

SOME FEATURES OF MAWDUDI'S TAFHĪM AL-QUR'ĀN

*Mustansir Mir**

Abul-A'la Mawdūdī (1903-79) was a leading Muslim scholar of the twentieth century.¹ He has written extensively on a variety of Islamic subjects.² He wrote in Urdu, but his works, quite a few of which have been translated into other languages,³ have exercised deep influence on educated classes, especially the youth, in many parts of the Muslim world. Though essentially a scholar of the traditional mold, Mawdūdī, unlike many other Muslim scholars, is alive to the problems of modernity as they confront the Islamic

*Dr. Mustansir Mir, teaches Islamic Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. His articles have appeared in many scholarly journals.

¹ Mawdūdī was born at Aurangabad (Deccan, India). After several years of religious education, he started his career as a journalist at the age of fifteen, becoming, in 1921 and 1925 respectively, the editor of *Al-Muslim* and *Al-Jam'iyyat*, biweekly Urdu organs of a major organization of Indian Muslim scholars. At the suggestion of the poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Mawdūdī in March 1938 moved to Pathankot (East Punjab, India) in order to start work on the recodification of Islamic law. But Iqbal, from whom the chief support for the project was to come, died in the following month, and the project never got off the ground. In 1941 Mawdūdī founded the Jama'at-i Islami (Islamic Party) with the aim of bringing about social change in accordance with Islamic principles. In 1947 Pakistan came into being and the Jama'at headquarters were moved to that country. The Jama'at turned political in 1957 and Mawdūdī continued to lead it until 1972, when he had to resign on account of bad health. Although he was politically active for a long time, Mawdūdī is best known as a thinker and writer. A number of biographies of Mawdūdī have been written, most of them in Urdu and practically all of them of poor quality. For a brief life-sketch of Mawdūdī in English, see Kurshid Ahmad and Zafar Ishaq Ansari's, *Mawlānā Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdūdī: An Introduction to His Vision of Islam and Islamic Revival*, Kurshid Ahmad and Zafar Ishaq Ansari (eds.), *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honor of Mawlana Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdūdī* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1979), pp. 360-65).

² For a list of Mawdūdī's writings, see Ahmad and Ansari, pp. 3-10.

³ Few modern Muslim writers have been translated into so many languages. Mawdūdī's short *Dīniyāt* (available in English as *Towards Understanding Islam* [rev. ed.]; Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1980) has alone been rendered into more than twenty languages.

world. It is this combination of the traditional and modern strains, and his skillful exposition of Islam, that makes him one of the most widely read Muslim authors of today.⁴

Tafhīm al-Qur'ān,⁵ a six-volume commentary on the Qur'ān, is Mawdūdī's *magnum opus*. It is not only a treasury of information, it is also a distillate of Mawdūdī's thought. In writing *Tafhīm*, as he says in the Preface to the book, Mawdūdī has in mind the needs of those educated laymen who wish to understand the message of the Qur'ān but lack access to the original Arabic sources on the subject;⁶ the word *tafhīm*, which means "to make someone understand," aptly describes the nature of the book. The following pages analyze some of the features of the work.

A Modern Commentary

Even a cursory reading of *Tafhīm* would show that the work is a "modern" one. Most Urdu Qur'ān commentaries present a "traditional" look in that they lack methodical arrangement of material. *Tafhīm* seems to satisfy many of the formal requirements one expects a book of this kind to meet. A typical page of *Tafhīm* is divided into three portions: one for the Qur'ānic text; one for the translation; and one for notes. It is thus possible to read the translation uninterrupted—a convenience appreciated by those familiar with the irksome pattern of interlinear Urdu translations of the Qur'ān. The translation is presented in logical paragraphs. Occasionally, extended quotations are set off from the main text, even given in smaller print. Each volume has a detailed analytical index of subjects treated in the notes. There are 32 maps of historic routes and important geographical locations, and 12 black-and-white photographs, most of them of buildings of Thamudan style of architecture. There are copious cross-references.

Again, most of the Urdu Qur'ān commentaries employ a highly Arabicized and Persianized idiom that proves to be prohibitive to most common readers. *Tafhīm* is written in a style that an average reader not only finds comprehensible, but also delightful. *Tafhīm* has been called the first best-selling Urdu

⁴ It may be mentioned here that Mawdūdī commands a masterly prose style. Unfortunately, however, the English translations of his works fail to capture this. This is all the more unfortunate because it is these English translations that have often served as the base language for the translation of Mawdūdī's works into other languages.

