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The Shift of Al-Shawkani's Theological Thinking in Tafseer Fath al-Qadeer from Zaydi Shi'i to Ash'ari Sunni

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Abstract

This article aims to examine Al-Shawkani's theological thinking in *Tafseer Fath al-Qadeer*, which allegedly underwent a shift from the Zaydi (Fivers) Shi'i sect to Ash'ari (Twelver) Sunni theology. *Tafseer Fath al-Qadeer* is Al-Shawkani's masterpiece in the field of commentary. Al-Shawkani was a leading scholar in Yemen from the late medieval period to the modern era. He grew up in the Zaydi Madhab (school of thought). Nevertheless, he contradicted his original madhab, leading to a shift in his theological thinking. This study employs a qualitative approach using textual analysis of *Tafseer Fath al-Qadeer* to explore Al-Shawkani's theological perspectives and the reasons underlying this shift. Al-Shawkani's shift in thought becomes evident in his commentary on theological verses in *Tafseer Fath al-Qadeer*. Referring to Al-Shawkani's arguments on theology, such as issues on seeing God in the hereafter, the coming of God, martyrdom, and *istiwa'* (God's residence), Al-Shawkani leaned more toward the arguments proposed by the Ash'ari school rather than those by the Zaydi or Mu'tazili madhab. The findings reveal that Al-Shawkani frequently criticized Mu'tazili thoughts using both *naqli* (scriptural) and *aqli* (reasoning) propositions, signaling a departure from Zaydi theology. However, in the debate about the Quran's position—whether it is *qadim* (eternal) or created—Al-Shawkani maintained an independent stance. This shift in thought is reasonable, considering that Al-Shawkani, as a moderate Zaydi Shiite, sought to open himself to theological perspectives from other madhabs, which he considered more accurate. This research contributes to the scholarly understanding of theological evolution within Islamic traditions by demonstrating Al-Shawkani's methodological approach to reconciling theological divergence. It also provides a framework for examining inter-sectarian influences in Islamic theology and their impact on exegetical works.

Keywords: *Tafseer Fath al-Qadeer, Theological Thinking, Zaydi Shi'i, Ash'ari Sunni*

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INTRODUCTION

In the cross-history of the Quran commentary, the Muslim's commentary on their holy book always develops along with the development of human civilization and cultures. This is because a commentator always tries to think and find meanings and messages which cannot be understood from the literal text of the Quran verses. This reality is due to the fact that a *mufasssir*

(commentator), when interpreting the Quran, is usually influenced by socio-cultural condition where he lives, even by the political situation and theological schools which surround him (Mufid, 2020). In addition, there is a tendency in the way a *mufasssir* understands the Quran in accordance with the science discipline he concentrates on. Therefore, despite the same verse object of study, the results of the commentaries may vary.

The diversity of commentary styles is a positive thing which shows the treasures of Islamic thoughts extracted from the Quran. This means, the Quran has greatly contributed and bestowed to the flourishing plurality in the commentary itself. Almost in every line of life, including in the thoughts of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *kalam* (discourse), Sufism (philosophy), and commentary, there are various madhabs or sects of thoughts (Mustaqim & Qudsy, 2008, p. 60). The emergence of these sects in commentary goes along with the development of knowledge in the Muslim's ways of thinking which began in the medieval period. Of the developing sects at that time was theology. At this period, the style of the Quran Commentary carried out by commentators was of theological thinking.

The commentary of theological verses also draws Al-Shawkani's attention in his commentary works. On several occasions, he extends the commentary of theological verses by discussing the arguments of his predecessors. Al-Shawkani who is a Shi'ite of Zaydi Shi'i sect does not necessarily follow his predecessors' arguments, the Zaydi scholars who share a theological affinity with Mu'tazili sect. In fact, he often disagrees with the arguments of the madhhab he professes. Al-Shawkani's openness to theological thinking is supported by his very profound level of science towards various theological sects, proving that he is not only fanatic on his own sect. From the points of view above, this article wants to discuss Al-Shawkani's theological thinking in his exegesis masterpiece, *Fath al-Qadeer*. In order to figure out the theological thinking tendency, an overview of *Fath al-Qadeer*, Al-Shawkani's educational background, and an overview of Zaydi Shi'i and Ash'ari Sunni are depicted. This study was conducted to find out whether there was in fact a shift in Al-Shawkani's theological thinking, especially with regard to the attributes of God mentioned in the Quran. In this exegesis, Al-Shawkani was allegedly not prone to the Zaydi Shi'i sect; there was even a shift in his theological thinking. Furthermore, the data collecting method was done through documentation and interpreted in a descriptive-critical analysis.

DISCUSSION

1. An Overview of Tafseer Fath Al-Qadeer

Fath al-Qadeer is one of Al-Shawkani's greatest works in the field of commentary (mufasir), in the late medieval period until modern era. Al-Shawkani wrote this exegesis for seven (7) years (1223-1229 H / 1808-1814 AD). In his introduction, Al-Shawkani testified that the writing of this exegesis was motivated by his desire to build the Quran as an answer to his opponents, an explanatory for the doubts, and an explanation of *halal* (what is allowed) and *haram* (what is disallowed) (Al-Shawkani, 2014a: 40). From the description above, Al-Shawkani is very enthusiastic in expressing his thoughts in his exegesis.

