Chapter – 4

The Exegesis of Sūrah An-Nūr – A Comparison of Asad with two Contemporary Qur’ānic Scholars
For a better appreciation of the nature, tone and tenor of Muhammad Asad's *magnum opus*, *The Message of the Qur'ân*, it would be in the fitness of things to have some sort of a comparative study of this work with some other note-worthy works of the 20th century. While there have been a large number of notable *Tafsîr* works in numerous languages of the world, which could be compared with that of the work of Asad, it is nonetheless a prerogative of the present author to select some *tafâsîr* for the purpose – selection would, however, not be without reason and justification – not necessarily to the satisfaction of all.

While the list of the Qur'ân translations is very large, yet the same is not the case with *tafâsîr* works, which are, in comparison to the translations, limited in number. In English, one would have liked to compare Asad's work with that of Pickthall's yet the two cannot be fully called as comparable entities. Pickthall's work is of the translation of the meaning of the Qur'ân only and Asad's is that of exegesis and translation. Hence the choice of Abdullah Yusuf Ali's "*The Holy Qur'ân*" – which contains translation and the exegetical notes. Also Yusuf Ali's *tafsîr* work has been widely distributed by the Saudi's, who had earlier banned Asad's work – so is very much one of the most available English commentaries of the Qur'ân in the Muslim World and beyond it. Its popularity among the educated Muslims is almost established beyond any doubt.

Twentieth century has been very significant in the production of very valuable exegetical works in the Urdu language also spoken mainly in the Indo-Pak subcontinent, and Muslim immigrant communities in the Gulf region, Europe and America. Sayyid Abu'l Ali Mawdūdi's *Tafheem al- Qur'ân* has influenced very large sections of the Muslim community particularly its educated
class. Mawdūdī's *tafsīr* work, now being rendered into English (Already seven volumes are available), is another work, which shall be compared in the following pages.

Of all the English translations and exegesis of the Qurʾān, Asad's *The Message of the Qurʾān*, has been regarded as the most controversial. To be more specific, in addition to other objectionable part, it is *Sūrah An-Nūr* (The twenty-fourth *Sūrah*) whose rendition and exegetical notes are considered the most objectionable of Asad’s work. So, in this chapter some parts of the *Sūrah An-Nūr* – its treatment and contents of the exegetical notes contained in the three exegetical works of the 20th century shall be subjected to a comparative study.

For this study, Sayyid Mawdūdī's ‘*Tafheem al- Qurʾān*’ English version ‘Towards Understanding the Qurʾān’ (vol. VI), translated and edited by Zafar Ishaq Ansari, (New Delhi, Markazi Maktaba Islami Publishers, 2003) and Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s ‘*The Holy Qurʾān*’ (Published by Amana Corp., U.S.A., 1983) has been consulted.

A. Introduction

(i) Asad

He is usually very brief in his introductions to *Sūrahs*: Here he categorizes *Sūrah An-Nūr* (the Light) as of ‘Medina period.’ Then says:

From various allusions (particularly in verses 11-20) to historical incidents connected with the Prophet’s campaign against the tribe of Muṣṭaliq, it is evident that this *Sūrah* was revealed towards the end of the fifth or the beginning of the sixth year after the *hijrah*. 

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174
A large part of it deals with the mutual relations of the sexes and with certain ethical rules to be observed in the context of this relationship. Verses 2-9, in particular, lay down definite legal injunction concerning illicit sexual intercourse, while verses 27-29 and 58-59 stress each individual's right to privacy.

The title is derived from the mystic parable of the ‘Light of the God’ in verses 35 and its echo in verses 40: “he to whom God gives no light, no light whatever has he!”

(ii) Yusuf Alî

In the beginning of the Sûrahs, A Yusuf Alî in addition to introduction, adds summary of the contents of the Sûrah. Also he has rhythmic commentary of parts of the Sûrah in the beginning of each part.

Here he started by writing:

The environmental and social influence which most frequently wreck our spiritual ideals have to do with sex, and especially with its misuse, whether in the form of unregulated behavior, of false charges and scandals, or breach of the refined conventions of personal and domestic privacy. Our complete conquest of all pitfalls in such matters enable us to rise to the higher regions of Light and God-created Nature, about which a mystic doctrine is suggested. This subject is continued in the next Sûrah.

As the reprobation of false slanders about women (XXIV.11-20) is connected with an incident that happened to hadhrat ‘Āisha in A.H. 5-6 that fixes the chronological place of this Medina Sûrah.

Summary - Sex offence should be severely punished, but the stickiest evidence should be required, and false slanderers are also
worthy of punishment. Light talk about women reprobated (XXIV. 1-26, and C. 157).

Privacy should be respected, and the utmost decorum should be observed in dress and manners (XXIV. 27-34, and C. 158).

Parable of Light and Darkness: order and obedience in Nature point to the spiritual duty of man (XXIV. 35-57, and C. 159).

Domestic manners and manners in public or collective life all contribute to the highest virtues, and are part of our spiritual duties leading up to God (XXIV. 58-64, and C. 160).

C. 157 – (XXIV. 1-26).

Chastity is a virtue, for men and women,  
Whether joined in marriage, or single,  
Or widowed. The punishment for offences  
In such matters should be public. No less  
Grave is the launching of false charges  
Or rumours against the fair reputation  
Of women, or the spreading of such  
Slanders, or the facile belief in them.  
Evil is ever spreading its net.  
Good-men and women should ever be  
On their guard, and pray for God’s grace and mercy.²

(iii) Mawdūdī

Unlike Asad and Yūsuf Alī, Mawdūdī has a detailed introduction. It is comprised of the parts dealing with title of the Sūrah; Period of revelation; Historical Background, a map showing campaign against Banū al-Muṣṭaliq, Subject Matter and Main Themes.³
Title

The title is derived from verse 35 of this Sūrah: “Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.”

Period of Revelation

There is agreement that this Sūrah was revealed after Ghazwat Banū al-Muṣṭaliq. It is evident from the Qurʾān itself that it was revealed in the well known incident of (ifk) which is mentioned in detail in verses 11-20. Moreover, it is established by authentic traditions that this incident took place while the Muslims were on the move in connection with the campaign against the Banū al-Muṣṭaliq.

There is, however, disagreement about whether this expedition took place before the Battle of Aḥzāb in 5. A.H. or after the battle in 6. A.H. This matter needs to be investigated because the injunctions regarding ḥijāb are to be found in only two Sūrahs of the Qurʾān: al-Aḥzāb and the present Sūrah, al-Nūr. As far as Sūrah al- Aḥzāb is concerned, there is complete agreement that it was revealed on the occasion of the battle of Aẓḥāb. Now, if the Battle of Aḥzāb predates the expedition of the Banū al Muṣṭaliq, it obviously means that the earlier injunctions about ḥijāb are those that are embodied in Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, and that these have been supplemented by the current ones in Sūrah al-Nūr. Conversely, if the campaign against the Banū al-Muṣṭaliq took place before the Battle of Aḥzāb, the sequence would be reversed, meaning thereby that the injunctions pertaining to ḥijāb commenced with those found in Sūrah al-Nūr and that they were given their final touch in Sūrah al-Aḥzāb. Since confusion on this issue might cloud our understanding regarding the wisdom underlying the injunctions
about ḥijāb, it is necessary to ascertain the date of the revelation of Sūrah al-Nūr before proceeding any further.5

Mawdūdī undertakes the issue and concludes that Sūrah al-Nūr was revealed in the later half of 6. A.H., a few months after the revelation of Sūrah al-Ĥţāb.6

Historical Background

Having ascertained that Sūrah al-Nūr was revealed in the later half of 6. A.H., a few months after the revelation of Sūrah al-Ĥţāb, let us now consider the background against which it was revealed.7

The rise of the Islamic movement beginning with the Muslims victory at the Battle of Badr had reached a high point by the time of Ghazwat al-Ĥţāb. The Jews, the hypocrites and the wavering Muslims had all begun to realize that it would be impossible to thwart this nascent movement merely by force of arms. On the occasion of Ghazwat al-Ĥţāb all these hostile elements forged a united front and a massive army of 10,000 invaded Madina. These opponents of Islam maintained their siege of Madina for one full month and then at long last they retreated in utter frustration. No sooner had they retreated than the Prophet (peace be on him) proclaimed: “The Quraysh shall never invade you after this year; but it is you who will be in a position to invade them’ (Ibn Hishām, Vol.3, p. 266).8

Mawdūdī observed that as per the numbers and weaponry, anti-Islamic forces were still far superior to the Muslims. Yet, the unblemished character of the Prophet (S) and the Muslim community was unparralled and their body politic was characterized with inner cohesion, solidarity and discipline, hence
the Jews and polytheists proved no match for them, neither in times of peace nor of war.⁹

So Mawdūdī elaborates:
People who are wicked and mean by nature display a strange characteristic when they observe the good qualities of others. Even when they realize that the good qualities of others are conducive to their success and their own weaknesses cause them to suffer loss, they are still hardly inclined to purge themselves of their weaknesses or adopt the good qualities found among others. On the contrary, they concentrate all their attention on manipulations aimed at promoting the same weaknesses from which they suffer.¹⁰

In this respect, the anti-Islamic forces resolved to launch a campaign to malign the Muslims. They thought that as a result of this campaign, the world would look at the Muslims as not significantly different from them, that the former too were not completely free from a blemish. As a result of this mentality, instead of engaging the Muslims in the armed battle, the enemies of Islam directed their efforts at launching vicious and mean campaign against them. This was in addition to attempts to sow discord in their ranks.¹¹

Mawdūdī, furnishes the background in detail, how hypocrites were used in carrying out slander campaigns against the Prophet (S) first on the issue of Zayd bin Ḥārithah (Prophet’s adopted son) divorce from his wife Zaynab bint Jaḥsh and later Prophet’s marriage with her and second on the occasion of the expedition of Banū al-Muṣṭaliq – hurling accusations against Hadhrat ʻĀishah – Prophet’s beloved wife. Mawdūdī is of the view that the hypocrites had created such a fuss, that some traditionalists and Muffassīrīn had carried such stories that orientalists to this day are
misusing them to distort the image of the unblemished character of the Prophet and his wife, Hadhrat Ā’ishah.\textsuperscript{12}

Mawdūḍī investigates the nature of slander and establishes, analytically the absurdness of the charges and concludes the discussion on this issue by saying:

The remaining details of the incident are mentioned in our explanatory notes which pertain to the Qur'ānic verses that exonerate Ā’ishah from the charges leveled against her (see verse 11 ff.). The point made above is that ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy by initiating this mischief attempted to kill several birds with one stone. On the one hand, he attacked the honour of the households of both the Prophet (peace be upon him) and Abū Bakr. On the other, he sought to lower the moral prestige of the Islamic movement which was then at its pinnacle. Furthermore, had Islam not brought about the moral transformation of its followers, the mischief created by him would have provoked a civil war between the Muhājirūn and the Ansār let alone between the two tribes of the Ansār themselves who might have engaged in gory acts of fratricide.\textsuperscript{13}

\section*{Subject Matter and Main Themes}

Under this subheading, Mawdūḍī writes:

The above account provides the background against which the last six sections of \textit{Sūrah al-Ahzāb} were revealed, this at a time when the first major propaganda campaign against Islam was launched. This was on the occasion of the Prophet’s marriage with the divorced wife of his adopted son, Zayd. (see al-Ahzāb 33:28-Ed.)\textsuperscript{14}

As far \textit{Sūrah al-Nūr}, it was revealed at the time of the second major propaganda campaign against Islam. If one systematically
studies both *Sūrahs* against this background, it facilitates an understanding of the underlying wisdom of the injunctions expounded in them.\(^{15}\)

The hypocrites had intended to defeat the Muslims in that very field in which the latter had enjoyed superiority. Rather than engage in an emotionally charged disquisition against the conspiracies of the hypocrites, the Muslims were asked to fill in the gaps in their own moral conduct. In short, they were required to fortify themselves on the moral front.\(^{16}\)

We have already taken note of the storm of mischief that the hypocrites and unbelievers raised on the occasion of the Prophet's marriage to Zaynab. It was during those turbulent days that *Sūrah al-Ahzāb* was revealed and the following directives laid down in that *Sūrah* especially with respect to social relations:

(i) The wives of the Prophet (peace be on him) were asked to stay in doors with grace and dignity and not to go about making a public display of their attractions. They were also directed that whenever they happened to converse with men who did not fall into the category of *mahram*, they should avoid any mannerism that would lead such men to entertain uncalled-for expectations. (see verses 32-3 of *Sūrah al-Ahzāb*).

