

Foreword

The Qur'ān is the foundation and mainstay of Islamic faith, life and culture. Islam and the Muslim *ummah* are unique in so far as their bedrock is primarily a Book – the Qur'ān. This Book gave the Muslims their distinct worldview and vision of life. Historically speaking, the Qur'ān performed the great feat of transforming a motley group of warring tribes of seventh-century Arabia into the Muslim *ummah* which soon developed into a dynamic world community with a message for humanity at large. It not only fashioned the historical personality of the Muslims but also remained the main source of their inspiration and guidance throughout the fourteen centuries of their history.

The Qur'ān encompasses the totality of God's Revelation to Muḥammad (peace be on him), the last in the distinguished series of Prophets raised for mankind's guidance. The uniqueness of the Qur'ān lies in its being the Final Revelation. It is precisely for this reason that it preserves and protects whatever was revealed prior to it. It also represents the culmination and zenith of the Divine Revelation which commenced with the birth of Adam and came to an end with the Prophet's return to the Mercy of his Lord. Being the Final Revelation, God saw to it that the

ravages of time would play no havoc with it: that nothing of it would be lost, nor any part of it altered, nor anything extraneous to it find its way to it. It was God's Will that the Final Revelation should be preserved in its entirety exactly as it had been communicated to the Prophet (peace be on him) by Gabriel, and exactly as the Prophet (peace be on him) had communicated it to his contemporaries. All this was essential since this Last Book was meant to serve as a beacon light for the guidance of all humanity till the end of time.

The intrinsic value of the Qur'ān is evident to many perceiving eyes and reflecting minds. On the other hand is the heart-rending fact that human beings in large numbers are scarcely aware of the Qur'ān's message and teachings. What is more, thanks to the strong Islamophobic media that presently holds sway over the world, multitudes of people are averse to it. Quite a few Muslims regard an accumulation of external factors as responsible for creating a deep-seated prejudice against Islam and the Qur'ān. The fact, however, is that it is we Muslims who are to blame more than anyone else for the present state of affairs in so far as we have failed to give this Book its due by making it widely available in a form that would enable our fellow beings to grasp its meaning.

For a number of historical reasons, however, the interaction between the Muslims and the rest of the world, especially with the West, has been on the increase in recent times. This development can prove a turning point in history, especially if the Muslims can have the same degree of concern to make the Qur'ān's message and meaning accessible to all and sundry as they have for their mundane interests. Hence, instead of fruitlessly lamenting

the sordid state of affairs of the present, vigorous efforts should be made to change it by building bridges of understanding across the religious, cultural and ethnic divide found in our world today.

The Qur'ān – uncreated Word of God though it doubtlessly is – was revealed and communicated through the medium of a human language – Arabic. No wonder its original text remains a living miracle in a variety of ways. Hence those who know Arabic have access to a whole universe of meaning which is not easy for others to reach. For it is only by reading the Qur'ān in the original that one is exposed to its true beauty and grandeur. It is only the original Arabic Qur'ān that can make one appreciate “that inimitable symphony the very sound of which moves man to tears and ecstasy,”¹ as Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall has aptly put it. Even the best translations can never transport the Qur'ān's vast universe of meaning, or its astounding beauty and grandeur to their readers. The Qur'ān, in this sense, was always and will always remain untranslatable. Imperfect though all such translations are always bound to be, nevertheless the effort to translate the Qur'ān into other languages is absolutely essential to effectively communicate the substance of its meaning and message. Indeed it should be an ongoing activity of Muslim scholars for hopefully with the passage of time an increasingly better communication of the Qur'ān's meaning would be possible.

Now every language, including Arabic in which the Qur'ān was revealed, has its own style, diction and

1. Pickthall, M.M.: *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York: Mentor), p.VII.

ethos. The language of the Qur'ān is characterized by a unique mental and moral ambience: it has a distinct style, supported by a value-laden idiom, a multi-dimensional phrase-structure, a sequential inter-relatedness, all of which is expressed in a literary style of unsurpassable beauty and force. The language and style of the Qur'ān also reflect a set of values which are related to a number of concepts and ideas. All these go to make up an organic whole, a unique literary culture, and a self-sustaining spiritual and intellectual personality. In such a context it is evident that the translation needs to be really good to assist those who are not initiated to the ideas, values and spirit of this culture so that they are able to grasp the spirit and the meaning of the text. This is possible only if the translators have a good taste of the Arabic language, have remained immersed in the universe of the Qur'ānic meaning, and have the ability to express it with clarity, elegance and force.

