <i>shaykh</i> )
اَ اُ	ai ( <i>mein, kaisē, maidān, nātrang</i> )

### DOUBLED

اَ اُ	uwwa
اَ اُ	iyya

The letter ء is transliterated as a superscript comma and is not expressed when at the beginning (*adab, ṭāʾir, ṭhānā*).

The letter ع is transliterated as a superscript inverted comma (*ʿilm, maʿlām, saʿūd*).

اِ is transliterated as *ah* in pause form and *ar* in construct form (*Madīnat al-Munawwarah, Madīnah*).

Article اِ is transliterated as *al-* (*ʾl-* in construct form) whether followed by moon or sun letter (*Abūʾl, al-Shams waʾl-Qamar*).

اِ as a Persian/Urdu conjunction is transliterated as *-o* (*nazm-o qabṭ*).

Short vowel — when used in Persian/Urdu possessive or adjectival form, is transliterated as *-i* (*Bāb-i Fihri, Kalam-i-Majid*).

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## INTRODUCTION

The religious reform movements have always had deep roots in religious experiences. In the history of Islam and Christianity, these experiences brought about very influential movements. In Islam, the Qur'ān and the Sunnah provided the basis for reform movements such as Salafism. In Christianity, the Bible provided the basis for the movement of Protestantism. Some scholars like Lewis Spitz and Serajul Haque have carried out a broad survey of these movements and tried to find out the factors, which led to their emergence.

Salafī movement has primarily been influenced by the thought of Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328 CE). He rejected practices associated with Muslim theology, (*'ilm al-kalām*), philosophy, and mysticism. He wrote a book on the principles of the interpretation of the Qur'ān titled *Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*. In his *Muqaddimah*, he rejects those unauthentic interpretations of Muslim theologians, which are based on *ta'wīl* and reason. In his opinion, the best Qur'ānic exegesis is that of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī who follows the opinions (*maqālāt*) of the Salaf with a complete chain of authority. Moreover, there is no heretical innovation (*bid'ah*) in his exegesis.

The most influential work on this aspect is perhaps that of Serajul Haque, *Imām Ibn Taimīya and His Projects of Reform*. He briefly explains the teachings and views of Ibn Taymiyyah. One of the basic principles of his reform teachings is “go back to the book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet.” Beyond this, there is nothing but *bid'ah* (innovation), impiety, *shirk* (polytheism), and *kufṛ* (infidelity).

Protestant movement has primarily resulted from the thought of Martin Luther. He argued that there was no authority higher than the scripture. However, according to Martin Luther, there is no need of the Church tradition. He rejected the allegorical interpretation of the scripture because he considered the scripture as the only authority. His basic principle of “return to the scripture as sole authority”

means that the scripture has fundamental authority.<sup>1</sup> The scripture authenticates itself and the church, not the other way round.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the major Protestant principle is “the scripture alone.” Probably the most important work on this topic is *The Protestant Reformation: 1517-1559* by Lewis Spitz. Spitz surveys the reformation period of 1517-1559 and focuses on the religious reformation, which was the main characteristic of that time. Both reform movements Salafism and Protestantism in Islam and Christianity respectively, share a common principle that is “return to the scripture as the sole authority.” This study would investigate history and development of the interpretation of the scripture with special reference to Ibn Taymiyyah and Martin Luther and the impact of their reform movements on their respective societies.

#### **a) Importance of the Topic**

To the knowledge of the present researcher, there is no comparative study on the topic “religious authority and the interpretation of the scripture” with special reference to Ibn Taymiyyah and Martin Luther. “Return to the scripture as the sole authority” is one of the basic principles, which shaped Salafism and Protestantism in Islam and Christianity respectively. Islam and Christianity both are Semitic religions and have followers all over the world in large numbers.

Many controversies occurred in both religions especially about the reform movements and various questions have been raised about them. It is considered as one of the basic and common problems for both Christians and Muslims. This thesis will help those who want to know about the interpretation of the scripture (the Qur’ān and the Bible) and the principle of “return to the scripture as the sole authority,” which caused emergence of reform movements Salafism and

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<sup>1</sup> William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, revised and updated ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 47.

<sup>2</sup> Jack Rogers, *Biblical Authority* (Texas: Word Book Publisher, 1977), 24.

Protestantism in Islam and Christianity respectively. Therefore, it is important to study the impact of this principle.

#### **b) Limits of the Topic**

There have been a large number of religious reform movements and leaders. This research, however, is limited to Ibn Taymiyyah and Martin Luther with regard to the interpretation of the scripture and principle of “return to the scripture as the sole authority.”

Most of Martin Luther’s original works are available in German language. However, some of his works have also been translated into English. This research draws upon English, Urdu, and Arabic sources only. Both scholars have largely contributed to the religious studies.

#### **c) Literature Review**

According to my knowledge, there has not been done any comparative study of these two scholars viz. Ibn Taymiyyah and Martin Luther with reference to the interpretation of the scripture and principle of “return to the scripture as the sole authority” yet. However, there is some sketchy material available about how these two scholars responded to the problems of their times and brought about a fundamental reform in their respective communities. Many books and articles have been written on these scholars. However, I will discuss some of relatively more important works.

Serajul Haque in his book, *Imām Ibn Taimīya and His Projects of Reform* briefly explains the teachings and thought of Ibn Tamiyyah. The writer discussed the contribution of Ibn Taymiyyah to the interpretation of the Qur’ān. To some extent, he also discussed one of the basic principles of his reform teaching, “Go back to the book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet.” Beyond this there is nothing but *bid’ah* (heretical innovation). However, we do not find any comparative study on these scholars.

Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed also edited *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*. A number of papers address the significance and authority of the Salaf and mention that Salaf are the main point of Ibn Taymiyyah's theology. Ibn Taymiyyah challenges the dominant doctrines of the theological and legal schools and often appeals to the authority of the Salaf.

Arthur Skevington Wood in his work *Captive to the Word: Martin Luther, Doctor of Sacred Scripture*, used a detailed knowledge of the biography of Luther and his study of the Biblical text and the interpretation of the scripture. He discussed Luther's method of the interpretation of the scripture. However, he did not give examples of his Biblical interpretations.

Lewis Spitz, in his work *The Protestant Reformation: 1517-1559*, surveys the reformation period between 1517 and 1559 and focuses on the religious reformation, which was a hallmark of that era. This is an important source on the history of the modern Protestant reformation. It tells how reformation developed in Christianity.

Adam S. Francisco in his highly acclaimed work *Martin Luther and Islam: A Study in Sixteenth-Century Polemics and Apologetics* highlights the interaction between Luther and Islam. He highlights the religious and political significance of the dialogue between Christianity and Islam in the contemporary world. For him, writings of Martin Luther mark the starting point of the Protestant interaction with Islam. In this book sheds light on Luther's theological engagement with Islam.

#### **d) Research Question(s)**

This research work aims at answering the following questions:

1. Do Ibn Taymiyyah and Martin Luther have similar approaches to the question of religious authority and the interpretation of the scripture?
2. Has Martin Luther been influenced by Ibn Taymiyyah in his approach to the religious authority and the interpretation of the scripture?



### **e) Objectives of the Research**

Christianity and Islam are among the revealed religions and are found almost in every corner of the world. This research aims at:

1. finding factors, which shaped the approaches of Ibn Taymiyyah and Martin Luther to religious authority and the interpretation of the scripture;
2. describing Ibn Taymiyyah and Martin Luther as discussed by different scholars with special reference to the authority of the scripture;
3. highlighting similarities and differences found between the approaches of Ibn Taymiyyah and Martin Luther to the interpretation and authority of the scripture.

### **f) Research Methodology**

The research has been conducted primarily by applying historical and textual analysis. That is, I analyzed the historical events, which brought about the emergence of the Salafism and Protestantism with special reference to the principle of “return to the scripture as the sole authority” as proclaimed by Ibn Taymiyyah and Martin Luther. This research also makes a comparative study of the two personalities. I have used primary and secondary source, including research articles, books, and encyclopedias.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **IBN TAYMIYYAH: RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AND INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURE**

### 1.1. Aḥmad b. Taymiyyah: An Intellectual Biography

Abū 'l 'Abbās Taqī' l-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm b. 'Abd al-Salām b. 'Abd Allāh b. al-Khiḍr b. Muḥammad b. al-Khiḍr b. 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh b. Taymiyyah al-Ḥarrānī was born at Ḥarrān<sup>3</sup> on Rabī ' al-Awwal 10, 661/January 22, 1263 and died at Damascus on Dhū 'l-Qa'dah 20, 728/September 26, 1328.<sup>4</sup> He is commonly known as Ibn Taymiyyah.

He is called Ibn Taymiyyah, because it is said that Muḥammad b. al-Khiḍr, one of his great-grandfathers, went once on a pilgrimage to Makkah. While crossing through the entrance gate of Taymā' (a small city near Tabūk), he noticed a young she-child coming out of a tent. When he returned back to his home and saw his beautiful newborn daughter, all of sudden he recalled that lovely she-child whom he had seen at Taymā' and exclaimed, "Yā Taymiyyah, Yā Taymiyyah" (O, the child of Taymā'). Muḥammad b. al-Khiḍr named that child Taymiyyah and subsequently this name became a title in this family.<sup>5</sup>

Ibn Taymiyyah was, since his childhood, very extraordinary and intelligent. He never wasted his time in useless activities. Due to Mongol invasion, his family had to move to Damascus, which was then under the rule of Mamlūks of Egypt. There, his father started delivering sermons in Umayyad Mosque. Ibn Taymiyyah studied under the prominent scholars of his time and followed his father's footsteps.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A city famous for being a center of Ḥanbalī jurisprudence. Now it is a town of Şanlıurfa province of modern Turkey (Tamara M. Green, *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran* [Leiden: Brill, 1992], 6).

<sup>4</sup> H. Laoust, "Ibn Taymiyya," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. B. Lewis et al., 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 3:951.

<sup>5</sup> Muḥammad Abū Zahrah, *Ibn Taymiyyah: Ḥayātuhu wa āthāruhu wa fiqhuh* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1991), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 17.

Damascus was, then, the center of Islamic sciences, where his father was the Director of the Sukkariyyah Madrasah. His father was a great scholar of Ḥanbalī School. Here Ibn Taymiyyah received excellent education. He memorized the Qur'ān in early age and studied the Qur'ānic exegesis, ḥadīth, fiqh, uṣūl al-fiqh, Arabic grammar and Muslim theology, etc. He also received knowledge from a number of other renowned scholars.<sup>7</sup> He graduated at the age of nineteen.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Some of them are 'Abū 'l-Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Dā'im al-Maqdasī (d. 668 AH) and 'Abū 'l-Naṣr 'Abd al-'Azīz b. 'Abd al-Mun'im (d. 672 AH) (Aḥmad b. Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, [Rabat: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, n.d.], 18:77).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 18:19.

## 1.2. The Influence of Ibn Taymiyyah

Ibn Taymiyyah's endeavors and his reformist struggles to empower the call towards coming back to the purified religion and the impact of his *da'wah* were felt much beyond Syria and Egypt, where he lived. The legacy of Ibn Taymiyyah continued in the form of scholars, organizations, and movements, which advanced the call to *tawhīd*. They benefited enormously from his wisdom and works regarding religious beliefs. The essence of Ibn Taymiyyah's *da'wah* is as follows:

1. Establishment of the perfect worship of Allah against all symptoms of *shirk*;
2. Understanding of religion in the light of the Qur'ān and Sunnah and clarification of doubts about the religion;
3. Appreciation of the teachings of all scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah and opposition to the blind imitation of jurists (*taqlīd*);
4. Call for the complete implementation of Islamic precepts.

### 1.3. What is Authority?

One can trace the etymological root of the English word “authority” to the Latin word *auctoritas* whose meanings include invention, advice, opinion, influence, or command. The word “authority,” in English, also connotes power.<sup>9</sup>

According to the Webster’s Dictionary, it means “the power to influence or command through opinion, behavior or right.”<sup>10</sup> According to Margaret Ann Faeth, “Authority is a quality that makes something seems true or real.”<sup>11</sup>

Weber describes three types of authority traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational authority. Traditional authority is associated with one’s ancestors and does not change in society. Charismatic authority is related to the religious leaders’ influence on society. Legal-rational authority is derived from a set of uniform principles. This type of authority is found in modern states, cities, and public sector.<sup>12</sup>

This is a general view of the authority. However, when one associates the authority with religion, it signifies religious authority.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Angus Stevenson, ed., *Oxford Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> *Webster’s Dictionary* (Perfection Learning Corporation, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Ann Faeth, *Power, Authority, and Influence: A Comparative Study of the Behavioral Influence Tactics Used by Lay and Ordained Leaders in the Episcopal Church* (Virginia: Falls Church, 2004), 8.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony T. Kronman, *Max Weber* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 44.

<sup>13</sup> For details, see Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke, “Introduction: Religious Authority and Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies: A Critical Overview,” in *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*, ed. Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1-15.

#### **1.4. What is Religious Authority?**

Although Religious authority is a much disputed issue in medieval and modern times, but our inquiry deals with medieval time, which is the period of Ibn Taymiyyah.

The religious authority performs a number of functions: the ability (power, right) to define correct belief and practice in monotheistic religions, which have revealed scriptures. Religious authority further involves the ability to define the canon, “authoritative” text and the legitimate method of interpretation. Religious authority can also be applied to and exercised by individuals, groups of the people or institutions.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 2.

### 1.5. Who Has the Religious Authority?

Religious authority, in Islam, is derived from the normative texts of the Qur'ān and Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be on him). One who has the authentic knowledge of the Qur'ān and Sunnah has authority over those who do not have this knowledge such as the caliphs, sultans or other rulers in the premodern as well as modern times. It is clear that the Qur'ān and Sunnah are the pristine sources of religious authority.

The Qur'ān and the Sunnah are considered the religious authority in Muslim society. Although Muslim scholars agree to this. However, the issue is how to implement the Qur'ān and Sunnah as religious authority. In the era of Ibn Taymiyyah, there were many theological schools of thought and extremist Sufis who interpreted the Qur'ān applying some *ta'wīl* and tradition. According to Ibn Taymiyyah though, these schools of thought gave arguments from the Qur'ān and the Sunnah but they added to them some kind of wrong *ta'wīl*.

Ibn Taymiyyah strongly criticized Muslim theology (*'ilm al-kalām*) and attacked Sufism especially its doctrine of the “unity of Being.” He also denied blind acceptance of the views of the legal authorities (*taqlīd*). He mentions that the final authoritative source is the Qur'ān and Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be on him) along with the examples of the earlier ancestors, the Salaf.

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, there is no need for *ta'wīl* in the scripture because only the Salaf have the authority to interpret the scripture as the Prophet (peace be on him) explained all words of the Qur'ān and their meaning to his companions. Ibn Taymiyyah based his arguments on the Qur'ān and cited following verses from the Qur'ān:

And We sent down the Reminder (the Qur'ān) to you, so that you explain to the people what has been revealed for them, and so that they may ponder. (16:44)<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> (16:44) ﴿وَأَنزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِيُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ﴾



We have sent down the Book to you, only because you may explain to them what they differed about, and (so that it may be) guidance and mercy for a people who believe. (16:64)<sup>16</sup>

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(16:64) ﴿وَمَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا لِتُبَيِّنَ لَهُمُ الَّذِي اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ﴾<sup>16</sup>

## 1.6. Polemical Debates

In Ibn Taymiyyah's time many people and groups opposed his views. For him, they went astray and committed *bid'ah* (heretical innovation). Ibn Taymiyyah wrote many books and treatises against them. He also criticized them for doing wrong metaphorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the scriptures. By Muslim theologians (*mutakallimūn*), Ibn Taymiyyah means the Mu'tazilites,<sup>17</sup> the Ash'arites,<sup>18</sup> the Jahmites,<sup>19</sup> and the Qadarites.<sup>20</sup> For him, these groups went astray and committed heretical innovation (*bid'ah*).

Ibn Taymiyyah also criticized the Mu'tazilites for doing *ta'wīl* (metaphorical interpretation) of the Qur'ān. According to him, their Qur'ānic interpretations were based on mere reason. That was the violation of basic principles of the Qur'ānic interpretation and of the concept of *ta'wīl* as understood by him. They wrote many Qur'ānic commentaries on the basis of their wrong beliefs, he warns. These include, among others, the Qur'ānic exegesis written by

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<sup>17</sup> The Mu'tazilite theology emerged at the beginning of the second century AH (80 AH-131AH) in Basra in the late Umayyad period and flourished in the Abbasid period. Wāṣil b. 'Aṭā (d. 131/748) was the founder of this theological school. For further study, see William Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1973), 213; Michael Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 94.

