The Qurʾān, Orientalism, and the *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*

Muzaffar Iqbal[1]

The Qurʾān entered the flow of human history over a twenty-three year period, beginning in 610 CE with the first revelation to Prophet Muḥammad while he was in the cave of Ḥirāʾ, some fifteen kilometers from the Kaʿbah, the ancient House of Allah (*Bayt Allāh*), built by Prophet Ibrāhīm and his son Ismāʿīl, approximately twenty-five hundred years before the event. Its final verses were revealed in 632 CE, just a few days before the death of the Prophet in Madinah—the oasis town to where he had migrated in 622 CE. Ever since its revelation, the Qurʾān has drawn two fundamental responses from humanity: (i) belief in its Divine origin and in the veracity of the Messenger to whom it was revealed; and (ii) disbelief in its Divine origin and consequently disbelief in the Prophetic status of Muḥammad.

The first responses to the Qurʾān came from those who lived in Makkah and its environs. At that time, most residents of Makkah were either polytheists or atheists. In addition, there were some people who called themselves *ḥunafāʾ*, the monotheistic followers of the religion of Ibrāhīm. There were also pockets of Jewish and Christian tribes in northern and central Arabia.

During the twelve and a half year period of the Prophet's residence in Makkah after the first revelation (610-622 CE), only about 350 people accepted the Qurʾān as a Divine Book.[2] Even the leaders of the Prophet's own powerful clan—the Quraysh—rejected it. They accused him of fabricating the Book, although he did not know how to read or write; they called him a poet (*shāʿir*), even though he had never composed poetry; a soothsayer (*kāhin*), even though he had never learned that dark art; and a liar (*kādhib*), even though they themselves had given him the title of *al-Ṣadīq* and *al-Amīn*, the truthful and trustworthy. They were deeply troubled by the message of the Qurʾān which demanded that they give up their practice of worshipping idols and, instead, worship only one God: Allah, the Creator and the Supreme Sovereign, the infinitely the Infinitely Clement, the All-Merciful. The Qurʾān invited them to reflect on their own creation and on the creation of the heavens and the earth, the movement of planets and stars, the alternation of the day and the night, and numerous other observable phenomena in and around them in order to ascertain for themselves that this cosmos and all that it contains could not have come into existence without a Creator and could not sustain itself without Him. In distinct contrast to their beliefs, the Qurʾān explained its message of *Tawḥīd*, the Unicity of the Creator, in a sublime language that surpassed everything they had ever heard. It provided proofs for the impossibility of the existence of more than one God. It demanded that they give up idolatry and instead worship only Allah, cease their practice of burying alive their infant daughters, deal justly with orphans, give charity, and treat the weak with respect and kindness. It warned them of the ultimate consequence of their disbelief—an everlasting abode of fire in the Hereafter. To those who believed in its message, it promised an everlasting life of bliss, happiness, and felicity.

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2. This estimate is based on the number of Muslims who migrated to Abyssinia in the fifth year of *nubuwwah* (16); those who left Makkah for Abyssinia in the second hijrah to Abyssinia (82 or 83); those from Yathrib who accepted Islam before the hijrah (there were 12 men at the first ʿAqabah which took place in Dhuʾl-Ḥijjah, the 12th year of *nabuwwah*, and 73 men and two women at the second ʿAqabah which took place in Dhuʾl-Ḥijjah 13 Nabūwwah). There were 82, 83, or 86 Muhājir at the battle of Badr. Thus 350 is a generous estimate and includes families of these early Muslims.

With his hijrah to Madinah, the Prophet and the first Muslim community came in direct contact with Banū Qaynuqāʿ, Banū Naḍīr, and Banū Qurayẓah, the three Jewish tribes who then lived at the Oasis, as well as with certain Christian tribes who lived in other parts of the Arabian peninsula. The *sīrah* literature has preserved details of the Prophet's childhood trip to Syria, where the trading caravan met a Christian monk who recognized in him the future Prophet.[3] The evidence for the presence of Christian communities in areas frequented by Arabs of the Ḥijāz is also well established. Exegetical literature also contains specific references to a delegation of Christians from Najrān which visited the Prophet in Madinah in the ninth year after hijrah and argued with him about Prophet ʿĪsā.[4] The geographical region of the first impact of the Qurʾān expanded to include the entire Arabian Peninsula within the lifetime of the Prophet. Thus both the Jews of Madinah, and through them other Jewish tribes of the region, as well as Christians of the region were well aware of the message of the Qurʾān even during the life of the Prophet. This knowledge slowly made its way to other regions and became the mainstay of the first polemical works by Christians and Jews written in Europe.

Since the Qurʾān had confirmed all previous revelations even as it pointed out that the followers of the earlier revelations had broken their covenant with Allah and had falsified their Scripture, it accorded a special status to the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*). One of the first things the Prophet did upon his arrival in Madinah was to sign an agreement with the three Jewish tribes as well as with Banū Aws and Banū Khazraj, the two tribes of Helpers (al-Anṣār) who lived in Madinah. This agreement, own as the Constitution of Madinah (*al-mīthāq al-madīnah*), outlined the respective rights and duties of all parties.[5]

While confirming the religious status of Jews and Christians, the Qurʾān demanded that they accept the final revelation being sent to the Prophet. Historical evidence suggests that, except for some individuals, most Jews and Christians who came to know about the Qurʾān during the life of the Prophet refused to accept it as a revealed Book. This refusal by Jews and Christians to accept the Qurʾān as the final revelation and Prophet Muḥammad as the last and final Messenger in the line of Prophets which included their own Prophets—Mūsā and ʿĪsā—in time led to the emergence of Jewish and Christian polemical literature against the Qurʾān and Prophet Muḥammad.

Literature about the Qurʾān

Literature about the Qurʾān falls into four broad categories: (i) exegetical literature produced by believers, explaining the message of the Qurʾān from a variety of different perspectives; (ii) polemics written by disbelievers, refuting the Qurʾān; (iii) works of the Orientalists attempting to distinguish themselves from polemical works; and (iv) the contemporary academic works on the Qurʾān with their characteristic claims

3. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1424/2004), 121-23; hereinafter *al-Sīrah*.

4. This event is mentioned in almost all major exegeses in connection with the "Verses of *Mubāhalah*" in sūrah *Āl ʿImrān*: 3:61-2.

5. *al-Sīrah*, 306-10; also see Muhammad Hamidullah, *The Prophet's Establishing a State and his Succession* (Islamabad: Pakistan Hijrah Council, 1408/1988).

of objectivity and dispassionate scholarship. The most extensive work to date in this last category is *The Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān (EQ)*.[6]

The Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān

Spread over 2,919 pages in five volumes, with an additional 860 pages of five indices in the sixth volume, *EQ* has been produced with the intention of providing "rigorous, academic scholarship on the Qurʾān, scholarship that grows from a plurality of perspectives and presuppositions," as General Editor Jane Dammen McAuliffe states in her preface (*EQ* 1, ix). The work took thirteen years to complete, from its inception in 1993, when she met Peri Bearman, a senior Brill editor, "to explore the possibility of initiating such a project," to its completion in 2006 with the publication of an additional, unplanned, sixth volume. "The key words in the preceding sentence are 'rigorous' and 'academic'," she adds emphatically, while providing background on how the project progressed:

> Very quickly, four superb scholars, Wadad Kadi, Claude Gilliot, William Graham, and Andrew Rippin, agreed to join the editorial team. Both the desire to take stock of the field of qurʾānic (*sic*)[7] studies at the turn of the century and an interest in seeing this field flourish in the new millennium prompted our initial conversations. From its inception, then, *EQ* has gazed both backwards and forwards and this dual visioning has shaped the structuring of this encyclopaedia. As the associate editors and I proceeded with the planning, we were determined to create a reference work that would capture this century's best achievements in qurʾānic (*sic*) studies. But we also wanted *EQ* to stimulate even more extensive scholarship on the Qurʾān in the decades to come. (*EQ* 1, ix-x)

Yet more important than this retrospective and prospective vision was the editors' desire to "make the world of qurʾānic (*sic*) studies accessible to a very broad range of academic scholars and educated readers" (*EQ* 1, x). To this end, the editors made a number of decisions, some of which were not easy:

i. They decided to use English-language entry words primarily to serve the needs of those scholars who do not have command of the Arabic language, even as they recognized that this would result in the loss of precision offered by transliterated Arabic entry-words; and

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6. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (General Editor), *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* (Leiden: Brill, 2001-2006); hereinafter *EQ*.

7. Some Orientalists have started to use a new transliteration scheme for capitalization of certain key Islamic terms and words including the derivatives of "Qurʾān". Until recently, the generally accepted convention among academia was to follow a modified version of the schema used in the New Edition of *The Encylopaedia of Islam* (hereinafter *EI*), which employed an awkward spelling for "Qurʾān" (using "K" with a dot underneath rather than "Q"). The modified scheme replaced "K" with "Q". *EI*, however, used capitalization for "Qurʾānic", the adjective derived from "Qurʾān". Now a certain segment of Western academia has started to use the lowercase "q" for "qurʾānic" and other adjectives derived from "Qurʾān". *EQ* also follows this new convention. Since "everything signifies" is a truism, this shift is not without meaning. Among other things, a capital letter is used to represent uniqueness. When we spell "John", we impart a uniqueness to this word which is lost in "john". The word "Qurʾān" and its derivatives refer to a unique text and its qualities; therefore, to remove capitalization from a derivative but not from its mother word is, to say the least, an inconsistent choice. In this review, except for direct quotes, "Qurʾān" and all its derivatives are spelled with a capital "Q".

ii. They decided not to make *EQ* an encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān and its interpretation, resolving to formally exclude the latter even as they recognized that virtually every article in *EQ* would necessarily have to draw upon the corpus of Qurʾānic exegesis.