Despite being written by someone affiliated with Zaydi madhab, this exegesis is widely used and considered credible by the Sunnis, especially adherents of Ash'ari madhab. One of the reasons is, in this exegesis writing, Al-Shawkani refers to many books that have been known as the works of Sunni scholars, either in the fields of commentary, *hadith*, *fiqh*, *ushul fiqh* or linguistics. *Tafseer Fath al-Qadeer* is derived from its complete name entitled "*Fath al-Qadir al-Jami 'baina Fannai al-rivayah wa al-dirayah*." Al-Shawkani wants to combine the two forms of commentaries of *al-dirayah* and *al-rivayah* at once, and the method of (mentioning) such combination has not much been done by previous *mufassirs* (commentators) (Atabik, 2017).

In terms of commentary method, Al-Shawkani used *tablili* (analysis) method. This is based on his commentaries related to various aspects covered in the verses he commented on. Al-Shawkani in his exegesis also explained the meanings covered in it in accordance with the various fields of science he mastered. Judging Al-Shawkani using *tablili* method can be seen from his commentary basics in a detailed analysis by explaining the verses of the Quran from various aspects (Al-Ghumari, 1980: 165).

Besides using the *tablili* method, it can be said that Al-Shawkani very frequently used *muqaran* (comparative) method. This can be seen that, in this exegesis, Al-Shawkani presented and compared various commentaries in which they are different or even contradicting each other. The *muqaran* method used by Al-Shawkani can precisely be identified from the ways he interpreted, that is, almost all verses interpreted are always compared to one another. From this comparison, Al-Shawkani examined the most powerful and correct arguments of various different commentaries. Al-Shawkani raised the most powerful argument while explaining its meaning in-depth in the form of "*bi al-rivayah*" and "*al-dirayah*" interpretation.

In comparing scholars' arguments, Al-Shawkani mentioned the degrees of *hadith*,

namely *sahih* (valid), *hasan* (good) and *da'eef* (weak), even criticisms, comparisons showing the strongest arguments (*arjah*) are found. Through these kinds of methods, it seems that Al-Shawkani wants to combine the *tablili* and *muqaran* methods so as to get a comprehensive interpretation. Although, sometimes Al-Shawkani does not mention the hadith *sanads* (citations) in *tafsiral-rivayah* (narrated interpretation); this is because when referring to the original source (book), he couldn't even find the *sanads*, such as in *tafsir al- Durr al-Mantsur*, *tafsir al-Qurthubi* and others (Farmawi, n.d.: 56).

Thus, Al-Shawkani's commentary is unique in terms of its writing, sequences, delivery, scopes for various kinds of science of the Quran, its *al-rivayah* and *al-dirayah* combination. These are the privileges that Al-Shawkani has and many more features that the researcher will find when reading this exegesis, such as agreeing more to madhabs in matters of worship, criticizing the Mu'tazilas, the arguments of which are similar to those of Zaydi Shi'i, agreeing to many arguments expressed by the *Sunnis* (Al-Shawkani, 2014a: 49).

2. Al-Shawkani a Figure of Zaydi Shi'i

His full name is Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Abdullah Al-Shawkani al-Shan'ani. The name "Al-Shawkani" is attributed to the *Hijra Shawkan*, a village in *Shihamites* which is located in the east of Shan'a city (Al-Muqhafi, 2002: 883). Al-Shawkani's father, Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn al-Hasan ibn Muhammad ibn Salah ibn Ibrahim ibn Muhammad al-,,Afif ibn Muhammad ibn Riziq, was a prominent Yemeni scholar. He was trusted for many years by the Regime of *al-Qasimiyah* Leaders, a Zaydi dynasty in Yemen, to hold the position of judge (*qadhi*). Then, he had resigned two years before he died. It was from this family environment that Al-Shawkani grew up and was raised in an educated setting (Al-Shawkani, 2007a: 327).

Since his childhood, Al-Shawkani has memorized the Quran and its *tajweed* (recitation rules) very well. He studied the Quran from a number of *shaykhs* (the Quran teachers), one of whom was al-Faqih Hasan ibn ill Abdillan al-Habl. He studied *tajweed* from several *shaykhs* in San'a' before he was at the age of learning, that is, when he was not ten years old yet. After having memorized the Quran at the age of less than ten years, Al-Shawkani then memorized *matans* (texts of hadith) of *al-Azhar* book from his father, *mukhtas ar al-Faraid* by al-'Usaifiri, *al-Malbat al-Harm* by al -Hariri, *al-Kafiyah wa al-Syafiyah* by Ibn al-Hajib, *at- Tahzhib* by at-Taftazani, *at-Talkhis fi 'Ulum al-Balaghah* by al-Qazwaini, *al-Ghayah* by Ibnu al- Imam, *Manzhumah al- Jazari fi al-Qira'ah*, *Manzhumah al-*

Jazzar fi al-'Arud, and Adab al-Bahs wa al-Munazarah by al-Imam al-'Adhud (Al-Shawkani, 2007b: 106).

