

# IBRĀHĪM ‘UMAR AL-BIQĀ’Ī: EMBRACING PREVIOUS TRADITIONS THROUGH INTERTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION

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**Abstract:** This article delves into the scholarly contributions of al-Biqā’ī, a thinker whose intellectual journey unfolded amidst the turbulent backdrop of the Crusades, a period marked by intense horizontal conflicts between Muslims and Christians. Despite the charged atmosphere of polemical exchanges, al-Biqā’ī’s approach to intertextual interpretation sets him apart as a unique figure. His receptivity to Christian and Jewish traditions in his Qur’anic interpretations reflects an openness that defies the prevailing discord. This study scrutinizes al-Biqā’ī’s perspective on the status of the Gospel and the Torah within the realm of Qur’anic interpretation. Employing textual analysis, we argue that al-Biqā’ī permits references to the Gospel and the Torah as complementary sources (*isti’nās*) within the interpretive framework. However, he restricts their use as foundational or legal arguments (*istidlāl* and *ihtijāj*), particularly in theological or doctrinal matters. Within the theological context, al-Biqā’ī advocates against referencing the Gospel or the Torah. Nevertheless, when these references are confined to the complementary realm, such as citing historical narratives more elaborately detailed in the Gospel and Torah, they enrich insight, knowledge, and the narrative fabric of Qur’anic interpretation.

**Keywords:** Al-Biqā’ī, intertextual, Bible, Qur’anic interpretation.

**Abstrak:** Artikel ini berusaha untuk menggali kontribusi al-Biqā’ī, seorang pemikir yang hidup di tengah gejolak Perang Salib yang ditandai dengan konflik horizontal yang intens antara Muslim dan Kristen. Terlepas dari atmosfer polemik yang panas, pendekatan al-Biqā’ī terhadap penafsiran intertekstual membuatnya menjadi sosok yang unik. Penerimaannya terhadap tradisi Kristen dan Yahudi dalam penafsiran al-Qur’an mencerminkan keterbukaan di tengah perselisihan yang ada. Artikel ini meneliti perspektif al-Biqā’ī tentang posisi Injil dan Taurat dalam penafsiran al-Qur’an. Dengan menggunakan analisis tekstual, artikel berargumen bahwa al-Biqā’ī membolehkan rujukan terhadap Injil dan Taurat sebagai sumber pelengkap (*isti’nās*) dalam kerangka penafsiran. Namun, dia membatasi penggunaannya sebagai dasar atau argumen dalam ranah hukum (*istidlāl* dan *ihtijāj*), terutama dalam masalah teologis atau doktrinal. Namun demikian, ketika rujukan tersebut terbatas

pada ranah pelengkap, seperti mengutip narasi historis yang lebih rinci dalam Injil dan Taurat, maka hal itu dinilai akan memperkaya wawasan, pengetahuan, dan struktur naratif penafsiran al-Qur'an.

**Kata kunci:** Al-Biqā'ī, intertekstual, Bibel, interpretasi al-Qur'an

## Introduction

The name Burhānuddīn Abū al-Ḥasan Ibrāhīm b. 'Umar al-Biqā'ī (r. 809-885 H/1406-1480 AD) is widely known as Qur'anic exegete who has great attention to the aspect of *munāsabah* in the Qur'an (interrelationship and intra-textual harmony of the Qur'an), but there are still rare academic studies that discuss al-Biqā'ī in terms of dialectics between scriptures (intertextual). In fact, al-Biqā'ī is one of the scholars who is quite open to the scriptures of other religions, especially Christianity.<sup>1</sup> This is evidenced by the number of Gospel quotations in his tafsir works that are used as sources of interpretation. Even in one of his articles, Walid Saleh called al-Biqā'ī as a Muslim defender of the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

The closeness of al-Biqā'ī to the Gospel can be seen for example when interpreting Qs. al-Baqarah [2]: 87, al-Biqā'ī asserts that "the mention of the Gospels (in the verse) shows that the Prophet Muhammad, strengthened by the holy spirit (*ruh al-Quds*), came with "*bayyināt*" (proofs) which are the essence of the four Gospels".<sup>3</sup> He explains at length about the spirit discussed in this verse by mentioning and quoting the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John.

