

Is Mary Important for Herself or for Being the Mother of Christ in the Holy *Qur'an*?

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Christian interest in the exalted place of Mary in the Holy *Qur'an* derives from its resonance with discourse on women issues on the one hand and the centrality of Mary in the great encounter between Islam and Christianity on the other. Discourse on women issues – especially its feminist current – deals with the religious notion of women's liberation (Ahmad, 1992). It undertakes a re-reading of the central foundational texts (the Bible in its two testaments and the Holy *Qur'an*), especially those that valorize women and their human, social, and political roles. This feminist discourse criticizes evaluating women only by their relationship to men as wives, to children as mothers and to parents as daughters, that is, by their relationships to the family structure instead of by who they are in themselves. This feminist discourse also criticizes those who exclude women from the realm of the Holy and its symbols and rituals in order to prevent women from delving into issues that, in the view of some, are the special domain of religious scholars who are men. Today, a considerable number of Christian and Muslim women are undertaking this re-reading and criticism from a gender perspective that distinguishes between what is male and masculine and between what is natural and cultural. So, the natural differences between the male and the female are not being confused with the historical, social, and cultural differences between the two, that is, between what is eternal and what is temporal. In this regard, we quote the late scholar and teacher of *Qur'anic* studies A'isha 'Abdul Rahman (Bint al-Shati', d. 1998), who said that the Holy *Qur'an* never says, "Man and woman are not equal". It only says: "The crux of equality is what everyone bears of the trust of being human and its attendant responsibilities and what each is able to realize and acquire in the way of the perfection. The bad is not equal to the good, the immoral to the pious, the wayward to the guided, nor the miserly to the generous. Likewise, someone who knows is not equal to someone who is ignorant, nor is the darkness equal to the light" ('Abdul Rahman, 1967, p. 11).

Because the inclination today is one of more openness towards diverse religious traditions and because Mary today opens the door to dialogue not only between Muslims and Christians but also among Christians themselves – among Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants, despite their ecclesial differences – the academic and theological disciplines have begun to give the feminist and gender perspectives

serious consideration. Hence, this school of thought has shown interest in becoming acquainted with the *Qur'anic* Mary. She is the central figure whom God – Glory be to Him, Exalted is He – elected above the women of all creation. This is the God whom we cannot delimit by defining His sex (male or female): “Nothing is like unto Him” (42:11).

Before delving into the subject of whether Mary appears in the Holy *Qur'an* for herself or just for her motherhood, I will present the principle verses that call Mary to mind (Peace be upon her – pbuh) – that is, those verses that appear in the different Meccan and Medinan stages.¹ The community of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) either received his teachings, or quizzed him in creedal and mundane matters. These matters came to light as the mission developed toward the doctrine of God's unity and toward incorporating his people into the scriptural heritage of the history of salvation. I will read the verses on Mary in the *Qur'an* chronologically, that is, in the order in which they were revealed in time. This is to show us the ongoing attention to the figure of Mary in the Meccan and Medinan stages of early Islam. I will analyze the position of the story of Mary in the *sura* of Mary (or *sura* 19 of the *Qur'an*), from the annunciation and the journey to the desert to give birth, then the defense of her virginity against those who accused her of being unchaste, and up to the time when she returned to her people carrying the infant in her hands. Then I will discuss the verses on Mary in the *sura* of Al 'Imran (*sura* 3). The *sura* of Al 'Imran occurs in the context of a bitter debate on the religious or theological role of women. These verses are dedicated to Mary's merits and her election, before her own birth and up to her youth, and then her devotional preparation to receive revelation from God through an angel speaking to her. Mary is also mentioned in other verses in the Meccan and Medinan *suras*, and I will refer to them along the way. The story of Mary (pbuh) is found mainly in the Meccan *sura* of Mary (*sura* 19) and the Medinan *sura* of Al 'Imran (*sura* 3).

