



## Book Review



Dr. Muḥammad-‘Ali Rezaei-Esfahāni, *Didgāh-i mutifakkirān-i mu‘āṣir-i Qur’ānī: jarayānhā wa nazariyihā* [The perspective of contemporary Quranic thinkers: currents and theories], 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Qum: Pajūhishgāh-i Bayn al-Milālī-yi al-Muṣṭfā, 1398 Sh/ 2019. 319 pp. [In Persian]

The Quran is a miracle revealed to the Prophet. Its teachings provide guidance and a comprehensive plan for a felicitous life in this world and hereafter. Many great thinkers have attempted to gain access to and reflect on the sublime teachings of the Quran. The contemporary period has also witnessed the appearance of several thinkers in the field of Quranic studies. The book under review is an attempt to survey some of the outstanding Quranic thinkers of the contemporary period to communicate their views and activities and present their possible deficiencies or mistakes to prevent any deviation in understanding the Quran.

The first chapter concerns the generalities such as the concepts of the Quran, contemporary, thinker, theory, the domain of contemporary thinkers, and their activities. In the background section, the author refers to several books and articles related to this topic.

The second chapter concerns contemporary Quranic currents of thought, including approaches, characters, influential theories, their weak and strong aspects, and some of the works related to each current. After a brief presentation of the concept of “currents” (*jarayānhā*) and the background of “Quranic currents,” the author speaks about the most significant contemporary Quranic currents as follows:

1. The traditional Quranic current began from the dawn of Islam and appeared in tafsir books from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century onwards. Tafsir books such as those of *Ṭabarī*, *‘Ayyāshī*, *Tibyān* of Shaykh Ṭūsī, and *Majma‘ al-Bayān* of Ṭabrarī are instances of this type of tafsir. The traditional tafsir is usually

presented in the form of sequential (*tartībī*) tafsir, and pays special attention to the hadiths of the Prophet and the Infallibles (among Shiis) and the companions or successors (among Sunnis). Some of the outstanding traditional exegetes are Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Ayatollah Khu'ī, Ayatollah Ma'rifat, Ayatollah Jawādī, Ibn 'Āshūr, Ṭāhir al-Qādirī.

2. The social exegetical current: the fountainhead of this current can be found in Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Asad Ābādī's thoughts. Tafsir of *Fī zilāl al-Qur'ān* in Egypt, *Min wahy al-Qur'ān* in Lebanon, and Tafsir *Nimūnih* as well as *Partu'ī az Qur'ān* in Iran, are instances of social tafsir which mainly deals with the social and educative aspects of the Quran, pays attention to and employs the intellectual and scientific methods, tries to answer the doubts raised by opponents, and employs a lucid and simple style.

3. Interdisciplinary exegetical current (scientific tafsir) began in Egypt in the tafsirs such as Ṭanṭāwī's *al-Jawāhir* and then in India appeared in tafsirs such as Sayyid Aḥmad Khān's *al-Qur'ān huwa al-Hudā wa al-Furqān*, and in Iran appeared in the works of Muhandis Bāzargān and tafsirs *Nimūnih* and *Partu'ī az Qur'ān*. The scientific tafsirs pay attention to scientific aspects of the Quran, try to employ certain knowledge for the interpretation of scientific verses, and presents scientific theories based on the Quran. Some influential characters of this current are Dr. Labīb Bayḍūn and 'Abd al-Dā'im al-Kaḥīl. The author also refers to certain institutes, journals, and encyclopedias related to this current.

4. The Quranist current (*Ahl al-Qur'ān*): the proponents of this current believe in the sufficiency of the Quran in tafsir and Muslims' life. Some of the Quranists totally reject the *Sira* of the Prophet, and some others only accept the frequently-quoted and well-known (*mashhūr*) hadiths of the Prophet. Their main incentive was to negate the fabricated hadiths; however, they were gradually driven towards the negation of tradition in its totality. The current began with Aḥmad al-Dīn Emer Tustarī and



‘Abdullāh Jakralway in India and continued with *Parwīzīyūn* (the followers of Ghulām Parwīz) in Pakistan, and eventually was extended to Egypt. The most significant and controversial Quranist movement is headed by Subhi Mansur who presently lives in America.

5. The Salafī current (Wahhabism): the Salaf is extended from the companions to the successors’ successors in the third century. The fountainhead of this current is found in Ahl-i Ḥadīth (the followers of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal) and Ibn Taymiyyah’s thoughts. The contemporary extremist Salafī movement is under the influence of Muḥammad b. Abd al-Wahhab’s thoughts. The unity of this movement with the political party of *Al-i Su‘ūd* resulted in the extremist Wahhabi movement in Arabia, Ṭālibān in Afghanistan, and ISIS in Syria and Iraq. The proponents of this current emphasise the tradition of the Salaf, try to revive a type of Sunni Akhbārism, avoid intellectualism in the understanding of religion, propagate strict scripturalism, ascribe disbelief to other Islamic denominations due to their interpretation of monotheism, polytheism, intercession, and so on.

6. The Enlightenment current (New-Mutazilites, Westernised...): this current includes many of the new thinkers in different countries who try to awaken the Muslims in the context of intellectualism, scientism, and a new interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah. The proponents of this current have various approaches including new Mutazilites such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, westernized intellectuals such as Taha Yasin and Taqi-Zadeh, secular religious people such as Fethullah Gulen and Dr. Soroush, and certain religious modernists.

7. The Orientalists’ Quranic studies current developed to understand the religions, denominations, customs, history, and the countries of the East in order to prevent the rise of Islam, to christianise the Muslim territories, to manipulate their resources, and so on. However, among the orientalist were fair scholars who had scientific intentions and some of them

converted to Islam. This current began by the clerics from the beginning of the confrontation of the Muslims with the Europeans, it developed into imperial orientalism, and recently scientific orientalism has appeared and the Brill Encyclopedia of the Quran is an instance of it. Some of the Orientalists' general characteristics are fighting with the Quran and Islam, robbing the Muslims' inheritance and transporting them to Western museums, having doubt in the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad and the revelation of the Quran, paying attention to the controversial issues among the Muslims such as the compilation, distortion, and codices of the Quran to instigate the tribal controversies, and so on. Some of the significant contemporary orientalists are Goldziher, Noldeke, Muhammad Arkin, McAuliffe, and so on.

The third chapter deals with the significant and influential Quranic theories. The author presents some of the criteria of Quranic theories as innovation, lack of contradiction, harmony with the spirit of the Quran, lack of disagreement with the definitive verses (*muḥkamāt*) of the Quran and with Sunnah, and so on. Then, the author refers to the domains of Quranic theorising such as the history, exegetical methods, *ulūm* al-Quran, revelation and its relation with intuition and genius, and so on. Some of the significant Quranic theories are as follows:

1. Sayyid Jamal al-Dīn Asad Ābādī presented his theory of the return to the Quran and the implementation of the Quranic teachings in the social life of Muslims in Egypt in a famous and fiery speech after which many people fainted.

2. Martyr Motahari believes that the methods of the Quran in responding to the needs of contemporary man in the domain of the sources of religion are to introduce the intellect, prophethood and imamate which complement and interpret the Quran, the fact that the rules of the Quran are real statements (*qaḍāyāyī ḥaqīqīya*). In the domain of methods and rules, Martyr Motahari mentions the dynamic *ijtihād*, legislative system



which includes fixed and changeable rules as well as the primary and secondary rules, and so on.

3. Ayatollah Ma'rifat presents his theory of *batn* of the Quran in this order: 1. Discovering the purpose of the verse, 2. Abolishing the characteristics of time and place and people who are not involved in the actual fulfillment of the purpose of the verse, 3. Inferring a general rule from the verse, 4. Applying the aforementioned general rule to new examples. For example, in verse, ﴿أَرْسَلُهُ مَعَنَا غَدًا يَزْتَعُ وَيَلْعَبُ﴾ (Let him go with us tomorrow so that he may eat lots of fruits and play) (*Sūra Yūsuf/12*), after performing the above-mentioned steps, the purpose of the verse is extracted as such: Fathers should take care of their children so that cunning people do not separate them from their father with evil plans and under the pretext of eating and playing. Also, Ayatollah Ma'rifat presents the theory of conditional, preparatory, and gradual *naskh*.

4. Martyr Muḥammad-Baqir al-Ṣadr has presented the theory of *Manṭaqat al-Firāgh* (domain of no explicit assertion) which means there are issues about which the Divine lawgiver is silent and has delegated their rulings (*aḥkām*) to the Muslim government to decide by considering the general purposes of the Islam and the conditions of the time. Then, the author refers to the scope, characteristics, reason, results, and instances of *Manṭaqat al-Firāgh*. Also, he has presented the theory of the extra-thematic tafsir (*tafsir-i burūn-Qur'ānī*) which means to take the subjects of thematic tafsir from the context of the society; that is, to present the needs and problems in the form of question to the Quran, and by collecting the related verses and their thematic interpretations, to find the answer.

5. Imam Khumayni presents his theory concerning the role of time and place in *ijtihād* which deals with the instances, scope, and influence of time and place in the understanding of the Quran and hadiths, the subject, scope, and deduction of rulings, the issue of governmental ruling and so on.

6. Dr. Muhammad-Ali Rezaei Isfahani has presented his theory of the role of common or prevalent practice (*urf*) in the implementation of the Quran in contemporary life and its applicability in personal, social, and scientific discussions; therefore, to understand the custom, its religious domain is influential in responding to the needs of the modern men by the Quran. Another theory presented by Dr. Rezaei Isfahani concerns the thematic interdisciplinary tafsir.

7. Ayatollah Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, believes that the humanities should be based on the Quran. Given the significance of the humanities, its present condition in Iran, and its shortcomings, Ayatollah Khamenei emphasises the production of knowledge and new theories, the use of the current knowledge in the world with a critical look, benefitting from our own cultural-scientific heritage and paying special attention to the Quranic teachings. The author, also, refers to three other theories related to the Islamization of the humanities as proposed by Ayatollah Misbah, Ayatollah Jawadi, and Dr. Golshani.

8. The theory of the school of separation (*maktab-i tafkik*) versus the school of unity of the Quran, mysticism, and reason: the separation school was established by Mirza Mehdi Gharavi Isfahani a century ago, and nowadays is supported by some of the scholars in Mashhad such as Ayatollah Sayyidan and the Hakimi brothers. It emphasises the separation of Quran from mysticism and philosophy. Of course, the proponents of this school differ with regard to their attitude about the degree of this separation or opposition. In contrast, the school of unity supported in the present era by such thinkers as Allamah Hasan-Zadeh and Ayatollah Javadi Amoli emphasise the unity of the Quran, philosophy, and mysticism.

Finally, the author touches upon such topics as scientific miracles, wonders, and theories of the Quran, methodology of the scientific understanding of the Quran, the elements, rules, and instances of Quranic scientific theorizing.



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