

The Interfaith Dimension of Some Recent English Translations of the Quran: A Critical Analysis**Abdur Raheem Kidwai**

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Abstract

Purpose: The objective of the paper is to explore the Interfaith dimension, if any, in select English translations of the Quran. Are these translations addressed only to the Muslim readership? Do these capture and convey the universal message of the Quran, which is directed at Muslims and non-Muslims alike? Since this aspect of the English translations of the Quran has been hardly explored, this study is an attempt to fill this gap. It will help readers realize the relative strengths and weaknesses of various translation.

Methodology: Select English translations have been closely and critically analysed in terms of the quantum of their contribution to Interfaith understanding. Some translations stand out on this count while others lack this dimension. So it is based on both inductive and deductive approaches.

Findings: This paper first provides a critical, historical survey of the English translations of the Quran, namely, those by Alexander Ross (1649), George Sale (1734), J. M. Rodwell (1861), E. H. Palmer (1880), Richard Bell (1937-1939), A. J. Arberry (1955), N. J. Dawood (1956), Alan Jones (2007) and A. J. Droge (2014). This paper draws attention to the unpalatable note of polemics under the pretext of comparative religion in the Orientalists' English translations of the Quran. Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), however, set in motion a new trend in the field: interfaith understanding from the perspective of pluralism. This trend is reflected more sharply in the translations by Thomas Cleary (2004) and Safi Kaskas and David Hungerford (2016). Although in their fairly recent English renderings of the Quran, G. S. Reynolds (2018) and Jane McAuliffe (2017) promise to study the Quran from an interfaith dialogue perspective, they often revert to the polemical Orientalist stance of discrediting the Quran as a poor imitation of the Bible. This paper examines the 21st century English translations of the Quran by Thomas Cleary (2004), Safi Kaskas and David Hungerford (2016), G. S. Reynolds (2018) and Jane McAuliffe (2017).

Originality: This is the first study of its kind – assessing the select translations in term of their promotion of the ideals of peaceful coexistence as spelled out by the Quran.

Keywords: Interfaith, English translations of the Quran, Orientalists, comparative religion.

أبعاد الحوار بين الأديان في بعض الترجمات الإنجليزية المعاصرة لمعاني القرآن الكريم: دراسة نقدية

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ملخص البحث

أهداف البحث: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى البحث في البعد الخاص بحوار الأديان في مجموعة مختارة من الترجمات الإنجليزية لمعاني القرآن الكريم؛ وذلك بهدف الإجابة على السؤالين التاليين: هل هذه الترجمات موجهة إلى القراء المسلمين دون غيرهم؟ وهل تستوعب الرسالة العالمية للقرآن الكريم وتُعبّر عنها، وهي الرسالة التي تستهدف المسلمين وغير المسلمين على حد سواء؟ ونظرًا لندرة الدراسات حول هذا الجانب في الترجمات الإنجليزية، فقد جاءت هذه الدراسة كمحاولة ملء هذا الفراغ؛ إذ ستساعد القراء على فهم مواطن القوة والضعف النسبية في الترجمات المختلفة.

منهج الدراسة: تناولت الدراسة الترجمات الإنجليزية المختارة بالتحليل الدقيق والنقد الموضوعي من زاوية حجم إسهامها في تيسير فهم الحوار بين الأديان، حيث برزت بعض الترجمات في هذا المجال، بينما افتقر بعضها الآخر إلى هذا البعد. وعليه، فإن هذه الدراسة تجمع بين المنهجين الاستنباطي والاستقرائي.