Mary is unique among the female figures in the *Qur'an*. She was also unique among the women who were contemporary to the Messenger and participated in the emergence of early Islamic society. This uniqueness lies in her being mentioned multiple times in the *Qur'an*, as were preceding prophets such as Adam, Abraham, and Moses (Peace be upon them). This means that the Marian verses do not appear only once as in the cases of other exemplary female figures such as the Queen of Sheba or the wife of 'Aziz. Attention to them is limited to one place or a single occasion. This is something of the utmost importance. This means that the revelation calling to mind Mary for herself, for her motherhood, and for theological reasons is something that continues on as the mission develops. We will see in the course of this study that it is not just a matter of the revelation recalling Mary because of the annunciation and the birth narrative, or for arguing with those who challenge Muhammad on the issue of the Word of God that He imparted to Mary. It is also because of the ability of the feminine to make contact with the Holy and to receive revelation through the angel who was sent only to the elected ones among the prophets and the righteous.

The *Sura* of Mary (*Sura* 19, Meccan)

Mary, mother of Jesus (pbuh) is mentioned in the *sura* of Mary in many motifs. This includes the annunciation and birth of Christ (pbuh), Mary's journey to the desert, giving birth by the palm tree and the stream, and the defense of Mary against those

1. Verses are classified as Meccan or Medinan depending on where the verses were revealed. The Meccan *suras* are the earlier *suras* of the *Qur'an* that were revealed in Mecca whereas the Medinan *suras* are those which were later revealed in Medina.

who accuse her of evil. She is mentioned immediately after Zachariah (Zachariah is mentioned in verses 2-15) and the narrative announcing his son John. Together these two stories constitute the first part of the *sura* of Mary. Mention of Zachariah and the story of the birth of his son John from “a barren woman” and a father who “had reached an advanced age” and mention of Mary and the story of the birth of her son from a mother “whom no man had touched and who had not been unchaste” both occur in the context of God’s power to create: “Glory be to Him! When He decrees something, He only says to it, ‘Be!’, and it is” (19:35). Mention of these two stories is from the Heavenly Book, as we hear the revelation repeat: “[this is] a mention of the mercy of your Lord to His servant Zachariah” (19:2), which is followed by the divine injunction to “Mention Mary in the Book” (19:16), then, “Mention Abraham in the Book” (19:41), “Mention Moses in the Book” (19:51), “Mention Ishmael in the Book” (19:45), and “Mention Idris in the Book”. If this points to anything, it points to the revelation’s attention to preparing a genealogy for the biblical prophets: Zachariah, John, Mary and Jesus, then Abraham and his two sons, Moses and his brother, etc.

The purpose of this is not chronological listing. The sequence does not seem to be limited to the temporal order of these messengers and prophets, each of whom is lauded. The purpose of this is only to mention their struggles with their peoples, which resemble the struggle of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) with his people while he was revitalizing his call to monotheism and his hope that God would intervene on his behalf to defend him. When Zachariah addresses his Lord, he complains, fearful for his posterity: “My Lord, my bones have weakened; my hair has grayed; and I have not been unblessed in my supplications. Now, I fear my kinsfolk after I am gone, as my wife is barren. So, grant me a successor from You” (19:4-5). Mary complains similarly, despairing with her people who accuse her so much that she wants to die: “Oh that I had died before this, that I were nothing, forgotten!” (19:23). Likewise, Abraham confronted his father, admonishing him to repudiate worshipping other than God. In affectionate and tender speech, he expresses the gentleness of the prophets toward their fathers. He repeats his call to his father. Perhaps the repetition might influence him. He says, “O my father! Why do you worship what does not hear or see or is of no help to you? O my father! Knowledge has come to me that has not come to you. Follow me, and I will guide you to a straight path. O my father! Do not worship Satan. Satan was indeed a rebel against the Compassionate. O my father! I fear that a chastisement from the Compassionate will afflict you and that you will be a friend of Satan” (19:42-45). Mention of the prophets’ struggles with their peoples and calling to mind the righteous ones is not limited to intergenerational struggle. Indeed, it surpasses that. It extends to lauding the prophets generally after each of them has been lauded specifically. Hearing these religious figures mentioned at this early stage of the Messenger’s mission² must have had an impact on the illiterate Meccans and “those to whom the Book has been given” among the Christians because these subjects were linked to their heritage and their religious sentiments toward Mary and Jesus.