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Biqā'ī is known as Qur'anic exegete who has paid attention to the textual relationship of the Qur'an (*munāsabat al-Qur'ān*). Some studies have been written to underline the contribution of al-Biqā'ī in this discourse, such as: Abd. Basid, "Munasabah Surat Dalam Al-Qur'an: Telaah atas kitab *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsuh al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar* karya Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī" (Tesis, Pascasarjana UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2016); Said Ali Setiyawan, "Munāsabah Surat-Surat Juz 'Amma: Kajian Terhadap Pemikiran Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī dalam Kitab *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsuh al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*" (Thesis, Pascasarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2015); Israr Ahmad Khan, "Al-Biqā'ī and Iṣlāḥī: A Comparative Study of Tafsīr Methodology," *Intellectual Discourse*, Vol 11, No. 2, (2003): 183-207; Nevin Reda El-Tahry, "Textual Integrity and Coherence in the Qur'an: Repetition and Narrative Structure in Surat al-Baqara" (Thesis, University of Toronto, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Walid Saleh and Kevin Casey, "An Islamic Diatessarot: Al-Biqā'ī's Harmony of the Four Gospels," in Sara Binay and Stefan Leder (eds.), *Translating the Bible into Arabic: Historical, Text-critical and Literary aspects* (Beirut: Orient Institute Beirut, 2012), 85.

<sup>3</sup> Burhānuddīn Abī al-Ḥasan Ibrāhīm b. 'Umar al-Biqā'ī, *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsuh al-Āyāt wa al-Suwar*, Vol. 2 (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, t.th), 21.

This evidence tells us about al-Biqā’ī’s familiarity, expertise and openness to the traditions of the heavenly books, an attitude that is still quite rare among Qur’anic exegetes, both from classical to contemporary times.

In this context, al-Biqā’ī can be said to be an exegete who has an accommodating trend towards other scriptures. Yet, if seen in its historical roots, al-Biqā’ī, who lived in the Mamluk dynasty, should have had a high suspicion of the Christians. Because at that time the residue of fierce fighting between Muslims and Christians due to the battle of the cross was still being a collective memory of Muslims. In this case, al-Biqā’ī’s very accommodating attitude towards the Christian scriptures is precisely a historical puzzle that is not easy to understand. What is the relationship that makes him very open to the traditions of Christians, even though at that time they became the common enemy of Muslims.

When viewed from the perspective of Qur’anic interpretation, this fact is both unique and paradoxical. Basically, non-Islamic traditions, known as *isrā’iliyyāt*<sup>4</sup> in the Qur’anic exegesis, are treated with caution by the exegetes. There are even some exegetes who are quite extreme in addressing *isrā’iliyyāt* and do not want to deal with non-Muslim scriptural traditions because they consider that the holy books of the people before the Prophet Muhammad have been abrogated by the Qur’an. There are several hadith reports that are often referred to in discussions about *isrā’iliyyāt*. For example, the narration of Abū Hurayrah which explains that

“At one time a scribe read the Torah in Hebrew and then he explained it to the Muslims in Arabic, so the Prophet Muhammad then said: do not correct the people of the book and do not

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<sup>4</sup> Etymologically, *isrā’iliyyāt* is defined as stories or legends narrated from Israelite sources, be it from scriptural sources or verbal sources told by someone. Israel itself is used as a specific term because it refers to the Jewish people, *Banū Isrā’īl*. Therefore, anyone who believes in Judaism is called an Israelite. However, in its development, the term *isrā’iliyyāt* gained an expanded meaning in the hands of exegetes and *muhaddith* (hadith scholars), i.e. everything that comes from past stories whose narratives are attributed to Jewish and Christian sources or other than these two traditions. See, Muḥammad Ḥadī Ma’rifah, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn fī Ṭhābībī al-Qaṣīb*, Vol. 2 (Iran: Mu’assasat al-Quds al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1428 H), 594-5. See also, Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, Vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktabah Waḥbah, t.th.), 121.

disbelieve them, tell them we believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us and we believe in what has been revealed to you”.<sup>5</sup>

This “in-between” position is what makes scholars differ in their opinions about the existence of *isrā’iliyyāt* in the world of interpretation. We can see, for example, the views of Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī who is very fluid and in the middle position (*mutawāsīṭ*) and Hādī Ma’rifah who is quite strict in addressing this matter (*mutashaddid*). This can be seen when they understand the Prophet’s hadīth “*ḥaddithū ‘an banī isrā’īl wa lā ḥaraj*” (tell about the Children of Israel, it is not a sin). Al-Dhahabī understands this hadīth as evidence of the permissibility of narrating anything from the Children of Israel. Hādī Ma’rifah, on the other hand, understands the hadīth to be a figurative language which implies that it is not permissible to narrate haphazardly anything that comes from the Children of Israel.<sup>6</sup> Ma’rifah is of the view that the following hadīth says “*narrate a tradition from me and do not lie*”. From here, Ma’rifah thinks that the figurative language used by the Prophet above is a binary language, between the tradition of the Children of Israel which is full of lies, and the Prophet’s tradition which is full of truth. In this case, Ma’rifah is quite selective and can even be said to be quite harsh in selecting *isrā’iliyyāt*.

