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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Philosophy and Religion***Dialectical engagement with biblical narratives in Ibn 'Ashur's Tafsīr Al-Tahrīr wa Al-Tanwīr: Study of Aaron, Jesus, and Noah's Wife narratives**Hurnawijaya<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Akrom Auladi<sup>2</sup>, Nur Fitriana<sup>2</sup>, Ahmad Faruq Khaqiqi<sup>2</sup>, Mutiara M<sup>2</sup>, Ulfia Ningrum<sup>2</sup>, Tika Nadila<sup>2</sup>, M. Arsyad Haikal<sup>2</sup>, Syifa Urrachmi Nurul Alfi<sup>2</sup>, Nurilhilmah<sup>2</sup>, Najwah Arsyad<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia<sup>2</sup>Universitas PTIQ Jakarta, Indonesia\*Correspondence: [hurnawijaya@uinmataram.ac.id](mailto:hurnawijaya@uinmataram.ac.id)**ABSTRACT**

The historical marginalization of direct engagement with Biblical texts within Islamic exegetical traditions has contributed to an ahistorical perception of the Qur'ān's narrative relationship with Judeo-Christian traditions. While classical mufasssīrūn (exegetes) predominantly relied on orally transmitted Isrā'īliyyāt narratives rather than engaging directly with Biblical texts, this methodological limitation began to shift significantly in the colonial era. This article examines the critical dialectic methodology employed by Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn 'Ashur (1879-1973) in his magnum opus, al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr, as a pivotal epistemological intervention in modernist Qur'anic hermeneutics. Operating within the complex socio-intellectual landscape of French colonial Tunisia, Ibn 'Ashūr developed a sophisticated hermeneutical framework that directly engaged Biblical texts while simultaneously challenging their narratological authority. Through comparative textual analysis of three paradigmatic narratives—the Golden Calf episode (QS. Tāhā), the Christology of Jesus/Isa (QS. Maryam), and the status of Noah's wife (QS. Tahrīm)—this study reveals how Ibn 'Ashur's critical dialectic represents an epistemological negotiation between traditional Islamic exegetical principles and modern text-critical methodologies. The findings demonstrate that Ibn 'Ashur's approach transcends mere apologetics by constructing a multi-layered hermeneutical framework that simultaneously validates the Qur'anic narrative through rational argumentation, historical contextualization, and linguistic analysis while positioning it as an epistemologically superior corrective to perceived Biblical inconsistencies. This research contributes to the evolving understanding of Muslim intellectual responses to modernity and colonialism through textual engagement, revealing how comparative scriptural hermeneutics functioned as both intellectual resistance and epistemological restructuring in early 20th century Islamic reformism

**KEYWORDS:** Critical Dialectic, Ibn 'Ashur, Qur'anic Hermeneutics, Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir

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## Introduction

In the classical tradition of Qur'anic interpretation, systematic and critical dialectical engagement with biblical narratives is rarely found. This phenomenon creates an epistemological paradox: on one hand, Qur'anic exegesis is replete with references to biblical narratives through *Isrā'īliyyāt*, yet on the other hand, premodern Islamic scholarship generally avoided direct engagement with Judeo-Christian scriptural texts. This asymmetry produces what Gabriel Said Reynolds calls an ahistorical perspective in understanding the intertextuality of the Qur'an with biblical tradition (Reynolds, 2010b, pp. 8–12). This interpretive tradition that marginalized direct textual dialogue with the Bible underwent significant transformation during the colonial era when Muslim scholars began adopting more critical approaches to *Isrā'īliyyāt* sources and engaging directly with biblical texts. Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn 'Ashur (1879-1973) represents a paradigmatic turning point in this exegetical tradition through his magnum opus, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr. As shaykh al-Islām* and rector of Zaytuna University operating within the French colonial sphere of influence, Ibn 'Ashur confronted biblical narratives directly while asserting the epistemological superiority of the Qur'an—what this study terms critical dialectics. This approach marks an important methodological transition from dependence on *Isrā'īliyyāt* traditions to direct engagement with biblical textuality as an object of analysis.

Previous studies on Ibn 'Ashur have explored various aspects of his thought but tend to fall into two main tendencies that have not fully captured the dynamics of his critical dialectics with biblical tradition. The first group focuses on his hermeneutical methodology, as seen in the works of Ṣāqar and Suleimān et al., who analyze the ten methodological principles formulated by Ibn 'Ashur as the foundation of his interpretation (Ṣāqar, 2001, pp. 89–103; Suleimān, 2024). They emphasize how Ibn 'Ashur performed a significant recalibration of the epistemic hierarchy in the *tafsir* tradition by providing greater space for hermeneutical rationality compared to *tafsir bi al-ma'thūr*. The second group, including works such as Mubarak, Ono, Mustofa & Syarifah, and Fırat, examines the thematic application of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* principles in Ibn 'Ashur's interpretation of specific verses related to gender, religious freedom, and law (Fırat, 2024; Mubarak, 2018; Mustofa & Syarifah, 2021; Ono, 2021). While contributing significantly to understanding Ibn 'Ashur's contemporary relevance, these approaches tend to overlook an important comparative dimension of his hermeneutics—namely his critical engagement with biblical textuality in the colonial context.

