QS 5 Q 3:1–7

3.1 Alif Lam Mim
3.2 God!
There is no god but He!
Ever-Living, Everlasting.
3.3 He sent down to you the Book with the Truth,
Confirming His previous Scriptures.
And He sent down the Torah and the Evangel,
3.4 beforehand: A Guidance to mankind. And He
sent down the Criterion.
Those who blaspheme against the revelations of God shall meet with terrible torment. God is Almighty, Vengeful.
3.5 From God nothing is hidden on earth or in heaven.
3.6 It is He who gives you shape in the wombs, in any manner He pleases.
There is no god but He, Almighty, All-Wise.
3.7 It is He who sent down the Book upon you. In it are verses precise in meaning: these are the very heart of the Book. Others are ambiguous. Those in whose heart is waywardness pursue what is ambiguous therein, seeking discord and seeking to unravel its interpretation. But none knows its interpretation save God, while those deeply rooted in knowledge say:
"We believe in it. All is from our Lord." Yet none remembers save those possessed of minds.

3.1 Alif, Lâm, Mîm.
3.2 Allah! Pas de divinité à part Lui, le Vivant, Celui qui subsiste par Lui-même «Al-Qayyum».
3.3 Il a fait descendre sur toi le Livre avec la vérité, confirmant les Livres descendus avant lui. Et Il fit descendre la Thora et l'Evangile.
3.4 auparavant, en tant que guide pour les gens. Et Il a fait descendre le Discernement. Ceux qui ne croient pas aux Révélations d'Allah auront, certes, un dur châtiment! Et, Allah est Puissant, Détenteur du pouvoir de punir.
3.5 Rien, vraiment, ne se cache d'Allah de ce qui existe sur la terre ou dans le ciel.
3.6 C'est Lui qui vous donne forme dans les matrices comme Il veut. Point de divinité à part Lui, le Puissant, le Sage.
3.7 C'est Lui qui a fait descendre sur toi le Livre: il s'y trouve des versets sans équivoque, qui sont la base du Livre, et d'autres versets qui peuvent prêter à d'interprétations diverses. Les gens, donc, qui ont au cour une inclination vers l'égarement, mettent l' accent sur les versets à équivoque cherchant la dissension en essayant de leur trouver une interprétation, alors que nul n'en connaît l'interprétation, à part Allah. Mais ceux qui sont bien enracinés dans la science disent: «Nous y croyons: tout est de la part de notre Seigneur!» Mais, seuls les doués d'intelligence s'en rappellent.

سورة آل عمران
الم (1) اللَّهُ لاَ إِلَهَ إِلاَّ هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ (2) نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنْزَلَ التَّوْرَاةَ وَالإِنْجِيلَ (3) مِنْ قَبْلُ هُدًى لِلنَّاسِ وَأَنْزَلَ الْفُرْقَانَ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ ذُو انْتِقَامٍ (4) إِنَّ اللَّهَ لاَ يَخْفَى عَلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ فِي الأَرْضِ وَلاَ فِي السَّمَاءِ (5) هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَوِّرُكُمْ فِي الأَرْحَامِ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ لاَ إِلَهَ إِلاَّ هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ (6) هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلاَّ اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلاَّ أُولُو الأَلْبَابِ (7)

Azaiez

Ce passage illustre la nature et la fonction du métatexte, ou métadiscours (Ben Taïbi 2009: 65–67) ou encore autoréférence dans le Coran (Boisliveau 2010, 2012). A la suite d'Andrée Borillo, on définit le métadiscours comme « à la fois discours et glose sur le discours dans lequel il est immergé (...) l'objet visé reste le code de la langue

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(…) soit il porterait sur les signes eux-mêmes – leur forme, leur sens – pour l'expliciter, les définir, soit il mentionnerait des énoncés pour les mettre à distance, les rapporter a une autre source » (Ben Taïbi 2009: 65). Ici, le discours sur le discours vient dans ce passage expliciter : [1] le processus de la révélation (l'acte de descendre: *nazzala*) et ses protagonistes (Allah et un allocutaire : *ʿalayka*) ; [2] la nature de la révélation (*ḥaqq*, *ḥudā*, *āyāt*) ; [3] l'auto-désignation de la révélation (*kitāb*, *furqān*) ; [4] la finalité de la révélation (*muṣaddiqan li-mā bayna yadayhi*) ; [5] les conditions d'interprétations (*mā yaʿlamu taʾwīlahu ʾillā allāhu*). On peut affirmer avec cet exemple que le Coran se dote avec la métatextualité d'un discours pour expliquer son code.

