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## Muslim and Non-Muslim Voices on Qurān in the light of the Clinton Bennett's Work

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**ABSTRACT**

*Qur'ān being the last divine book, has undergone a constant change of response from Muslim and non-Muslim scholars in the last fourteen centuries. Everybody has tried to understand Qur'ān according to his own experiences and perceptions. These scholars have adopted various attitudes to understand and interpret the Qur'ān and Qur'ānic knowledges in every face of history. Clinton Bennett is one of the scholars who has compiled and analyzed the various approaches relating Qur'ān. Moreover his coined hierarchy seems to be comparatively proper because he has divided the relative scholars into different categories according to his own classification.*

*Muslim attitudes include conservative (Traditionalists/Revivalists), Moderate (Liberal) and the Progressive ones, while non-Muslim attitudes consist of faith sensitive and critical ones. In addition to the elaborations of various scholastic attitudes Clinton Bennett has at times cited his own version therein.*

*In the study underhand we will try to discuss the hierarchy of the Qurānic beliefs as visualized by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. We will discuss the class and position of the scholars given by Clinton Bennett to them in his hierarchy and would narrate the contribution of the scholars hereafter. We will also examine and study the relative scholars by our own critical analyzation. This research is descriptive and analytical in nature and presents a detailed analysis of the work, it is based upon..*

**Keywords:** Clinton Bennett, Orientalists, faith sensitive approach, Critical approach, Conservative approach, moderate approach, Progressive approach in Pakistan, Pragmatic Pakistan, Social Egalitarianism



## 1.1 Introduction

In the recent times Qur'ān has been analyzed according to the scientific principles. The contents and topics have been tried to understand in new style and perspective. New trends have been and are being tested to interpret Qur'ān. This multiple approach of study has given birth to various schools of thoughts. For instance the belief and concept of uncreatedness of Qur'ān has resulted into a perpetual conflict and debate about the very origin of Qur'ān as a word of God. Same way the different interpretation, the topics and contents of Qur'ān has been the main reason to create various conceptual groups and school of thoughts like Mu'tazilites', Dehri and khwarigites. In the present times different approaches and attitudes to the comprehension of the Qurānic text have been evolved since the beginning of the revelation of holy Qurān. Clinton Bennett has found that there are mainly three schools, conservative (Traditionalists/Revivalists), Moderate (Liberal) and Progressive ones amongst the Muslim while the Non-Muslims are divided into faith sensitive and critical.

It has been learned that Clinton Bennett personally has been considerably impressed by the literacy pursuit of the holy Qurān and especially by its language and style. After considering the personal attitude of Bennett's comprehension of holy Qurān, there are certain glimpses of his contribution. There after his analysis of various attitudes of scholars for understanding the holy Qurān and his hierarchy are examine herein.

### a) The Arabic of Qurān

Clinton Bennett takes an account of the discussion regarding the quality of the language of Qurān and the poets and poetry of the pre-Islamic era in Arabian Peninsula, has finally asserted that Arabic is the best of tongues and that the Arabic of the Qurān is flawless and matchless; in this way it must be believed that

*"If the author of the Qurān is Divine so is its language and contents."*<sup>1</sup>

He has noted that the Muslims believe the Qurān cannot be translated into any other language of the world but it can be interpreted to some extent. The attraction and the divine impression it has in the Arabic language it loses the said property while translated into any other language as Kabbani comments:

...A Muslim reading the Qurān in Arabic and a non-Muslim reading it in translation are simply not reading the same book.<sup>2</sup>

### b) Qurān as Divine or Human Word

Clinton Bennett has quoted Abu Zayd (2010) who has self-consciously drawn on the Mu'tazilites' concept of a created Qurān. He argues that "it exists as both a divine and as a human word". As a human Mushaf, Qurān is subject to linguistic historical criticism. While it's Divine nature is

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<sup>1</sup>Clinton Bennett, *Studying Islam: The Critical Issues* (London: The tower building 11 York road continuum, 2010), 126.

<sup>2</sup>Clinton Bennett, *Muslims and Modernity: An Introduction to the Issues and Debates*,(London: The tower building 11 York road continuum,2005), 98.

beyond the realm of scientific inquiry and as a historical text, although 'originally divine', the Qurān's interpretation is absolutely human.<sup>1</sup> The meaning of a text is fixed because of its historicity, but its significance while firmly related and rationally connected to the meaning, is changeable and trans-historical.

Mr. Bennett has quoted Denffer (born 1949), who says,

*The best Tafsir (exegesis) is when the Qurān explains the Quran, is followed by a Hadith explaining the Qurān and followed by a companion doing it.*<sup>2</sup>

### c) Creativity and Literacy Pursuit

Bennett referring to William Albert Graham (born 1943) and Kirmani (2006) who opined that the actual meaning of 'Ijaz' is not immitability but invalidation or prevention of any attempt at a challenge.<sup>3</sup> But it is generally believed that literary excellence of Qurān cannot be surpassed and no-body had ever been successful to compete the standard of Qurān, even though the opponents of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had all the time of the world and ambition to match the literary standard of Qurān in spite of the fact that the contemporaries had masterly eloquence but they remained silent and they are silent.