النتائج: يُقدّم هذا البحث في البداية دراسة تاريخية نقدية استعراضية لترجمات معاني القرآن باللغة الإنجليزية، وعلى وجه الخصوص ترجمات: ألكسندر روس (١٦٤٩)، وجورج سيل (١٧٣٤)، وج.م. رودول (١٨٦١)، وإ.ه. بالمر (١٨٨٠)، وريتشارد بيل (١٩٣٩)، وأ.ج. آربري (١٩٥٥). ون.ج. داوود (١٩٥٦)، وآلن جونز (٢٠٠٧)، وأ.ج. دروغ (٢٠١٤). ثم ينتقل إلى لفت الانتباه إلى الملاحظات الجدلية غير المقبولة المطروحة في ترجمات المستشرقين لمعاني القرآن باللغة الإنجليزية تحت ستار دراسة مقارنة الأديان. وقد أطلق سيد أحمد خان اتجاهًا جديدًا في هذا المجال، وهو فهم الحوار بين الأديان من منظور التعددية. ونجد هذا الاتجاه بصورة أكثر وضوحًا في ترجمات معاني القرآن لكل من: توماس كليري (٢٠٠٤)، وصافي كاسكس (٢٠١٦)، وديفيد هنغرفورد (٢٠١٦). ورغم زعم ج.س. رينولدز (٢٠١٨) وجين ميكالف (٢٠١٧) التزامهما في ترجمتهما الحديثة للقرآن باتباع منظور الحوار بين الأديان، إلا أنهما في الواقع غالبًا ما لجأ في ترجمتهما إلى الموقف الاستشراقي الجدلي الذي كان هدفه الرئيس التشكيك في القرآن، والقول بأنه تقليد هنزيل للإنجيل. ويدرس هذا البحث بعض ترجمات القرآن الصادرة في القرن الحادي والعشرين مثل ترجمات: توماس كليري (٢٠٠٤)، وصافي كاسكس، وديفيد هنغرفورد (٢٠١٦)، وج.س. رينولدز (٢٠١٨) وجين ميكالف (٢٠١٧).

أصالة البحث: هذه الدراسة هي الدراسة الأولى من نوعها التي تُقيّم الترجمات المختارة من حيث علاؤها لقيم التعايش السلمي التي جاءت في القرآن الكريم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: حوار الأديان، ترجمات القرآن الكريم للإنجليزية، المستشرقون، مقارنة الأديان.

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The Quran in the West

Regrettably, the study of the Quran in the West has been, through the ages, vitiated by dogmatic presuppositions, resulting in polemics and the emergence of the academic discipline of Orientalism, which presents sheer hostility towards all things Islamic. Norman Daniel's monumental work, *Islam and the West*⁽¹⁾ documents the incontrovertible evidence of the deliberate distortion of the Quran by Western writers from the earliest times to the medieval period. Illustrative of this antagonism towards the Quran are the title pages of some of the early complete English translations of the Quran. The title page of the first English translation by Alexander Ross (1649) reads as follows:

The Alcoran of Mahomet. Newly Englished for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the Turkish vanities.

Equally demonstrative of this negative view is the title page of George Sale's (1734) translation in denying the divine origin of the Quran and ascribing its authorship to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

The Koran Commonly called The Alcoran of Mohammed.

Needless to add, both of these versions teem with unpardonable instances of mistranslation, omission, interpolation of imaginary scandalous stories and calumny directed against the Prophet (peace be upon him). Ironically enough, Ross did not know any Arabic, as is affirmed by Sale and Matar,⁽²⁾ yet he had the temerity to embark upon a translation of the Quran from Arabic into English. Sale was, no doubt, well grounded in Arabic, for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPKC), founded in England in 1698, had commissioned him to translate the Bible into Arabic. Notwithstanding his expertise in Arabic, Sale mischievously translated the recurrent Quranic expression *al-nas* (O mankind) as "O men of Mecca" to leave the distinct impression that the message of the Quran was directed at only the 7th century local Makkans. Mohar Ali identifies some more glaring shortcomings in Sale's translation:

... the intention was to overthrow the Quran. Sale spared no means to distort its meaning. The distortion was done in a number of ways, mainly, a) paraphrasing; b) deliberate mistranslation and also mistranslation due to i) omission of words or expressions in the text from the meaning; ii) lack of understanding of

(1) Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: Making of An Image*. Edinburgh, 1961.

