***The Qurʾān and The Bible: Text and Commentary***, by Gabriel Said Reynolds; Qurʾān translation by Ali Quli Qarai (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), xiii + 1032 pp., ISBN-13: 978-0300181326, $40.00 (hb)

Reynolds begins his sizable work entitled *The Qurʾān and The Bible*, which is apparently an output of significant long-term research, with preliminary remarks on the Old Testament's inclusion in the Christian Bible by the Early Church fathers and makes a comparison with early and later Islamic approaches to the Bible. According to the author, in the beginning period of Islam, the Bible could theoretically have been considered an authoritative scripture, inferring from such verses as Q 10:94 and Q 5:47, but then falsification *(taḥrīf)* allegations against the Bible became the prevailing conception among Muslims in other verses such as Q 2:42, 59, 79; 3:71, 187; 4:46; 5:13; 7:162 (p. 1).

Unlike other comparison works between the Bible and the Qurʾān, Reynolds makes his work proceed according to the Qurʾānic order, as this method is thought to be beneficial for readers to comprehend the structure and content of the Qurʾān. *The Qur'ān and The Bible* is composed of two main parts: English translation of verses and footnotes. The author uses the Qurʾān translation by Ali Quli Qarai and qualifies it one of the best Qurʾān translations, as it portrays the Qurʾānic meanings according to traditional Islamic understandings (p. 7), and he refers to other translations when necessary. The Qurʾān verses are accompanied by extensive footnotes from the author. At the end of the book, there is a selective primary and secondary bibliography, the length of which easily proves the work's comprehensive nature. However, primary Islamic sources are far fewer in number in the bibliography than non-Islamic sources. A well-classified index of the Qurʾān and a separate index of citations of biblical verses are the other high-level characteristics of the work.

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In terms of the content of the book, one must note the author's elaboration on his conviction that the Qurʾān is an original work in literary and religious terms and that Qurʾānic content heavily depends on its audience having knowledge of the Bible and the biblical traditions of the time in which it was composed by its "author(s)." It is fair to say that Reynolds's postulate that the Qurʾān was written by an "author/authors" is notably present throughout the work. The absence of direct quotations in the Qurʾān of Jewish and Christian scriptures and texts is presented as the basic sign of orally transmitted Biblical knowledge. Accordingly, it is stated that "'the author' of the Qurʾān would have heard only descriptions or paraphrases of such texts rendered into Arabic orally, most likely from some form of the Semitic language known as Aramaic." (p. 3). Thus, the author diverges from some of the traditional non-Muslim approaches that are known for attributing to the Qurʾān a pagan background (p. 17).

In the following chapters, Reynolds provides explanations about the method, structure, and scope of his work as well as the earlier scholarship of others on the Qurʾān and the Bible under separate headings. He classifies the book as "a reference work and an argument about the importance of a 'contextual' reading of the Qurʾān" (p. 4). His rather skeptical stance towards the Islamic tradition, consisting of narrations of occasions of revelation, and his method, which can be characterized by a departure from the chronological reading of the Qurʾān and by eliminating narrations on the Prophet's life span, seem the most problematic aspects of the book when recent scholarship proving the contrast is taken into consideration. He insists on the functionality of reading the Qurʾān in its own context, an era known as late antiquity, in contrast with N. Sinai's counterargument of "the Qurʾān as Process" and Angelika Neuwirth's and J. Witztum's way of handling the Qurʾān in terms of inner Qurʾānic chronology (p. 18). To this end, the author describes his method as "Qurʾanist" (p. 5), which explicitly parallels the *sola scriptura* motto. However, Reynolds uses Biblical material that can be dated after the Qurʾān, paving the way for anachronism.[1]

[1] Some of these works are *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, *The Targum of Pseudo Jonathan*, and *Exodus Rabbah*. While discrediting almost all of the Islamic narrations on occasions of revelations on the grounds that they were probably composed after