Recent research on intertextuality between the Qur'an and Bible by scholars such as Pregill, Reynolds, and Albayrak has demonstrated the importance of comparative approaches for understanding the narratological dynamics of scripture in the Abrahamic tradition (Albayrak, 2001; Pregill, 2020a; Reynolds, 2010b). Pregill and Albayrak's work on the *Golden Calf* narrative has revealed the epistemological complexity in understanding fundamental differences between the depiction of Sāmīrī in the Qur'an and the narrative about Aaron in the Book of Exodus (Albayrak, 2001; Pregill, 2020a). Similarly, studies on Qur'anic Christology by Demichelis and Haleem highlight fundamental differences in the conceptualization of Isa/Jesus (Demichelis, 2021; Haleem, 2006). However, these studies have not adequately explored how 20th-century reformist Muslim scholarship such as Ibn 'Ashur developed new hermeneutical methods to integrate modern textual criticism with traditional Islamic epistemological principles.

This article argues that Ibn 'Ashur's critical dialectics represents a complex and multi-dimensional epistemological intervention. Through textual analysis, historical contextualization, and rational argumentation, Ibn 'Ashur not only seeks to demonstrate deficiencies in biblical narratives but also acts as a biblical hermeneutical interpreter himself. He offers alternative interpretations of biblical texts to reconcile disparities with Qur'anic narratives (Ṣāqar, 2001). This approach transcends traditional apologetics because it does not merely assert the normative superiority of the Qur'an, but rather constructs an epistemological framework that integrates modern critical methods with Islamic axiology. His critical dialectics is laden with dogmatic and historical presuppositions that reflect his liminal position—situated at the intersection of tradition and modernity, colonial resistance, and internal reform.

This research employs a hermeneutic-genealogical approach that integrates textual analysis and historical contextualization. This methodology consists of three main components: First, comparative textual analysis that identifies patterns of critical dialectics in Ibn 'Ashur's interpretation of biblical narratives in the Qur'an. The focus of this analysis is on three paradigmatic cases: (1) the Golden Calf narrative in *Surah Taha*, (2) the Christology of Jesus in *Surah Maryam*, and (3) the status of Noah's wife in *Surah Tahrīm*. These three cases are

selected based on their epistemological representativeness in demonstrating three controversial dimensions in prophetic narratives: prophetic epistemology (the case of Aaron), theology of divinity (the case of Jesus), and prophetic morality (the case of Noah's wife). These cases are also chosen because they reflect the spectrum of Ibn 'Ashur's methodological approaches, from explicit criticism of biblical narratives to more nuanced attempts at hermeneutical reconciliation.

## A. The Socio-Intellectual Context of Ibn 'Ashur and His Encounter with the Bible

Ibn 'Ashur (1879-1973) lived during a transformative period marked by the challenges of colonialism, religious identity crisis, and intellectual reform in Islam. His position as a scholar operating in Tunisia under French domination placed him at a critical intersection between Islamic tradition and European modernity. This condition created circumstances that Ibn 'Ashur responded to, particularly after assuming the position of mufti in 1932 (Nafi, 2005, p. 11). In his early life, Ibn 'Ashur was not heavily involved in the political sphere, but the increasingly heated socio-political conditions following French policies that affected citizenship identity and diversity in Tunisia influenced the fatwas and educational reform movements he led.

### 1. Biographical and Intellectual Background

Ibn 'Ashur can be traced to have a family background involved in both religious and political spheres. One of the 'Ashur family lineages named Muhammad ibn 'Ashur was a Sufi of the Shadhili *tariqa* who was born in 1031/1621 in Salé, one of the cities in Morocco. From Morocco, he traveled to the Hijaz for hajj and to Tunisia to become a teacher of that Sufi order. Three generations before Ibn 'Ashur, namely Ahmad (d. 1255/1839) and Muhammad (also known as Hamada; d. 1265/1849), were sent to study at Zaytuna and also occupied themselves with spiritual matters (Nafi, 2005). However, from his mother's side, his grandfather named Muhammad Al-'Aziz Bu 'Attur (1825-1907) was the prime minister of 'Ali Bey III (1882-1903), the first ruler of Tunis after France successfully controlled Tunisia. From that family line, Ibn 'Ashur inherited a family engaged in religion from his father's side and renowned in politics from his mother's lineage.

His formal education took place at Zaytuna University, one of the oldest and most prestigious centers of Islamic learning in the Muslim world. Here, he acquired the foundations of *tafsir*, *fiqh*, and Arabic language, including understanding of the *tafsir al-ma'thur* tradition that he later critically evaluated in his own work (al-Najjar, 2008, pp. 72-76).