In studying these various disciplines, Al-Shawkani did not suffice himself with *talaqqi* (a face-to-face learning) to one scholar only, even he did *talaqqi* to many scholars at the same time. For instance, he studied *nahwu* and *sarf* (the Arabic grammar) to Shaykh Ismail Ibn al-Hasan Ahmad, Shaykh Abdullah ibn Ismail an-Nahmi, Shaykh al-Qasim ibn Yahya al-Khaulani at the same time. As he studied *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) from his father, Shaykh Abdurrahman ibn Qasim al-Madani, Shaykh Ahmad bi „Amir al-Hada'i and Shaykh Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Harazi in the periods before he gave *fatwas* (rules on a point of Islamic law recognized by the authority) to the community (Namsuk, 1999: 86).

Although Al-Shawkani studied various disciplines of religion from different scholars and certainly more senior than him, Al-Shawkani never studied outside the city of San'a'. This was because his parents allowed him to study only in Sana,,a. Nevertheless, there are certainly reasons why Al-Shawkani only studied in Sana" a. To his father, the city of San,,a" was considered sufficient because the condition of its educational development at that time was better than other cities in the Islamic world.

In addition, 'Ali Al-Shawkani (Al-Shawkani's father) was a Zaydi Shi'i scholar who had a high and great reputation in the kingdom, who was then serving as a *Qadi* (judge). Therefore, he wished his son to occupy the position of a great Zaydi scholar. To make his ideals come true, Al-Shawkani was at first directed to study Zaydi Shi'i sect from the Zaydi scholars who were at that time concentrated in San,,a" (Rusli, 1999: 56). Al-Shawkani's intellectual pace was very much felt by Yemenis and surrounding areas. As a scholar and as a *qadi* in his days, many people learned from him.

From the previous explanation, it is clear that Imam Al-Shawkani grew up in the Zaydi madhab, he learned a lot from the Zaydi scholars. The Zaydi Shi"ism is a moderate group in which of its scholars" teaching is very close to the thoughts of the Sunni Madhabs (Four schools of thoughts). In the field of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), the Zaydi madhab is closer to the *fiqh* of *abl as-sunnah* than that of Shi'a. In the field of *muamalat* (social interaction), the Zaydi madhab is close to the Hanafi. Moreover, Abu Hanifa had studied from Imam Zaid. Likewise, in the field of *usul fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence), the Zaydi madhab is also not much different from the Sunni madhabs (Rusli, 1999: 65).

Al-Shawkani was educated in the Zaydi environment; his father, who was his first *madrassa* (school teacher), was one of the most famous scholars in the Zaydi madhab at his time. In addition to studying from the Zaydi scholars, he also studied books out of the Zaydi madhab, such as *ushul fiqh* book of Shafi'i madhab, the hadith book of *Bulugh al-Maram* laws, Sahih al-Bukhari and his '*Fath al-Bari*' *sharh* (explanation), and many other books which are prone to the Sunni scholars' learning traditions, both in an independent way and through *talaqqi* (face-to-face learning) with their teachers (Rusli, 1999: 66).

3. Patterns of Zaydi Shi'i Exegesis

The Zaydi madhab is a group which follows a moderate way of thinking and religion, and considered to be closer to the Sunnis than to the Shi'ite leadership. Their moderate stance in thinking is illustrated in the way they define the Quran. In fact, the definition they establish is almost similar to that the Sunni scholars do. According to the Zaydi madhab, the Quran is *Kalamullah* (word of God), which was passed down to the Prophet Muhammad to demean other *kalams*, both with the shortest *surah* (chapters) and with a number of *mutawatir* (credibly successive narrated) verses. According to the Zaydi madhab, *basmalah* is a part of the Quran, except for the chapter *at-Taubah* (*al-Bara'ah*). *Basmalah* is the beginning of *al-Fatihah* and of each chapter, as held by the majority of scholars, especially the Imam Shafi'i madhab (Faudah, 1987, p. 238).

According to the description above, it can be concluded that the Zaydi madhab completely agrees with the belief of the majority of scholars, that the Quran is the word of God (*kalamullah*) that is not tainted by evils, both from the front and the back, passed down from the presence of God, 'The All Praiseworthy. But on the other hand, the Zaydi madhab was greatly influenced by Mu'tazili thoughts considering that Imam Zaid (the founder of Zaydi) had met Washil ibn 'Atha' and both agreed on their thoughts. From this, it can be said that there is a close connection between the thought of Zaydi and Mu'tazila on theological issues (Faudah, 1987: 239).

In commenting the Quran verses, the Zaydi is said to be greatly influenced by the thoughts and beliefs of the Mu'tazili Sect. This can also be seen from the Zaidi scholar's commentaries on the Quran verses that have been recorded in the form of exegesis books, both from the earliest days of the establishment of Zaydi Shi'i sect to the Al-Shawkani's time. Al-

Zahabi (Al-Žahabī, 1995: 306) once studied the Zaidi scholar's exegesis, either in printed forms or in manuscripts. At first, al-Zahabi only found two commentaries, that is, Al-Shawkani's *Tafseer Fath al-Qadeer* and *al-ahkam* exegesis entitled *al-Tsamarat al-Yani,ah* by Syamsuddin Yusuf ibn Ahmad, a Zaydi scholar in the ninth-century of Hijriya.

