

time and space. For these reasons, Muslims believe the mission attributed to Prophet Muhammad is universal and not limited by geographical or ethnological ethnic boundaries.

Muslims consider the Qur'an as a message to all mankind, a Revelation, which came to ensure the victory of God's oneness (*tawhīd*) over paganism and to correct Judeo-Christian misunderstanding of the Bible as well as Christian errors concerning Jesus. With regards to the existence of a one 'true religion' and the validity of its legislations, Muslim exegetes maintain that there is a primordial original pure faith and that Islam is its manifestation for humanity. As such, its legislations, although containing different laws and commandments to those of earlier scripture, are fundamentally the same, replacing those no longer suitable for modern times.

Chapter Five

Exegesis, Social Science and Judaism in the Qur'an

Mohammed Abu-Nimer

Throughout Islamic history, religious scholars have been viewed as public intellectuals whose opinions have been valued on all matters. Indeed, in some periods, these scholars excelled in other disciplines, including physics, algebra, chemistry, astronomy, and medicine. However, views expressed in Qur'anic commentaries received little critical examination, which is a necessary endeavor for contemporary Islamic reform. I briefly address here the views of some of these exegetes and Qur'an scholars, in terms of their views on the Jews in the Qur'an.

Muhammad ibn Bahader ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Zarkashī (d. 1391) explained that exegesis is needed for three reasons: people differ in their intellectual abilities, so some readers may need assistance to comprehend; parts of the Qur'an are built on certain assumptions that are not apparent to the common person; and some words may carry multiple meanings and can be deciphered only by learned specialists. Al-Zarkashī presented key knowledge requirements for prospective scholars in the field, including classical Arabic diction and phonetics and *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation). He explained that some parts of the Qur'an could be difficult to comprehend because of *ʿumūm*

al-ṣ̣ghab (general form) and *khuṣūṣ al-sabab* (particular reason).³⁰ Some verses may appear general in their wording but may address a specific circumstance.

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī (d. 1505) classified the Qur'anic revelation into two main categories. The first category includes what took place after an incident or a question to the Prophet, and the other had no pretext. He also added another layer of context that can affect the meaning of Qur'anic verses: the specific place and time of revelation and whether it carried new substance or overlapped with previous revelation.³¹ One major approach to exegesis is known as *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān* (interpreting the Qur'an by means of the Qur'an), which is built on the assumption that parts of the Qur'an complement each other. Another approach is called *al-tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* (exegesis using tradition).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ismā'īl al-Fārūqī approached the Qur'an as a whole in order to construct a *tawhīdī* (monotheistic) worldview. Al-Fārūqī and Nasr offered an understanding of God's relation to man based on the concept of *khilāfah* (vicegerency). Nasr emphasized the mystical aspects of Islam, while al-Fārūqī focused on theology.

The validity of the Qur'an for all times and places does not mean that every statement in it claims to be true everywhere and all the time. As explained, classical scholars of the Qur'an were usually very particular about noting the context of revelation. The contemporary holistic understanding of the Qur'an raises several methodological and interpretative challenges to classical exegesis works cited in this study. The main theoretical concern arising from the critique of past works is whether social commentary is a different enterprise than the one concerned with expounding scriptural messages. If it is difficult, impractical, or undesirable to separate the two functions, one still has to ask whether exegetes who are not trained to observe human behavior are qualified to engage in credible expositions of what the Qur'an means to the evolving human condition. In any case, when exegetes delve into such subjects, they automatically cross over to a new interdisciplinary field of knowledge. By doing so, they should welcome critique from a wide range of experts. To deal with the practical implication of this question, one can imagine the possibility of establishing an interdisciplinary field of knowledge that would train scholars in both exegesis and social and behavioral sciences.