

Major Themes of the Quran - Discussion Guide

In *Major Themes of the Quran*, Fazlur Rahman describes some foundational teachings of the Holy Book of Islam. The first half of the book covers such traditional religious topics as the character of God, the condition of man as an individual, the place of man in society, and the role of nature. Quoting the Quran copiously, Rahman demonstrates similarities of Muslim teachings with the other monotheistic religions, describes some differences, and in some cases explains why he believes the Quran is superior. His work is topical, not chronological. It lacks the historical context and hermeneutical emphasis found in the best Bible commentaries.

The Quran informs the beliefs of over one billion people in the world and therefore plays an important role in world affairs. It is highly controversial and widely misunderstood, with some exalting it as the perfect word of God and others dismissing it as a disjointed set of sayings preaching violence and murder. While no Christian would believe the Quran to be the equivalent of the Bible, there is great danger in underestimating it. John Gallagher, an expert on politics and religion who has served four generals and two Presidents, says that any religion that survives the "ten generation test", meaning it has met the needs of its adherents for ten generations (400 years), is likely to endure. It must be taken seriously. Islam, as revealed in the Quran, the Hadiths, and the other traditions, has certainly passed the Ten Generation Test.

Questions on God

1. How does Rahman's discussion on the existence of God compare with Christian and Jewish discussions on the same topic (2)?
2. What do you think about the chain "creation-preservation-guidance-judgment" as manifestations of God's mercy? How does this compare with Christian and Jewish beliefs (9)?

3. Is all of nature "muslim" (submitted to God)(13)? What does this mean? How does this fit with the Christian doctrine of the fall, that all creation will be redeemed by Christ's work (Romans 8).

4. Is the God of the Quran loveless, remote, capricious and tyrannical (15)?

Questions on Man as an Individual

1. What does Rahman consider a "radical mind-body dualism"? Does Christianity presuppose it (17)?

2. What is the Quranic doctrine of angels (18)? How does it fit with the Christian doctrine?

3. What does the Quran say about original sin (19)? How does that shape the rest of Islam?

4. Rahman states "God does not change the situation of a people until they change it themselves (19)." How does this fit with Christian doctrine?

5. Is Sufism pantheistic (23)? How does it compare to Christian and other forms of mysticism?

6. What is the balance of opposing tensions (p27)? What would the Bible say about the concept?

7. Is merciful justice really the theme of Islam and fatherly love the theme in Christianity (29)?

8. On what basis does the Quran reject saviorship and intercession? What assumptions about human nature does this suggest (31)?

9. Rahman's three types of knowledge for man include knowledge of nature, knowledge of history/geography, and knowledge of man himself (34). Is this a useful construct? Does the Bible have anything like it?

Questions on Man in Society

1. The aim of the Quran is a viable, equitable and just social order on earth (37)? What is the aim of the Bible?
2. Do the needy have a right to the resources earned by others (39)? What does the Bible say on this issue?
3. How does the ban on usury affect Muslims today (41)? Where did it come from?
4. What is the fundamental social unit in Islam (42)? What is it in Christianity?
5. On what basis does Islam teach the equality of all humans (45)?
6. Rahman notes that people have a right to life, religion, earning and owning property, personal human honor, and dignity. The State has a duty to protect these things (46). How does this fit with Western and with Christian beliefs?
7. Did Islam intend that polygamy and slavery would eventually go away (48)? What are the relations between men and women?
8. What is the role of the sword in Islam (44, 63)?

Questions on Nature

1. How does the Muslim view of the infinite God and the finite creation fit with the Christian one (67)?
2. How does Rahman define a miracle? Did he get his definition from the Quran (69)?
3. What does Islam see as signs or miracles (73)?
4. Is the primary purpose of nature to serve man (79)?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Rahman, Fazlur. *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2009.