<sup>18</sup> The Ash'arite theology is an early theological school of Islam (Sunni in particular). The founder of this theological school was Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936). The followers of the school are known as Ash'arites.

<sup>19</sup> The Jahmite theological school that appeared in the second century AH refers to the followers of Jahm b. Safwān. He called for fatalism and denied human freedom.

<sup>20</sup> The first Islamic sect who appeared at the beginning of the reign of the Umayyad Caliph 'Umar b. Abd al-'Azīz. According to Qadarites, Allah gave humans free will, without which one cannot be fully accountable for their actions. They also believe that Allah does not know a person's actions in prior to their occurrence.

Ibrāhīm ‘Ulayyah (d. 218 AH);<sup>21</sup> the book authored by Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad ‘Abd al- Wahhāb al-Jubā’ī (d. 303 AH); *al-Tafsīr al- Kabīr* written by al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al- Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī (d. 415 AH);<sup>22</sup> the book authored by ‘Abū ‘l- Ḥasan ‘Alī b. ‘Isā Rummānī (d. 382 AH); and *al-Tafsīr al Kashshāf* by Abū ‘l-Qāsim al- Zamakhsharī. These all theologians were Mu‘tazilites.<sup>23</sup>

The Mu‘tazilites often used their reason for determining right and wrong. They employ the reason-based method of interpreting the Qur’ān. According to them, the scripture should be rationally accepted. For Ibn Taymiyyah, however, their interpretation should not be fully trusted. Because such types of rational discussions were not found in the Qur’ānic commentaries of the Salaf. Some of these exegeses are unique in terms of their contents. However, they also include heretical innovations, in such a manner that a layman cannot notice them. Ibn Taymiyyah takes *al-Tafsīr al-Kashshāf* as an example. Al-Zamakhsharī promoted wrong (*bāṭil*) beliefs among the people. Many groups emerged among Muslims like Rawāfiḍ, Imāmiyyah, and philosophers who further popularized wrong concepts and beliefs among Muslim.<sup>24</sup>

Following are some examples of Rawāfiḍ’s interpretations of the Qur’ānic verses, which Ibn Taymiyyah mentioned in his *Muqaddimah*:

- a. “If you should associate with Allah, your work would surely become worthless, and you would surely be among the loser”<sup>25</sup> (39:65). Rawāfiḍ

<sup>21</sup> Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Lisān al-mīzān* (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-A‘lamī li ‘l-Maṭbū‘āt, 1971), 1:34.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 3:376.

<sup>23</sup> Aḥmad b. Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*, ed. ‘Adnān Zarzūr (Kuwait: Dār al-Qur’ān al-Karīm, 1971), 83.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>25</sup> (لَئِنْ أَنتُم مِّنْ عِندِي لَتَكُونُنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ) (39:65).

interpreted this verse as “if you (O’ Prophet) made Abū Bakr and ‘Umar partners with ‘Alī in caliphate, your good deeds will be invalid.

- b. “Indeed Allah commands you to slaughter a cow”<sup>26</sup> (2:67). Rawāfiḍ hold that here the word “cow” refers to ‘Ā’ishah.
- c. “He released the two seas”<sup>27</sup> (55:19). According to Rawāfiḍ, here “two seas” signify ‘Alī and Fāṭimah.
- d. “Emerge pearl and coral”<sup>28</sup> (55:22). According to Rawāfiḍ, “pearl and coral” means Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.
- e. “And all things we have enumerated in a clear register”<sup>29</sup> (36:12). For them, “clear register” means ‘Alī.<sup>30</sup>

These are some examples of the invalid interpretation of the Qur’ān, which Ibn Taymiyyah mentioned in his *Muqaddimah*.

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<sup>26</sup> (2:67) (إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَذْبَحُوا بَقَرَةً).

<sup>27</sup> (55:19) (مَرَجَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ يَلْتَقِيَانِ).

<sup>28</sup> (55:22) (يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا الْكُوفُ وَالْمِزَانُ).

<sup>29</sup> (33:12) (وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُبِينٍ).

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah*, 87.

## 1.7. Interpretation of the Scripture

The interpretation of the scripture depends on sufficient religious knowledge. To interpret the foundational texts of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, one needs to have a good understanding of the religious knowledge. Although, many Muslim scholars have worked on the interpretation of the scripture and got their place and position in their respective communities, there are still some questions, which need to be addressed.

- a. Who has the right to interpret the Qur'ān?
- b. What are the basic principles of interpreting the Qur'ān?

Though many scholars have addressed these issues, we will restrict our discussion to the views of Ibn Taymiyyah alone.

Why did Ibn Taymiyyah feel it necessary to write *Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* (An Introduction to the Qur'ānic Hermeneutics)? As he himself explained it, some of his friends asked him to write an introduction containing general principles, which would help them in understanding the Qur'ān. Furthermore, the *Muqaddimah* was intended to help the reader in differentiating the correct Qur'ānic interpretation from the erroneous one and to serve as a criterion for identifying the correct opinions. Such a criterion is necessary, he states, because there are many Qur'ānic commentaries in which strong opinions have been mixed with weak ones and the true with the groundless. Some of these Qur'ānic commentaries are based on valid reasoning, other are not. Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes that Muslim community is in dire need of understanding the Qur'ān in a way, which must not be deviated from the truth.<sup>31</sup>

In his introduction to *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Taymiyyah does not reject all Qur'ānic exegeses of his contemporaries as being groundless. He observes that some of them are authentic while others not. Nor does he hold that all schools of

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 10.

Islamic thought have erred in their interpretations of the Qur'ān. He only suggests that some of exegeses are based on correct understanding of the Qur'ān while others are unfounded. Later in his *Muqaddimah* as well as in his other writings, he, however, expresses his concerns about the ever growing number of the Qur'ānic interpretations, which contradict the beliefs of the Salaf. He points out false opinions on which such interpretations were based. He criticizes them from rational and scriptural points of view. What disturbed him most were the people who, in his view, had gone astray and claimed that their understanding of the Qur'ān was correct, though it contradicted the views of the Salaf.

Although in some respects, Ibn Taymiyyah differed with those of the mainstream Muslim jurists, he shared with them fundamental convictions regarding the authority of revelation and the Prophetic traditions as well as the authenticity of the Qur'ānic interpretations of the companions and their followers. As a result, Ibn Taymiyyah recognized efforts of these scholars and was far from accusing them of having gone astray or committing heretical innovation in religion.

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## 1.8. Qur'ānic Hermeneutics

In the following lines, we will elaborate some Qur'ānic hermeneutics as explained by Ibn Taymiyyah in his *Muqadamah*:

- a. Interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān itself
- b. Interpretation of the Qur'ān by Prophetic traditions
- c. Interpretation of the Qur'ān by sayings of the companions of the Prophet (peace be on him)
- d. Interpretation of the Qur'ān by the opinions of the followers of the companions of the Prophet (peace be on him)
- e. Interpretation of the Qur'ān by Israelite traditions (*Isrā'īliyyāt*)<sup>32</sup>

### 1.8.1 Interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān Itself

What comes in one Qur'ānic verse inexplicitly is often explained in some other Qur'ānic verse explicitly. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, interpreting one verse of the Qur'ān by another verse of the Qur'ān is the best method of the Qur'ānic exegesis. If a verse cannot be explained in light of some other Qur'ānic verse, then one should turn to the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be on him). The second method will apply to the interpretation of the Qur'ān based on the Sunnah. Ibn Taymiyyah follows famous Muslim jurist Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī who maintains that the statements of the Prophet (peace be on him) regarding the Qur'ānic exegesis represent his understanding of the Qur'ān and are derived from the Qur'ān itself.<sup>33</sup> The Prophet knew and understood Allah and His teachings better than anyone else

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<sup>32</sup>His method is repeatedly referred to by many scholars of Qur'ānic studies when they come to a discussion of Qur'ānic interpretation by tradition (*tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr*). Ibn Taymiyyah is deemed to be the thinker who laid the scriptural and rational foundation of this school (see Abū Zahrah, *Ibn Taymiyyah*, 220-236).