(ii) Those Muslims who did not have any ties of kinship with the Prophet's family were barred from entering his house unless they were specially granted permission to do so. If they needed to ask anything of the Prophet's wives, they were to do so from behind a screen (verse 53).

(iii) A distinction was drawn between *mahram* relatives and those who were not *mahram*. In this respect, in injunction was
issued (verses 55) directing that only *mahram* relatives could freely enter the house(s) of the Prophet (peace be on him).

(iv) It was impressed upon the Muslims that the Prophet’s wives were their mothers and, hence, no one could marry them after the Prophet (peace be on him) just as no person may marry his mother. Hence, the Muslims were asked to have nothing but the purest of intentions with regard to the Prophet’s wives (verse 53-4).

(v) The Muslims were also warned that causing any offence to the Prophet (peace be on him) would incur God’s curse upon them both in this life and in the next, and that it would render them liable to a humiliating punishment in the hereafter. Likewise, those who cause an unjustified hurt to the Muslims, be they men or women, or who calumniate them, commit a grave sin (verses 57-8).

(vi) All Muslims women were directed that whenever, they have to go out they should properly cover their bodies with their outer garments and cast their mantle over their faces (verse 59).

Subsequently, when the same slander campaign again rocked the Madinian society, *Sūrah al-Nūr* was revealed. It also embodied injunctions that are relevant to the realms of morality, social life and law. The purpose of those injunctions was to protect Muslim society from the rise and spread of social evils. If social evils were to raise their ugly heads, then certain measures are documented as a means of curbing them. What follows is a summary of the injunctions and directives given in the same sequence in which they appear in this *Sūrah*. So that one has fairly clear idea about the whole range of measures – legal, moral and social – that were prescribed by the Qur’ān.
These were prescribed at the appropriate psychological moment as assistance in the reform and development of human society.

(i) Illicit sex, which had already been denounced as a social evil (al-Nisā 4:15-16), was now declared a cognizable criminal offence. The specific punishment of one hundred lashes was laid down with regard to those so convicted.

(ii) People were directed to refrain from having social relations with those who were morally corrupt. The believers were furthermore especially asked not to enter into matrimonial relations with the morally corrupt.

(iii) Anyone who accuses another of unlawful sexual intercourse (Zinā) and fails to produce four witnesses to substantiate such a charge is liable to a punishment of eighty lashes.

(iv) The procedure of li'an was laid down in respect of the husband who accuses his wife of having committed unlawful sexual intercourse (for an explanation of li'an see Glossary of Terms)

(v) While refuting the false allegations of the hypocrites against 'Ā'ishah, it was laid down that people should not blindly accept slanderous charges leveled against persons of honorable character nor should they go about spreading them themselves. Instead people should seek to curb the circulation of such outrageous reports rather than go about narrating them to others.

In this connection a general principle was expounded: that men of clean character are suitable to form matrimonial relations with women of clean character. In fact it is quite difficult for such people to feel at home with corrupt women even for a few days. The same is true about women of clean character. The soul of a
good-character woman will find peace and harmony with a good-character man alone and she will be totally out of place if she makes a life-partner of a corrupt man. Given that the Prophet (peace be on him) was a person of clean moral character – in fact he was possessed of the cleanest possible character – does it stand to reason that he would make a corrupt woman his favourite wife? How can it be imagined that anyone as pious and righteous as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) would take and keep a woman of disreputable character as his wife, one who goes to the extent of committing adultery. Thus, the accusation that was leveled against ‘A’ishah was no more than a slanderous lie fabricated by a depraved person. The whole account of the incident was so outrageously false that no one could possibly believe it. The people should have used their brains and seen with open eyes what kind of person leveled such an outrageous accusation.17

(vi) Those who are guilty of spreading malicious rumours and seek to spread moral corruption in Muslim society deserve punishment rather than encouragement.

(vii) As a general rule, it was prescribed that relations in the Muslim society should be based on the principle that people should have good faith with regard to one another. Everyone was to be considered innocent until it proved otherwise, rather than vice versa.

(viii) A general directive was given that people should not enter one another’s house freely. They may do so only when they are expressly permitted by the owners to so enter their homes.
(ix) Both men and women were asked to restrain themselves from intentionally looking at, let alone ogling, members of the opposite sex.

(x) Women were directed to cover their heads and bosoms even in their own homes.

(xi) Women were also directed not to display their attractions before anyone other than their husbands, their mahram relatives and the servants of house.

(xii) They were directed not only to cover their personal adornments, but also not to go out of their homes while wearing tinkling ornaments.

(xiii) The practice of remaining unmarried was declared to be undesirable both for men and women. A general directive was given that unmarried persons, including slave men and women should marry. This because to remain unmarried often makes people instrumental in the spreading of corruption or makes them vulnerable to the same. Those who are unmarried, even when they themselves do not directly engage in moral corruption, are at least more amenable to lending their ears to rumours of moral corruption and to spreading those rumours around.

(xiv) A device, namely mukātabah, was found for the emancipation of slaves, both male and female. (See Glossary of Terms – Ed.) The masters of slaves were urged to provide financial assistance to those who had made mukātabah contracts in order that they may be able to emancipate themselves.

(xv) The use of slave-girls for prostitution was henceforth prohibited. Up until this time it has been customary for slave-girls to belong to this profession. Hence, the
prohibition of this practice was aimed at extirpating prostitution.

(xvi) Domestic servants and minor children were directed not to enter unannounced the bedrooms of any male or female of the house during the hours of privacy (i.e. in the early hours of morning and afternoon, and at night). Even children were required to seek permission before entering anyone's bedroom.

(xvii) Old women were granted the concession to take off their headscarves in their own homes. They were, nevertheless, asked not to make a deliberate display of their attractiveness; they were told that it was preferable if they continued to wear headscarves to cover themselves.

(xviii) The blind, the lame, maimed and the sick were granted leave to eat anything at anyone's house and the same would not be considered as theft or embezzlement. In other words, such persons would not be taken to task for so doing.

(xix) Close relatives and friends were allowed to eat freely at one another's houses, even without obtaining formal permission, and that doing so was to be considered the same as eating at one's own place. Thus, members of society were brought closer to each other and the barriers of estrangement removed. This was done in order to foster mutual affection and a sincere warmth between people so that any mischief-mongers might be hard put to find gaps they could exploit to achieve their own nefarious designs.

Along with providing these directives, this Sūrah also outlines those features which distinguish the hypocrites from the true believers. Moreover, measures were prescribed so as to introduce
greater discipline in the collective life of the Muslims. Steps were also taken to reinforce the inner strength of Muslim society.\textsuperscript{18}

What is most remarkable is that whole Sūrah is absolutely free from the bitterness caused by vulgar and obscene accusations. Consider the context in which the Sūrah was revealed on the one hand, and note its contents and style on the other. Even though the atmosphere was highly charged, both the content and the tenor of this Sūrah rise above what would normally be expected of any discourse on such an occasion. Take into account the provocative background of the events and note the restrained dignity in which the laws were laid down, the reformative directive given, the guidance provided, and the instruction and admonition imparted. This indicates that even when Muslims encounter mischievous hostility they should always act with wisdom and restraint and be magnanimous despite all provocations. The tone and tenor of this Sūrah's discourse also conclusively prove that the Qur'ān was in no way composed by Muḥammad (peace be on him). For had it been so, it would have carried some reflection – notwithstanding the loftiness of the Prophet's vision and greatness of his character – of the bitterness that an innocent person feels when his own honour and dignity are subjected to outrageous attack. On the contrary, there is every indication in the Sūrah that it is the work of one who is looking at the human situation from a great height. One who is providing valuable guidance to mankind without being affected by any personal or narrow considerations, or by the conditions obtaining at a given time and place.\textsuperscript{19}

B. Verses 1-34

Asad

In his first note, he explains:
It would seem that the special stress on God's having laid down this Sūrah "in plain terms" is connected with the gravity of the injunctions spelt out in the sequence: in other words, it implies a solemn warning against any attempt at widening or re-defining those injunctions by means of deductions, inferences or any other considerations unconnected with the plain wording of the Qur'ān.20

About 'Zinā' and its punishment, Asad says: The term Zinā signifies voluntary sexual intercourse between a man and a woman not married to one another, irrespective of one or both of them are married to other persons or not: hence, it does not in contrast with the usage prevalent in most Western languages – differentiate between the concepts of 'adultery' (i.e., sexual intercourse of a married man with a woman other than his wife, or of a married woman with a man other than her husband) and 'fornications' (i.e., sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons). For the sake of simplicity I am rendering Zinā throughout as 'adultery', and the person guilty of it as 'adulterer' or 'adulteress', respectively.21

Asad, on the Qur'ānic injunction of carrying out the punishment in the presence of a group of the believers, comments, thus:

The number of those to be present has been left unspecified, thus indicating that while the punishment must be given publicity, it need not be made "public spectacle".22

Verse 3rd is rendered by Asad, thus:

[Both are equally guilty:] the adulterer couples with none other than adulteress – that is, a woman who accords [to her own lust] a place side by side with God; and with the adulteress couples none other than
an adulterer – that is, a man who accords to his own lust a place side by side with God: and this is forbidden unto the believers.

Asad in his exegetical notes on the verse, explains: The term mushrik (fem. Mushrikah), which normally signifies a person who associates in his or her mind all manner of imaginary deities or forces with God, or who believes that any created being has a share in His qualities or powers, is here evidently used in the widest metaphorical sense of this term, denoting one who accords to his or her desires a supremacy which is due to God alone, and thus blasphames against the principles of ethics and morality enjoyed by Him. The particle aw (lit. “or”) which connects the word mushrikah with the preceding word Zāniyah (“adulteress”) has in this context – as well as in the next clause, where both these terms appear in their masculine form – an amplifying, explanatory value equivalent to the expression “in other words” or “that is”, similar to the use of this particle in 23:6...

Asad makes further elucidation of the above passage in his next note of the same verse. He elaborates: Some of the commentators understand this passage in the sense of an injunction: “The adulterer shall not marry any but an adulteress or a mushrikah; and as for the adulteress, none shall marry her but an adulterer or mushrik.” This interpretation is objectionable on several counts: firstly, the Qur’ān does not ever countenance the marriage of a believer, however great a sin he or she may have committed, with an unbeliever (in the most pejorative sense of this term); secondly, it is fundamental principle of Islamic Law that once a crime has been expiated by the transgressor’s undergoing the ordained legal punishment (in this case, a hundred stripes), it
must be regarded, insofar as the society is concerned, as atoned for and done with, and, lastly, the constructions of the above passage is clearly that of a statement of fact (Rāzī), and cannot be interpreted as an injunction. On the other hand, since adultery is an illicit sexual union, the verb yankihu, which appears twice in this passage, cannot have the customary, specific meaning of “he marries” but must, rather be understood in its general sense — applicable to both lawful and unlawful sexual intercourse — namely, “he couples with”. It is in this sense that the great commentator Abū Muslim (as quote by Rāzī) explains the above verse, which stresses the fact that both partners are equally guilty inasmuch as they commit their sin consciously implying that neither of them can excuse himself or herself on the ground of having been merely “seduced.”