Likewise, he acts with suspicion towards the consultation of pre-Islamic, *Jāhilī* poetry in the Qurʾān interpretation, as he seems convinced that the Qurʾānic vocabulary reflects the post-*Jāhilī* period; in other words, pre-Islamic poetry was composed in a much later period than the Qurʾān, according to Reynolds. He grounds this approach in Nöldeke's well-known work, *History of the Qurʾān*, and Taha Husayn's arguments about the fact that although the most famous pre-Islamic poets are allegedly from different tribes, no evidence of dialect varieties is available in the related literature. To this end, Reynold follows Nöldeke's arguments on poetry by Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt, some of which can be thought of as genuine, while some passages in his poems were probably composed later (p. 5). However, this argument seems too inductive to lead sound conclusions, and it rules out the possibility that the poets of that time could have been using a common literary vocabulary that was more homogeneous and separate from the dialect of common inhabitants uttering dialectical expressions in their everyday communication.

In Reynolds' work, the Qurʾān's originality lies in the nature of its relationship with biblical traditions, and, appreciating that an understanding of this is only possible by handling the Qurʾān within its own historical context, Reynolds chooses to disregard certain medieval traditions and exegesis works in examining Qurʾānic meanings. In this direction, he mostly refers to two classical works within the Qurʾānic interpretation literature. These are English translations of *Asbāb nuzūl al-Qurʾān* by al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076) and the well-known tafsīr, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*.

In the concluding section of his work, Reynolds emphasizes that the Qurʾān's relationship with Christian tradition, specifically with the writings of the Syriac Christian fathers, is much more notable than its allusions to the Jewish tradition. He occasionally prefers utilizing Syriac literature for explaining Qurʾānic content (p. 10) instead of following the usual path of other Western scholars who often handle the Qurʾān within the framework of the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish sources pursuant to their assumptions on the relation between the Prophet's biography and his encounters with the Jews dwelling in Medina. To this end, especially in Sūrah 12, Reynolds mostly refers to

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the revelation of the Qurʾān, the author embraces a rather optimistic approach to the dating of these works. See p. 9.

the work titled *The Syriac Milieu of the Qurʾān* by Joseph Witztum, attaching a Syriac background to content of the Qurʾān, particularly in the protagonists of the stories about Abraham and Ishmael, Cain and Abel, and Joseph. For instance, with regard to Q 12:74-75, the commentary he provides is as follows:

> By having the brothers declare here that the one in whose bag the goblet is found "shall give himself over" (that is become a slave or prisoner) the Qurʾān differs from the declaration of the brothers in Genesis 44:9, where the brothers recommend death for the guilty party. This reflects how Syriac Christian authors sought to reconcile Genesis 44:9 with the following verse..." (p. 18).

The vocabulary of the Qurʾān is another main point on which the author focuses. Reynolds does not track the etymological root of each religious term in the Qurʾān. Instead, mostly inspired by the prominent work by Arthur Jeffery titled *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān*, Reynolds classifies philological evidence systematically to enlarge the Qurʾān's cultural environment to its greatest extent, pointing out a number of loan words in the Qurʾān's spectrum and emphasizing Palestinian Aramaic's superiority to Syriac[2] in the vocabulary of the Qurʾān.

In his conclusion, Reynolds emphasizes five main inferences of his work. One of these is the special relationship between the Qurʾān and Christian tradition. To put it simply, the Qurʾān is in conversation with Christian sources more than it is with the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, yet there are certain cases in which the Qurʾān develops its themes from the Old Testament. The author states the following:

> This is evident with the Qurʾān's account of God's commanding the angels to bow before Adam, and the devil's refusal to do so, a tradition prominent in the Christian tradition (where Adam – before the Fall – is a prototype of Christ) and largely avoided in Jewish tradition. It is also seen in the accounts of the Companions of the

[2] Aramaic is classified as "Lingua Franca of the late antique near east" by Emran Iqbal El-Badawi. El Badawi explains Islam as "a response to disunity of Aramaic churches." As per his remarks, "the articulator as well as the audience of the Qurʾān were monotheistic in origin, probably bilingual, culturally sophisticated and accustomed to the theological debates that raged between the Aramaic speaking churches." El-Badawi, *The Qurʾān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

Cave or *Dhū l-Qarnayn* (the two-horned man) in the Qurʾān 18 related to Christian legends of the sleepers of Ephesus and Alexander, respectively (p.19).

