

Exegesis, Social Science and the Place of the Jews in the Qur'an

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Throughout Islamic history, religious scholars have been viewed as public intellectuals whose opinions have been valued on all matters. Indeed, in some periods, these scholars excelled in other disciplines, including physics, algebra, chemistry, astronomy, and medicine. Still, views expressed in Qur'anic commentaries received little critical examination, which is a necessary endeavor for contemporary Islamic reform. This paper addresses the views of sixteen exegetes and Qur'an scholars concerning Jews in the Qur'an, and applies both traditional and contemporary approaches to scriptural understanding.

Muḥammad bin Bahāder bin 'Abdallāh al-Zarkashī (d. 1391) explained that exegesis is needed for three reasons: people differ in their intellectual abilities, so some readers may need assistance to comprehend; parts of the Qur'an are built on certain assumptions that are not apparent to the common person; and some words may carry multiple meanings and can be deciphered only by learned specialists. These factors have become more complex as the usage of the Arabic language and the human condition in general continue to evolve. That the number of highly educated people has reached levels never known before illustrates how change can affect contemporary people's expectations from scholars. Those who specialize in Qur'an studies are no exception.

The process of reform must engage with the established tradition of exegesis and its methods. Al-Zarkashī presented key knowledge requirements for prospective scholars in the field, including classical Arabic diction and phonetics and *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation). He explained that some parts of the Qur'an could be difficult to comprehend because of *'umūm al-sīghah* (general form) and *khusūṣ al-sabab* (particular reason).¹[1] Some verses may appear general in their wording but may address a specific circumstance.

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) classified the Qur'anic revelation into two main categories. The first is that which took place after an incident or a question to the Prophet, and the other had no pretext. Al-Suyūṭī added another layer of context that can affect the meaning of Qur'anic verses: the specific place and time of revelation and whether it carried new substance or overlapped with previous revelation.²[2] A careful scholar should pay attention to the intricacies of these considerations.

One major approach to exegesis is known as *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bil-Qur'ān* (explaining Qur'an with Qur'an? Interpreting the Qur'an by means of the Qur'an), which is built on the assumption that parts of the Qur'an complement each other. Another approach is called *al-tafsīr bil-ma'thūr* (exegesis using tradition). Some of these traditions are attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad and thus are part of Ḥadīth, which comprises his words, deeds, and approvals. Other traditions are only attributed to the companions of the Prophet or members of his household, while others are narratives that appeared in early writings of *Sīrah* (the biography of the Prophet and the history of the first generation of Muslims). Scholars of Ḥadīth developed methodologies to authenticate attributions to the Prophet, but the rest of *ma'thūr* has not been subject to serious scrutiny.

Early scholars of the Qur'an frowned upon *tafsir bi'l-ra'y* (exegesis through personal opinion). Mu'tazilite rationalists saw this as an attempt to block *ijtihad* (independent reasoning). Yet the classical scholars only wanted to protect the status of the scripture as a source of truth telling whose understanding should not be marred by whims or non-scholarly purposes. Despite this theoretical stance, exegetes have often conflated their views on social and political affairs with their attempt to explain the meaning of Qur'anic verses.

The next section briefly reviews the ideas of Seyyed Husain Naṣr and Ismā'īl al-Fārūqī, who approach the Qur'an as a whole to construct a *tawhīdī* (monotheistic) worldview. Each generated a unique formula for understanding based on the grand Qur'anic ideas about the relationship between God and his creation. Within this framework, the section constructs the Qur'anic narrative of Jews and Judaism before turning to the critical review of classical exegesis.

The Place of Jews in the Qur'an: A Holistic Approach

Al-Fārūqī and Naṣr offer an understanding of God's relation to man based on the concept of *khilāfah* (vicegerency).³^[3] God made men and women His deputies on earth, and sent them messengers to teach them how to lead a "God-like" life.⁴^[4] Naṣr emphasizes the mystical aspects of Islam, while al-Fārūqī focuses on theology, but both postulate that all human beings share a certain *fiṭrah* (nature) that is essentially good but have the capacity to commit wrong.⁵^[5] This is why humans are held accountable individually for their own deeds.⁶^[6]

Naṣr justifies his holistic philosophy by suggesting that the Qur'an "is the source of knowledge, not only metaphysically and religiously, but even in the domain of particular fields of knowledge."⁷^[7] Qur'anic wisdom represents "a set of doctrines which expand knowledge of the structure of reality and man's position in it."⁸^[8] Al-Fārūqī writes of this same universal message when he expounds on how monotheism can influence the various aspects of human life.⁹^[9]

Traditional exegetes typically cited a verse or a *ma'thūr* piece to explain a single verse or a group of verses. The rest of the commentary may have included linguistic explanations and reflections on life events. Viewed from a holistic perspective, this mode of interpretation tends to offer a compartmentalized understanding of the Qur'an. Therefore, the contemporary systematic approaches raise the standard of competence in Islamic studies. Such is the hallmark of the careers of the contemporary exegete Muḥammad Asad and religion scholar Maḥmūd Ayoub, who do not dismiss tradition.

A holistic view of the scripture requires that an understanding of any part of the Qur'an be congruent with the basic premises of the overall Qur'anic narrative. Al-Fārūqī writes, "Divine unity and unity of truth are inseparable. They are aspects of one and the same reality. This becomes evident when we consider that truthfulness is a quality of the proposition of...*tawhīd*, namely that God is one."¹⁰[10] Those who believe the Qur'an is good for all times and places ought to make sure that any conceptions attached to revelation do not contradict its core foundations.

Much of the story of revelation in the Qur'an begins with Abraham, the father of prophets. His story is the most prominent in the Qur'an, save Muḥammad's. The Qur'an emphasizes that all prophets preached the core belief in God, which stands as the foundation for the moral principles that all the faiths share. The Qur'an distinguishes between the core message and the expressions of *tawhīd* in the life of the believers. God willed that there be differences in details, but they are all supposed to lead to the straight path. Louay Ṣāfī uses the term "Qur'anic Narrative" to refer to this macro view of the Qur'an.¹¹[11]

The Qur'an confronts Jews (and Christians) with its own truth claims. Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants were neither Jewish nor Christian.¹²[12] They were all *Muslims* (submitters) to God. The Qur'an essentially tells Jews and Christians that they belong with Muslims to the same family of faith. They are challenged to respond to the unified message of the prophets of God.¹³[13]

The Qur'an recognizes *banū Isrā'īl* (the Children of Israel) as a distinct group of people whose existence, struggles, and trials preceded the prophetic career of Moses. They faced oppression with patience and constancy until Moses led their deliverance to the Holy Land, where they enjoyed great wealth and sustenance.¹⁴[14] They were blessed and favored over all people;¹⁵[15] they were given a covenant from God through Moses;¹⁶[16] and were given revelation and wisdom of governance.

Within this framework, the Qur'anic narrative maintains close affinity to Jewish religious history. Bernard Lewis's assertion that the Qur'anic mention of Jews is insignificant is inaccurate.¹⁷[17] A keyword search of the Qur'an produces 131 verses that mention Musa (Moses). Other key Jewish figures and term are featured in many verses.¹⁸[18] The sum of these

occurrences, which do not include other important stories related to the Israelites, e.g., Pharaoh and Exodus, constitute nearly 5 percent of the Qur'an's 6,000 verses.

The Israelites received most prophets mentioned in the Qur'an? Most of the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an are Israelite prophets.; Indeed much of the history of prophethood is Jewish. The Israelites had internal challenges and disagreements and developed schisms.¹⁹[19] Among them were literalists who made it hard for themselves to obey God's commands.²⁰[20] The Qur'an focuses on the morals of this and other religious experiences rather than the details of what had happened. For example, the Qur'an mentions an unnamed group of Jews identified by having lived after Moses. They asked their unnamed prophet for a leader to fight in the good cause of God, but did not keep their commitment when that leader arose among them.²¹[21] Other Jews were only identified by their actions; e.g., those who violated the fishing ban on the Sabbath ²²[22] these were a small group.

When one considers the totality of the Jewish experience as told in the Qur'an, the Islamic scripture clearly confirms its truths, while showing the diversity of Jews as a people, including those who rejected and even killed prophets,²³[23] worshiped the calf when Moses was away,²⁴[24] and took their rabbis as lords.²⁵[25] Others were cursed by David and Jesus for their disbelief.²⁶[26]

Christians and Muslims also receive praise and rebuke in the Qur'an. Even the Prophet Muhammad was scolded for ignoring a blind man seeking spiritual understanding. A whole *Sūrah* (chapter) of the Qur'an was revealed on this occasion.²⁷[27] Like the Muslim and Christian experiences, Jewish history offered mirror images of blessing and curse, belief and disbelief, knowledge and ignorance, wisdom and poor judgment, righteousness and wrongdoing.

Some Qur'anic verses describe the entire Jewish experience while others allude to only parts of it. Some of the stories specifically refer to certain Israelite groups. This is illustrated by how the Qur'an engaged the Jews who lived among the Muslims in Madīnah. A verse reads that the knowledge of Jewish scholars vindicates the truthfulness of the Qur'an.²⁸[28] In another verse, Jews (and the Christians) would like Muslims to follow their ways; the Prophet is

instructed not to follow the desires of any people but to remain steadfast on the straight path of God.²⁹[29] Jews who were cited as ridiculing God's attributes were cursed.³⁰[30] When conflict developed between Jews and Muslims, the Qur'an noted their enmity.³¹[31] Louay Şāfi explains: "The Qur'an condemned the unscrupulous behavior of several Jewish tribes toward the Prophet and the newly founded Muslim community, in violation of their own religious teachings, while urging the Muslims to respect the religious freedom of the Jews and the religious tradition of Judaism."³²[32]

The Qur'an therefore informs Muslims about some episodes of Jewish history while highlighting the creedal and moral foundation that the Abrahamic faiths share. In the Qur'anic conception, Jews are just like any others, including Muslims, who have had their own challenges with revelation. All will be held individually accountable to God for their deeds.³³[33]

Using this understanding of the Qur'anic narrative, the next section focuses on the learning content of the interpretations of verse 5:82 in *tafsīr* sources. The verse reads: "You will find the most hostile among men to the believers the Jews and polytheists; and you will find the most affectionate to the believers those who say we follow Christ; for there are among them monks and scholars and they are not arrogant."³⁴[34]

Verse 5:82 is particularly interesting because it makes a clear statement about relations between Muslims, Christians and Jews, and it offers an obvious contrast of amity and enmity within members of the three faiths during the time of revelation. Therefore, it fits the theoretical interest of exploring the relationship between exegesis and important elements of social science. As will be demonstrated below, exegetes make significant observations on human behavior, which raises the question of whether such statements are supported by revelation or require assessment through social science criteria.

Exegesis versus Stereotypes

Exegetes in the first three centuries refrained from excessive commentary and limited the application of the verse to specific groups of Christians and Jews rather than to all Christians and Jews. Mujāhid (d. 723) was a contemporary of the successors of the Prophet's companions. He was a student of Ibn 'Abbās. He is a widely cited source of *Ma'thūr*. He did not address the part referring to Jews. Possibly, he thought the verse was a statement of fact, given the growing conflict between Muslims and Jews at the time. Al-Samarqandī (d. 823) and al-Şan'ānī (d. 827) wrote that the verse denoted the Jews of Medina who allied themselves with the pagan Arabs

against the Prophet Muhammad. All three works agree that the reference to Christians meant for the kind treatment Muslims received from the Christian King of Abyssinia al-Najāshī.³⁵[35]

Several later exegetes concurred with this cautious approach, including al-Tha‘ālibī (d. 876), al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067), al-Wāhidī (d. 1076), and ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1328). Al-Tha‘ālibī cited a ḥadīth warning any Muslim to avoid being alone with Jews out of public sight out of fear for their security. Still, he stressed that neither Jews nor Christians have affection for Muslims. Al-Najāshī and his companions were only an exception. Al-Tha‘ālibī saw other Christians as hostile. He did not refer to specific events but mentioned specific actions, including killing Muslims and destroying their property. Perhaps this was in reference to the rising conflict between Muslim and Byzantine forces. In other words, he understood revelation in light of observable facts that appeared not consistent with the statement of 5:82.

A number of these exegetes did not offer Qur’an or *ma’tūr* to support their exposition, including al-Ṭūsī and al-Wāhidī. It is possible that they were only passing on knowledge they gained from others. At the time, there was not much concern for crediting authors. Qur’an scholarship was generally seen as a way to serve God by sharing His message. This is why it was not considered improper to paraphrase unnamed sources introduced in the passive form *qīla* (it is said). Therefore, exegetes -- at least some of them -- perceived the most important part of their role was to communicate the message of the Qur’an.

Yet most exegetes drew timeless generalizations about Jewish behavior. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 939) noted that God told of the Christians being more softhearted and thus closer than Jews are to Muslims.³⁶[36] Al-San‘ānī (d. 1096) seemed to assume the meaning of a general Jewish enmity, but claimed the verse’s reference to Christian affection applies only to forty people from Abyssinia who came to the prophet to accept Islam, a story that appeared in other sources. He distinguished between those and the disbelieving Christians who are equal to Jews in their hostility to Muslims.³⁷[37] In essence, he qualified the message of the verse by offering a generalization about the dominant sentiment among Christians. Al-San‘ānī warned against applying the feeling of amity toward all Christians, but did not substantiate his position. One must assume he counted on his reader’s acquiescence due to what was generally known at the time about conflict between Muslims and Christians. When al-San‘ānī died, the Crusades were underway. Whatever the real reason, it could not have stemmed from a method of interpretation because the exegete did not employ the same qualification to his understanding of the other part of the verse.

In contrast, al-Baghawī (d. 1122), who lived in the mid-Crusades period, approached this verse in two ways. First, he agreed with al-San‘ānī’s view of the Christians, adding that “they kill Muslims, capture them, destroy their countries and mosques, and burn their Qur’ans.”³⁸[38] Second, he acknowledged unnamed exegetes suggesting that that verse refers to “all Jews and all Christians because Jew are hardhearted while Christians are softhearted.”³⁹[39] Al-Baghawī did

not offer any support from the Qur'an, Ḥadīth, other *Ma'thūr*, or behavioral observation for this emphatic characterization.

By then, these social stereotypes of Jews and Christians may have become acceptable in exegetes' circles. Approximately, two decades after al-Baghawī, Abū al-Qāsim al-Zamakhsharī al-Khawārizmī (d. 1144) accepted the notion of Christians being "softhearted." He opined that Jews are lumped with the polytheists because they are snobby and will not respond to truth. He cited what he called a "very weak" Ḥadīth: "Whenever two Jews are alone with a Muslim they would consider killing him."⁴⁰[40] This narrative presents another dilemma: If Qur'an exposition is about explaining revealed truth, is it proper to support it by a discredited attribution to the Prophet? The irony is that some of the rigidity developed around using *tafsir bi'l-ma'thūr* was meant to clear the meaning of the Qur'an from *Ra'y* that does not possess truth claim.

By the fourteenth century, Jewish and Christian stereotypes had already been established in exegetical literature. Al-Nasafī (d. 1310) repeated the notion that Jews are hardhearted and Christians are softhearted and modest, without reference to supporting evidence from *ma'thūr*.⁴¹[41] A few decades later, Muḥammad al-Gharnāṭī al-Kalbī (d. 1341) delivered the most equivocal statement of Jew-phobia. He cited their alliance with Meccan polytheists as only an example proving an eternally valid trend. "This remains true until the end of time: every Jew is very hostile to Islam and cunning against its people."⁴²[42] Such notion clearly violates the spirit and text of the Qur'an.

Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī (d. 1373) offered a psychological profile of Jews to explain their disbelief: "The disbelief of the Jews is caused by arrogance and the tendency to reject truth. This is why they are cursed until Judgment Day." Like many exegetes, Ibn Kathīr was more careful about generalizations regarding Christians, asserting that 5:82 was meant for al-Najāshī and his people.⁴³[43] Likewise, al-Baydawī (d. 1388) explained Jewish behavior using almost the same words that appeared in earlier exegetical works. He pointed out their snobbish attitude, excessive expression of disbelief, and habit of opposition to prophets. He added to these characterizations charges of whimsical thinking and reliance on imitation. Predictably, he painted Christians with a broad brush as being humble and devoted to knowledge and good works. Interestingly, he concluded by stating that these are praiseworthy attributes "even for non-believers."⁴⁴[44] This idea of goodness that is totally detached from belief is congruent with the Qur'anic concept of *fiṭrah* (human nature), a major theme in contemporary Islamic understanding, as presented above by Naṣr and al-Fārūqī.

Al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) refrained from issuing generalizations, but did not justify the use of a discredited Hadith about a Muslim being alone with Jews. One may speculate that he assumed this would not be challenged. He referred to the Christians of Abyssinia who recognized the truthfulness of the Qur'an, but did not suggest that they must have converted to deserve praise.

He cited another *Ma'thūr* suggesting al-Najāshī, along with Abyssinian monks and scholars, listened to a recitation of the Qur'an.⁴⁵[45]

Abū al-Su'ūd (d. 1544) suggested that this verse only reaffirms what is known about Jews who are “snobbish, extreme disbelievers, and immersed in following whims and desires.” He scolded them for their blind following of tradition, lack of inquisitiveness, and propensity to rebel against prophets. Abū al-Su'ūd referred to Christians as *jins* (a distinct category of people). He accepted the generalized notion of Christian affinity to Muslims because, in his words, many Christians are that way. Then he qualified his perception of Jews, stating that although some are guided, most are not. He referred to the alliance between Jews and pagan Arabs but not to the Abyssinian Christians.⁴⁶[46] In other words, he acknowledged that the verse referred to the behavior of Medina Jews, yet he offered a generalized statement about the religious attitudes of most Jews, never testing it against knowledge of the Jews of his time and/or locale. He paraphrased some other verses of the Qur'an that mentioned wrongdoing of Jews who lived in the past, ignoring the verses praising other Jews.

The same methodological error applies to al-Amadī's characterization of many Christians as believers. Although the statement might actually have been true at the time of revelation and the time of al-Amadī, that knowledge would not be derived from 5:82. The verse is not concerned with quantifying the faithful crowd. Even the best quantitative research techniques would have difficulty reaching definitive generalizations about such a difficult topic.

Exegetes who derived meaning from Arabic grammar reached conflicting conclusions. Abu Muḥammad al-Andalusī (d. 1151) wrote that the prefix “*l*” in the word *latajidanna* (verily, you shall find) indicates an absolute affirmation that applies to all times, although he acknowledged that the verse refers to a current state of affairs. Yet, then he excluded Jews with moral character. Like other exegetes, he offered a static profile of all Jews on the basis of Jewish-Muslim relations at the time of the Prophet or on authority of previously rehashed assumptions regarding the behavior of the great majority among them. Behavioral studies of this nature were not available at the time. Although the verse offers a contrast of Jewish and Christian sentiments vis-à-vis Muslims, al-Andalusī generalized about Jews but remained cautious regarding Christians. He only added the following tweak: “The Qur'an is not saying Christians feel affection toward Muslims; it only tells that they are *aqrabu* (closer) than the Jews and polytheists to Muslims.”⁴⁷[47]

In contrast, Abū 'Abdullāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273) expressed a starkly different understanding of the use of suffix and prefix in Arabic, suggesting that the “*l*” in *latajidanna* denotes an oath for emphasis while the ending with “*anna*” is meant to make a distinction between the present state of affair and the future. This analysis begs the question of whether al-Andalusī, who lived only a century earlier, missed the meaning of the prefix? Do you mean suffix? “NA” is at the end of the word, not its beginning “*anna*.” Classical Arabic conventions had already been set by then. Al-Qurṭubī did not recall other verses praising Jews and criticizing Christians, but

his explanation of the reference to Jews, along with his citation of the story of al-Najāshī to contextualize the reference to Christians, is highly responsive to time and place factors.⁴⁸[48]

Abū al-Fadl al-Baghdādī al-Alūsī (d. 1854) used language to stress that Jews are even more hostile than the polytheists because they are mentioned first. This is the only time an exegete made use of the spoken language to indicate emphasis in a written commentary. In Arabic, the article “*wa*” (and) implies equal emphasis.⁴⁹[49] In contrast, Muḥammad al-Shawkānī (d. 1834) used knowledge of grammar and sentence structure to emphasize what is literally apparent in the meaning. His approach is minimalist, assuming that readers would only need an explanation for uncommon words or complex structures.⁵⁰[50]

Scripture and the Dynamic Nature of Human Behavior

One cannot infer too much about each exegete by looking at their interpretation of one verse. The focus here is to raise questions and offer answers about the nature of the exegesis field and its possible overlap with behavioral social sciences, given what exegetes actually have done. The review clearly shows substantive disparity not only in the way exegetes understood 5:82 but also in their perception of their own role. Some saw their job was to make reading the Qur’an easier; others wanted to amplify the message of the Qur’an; others wanted to read in the Qur’an practical suggestions dealing with the world around them. Some began from their observations in the world and attempted to support them from the Qur’an and other traditions. Asma Afsaruddin demonstrates that Shī‘ī and Sunnī scholars used the Qur’an to debate who had the right to succeed the Prophet in political leadership.⁵¹[51] A holistic approach that seeks to glorify the Qur’an as an eternal source of truth telling would discourage such usage.