About Qur’ānic punishment of eighty stripes to a man who accuses chaste women adultery and fails to produce four witnesses in support of his accusation, Asad says that by implication same holds true for a woman who accuses a man of illicit sexual intercourse, and is subsequently unable to prove her accusation legally. In his concluding remarks on the issue, Asad says:

Since such a complete evidence is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to obtain, it is a obvious that the purpose of the above Qur’ānic injunction is to preclude, in practice, all third-party accusations relating to illicit sexual intercourse — for, “man has been created weak” (4:28) — and to make a proof of adultery dependent on a voluntary, faith-inspired confession of the guilty parties themselves.
In his brief exegetical notes on the foul slander against 'Ā'ishah, Asad says that 'her innocence was established beyond all doubt' and asserts:

— As is the case with all Qur'ānic allusions to historical events, this one, too, is primarily meant to bring out an ethical proposition valid for all times and all social circumstances and this is the reason why the grammatical construction of the above passage is such that the past-tense verbs occurring in verses 11-16 can be—and, I believe, should be—understood as denoting the present tense.²⁷

Part of Verse 21 is rendered by Asad as:

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O \text{YOU who have attained to faith! Follow not Satan's footsteps: for he who follows Satan's footsteps [will find that], behold, he enjoins but deeds of abomination and all that runs counter to reason.}
\]

In the exegetical note of the above verse, Asad writes:

In this context, the term \textit{al-munkar} has apparently the same meaning as in 16:90 (explained in the corresponding note 109) since, as the sequence shows, it clearly relates to the unreasonable self-righteousness of so many people who "follow Satan's footsteps" by imputing moral failings to others and forgetting that it is only due to God's grace that man, in his inborn weakness, can ever remain pure.²⁸

In note 109 of 16:90, about the purport of the term \textit{al-munkar}, Asad writes:

The term \textit{al-munkar} (rendered by me in other places as "that which is wrong") has here its original meaning of "that which the mind [for the moral sense] rejects", respectively "ought to reject".
Zamakhshari is more specific, and explains this term as signifying in the above context “that which [men’s] intellects disown” or “declare to the untrue” (mā tunkiruhu al-‘uqūt): in other words, all that runs counter to reason and good sense (which, obviously, must not be confused with that which is beyond man’s comprehension). This eminently convincing explanation relates not merely to intellectually unacceptable proportion (in the abstract sense of the term) but also to grossly unreasonable and, therefore, reprehensible actions or attitudes and is, thus, fully in tune with the rational approach of the Qurʾān to question of ethics as well as with its insistence on reasonableness and moderation in man’s behaviours. Hence my rendering of al-munkar, in this and similar instances, as “all that runs counter to reason.”

Verses 30 and 31 have been rendered by Asad as:

Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity: this will be most conducive to their purity – [and,] verily, God is aware of all that they do.

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity, and not to display their charms [in public] beyond what may [decently] be apparent thereof; hence, let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms. And let them not display [more of] their charms to any but their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands’ fathers, or their sons, or their husbands’ sons, or their brothers, or their brother’s sons, or their sister’s sons, or their womenfolk, or those whom they rightfully possess, or such male
attendants as are beyond all sexual desires, or children that are as yet unaware of women's nakedness; and let them not swing their legs [in walking] so as to draw attention to their hidden charms and [always], O you believers – all of you – turn into God in repentance, so that you might attend to a happy state!  

Asad, in his exegetical note on the first part of verse 30 gives the literal meaning of the part of the verse and then has his elaboration: lit., “to restrain [soothing] of their gaze and to guard there private parts” The latter expression may be understood both in the literal sense of “covering one’s private parts” – i.e., modesty in dress – as well as in metonymical sense of “restraining one’s sexual urges”, i.e., restricting them to what is lawful, namely, marital intercourse (c f. 23:5-6). The rendering adopted by me in this instance allows for both interpretations. The “lowering of one’s gaze”, too, relates both to physical and emotional modesty (Rāzī).  

Asad, in his subsequent note on his interpolation of the word “decently” comments;
My interpolation of the word “decently” reflects the interpretation of the phrase illā mā zāhara minhā by several of the earliest Islamic scholars, and particularly by Al-Qiffāl (quoted by Rāzī), as “that which a human being may openly show in accordance with prevailing custom (al-‘ādah al-jāriyah)”. Although the traditional exponents of Islamic Law have for centuries been inclined to restrict the definition of “what may [decently] be apparent” to a woman’s face, hands and feet – and sometimes even less than that we may safely assume that the meaning of illā mā zāhara minhā is much wider, and that the deliberate vagueness of this phrase is
meant to allow for all the time-bond changes that are necessary for man’s moral and social growth. The pivotal clause in the above injunction is the demand, addressed in identical terms to men as well as to women, “to lower their gaze and be mindful of their chastity”: and this determines the extent of what, at any given time, may legitimately i.e., in consonance with the Qur’ānic principles of social morality- be considered ‘decent” or “indecent” in a person’s outward appearance.  

Asad, explains the term ‘Khimār’ used by the Qur’ān, and its purport:
The noun Khimār (of which Khumur is the plural) denotes the head-covering customarily used by Arabian women before and after the advent of Islam. According to most of the classical commentators, it was worn in pre-Islamic times more or less as an ornament and was let down loosely over the wearer’s back; and since, in accordance with the fashion prevalent at the time, the upper part of the woman’s tunic had a wide opening in the front, her breasts were left bare. Hence, the injunction to cover the bosom by means of a khimār (a term so familiar to the contemporaries of the Prophet) does not necessarily relate to the use of a khimār as such but is, rather, meant to make it clear that woman’s breasts are not included in the concept of “what may decently be apparent” of her body and should not, there, be displayed.

Asad, while commenting on the verses relating to slaves whereby their masters are asked to help them get freedom, *inter alia*, says:
The stipulation that such a deed of manumission may not be refused, and the establishment of precise judicial directives to this end, clearly indicates that Islamic Law has from its very beginning
aimed at an abolition of slavery as a social institution, and that its prohibition in modern times constitutes no more than a final implementation of that aim.\textsuperscript{33}

\textbf{Abdullah Yusuf Alî}

In his first exegetical note of the first verse Yusuf Alî writes:

It must not be thought that the checking of sex offences or of minor improprieties that relate to sex or privacy, are matters that do not affect spiritual life in the highest degree. These matters are intimately connected with spiritual teaching such as God has sent down in this \textit{Sûrah}. The emphasis is on “We”: these things are not mere matters of convenience, but God has ordained them for our observance in life.\textsuperscript{34}

About \textit{Zinā} and its punishment, Yusuf Alî says:

\textit{Zinā} includes sexual intercourse between a man and a woman not married to each other. It therefore applies both to adultery (which implies that one or both of the parties are married to a person other than the ones concerned) and to fornication, which, in its strict significance, implies that both parties are unmarried. The law of marriage and divorce is made easy in Islam, so that there may be the less temptation for intercourse outside the well-defined incidents of marriage. This makes for greater self-respect for both man and woman. Other sex offences are also punishable, but this section applies strictly to \textit{Zinā} as above defined.\textsuperscript{35}

Yûsuf Alî, about the punishment to be carried out in presence of a group of believers writes:

The punishment should be open, in order to be deterrent.\textsuperscript{36}

Yûsuf Alî renders third verse of the \textit{Sûrah} as:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Let no man guilty of} 
\end{quote}
Adultery or fornication marry
Any but a woman
Similarly guilty, or an Unbeliever:
Nor let any but such a man
Or an Unbeliever
Marry such a woman:
To the Believers such a thing
Is forbidden.\textsuperscript{37}

Yūsuf Alī in his exegetical note on the verse observes:
Islam commands sex purity, for men and for women, at all times –
before marriage, during marriage, and after the dissolution of
marriage. Those guilty of illicit practices are shut out of the
marriage circle of chaste men and women.\textsuperscript{38}

Yūsuf Alī, regarding false accusations against chaste women
comments:
The most serious notice is taken of people who put forward
slanders or scandalous suggestions about women without adequate
evidence. If anything is said against a woman’s chastity, it should
be supported by evidence twice as strong as would ordinarily be
required for business transactions, or even in murder cases. That
is, four witnesses would be required instead of two. Failing such
preponderating evidence, the slanderer should himself be treated
as wicked transgressor and punished with eighty stripes. Not only
would he be subjected to this disgraceful form of punishment, but
he would be deprived of the citizen’s right of giving evidence in
all matters all his life, unless he repents and reforms, in which
case he can be readmitted to be a competent witness.\textsuperscript{39}
Regarding the malicious propaganda about Hadhrat 'Ā'ishah, Yusuf All has given the historical account of the incident and the role of hypocrites in it, thus:

This gave occasion to enemies to raise a malicious scandal. The ringleader among them was the chief of the Medina hypocrites, 'Abdullah ibn Ubai, who is referred to in the last clause of this verse. He had other sins and enormities to his debit, and he was left to the spiritual punishment of an unrepentant sinner, for he died in that state. The minor tools were given the legal punishment of the law, and after penitence mended their lives. They made good.  

Verse 21 of the Sūrah is rendered by Yusuf All as:

*O ye who believe!*
*Follow not Satan's footsteps:*
*If any will follow the footsteps Of Satan, he will (but) command What is shameful and wrong:*
*And were it not for the grace And mercy of God on you, Not one of you would ever Have been pure: but God Doth purify whom He pleases: And God is One Who Hears and knows (all things)*

Abdullah Yūsuf Alī in his exegetical note writes:

Note the refrain that comes four time in this passage, "were it not for the grace and mercy of God..." Each time it has a different application. In XXIV. 10, it was in connection with the accusation of infidelity by one of the spouses against the other. They were both reminded of God's mercy and warned against suspicion and
untruth. (2) In XXIV. 14, the Believers were told to the wary of false rumours lest they should cause pain and division among themselves: it is God's grace that keeps them united. (3) Here is an admonition for the future: There may be conspiracies and snares laid by Evil against simple people: it is God's grace that protects them. (4) In XXIV. 21, the general warning is directed to the observance of purity in act and thought, concerning one's self and concerning other: it is only God's grace that can keep that purity spotless, for He hears prayers and knows of all the snares that are spread in the path of the God.\textsuperscript{41}

In another note regarding the above quoted verse, Yusuf Ali states: Spotless purity in thought, word, and deed, includes the disposition to put the best construction on the motives of others, so that we ascribe no evil motive to the seeming indiscretions of virtuous people. Such a high standard can only come by the grace of God. Who hears all prayers and knows all the temptations to which the human nature is subject. His will and plan make both for spiritual protection and spiritual peace, and we must place ourselves trustingly in his hands.\textsuperscript{42}

Verses 30 and 31 of \textit{Sūrah Al-Nūr} have been rendered by Yusuf Ali as:

\begin{quote}
Say to the believing men
That they should lower
Their gaze and guard
Their modesty: that will make
For greater purity for them:
And God is well acquainted
With all that they do.
And say to the believing women
That they should lower
\end{quote}
Their gaze and guard
Their modesty; that they
Should not display their
Beauty and ornaments except
What (must ordinarily) appear
Thereof; that they should
Draw their veils over
Their bosoms and not display
Their beauty except
To their husbands, their fathers,
Their husband's fathers, their sons,
Their husband's sons,
Their brother's sons
Their brothers or their brother's sons,
Or their sisters' sons,
Or their women, or the slaves
Whom their right hands
Possess, or male servants
Free of physical needs,
Or small children who
Have no sense of the shame
Of sex, and that they
Should not strike their feet
In order to draw attention
To their hidden ornaments
And O ye Believers!
Turn ye all together
Towards God, that ye
May attain Bliss.⁴³
Abdullah Yusuf Ali, in his exegetical note on the 30th verse, quoted above, comments:
The rule of modesty applies to men as well as women. A brazen stare by a man at a woman (or even at a man) is a breach of refined manners. Where sex is concerned, modesty is not only "good form": it is not only to guard the weaker sex, but also to guard the spiritual good of the stronger sex.44