2. The *sura* of Mary was revealed between the emigration to Abyssinia (in the seventh year of the mission) and the event of the Heavenly Journey. According to the study of Nöldeke on the temporal or chronological order of the *Qur’an*, the *sura* of Mary is considered to be from the middle Meccan period.

The annunciations and births of John and Jesus (Peace be upon them) and their corresponding stories are first and foremost matters of Christian interest. We see it particularly at the beginnings of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In the *Qur’an*, however, we have the story of the angel’s annunciation to Mary, Mary’s journey into the desert to give birth, and her return to her people in serenity. What is new here is

this celebratory narrative dedicated to the main figure of Mary (Mary is mentioned from verses 16 to 33) and to the ongoing dialogue with her to confirm and highlight her feminine experience in her relationship with her self and her body (through natural childbirth). This perhaps aims to humanize the picture of Mary, which the revelation intends to be an exemplar. All of this expresses the sentiments of every woman who learns that she will have a child, carries the child through pregnancy, and endures the pain of child-birth and the accusations of people against her. This until that misery and anguish is dispelled by God intervening to stand beside her and honor her. So also, the misery and anguish that the Messenger (pbuh) suffered at the hands of his people does not differ from the misery and anguish that Mary (pbuh) suffered at the hands of her people. The motif of the tree and the stream that shifts the scene of Jesus' amazing birth from the desert to an oasis is but an old motif that creates a parallel between female fertility and the fertility of the earth. In the background to the picture of Mary as the mother of Jesus (Peace be upon them) is the female celebrated as an ideal type.

The Sura of the Believers (Sura 23, Meccan)

The Sura of the Believers belongs to the Meccan period and is near in milieu to the revelation of the story of Mary in the *sura* named after her (i.e. *sura* 19). In the course of presenting God's verses about messengers whom their peoples belied and treated arrogantly, the messengers Noah, Hud, Moses, and his brother Aaron are mentioned. Then come the turns of Jesus and Mary, who are mentioned as follows: "We made the Son of Mary and his mother a sign, and we gave them shelter on a high ground (*rabwa*) having a meadow (*qarar*) and a spring (*ma'in*)" (23:50). The *Qur'an* takes every occasion to declare that Jesus is named "Son of Mary". This is to emphasize Jesus' maternal lineage and the absence of paternal lineage. In the *sura* of the Believers Mary and Jesus are noted only in one verse (23:50). This indicates that their story had already appeared earlier in the *Sura* of Mary. The *rabwa* where God sheltered the two of them means "high place", *qarar* means "level earth", and *ma'in* means "running water". The mention of earth and water points to the oasis in the wasteland in which Mary found provision, the stream, and serenity. This verse is important because it expresses very clearly that Jesus and his mother Mary are a single sign in which they share together, that is, the pregnancy of Mary who knew no man and the birth of Jesus without a father. Their relationship lacked a paternal element. The Messiah was brought to perfection through his mother who bore the Word so that the two of them might represent the perfection of humanity (in one soul) regardless of gender. The unity between Mary and the Messiah – as 'Adnan al-Maqrani indicates – "appears through the permanent inseparability of their two names in the *Qur'an*. It is as though the umbilical cord that ties them together has never been cut" (Al-Maqrani, 2001).

The issue of the divine paternity of Jesus gave rise to a controversial theological disagreement in Christianity. The Holy *Qur'an* cites this disagreement: "Such was Jesus, Son of Mary; a statement of truth about which they dispute" (19:34). This disagreement was settled by relating the son to the mother without hesitation. This goes back to the maternal ties in the relationship of 'Imran's wife to her daughter Mary, that is, the relationship of a mother to her daughter to form together the maternal lineage of Jesus (pbuh). It is not enough that Jesus be related to Mary so as to be addressed according to his relation with his mother: Jesus, Son of Mary. He acquires his origin in a religious family through his maternal descent from the family of 'Imran, which has the same

status as the Abrahamic descent from the family of Abraham. Therefore, narratives of the infancies of Mary, John, and Jesus appear together in the *sura* of Al 'Imran with God's election of this progeny: "God elected Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham and the family of 'Imran over all creation as a progeny, descending one from the other. God is all-hearing, all-knowing. Remember when the wife of 'Imran said ... Thereupon Zachariah invoked ... Remember when the angels said, 'O Mary'" (3:33-35, 38, 42).