The main distinguishing factor in Ibn 'Ashur's intellectual development was the bilingual education he received at Madrasah Sadiqiyyah, an institution established to train the Tunisian elite in modern administration (Ibn al-Khoja, n.d., pp. 31-35). His proficiency in French gave him direct access to European scholarship, including modern biblical criticism that was rapidly developing in France in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Unlike many traditional scholars who only accessed European thought through translations or mediation, Ibn 'Ashur could interact directly with primary sources, giving him a unique perspective on textual criticism methodology (Nafi, 2005, pp. 3-5).

His professional career as a judge (*qadi*), mufti, and eventually *Shaykh al-Islam* of Tunisia as well as rector of Zaytuna University placed him at the institutional intersection between traditional religious authority and the colonial state. This liminal position, although often trapping him in political conflicts, also facilitated the development of a hermeneutical approach that integrated tradition and modernity (El-Mesawi, 2014, pp. 27-33).

### 2. Sources of Biblical Knowledge

Ibn 'Ashur's engagement with biblical texts was enabled through three primary channels: Arabic Bible translations (particularly the Van Dyck translation that became standard in the Arab world), his French language skills providing access to European biblical criticism literature, and intellectual connections with Egyptian reformists like Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida through *al-Manar* journal (Ibrahim, 2018; Yakubovych, 2016, pp. 118-122). These influences allowed him to develop a critical hermeneutical approach that transcended traditional Islamic polemics while avoiding mere imitation of Western methodology (El-Mesawi, 2014, pp. 40-43).

Methodologically, Ibn 'Ashur distinguished himself from contemporary Muslim reformists. Unlike

Muhammad Abduh (1947, pp. 156–158), who minimized Qur'an-Bible disparities to emphasize Abrahamic universality and Rashid Rida, who adopted confrontational polemics against Christian texts (Mir, 1988). Ibn 'Ashur developed nuanced comparative hermeneutics that acknowledged biblical historical value while maintaining Qur'anic corrective authority. His approach more closely resembled Indian subcontinent scholars Shibli Nomani and Hamiduddin Farahi in developing critical-comparative biblical analysis. However, Tunisia's unique colonial context provided distinctive dimensions to his critical dialectics, particularly through access to French biblical scholarship unavailable to reformists in other regions.

## B. Critical Dialectics of Biblical Criticism in Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir according to Ibn 'Ashur

Ibn 'Ashur's critical dialectics toward biblical narratives in *Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir* represents a complex and multi-dimensional hermeneutical methodology. Through analysis of three paradigmatic cases, this section explores how Ibn 'Ashur operationalizes his comparative approach to reconcile disparities between Qur'anic and biblical narratives.

### 1. Critical Dialectics of Prophetic Epistemology: The Golden Calf Narrative in Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir

The Golden Calf narrative represents one of the most significant narrative contradictions between the Qur'an and Bible. The fundamental difference lies in identifying the main actor responsible for creating the golden statue: the Qur'an (QS. Taha 20:83-85, 95-97; QS. Al-A'raf 7:148-150) identifies Sāmirī as the primary instigator, while the Book of Exodus (32:1-6) explicitly depicts Aaron as the maker of the statue at the request of the Israelites (Pregill, 2020b, pp. 68–75). This narrative disparity has profound epistemological implications, particularly regarding the concept of *'iṣmah* (prophetic infallibility) in Islamic theology.

In his interpretation of QS. Taha 20:83-85, Ibn 'Ashur develops a multi-dimensional comparative analysis involving linguistic, theological, and historical aspects. This interpretation begins with a critical observation of the limitations of information in the Torah.

*“Wa laysa fī kitāb al-Tawrāh mā yushīru ilā akthar min ṣun' banī Isrā'īl al-'ijl min dhahab ittakhadhūhu ilāhan fī muddat maghīb Mūsā, wa anna sabab dhālik istibtā'uhum rujū' Mūsā; qālū lan nabraḥa 'alayhi 'ākifīn ḥattā yarji'a ilaynā Mūsā”*

There is nothing in the Book of Torah that indicates more than the making of the golden calf by the Israelites, which they took as a god during Moses' absence, and that the cause of this was their impatience for Moses' return; 'They said: We will not cease worshipping it until Moses returns to us' (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984a, p. 225). Through this statement, Ibn 'Ashur performs two important hermeneutical maneuvers: first, identifying “absence” in the biblical narrative (explanation of Moses' haste) as an indicator of epistemological incompleteness; second, positioning the Qur'an as a source that provides narrative details missing in biblical tradition. This approach reflects what Walid Saleh calls “corrective hermeneutics” that affirms Qur'anic authority while acknowledging basic similarities with biblical tradition (Saleh, 2013, pp. 227–230).

