BOOK REVIEWS

Toshihiko Izutsu: GOD AND MAN IN THE KORAN: SEMANTICS OF THE KORANIC WELTANSCHAUUNG; published by the Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, Keio University, Tokyo, 1964, pp. 244; index 4; price $8.00.

This book, which constitutes volume V of the series Studies in the Humanities and Social Relations of Keio University is written by Professor Toshihiko Izutsu and has emerged out of his lectures at McGill University, Montreal in the spring of 1962 and 1963 (Preface). Actually, I participated in a seminar given by Dr. Izutsu at McGill during the 1960-61 session where he had tried out some of the ideas contained in this book. These seem to have matured over the years and this constitutes not only a welcome addition to the existing literature on Islam but introduces a new approach to the understanding of Islam, particularly by non-Muslims—the linguistic approach. The Arabic mistakes that appear in the book (some of which must be sheer misprints which are also frequent in the book) must not lead the reader to accuse the writer of inadequacy in Arabic which he knows and speaks fluently. Nor is this Dr. Izutsu’s first work on the Qur’an: he has already given us a work on the ethical concepts of the Holy Book.

At the outset, Dr. Izutsu gives us his idea of the science of linguistics or semantics through which he wishes to understand the Qur’an. “Semantics as I understand it is an analytic study of the key-terms of a language with a view to arriving eventually at a conceptual grasp of the Weltanschauung or world-view of the people who use that language . . . .” (p. 11). A semantical study of the Qur’an would, therefore, be an analytical study of the key-terms of the Qur’an. In the succeeding pages, Dr. Izutsu makes it abundantly clear that by a study of the key-terms is not merely meant just a mechanical analysis of these terms or concepts in isolation or as static units but even more importantly includes their living, contextual import, as they are used in the Qur’an. Thus, although the term Allah was used by some pre-Islamic Arabs not only to mean a deity among deities but even a supreme deity in hierarchy of deities, yet the Qur’an wrought a most fundamental change in the Weltanschauung of the Arabs by precisely changing the contextual use of this term, by charging it with a new import—and that by eliminating all deities and bringing the concept of Allah to the centre of the circle of being. In order, therefore, to understand and even to find out the key-concepts themselves, one must know first of all the entire basic structure of the Qur’anic world of ideas. A portrayal of this basic structure or total Gestalt is then attempted in Chapter III for, “The proper position of each individual conceptual field, whether large or small, will be determined in a definite way only in terms of the multiple relations all the major fields bear to each other within the total Gestalt” (p. 73).

With this we also approach the basic dilemma of Dr. Izutsu’s semantic methodology. The key-terms, which, when grasped, were supposed to yield an understanding of the system as a whole (for, Dr. Izutsu assures us that the “key-
terms determine the system”), cannot themselves be understood and even fixed without a prior knowledge of that system. This is what is called a vicious circle. There is nothing basically vicious with the approach (which is, indeed, a commonsense approach) that the best way of understanding a system is to study that system (in the present case the Qur’anic Weltanschauung) as a whole and to pay special attention to its important concepts. I, therefore, must suspect that viciousness is the result of the desire to make semantics a science and to make grandiose claims on behalf of it.

From an Islamic point of view, however, this is only a formal difficulty; we shall now briefly see what constitutes for Dr. Izutsu, the substantive structure of this Qur’anic teaching. This teaching our author discovers in the first place in a fourfold relationship between God and man, viz., (i) God is the creator of man; (ii) He communicates His Will to man through Revelation; (iii) there subsists a Lord-servant relationship between God and man and (iv) the concept of God as the God of goodness and mercy (for those who are thankful to Him) and the God of wrath (for those who reject Him). The believers in this fourfold relationship between Allah and man constitute a Community (Ummah Muslimah) by themselves and believe in the Last Day—Paradise and Hell. Dr. Izutsu’s description of the historical evolution of these concepts in pre-Islamic Arabia up to the appearance of Islam is quite rich and valuable.

The main question is whether the basic structure of the Qur’anic Weltanschauung, as described by Dr. Izutsu, really does adequately tally with the Qur’anic teaching. One cannot help thinking that the author has carefully and quite subjectively tailored this “basic structure” to fit what he himself has decided to be the “key-concepts” of the Qur’ân. He may have thereby semi-consciously discovered in the Qur’an the counterparts of his personal religious Weltanschauung. For, how else explain the fact that in this total picture the moral element is totally wanting? On p. 117, Dr. Izutsu approvingly quotes Prof. Sir Hamilton Gibb to the effect that the main difference between the portrayals of Heaven and Hell by Umayyah Ibn Abi al-Ṣalt and by the Qur’ân is that in the Qur’ân they are “linked up with the essential moral core of the teaching”. But apparently Dr. Izutsu does not understand the implications of Gibb’s statement because he himself entirely ignores the moral field as though it forms no part of the “basic structure of the Qur’anic Weltanschauung”. Indeed, on p. 77, while speaking of the “ethical relation” between God and man, Dr. Izutsu links up the ideas of salvation and damnation with purely personal faith.