In the subsequent note, regarding prohibition to display ornaments, Yusuf Ali elaborates:
Zinat means both natural beauty and artificial ornaments. I think both are implied, but chiefly the former. The woman is asked not to make a display of her figure or appear in undress except to the following classes of people: (1) her husband, (2) her near relatives who would be living in the same house, and with whom a certain amount of neglig is permissible; (3) her women, i.e., her maidservants, who would be constantly in attendance on her: some commentators include all believing women; it is not good form in a Muslim household for women to meet other women, except when they are properly dressed; (4) slaves, male and female, as they would be in constant attendance; but this item would now be blank, with the abolition of slavery; (5) old or infirm men-servants; and (6) infants or small children before they get a sense of sex. c.f. also XXXIII, 59.45

Yusuf Ali, on Allah’s prohibition on striking the feet to attract attention, comments:
It is one of the tricks of showy or unchaste women to tinkle their ankle ornaments, to draw attention to themselves.46

In another note on the above quoted verse, Yusuf Ali states:
While all these details of the purity and good form of domestic life are being brought to our attention, we are clearly reminded that the chief object we should hold in view is our spiritual welfare. All our brief life on this earth is a probation, and we must make our individual, domestic, and social life all contribute to our holiness, so that we can get the real success and bliss which is the aim of our spiritual endeavour. Mystics understand the rules of decorum themselves to typify spiritual truths. Our souls, like a modest maiden, allow not her eyes to stray from the One True God. And her beauty is not for vulgar show, but for God.\textsuperscript{47}

About the Qur'\textsuperscript{n}ic directive to the masters to help the slaves get freedom, Yusuf Ali \textit{inter alia} says:

The law of slavery in the legal sense of the term is now obsolete. While it had any meaning, Islam made the slave’s lot as easy as possible. A slave, male or female, could ask for conditional manumission by a written deed fixing the amount required for manumission and allowing the slave meanwhile to earn money by lawful means and perhaps marry and bring up a family. Such a deed as not to be refused if the request was genuine and the slave had character. Not only that, but the master is directed to help with money out of his own resources in order to enable the slave to earn his or her own liberty.\textsuperscript{48}

\textbf{Mawdūdī}

In his first note Mawdūdī states:

The opening verse persistently stresses ‘We’. The purpose behind this is to vehemently emphasize that this \textit{Surah} was revealed by ‘Us’ [i.e., by God] rather than anyone else. Hence, it ought not to be taken lightly, as something coming from one who lacks power and authority. It should be appreciated that He who has revealed
this *Sūrah* is One who holds everyone's life in His grip, Who is so overwhelmingly powerful that no one can go beyond His control.

It is further clarified in the later part of the verse that whatever has been said in this *Sūrah* is not in the nature of 'recommendations' or 'suggestions', that may or may not be followed by a person, depending on his own will. They are instead, categorical commands which must be followed. If someone believes in and wants to submit himself to God, it is imperative that he acts in conformity with these commands. Furthermore, far from being ambiguous, these commands are couched in terms which are both clear and categorical. As a result, it is not justifiable to make excuses and contend that since the injunctions were incomprehensible it was not possible to act upon them.

The preamble is followed by the commands themselves. The preamble seems to underscore how important the commands are in the sight of God. It is pertinent to point out here that no other *Sūrah* of the Qur'ān has such a powerful preamble.\(^{49}\)

Regarding Qur'ānic punishment for *Zinā*, Mawdūdī, in his exegetical note on the issue, makes a detailed study of the issue concerned, which runs for almost 29 pages of his English version. He gives the reason for such an elaboration:

The issue under discussion in hedged in by several legal, moral and historical aspects which need to be explained and elaborated upon. If these were not mentioned in detail, it would be extremely difficult for a person of our time to appreciate the Qur'ānic legislation expounded here. Hence, what follows is an attempt to
shed light on different aspects of the Qur’ānic legislation in question...

Mawdūdī, in the note, highlights the need of marriage for a stable society; the need for stopping unlawful sexual intercourse; innate abhorrence of sound human nature to illicit sex; the position of religious traditions viz. Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism etc. on the issue, the results of leniency towards sexual crimes on the society; the practices and the laws in the ancient civilization like that of Babylonian, Greece, Indian, Roman on sexual relations, Islam's measures on spiritual, moral and social level for the prevention of sexual crimes and law being the last resort; Qur’ān reason for maintaining distinction between a free person and a slave who commit sexual crime; detailed rebuttal of the objections of the Qur’ānic punishment; Muslim jurists' position on the issue; necessary conditions mandatory to be fulfilled before punishing an accused; Islamic law being that the accused be granted benefit of doubt has to be observed by the courts; Qualities of witnesses; fate of witnesses if they fail to prove the guilt or disagree among themselves; the distinction in punishment maintained between unmarried persons guilty of unlawful sexual intercourse and married persons guilty of sexual intercourse; Form of punishment to a sick or old person or a pregnant lady; rules for the execution of punishment etc.

Mawdūdī, inter alia, with the help of traditions and jurists, stresses the point that the punishment of one hundred lashes is for Zinā committed by unmarried male and female. The punishment for Zinā committed by married persons is stoning to death. He concludes his discussion, on the point of highlighting the spirit of the punishment in Islam:
... From an Islamic viewpoint, even the punishment that is meted out to the worst kind of criminal is motivated by good-will for all, including the culprit, rather than by any feeling of hostility or vengefulness. Hence, after the culprit is punished, he is treated with compassion and kindness. It remains for the present civilization to have the unique distinction of taking petty-mindedness to its current heights. It is possible under this civilization alone for someone to be killed by the police and the army, a killing which a judicial inquiry of sorts validates, but not for him to be given a decent burial or for anyone to say a good word about him.

Mawdūdī, regarding the Qur'ānic directive on executing the punishment in presence of a group of Muslims, comments:

...This would, on the one hand, arouse in the culprit a feeling of shame and on the other serve as a lesson to others.

This throws further light on the Islamic concept of punishment. While laying down the punishment for stealing, the Qur'ān adds: ‘This is a recompense for what they have done, an exemplary punishment from Allah.’ (al-Mā'idah 5:38.)

In the same vein, people are being directed in the present verse to publicly enforce the punishment on those guilty of unlawful sexual intercourse. This highlights three main objectives of punishment in Islam. First, it is to make the culprit suffer for the evil he has perpetrated on some of his fellow beings or society as a whole. Second, it seeks to deter the people who are inclined towards the evil so that they are dissuaded from committing the same offence again. Third, punishment is to be meted out to culprits in order that those members of the society who are disposed to criminal acts should be deterred from actually committing them. Moreover,
one advantage of publicly enforcing punishments is that those in
authority are likely to shrink from acting either too leniently or
with undue harshness with offenders.\textsuperscript{54}

Mawdūdī renders verse 3 of the Sūrah al-Nūr as:

\begin{quote}
Let the fornicator not marry any except a
fornicatress  
Or an idolatress and let the
Fornicatress not marry any
Except a fornicator or an
Idolater. This is forbidden to the believers\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

Mawdūdī is his exegetical note on the verse has the following
elaboration:

A befitting match for a person who is guilty of unlawful sexual
intercourse and who does not subsequently repeat the offence
could only be either a woman who does not mind unlawful sexual
relations or a polytheist. A believing woman of good moral
character cannot be a good match for such a dissolute person. It is
infact prohibited for believers to willfully give their daughters in
marriage to such persons. Therefore, as far as those women who
are guilty of unlawful sex and to who do not repent thereafter are
concerned, it is in men of the same character or polytheists where
they will find appropriate spouses. For quite obviously such
women are not befitting spouses for believers of good character.

Infact it is not only inappropriate but also forbidden for a good
character believer to marry a woman who is known to be morally
dissolute, especially in matters pertaining to sex. It is obvious
then that this injunction applies to those men and women who
persist in their evil ways. As for those who repent and
subsequently mend their ways can no longer be treated as tainted with the guilt of unlawful sexual intercourse.

... The verse does not lend itself to the conclusion that a sexually deviant Muslim's marriage with a polytheist woman or that of a sexual deviant Muslim woman's marriage with a polytheist man is legitimate. Rather, the verse underscores the fact that unlawful sex in an outrageous act and a Muslim who is guilty of it is no longer worthy of having matrimonial relations with good charactered persons of the Muslim society. If there is any such dissolute person, he should better turn his attention to those of his own ilk – either those who are guilty of sexual immorality like himself, or polytheists who do not consider themselves bound by God's commands. (See Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol.2, p.159-Ed.)

Mawdūdī, in the same note, has quoted many traditions to this effect and the directives of the *Khulafā al-Rashideen* on such cases.

Regarding Qur'ānic punishment on false accusations against chaste women of illicit sexual intercourse, Mawdūdī explains:

This directive aims at putting an end to salacious talk and gossip in society about illicit sexual relations between people. People are required to abstain from the same because it leads to numerous other evils. The worst effect is that it creates an atmosphere conducive to illicit sex. A person relates to another person the illicit sexual adventure of another person. These tales naturally circulate and in due course a lot of exciting material is added to the original stories. This arouses sexual passion all around. Those inclined to evil ways thus come to know through whom their sexual passions can be gratified.
The Shari‘ah, however, aims to nip this evil in the bud. Therefore, on the one hand, it prescribes that a person convicted of unlawful sexual intercourse be subjected to the most severe punishment to which any criminal would be subjected. On the other hand, it also ensures that the person who accuses other of this grave offence be able to conclusively prove it, and if he fails to do so that he be severely punished with 80 lashes.

This so as to deter people from slandering others. Even if one observes someone actually indulging in unlawful sex before one’s own eyes, one should not publicize it, this to prevent corruption from spreading. If one can secure the required number of witnesses one may report the matter to the authorities concerned, but one should certainly not go about publicizing it. Only in this manner can one duly prove the person concerned to be guilty and thereby have the authorities punish him...

Mawdūdī, in an effort to make the Islamic position clearer on the issue, engages into a long discussion covering about 11 pages, dealing with the qualification or otherwise of the accuser, of the accused, juridical verdicts to this effect etc. etc.

Regarding false accusations against Hadhrat ‘Ā‘ishah, Mawdūdī, in his note, states that Qur’ānic use of ifk (calumny) which, ‘amounts to negation of the charge by God Himself.’ He gives detailed accounts of the incident and its effect on the Muslim community, role of the hypocrites and the results of the incident, and writes:

... Thus, the hypocrites’ hopes were dashed to the ground. Contrary to their expectations, the moral superiority of Muslims shone even more brightly in the wake of this incident.
Another redeeming feature occasioned by the incident was the addition of several injunctions, laws and social regulations. Thanks to these, it lies within the power of the Muslim society to keep itself immune from the rise and spread of evil and to expeditiously curb such evil if and when it does raise its head.

Another good that ensured from this incident was that it made the Muslims realize that the Prophet (peace be on him), with all spiritual loftiness and the very special mission bestowed upon him by God, did not have access to the realm that lies beyond sense-perception. All that he knew pertaining to this realm consisted of what God Himself chose to acquaint him with. Unless God revealed anything pertaining to this realm, the Prophet's knowledge was like that of any other human being. We note that for one full month the Prophet (peace be on him) remained in great anguish. Sometimes he would ask his maid servant, then his other wives, and then ‘Ali and Usāmah about the matter. Likewise, he told ʿĀʾishah: ‘If you have committed this act, you should repent and if you are not guilty, God will proclaim your innocence.’ If he had known the Unseen, he would not have conducted such an investigation, nor would he have asked ʿĀʾishah to repent. It was only God Who clarified that whole matter and the Prophet (peace be on him) came to know – thanks to His revelation – what he had been unable to know for a whole month.

