

## How to read the Bible and the Qur'ān in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Almir Fatić<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The interpretation of sacred texts in general and of the Bible and the Qur'ān more particularly is likely to occupy the global public's attention increasingly over coming years and decades. A number of events during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century has lent force to this contention, presaging yet another critical phase in the relationship between the world of the West and that of Islam. Responsible interpretation of the Bible and the Qur'ān can help prevent potential misunderstandings between these two worlds. Comparative study is a significant issue in this context, especially in areas, such as Bosnia, where the adherents of both books live together. As sacred texts, they share common elements, including a) their origin in the monotheistic tradition, b) their distribution and availability, c) authority, d) ambiguity, e) universality, f) and the presence of problematic or difficult places within them. The method of contextual understanding and interpretation is an essential tool, in the broadest sense of the word, for a proper understanding of the so-called *difficult places* in the Qur'ān. We deploy hermeneutic instruments in such contextualization to enable this process, not least such hermeneutic disciplines as the "science of the occasions and circumstances of Revelation" (*asbab al-nuzul*), the "science of the Makkan and Medinan Revelation" (*'ilm al-Makki wa al-Madani*), the "science of the derogating and derogated verses" (*'ilm al-nasik wa al-mansuk*), the "science of Shariah law methodology" (*usul al-fiqh*), within which the general aims and intentions of the Qur'ān (*maqasid al-Qur'an*) and of Islamic law (*maqasid al-shari'a*) are explored, and the life and practice of the Messenger of Islam, p.b.u.h., (*sunna as a practical commentary on the Qur'ān*). Contextual interpretation of the Qur'ān and the Bible is a practical contribution to peace and better understanding among people of different religious beliefs.

**Keywords:** Bible, Qur'ān, Bosnia and Herzegovina, understanding, interpretation, religious pluralism, tolerance, "difficult places" in the Bible and the Qur'ān, the method of contextual interpretation.

1 Dr. Almir Fatić is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo.

## Introduction

The question of the interpretation of sacred texts in general and of the Bible and the Qur'an in particular is likely increasingly to occupy the attention of the world academic and non-academic public in coming years and decades. This contention is advanced on the basis of a number of events that have taken place since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including September 11, 2001, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the "war on terror", the cartoons of the Prophet of Islam, the Dutch parliamentarian's propaganda film about the Qur'an and the Muslim YouTube response ... all of which unfortunately presage yet another critical phase in the relationship between the world of the West and that of Islam. The Bible and the Qur'an contain the noblest teachings and ideas humanity has ever known and are respectively central to the religious practice of each of these two worlds, as well as to other practices, insofar as their adherents commonly refer to these teachings and ideas to justify their motives or acts. Many aspects of the religious and other practices of modern man can clearly not be understood without knowing their starting points, i.e., in the sacred texts that have been determining human religiosity for centuries. The case is strong for believing that responsible interpretation of sacred texts, primarily the Bible and the Qur'an, can help in the mission of building peace between people of different religious beliefs and in normalizing relations between their worlds, especially in areas where those who believe in the Bible and the Qur'an as holy and universal texts have lived in coexistence for centuries. Indeed, is not spreading peace and love among people at least a fundamental goal of every sacred text?

## Bosnia: A Biblical-Qur'anic Country

Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is "neither East nor West", but rather "both East and West", is just such a country, where adherents of the Bible and the Qur'an have coexisted for centuries. Thus, in the country of Bosnia, both *the joyful news*<sup>2</sup> of Jesus and Muhammad's *warnings to the whole world*<sup>3</sup> have been present for centuries. Bosnia and Herzegovina, unlike most other countries, has for centuries served as an example of a space in which the Biblical and Qur'anic messages of peace, coexistence, love and good neighbourly relations resonate harmoniously. The Bosnian Academician Enes Karić likes to say that Bosnia is "a land that draws its origin from the sacred pages of the Bible and the Qur'an,"<sup>4</sup> alluding to its diverse religious mosaic. Are those who follow the Bible and the Qur'an in Bosnia

2 *Scripture - New Testament*: Mark 16:15.