Ibn 'Ashur then performs historical contextualization of the Sāmirī narrative, rejecting his personal identification as Mūsā ibn Ḥafar (the view of al-Zamakhsharī and al-Qurṭubī) as well as geographical derivation from Samaria (which he considers anachronistic). Instead, he proposes a socio-religious interpretation that identifies “Sāmirī” as a sectarian category with historical continuity.

*Wa'lam anna al-Sāmiriyyīn laqab li-ṭā'ifah min al-Yahūd yuqāl lahum ayḍan al-Sāmirah, lahum madhhab khāṣṣ mukhālif li-madhhab jamā'at al-Yahūdiyyah fī uṣūl al-dīn...”*

Know that Sāmiriyyūn is a title for a group of Jews who are also called Sāmirah, they have a special doctrine that differs from the doctrine of the Jewish community in religious principles... (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984a, p. 227) By tracing this group to the time of Jesus and referring to their negative portrayal in the Gospels of Matthew (10) and Luke (9), Ibn 'Ashur constructs a more coherent narrative from the perspective of Abrahamic tradition. This methodology demonstrates how Ibn 'Ashur integrates modern historical-critical approaches with traditional Islamic epistemology, using Gospel texts to strengthen the Qur'anic portrayal of opponents of monotheism



(Nafi, 2005, pp. 10–11). The pinnacle of his critical analysis emerges when Ibn ‘Ashur explicitly identifies a “major error” in the Exodus narrative.

*Wa waqa’at fī kitāb al-Khurūj min al-Tawrāh fī al-iṣḥāḥ al-thānī wa al-thalāthīn zallah kubrā, idh za’amū anna Hārūn ṣana’a al-’ijl lahum lammā qālū lahu: ‘iṣna’ lanā ālihah tasīru amāmanā li-annā lā na’lam mādhā aṣāba Mūsā fī al-jabal fa-ṣana’a lahum ‘ijlan min dhahab’. Wa aḥsibu anna hādhā min āthār talāshī al-Tawrāh al-aṣliyyah ba’d al-asr al-Bābalī, wa anna alladhī a’āda kitābatahā lam yuḥsin taḥrīr hādhīhi al-qīṣṣah. Wa mimmā naqṭa’u bihi anna Hārūn ma’ṣūm min dhālik li-annahū rasūl.*

A major error occurred in the Book of Exodus from the Torah in chapter thirty-two, when they claimed that Aaron made the calf for them when they said to him: ‘Make for us gods who will go before us, because we do not know what happened to Moses on the mountain, so he made a golden calf for them.’ I suppose this is one of the effects of the disappearance of the original Torah after the Babylonian captivity, and that the one who rewrote it did not properly record this story. What we can be certain of is that Aaron is protected from such [sin] because he is a messenger (Ibn ‘Ashur, 1984a, p. 230).

That argumentation combines three important methodological elements. First, historical criticism that reflects modern biblical scholarship about post-exilic composition of the Pentateuch, demonstrating Ibn ‘Ashur’s familiarity with European scientific discourse (Friedman, 1997, pp. 70–74). Second, Islamic epistemological principles about the *‘iṣmah* of prophets that function as parameters of narrative truth. Third, hermeneutical authority given to himself as an interpreter to “correct” biblical narratives based on Islamic epistemological frameworks.

Interestingly, Ibn ‘Ashur does not completely reject the historical validity of biblical narratives. He acknowledges parts of the Exodus narrative that do not contradict fundamental Islamic principles. This selective approach reflects a more sophisticated methodology compared to the total rejection or uncritical acceptance of biblical tradition often found in traditional Islamic scholarship (Saleh, 2006).

Richard Elliott Friedman’s analysis of the “E” source in the Golden Calf narrative as representing anti-Aaron tendencies from Levite priests in Shiloh offers an interesting parallel to Ibn ‘Ashur’s criticism (Friedman, 1997, pp. 70–74). Despite departing from different epistemological traditions, both identify political and sectarian dimensions in narrative construction. However, while Friedman sees this as evidence of internal evolution within Jewish tradition, Ibn ‘Ashur interprets it as an indication of post-canonical distortion of original revelation. Ibn ‘Ashur’s critical dialectics in this case not only rejects the epistemological authority of biblical narratives but also offers alternative narratives that integrate elements from Judeo-Christian tradition into a Qur’anic framework. This approach transcends simple polemics, demonstrating a sophisticated model of comparative hermeneutics in a colonial context (Pregill, 2020b, pp. 210–215).

## 2. Critical Dialectics of Christology in the Isa/Jesus Narrative in Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir

The fundamental differences in Christology between Islamic and Christian traditions make narratives about Isa/Jesus a zone of intense theological contestation. In interpreting Surah Maryam, Ibn ‘Ashur develops critical dialectics that respond to the doctrine of Jesus’ divinity by emphasizing the humanity and prophetic status of Isa in the Qur’anic narrative, while criticizing what he sees as distortions and omissions in Gospel texts (Khalidi, 2001, pp. 12–18).