When reflected on the existing commentaries based on the two views above, they generally never escape from the sources of Israel. From al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Khāzin, al-Rāzī and others, they are all involved in referring to pre-Islamic traditions. For they generally used the narrations of the Companions who had converted from Judaism to Islam. We can look at the history of some early Muslims who were once Jews and later converted to Islam, such as Ka’b b. al-Aḥbār, ‘Abdullāh b. Sallām, Wahb b. Munabbih, Tamīm b. Aws al-Dārī, and Ibn Jurayj.<sup>7</sup> Genealogically, it was from them that the sources of *isrā’iliyyāt* entered the Islamic tradition. In contrast to the format of referencing that has been done by the majority of Qur’anic interpreters, the format used by al-Biqā’ī seems more ‘vulgar’. Rather than simply referring to pre-Islamic narratives narrated by the Prophet’s companions who had converted to Islam, al-Biqā’ī refers directly to the scriptural sources. This reference can certainly be

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<sup>5</sup> Ma’rifah, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasīrūn*, 598.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 605.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 608-27.

considered quite ‘objective’, as he directly uses primary sources in the reference system and not through intermediaries (secondary sources) which are very likely to have experienced a reduction in meaning and language.

Al-Biqā’ī’s openness to the Gospel traditions raises the question of how he views other religious scriptures. This is because, as stated earlier, some exegetes are reluctant to use the Gospels as a source of reference as they have assumed that the pre-Islamic scriptures have been abrogated or replaced by the Qur’an. In addition, some exegetes use some verses such as al-Baqarah [2]: 75, al-Mā’idah [5]: 13 and 41, consider that the Gospel scripture has suffered a lot of forgery (*tahrif*) and replacement (*tabdil*). In this context, al-Biqā’ī’s view of the verses indicating the existence of *tahrif* and *tabdil* in the holy books before the Qur’an is interesting to study. The reason is that the existence of religion is also determined by the existence of a pure and intact diversity heritage as it was originally revealed to the saint who inspired the religious movement. In this case, al-Biqā’ī’s openness in using the Gospel as a source of interpretation certainly places him as a scholar who has a theological foundation and perspective that is quite different from most Muslim scholars who lived in the middle ages and before.

Related to this subject, Walid Saleh has extensively examined al-Biqā’ī’s ideas, particularly his connection with the Qur’an and the Bible. Saleh has authored various works delving into this relationship. One such work, co-written with Kevin Casey and featured in “Translating the Bible into Arabic: Historical, Text-Critical and Literary Aspects,”<sup>8</sup> discusses al-Biqā’ī’s interaction with the four Gospels. This piece analyzes how al-Biqā’ī interpreted and indexed the four Gospels. Another article by Saleh, “Sublime in Its Style, Exquisite in Its Tenderness: The Hebrew Bible Quotations in al-Biqā’ī’s Qur’an Commentary,”<sup>9</sup> focuses on al-Biqā’ī’s use of Hebrew Bible quotations in his Qur’an commentary, examining the linguistic and stylistic aspects. Additionally, Saleh conducts a comparative study between al-Biqā’ī and the codex *Vindobonensis Palatinus*, both

<sup>8</sup> Saleh & Casey, “An Islamic Diatessaron”: 85-115.

<sup>9</sup> Walid Saleh, “Sublime in Its Style, Exquisite in Its Tenderness: The Hebrew Bible Quotations in al-Biqā’ī’s Qur’an Commentary,” in Y. Tzvi Langermann and Josef Stern, *Adaptions and Innovations: Studies on the Interaction between Jewish and Islamic Thought and Literature from the Early Middle Ages to the Late Twentieth Century* (Belgium: Peeters, 2007), 331-347.

contemporary but located in different places (Cairo and Spain).<sup>10</sup> This study aims to explore the coherence explanations regarding the vanished communities in the two manuscripts. Notably, Saleh's work prioritizes the comparison of manuscripts rather than delving extensively into al-Biqā'ī's paradigm of intertextual interpretation. Therefore, this article aims to examine what seems to have been neglected in previous studies, namely the theological basis of al-Biqā'ī in using Biblical narratives in interpreting the Qur'an.

### **The Qur'an and *Isrā'iliyyāt***

The Qur'an is a revelation that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad gradually from 610 to 632. In the span of 22 years, the revelation of the Qur'an fell in various places and times. Mecca and Medina are two loci that are often used as the categorization of scholars about the process of the Qur'an's descent. Muslim scholars then classified the phase of the Qur'an's descent in Mecca as Makkīyah verses, while the verses that were revealed when the Prophet began to migrate to Medina were referred to as Madanīyah verses. This process at least marks the historicity of the Qur'an which is considered important by some scholars. This historical marking appears in the features of verses that differ from one locus to another. For example, the verse revealed in Mecca always uses a general *khitāb* (object of conversation), *yā ayyuha al-nās* (O people), whereas in Medina the Qur'an uses a specific object of speech, *yā ayyuhaalladhina āmanū* (O believers). Therefore, it can be underlined that the context of the revelation of the Qur'an has an important role in shaping the linguistic format of the Qur'an.