This enabled the Muslims to learn by direct experience that they should abstain from that exaggerated and excessive veneration which had characterized the attitude of the followers of other religions towards their religious leaders. Presumably God had delayed revealing the truth of this matter for one full month in order to drive this point home to the Muslims. Had the whole
matter been instantly revealed this lesson would probably not have been imparted so effectively.\textsuperscript{60}

Mawdūdī has rendered verse 21 as:

\begin{quote}
Believers! Do not
Follow in Satan's footsteps. He
who follows in Satan's
footsteps (let him remember that) Satan bids people to
indecency and evil. Were it not for Allah's Bounty and His
Mercy unto you, not one of you
Would have ever attained purity.
But Allah enables whomsoever He wills to attain purity.
All is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

In one of his exegetic notes related to the above quoted verse, Mawdūdī writes:

Satan is determined to bog man down in the filth of evil. Had God, out of His sheer Grace and Benevolence, not made what is good distinct from what is evil and had He not shown man the Right Way and enabled him to reform himself accordingly, no one would have been able to purify his own life merely on the basis of native endowments.\textsuperscript{62}

In the subsequent note on the last part of the verse, Mawdūdī explains:

God does not arbitrarily endow people with the ability to purify themselves. Rather, He does so on the basis of His knowledge as to who sincerely seeks the Right Way and who seeks error. So pervasive is God's knowledge that He hears what people say in their own privacy and He knows that ideas that cross a man's
mind. Hence, God decides on a sound and solid basis whom He enables to purify himself and whom He does not.65

Verse 30 and 31 of Surah Al- Nūr as rendered by Mawdūdī are;

(O Prophet!) Enjoin believing men to restrain their gaze and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Surely Allah is well aware of all what they do.

And enjoin believing women to restrain their gaze and guard their private parts and additionally not to reveal their adornment except that which is revealed of itself; let them draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment to any save to their husbands, or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands.

Or of their own sons, or the sons of their husbands, or the sons of their brothers, or the sons of their sisters,

Or the women with whom they associate, or those that are in their bondage, or the male attendants in their service free of sexual desire,

Or children that are yet unaware of the private parts of women. Nor should they stamp their feet on the ground in such manner that their hidden ornament becomes revealed.
Believers, turn together, all of you, to Allah in repentance that you attain true success.\textsuperscript{64}

Mawdūdī in his first note on verse 30 explains:
The words used here are yaghuddū min absārihim. Literally the word ghadd denotes reducing or lowering something. The words ghadd al-basar, therefore, are usually translated as 'lowering one's gaze' or 'keeping one's gaze downwards. This Qur'ānic directive does not mean, however, that one should always gaze downwards. What it really means is that one should not look thoroughly at a certain thing; that one should not allow one's eyes to be unfettered in looking. In other words, one should avoid looking at things which it is improper to look at. This may be achieved either avoiding looking at something by turning one's gaze away or by lowering it. Once again, the word min absārihim use of the preposition min implies this. In other words, God does not intend that people should not look thoroughly at anything. God only wants that they should exercise restraint in looking at certain things. It becomes evident from the context that this directive is addressed to those men who focus their gaze on women, or who cast their glances at other's private parts, or who intentionally look at obscene objects.\textsuperscript{65}

Mawdūdī, in elucidation of the Qur'ānic directive for 'lowering one's gaze', Mawdūdī quotes several traditions of the Prophet (S). He, however, states that there should not be any misunderstanding to the fact that during Prophet's time women used to cover their faces. Mawdūdī, with the help of several traditions concludes that in Islamic society, during the Prophet's time woman used veils to cover their faces. But accepts exceptions to this routine, e.g., seeing a woman whom one intends to marry; to see a suspect
woman during interrogation; a judge may see a female witness at the time she gives evidence, or a doctor may examine a female patient.\textsuperscript{66}

In addition, Mawdūdī, sees in the above command, implication that one should not look at the satr (the parts of the body which ought to remain covered) of a male or female.\textsuperscript{67}

In another, note, Mawdūdī explains:

The directive 'to guard one's private parts' does not simply aim at dissuading people from engaging in unlawful satisfaction of their sexual passions. It also seeks to prevent people exposing their satr before others. For men, the satr denotes the entire part of the body from the naval to the knee (see Ahmād ibn Ḥanbal, Musnad, Vol.2, p. 187 – Ed).\textsuperscript{68}

In the light of several traditions, Mawdūdī concludes that the rules regarding women looking at men are not as strict as those regarding men looking at women.\textsuperscript{69}

Elucidating another point regarding the above quoted verse, Mawdūdī says:

Believing women are asked to shun any unlawful gratification of their sexual urges and to refrain from exposing their satr before others. These directives are applicable to both men and women, though the parts of the body that constitute satr for men are different from the parts of the body that constitute satr for women.

Likewise, the parts of a woman's body which may not be exposed before men differ from the parts of a man's body which may not be exposed before women.\textsuperscript{70}
Mawdūdī adds: A woman may not expose any part of her body other than her hands and face before men: no other part of her body should be exposed before anyone other than her husband, and this prohibition applies even to her father and brother. Nor should a woman wear such transparent or tight clothes that expose her body or reveal its shape.\(^7\)

Several traditions are quoted by Mawdūdī to the effect of his assertions regarding obligatory covering of the body of women. In their light, Mawdūdī, *inter alia* says:

Some relaxation on this count may be made by a woman with those of her close relatives with whom for her marriage is forbidden (such as her father and brother). For example, she is permitted not to cover those parts of her body whose use is required in connection with domestic chores. She may thus expose her arms for kneading bread, or she may fold up her clothes a little above the usual position while washing the floor [which would also expose a part of her legs]...\(^7\)

About Qur’ānic command to women ‘and additionally not to reveal their adornment’, Mawdūdī writes:

It is worth noting that the requirement of the *Sharī‘ah* with regard to women is different to what it requires of men. The *Sharī‘ah* requires men to keep their looks away from the opposite sex and to guard their chastity. Women, however, are required to abide by some additional rules as well. This makes it quite clear that in this particular regard the sexes are not alike.\(^7\)

In the next note, Mawdūdī states:

We have translated the word *Zīnah* in this verse to mean ‘adornment’. This essentially consists of those means used by
women to make themselves look attractive:

(i). good dress (ii) ornaments, and (iii) other cosmetics used by
women the world over to beautify their heads, faces, hands and
feet...^{74}

Mawdūdī seems to be upset with some of the interpretations of *illā
mā zhara minhā* ('that which is revealed of itself') and *inter alia*
says: ...There is a world of difference between revealing
something and something being revealed of itself. The Qur'ān, no
doubt, makes allowance for something which is revealed of itself.
To interpret the verse to signify granting women permission to go
about deliberately displaying their adornment which are attractive
to men runs counter to the intent of the Qur'ān. Such a view is
also discordant with the authentic traditions which indicate that
after the Qur'ānic commands pertaining to *hijāb* were revealed,
women did not appear in public with their faces uncovered. The
*hijāb* injunction included the requirement to cover the face, and
the veil thus assumed the position of an indispensable part of the
female attire except in the state of *ihram*...^{75}

Mawdūdī, regarding *hijāb* explains:

In the days of *Jahiliyah* women had their head tied with a kind of
head-band which was fastened by a knot at the rear of the head.
The front slit in their shirt remained partly open, thus revealing
their neck and the upper part of their bosom. They wore nothing
except this shirt to cover their breasts. Their hair was worn in two
or three plaits which dangled freely behind . (see Zamakhshari, *al-
upon the revelation of this verse, the practice of wearing a veil
came into vogue among Muslim women...
No sooner had this verse been revealed than Muslim women hastened to change their dress sense. Praising believing women in this regard, 'Aishah said: ‘when Surah al-Nur was revealed and the Prophet’s companions returned to their homes and recited its verses to their wives, daughters and sisters, there was not a single woman among the Ansâr who was not moved by the words “...let them draw their veils over their bosoms” (verse 31). Immediately everyone of them made veil out of whatever they had: a waist band or a sheet of cloth. The next day, all Muslim women were present in the Prophet’s Mosque for Fajr prayers with their veils.' Another tradition from ‘A’ishah contains the additional information that Muslim women cast away their transparent and semi-transparent clothes and especially selected thick material for their veil. (Ibn Kathîr and Abu Da’ûd, Kitâb al-Libas, ‘Bab Qawl Allâh to’âlâ: yudnîn ‘alayhinna min Jalabibihinna and ‘wala-ya’dribna bi khumirihinna ‘alâ Juyûbihinna – ed).

In another note, on the circle of close relative, among whom a woman can perfectly go, Mawdûdî says:

...This consists of emphasizing that a woman should not display her adornment, either deliberately or out of negligence, before anyone outside this well-defined circle of very close relatives. Nonetheless, if any lapses occur, despite a woman’s efforts not to display her attractions and without her intent, or because it was not possible for her to keep herself covered despite her wanting to do so, God extends His assurance to such believing women that He will pardon them.76

About the import of the lists of relations, a woman can freely go about, Mawdûdî explains:

...The Prophet (peace be on him) did not interpret this verse to mean that a woman was required to observe hijâb with all her
relatives except those mentioned in the present verse. He rather derived from this verse the general rule that a woman need not observe hijāb with all those relatives with whom for her marriage is forbidden. The category of relatives includes her uncles, both maternal and paternal, her sons-in-law and foster relatives...

Mawdūdī has another point about those relatives with whom neither marriages is permanently forbidden (which make it permissible for a woman to freely appear before them) nor whom are total strangers so that it would be required to observe strict hijāb. He says:

The position with regard to such people has not been specifically laid down by the Sharī'ah. Therefore, a categorical ruling about them cannot be given. For such a ruling is contingent upon many considerations such as the nature of their kinship, their age, the age of the woman concerned, the nature of the relations between the two families, and the living conditions of the persons concerned (such as sharing a house, or living separately, etc.). Since these circumstances vary from case to case, the ruling will also differ from one case to another.

In another, note, Mawdūdī, after discussing different opinions, says:

It seems that the purpose of this Qur'ānic verse is to exclude unrestricted association with those women who are total strangers or whose character and conduct are either not known or who are of doubtful character, making them un-worthy of trust. This view seems to be corroborated by those authentic traditions which mention that non-Muslim women used to visit the wives of the Prophet (peace be on him). In such matters the main consideration should be the character of the women concerned rather than their
formal affiliation with one religious community or another. Muslim women may mix freely with all women of good character, with all women who are modest, good-mannered, and belong to families that are well known and are considered trustworthy regardless of whether are Muslim or non-Muslim...

Mawdūdī, in elucidation of other part of the verse, quotes opinions of the Jurists, and on one occasion comes up with:

We thus learn that in order to be considered as belonging to the category of *ghayr ʿūlī al-Irbah min al-Rijāl* it is not enough for him to be physically incapable of the sexual act. What needs to be fully ensured is that such a person is altogether free of sexual desire, of every vestige of the same, and that he is truly not at all interested in women. For if there is an iota of sexual desire in him, he is liable to cause much mischief.

Regarding Qur'ānic injunction to women ‘Nor should they stamp their feet on the ground in such a manner that their hidden ornament becomes revealed, Mawdūdī explains.

The Prophet (peace be on him) did not restrict this injunction stopping women from stamping their feet and so revealing their hidden ornaments just on the basis of that action. Instead, he derived from this injunction the general principle that any act which arouses the sexual passions of men, whether through hearing, sight or any other sense, comes into conflict with the purpose underlying God’s directive to women that they may not reveal their adornments before men. Hence, the Prophet (peace be on him) asked women not to go out wearing perfume...

