
The book under review introduces the reader to the contents of the Qur'an without any attempt to justify or criticise them.

The book is quite comprehensive; no theme contained in the Qur'an has been overlooked. Beliefs and commandments, historical events and parables, this world and the other world, angels and jinns, abbreviated letters and oaths, in short nothing is left out. It is comparable to other such works as W. Montgomery Watt's Companion to the Qur'an. However even though the latter is a very useful book and devoid of interjections but its arrangement is Surah-wise. On the other hand, the book under review has been arranged topically and systematically.

The book is divided into eight chapters, the first chapter being introductory. Every chapter is sub-divided into several sections under different headings so that if a reader cannot afford enough time to go through the Qur'an he may find all the relevant information under the relevant heading. Hence a reader can find all about the jinn as stated by the Qur'an in the chapter ‘His Creatures’ under the heading ‘Jinn.’ It differs from another book titled Qur'an: Basic Teachings (by Thomas Ballantine and two others) that too deals with entire teachings of the Qur'an under several topics in that, that the approach of the authors of that book is mostly selective.

The most laudable feature of the book is its author's approach to the subject. He has set aside all other sources, traditions and theological disputations, for the purpose of discussion as well as for the purpose of interpretation and has reproduced what he himself understood from the literal meanings of the verses of the Qur'an. This has saved the author from many a controversy and the reader from many a confusing disputation.

Nevertheless, at occasions one finds slight deviations from the above-mentioned 'path'. For example, the observations made in the Introductory chapter, the explanatory notes at the end of each chapter that sometimes speak of the author's non-objectiveness his remarks that according to the traditions the Arabic is the language of those who are in paradise and his displeasing tone while dealing with the punishment of theft as prescribed by the Qur'an. These deviations annoy the reader and mar the beauty of the book.

Interpolations and personal interjections of the authors during the course of guiding the readers to religions and their sacred books is an intellectual exploitation and a pious piracy; hence never met with approbation.

It is because of the extreme objectiveness of the author that his chapter on Commandments (of the Qur'an) is the most beautiful chapter of the book imparting ample
The passages on the (form of) Government as derived from the teachings of the Qur’an are worth reading and, despite being brief, are more informative than several voluminous books written on the subject.

The reviewer personally does not agree with the author as to the interpretation of many verses. For example the observations made by the author that Verse 6:67 refers to the possibility of Satan causing the Prophet (S.A.W.) to forget God’s revelations (p. 22.) Likewise is his translation of the Verse 12:52 that Allah abrogates the interpolations of Satan into the utterances of the prophets (p. 22). But the author is supported by the recognized translations and famous commentaries of the Qur’an as Tabari, for example, quotes the notorious anecdote of gharānīq while explaining the above-mentioned verse.

On page 143, because of misprint, the Verse 4:94 translated as ‘if the guilty person cannot afford to pay blood-money he must fast two consecutive days’. The correct translation is ‘two consecutive months’ (instead of days).

There are passages in the book which are likely to be resented by the majority of the Muslims. For example, the following passage in the Introductory chapter:

Nearly all the penal provisions contained in the Qur’an reflect the social conditions which were characteristic of the Arabian tribes 14 centuries ago, and to treat them as binding today would in many cases be lamentable anachronism. (p. 4).

The author does advance arguments in support of his opinion in detail. The author also points out some inconsistencies in the Qur’an such as on the attitude (of the Qur’an) towards other religions, predestination and freewill and the punishment of adultery. On the other hand the Qur’an proclaims that ‘if it were from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many a discrepancy (4:82).

Mere expression of resentment and condemnation is never useful. The above-mentioned points require special research articles by those who are well versed in Islamic theology and the exegeses of the Qur’an. Otherwise the conclusions drawn, or arrived at, by the author will make their permanent abode in the minds of the readers.

The reviewer, notwithstanding the above remarks, is of the opinion that the book is useful for the impartial readers and a welcome step in this field.

GHULAM MURTADA AZAD