### d) Qurān and the Traditions

Bennett quotes Nasr (born 1933) as;

*"Without Hadith much of the Qurān would be a closed book".*<sup>4</sup>

And it is almost impossible to understand Qurān without the guidance of Hadith. For example, permission to Prophet ﷺ to have more than four wives and the peculiar title of Al-Mudassir or Al-Muzammil, the related background knowledge of the Holy revelation and its unique form i.e. arrangement of Surah according to revelatory event and their order according to assigned directions of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the punctuation thereof.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Muslim and Non-Muslim voices on the Qurān

Bennett has highlighted the contributions of various Muslim and non-Muslim scholars namely Esposito(b.1940), Maurice Bucaille (1998), William Muir (1905), Gibb (1971), Smith (2000), Sir Syyid (1898), Allama Iqbal (1938), Sayyid Abduh (1905), Sayyid Qutub (1966), Maulana Mawdudi (1979), and Farid Esack (born 1959) on the topic of Qurān. Those two Muslim scholars who have offered such presentations, Denffer (born 1949) is one of them who represent the traditionalist (conservative) group like Mawdudi (1979) and others as far as their response to Qurān is concerned. While on the other hand, the thinker highlighted by Dr. Bennett is Farid Esack (Born

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 102.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 103.

<sup>3</sup> Bennett, Studying Islam, 129.

<sup>4</sup> Clinton Bennett, In Search of Muhammad (London: Cassell wellington house 125 strand 1998),41

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, In Search of Muhammad,42.

1959) who is impressed by the Liberal (enlightened) group of scholars namely Arkoun (1928)<sup>1</sup>, Rahman (1988)<sup>2</sup> and Zayd (2010). Bennett has judged that Esack, Arkoun and Fazlu Rahman as the progressive modern critics of Qurān who judged the Hadith reports by the general spirit of Qurānic standard.

A

While making the comparative study of traditional and modern scholars Mr. Bennett has picked Denffer (Born 1949) who mentions the traditional beliefs regarding Qurān such as topics of Prophetic revelatory event, the preserved Tablet and its uncreatedness while Esack gives the detail account of the sensitive and touchy dimensions like nature and response of Qurānic revelation and Satanic verses affair. Denffer does not mention any serious split as far as the collection and compilation of the Holy Qurān is concerned while Esack extra ordinarily focuses on the difference of opinion of Abdullah bin Mas'ud (650 AD) in this regard (however, the compilation and recitation process and the services of Hazrat Zayd b. Thabit (665 AD) and His companions are highly praised by Denffer, Mawdudi and also by Esack). In the same way Esack has discussed in detail '*Nasikh o Mansookh*' verses. He has liberally discussed the compilation of Qurān and opined that the compilers made use of their own choices. Esack has understood that the Qurānic text and the Hadith-e-Qudsi are intermingled and overlapped each other as he thinks that it was very difficult for the Holy Prophet ﷺ to distinguish between the two words of God. He has highlighted the human and historical phenomena in this context.<sup>3</sup>

Of course the approach of Esack has been continuously critical and liberal is much closer to that of orientalist's approach. Therefore, according to him Qurān is the part and not the whole as 'Mother of the Book'.

*Esack offers substantial discussion about the relationship between the Qurān and its recipient. He refers to this as a 'grey area' that Muslim scholarship has traditionally avoided.<sup>4</sup>*

As far as, sequence of Qurān is concerned, Esack takes it a frustrative study for the non-Muslims and this is the very point which has been highlighted by the critics of Qurān who think that 'there is a part played by the human intelligence'.

Esack comments that, with the exception of just a few scholars, Muslims have not attempted to explain the '*disjointedness*' of the Qurān" (2002:64)<sup>5</sup> and the repetition is also criticized by the anti-Islamic scholars.

Clinton Bennett has made a comparison of Denffer and Esack and found that Denffer is closer to

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Mohammed Arkoun was an Algerian scholar and thinker of Kabyle descent. He was considered to have been one of the most influential secular scholars in Islamic studies contributing to contemporary intellectual Islamic reform

<sup>2</sup> Fazlur Rahman Malik, generally known as Fazlur Rahman, was a modernist scholar and philosopher of Islam from today's Pakistan.

<sup>3</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 85-95.

<sup>4</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 89.

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 100.

conservatism and is scholarly lover while Esack is closer to the non-Muslim critics and the so-called liberals. However, at certain points they are on the same page for example the conservative or the traditionalists' and Liberal approach of the Qurān is agreed upon by both scholars that the language of Qurān is Arabic and its style is "Saj" which is unmatched, un-creatable and deep as being the word of God Almighty.

