

Studying the Qur'an

The holy book of the Muslims is the Qur'an; it is the revelation of Almighty Allah upon Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny). The 114 chapters of the Qur'an were revealed in a piece-meal form in around twenty-two years; some of the verses were revealed in Mecca while others were revealed in Medina. For Muslims, the Qur'an is the first and the foremost source of Islamic laws and values. It is considered the final message of God for mankind, and it is to be followed at all times and in all places until the end of this world.

“These days we are often told that we must keep up with the times,” writes Dr. Nasr, a prominent Muslim scholar who currently teaches Islam at the George Washington University in D.C. “Rarely does one ask what have the ‘times’ to keep up with. For men who have lost the vision of a reality which transcends time, who are caught completely in the mesh of our time and space and who have been affected by the historicism prevalent in modern European philosophy, it is difficult to imagine the validity of a truth that does not conform to their immediate external environment.

Islam, however, is based on the principle that truth transcends history and time. Divine Law is an objective transcendent reality, by which man and his actions are judged, not vice versa.

What are called the ‘times’ today are to a large extent a set of problems and difficulties created by man’s ignorance of his own real nature and his stubborn determination to ‘live by bread alone’. To attempt to shape the Divine Law to the ‘times’ is therefore no less than spiritual suicide because it removes the very criteria by which the real value of human life and action can be objectively judged and thus surrenders man to the most infernal impulses of his lower nature. To say the least, the very manner of approaching the problem of Islamic Law and religion in general by trying to make them conform to the ‘times’ is to misunderstand the whole perspective and spirit of Islam.”¹

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Some Muslim sisters have started incorporating Western feminist ideology in studying the Qur'an; they believe that *hijab* and other related issues have been interpreted from almost exclusively male perspective. Some of them go to the extent of saying that since all Prophets and Messengers were men,

and so the laws are also biased towards men.

The problem with this trend of thought is that there is no evidence to support it. It is baseless to accuse the Prophet (s.a.w.), the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), and even the jurists —who are only considered an authority if they are just and upright in character— of having a male bias in interpretation of the divine laws. Are we going to have now a gender-based interpretation of the Qur'an where the men and the women will study the holy Book differently? The Qur'an clearly says,

“And do not covet that by which Allah has made some of you excel others; men shall have the benefit of what they earn and women shall have the benefit of what they earn; and ask Allah of His grace; surely Allah knows all things.” (4:32)

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Such Muslim “feminists” are also of the opinion that a woman has a right to interpret Qur'an according to *her own* understanding, and that she has the right to choose how she interprets her dress code. In their discussion, the famous verse 2:256 is brought as evidence:

“There is no compulsion in the religion...”

First of all, the verse 2:256 is not giving the choice for a Muslim to do whatever he or she likes. “Muslim” means someone who submits to God’s commandments. To say that a person can be a “Muslim” and still have “choice in everything” is a true oxymoron. Secondly, such brothers and sisters conveniently ignore the context of that verse. The verse is talking about the choice of religion before coming into Islam—submission to the will of God. It means that no one can be forced to become a Muslim.

“There is no compulsion in the religion; truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error; therefore, whoever disbelieves in the Shaytan and believes in Allah, he indeed has got hold onto the firmest rope which shall not break off; and Allah is Hearing, Knowing.”

The verse is clearly talking about rejecting the Shaytan and believing in Allah. It does not mean that a Muslim has a choice in whatever he or she wants to do.

Once a person has submitted to God, there is no choice left for him or her in the matters already decided by Allah and His Messenger. See the following verse that makes the issue of obedience clear for both men as well as women:

“And it behoves not a believing man and a believing woman that they should have any choice in their matter when Allah and His Messenger have decided a matter; and whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he [or she] surely strays off a manifest straying.” (33:36)

And so the Qur'an is for all: man and woman, young and old, white and black, Arab and non-Arab,

easterner and westerner; but it has to be studied on its own terms without imposing the personal likes or dislikes upon it and without strait-jacketing it into this or that 'ism'.

1. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought* (Albany: SUNY, 1981) p. 26.

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