Some recent works on this topic are:

- Buaben, Jabal, *Image of the Prophet Muhammad in the West*. Leicester, 1996.
- Dimmock, Matthew, *Mythologies of Prophet Muhammad in Early Modern English Culture*. Cambridge, 2013
- Grosrichard, Alain, *the Sultan's Court: European Fantasies of the East*. Tr. Liz, Heron. London, 1998.
- Gunny, Ahmad, *Perception of Islam in European Writings*. Leicester, 2004.
- Kahf, Mohja, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman*. Texas, 1999.
- Kidwai, A. R., *Images of the Prophet Muhammad in English Literature*, New York, 2018.
- Kidwai, A. R., *Orientalism in English Literature: Perception of the Islam and Muslims*. New Delhi, 2016.
- Quinn, Frederick, *The Sum of All Heresies: The Image of Islam in Western Thought*. New York, 2007.
- Sophia Rose Arjana, *Muslims in the Western Imagination*. New York, 2015.
- Tolan, J. V. (Ed.), *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam*. New York, 1995.
- Tolan, J. V. (Ed.), *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*. New York, 2002.

(2) George Sale, *The Koran*. London, 1734 p. vii.

Nabil Matar, "Alexander Ross and the First English translation of the Quran," *Muslim World*, 88:1 (January 1998), pp. 82 and 85.

the correct meaning of some Arabic expressions, iii) the use of Christian theological terms and concepts, iv) and interpolation of words and expressions extraneous to the text and c) faulty notes and comments. The whole work is replete with these faults.⁽¹⁾

Even in the face of such twisted presentation, Sale's version was printed as many as 160 times, including its 67 editions in the US alone. It commanded such respect in the West that Theodore Arnold translated it into German in 1746, Kalmkor into Russian in 1792 and Litza into Bulgarian in 1902. In Sale's own words, his objective behind translating the Quran was to expose "the imposture" of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the "forgeries" of the Quran and "to attack [Islam] with success" in order to attain "the glory of its overthrow."⁽²⁾

Orientalist English Translations of the Quran

The Orientalist versions that followed Sale's were no better. J. M. Rodwell, the rector of St. Ethelberga's Church, took up the job of translating the Quran in 1861 in order "to show that the Quran... is based upon Christianity and Judaism, partially understood."⁽³⁾ Furthermore, Rodwell played havoc with the received Surah order, as he rearranged it chronologically, as is evident from the title of his translated version:

The Koran, the Surahs Arranged in Chronological Order.

Unabashedly he speaks of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as "the crafty author" of the Quran and expostulates all sorts of malice and calumny against him. E.H. Palmer's *The Quran* (1880) bristles with numerous errors of mistranslation and a lack of comprehension. In his scholarly critique of this translation in the *Journal of American Oriental Society*,⁽⁴⁾ A. R. Nykl has pointed out as many as 70 serious mistakes in Palmer's rendering. As to Palmer's credentials, he was murdered in Egypt on 11 August 1882 while he was reportedly there on a British Secret Service mission. The next Orientalist venture, Richard Bell's *The Quran: Translated with a Critical Rearrangement of the Surahs* (1937-1939), betrays the sheer polemical design of its author, who had earlier written *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* (1926). The titles of both these works by Bell, a church official in Wamphry, Scotland, underscore his hostility towards Islam and the Quran. Apart from denying outright the divine origin of the Quran, Bell professed and promoted another outrageous view that the Quranic text needed to be rearranged afresh. As the self-appointed editor of the Quran, Bell wrote of many instances of "misplacements, alterations, substitutions and derangements" in the original Quranic text. In his opinion, for example, verses 206-208 of Surah Al-Baqarah are mere "unconnected scraps" that have, by mistake, found their way into the Quran. Alfred Guillaume, himself a leading Orientalist, disapproved of this brazen incisive exercise on Bell's part:

I confess that his [Bell's] surgery is so devastating that I cannot use his translation. By cutting out verses and transposing them for purely subjective reasons and by going on to amputate half the verses and even phrases he provokes a mental resistance to textual analysis ... "the man has lost all sense of proportion."⁽⁵⁾

(1) M. Mohar Ali, *The Quran and the Orientalists*. Norwich, UK, 2004, p. 332.

(2) George Sale, *The Koran*. p. iv.

(3) J. M. Rodwell, *The Koran, Translated from the Arabic, the Suras arranged in Chronological order with Notes*. London, 1861, pp. xxv.

(4) A. R. Nykl, "Notes on Palmer's *The Quran*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 56 (1936), pp. 77-84.

(5) Alfred Guillaume, "Review on the *Koran Interpreted*," *Muslim World*, 47: 1 (January 1957), p. 248.