<sup>33</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah*, 93.

understood. Therefore, his interpretation must take precedence over the interpretations of all other people.<sup>34</sup>

### 1.8.2 Interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Sunnah of the Prophet

In Ibn Taymiyyah's view, many verses were revealed to instruct the Prophet (peace be on him) to explain the Qur'ān to the companions.<sup>35</sup> Due to this, the Prophet (peace be on him) said: "Remember, I have been given the Qur'ān and what is similar to it." For Ibn Taymiyyah, "what is similar to the Qur'ān" is the Sunnah.<sup>36</sup> He further explains that the Sunnah is also a form of revelation with one difference that the latter is recited in the prayers while the former not. An argument for Sunnah's being an interpretive source of the Qur'ān lies in the narration of the companion Ma'ādh b. Jabal. When he was sent to Yemen as a Governor, the Prophet (peace be on him) asked him, "By what will you make decisions?" He answered, "By the Qur'ān." The Prophet asked, "If the solution is not found in the Qur'ān?" Ma'ādh said, "By the traditions of the Prophet." The Prophet asked again, "If the tradition also fails to give you the solution?" He said, "I will make a decision by my own estimation." The Prophet (peace be on him) expressed his approval of that answer.<sup>37</sup>

In Taymiyyah's analysis, the method of the Qur'ānic interpretation is not limited to the Qur'ān itself and the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be on him). If the explanation of the Qur'ān is not found in either of them, then interpreter should refer to the sayings of the companions and their righteous followers whom he calls the Salaf.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 13:136.

<sup>35</sup> For instance, see the Qur'ānic verses (16:44;16:64) mentioned above.

<sup>36</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū'at al-Rasā'il wa 'l-Masā'il*, vols. 1-3 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1992), 200.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddima*, 105.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-105.



### 1.8.3 Interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Saying of the Companions

For Ibn Taymiyyah, the Salaf are the companions of the Prophet (peace be on him). It is his strong conviction that the Prophet explained every word of the Qur'ān to his companions. This belief derives from certain Qur'ānic verses,<sup>39</sup> prove that the Prophet (peace be on him) elaborated the Qur'ān to his companions.

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, not all companions had equal authority of interpreting the Qur'ān, however. Those who had the authority and sufficient knowledge of the Qur'ān included learned companions as 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd and 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās. Ibn Taymiyyah describes that Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī stated, "'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd said, 'I swear there is no God except Him. With regard to every single verse that was revealed, I know about what and where it was revealed. If I knew, there was someone more knowledgeable about the Book of God than me . . . I would have surely visited him.'"<sup>40</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah also quotes al-A'mash saying that Mujāhid said: "If I read the reading of Ibn Mas'ūd, I do not feel any need to ask much from Ibn 'Abbās."<sup>41</sup> By the above quotation, Ibn Taymiyyah obviously intends to stress that certain companions were more actively engaged in the study of the Qur'ān than others were and that they had valuable knowledge of the Qur'ān. Hence, there remains no doubt in their authority of explaining the Qur'ān.

The companions had the authority not only because they received the knowledge of the Qur'ān directly from the Prophet (peace be on him) but also because they had first-hand knowledge of the "occasions of revelation." They knew what circumstances a certain revelation was revealed in or about. Therefore, they

<sup>39</sup> For instance, see the Qur'ānic verses (16:44;16:64) mentioned above.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah*, 96.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

had a complete understanding of revelation. In addition, their knowledge of the Qur'ān was better than that of the later generations.<sup>42</sup>

Certainly, Ibn Taymiyyah called for the authority of the Salaf and demanded that later Muslims should follow their Qur'ānic interpretations. However, the question is which opinions of the Salaf should be followed? Because the Salaf had also their own disagreements about the interpretations of certain Qur'ānic verses and their "occasions of revelation." Ibn Taymiyyah was aware of this problem. According to him, the disagreements of the Salaf do not amount to the extent that one should reject their authority on the Qur'ānic interpretation, mainly for two reasons. First, because soundness or otherwise of available traditions can be assessed and known. Secondly, because their disagreement falls into the domain of diversity of views (*ikhtilāf tanaww'u*) not into the domain of contradiction (*ikhtilāf taḍādd*).<sup>43</sup>

#### 1.8.4 Interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Opinions of the Followers

The companions were not the only authentic source of the Qur'ānic interpretation. Because they also elaborated the meanings of the Qur'ān to their followers (*tābi'ūn*). Ibn Taymiyyah believes that the companions taught the Qur'ān to their students and that there is no Qur'ānic verse whose interpretation was not known by the companions of the Prophet (peace be on him) and their followers.<sup>44</sup> One of well-known followers is Mujāhid who says, "I learned the Qur'ān with Ibn 'Abbās. I stopped at every verse of the Qur'ān and asked him about its interpretation." On another occasion, he stated, "I studied the Qur'ān three times from the start to the end. I stopped at every verse and I asked Ibn 'Abbās about it."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>43</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, 13:381; 19:139-41.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 17:397, 415.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah*, 102.

Ibn Taymiyyah also stresses that the correct way of interpreting the Qur'ān is refer to the sayings of the companions. He emphasizes that the interpreter must follow their views, while explaining the Qur'ānic verses. The Salaf refrained from expressing any opinion about the Qur'ānic verses, whose interpretations they did not know exactly. Abū Bakr once said, "Which sky will protect me and which earth will help me to survive if I say regarding the Qur'ān things, which I do not know?" 'Uthmān b. 'Affān also said, "I did not say about the Qur'ān what I did not know." These sayings show how the Salaf refrained from expressing opinions about the Qur'ān without knowledge ( *'ilm*) and avoided giving personal opinions. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, the interpretation of the Qur'ān through mere reason is forbidden (*ḥarām*).<sup>46</sup>

#### **1.8.5 Interpretation of the Qur'ān by Israelite Traditions (*Isrā'īliyyāt*)**

Ibn Taymiyyah classified the Israelite traditions (*Isrā'īliyyāt*) into three categories. First are those Israelite traditions in which truth, without doubt, is contained. Such traditions should be accepted. The second are those Israelite traditions, which contradict the truth that has already been established by more authentic sources. These are surely rejected. Third are those Israelite traditions, which are of doubtful nature. Ibn Taymiyyah opines that such traditions should be neither accepted nor rejected.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 108-115.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

## 1.9 Critical Remarks

Ibn Taymiyyah was an ardent reformer of Muslim society. He lived in a time when many Sufis, theologians, and philosophers especially of Damascus and Syria were manipulating metaphorical interpretations (*ta'wīl*) and reason while interpreting the scripture. He possessed a profound knowledge of history and was well versed in religious sciences. He started writing books and treatises against the deviations of contemporary Sufis, theologians, and philosophers.

Ibn Taymiyyah developed Qur'ānic hermeneutics in his *Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* (An Introduction to the Qur'ānic hermeneutics). In the light of these principles, one may understand the authentic meaning and interpretation of the Qur'ān. These also included the principle of "return to the scripture as the sole authority." His approach to the interpretation and authority of the scripture consists of a number of other reliable and trustworthy principles. He had written many books on religion, including Qur'ānic commentaries. However, some of his religious works are of controversial nature and failed to receive the approval of mainstream Muslim scholars. However, his approach and insights are still relevant to the contemporary age.

He presented a simple solution to Muslims' problems. That is, without understanding the authentic teachings of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, Muslims would never progress. It was the same idea which, Shaykh Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī, Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, and Muḥammad Iqbāl, among many other Muslim reformers, supported centuries after the death of Ibn Taymiyyah.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **MARTIN LUTHER: RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AND INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURE**

## 2.1 Martin Luther: An Intellectual Biography

During the sixteenth century, the Christians of Germany as well as rest of the Christendom were living under the authority of the Church. The Church and the Pope had full authority. It was very difficult for a Christian in Germany as well as in other parts of the Christendom to stand against Pope's authority and Church Tradition. In those difficult circumstances of Germany, Martin Luther offered Christians a way to relief, by claiming that the only authority was the scripture. Moreover, he translated the Bible into German language and called the people "to return to the scripture as the sole authority." Owing to his ideology, a new Christian movement namely Protestantism started. This chapter explores the biographical account, authority and interpretation of the scripture and influence of Martin Luther during his life and afterward.

Martin Luther (originally Martin Luder or Martinus Luther), a German theologian and a leader of the Protestant reformation, was born to a poor Christian family on November 10, 1483, at the Saxon town of Eisleben in Germany and died on February 18, 1546.<sup>48</sup> His father, Hans Luder, was a miner and his mother, Margaret Ziegler, belonged to a middle-class family. They had emigrated from the farming community of Mohra.<sup>49</sup>

It was S.T Martin Tours feast day when Luther was baptized. Hans Luder gradually became the owner of a Copper mine, which was near to Mansfeld.<sup>50</sup> He

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<sup>48</sup> Julius Koestlin, *Life of Luther* (New York: n.p., 1883), 27. For further details, see Gustav König, *The Life of Martin Luther: The German Reformer* (London: Nathaniel Cooke, Milford House, 1853); James Mackinnon, *Luther and the Reformation* (New York: Russell & Russel, 1962).