The *Sura* of Al 'Imran (*Sura* 3, Medinan)

The Marian verses in the *sura* of Al 'Imran are not revealed to address the journey of the female toward motherhood, with female fertility compared to the fertility of the earth. On the contrary, the Marian verses are revealed to address the religious and social role of the woman, which is set forth in a panoramic presentation of Mary's infancy, youth, and election to receive the good news of a child. All of this is addressed in the context of preparing this exemplar elected from among women, which the revelation desired to be focused on Mary. In the genealogy of the family of 'Imran, the Marian verses are the fine thread that links together the miraculous births to 'Imran's wife, Zachariah, and Mary. This first thread links the maternal lineage, which the revelation desires to highlight for the first time, with the Abrahamic lineage.

To prepare this maternal lineage, we hear the story of 'Imran's wife who makes a vow to her Lord when she becomes pregnant. Added to it is the story of Zachariah's invocation of his Lord asking for a boy to succeed him. Then comes the annunciation of Jesus (pbuh) to Mary. Thus, there are three interrelated annunciations: the annunciation of Mary, the annunciation of John, and the annunciation of Jesus. We will limit ourselves to discussion of the first and last annunciations only, that is, the annunciation of Mary, the annunciation of Jesus, and the narrative and the dialogue that accompany them. In the story of Mary's infancy, her mother devotes her to service in the temple before her birth. Her invocation is the humble invocation to her Lord that her Lord accept her vow:

"My Lord! I have vowed to You, in dedication, what is in my womb. Accept this from me. Indeed, You are all-hearing, all-knowing". When she gave birth to her, she said, "My Lord! I have given birth to a female" And God knew well what she had given birth to. "The male is not like the female. I have named her Mary. I seek refuge for her in You and for her progeny from the accursed Satan". (3:35-36)

How often is the statement of 'Imran's wife, "The male is not like the female", taken out of the context of this story and the argument at hand to justify separation between the two sexes. This statement expresses the mother's disappointment that the child she had vowed to dedicate was a female with whom she could not fulfill the vow. Therefore, she placed the male and the female in a relationship of binary opposition to express forthrightly the problematic idea of having a female serve in the temple. According to societal custom at that time, the female could not do what the male could do in the Sanctuary (the Holy of Holies). However, the revelation answered 'Imran's wife: God had accepted Mary graciously and would make her grow up well. It even uses the all-inclusive temporal expression 'whenever' – "Whenever Zachariah went in to her in the Sanctuary" (3:37) – to indicate Mary's strength in devotion, spiritual discipline, and prolonged prayer in the Sanctuary, which is known as the most honorable and exalted

of councils. After learning that she had given birth to a female, 'Imran's wife announced that she had named her: "I have named her Mary. I seek refuge for her in You" (3:36). This announcement indicates that 'Imran's wife held the prerogative to name. In a patriarchal system, it is usually the fathers rather than the mothers who name the children because naming follows on from the legitimacy of the one who names and the one who knows the names: "He taught Adam all of the names. Then, He presented them to the angels. He said, 'Tell Me the names of these if you are truthful" (2:31).

