

The Relationship between the Qur'an and the Sunnah

From 25 July to 6 August 2010, a select group of scholars invited by the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) analyzed “The Relationship between the Qur'an and the Sunnah.” Chaired by Mahmoud Ayoub (Hartford Seminary), this twenty-session event focused on how Muslims are dealing with Islam's two core sources in the twenty-first century.

Sherman Jackson (University of Michigan), in his “Beyond the *Fiqh*-Reform Paradigm,” analyzed how *fiqh* and *taqlid* have entrapped and crippled the Muslim world's imagination. *Taqlid* needs to give way to *ijtihad*, for current problems can be solved only if social realities are accepted. He urged participants to either reconcile with American society or engage in appropriation, both of which the Prophet did; that “overemphasis on *fiqh* constitutes a mistake and leads us down the wrong path”; and that it is “not the business of *fiqh* to generate cultural and intellectual phenomenon.” In addition, Muslims must realize what is being borrowed and why it is being borrowed.

Muqtadar Khan's (University of Delaware) paper, “Revisiting the Status of the Other in the Qur'an,” opined that there must be moral equality for all, regardless of religion. In Muslim-majority countries, non-Muslims' religious freedom is undermined by making them second-class citizens. This will end only when equality is practiced both in public and in private. He then dealt with Qur'an 2:62, 5:69, 5:48 and similar verses, asking whether they have been distorted, abrogated, or rendered invalid after the Prophet's birth. According to him, abrogation adds to or amends/clarifies a particular issue, as opposed to abrogating tolerance or any other principle. What is needed is a “secular” commentary, one that can solve the Muslims' real problems.

Imtiyaz Yusuf's (Assumption University, Bangkok) "The Concept (*Din*) in the Qur'an as Interpreted by Isma'il al-Faruqi" dealt with this great scholar's approach to and concept of *din* as "religion." He made several points in this regard: monotheism is the core of religion, religion (not race or nationalism) is one's true identity, and Arabs view Islam is a struggle between monotheism and polytheism. After describing the various approaches to the Qur'an (e.g., ideational, axiological, and aesthetic), he said that monotheism is an Arab worldview, for all "Semitic" races originally came from the Arabs. AJISS 28:3 will present the encyclopedic range of al-Faruqi's intellectual pursuits and analyze the genesis of his ideas and critique of the West's philosophical and religious traditions as well as modernity.

Ayoub, Aisha Musa (Florida International University), Louay Safi (Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding), and Jamal Barzinji (IIIT) addressed the "Panel on IIIT's Islamic Reform Mission." Ayoub talked about how Islam does not need a European-style Reformation, for that involved a reform of theology, not of people. Muslims need to reform their attitudes toward Islam, how it is approached and embodied, and this is best done through education. Noting the lack of appreciation for Islam's depth among Muslims and non-Muslims, Musa said that Muslims need to make sources more accessible through translation, develop a clear methodology, and publish appropriate literature.

Safi mentioned that we cannot "reform" the Qur'an, but we can "reform" its interpretation (*viz.*, understanding). He stated that the "Islamization of Knowledge," IIIT's original *raison d'être*, means questioning the presuppositions (usually undeclared) of existing knowledge and seriously engaging with western sources and traditional Islamic knowledge. He also pointed out the need for intercultural dialogue with everyone, dealing with western knowledge head on, and moving beyond religion (toward humanity) and just quoting Qur'anic verses and hadiths. Barzinji remarked that Muslims are alienated from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, have a problem in dealing with their heritage, never saw the West as the most serious threat, and thought that establishing an Islamic state would solve everything. He called for a new methodology, an honest assessment of the West's achievements, and reforming the Muslim world's educational system (especially Islamic studies).

Cemil Aydin (George Mason University), Ayoub, Musa, and Khaleel Mohammad (San Diego State University) addressed the "Panel on Teaching Islam in American Universities." Aydin cited the several stages of the development of Islamic studies as an area of research: the need to understand

Muslims as they continued to come here as students, teachers, and intellectuals; the premise that “understanding others helps you understand yourself”; and the desire of mainly indigenous and immigrant Muslims to better understand Islam. As opposed to colonial-minded Europeans, Americans wanted new markets. As more Muslims came in after the Second World War, and as Israel was established and American missionary activities in the region increased, Islamic studies went through inclusion in political science and religious studies, as well as other fields, before becoming a field in its own right. Since 9/11, the field has been changing as Muslims seek mainstream acceptance and more Americans want to learn what Islam really teaches.

Musa pointed out that the “Islam vs. the West” dichotomy is inappropriate, for Islam is a world (not a “geographical”) religion and has roots in common with Judaism and Christianity. Islam is usually studied in the context of the ancient and/or modern Near/Middle East; the focus needs to include South Asian and other centers of Islamic civilization. She stated that although Islamic studies is not considered an “academic study,” it is now moving into religious studies departments. Reflecting upon the fact that the field is only twenty or thirty years old, she sees a great deal of opportunity for growth. Mohammad was more negative. He opined that Muslims “idolize” non-Muslim scholars to gain some credibility and that Muslims need to realize that agendas do exist and that certain topics are taboo.

Among the other presentations were Ayoub’s “The Relationship between the Qur’an and Sunna in Context,” Syed Nasir Zaidi’s (Al-Zahra Islamic Center, Canada) “Role of Time and Space in Understanding the Qur’an and Sunnah,” Kenneth Honerkamp’s (University of Georgia) “The Qur’anic Roots and Ethical Foundations of *Suluk* in Islamic Pedagogical Methodology and Its Relvance Today,” Jasser Auda’s (Qatar Foundation) “Aisha’s Critique of Authentic Hadith Content,” Ahmed Kazemi Mousavi’s “Taha Jabir al-Alwani on the Space-Time Factor in Understanding the Qur’an and Sunnah,” and Sami Catovic’s (Temple University), “The Common Word Initiative and Contemporary Interpretations of Verse 64 Sura 3 (Al `Imran).” All presentations were followed by lengthy and lively question-and-answer sessions.

The event concluded with a panel during which the participants, as well as Ayoub and Barzinji, made their final remarks. A graduation ceremony for IIIT’s 2010 summer students was then conducted in the library and certificates and awards of IIIT research fellowships for 2010-11 were given.

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