⁵ Abū 'l-Ā lā Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* (6 vols.; Lahore, 1949-72). An incomplete translation of *Tafhīm* (up to S. 17) is available in English under the title of *The Meaning of the Qur'ān*, tr. Ch. Muhammad Akbar, 6 vols. [vols. 5-6 edited by A. A. Kamal]; Lahore, Islamic Publications, 1967-?). Unless otherwise stated, all references to Mawdūdī in this article are to *Tafhīm* (Urdu edition), with only the volume number and page(s) given.

⁶ 1,6.

Qur'an commentary, and the main reason for its popularity is the limpid beauty of its style.

Above all, *Tafhīm* is modern in that its author evinces an awareness of the situations and problems of the present age. On quite a few occasions Mawdūdī cites, in support of his interpretation of Qur'anic verses, recent researches in the fields of physics, medicine, and archeology.⁷ And, as a study of *Tafhīm* shows, its author addresses himself to many concerns and questions that a twentieth-century reader—Muslim or non-Muslim—of the Qur'an is likely to have.

Translation

In the Preface⁸ to *Tafhīm*, Mawdūdī says that he has attempted to make an interpretive translation of the Qur'an. Most of the Urdu translations of the Qur'an are literal and, as such, suffer from a number of drawbacks: they fail to convey in any degree the beauty and eloquence of the original; they disregard the fact that the Qur'anic style is that of an orally delivered discourse, and not of a written treatise; they fail to suggest the context and environment in which any given sura was revealed; and they do not adequately bring out the special meanings the Qur'an assigns to many words.⁹ Mawdūdī writes:

It is with a view to rectifying these shortcomings of a literal translation (*lafzi tarjamah*) that I have adopted the method of interpretive rendering (*tarjumānī*) of the Qur'an. Instead of supplying a word-for-word translation, I have endeavored to convey in Urdu, with the utmost possible accuracy, the sense I gather from a Qur'anic verse and the impression the verse makes on my mind. Avoiding literalism, I have tried to render the flawless Arabic of the original into flawless Urdu; to bring out in written language, in an un-

⁷ It should be pointed out, however, that Mawdūdī cites scientific researches for illustrative purposes only. That is, he cites such findings to substantiate Qur'an interpretations he has reached on extra-scientific grounds, but these findings do not form in him, as they do in some other Muslim scholars, the staple of Qur'an exegesis. He may be contrasted, for example, with the Egyptian Qur'an commentator, Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī (1870-1940), author of *Al-Jawāhir fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an* (26 vols. in 13, 2nd printing; Tehran: Intishārāt-i Af-tāb, 1931). Jawhari believes that one of the *primary* aims of the revelation of the Qur'an was to motivate Muslims to study the natural sciences and make advancement in scientific fields ranging from botany and zoology to oceanology and astronomy. For a brief introduction to Jawhari's approach to the Qur'an, see his *Al-Qur'an wa 'Ulum al-'Asriyya* (2nd printing; Egypt: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi), 1951.

⁸ I have translated *dibachah* "preface." Mawdūdī also writes a *dibachah* to each sura, but there it is more appropriately translated "introduction," for that, in fact, is the nature of such *dibachahs*.

⁹ 1,6-10.

constrained manner, the unbroken continuity of the oral communication; and to reproduce not only the meaning and message of the Qur'ān, but, as far as possible, the power and magnificence of the Qur'ānic language as well.¹⁰

Mawdūdī's is admittedly the most readable Urdu translation so far. An authority on the Urdu language and a great stylist. Mawdūdī was ideally suited to the task. He has succeeded, better than anyone, in capturing in Urdu the vigor and eloquence of the Arabic original. We will distinguish three characteristics of his translation.¹¹

First, the translation is expository. Sometimes in parentheses but usually woven into the translation itself we find interpretive material. Such material is used by Mawdūdī to accomplish several purposes, for example, to expound Qur'ānic laconicism: S. 8:19, *wa in ta'ūdū na 'ud*, "But if you turn around and repeat the blunder, we will repeat the punishment" (cf. Arberry, "But if you return, We shall return"); to explain expressions with special meanings: S. 14:5, *wa dhakkirhum bi ayyām Allāh*, "And advise them by relating to them the significant events in the divine annals" (cf. Arberry, "and remind them thou of the Days of God"); to supply the definite and the concrete for the indefinite and the abstract of the original: S. 1:63, *wa 'adhkurū mā fīhi*, "And keep in mind the laws and injunctions inscribed in it" (cf. Arberry, "And remember what is in it"); and to indicate the particular dimension of meaning of a verse, or a part of it, might have in a particular context: S. 2:220, *inna Allāh 'azīzun ḥakīmun*, "But, besides possessing power and authority, He is All-Wise" (cf. Arberry, "Surely, God is All-mighty, All-wise").