According to the *Qur'an*, at her birth and after naming her, Mary's mother asked God to protect her child and her progeny from the accursed Satan (this will be referred to as the refuge-seeking verse in this article 3:35-36). This has caught the attention of both Muslims and Christians. Muslim commentators have been concerned with the issue of Mary and her son's protection from Satan's touch at birth. This is narrated in the *hadith* of Abu Hurayra: "Satan touches every child at birth, and he begins to cry at his touch, except Mary and Jesus". Al-Tabari interprets this refuge-seeking as God "responding to her. God gives her and her progeny refuge from the accursed Satan, and He does not give him any access to her" (Al-Tabari, 1969, p. 336). However, al-Tabari does not link this refuge seeking to the story of Adam, Eve, the fall from the Garden, and the notion of sin transmitted through the progeny of Adam. In any case, classical and modern commentators such as al-Zamakhshari (d. 1144), Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (1210), al-Qurtubi (d. 1273), and Muhammad Abdu (d. 1905) criticize the *hadith* of Abu Hurayra. As al-Razi asks, "Why does God – Exalted is He – protect Mary and Jesus and not the rest of the prophets – Peace be upon them?" (al-Razi, 1938). Abu Hurayra's *hadith*, which seems to have been narrated to interpret the refuge seeking verse, is discredited because the notion of original sin transmitted through human progeny is absent in Islam. In the Islamic concept, human nature cannot be stamped with a permanent sin. This notion is not in keeping with the humanity of the prophets in Islam and their ability to commit sins. Hence they are forgiven when they seek forgiveness: "Adam disobeyed his Lord and went astray" (20:121). Then, "Adam received words from his Lord, and He forgave him. Indeed, He is the all-Forgiving" (2:37). Then, Moses killed someone, and he said to His Lord, "My Lord! I have wronged myself. So, forgive me! So, He forgave him. He is indeed the all-forgiving, the all-merciful" (28:15). It is also not in keeping with legal obligation, which puts women and men on the same level in spiritual and ethical matters. The place of Mary is independent of her son in this respect. The Dominican Father George Anawati (1958) made a necessary contribution in clarifying the Islamic position on Mary's mother's seeking refuge "for her and for her progeny from the accursed Satan" and on the *hadith* of Abu Hurayra. He came to a conclusion similar to ours, namely, that the notion of "protection from original sin at birth" is absent from the teachings of Islam, which fundamentally does not believe in the transmission of original sin. For my part, I will add that linking the transmission of original sin to the virgin birth or the inferiority of the woman stained with original sin has absolutely no basis in the *Qur'an*. The *Qur'an* does not in any way tie women to a permanent sin that stained Eve forever.

The apocryphal infancy gospels linked to the heritage of popular piety preserve the story of Mary's infancy for us, and the *Qur'an* has preserved this story showing the role of the female in the history of salvation, that is, the extent to which the woman participates in the Holy or is permitted to enter the temple and reside in

the Sanctuary for worship and devotion. It is as if the revelation here discusses a theology of the Muslim woman through Mary. For no sooner do we hear that Zachariah saw something extraordinary in the marvelous provision (of food) for Mary that he longs for a child, even though he had despaired of having a child because of his old age and that of his wife: “Her Lord accepted [Mary] graciously, made her grow up well and entrusted her to Zachariah. Whenever Zachariah went in to her in the Sanctuary, he found that she had provision. He said, ‘O Mary! From where did you get this?’ She said, ‘It is from God, and God provides for whomever He wills without measure’. Then Zachariah invoked his Lord, saying, ‘Lord, grant me from before You a fair progeny. You are all-hearing of invocation’” (3:37-38). Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, in his usual style of presenting issues and proofs, discussed wonders of the saints that occurred because extraordinary phenomena appeared at the hand of Mary in this provision. He claimed that these extraordinary phenomena were not a miracle for Zachariah (pbuh). Rather they were a wonder for Jesus (pbuh) or they were a wonder for Mary (pbuh). In this context of accepting Mary graciously at the highest level, we mention the verse of election:

When the angels said, “O Mary! Truly, God has elected you, cleansed you and elected you over the women of all creation. O Mary! Be obedient to your Lord. Prostrate yourself and bow down with those who bow”. This is part of the tidings from the Unseen which We reveal to you. You were not in their midst when they cast their pens to see who would take charge of Mary, and you were not in their midst when they were disputing. (3:42-44)

The two elections in the verse which narrates Mary’s first election, her cleansing, and her second election over the women of all creation have been discussed from more than one angle. From the meanings of the first and second elections to the issue of cleansing and its meanings, I will give an example of commentary that consistently reflects the culture of the commentator who plays the role of mediator between us and the text. This *Qur’anic* text, as we will see, is distinguished by a spirit of development and openness to the woman. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi interprets the first election as follows:

First, He – Exalted is He – accepted her being dedicated even though she was a female. Second, when her mother gave birth to her, she did not nourish her for a moment but turned her over immediately to Zachariah, and her provision came from heaven. Third, He – Exalted is He – freed her to worship Him and favored her in this with all kinds of grace, guidance and protection. Fourth, her livelihood sufficed for her. Her provision came from God – Exalted is He – according to what He – Exalted is He – said, “From where did you get this?” She said, ‘It is from God.’” Fifth, He – Exalted is He – made her hear the speech of the angels orally, and that was not given to any other female. As for the cleansing, first, God – Exalted is He – cleansed her from unbelief and disobedience. Second, He cleansed her from contact with men; third, from menstruation; and fourth, from blameworthy deeds and shameful habits. Fifth, He cleansed you (sic) from what the Jews say and their accusations and lies. What is meant by the second election is that He – Exalted is He – gave her Jesus – (pbuh) – without a father; He made Jesus speak after she had delivered him so that he bore witness to her innocence; and He made her and her son a sign to all creation (Al-Razi, n.d., p. 46).

The election of Mary over the women of all creation puts Mary in the running for

the best of women in Islam. As al-Tabari narrates, “It suffices for you that Mary bint ‘Imran, the Pharaoh’s wife, Khadija bint Khuwaylid, and Fatima bint Muhammad (daughter of the Prophet) are among the women of all creation” (Al-Tabari, pp. 395-397). Mary used to sit – in texts surrounding the basic text, that is, in the classical *Sunni* and *Shi‘i* commentaries – on the highest summit, even though the introduction of Fatima into this competition sometimes pushed the latter to the forefront at the expense of Mary. However, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, who combined theological and philosophical knowledge and developed *Qur’an* commentary into a comprehensive science, does not link Mary’s first and second elections with God’s election of Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of ‘Imran over all of creation as a progeny, descending one from the other. That is, he does not link the verse of Mary’s election with the election of the family of ‘Imran, which was prior in genealogical order to the family of Jesus.

Mary stands alone among all the women of the *Qur’an* due to her first and second elections and her purification, and her intensive rites of worship through prostration and reverence. Mention of these special distinctive devotional acts of Mary come as if to prepare Mary for the great role of receiving the wonderful news that she was pregnant with the Word, whose name was Jesus Son of Mary. By this she laid the foundation for a maternal lineage from ‘Imran’s family, which constituted Mary and her son’s family: “When the angels said, ‘O Mary! God gives you good news of a Word from him. His name will be the Messiah, Jesus Son of Mary. He will be greatly honored in this world and in the hereafter, and he will be one of those near to God’ ... She said, ‘My Lord! How can I have a child when no man has touched me?’ He said, ‘Even so, God creates what He wills. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it: Be! and it is’” (3:45, 47). The annunciation emphasizes the power of God in creating Jesus without a father and from a virgin mother. God accepted a female to receive revelation through the angel’s appearance. This had never happened to any woman. This raises the question of whether Mary’s reception of revelation from God in the same way as the Messenger Muhammad falls under the rubric of prophethood. Ibn Hazm (d. 1046), the Andalusian Zahiri³ philosopher tries in one chapter in his book *Al-Fasl fi al-milal wa al-ahwa’ wa al-nihal* to establish prophethood for women generally and the prophethood of Mary specifically. In this he relies on the literal sense of the *Qur’anic* text. Ibn Hazm says:

It is absolutely impossible in any respect that this address from an angel be given to anyone but a prophet. We find that He – Exalted is He – has sent Gabriel to Mary, mother of Jesus – (Peace be upon them both). He addresses her to give her a pure boy. This is authentic prophethood and a message to her from God – Exalted is He. (Ibn Hazm, 1938, p. 12)