One may raise the general question whether an ethical relationship, properly speaking, can be established at all between God and man. To God one can have only a worshipful attitude and not an ethical or moral attitude which he can have only towards other men, strictly speaking. One cannot be good to God but only to men. To a Weltanschauung like Dr. Izutsu’s, therefore, for which man-God relationships are imperturbable by and indifferent to man-man relationships, and can be established per se, the Qur’anic teaching is directly opposed—far from being adequately described by that Weltanschauung. That the Qur’ân’s chief aim is to create a moral-social order, is actually proved if one historically studies the process of the revelation of the Qur’ân—the actual
challenges which the Prophet flung initially to the Meccan society. These challenges were not only to the pantheon of the Meccans at the Ka'bah but also to their socio-economic structure. This shows the superiority of the historical approach to the approach of the pure semanticist.

Only a historical approach can also do justice to the evolution of concepts, particularly the concept Allāh. Dr. Izutsu, on the basis of certain verses of the Qur'ān, thinks (e.g., p. 101 ff.) that the view of One God (Allāh) generally prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia on the eve of Islam, was "surprisingly close in nature to the Islamic one". There is, however, strong evidence to believe that this "surprisingly close concept of Allāh was developed by the Meccans under the impact of the Qur'ānic criticism and, on the basis of this newly evolved concept, they wanted to effect a compromise with the Prophet. The Qur'ān itself bears testimony to this.

One big trouble with Dr. Izutsu's conception of the Qur'ānic teaching on God-man relationship is that he does not keep the Meccan milieu in view and for him there is no difference between a bedouin and a Meccan of the Prophet's time. The bedouin was haughty, proud, unrestrained and boastful beyond any proper sense of reserve; he was over-conscious of his individual self-respect—he possessed the quality of jahl (opposed to hilm). The function of Islam, therefore, consisted, above all—according to him—by humbling this haughtiness and unlimited sense of pride. This was done effectively by projecting an idea of God, which is, above all, forbidding and fear-inspiring. The truth, however, is that the immediate addressees of the Qur'ān were the Meccans—more particularly their wealthy commercial classes. These people recognized no restraint on their amassing of wealth; did not recognize any obligations to their less fortunate fellow-men; regarded themselves "self-sufficient (mustaghfīn)" i.e., law unto themselves. It is to them that the Qur'ān first threw its challenge and required them to recognize limitations on their "natural rights". It was until they had rejected the challenge that the Qur'ān backed up its demand by a theology with the doctrines of Heaven and Hell.

To make these criticisms, fundamental as they are, is not to deny the intrinsic value of this book which, according to this reviewer, lies in bringing out both the contrast and the continuity between the Qur'ānic teaching and the post-Qur'ānic developments in Islam at the hands of Muslims. On such vital issues as the definition of Islam and Imān (chapter II, section II) and the freedom of man vis-à-vis God (chapter VI), how Muslim speculative theology later deviated from the pre-speculative mood of the Qur'ān has been incisively brought out. One wishes the author had shown more elaborately and decisively that the Qur'ān, far from being a work of speculative thought interested in system building, was as a living monument of moral and spiritual guidance, interested in keeping alive all the moral tensions which are requisite for good and fruitful life. It is because the Qur'ān is interested in action that it is not shy of putting side by side the contradictory and polar terms of the moral tension. But probably the preoccupation of Dr. Izutsu to build out a system himself from the Qur'ān did not allow him to do so.

Dr. Izutsu's treatment of the question of wahy or verbal communication from God in Chapter VII is good and comprehensive, although it is somewhat un-
critical in the acceptance of the traditional material on the subject and also
naive in its interpretation. On p. 166 ff. we are told that verbal communication
can occur only between two beings of the same order of existence—which is, of
course, correct. But then Dr. Izutsu tries to rationalize as to how the Prophet
could have actually heard Words of Revelation and he tells us that the Prophet,
in his moments of Revelation, was transformed into a higher being “against his
nature” (p. 167). He does not see that this, in fact, explains nothing for the
question still would remain. How is it possible for a being of one order to get
altogether transformed—even against his own nature—from time to time, into a
being of a different order and how, after the moments of Revelation have passed
and the Prophet returns to his normal self, would he keep his identity? On the
whole, Dr. Izutsu’s use of the terms “nature” and “supernatural” in this context
clearly smacks of the Christian doctrines about Jesus. The author’s differentiation
between the Biblical concept of Prophecy and the Qur’anic concept is,
again, very good. I would like to add that the Prophecy of the biblical Prophets
was not always natural but was often an art cultivated in the Jewish temples.

In the end, one would like to underline the fact that this book is from the
pen of the first serious Asian non-Muslim scholar and a Japanese. As such, we
welcome Dr. Izutsu’s work and hope that it will be the harbinger of a growing
tradition of Islamic scholarship in the Far East.

RA WALPINDI FAZLUR RAHMAN

Ahmad bin Mohamed Ibrahim, SOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT OF MUSLIM
LAW; published by Malayan Law Journal, Singapore, 1965; pp. 134; price
not mentioned.