<sup>49</sup> It is located in Upper Saxony, in the region of the Thuringian Timberland, and near to Eisenach. For more details, see John Rae, *Martin Luther: Student, Monk, Reformer* (London: Forgotten Books, 2013), 2-3.

<sup>50</sup> Koestlin, *Life of Luther*, 27.

wished to educate his son to become a lawyer.<sup>51</sup> For this purpose, He sent Luther to Latin schools of Magdeburg and Eisenach, situated in Mansfeld.

Martin Luther started his early education in 1488. In 1498, he went to a school run by the Brethren of the Common Life in Magdeburg.<sup>52</sup> He was matriculated from the University of Erfurt, in 1501. Erfurt was one of the most famous universities in Germany at that time.<sup>53</sup>

Martin Luther's basic beliefs include the following:

- a. The Bible is the sole authority. No other authority such as the Pope's or the church tradition can be accepted.
- b. The priesthood is a universal phenomenon and every Christian can choose to be a priest.
- c. Only two sacraments are authentic according to the Bible, i.e., Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. The remaining five must be rejected.<sup>54</sup>
- d. Salvation can be attained only through the faith and not by actions.<sup>55</sup>
- e. No visible Church was made by God where man worships for the salvation.

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<sup>51</sup> Charles Ebert Hay, *Luther the Reformer* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1898), 11.

<sup>52</sup> John Louis Nuelsen, *Luther: The Leader* (New York: n.p., n.d.), 16.

<sup>53</sup> Rae, *Martin Luther*, 22.

<sup>54</sup> Martin Luther, "A Treatise Concerning the Blessed Sacrament and Concerning the Brotherhood," in *Works of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915), 2:9.

<sup>55</sup> Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 6 October 1520," in *Works of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915), 2:284.

## 2.2 Religious Authority in the Scripture

The word authority is used in many ways and meanings, as we have already discussed in the first chapter. However, here we will focus on it only in the Christian context. The word authority has been used many times in the New Testament. For example Mark in (11: 27-33) records that the chief priests of the Temple asked Jesus Christ who had given him the authority to teach and do other certain things. Moreover, Matthew in (28:18) mentions Jesus Christ proclaiming for himself all authority in heaven and on earth.<sup>56</sup> These and many other passages in the New Testament help in understanding the concept of authority as preserved in Christian scriptures.

Religious authority in Christianity, however, has been much contested issue during medieval as well as modern times. According to Luther, the scripture has the sole authority. One notices the influence of his idea of the scriptural authority in many parts of the world, especially within Protestant Christianity.

Religious authority has a number of forms and functions, such as 1) The right to define authentic beliefs and practices in monotheistic religions, which possess the revealed scriptures. 2) It also involves the ability to define the canon i.e., authentic texts and the legitimate methods of interpretation. In Christianity, religious authority can be exercised by individuals, groups or institutions.<sup>57</sup>

In early medieval Christianity, the Roman Catholic Church had various sources of authority and guidance for understanding the scripture, like allegorical interpretation, historical events, literal interpretation, and the teachings of the fathers. The problem arose, however, when different individuals or groups used variant texts of the scriptures or their interpretations to support their particular “views” on certain issues. Before the advent of Protestantism, Catholic Church

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<sup>56</sup> <http://www.bible.ca/ef/expository-mark-11-27-33.htm>.

<sup>57</sup> John Renard, *Islam and Christianity: Theological Themes in Comparative Perspective* (London: University of California, 2011), 117-120.



monopolized the authority of interpreting the scripture in accordance with the Church tradition.<sup>58</sup>

The Bible is considered the religious authority in Christian especially Protestant society. Protestant scholars agree with this. However, the question is how to implement the Bible's religious authority. During the era of Martin Luther, many Catholic schools of thought undermined the Bible's authority by adding the Church tradition to it. Only the clergy men knew the meaning of the Bible. Before Martin Luther, some translations of the Bible were available in German language. However, these translations were not easy to understand, hence beyond the access of common people.

In April 1521, Martin Luther declared the scripture as the supreme authority at the Diet of Worms. Luther responded to Meister Eck and refused to accept the authority of the popes and councils because they contradicted each other. He argued that his conscience compelled him to obey the Word of God alone.<sup>59</sup> In another place, Luther admits only limited and qualified significance of the teaching of the Fathers. Because they are just like a guide and help and guide to understand the scripture. The only authority is the scriptures not Fathers. Because they do not have the virtue of infallibility. They are humans, while the ultimate authority is the Word of God. This explains the concept of the authority of the scriptures as understood by Luther. Although the scripture is the sole authority according to Luther, the scripture at many places needs interpretation. This led to the necessity of hermeneutics in order to interpret the scripture correctly.

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<sup>58</sup> Joseph H. Lynch, *Early Christianity: A Brief History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13.

<sup>59</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Mentor, 1955), 144.

### 2.3 Polemical Debates

Martin Luther was against certain teachings taught by the Roman Catholic Church clergy. Among these teachings were the authority, the interpretation of the scripture, and the seven sacraments i.e., Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Marriage, Penance, Holy Orders made by the Pope and the selling of indulgences.

Luther recalls in his later life that when he studied the *Epistle to the Romans*, it clearly exposed to him what God said about the forgiveness of sins and salvation. He saw a loving God who freely offered a gift of salvation through faith. While the Roman Catholic Church's teachings were against this, he rejected its claim to be the only way to human salvation. Luther also rejected the right of the Pope to excommunicate and reprimand any Christians who denied the Church authority. In *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, he accepted only two sacraments, i.e., Baptism and Eucharistic authenticated by the Bible out of seven sacraments of the Catholic Church.<sup>60</sup>

In his 95 theses, Luther challenged the authority of the Pope to receive indulgences. Luther's theses also addressed the wrong idea according to which man was given precedence over God by Catholic Church. Another point stressed that Popes were not paying enough attention to the requirements of the society. In his theses, he also wrote on indulgences, the authority of the Pope, and other issues.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of Protestantism* (New York: Facts On File, 2005), 63; also see Martin Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012); Luther, "Babylonian Captivity of the Church."

<sup>61</sup> Luther, *Basic Theological Writings*, 27.

## 2.4 Martin Luther and His Opponents

Luther's theses were one of the controversial issues of that time. Many people wrote against his reform ideas. The chief writers against Luther were Tetzel and Eck. Prierias (d. 1527) wrote a Latin dialogue against Luther's theses in June 1518. He identified the Pope with the Church of Rome, and the Church of Rome with the Universal Church, and denounced every departure from it as a heresy. Luther republished the dialogue in August 1518 with a reply.

When Prierias's and Luther's dialogue came to an end, a meeting was arranged under the Cardinal council in Augsburg. In this meeting, Thomas Cajetan (1469-1534) persuaded Luther to denounce his allegations against the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. Luther, however, refused to do so and retained his position. When Cajetan's efforts failed, he requested Johann Von Staupitz (1460-1524) to convince Luther. However, Luther constantly insisted on his view regarding Pope and the Roman Catholic Church.

The Leipzig Disputation was held between Martin Luther and John Eck at Leipzig University in June and July of 1519. The main doctrines, which were discussed in this disputation included good works, the papal primacy, free will, and indulgences. Eck argued that the Pope's authority was established by the Christ as head of the Church on the earth. Luther proclaimed that the Christ alone is the head of the Church on the earth and the heaven. He concluded that though he respected the Fathers, but he preferred the authority of the scripture.<sup>62</sup>

Although public supported Luther, both parties claimed the victory. Luther exercised, however, a deep influence on youngsters and many students left Leipzig

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<sup>62</sup> *The Lutheran World Almanac and Annual Encyclopedia* (New York: National Lutheran Council, 1923), 19.

for Wittenberg. With the passage of time, Luther involved himself in a revolutionary crusade against the Catholic Church.<sup>63</sup>

On January 22, 1521, the imperial of the Diet of Worms was opened by Emperor Charles V. They summoned to Luther to appear before the assembly and renounce his views. On April 16, 1521, Luther appeared before the assembly and vowed not to accept the authority of the Pope unless he was convinced through the scripture. On May 25, 1521, Emperor Charles V issued the Edict of the Worms against Luther, declaring him a heretic and an enemy of the state and banning his literature. While coming back to Wittenberg, Luther fled to Wartburg Castle, at Eisenach. He stayed there for a year. During this period, he continued working on the Bible. His stay in Wartburg Castle was a very constructive and creative period of his life. This was also a very useful period of his movement of reform.