The translations of the Qur'ān that are devoid of sympathy, understanding and reverence will fail to make their readers appreciate its message in any depth. It is unfortunate that several translations through which readers approach the Qur'ān lack empathy for the Qur'ān, and some even attempt, in our opinion, to distort and denigrate it. Even where a translation does not suffer from deliberate distortion or misrepresentation, it generally lacks an insightful understanding. Moreover, quite often these translations make a dull reading compared to the sparkling original. Since the ordinary reader of the Qur'ān is not familiar with the ethos of the Qur'ān and is not properly initiated into the culture of the Divine Word, he/she is often unable to taste its sweetness, to

encompass its breadth, and fathom its depths, through many of these translations. Hence good translations in different languages, especially English, are a pressing need of the hour. It is heartening that a number of able scholars, who are respected by the Muslims as authentic spokespersons of Islam, have responded to this need of our times. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, and Muhammad Asad are some of the most outstanding names that instantly come to mind from among a growing body of distinguished translators of the Qur'ān.

A great Muslim scholar of the twentieth century, Mawlānā Sayyid Abul A'ālā Mawdūdī (1903-1979), was conscious that a fresh effort to translate and explain the Qur'ān was needed for the Urdu-reading public. In response to that he devoted several decades of his life and produced his monumental work, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, which is a unique contribution to the contemporary literature on the exegesis of the Qur'ān. The uniqueness of *Tafhīm* lies in the fact that it is focused on explicating to the fullest extent possible the Guidance embodied in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ānic Guidance has to be optimally appreciated by all because it is meant to shape man's worldview and outlook on life as well as to shape the pattern of individual and collective behaviour and to mould human institutions in line with the letter and spirit of God's imperatives.

In *Tafhīm* Sayyid Mawdūdī also emphasizes that the Qur'ān is not meant for a docile, arm-chair reading. It is essentially meant for those who seek to know the Truth and after knowing it will actively engage themselves in living according to its demands and will also strive to make it prevail in their milieu. It is meant for those

who are ready to change themselves and willing truly to change the world around them. It calls upon those who embrace its message not to be satisfied ever with the *status quo*, but to strive ceaselessly to improve themselves, improve their fellow-beings and improve the order of things in which they are placed.

Sayyid Mawdūdī's *magnum opus*, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, was published in Urdu in six volumes and is spread over several thousand pages. It was felt that it should reach the vast body of English-reading public spread across the globe. Hence we arranged for its English translation which is being published under the auspices of the Islamic Foundation, Leicester, UK. Seven volumes of it have already been published. Work on the remaining volumes is under way but its completion may take several years. Hence it was considered appropriate to publish a shorter, one-volume work about the Qur'ān that would be of use to those who might not have the time or sustained interest and patience to study the voluminous work that *Tafhīm* is.

As good luck would have it, after completing *Tafhīm* Sayyid Mawdūdī himself became aware of the same need and therefore produced a one-volume edition of his work to which he gave the title *Tarjuma-'i Qur'ān-i Majīd ma' Mukhtaṣar Ḥawāshī*. Sayyid Mawdūdī added to his translation of the Qur'ān, which in itself was a landmark achievement, short notes which he considered essential for a clear understanding of the Qur'ān. These notes are by far and large an abridgement of the copious notes of his *Tafhīm*.

Sayyid Mawdūdī's translation has certain unique features. It is an interpretative translation in direct,

Foreword

forceful and modern Urdu which has now been rendered into forceful and modern English. In the first place, this translation conveys the meaning of the Qur'ān in a style that hopefully reflects something of the beauty, force and majesty of the Qur'ān. This translation is supported by short notes and those too in a very limited number. They primarily aim at clarifying either the background of a particular verse or elaborating a point where the uninitiated reader might require some assistance in grasping the meaning and import of a Qur'ānic verse. It is hoped that in its present form the translation with short notes accompanying it will provide a useful aid for an essential understanding of the Qur'ān. The purpose of the work is to assist those who seek to have access to the meaning of the Qur'ān but who can do so only through the medium of the English language.

Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari, my dear brother, life-long friend, and colleague has very ably produced the English rendering of this work. I have no hesitation in saying that Dr. Ansari has rendered the same kind of service to the English-reading public that Sayyid Mawdūdī had rendered to the Urdu-reading public. It represents a monumental achievement. I pray to Allah to bless this effort and make it a light-house for those who are stumbling in quest of the Truth of which the Qur'ān is a unique repository. May God bless all those who have contributed in one way or another to making this project see the light of day and may He amply reward them for that.

Islamabad
Muḥarram 28, 1426
March 10, 2005

Khurshid Ahmad