In addition to these two decisions, which have important consequences for the structure of the encyclopaedia, *EQ* is based on the premise that there is

> no single academic tradition of qurʾānic (*sic*) scholarship. Centuries of Muslim scholarship on the Qurʾān constitutes a timeline that overlaps with that of generations of Western scholarship on the text. And neither of these categories, inexact as they are, represent a single, monolithic approach or a unique, overriding methodology. Both between and within the worlds of Muslim and Western qurʾānic (*sic*) scholarship one finds vigorous and contentious debate….Scholarly perspectives can no longer be neatly pinned to religious identification and good scholarship is flourishing in this richly plural environment. The editors of *EQ* have striven to capture that plurality within the pages of this encyclopaedia, wanting this work to represent the widest possible range of rigorous, academic scholarship on the Qurʾān. (*EQ* 1, xi)

That these considerations, decisions, premises, and choices construct the broad framework for *EQ* is obvious. What may not be so obvious, however, is the backdrop from which they have arisen as well as the nature and meaning of certain key words used in the carefully worded preface, which includes "A concluding comment on controversy":

> Some Muslims feel strongly that no non-Muslim should even touch the Qurʾān, to say nothing of reading and commenting upon it. Yet most Muslims do not feel this way. While there are those who choose to ignore non-Muslim scholarship on the Qurʾān as irrelevant or inherently flawed and misinformed, others welcome the contributions non-Muslim scholars have made to this field. (*EQ* 1, xiii)

The preface ends with a personal statement:

> I have deliberately embraced a plurality of method and perspective within the pages of *EQ,* but I have done so conscious of the fact that not all scholars, whether non-Muslim or Muslim, agree with this approach. There are Muslim colleagues who have preferred not to participate out of fear that association with *EQ* would compromise their scholarly integrity. There are non-Muslim colleagues who have demurred for exactly the same reason. Nevertheless, these are very much the exceptions. Most scholars who were invited to contribute accepted with enthusiasm and alacrity, pleased to see the appearance of a reference work that would foster continued development within the field of qurʾānic (*sic*) studies. (*EQ* 1, xiii)

This summary of the editors' choices and decisions as well as the broad framework of *EQ* is enough to start examining, in some detail, claims and premises of this ambitious undertaking, consisting of 694 articles[8] of varying length that fall into two categories: articles "that treat important figures, concepts,

8. The description on back cover of *EQ* claims "nearly 1000 entries in five volumes," perhaps this includes single-line entries.

places, values, actions and events to be found within the text of the Qurʾān or which have an important relationship with the text; and essay-length treatments of important topics within the field of qurʾānic (*sic*) studies." (*EQ* 1, xii) The articles in these two categories have not been distinguished from one another and hence it remains up to the reader to discern which article belongs to which category.

Claims and Premises

In her preface the General Editor of *EQ* reiterated the editors' desire for "rigorous and academic scholarship", explaining further that this is a "scholarship that grows from a plurality of perspectives and presuppositions" (*EQ* 1, xi).

The adjective "rigorous" is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary variously as "severely exact, rigidly accurate or logical, scrupulous, strictly adhered to, unswerving." Its application to *EQ* presumes certain pre-existing standards. Although these standards have not been explicitly delineated, one assumes they are the well-touted claims of the academia such as impartiality, reliance on fact rather than opinion, thorough research, inclusion of all available viewpoints, and so on. What is meant by "rigorous academic" has, as noted, been further elaborated by the General Editor as the "scholarship that grows from a plurality of perspectives and presuppositions" (*EQ* 1, xi).

In real-life situation, this would mean that scholars contributing to *EQ* would be known to hold such plurality of perspectives and presuppositions. A quick examination of the list of contributors, however, reveals that an overwhelming majority of contributors holds only one foundational perspective on the Qurʾān—a modernist, relativistic, evolutionary perspective that takes the text of the Qurʾān as a human construction and that calls for a historicist hermeneutic. While they may differ in methodology and techniques, most differences among these scholars are peripheral to this foundational perspective. This is as much true of most Muslim contributors as it is of non-Muslims. Nor can this be by default; when an editor invites contributions from someone who calls himself a "secular Muslim", or from a scholar whose approach to the Qurʾān is steeped in Western feminism, she or he already knows the nature of the contribution such scholars would make to the project. The choice of scholars enlisted for the project is neither incidental nor accidental; rather, it reflects considered preferences and intellectual affinities of the editors.[9] Likewise, when the editors decide that, out of 278 contributors, only about 20 percent would be Muslims of a particular academic lineage, they have already decided in favor of a certain perspective, notwithstanding the rather contentious claim that "religious affiliation is of no consequence in academic scholarship" (*EQ* 1, xi). Furthermore, Muslim contributions are largely peripheral: most of the articles dealing with fundamental concepts, ideas, and terms of the Qurʾān have come from non-Muslim contributors. It is also noteworthy in this context that although there are 278 authors in the list of contributors, 123 have contributed only one article, 65 have contributed two articles each, and 37 have written three articles; thus 47.5% of *EQ* (330 articles) come from the pen of only 53 authors, 95% of whom are non-Muslim whose Orientalist approach to the Qurʾān borders on polemics.

The claim that *EQ* includes a plurality of perspectives may be true, but these perspectives stem from the same font—that which negates, ignores, or considers irrelevant the phenomenon of revelation (*waḥy*)

9. It is not without reason that similar preferences mark the other work of the General Editor of *EQ,* see McAuliffe (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Qurʾān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), where selected contributors have a similar attitude toward the Qurʾān.

as understood in Islam. The perspective that emerges in the absence of this fundamental precept may produce a host of mutually differing opinions, but they cannot be said to be arising out of a plurality of fundamental premises; they all rest on the supposition that the Qurʾān is not the actual Word of God—at least, not as the Qurʾān itself claims—but a human construct, originating orally at a specific time and place and undergoing textual "evolution" like all other oral texts.

There is a claim on the back cover of *EQ* which tells us that "hundreds of scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, have collaborated in the creation of this work." This is simply incorrect; there are exactly 278 contributors, no more, no less. Within this specific number, about twenty percent are Muslims, many of whom are known to subscribe to the same perspective as of the non-Muslim contributors.

The "Preface" also claims that "centuries of Muslim and non-Muslim scholarship on the Qurʾān constitutes overlapping categories which do not embody any single, monolithic approach or a unique, overriding methodology" (*EQ* 1, xi). As proof for this claim, the General Editor draws attention to "the presence of vigorous and contentious debates within Islamic scholarship" (*EQ* 1, xi). But does the existence of one basic and fundamental underlying framework for treating a text foreclose the possibility of vigorous and contentious debates? The entire corpus of Muslim scholarship on the Qurʾān is based on the premise that the Qurʾān is the Word of God sent down to the Prophet of Islam through the medium of an Angel, Jibrīl, just as He sent revelation to other Prophets before him. Furthermore, Muslims have always believed that, as a revealed text, the Qurʾān is protected from any corruption. This protection has been guaranteed by none other than the One Who Sent it down through a trustworthy Spirit (*al-Rūḥ al-Amīn*), Jibrīl; hence, for them, certain questions related to the text of the Qurʾān, so often discussed in modern academic scholarship, have never been valid questions. While it is true that generations of Muslim scholars have produced a vast body of literature on the Qurʾān, written from a variety of linguistic, legalist, literary, esoteric, and other perspectives, and that within this vast body of literature one finds fierce disagreements, critiques, and debates, yet the overriding fact is that all of this takes place within the boundary condition set by the Sender of the Qurʾān: *Verily, We have sent it down and We are its Protector*.[10] It is only those who deny its truth, the Qurʾān asserts, who allege that it can be corrupted: *Verily, those who deny the truth of this Reminder, when it has come to them [are the losers]; for, behold, it is a Mighty Book; no falsehood can enter it from front or from behind; sent down with great care by the One who is truly Wise, ever to be praised*.[11] In another, rather stern, passage, the Qurʾān forecloses the possibility of any change to its text by anyone, including the Prophet himself: *Now if he [whom We have entrusted with it] had dared to attribute something [of his own] unto Us, We would indeed have seized him by his right hand, and would indeed have cut his jugular vein, and none of you could have saved him. Verily, this [Qurʾān] is a reminder to all the God-conscious*.[12]

Obviously al-Zamakhsharī's *Tafsīr al-kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl* and Ibn Kathir's *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* are two very different kinds of exegesis, using very different methodologies and techniques, but they both arise from the same basic framework mentioned above; their dissimilarity is of a different order as compared to a work that arises from an opposing foundational perspective. Thus, as far

10. *Al-Ḥijr*: 9. All translations are mine. I have consulted a number of translations of the Qurʾān as well as different *tafāsīr* to render the meanings of the Qurʾānic *āyāt* into English.

11. *Fuṣṣilat*: 41-42.

12. *Al-Ḥāqqah*: 44-49.

as the Qurʾān is concerned, there are only two clearly delineated foundational or meta-perspectives, out of which all other perspectives can be said to have emerged: the first considers it a text whose author is none other than God Himself; the other does not hold this view.

This division is neither new nor ad hoc; it has existed ever since the first verses of the Qurʾān were revealed. The Qurʾān itself refers to these two fundamental divisions and through them classifies human beings into two categories: those who believe it to be a Divine revelation and those who do not. *And this Qurʾān is not such as could ever be invented in despite of Allah; rather, it is the confirmation of that which was [revealed] before it, an exposition of the Book— therein is no doubt—from the Sustainer of all the worlds. Or do they say he has invented it! Say: 'produce, then, a sūrah like it, and call to your assistance whomever you can other than Allah, if you are truthful*.[13]

What is meant by pluralism in the claim by the editors of *EQ* is, therefore, a pluralism that arises from *within* the same monochromatic prism, sharing the same basic premise. It is this monochromatic premise which defines the fundamental aspect of approaches to the Qurʾān by non-Muslim scholars. These approaches may be construed as having shades, even diversity, but at best, it scholarship remains uncommitted to the authorship of the Qurʾān; at worst, it attributes the text of the Qurʾān to Prophet Muḥammad and then tries to discover its "sources", whether human, psychological, mythical, or historical.

It is noteworthy that the Qurʾān has already responded to these allegations: …*And they say: 'you are an inventor [of this revelation];' rather, most of them have no knowledge. Say: 'The Holy Spirit has brought it down from thy Sustainer with truth so that it might firmly establish those who believe, and so that it may be guidance and glad tidings unto all who submit. And, indeed, full well do We know that they say, 'he is taught by a human being.' The tongue of him to whom they maliciously point is ʿajamī [non-ʿarabic] whereas this is clear Arabic*.[14]

Likewise, for those who claim that the Qurʾān is an inspired book—like the inspiration of poets—rather than revelation, the Qurʾānic response is: *By all that you see and what you do not see, behold, this [Qurʾān] is indeed the saying of a noble Messenger, and is neither the word of a poet—however little you may believe—nor the word of a soothsayer, however little you take it to heart; a revelation from the Sustainer of all the worlds*.[15]

Pluralism has become a byword—a politically correct and academically sound but much abused word—often serving to gloss the imposition of a specific worldview which has grown out of a particular history, namely, that of modern Western thought, through a series of revolts against God. These revolts have produced various theological, scientific, and political revolutions in Western thought since Renaissance. They have given rise to ideologies and philosophies which attempt to construct a Kingdom of Man on earth in which Man himself is the measure of all things.[16] This historical process has also given birth to

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13. *Yūnus*: 37-38.

