

WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT THE QURAN

WAMY Series on Islam No. 2

Humanity has received divine guidance through two channels: the word of Allah and the prophets who were chosen by Him to communicate His will to humanity. These channels have always functioned together, and if one is ignored or neglected, the will of Allah cannot be known with any degree of accuracy. The Hindus neglected their prophets and focused all of their attention on their books, which proved to be only word puzzles that eventually were no longer understood by the people. Similarly the Christians, disregarding the Bible, attached importance only to the person of Jesus Christ and eventually deified him. This resulted in the loss of the very essence of tawhid (monotheism) contained in the Bible.

As a matter of fact, the main scriptures revealed before the Qur'an i.e., the Old Testament and the New Testament, acquired book form long after the days of the prophets. Moreover, the New Testament was not recorded in the language spoken by Jesus Christ, believed to be Aramaic, but in Greek. This was because the early Christians made no serious effort to preserve their revelation during the lifetime of their prophet. The Old and New Testaments, which together form the Christian Bible, now consist of translations of various individuals' accounts of the original revelations as well as the additions and deletions made by the faithful.

The Qur'an, as the last revealed book of God, is extant in its original form. Allah Himself guaranteed its preservation. The entire Qur'an was recorded in written form during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on pieces of palm leaves, parchments, bones, and other suitable surfaces. Moreover, there were tens of thousands of his followers who memorized the whole Qur'an, and the Prophet himself used to recite it to the angel Gabriel once a year and twice when he was about to die.

After the Prophet's death, Abu Bakr, the first caliph, oversaw the collection of the Qur'an into one volume by the Prophet's scribe, Zaid Ibn Thabit. This volume remained with Abu Bakr who, when he was about to die, entrusted it to his successor, Umar Ibn al Khattab who, in turn, passed it on to Hafsa, the Prophet's wife. It was from this

original copy that Uthman, the third caliph, prepared several other copies and sent them to different Muslim territories.

The Qur'an was preserved so meticulously because it was to be the book of guidance for all humanity forever. Thus it does not address only the Arabs, even though it was revealed in their language. It speaks to man as a human being: "O Man! What has seduced you from your Lord?" The practical nature of the Qur'anic teachings is established by the examples of the Prophet and of pious Muslims throughout history.

The Qur'an instructions are aimed at the general welfare of man and are based on possibilities within his reach. Its wisdom is conclusive in all of its venous dimensions. It does not condemn or torture the flesh, nor does it neglect the soul. It does not humanize God nor does it deify man. Everything is carefully placed where it belongs in the total scheme of creation.

Those scholars who allege that Muhammad wrote the Qur'an claim something that is not humanly possible. Could anyone living in the sixth century CE. utter such scientific truths as the Qur'an contains? Could he describe the evolution of the embryo inside the uterus so accurately that it matches the description given by modern science?

Secondly, is it logical to believe that the Prophet, who, until the age of forty, was known far and wide for his honesty and integrity, began all of a sudden to write a book that is without equal in literary merit and that could not be surpassed by the whole legion of the Arab poets and orators of the highest caliber?

And lastly, is it justified to say that Muhammad (PBUH), who was known to his people as al-Amin (The trustworthy) and who is still admired by non-Muslim scholars for his honesty and integrity, came forth with a false claim and on that falsehood trained thousands of individuals of character, integrity, and honesty who were able to establish the best human society that the world has ever known? Surely, any sincere and unbiased searcher of truth will come to believe that the Qur'an is the revealed book of Allah.

Without necessarily agreeing completely with their statements, we would like to quote some of the opinions of important non-Muslim scholars who have studied the Qur'an. Such comments show that the non Muslim world is taking a more serious view of the Qur'an and

that it is beginning to appreciate its truth. We appeal to all people who are seeking spiritual truth to study the Qur'an in light of the aforementioned points. Cast your preconceived notions aside and listen to what these people have to say.

However often we turn to it [the Qur'an], at first disgusting us each time afresh, it soon attracts, astounds, and in the end enforces our reverence... Its style, in accordance with its contents and aim, is stern, grand, terrible - ever and anon truly sublime. Thus this book will go on exercising through all ages a most potent influence.

- Gethe,
quoted in T P Hughes' Dictionary of Islam, p 526.

The Koran admittedly occupies an important position among the great religious books of the world. Though the youngest of the epoch-making works belonging to this class of literature, it yields to hardly any in the wonderful effect which it has produced on large masses of men. It has created an all but new phase of human thought and a fresh type of character. It first transformed a number of heterogeneous desert tribes of the Arabian peninsula into a nation of heroes, and then proceeded to create the vast politico-religious organizations of the Muhammadan world which are one of the great forces with which Europe and the East have to reckon today

- G. Margoliouth
Introduction to. M. Rodwell's
The Koran, New York Every man's Library, 1977, p. VII.

A work, then, which calls forth so powerful and seemingly incompatible emotions even in the distant reader distant as to time, and still more so as to mental development - a work which not only conquers the repugnance with which he may begin its perusal, but changes this adverse feeling into astonishment and admiration, such a work must be a wonderful production of the human mind indeed and a problem of the highest interest to every thoughtful observer of the destinies of mankind.

- Dr. Steingass
quoted in T. P. Hughes' Dictionary of Islam, pp. 526-7.

The above observation makes the hypothesis advanced by those who see Muhammad as the author of the Qur'an untenable. How could a man, from being illiterate, become the most important author, in terms of literary merits, in the whole of Arabic literature? How could he then pronounce truths of a scientific nature that no other human being could possibly have developed at that time, and all this without once making the slightest error in his pronouncement on the subject?

- Maunce Bucaille,
The Bible, the Qur'an and Science, 1978, p 125.

Here, therefore, its meets as a literary production should perhaps not be measured by some preconceived maxims of subjective and aesthetic taste, but by the effects which it produced in Muhammad's contemporaries and fellow countrymen. If it spoke so powerfully and convincingly to the hearts of his hearers as to weld hitherto centrifugal and antagonistic elements into one compact and well organized body. animated by ideas far beyond those which had until now ruled the Arabian mind, then its eloquence was perfect, simply because it created a civilized nation out of savage tribes, and shot a fresh woof into the old warp of history.

- Dr: Steingass
quoted in Hughes' Dictionary of Islam, p. 528.

In making the present attempt to improve on the performance of my predecessors, and to produce something which might be accepted as echoing however faintly the sublime rhetoric of the Arabic Koran, I have been at pain to study the intricate and richly varied rhythms which-apart from the message itself-constitute the Koran's undeniable claim to rank amongst the greatest literary masterpieces of mankind ... This very characteristic feature-"that inimitable symphony" as the believing Pickthall described his Holy Book, "the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy"-has been almost totally ignored by previous translators; it is therefore not surprising that what they have wrought sounds dull and net indeed in comparison with the splendidly decorated original.

-Arthur J Arberry
The Koran Interpreted London: Oxford University Press, 1964,p.X

A totally objective examination [of the Qur'an] in the light of modern knowledge leads us to recognize the agreement between the two, as has been already noted on repeated occasions. It makes us deem it quite unthinkable for a man of Muhammad's time to have been the author of such statements, on account of the state of knowledge in his day. Such considerations are part of what gives the Qur'anic revelation its unique place, and forces the impartial scientist to admit his inability to provide an explanation which calls solely upon materialistic reasoning.