Another inference he points out is that the intertextual characters and themes that the Qurʾān echoes are usually in parallel with Christian accounts of the related theme, such as the Qurʾānic narrative portraying Abel as "a willing and passive sacrifice" (Q 5:28), the existence of a wolf(s) in the account of Joseph (Q 12:13), and the way in which the Qurʾān describes Israelites as "killers of prophets." (pp. 12-15).

Maxims, metaphors, and phrases in some verses are thought to be other signs of the intimate relationship between the Qurʾān and Bible. The author exemplifies this with "the needle's eye" maxim in Q 7:40 and the same usage in the Synoptic Gospels, where Jesus uses the metaphor of the camel and the eye of the needle to clarify that it will be difficult for the rich to enter Heaven.[3] On the other hand, the Qurʾān applies this metaphor to those refusing signs from God.[4] It is fair to say that the author also unnecessarily associates some of the phrases and principles in the Qurʾān, which may well be classified as common ethical and conscientious truths across all times and beliefs, with Biblical tradition, although they are too general to pertain to any Semitic religion. For example, with reference to verses such as "giving alms secretly" (Q 2:274) (p. 105), "kindness to orphans" (Q 2:177) (p. 81), "no soul will be of any avail to another soul" (Q 82:19) (p. 892), Reynolds struggles to attach a biblical background to the related verses and to thus imply that the Qurʾān takes all of its subject

[3] Matt. 19:23-24; Mark 10:25, Luke 18:25

[4] Expounding upon such instances, the author points out phrases like "walking humbly on the earth." Cf. Matt. 5:4; heaven as a "tillage," which is similar Matt. 13:23; "tasting death" like in Matt. 16:28; Joh 8:52; and the parable of foolish virgins, which shows similarity with Matt. 25:1-13. In setting off these examples, Reynolds also highlights the Qurʾān's particular interest in "preaching Christians;" accordingly, Jews are the community punished by God because of their wrongdoings, and they have been cursed because of this. In contrast, the position of Christians notably differs, and while the Qurʾān admonishes Christians to remember message of Jesus, they are the people whose fate is yet to be determined with regards to the Qurʾān's content. p.24.

principles from Biblical tradition. This point may well be defined as the weakest part of Reynolds' work.

Additionally, there are some idioms that are likely to be cultural terms rather than theological ones, and Reynolds also does not hesitate to ground such Qurʾānic verses in Biblical tradition. Q 2:187, describing a "white streak and dark streak (thread)," is no exception to this. The author argues that a tradition in Mishnah Berakhot explaining the Shema prayer time with "blue and white wool" constitutes a basis for the Qurʾānic usage of the phrase (p. 83). However, this approach seemingly rules out the fact that cultural proximities inevitably lead to common linguistic terms and expressions that are not necessarily theological all the time.

Likewise, some of the metaphors and parables in the Qurʾān are occasionally presented as intertextual expressions by the author, though there is no sound reason for doing so. To illustrate, Q 2:264, 265 articulates the following parable: "Their parable is that of a rock covered with soil: a downpour strikes it…if it is not a downpour that strikes it then a shower, and God watches what you do." These two verses, along with preceding three, are associated with Luke 8:8, which compares believers to a crop that grows abundantly.