14. *Al-Naḥl*: 101-103.

15. *Al-Ḥāqqah*: 38-43.

16. Man, with a capital "M", is used here as translation of *insān*, an Arabic word denoting a human being, whether male or female; this makes it possible to avoid awkward constructions, requiring gender specifications.

certain foundational institutions, the Western Academy is one such institution. Since *EQ* is an academic work, a fuller examination of the perspective from which it has emerged requires an understanding of the historical process through which the Academy has gained its current perspectives on religion in general and Islam and its Scripture in particular.

Religion and the Academy

The academic discourse on religion has been shaped by specific currents in Western thought, beginning with a phase of pseudo-Christianization of Aristotelian philosophy—mainly through the influence of Thomas Aquinas (1225-74)—,[17] and passing through the Reformation,[18] Humanism,[19] Naturalism,[20] Nationalism, the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century, Rationalism,[21] Deism,[22] Idealism,[23] Positivism,[24] Historicism,[25] Utilitarianism,[26] Marxism,[27] Scientism,[28] and many other "isms". The Academy being

17. The Italian philosopher, theologian, and Dominican friar, regarded as the greatest figure of scholasticism. He also devised the official Roman Catholic tenets as declared by Pope Leo XIII. His works include many commentaries on Aristotle as well as the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, intended as a manual for those disputing with Spanish Muslims and Jews. His principal achievement was making the work of Aristotle acceptable in Christian Western Europe; his own metaphysics, his account of the human mind, and his moral philosophy were a development of Aristotle's, and in his famous arguments for the existence of God, he was indebted to Aristotle and to certain Muslim philosophers.

18. The 16th-centuary European religious movement for the reform of the doctrines and practices of the Church of Rome, resulting in the establishment of the Reformed and Protestant Churches.

19. A belief or outlook making human beings the measure of all things, seeking solely rational ways of solving human problems, and concerned with humankind as responsible and progressive intellectual beings.

20. The belief that only natural (as opposed to supernatural or spiritual) laws and forces operate in the world. Also, the belief that moral concepts can be analyzed in terms of concepts applicable to natural phenomena.

21. The practice of treating reason as the ultimate authority in religious matters. Also, the practice of explaining supernatural or miraculous events on a rational basis. In philosophy, the doctrine that reason should be the only guiding principle in life, obviating the need for reliance on or adherence to any form of religious belief.

22. The belief in one God, who created but does not intervene in the universe; the so-called 'Natural Religion'.

23. That is, any of various systems of thought in which the object of external perception is held to consist of ideas not resulting from any unperceived material substance.

24. The philosophical system elaborated by Auguste Comte (1798-1857), recognizing only positive facts and observable phenomena and rejecting metaphysics and theism; the term here is being used to denote a humanistic system founded on this philosophy. Also, the belief that every intelligible proposition can be scientifically verified or falsified, and that philosophy can only be concerned with the analysis of the language used to express such propositions.

25. The tendency to regard historical development as the most basic aspect of human existence, and historical thinking as the most important type of thought.

an integral part of the modern Western civilization draws its legal, human, and material resources from that same civilization, and has been influenced by all these currents. Its entire apparatus of teaching, research, and knowledge production rests on the same currents of thought that have shaped modern Western civilization. This civilization has emerged out of a series of revolts against what it subsequently called its "Dark Age". While there is considerable difference of opinion among scholars working in different fields about when the Middle Ages ended and when what is now called "modern times" began, for our purpose there is a clear demarcation between the two eras: the dawn of the fourteenth century. "This date marks the beginning of a fresh decline," wrote René Guénon (1886-1951) in *The Crisis of the Modern World*,

> which has continued through various phases and with gathering impetus down to the present day. The real starting point of the modern crisis dates from that moment: it witnessed the first signs of the disruption of Christendom, with which the Western civilization of the Middle Ages was inseparably bound up: at the same time, while it marked the break up of the feudal system, so closely linked with that same Christendom, it also coincided with the origin of the formation of "nations". Modern times must therefore be regarded as going back almost two centuries farther than is usually assumed to be the case; the Renaissance and the Reformation were both primarily in the nature of results and they were only rendered possible by the preceding decadence; but far from constituting a revival, they denoted a yet more serious decline since they completed the rupture with the traditional spirit, the former in the domain of the arts and science and latter in the sphere of religion itself, and that, in spite of the fact that this is the field in which it would have seemed most difficult to conceive of the possibility of such a rupture taking place at all.[29]

The Renaissance man was, therefore, already a fallen man, the one who sought solace in the philosophical thought of the fifth century BCE—an era deemed to be the golden age of Greek thought, while in fact it was an age of decline and decadence even when compared to the Pythagorean era, not to mention the pre-Pythagorean age. "The Renaissance was really the death of many things; on the pretext of a return to Graeco-Roman civilization it merely took over the most outward part of that civilization…there

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26. The doctrine that actions are right if they are useful or for the benefit of a majority; specifically, as the term is used in Western philosophy to denote the doctrine that the greatest good for the greatest number should be the guiding principle of conduct.

27. Here referring specifically to the impact of the political and economic theories of Karl Marx (1818-83) on Western religious and philosophical thought, especially his emphatic belief in scientific laws determined by dialectical materialism.

28. Excessive belief in the power of scientific knowledge and techniques and their applicability to other fields including the study of religion, human behavior, social sciences.

29. René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Marco Pallis and Richard Nicholson (London: Luzac & Co., 1942), 9; hereinafter *Crisis*; original French edition, *La crise du monde moderne* (Paris: Bossard, 1927).

was a word which rose to repute at the time of the Renaissance and which summarized in advance the whole programme of modern civilization: this word is 'humanism'."[30]

In short, in the very process of its so-called Renaissance, European religious thought suffered an irreparable loss through

> reducing everything to purely human proportions, of eliminating every principle belonging to a higher order and, figuratively speaking, of turning away from heaven on the pretext of gaining possession of the earth; the Greeks, whose example men claimed they were following, had never gone so far in this direction, even at the time of their lowest intellectual decadence, and utilitarian considerations had at least never occupied first place with them as they were very soon to do with the moderns. "Humanism" was already an earliest form of what has subsequently become contemporary "laicism"; and, in attempting to reduce everything to the stature of man taken as an end in himself, modern civilization has sunk stage by stage to the level of his lowest elements and aims at little more than satisfying the needs inherent in the material side of his nature, an aim which is, in any case, quite illusory, as it continually creates more artificial wants than it can ever hope to satisfy.[31]

The rise of the "material civilization",[32] which now engulfs all realms of modern life and thought, was only possible at the expense of the destruction of the Kingdom of God, and "Humanism" provided all that was necessary for this barter. As a result, not only did profane sciences of nature emerge, but the whole understanding of the natural order was reduced to a human level. There arose new fields of scholarship with their own methodologies and approaches, all tailored to the needs of the new Kingdom of Man to which "Humanism" gave birth; the academic study of religion was one such new discipline which first made its appearance in European and British universities and then spread to North America. Christianity was the first victim of this academic adventure. It provided a vast field of unending research to academic scholars in fields as varied as historiography, textual analysis, theology, sociology of religion, religious praxis, and so on. In the process of recasting religion and what it means to humanity, the doctors of the Academy developed tools, methodologies, and conventions which they then started to apply to other religions. *The Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* is the work of scholars who study religious texts from within this well-established academic tradition.

Certain key features of this tradition were succinctly summarized by Muhammad Hasan Askari (1919-1978) in a short two-part treatise. Part two of this book contains a list of 153 specific presumptions,

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30. *Crisis*, 9-11.

31. *Crisis*, 11.

32. A term used here in the sense in which Guénon used it to mean "an entire mental outlook…which consists in more or less consciously giving preponderance to things belonging to the material order and to preoccupations relating thereto, whether these preoccupations still retain a certain speculative appearance or whether they remain purely practical ones; and it cannot be seriously denied that this is, in fact, the mental attitude of the great majority of our contemporaries" (see *Crisis*, 80 and *passim*).

claims, and approaches to Islam which Askari called aberrations (*gumrāhī*).[33] He pointed out that in previous eras aberrations were limited in number and in their geographical spread, but that this is no longer the case. Furthermore, certain foundational religious terms have changed meaning in Western thought so many times during the last three centuries that their use poses basic difficulties in understanding primary concepts; every few years, they are given a new meaning with the result that there is no fixed meaning attached to these terms anymore. "Religion" and "*fiṭrah*" are two prime examples of this kind of distortion. They have been used to mean so many different things that they have become meaningless.[34]

The major aberrations included in Askari's list are summarized below; evidence of most of these traits can be found in the articles of *EQ,* as will become more apparent as we examine some typical articles in the next section.

According to Askari, Orientalists and their intellectual heirs, the academic scholars

> lack the understanding that the religion (*dīn*) has three distinct elements: beliefs (*ʿaqā'id*); acts of worship (*ʿibādāt*); and ethics (*akhlāq*), in this order of importance, or takes one or two of these and leaves the other;
>
> they do not consider beliefs (*ʿaqā'id*) to be an integral part of religion; or consider beliefs something that changes from time to time (evolutionary perspective); or as means of emotional satisfaction;
>
> they consider *ʿibādāt* (specific acts of worship) mere rituals which can be accepted, rejected, or modified by human beings;
>
> they consider religion a social institution and a means for the organization of society and take religion as a means for improving material life;
>
> they limit religion to ethics or think of religion as an ethical system; they assume that the purpose of religion is character-building—and equate character with those traits that are deemed socially useful;
>
> they think that religion is a product of the human mind and take it as an evolutionary process; they even consider God or the concept of God to undergo evolution;
>
> they consider false beliefs (*bāṭil*) at par with true beliefs (*al-ḥaqq*) under the pretext of tolerance and liberal thinking; they apply relativism to religious principles and insist that all ideas are only relatively true, not absolutely;
>
> they deny the existence of the Intellect (*ʿaql*) or equate it with Reason; they deny the existence of knowledge (*ʿilm*) beyond that which can be gathered by Reason, and negate the existence of means of knowledge that are higher than Reason and thereby limit knowledge to the knowledge of the material world; they reject or rationalize beliefs which are beyond Reason; they even attempt to find rational

33. Muhammad Hasan Askari, *Jadīdiat yā maghrabī gumrāhīyon kī tārīkh kā khākah* (*Modernism or An Outline of the History of Western Aberration*) (Lahore: ʿIffat Hasan, 1979); hereafter *Jadīdiat*. This work heavily relies on Guenon's *Crisis* and other writings.