Dissatisfied with his findings, al-Zahabi tried to examine more deeply through works related to the object of study, such as the book of *Fibrasat* by Ibn an-Nadim. In this book, al-Zahabi found that Muqatil ibn Sulaiman was categorized as one of the Zaydi scholars who had works in the field of commentary. In addition to Muqatil's exegesis, al-Zahabi also discovered the book of *Tafsir al-Shaghir* by Abu Ja, far Muhammad ibn Mansur al-Muradi as the work of Zaydi scholar (Al-Žahabī, 1995: 307).

Of all the commentary works which have been examined by al-Zahabi and al-Ghumari, up to now the Zaydi madhab's exegesis which still exist, printed and often made as references of the Zaydi madhab are Al-Shawkani's exegesis called "*Fath al-Qadeer*" and Syamsuddin Yusuf bin Ahmad's "*al-Tsaamarat al-Yaniah*" (Al-Žahabī, 1995: 308). This shows that the Zaydi madhab in its development did not very much interest many people, resulting that not many scholars were affiliated with this Zaydi Shi'i sect.

In commenting theological verses of the attributes of God, the Zaydi and Mu'tazili madhabs declared that the attributes of God are not something other than His own Substance. Otherwise, according to the Zaydi madhab, it will lead *Qadim* to be countable. This implies that there is no recognition of the attributes of God before. Based on this basis, the Zaydi and Mu'tazila asserted that the Substance of God must not be distinguished from His attributes (Nasution, 1986: 135). The Zaydi and Mu'tazila divert meanings of the attributes of God from the original meaning to another meaning. Referring to that, the Zaydis and Mu'tazilites believe that God knows by His Substance, not by His knowledge. It's in contrast to the Sunnis who declare that God is by His Substance and His knowledge.

Referring to the statements above, according to the Zaydi and Mu'tazila, God has no attributes attached to Him. Abu Zahrah stated that their perception about God as revealed by Ash'ari, is negative. To them, God has no knowledge, has no power, has no wish and so on. This does not mean that God, to them, does not know either, nor has power, nor lives and so on (Zahrah, 1995: 422). God does know, does have power, but the terms "knows", "has power" and so on are not attributes in the true meaning of the words. The meaning of "God knows by

His Substance”, according to al-Jubbai refers to “know”, God does not intend to attribute to knowledge or the state of knowing (Atabik, 2016).

4. Theological styles of Tafseer Fath al-Qadeer

Commentary style deals with a certain color, direction, or tendency of a thought or an idea that dominates a commentary work (Baidan, 2011: 388). Al-Shawkani in his exegesis does not seem to have a specific tendency on the use of an absolutely specific style of scientific thoughts, such as a tendency on theology, jurisprudence, linguistics or any other tendencies. Al-Shawkani actually combines various styles in his exegesis that is of theology, jurisprudence, or Arabic literatures.

Someone's interpretation is determined by his madhab affiliation and the science disciplines he pursues. Likewise, since childhood, Al-Shawkani has been forged in the Zaydi Shi'i environment. However, the depth of his knowledge was not necessarily affected by the madhab. Besides Zaydism, there are various sects which have adorned the religious life in San'a', but that did not simply turn Al-Shawkani to be the member of one of these sects either. However, it must be admitted, the number of sects more or less influenced him on expressing his commentary thoughts. Therefore, it is not surprising that in his exegesis, Al-Shawkani talks a lot about theology (science of *kalam*/discourse), which shows his stance towards his religious position.

Of the discourse themes which adorned his commentary was the debate on the attributes of God in terms of *istima'* (God's residence), this can be seen from his commentary on the Quran Chapter al-A'raf verse 54:

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يُغْشِي اللَّيْلَ النَّهَارَ يَطْلُبُ حَشِيئًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ وَالنُّجُومَ مُسَخَّرَاتٍ بِإِذْنِهِ أَلَا لَوْ لِلنَّاسِ أَلْفُ أَلْفٍ مَّا لَهُمْ فِيهِ شَيْءٌ تَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Meaning: *Indeed your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then settled on the Throne. He draws the night's cover over the day, which pursues it swiftly, and [He created] the sun, the moon, and the stars, [all of them] disposed by His command. Look! All creation and command belong to Him. Blessed is Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.* (QC Al- A'raf: 54).

In interpreting this verse, Al-Shawkani presented various arguments of discourse scholars, he explained, "The scholars have fourteen different arguments on the meaning of this verse. The most correct one is *al-Salaf al-Salih* madhab, stating that God settled on the throne without us knowing how, but in an appropriate manner with Him while purifying Him of

what is not permissible. *Istawa* in Arabic means high and settled. *Istawa* means conquering and defeating (Al-Shawkani, 2014b: 298).

Likewise, when Al-Shawkani commented the word of God in the Quran Chapter Taha verse 5:

Meaning: *the All-beneficent, settled on the Throne*" (QC Taha: 5).

الرَّحْمَنُ ُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى

Al-Shawkani referred to some of his predecessors' arguments by stating, Ahmad ibn Yahya said, "Sa'lab said, "*Istawa*" is facing something" as asserted by Az-Zajaj and Al-Farra'. Another argument says that *istawa*" is a metaphor of empire and power. Al-Shawkani did *tarjih* (prioritizing) by asserting: "the argument I believe is in accordance with that of Abu Hasan Al-Ashari, that is, that God settled on the Throne without us knowing how and up to". This argument has been preceded by the majority of *al-Salaf al-Salih* who interpreted the attributes as they are without distorting or institutionalizing (Al-Shawkani, 2014c: 491).