Modern thinkers have also paid much attention to the context of the revelation of the Qur'an. Because according to him, the context has an important role in helping readers to see the Qur'an as a whole. Involving the context of the revelation of the Qur'an in interpretation is a necessity if you do not want to be trapped in a formal linguistic circle. The only analysis of formal linguistic units is often considered to break the chain of the Qur'an with its context. Therefore, understanding the context of the Qur'an such as the cultural, social,

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<sup>10</sup> Walid Saleh, "Reflection on Muslim Hebraism: Codex Vindobonensis Palatinus and al-Biqā'ī," in Suzanne Conklin Akbari & Karla Mallette, *A Sea of Languages: Rethinking Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 71-81.

theological, and customary law systems of the Arab community is a fairly important entry point to enter the discourse of the “culture” of the Qur’an.

If the Qur’an reveals its position as a corrector of the previous scriptures, then it is somewhat different from the position of the interpretation of the Qur’an. The Qur’anic interpretation is generally more accommodating and utilizes historical data in previous scriptural records to add information about the Qur’an’s brief data on past history. For example, the description of the Qur’an about the prophets and their people, not much description is found at length, except only the story of the Prophet Joseph. The lack of description of this matter is what makes scholars look at the scriptures and previous sources to explore and reconstruct complete information about past events. The information obtained from the past is called as *isrā’iliyyāt* in terms of Qur’anic interpretation tradition.

Etymologically, *isrā’iliyyāt* is the plural form of the word *Isrā’īliyah*; a name attributed to the word *Isra’il* (Hebrew) which means ‘Abdullāh (servant of God).<sup>11</sup> In another sense, *isrā’iliyyāt* is attributed to the Prophet Ya’kūb b. Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm. Sometimes *isrā’iliyyāt* is synonymous with Judaism, although this is not the case. *Bani Israel* (the children of Israel) indicates a reference to the lineage of the nation, while Judaism refers to the mindset, including religion and dogma.<sup>12</sup>

### **Distortion of the Bible in the Discourse of Islamic Thought**

This section will discuss the verses that seem to have polemical nuances in the Qur’an. These polemical verses are not to say that the Qur’an contains polemics in it, but rather to mean that the Qur’an contains verses that are “critical” of the heavenly books that were revealed before Islam, namely the Gospel and the Torah. The vocabulary of the Gospel and the Torah is also mentioned by the Qur’an clearly in many verses. And the Qur’an does not mention other holy books, apart from these two books. This means that the dynamics of Qur’anic criticism are mostly aimed at the religions of the predecessors that came before Islam. And they are the religion born from the descendants of Abraham. The Qur’an also does not mention

<sup>11</sup> Khalaf Muḥammad Ḥusaynī, *Al-Yabūdīyah bayn al-Masīḥīyah wa al-Islām* (Egypt: Al-Mu’assasat al-Miṣriyah al-‘Āmmah, 1974), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Supiana and M. Karman, *Ulumul Qur’an* (Jakarta: Pustaka Islamika, 2002), 197.

books or advice from other religions, such as the Majusi (Zoroastrian)<sup>13</sup> sect which has a holy book called *Dasatir* and *Avesta*;<sup>14</sup> Manichaean teachings brought by the prophet Mani and popular in Persia, and also the Sabians, all of whom existed at the time the Qur'an was revealed. Likewise, the Qur'an does not seem to mention the religions that existed outside of Arabia, such as Sikhism, Hinduism and Buddhism, which were born, live and have many adherents in the regions around India.

In the first point, in addition to describing the polemical verses, the researcher will also explain how some exegetes view in responding to the verse. This means that we will show how they interpret the polemical verses. Meanwhile, in the second point, the researcher explains the views of al-Biqā'ī in understanding and responding to the polemical verses. From this point, it will be explained about the attitude and position of al-Biqā'ī when dealing with the authority of non-Islamic sources. This point also wants to comparatively explain al-Biqā'ī's ideas about the authority of the heavenly books or the tradition of the people of the book with the ideas of other exegetes.

Some scholars such as Ibn Kathīr have taken the view that "changing words from their places" is interpreted as "interpreting the verses of God that are not in accordance with their interpretation and interpreting them not in accordance with what God intended intentionally and spreading slander". Quoting Mujāhid and Ibn Zayd, they listened only to their own words and ignored the words of others. They even deliberately told the Prophet Muhammad that they would not follow his teachings and understanding. It was only their own exclusive understanding that they held on to, even though it was

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<sup>13</sup> Zoroastrianism developed in ancient Persia and was brought by a prophet named Zoroaster. Zoroaster is thought to have lived around 1100-550 BC. Zoroaster's teachings came to influence the religious understanding of the Persians who tended to be polytheistic. The basic teaching of Zoroastrianism is monotheism, which is the worship of only one God, Ahura Mazda. Angra Mainyu, which is the Darkness and the opposite of Ahura Mazda, is the denial of God. There are now only 2 million followers of this religion. Even in his home country, Zoroastrianism is followed by between 10,000 and 100,000 people.

