Abstract

Since doing my Master of Arts in Islamic Studies at the University of Birmingham in England, I have become more and more convinced that the advancement of world peace depends on good relations and harmony among all the religions of the world. Persons who have a deep understanding and appreciation of different religions will be able to promote such peace and harmony. This research proposal is the expression of my desire for such a deep understanding and appreciation of Islam.

The appeal of Islahi's commentary on the Qur'an - *Tadabbur-i-Qur'an* - lies in its focus on the text of the Qur'an itself rather than on the traditional commentaries and books of history that have dominated Qur'anic *tafsir* throughout the centuries. Another attractive aspect of Islahi's approach is the encouragement he gives to the reader of the Qur'an to make use of reason in the process of interpretation. Since Islahi gave such importance to the use of reason in *Tadabbur-i-Qur'an*, my enquiry into his commentary will investigate the kind of logic that Islahi uses. In other words, my enquiry will examine how consistent Islahi was in his own use of reason in his commentary. I will also examine the consequences to which Islahi's way of logical thinking leads him.

It is clear that the reader is the central figure in Islahi's commentary. In fact, at many points in his commentary, Islahi draws a general conclusion only after inviting the reader to reflect (*tadabbur*) on the Qur'an. Again, the

Islahi is concerned only about the addressees living during the time of revelation and not about addressees living *after* the time of revelation.

Islahi's description of the context is based on his own interpretation of the text because he derives it entirely from the text of the Qur'an. Even his references to Arab culture express his own perception. While Islahi dismisses the traditional importance given to the "occasions of revelation", he constantly refers to the history and customs of Arab and Jewish peoples who lived before and during the time of revelation. He understands the revelation of the Qur'an as taking place within the historical, social and political circumstances and conditions of the period. But he relies on his own intuitive perception of these circumstances.

Islahi argues that the Qur'an is coherent because he finds a common theme (*'umud*) connecting all the Surahs. Islahi's argument depends on the literal application of certain words concerning the deposition of the Jews and the Christians and the victory of the Muslims in Mecca. He also finds structural links connecting the Surahs with each other.

Islahi presents the "original intention" and the "correct meaning" of the Qur'an in terms of the victory of the Muslims over the Quraysh. He relates everything in the Qur'an to this "correct meaning", according to which the mission of the Prophet (peace be upon him) was to lead the Muslim community to form an Islamic society and government. The Qur'an provides the laws for this new society. God has taken away the mandate He had given to the Jews and the Christians and transferred it to the Muslims, who are the "best community" because they promote justice and truth in

society. The perfect *din* has now been conveyed to the Muslims and the Inviolable House of Worship in Mecca has been returned to its rightful custodians. This is the vision Islahi expresses throughout his commentary.

Islahi's purpose in writing *Tadabbur-i-Qur'an* is to argue that Muslims will once again experience their former success and power by adopting the action-plan outlined in the Qur'an. Islahi demonstrates from the battle of *Badr* and the battle of *Uhud* that the struggle between truth and falsity is not only a spiritual struggle but involves a political struggle as well. *Tadabbur-i-Qur'an* contains a clear and a strong promise of political supremacy for the Muslims.

Since he does not offer criteria to distinguish the literal from the metaphorical use of language, Islahi is able to apply the narratives and the parables of the Qur'an to any specific agents in history that illustrate the particular message he wishes to convey. Islahi recognizes the metaphorical and symbolic way that language is used in the Qur'an but attempts, nonetheless, to arrive at the single, objective and correct meaning of the text. However, the text of the Qur'an cannot escape the influence of the reader and of the context.

Islahi makes constant use of ideas like *sunnat-i-ilahi, itmam-i-hujjat* and other concepts such as consolation (*tasalli*) for the Prophet (peace be upon him) and reward and punishment (*jaza o saza*) because such abstract concepts provide a synthesis of the historical narratives and so contribute to the coherence of the Qur'an. He uses such ideas as umbrella concepts to bring diverse aspects of the Qur'an together under one coherent theme.

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Islahi does not respect the principles of Biblical exegesis but approaches the former Scriptures with the same principles of interpretation that he uses for the Qur'an. The result is that he often finds inexplicable contradictions between the Qur'an and the Bible.

In conclusion, there seems to be no sound basis for the distinction between the internal and the external principles of interpretation that Islahi makes in his Preface to *Tadabbur-i-Qur'an*. Since human attempts to understand the Qur'an depend on personal effort, all these efforts must fall under the category of *zanni*. For example, the search for the theme (*'umud*) of each Surah requires a capacity for sustained reflection (*tadabbur*). Similarly, all the principles of interpretation that Islahi uses in his commentary should be called *zanni*.

Islahi says that the Surahs of the Qur'an form seven Surah Groups. As can readily be seen from the table of contents, I have made an analysis of each Surah from the first four Surah Groups of *Tadabbur-i-Qur'an* and I have included my conclusions directly after my analysis of each Surah. I could not adopt this procedure for the last three Surah Groups due to limited space. So I have given only an overview of these remaining Surah Groups. However, the main lines of Islahi's approach to the Qur'an are clear from my discussion of the first four Surah Groups. Finally, I did not find it necessary to make a separate analysis of Surah *Al Fatihah* because Islahi links Surah *Al Fatihah* with Surah *Al Baqarah*.

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