

The Miraculous Quran (7 of 11): Various Aspects of the Quran

I noticed almost immediately that the Quranic teachings are very comprehensive, complete, balanced and practical. For the sake of brevity, I will not go into this aspect in any detail but it was something that impressed me quite a bit. The range and flexibility of the laws of the Quran are impressive. It was clear to me that this book was not revealed just for a people at a specific time but was meant for people of very different times and places.

The Quran is very comprehensive in that it touches upon and gives clear guidance concerning such diverse issues as ritual acts of worship, business transactions, marriage, divorce, the laws of warfare and so on. There is a definite balance that one feels when one reads the Quran. A human's spiritual and mundane needs are met simultaneously in the same passage. Even the most detailed passages concerning law still contain admonition, remembrance of Allah and exhortation to behave in the best manner possible.

The scope of the Quranic teachings is not just for the individual himself. It is not the case that Allah has given him some kind of spiritual guidance to, perhaps, only guide his morals and character. Instead, Allah has also revealed a law that is meant for society as a whole. Humans do not have to grope about trying to decide what is best for the community at large. It has been given by Allah to guide mankind to the best way of life.

It covers the individual's personal practice and piety as well as his relationship with his parents, spouse, children, neighbors, community and humanity as a whole. All of this with a proper balance and within the overall framework of making one's life a true and complete form of worship of God alone. There is clearly one only goal for humans—the worship of God—and all of the deeds of this worldly life fall within the scope of that goal. There is no schizophrenia in a person's life. He is not trying to please God and Caesar at the same time or even at different times. He does not even need to resort to chasing after vain desires and compromise his ethics to live a rewarding life in this world. He simply needs to live his life in this world in a wholesome manner under the shade of the comprehensive guidance of the Quran.

One Particular Aspect of Islamic Law: Its Practicality

The practicality of Islamic Law is one particular aspect that truly impressed me at that time, coming, again, from my Christian background. It is a great blessing that in Islam one finds detailed teachings that result in their desired goals while, at the same time, being extremely practical and consistent with human nature. The lack of such teachings is one of the greatest dilemmas faced by Christianity. For example, with respect to societal cohesion and interaction, the greatest teachings found in the New Testament are what are known as “the hard sayings” of Jesus. They are as follows:

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:38-48).

Christian scholars themselves are perplexed. How are such obviously impossible or impractical teachings to be applied? Just one example of a discussion of these words will suffice to show how perplexing they are to those who staunchly believe in them:

[For interpreting these words, t]he model proposed by Joachim Jeremias is simple, representative, and of continuing influence. According to this model, the Sermon usually is seen in one of three ways: (1) as a perfectionist code, fully in line with the legalism of rabbinic Judaism; (2) as an impossible ideal, meant to drive the believer first to desperation, and then to trust in God's mercy; or (3) as an ‘interim ethic’ meant for what was expected to be a brief period of waiting in the end time, and which is now obsolete.

Jeremias adds his own fourth thesis: The Sermon is an indicative depiction of incipient life in the kingdom of God, which presupposes as its condition of possibility the experience of conversion. More complex or comprehensive schematizations have been offered, but most major interpreters can be understood in relation to the options posed by Jeremias.

In Islam, there are no such dilemmas. The teachings are easy, flexible, practical and completely suited to everyday life, even for a new Muslim living in a completely non-Islamic environment, such as I was. The famed author James A. Michener also noted and appreciated this aspect of Islam. In one of the earliest writings that I had read about Islam, entitled "Islam—the Misunderstood Religion," Michener wrote,

The Koran is remarkably down-to-earth in its discussion of the good life. In one memorable passage it directs: 'When ye deal with each other in transactions involving future obligations reduce them to writing... and get two witnesses...' It is this combination of dedication to one God, plus practical instruction, that makes the Koran unique.

Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 27. Quoted in *Islam—The First and Final Religion* (Karachi, Pakistan: Begum Aisha Bawany Waqf, 1978), pp. 86-87.