<sup>14</sup> The Avesta consists of four parts: The Yasna which contains a collection of prayers and rules of worship; The Visparat which contains praises to God; The Videvdāt which contains purification rituals; and The Khode Avesta which contains a collection of prayers, praises and poems about heroism.

full of slander.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Ibn Kathīr adds that they actually knew what was right and what was wrong, but they were reluctant to recognize the truth that came from Muhammad, whether for personal reasons or socio-religious sensitivities.

Likewise, al-Bayḍawī in his exegesis *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta’wīl* interpreted this verse that they, the Jews, interpreted God’s verses according to their desires, so that the results of their understanding deviated far from what was actually revealed by Allah. In additions, al-Bayḍawī in interpreting this verse adds that some of those who are guided (*min alladhīna hādū*), there are some groups who change the words (*al-kalīm*) of God, or in other words, deliberately deviate the verses of God from their original place that has been placed by God by removing them (*bi iẓālatihī ‘anhā*) and placing something else into the verse.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, according to al-Qurṭūbī, the meaning of the word *yuharrifūn al-kalīm* is that they change the words or speech of the Prophet Muhammad and also what is in their holy book, the Torah. They did not do this to all sentences or sayings, but only to texts with a socio-religious dimension such as the texts that came out of the tongue of the prophet Muhammad, both the Qur’an and the hadith, and also their holy book which was revealed long before the Qur’an was revealed. However, al-Qurṭūbī also agrees with the scholars above in interpreting the meaning of *yuharrifūn* as interpreting the text not in accordance with its interpretation, and God reproaches those who do this because they do it intentionally.<sup>17</sup> It is this aspect of intentionality that seems to be a specific marker of the deviant behavior of some of these groups. And it can basically be seen from the expression of the verse in full, that they do not want to hear (read: obey) the words of the Prophet Muhammad. And they actually know the right things, but they are reluctant to admit it. Herein lies their deliberate denial of God and His prophet.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Imād al-Dīn Abī al-Fidā’ Ismā’īl b. Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: ‘Īsā al-Bāb al-Ḥalabī, t.th.), 507.

<sup>16</sup> Nāṣir al-Dīn Abī al-Khayr ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Umar b. Muḥammad al-Shīrazī al-Shāfi’ī al-Bayḍawī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta’wīl*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Murshīlī, Vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār Ihyā al-Turath al-‘Arabī, t.th.), 77.

<sup>17</sup> Abī ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭūbī, *Al-Jāmi’ li Abkām al-Qur’ān*, ed. Hisyām Samīr al-Bukhārī, Vol. 5 (Riyād: Dār ‘Ālam al-Kutub, t.th.), 243.

Regarding the word “*kalim*”, al-Ṭabarī cites several opinions, some of which are interpreted as “*changing its meanings from its original interpretation*”. He mentions that the word *kalim* is a plural form of the word *kalimah*. Mujāhid is more emphatic in interpreting the *kalim* with the Torah. In this case, Mujāhid interpreted the words “*yuharrifūn al-kalim ‘an mawāḍi‘ih*” to mean the substitutions that the Jews made to the Torah. While replacement or change from its place (*‘an mawāḍi‘ih*) is interpreted as a replacement of its original place and replacement of the forms of the Torah from its origin. Thus, the implication is that the Torah underwent many changes.<sup>18</sup>

In al-Ṭabarī’s view, this verse is even more clearly critical of the Jews. At the beginning of the sentence in this verse, it is mentioned that the Jews have broken the promise they have kept. Therefore, God then curses them so that their hearts become frozen and hard. It is this hardness of heart that causes them not to receive guidance from God. In fact, al-Ṭabarī mentions that this act of breaking promises has become a habitus in their lives and their predecessors. This can be seen from the history of Jewish life who also often broke promises to Prophet Moses.<sup>19</sup>

In the view of the modern commentator, Muṣṭafā al-Maraghī, he groups the 13<sup>th</sup> verse of Sūrat al-Mā’idah into a relational arrangement (*munāsabah*) in one group along with verses 12 and 14. Thus, al-Maraghī seems to explain that the three verses have one related discussion, which is about the bad behavior of the Jews. Slightly different from al-Ṭabarī, al-Maraghī’s brief *munāsabah* (interrelatedness and harmony of texts) approach makes his global interpretation not only criticize the Jews but also the Christians. This is because in verse 14, the Christians are also mentioned that they have forgotten the places where God’s verses have been given to them. So that the ideas or verses of God are mixed with ideas that come from their thoughts.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, al-Maraghī explains the act of changing God’s words from its place of origin. He explains that this can be of two kinds. Firstly, sometimes it is changing the words that should be

<sup>18</sup> Abī Ja’far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, ed. ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī, Vol. 7 (Cairo: Ḥajr, 2001), 103.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, Vol. 8, 248.