The author of this slim volume is the State Advocate-General of Singapore.
He sought “to reconcile the views of the Orientalists on the one hand and the
Muslim authorities on the other” on Muslim law in a work designed essentially
for students. It is doubtful if he has succeeded in this object or indeed whether
such a reconciliation on fundamentals is possible. But the endeavour to narrow
the areas of disagreement is most welcome. More important, this approach is
infinitely more beneficial than the crude propagandist approach of trying to prove
how wrong the other party is as if the search for enduring truth and knowledge
was nothing more than a high school elocution contest. The author approaches
these differences with the attitude of the true scholar seeking to honestly under-
stand these differences without imputing dark motives and setting down the
differences without distortion.

The book is divided into three main chapters: The Sources of Muslim Law,
The Development of Muslim Law and finally Some Muslim Jurists and Their
Writings. “Sources” is not used as a translation of ṭālīl but rather denotes
“theory” hence the inclusion of such topics as ‘legal capacity’, ‘legal fictions’
and ‘rights and obligations’ in such sub-divisions of this chapter.

The second chapter divides Muslim legal history into seven periods and
excludes the pre-Islamic period. It begins thirteen years before the hijrah and
examines the Shi’ah and the Kharijij as well as the Sunnī. There is an unnecessary
and inexplicable amount of overlapping and disregard of strict chronological order and the divisions themselves require reconsideration by the author. For example the sixth period encompasses both Ibn Taymiyyah and Muḥammad Iqṭāl while the last period begins in 1922 A.C. and, nevertheless, includes a discussion of Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 144 A.H.) and the Fatāwā ‘Ālamgīrī of the Emperor Aurangzeb (d. 1707 A.C.).

The last chapter gives a long list of Muslim jurists with their main works divided according to their schools. This should be more fully and systematically developed in order to guide students conversant with Arabic to more advanced readings.

Some of the technical deficiencies of the book should be pointed out. The use and non-use of italics is contrary to normal practice and inconsistent. The Qurʾān is italicised and hijrah is not. Imām is sometimes italicised and sometimes is not. The only diacritical mark used is the closed inverted comma probably due to the shortcomings of an otherwise excellent printing press. This mark is not used however for the Qurʾān which is rendered “Quran”. The punctuation could have been improved in places such as the sentence: “When al-Shafī‘ī wrote the process of Islamicizing the law, of impregnating it with religious and ethical ideas had been essentially completed.” The language at places is more obscure than needed to express the thought such as: “The price that had to be paid for this recognition was that the extent to which traditions from the Prophet was in fact accepted as a foundation of law was in future to be determined by the consensus of the scholars.”

These blemishes should be corrected in any second edition and a glossary with a more detailed index added to enable this book to fulfil the function of a student’s introduction to Islamic law. Basically this book is well-suited to perform this task. It is descriptive rather than analytical or exhortatory. It covers all views and schools of Muslim legal thought and brings in in full measure contemporary Muslim thinking. If the result is not consistent or continuous this is more a reflection on the state of Muslim thinking rather than on the author’s ability. This appears on the controversy on Abū ʿAbd Allāh’s reliance or otherwise on traditions, on the small number of traditions in Mālik’s Muwatta’ and Mālik’s role in the question of reliance on tradition, on the extent to which ijma’ is revocable and the question of whether consensus has operated as a progressive or retrogressive force. The distinction between qiṣṣa and ra’y is often enough lost and absurdly exaggerated ideas exist today (and have existed) on the extent to which the injunctions of Islam are ascertainable through the nuṣūḥ or “clear” rulings of the Qurʾān and Sunnah.

Equally valuable in this book is the author’s scholarly approach to the views of Western Orientalists. Clearly he does not suffer from any chip on his shoulder or an aggressively defensive inferiority complex. The researches of Joseph Schacht, for example, on the earlier period of Muslim law and the role of al-Shafī‘ī cannot be ignored by any Muslim scholar.

Another way in which the author has rendered a desirable service is in dealing not only with the works of contemporary Muslim scholars on Muslim law but also with the trends of present-day Muslim legislation and of the developments taking place through the activity of Muslim judges in specific cases before the courts.
Such a wide outlook is inevitably highly compressed in a concise student's introduction to Muslim law. The brevity of the references and descriptions was dictated by the need for keeping this work to its stated purposes. Students entering at early university level into the wonders and mysteries of Islamic law, Muslim law, Anglo-Muhammadan law, _droit Musulman_ and the laws of contemporary Muslim states have in Dr. Ahmad bin Mohamed Ibrahim's book an understandable introduction of a wider kind than exists at present.

The more conservative of the 'ulamāʾ if they were able to read this work would doubtless dismiss it as being written by someone "not competent" and addressed to others also "not competent" which gives a droll quality to the author's observation in his preface: "It is heartening to see lawyers both Muslim and non-Muslim taking an interest in the Muslim law. Unfortunately it is still not accepted amongst Muslims that Muslim law is a specialist field which is the proper concern of lawyers and every Muslim (whether he is a lawyer or not) claims to be an authority on the law."

KARACHI

KEMAL A. FARUKI