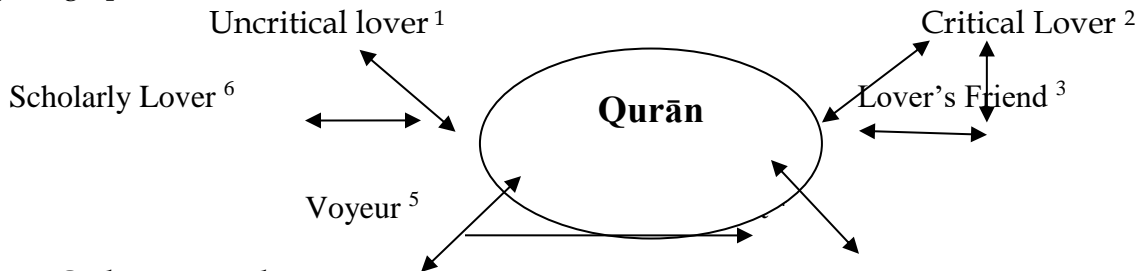
Bennett points out a quality habit of Denffer that he has adopted a majority faith sensitive point of view rather than a critique view; this is the reason that he had not gone deep into these affairs. Concluding the comparison he has declared that even Esack has not differed with the consensus of Muslim scholars as far as the Qurānic learnings are concerned. For example the forms of Qurānic revelations, the oral nature of revelation, the eternity and universality of Holy Qurān and being the final message through the last Prophet ﷺ.<sup>1</sup>

While later on, Mr. Bennett confirms that the Prophet was Ummy, Esack takes "Unletteredness" of the Prophet as a self-imposed concept developed later on for the polemics in order to prove the Qurānic text as a word of God. Nasr (born April 7, 1933) rightly responded to this issue by comparing the virginity of Mary as a most suitable reception of "Word of God" with the "Unletteredness" of the Holy Prophet for the final word of God. He states that:

*The Prophet must be unlettered for the same reason that the Virgin Mary must be virgin. The human vehicle of a divine message must be pure and untainted. The divine word can only be written on the pure and untouched tablet of human receptivity.*<sup>2</sup>

#### a) Six Approaches to Qurān Adopted from Esack (2002: 2-10)

Clinton Bennett has acquired six approaches to the Qurān from Esack and has converted them to a cyclic graph.<sup>3</sup>



1. Ordinary Muslims
2. Most of them are scholars who criticize Qurān for example Esack and Abu Zayd.
3. They agree with most of the insiders. They are critiques but have a regard for Muslim friends. For example Kenneth Cragg and William Cantwell Smith.

<sup>1</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 85-90.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, In Search of Muhammad, 77.

<sup>3</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 105.

4. Polemicists Shares the views of human origin of the Qurān, maintain their neutrality. They reject the claim of divine revelation. Most of them are Christians. They have conjectural nature of their arguments for example Ibn Warraq.
5. They claim to be value free scholars, uninterested in Muslim beliefs for example Cook and Crone, John Wansbrough.
6. Believe in the divine revelation take Qurān as self evidently God's word beyond question and doubt. For example Denffer and Mawdudi (1998).

**b) Is Qurān a Director of War?**

Texts contain much discussion about the meaning of the word *jihad*. It is often and rightly argued that the word *Jihad* does not mean war only, but striving and includes many types of striving to struggle against temptation. Jihad when used in the Qurān is usually followed by *fi-sabeelillah* (in path of Allah) however texts also point out that jihad can denote armed struggle and that when used without a qualification such as “*of the heart*” it usually means war on behalf of Islam.

**i. Conservative (Traditionalist/Revivalist) Muslims on Pacifist Islam**

According to Dr. Bennett Maulana Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb and Osama bin Laden out of conservative group agree on the world domination of Islam by any means and that is their Qurānic version of Jihad. They stand on extreme right. We are giving the verdict of one of them Sayyid Qutb.

**c) Sayyid Qutub's point of view on Qurānic Jihad**

Sayyid Qutb takes Jihad as a Gradual Strategy which was slowly imposed. Firstly, inviting the family members to adopt Islam, then to the relatives, then after Hijrah fighting against who fight against Muslims and lastly, to continue fighting until the Islam is dominant over all the religions. Sayyid Qutb has also cited some verses of jihad. he has learned from Qurān,

*Islam is rather a total system of life and jihad 'a name for striving to make this system of life dominant in the world'.<sup>1</sup> "Qutb sees Q 4: 74-6, 8: 38-40, 9: 5 and 9: 29-32 as a 'clear' mandate for jihad, says that 'taking initiative' is of the 'very nature of Islam'.<sup>2</sup>*

The conservative group argues from these verses:

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كَرِهٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ<sup>3</sup>

Fighting is prescribed for you, and you dislike it.

فَإِذَا انسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرَ الْحُرْمَ فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخَذُوهُمْ وَاحْصُرُوهُمْ وَاقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ مَرْصَدٍ فَإِن تَابُوا

<sup>1</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 204.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 204.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Baqara, 216:2.

وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ<sup>1</sup>

And when the sacred moths are passed, slay the unbelievers wherever you find them...beleaguer them, and lay in wait for them in every stratagem of war.

فَاتْلُوا الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَا بِالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلَا يُحَرِّمُونَ مَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَلَا يَدِينُونَ دِينَ الْحَقِّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَتَّى يُعْطُوا الْجِزْيَةَ عَنْ يَدٍ وَهُمْ صَاغِرُونَ<sup>2</sup>

Fight those who do not believe in Allah or the last day...until they pay the poll tax.

These verses abrogate the earlier text and justify a perpetual war, employing all means, against unbelief. This is a corporate duty for the Muslim world (heretical Muslims also qualify as targets).

## ii. Moderate (Liberal) Muslims on Pacifist Islam

Moderate commonly known as liberal, believe that Jihad in Islam and Qurān allows and permit only defensive war yet intellectual win over is preferable. The said group includes Chirgh Ali, Muhammad Shaltut and Yousaf Qaradawi; who agree with each other. we are quoting Shaltut's verdict on the said version.