Dye

Les débuts (et les fins) des sourates sont souvent porteurs d'un important message théologique, mais ce sont aussi des passages où peut transparaître une intervention éditoriale. Leur composition peut ainsi être fort embrouillée. J'ai donc plus de questions que de réponses. Par exemple : s'il y a ici de la métatextualité, ou la supposée autoréférentialité du Coran, doit-on penser que ce texte a été composé du vivant de Muḥammad, avant même la compilation du Coran – à une époque où il n'était vraisemblablement pas question de faire un codex ? Ou la métatextualité ne concernerait-elle *que* la sourate Āl ʿImrān ? Ou la rédaction de cette péricope ne serait-elle pas postérieure, et devrait être imputée, *au moins en partie*, aux scribes responsables de la collecte du Coran ?

V. 1 : Une hypothèse plausible est que les « lettres mystérieuses » soient des abréviations de formules, possiblement syriaques (Luxenberg 2008). On pourrait lire *emar lī Māryā* (*ʾ-L-M*), « le Seigneur m'a dit ».

V. 3 : *muṣaddiqan li-mā bayna yadayhi* : doit-on comprendre « confirmant ce qui est descendu avant lui », à savoir *al-kitāb*, auquel cas *al-kitāb* est soit le Coran, soit la sourate, soit l'ensemble des révélations antérieures (notamment la Tora et l'Évangile) ? Ou « confirmant ce qui est devant lui », le pronom *hi* faisant référence à Dieu, et *al-kitāb* désignant l'Écriture céleste? Le parallèle avec Jésus et la Tora, signalé par Reynolds, paraît pertinent : le rédacteur du texte ferait du destinataire de la sourate un prophète annoncé par les révélations antérieures, les accomplissant, tout en étant habilité à en donner l'interprétation juste.

V. 7 : *al-kitāb* est souvent identifié au Coran, et on voit dans les *āyāt muḥkamāt* et les *āyāt mutašābihāt* des versets coraniques. Cette lecture ne va pas de soi : normalement, *al-kitāb* ne désigne pas le Coran (cf. Q 10:37 ; noter que Q 43:4 dit qu'un Qurʾān arabe est *dans* la « mère du Livre », ce qui n'implique pas qu'il lui soit identique). Les *āyāt muḥkamāt* pourraient être, non les versets, mais les signes clairs, les preuves évidentes, qui apportent la sagesse, tels qu'ils sont relatés dans l'Écriture. Sur les *āyāt mutašābihāt* : le texte semble simplement condamner les chicaneurs.

Hilali

There are three types of time put together in a circular order: an absolute time in which the divine acts subscribe (vv. 1–2), the past and the present (vv. 3–4). The time is broken in the verse by the intervention of the scripture in human history (v. 7). The revelation modifies the relationship with time from the time of *tanzīl* (revelation) to the time of *taʾwīl* (interpretation). One of the meanings of the word *taʾwīl* is to go back to the beginning. The issue of *ʿilm* (knowledge) determines the time of interpretation and refers to the future. The mention of knowledge is kept out of time and out of the verse itself since the present time of the verbs express in Arabic both the present and the future. The end of the verse is opened to the absolute knowledge and absolute time and gives to the verse a circular structure in which the past and the future are situated successively in the time of revelation and interpretation while the absolute knowledge, like God himself, is situated out of the frame of time: Absolute time (God); Past (revelations); Future (interpretation); Absolute time (knowledge).