In like manner, the Prophet (peace be on him) disapproved of women unnecessarily making men hear their voice. The Qur’ān
itself allows women to talk to men. (This seems to be the implications of \textit{al-Ahzāb} 33:32-Ed.). It is also known that the Prophet's wives themselves explained religious matters to people. But when no religious or moral benefit expected to ensure from women talking to men, it is not considered desirable that they provide men with an opportunity to be gratified by the charm of the female voice...\textsuperscript{81}

Concluding the discussion on the topic, Mawdūdī states the reform introduced by the Prophet in this regard, along with the concerned traditions.

(i) The Prophet (peace be on him), forbade people, even a woman's male relatives, from meeting her alone, i.e., in the absence of her \textit{mahram} relatives...

(ii) The Prophet (peace be on him) did not allow a non-\textit{mahram} male to touch the body of a woman...

(iii) The Prophet (peace be on him) strictly forbade women from traveling without any \textit{mahram}, or traveling with any \textit{non-mahram}...

(iv) The Prophet (peace be on him) discouraged intermingly between men and women both by precept and practice.

(v) Islam does not allow women to adorn themselves but at times it even urges them to do so. At the same time, it has attempted to prevent their going to excess in this matter...\textsuperscript{82}

Mawdūdī discusses in detail the nature of society at the time of the prophet \textit{vis-à-vis} slavery and Islam's role in its reformation and future directive in this matter, thus:
As for the future, Islam explicitly forbade the practice of capturing free people, enslaving them and to buy and sell them. Islam did, however, allow -- yes allow rather than order -- that prisoners of war may be enslaved under certain conditions. They may be enslaved if the respective states to which the prisoners of war belonged did not exchange them with Muslim captives of war, or if those captives did not pay their own ransom. Nonetheless, those who were taken as prisoners of war could obtain their freedom by entering into manumission agreement. Furthermore, Islam issued several directives that slaves -- and these were as much applicable to slaves who were initially war captives as they were to slaves who had been in bondage for a long time -- be set free as expiation for their sins, and to please God. It was also prescribed that a person might will that his slaves gain their freedom after his death. Additionally, if the master of the slave girl had sexual relations with her resulting in the birth of a child, she would automatically attain freedom upon her master's death, whether he had made a will to that effect or not.

These are some of the main solutions to the problem of slavery. Yet a number of ignorant and ill-informed people, who neither know nor try to acquaint themselves of the relevant facts, direct their vituperation against Islam on this account. On the other hand, those who are given to apologizing, go about claiming that Islam did not retain any form of slavery whatsoever.\(^83\)

C. Verses 35 to 64

Asad

In this portion of \textit{Sūrah al-Nūr}, some highlights of Asad's commentaries are:
...The parable of “light of God” is not meant to express His reality – which is inconceivable to any created being and, therefore, inexpressible in any human language – but only to allude to the illumination which He, who is the Ultimate Truth, bestows upon the mind and the feelings of all who are willing to be guided. Ibn Kathîr quote Ibn ‘Abbâs and Ibn Mas’ûd as saying in this context: “It is the parable of His light in the heart of a believer.”

...The ‘lamp’ is the revelation which God grants to His prophet and which is reflected in the believer’s heart – the “niche” of the above parable (Ubayy ibn Ka‘b, as quoted by Ṭabârî) – after being received and consciously grasped by his reason (“the glass [shinning brightly] like a radiant star”) for it is through reason alone that true faith can find its way into the heart of a man.

...It would seem that this is an allusion to the organic, continuity of all divine revelation which, starting like a tree from one ‘root’ or proposition – the statement of God’s existence and uniqueness – grows steadily throughout man’s spiritual history, branching out into a splendid variety of religious experience, thus endlessly widening the range of man’s perception of truth. The association of this concept to the olive tree apparently arises from the fact that this particular kind of tree is characteristic of the lands in which most of the Prophetic precursors of the Qur’ânic message lived, namely, the lands to the east of the Mediterranean: but since all true revelation flows from the Infinite Being, it is “neither of the east nor of the west” – and especially so the revelation of the Qur’ân, which, being addressed to all mankind, is universal in its goal as well.

...because of their complexity, certain truth can be conveyed to man only by means of parables or allegories.
Verse 55, is rendered by Asad as:

*God has promised those of you who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds that, of a certainty, He will cause them to accede to power on earth, even as He caused [some of] those who lived before them to accede to it; and that, of a certainty, He will firmly establish for them the religion which He has been pleased to bestow on them; and that, of a certainty, He will cause their erstwhile state of fear to be replaced by a sense of security - [seeing that] they worship Me [alone], not ascribing divine powers to ought beside Me.

*But all who, after [having understood] this, choose to deny the truth - it is they, they who are truly iniquitous!*\(^88\)

In the exegetical notes on the verse, Asad says: Lit., “cause them to be successors on earth” – i.e., enable them to achieve, in their turn, power and security and, thus, the capability to satisfy their worldly needs.

This Qur’ānic reference to God’s “promise” contains an oblique allusion to the God-willed natural law which invariably makes the rise and fall of nations dependent on their moral qualities.\(^89\)

...c.f. 5:3 – “I have willed that self-surrender unto Me (*al-Islam*) shall be your religion.” Its “firm establishment” (*tamkīn*) relates to
the strengthening of the believers' faith as well as to the growth of its moral influence in the world.\textsuperscript{90}

...Lit., “exchange for them, after their fear [or danger], security”. It is to be noted that the term \textit{amn} signifies not merely outward, physical security but also – and, indeed, originally – “freedom from fear” (Tāj al-‘Arus). Hence, the above clause implies not only a promise of communal security after an initial period of weakness and danger (which, as history tells us, overshadows the beginnings of every genuine religious movement), but also the promise of an individual sense of inner security – that absence of all fear of the unknown which characterizes a true believer... i.e., the believer’s freedom from fear is a direct outcome of his intellectual and emotional refusal to attribute to any one or anything but God the power to shape his destiny.\textsuperscript{91}

Part of verse 58 is rendered by Asad as:

\textit{O YOU who have attained to faith! At three times [of day], let [even] those whom you rightfully possess...}\textsuperscript{92}

In exegetical note Asad gives the literal meaning of the above part and also his explanation:

Lit., “whom you right hand possess”- a phrase which, primarily and as a rule, denotes male and female slaves. Since, however, the institution of slavery is envisaged in the Qur’ān as a mere historic phenomenon that must in time be abolished (c.f. notes 46 and 47 on verse 33 of this Sūrah, as well as note 146 on 2:177), the above expression may also be understood as referring in general, to one’s close dependents and to domestic servants of either sex. Alternatively, the phrase \textit{mā malakat aymānukum} may denote, in this context, “those whom you rightfully possess through
wedlock”, i.e., wives and husbands (c.f. 4:24 and the corresponding note 26).³³

Yūsuf Ali

In the last half of the Sūrah Al-Nūr, some of the highlights of Abdullah Yūsuf Ali’s comments are:

Embedded within certain directions concerning a refined domestic and social life, layer upon layer of allegorical truth about spiritual mysteries. No notes can do adequate justice to its full meaning. Volumes have been written on this subject, the most notable being Imam Ghazālī’s Mishkāt-ul-Anwār...³⁴

The physical light is but a reflection of the true Light in the world of reality, and that true Light is God. We can only think of God in terms of our phenomenal experience, and in the phenomenal world, light is the purest thing we know. But physical light has drawbacks incidental to its physical nature: e.g., (i) it is dependent upon some source external to itself; (ii) it is a passing phenomenon; if we take it to be a form of motion or energy it is unstable, like all physical phenomena (iii) it is dependent on space and time; its speed is 186,000 miles per second, and there are stars whose light takes thousands of years before it reaches the earth. The perfect Light of God is free from any such defects.³⁵

The first three points in the Parable centre round the symbols of the Niche, the Lamp, and the Glass.

1. The Niche (Mishkāt) is the little shallow recess in the wall of an Eastern house, fairly high from the ground, in which a light (before the days of electricity) was usually placed. Its height enabled it to diffuse the light in the room and minimized the shadows. The background of the wall and the
sides of the niche helped to throw the light well into the room, and if the wall was white-washed, it also acted as a reflector: the opening in front made the way for the light. So with the spiritual Light: it is placed high, above worldly things; it has a niche or habitation of its own, in Revelation and other Signs of God; its access to men is by a special Way, open to all, yet closed to those who refuse its rays.

2. The Lamp is the core of the spiritual Truth, which is the real illumination; the Niche is nothing without it; the Niche is actually made for it.

3. The Glass is the transparent medium through which the Light passes. On the other hand, it protects the light from moths and other forms of low life (lower motives in man) and from gusts of wind (passions), and on the other, it transmits the light through a medium which is made up of and akin to the grosser substances of the earth (such as sand, soda, potash, etc), so arranged as to admit the subtle to the gross by its transparency. So the spiritual Truth has to be filtered through human language or human intelligence to make it intelligible to mankind.\[96\]

...The glass by itself does not shine. But when the light comes into it, it shines like a brilliant star. So men of God, who preach God’s Truth, are themselves illuminated by God’s Light and become the illuminating media through which the Light spreads and permeates human life.\[97\]

...The olive tree is not a very impressive tree in its outward appearance. Its leaves have a dull greenish brown colour, and in size it is inconspicuous. But its oil is used in sacred ceremonies and forms a wholesome ingredient of food. The fruit has an especially fine flavour.\[98\]
...The mystic Olive is not localized. It is neither of the East nor of the West. It is universal, for such is God’s Light. As applied to the olive, there is also a more literal meaning, which can be allegorized in a different way. An olive tree with an eastern aspect gets only the rays of the morning sun; one with a western aspect, only the rays of the western sun. In the northern hemisphere the south aspect will give the sun’s rays a great part of the day, and *vice versa* in the southern hemisphere. But a tree in the open plain or on a hill will get a perpetual sunshine by day: it will be more mature, and the fruit and oil will be of superior quality. So God’s Light is not localized or immature: it is perfect and universal. 99

...Pure olive oil is beautiful in colour, consistency, and illuminating power. The world has tried all kinds of illuminants, and for economic reasons or convenience, one replaces another. But for coolness, comfort to the eyes, and steadiness, vegetable oil are superior to electricity, mineral oils, and animal oils. And among vegetable oils, olive oil takes a high place and deserves its sacred associations. Its purity is almost like light itself: you may suppose it to be almost light before it is lit. so with spiritual Truth: it illuminates the mind and understanding imperceptibly, almost before the human mind and heart have been consciously touched by it. 100

...Glorious, illimitable Light, which cannot be described or measured. And there are grades and grades of it, passing transcendentally into regions of spiritual height, which man’s imagination can scarcely conceive of. The topmost pinnacle is the true prototype Light, the real light, of which all others were reflections, the Light of God. Hence the saying of the holy Prophet about God’s “Seventy thousands veils of Light”. 101
Abdullah Yusuf Ali has appended (appendix viii) at the end of the Surah al-Nur, titled, Mystic Interpretations of the Verse of Light (xxiv. 35), which runs into five long pages. He writes:

Among the beauties of the Qur’ān, not the least is that sends its mystic interpreters into ecstasies of spiritual delight. While its plane meaning contains noble precepts of ordinary conduct; its mystic passages reveal spiritual mysteries which can be expressed by the phrase “Light upon light” (xxiv.35). It is an endless chain of illumination is which ordinary knowledge dissolves as if it were ignorance.¹⁰²

Yūsuf Ali, in the aforesaid appendix, reproduces Imam al-Ghazālī’s interpretation on these sublime passages as contained in Mishkāt al-Anwār, a Translation with Introduction, by W.H.T. Gairdner, published by the Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1942.¹⁰³