Since he believed in the sole authority of the Bible, he translated the New Testament into German language. The Bible had already been translated into German language, but these translations failed to influence the public because of their expensive cost and low quality. Later on, Luther went to Wittenberg and wrote many books and pamphlets due to which his reform movement spread in Germany and other parts of the world.

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<sup>63</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classic Ethereal Library, 1882), 105.

## 2.5 Catholic Church's Interpretation of the Scripture

Before we discuss Martin Luther's principles of the interpretation of the scripture, it seems appropriate to discuss the Catholic Church's principles of the scriptural interpretation, which he mostly criticized and rejected.

According to Catholics, the Bible should be interpreted in the light of the tradition of the Catholic Church that includes the interpretations of the Church fathers, decisions of the councils, oral tradition etc. Moreover, the Catholic Church accepts the spiritual and allegorical methods of interpretation.<sup>64</sup> Whatever the Catholic Church has said, is accepted by the Catholic interpreters regarding introduction and authorship of the books of the Bible.

Following are some of the important principles of interpreting the scripture according to the Catholic Church:

First, since the church is the custodian of the scripture, it has the right to interpret the scriptures. Second, Catholics believe that Christianity is preserved in the Catholic Church in oral and written forms. They add the tradition to the Bible. Therefore, they have a repository, which has been transmitted throughout the centuries in an oral form (tradition), and in a written form (the Bible). Third, the written form is sometimes ambiguous and needs authentic interpretation.<sup>65</sup> It is difficult for common persons—who possess no knowledge of Hebrew or Greek or of the writings of the church Fathers—to interpret the scripture. Because its complications are beyond their comprehension.<sup>66</sup>

True tradition, in oral and written forms, held by the Church is known as the interpretation of the scriptures. The written tradition can only be known by the

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<sup>64</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, "The Bible in Catholic Life," in *Catholic Bible*, ed. Jean Marie Hiesberger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 14.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Sheehan, *Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine* (UK: Saint Austin Press, 2001), 13.

Church, which holds the mark of apostolicity. A Catholic author states, “Any meaning not in keeping with Scriptural grammar, context, or the concrete conditions of the Biblical writers, or not in harmony with the fact of inspiration and the spirit of the Church’s interpretation, cannot be the true sense of Scripture.”<sup>67</sup>

According to Catholics, there are two sources of revelation, which interprets each other. Unclear matters of the unwritten tradition are explained through the scripture and *vice versa*.<sup>68</sup> The Catholic Church does not confine itself to the scripture alone. Rather it is the deposit of faith in both oral and written forms. The unwritten convention (oral Tradition) might then be utilized to complement what is in the written form (the scripture).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> A. J. Maas, “Hermeneutics,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles George Herbermann (Grand Rapids, IM: Christian Classic Ethereal Library, n.d.), 7:708.

<sup>68</sup> A. M. Henry, *Introduction to Theology* (Fides: Chicago, n.d.), 1:67.

<sup>69</sup> Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Text Book of Hermeneutics* (Michigan: Baker Academy, 1970), 44.

## 2.6 Interpretation of the Scripture

According to Martin Luther, there is no need of church tradition and he rejected the allegorical interpretation of the scripture. His basic principle of “return to the scripture as the sole authority” means that the scripture has fundamental authority.<sup>70</sup> Only the scripture holds divine authority over the life and conduct of Christians. For Luther, the scripture authenticates itself and the church, not the other way around as the Catholics contended. Because for Christians the final authority is the scripture and its purpose is to speak to them of personal salvation.

Martin Luther’s hermeneutics has been discussed by many scholars.<sup>71</sup> However, Luther himself did not write about hermeneutics. It was, in fact, derived from his followers’ writings and it is attributed to him because it is based on his teachings. Most of Luther’s principles of hermeneutics were compiled by one of his followers, Mathias Phlasis. Some of his hermeneutical principles are as follows:

### 2.6.1 The Psychological Principle

The prerequisites for an interpreter are faith and illumination, which are personal as well as spiritual.<sup>72</sup> The believer should seek the guidance of the Spirit and depend on that guidance. In *Table Talk*, he writes, “We ought not to criticize, or judge the Scriptures by our mere reason, but diligently with prayer, meditate thereon, and seek their meaning.”<sup>73</sup> Since the scripture was inspired, it demands a spiritual

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<sup>70</sup> Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 47.

<sup>71</sup> Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 39-44.

<sup>72</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 54; also see Robert Grant with David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (USA: Fortress Press, 1984), 92.

<sup>73</sup> Martin Luther, *Table Talk*, trans., William Hazute (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classic Ethereal Library, n.d.), 21.

approach from the interpreters. Luther writes, “The Bible should be regarded with wholly different eyes from those with which we view other productions.”<sup>74</sup>

### 2.6.2 The Principle of the Authority

According to Luther, the Bible is considered as the supreme and final authority in theological matters, and therefore, is above all ecclesiastical authority.<sup>75</sup> Its teaching cannot be countermanded nor qualified nor subordinated to ecclesiastical authorities, whether of persons or documents.<sup>76</sup> According to Martin Luther,

That is the true method of interpretation, which puts scripture alongside scripture in a right and proper way; the father who can do this best is the best among them. And all the books of the fathers must be read with discrimination, not taking their word for granted, but looking whether they quote clear text and explain the scripture by other and clear scripture.<sup>77</sup>

### 2.6.3 The Principle of Literal Interpretation

This principle replaces the four-fold system of the scholastics. Hermeneutics had been divided by the scholastics into two divisions, the literal and the spiritual. The spiritual had been further divided into following three divisions: allegorical,<sup>78</sup> anagogical,<sup>79</sup> and tropological.<sup>80</sup> The primacy of the literal interpretation of the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>75</sup> Arthur James, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Gujranwala: ABES, 2009), 83.

<sup>76</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 53.

<sup>77</sup> Luther, “Answer,” 3:334.

<sup>78</sup> Allegorical interpretation is the interpretation of a document whereby something foreign, peculiar, or hidden is introduced into the meaning of the text, giving it a proposed deeper or real meaning (Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 223).

<sup>79</sup> Anagogical means “to lead up” and refers to the possible future or eschatological element in the text (ibid., 224).

<sup>80</sup> Tropological interpretation is specifically the interpretation of the Old Testament based on the fundamental theological unity of the two Testaments whereby something in the Old shadows, prefigures, or adumbrates something in the New. Hence what is interpreted in the Old is not foreign



scripture had been strongly maintained by Luther. In the Table Talk, he affirms, “I have grounded my preaching upon the literal word” (On God’s Word, XI).<sup>81</sup> Farrar cites him as writing, “The literal sense of Scripture alone is the whole essence of faith and of Christian theology.” Briggs cites him as saying, “Every word should be allowed to stand in its natural meaning, and that should not be abandoned unless faith forces us to it.”<sup>82</sup> In another place Luther says,

I would not have a theologian give himself to allegorizing until he has perfected himself in the grammatical and literal interpretation of the scripture; otherwise, his theology will bring him into danger as Origen discovered.<sup>83</sup>

The literal principle implies three sub-principles:

#### **2.6.3.1 Luther’s Selective Adoption of Allegorical Interpretation**

Allegorical interpretation was labeled as “dirt,” “scum,” and “obsolete loose rags,” by Luther. He linked allegorizing to a harlot and a monkey game. However, he was against that kind of allegory, which was used by Catholics. He was not adverse to allegory, if the content were Christ and not something of the papacy. In fact, his inconsistency regarding this principle has been admitted by his students as he engages himself in some typical medieval allegorization. However, in principle, he broke with it, and in much practice, he repudiated it even though he was not entirely free from it.<sup>84</sup> Luther deems the use of allegories in Christian doctrines very dangerous. He warns his fellows against allegories and urges them to accustom themselves to remain by the clear and pure text.<sup>85</sup>

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or peculiar or hidden, but rises naturally out of the text due to the relationship of the two Testaments (ibid., 223).

<sup>81</sup> Luther, *Table Talk*, 23.

<sup>82</sup> Charles Augustus Briggs, *History of the Study of Theology* (London: Duckworth, 1916), 2:107.

<sup>83</sup> Luther, “Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” 3:276.

<sup>84</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 54.

<sup>85</sup> Luther, *Table Talk*, 274.