<sup>20</sup> Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Maraghī, *Tafsīr al-Maraghī*, Vol. 6 (Egypt: Muṣṭafā al-Bāb al-Ḥalībī wa Awlādūh, 1946), 72.

prefixed to be born, sometimes it is by addition or subtraction (corruption), sometimes it is also by changing the meanings by bringing the meaning of the words not in accordance with what should be the meaning attached to them. And all this has happened in the Torah and all their books. As for the Torah that was written by Moses and was sworn to the children of Israel to memorize and protect it, it has been lost according to the agreement of Jewish and Christian historians, and they agree that the writing of the Torah that exists today is a work written long after the prophet Moses died.<sup>21</sup>

In this context, the next verse which reads “*wa nasū ḥaẓẓan min mā dbukkirū bilī*” has relevance to the bad behavior of the Jews who have lost their book because they were negligent and did not protect the book. Al-Maraghī adds the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (causes of revelation) in explaining this verse that this verse was revealed when the Jews broke many of their promises. However, they were not punished except to be asked to leave the land of Arabia at that time.<sup>22</sup>

This is also the case with the Christians, who are briefly mentioned in verse 14, that they have actually been given provisions to behave in obedience to God’s demands. However, they took the path taken by their predecessors, the Jews, by denying this guidance. They committed various treasonous practices against the sacred text. In fact, al-Maraghī speaks of them as having changed their “religion” and broken the promises they had made.<sup>23</sup>

In al-Ṭabarī’s exegesis, it is explained that the practice of replacing or changing the Jews against their holy book can be illustrated from this verse. This verse explains the unwillingness of the Jews to take the laws that have been determined in their holy book. They change it and replace it with something else. So, they said: “*If this (which they have changed) is given to you, then accept it, and if you are given something other than this, then be careful*”. This verse is basically related to the law of stoning. It is when someone commits adultery, the most appropriate punishment for him is stoning. This law was originally stated in the Torah, but in the process of development, the law was changed by them. Even though they knew that the law had become God’s provision for them. Then, when there were several incidents that occurred among the Jews, about young men who committed

<sup>21</sup> Al-Maraghī, *Tafsīr al-Maraghī*, Vol. 6, 75.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

adultery, the law was annulled by their leaders.<sup>24</sup> This is what some scholars mean by abandoning some of the contents of the Book (*wa nasū ḥaẓẓan min mā dhukkiriḥ bihi*) is forgetting the Book by not carrying out the commands in it.<sup>25</sup>

From the above explanations, it can be underlined that the Qur'anic criticism is directed more towards the Jews than the Christians. Of the four verses mentioned above, all are directed at the *keḥṭāb* (object of discussion) of the Jews. Only one verse, in Qs. al-Mā'idah: 14, which also corresponds to the Qur'anic criticism of the Jews mentioned in the previous verse. This indicates that the polemic over the authenticity of the scriptures of the People of the Book is mostly dominated between Muslims and Jews.

### **Al-Biqā'ī and His Life**

Al-Biqā'ī with the full name Abū al-Ḥasan Ibrāhīm b. 'Umar b. Ḥasan al-Rubāṭ al-Biqā'ī al-Dimashqī al-Shāfi'ī was born in the village of Khirbat Rūhah in an area called Biqā' in 809 AH. He died in Damascus in 885 AH at the age of 76. The name al-Biqā'ī was taken from his home region, the Biqā' valley located in Lebanon, which used to belong to Syria before the division of Syria into several countries. The valley is located between Ba'labakka, Hamaṣ, and Damascus and is about seventy miles long and three to seven miles wide. While al-Kharbawī is the name of an area with abundant water in the Biqā' valley, where Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqā'ī was born.<sup>26</sup>

His parents lived very simply and had no worldly wealth at all. He grew up under the tutelage of his parents. As a child, he learned to read, write, and memorize the Qur'an. He learned from his own uncle, Aḥmad b. Ḥasan al-Rubāṭ. His intelligence and strengths have been apparent since childhood. Evidently, he was able to memorize the Qur'an when he was ten years old and mastered various kinds of knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

Since Damascus was occupied by the Crusaders at that time, he was among the scholars who participated in jihad against them. Al-

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<sup>24</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. 8, 425.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Maraghī, Vol. 6, 75.

<sup>26</sup> Burhān al-Dīn Abī al-Ḥasan Ibrāhīm b. 'Umar al-Biqā'ī, *Masā'id al-Naẓar li al-Ishraf 'alā Maqāsid al-Suwar I* (Riyad: Maktabat al-Ma'arif, 1987), 31-32.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

Biqā‘ī was a brave soldier, not afraid of the enemy, and never afraid of the large number of enemy soldiers even though the number of Muslim soldiers was small. During his life, he lived in the mosque to keep away from worldly pleasures and seek peace, quiet, and a comfortable place to write his works and keep away from those who hated him.