Ibn ‘Ashur’s analysis of Isa’s miracle of speaking in the cradle (QS. Maryam 19:30-33) highlights narrative elements absent from the Gospel canon.

*“Kalām ‘Isā hādhā mimmā ahmalathu anājil al-Naṣārā li-annahum ṭawaw khabar wuṣūlihā ilā ahlihā ba’d waq’ihā, wa huwa ṭayy yata’ajjabu minhu. Wa yadullu ‘alā annahā kutibat fī aḥwāl ghayr maḍbūṭah, fa-aṭla’a Allāhu ta’ālā ‘alayhi nabiyyahu - ṣallā Allāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam -.”*

This speech of Jesus is among what the Gospels of the Christians neglected because they folded [concealed] the news of her [Mary’s] arrival to her family after giving birth, and this is a concealment that is astonishing. This indicates that they [the Gospels] were written in circumstances that were not precise/accurate, so Allah the

Exalted informed His Prophet [Muhammad] about it (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984a, p. 108).

This statement operationalizes two important hermeneutical strategies. First, identifying “absence” in the Gospel canon as a significant omission indicating epistemological incompleteness, not merely narrative variation (Reynolds, 2010a, pp. 189–192). Second, characterizing the conditions of Gospel composition as *aḥwāl ghayr maḍbūṭah* (circumstances that were not orderly or accurate), a term that reflects methodological criticism of the historical reliability of Gospel texts. This terminology demonstrates Ibn 'Ashur's familiarity with modern biblical critical discourse about Gospel composition and transmission, although articulated within an Islamic epistemological framework regarding revelation (McAuliffe, 1996). Ibn 'Ashur gives special attention to Isa's opening declaration in verse 30: “*innī 'abd Allāh*” (“Indeed, I am a servant of Allah”). He interprets this as a theological proclamation that deliberately precedes and anticipates future Christological deviations.

*“Wa al-ibtidā' bi-waṣf al-'ubūdiyyah li-Llāh alqāhu Allāhu 'alā lisān 'Īsā li-anna Allāha 'alima bi-anna qawman sa-yaqūlūna: innahu ibn Allāh.”*

And the beginning with the description of servitude to Allah that Allah placed upon Jesus' tongue because Allah knew that a people would say: Indeed, he [Jesus] is the son of Allah. (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984a, p. 110).

This analysis reflects a prophetic-teleological interpretation that positions the Qur'anic narrative as anticipation and correction of doctrinal evolution in Christian tradition (Demichelis, 2021, pp. 980–981). This approach not only affirms the epistemological priority of the Qur'an but also constructs a hermeneutical framework in which differences between Islamic and Christian traditions are understood not as ahistorical contradictions, but as results of progressive distortion of the original monotheistic message conveyed by Jesus himself (Reynolds, 2010a, pp. 195–198). Another dimension of Ibn 'Ashur's critical dialectics emerges in his analysis of the reference to “*al-kitāb*” (the book) in verse 30. He offers a dual interpretation that questions the textual autonomy of the Gospel.

*“Wa al-kitāb: al-sharī'ah allatī min sha'niḥā an tuktab li-'allā yaqa'a fīhā taghyīr. Fa-iṭlāq al-kitāb 'alā sharī'at 'Īsā ka-iṭlāq al-kitāb 'alā al-Qur'ān. Wa al-murād bi-al-kitāb al-Injīl wa huwa mā kutiba min al-waḥy alladhī khāṭaba Allāhu bihi 'Īsā. Wa yajūzu an yurāda bi-al-kitāb al-Tawrāh fa-yakūnu al-ītā' itā' 'ilm mā fī al-Tawrāh ka-qawlihi ta'ālā 'yā Yaḥyā khudh al-kitāb bi-quwwah'. Fa-yakūnu qawluhu 'wa ja'alanī nabiyyan' irtiqā' fī al-marātib allatī 'ātāhu Allāhu iyyāhā.”*

And the book: the law whose nature is to be written so that no change occurs in it. So calling the law of Jesus “the book” is like calling the Qur'an “the book.” What is meant by the book is the Gospel, which is what was written from the revelation that Allah addressed to Jesus. And it is also possible that what is meant by the book is the Torah, so the “giving” would mean giving knowledge of what is in the Torah, like His saying the Exalted: ‘O John, take the book with strength.’ So his saying ‘and He made me a prophet’ would be an elevation in the ranks that ‘Allah gave him’ (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984a, p. 112).

This deliberate interpretive ambiguity has significant theological implications. By suggesting the possibility that the “book” referred to is the Torah, not a separate document called the “Gospel,” Ibn 'Ashur implicitly questions the textual autonomy of Christian tradition and emphasizes the essential continuity of Jesus' mission with Moses' tradition (Khalidi, 2001, pp. 23–26). This approach is consistent with the Islamic conception of *risālah* (prophetic message) as uninterrupted, where each prophet continues and renews (*tajdīd*) the essence of the same revelation (McAuliffe, 1996, pp. 151–153). Ibn 'Ashur further reinforces this interpretation through his analysis of the phrase “*mā dumtu ḥayyan*” (as long as I live) in verse 31.