Exegesis sources in the first three centuries did not draw generalizations about the character of Jews or Christians from 5:82. In sharp contrast, the twentieth-century work of Seyyed Quṭb (d. 1966) reads the Qur’an in light of historical events, including the Crusades, modern Western imperialism, and contemporary Israeli colonialism. He accepted the notion that Jews have been Islam’s enemies from the start, adding to that clear anti-Jewish rhetoric, accusing Jews of having caused the ills of modern society.⁵²[52] Clearly, Quṭb infused in his commentary a certain reading of history that he acquired before writing his Qur’an commentary. The shadow of the Arab-Israeli conflict looms large in how he related to Jews. Quṭb attributed the mention of Christians in this verse to the people of Najrān, a small Christian group in Arabia that accepted Islam. In this line of thinking, only Christians who convert can be close to Muslims while Jews are always bad and anti-Muslim.

The gist of Quṭb’s commentary is not completely anomalous. Most of the works reviewed for this paper offer a generalized negative portrayal of Jews. Al-Kalbī even claimed this is

simply the nature of Jews and will never change. Al-Baghawī, al-Zamakhsharī, and Ibn Kathīr mentioned the specific context of the conflict with Jewish tribes in Madīnah, but still used this as more evidence of the ill-natured quality of Jews as a category of people.

It is worthwhile to contrast this understanding with how these five exegetes dealt with verse 2:47, which reminds the Israelites that God has favored them over all people. All five exegetes express the understanding that the praise applies only to the past, to the time of Moses and other Jewish prophets.⁵³[53] In other words, praise is limited to a specific generation of Jews, but curse pertains to all other Jews (or those since the generation that opposed the Prophet Muhammad). This logic violates the Qur'anic opposition to the notion of collective responsibility. No people should be judged by what their coreligionists did in the past, either individually or collectively.⁵⁴[54]

Jews are described in many *tafsīr* sources as “hardhearted,” “snobbish” and “arrogant,” while Christians are seen as “softhearted” and “humble.” Such descriptions are obviously not general statements about Christian and Jewish ethics; they are presented as collective attributes of members of the two groups. As such, they meet the definition of stereotypes. This finding raises the specific question of whether it is the place of Qur'anic exegesis to profile the behavioral traits of individuals or groups.

People create conventions by which they relate to one another and the world around them. Their shared experiences inform their patterns of thinking and behavior and allow them to form what the Qur'an calls “peoples and tribes.” However, nothing in the Qur'an suggests that people are born with cultural characteristics that stay with them and their progeny. Indeed, the Qur'anic narrative supports the notion that people are endowed by their Creator with the ability to make conscious choices with regards to their behavior. This dynamic conception of the human experience renders false any static stereotypes.

The validity of the Qur'an for all times and places does not mean that every statement in it claims to be true everywhere and all the time. As explained above, classical scholars of the Qur'an were usually very particular about noting the context of revelation. The review of 5:82 interpretations shows that many exegetes ignored this important consideration. Many ventured to ascribe eternal behavioral qualities to categories of people based on their religious affiliation. To help future scholars avoid such an error, maybe it would be worthwhile to engage in a classification process that would identify verses whose validity is timeless and those that are bound to time and place.

This will not stop exegetes and others from attempting to relate scripture to personal and public life. There are a number of ways to deal with statements by exegetes implying social learning. The first option is to dismiss them because they lie outside the boundaries of the exegesis specialization. Those with secular scholarly orientation may prefer this response. The risk implied in this choice is clear: excluding oneself from what could be an important discussion. The second option would be to evaluate arguments presented in this sort of discourse based on evidence and logic.

In conclusion, the contemporary holistic understanding of the Qur'an raises several methodological and interpretative challenges to classical exegesis works cited in this study. The main theoretical concern arising from the critique of past works is whether social commentary is

a different enterprise than the one concerned with expounding scriptural messages. If it is difficult, impractical, or undesirable to separate the two functions, one still has to ask whether exegetes who are not trained to observe human behavior are qualified to engage in credible expositions of what the Qur'an means to the evolving human condition. In any case, when exegetes delve into such subjects, they automatically cross over to a new interdisciplinary field of knowledge. By doing so, they should welcome critique from a wide range of experts. To deal with the practical implication of this question, one can imagine the possibility of establishing an interdisciplinary field of knowledge that would train scholars in both exegesis and social and behavioral sciences.

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