### d) Shaltut's verdict on "The Koran and Fighting"

Bennett has introduced Shaltut an Egyptian writer, wrote a book "The Koran and Fighting", summarized by Peters in 1977 containing the application of verses of fighting and abrogation. He stresses that Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ mission was to warn and to persuade people (Q 5: 19)<sup>3</sup> and use the force mostly as deterrent.

Shaltut describes the two types of fighting are mentioned in Qurān; firstly the fight against Muslims and secondly the fight against non-Muslims. The writer (Shaltut) after having a long debate on the works of Qaradawi and Sayyid Qutb concludes that "God does not like aggressors" and this is the general policy of the Holy Qurān and the Holy Prophet ﷺ<sup>4</sup>

They argue from these verses:

أَذِّنْ لِلَّذِينَ يِقَاتِلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلَمُوا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ . الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَقُولُوا رَبَّنَا اللَّهُ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَفَسَدَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَبِئْسَ مَا يَكُونُ لِلظَّالِمِينَ عَذَابًا . وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَفَسَدَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَبِئْسَ مَا يَكُونُ لِلظَّالِمِينَ عَذَابًا . وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لَفَسَدَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَبِئْسَ مَا يَكُونُ لِلظَّالِمِينَ عَذَابًا .<sup>5</sup>

To those against whom war is made, permission is given to fight, because they have been wronged

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يِقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Al-Tawbah, 5:9.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Tawbah, 29:9.

<sup>3</sup> يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَكُمْ عَلَىٰ فَتْرَةٍ مِنَ الرُّسُلِ أَنْ تَقُولُوا مَا جَاءَنَا مِنْ بَشِيرٍ وَلَا نَذِيرٍ . فَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بَشِيرٌ وَنَذِيرٌ . وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ .

<sup>4</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 220-223.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Hajj: 39-40:22.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Baqra: 190:2.

*Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not provoke hostility-  
God does not love aggressors*

وَإِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلْمِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ<sup>1</sup>

And if they incline to make peace, incline thou it

These verses, which permit only defensive war and express distaste for war, qualify the verses on the right, that is, they only allow Muslims to fight unbelievers who fight them.

### iii. Progressive Muslims on Pacifist Islam

Bennett's progressive group includes Taha, Farid Esack and M. Talibi etc. they opine that Islam opposes the use of violence because God does not allow violence and according to them the sword verses were temporary and conditional.

#### e) Taha's Verdict on Qurānic Jihad

Taha (1987) argued that jihad was not an original percept in Islam and advocated that Qurān permitted fighting only when absolutely necessary. For him Q16: 125, "propagate the path of your Lord in wisdom and peaceable advice", takes priority over all other verses. Use of the sword was permitted after hijrah, which Taha describes as like a surgeon's lancet and not a butcher's knife, since it was designated to cut out evil.

Mr. Bennett has highlighted Esack's views, Esack stresses that

*The purpose of jihad is to achieve justice and not to establish Islam as a  
religious system or to replace one dominant group with another.*<sup>2</sup>

They argue from these verses of Holy Qurān:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بَالِئِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ  
أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ<sup>3</sup>

*Invite all to the way of the Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching and  
argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious.*

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ<sup>4</sup>

*Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel evil with what is better and  
those who were your enemy will be as your friends.*

لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصِطِرٍ<sup>5</sup>

*Thou art indeed a Warner.*

These verses of peace represents Islam's true stance and fighting is only permitted in the most extreme circumstances of self-defense or against oppression and injustice.

As far as the Qurānic version of Jihad is concerned the Muslim scholars are divided into three

<sup>1</sup> Al-Anfal:61:8.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 229.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Nahal, 125:16.

<sup>4</sup> Fusilat, 34:41.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Ghashiya, 22:88.

groups as explained above namely the first group who opines that Jihad is the social device of Qurānic Shariah to dominate the world by force that is Jihad. Second group takes Jihad as a defensive permissible action against the enemy forces. Thirdly and lastly a group of Muslim scholars takes Jihad as an extreme permissibility to save the lives of Muslim community and in individual cases to save ones skin. Bennett has categorized the first group as aggressive and fundamental while the later two as apologetic and reconciliatory.

### Muslim voices on gender in Islam mentioned in Qurān

Clinton Bennett is of the point of view that Islam does not treat women properly according to the West i.e. Islam is misogynist. That is the 'Canker' which damages the whole Islamic thought. As Clinton Bennett perceives the gender equality version of Qurān can be divided into two categories right and left. The rightists are generally Traditionalists and conservatives while the leftists are somewhat closer to the western point and socialistic liberalism. The rightists give preference to the male dominance verses over the verses of gender equality. Some verses of male preference are given below:

وَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ<sup>1</sup>

*And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them, and men are a degree above them.*

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لَأَزْوَاجِكُمْ وَبَنَاتِكُمْ وَنِسَاءَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا<sup>2</sup>

*O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over their bodies (when abroad) so that they should be known and not molested.*

The leftists group gives more importance to the verses of gender equality as compared to the verses mentioned above which are as under:

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِنْكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ بَعْضُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ<sup>3</sup>

*And their Lord answered them; truly I will never cause to be lost the work of any of you, be you a male or female, you are members one of another.*

لِلَّهِ مَلِكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ يَهَبُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ إِنَاثًا وَيَهَبُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ الذَّكَورَ<sup>4</sup>

*To Allah belongs dominion of the Heavens and the Earth. He creates what He wills. He bestows female children to whomever He wills and bestows male children to whomever He wills.*

Regarding gender equality Muslim scholars are positioned into two groups, rightists and leftists. The first group that is the rightists, plea for the dominance of man while the leftists have preferred

<sup>1</sup> Al-Baqra, 228:2.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Ahzaab, 59:33.

<sup>3</sup> Aal-Imran, 195:3.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Shura'a, 49:42.

the parallel gender equality and both groups have quoted the Qurānic verses for the sanctions of their claims as we have mentioned some of these verses above.

**i. Conservative position**

Bennett has positioned Mawdudi on **extreme-right** which is a conservative category on Qurānic version of gender equality. He has cited Mawdudi (1998) who in his book '*Purdah and the status of Women in Islam*' out of his many writings, has said that before Islam the women enjoyed no human rights and protection and thinks that equality in every walk of life between men and women is un-natural. The equality of women brings her ill reputation and the chances of corruption, to save their faces, the Westerners call it "*art*". This so-called equality is imported into Muslim countries from the so-called civilized west and our civilized society has been indulged into the un-civilized customs. Mawdudi (1998) further states,

*"Thus, they found fault with slavery and the Muslims averred that it was absolutely unlawful... they object to polygamy and the Muslims at once closed their eyes to a clear verse of the Qurān ... they said that Islam disfavored art, the Muslims stated that Islam had always been patronizing music and dancing, painting and sculpture".<sup>1</sup>*

In short Mawdudi has made clear his own position in the Qurānic version of gender equality. He contends that the Qurān guarantees women rights that western society has traditionally denied, and that even today Muslim women better off than their non-Muslim sisters. To reject the polygamy is to oppose what the Qurān clearly permits. Thus he has moralized conditional polygamy and man empowerment and opined it to be non-alterable.

**ii. Centrist position**

While Akbar Ahmed and Kabbani representing the **centre-right** resolves that ignorance of Islam causes some social problems and therefore some changes are unavoidable. They think that wearing the hijab is actually the freedom and protection of the women therefore, west can learn from Qurānic teachings the respect for women.

**iii. Feminist position**

Leila Ahmad, Taha, Esack, Tibi, An-Na'im, Sheerin Ebadi and Mernisi, representing a **centre-left** contribution and offering what can be described as an Islamic feminist position. This group of scholar thinks that, the true spirit of Islam confers women with dignity and freedom. They believe that the present family and social order explaining the gender position is the product of male elite. Actually there is a dire need of reorientation of the Qurānic concept of gender equality; which they think that reverse the notion to the real equality. If Qurān is properly studied and understood, there is no gender discrimination in it. The term Islamic feminism was coined by western academics to describe this approach.

Esack, Tibi (2001), Taha and an-Na'im argue that,

*Those verses of Qurān that speak of the equality of men and women before God abrogate (and not vice-versa as classical scholars argued) those that*

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 133.

*uphold (or appear to uphold) male superiority.*<sup>1</sup>

And think that polyandry may be legalized.

The **central-left** people representing the western society take the custom of veil as restricting the women to itself.

#### **iv. Humanist position**

This group, Moghisi, Taslima Nasreen, Nawal El Saadawi, Naguib Mahfouz lying on the **extreme-left** opined and believes that gender equality problem has no solution within the framework of Islam it must be referred to the visionary super-human society out of Islam.

#### **Non-Muslim voices on Qurān**

Clinton Bennett highlights the opinions and evaluations of Non-Muslims regarding the Qurān, for example according to them Prophet of Islam ﷺ had compiled the Qurān by aggregating the beliefs, rituals and stories taken from various religions. In this context Mr. Bennett categorized the Orientalists into different groups with respect of their opinions. Firstly, who believed in the sincerity of the Prophet, secondly who took Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as self-serving personality, whereas some of them do believe in the inspiration of the Noble Prophet ﷺ by God still they are of the opinion that the Qurān is supplemented by Muhammad ﷺ himself. Some of them suspect the process of compilation and do believe that the process was edited and redacted by the companions. There is a group of Orientalists who object the chronology and the dates of revelation and lastly some have related Qurān with the poetry for example according to them chapter 54, Al-Qamar of Qurān is the wording of Imr al-Qaise. While Bennett has concluded that the language of Qurān being the divine word is beyond the human understanding and criticism. Although the main sources of information for the situations of revelations are the biographies of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and Hadith.

Mr. Bennett has given an account of controversial and unacceptable scholarly works in the west like Cook and Crone while thereafter he has quoted Esposito (b.1940) who made no reference to any of such scholarships in his text. According to him a lot of work was made on Qurān in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Simultaneously Theodor Noldeke (1836-1930) has pioneered the reconstruction of the chronology of revelations in historic order and which is still now the latest work on the subject. His book '*Geschichte des Qorans*' won a prestigious prize. In addition to the above mentioned submissions Bell's '*Introduction to the Qurān*' revised by Watt (1909-2006) has introduced new trends on the study of Islam in the West. After Noldeke and Bell, Wansbrough has started a new mode of research and certification of the facts but according to him the Holy Qurān was composed two centuries after the life of Holy Prophet ﷺ. He was receiving death threats because of his works.

Mr. Bennett has listed the account of the reservations and objections of western scholars for example Motzki (b.1948), Wansbrough, Crone and Cook, regarding the historicity of events, the

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 143.

number of Surahs in Qurān and the Prophet's call for "Tawheed". The critics in the west opine that the term "Five Pillars" is not found in the Qurān and last but not least the compilation and canonical order of Qurān finalized later on after the Life of Muhammad ﷺ. For example as Motzki (b.1948) says that

*Most western Islamicists reject Muslim traditions about a first collection under Abu Bakr but accept those about the official recension during the caliphate of Uthman, although these accounts also contain problematic details (62).<sup>1</sup>*

Moreover Motzki (b.1948) believes that Qurān is the personal contribution of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ Himself.

Thereafter another western scholar Wansbrough claims that the style, structure or content of the received Qurān do not suggest one source but it has supposedly another source being the 2<sup>nd</sup> "Rabbinical literature" because of which Qurān has multi lateral exegesis.

On the same time Crone and Cook emphasized similarity between Muhammad ﷺ and Moses. Cook and Crone have expressed their views on Qurān as they wrote:

*The book is strikingly lacking in overall structure, frequently obscure and inconsequential ... given to ... repetition (18).<sup>3</sup>*

While according to their understanding the traditions are fabricated, although Mr. Bennett approves of the Cook and Crone's findings who, do not speak of the Prophet disrespectfully as they attribute his life as the creation of others.

So, the critics of Qurān quoted by Bennett are William St. Clair Tisdall(1859-1928)<sup>4</sup>; Bell (1945); Crone (1977) and Cook (1983); and Ibn Warraq (1995).

Along with his previously mentioned three approaches (Conservative (traditionalist/Revivalist) approach, Moderate (Liberal) approach and Progressive approach), Bennett has envisaged three approaches (Critical approach, Faith sensitive approach and Taking critical scholarship seriously without compromising faith sensitivity) mentioned hereafter, keeping in view the mode of expression adopted by the scholars.

He has narrated the three different approaches of the study of Qurān and Muhammad ﷺ and made a comparison thereof. He has given in brief summary of Islamic beliefs and especially of those more sensitive nature and has put forward a way to teach Islamic studies in the class room

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett, Studying Islam, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Studying Islam, 41.

<sup>3</sup> Bennett, Studying Islam, 41.

<sup>4</sup> William St. Clair Tisdall (1859–1928) was a [British historian](#) and [philologist](#) who served as the Secretary of the [Church of England's](#) Missionary Society in [Isfahan, Persia](#). William St. Clair Tisdall was fluent in several Middle Eastern languages including [Arabic](#), and spent much time researching the sources of Islam and the Qurān in the original languages. He also wrote grammars for [Persian](#), [Hindustani](#), Punjabi and [Gujarati](#).

and has cited mostly the Esposito (b.1940) methodology that is “As the Muslims believe”.

**i. The Faith-Sensitive Approach**

Faith sensitive approach means and denotes making concessions for the critical beliefs of a certain religion or sect of a religion. Faith sensitive scholars avoid touching the faith sensitive points and they have a sensitive consideration for the critical issues. This group includes Esposito, Smith and Maurice Bucaille.

**f) Esposito’s (b.1940) approach**

Clinton Bennett has said that Esposito (b.1940) sets out to listen to Muslim voices in order to grasp, understand and appreciate what is practiced by Muslims and what is believed by them to be true. He does not take Muhammad ﷺ as a Prophet yet he believes in the Divinity of the revelation and has claimed Qurān not to be the work of Muhammad ﷺ himself. And he has expressed the relationship between Qurān and Muhammad ﷺ in these words:

*The Qurān is the Book of God ... the eternal, uncreated, literal word of God ... revealed ... to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as a guide for humankind.*<sup>1</sup>

Discussing Esposito’s (b.1940) methodology that is “As the Muslims believe”, Bennett has learned that Esposito (b.1940) noting the Muslim traditions believed that they have accepted the intercession of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Instructor may explain that the customary style of referring the Qurān chapter by chapter and verses is a western convention. Muslims tend to cite the name of surah without mentioning the chapter or verse or to say “The Qurān says”. They may or may not explain the term “Surah” usually rendered as a chapter and “Ayah” rendered as a verse literally meaning as a “sign”, depending on how many Arabic words, the students can comprehend. On the other hand it would be certainly emphasized that the Muslims take the Qurān properly the words of God while they are in Arabic.

*They may refer to heavenly tablet (Q85: 21-2) to a graduated process of being “sent down” first as heavenly tablets as recitation to Muhammad (ﷺ). Then they explain the term “Wahi” (revelation).*<sup>2</sup>

Because Esposito (b.1940) has cited the facts from the Muslim society, therefore he does not give the sources of references and just says “As the tradition tells us” and “Muslim tradition reports” while Muir has made references to the context.

Professor Bennett has guided the academy instructor to avoid the (so called) controversial aspects of the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ so that the sensitive questions might not be raised in the academy as he is of the view that,

*The instructor may choose to allude to some aspects of the life of Muhammad (ﷺ) because if he or she does not do so, students are likely to raise questions about Islam. For example, Muhammad’s (ﷺ)*

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett, Studying Islam, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Studying Islam, 36.

*marriages and engagement in war are widely known and the instructor may be asked to explain these.*<sup>1</sup>

It is hereby noted that more sensitive issues should not be avoided rather they must be defended positively to coincide with the faith-sensitivity and to contrast the critical approach.

#### **g) Maurice Bucaille on the Qurān and Science**

While discussing Qurānic epistemology Bennett has discussed the contribution of Maurice Bucaille (born 1922) the chief of surgical unit of Paris University, who has tried to behave like an insider saying that,

*Qurān accurately describes scientific phenomena long before modern scientists had discovered, or rather rediscovered, them.*<sup>2</sup>

In his book 'The Bible, The Qurān and Science' (1978), Bucaille after making a comparative study of the religions, has learned that the Qurānic scientific knowledges are more accurate and comprehensive as compared with those of Bible and his ideas are known as 'Bucallism'.

#### **ii. The Qurān and Critical Study (Critical approach)**

The critical approach being opposite to the faith-sensitive one and makes no concession for faith sensitivity. It highlights and criticizes the acute religious issues. The non-Muslim scholars belonging to this group have never cared to think the sentiments of Muslim insiders.

Primarily Dr. Bennett has discussed the different approaches of the western scholars regarding Qurān and later on he has analyzed the polemic views of different western scholars in this regard. He has also listed the famous works of the Orientalists. Most of whom had alleged the Prophet of Islam ﷺ to compose the Qurān Himself and the same has been held by Muir.

#### **h) Muir's Approach**

Clinton Bennett has based his works on the classic literature of Islam, for example the collection of 'Waqidi'. Conclusively speaking he has understood that the Holy Prophet ﷺ has Himself compiled the Qurān and as His ﷺ knowledge of Christianity was based upon interaction with Christian slaves and then dominant Jewish literatures, according to Muir it contributed to literature of Islamic studies. Muir thought that Prophet of Islam ﷺ was possessed by evil spirits which means according to the analysis of Dr. Bennett that Muir did not believe in divinity of revelation pertaining to the Qurān and Messenger of Allah ﷺ. And if at all he believes in the revelation he takes it as aspiration of the Satan. Moreover he has consumed ten pages on the so-called satanic verses. Muir depicted Islam's uncompromising belief in 'One God' and the brotherhood of all believers as a virtue but he blamed Islam of perpetuating three evils namely polygamy, slavery and divorce. He also concluded that "sword and Qurān" were the most fatal enemies of civilization.

Muir like Pfander and Al-Kindy believes that certain literature of Qurān has been taken from the classic Jewish literature and Zoroastrian sources.

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett, Studying Islam, 34.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 115.

He after taking into account of the above mentioned western scholars has taken Farid Esack and Ibn Warraq who had accused the Egyptian Muslim scholar, Nasr (born April 7, 1933) Abu Zayd of apostasy.

**i) Miracles and the Problem related to them**

Clinton Bennett refers to non-Muslim scholars who think that the Holy Prophet's ﷺ claim of miracles is contradicting the text of Qurān. According to him it is not easy to prove the happening of miracles for example, 'the splitting asunder of the moon'.

*John Burton (1994) cites ten Qurānic references which deny, or appear to deny that Muhammad (ﷺ) wrought miracles.<sup>1</sup>*

Mr. Bennett says;

*It is my view that non-Muslim scholars may have overstressed contradiction between the Qurān and the miracle stories.<sup>2</sup>*

Bennett gives his own view regarding the reality of miracles;

*To a degree, I agree with Crone's view that the process whereby information was reshaped is more akin to the growth of rumors than the fabrication of documents, and the simplistic choice between authenticity and forgery.<sup>3</sup>*

In one way or the other Dr. Bennett puts the miracles into deep contradiction. But the truth is given in Sahih Ahadith with reference to Qurān that is not discussed by him as it should be, as he puts forth such contradiction in political way.

Al-Kindi (801-873 AD)<sup>4</sup> critically and negatively presents the Muslim views about Muhammad's ﷺ personality by saying him merely a soldier of fortune without any miracle and Qurān as concocted one. He sees Muhammad ﷺ as a confused person without any law and order system having contradictions in it. He believed that

*Histories are all jumbled together and intermingled; evidence that many different hands have been at work therein, and caused discrepancies, adding or cutting out whatever they liked or disliked. Are such, now, the conditions of revelation sent down from heaven? (pp. 18-19, 26)<sup>5</sup>*

While having a discussion on the Word "Ummi", Professor Bennett presents the views of non-Muslim scholars that Ummi means that Muhammad ﷺ was unscriptured.

As in the previous parts the two main groups of scholars namely the Critics and Faith sensitive

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett, In Search of Muhammad,45.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, In Search of Muhammad,52.

<sup>3</sup> Bennett, In Search of Muhammad,54.

<sup>4</sup> Abu Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn 'Ishāq aṣ-Ṣabbāḥ al-Kindī, known as "the Philosopher of the Islamic empire", was an Arab Muslim philosopher, polymath, mathematician, physician and musician.

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, In Search of Muhammad,76.

have been discussed in detail. Yet there are some scholars who do not fall in the category of above mentioned groups; they are namely the scholars who have criticized Qurān without compromising the faith sensitivity.

**iii. Taking critical scholarship seriously without compromising faith sensitivity**

A group of Muslim Scholars adopt a radical approach to the study and interpretation of Qurān. They criticize to the extent that they seem to compromise on faith sensitivity and the famous Muslim scholar Esack one of them. None the less this radical opinion is generally adopted by non-Muslim scholars but Esack and some others seem to agree with the non-Muslim scholars.

**j) Esack and the critical approach**

Mr. Bennett took Esack as a top Muslim scholar who attempts to select the best answer or explanation out of the various views and trends in Qurānic scholarship and adopts a critical manner without favoring any particular position or belief. Esack believes that basically Qurān addressed the people of seventh century of Hijaz and although perceived as problematic for the majority of Muslims yet Esack believes that there is a “grey area” between the receipt of revelation and its publication.

Another critical issue is about so-called Satanic Verses Esack suggests that,

*This could provide ‘a glimpse into how the Prophet may have subconsciously willed revelation.<sup>1</sup>*

Regarding hadith Esack’s view is somewhat closer to Muir.

**k) Abu Nasr (born April 7, 1933) Zayd on the textuality of the text**

Dr. Bennett writes that Zayd has taken Qurān as human “Mushaf” which is subject to linguistic and historical criticism while the divine nature of Qurān is beyond the realm of scientific inquiry and human investigation.

He has contended that many Muslims believe that Islam did not begin in 610 or 622 but it was always God’s ideal for men and women like Adam and Eve perpetually. Adam receiving the first book, was the first Prophet, He Peace Be upon Him recited *Al-Shahada* like all the Prophets and Muhammad ﷺ was the final Prophet. This avoids giving the impression that Islam begins with or is bilaterally contingent with Muhammad ﷺ or Arabia.

**l) An-Na’im on Islam and Human Rights**

An-Na’im (Born in 1946)<sup>2</sup> is a law graduate from the Universities of Khartoum, Sudan, Cambridge, England and Edinburgh, Scotland. He passed his doctorate from Edinburgh. He is a champion of Mahmud Muhammad Taha’s approach to the reformulation of Islamic law. Like Taha, An-Na’im also believes that human rights and Islamic Shari’ah are incompatible. Therefore, they advocate the reconstruction and reformulating the Shari’ah laws. Taha has highly valued his thoughts. Accordingly he differs with Mawdudi (1998) and UIDHR. Bennett has elaborated An-

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett, *Studying Islam*, 46.

<sup>2</sup> Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na’im is a Sudanese-born Islamic scholar who currently lives in the United States and teaches at Emory University.

Naim's views on the human and slavery regulations and some other concepts;

*Thus, slavery was tolerated. The Qurān does not specifically ban slavery, although it does regulate it. Similarly, the equality of man and women did not exist as a concept. At the time, the 'most the shari'ah could do was to modify and lighten the harsh consequences of slavery and discrimination on grounds of religion or gender.'*<sup>1</sup>

He tabulated a list of Qurānic verses which deals with polygamy, divorce, inheritance and marriage with non-Muslims and the disparity between Muslim men and women, which he suggested to be abrogated by the verse of equality (Q33: 35)<sup>2</sup> that affirms the spiritual equality of the sexes.

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<sup>1</sup> Bennett, Muslims and Modernity, 74.

<sup>2</sup> إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

## Conclusion

Most of the orientalist have worked on the contents, issues and teaching of Qurān. They have given their individual and collective response on the literature of Qurān. While Bennett has tried to classify the work of Qurān and also scholars categories thereof. Discussing the variational versions of the scholars he has synthesized his own evaluation of the Qurānic literature. He speaks very high of the contents and literature of Qurān. He is very highly impressed by the flow of language of Qurān, its eloquence, its metaphoric explanation of Hell and Heaven. Bennett has discussed about different issues of Qurānic teachings and has cited the Muslim and non-Muslim responses of various scholars on such issues like Jihad, rule of women and Gender equality in Qurān, scientific interpretation of Qurān and Human rights etc. He has examined the revelatory order of Qurān, its compilation and important events of Islamic history, in the perspective of lunar Arab calendar.

Taking conclusive view of the scholars work on Qurān, Clinton Bennett classified Muslim and non-Muslim voices on Qurān into two and three groups respectively; Muslim voices are conservative (Traditionalists/Revivalists), Moderate (Liberal) and the Progressive ones. Moreover non-Muslim Groups are namely faith sensitive (who care for the sentiments of Muslims) and the critical (who give their point of view irrespective of the insiders' beliefs and the sentiments of Muslims).

Clinton Bennett's personal sympathy lies with progressive (Left/Centre Left) interpretations of Islam and as far as non Muslim scholars are concerned Bennett agrees with the faith sensitive group. However, he has tried rigorously to be fair in describing and analyzing all interpretations.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Clinton Bennett, Muslim and Modernity, Preface xvii.