34. *Jadīdiat*, 16-18.

> bases for religious commands (*aḥkām*); they deny miracles or interpret them on rational basis;
>
> they deny the authenticity of the oral tradition and demand textual evidence for all things;
>
> they do not accept any authority, even the authority of a Prophet; they insist that their own opinion as valid as the *ḥukm* found in the Book of Allah or in the saying of the Prophet;
>
> their entire framework of study is built upon Positivism, Pragmatism, and Utilitarianism; they make material progress the measure of all things.[35]

The Qurʾān and the Academy

The Encylopaedia of the Qurʾān carries the stamp of the Academy; its editors and contributors are trained in the Academy; most of its articles build upon the previous academic scholarship on the Qurʾān. This academic pedigree can be traced back to the work of the nineteenth Orientalists and, through them, to the five centuries of discourse on the Qurʾān by Christian polemists-cum-philologists who appeared on the Western academic scene in the fourteenth century, when the Church Council of Vienna, held in 1312, announced the establishment of chairs in Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac at Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon, and Salamanca.[36] It is the vast store of Orientalism from which most of the articles of *EQ* draw their material, although "[t]oday an Orientalist is less likely to call himself an Orientalist than he was almost any time up to World War II," Edward Said noted in 1978.[37]

The academic discourse on the Qurʾān may have re-cloaked itself in new garb in order to distinguish itself from Orientalism proper, but it is unreasonable to assume that any scholarly tradition can dissociated itself from the core values, assumptions, and premises of its mother-tradition. Thus, while the current academic writings on Islam are no more the sole dominion of the erstwhile Orientalist, the study of Islam as a subject alongside other religions in the relatively new departments of religious studies, as well as in the older and well-established area study departments and departments of languages and literature at numerous British, European and North American universities, has umbilical links with the Orientalism of yesteryears. It is not necessary to go into the history of the stages through which polemics changed into Orientalism and Orientalism into contemporary academic writings, as these links are well established in other sources.[38]

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35. This is a composite summary of the "List of 153 Aberrations", 100-129.

36. For an excellent overview of engagement of Western Christendom with the Qurʾān, see Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960), and Thomas E. Burman, *Reading the Qurʾān in Latin Christendom, 1140-1560* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Burman appreciates the ground breaking work of Norman Daniel, but takes a somewhat different, albeit overstated position, that not all works of these centuries were polemical in nature. He fails, however, to show this on the basis of manuscripts he examines. In fact, most of the material evidence he presents in his well-researched book confirms and reinforces the general conclusions presented in Daniel's excellent work.

37. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 53.

38. See, for instance, the last chapter of Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, "The Survival of Mediaeval Concepts"; also see A. L. Tibawi, "English-Speaking Orientalists: A Critique of

A general survey of the contemporary Western academic study of the Qurʾān, of which *EQ* is the most comprehensive and distinguished product, makes it abundantly clear that it cannot rid itself of the very foundation on which it stands, because the "orientalists have, nonetheless, bequeathed to the present generation monumental works of scholarship on the Islamic religion, history, and society, without which Middle Eastern and Islamic studies today would be unthinkable."[39] "And yet despite its failures, its lamentable jargon, its scarcely concealed racism, its paper-thin intellectual apparatus, Orientalism flourishes today in the forms I have tried to describe."[40]

Furthermore, as far as the Qurʾān is concerned, there is a specific linkage between current Western academic approaches to the Qurʾān and past scholarship. This is so because non-Muslim scholars in Western academia face a unique dilemma when approaching the Qurʾān: they cannot commit themselves to any position about the Divine origin of the Qurʾān because their professional obligation is to maintain an uncommitted detachment from the object of their study. Yet, in this case, the object itself makes it impossible to maintain such neutrality, for the Qurʾān demands that one must settle the fundamental issue of its authorship before any further interaction can occur. One must either accept or reject the Qurʾānic claim to be actual Divine Revelation. A corollary of whatever choice they make is their position regarding the Prophet. Acceptance of the Qurʾān as Divine Revelation simultaneously entails the acceptance of Prophet Muḥammad as the final Messenger of Allah. If they reject the Qurʾānic claim, they simultaneously reject his prophethood and thereby find themselves in the difficult position of questioning his honesty and truthfulness—something that polemical writers have done for centuries. This dilemma has been recognized by a number of academic scholars along with the admission that no alternative solutions are available. The best option, then, for academic scholars is to explicate the message of the Qurʾān from the perspective of believers as well as non-believers—a difficult task similar to trying to wear two hats at the same time. Thus, academic scholars find themselves in an irresolvable dilemma: if they commit to a position on the Qurʾān, they sacrifice their 'impartiality'; if they do not, they cannot legitimately interact with the text they are studying. This predicament can be more fully appreciated if we keep in view the fact that most non-Muslim academic scholars rely on the work of previous scholars for constructing their own arguments and most of their references go back to the Orientalists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who, in turn, constructed their work on the polemics of the Middle Ages. This lineage, inherent in the very structure of academic scholarship, not only includes centuries of accumulated and often detailed scrutiny of source material, valuable manuscripts, and keen insights, but also brings to bear the framework, premises, and biases of previous generations. In the case of the Qurʾān, this genealogy reaches back to the polemical works of medieval Jewish and Christian writers—a tradition that eventually took the form of Orientalist scholarship.

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their Approach to Islam and Arab Nationalism" in *Islamic Quarterly*, vol. viii (1964) nos. 1 and 2, 25-45, and its sequel, "A Second Critique of English-Speaking Orientalists: Their Approach to Islam and the Arabs" in *Islamic Quarterly* vol. xxiii (1979) nos. 1, 3-54, where Tibawi has demonstrated how medieval European polemics have resurfaced in the works of contemporary academic scholars such as W. Montgomery Watt, Kenneth Cragg, Bernard Lewis, John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone, and Michael Cook.

39. Richard C. Martin (ed.), *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1985 and 2001), 13.

40. *Orientalism*, 321.

Some Characteristic Features of *EQ*

Every entry in *EQ* follows a set pattern: it begins with a definition of the word, term, or concept, counts the number of times the word or term is used in the Qurʾān, and establishes its root. This style gives a certain degree of consistency to the entire work. This initial uniformity is, however, soon lost as individual scholars develop their themes on different patterns. Most attempt to find antecedents of the Qurʾānic idea, term, or concept about which they are writing in Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, or Manichean sources. This is followed by charting an evolutionary path, which supposedly reflects the "evolution" of idea or concept during the twenty-three years of Prophetic life, often making use of the demarcation represented by Makkan and Madinan periods. An overwhelming majority of articles in *EQ* then proceed to include selected interpretive data from Muslim and non-Muslim sources, often minimizing the importance of well-established Muslim understandings by giving more importance to peripheral or Orientalist' writings. Thus a Shaked or a Sundermann (*EQ* III, 144a) stands as tall as an al-Ṭabarī, and a Gibb is given the chance to say the final word: "Gibb is certain that the doctrine of the last judgment in the Qurʾān was derived from Christian sources, especially from the writings of the Syriac Christian Fathers and monks" (*EQ* III, 144a).

Yet another wide-spread feature of *EQ* is doubt. One has to really search for entries which do not have a liberal sprinkling of words like "perhaps", "may be", "is doubtful", "uncertain", "this poses difficulties", and "there is confusion in Islamic sources". This is a general characteristic of Orientalism, but it really stands out in *EQ* because this work is about a Book *in which there is no doubt*, a revelation that instills certainty in the hearts of those who seek guidance; *EQ* seeks to erode certainty. That it is filled with a scholarship that is based on sheer disbelief is obvious; that it is a poor specimen of even that tradition of doubt becomes clear when one examines individual entries in detail. A typical example is "Last Judgment".

The Last Judgment

Starting with a definition, "God's final assessment of humanity", Isaac Hasson, the author of this entry, tells us that this is one of the most important themes of the Qurʾān and it appears in many forms, especially in the first Makkan suwar (*EQ* III, 136a). He then explains:

> Belief in the last judgment, with the concomitant belief in paradise for those who performed good deeds and in hell for those who did not believe in God and did evil, became one of 'the pillars of faith' (*arkān al-īmān*, cf. Q. 4:136), as these were called by later Muslim sources. Many sūras indicate that those who trust in God and in the day of resurrection are considered to be believers (Q. 2:62, 126, 177; 3:114; 4:162; 5:69; 9:18),[41] and those who refute these tenets are unbelievers, or those who have gone 'astray', and Muslims must fight them. The ḥadīth literature adds material to emphasize the importance, in Islam, of belief in the resurrection" (*EQ* III, 136a).

This description is followed by a typical Orientalist twist to the topic:

41. Note that despite the initial claim of the author, "especially in intial Meccan sūras", all these references are to *suwar* revealed in Madinah!

> Certain Western researchers suppose (Seale, Arab's concern, 90-1) that Muḥammad tried, at the beginning of his prophecy, to convince his audience that there was going to be a day of resurrection. Considering their reaction (Q 75:3-4; 79:10-1) to this concept, Muḥammad *then* warned them that there was going to be a day of judgment (Q 44:40). This line of thinking also maintains that the Meccans' refutation of *Muḥammad's doctrine* of resurrection and a day of reckoning—and their tendency to ridicule these issues—may explain the abundance of references to these themes in the Qurʾān, as well as to *conflation of Yawm al-qiyāma* and *yawm al-dīn*. There is reason to believe that such qurʾānic (*sic*) abundance, supported by a flux of interpretations and ḥadīths (*sic*) elaborating the details of the last judgment, may have led P. Casanova to the following explanation for *Muḥammad's failure to designate a successor*: namely, Muḥammad was convinced that the end of the world was so close at hand that he himself would witness it, and, consequently, there was no need for him to name a successor (Casanova, *Mohammed*, 12; for a critical view, see Watt-Bell, *Introduction*, 53-4; see Caliph). (III, 136b, emphases added.)