Al-Qurtubi (d. 1273), the Andalusian jurist who died 200 years after Ibn Hazm, agrees with Ibn Hazm concerning prophethood for women, and he defends especially the prophethood of Mary, mother of Jesus. He invokes the verse of election and reinforces the *Qur’anic* witness with Prophetic witness in the *hadith*: “Among men many were perfected. Among women only Mary bint ‘Imran and Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh, were perfected...” He continues, “Absolute perfection belongs exclusively only to God – Exalted is He. There is no doubt that the most perfect kind of human is the prophets. Following them are the saints among the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous. If that

³. *Al-Zahiriya* is a school of Islamic law based on deriving the law from the literal text of the *Qur’an* and the *Sunna*.

is confirmed, then it is said: prophethood is meant by the aforementioned perfection in the *hadith*, and it follows necessarily from that that Mary is a prophet because God revealed to her by means of the angel as He has revealed to the rest of the prophets. It is correct that Mary (pbuh) and Asiya are prophets” (Al-Qurtubi, 1958, p. 83).

However, al-Tabari, al-Zamakhshari, and al-Razi, that is, the great majority of eastern classical commentators, reject the prophethood of Mary. This is despite the fact that the Andalusians have another view, as we have just shown with the two jurists Ibn Hazm, the Zahiri, and al-Qurtubi, the Maliki⁴ author of the commentary *Jami' li-ahkam al-Qur'an*. The revelation's focus on the humanity of Jesus and his mother and criticism of whoever makes them “two gods apart from God” (5:116) does not prevent discussing the prophethood of women. It would not appear that this prophethood should be considered differently from texts that placed women and men on the same level in respect to entrustment. If it were otherwise, why would reputable and oft-quoted commentators discuss this? Opening this door raises questions about the historical and the human circumstances of those commentators who do not try to relate Mary's spiritual experience to the experience of the rest of the prophets in receiving revelation, even though the signification of the Marian verses in the *sura* of Al 'Imran gives all religious rights to the Muslim woman. Acceptance of her worthiness of entrustment and responsibility appeared from the time Mary was told to shake the tree (an indicator of personal effort) to the time when she was accepted in the Sanctuary for spiritual preparation at the highest level to receive revelation through the speech of the angel. This may be considered the spiritual equality between male and female to which the Holy *Qur'an* calls without any ambiguity or embellishment.

Conclusion

This article has examined the *Qur'anic* verses on Mary from her arduous journey into the desert and her confrontation with her people upon returning carrying the infant in her hands on to her training in prayer and worship in the Sanctuary in order to receive direct revelation from God. From this, we are perhaps in a position to form a picture of the relation between Mary's self and motherhood in the Holy *Qur'an*.

On the one hand, the Marian verses and mention of her in the Heavenly Book occur only in the course of infancy narratives, which are also celebrated in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The narrative of Mary's childhood is similar to that of Jesus, from the story of her mother's pregnancy to her growth in worship and her election for the annunciation. In her endurance at the personal level (the pains of childbirth and the confrontation with her people while carrying the infant) and at the socio-religious level (her acceptance into the Sanctuary), Mary was transformed into the ideal type of the firm, believing, and devoted female. Mary certainly was designated to be the mother of Jesus. However, the matter is not limited to that. We have also Mary's conversation with the angel, Mary's serenity in delivering in a wasteland, the conversation of her people with her and their defamation of her chastity, and the Messiah's words in the cradle defending his mother. We also have the end of the text in which the Messiah Jesus Son of Mary announces God's decree of prayer and alms for him, the righteousness of his mother, and compassion and loyalty to her. In all of this the *Qur'anic* text stands with the female declaring the importance of fertility, and it stands with the female in the pain of childbearing, showing her suffering the pain alone. Then it

4. The *Maliki* school of law is based on the work of *Imam* Malik. He introduced the recognition of *'amal*, i.e., the effective and unanimous practise of Medina, which he established as an organized judicial system.

stands with the female against slander and easy defamation of her chastity. Even though all of these matters might be subsumed under a theology against despairing of God's mercy, they nonetheless also involve a defense of Mary in her very femininity. Hence, the *Qur'an* shows special concern for Mary beyond the narratives of Jesus' infancy because of its fundamental awareness of the essence of the human female and because exclusion of the female from the Holy and its symbols does not exist at all. The female does not undertake this journey alone only to connect with the Spirit of God. Rather, she enters the Sanctuary in the Holy of Holies to worship and grow and prepare for the annunciation coming from God through the direct appearance of the angel.