3 *Qur'an*: Al-Qalam/The Pen, 52

4 Enes Karić, *Essays (on behalf) of Bosnia* (Sarajevo: El-Kalem, 1999), p. 280.

today unable to renew and continue this sacred spiritual symphony and preserve the valuable experiences transferred to them by their ancestors?

## Some common characteristics of the Bible and the Qur'ān

The Bible and the Qur'an share certain common characteristics as holy texts. This should not come as a surprise. These characteristics must be recognised, pointed out and kept in mind when we read, understand, and interpret the Bible and the Qur'ān. The following passage presents only a few of them briefly.

### *Origins and monotheistic traditions*

First, it is well-known that the Bible and the Qur'ān *come from the same part of the world* and contain more or less *the same monotheistic tradition* within themselves. The Qur'ān “openly refers to its biblical relation and constantly lays claim to a place in the monotheistic cycle.”<sup>5</sup> The Qur'ān offers its own monotheistic vision, one that, in certain metaphysical, eschatological, cosmological, ethical and other aspects, coincides with that of the Bible, while, in others, diverging. The fact is that the Bible and the Qur'ān share a number of common themes, characters and moral commandments. For example, both books show respect towards Hazrat Maryam / the Virgin Mary and her son 'Isa / Jesus. There is a Qur'anic Sura named after Maryam. The Qur'an also confirms the mission of 'Isa/Jesus and his miracles (supernatural acts): the power of speech while he was in the cradle and his treatment of lepers and reviving of the dead by God's will,<sup>6</sup> etc. Despite these similarities, big differences remain between them, of course, but that is not the subject of this paper.<sup>7</sup>

5 Malik ibn Nabi, *Kur'anski fenomen*, translated into Bosnian by Hilmo Ćerimović, (Sarajevo: Starješinstvo islamske zajednice Bosne i Hercegovine, Hrvatske i Slovenije, 1989), p. 127: The Qur'an confirms the truth of previous revelations: “It was We who revealed the law (to Moses): therein was guidance and light” (Al-Ma'ida/The Table Spread, 44); “And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah.” (Al-Ma'ida/The Table Spread, 46). However, at the same time, the Qur'an points out that those books “suffer from insertion and the distortions of those who were obliged to guard them”; see for example: Al-Baqara/The Heifer, 79.

6 See: *Qur'an*: Ali 'Imran / The Family of 'Imran, 49.

7 For wider similarities and differences between the Bible and the Qur'an, see Hans Küng and Josef Van Ess, *Kršćanstvo i svjetske religije - islam*, translated by Ladislav Z. Fišić (Livno: Svjetlo riječi, 1995); M. M. al-A'zami, *The History of the Qur'anic Text: From Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, (Leicester: Islamic academy, 2003); Joachim Gnllka, *Biblija i Kur'an – što ih spaja a što razdvaja* (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2007).

### *The Bible and the Qur'an - the most accessible sacred texts*

Another feature to be pointed out is that the Bible and the Qur'an are probably the most accessible sacred texts today. Unlike the Vedas, which the Brahmins always felt should be protected from non-Brahmins, the Bible and the Qur'an have been spread all around the world in a variety of ways. Firstly, thanks to modern technologies of sound and image, the Bible and the Qur'an are available as never before to the human eye, ear and mind. Today, the Bible and the Qur'an can be and are read even by those who do not believe in them at all. This aspect of modernity can seem very positive for believers in the Bible and the Qur'an. But it also carries a kind of risk. *The issue of the responsible interpretation of the Bible and the Qur'an arises here in all its importance* and it is, I believe, here that the responsibility of their adherents lies today, especially of theologians and of the religious communities as institutions.

#### *The Authority of the Holy Text and Responsibility for its Interpretation*

It is in the nature of sacred text that it contain two things at once. It is at once a *product of its own time* (as revealed at a given time) and has authority *in our time*.<sup>8</sup> Both the Bible and the Qur'an have the attribute of holiness. Both have people who believe in their sanctity, which is why their authority lasts. Commentators on the Qur'an and the Bible of all times face the question: *What do the Bible and the Qur'an mean today?* This is a central issue faced by any trying seriously and responsibly to interpret either text. The next logical question to arise is: *How to interpret today a text created (revealed) long ago?* This question entails a series of further ones – which can only be put here:

- *What is the true meaning of the Book?* This issue is common to Jewish, Christian and Muslim theologians. According to Henry Corbin, their “first and last task is to understand the true meaning of this book.”<sup>9</sup>
- *Is “Scripture to be understood in its own terms (sola scriptura) as required by Protestant hermeneutics, as opposed to the traditional principle of the Roman church?”*<sup>10</sup>
- *Whether interpretation of the sacred text should be ex mente auctoris, “from the mind of the author, without reading into the text meanings that can not have been intended by its human author” (a principle with which Christian interpreters of the Bible sometimes agree) or, rather, “it is not very well possible to reject certain interpretations because the author in his time could not have intended them?”* (Such interpretations are accepted by Muslim commentators precisely because the Qur'an “has no human author, but is, as Muslims believe, the direct word of God himself.”)<sup>11</sup>

8 Michael Cook, *The Koran* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 143.

9 Henry Corbin, *Historija islamske filozofije* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1987), p. 13.

10 Hans Georg Gadamer, *Istina i Metoda* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1978), p. 15.

11 J. J. G. Jansen, *The interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), p. 33.

These are only a few of the important questions inevitably encountered in reading, understanding and interpreting the Bible and the Qur'an today. Answering them is to be left *to those worthy*,<sup>12</sup> as the Holy Qur'an says, to Jewish/Christian/Muslim theologians and commentators. Unfortunately, many such self-appointed interpreters – especially of the Qur'an – arrogate to themselves the right to interpret the Book without even elementary knowledge of the major rules and principles of interpretation.<sup>13</sup>

### *The Bible and the Qur'an - ambiguous texts*

The next characteristic common to the Qur'an and the Bible is that they are *ambiguous texts*. Their ambiguity is not the result of linguistic process, but structural in nature. This ambiguity is their advantage. Otherwise, their ambiguity introduces no novelty. The history of their interpretation makes us aware, for example, of the Jewish and patristic discussions of the four levels of meaning of the Holy Book<sup>14</sup> and of the Muslim classic commentary on the so-called theory of the “seven *ahruf* of the Qur'an” (lit. the “seven letters of the Qur'an”).<sup>15</sup>

With sacred texts, we encounter what Roland Barthes calls the “institutionalized pluralism” of their meanings and interpretations.<sup>16</sup> It is their very openness and ambiguity which allows their wide application in human practice, as well as their potential applicability to new radically amended circumstances by believing Jews, Christians or Muslims, in contrast to the original homeland of the Holy Books. The many broad opportunities offered by allegorical, symbolic, or mystical interpretations of sacred texts, that have traditionally gone together with other methods of interpretation, can only be mentioned here in passing.<sup>17</sup>

12 *Qur'an*: Al-Nisa' / The Women, 58.

13 See: Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi, *Osnovne pretpostavke za razumijevanje Kur'ana* (Sarajevo: Starješinstvo islamske zajednice Bosne i Hercegovine, Hrvatske i Slovenije, 1984); Almir Fatić, “Neka temeljna pravila u razumijevanju i tumačenju Kur'ana”, *Takvim*, 2008, pp. 21-34.

14 Heb. *peshat*, “literal translation”; *remez*, “implied meaning”; *derash*, “homiletic comprehension”; *sod*, “mystical, allegorical meaning” (*Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, II, p. 100).

15 For more on the “seven *ahruf* of the Qur'an”, see Ahmad Von Denffer, *Uhum al-Qur'an*, section: Variety of Modes (New Delhi: Millat Book Centre, 1994), pp. 111-115; Abdullah Saeed, “Flexibility in reading the text,” in: *Interpreting the Qur'an* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 69-76.

16 Roland Bart [Barthes], *Literatura, mitologija, semiologija* (Beograd: Nolit, 1971), p. 10.

17 For example, Philo of Alexandria informs us that the Essenes gave the greater part of their teachings in the form of allegory. See Eugen Werber, *Kršćanstvo prije Krista?* (Zagreb, 2007), p. 64. For the mystical interpretation of the Qur'an, see Christin Zahra Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Nerkez Smailagić, *Uvod u Kur'an* (Zagreb, 1975), pp. 155-175; Jusuf Ramić, *Tefsir – Historija i metodologija* (Sarajevo: Fakultet islamskih nauka, 2001), pp. 182-191.

### *The Universality of the Text in a religiously plural world*

The Qur'ān and the Bible offer a very far-reaching and, for modern commentators, very challenging message, their universality. Almighty God says in the Qur'an:

We sent thee not [O Muhammad], but as a Mercy for all creatures.<sup>18</sup>  
Jesus says: Go unto the whole world and preach the Good news.<sup>19</sup>

The question remains of *how to justify and maintain the legitimate universality of the modern world's pluralistic religious image and its mixture of the followers of different religious traditions*. It is a unique religious blend of a sort never before recorded in the history of mankind.

According to the Qur'ān, the "heterogeneity of people is the God's will, and those who worship Him must learn how to live in a pluralistic society and pluralistic world."<sup>20</sup> The basis for this lies in the following Qur'ānic verses:

If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one people: but they will not cease to dispute.<sup>21</sup>

To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, according to the Qur'ān, Islam is not to be imposed on individuals or nations against their will:

Let there be no compulsion in religion.<sup>23</sup>

These verses unequivocally establish the principle of freedom of belief and expression and in the confession of one's own religious beliefs. This recognizes the religious pluralism of humanity,<sup>24</sup> explicitly stated in the following verse:

Those who believe [in the Qur'an], and those who follow the Jewish [scriptures],

18 *Qur'an*: Al-Anbiyā' / The Prophets, 107.

19 *Mark*, 16:15-16.

20 Fathi Osman, "Džihad: Legitimna borba za ljudska prava", in Enes Karić (ed.), *Ljudska prava u kontekstu islamsko-zapadne debate* (Sarajevo: Pravni centar, Open Society Fund, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1996), p. 218.

21 *Qur'an*: Hūd, 118.

22 *Qur'an*: Al-Mā'ida / The Table Spread, 48.

23 *Qur'an*: Al-Baqara / The Heifer, 256.

24 For more on the idea of religious pluralism in the Qur'an, see Abdulaziz Sachedina, "The Qur'an and other religions" in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 291-309.

and the Christians and the Sabaeans - any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.<sup>25</sup>

The leading contemporary Muslim philosopher, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who is of Iranian origin, has said that “man in the modern world faces a new experience of real importance, an experience his ancestors never encountered. It is not the experience of discovering new continents or even planets, but of travelling from one religious universe to another.”<sup>26</sup>

Life in Bosnia and Herzegovina bears daily witness to these wise words. Nasr is also right in saying that “the simple proximity of two religious communities is not what creates awareness of the need for knowledge of a religious world different from their own.”<sup>27</sup>

The truth is that, despite centuries of living so closely together, the various religious communities in Bosnia do not know enough – almost nothing indeed, and sadly, even that through prejudice – about each other’s religious universes. There is an old proverb that each man is the enemy of what he knows not. Knowledge of the other and different helps us understand our own faith, while ignorance of the other and different does not help us in understanding our own religion! We detect this attitude in the words of the philosopher Nasr:

A follower of any religion, whether Christian, Muslim, or Hindu, who is unwilling to accept the testimony of the presence of the Spirit in other religions, is in danger of losing their own understanding of faith. Therefore, the task of understanding other religions is not only of scientific interest, but is also of the greatest religious and theological significance.<sup>28</sup>

When a Muslim in Bosnia reads the Bible or a Jew or Christian the Qur’ān, they gain in understanding of their own religion and at the same time in knowledge of others.

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25 *Qur’an*: Al-Baqara / The Heifer, 62.

26 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Religija i religije: izazov življenja u multireligijskom svijetu”, in *Ljudska prava u kontekstu islamsko-zapadne debate*, 12.

27 *Ibid.*, 14 – “History teaches us that physical proximity or presence of two or more religions in one place is not enough by itself to their members to gain full awareness of other religions, and the religious freedoms of others”. Adnan Silajdžić, “Potreba i mogućnosti muslimansko-kršćanskog dijaloga – islamski pogled” *Vrhbosnensia*, year III, no. 2, Sarajevo, p. 211.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

### *Tolerance of the belief and disbelief of others*

The question of the universality of the sacred texts is closely related to that of tolerance for the belief and disbelief of others. In the world we live in, as well as people who belong to other religious universes, we also meet those who do not believe in sacred texts or religious beings at all. In our understanding and interpretation of the Bible and the Qur'an, we must count on both groups, because, according to the Qur'an, God Almighty allows infidelity, i.e. He offers a choice: Let him who will believe, and let him who will, reject (it).<sup>29</sup>

As already noted, religious diversity is a matter of the Divine will. The Qur'an reveals a *plan* of that will:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)).<sup>30</sup>

This verse insists on knowledge of the other and different. The initial reference *O mankind* has a universal meaning.

The Qur'an goes further in declaring friendship towards Christians and their clergy:

...and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, "We are Christians": because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant.<sup>31</sup>

Hence the late Ismail Ragi al-Faruqi and Lois Lamya Faruqi have claimed that the "honour with which Islam regards Judaism and Christianity, their founders and scriptures, is not mere a courtesy but acknowledgement of religious truth."<sup>32</sup>

### *Problematic or difficult places in the Qur'an and the Bible*

Another important common feature of the Qur'an and the Bible is the existence of so-called *problematic or difficult places in both Books*. Difficult that is in terms of their interpretation. Some passages in the Qur'an and the Bible have a very unusual ring to the modern reader. This gives rise to different interpretations and exegeses. In such cases, one may find oneself following one authority or another or be drawn into the game of counterposing authorities against each another. When it comes to the interpretation of the Qur'an, "unlike some postmodern literary criticism... [commentators] play a game with rules."<sup>33</sup>

29 *Qur'an*: Al-Kahf / The Cave, 29.

30 *Qur'an*: Al-Hujurat / The Inner Apartments, 13.

31 *Qur'an*: Al-Ma'ida / The Table Spread, 82.

32 Ismail Ragi Faruqi and Lois Lamya Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (London: The Macmillan Co., 1986), p. 191.

33 Michael Cook, *The Koran. A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 28.

Even in the classical age of Islam, practitioners of the interpretation of the Qur'an operated a very rigorous set of rules for doing so and condemned anyone who dared to interpret it arbitrarily or with bias (*bi al-hawā*). From these rules the traditional *tafsir* or scientific disciplines<sup>34</sup> developed that commentators on the Qur'an must know for their interpretation to be considered valid or acceptable. A lack of knowledge of these disciplines necessarily results in unacceptable, arbitrary, tendentious and plain wrong and unacceptable interpretation of the Qur'an. The history of the Muslim practice of interpreting the Qur'an includes many attempts of this sort, including some by non-Muslims or more precisely by tendentious Orientalists.

We give below a few examples of the so-called difficult places in the Qur'an and the Bible for which commentators and exegetes have devised interpretative possibilities. There is no discussion of them, as that would require more lengthy elaboration than is possible here.

- *The Qur'anic story of the ancient Israelites God put on trial for hunting on the Sabbath and punished by turning them into monkeys.*<sup>35</sup>
- *Biblical statements on war and the law of war.*<sup>36</sup>
- *The Qur'anic "verse on swords"<sup>37</sup> or general verses about jihad.*<sup>38</sup>
- *The Qur'anic and New Testament attitude to women.*<sup>39</sup>

34 For more on this, see "Traditional disciplines of Qur'anic Studies", in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, V, pp. 318-336. See also Enes Karić, *Kako tumačiti Kur'an* (Sarajevo: Tugra, 2005), the chapter on "Napomene o naukama tumačenja Kur'ana", pp. 337-354.

35 "Ask them concerning the town standing close by the sea. Behold! They transgressed in the matter of the Sabbath. For on the day of their Sabbath their fish did come to them, openly holding up their heads, but on the day they had no Sabbath, they came not: thus did We make a trial of them, for they were given to transgression. When some of them said: "Why do ye preach to a people whom Allah will destroy or visit with a terrible punishment?"- said the preachers: "To discharge our duty to your Lord, and perchance they may fear Him." When they disregarded the warnings that had been given them, We rescued those who forbade Evil; but We visited the wrong-doers with a grievous punishment because they were given to transgression. When in their insolence they transgressed (all) prohibitions, We said to them: "Be ye apes, despised and rejected." (Al-A'raf / The Heights, 163-6). There is a brief statement on this in Al-Baqara / The Heifer, (65)

36 For example: "But in the cities of these nations, whose land you Lord, your God, gives you as the heritage, you will not leave alive anything that breathes." (Deuteronomy 20:16).

37 "But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practise regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful." (Al-Tawba / The Repentance, 5).

38 For a recent view of verses/items that treat the issue of *jihad*, see Louay M. Safi, *Mir i granice rata* (Prevazilaženje klasične koncepcije džihada), (Sarajevo: Bemust, 2004).

39 "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next) refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all)." (Al-Nisa' / The Women, 34);

"Also I think women dress decently, to spruce up with shame and moderation, not with braided hair, or gold and pearls or costly garments, but with the works of charity as befits women who profess religion. A woman should learn in full submission! I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise any authority over a man, but to be silent!" (1 Timothy, 2:9-12)

## Conclusion: The need for a contextual method of interpretation

In order to understand and read the examples given above and others like them properly – examples from the Qur'an – they must be viewed in light of the Qur'an's contextual meaning in the broadest sense of the word, of its linguistic, thematic, cultural, sociological, and civilizational context. This broader contextualization utilises hermeneutic instruments and resources that enable this process, such as:

- The historical context of the revelation of these verses (the hermeneutical discipline of Qur'anic interpretation is called *asbāb al-nuzul*, the “science of the occasions and circumstances of revelation”).
- The time sequence of revelation, i.e. whether they belong to the Makkan or Medinan phase of revelation (the hermeneutical discipline that deals with this is called *'ilm al-Makki wa al-Madani*).
- Redefining the classical theory of derogation (the hermeneutical discipline that deals with this is called *'ilm al-nāsik wa al-mansūk*).
- The general aims and intentions of the Qur'an (*maqasid al-Qur'an*) and Islamic law (*maqasid al-shari'a*) (which are studied within the framework of *usul al-fiqh* / the *science of the methodology of Shari'a Law*, one of the scientific disciplines knowledge of which is prerequisite for proper interpretation of the Qur'an).
- The life and practice of the Prophet of Islam, (p.b.u.h.) as a *practical commentary on the Qur'an*.

Mastery of all these hermeneutical disciplines for the proper interpretation of the Qur'an is required fully to understand the examples given above. False or tendentious interpretations are the result of a lack of knowledge of these important disciplines. The study of these disciplines should be approached in the light of the urgent need for those who do know them to present and articulate them to their co-believers and others. This is how to contribute to a better and, above all, correct and responsible understanding of the Qur'an in the world we live in.

Contextual interpretation of the Qur'an and the Bible will, I believe, contribute to peace and understanding between people of different religious beliefs, which is their primordial obligation.