proved by the actual linguistic usage among the Arabs. Secondly, if the verse were addressing permanently invalid persons, why did it ask them to do good willingly but it was better for them to fast?

The learned author skips over some of the verses. He has not offered any explanation of \textit{Alif Lām Mim} or the verse 116, which mentions the People of the Book as saying that Allah has taken to Him a son. He states that al-Masjid al-Aqṣā was made the \textit{qiblah} for the Muslims after the \textit{Hijrah}. Historically, this is not correct and the Prophet (peace be on him) used to face towards the said mosque while he was in Makkah before the \textit{Hijrah}.

There are numerous mistakes of proofreading. A long paragraph at p. 31 appears twice. The annexures contain important Arabic or hybrid words used as terms (pp. 794–97) and an index of important themes of reflection (pp. 798–808).

\textbf{Khalid Masud}

---


It must be noted from the outset that \textit{Muhammad, the Qur'an and Islam} is unfortunately not a serious academic work. It is driven by a highly partisan agenda and its tone is negative, even condescending in its treatment of traditional Muslims’ claims made for the Qur’ān and the Prophet; interestingly enough, he is equally dismissive of some of the more recent Western scholarship on early Islam. For him W. M. Watt is much too even-handed in his treatment of the Qur’ān and Muhammad. Although he nowhere acknowledges the point, the author’s orientation is clearly Christian, but it should also be noted that the Christianity in question is of a decidedly narrow sort. His orientation is apparent throughout the work and it colours both his approach and the conclusions to which he arrives.

Newman insists on applying what might be called a source-critical approach to the Qur’ān and objects to scholars like W. M. Watt who have argued that in the case of the Qur’ān, at least, the question of sources is largely irrelevant to an understanding of the text as it stands. Newman, by contrast,
insists that source analysis is highly pertinent, and he clearly believes that it is possible to trace much of the Qurʾān’s content back to older Jewish and Christian sources. The ease with which he identifies these sources is astonishing and, in my view, reflects a failure to appreciate the enormous difficulty involved in attempting to identify the sources of a text like the Qurʾān. Newman clearly believes that it can be done and apparently with relative ease. The scholarly studies he cites throughout the work are revealing; they are almost entirely older studies of what is now generally referred to as the “orientalist” variety, among them those of Thoedore Nöldeke, F. Buhl, T. Andrae, R. Bell, etc. Judging from the notes to this study, Newman is either unaware of the immense scholarship on the Qurʾān produced over the past half century or he has intentionally chosen to ignore it, perhaps because much of it flies in the face of the conclusions he wishes to advance.

Newman’s approach to the sīrah literature is equally dismissive. He believes that it is for the most part unreliable since it is driven by what he believes to be an ideological agenda. One cannot doubt that it is, to some extent, partisan in its orientation, but it does not follow that it is eo ipso untrustworthy. His cavalier and uncritical approach to the question of the sīrah appears to be dictated by his starting point. It is interesting that he nowhere cites studies produced over the past several decades by those who stand within what might be called the Wansbrough tradition of Islamic studies; this is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that some of their conclusions do occasionally tend to reinforce those defended by Newman. It may be that he is unaware of their existence. Although one can criticize some of the more excessive claims made by members of the Wansbrough “school”, their scholarship is painstaking and detailed. This can hardly be said of Newman’s work.

In his approach to the Qurʾān and the sīrah literature, Newman appears to be driven by an overriding objective, viz., to call into question the reliability of the earliest sources on which Islam rests. Though he does not spell it out, his reasoning seems to be that by calling into question Islam’s primary sources one can show that Islam rests on shaky grounds and that its foundational claims are therefore to be taken with a grain of salt, if not dismissed outright. In my view, there is no place in the academy for pretentious and tendentious works of this sort.

Merlin Swartz