

## EPILOGUE

Anyone writing about Islam must initially decide whether or not he believes in Muḥammad as a prophet. Scholars who acknowledge him as a genuine messenger, the noblest of all prophets, enjoy an incredible library of *ḥadīths* and divine revelations from which to draw their inspiration. By necessity they will share innumerable similarities, even total agreement on fundamental issues; whatever minor variations arise due to shifting circumstances are entirely natural and human. Those refusing this viewpoint however, must by extension see Muḥammad as a fictitious figure, a deluded man possessed of some illness, or simply a liar bearing false claims of prophethood. At best an enigma, too powerful and unnerving for our political realities. Such is the inescapable stance that every non-Muslim writer must take, through which his or her efforts are filtered. If there was no veiled motive, no yearning to puncture the image of Muḥammad as a messenger, or of the Qur'ān as the Word of the Creator, or of Islam as divinely ordained, what would compel this person to sit down and write?

Orientalist research transcends mere subjectivity to manifest itself as anti-Islamic dogma. Its view is born in regal ancestry: intense rivalry of religions, centuries of crusades, the colonization of Muslim lands, and a colonial pride that blossomed into contempt for the customs, beliefs and the very history of Muslims. To this we add the more recent motives: encouraging secularism to promote global Jewish inclusion and ensure Israel's territorial integrity. And along these ancestral lines their efforts will continue, attacking the Qur'ān just as their forefathers sought other means to dominate the 'Muhammadans', as though Muslims were prostrating before a golden idol of that name.

The maxim of Ibn Sīrīn (*d.* 110 A.H.) holds greater urgency today than ever before:

This knowledge [of religion] constitutes faith, so be wary of whom you acquire your knowledge from.<sup>1</sup>

This means that on Islamic issues—whether the Qur'ān, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, history *etc.*—only the writings of a practicing Muslim are worthy of

<sup>1</sup> Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, i:14.

our attention. These may then be accepted or rejected according to their merits.<sup>2</sup> But as to individuals who clearly hail from outside the community, their motives concealed behind a slender façade of sincerity, we can only meet them with rejection. Neither can we make them *sheikhs* of Islam,<sup>3</sup> nor can we accept their claims to that title.

In news coverage of former President Clinton's impeachment trial a few years ago, I cannot once recall a film reviewer or food critic being asked for his or her *legal* opinion on this case, even though copies of the United States Constitution are available for all to read. Legal discussions were rightfully limited to lawyers and professors of constitutional law. Nor did professors of law from elsewhere participate, since this was an internal predicament for the United States. This is sadly far from how Islam is treated. Can a sports commentator, having read the Constitution on the internet and listened to lawyers during news coverage, expect his legal opinion to carry scholarly weight? No, but people from outside relevant academic circles, such as Toby Lester, voice their opinions in articles which then gain scholarly status. Does the German professor of law have the clout to appear on television and instruct the American people on how to run *their* judicial system? No, but Western scholars feel impelled to instruct Muslims as to how they must interpret their own religion.

Allāh remains supreme whether we live in the first, twenty-first or the last century, and whoever seeks to dethrone Him, however self-assuredly, burns only himself without touching a single fiber of His Glory. No one can be forced to believe in the Qur'ān's sanctity; people must settle on their own paths as they alone will bear the future consequences of their deeds. But here, in this life, no outsider addressing Muslims and passing judgment on their faith and scholarship should find his words falling on attentive

<sup>2</sup> Even non-Muslims seeking to learn about Islam should begin by reading the Muslim literature. When university students wish to study socialism for instance, they always start with the essential manifestos to comprehend the general subject before, perhaps, moving on to critiques of socialist theory. The same scheme applies to biblical studies. So for students of Islamic studies to begin and end their field of knowledge with Orientalist writings, to almost completely ignore the traditional Muslim sources and simply listen to what Western revisionism claims, is wholly absurd.

<sup>3</sup> Back in the early 1990s while teaching at Princeton University, an incident led me to rediscover the importance of Ibn Sirin's statement. The head of the Dept. of Religious Studies, Prof. L. Udovich, a Jewish scholar well-versed in Arabic and Islamic Jurisprudence (and a colleague with whom I was on good terms), told me jokingly, "I know Arabic and *fiqh* so I am a *sheikh*". This disturbed me considerably; I did not know how to get out of such a possible scenario of non-Muslims delivering *fatwās* (legal opinions) in the future. After a few days' search I stumbled upon this golden rule, and have gratefully remembered it since.

ears. If such is not the case today then Muslims must take their fair share of the blame.

