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Tabatabai, Muh. Hüseyin (191248)

CHAPTER 9

HADITH COMMENTARY

'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Exegetical
Hadiths in al-Mizān: A Contemporary
Imāmī Commentary on Hadith?

Shadi Nafisi*

Continuity and Change

EDITED BY
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'Allāma Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1320–1402/1903–1981)¹ was a contemporary Iranian philosopher, mystic, theologian, exegete and prominent scholar on hadith. He was a master of the Islamic traditional sciences, received *ijāzas* in narrating and interpreting hadith, attained the rank of *mujtahid* and mastered Islamic philosophy according to the school of Mullā Ṣadrā.² He dedicated his scholastic life to teaching and writing on two subjects that had been overlooked in the traditional seminary curriculum: philosophy and exegesis. His lifetime effort in these fields sparked a revival of Islamic philosophy in contemporary Iran and led him to write the twenty-volume Qur'an commentary *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, a work that is considered the most important contemporary Shī'i exegesis.³

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1 For further information about Ṭabāṭabā'ī, see Medoff, 'Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Moḥammad-Ḥosayn', *Elr*, <<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/tabatabai-mohammad-hosayn>> (accessed 1 July 2020); Medoff, 'Ijtihad and Renewal', ii–vi, 1–20; Algar, 'Allāma Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī', 326–351; Kamaly, *God and Man in Tehran*, 138–144; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Shī'ite Islam*, 21–25; Ehteshami and Rizvi, 'Beyond the Letter', 444–448. For a list of primary sources on Ṭabāṭabā'ī's biography, see Medoff, 'Ijtihad and Renewal', 139–145.

2 That is, Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Shirāzī, best known as Mullā Ṣadrā Shirāzī (1045/1635–36?), a Shī'i philosopher of the Ṣafavid period and arguably the most significant Islamic philosopher after Ibn Sīnā. For his ideas, see Rizvi, 'Mollā Ṣadrā Shirāzī', *Elr*, <<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/molla-sadra-sirazi>> (accessed 1 August 2020).

3 Six volumes of this exegesis have been translated into English by Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi and published in twelve volumes. After Rizvi's death, his son finished the incomplete thirteenth volume. The remainder has been translated by Tawus Raja, including volumes 14 to 16 and 25 to 30. Rizvi's translation, although useful, is not very precise; see Medoff, 'Ijtihad and Renewal', x. Its popularity is clear from the number of dissertations (MA/PhD) focused

238-262

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Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī

Urs Gösken

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1 Introduction

Given the intellectual and spiritual authority he commanded both during his lifetime and in the posthumous reception of his work, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī can safely be considered as one of the most influential Islamic scholars in more recent history, certainly as far as the Shiite community is concerned. This chapter, out of an output ranging from jurisprudence to mystical poetry, confines itself to Ṭabāṭabā'ī's Qur'ān exegesis – notably by discussing his main exegetical work *al-Mizān fi tafsiṛ al-Qur'ān*¹, briefly referred to as *Mizān*, – and the hermeneutical concept underlying it. In the case of this particular scholar, however, even this limited topic could not be meaningfully taken up unless we connect it, at the more immediate level, to Ṭabāṭabā'ī's overall scholarly concerns and intellectual-spiritual background, then, in a wider context, to transformations inside the Shiite religious institution in the second half of the 20th century, and, finally, to Iran's more recent sociocultural history as a whole. Adopting this threefold perspective is also indispensable for understanding the effective history of his whole work as a scholar, including his exegesis of the Qur'ān.

2 Life, Works, Historical and Intellectual Context

One main challenge for any scientifically useful portrayal of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's life is posed by the fact that many relevant sources have been authored by individuals personally and doctrinally close to the scholar and, hence, tend to fuse biography with hagiography. In addition, a number of their authors came to play a role in establishing and shaping the Islamic Republic of Iran, which encouraged ideological appropriations of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's legacy.² Recollections of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's life and persona, most of them by students of his, can be found in the commemorative volume, edited by Ghulām Riżā Gulī Zawāra, *Life-giving Sips: Highlights of 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī's Life*,³ in *The Shining*

¹ English translation: *The Balance in Exegesis of the Qur'ān*. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān fi tafsiṛ al-Qur'ān*, 20 vols. (Qum: Mu'assasa-i Matbū'āti-i Ismā'īliyyān, 1973).

² Some of them are mentioned in Ḥamid Ṭālibzāda, *Falsafa: Āshnāt bā falsafa-i islāmī* [Philosophy: Acquaintance with Islamic Philosophy] (Tehran: 'Ulūm va Ma'ārif-i Islāmī, 2007), 114; Mohammad Jafar Elmi, "An Objective Approach to Revelation: S.M.Ḥ. Ṭabāṭabā'ī's Method of Interpreting the Qur'ān" (PhD diss., The University of Birmingham, 2002), 12 f.

³ Persian original: Ghulām Riżā Gulī Zawāra, ed., *Jur'a-hā-i jān-baksh: Farāz-hā-i az zindag-i 'Allāma Ṭabāṭabā'ī* (Qum: Ḥuzūr, 1999); Seyed Ali Sadr, "Offenbarung, Exegese und Ratio: 'Allāma Saiyid