



CONTEMPORARY
APPROACHES TO
THE QUR'AN
AND SUNNAH

Edited by MAHMOUD AYOUB



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FOREWORD

Contemporary Approaches to the Qur'an and Sunnah is a collection of specially selected papers presented at the 2008 Summer Institute for Scholars convened at the IIIT headquarters in Herndon, Virginia, USA July 15 to August 15, 2008. The essays making up the collection are not random but focused discussions, divided into four parts, and comprised of diverse writings on various significant subjects relating to the Qur'an and Sunnah, of common and intellectual interest as well as relevancy.

Inaugurated in 2008 and now in its fourth year, the purpose of the Summer Institute is to bring together and engage senior and young scholars with a particular interest or expertise in Qur'anic Studies or the Sunnah in focused, organized discussions of topics related to a contemporary understanding and articulation of issues involving the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The specific objectives of the Summer Institute are to:

- Develop methods or approaches of understanding the Qur'an and Sunnah that are both authentic and relevant to contemporary realities and sensibilities in the West and the Muslim world.
- Suggest means and instruments of engaging the scholarly community, the religious community, the media and the public at large in learning processes, debates or experiences that make intelligible the wisdom of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and their relevance to contemporary human affairs.
- Broaden the scope of conversations on issues pertaining to the Qur'an and Sunnah through the inclusion of social and physical scientists beside the scholars of the traditional Islamic disciplines.

Foreword

We hope that both general and specialist readers benefit from the perspectives offered and the overall issues examined in the book.

Where dates are cited according to the Islamic calendar (hijrah) they are labelled AH. Otherwise they follow the Gregorian calendar and labelled CE where necessary. Arabic words are italicized except for those which have entered common usage. Diacritical marks have been added only to those Arabic names not considered modern. English translations taken from Arabic references are those of the author.

The IIIT, established in 1981, has served as a major center to facilitate serious scholarly efforts based on Islamic vision, values and principles. The Institute's programs of research, seminars and conferences during the last thirty years have resulted in the publication of more than four hundred titles in English and Arabic, many of which have been translated into other major languages.

We express our thanks and gratitude to the contributors for their cooperation throughout the various stages of production. We would also like to thank the editorial and production team at the IIIT London Office and all those who were directly or indirectly involved in the completion of this book including, Shiraz Khan, Dr. Maryam Mahmood, Tahira Hadi, Sara Mirza and Salma Mirza. May God reward them for all their efforts.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE QUR'AN AND SUNNAH are the two primary sources of Muslim faith, life, law and morality. They are as well the framework of the Islamic worldview and civilization. The Qur'an is believed by all faithful Muslims to be literally the Book of God, and the Sunnah, or life-example of the Prophet Muhammad (ṢAAS),* is the key to the understanding and interiorization of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an is for Muslims the foundation of their faith and the Sunnah is the framework of their morality. Together they constitute the two sources of the law (Shari'ah) of God, which is humanity's guide to prosperity and happiness in this life and to the bliss of the hereafter. Both the Qur'an and Sunnah were revealed by God. The Qur'an, being the divine communication or revelation (*wahy*), was sent down to the Prophet through Gabriel, the angel of revelation. The Sunnah, being divine inspiration (*ilhām*), was taught and instituted by the Prophet Muhammad. God says, "He it is who sent a messenger to the unlettered people from among themselves to recite to them His revelations, purify them and teach them the Book and Wisdom..." (62:2). The Qur'an is the Book (*Kitāb*) and the Sunnah is the wisdom (*ḥikmah*) with which Muhammad, the last prophet of God was sent to guide humankind to the straight way (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*), which leads to God.

After the Prophet's death, 'Ā'ishah, the "mother of the faithful" was asked to describe the Prophet's character, or moral conduct (*khulq*). She replied, "His character was the Qur'an." During his life, the Prophet Muhammad was the living embodiment of the Qur'an. After his death, his Sunnah continued and will continue to live in the life of the Muslim Ummah till the day of Resurrection.

*ṢAAS – *Ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*: May the peace and blessings of God be upon him. Said whenever the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.

Arguments for Abrogation in the Qur'an: A Critique

ISRAR AHMAD KHAN

INTRODUCTION

THE Qur'an is perhaps the most widely consulted scripture in the world, and also perhaps the most manipulated with regards to source of law. *Fuqahā'* and *mufasssirūn* have provocatively subjected the Qur'an to progressively more complex interpretative and legislative contemplation. One group of scholars uses the Qur'an to substantiate its own set of views and rebut others whilst another uses the Qur'an to authenticate its particular thoughts and condemn the approach of rivals. Theological and legislative debates revolving around the Qur'an have caused the once united Muslim Ummah to divide into various camps which most of the time have been at odds with each other over most issues.

One such issue related to the Qur'an is that of abrogation. Muslim scholars in general, and *fuqahā'* and *mufasssirūn* in particular, have been fairly aggressive and hostile towards one another over the question of abrogation in the Qur'an. The opinion of the '*ulamā'*' can be predominantly divided into two camps, those favoring abrogation and those negating it, with both insisting upon the validity of their own respective opinion on the subject. Fifteen hundred years later (that is since the revelation of the Qur'an) the dispute over the issue of abrogation is as fresh as it might have been during its early stage.

Logically speaking, only two probabilities can exist concerning the claim of the two groups: either both groups of scholars have mistaken the issue of abrogation or only one of them stands for the truth. In no

Towards a Qur'anically-Based Articulation of the Concept of "Just War"

AISHA Y. MUSA

*Fight in the way of God those who fight you, but
do not commit aggression (QUR'AN 2:190)*

INTRODUCTION

TODAY, the word jihad has become a very conspicuous part of the English lexicon. A search of the word "jihad" on Amazon.com in the category of "Islam" finds more than 1,000 books listed, ranging from scholarly and academic works to vitriolic anti-Muslim propaganda. In the process of entering popular English usage, however, there are connotations being imposed on the word that Qur'anic usage does not support. The most insidious of these is the common rendition of the word jihad as "holy war." Both Muslims and non-Muslims now often translate the word jihad as "holy war." Often people take verses or parts of verses from the Qur'an, ignoring context and related verses, to make Islam appear warlike and violent, or to justify hostility and aggression.

Among non-Muslims, this stems both from widespread, general ignorance about Islam and a tendency to view the violent behavior of groups and individuals who identify themselves as Muslims and claim an Islamic agenda as generally representative of Islam. The popular conception of jihad as "holy war" is also fostered by a rising tide of anti-Islam propaganda from a variety of pseudo-scholars.¹

Unfortunately, misunderstanding of this issue is not found only among non-Muslims. Some who identify themselves as Muslims help perpetuate this misunderstanding by actively encouraging acts of

Religious Pluralism and the Qur'an

MAHMOUD AYOUB¹

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

RELIGIOUS diversity is as old as human history. From ancient cave dwellers to the societies of the great empires of China, India, Iran, Egypt and Babylon, religion as the human quest for the divine manifested itself in a variety of languages, devotional practices, myths and rituals. In reality, in these and myriad other cultures, religion has been the fountainhead of civilization.²

Religion may also be regarded, at least in its literary, artistic and philosophical manifestations, as the product of culture. Thus the plurality and diversity of religions is a reflection of the plurality and diversity of cultures and civilizations. In this paper, I will first define pluralism religiously and philosophically. I will then attempt to contextualize it within the history of the civilizations of the Middle East. I will finally discuss religious pluralism in the Qur'an. I am convinced that the Qur'anic worldview, with its emphasis on the diversity of human racial and cultural identities and man's innate capacity to know and have faith in God, recognizes the diverse religions of humankind as divinely preordained ways to this ultimate goal.³

WHAT IS PLURALISM?

In its lexical usage, pluralism signifies plurality, as opposed to singularity. Plurality, moreover, implies difference, and hence diversity. Theologically, the expression religious pluralism must be distinguished from

Qur'anic Revealed Scripture vs. Judeo-Christian Scripture:

A Muslim Perspective of the Universal & Particular in the Scriptures

KHALED TROUDI

INTRODUCTION

MUSLIMS believe that the Qur'an and the previous Judeo-Christian scriptures represent the very word of God (*kalām Allah*). They claim that these scriptures have been sent throughout human history, before Muhammad, "with universal as well as particular guidance to direct human life in order to achieve the divine goal on earth."¹ The universal guidance is designated to provide a direct discourse that speaks to all human beings, while the particular one has, according to the Islamic tradition, specific spiritual and temporal affairs designated to a specific nation under the leadership of God's prophet.² This paper examines why Muslims believe the Qur'an to be the predominant (*muḥaymin*) revealed scripture (the "universal") while the Judeo-Christian scriptures represent the "particular." An analysis of various Qur'anic verses will provide the methodology that is used to undertake the different approaches of this study.

The first approach will examine the idea of the unity of all revealed scriptures according to Muslim theology. It will study verses (42:13), (3:95), (2:130-33), and (22:78) to show how Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share the same source of divine revelation, while their original forms can be considered to be one religion, not just part of a religious tradition. These verses help explain how each Abrahamic religion shares a common core of religious and ethical teachings, even though they differ in time and space, especially regarding their doctrines and dogma.

Exegesis, Social Science and the Place of the Jews in the Qur'an

MOHAMMED ABU-NIMER

THROUGHOUT Islamic history, religious scholars have been viewed as public intellectuals whose opinions have been valued on all matters. Indeed, in some periods, these scholars excelled in other disciplines, including physics, algebra, chemistry, astronomy, and medicine. Still, views expressed in Qur'anic commentaries received little critical examination, which is a necessary endeavor for contemporary Islamic reform. This paper addresses the views of sixteen exegetes and Qur'an scholars concerning Jews in the Qur'an, and applies both traditional and contemporary approaches to scriptural understanding.

Muḥammad ibn Bahāder ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Zarkashī (d. 1391) explained that exegesis is needed for three reasons: people differ in their intellectual abilities, so some readers may need assistance to comprehend; parts of the Qur'an are built on certain assumptions that are not apparent to the common person; and some words may carry multiple meanings and can be deciphered only by learned specialists. These factors have become more complex as the usage of the Arabic language and the human condition in general continue to evolve. That the number of highly educated people has reached levels never known before illustrates how change can affect contemporary people's expectations from scholars. Those who specialize in Qur'an studies are no exception.

The process of reform must engage with the established tradition of exegesis and its methods. Al-Zarkashī presented key knowledge