*“Fa-al-istighrāq al-mustafād min qawlihi 'mā dumtu ḥayyan' istighrāq 'urfī murād bihi al-kathrah; wa laysa al-murād al-ṣalāh wa al-ṣadaqah al-mafrūdatayn 'alā ummatihī, li-anna siyāq al-kalām fī awṣāf tumayyizu biḥā 'Īsā 'alayhi al-ṣalām, wa li-annahu lam ya'ti bi-shar' ṣalāh zā'idah 'alā mā shurī'a fī al-Tawrāh.”* (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984a, p. 113).

(So the totality understood from his saying ‘as long as I live’ is a customary/conventional totality intended as

intensity/frequency; and what is meant is not the prayer and charity obligated upon his community, because the context of the speech is about characteristics that distinguish Jesus peace be upon him, and because he did not come with additional prayer legislation beyond what was legislated in the Torah.)

The statement that Jesus did not come with additional prayer legislation beyond what was legislated in the Torah, directly criticizes claims of radical liturgical reform in Christian tradition. This approach reflects the Islamic conception of prophethood as renewal (*tajdīd*) and confirmation (*taṣdīq*) of existing monotheistic tradition, not total replacement as implied in Christian theology about the New Testament (Demichelis, 2021, pp. 982–983). Another polemical dimension of Ibn ‘Ashur’s critical dialectics emerges in his analysis of verse 33, where he identifies anti-Jewish elements in the Qur’anic narrative.

*“Wa mu’adhdhin ayḍan bi-tambīd al-ta’rīd bi-al-Yahūd idh ṭa’anū fīhi wa shawwahūhu fī al-aḥwāl al-thalāthah; fa-qālū: wulida min zinā, wa qālū: māta maṣlūban, wa qālū: yuḥsharu ma’a al-malāḥidah wa al-kafarah, li-annahum yaz’umūna annahu kafara bi-aḥkām min al-Tawrāh.”*

And also giving a signal as a prelude to allude to the Jews when they slandered and defamed him in three conditions; they said: he was born from adultery, and they said: he died crucified, and they said: he will be gathered with the atheists and infidels, because they claim that he denied some laws of the Torah. (Ibn ‘Ashur, 1984a, p. 115).

By identifying three Jewish accusations against Jesus—illegitimate birth, ignominious death on the cross, and final fate with the misguided—Ibn ‘Ashur constructs a three-way dialectic between Jewish, Christian, and Islamic positions (Khalidi, 2001, pp. 30–33). Within this framework, Islam is presented as the middle path that rejects both Jewish disparagement of Jesus and Christian deification of him. This dialectical methodology is consistent with Qur’anic hermeneutics regarding the concept of *ummataṇ wasaṭan* (middle or moderate community) that offers corrective synthesis to previous theological extremities (Albayrak, 2008, pp. 301–328). Through this analysis, it becomes clear how Ibn ‘Ashur’s critical dialectics toward Christology functions not only as criticism of Christian tradition but also as epistemological reconstruction of the Jesus narrative that integrates elements from Judeo-Christian tradition into an Islamic theological framework. This approach represents significant evolution from traditional anti-Christian polemics, demonstrating nuanced awareness of the complexity of Christian doctrinal history while still asserting the superiority of the Qur’anic narrative (Reynolds, 2010a, pp. 200–202).

### 3. Critical Dialectics of Prophetic Morality in the Story of Noah’s Wife in Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir

The narrative about Noah’s wife in the Qur’an and Bible displays significant divergences with theological implications regarding prophetic morality and salvation. While the Book of Genesis (6-9) depicts Noah’s wife as a family member saved in the ark, QS. At-Tahrim 66:10 explicitly categorizes her alongside Lot’s wife as betrayers of their husbands who were prophets (Haleem, 2006, pp. 43–45). Ibn ‘Ashur develops sophisticated critical dialectics to reconcile this disparity. In his interpretation of QS. At-Tahrim 66:10, Ibn ‘Ashur first acknowledges the existence of information in the Torah that appears to contradict the Qur’anic narrative.

*“Wa qad warada fī sifr al-Takwīn min al-Tawrāh dhikr imra’at Nūḥ ma’a alladhīna rakibū al-safīnah wa dhikr khurūjihā min al-safīnah ba’d al-ṭūfān thumma ṭuwiya dhikruhā”*

It has been mentioned in the Book of Genesis from the Torah about Noah’s wife among those who boarded the ship and mentioned her exit from the ship after the flood, then [the Torah] no longer mentions her (Ibn ‘Ashur, 1984b, p. 362).

Unlike previous cases where he explicitly identified “errors” in the Torah, here Ibn ‘Ashur takes a more nuanced hermeneutical approach. Instead of alleging textual distortion, he offers two reconciliation hypotheses.