Mawdūdī's expository technique certainly works well and is largely responsible for the high degree of readability of *Tafhīm*. It is not without its problems, however. For one thing, there is the risk of overplay. For instance, S. 2:178, *al-ḥurru bi al-ḥurri wa al-'abdu bi al-'abdi wa al-unthā bi al-unthā*, is clear enough as "freeman for freeman, slave for slave, female for female" (Arberry), but Mawdūdī's "If a freeman has committed the murder, then the freeman should be punished; if a slave is guilty of murder, then . . ." is needless-

¹⁰ I, 10-11.

¹¹ I have given my own translation of the examples cited below. Since the examples are meant to illustrate aspects of Mawdūdī's Urdu translation, in rendering them I have generally tried to stay close to the Urdu text. I have also provided A. J. Arberry's translation of the examples given (*The Koran Interpreted* (2 vols. in 1, 5th printing; New York: MacMillan, 1973). This I have done not with a view to judging the merit of the one translation relative to the other, but in order to enable the reader to appraise Mawdūdī's translation with reference to a standard English translation that seeks to ensure fidelity to the Qur'ānic text. In other words, I have used Arberry's translation as a "control." For the translations, volume and page(s) from Mawdūdī or Arberry are not given.

ly drawn out and smacks of what Fowler has called "elegant variation."¹² Also, sometimes Mawdūdī incorporates into the translation material that does not rightly belong there. S. 37:49, *ka annahunna baydun maknūnun*, is rendered by him as: "[women who are] delicate like the pellicle concealed under the shell of an egg." Now the verse is saying no more than "as if they were carefully preserved eggs."¹³ But to maintain, as does Mawdūdī on the basis of a *hadīth*, that the reference here is to the pellicle of an egg,¹⁴ and to translate accordingly, is to exceed one's limits as translator.

Second, in translating Qur'ānic idioms and idiomatic expressions, Mawdūdī tries to provide equivalent Urdu idioms and idiomatic expressions. The thin film covering a datepit is called *qīṭmīr* in Arabic, and the idiom *la yamlīku qīṭmīran* means "he possesses nothing," that is, not even a *qīṭmīr*. The idiom occurs in S. 35:13, and the Arberry translates it "those . . . possess not so much as the skin of a date-stone." Mawdūdī's rendering is: "they do not own so much as a blade of straw (*par-i kāh*)." S. 68:42 speaks of the panic that will occur on the Last Day, and reads: *yawma yukshafu 'an sāqin*. Arberry's "Upon the day the leg shall be bared" is accurate but does not help the reader. Mawdūdī translates: "The day people shall have a hard time of it." S. 23:82 contains the words *idhā---kunnā turāban wa 'izāman*. Arberry's "when we are . . . become dust and bones" is faithful to the Arabic and clear in meaning. Mawdūdī's translation is less faithful to the Arabic but gains in idiomatic force: "when we are . . . reduced to a bunch of bones (*hadīyon kā pinjar*)." And sometimes Mawdūdī achieves a happy synthesis of the literal and the idiomatic. S. 21:15 ends with *ja 'alnāhum ḥaṣīdan khāmidīna*, which is rendered by Mawdūdī as: "until we mowed them down, and not a spark of life was left in them" (cf. Arberry, "until We made them stubble, silent and still"). Sometimes, however, Mawdūdī's quest for Urdu parallels does not produce propitious results. To give only one example, he translates S. 74:52, *ṣuḥufan munashsharatan*, "open letters," which considerably waters down the Arabic

¹² H. W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, rev. Sir Ernest Gowers (2nd ed.; The English Language Society and Oxford University Press, 1968), s.v. "elegant variation."