From the example of above commentary, it can be stated that regarding the issue on the attributes of God, Al-Shawkani is more prone to the Sunni sect, where they determine what God and His Messenger have determined and deny what God and His Messenger refuse, without giving a *takwil* (hidden meaning explanation) of those verses. As Imam Malik once said, "*Istawa*" is known (*maklum*) and how is unknown (*majhul*). Questioning about that is a heresy (*bidaah*) and believing it is mandatory (*wajib*)".

5. Theological Commentary of Ash'ari (The Sunnis)

In establishing theological beliefs, The Sunni madhab or *Ahl al-sunnah wa al-Jamaah* makes use of text and reasoning combination. This madhab was introduced by Abu Hasan al-Ashari and a number of figures who shared the same sect. The method they applied in interpreting the Quran is to adhere the methods adopted by the Messenger of God and *al-Khulfa al-Rashidun* (Four Caliphates). They hold on to the arguments of *manqul* (quoted) from the Messenger of God and also the Companions and the *Tabiin* (the Followers). They also use reasonings in interpreting verses. Even though, if they encounter authentic and clear texts, they prioritize texts rather than human reasonings (Tazkiyah, 2018).

Of the theological verses commented by the Ash'ari madhab are those related to the issue on the attributes of God. These verses have drawn the attention of theological madhabs. Al-Ashari asserted that in commenting the verses considered to contain likeness with God as found in the verse "*The Hand of Allah is on the hands of His creatures*" [QC. al- Fath: 10]). It is commented through *tafwidh* method, giving meaning to God whilst not equalizing Him with His creatures. This means that the 'hands' of God worth as 'hands' of the Greatness of the Great God, not by understanding of physical „hands“ of human hands. Thus, His „hands“ are 'attributes' as is His hearing, and sight. Based on the understanding above, al-Ashari avoided the concept that equates God with His creatures, neither denied the attributes of God (Al-Ash'ari, 2010: 104).

In theological thinking of the attributes of God, Ash'ari madhab is divided into two; the first group taking an act of *tafwid*, handing over the issue on verses of the attributes of God without giving a detailed interpretation of their hidden meaning (*salaf* generation). The act of *tafwid* is carried out because it avoids misunderstanding about the likeness of God with His creatures. According to this belief, in understanding the verses of the Attributes of God, it must be done by obeying linguistics rules commonly used by the Arabs (Zuhri & Ula, 2015). The use of this linguistics term can merely lead us to pure assumptions since the issue on the attributes of God is a matter of faith which takes a certain consideration rather than pure presumption only, whereas there is no other way to find that certainty. Thus, we just stop in understanding it in terms of the linguistics sides and hand its meaning over to God Himself (Faudah, 1987: 97).

Next, the second group who provides conventional commentary of the verses of the Attributes of God. It means, if those verses are found, they must be commented with secondary meanings instead of the original ones. This term is called the act of "*ta'wil*" (the allegorical interpretation of the Quran). This group is divided into two; 1) the first group trying to uncover the hidden meaning of the *sam'iyah* attributes of God, but without clarity. They determine the *sam'iyah* attributes without knowing how they are in nature. For example, the „*istima*„attribute of 'God, they apply this attribute in the form of the nature of hands, eyes, and others. 2) the second group trying to uncover the hidden meaning of texts relating to the attributes of God by determining meanings, for instance, „*istima*' means to take control of, „*face*“ means the substance of God, „*hands*“ means power (Al-Shahrastani, 1996: 433).

The Ash‘ari madhab, both *salaf* (predecessor generation) and *khalaf* (successor generation), in understanding the verses of the Quran agree on general principles. First, in terms of theological principles, they always hold on to the physical meanings of the verses of the Quran and the Sunnah (hadith), without giving a detailed explanation on cases that may or not be attributed to God (Adnin & Zein, 2020). Second, regarding with the words of which physical meanings are not in accordance with the holiness of God to comment on. Third, if a *mutashabihat* (hidden meaning) verse has a *ta‘wil* (allegorical interpretation), from which a close understanding can be obtained, then in this case, an *ijma* (scholars’ consensus) argument must be taken into account (Faudah, 1987: 98). Through this kind of moderation in theological thinking which Ash‘ari madhab is later considered as a moderate sect. The moderate stance shown by the Ash‘ari madhab in theological thinking makes it quickly spread to various Islamic countries. Even today, the majority of Muslims in the world are theologically adhering to Ash‘ari madhab.

Ash‘ari’s moderate stance is also based on the use of propositions. This school of thought uses two propositions at once (*naqli* and *aqli*) in arguing on the issue of *aqidah* (faith). Not only do they use the verses of the Quran and hadith in determining the attributes of God, His Messengers, Doomsday, Angels, Judgement Day as well as the blessings of heaven and the torments of hell, but they also take advantage of the functions of reasoning and rational propositions in proving the truth of the *Naqli* propositions. Instead, they do not only make reasoning as a text breaker in interpreting it, but they also hold on to the literal understanding of the text. Nevertheless, they make reasoning as an aid to understand and support the physical meaning of a text (Atabik, 2016).