Madigan

V. 7 is the classic case of an apparently extremely self-referential statement. However, we can see how things change if we think beyond—or perhaps we should say before—a closed corpus of scripture. Are we to understand this as a metatextual intrusion into what could otherwise stand as the immediate engagement of the divine word with the Prophet and his hearers? In a conference discussion some years ago, Neal Robinson suggested that if one were to understand the term *kitāb* in the broad way I had proposed in *The Qurʾān's Self-image* (2001)—as a metaphor for God's knowledge and authority, rather than as a closed corpus of scripture—then the *āyāt mutašābihāt* of v. 7 could be taken as referring to the perplexing nature of the rout at the battle of Uḥud, which Robinson considers to be the context for the whole *sūra*. Following his lead, we can propose a reading of the verse in terms like this: God's sovereign decree (*kitāb*) is revealed in His acts (*āyāt*) some of which (like the victory at Badr) are unambiguous and plainly understandable (*muḥkamāt*) and so reflect the essential thrust of what God has determined for the future (*umm al-kitāb*). The meanings of other events (for example, the defeat of Uḥud) are not immediately apparent (*mutashābihāt*). Those who are perverse appeal to these ambiguous events in order to divide the community and cause it to lose faith. However, only God knows how these events are to be understood in the light of his overall plan, and everyone who knows God's ways (*al-rāsiḫūn fī-l-ʿilm*) believes that all these events come from God and manifest God's will. Even if one were not to tie this verse to Uḥud, it would still make good sense as a general statement about faith in God and in God's knowledge and authority, and so would not seem such an interruption to the repeated creedal affirmations of Q 3:1–7.

Pregill

A programmatic statement in which the revelatory community's relationship to Christian tradition is asserted, but its distinctive characteristics highlighted as well. In this regard, this *sūra* is one of the most insistently sectarian revelations in the Qurʾān, in Wansbrough's sense of the term.

This *sūra* would have to be central to any attempt to rethink the emergence of what became the Islamic community in the late antique environment, especially in the context of what the building consensus would agree was a mixed ethnic, cultural, and religious milieu in which Syrian Christianity in particular had become well established. Throughout the *sūra* the author seems to be elaborating his particular vision of a rectified religion, particularly by revisiting Christianity's Israelite roots and rethinking its relationship to the Bible.

V. 2: *al-ḥayy al-qayyūm:* the Living, the Abiding, as in Q 2:255 above. Here combined with other epithets of a conspicuously Biblical ambience in v. 6: *Allāh ʿazīz waḏū intiqām*, i. e., *Êl Šaddây, Êl Qannâʾ*. The subsequent references to God as He who searches things out and shapes humanity in the womb likewise evoke Biblical precedents.

V. 3: *al-kitāb:* "Scripture" in its most diffuse, dynamic sense, a process of revelation rather than an entified example of it (cf. Madigan 2001). Concrete examples follow.

V. 4: *furqān:* the logic of the verse would seem to dictate that this is the title of another particular example of scripture (thus the identification with *al-Zabūr* in the *tafsīr*). Donner (2007) identifies *furqān* here with Syriac *pūqdānā* "commandment"; Rubin (2009), on the other hand, asserts that philological evidence preserved by the lexicographic tradition proves that the word has a well-established, and presumably authentically ancient, Arabic meaning of "dawn," which the Qurʾān adopts in the sense of "guiding light."

All that said, drawing on Bell (1953) in particular, I have wondered if this might instead be construed as a reference to an eschatological text particular to the community that our speaker is addressing that was eventually integrated into the *muṣḥaf;* that is, *al-Furqān* is a proper noun. Given the overarching concern with eschatology in the final *ǧuzʾ* of the canonical Qurʾān – a section of the scripture that seems thematically and stylistically coherent – could Q 77–112 be the *al-Furqān* to which this verse refers? Walid A. Saleh's recent critique of scholarship on *furqān* ("A Piecemeal Qurʾān: *furqān* and its Meaning in Classical Islam and Modern Qurʾānic Studies," *JSAI* 42 (2015): 31–71) takes a rather different approach, though he likewise emphasizes the term's significance in the context of the Qurʾān's self-presentation.

V. 7: *muḥkamāt* and *mutašābihāt:* much discussed in traditional exegesis. The verse denounces, in a general way, people who approach scripture and argue over trivialities, as opposed to those who recognize that scripture's primary purpose is to be an instrument for attaining salvation, perhaps as a criticism against the midrashic impulse to over-scrutinize scripture. The foundational things (*muḥkamāt*)

are the essence of scripture (*umm al-kitāb*); regarding its obscurities (*mutašābihāt*), only those with deviation in their hearts pursue them; "they are looking for trouble by looking for its ultimate meaning, for none knows its ultimate meaning but God."

Reynolds

In its presentation of Jesus the Qurʾān makes him a prophet who confirms (*muṣaddiq*) the *tawrāt* (Q 3:50; 5:46; 61:6; on this see Paret, *Kommentar*, ad loc.). Here (v. 3) the Qurʾān's prophet is said to receive a revelation (*kitāb*) which confirms what came earlier (*mā bayna yadayhi*) from the *tawrāt* and *inǧīl*, thus at once making him a prophet like Jesus and a prophet who succeeds Jesus.