The other theme seen in Reynolds' work is the Qurʾān's hallmark theological and prophetological discourse, which clearly deviates from the Biblical tradition. For example, in such discourse, Noah, who does not speak in the Old Testament narrative, transforms into "a preacher of theological righteousness" in the Qurʾān, and this makes him an early prototype for the Prophet Muḥammad. Likewise, as the Qurʾānic verses proclaiming the dictate to "obey God and the Messenger" do not have an equivalence in the Bible; this is also classified as a variation between the former and latter sources (pp.13-14).

The author also includes very valuable statements on the language of the Qurʾān. While he does stress the importance of the scholarship on the Qurʾān's historical context in the Near East in late antiquity, he states quite frankly that "there is no reason to assume that the Arabic of the Qurʾān is the fully developed Classical Arabic of medieval grammarians" (p.14). To support this assertion, he refers to the Qurʾān itself (Q 46:12), thus adhering to his Qurʾānist method.

With regard to Reynolds' statements, in some cases, the Qurʾān departs from the biblical account of the intertextual theme "to

develop a certain symbolism," and in other cases, the Qurʾān "seems to be following a legendary adaptation of a biblical account" (this seems to be case with the story of Haman, who presumably ends up in Egypt because of a minor error in the details of the ancient Ahiqar legend). Reynolds concludes that some "confusions" in the Qurʾānic account of Mary, the name Azar, etc.[5] illustrate the orally transmitted biblical knowledge at the time in which the Qurʾān came into being (p.15). In this vein, it is worth remembering El-Badawi's counterarguments:

> [T]he outright conflation of Mary the mother of Christ (Q 5:17) on the one hand with Mary the daughter of Amram (ʿimrān; Q 66:12) or sister of Aaron (Q 19:28) on the other, and [...] should not immediately be viewed as contradictions, but rather a "creative tension" imposed on the reader by the text […] —at least not until systematically and methodologically proven otherwise. The point is that such a dexterous command of Biblical and post-Biblical literature as a whole, and such strong volition on the part of the Qur'ān's authorship, is central to our understanding of its dogmatic rearticulation of the Aramaic Gospels Tradition (El-Badawi 2014, 9).

In conclusion, the intertextuality between the Qurʾān and Biblical tradition is an irrefutable phenomenon. The classic non-Muslim perspective on this basic feature of the Qurʾān, which the Qurʾān itself never disclaims such a reliance upon, has always existed within the framework of a "mission" to portray the Qurʾān as an unoriginal work. However, Reynolds's book generally underlines as much as possible the novel characteristics that the Qurʾān exhibits in its usage of Biblical material. In this vein, Reynolds's work deserves deep praise, despite the exceptional sections where the Qurʾān is unnecessarily associated with Biblical tradition. The wide range of references used within Reynolds's book is another of its outstanding qualifications, making it a reference work for other future literature.

On the other hand, as stated above, the author applies a methodology that is clearly questionable. While Reynolds is skeptical about early Islamic sources on the grounds that they are not

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[5] For a comprehensive study on the Qurʾānic narratives and characters that are still equivocal between Muslim and non-Muslim apologetics, see Mustafa Öztürk, *Kur'an Kıssalarının Mahiyeti*, İstanbul: Kuramer, 2017.

authentic, he does not trace material back to Christian primary sources such as Biblical narratives, and he also disregards the fact that there exists a close relationship between the Old Testament and Canaan civilization. In other words, no religion is created out of nothing.

Additionally, the foreign vocabulary of the Qurʾān should be accepted as part of a common memory of Semitic religions, and Reynolds's emphasis on the Qurʾān's loanwords from Biblical tradition may well be enrichened by the statements of El-Badawi:

> It demonstrates how the Qur'ān via the agency of late antique *lingua franca* of the Near East—Aramaic—selectively challenged or re-appropriated, and therefore took up the "dogmatic re-articulation" of language and imagery coming from the Aramaic Gospel Traditions, in order to fit the idiom and religious temperament of a heterogeneous, sectarian Arabian audience (El-Badawi 2014, 5).

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