Note the embedded Orientalist views in the italicized text; note also the evolutionary perspective of the author to which attention was drawn by Askari; note also the Orientalists' claims that there are contradictions in the Qurʾān. It is obvious that anyone deriving such conclusions from certain verses of the Qurʾān or the text of certain *aḥādīth* does not understand the difference in time scales used by the Qurʾān for cosmic events and his or her understanding of what constitutes "nearness to the end of time."[42] But more than this obvious problem, what we have in this short quotation is the entire subtext of Orientalist scholarship on the Qurʾān in miniature form, displaying, in bold strokes, its total failure to understand or even portray the Qurʾānic view of Prophecy (*nubuwwah*, *risālah*), the historic function of the men chosen by Allah to act as His Messengers, and the role of Divine guidance during the entire Prophetic life of the men so chosen for Prophethood. Even though one does not expect academicians to write from the perspective of a believer, academic fairness and scholarly norms demand a minimum level of courtesy toward the beliefs of one fourth of humanity; if nothing else, they can at least acknowledge what the Qurʾān actually says on the topic before plying their trade of pejorative comments. To totally ignore the Qurʾānic view, to leave it out, or misquote and misconstrue Islamic views does not produce vigorous academic scholarship and is indicative of either lack of competence, outright academic dishonesty, or both.

According to the Qurʾānic view, Allah chooses as His Messengers whomsoever He wishes from among human beings. By this selection, they are elevated in their status. While remaining human (*bashar*) in their constitution, they perform the function of a Prophet through a very special and unique relationship with the Creator. Their submission to the Creator, their sublime character, and their exemplary uprightness makes them models for humanity. They convey the Divine message as they receive it while their own sayings and deeds create the path which becomes the Sunnah followed by those who wish to achieve the everlasting success to which Divine Message calls all humanity. The time in history during which one of Allah's Messengers was a resident of this Earth, was unique. Though this time was part of human history in general, it was not like the time when a Prophet was not living among humanity. Allah

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42. For a brief but insightful overview of the Qurʾānic descriptions of the "rushing approach of the Hour of Doom," see Rodney Blackhirst, "Numbers and Letters: Modern and Traditional Perspectives on some Mysteries of the Qur'an," *Sacred Web* 16, 167-174.

directs and guides His Prophets in all aspects of their lives. Prophets come to warn and give glad tidings; they bring news from the One from Whose inexhaustible knowledge nothing is hidden. They live in total submission to His commands; they can neither add to nor subtract from the revelation (*waḥy*) they receive; their role is to convey it. In other words, in matters of religion, Allah's Prophets say nothing from their own, they merely convey the Message.[43] Likewise, in their personal lives, they are under the direct command of Allah: they live where He wants them to live, they marry whom He wants them to marry; they migrate from their places of birth when He tells them to; their *hijrah* is often linked to their overall Prophetic mission. Although they are the chosen Messengers, it is not in their power to guide anyone, for only Allah guides whomsoever He wishes,[44] and when they depart from this world, they do not leave behind a successor; prophecy is not hereditary. All of this is absent from the purview of the writer of the entry on "Last Judgment".

Hasson further states that "there is reason to believe that such qurʾānic (*sic*) abundance, supported by a flux of interpretations and ḥadīths (*sic*) elaborating the details of the last judgment, may have led P. Casanova to the following explanation for Muḥammad's failure to designate a successor: namely, Muḥammad was convinced that the end of the world was so close at hand that he himself would witness it, and, consequently, there was no need for him to name a successor" (*EQ* III, 136), but he fails to tell his readers that Casanova invented this explanation without any knowledge of such matters; the least he could have done was to inform his readers what Islamic tradition says in this regard, namely, the Prophet was acting under Divine command. Had the author of this entry given weight to the abundance of *aḥadīth* containing prophecies about the end of the world preceded by clear signs of the "Hour", it would have become clear to him that the Prophet did not think the "Hour" was so imminent. But the author of this *EQ* entry gives such a prominent position to the opinion of the French Orientalist Paul Casanova (1861-1926), that he does not seem to look in any other direction. Furthermore, he does not tell his readers that Casanova's distorted views about the Qurʾān and the Prophet were not considered worthy of attention even by his own peers. When he published his *Mohamed et la fin du*,[45] it was rejected as a flawed work:

> His thesis is a development of the view that Muhammad was moved to undertake his mission by the impression made on him by the idea of the approaching Judgment. Casanova thinks that he must have come under the influence of some Christian sect which laid great stress on the near approach of the end of the world. That formed the main theme of his early deliverances and was an essential part of his message from beginning to end of his prophetic activity. As the event, however, did not substantiate his prophecy, the leaders of the early Islam so manipulated the Qurʾān as to remove that doctrine from it, or least conceal its prominence. This thesis has not found much acceptance, and it is unnecessary to refute it in detail. The main objection to it is that it is founded less upon study of the Qurʾān than upon investigation of some of the byways of early Islam. From this point of view, the book still has value. When Casanova deals with the Qurʾān

43. *He does not speak from [his own] inclination; it is but a Revelation revealed* (*al-Najm*: 3-4).

44. *Al-Baqarah*: 26, 213, 272; *al-Anʿām*: 88.

45. Paul Casanova, *Mohamed et la fin du monde* (Paris : P. Geuthner, 1911-24).

> itself, his statements often display incorrect exegesis and a total lack of appreciation for the historical development of Muhammad's teaching.[46]

Having passed his judgment on what might have led Casanova to his conclusion about why the Prophet did not nominate a successor, the author of the "Last Judgment" goes on to state: "the qurʾānic (*sic*) material on the last judgment is very rich and colorful but the allusions in the holy book do not provide a comprehensive picture of all of its details" (III, 137b). Moreover, we are told: "since the ordering of events at this stage of the judgment day is not consistent and is sometimes even contradictory, many authors tried to arrange them (III, 139b)." It may be argued that what appears to Hasson as contradictory may not be entirely due to his own failure to understand the Qurʾānic descriptions, but when he tells us that "in Arabic, the root *d-y-n* (*dīn*) poses some difficulties since it has three different etymologies and, in consequence, different connotations" (*EQ* III, 141b), one begins to understand where the problem lies, for even an elementary student of Arabic language knows that Arabic roots almost always carry multiple meanings and it is their usage that determines which meaning or shade of meaning is expressed in a given text. One expects "rigorous academic scholarship" to meet at least the basic criteria of linguistic expertise, but such is not the case.

Under the subheading "The Place of the Last Judgment", we read: "The Umayyad regime openly encouraged this view [of ascribing the place of the Last Judgment to al-Quds] because it gave them legitimization to move the Muslim center of worship from Medina, the city of the Prophet, to Syria, which includes Jerusalem" (*EQ* III, 142b). What does "Muslim center of worship" mean here? The Prophet had supplicated to Allah to make the radiant Madinah (*al-Madinah al-Munawarrah*) his *ḥaram*,[47] but it cannot

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46. Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qurʾān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1953), 46-7. It is needless to say that Bell's own views on the Qurʾān are steeped in the same dye from which Casanova derived his coloring. In the same paragraph, Bell goes on to state: "It is true that Muhammad proclaimed the coming Judgment and the end of the world. It is true that sometimes it hinted that it might be near; see, for example, XXI, 1, XXVII, 73 f. In other passages he disclaims knowledge of times, and there are great differences in the urgency with which he proclaims the doctrine in different parts of the Qurʾān. But all this is perfectly natural if we regard Muhammad as a living man, faced by both personal problems and outward difficulties in carrying out a task to which he had set his hand. Casanova's thesis makes little allowance for the changes that must have occurred in Muhammad's position through twenty years of ever-changing circumstances. Our acceptance of the Qurʾān as authentic is based, not on any assumption that it is consistent in all its parts—it is not—but on the fact that, however difficult it may be to understand in detail, it does, on the whole, fit into a real historical experience, and bears the stamp of an elusive, but in outstanding characteristics, quite intelligible personality" (47). Bell's work is based on the Orientalists' claim that the Qurʾān is a forged document, the work of a man who was helped by certain Christians and who was influenced by the theological currents of his times. In 1970, it was given a new lease of life by his student, Montgomery Watt, who "revised" the text, taking out the most obvious malevolent statement and some of the offending statements, but leaving the basic structure intact. Watt undertook this project to "maintain the influence of a great scholar, and was emboldened by the success of Theodor Nöldek's pupil's in revising and continuing his work." W. M. Watt and R. Bell, *Introduction to the Qurʾan* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), v.

47. "Ibrāhīm had made Makkah inviolable and had supplicated for its residents; indeed, I make Madinah inviolable just as Ibrāhīm had made Makkah inviolable and I supplicate for [blessings in its two weights of measure] *ṣāʿ* and *mudd* twice as much as Ibrāhīm had supplicated for the Makkans." *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, K. al-Ḥajj, Bāb Faḍl al-Madīnah.

be said to be "Muslim center of worship". In fact, the very concept of a specific city being the "Muslim center of worship" is utterly foreign to Islam. As far as place of worship is concerned, the entire earth is a place of worship, and although both Madinah and the inviolable city of Makkah, wherein is the House of Allah (*bayt Allāh*), both have a very special status, neither can be said to be the "center of worship", for the center of worship in Islam is Allah, to Whom *everything in the heavens and earth submits, willingly or under compulsion*.[48]

Hasson concludes his article by doing what most Orientalists do: he tries to find "sources" in previous religions for what the Qurʾān has to say on the topic of his essay and gives the final word to Gibb: Gibb (*Mohammedanism*, 26-7) is certain that the doctrine of the last judgment in the Qurʾān was derived from Christian sources, especially from the writings of the Syriac Christian Fathers and monks" (*EQ* III, 144a).

Let us finally note that "Last Judgment" as a term is in itself of Christian origin and has been imposed on the Qurʾānic theme of accountability (*ḥisāb*). This imposition is, however, not as blatant as the patently Christian ritual of Baptism which has been given the space of a full entry in *EQ*. While only the editors can tell why this concept, utterly foreign to the Qurʾān, is present in *EQ*, its author acknowledges that it is closely identified with Christianity, but resorts to illogical reasons for its justification: "There is one possible reference in the Qurʾān to baptism, Q. 2:138: "The baptism (*ṣibgha*) of God and who is better than God in terms of baptizing (*ṣibghatan*)?" To translate *ṣibgha* as "baptism" is obviously incorrect, but the author of that entry attempts to justify it on the basis of certain corrupt English translations (1, 200a)!