Al-Biqā‘ī was a prolific scholar. Besides writing about Qur’anic exegesis, he also wrote about various fields of science such as philosophy, jurisprudence, *uṣūl fiqh*, *qirā‘ah*, language and so on. Among his works are: *Naẓm al-Durar fī Tanāsuh al-Ayāt wa al-Suwar*. This book was published by three publishers: Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-’Uthmāniyah India in 22 volumes, Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmi Kairo in 22 volumes and Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyah Lebanon in 8 volumes.

### **Al-Biqā‘ī and the Use of the Tradition of the People of the Book**

In this, we will address some issues on how does al-Biqā‘ī view the authority of the Gospel and the Torah in interpreting the Qur’an, to what extent does al-Biqā‘ī use the Gospel and the Bible in the interpretation of the Qur’an, and to what extent does al-Biqā‘ī view the claim of the infidelity of the Gospel and the Torah which is often a common claim of Muslims, thus implying that the Gospel and the Torah are not authoritative.

In the preamble to his book *al-Aqwāl al-Qawīmah fī Hukm al-Naql min al-Kutub al-Qadīmah*, al-Biqā‘ī writes, “whoever criticizes this book (*al-aqwāl*), then it seems they have no deep understanding.”<sup>28</sup> This opening words illustrate how fiercely al-Biqā‘ī debated with other scholars about the use of non-Muslim sources. For other scholars, non-Muslim sources are considered to have been perverted and not worthy of being used as religious reference material, let alone as a reference for interpreting the Qur’an. This may be motivated by the “suspicion” and strict attitude of the scholars in assessing the sources used. Because after all, sources are very influential in creating scientific buildings and a person’s perspective. Where and how one gets information will greatly affect the results of one’s readings and observations. Therefore, being very open to using non-Islamic sources is suspected of damaging the system and order of Islamic

<sup>28</sup> Burhān al-Dīn Abī al-Ḥasan Ibrāhīm b. ‘Umar, *Al-Aqwāl al-Qawīmah fī Hukm al-Naql min al-Kutub al-Qadīmah* (Cairo: Maktabat Jazīrat al-Ward, t.th), 46.

values in the Qur'an. Moreover, the Qur'an is believed to have a series of miracles, which are often referred to as *i'jāz*, one of which is its preserved authenticity. The value of this authenticity is not only in meaning, but also in its textuality, which is maintained by the words that are transmitted from generation to generation without any missing.

This reason for authenticity seems to be what makes scholars reluctant to use non-Muslim sources, let alone align them. That is because they also believe that among the holy books (Islam, Judaism, Christianity), only the holy books of Muslims are still maintained in authenticity. So, it is not feasible to align the Qur'an with the any other holy books.

Unlike this state of scholars, al-Biqā'ī has a different attitude. He did not prohibit the use of the Gospel or the Torah in interpreting the Qur'an. In fact, he himself uses it. This can be seen in various verses in his tafsir *Nazm al-Durar*, there are many quotations from the Gospel and the Torah used by al-Biqā'ī in interpreting the Qur'an.

Related to this different attitude, al-Biqā'ī stated that "the law of naql (taking) from the Children of Israel even though it is not justified by the book of the Qur'an and is not blamed by the Qur'an is permissible. Because the purpose of the naql is isti'nas (for hospitality) not as a guide (i'timad).<sup>29</sup> From this explanation, Al-Biqā'ī firmly and loudly allows intertextual studies between the holy books of the heavenly religions, namely the Qur'an, the Gospel and the Torah. For him, the intertextual study is not intended as a guide (i'timād) but only as isti'nas. The word i'timād here actually needs to be highlighted because it does not fully clarify the position of the extent to which the authority of the Gospel and the Torah is used in the intertextual study of the Qur'an and the holy books of the heavenly religions. Is i'timād here related to matters of theology, creed, shari'a and faith alone? Or does it also include social domains such as law and muamalah? If it is the former, then there is no problem, because the creed, shari'a and faith of Muslims have significant differences with the theology of Christians and Jews. But if it is the latter, then this social sphere becomes an interesting thing to study, especially in relation to the study of ushul fiqh such as shar' man qablana (the shari'at of the prophets before Muhammad).

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 10.

However, in answering what *isti’nas* means, al-Biqā’ī reiterates that “*anna naql al-aqwāl wa al-akhbār al-mushtamilah ‘ala al-‘ibrāh wa al-‘iddah jā’iz shar’an, sama’un kānat al-aqwāl ma’lūmat al-ṣidq aw lā*” (that quoting opinions and news that contain wisdoms is permissible, regardless of whether the news is known to be true or not).<sup>30</sup> From this quote, it is clear that al-Biqā’ī says that as long as the opinions and news quoted contain *‘ibrāh* and *maw’izāh* (wisdom and moral messages), then the truth of the news is considered less important. This is because the main purpose of quoting is to convey a moral message. However, al-Biqā’ī explains further that when the news is known to be true then it does not matter, and when the news is still problematic with its veracity, it is necessary to seek further information by juxtaposing similar news that has the same content and moral message. He uses the comparison of scholars who have written many books, where scholars also quote various opinions in which there are news that are strong in truth and also news that are weak in truth.