*“Fa-la’allahā kafarat ba’d dhālik aw la’alla Nūḥan tazawwaja imra’atan ukhrā ba’d al-ṭūfān lam tudhkar fī al-Tawrāh”*

(Perhaps she became an unbeliever after that, or perhaps Noah married another woman after the flood who was not mentioned in the Torah. (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984b, p. 363).

This approach demonstrates methodological evolution in Ibn 'Ashur's critical dialectics. Instead of directly rejecting the validity of biblical narratives or claiming textual distortion, he uses hermeneutical analysis to identify possible narratives that can reconcile both traditions (Haleem, 2006, pp. 46–48). This maneuver represents a more sophisticated form of “critical dialectics” that acknowledges the complexity of biblical tradition while still maintaining the final authority of the Qur'an. Ibn 'Ashur then delves into the meaning of betrayal referred to in the verse, emphasizing its theological dimension.

*“Wa al-maqṣūd min ǧarb al-maṭhal bi-himā al-tanbīh ‘alā anna qarābat al-ṣāliḥīn lā tanfa’u al-mar’ah idhā kānat kāfirah, fa-al-murād bi-al-khiyānah: al-kufr... fa-khiyānatuhumā khiyānah fī al-dīn wa hiya al-kufr, ay: kānatā kāfiratayn. Fa-ammā imra’at Nūḥ fa-al-ẓāhir annahā akhfāt kufrāhā”*

The purpose of giving an example with both of them [Noah's and Lot's wives] is to remind that closeness to the righteous does not benefit a woman if she is an unbeliever. So what is meant by betrayal is: unbelief... Their betrayal is betrayal in religion, which is unbelief, meaning: both were unbelievers. As for Noah's wife, it is apparent that she concealed her unbelief (Ibn 'Ashur, 1984b, p. 364).

By defining betrayal as concealed unbelief (not marital infidelity as might be assumed), Ibn 'Ashur constructs an interpretive framework that maintains the integrity of the Qur'anic narrative while explaining why this betrayal was not explicitly recorded in biblical tradition (Sells, 2000, pp. 67–87). This approach reflects a more complex hermeneutics compared to simple claims of *tahrīf* (distortion) often found in traditional Islamic polemics (Reynolds, 2010a, pp. 205–207).

These three cases—the Golden Calf narrative, the Christology of Jesus, and the status of Noah's wife—demonstrate methodological evolution in Ibn 'Ashur's critical dialectics. From explicit identification of “errors” in the Book of Exodus to hermeneutical reconciliation in the case of Noah's wife, his approach reflects a spectrum of hermeneutical strategies operationalized to address disparities between Qur'anic and biblical traditions (Nafi, 2005, pp. 12–14). The methodological unity underlying this diversity of approaches is a fundamental epistemological commitment to the authority of the Qur'an as the criterion of truth (*furqān*), while integrating insights from biblical tradition and modern critical methods within a coherent hermeneutical framework (El-Mesawi, 2014, pp. 45–48).

### C. Critical Dialectics as Epistemological Resistance in Colonial Context

Ibn 'Ashur's critical dialectics does not operate in an intellectual vacuum but emerges as a response to specific epistemological challenges in the colonial context of Tunisia. As a scholar operating at the intersection of European modernity and Islamic tradition, his hermeneutical methodology reflects a complex form of epistemological resistance to colonial intellectual hegemony (Hallaq, 1984, pp. 33–35). French colonization of Tunisia (1881–1956) represented not only political and economic domination but also epistemological hegemony. The colonial administration actively promoted narratives about Western intellectual and cultural superiority, positioning Islam as a backward tradition requiring enlightenment from European rationalism (Perkins, 2014, pp. 50–56). Orientalist discourse about biblical scholarship, which claimed scientific authority in interpreting religious texts, became an integral part of this colonial project (Said, 1978, pp. 205–254).

This epistemological challenge was intensified by Christian missionary activities that used European biblical scholarship to criticize perceived inconsistencies in Islamic tradition, including disparities between biblical and Qur'anic narratives (Zebiri, 1997, pp. 44–58). Questions about the historical reliability and internal coherence of the Qur'an were often raised in this context, threatening not only the textual authority of Islamic scripture but also the institutional legitimacy of scholars as its interpreters (Yakubovich, 2016, pp. 125–128). Ibn 'Ashur, as *Shaykh al-Islam* and rector of Zaytuna University, was at the forefront of facing these epistemological challenges. His position required him to respond to orientalist and missionary criticism while maintaining the authority of Islamic tradition, a task complicated by his acceptance of certain aspects of modern scientific methodology (El-Mesawi, 2014, pp. 50–52).