6. Al-Shawkani’s Theological Exegesis: From the Zaydi to Ash‘ari

Al-Shawkani is a scholar who believes that the door to *ijtihad* (a thorough and careful exertion in finding solution to an issue) is always open. In carrying out *ijtihad*, Al-Shawkani always calls for the adoption of propositions and discards arguments which are not based on the propositions. Based on this background, Al-Shawkani disputes with the sect of his people in various issues, some of which are dealing with branches (*furu‘iyyah*) and some of them are basic (*ushuliyyah*). Namsuk explains that several examples of different arguments between Al-Shawkani and the Zaydi madhab. Whilst, those different arguments can be in details referred to in the book

„*as-Sail al-Jarrar*„, the last book written by Imam Al-Shawkani (Namsuk, 1999: 23–24).

First, Al-Shawkani is different from the Zaydi Madhab in terms of the notion of “*ahl al-bait*.” He argues that „*ahl al-bait*” covers all Prophet Muhammad’s wives, „Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain. Meanwhile, the Zaydi argues that „*ahl al-bait*” is specifically addressed to Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain. Secondly, Al-Shawkani differs from the Zaydi in terms of the notion of “*Imamah*”. He believes that “*Imamah*” is permissible for all descendants of the Quraysh tribe, whilst the Zaydi believes that “*Imamah*” should originate from the descendants of Ali and Fatima. Third, Al-Shawkani differs from the Zaydi’s argument which permits rebellion against cruel leaders. In contrary, Al-Shawkani states an obligation to obey leaders and rulers and forbids rebellion against them as long as they always do prayers, show no disbelief in God in themselves, nor command sins and disobedience (Al-Shawkani, 2012c: 236).

Fourth, Al-Shawkani disagrees with the Zaydi madhab which allows building domes on the tombs of people who are considered noble and for the kings. Fifth, Al-Shawkani strongly disagrees with the Zaydi madhab which requires the following things: 1) The invalidity of Friday prayers without the presence of a fair *imam* (priest) coming from the *Ahlul Bait*. 2) The Zaydi requires the use of “*Hayya „ala khair al-‘amal*” in *azan* and *iqama* (prayer calls) sentence. 3) Fasting on *Yaum Syak* (day of doubt). 4), Doing „*jama*” 'or combining two prayers, of *zuhr* and *asr*, of *maghrib* and *isha*, with no exception. 5), washing genital as a part of *wudu* (ablution).

Whereas, in theological issues, Imam Al-Shawkani madhab is often in agreement with the Ash‘ari madhab, except in a very few number of cases despite the fact that he has held of Zaidi Shi‘i sect since he was a child. Moreover, in theological issues, he used to hold on to Mu‘tazili sect, considering that Imam Zaid was one of the *Wasil bin ‘Atha*’ (80-131 H), founders of the Mu‘tazili sect (Rusli, 1999: 66). Of the issues in contrast to the Ash‘ari’s argument is one dealing with the position of the Quran, whether it is *qadim* or a creature/novelty.

Although Al-Shawkani was raised in a Zaydi environment which had a tendency on the Mu‘tazili sect in theological issues, frequently found in his works, he actually criticized the Mutazilite’s arguments. For instance, in case of interpreting chapter *Ali Imran* verse 178,

لِيَرْزَاؤُوا إِنَّمَا
 إِنَّمَا نُؤْتِيهِمْ

(We give them respite only that they may increase in sin), Al-Shawkani

Immediately attacked Mu'tazila by sharp criticisms. He stated that the number of scholars (*jumbur ulama*) argued with this verse in stating the vanity of what was claimed by the Mu'tazila, because God informed that He lengthened the ages of unbelievers and prospered their lives in order to increase their sins (Al-Shawkani, 2014a: 654).

Al-Shawkani's statement above at the same time stroke back az-Zamakhshari's arguments in "*al-Kashshaf*" stating that: Surely, increasing sin is a form of *illah* (reason), and reason is not an explanation, can't you say? "*qa'adta 'an al-ghazwi*" (you are not to take part in a battle) for the weak and sick, and "*kbarajtu min al-balad li mukhafat al-syarri*" (I came out of this country for fear of getting badness), even though there is no explanation to you, because it is only *illah* (reason) and cause (Al-Zamakhshari, 2016: 664).

Also, Al-Shawkani sharply criticized the Mutazilite's arguments stating that someone could not see God, either in the world or in the here after, this is stated in the commentary of chapter *al-Baqara* verse 55:

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ آلِ مُوسَى لَمَّا قَالُوا إِنَّا نَرَى اللَّهَ جَهَنَّمَ فَأَخَذْتُمْ الصَّاعِقَةَ وَأَنْتُمْ تَبْظُرُونَ

Meaning: And when you said, „O Moses, we will not believe you until we see Allah visibly, thereupon a thunderbolt seized you as you looked on. (QC *Al-Baqarah*: 55).

The God's unwillingness to the request of the Israeli descendants who wanted to see Him was used by the Mutazila as an argument that the God would not be seen in this world or in the hereafter. While another group, argued the possibility of seeing God in the world, and could occur in the afterlife. Al-Shawkani defended this second argument while criticizing the Mutazilites by asserting that many authentic *hadits mutawatir* (credibly successive narrated hadiths) stating that people will see God in the hereafter, and this is a sure proposition. Al-Shawkani added, it is not proper for someone to refer to the theological formulations put forward by Mutazili's predecessors, and their statement saying that reasoning has determined them. That is a fragile claim (the edge of a collapsed cliff) and a formula which only trick people with no useful knowledge (Al-Shawkani, 2014a: 195).