A. J. Arberry's *The Koran Interpreted* (1955) stands out above other Orientalist versions for being largely free from the errors of the common Orientalist perspective, especially about the Judeo-Christian origin of the Quran. Arberry's version is, nonetheless, marred by several inexplicable instances of misrepresenting the meaning and message of the Quran.⁽¹⁾ His misreading is all the more intriguing because he was a Professor of Arabic in Egypt and later at the Universities of London and Cambridge. N. J. Dawood, an Iraqi Jew, was the next to translate the Quran into English. His version, *The Koran* (1956), is geared towards misleading readers against Islam and the Quran. Indeed, his "Introduction" conjures up an image of Islam, particularly of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), that constantly reinforces Islam's association with usurpation, injustice and bloodshed.⁽²⁾ After a gap of more than 50 years, the next Orientalist foray into the field was Alan Jones's *The Quran* (2007). Jones blatantly brands the Quran as a patently polemical work that arouses sheer hatred against the Jews and Christians. In the post-9/11 world, this assertion assumes more menacing overtones, as it tends to designate the Quran as hate literature. Furthermore, Jones assails the Quran from another angle. According to him, the Quran is highly problematic and incomprehensible in both its style and its content. Throughout his work, he dismisses most of the Quranic terms and expressions as "uncertain, unclear, conflicting, doubtful, not cogent, troublesome and very difficult." For him, the Quran is no more than a grotesque mixture of Judeo-Christian material and popular Near Eastern tales.⁽³⁾ No less vitriolic is A. J. Droge's *The Quran* (2014). Like other Orientalists, he, too, asserts that the Quran is a problematic text, teeming with lacunae, obscurity and uncertainty of meaning and is disfigured also by "later additions, glosses, and insertions, misplaced and out of place clauses and parts, and revision, omission and variant recessions." In at least 116 places, Droge dismisses the Quranic terms and expressions as "mysterious, lacking clarity and obscure." He leaves a distinct impression on readers that the Quran "is a puzzling text." Equally tendentious are his several "explanatory" notes, which bear no resemblance to the intent of the Quranic text. Unlike his predecessors and contemporaries, Droge, however, does not insist on the Biblical antecedents of the Quran. Rather, in some places, he acknowledges the originality of the Quran.

The acknowledgement that the Quran is a Scripture with its own characteristic world view and value system, notwithstanding some affinity with the Bible, is a propitious shift in recent Western scholarship on the Quran. What is more gratifying is that this paradigm shift is anchored in the call for interfaith dialogue and a better understanding between the adherents of the two major world faiths—Christianity and Islam.

The Christian–Muslim Polemics

Prior to this significant change, under the pretext of comparative religion studies, both Christian and Muslim scholars had been engaged in a bitter polemical debate vitiated by abuse and rancor. This ugly exercise went unabated in late 19th and early 20th-century British India. This was largely provoked by the Evangelical project launched by the aggressive Christian missionaries in British India who were determined to convert Muslims. They were emboldened by the 1813 Act of British Parliament, which had sanctioned their proselytizing project. The inflexible, exclusivist attitude of Indian Muslims, emanating from their fear and insecurity psychoses as a vanquishing religious minority group in British/Christian India, further ag-

(1) A. R. Kidwai, "Arberry's *The Koran Interpreted*," in *Translating the Untranslatable: A Critical Guide to 60 English Translations of the Quran*, 2011, pp. 258-268.

(2) A. R. Kidwai, "Dawood's *The Koran*," in *Translating the Untranslatable*, pp. 271-276.

(3) A. R. Kidwai, "Alan Jones's *The Quran*," in *Translating the Untranslatable*, pp. 277-281.

gravated the situation. A case in point is the unpalatable exchange of castigating polemical works between Revered. Karl G. Pfander's *Mizan Al-Haq* (1835) and Rahmatullah Kairanawi, the author of *Izhar Al-Haq* (1864).⁽¹⁾ In sum, the entire field reeked of bigotry, intolerance and hatred.

