DAWAT-UL-QURAN, THE QURANIC MESSAGE SOME VERSES SELECTED FROM THE HOLY QURAN WITH INTERPRETATION.

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DAWAT-UL-QURAN [Da'wat al-Qur'an], as its subtitle prescribes, is a selection and interpretation of the Qur'anic verses. The original Urdu work (2nd edition in 1398), as it appears from the 'reviews, impressions and notes' by the noted Pakistani intellectuals (reproduced on pp. ii–ix 6–20), was received quite favourably. The author Dr. Fazluddin (Ajmeri), a homeopath doctor, has amassed his materials from a wide range of exegetical writings in Urdu, particularly from 'Abd al-Qadir Siddiqi's Tafsir Siddiqi and Hamid Hasan Bilgirami's Fuyud al-Qur'an. His Dawat-ul-Quran, however, differs from the above mentioned works; firstly, it is confined to Sūrat al-Fātiha, a very small part of al-Baqarah and an ad hoc selection of verses from other Sūras. Secondly, instead of concentrating on lexical, theological or juridical exposition, the author has chosen to write essays on various themes, mostly inferred from the verses. The addressees of the Dawat-ul-Quran are the "educated Muslims of the modern world, who under the influence of the West have forgotten and drifted away from the teachings of the Qur'an ...." (p. 26). The objective of the book is defined: "these modern Muslims may also read and understand the Qur'an and get the message in a language that they can understand" (p. 26).

That is perhaps why the work was originally written in Urdu and then the translator (author's eldest son who studied clinical psychology in the US and is now residing there) felt it "essential to have an English translation for the non-Urdu speaking population." (xv).

The recurring theme of the book is that the key to success lies in studying and understanding the Qur'an. The Muslims lost their glory because they forgot the message of the Qur'an, and presently non-Muslims, especially in the West, are making progress because they are following the teachings of the Qur'an. The author quotes a news item which reports the popularity of miswāk in Europe (p. 61). There is also a reference to Radio Moscow's broadcast which affirmed that Soviet Russia owed its progress in scientific field to Muslims from whom it had taken the queue. (p. 161).

It is not, however, to be concluded that the author would approve of emulating the West. He is pointing out to the West only as an example of those who succeeded because they followed the Qur'an. He, therefore, excoriates the modern youth who are following the West. One wonders how following the West is condemnable, if the 'West is following the Quranic teachings'.

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Since this theme is very common in today's popular Islamic literature, a detailed comment is in order.

Muslim elite who has been long habituated to define truth and success in terms of political supremacy and material prosperity, is deeply confused by the continued hegemony of the Christian and secular West over the Muslims. The puzzling question in the 19th century was: Why were the Western nations ruling the Muslims? There were two reactions to this question. The traditionalist elite, mostly the 'ulama', argued that it was a trial period for Muslims and that they could survive only by resisting the Western impact, and by adhering to their own traditions. The modernist elite, on the other hand, argued that the supremacy of the West proved that the west was successful and hence should possess the truth. But since they believed that there could be no truth other than Islam, it followed that the West must be following the teachings of Islam. Quite logically they prescribed the emulation of the west; learning western sciences and adoption of western political, legal and economic systems. They stressed that all these pursuits were commendable because they were in fact Muslim in origin. The traditionalist scathed the modernists as slaves of the west and declared all the western sciences, institutions and concepts as un-Islamic.

The dilemma of the author of the Dawat-ul-Quran is that he believes with the modernists that the present day non-Muslims are successful because they are following the Quranic teachings but he joins the traditionalists to denounce those who are following the West. According to the author the western society and the western culture are "greatly opposed to Islamic teachings" (p. 50)

"Alas! In our practical life we are the true followers of the Jews, the Christians and the Westerners, and literally dancing on their tune. What a contrast? In our prayers we ask God to help us stay away from the path of those who are unbelievers and unfaithfuls, but practically we never remember what we have asked God and keep on following, most of the time very deliberately, the path of the non-Muslims" (p. 50)

Yet on the other hand he asserts passim in the book:

"We know that the non-Muslim now are in reality following the teachings of the Quran without accepting it as Divine source and are successful everywhere though they have not accepted it as their faith" (p. 26)

It appears that the author covets the scientific achievements of the West but would like to decorticate the unbelief from them. Like some other Muslims, he would approve of western technology but not its political, social or economic institutions. One may ask whether it is possible to isolate technology and science from the social, political and economic development. Nevertheless the more pertinent question is: should we not turn to the west for technology and science, to where should we turn for guidance.

The author points to the Qur'an and argues:

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of economics......book of celestial science, and, in short, book of multi-
knowledge and a perpetual reference book), is alive and present in original
form."

Accordingly the author uses captions such as "Islamic Economic System" (pp. 185—196) and "Law making and Constitutions for Mankind" (pp 197—207) to explain the mean:
gings of the various verses. For instance under the latter caption he deals with the verse
"Establish prayer, pay Zakat and bow with those who bow before your God" (2 : 43),
which he explains was addressed to the Jews. He argues that the verse refers to three
clear orders: (1) to pray (2) to pay Zakat and (3) to pray in congregation, and con-
cludes:

"If the Muslims can follow these three fundamental principles indicated in
the above verse they can regain their lost empire and establish God's Govern-
ment on the surface of the earth again"... (p : 206)

It is puzzling how the author could pass the above as "Law making and Constitu-
tion for Mankind". It is unfortunate but this type of interpretations breed obscura-
tism. They are popular because they are convenient. If the recent experience of the
Muslim Ummah can be of some guidance, vacuous, obscurantist and ambiguous inter-
pretations cannot help us achieve the glory we are seeking.

The book is however a welcome addition to the popular Quranic literature in
English language. English translation, though not faithful to the original at places, is
commendable. The work definitely requires proper editing; commercial announcements,
readers' comments and other matters are jumbled together with the main text.

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