From the two examples above, it is clear that Al-Shawkani addresses criticisms to the Mu'tazili sect, although the Zaydi Shi'i sect in many respects, including theological issues, followed the Mutazili's thoughts, because Imam Zaid was one of the students of *Wasbil bin 'Atha'* (80 -131 H). In fact, according to al-Shahrstani, the Zaydi followers glorify Mu'tazili leaders rather than „*Ahl al-Bayt*“ figures (Al-Shahrastani, 1996: 155). This is what makes it different from Al-

Shawkani, although he is affiliated with the Zaydi madhab, but often he actually criticizes theological thinking almost similar to the madhab he is affiliated with.

Al-Shawkani's theological thinking appears to be truly to follow the Sunni as confronted with the issue of *Sifatullah* (the Attributes of God). In interpreting the QC *al-Baqara*: 210, explains: "There is nothing they have been waiting for, but the coming of God and His angels with what God has promised them, that is, "*hisab*" (the judgement day) and "*azab*" (retaliation) in the shadow of the clouds." When commenting the clause *أَن يَأْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ*, Al-Shawkani prioritizes (*tarijib*) of al-Ahfasy's argument stating that the meaning of *ityan* may refer to *al-jaza* 'or retaliation, *jaza*' is called *ityan* as *takhwif* or *ta'zib* (frightening or punishing), as mentioned by *ityan* in the story of the Thamuds (Al-Shawkani, 2014a, p. 374). A similar meaning is stated as al-Shawkani when commenting QC *al-An'am*: 158, *يَأْتِيَنَّكَ أَوْ*, of which commentary is: O Muhammad, as they put it through their words, "أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْنَا الْمَلَائِكَةَ أَوْ نَرِي رَبَّنَا لِلَّا" which means: "Or comes your Lord's decision to destroy them". From this commentary, it seems that Al-Shawkani uncovers the hidden meaning by shifting the meaning in accordance with the glory of God. Through this way, it can be said that Al-Shawkani is more prone to the arguments of al-Ashari madhab than to any other theological madhabs (Al-Shawkani, 2014a: 254).

The discussion on theology also adorns *Tafseer Fath al-Qadeer* as Al-Shawkani breaks down the scholar's debates over the lives of the martyrs. This can be seen from his commentary on the QC. Ali Imran verse: 169:

وَلَا تَحْسَبُوهُمْ بَدُوتًا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْواتٌ بَلْ أَحْيَاءُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَيُرَوُّونَ

Meaning: *Do not suppose those who were slain in the way of Allah to be dead; rather they are living and provided for near their Lord, (QC. Ali Imran: 169).*

In commenting this verse, Al-Shawkani presents the debate of *kalam* scholars. He states that the experts have different arguments on the martyrs, who are they? Some argue, they are the martyrs of *Uhud* battle. There are also those who argue that they are the martyrs of *Badr* battle. There are also those arguing, they are the martyrs of *Mauna* well. What is clear, although this verse is passed down by a special cause, but the law is concluded based on the *lafaz* (words) in general, not based on the exclusivity of the cause. Meanwhile, in terms of meaning, Al-Shawkani agrees with the arguments of *jumbur ulama*, that they are really alive. However, they are in disagreement, among of whom argue that their spirit is returned to them in their graves and they get pleasure then. *Mujahids* argue, they are given fortune of the fruits of heaven, for those who get the aroma of heaven, but they have not even been there yet. Whilst, in addition to

jumbur, some argue that the life meant is figurative, meaning that in God's law, they are entitled to enjoy heaven (Al-Shawkani, 2014a: 647). Al-Shawkani then justifies and tends to the first argument that turns out to be the Ash'ari's. He said that nothing is indicated figuratively. This is also based on the *Sunnah* (hadith) of the Prophet, their spirits are in the belly of green birds and they are provided with good fortune, good food and a lot of fun in heaven.

Another *kalam* issue which draws the attention of Muslims is whether the Quran is *qadim* and *huduts* (novelty). The issue also gains a portion of Al-Shawkani's commentary in his exegesis. This can be seen from his commentary on the QC. *al-Anbiya* ': 2,

مَا يَنْتَظِرُهُمْ مِنْ ذِكْرِ مَنْ رَبِّهِمْ مَذْهَبَ الْإِلَهِ اسْتَمْعَوْهُ وَيَسْمَعُونَ

Meaning: "There does not come to them any new reminder from their Lord but they listen to it as they play around (QC *Al-Anbiya* ': 2).

According to Al-Shawkani, the Prophet Muhammad, the Companions, and the Followers (*Tabiin*), and scholars were generally reluctant to talk about this issue. Therefore, the safest way to this issue is by the act of silence (*tawaqquf*). This issue has led to slanders, because every scholar who at the time of the caliph al-Ma'mun of the Abbasid caliphate had to be tested with this question. Thus, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal had a strong stance that is, confirming that the Quran was *qadim*, thus he was severely punished by the authority. This was because at that time, the reign was controlled by the Mu'tazili ideology which held on that the Quran was a creature (novelty) (Al-Shawkani, 2014c: 455).

