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Chapter 11

DIVINE JUSTICE AND THE HUMAN ORDER

An Islamic Perspective

Azizah Y. al-Hibri



The Qur'anic worldview is a seamless web of ideas that begins with *tawhīd* (the belief in a single God) and permeates various aspects of Qur'anic teaching from creation and the nature of the universe to ethics, social relations, and commercial and constitutional matters.¹ By ignoring the systematic worldview of the Qur'an, we risk impoverishing, even distorting, the various concepts that govern the Qur'anic approach to specific areas of human existence. Yet many of us, including some Muslims, believe that we can understand the Qur'an by discussing it one verse or passage at a time. This essay will argue that there is a unified worldview that permeates the Qur'an, and that makes it a seamless web of ideas, so that each verse cannot be properly understood without reference to others. In one sense, this is not a new argument, because ancient jurists have already stated that passages in the Qur'an explain each other.²

1. In this article, I use the famous translation of Yusuf Ali, entitled *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Brentwood, Md.: Amana Press, 1992). I have revised it in some cases to modernize archaic language (such as to use "you" instead of "thee"). More importantly, I have replaced the word "Allah" with the word "God," since "God" is the proper English translation of the word "Allah." The God of Islam is the same God of the other Abrahamic faiths. Using the Arabic word for "God" clouds that fact. Finally, in a couple of places I changed a word in order to make the translation more accurate. For example, "al-nas" includes men and women, as 'Ā'isha, the wife of the Prophet, pointed out. So "people" is a better translation of this word than "mankind."

2. See, e.g., Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashi, *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulum al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1988), 2:175.

I will argue that *tawhīd*, whose object is an All-Merciful and All-Compassionate Abrahamic God, leads to a particular Qur'anic philosophy that is reflected throughout the universe, including both spheres of the world, inanimate and animate. But the operation of this philosophy is not the same in the two spheres. In the first sphere, its operation is determined through the laws of nature. In the second, it is not, because God has endowed humans with free will. That difference has often led most jurists to discuss the basic principles of each sphere separately, as if they were totally independent from each other. I shall argue that such an approach leads to a fragmented understanding of the world that goes counter to Qur'anic philosophy. Further, it leads at times to error in understanding such important Qur'anic concepts, as *al-mīzān* and *al-'adl*. These concepts represent overarching principles that flow between and within the two spheres, and cannot be understood in their fullness without the recognition of their overarching character. Misunderstanding or misconstruing these principles diminishes our ability to pursue the Islamic ideal in the various areas of human life.

For example, principles such as those governing gender relations in the family and constitutional rights in the state have often been treated in isolation from the overall Islamic worldview. As a result, they became subject to political and personal whims, and in the process created confusion among the Muslim masses. Tying these principles to the Islamic worldview and positioning them securely within it will eliminate problems of error, distortion, and confusion.

The Role of *Tawhīd*

Central to the Islamic worldview is the concept of a single supreme being, namely God. This concept is the lynchpin of all Islamic beliefs and reverberates throughout the Islamic worldview. The Qur'an clearly states that the God of Islam is the same God as that of Christianity and Judaism, calling followers of these two religions "People of the Book" (Qur'an 3:64). But the Qur'anic revelation, while accepting Jesus as a major prophet of Islam, rejects the concept of the Trinity, a position I refer to as "deep monotheism." *Surat al-Ikhlās* (chapter 112) of the Qur'an is dedicated in its entirety to articulating this position. It states: