

Book Review

New interpretive translation of the Qur'an

By Muhammad Mojlum Khan

The Glorious Qur'an by Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadri, London: Minhaj ul-Qur'an Publications, pp1102, HB, 2011, £24.99.

Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadri is a leading Pakistani Islamic scholar, orator and author. When I first met him more than fifteen years ago, I found him to a charismatic and eloquent speaker on Islamic topics. Born in the city of Jhang in Pakistan in 1951, he combined traditional learning with academic study of Islamic sciences, obtaining his doctorate in Islamic law from the University of Punjab in Lahore. Fluent in Arabic, Urdu and English, he is well-known for his talks on aspects of Islam and Sufism on many Pakistani satellite channels. His ability to transcend the Deobandi-Barelvi theological dichotomy has turned him into an important unifying religious figure in his native Pakistan as well as the Subcontinent as a whole.

In addition to the numerous talks and lectures he has delivered, Qadri is a prolific writer. His many writings on aspects of Islamic law, jurisprudence and Sufism are widely read in his native Pakistan although increasingly more and more of his works are being translated for the benefit of English-speaking Muslims. However, he is better known for his recent *fatwa* (legal edict) against religious extremism and terrorism. Consisting of around 500 pages, in this edict the author has successfully repudiated all forms of violence, extremism and terrorism from a traditional Islamic perspective.

In addition to the above, he has recently translated the Qur'an into English. Upon close inspection, however it became clear that his English translation is, in fact, a rendering of his highly successful Urdu translation. What motivated him to undertake this task? Unfortunately, Qadri has failed to explain why he undertook such an important and onerous task. Other than a two-page introduction to the translator, there is no introduction or explanation why this work was produced. Thankfully, I have a copy of the recently published paperback edition of this translation. It includes a brief explanation by Abdul Aziz Dabbagh, presumably a friend of Qadri, about his motivation and methodology for producing this work. It would have been much better for Qadri himself to have supplied a detailed introduction explaining why he prepared the Urdu translation in the first place and why it was necessary to produce a separate English edition.

However, according to Dabbagh, 'To meet the requirements of the modern reader, ...Qadri has intended for this translation of the Holy Qur'an to be fully interpretive...To achieve this objective, he has added parenthetical interpretations in step with the translated sentence structures, which are also consistent with the structures of the Arabic text...' (p1, paperback edition, 2012) Qadri's interpretive approach has enabled him to relate Qur'anic teachings to modern scientific knowledge and express multiple layers of its meaning as well as elucidate spiritual teachings of the Divine revelation, not to mention expressing his profound love and reverence for the blessed Prophet (peace be on him) among other things.

Having read the edition incorporating the Arabic text side-by-side with English translation and the new English-only paperback edition, I must admit that I prefer the former because it enables one to check the original Arabic text with Qadri's translation especially as he has chosen to add his parenthetical explanations to the Qur'anic verses rather than use separate footnotes. And although his explanations appear in brackets, it would have been much better if the translated Qur'anic verses were in bold and the explanations were printed in a slightly smaller font to avoid confusing the essential Qur'anic text with the explanations (it can be easily done if one is not familiar with Arabic). This approach, I should add, has been very effectively used by the publishers of the *Qur'an Made Easy: Arabic Text with English Translation* (Islamic Book Service, New Delhi, 2010).

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Nevertheless, I agree with Dabbagh that by clarifying the meaning of *jihad* and *qital*, and by contextualising the verses dealing with military struggle, the translator has dispelled misunderstanding and confusion that have 'arisen in relation to these terms on the part of both Muslims (particularly that section predisposed to violent extremism) and non-Muslims and bring out the true meaning of these terms.' (p4, paperback edition, 2012)

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