The act of silence for not giving arguments on this issue indicates that Al-Shawkani has his own stance, so that this issue no longer goes on to be a polemic in Muslim societies. This stance taken by Al-Shawkani also indicates that he does not follow the mu'tazili madhab, stating that the Quran is a creature or novelty and disagreeing with the Ash'ari madhab which states that the Quran is *qadim*. If the issue of novelty and state of *qadim* of the Quran keeps on going to be talked about, it will open up old scars, when the Mu'tazilites and the Sunnis were disbelieving each other which resulted in cursing one another and *mibnah* (faith-testing) occurred.

The theological issue often debated over is God-seeing. In this issue, Al-Shawkani was among the scholars who opposed the Mu'tazili's arguments. In his commentary, he criticizes the Mu'tazili's arguments stating that God cannot be seen in the world nor in the hereafter. This can be found in his commentary on the QC. *al-Baqara* verse 55:

وَأَقُولُ لَكُمْ يَا مُوسَى إِنَّ نَبِيَّكُمْ لَكَ خَشَعَةٌ نَرَى اللَّهَ جَهْرَةً فَأَخَذْتُمْ الصَّاعِقَةَ وَأَنْتُمْ تَنْظُرُونَ

Which means: “And when you said, „O Moses, we will not believe you until we see Allah visibly.” Thereupon a thunderbolt seized you as you looked on.” (QS. Al-Baqarah: 55).

The God’s unwillingness to the request of the Israeli descendants who wanted to see Him was used by the Mutazilites as the proposition that God could not be seen in this world nor in the hereafter. Meanwhile other groups, argued on the possibility of seeing God in the world, and could happen in the afterlife as well. Al-Shawkani defends this second argument while criticizing the Mu’tazili sect by saying that many authentic *mutawatir* (credibly successive narrated) hadiths claiming that people will see God in the hereafter, and this is an absolute proposition. Al-Shawkani added that it is not proper for someone to refer to the theological formulations put forward by the Mu’tazili predecessors, and their statements that reasoning determined them. That was a fragile claim (the edge of a collapsed cliff) and the formulation only tricked people who did not have useful knowledge (Al-Shawkani, 2014a: 195).

Al-Shawkani mentioned another verse which is used as a justification that someday in heaven, the Muslims are able to see God. “*Faces (of the believers) on that day look fresh*” (QC al-Qiyamah: 22), that is, to gain wonderful pleasure, at that time trees look very beautiful, just like very wonderful grass and the sight of natural life is so beautiful and pleasant. Meanwhile, “*to the Lord, they are looking at*” (QC al-Qiyamah: 23). This includes eye sight, which is truly in state of consciousness, seeing the Creator and the Owner of the Vision (Al-Syawkani, 2014c: 423). In this verse, we can see that Al-Shawkani’s tendency on Ash’ari madhab, stating that in heaven, God can be seen with own eyes and consciousness. This opinion overlaps with the Mutazili’s argument which says that God cannot be seen, even in the hereafter.

CONCLUSION

Al-Shawkani was a prominent scholar in Yemen from the late medieval period to the modern era. He grew up in a Zaydi *madhab* environment. Among his many works is *Tafseer Fath al-Qadeer*, a masterpiece in Islamic commentary. His extensive knowledge in various fields of religious science led him to assert that the door to *ijtihad* is always open. This perspective is reflected in his openness to various theological thoughts. Although he was brought up within the Zaydi environment, his thinking surpassed that of traditional Zaydi scholars. On several

occasions, he criticized Zaydi theological arguments, which often shared similarities with the Mu'tazili sect.

Al-Shawkani's shift in thought became evident in his commentary on theological verses in *Fath al-Qadeer*. For instance, his views on the attributes of God, such as the issues of seeing God in the hereafter, God's coming, martyrdom, and *istima'* (God's residence), aligned more closely with Ash'ari arguments than with Zaydi or Mu'tazili theology. He frequently criticized Mu'tazili thoughts using both *naqli* (scriptural) and *aqli* (reasoning) propositions. However, on the issue of the Quran's position—whether it is *qadim* (eternal) or created—he maintained an independent stance. This illustrates that Al-Shawkani's theological thinking underwent a significant shift from Zaydi Shiite traditions to Ash'ari perspectives. This shift is understandable given his moderate theological stance and openness to adopting theological views from other *madhabs* that he deemed more accurate.

The study contributes to the field of Islamic theology by showcasing Al-Shawkani's methodological approach to reconciling divergent theological traditions. His work highlights the potential for theological evolution within a traditionally rigid framework, providing a model of open-minded engagement with varying perspectives in Islamic thought.

However, this study is limited by its reliance on textual analysis of *Fath al-Qadeer* without broader contextual exploration of how Al-Shawkani's theological shifts influenced his contemporaries or subsequent scholars. Additionally, the study does not sufficiently address the social and political factors that may have influenced his openness to Ash'ari theology.

Future research should explore the broader impact of Al-Shawkani's theological shifts on later Islamic scholarship and consider how his approach could inform contemporary debates on inter-sectarian theological dialogue. Empirical studies focusing on the reception of his ideas in both Zaydi and Ash'ari communities would provide further insights into the dynamics of theological adaptation.

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