#### D. Epistemological Resistance and Tradition-Modernity Reconciliation

The broader significance of Ibn ‘Ashur’s critical dialectics lies in its contribution to the project of reconciling Islamic tradition with modernity. Unlike conservative responses that reject modernity entirely or secularist approaches that subordinate religion to modern rationality, Ibn ‘Ashur develops a hermeneutical methodology that enables productive dialogue between both (Rahman, 1982, pp. 132–138). By maintaining fundamental Islamic epistemological principles such as the concept of *‘iṣmah* of prophets and the authority of the Qur’an as *furqān* (criterion of truth), while adopting modern textual analysis methods and insights from historical studies, Ibn ‘Ashur offers a model of engagement with modernity that does not compromise the integrity of Islamic tradition (El-Mesawi, 2014, pp. 53–55). This approach enables internal regeneration of the *tafsīr* tradition that responds to contemporary epistemic conditions without falling into reductionist dichotomies between tradition and modernity (Campanini, 2009, pp. 129–131).

The three cases analyzed in this study—prophetic epistemology, theology of divinity, and prophetic morality—demonstrate how Ibn ‘Ashur’s critical dialectics operates in fundamental epistemological domains that become the focus of contestation between Islamic tradition and Western modernity (Ibrahim, 2018, pp. 165–170). By developing a hermeneutical methodology capable of reconciling narrative disparities and dialoguing different epistemological traditions while maintaining the final authority of the Qur’an, Ibn ‘Ashur offers a model of engagement with biblical textuality that transcends both traditional apologetics and modern epistemological relativism (Nafi, 2005, pp. 18–20).

#### Conclusion

These findings have important implications not only for contemporary understanding of intertextuality between the Qur’an and Bible, but also for interfaith dialogue and contemporary comparative hermeneutics. Ibn ‘Ashur’s approach offers a model of engagement with biblical texts that transcends both traditional apologetic polemics and orientalist historical reductionism. In the context of contemporary interfaith dialogue, Ibn ‘Ashur’s methodology demonstrates the possibility of acknowledging substantive differences in religious narratives without falling into relativism or antagonism. For the contemporary Islamic world still grappling with the challenges of modernity and postcolonialism, Ibn ‘Ashur’s critical dialectics offers an example of critical engagement with different epistemological traditions while maintaining the integrity of Islamic tradition. This model is relevant for developing contemporary Islamic hermeneutics capable of dialoguing with global scholarship without losing its indigenous value framework.

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## Authorship and Level of Contribution

Hurnawijaya devised the main conceptual idea of “critical dialectics,” designed the research framework, and supervised the overall project. Akrom Auladi, Nur Fitriana, and Ahmad Faruq Khaqiqi performed the in-depth textual analysis for the respective case studies on the narratives of Aaron, Jesus, and Noah’s wife. Contextual research was conducted by Mutiara M (socio-intellectual background), Ulfia Ningrum (biblical sources of knowledge), and Tika Nadila (colonial context). M. Arsyad Haikal conducted the literature review, while Syifa Urrachmi Nurul Alfi drafted the methodology section. Nurilhilmah verified the data and managed the references, and Najwah Arsyad helped ensure cohesion and performed the final proofreading. Hurnawijaya took the lead in writing the manuscript by integrating draft contributions from all other authors. All authors discussed the results, provided critical feedback, and contributed to the final manuscript

## Glossary of Terms

- *‘Iṣmah*: The Islamic doctrine of the infallibility or divinely protected sinlessness of prophets.
- *Fatwa*: An authoritative legal opinion or ruling issued by an Islamic scholar (mufti).
- *Fiqh*: Islamic jurisprudence; the human understanding and practice of divine Islamic law.
- *Furqān* (The Criterion): A name for the Qur’an, emphasizing its role as the standard for distinguishing between truth and falsehood.
- *Isrā’īliyyāt*: Narratives originating from Judeo-Christian sources that were historically transmitted (often orally) and used by early Muslim exegetes to elaborate on Qur’anic stories.
- *Maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*: The higher objectives or underlying purposes of Islamic law.
- *Mufasssīrūn*: The plural of mufasssīr; exegetes, commentators, or interpreters of the Qur’an.
- *Mufti*: An Islamic legal scholar qualified to issue a fatwa.
- *Qadi*: A judge in an Islamic court.
- *Shaykh al-Islām*: “The Elder of Islam.” A high and honorific title given to an eminent and influential Islamic scholar.
- *Tafsīr*: Exegesis or interpretation of the Qur’an.
- *Al-Taḥrīr wa Al-Tanwīr* (The Verification and The Enlightenment): The title of Ibn ‘Ashur’s magnum opus (major work) of Qur’anic commentary.
- *Taḥrīf* (Arabic): An Islamic theological concept referring to the alteration, corruption, or distortion of earlier scriptures, namely the Torah and the Gospels.
- *Tariqa* (Arabic): A school or order of Sufism (Islamic mysticism).
- *Ummatan wasaṭan* (Arabic): A “middle nation” or “justly balanced community,” a Qur’anic term describing the Muslim community as one that avoids theological and practical extremes.

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