Even though Mary's story in the *sura* of Mary is about childbirth, it is primarily her story. The events revolve around her, and the characters converse with her because of who she is in herself. The name of Jesus (pbuh) is absent in the conversations, even when he introduces himself at the end of the narrative in the first person: "I am the servant of God, Who gave me the Book and made me a prophet and made me blessed... Peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I will die and the day I will be raised alive" (19:30-31). His name appears only in the commentary on the theological controversy that existed among the Christians themselves: "Such was Jesus Son of Mary; a statement of truth about which they dispute. It is not for God to take a son. Glory be to Him! When He decrees something, He only says to it, 'Be!', and it is" (19:34-35). Even though the story is about the annunciation, the childbirth, the introduction of the child and welcoming him, Mary is transformed at the narrative level from the mother of Jesus to the ideal female. This is on account of the revelation's concern to show the importance of the female at the level of fertility and giving birth and the importance of the mother at the level of emotion and intergenerational struggle.

Mary and her son constitute one sign. This is something that the text makes clear. Mary is referred to by her familial relationship as the daughter of 'Imran, the sister of Aaron, and by her name Mary when the angels call her. In stories about her, however, she is linked to the annunciation and the birth of the child whom God had given her, that is, to her motherhood of the Messiah. A prominent problematic in *Qur'anic* polemic is the divine paternity of Jesus, so it seems. Thus, focus is also given to the importance of Mary's motherhood: she was able to name her son and relate him to her elected family. This is among the things that made Mary's tie to him similar to the umbilical cord which ties a mother to her fetus. That is, God made the two of them one sign.

We conclude by saying that all this makes the distinction between Mary's self and her motherhood obvious. This is due to the importance of the annunciation of the Word to her (It was also announced to the preceding prophets). The Word was Jesus Son of Mary. Therefore, we cannot split the *Qur'anic* story of Mary from the story of her son's birth because her story is narrated along with the good tidings of the Lord Christ's infancy and with the controversy around his birth, the details of which the text recounts. This indicates that the importance of Mary's motherhood and her giving birth to the Messiah Jesus (Peace be upon them both) depends on the extent to which she is important in herself, which is highlighted in the Holy *Qur'an*.

The verses on Mary – the story of her journey to give birth to her son and the story of her infancy – are entirely from the recited *Qur'an*. The idea that is always tied to the term "*Qur'an*" is "recitation" (*tilawa*), which is considered to be one of the acts of worship:

“It is for us to gather it and recite (*Qur’an*) it. When we recite it, follow its recitation” (75:17-18). That is, the Holy *Qur’an* is fundamentally a text recited for audition and for prayer. This makes people aware of Mary so that the Arab aesthetic taste is informed by the humble Marian spirit that we perceive in our recitation of the *sura* of Al ‘Imran and the Gospel of Luke. The oral Christian heritage has preserved the story of Mary’s infancy, and there are traces of her in the liturgy and in eastern Christian iconography. So also, the Holy *Qur’an* preserved for us this oral Christian heritage to be recited in the spirit of mercy. We see this spirit in the gift of children to fathers and mothers and in the relationship of mercy between sons and fathers and sons and mothers, in the spirit of the Marian prayer exalting the Lord – the Magnificat – in the Gospel of Luke, and in the spirit of mercy and the All-Merciful, to which the revelation responded through the mouth of Muhammad. We conclude by mentioning part of Mary’s prayer from the Gospel of Luke and that which resembles it in the *sura* of Al ‘Imran:

For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name. His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. (Luke 1:49-53)

Say, ‘O God, Master of Sovereignty! You give sovereignty to whomever You will, and You take sovereignty away from whomever You will. You exalt whomever You will and You abase whomever You will. In Your hand is the good, and You are powerful over all things’”. (3:26)

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