EQ on the Qurʾān

One of the most telling features indicative of *EQ*'s direct descent from Orientalism is to be found in articles which directly deal with the Prophet, revelation, and the Qurʾān itself.[49] Almost all of these were assigned to non-Muslims and almost all of them contain the imprint of the polemical and Oriental works. In "Ḥadīth and the Qurʾān", an article divided into eleven sections, G. H. A. Juynboll outlines the structure of his article in a scientific manner, but as soon as he begins to comment, the entire list of Askari's Western aberrations begins to make its presence felt. In the very first comment, he dismisses al-Suyūṭī's *Itqān* because he quotes "surveys on a variety of qurʾānic (*sic*) subjects with the name of only one ancient authority (often Companion like Ibn ʿAbbās or Ubayy b. Kaʿb) prefixed as the transmitting authority" (*EQ* II, 378a), and then goes to pass a rather typical verdict: "The significance of such *isnād* is slight on the whole, and mentioning them at all seems more a matter of habit than a purposeful attempt to substantiate historically the transmission paths of such studies" (*EQ* II, 378a). This dismissive attitude, expressed in such authoritative language, reflects a total ignorance of the norms of Islamic scholarship, the nature and purpose of texts such as al-Suyūṭī's monumental work on the Qurʾān, and the familiar Orientalist view of *ḥadīth* literature not being reliable. As already mentioned, Muslim scholars of the pre-modern era were writing within a larger context and intellectual milieu and often for a readership well-versed in the discipline; their work was neither for the layman, nor for the would-be Orientalists of the later centuries

48. *Āl-ʿImrān*: 83.

49. These include "Ḥadīth and the Qurʾān," "Heavenly Book," "History of the Qurʾān," "Holy Spirit," "Inimitability," "Manuscripts of the Qurʾān," "Miracles," "Oaths," "Opposition to Muḥammad," and "Oft-Repeated".

who would need footnotes, references, and sources to give credence to a text. When Ibn Kathīr or al-Suyūṭī quoted the final link in a chain of narrators, they were confident of the easy availability of scholars and texts who knew the entire chain, and who could often quote it from memory. Thus they did not need to encumber their works with footnotes and references. It is the peculiar mental makeup of the Orientalists that demands such detailed references and remains unsatisfied when they are provided in source material.

Juynboll's treatment of the traditions regarding the beginning of *waḥy* (section 2) is no better than the one found in the first section. The whole thrust of his narration is to show, in insidious ways, that the traditions were invented to prove a fabricated story about the revelation. In other words, the Muslim view of the beginning of revelation did not come into existence on the basis of solid, believable, and original accounts of what actually happened; rather, Muslims fabricated a story about how the revelation began, and then invented *isnād* for the fabricated *aḥādīth* to prove the story. In this case, he states:

> The best-known tradition about the beginning of the revelation (*waḥy*) depicts how the Prophet was visited by the angel Gabriel who gave him a short text to recite, the first divine revelation of all, five verses of Q 96: "Recite in the name of your lord…" The oldest version of the story extant in the sources may tentatively be attributed to the storyteller (*qāṣṣ*) of Mecca, ʿUbayd b. ʿUmayr (d. 68/687), officially installed in that position by the second caliph, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. This version was later reworded and provided with some crucial interpolations by the Medinan/Syrian chronicler Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742). He traced the account back to the Prophet via a ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr/ʿĀʾisha *isnād*. The development of the textual accretions and embellishments of the story—including an attempt of the *mawlā* Yaḥyā b. Abī Kathīr (d. between 129/747 and 132/750) to have Q 74:1-5 accepted as the first revealed verses—as well as of its multiple *isnād* strands, has been studied and provided with diagrams of the *isnād* bundles by Juynboll (Early Islamic society, 160-71) and Schoeler (Charakter, chap. 2; cf. also Rubin, Iqraʾ). (*EQ* II, 381)

Note how he constructs his narration about the *sanad* of the *ḥadīth*: it is not ʿĀʾishah/ ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr who are the original narrators of this *ḥadīth*,[50] from whom the alleged "storyteller" received his account, but the other way around. Note the construction: "Jibrīl gave him a short text" nowhere to be found in this *ḥadīth*, which clearly states that Jibrīl said "*Iqrā*'" (recite). Also note the self-perpetuation in the references to his own work and that of two other neo-Orientalists as authorities cited to validate the assertions.

In a like manner the author discredits *aḥādīth* about merits of recitation. "The slogan-like Prophetic tradition 'Adorn the Qurʾān with your voices' is supported by a complex *isnād* bundle in which the position of the early Successor and Qurʾān expert Ṭalḥa b. Muṣarrif (d. 112/730) may be construed as that of common link. In fact, his may be considered one of the earliest datable traditions in the entire canonical ḥadīṭh corpus. In view of his purported Qurʾān expertise he might conceivably be this tradition's originator" (*EQ* II, 387a).

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50. Al-Bukhārī, *Badāʾ al-waḥy,* Bāb*: kayfa kāna badaʾ al-waḥy ila rasūl Allāh*, number 3; also Muslim, *al-Īmān, bāb badaʾ al-waḥy ila rasūl Allāh*, number 160.

This article repeats numerous polemical and Orientalists contentions in an insidious manner. Commenting on the rules concerning *tayammum*, the author states: "In all likelihood the discussion dates to the life-time of the Prophet, or in any case to the time when these verses became generally known, probably in the course of the first/seventh century. Traditions about *tayammum* were inserted in the stories featuring ʿĀʾisha which have Hishām b. ʿUrwa as common link…" What is being said in this distorted manner is that verses of *tayammum*[51] were not generally known during the life of the Prophet and that they only became generally known in the course of the first century of Islam—an assertion that defies all accounts in Islamic literature.

"History and the Qurʾān" by Franz Rosenthal is yet another example of the hybrid scholarship that thoroughly mixes Orientalist tropes with academic scholarship. The article starts in a detached manner, outlining a linguistic topography for the article, and then suddenly we read: "The question of whether the Prophet's views of the historical process underwent changes during his lifetime does not, it seems, admit of a sufficiently well-grounded answer" (*EQ* II, 429). Even though one does not expect non-Muslims to write from the premises of a believer, what is remarkable about Rosenthal's entire article is the total absence of any mention of what Islamic scholarship has to say on this subject, an authoritative style that assumes the Qurʾān to be the book composed by the Prophet as a fact and not as the author's own view, and the usual Orientalist struggle to locate the "sources" at Prophet's disposal. Where sources cannot be shown to assist in the "composition of the Qurʾān", as in the story of *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf*, the author presents this absurd theory: Muḥammad seems to have worried about the dearth and inaccuracy of the data available to him. This becomes particularly clear in the discussion of the history of the Seven Sleepers where the Prophet had to acknowledge the lack of chronological information. He worried about the uncertainty of the length of time they spent sleeping in the cave. They themselves did not know it, and the indicated precise number of 309 years is also uncertain" (*EQ* II, 433b). The author's total disregard for fourteen centuries of Islamic scholarship, his self-centeredness, and his misreading of the Qurʾān are the hallmark of this "scholarship": for instance, regarding the Qurʾānic use of "before" (*qabl-, min qablu*), he passes an authoritative judgment: "It took on a formulaic character and appears sometimes where it might as well have been left unstated, as when the jinn are stated to have been created before man" (*EQ* II, 433b).

Muslim Sources and *EQ*

EQ taps into a vast reservoir of exegetical literature as well as the *sīrah* and *ḥadīth* texts, but in most of the articles this Muslim material is poured into a pre-established mould, often with explanatory phrases like "Muslims believe," "the Muslim understanding is," "Islamic tradition says," and so on. This usage, however, does not make the perspectives used in *EQ* pluralistic, for the Muslim material is not used to construct the mould or the perspective, but instead is simply added to a pre-cast Orientalists' framework. One example will suffice: Gerhard Böwering's article "God and his (*sic*) Attributes." He first tells us that "Muḥammad proclaimed the Qurʾān 'in the name of Allāh,'" and then goes on to state that "Muslims believe the Arabic Qurʾān to be the actual word of God through which God makes himself (*sic*) known to humanity (*EQ* II, 317)." A few sentences later, however, one finds a lineage which Muslims would consider nothing but blasphemous:

51. *Al-Anʿām*: 43 and *al-Māʾidah*: 6.

> From his youth, Muḥammad was intimately familiar with this name [Allāh] for the supreme God since his father's name was ʿAbdallāh, "servant of Allāh." It seemed most natural to him, therefore, to employ the word "Allāh" for God in his qurʾānic (*sic*) proclamation, rather than to introduce a totally new name for his monotheistic concept of God. (*EQ* II, 317)

The name of the father of the Prophet comes from the Muslim sources, but this information is appropriated by underlying assumptions which transmute it: it was somehow the Prophet who chose which name to use for Allah; it is his and not God's Qurʾānic proclamation; he could have introduced a totally new name, but he did not do so for reasons of expediency. This is not an isolated or unique example of how *EQ* employs Muslim material to present "pluralistic" perspectives.

Lemmata

The editors' choice of English-language entry-words, or lemmata, has been rationalized on the basis of *EQ*'s target readership while recognizing the loss of precision due to this move (*EQ* I, x), but there is no criteria described for the selection of these entry-words. As Izutsu once noted, one cannot simply

> pick up out of the whole vocabulary of the Qur'an all important words standing for important concepts like *Allāh, Islām, nabiy* (prophet), *īmān* (belief), *kāfir* (infidel) *etc., etc.*, and examine what they mean in the Qur'anic context. The matter, however, is not in reality so simple, for these words or concepts are not simply there in the Qur'an, each standing in isolation from others, but they are closely interdependent and derive their concrete meanings precisely from the entire system of relations. In other words, they form among themselves various groups, large and small, which, again, are connected with each other in various ways, so that they constitute ultimately an organized totality, an extremely complex and complicated network of conceptual associations.[52]

We are not told why certain entry words were selected while others were not. In addition, numerous entries hardly fulfill the minimum academic standard one expects from an encyclopaedic work. For instance, anyone wishing to know the Qurʾānic view of Allāh—the personal name of God—would not even find that entry in *EQ,* even though the word "Allah" has become a much used English word. The article is to be found under "God", but even that article is not comprehensive in itself; when one looks at other articles, where associated concepts such as "polytheism," "atheism," and "idols" are found, one finds there is hardly any connection with the original discussion. The *EQ* has no article on *tawḥīd*, the doctrine that there is one and only one God, Allah. One can hardly conceive of an encylopaedia of the Qurʾān claiming to have articles "that treat important concepts" of the Qurʾān without devoting a substantial entry to this pivotal Qurʾānic concept, especially when the same work contains entries on "Aḥmadiyya," "African Literature," "Dog," and "Samson."