Notwithstanding all of this, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), a distinguished educationist, social reformer and statesman, swam against the tide and carried out his daring venture, representing a sane voice of peaceful coexistence and interfaith understanding between the British/Christians and Muslims in British India. He stands out as possibly the first Muslim scholar to have championed pluralism in the 1860s when this concept was almost unthinkable. His *Tab'in Al-Kalam fi Tafsir Al-Tawrat wa Al-Injil 'ala Millat Al-Islam* (The Mohammadan Commentary on the Holy Bible), published in Aligarh, India in 1865, represents a sincere attempt at a comparative religion study. This work rested on Sir Syed's premise that all faiths deserve equal respect. Significantly, for espousing this cause, he employed typical Islamic theological terminology. The Arabic title of his work introduces itself as the "Tafsir" of the Torah and the Gospels. Sir Syed's use of the term "Tafsir", which is associated in the Muslim mind specifically with the exegesis of the Quran, is intended to drive home the point that the Bible, being Scripture, is equally as worthy as the Quran of reverence. The same thinking accounts for his designating the Bible as "The Holy Bible" on the title page. It must, however, be clarified that in his commentary, Sir Syed does not overlook the instances of the human interpolation and distortion in the Bible. However, he emphasizes the commonality between the Bible and the Quran, particularly their shared moral values. He identifies the Quranic passages that resonate with the Biblical teachings, asserting that this affinity is on account of their common divine origin. Sir Syed also emphasizes the equal status enjoyed by all the Messengers of God. In the same vein is his assertion about the essential unity of the whole mankind, as Christians and Muslims alike are the progeny of Adam and Eve. Sir Syed's work was a significant step forward in the direction of promoting cordial social relations between Christians and Muslims.

Interfaith Dimension in the English Translations of the Quran

The seed sown by Sir Syed in the 1860s has by now gained much elaboration and traction, as one can see in a survey of some of the recent English translations of the Quran by both Muslims and non-Muslims. These translations appear to be wedded unflinchingly to the ideal of interreligious understanding that is characterized by respect for all faiths and a desire to rally around commonalities. The first notable venture typifying this trend is *The Quran: A New Translation* (2004) by Thomas Cleary, a US-based scholar specializing in Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian and Islamic religious texts. He made a genuine attempt to drive home the importance and relevance of the Quran for today's post-Christian, secular mind. Additionally, Cleary draws attention to the uniqueness and universality of the Quran, asserting that "the Quran speaks to humanity as a whole, to nations, communities, families, and individuals, complete with both an outer teaching and an inner teaching, it speaks of both persons and to souls, individually and collectively."⁽²⁾ More remarkably, as an accomplished translator of Buddhist and Taoist religious texts, he cites, at places, some passages, mostly from the *Flower Ornament Scripture*, that are identical in tenor with several Quranic

(1) A. R. Kidwai, *God's Word, Man's Interpretations: A Critical Study of the 21st Century English Translations of the Quran*, New Delhi, 2018, p. 135.

(2). Thomas Cleary, *The Essential Koran*, Delhi, 1997, p. x.

passages. According to this comparative perspective in his commentary on the Quran, the Buddhist and Islamic traditions have much in common in the following wide range of topics and themes: the conduct of hypocrites, giving to charity out of love for God, nature and an immense ambit of knowledge, the excellence of mutual love and sympathy, shunning of the blind conformity to ancestral ways, a quest for the light of God and using historical events for understanding eternal truths. Cleary has thus opened up a new vista of comparative Quranic scholarship by bringing a little-known aspect into the light: the common ground between Buddhism and Islam.

Safi Kaskas's and David Hungerford's Venture

More extensive and candid, however, is *The Quran with References to the Bible* (2016) by Safi Kaskas and David Hungerford,⁽¹⁾ the two US-based votaries of “the reconciliation between all the children of Abraham.” Nowhere does their work discuss the Judeo-Christian antecedents of the Quran or brush the Quran aside as a crude imitation of the Bible. The Jewish origin of the Quran has been the refrain of leading Orientalists such as Baum, Stark, Geiger, Hirschfeld, Horvitz, Katsh, Schaprio, Torrey and Speyer. For another group of Orientalists, namely, Ahrens, Beck, Bell, Margoliouth, Jeffery, Muir, O’ Shaughnessy, Watt and Welch, the Quran is made up of the material brazenly lifted from the Gospels.⁽²⁾