Yūsuf Ali rendered verse 55 of Surah al-Nur as:

\[
\begin{align*}
God & \text{ has promised to those} \\
\text{Among you who believe} \\
\text{And work righteous deeds, that He} \\
\text{Will, of a surety, grant them} \\
\text{In the land, inheritance} \\
\text{(of power), as He granted it} \\
\text{To those before them; that} \\
\text{He will establish in authority} \\
\text{Their religion – the one} \\
\text{Which He has chosen for them;} \\
\text{And that He will change} \\
\text{(Their state), after the fear} \\
\text{In which they (lived), to one} \\
\text{Of security and peace:}
\end{align*}
\]
'They will worship Me (alone)
And not associate aught with Me!'
If any do reject Faith
After this, they are
Rebellious and wicked.\textsuperscript{104}

In the exegetical notes, Yūsuf Ali writes:
Three things are promised here, to those who have Faith and obey God's Law (i) they will inherit power and authority in the land, not any selfish purpose of theirs nor by way of favouritism, but in order that they may maintain God's Law; (ii) that the Religion of Right, which God has chosen for them, will be openly established, and will suppress all wrong and oppression; (iii) that the righteous will live in peace and security, instead of having to suffer persecution, or leave their hearths and homes for the cause of God, or practice the rites of their Faith in secret.\textsuperscript{105}

...If this verse was revealed about the time of the Battle of the Ditch (\textit{Khandaq}), also called the Battle of Confederates (\textit{A}{	ext{"h}zāb}), A.H. 4-5, we can imagine the comfort it gave to the Muslims who were besieged in Medina by a force ten times their number. The Muslims then lived in a state of great suspense and danger, and under arms for days on end. (see xxxiii. 9-20). The security and authority they were promised came to them subsequently in abundant measure.\textsuperscript{106}

Yūsuf Ali renders part of verse 58 as:
\begin{quote}
\textit{O Ye who believe!}
\textit{Let those whom your right hands}
\textit{Possess...}\textsuperscript{107}
\end{quote}
On this part of the verses, Yūsuf Ḥāfiẓ has following to say in his exegetical notes:

We now come to rules of decorum within the family circle in refined society, servants and children have rather more freedom of access, as they come and go at all hours, and there is less ceremony with them. But even in their case there are limitations. During the night, before Morning Prayer, i.e., before dawn, they must discretely ask for permission before they enter, partly because they must not unnecessarily disturb people asleep, and partly because the people are then undressed. The same applies to the time for the midday siesta, and again to the time after night prayers, when people usually undress and turn in to sleep. For grown ups the rule in stricter: they must ask permission to come in at all times (xxxiv. 59)

...This would mean slaves in a regime of slavery. But the principle applies to all personal servants, who have to render personal service to their masters or mistresses by day and by night.

Mawdūdī

Some highlights of the exegetical notes, in the verses 35 to 64 of Sūrah al-Nūr, as written by Mawdūdī is as follows:

Light is that which causes other things to become visible. Light, thus, appears of itself and also causes other objects to become apparent. This is the general perception of light. Correspondingly, lack of light is branded by man as darkness. When one is able to see things properly and everything is clear, man says that there is light.

The word light is used with respect to God in this very sense. It is not to be taken literally to mean that God is some ray of light
which travels at the speed of 186,000 miles per second and reaches the retina of our eyes and ultimately affects the centre of vision in the brain. This particular attribute is not a part of the essential meaning for which man has invented this word.

The statement that God is the Light of the heavens and the earth is to be taken in its basic sense rather than in the material connotations of this word.\textsuperscript{110}...

...The word 'light' is also used to mean 'knowledge', whereas its antonym – ignorance – is characterized by 'darkness'. In this sense, once again, God is the light of the universe for one can gain knowledge of reality and the right way man should tread only from God. Unless one turns to God for light one is doomed to the darkness of ignorance and consequently to sheer error.\textsuperscript{111}

...The olive tree is blessed in the sense that it carries numerous uses and benefits.\textsuperscript{112}

That is, the tree is situated in an open site or at a height so that it is constantly exposed to the sun. It is not behind anything for had it been so located it would have received sunlight either only in the forenoon or only in the afternoon. Now an olive tree which is constantly exposed to the sun produces oil which is very thin. Also, the olive oil produced by such a tree is used in a lamp and the light that it emits is very bright. By contrast, trees located eastward or westward produce a darker and thicker variety of oil. Hence when that oil is used in a lamp, the light it emits is not as bright.\textsuperscript{113}

...Since the verse draws attention to the similitude between God's Light and the light of the lamp, it removes any misunderstanding which might have arisen regarding the statement that 'Allah is the
Light of the heavens and the Earth'. It clearly indicates that in linking God to light, the intention is not to conceive God’s essence to be nothing but light. Rather, God is possessed of perfection in all respects. This is true about His being possessed of light. The Qur’anic statement that ‘Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth’ signifies that God personifies light. The purpose of such a statement is to stress this aspect of God. In other words, what is being said is that God is both the embodiment and source of light. This is a literary device meant to underscore something. In literature we occasionally come across use of this technique. For example, sometimes we say about a person in whom we find generosity at its best that he is generosity itself. Or we say about someone whose beauty is extraordinary that he (or she) is beauty personified.114

Mawdūdi has rendered verse 5 of Sūrah al-Nūr as:

\[
\text{Allah has promised those of you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will surely empower them as vicegerents in the land even as He empowered those that preceded them, and that He will firmly establish their religion which He has been pleased to choose for them and He will replace the state of fear that they are in with security. Let them serve Me and associate none with Me in My Divinity. Whoso disbelieves after that, such indeed are the ungodly.} \]

Mawdūdi, in his exegetic notes on the above verse, has, inter alia, the following observations:
...The present statement aims at warning the hypocrites that God’s promise to bestow his vicergency on Muslims does not apply to those who only have Muslim names or who were registered as Muslims on the occasions of a census or at the time of their birth. That promise was in fact meant for true Muslims who are firm in their belief, who are righteous and God-fearing in their character and conduct, and who faithfully follow the religion of God, who are committed to purge themselves of every taint of polytheism and who worship with full devotion the One True God and none else. Those who are devoid of these qualities and only claim with their tongues that they are believers do not deserve to receive this favour, nor was the promise of this favour meant for them.\textsuperscript{116}

Rejecting particular interpretation, Mawdūdī argues:

Some people tend to interpret viceregency in the narrow sense of mere power, of dominance and hegemony. With this false assumption, they infer that whoever is in power is \textit{ipso facto} a true believer, is righteous, is on the way of God, and that \textit{ipso facto} he worships God and shuns polytheism. What is even more deplorable is that in order to justify their inference they misinterpret several key terms of the Qur’ān such as faith, righteousness, religion, worship of God, and polytheism. Such people tend to distort whatever they find, i.e., find it discordant with their preconceived notions. This is the worst interpretation of the teachings of the Qur’ān, even worse than the distortion of the scripture by the Jews and Christian. For this interpretation ascribes a meaning to this Qur’ānic verse which distorts the teaching of the Qur’ān in its entirety and disturbs the whole Islamic scheme of things. If one understands God’s viceregency in the above sense, the promise to bestow God’s viceregency is applicable to all those who have been dominant in the world either in the past, or are in the present. This
applies to all holders of power, even to those who have rejected God, revelation, Prophethood, the Hereafter, and all other articles of faith. It also applies to all those who are steeped in what the Qur'ān brands as major sins such as dealing in interest, having unlawful sexual relations, and drinking and gambling. If all such people are true believers and are elevated to God’s vicegerency owing to this twisted understanding of the verse, then faith is bound to be perceived as no more than following the laws of nature, and righteousness as no more than efficiently exploiting and harnessing those laws to serve one’s own purpose. If these assumptions are accepted, then true religion would mean nothing else but gaining perfect mastery in natural sciences and thereby making the utmost progress in trade, industry, business and in other walks of life. By the same token, serving God would mean strictly following the laws which insofar as they are natural laws, are essential for the success of every human endeavour, both individual and collective. Likewise, if these assumptions are correct, then polytheism can only mean that a person or a people adhere, along with following these natural laws which are useful in pragmatic terms, to ways that are conducive to harm.117

Explaining the Qur'ānic usage of term, Khilāfah Mawdūdī writes: To look at the matter more carefully, the Qur'ān employs the term khilafah (vicegerency) and the verbal form istikhlaṣ (bestowing power on the land) which is derived from it in three different ways. In each case it is the context which determines the meaning in which these terms are used.

One of the meanings of the term Khilāfah is to possess the powers granted by God. In this sense all the descendants of Adam are vicegerents of God on earth. The second meaning of the word Khilāfah is to possess and exercise the powers of vicegerency
within the parameters of God's sovereignty and in accordance with God's Will (that is, God's revealed Will or command rather than the will which underlies the cosmic order and consists of natural laws). Taken in this sense, only a believer who acts righteously can be considered to have assumed the vicegency that conforms to this description. On the contrary, an unbeliever or a wicked person cannot be God's vicegerent in this sense, instead, he is a rebel because he abuses the powers that have been granted to him by His Lord in His realm.

In its third usage, the word *khilāfah* means one community's succession by another community, its replacing the dominant community in the sense of wresting power from it.  

Contextualizing the above quoted verse, Mawdūdī, states: Anyone who reads the present verse on *Khilāfah* and remembers the context in which it occurs, can never have an allusion as to the sense in which the expression *khilāfah* has been employed here. In this particular instance, *khilāfah* denotes a government which fulfils all the obligations of vicegency according to God's revealed command (rather then simply according to natural laws.)

Refuting the contention of some, Mawdūdī asserts:
To contend this promise of God applies to the dominant powers of our own time such as the USA or the former USSR is tantamount to gross ignorance. If these powers, by the sheer dint of their redoubtable material power are considered to be the holders of the office of *khilāfah*, one is left wondering why God should have cursed Pharaoh and Nimrod. (For further elaboration see Towards Understanding the Qur'an, Vol., V, al-Anbiya' 21, N. 9, pp. 299-304).
Mawdūdī, infers, from the above quoted verse, an affirmation of the validity of *khilafah al-Rāshidah* as well. He says:

Another important point seems noteworthy, namely that while this promise of God pertains indirectly to Muslims of a later date, it was in the first instance directly addressed to the Prophet’s companions.

...Not only was Islam established in the region from which it had risen, but also in many other parts of the world. That God did make His promise come true is corroborated by the events which unfolded during the caliphate of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān. God’s promise was fulfilled in such a resounding manner that a fair-minded person can hardly have any doubt about the validity of the caliphate of these three since the Qur’ān itself testifies to it, and God Himself confirmed them to be true believers...

Mawdūdī renders part of verse 58 as:

*Believers! At three times let those whom you possess...*  

In the exegetical note, relating to this part of the verse, Mawdūdī writes:

In the opinion of the majority of the Qur’ānic commentators and jurists, the expression *al-ladhīna malakat anymānukum* stands for one’s slaves, regardless of whether they are male or female. However, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar and Mujāhid interpret the expression to mean male slaves thereby excluding female slaves. In view of the Qur’ānic injunction that follows there is no ground whatsoever to exclude slave-girls. The point is being brought home here is that in the same way that it is improper for one’s minor children to invade one’s privacy, it is also improper for one’s slaves to do so.
Jurists are, however, agreed that the injunction pertains to both adult and minor slaves.¹²³

D. An Estimate

The renderings of selected verse of Sūrah al-Nūr, and related exegetical notes by the three outstanding scholars of the twentieth century, must have given us 'a feel' of the similarities and differences in the approaches of their studies and also of their particular intellectual, and spiritual makeup More evident is the 'particular agenda' and 'target groups' they have in mind, while accomplishing their tasks. Not least is influence of intellectual, social and political milieu they lived and were brought up. It also sheds light on the sources; they depend upon, or quote in their exegetical notes.