In addition, there are conceptual problems in the way certain technical terms have been used as entry words. These conceptual problems are neither incidental nor limited to a few entries; they are rampant and arise due to the aberrations that have crept into the modern Western understanding of religion. The editors of *EQ* have constructed their lemma out of a non-Qurʾānic schema, as if there is no internal

52. Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: Keio University, 1964), 4.

conceptual and thematic unity in the Qurʾān. Their disregard for the inherent structure of the Qurʾān has produced a host of artificial and irrelevant entries, with no Qurʾānic roots[53] or entries with Christian colorings.[54] Another consequence of this artificial schema is ad hoc decisions regarding what should be included or excluded from *EQ*: certain close Companions of the Prophet are included while others are excluded, and there is no explanation for either selection or omission. Among the animals, birds, and reptiles mentioned in the Qurʾān, one finds articles on "Dog" and "Camel", but not on "Horse" and "Wolf". The Queen of Sabā has an article, but the hoopoe carrying the letter of Prophet Sulaymān to her does not. The "Bee" and the "Ant"—both used in the Qurʾān as *sūrah* names—do not have articles devoted to them; there is merely a cursory reference to them in the entry "Animal Life". Likewise, from the fruits and herbs mentioned in the Qurʾān, one finds an article on "Date-Palm" but not on "Grapes", "Olives", or "Pomegranate".

A Note on *EQ* Sources

One of the major problems of the material presented in *EQ* pertains to sources and how they have been used. Some non-Muslim contributors seem to have little familiarity with Muslim source material and sometimes they have made very serious claims based on secondary sources. For instance, while referring to the sixth verse of *sūrah aṣ-Ṣaff* in the article "Names of the Prophet", the author mentions a variant reading by Ubayy bin Kaʿb which is substantially different from the standard text of the Qurʾān in which God has Prophet ʿĪsā say: *I announce a messenger who will come after me, whose name will be Aḥmad*. The variant reading quoted by the author of that article reads: "I announce a prophet whose community will be the final one and by whom God will put the final seal on prophets and messengers" (*EQ* III, 502a). This important textual variant is presented solely on the authority of Parte.[55] This is not an isolated instance.

Another important problem stems from an utter disregard of the hierarchy of authorities and branches of knowledge in Islam; this creates a great deal of confusion. When an al-Ṭabarī or an Ibn Kathīr gathers all available material on a given subject in his *tafsīr*, he does so within an existing intellectual milieu and scholarly framework wherein the hierarchy of authorities and relative position of various branches of knowledge is well understood. Whoever approached these encyclopaedic exegeses in their times shared this understanding with them and understood this hierarchical structure and hence used source material accordingly. Subsequent generations of Muslim scholars were trained to use this material within a system of teaching in which authority rested with the teacher and not with the book being used as a text. This system of education has now almost disappeared; it is certainly not present in the Western academy, where a person specializing in *ḥadīth* or the Qurʾān does not possess adequate training in reading source material even in his or her own field, let alone in other branches such as *fiqh* and *sīrah*. This is in stark contrast to the medieval Muslim scholars, who commanded a vast range of subjects and easily moved from one field to another. Yet, *EQ* contributors routinely gather all kinds of material for their articles—perhaps because this is what passes for scholarly writings—and, having gathered a vast array of often mutually conflicting and contradictory information on a given subject, they feel lost. They try to

53. For instance, "Bahāʿīs"; "Cups and Vessels"; "Deobandis"; "Flying"; "Furniture and Furnishings"; and "Grasses".

54. For instance, "Bread", and "Baptism".

55. R. Parte, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkkoranz* (Stuttgart 1971).

escape from this impasse by claiming that there is confusion in Muslim source material. The confusion is there, of course, but it is in their own minds. The *EQ* article "Revelation and Inspiration" is a typical example of such confusion and the lack of adequate training in reading source material.

In the course of this article, we find the author quoting material from diverse Muslim sources such as *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, and *sīrah* books, without any understanding of their relative position and authority and ends up with a cul-de-sac from where the only way out is to pass the verdict that there is confusion in sources. Here is what we read under the subheading "The experience of revelation":

> The time leading up to the initial experience of revelation for Muḥammad was, according to Muslim tradition, characterized by vivid dreams and portents (Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra*, 151; Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, i, 1143-6; id., *History*, vi, 63-7). When the revelation actually begins, *one finds a certain vagueness in the tradition* about whether the Prophet initially encounters God (as seems to be suggested by Q 53:1-18; see also Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra*, 150; trans. Ibn Isḥāq-Guillaume, 104-5; Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, i, 1147; trans. Watt/McDonald, *History*, vi, 67-8, where it is said *al-ḥaqq*, one of the names of God, came to him; see God and His Attributes), or whether his dealings with the divine are always through the medium of Gabriel. The *consensus of the tradition* has it that the first words of the Qurʾān to be revealed were the beginnings of sūra 96, when Gabriel came bringing a cloth on which was embroidered the text to be recited. Three times the messenger tells Muḥammad to recite and he answers that he is unable, until finally Gabriel teaches him what to recite, and the words remain with him (*EQ* IV, 441a, emphasis added).

First of all, one notices an indiscriminate use of source material; in the hierarchy of branches of knowledge, *Sīrah* literature is not considered a *sanad* for matters of *dīn*, and hence to base the argument about *waḥy* on an account in Ibn Isḥāq is unsound. Second, while it is true that *al-Ḥaqq* is a Divine attribute, no Muslim scholar would even think of construing an attribute of Allah in this narration to mean God Himself came to the cave. In addition, the full text of this narration, going back to ʿĀʾishah, and reported by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, has a sequence of events prior to the actual appearance of Jibrīl in the cave which makes it abundantly clear that what is meant by *al-ḥaqq* in the said account is "the Truth"; it reads:

> The first kind of revelation to which the Messenger of God was initiated was that of true dreams during sleep, and he never saw a dream but it came like the dawn of the morn. Thereafter, solitude became dear unto him, and he used to withdraw into the seclusion of the cave of Ḥirāʾ and there applied himself to ardent devotions for many nights ere he would return home and provide himself with provisions; then he would return unto Khadījah and provide himself with food for a similar [number of days] until the truth came unto him whilst he was in the cave of Ḥirāʾ and the angel came unto him and said: 'Recite'. He said: 'I am not of those who read.'…[56]

56. The *ḥadīth* continues to tell us about the three embraces by Jibrīl, the recitation of the first five verses of *sūrah al-ʿAlaq*, and the return of the Prophet to his home in a state of fear and trembling. Al-Bukhārī, *Bidāʾ al-waḥy,* Bāb*: kayfa kāna badaʾ al-waḥy ilā rasūl Allāh*, number 3; also Muslim, *al-Īmān, bāb badaʾ al-waḥy ila rasūl Allāh*, number 160.

Furthermore, *EQ* article mentions an unreferenced "consensus of the tradition" about an actual piece of embroidered cloth that Jibrīl supposedly brought to the Prophet. The cloth tradition is not consensus tradition by any means; it is a *mursal ḥadīth*, reported by Ibn Ashtah in his *al-Muṣāḥif*, on the authority of ʿUbayd bin ʿUmayr, a *tābiʿī*, and by two other *tābiʿīs*, al-Zuhrī and ʿAmr ibn Dinār, both of whom have the same source.[57] It is ironic that, while Western scholarship has historically been adamant about the written text of the Qurʾān being a post-Prophetic event, we here have a reversal, insisting on a "consensus of the tradition" about an actual piece of cloth on which the text was written right at the beginning of the revelation!

Muslims and *EQ*

EQ presents special problems for Muslims who have contributed to it as well as for those who will use it as a reference work. All Muslims believe the Qurʾān to be a revelation. This belief is one of the six *arkān* of their faith (*Īmān*).[58] It entails, among other things, the basic presupposition that whatever is contained in the Qurʾān is from Allah and that it is absolutely true. Allah, by definition, is the One Who is *al-Ḥaqq* (The Truth), the Possessor of Knowledge of the unseen and the seen (*ʿĀlim al-ghayb waʾl-shahādah*)—the One Who sent down this Book to His final Messenger and the One Who has vowed to protect it from all corruption. For Muslims, this belief is neither a systematically rationalized premise based on data gathered through the use of the faculty of reason nor a discursive truth, but a foundational *a priori* truth, an imprint upon the innate nature (*fiṭrah*) which they believe in their hearts and testify with their tongues. For them, the Qurʾān is the actual Word of God, *a Book wherein is no doubt*,[59] sent down for guiding humanity to the Straight Path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*)—a Book whose truth can, nevertheless, be affirmed through the signs present in the cosmos as well as within their own beings: *Indeed, We will show them our Signs in the utmost horizons of the cosmos and within themselves so that it becomes clear unto them that this* [*revelation*] *is indeed the truth*.[60] They also believe that the Qurʾān can truly be understood by those who believe in it. *The Qurʾān is guidance and healing for the believers; but for those who will not believe—in their ears is deafness, and they remain blind to it; they are those who will be called from a far-away place*.[61]

Furthermore, Muslims understand that commenting and writing on the Qurʾān is a serious task. They know and believe that if they mislead others due to their own lack of knowledge or wrong beliefs, they will incur the burden of those whom they have misled: *And when they are asked what it is that your Sus-*

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57. In *ḥadīth* terminology, a narration ascribed to a *tābiʿī* without a direct connection to the Prophet through a Companion, *ṣaḥābi*, is called *mursal* and its authenticity is less than that of a narration directly attributable to the Prophet from a Companion (*marfūʿ*). For references to the cloth-narration, see *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 76-77. Also see Aḥmad b. ʿAlī bin Ḥajr al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī* (Dār al-Maʿrifah, 1379 A.H.), vol. 8, 718. I am thankful to Waleed bin Bleyhesh al-Amri and Zafar Ishaq Ansari for drawing my attention to the references in *al-Itqān* and *Fatḥ al-Bārī*.

58. *Arkān* (sing. *rukn*); lit. corner; in legal religious usage such as *arkān al-dīn*, it denotes pillars of religion. The six *arkān* of *Īmān* are: belief in Allah; His angels (*malāʾikah*); His Books (*kutub*); His Messengers (*rusl*); the Last Day (*al-yawm al-ākhir*); and in Destiny (*Qadr*).

59. *Al-Baqarah*: 2.

60. *Fuṣṣilat*: 53.

61. *Fuṣṣilat*: 44.

tainer has sent down, they say: 'fables of the ancients'! Indeed, they shall carry their own full burdens on the Day of Judgment as well as part of the burden of those whom they have misled without any sure knowledge and know that it will, indeed, be a very miserable burden that they shall carry.[62] They also know on the authority of the one to whom the Qurʾān was revealed—the honest (*al-Amīn*) Messenger, upon whom be peace and blessings of Allah—that "the one who interprets the Qurʾān by his own opinion (*biʾl-raʾihī*) shall find his abode in the fire."[63] For them, the words of the Prophet are not mere conjunctures of an ordinary human being but true news (*khabar*) from the one whose knowledge comes from the Possessor of Knowledge of the manifest and the hidden. Thus, they understand that their writings on the Qurʾān are not merely an academic exercise and that their words would either guide or misguide others about matters of utmost importance.