Kaskas and Hungerford, however, subscribe to the idea of a common, single source of all Scriptures. They cite a massive number of 3000 Biblical quotations to illustrate the shared perspective of the Bible and the Quran on an amazingly rich ambit of terms, concepts and even doctrines. In so doing, the authors do not “emphasize the differences between Islam and other Abrahamic religions (wall-building), but rather emphasize the commonalities (bridge-building).” (p. xii). That is why this work avoids discussing contentious issues such as the Trinity, the Jewish rabbis’ misconduct, the Jewish notion about their guaranteed deliverance, the Israelites’ slaying of Prophets, and the Bible foretelling the advent of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), though these issues figure prominently in the Quran. In contrast, the cited Biblical passages supplement and complement Quranic things. Amazingly, all Quranic articles of faith appear in this work alongside their Biblical endorsement. Take Surah Al-Fatihah as an example. All the doctrines featured in this Surah, ranging from certain attributes of God to His absolute and exclusive power on the Day of Judgement and from His oneness to man’s obligation to abide by the straight path shown by Him, are corroborated with pointed references to the relevant Biblical passages. (p. 1). Though it might sound incredible for Muslim readers, this work affirms the doctrine of monotheism on the authority of as many as 9 Biblical passages (p. 31). Verses 1-13 of Surah Al ‘Imran spell out the following doctrinal issues: the revelation of God’s Book to the Messengers, God’s Omniscience and His reckoning in the Afterlife, His boundless mercy and punishment and His succor for the Believers. All these are attested to in the Bible (p. 35). Most of the annotations are devoted to the noble goal of building bridges between the Bible and the Quran. In our era, which is rocked by the deplorable incidence of terrorism in the name of Islam and the detestable Islamophobia prevailing in the West, this work aimed at cementing cordial Jewish–Christian–Muslim relations is all the more desirable and rewarding.

(1) Safi Kaskas and David Hungerford, *The Quran with References to the Bible*. Fairfax, VA, 2016.

(2) Muhammad Mohar Ali, *The Quran and the Orientalists*. Norwich, UK, 2004. Muhammad Mustafa Al-Azami, *The History of the Quranic Text from Revelation to Compilation*. Leicester, UK, 2003.

G. S. Reynolds's *The Quran and the Bible*

The Quran and the Bible: Text and Commentary (2018)⁽¹⁾ by Gabriel Said Reynolds, Professor of Islamic Studies, University of Notre Dame, USA, stands in a sharp contrast to earlier highly biased Western writings on the subject such as Abraham Geiger's *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (What has Muhammad taken from Judaism?) (1833) and Heinrich Speyer's *Die biblischen Erzählungen in Quran* (The Biblical Narratives in the Quran) (1931), which unequivocally assert the Judeo-Christian origins of the Quran. It is therefore all the more refreshing to note that Reynolds promises in this work "a new lense through which to view the powerful links that bind" Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Far from dwelling incessantly on the unacknowledged borrowings in the Quran as earlier Orientalists had done, Reynolds affirms that "in the present work Bible and Quran are brought together. This work is meant to be a contribution to our understanding of the Quran by bringing to light its conversations with Biblical literature. The Quran alludes to and develops earlier traditions. My conviction ... is that the Quran is an original work in literary and religious terms but also a work which depends heavily on its audience's knowledge of the Bible and the traditions which developed out of the Bible." (p. 2). His assertion about the Quran as an "original" work is very gratifying, indicating as it does that the truth will eventually dawn.

Although Reynolds opens his work with this promising remark: "The Quran has consciously reshaped Biblical material to advance its own religious claims" (p. 3), it is unfortunate that he soon reverts to echoing the statements of the tired, tendentious Orientalist perspective on the Quran. Take his following observations as examples:

