

Evaluating the Theory of Quranic Contemporaneity in the Exegetical Views of Imam Khomeini and Allāmeḥ Ṭabāṭabā'ī

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Introduction

The simultaneous advancement in the Western world alongside the decline of Muslims in various aspects of life in recent centuries convinced many Muslim scholars that the root cause of this crisis lay in distancing from the Quran. They believed the solution was a return to the Quran. This realization led to the emergence of a theory known as "Contemporary Interpretation" (Tafsīr 'Aṣrī) within religious circles, particularly among Islamic scholars. The primary goal of this approach is to demonstrate the practical efficacy of religion in modern life and to showcase the immense capacity of the Holy Quran in addressing contemporary issues. "Contemporary Interpretation" serves as a broad term for various interpretive approaches aimed at harmonizing the message of the Quran with the present age.

A critical challenge associated with the concept of Tafsīr 'Aṣrī (Contemporary Interpretation) lies in the risk of misappropriating the Holy Quran to meet contemporary human needs inappropriately. More precisely, the primary threat to this interpretive approach is the potential departure from authentic Quranic knowledge and the uncritical alignment with modern worldviews. Such a deviation could lead to the overshadowing of the Quran's timeless wisdom by contemporary desires and ideologies. To mitigate this risk, the present study intentionally refrains from using the term Tafsīr 'Aṣrī and instead adopts the concept of Mu'āṣarat Qur'ānī (Quranic Contemporaneity). This shift in terminology aims to preserve the integrity of Quranic teachings while engaging with the demands of the modern age, avoiding any notion of imposing contemporary human expectations onto the Quran. The theory of Quranic Contemporaneity endeavors to continually rejuvenate our understanding of the Quran in alignment with the evolving needs of each era, without compromising its divine teachings. Nevertheless, this approach has been subject to diverse interpretations among Islamic scholars, underscoring the necessity of establishing a sound and balanced framework for this theory.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology to undertake a comparative analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of the Quranic Contemporaneity theory. The research specifically focuses on the exegetical perspectives of Allāmeḥ Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Imam Khomeini, aiming to



critically examine and juxtapose their interpretive frameworks concerning the alignment of Quranic teachings with contemporary contexts.

Findings

The findings of this study reveal that a specific interpretation of the Quranic Contemporaneity theory, based on a Maqāṣid-oriented (purposive) approach, is evident in the exegetical views of Allāmeḥ Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Imam Khomeini. The first significant foundation of this theory is a systematic approach to Quranic teachings, grounded in the spirit of Tawḥīd (monotheism). According to these scholars, this perspective extends across all domains of belief, ethics, and practice, guiding the application of Quranic knowledge consistently in all areas of life. Both scholars emphasize the Maqāṣid approach to Quranic interpretation, which may initially seem at odds with the Quranic Contemporaneity theory. While the Maqāṣid approach focuses on the author's intent as crucial to understanding the Quranic text, the Quranic Contemporaneity theory encourages responsiveness to contemporary needs. However, this apparent contradiction can be resolved through the principle of the Correspondence between the Revealed Book (Kitāb al-Tadwīn) and the Natural Order (Kitāb al-Takwīn), a concept both scholars uphold. Another important foundation is the necessity of moving from conceptual understanding to identifying specific applications (maṣādiq). The Quran often addresses humanity through practical examples rather than abstract concepts. Imam Khomeini and Allāmeḥ Ṭabāṭabā'ī assert that the ultimate goal of the Quran is to elevate humans toward divine proximity (qurb ilallāh). They emphasize that the Quran continues to address all individuals until the Day of Judgment, highlighting the need to recognize its continuous manifestations as a living and ever-relevant text.

Conclusion

Although the recitation of the Quran remains a singular and unchanging act, the meanings it conveys can vary depending on different temporal and spatial contexts, the diverse nature of individuals, and even the varying states of a single person. However, this dynamic emergence of meanings from the Quran is contingent upon the reciter possessing qualities such as insight and spiritual mindfulness. The Quranic Contemporaneity theory, grounded in a Maqāṣid-oriented (purposive) perspective, offers a significant framework for aligning the Quran with contemporary needs. By adopting a graded view of existence (tashkīkī) and harmonizing the Revealed Book (Kitāb al-Tadwīn) with the Natural Order (Kitāb al-Takwīn), this theory supports a continual renewal of Quranic understanding suited to the needs of each era. This theory acknowledges the multiple levels of the singular truth of the Quran, rejecting the notion of relativism in understanding. At the same time, it validates diverse interpretations, each corresponding to one of these levels of truth. This approach facilitates dialogue between contemporary needs and the Holy Quran, enhancing its capacity to address evolving human challenges.

Keywords

Quranic Contemporaneity, Maqāṣid Approach, Contemporary Interpretation, Imam Khomeini, Allāmeḥ Ṭabāṭabā'ī.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with research ethics. The authors observed the ethical principles in conducting and publishing this scholarly research, and this is confirmed by all of them.

Conflict of interest

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