### **2.6.3.2 Luther's Acceptance of the Primacy of the Original Languages**

Luther maintains that the original revelation of God cannot be truly understood until it is recovered from the Hebrew and Greek Testaments. Luther advises the preacher, "While a preacher may preach Christ with edification, though he may be unable to read the Scriptures in the originals, he cannot expand or maintain their teaching against the heretics without this indispensable knowledge,"<sup>86</sup> of Hebrew and Greek. Luther rightly deserve the credit for sponsoring the revival of Hebrew and Greek studies.

### **2.6.3.3 The Historical and Grammatical Principle**

As indicated by Luther, the reliable understanding of the author and his times is very important for interpretation. Historical understanding provides the reader with the essential knowledge of the contents. It is obviously connected with comprehensive knowledge of the scriptures, which enables the interpreter to understand the idioms and expressions of the scripture.<sup>87</sup>

### **2.6.4 The Sufficiency Principle**

Luther maintains that the genuine understanding of the Bible can be achieved by the sincere and capable Christians. It is held by Catholics that the scriptures are so ambiguous that their true meaning can be known only by the Teaching Ministry of the Church. According to Luther, on the contrary, the Bible belongs to all Christians. Therefore, it must not be monopolized by the Church Ministry alone. Rather, any competent Christian can interpret the scripture. The Bible is sufficiently clear to reveal its meaning to the believer, Luther maintains. Moreover, the scripture has a universe of its own and interprets itself. Where the Bible was ambiguous, the Catholics resorted to the unwritten tradition of the Church. However, for Luther,

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<sup>86</sup> Russell L. Penney, "Principles of Hermeneutics," in *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics: A Guide to the History and Practice of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2000), 55.

<sup>87</sup> Grant, *Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, 94.

the Bible contains everything that is necessary to salvation. Whatever is not in the scripture cannot be deemed necessary or an article of faith.<sup>88</sup>

### **2.6.5 The Christological Principle**

The literal interpretation of the Bible is not required for itself. Rather, finding Christ is the ultimate purpose of all interpretations.<sup>89</sup> As Luther states, “This is the correct touchstone to censure (or test) all [biblical] books if one sees if they urge Christ or not.” Smith cites Luther as saying, “If you will interpret well and securely, take Christ with you, for he is the man whom everything concerns.”<sup>90</sup>

### **2.6.6 The Holy Spirit Principle**

Another Luther’s valuable method of interpretation emphasizes that the work of the Holy Spirit should be reflected in the life of the interpreter. Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit to see precisely what a verse educates about Christ. Due to this, like Luther in the fifteenth century, today’s readers are assured that God has given through his Spirit the capacity to impartially comprehend and subjectively encounter the truths of the scripture. Making the whole Bible a Christian book is Luther’s approach. It has been carried out by the Fathers with their figurative system though Luther does it with his Christological guideline.

### **2.6.7 The Law-Gospel principle**

The Law-Gospel principle is one of the most important principles of Luther’s hermeneutics of the scripture. According to Luther, the Law and the Gospel are two different things.<sup>91</sup> Due to these, God speaks to humans. The Law deals with the knowledge of human sin, the nature of the sin, and the commandment of the God

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<sup>88</sup> T. D. Gregg, *Free Thoughts on Protestant Matters* (Dublin: W. Curry, 1847), 189.

<sup>89</sup> Grant, *Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, 44-45.

<sup>90</sup> Henry Preserved Smith, *Essays in Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1921), 78.

<sup>91</sup> Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 57.

who wills for human life what He expects from His creature to do. For Luther, the Law is God's word about human sin and imperfection whose purpose is to drive humans to their knees under a burden of guilt. On the contrary, the Gospel is God's grace and power to save. Therefore, he maintains that when someone interprets the Bible, they must distinguish between the Law and the Gospel.<sup>92</sup>

These principles led Luther to profound insights into the meaning of the scripture. Luther's many commentaries cannot be read by ordinary people and his sermons are not easily comprehended because of the vigor and profundity of his exegetical views. His exegeses are connected with his day. Like Augustine, he was a doctor of the scripture as well as a doctor of the human soul. Not merely Protestant theologians but even recent Roman Catholic historians acknowledge Luther's import for the history of the Biblical interpretation and Christian theology.

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<sup>92</sup> Luther, *Table Talk*, 129-130.

## **2.7 Critical Remarks**

The sixteenth-century Europe witnessed Martin Luther's ideas of reformation. He opened a way for Christians to challenge the authority of the Pope and Church tradition and called for "return to the scripture as the sole authority." He contributed to the development of the modern reformed Christian world. He put all his efforts in the difficult conditions of the German reformation in order to realize modern reform principles and later led his people to the contemporary reformation.

Luther, likewise, built up his understanding of the scripture from his own different experiences, as seen in the significant impact that his individual change had upon his understanding of the role of the scripture in the adherent's life and the authority it had in the matters of faith. Luther's perspective of the scripture was predominantly guided by the scripture itself, providing him with a foundation whereupon he assembled his resolution to withstand the authority of the Roman Church.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN IBN TAYMIYYAH'S AND MARTIN LUTHER'S APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AND INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURE**

There are many similarities and differences between Ibn Taymiyyah and Martin Luther regarding the religious authority and interpretation of the scripture. I could not find any documentary evidence, which should indicate that Martin Luther was aware of any works of Ibn Taymiyyah. It was perhaps the demand of the time and conditions, which led both scholars to hold certain similar views regarding religious authority and interpretation of the scripture. A comparison between the approaches and works of Ibn Taymiyyah and Martin Luther is below.

### 3.1 Ibn Taymiyyah and Martin Luther on Religious Authority

Ibn Taymiyyah and Martin Luther both were well-known religious scholars and reformers of their times. When we critically analyze their views about religious authority, we find that both scholars have the same approach, that is, “only religious authority is the scripture.” In the era of Ibn Taymiyyah, there were many theological schools which held heretical views and extremist Sufis who misinterpreted the Qur’ān with the addition of some *ta’wīl* and tradition. Ibn Taymiyyah criticizes speculative theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*) and various forms of Sufism especially its doctrine of the “unity of Being.” He also rejected the blind acceptance of the *taqlīd*. He mentions that the final authoritative source is the Qur’ān and Sunnah of the Prophet along with the examples set by the earlier generations, the Salaf.

Similarly, in the era of Martin Luther, many Catholic schools of thought interpreted the Bible in the light of the Church tradition. The Pope and the Church tradition were also considered as authority. Martin Luther strongly criticized the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Oriental Church for their acceptance of the Bible as only one of the authorities among other authorities such as the moral unanimity of the Fathers, the ancient Creeds, the decisions of the ecumenical councils, and oral tradition.

Although, in many aspects, both scholars have similar approaches to the religious authority, in some aspects, however, Ibn Taymiyyah differs with Martin Luther because the former accepts the authority of *ijmā’* (consensus) and the Salaf while Luther has no concept of *ijmā’* or Salaf. One reason is that there are differences between the historical development of Islam and Christianity. The early period of Islam was overall favorable and Islam swiftly expanded in the Arabian Peninsula. The companions of the Prophet (peace be on him) himself and their followers preserved the knowledge from them. That is, why they are called the Salaf. Ibn Taymiyyah also accepts the authority of the Salaf, Sunnah, and *ijmā’*. *Ijmā’* is also based on the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (peace be on him). On the other hand, Christianity from the very beginning faced many difficulties. Teachings of



Jesus Christ could not be completely preserved by his immediate followers. They were under the influence of the Jewish, Greek, and Roman culture. Due to these reasons, they were not able to preserve the teaching of Jesus Christ in a way the companions of the Prophet (peace be on him) could. For these reasons, Martin Luther perhaps did not mention the authority of the Salaf and *ijmā'* in his writings.

## 3.2 Ibn Taymiyyah's and Martin Luther's Principles of Interpretation

One can point out many similarities found in both scholars' approaches to the principles of interpretation. Both emphasize that people are in dire need of authentic understanding of their sacred scripture. *Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* of Ibn Taymiyyah and the German translation of the Bible as well as other works of Martin Luther related to the principles of interpretation were intended, in their respective contexts, to help the reader in differentiating the correct interpretation of the scripture from the erroneous one and to serve as a criterion for identifying the correct opinions. Such a criterion was inevitable because both scholars realized that there were many normative texts about which strong opinions had been mixed with weak ones, and the true with the groundless. Following are some common approaches regarding the principles of the interpretation of the scriptures by both scholars.