- a) 'The Quran transfers the imagery associated with Jerusalem to Mecca.' (p. 70)
- b) 'The idea that a woman should suckle her children for two years (31:14) has a basis in the Talmud.' (p. 92)
- c) [The Quran] 'follows the usage of the Aramaic texts which speak of God's shekinta' (p. 96)
- d) 'Verse 249 of Al-Baqarah about Saul and Goliath is not the only case of the Quran transferring (or mixing) Biblical traditions.' (p. 97)
- e) 'Verses 250-251 of Al-Baqarah: The Quran follows here the narrative of 1 Samuel.' (p. 97)
- f) 'Verse 255 of Al-Baqarah (Ayah Al-Kursi): Noldeke-Schwally (*History*, 1, 84) argue that this verse might be a translation of a Jewish or a Christian hymn' (p. 99)
- g) '2:259: As in the previous verse, the Quran here uses a narrative from Biblical tradition' (p. 101)
- h) '2:261-265: In these verses, the Quran seems to build upon the gospel parable of the sower' (p. 103)
- i) '3:33: The Quran thus conflates the two Marys ... The conflation is likely a confusion...' (p. 114)
- j) '3:35-36: The Quran closely follows here the *Protoevangelium of James*, a Greek Christian work' (p. 115)

Likewise, despite his thorough grounding in both Biblical and Quranic texts, Reynolds turns a blind eye

(1) Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Quran and the Bible; Text and Commentary*. IL, USA, 2018.

to the distinctive features of the Quran, especially its transformation of the Biblical material. In hundreds of instances, the Quran differs radically from the Bible and makes an altogether divergent point, though seemingly using the same Biblical content. One major dissimilarity between the Bible and the Quran is that the latter exonerates all Messengers of God, particularly the Prophets David and Solomon (peace be upon them) from the outrageous charges leveled against them in the Bible, including those of idolatry and fornication. Equally significant is the Quranic version that holds both Adam and Eve guilty in the same measure for their disobedience to God. This is in a sharp contrast to the Biblical one, which places the blame squarely on Eve. It is worth adding that this Biblically engendered misogyny lies at the core of the early Church fathers' denunciation of not only womankind but also the institution of marriage. The Quranic concept of God is also vastly different from the Biblical concept of God. In the Quran, God is neither jealous and vindictive nor partisan by choosing the Israelites as His favorite ethnic community. Far from appreciating the unique Quranic account of the People of the Cave and of Mary, Reynolds brands it as "anti-Christian." (pp. 451 and 480). In sum, Reynolds does not keep his promise of highlighting the common ground between the Bible and the Quran and ends up discrediting the Quran in the centuries-old Western polemical vein.

Jane McAuliffe's Work

The Quran (2017)⁽¹⁾ by Jane McAuliffe, the editor of the fairly recent *Encyclopaedia of the Quran*, deals with the interfaith dialogue aspect only in passing. She has nonetheless done well in identifying several thematically identical passages in the Bible and the Quran (pp. 8, 9, 11, 66, 71, 79, 80, 83, 87, 117, 120, 151, 161 and 240). It is unfortunate that she does not elaborate this vast common ground between the two Scriptures. Even worse, in some of these instances in which she typifies the commonality between the Biblical and Quranic narratives, her explanatory notes betray the errors of a perspective common to the Orientalists. While discussing the Quranic allusion to the young Ishmael's sacrifice, which Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) was asked to carry out as part of his trial, McAuliffe abruptly interpolates this sectarian twist: "Shi'i commentators have understood it as a reference to the sacrifice of Husayn, Muhammad's grandson at Karbala (680 CE)." (p. 240). Her intrusion of another non-Quranic, and rather un-Quranic, idea is regrettable, as she asserts: "Muslim scholars have debated whether Iblis was a fallen angel or a jinn." (p. 7). The idea of "a fallen angel" is alien to Islam. The Quran categorically designates Iblis as a jinn (Al-Kahf 18: 50). In the face of this explicit Quranic pronouncement, any discussion to the contrary is pointless. More lamentable is her reliance on some *Israiliyat* reports about Prophet David (peace be upon him), which ascribe serious moral failings to him. (p.243)

Conclusion

In sum, the efforts of an interfaith dialogue, which are at the fore in Cleary's and Kaskas's and Hungerford's versions, appear in a diluted form in Reynolds's work and only nominally in McAuliffe's rendering. The trend for promoting an interfaith understanding in studies of the Quran is nonetheless highly welcome and relevant. Muslim scholars should come forward to explore this aspect energetically and effectively because interfaith understanding is needed all the more in our troubled times. Another idea worth exploring is a critical examination of some recent English translations of the Quran by Muslim scholars in terms of their concern or otherwise for affirming interfaith understanding.

(1) Jane McAuliffe (Ed.), *The Quran*. New York, 2017.

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