

Current project Nasr Abu Zayd on the Quran:

A few years ago, I started to realize that the tension surrounding many issues in the Qur'an cannot be solved by dealing with the Qur'an as only a text. The Qur'an maintains that, as a text authored by God, it has no contradictions (Q 4:82). Yet the phenomenon of contradiction does exist; it was realized by the theologians who tried painfully to solve it by adhering to the duality of clarity-ambiguity. It was also realized by the jurists who tried to solve it by adhering to the doctrine of abrogation. In modern Qur'anic studies in the Muslim world, the phenomenon is also realized and the solution proposed is to distinguish between two dimensions in the Qur'anic worldview, the universal and the historical. In all these efforts, the phenomenon is realized but not fully solved. My assessment is that the concept of textuality with its underlying assumption of author is the cause of this paradoxical entrapping between historicity and divinity, or between the chronological order and the mushaf order.

Realizing the fact that the Qur'an was originally a series of discourses, each of which has certain historical context and certain degree of independence, I suggested a redefinition of the Qur'an as discourse(s). These discourses reflecting polyphony rather than monophony and reflect not only different situations but also different addressees. A humanistic hermeneutics, I suggest, is to consider in every discourse-unit: 1- who the speaker is and who the addressees are; 2- the mode of discourse under investigation, whether argumentative, persuasive, polemic, proscriptive, prescriptive, descriptive, inclusive or exclusive etc. Thus I do not deal with the sura (chapter) or with the `Āya (verse) as independent units; the unit is the identified discourse according to the norms suggested.

For now, I propose dividing the Qur'an's worlds not exactly worldview- into five interdependent domains, each of which reflects one level that has been taken away and disconnected from the other levels in one of the Islamic disciplines, namely fiqh, theology, philosophy and mysticism. These worlds could be summarized as follows:

1. Cosmology, the Qur'anic worldview of the cosmos, the universe, nature, creation and recreation, the creator, death and resurrection are presented.

2. The divine-human relationship. Here closeness and distinction are both emphasized in different modes of discourse. Despite this emphasized closeness, mediation between the divine and the human is presented in poetic language describing the angels filling the space between heaven and earth bringing down God's amr or command. The fact that God always sends guidance to humans via the mediation of angels is a token of His care for them. Humans in return are expected to be grateful.

3. Ethical and moral dimension. Here the Qur'an maintains a certain tension between the possibility of human perfection and the reality of human moral deficiency. The complex divine image of God as merciful and mighty could be understood as a parallel or reflection of human nature.

4. Society. Here the Qur'an deals with specific societal practical issues like marriage, divorce, and inheritance. On this level we find legal ruling interwoven with ethics.

5. Punishment (hudud). This level exists in the Qur'an but it does not belong to the worldview of the Qur'an. It does not even belong to the category of "rules" (level 4). Cutting off the hands of the thief, flogging an adulterer and those who falsely accuse

others of adultery (qadhf), - not to mention stoning, rajm, (which is not a rule in the mushaf but is claimed have been abrogated in its textual form only, are not genuine Qur'anic rulings. These forms of punishment existed before the Qur'an, and the Qur'an borrowed them in order to protect society against crimes. These levels and there may be more -- are all intrinsically interwoven in the Qur'an and the Qur'anic worldview could not be reconstructed without them.