Mawdūdī¹²⁴ (1903-1979), was primarily concerned with the reconstruction of Muslim Ummah and re-establishment of Islamic systems of life – badly bruised because of malūkiyah (Kingship, non Islamic forms of ruleship in the Post-Khilāfah al-Rāshīdah as Mawdūdī put it) and Western domination on Muslims (Mawdūdī had expressed more anguish at West’s intellectual and cultural domination on the Muslims). He was an outstanding personality who galvanized millions and millions of young men and women in the 20th century with his call for ‘Iqamate Deen’. He was very conscious of the Westernized Muslims and Orientalist charges against Islam, Islamic government, Islamic law, Islamic family setup, slavery, Position of women in Islam etc. etc.

Not being apologetic, Mawdūdī is assertive in his explanations on the subject and like an architect, in very meticulous in details, needed for instilling confidence among those affected by the West
who had lost confidence in the relevance of Islamic legacy and its resurgence in the contemporary period. Many times he seems to be more as a ‘*Muftī*’ (Jurisprudent) than as a ‘*Mufassir*’ (Exegete) when, in the exegetical note of a verse, he goes to great lengths in explaining the legal rulings, directives and all such features, which usually are restricted to the realm of Jurisprudence.

Nevertheless he upholds mostly traditional opinions regarding the issues related to *ḥijāb*, punishment for *Zina* etc. He looks, at the teachings of the Qur’ān as directives for an ‘Islamic movement’. So his ‘Islamic Movement Perspective’ is evident in his explanations of the aforesaid verses. He, unlike Asad and Yusuf Ali, dwells at length on the question of *khilāfah*, taking into account all those interpretations which were being floated by apologetics like Inayatullah Khan Mashriqī and others. As Mawdūdi was involved for the reestablishment of *khilāfah* in the political sense too, so he seems to be very anxious to demonstrate that his ideas on the issue are quite in conformity with the Qur’ānic purport.

Though the ‘verse of Light’ has usually been interpreted in mystical formulation, Mawdūdi tries to give it what one may call as intelligible explanations as he seems to be averse to mystical explanations.

**Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali** (1872-1953)

Yūsuf Alī was born and raised in British India, and divided much of his life between England and India. Following the trend of his times, Yusuf Alī, like Muḥammad ‘Alī Jawhar and other talented young Indians, joined the coveted Indian Civil Service (ICS) in 1896. He lived an uneven, turbulent and tragic life which had
periods of calm, certainty and economic prosperity. He married a British woman, lived and worked in India and Britain, went through personal tragedies and finally sought solace in the Qur'ān by embarking upon its translation in 1929, he finished it eight years later. The political upheavals of Yusuf Ali’s times, his peculiar understanding of the role of the British system in Indian politics, his affinity with the English romantic poets and his relationship with the Raj had significant impact on the choice of diction and vocabulary employed in his translation.

Throughout his translation and exegetical notes, quite obvious in the foregone pages, is Yusuf Ali’s mystic approach and his mystical understanding of the Qur’ānic injunctions. Yusuf Ali, as stated, lays more stress on the mystical aspect of the Qur’ānic injunctions. So the laws and commandments, which are promulgated in the Sūrah al-Nūr, are for Yusuf Ali matters which affect the spiritual life. He does not seem to be anxious to elucidate the legal positions, which are deducable from the relevant verses. Though he translates the word Zīnā as ‘Adultery or Fornication’, yet he is oblivious to the fact that the verse is the basis of the law for fornication only. Qur’ān statement elsewhere point to some different punishment for the adultery and the Prophet’s Sunnah, which is now an integral part of Islamic Law, is stoning to death for an adulterer of adulteress.

Quite natural to his temperament, he is more elucidative to the issues and the aspects which he thinks demand of mystical interpretations. So he has a full-fledged appendix on the ‘Mystical Interpretation of the verse of Light.’
Muḥammad Asad (1900-1992)

In contrast to Yūsuf Alī, Asad, seems to be averse to mystical interpretations. His explanations have the rationalistic underpinnings. For example: The word almunkar is translated by Asad ‘all that runs counter to reason.’ In the exegetical note Asad clarifies that Zamaksharī has conveyed this meaning, yet its current use as such seems to be loaded with negative connotations as well, notwithstanding Asad’s explanation in the exegetical note that “decency” and “indecency” shall be determined as per the Islamic social mores. “Western reason” as it is currently in use militates against the sober, pure, meanings of the Qur’ānic ‘al-Munakar’. Though he quotes vast classical sources but is inclined to those explanations which ‘fit in’ his rationalistic approach.

While there have been some differences among the Fuqahā (jurisprudents) on some minor point relating to ḥijāb. Asad is novel in his assertions that Qur’ānic ḥijāb does not necessarily include covering the head. He alludes to the use of ‘Khimar’ as a part of Arab tradition – that way not binding on non-Arab or succeeding generations. He does not specify position of Prophet’s Sunnah in this respect.

While Asad attempts at ignoring the tradition and going to the source, this approach seems to be very selective. Modernist trend, which is the milieu Asad encountered, seem to be exerting its influence on his approach and inferences, notwithstanding his otherwise direct and impressive explanations.

Asad is clear in his introduction to the Sūrah al-Nūr: “Verses 2-9, in particular, lay down definite legal injunctions concerning illicit sexual intercourse.” ...He maintains that in European languages, a distinction is there between fornication and adultery, but the word
Zinā, used in the Qur‘ān has both the connotations – fornications and adultery. He says it is out of simplicity he be using ‘adultery’ for zinā; where as in the relevant verse the punishment is declared for the offender one hundred lashes – which is as per the Islamic law – based on the Qur‘ān and the Sunnah – a punishment for fornicator or fornicatress only not for adulterer or adulteress. Muhammad Asad does not speak of any difference in the punishment of fornicator/fornicatress and adulterer and adulteress, in his exegetical note. This way his translation “adulterer or adulteress” seems to be erroneous and misleading. Omission of the point that there is death penalty for adulterer and adulteress in Islamic law make the matter more fishy.

Although his discussion on the rest of the verse is quite fascinating, yet his comment on the Qur‘ānic directive to carry out the punishment in presence of the people is strange. He focusses on the issue that Qur‘ān talks of a group, ‘whose number is indeterminate’, it means that the Qur‘ān does not want to make the event a ‘public spectre’. This seems to be quite contradictory to Qur‘ān’s purport.

On the question of slavery, Asad’s explanations are impressive yet smack of apologia – a defensive posture, indeed unlike that of Mawdūdī, who too gives explanations convincing enough, but in a more assertive tone. Again Mawdūdī not only maintains the distinction of fornication and adultery but undertakes a long discussion on its validity and issues related to its practical application. Yūsuf Ali, though more concerned with the spiritual implication of the Qur‘ānic injunction has retained both the meanings of Zinā – fornication or adultery but has not specified about the particular legal injunction derived from this verse. So even use of both the words are not helpful in that respect. His tone
and approach on the question of slavery seems to be very akin to that of Asad.
Endnotes

1 Asad, *The Message of Qurʾān*, p. 532.
4 Ibid., p.131
5 Ibid., pp. 131-132.
6 Ibid., pp. 132-133.
7 Ibid., p.133.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., pp. 133-134.
10 Ibid., p. 134.
11 Ibid., pp. 135-136.
12 Ibid., pp. 136-142.
13 Ibid., 142.
14 These interjections, marked by ‘Ed.’ are from Zafar Ishaq Ansari, in the English version of Mawdūdī’s *Tafsir* work.
16 Ibid., pp. 142-143.
17 Ibid., pp. 143-145.
18 Ibid., pp. 146-147.
19 Ibid., p. 147.
20 Asad, *op. cit.*, p. 532.
21 Ibid., N.2, p. 532.
22 Ibid., N.3, p. 532.
23 Ibid., N. 4, p. 533.
24 Ibid., N. 5, p. 533
25 Ibid., N. 7, p. 533
26 Ibid., N 7, pp. 533-34.
27 Ibid., N 12, pp. 534-535.
28 Ibid., p. 536.
29 Ibid., pp. 538-539.
30 Ibid., n 36, p. 538.
31 Ibid., N 37, p. 538.
32 Ibid., fn 38, pp. 538-539.
33 Ibid., fn 46, p. 540.
35 Ibid., N. 2954, p. 896.
36 Ibid., N. 2956, p. 896.
37 Ibid., p. 896.
38 Ibid., N. 2957, p. 896.
39 Ibid., N. 2958, p. 897.
40 Ibid., N. 2962, p. 896.
41 Ibid., N.2971, p.901.
42 Ibid, N. 2973, p. 901.
43 Ibid., pp. 904-5.
44 Ibid., N. 2983, p. 904.
46 Ibid., N 2986, p. 905.
47 Ibid., N. 2987, p. 905.
48 Ibid., N. 2991, p. 906.
49 Mawdūdī, op. cit., N. 1, p. 149.
50 Ibid., N. 2, p. 149.
51 Ibid., p. 149-179.
52 Ibid., p. 173.
53 Ibid., p. 179.
54 Ibid., N. 4, p. 181.
55 Ibid., p. 179.
56 Ibid., N.5, pp.181-82.
57 Sec, Mawdūdī, op. cit., pp. 182-83.
58 Ibid., N. 6, pp. 183-4.
59 Ibid., N. 6, pp. 184-194.
60 Ibid., N. 10, P. 208.
61 Ibid., p. 213
62 Ibid., N. 18, p. 214.
63 Ibid., N. 19, p. 214.
64 Ibid., pp. 222-238.
65 Ibid., N. 29, pp. 222-223.
67 Ibid., p. 226.
68 Ibid., N. 30, p. 226.
69 Ibid., N. 31, p. 227.
70 Ibid., N. 32, p. 228.
71 Ibid., N. 32, p. 228.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., N. 33, p. 229.
74 Ibid., N. 34, pp. 229.
75 Ibid., N. 35, pp. 229-30.
76 Ibid., N. 36, p. 230.
77 Ibid., N. 42, p. 232.
78 Ibid., N. 42, p. 232.
79 Ibid., N. 43, p. 234.
80 Ibid., N. 45, p.237.
81 Ibid. N. 47, p. 238.
82 Ibid., pp. 239-42.
83 Asad, op. cit, N. 50, p. 541.
84 Asad, op. cit, N.50, p. 541.
85 Ibid., N. 51, p. 541.
86     Ibid., N. 52, p. 541.
87     Ibid., N. 55, p. 541.
88     Ibid., pp. 544-5.
89     Ibid., N. 71, p. 544.
90     Ibid., N. 72, p. 544.
91     Ibid., NN. 73, 74., pp. 544-5.
92     Ibid., p. 545.
93     Ibid., N. 78, p. 545.
94     Yūsuf Allī, op. cit., N. 2996, p. 907.
95     Ibid., N. 2997, p. 907.
96     Ibid, N. 2998, p. 907.
97     Ibid., N. 2999, P. 08.
98     Ibid. N. 3000, p. 98.
99     Ibid., N. 3001, p. 908.
100    Ibid., N. 3002, p. 908.
101    Ibid., N. 3003, p. 908.
102    Ibid., Appendix- VIII, p., 920.
103    Ibid.
104    Ibid., pp. 914-5.
105    Ibid., N. 3031, p. 914.
106    Ibid., N. 3032, p. 914.
107    Ibid., p. 915.
108    Ibid., N. 3033, p. 915.
109    Ibid., N. 3034, p. 915.
111    Ibid.
112    Ibid., N. 63, p. 253.
113    Ibid., N. 64, p. 253.
114    Ibid., N. 65, p. 225.
115    Ibid., p. 263.
117 Ibid., N. 83, p. 264.
118 Ibid., N. 83, p. 265.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid., p. 267.
122 Ibid., p. 267.
123 Ibid., N. 86, p. 268.
125 For biographical details see M.A. Sheriff, Searching for Salace: A Biography of ‘Abdullah Yūsuf Allī, an interpreter of the Qurʾān (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1994.)