We live in difficult times, and difficult times may well lie ahead; Allāh knows best. One or two decades ago the notion of Western scholars forcing Muslims to excise all Qur'anic references to Jews might have appeared far-fetched to some, but now the realities of our era blanket us with the vigor of a hailstorm. What the scholars did theoretically, their governments are now pursuing politically, and their efforts take tangible shape all around us. Western intervention in the Islamic curriculum; forced auditing and closures; directives which openly call for purging the Qur'ān of all references to *jihād* or anything critical of Christians and Jews; vague personalities with Arabic-sounding surnames (whose names I will not mention as they deserve no publicity), claiming things about Islam which no Muslim has claimed before; 'terrorism experts' who appear on international newsfeeds to pronounce their judgments on Muslim texts; secularist governments seen as the ideal worth aspiring to, while more conservative ones loom as an impending threat. On all levels, the Qur'ān is under assault as never before.

What lies ahead is a mystery kept with Allāh, but the least we must do is to understand the principles of our religion and the essentials which do not vary with time. Among these must be our reverence for the Qur'ān. Any piece of text which differs from the Muṣḥaf in our hands, regardless of what it claims to be, is not and can *never* be part of the Qur'ān. Likewise, any attempt by non-Muslims to dictate to us the precepts and legitimacy of our own religion must be dismissed outright. Whatever the political climate, Muslim views on the Holy Book must remain firm: it is the Word of Allāh, constant, immaculate, unalterable and inimitable.

عن تميم الداري، قال: سمعت رسول الله ﷺ يقول: ليلنن هذا الأمر ما بلغ الليل والنهار، ولا يترك الله بيت مدر، ولا وبر، إلا أدخله الله هذا الدين، يعزّ عزيز أو بذلّ ذليل. يعزّ الله عز وجل به الإسلام، وذلا يذلّ الله به الكفر.<sup>4</sup>

Tamīm ad-Dārī relates, "I heard the Prophet say, '[This religion] will reach the expanses of the day and night, and Allāh will not leave off any house of mud nor wool [*i.e.* in the city or countryside] till He has introduced this religion into it, either through the glory of the honorable or the ignobility of the dishonorable. Such is the honor that Allāh will bestow on Islam, and the debasement that He will cast on disbelief".

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, iv:103, *ḥadīth* no. 16998.

﴿ يُرِيدُونَ أَنْ يُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَيَأْبَى اللَّهُ إِلَّا أَنْ يُتِمَّ نُورَهُ وَلَوْ  
كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾ هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ  
لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾ ٥

“They seek to extinguish the [guiding] radiance of Allāh with their mouths, and Allāh refuses but to complete His radiance regardless of how abhorrent that is to those who disbelieve. It is He Who sent forth His messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, that He may elevate it above all false beliefs, however abhorrent that is to those who ascribe partners to Him.”

<sup>5</sup> Qur'ān 9:32-33.

## GLOSSARY TERMS

Abrogation	Replacement of an earlier legalistic verse with a chronologically successive one. The latter supplants the rulings inherent in the former and, in certain cases, removes the former's wording from the Qur'an as well.
<i>Alif</i>	The first letter of the Arabic alphabet and the first of three vowels. Although Arabic is by and large written phonetically, <i>alif</i> is an exception and the patterns for its usage are irregular at times.
Autographed copy	The first or original manuscript of a work, not that of a subsequent pupil or copyist.
Anṣār	Lit. “supporters”, the Muslims of Madinah who, pledging allegiance to the Prophet, joined the Muslim immigrants from Makkah in establishing the first Islamic state.
A.H.	Anno Hegirae (in the year of the Hijra). In reference to the Prophet's journey from Makkah to Madinah in the month of Rabī' al-Awwal, 1 A.H., which heralded the beginning of the first Muslim state and, hence, of the Muslim calendar.
Adhān	The initial call to each of the five daily prayers, proclaimed by the mu'adhhdhin.
<i>ʿAdl</i>	“Of righteous conduct.” Characterized by as-Suyūṭī as a mentally sound Muslim who has reached maturity, is free from the causes of indecency, and who observes the norms and standards of his community.
Allāh	The One God, the Everlasting. He has always been, has no progeny, and in His image nothing has been created.
Āyah	A verse of the Qur'an; can also be used more generally to mean any of Allāh's signs in the created universe.