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Towards an Existential Hermeneutics of the Qur'ān

The Quran is an instance of the existential phenomenon of revelation. Since its immediate concern was the rational, moral, and spiritual growth of its initial addressees – the human community of seventh century Arabia – it is radically human-centric. The verses of the Quran were revealed gradually to facilitate the growth of the blessed Prophet and his community. This necessitated that their content be both contextual and evolutionary. Accordingly, an existential hermeneutics of the Quran demands an appreciation of its verses chronologically together with an understanding of their context in addition to the 'prior-knowledge' of the interpreter (which is the general knowledge of the interpreter's human community). It should be noted that 'an understanding of the context' includes an awareness of the states of the Prophet's mind as well as the detail of the happenings of human community being addressed initially. Such an existential hermeneutics has two fundamental assumptions and two meta-exegetical assumptions. The fundamental assumptions are:

1. The Quran is an instance of the phenomenon of divine communication, and hence it is one part of it, albeit a very significant one.
2. The Quran is communicating the truths of the nature of existence in accordance with the knowledge base of the human community being addressed initially.

The meta-exegetical assumptions are:

1. The no-finality of any interpretation on account of the innate limitation in any understanding to encapsulate the nature of existence as it is.
2. And hence the necessity of constantly appraising the existential hermeneutics of the Quran to ensure that it is congruent with intuition and reason.

The hermeneutical keys of an existential hermeneutics of the Quran include:

1. Relying on the literal meaning unless metaphorisation is warranted.
2. Divesting the hermeneutical process of all assumptions that are not verifiable.
3. Attending to the sequence of terms within verses and the sequence of the verses themselves in addition to comparing the verses with each other.
4. Interpreting the Quran in light of the chronological order of revelation.
5. Interpreting key terms within the verses and the verses themselves in light of previous religious and non-religious sources.

Therefore, this paper will substantiate the assumptions of the existential hermeneutics of the Quran mentioned above by analysing: 1- the verses that have been presumed to be discussing its own reality and comprehensive nature; and 2- verses pertaining to God and His nature. This will provide insight into the existential nature of the Quran and the creation (or revelation) of God more broadly.



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Shaykh Arif Abdul Hussain is the founder and director of Al-Mahdi Institute (AMI), established in 1993, where he also serves as a Senior Lecturer in Legal Theory and Philosophy.

He began his seminary education at Madrasa al-Sayyid al-Khū'ī in London, graduating in 1988, and continued his studies in Qom from 1989 to 1993. During his time there, he studied privately under several leading scholars. After founding AMI upon his return to the UK, he pursued advanced seminary studies (*dars al-khārij*) under Ayatollah Hussain Amini and was granted *ijāza of ijtihād* by both Ayatollah Amini and Ayatollah Professor Sayyid Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad.

Shaykh Arif is the author of the Islam and God-Centricity series, which re-examines the core message of Islam and the human condition. He has also written and translated numerous other works, including his 2003 translation of the first volume of al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's seminal *Durūs fī 'ilm al-uṣūl*, and is currently working on the second volume.

In addition to his academic work, Shaykh Arif is a prolific speaker and teacher, having taught at Madrasa al-Sayyid al-Khū'ī, the seminary in Qom, and the Islamic College in London. His lectures and writings continue to influence Muslim communities and scholars worldwide.