

Book Review

Towards Understanding the Qur'an Translation of Mawdūdī's Tafhīm al-Qur'an

*By Zafar Ishaq Ansari. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1988/1408
(Vol. 1), 1989/1409 (Vol. 2)*

Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdūdī's multi-volume *Tafhīm al-Qur'an* is a major Qur'an commentary of the twentieth century. Written over a period of about thirty years, the work runs the gamut of Qur'anic – and Islamic – thought and doctrine, and is the *magnum opus* of a writer called by Wilfred Cantwell Smith "the most systematic thinker of modern Islam." As such, *Tafhīm* is an important work. An English translation exists, but clearly there was a need for a new translation, and that is what Zafar Ishaq Ansari attempts to provide in *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, of which two volumes, covering the first six *sūrahs* of the Qur'an, have so far been published.

Ansari's translation may be called "authorized" in that it was the author's wish that Ansari render *Tafhīm* into English. The translation reads quite well. Being intimately familiar with Mawdūdī's style, and being a writer of repute in his own right, Ansari has done a good job of rendering *Tafhīm* into English. Besides possessing a high degree of readability, the work has other notable features. The translator has furnished complete documentation for the quotations in the original work, including all *ahadith*, and, while retaining and translating the highly useful subject index of the Urdu original, has added a glossary of terms, biographical notes, a bibliography, and a general index. On occasions, alternative interpretations, offered by other scholars, are noted (e.g. of the object pronoun in *ya'rifūnahu* in the Qur'an, 2:146 [*Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, 1:125], or of *alladhīna yakhāfūna* in 5:23 [ibid., 2:151, n. 45]), the reasons for the use of certain Islamic terms by Mawdūdī (e.g. "caliphate" for pre-Islamic kingships, etc. [2:153]) are given, and terms and expressions which an Urdu reader would understand because of his particular cultural background are explained for the English reader. The amount of such notes and explanations seems to increase in Volume 2.

A few problems may be noted. Here and there certain portions of the original text are not translated. From the author's Preface and Introduction especially, several paragraphs have been left out. While every attempt is made to convey the general meaning of the parts omitted, the omissions in some cases are not indicated. Unlike the Biographical Notes, the Glossary of Terms, found in each volume, is not meant to be cumulative. There are, however, some repetitions in the Glossary of Vol. 2 (e.g. *Ahl al-Dhimmah*, Din, Hadith,

Hajj, *Ihrām*, and *Jāhiliyah*), and a few entries which one would expect to find in the Glossary of Vol. 1 (e.g. *ahl al-kitāb* and *fī sabīl Allah*) are found in the Glossary of Vol. 2. Also, certain important terms (e.g. *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* [see Q. 3:7]) are missing from the Glossary.

These problems aside, *Towards Understanding the Qurān* is a noteworthy achievement. Zafar Ishaq Ansari should be complimented on making the principal work of Mawdūdī accessible to English readers. In the West, Mawdūdī as a thinker has received increasing attention in the recent past. This translation, which is likely to reach a large audience, should enable Western scholars to make a closer study of Mawdūdī's thought and ideas than has hitherto been possible. The volumes are attractively printed. One certainly hopes that Ansari will make translation of *Tafhīm* his first priority, and that a complete translation of *Tafhīm* will become available in a relatively short period of time.

Mustansir Mir

Department of Near Eastern Studies
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor