

The Qur'an, Orientalism and the Encyclopedia of the Qur'an by Muzaffar Iqbal

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Built on the characteristic biases, claims and false premises of the Orientalists, EQ is a non-representative, discourteous, scandalous and blasphemous hodgepodge of disparate material (Iqbal, p. 50).

In 2008, Iqbal published an article in *Journal of Qur'anic Research and Studies* (vol.3, issue 5) in Medina. Later, Islamic Book Trust which is affiliated to The Other Press re-published it as a non-lengthy book in Malaysia. Many Muslim scholars endeavored to write some critical notes against Orientalists' works those Westerners and non-Muslims who spent considerable time on Islamic and Qur'anic Studies. One of these Muslim scholars is Muzaffar Iqbal who has published his reputed book of "science and Islam" a few years ago.

At the outset, Iqbal historically talks about the early period of Islam and some interreligious disputations between Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Iqbal main concentration in this book is about the literature and the Qur'an which he divides it into four sections of: (a) Believers' exegetical literature; (b) disbelievers polemical writings; (c) those orientalists who attempted to distinguish their statements from polemical works; (d) the contemporary academic works on the Qur'an with their characteristic claims of objectivity and dispassionate scholarship. After that, Iqbal gradually follows his main target in category 'd' for examining the Encyclopedia of the Qur'an (EQ) as one of the greatest Islamic Projects in the West.

He developed his essay's thesis by analyzing the notes of Jane Dammen McAuliffe who was the General Editor of EQ. Iqbal also critiqued her wish to "make the world of Qur'anic (sic) studies accessible to a very broad range of academic scholars and educated readers" (p. 6).

Iqbal, who himself is the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Islam and Science*, as well as the general editor of Integrated Encyclopedia of the Qur'an (IEQ) creates a connection between Orientalists, the Academy, Religion and Western Civilization from Dark Age to Modern Age in order to prove his critical notes. Also, he indirectly

indicates that "most articles of EQ have been written based on aberrations (*gumrahi*)" (p. 18).

"Some Characteristic Features of EQ" is a part of the book in which Iqbal indicates weakness points of EQ.

McAuliffe's utterances and functions are the body of this book; Iqbal is unpleasant when he invited someone who calls himself a secular Muslim to write about the Qur'an. It seems many Muslims; particularly those who follow the traditionalism could not cope with modernism categories like secularism, humanism, liberalism and so forth.

Iqbal would state that the number of Muslim contributors in EQ project is much less than non-Muslim contributors and he asks this question why most of the entries dealing with fundamental concepts, ideas and terms of the Qur'anic literature have been written by non-Muslim contributors?!

Apart from McAuliffe's preface in EQ, the rest of critical statements in this book are related to the various entries of "God's Final Judgment of humanity" by Isaac Hasson, "History and the Qur'an" by Franz Rosenthal or "God and his Attributes" by Gerhard Böwering.

Besides, one of the major assertions of the author is about the sources and how they have been used. He assumed that "Some non-Muslim contributors seem to have little familiarity with Muslim source material and sometimes they have made every serious claims based on secondary sources" (p.39). All of these brought about Iqbal sadly points out that his co-religionists i.e. Muslim contributors and readers got involved in a full distorted project. Hereby, Iqbal ends his book with this conclusion that "Built on the characteristic biases, claims and false premises of the Orientalists, EQ is a non-representative, discourteous, scandalous and blasphemous hodgepodge of disparate material" (p. 50).

Nonetheless, this book made an attempt to expose how some orientalist's works moved unlike the Islamic and Qur'anic literature. It is also understood that Muzaffar Iqbal completely rejected the 13-year efforts of scholars in the enormous EQ project. Likewise, regarding the contribution of Muslim scholars to the EQ project, it should be noted that Jane Dammen McAuliffe has mentioned the following point at her preface: "There are Muslim colleagues who have preferred not to participate out of fear that association with the EQ would compromise their scholarly integrity" [1] (EQ. I. xiii) which it has not been discussed by Iqbal. Moreover, as I asserted in journal of *al-Bayan*, there are some types of polemical discussions between Muslims and Orientalists, but both parties must move warily because once in a while polemical disputations caused misunderstanding among the public, an aversion to science among scholars and an aversion to religion among Muslims [2] although the comment of Andrew Rippin is always worthy of note that who knows who is a real Muslim and who is a non-Muslim?

All in all, next to the EQ and its preface, Muzaffar Iqbal's book as a well-written critical essay is recommended to Muslim and non-Muslim readers.

REFERENCES

1. McAuliffe, J.D., 2003. Encyclopedia of the Qur'an. Brill Academic Publishers.
2. Daneshgar, M., 2012. Qur'an, Orientalists and Western Scholars. *Al-Bayan*, 10(2): 5-9.