Rippin

I continue to think, despite some scholarly arguments against this, that the Qurʾān has been written in light of an understanding of religion as focused around scripture and that the assertion of the status of scripture is fundamental to the author. The reference to "book" here refers to that status. The use of *furqān* perhaps suggests an attempt to name this book.

With that understanding, the interpretation of *muḥkam* and *mutašābih* do become more problematic, for sure. If, after all, *kitāb* has more the sense of "ruling" then understanding *muḥkam* as an explicit reference to laws makes some sense. If *kitāb* does suggest scripture as such, then the meaning of those words is less obvious.

Bell (1991: I, 65) suggests that "yet none remembers save those possessed of understanding" in v. 7 is an awkward intrusion, since the words being spoken prior to it continue in the speaking voice of those "well-grounded in knowledge" in the following verses. This passage should rightly be understood to continue for another two verses but that does not solve (it draws attention to) the problem of the awkwardness.

Stefanidis

The terms *mutašābihāt* and *muḥkamāt* (v. 7) are customarily translated as "ambiguous" and "clear." Medieval Muslim exegetes diverged over which verses were ambiguous or clear, but they generally agreed that the Qurʾān offered here a binary opposition that is in theory applicable to the whole corpus.

Taking into account the traditional context given for the first part of Q 3 which mentions a dispute with Christian interlocutors (namely the *Naǧrān* delegation, see al-Wāḥidī), Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd suggests a different interpretation. In his view, the categories *mutašābihāt* and *muḥkamāt* do not refer to the *kitāb* as a whole but only to the Qurʾānic presentation of Jesus, which underlines his humanity while at the same time recognizing his miraculous birth. It seems indeed possible that Christian polem-

icists (who, according to this reading, would be those referred to by *allaḏīna fī qulūbihim zayġun*) would have realized the ambiguous status of Jesus in the Qurʾān and used it as an argument in their favor. Abu Zayd's assessment is that, in order to refute any Christian misunderstanding, "the verses in which the Qurʾān describes Jesus as the "word and the "spirit" of God were declared "ambiguous" whereas the verses emphasizing his humanity as only a prophet and messenger were declared the "clear," the backbone of the book." (Abu Zayd 2004: 33).

Tengour

Composée de deux cents versets, la sourate *Āl ʿImrān* est considérée comme étant médinoise par la tradition musulmane et mecquoise par l'orientalisme. La controverse avec les Chrétiens de Naǧrān (vv. 59–63) ; la nativité de Marie et l'Annonce faite à Zacharie (vv. 38–46) ; la nativité de Jésus (vv. 47–58) comptent parmi ses thèmes. La séquence que forment les sept premiers versets est relative au dieu coranique et à la Révélation qu'il fait ou a déjà fait descendre.

Le verbe *nazzala*/ *yunazzilu* (v. 3), qui donne le nom verbal *tanzīl*, connote une répétition et une récurrence de l'action de faire descendre. Le verbe *anzala*/ *yunzilu* (vv. 3, 4, 7) à partir duquel est formé le nom verbal, *inzāl*, désigne quant à lui une descente déjà accomplie. Dans les deux cas, nous avons affaire à la racine arabe *N-Z-L* qui dans la langue ancienne renvoie d'abord à la descente de la pluie. Ce sens concret et particulièrement significatif pour le terrain aride de l'Arabie occidentale du début du VII[e] siècle, est toujours sous-jacent aux emplois coraniques des dérivés de la racine *N-Z-L* lorsqu'il s'agit de désigner la Révélation faite à l'homme Muḥammad ou aux autres peuples.