¹³ According to another Pakistani exegete. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī (b. 1906), the reference is to the eggs of an ostrich. The yellowish-white eggs, Iṣlāhī says, are jealously guarded by the ostrich, and the Arabs likened a chaste and cream-complexioned woman to them. *Tadabbur-i Qur'an* (8 vols.; Lahore, 1967-80), V,465. We may note that the pre-Islamic Arab poet, Imru' al-Qays in his *mu 'allaqah* (suspended ode) compares a woman to "the maiden egg of an ostrich, an egg that is cream-colored and has been nurtured by pure, unsullied water." Abū-Zakariyyā Yahyā ibn 'Alī al-Khatīb al-Tibrizī, *Sharḥ al-Qaṣā' id al-'Ashr*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (2nd printing; Egypt: Muḥammad 'Alī Ṣabīh wa Awlādūhū, 1964), p. 97.

¹⁴ IV,287-88, n. 30.

expression (cf. Arberry, "scrolls unrolled"). In general, however, Mawdūdī's treatment of Qur'anic idioms and idiomatic expressions is very skillful and constitutes one of the strengths of *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*.

Third, Mawdūdī often tries to combine in translation the several meanings or shades of meaning a word might have. The *yanābī'* of S. 39:21 is "springs" in Arberry; in Mawdūdī it is "creeks, fountains, and rivers." S. 68:25 contains the word *hard*, which, according to Mawdūdī, has three meanings: "to withhold something from someone," "to resolve to do something," and "to act swiftly."¹⁵ The sentence *wa ghadaw 'alā hardin qādirīna* is translated by Arberry: "And they went forth early." Mawdūdī translates: "Having resolved not to share it [garden produce] with anyone, they went forth in haste early in the morning." An inclusive translation of this kind has the advantage of presenting before the reader the full range of a word's meaning. At the same time it runs the risk of losing the raciness of the original and becoming all too cumbrous. S. 102:1 consists of only two words, *alhākum al-takāthuru*, and Mawdūdī's translation robs it of much of its incisiveness: "Your ambition to multiply your worldly possessions, in competition with one another, has made you heedless" (cf. Arberry, "Gross rivalry diverts you"). Moreover, the different meanings of a word may not all be intended in every case and a combination of them might prove to be infelicitous. S. 53:61 is *wa antum sāmīdūna*. Trying to accommodate the two meanings usually given of *sumūd*, "to put something off" and "to engage in singing and playing music," Mawdūdī translates the verse: "and you put these [matters] off by busying yourselves in singing and playing music."¹⁶ It is quite unlikely that the two meanings are simultaneously intended in the context (cf. Arberry, "while you make merry").

And yet the merits of Mawdūdī's translation would seem to far outweigh the imperfections. It was Mawdūdī's objective to prepare a lucid and self-explanatory translation of the Qur'ān, and, speaking overall, Mawdūdī achieves this objective with remarkable success.

Introductions to Suras

In the Preface to *Tafhīm*, after defending his method on interpretive translation, Mawdūdī writes:

Moreover, in order to fully understand the Qur'ān, it is imperative to keep in mind the background to its verses. Since it was not possible to present this background in the translation, I have provided, to each sura, an introduction¹⁷ in which I have tried to show, after

¹⁵ VI,63, n. 15.

¹⁶ V,224, n. 54.

¹⁷ *Dībāchah*. See n. 8 above.

thorough research, under what circumstances it was revealed. I have tried to determine what phase the Islamic movement was passing through, what needs and requirements the movement had; and what problems it faced at the time of a given sura's revelation.¹⁸

The introductions discuss the chronology of the suras, provide a historical background to the suras, and offer analyses of the suras.

While sufficient historical information is available for the purpose of determining the chronology of the Medinan suras, there is, Mawdūdī says, only one way of arriving at the chronology of the Meccan suras: by studying the internal evidence of these suras and checking it for verification against Muḥammad's (ṢAAS) life. Using this method, Mawdūdī makes a quadripartite division of the Meccan suras,¹⁹ and then tries to fix the period of each of them. It is notable that, to Mawdūdī, the internal evidence of a sura is an important determinant of chronology not only when the relevant historical information is lacking,²⁰ but often also when such information is available.²¹ According to Mawdūdī, the study of a sura's contents helps one decide whether it was revealed in Mecca or Medina,²² whether it is an early or late Meccan or Medinan sura,²³ and whether it is part Meccan and part Medinan.²⁴

An important part of the introduction consists of historical backgrounds. These backgrounds, especially the ones to many of the long and medium-length suras, are of the nature of short essays that depict the sociocultural environment in which the suras were revealed. Containing as they do critical insights as well as useful information, they put a helpful perspective on the suras. Among the best are the introductions to S. 8, 9, 24, 33, 59, and 105.