### 3.2.1 The Scripture Interprets Itself

In Ibn Taymiyyah's view, the best interpretation of the Qur'ān is to interpret the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān itself. What comes in one Qur'ānic verse implicitly is often explained in another verse explicitly. For him, this is the ideal method of exegesis. Luther, on the other hand, has the same principle, which suggests, "One passage must be explained by another." According to him, an unclear and doubtful passage must be explained by a clear and certain passage. This is the best method of interpretation as he mentions at one place.

That is the true method of interpretation, which puts scripture alongside scripture in a right and proper way; the father who can do this best is the best among them.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Luther, "Answer," 3:334.

Therefore, both scholars adopted the same approaches to the interpretation of the scripture. According to both Martin Luther and Ibn Taymiyyah, “to interpret the scripture through the scripture itself” is very essential and necessary for the interpretation of the scriptures.

### **3.2.2 The Literal, Grammatical Meaning**

Ibn Taymiyyah criticizes exegeses in which metaphorical interpretation is adopted instead of the original and literal meaning of the verses. He cites a number of examples of these kinds of interpretations in his *Muqaddimah* as we have discussed in the first chapter.

Similarly, Martin Luther strongly maintained the primacy of the literal interpretation of the scripture. Propp cites him as writing, “The literal sense of Scripture alone is the whole essence of faith and of Christian theology.”<sup>94</sup> However, when the content is Jesus Christ and not papacy, he accepted the allegorical meanings as well. On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyyah strictly followed his principle of literal meaning and never abandoned it.

### **3.2.3 The Sufficiency Principle**

Ibn Taymiyyah was capable of understanding the meaning of the scripture. He rejected blind following of the previous authorities. He holds that the Qur’ān belongs to all Muslims who have the right to understand it independently. Because it is a clear book with no ambiguity.

Martin Luther was a devout and competent Christian, having capability of understanding the Bible and thereby did not think that he needed the official guides to the interpretation offered by the Roman Catholic Church. He stressed that the Bible is a self-explanatory book, hence belonged to all Christians.

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<sup>94</sup> Steven H. Propp, *And with All Your Mind: A Novel about Evangelical Theology* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2010), 61.

### 3.2.4 Rational Interpretation is Forbidden

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, the Mu'tazilites often depended on reason in determining right and wrong. They applied the same rational method to the interpretation of the scripture. Their exegeses are not completely reliable because such types of rationalistic debates are not found in the exegeses of the Salaf who forbade interpretations based on reason alone.<sup>95</sup>

Similarly, Martin Luther rejects the rational interpretation of the scripture as he writes in his *Table Talk*, "We ought not to criticize, or judge the Scriptures by our mere reason, but diligently, with prayer, meditate thereon, and seek their meaning" (*On God's Word*, IV).

It is, nevertheless, pertinent to mention that Luther had had an inclination to rational interpretation in his early life. However, later on he rejected such an attitude. On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyyah denounced the rationalistic interpretations throughout his life.

### 3.2.5 Primacy of the Original Languages

Ibn Taymiyyah was an expert in the original language of the Qur'ān, which is Arabic. He studied Arabic language, for instance, with 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Qawī and became well versed in the famous Arabic grammar book of Sībawayh. Luther also held that the original revelation of God could only be truly understood if it is studied through the Hebrew and Greek Testaments. He did a great deal to sponsor the revival of Hebrew and Greek studies. Both scholars emphasized the importance of the original language, which is necessary for the interpretation of the scripture.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah*, 65.

### 3.2.6 Philosophical (*Ta'wīl* and Allegorical) Interpretation of the Scripture

Ibn Taymiyyah rejects invalid *ta'wīl*. He laments that some exegeses use *ta'wīl* instead of the original meaning. The *ta'wīl* does not clarify the correct meaning of the text. For this reason, many wrong interpretations crept into *al-Tafsīr al-Kashshāf* and other Qur'ānic exegeses of the Mu'tazilites.

Martin Luther also rejects the allegorical interpretation of the scripture. This was, however, his opinion about the allegorical interpretations made by Catholics. He himself sometimes resorted to the allegorical meaning when the subject was Christ.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Luther, *Table Talk*, 129.

### 3.3 Critical Remarks

In the final analysis, however, both scholars have similar approaches to the necessity of understanding the divine text in its original meaning, which is literal and grammatical. Moreover, they are said to have good command on the original languages of their scriptures, which is the basic requirement for the literal interpretation of the scriptures.

Both scholars hold that interpretations based on mere reason are forbidden. In Islam, there are two kinds of exegeses: one is called “*tafsīr bi 'l-ma'thūr*” (exegesis based on traditions) while the other is called “*tafsīr bi 'l-ra'y*” (exegesis based on reason). *Tafsīr bi 'l-ra'y* is a reason-based interpretation of the scripture. Ibn Taymiyyah rejects this kind of interpretation. In medieval Christianity, biblical hermeneutics also included the allegorical method, which relied on reason. Luther, However, rejected such type of interpretive method.

In sum, both scholars have similar approaches to universalizing the right of understanding the scriptures. The scriptures were not revealed to be understood only by a small group of people. Rather every qualified person has the right to understand them.

## CONCLUSION

Ibn Taymiyyah devoted most of his life to reform Muslim society in Damascus and Syria. He called upon Muslim community to purify their beliefs and practices. His basic principle was “return to the Qur’ān and Sunnah as the sole authority.” What he aimed was to restore the early Islamic spirituality and devotion to religion. He rejected certain views associated with Muslim theology, philosophy, and mysticism. He wrote a book on Qur’ānic hermeneutics titled *Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* in which he rejected those unauthentic interpretations of Muslim theologians, which were based on invalid *ta’wīl* and reason.

He strived to purify the religion in light of the Qur’ān and Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be on him). He strongly advocated for following the authority of the Salaf and contributed to the development of the reformed Muslim community on the pattern of the early three generations, the Salaf. The impact of his reformist thought can be noticed much beyond Egypt and Syria, where he lived. He inspired many new Salafist Movements and individuals during the late medieval and modern period such as the movements of Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb in Arabia, of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Asadabādī, and of Ahl al-Hadīth of the Indian subcontinent, to name a few.

Martin Luther was perhaps one of the most influential persons in modern European religious history. When Christian community was suffering from enormous problems at the hands of Catholicism, he rendered his services to the reformation. Most parts of the Europe were then under control of Roman Catholic Church. The Pope and the Church tradition were considered infallible authority. Only popes had the right to interpret the scriptures. Luther strove to show his coreligionists how to live a true Christian life. His keen interest in religion, especially in the Bible, provided a basis for his later works of reformation.

Initially, Luther faced a lot of resistance and criticism from the Catholic authorities. However, his work was later gradually acknowledged by many

Christians. His German translation of the Bible opened new vistas for Christian reformation. Luther likewise built up his understanding of the scripture from personal experiences, as seen in the significant impact his individual change had upon his understanding of the scripture. Luther's perspective of the scripture was, predominantly guided by the scripture itself.

Approaches of both scholars were identical in many ways because in their times both religions were under the influence of Greek philosophy. When Islam expanded beyond the Arabian Peninsula, Muslims had to directly interact with different cultures, religions, and philosophical trends. They also confronted with new situations and intellectual challenges for which they had to devise new disciplines and methods. In addition to the Qur'ān, they used rational and philosophical thought in order to present and explain the Islamic concepts and doctrines. To the time of Ibn Taymiyyah, these types of doctrines were on the peak. Working in this background, he rejected the philosophical thought and called for the purification of religion. Contrary to this, Christianity from the very beginning faced such philosophical problems because of its historical context. Jesus and his followers were living in the midst of political and cultural tension. Christians had to live under the influence of the Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures after Jesus Christ.<sup>97</sup> This led them to adopt many ideas from the Greek philosophy. This also explains why from the very beginning Christian interpretations were based on philosophy. Like Ibn Taymiyyah, Luther also rejected philosophical interpretations.

According to both scholars, one needs nothing in addition to the scripture. Because the scripture is enough for leading one to the salvation. Every qualified person should study the scripture independently and abandon the blind imitation of their religious leaders. Therefore, one principle common among them is "return to the scripture as the sole authority." Only the scripture holds divine authority for the life and conduct of both Muslims and Christians. Luther stresses that the scripture

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<sup>97</sup> Lynch, *Early Christianity*, 13.



authenticates itself and the church, not the other way around. Both urged their respective communities to return to the pristine religious teachings and distinguish the distorted tradition and heretical innovation from the pure religious tenets.

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