In further explanation, al-Biqā’ī clearly emphasizes that “Quoting from the Torah and Gospel and other books is permissible in today’s authorship for some familiar purposes, such as taking moral lessons, but it is not permissible to use them as a basis for principles related to rulings and principles or *usūl*, in accordance with what the scholars have written in their earlier books. The same applies to unverified reports that cannot be proven to be true or rejected, so it is permissible to act on them, although it is not obligatory to do so.”<sup>31</sup>

In relation to this idea, he argues using the Ḥanafīyah view that the Sharia of those before us is basically our Sharia of the beginning, if it is narrated without evil. Therefore, quoting from the Torah, Gospel and other holy books is an act that is permitted by Sharia. Another argument used by al-Biqā’ī is the prophet’s hadith that allows his people to tell the things obtained from the Children of Israel, “Tell me whatever you learn from me, even if it is a verse, and tell me what you learn from the Children of Israel, for that does not make it a sin.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 72

In explaining the above Hadith, al-Biqā'ī quotes some of the popular opinions and says that the *muhaddithin* (the scholars) explains that the meaning of the Hadith is that it is narrated from them with stories and sagas, because this can be a lesson and a moral message for those who have a mind of their own.<sup>33</sup> Strictly speaking, al-Biqā'ī considers that quoting from the sacred sources of the past is only permitted in terms of stories and sagas of the past. This is probably because the Qur'an does not explain these stories in as much detail and as thoroughly as the Gospel and the Torah. The Gospel itself contains stories of the journey of the prophets and their people in a coherent and detailed manner, while the Qur'an, the story of Moses for example, is not told coherently and is cut into small fragments in various suras in the Qur'an. This, according to the author, is the main reason why al-Biqā'ī loudly allows quoting the Gospel and the Torah for the purpose of interpreting the Qur'an.

In addition to this, al-Biqā'ī set certain limits in quoting the holy books before the revelation of the Qur'an. He argued that as for what is prohibited from quoting or writing from the books of the Torah or the Gospel is in matters other than stories and news, then when quoting other than that one must use the method of correspondence of what is heard and seen between the two sources, namely between the Qur'an and these holy books, and on this someone has said: as for what is prohibited from quoting is before the popularity of the Qur'an, fearing that the Qur'anic material will be mixed with other holy books.

This argument seems to utilize the rationality of the writing of the hadith where the prophet's hadith was initially forbidden to be written down for fear of mixing up the Qur'an and the hadith. Although this is opposed by some scholars because it negates the intellectual aspect of the Companions, al-Biqā'ī still uses this argument to reinforce his idea that writing or quoting other scriptures to interpret the Qur'an is allowed after the formative period of the Qur'an is over.

Another argument put forward by al-Biqā'ī regarding the permissibility of quoting the Gospels and the Torah for the purposes of interpreting the Qur'an is the consensus of the Muslim community on the permissibility of such intertextual quotations. Al-Biqā'ī said

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

that the tradition of intertextual quoting between holy books or more specifically quoting the Torah and the Gospel, has become commonplace in the Muslim world. According to him, this tradition has become commonplace and there is no closure. He also revealed that the tradition of quoting has become *ijma’ sukūṭī* (silent agreement). This, according to him, is evidenced by the number of commentaries that practice quotation, such as *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf* written by al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* authored by Imam Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and others.<sup>34</sup>

### Conclusion

As a scholar who has a high reputation in the study of the Qur’an, al-Biqā’ī is not reluctant to refer to the holy books of Christians and Jews explicitly to be included in his tafsir book. This model of reference was later criticized by several other scholars, and then al-Biqā’ī wrote a book containing an explanation of the permissibility of referring to these holy books. According to him, reference to the holy books of the Gospel and the Torah is very permissible in the context of *isti’nas* (hospitality), and not allowed in the context of *istidlal* and *ihitijaj* (as a basis or legal argument), especially for the field of theology or creed. This is where the relevance lies, al-Biqā’ī views that the fields of law, theology and sharia of the previous people have switched to the sharia that has been brought by the Prophet Muhammad. So there is no reason to refer to the old laws that have been obsolete. In this context, referring to the Gospel or the Torah in theological terms is not permitted. However, if the reference effort is only within the framework of *isti’nas* or looking for “entertainment”, such as quoting past stories, which in the Gospel and Torah are often told in more detail and detail, it can actually add insight, knowledge and story lines in the Qur’an. So that these additional efforts become added value in an effort to understand the texts of the Qur’an which contain stories of the past.

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