The introductions offer brief but compact analyses of the suras. In them Mawdūdī states the central themes of the suras, relating the themes to the suras' historical setting. He also uses the introductions to comment on the suras' structural composition,²⁵ to deduce lessons from the stories narrated in a sura,²⁶ to give his opinion on controversial issues,²⁷ to point out differences between suras with similar or identical themes,²⁸ and to explain aspects of

¹⁸ I, 11.

¹⁹ I, 521-522.

²⁰ E.g., IV, 172 (S. 34); IV, 520 (S. 43); IV, 576 (S. 45); V, 336 (S. 58); V, 452 (S. 61); VI, 38 (S. 67).

²¹ E.g., I, 434 (S. 5); III, 258 (S. 23); III, 552 (S. 27); V, 68 (S. 49).

²² E.g., II, 258 (S. 10); V, 244 (S. 55); VI, 180 (S. 76); VI, 402 (S. 97).

²³ E.g., II, 440 (S. 13); III, 672 (S. 29); VI, 418 (S. 99).

²⁴ E.g., III, 196 (S. 22).

²⁵ E.g., I, 229 (S. 3); II, 166-67 (S. 9); III, 728-29 (S. 30); V, 482-84 (S. 62); VI, 392-95 (S. 96).

²⁶ E.g., II, 321 (S. 11); II, 378-81 (S. 12); III, 258-59 (S. 23); III, 610-12 (S. 28).

²⁷ E.g., VI, 549-62 (S. 113-14).

²⁸ E.g., II, 320 (S. 10-11).

complementarity between suras.²⁹ Until S. 18, with a few exceptions, Mawdūdī presents the themes of the suras without regard to the order in which the themes occur in the suras themselves. Beginning with s. 18, he presents them in order of their occurrence in the suras. The first complete verse-by-verse analysis offered by Mawdūdī is that of S. 33, but it is only from S. 55 onward that he generally follows this scheme.

Together, the introductions make up a systematic guide to the Qur'ānic suras, and perhaps it would not be a bad idea to publish them in a separate volume. An English translation of such a volume would be a good way of introducing *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* to the English-speaking world.

Explanatory Notes

Mawdūdī writes in the Preface to *Tafhīm*:

I have scrupulously avoided introducing in the explanatory notes any subject that might distract the reader from the Qur'ān. I have written notes only on two kinds of occasions: 1) when I felt that the 1) when I felt that the reader would require an explanation, ask a question, or entertain some kind of doubt; and 2) where I was afraid that the reader would not pay sufficient attention to certain verses and, as a result, would fail to grasp their true significance.³⁰

According to this statement, and as can be seen from the first two volumes of *Tafhīm*, the explanatory notes were to have a small compass. But, beginning with the third volume, Mawdūdī casts his net wider and wider, and the notes gain in variety and detail.³¹ A study of the notes in *Tafhīm* would indicate that they have three main functions: explanatory, integrative, and critical.

The most important function, of course, is explanation. In the notes, Mawdūdī defends or gives reasons for his translations; cites the *sha'n al-nuzūl* (occasion of revelation) of certain verses if this differs from the general *sha'n al-nuzūl* of the sura in which those verses occur; presents the multiple meanings certain verses have; gives details of historical events and expounds the historical background of certain concepts; offers a compact, synoptic treatment of many key Qur'ānic terms; quotes traditional exegetical opinions; and presents details of the Qur'ānic legal injunctions with reference to the *Sunna* (normative conduct) of Muḥammad (ṢAAS) and major (Sunnī) legal works. *Tafhīm* is quite free from theological discussions, and there is hardly any ex-

²⁹ E.g., III,314-17 (S. 24, 33); III,610 (S. 26-28); IV,474 (S. 41-42); IV,574 (S. 44-45).

³⁰ I,11.

³¹ To give an example of the wider scope of the latter volume: S. 2:270 and S. 76:7 both speak of the making and fulfilling of one's vows. To the former Mawdūdī writes an eight-line note (I,208, n. 310), but the note to the latter covers several pages (VI,191-97, n. 10).

tensive treatment in it of issues in the so-called Qur'ānic science.

Mawdūdī often tries to present the Qur'ānic suras, especially the longer ones, as integrated wholes. This he does either by establishing structural links between the various parts of a sura or by pointing out how the different parts of a sura make reference to the same central theme. For example, he writes about S. 3:190 ff.: "These are the concluding verses, and they bear a connection not to the immediately preceding verses, but to the whole of the surah; it is especially important to keep in mind the opening verses of the sura."³²

The critical function of the notes is important, too. Mawdūdī subjects the interpretations of traditional scholars to scrutiny and does not hesitate to reject them if he thinks they are not warranted by the Qur'ānic context, contravene the Qur'ānic outlook or philosophy, or are based on weak logic and reasoning.³³ On a number of occasions he declares a *ḥadīth* to be unacceptable if it is found to be in conflict with the Qur'ān.³⁴ Also, *Tafhīm* is rich in critical comparisons of the Qur'ān with the Bible and the Talmud; probably the most detailed comparison of this kind is to be found in Mawdūdī's commentary on S. 12. Now and then, Mawdūdī criticizes Orientalist scholars' interpretations of Qur'ānic verses.³⁵

But a treatment of the explanatory notes of *Tafhīm* would remain incomplete without considering some of the motifs that run through them and impart to *Tafhīm* a distinctive character. Two such motifs are: Islam as a system of life, and the relevance of Islam in modern times.

Islam as a System of Life

The keystone of Mawdūdī's thought is that Islam is a system of life that deals with all spheres of human life and that, in order to be viable, Islam must be implemented in its entirety. Like many other works of Mawdūdī's, *Tafhīm* presents this view with full force.

The idea that Islam runs the whole gamut of life is, of course, not original to Mawdūdī. However, what Mawdūdī tries to do is offer a set of clear and well-argued definitions of key Islamic concepts within a coherently conceived framework. As an illustration of Mawdūdī's view of Islam as the holistic approach to life, we will take the Qur'ānic term *dīn* (religion, way of life) and see how it is treated in *Tafhīm*.

S. 39:2 reads, in part: "Worship God, making the *dīn* exclusively His."

³² I,310-11, n. 134.

³³ E.g., I,332, n. 26 (S. 4:16); II,252, n. 121 (S. 9:123); IV,235, n. 57 (S. 34:33); IV,442-43, n. 12 (S. 41:10).

³⁴ E.g., III,167-68, n. 60 (S. 21:63); III,240-44, n. 101 (S. 22:52-54).

³⁵ E.g., III,36-37, n. 57 (S. 18:60 ff.); IV,404-05, n. 41 (S. 40:26 ff.); VI,59, n. 4 (S. 68:4).

Mawdūdī first gives the three meanings the word *dīn* has in Arabic—sovereignty, submission, and custom or habit—and then writes:

In view of these three meanings, *dīn* in this verse represents the attitude and mode of behavior that man adopts in recognition of a being's superiority to him, and in submission to that being. And making the *dīn* exclusively God's means that one should not associate anyone with God in worship, that one should worship only Him, follow only His guidance, and *obey only His laws and injunctions*.³⁶ [Italics added.]

The italicized portion represents the emphasis Mawdudi places, here and elsewhere in *Tafhīm*, on the social and legal aspects of *dīn*. *Dīn*, he says, has a strong this-worldly dimension in addition to its other-worldly dimension. Unfortunately, however, Muslims have only too often construed the word in a restricted sense. Discussing S. 12:76, Mawdūdī writes:

By using [in this verse] the word *dīn* for the law of the land, the Qur'ān has fully explained the wide range of meanings *dīn* has. This use of the word categorically refutes the view of those who believe that a prophet's message is principally aimed at ensuring worship of the One God, adherence to a set of beliefs, and observance of a few rituals; of those who think that *dīn* has nothing to do with cultural, political, economic, legal, judicial, and other matters pertaining to this world. This view, which has been popular among Muslims for a long time, and which has largely been responsible for their failure to realize their duty to establish an Islamic order of life, is, according to this verse, utterly false. . . .³⁷

According to S. 42:13, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus were sent by God with the instruction, *aqīmū al-dīna* (establish the *dīn*). Mawdūdī comments on this verse at length. When the word *iqāma* (verbal noun form *aqīmū*) is used for material or corporeal (*mādī yā jismānī*) things, he writes, it means "to cause that thing to take an upright position" (as, raising an animal from the ground) or "to erect" (as, erecting a pillar). But when it is used for something abstract (*ma'nawī*,

it does not simply mean "to preach that thing," but "to act upon it, promote it, and actually enforce it." A person's *iqāma* of his rule does not mean that he is propagating his rule, but that he has established his authority over the people of the land and has so structured the various government departments that the entire ad-

³⁶ IV,356, n. 3.