Des mots comme *hudā* et *āyāt*, *āya* au singulier (vv. 4, 7), auxquels est ensuite associée la Révélation, entrent dans le champ sémantique de la guidance coranique. Le premier est construit sur la racine *H-D-Y* qui renvoie à l'idée de montrer et de mettre sur la bonne piste. Ce sens est toujours présent dans les dictionnaires médiévaux tardifs comme le *Lisān al-ʿArab* d'Ibn Manẓūr (m. 711/1312) où le mot *hudā* est donné comme étant opposé au mot *ḍalāl* (l'égarement de la bonne piste) et comme synonyme du mot *rašād* (le fait d'être sur la bonne piste). Dans le contexte tribal de l'époque, être sur la bonne piste lors des déplacements, nomades ou caravaniers, était une nécessité vitale. Le mot *hudā* est ainsi très occurrent dans le Coran. Son emploi métaphorique où le « bon chemin » est forcément celui du dieu coranique ne doit pas occulter le sens concret. S'agissant du mot *āya*, celui-ci désigne d'abord le signe de piste que l'on voit clairement de loin (voir *Lisān al-ʿArab* à cette entrée). Là encore, la parole coranique l'emploie à dessein pour signifier que la Révélation portée par Muḥammad est un signe probant, autrement dit un signe qu'il n'est pas possible de ne pas voir.

Dans une perspective d'anthropologie historique, le retour aux sens concrets d'une racine s'avère nécessaire à la compréhension d'une parole dont l'enjeu de

conviction était d'importance. Les images qui se profilent derrière ces mots devaient sans doute trouver un écho chez ceux à qui ils étaient destinés.

Toorawa

Alif Lām Mīm. One cannot ignore these inscrutable letters that appear as the beginning of *sūra*s (called *fawātiḥ*, "openers," or *muqaṭṭaʿāt*, "discrete [letters]"), an insistent component of the Qurʾānic text. In spite of a considerable amount of scholarship on these discrete and "mysterious" letters, as Devin Stewart has shown there is still something (perhaps even much) to be said (Stewart 2013). The relationship of the letters to the verses immediately following them—a relationship rooted in almost all cases in end-rhyme—must perhaps be looked at more closely.

Zellentin

The last verse of this passage (v. 7) differentiates between two parts of "the book" that was sent down: there are parts that are *muḥkamāt*, "clear," which derive directly from the heavenly "mother of the book" and there are parts that are *mutašābihāt*, "ambiguous," "likenesses," or perhaps more precisely "similes" (see Witztum 2014). The Qurʾān itself states that it only contains parts that have no doubt in them (e. g., Q 2:1) and associates itself with the "mother of the book" (e. g., in Q 43:4). Would this suggest that the similes in question would mainly be found in the previous parts of the heavenly "mother of the book" already explicated in v. 3 of the passage at hand, the Torah and the Evangel? This is not the case, since the Qurʾān also contains distinct similes: according to Q 2:26, for example, God uses parables that at the same time lead astray transgressors and guide the righteous, a saying that is related to the statement here that "those in whose hearts is deviance" pursue the "ambiguous" verses—or perhaps similes. How do we reconcile these apparently divergent tendencies of both employing and denouncing ambiguity?

The rabbinic exegetical tradition values the multiplicity of meaning of divine speech and fully endorses the mode of parable. For example, it classifies divine speech in ten categories, ranging from clearer forms such as "speech," "saying," and "command," to semiotically more complex ones such as "parable (*mšl*), metaphor, and enigma" (*Genesis Rabbah* 44:6). Arranging the breadth of divine speech on a continuum between clear and opaque, applying rabbinic thought to the passage in question would muddy the waters of the Qurʾān's respective clear-cut taxonomy. Rather, considering that the Qurʾān seems to integrate two late antique tendencies known from the Christian and the Judaeo-Christian tradition, we might even perceive of it as a model counter to the rabbinic one.

Namely, when the Qurʾān classifies the law into parts that are eternally valid and clear (*muḥkamāt*), parts that are allegorical (*mutašābihāt*), and, elsewhere, parts abrogated, mainly by Jesus (see Q 3:50), it seems to echo an oral tradition embodied most fully in the Judaeo-Christian three-partite classification of Scripture into the

pure law, the symbolic law, and the laws abrogated by Jesus, as attested in Ptolemy's "Letter to Flora" (see Epiphanius' *Panarion* 33.6, Ptolemy is discussed also in my commentary on QS 3). At the same time, the Qurʾān states that some ambiguous scriptural verses are a test for people that will lead some astray; this idea is well attested throughout the Christian and Judaeo-Christian literature (in addition to Ephrem, see e. g., *Clementine Homilies* 2.38 and 3.50).

In this case, hence, the Qurʾān places itself outside of the rabbinic attitude towards parables, which enables it to marshal "Christian" discourse against all those who "pursue" (v. 7) Scriptural ambiguity—likely a charge directed precisely against its rabbinic contemporaries who indeed valued the multiplication rather than the simplification of the meaning of Scripture.