These beliefs impose a certain degree of responsibility on the Muslim writers who publish works on the Qurʾān. Thus, the approximately fifty Muslims who have contributed articles to *EQ*, carry a responsibility for what they have written as well as where they have written. Their contributions to this project, which is marked by the aforementioned set of premises and framework, pose a problem for themselves as well as for their readers. No matter how genuine their own contributions may be, they are part of a work that is full of distortions and occasionally contains blasphemous statements about the Prophet as well as the Qurʾān. Their example is thus like that of a scientist who is assigned a small portion from a large research project which aims to build a weapon of mass destruction. This scientist produces what is required of him or her, without fully recognizing how his or her research fits into the larger project, the nature of which is only known to the managers of the project.

Likewise, *EQ* presents certain fundamental problems for its Muslim users. One cannot overemphasize the central position of the Qurʾān for Muslims, for whom it is *a Mighty Book, sent down by a truly Wise, ever to be praised [God]*.[64] Memorized by heart in childhood, the Qurʾān for Muslims is the real revealed Word of Allah, governing their everyday life, a lexicon operative in all spheres of their existence, from birth to death. Thus confronted with a scholarship that attempts to analytically dissect this revealed Book, often on the basis of premises utterly foreign to their own beliefs, Muslims cannot but consider such scholarship as inherently flawed and distorted. This distortion has various degrees—from willful, ideologically-construed manifestations to naïve, unconscious embedded forms—and over the course of the last three centuries this tradition of distortion has undergone through a process of rarefaction that has further veiled it. This process of successive veiling of what used to be easily discernible in the polemical works of the pre-modern era has meshed and blended falsehood with truth to such an extent that it has become difficult to recognize these distortions. Hence, the use of *EQ* by Muslims requires a certain degree of discernment. Those who have doubts about the dangers inherent in this work, may wish to investigate what the editors and most of the contributors of this work have written elsewhere; here is a specimen from Andrew Rippin, one of the four associate editors of *EQ*:

> The Qurʾān — a word taken to mean 'recitation' — is the collection of the religious utterances of Muhammad, son of ʿAbd Allah, who was born around the year 570. Muhammad, a native of the Arabian cultic center of Mecca, portrayed

62. *Al-Naḥl*: 25.

63. *Jāmiʿ Tirmidhī*, Abwāb tafsīr al-Qurʾān, 1. Narrated by Ibn ʿAbbās; Tirmidhī judged it to be *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ*.

64. *Fuṣṣilat*: 42.

> himself as a prophet in the line of Israelite prophets, understood to start with Adam and trace a line up through Moses, Abraham, and Jesus up to Muhammad as the final prophet. Muhammad's utterances take on the characteristics of much of the Biblical material, but, at times, appear to show influences of the Arabian context as well, especially in their rhythmic emphases.[65]

EQ has been published by Brill Academic Publishers, a publishing company known for its patronage of a specific kind of Orientalism. *EQ*'s academic lineage clearly includes Brill's famous *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (*EI*), first published in 1907 with a revised second edition completed in 2002 with the publication of volume XI. *EQ* was financially supported, in part, by grants from such well-known supporters of Orientalism as the Research Tools Program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, a Federal Agency of the United States Government, the British Academy, and the Oriental Institute, Leiden.[66] Both *EI* and *EQ* emerge from a particular tradition of Western scholarship on Islam, both employ similar research methodologies, both operate from the same premises about Islam and its Scripture; many contributors to *EI* have also contributed to *EQ*. Several years ago, when "C. E. Bosworth, one of the editors of Brill's *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, was asked why Muslim scholars, even those trained in Western institutions, were not invited to contribute to the Encyclopedia's essential articles (such as the *Qurʾān*, *ḥadīth*, *jihād*, etc.), he responded that this work was by the Western pen for Western people."[67] This may explain the nature of the "pluralism" claimed by the General Editor of *EQ* as well as the very raison d'être of the work.

The Qurʾān, the Academy, and the Contemporary World

After almost a century of focused attention to *Ḥadīth*, Orientalism in its reincarnation as academic scholarship now seems to have turned its attention toward the Qurʾān. Today the Academy sees Qurʾānic studies as the cutting-edge field of its research on Islam. This change in focus is not without affinities to certain recent global events which have strained the relationships between Muslims and the West in general. Like the Crusades and the Turkish Wars of the previous centuries, which produced an enormous interest in the Qurʾān in Western Christendom, current tensions have produced a new round of scrutiny of the Qurʾān by Western thinkers, clergy, and academia. There is, once more, a great deal of interest in the Qurʾān in the Western world both, at the level of general readership and in the Academy.[68] These new tensions have created a certain degree of urgency (and funding) to study the Qurʾān, which is now being seen as the very root of the "Muslim problem," not only by certain politicians but also by some scholars

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65. Andrew Rippin and Jan Knappert (eds.), *Textual Sources for the Study of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 1.

66. On June 12, 2007, Brill launched the third edition of its *Encyclopaedia Of Islam*, *Unity in Diversity: the (re)formulation of Islam by Islamic scholars through the ages*, exactly 100 years after the first publication of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*. The editorial board of *EI3* consists of four well-known Orientalists: Marc Gaborieau; Gudrun Krämer; John Nawas; and Everett Rowson.

67. This interesting remark is mentioned by M. M. Al-Azami in his *The History of the Qurʾānic Text: From Revelation to Compilation* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), xix.

68. This new-found interest in the Qurʾān exists at several levels of discourse. It is obvious in sensational and provocative journalistic writings which regurgitate old polemical literature (for example, Toby Lester's highly popular and sensational article, "What is the Koran?" *The Atlantic Monthly* 283, I (January 1999), 43-56, as well as in the steady stream of academic works on the Qurʾān.

and religious leaders. This perceived problem comes, more specifically, from the Qurʾānic verses on *Jihād*, which have attracted the attention of many influential politicians and various think-tanks. As a result of fear, misunderstanding, and sheer ignorance, terrorism is now being linked to the Qurʾān. Certain Muslim countries have been forced to "expunge" many verses dealing with *Jihād* from their educational curricula. The vigorous military, political, economic, and cultural campaign now underway has, however, not remained in the domain of politics; it has its academic counterpart, just as the Orientalism of yesteryears was not merely an academic exercise.[69] *The Qur'an and the West*, one of the first books on the Qurʾān published in the West after the events of September 11, 2001, is a case in point. The author, Kenneth Cragg, who "for six decades has been recognized and praised as one of the West's most gifted interpreters of Islam," is pre-occupied with the relevance of the Qurʾān to the events of that day, which he takes for granted as being the work of Muslims who were inspired by the Qurʾān. While both these premises are open to doubt, what is relevant here is the sheer force of these events, leading Western scholars and religious leaders like Cragg to look into the Qurʾān to discover the root of the "inner crisis in the liability of Islam".[70] Cragg oscillates between condemning the "harsh belligerence in the Qurʾān, a strong pugnacity on behalf of faith" and what he calls its "gentler side". Despite his counsel to Westerners to respect the Qurʾān and Muslims, Cragg's own highly charged book is filled with overt and covert insults and disparaging remarks. His book is primarily an attempt to sift and separate apart from the Book of Allah portions that can be called the "acceptable Qurʾān"—the one that has no political content, no theme under the title of *Jihād* save the *jihād biʾl-nafs*, a Qurʾān with no role in the shaping of society, for "the political power-exercise only came at all for the briefer Medinan period and had been firmly excluded throughout the defining Meccan years when only the ever prior preaching task was given [to the Prophet]".[71] He does this by making a sharp distinction between the Makkan and Medinan period of the Prophet's life as well Makkan and Medinan *suwar*—this time in a much harsher manner than he had done in his 1971 work, *The Event of the Qurʾān: Islam and Its Scripture*.[72] By so bifurcating the Qurʾān and *Sīrah*, Cragg's purpose is to

> care about an aberrant Islam, from which the menace comes, by caring with the Islam that can and must disown the other. That there is high tension between them with the Qur'an as party to it, cannot be in doubt. There is a dimension of harsh belligerence in the Qur'an, a strong pugnacity on behalf of faith. Its being there can perhaps be explained by the situation in which Muhammad's mission was embroiled by the obduracy of his local audience. The legacy of that militancy abides but can well be offset or abandoned by considerations no less explicit in the same Qur'an. These we are set to examine, in company with contemporary

69. In this context, it is important to note that most of the academic criticism of Edward Said's work has been directed against his brilliant exposé of the links between Orientalism and political ambitions of certain Western governments, even when this "academic imperialism"—to use Richard Martin's term—is recognized by some as a legitimate aspect of his work. For Said's response to this criticism, see his 1994 "Afterword" in *Orientalism*, 329-352.

70. Kenneth Cragg, *The Qurʾan and the West* (Washington DC: George Town University Press, 2005), 202.

71. Ibid., 24.

72. Kenneth Cragg, *The Event of the Qurʾān: Islam and Its Scripture* (Oxford: Oneworld, reprinted 1994).

> Muslims who know their crisis—the crisis between the two 'minds'—for what it is.[73]

While concluding her preface, the General Editor of *EQ* has pointed out that *EQ* is "an inaugural effort…a first attempt to create a substantial work of reference in a field that has relatively few such resources" (*EQ* 1, xii). Future editions are supposed to include additional subjects and themes suggested by readers and reviewers. Given the history of Brill Publishers, it is not unlikely that *EQ* will be reissued in a substantially expanded version in the not too distant a future just like its other publication, the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, which has now moved to a third version. The most important question in this regard is: can Western academia develop an altogether new framework for studying Islam and its Scripture that is not tainted by Orientalism? All indicators point to a negative answer, as no structure can stand without a foundation and the foundation upon which the Western academic discourse on Islam stands is utterly flawed.

Built on the characteristic biases, claims, and false premises of the Orientalists, *EQ* is a non-representative, discourteous, scandalous, and blasphemous hodgepodge of disparate material. It draws its material content from diverse Muslim and non-Muslim sources, but pours all of this material into a mould cast by the founding fathers of Orientalism—men whose understanding of religion in general and Islam in particular continues to dominate the field. They no longer openly call the most Noble Messenger of Allah an imposter and the Qurʾān a forgery, as they used to two hundred years ago, but they are saying the same thing in a slightly refined language. *They desire to extinguish the Light of Allah with their mouths; but Allah has willed to spread His Light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to the disbelievers*.[74]

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73. Ibid., 9-10.

74. *Al-Ṣaff*: 7.