³⁷ II,422.

ministration of the State is being run under his supervision . . . From this it should not at all be difficult to see that the prophets, when they were charged with the *iqāma* of *dīn*, were not simply expected to practice the *dīn* themselves, or to preach it to the people so that the latter might acknowledge it to be true. Rather, after the people had acknowledge it to be the true *dīn*, the prophets were supposed to take the next step and actually enforce the *dīn*, so that it should acquire mandatory power—and retain that power.³⁸

These quotations indicate the emphasis Mawdūdī places on the socio-political aspect of the Qur'ānic or Islamic scheme for human life. This emphasis is characteristic of *Tafhīm* and distinguishes it from most other Qur'ān commentaries, old and modern.³⁹ Incidentally, one cannot help feel that, on a few occasions at least, Mawdūdī's preoccupation with this aspect of Islam unduly influences his interpretation of the Qur'ān. To illustrate: the Arabic word *tawallā* means "to turn away," and also "to become a ruler or assume power." S. 2:205 begins: *wa idhā tawallā sa'ā fī al-ardi li yuḥsida fihā*. Mawdūdī translates: "And when he acquires power, all his activities in the land are aimed at spreading corruption." Now if the verse is read in conjunction with the preceding verse, one would be disposed to think that the context requires the other meaning in a note,⁴⁰ but his preference for the "political" type of meaning is rather obvious.

Relevance of Islam Today

This motif is closely linked in Mawdūdī with the first. Islam, Mawdūdī says, is not only a systematic religion, it is very much a workable proposition today. In order to establish his thesis, Mawdūdī deals with a number of issues and questions, raised in the Qur'ān, from a "modern" perspective. S. 2:275-76 distinguishes between *ribā* (usury or interest) and *bay'* (trade or commerce). It forbids the former and permits the latter, and remarks that God "wipes out" *ribā* but lets *ṣadaqāt* (acts of charity) "grow." Mawdūdī tries to vindicate the Qur'ānic position by discussing the matter not only from an ethical and spiritual viewpoint, but also from an economic angle.⁴¹ Of considerable interest in *Tafhīm* is Mawdūdī's treatment of the subject of Islamic law. Throughout *Tafhīm*,

³⁸ IV,488.

³⁹ In this respect, *Tafhīm* resembles, and invites comparison with, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, the Qur'ān commentary of the Egyptian scholar, Sayyid Quṭb (1906-66), (6 vols.; Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1973-74).

⁴⁰ I,159-60, n. 225.

⁴¹ I,211-13, nn. 317-18; I,214-16, n. 320. For a detailed discussion of the question of *ribā*, see Mawdūdī's *Sud* (Interest) (2 vols.; Lahore, 1948-1952). For related issues, see idem, *Ma'ashiyāt-i Islām* (Islamic Economics) (Karachi, 1970).

Islamic law. Throughout *Tafhīm*, sometimes in the form of brief notes and sometimes in more detailed discussions, Mawdūdī clarifies for the modern reader aspects of the Islamic legal approach, and explains how Islam furnishes man with definite guidance in the fields of constitutional, social, civil, criminal, and international law. S. 60:12 reads, in part: *wa lā ya‘ṣīnaka fī ma‘rūfin* (and that they [women who came to Muḥammad (pbuh) to pledge allegiance] shall not disobey you in respect of anything that is *ma‘rūf* [good, just, and reasonable]). Mawdūdī comments: “This statement in fact lays down the foundation-stone of the rule of law in Islam.”⁴² Sometimes he points out the legal potentialities of certain verses: “The rules contained in the following verses [S. 49:11 ff.], together with their explication as found in *Ḥadīth*, can serve as a basis for the formulation of a detailed Islamic law of libel.”⁴³

Exactly how well Mawdudi has succeeded in explaining the relevance of Islam in modern times or in presenting Islam as an integrated system of life is certainly a question that may be discussed. But this much at least may be said, that Mawdūdī is keenly aware of the importance of issues and problems of modernity which even today many Muslim Qur’ān scholars refuse to recognize as proper grist for their mills.

⁴² V,447, n. 22.

⁴³ V,84, n. 19.