The Qur'an is not directed towards any one particular nation, such as the Arabs, or to a particular sect of Muslims, but to non-Islamic societies as well as the Muslim nation as a whole.

There are numerous references to non-believers and idol worshipers, to the People of the Book (namely, the Jews, or the Tribe of Israel, and the Christians), exhorting each one to strive towards a true understanding of the Qur'an and of Islam.

The Qur'an calls each group to Islam by providing proofs and never stipulates that they be of Arab stock. Referring to idol worshipers, God says, "if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due then they are your brothers in religion” [IX:11].

Likewise, God talks about the People of the Book, (Jews, Christians and we include here the Zoroastrians), without referring to them as Arabs: Say O People of the Book come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but God and that we shall ascribe no partners to Him and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God [III:64].

It is true that before Islam spread beyond the Arabian Peninsula, Qur'anic injunctions were obviously directed to- wards the Arab nation. From the sixth year after the Hijrah (the migration of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina), when the din of Islam was being propagated beyond the peninsula, there are references which demonstrate that the Qur'an is addressing itself to mankind in general; nor example, in VI:19, "this Qur'an has been revealed to me that I may warn you and whomever it may reach," and in LXVIII:52 God says, "it is nothing else but a reminder to the worlds."

We read too in LXXIV:3936, "In truth this is one of the greatest signs, being a warning unto men. "

History has amply demonstrated that Islam has been embraced by a number of leading members of other religions, including the idol worshipers of Mecca, Jews, Christians and by people from diverse communities, such as Salman of Persia, Suhayb from the Roman people, and Bilal of Ethiopia.

The Perfection of the Qur'an

The Qur'an shows man the way to a realization of his goal on earth; it describes this path in the most complete terms. It is a way of correctly viewing the reality of things; a vision - personal, social and cosmic- based on a correct manner of behavior and a precise method of interaction between men.

In XLVI:30 we read that the Qur'an "guides to the truth and a right road, " meaning the road of right belief and correct action.

On another occasion, mentioning the Torah and the New Testament, God says, "We have revealed this Book to you with the Truth, confirming whatever Book was before it, and We keep watch over it" [V:48].

The Qur'an thus affirms the truth of the ways of guidance taught by the earlier prophets. In chapter XLII:13, "He has ordained for you that religion which He commended to Noah and that which We reveal to you (Muhammad) and that We commended to Abraham, Moses and Jesus, " and in chapter XVI:89, "And We revealed the book to you as an exposition of all things."

Thus we understand from these verses that the Qur'an not only encompasses the teachings of all divine books revealed before it but it also adds to and completes them. Everything which a man needs, both in terms of his spiritual and his social life, is contained and explained in the Qur'an.

The Eternal Quality of the Qur'an

The perfection and completeness of the Qur'an prove that its validity is not restricted to a particular time or place, since anything perfect is in need of nothing to complete it.

In chapter LXXXVI:13-14 God confirms that the Qur'an is "a conclusive word" and not a mere "pleasantry." It contains the purest of teachings concerning belief in life-after-death, together with an exposition of the realities of existence, while, at the same time, encompassing the fundamentals of correct human behavior.

Since laws governing transactions between men are directly linked to their beliefs, such a book can obviously not be annulled or changed with the passage of time. As He says in XVII:105, "We have revealed the Qur'an with Truth and it has descended with the Truth,"

meaning that the revelations and their ongoing validity are inseparable from the Truth.

Thus in X:32, "After the Truth what is there except error, " and in XLI:41-42, "In truth it is an impenetrable book, error may not enter in it from before it or behind it. "

In other words the Qur'an repulses, by its own perfection and completeness, any attempt to neither alter it now nor later can it be annulled or superseded. Many studies have been made of the permanence of the validity of the laws given in the Qur'an.

The reader is advised to consult them if he requires additional knowledge of the subject; to pursue the matter here, (namely, the position of the Qur'an in the lives of Muslims and the manner in which it demonstrates this), would be outside the scope of this book.

The Qur'an as a Self-Contained Proof

The Qur'an, being composed of words and meanings like any other book, explains itself. It does not remain silent when the situation of the text demands proof. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that Qur'anic terms mean anything other than the actual words being used. This means that every man, possessing a certain knowledge of the Arabic language, may clearly understand the meaning of the Qur'an just as he understands any other words written in Arabic.

There are many verses which are directed towards a specific group, such as the Tribe of Israel, or the Believers, or the non-believers and, sometimes, man in general; (they are addressed in phrases such as "O you who disbelieve" or "O people of the Book" or "O tribe of Israel " or "O Mankind ") The Qur'an discourses with them, offering them proof of its validity or challenging them to produce a book similar to it if they doubt it to be the Word of God.

Obviously it makes no sense to address people in terms which they do not understand or to demand that they produce something similar to that which has no meaning for them. In chapter XLVII-24 we read, "Why do they not reflect upon the Qur'an ", implying that if it was

from other than God, people would have found in it many inconsistencies.

It is clearly indicated in the Qur'an that verses which have a subtlety or particularity of meaning demand that the reader reflect upon them to remove any seeming differences of interpretation or incongruities that may appear at first inspection.

It also follows that if the verses themselves contained no apparent meaning, there would be no point in reflecting upon them in order to clarify the apparent problem of their interpretation. There are no indications from other sources, (such as the traditions of the Prophet), that demand a rejection of the outwardly manifest meaning of the Qur'an.

Some have argued that one should only refer to the commentaries of the Prophet in elucidating the meanings of the Qur'an. This argument is unacceptable, however, since the basis of the Prophet's commentary and of the Imams of his family must be sought for in the Qur'an.

It is difficult to imagine that the validity of the Qur'an is dependent on the commentaries of the Prophet or the Imams of his family. Rather, affirmation of prophecy and imamate must be contained in the Qur'an, which itself is the authentic proof and document of prophecy. This does

not, however, contradict the fact that the Prophet and the Imams of his family were responsible for clarifying those details of the shari'ah law (Divinely revealed law) which were not apparent from the actual text of the Qur'an.

They were, likewise, entrusted with teaching the knowledge contained in the Book, as seen in the following verse: And We have revealed to you the Remembrance so that you may explain to mankind that which has been revealed for them [XVI:44].

A similar reflection occurs in chapter LIX:7 where, in reference to the code of practice and law brought by the Prophet to mankind, it states, "And take whatever the messenger gives you. And abstain from whatever he forbids."

In chapter IV:64 it says, " We sent not a messenger, but to be obeyed, in accordance with the will of Allah" and, again, in chapter LXII:2, "He it is who has sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite to them His revelations and to make them grow and to teach them the Book and Wisdom. " According to these verses, the Prophet is the appointed explainer of the details of the Shari'ah law as well as the teacher of the Qur'an.

Moreover, according to the tradition known as Thaqalayn, which was authenticated by an uninterrupted chain of narrators, the Prophet has appointed the Imams of his own family as his successors. This is not to deny that others also, by correctly applying the teachings of sincere teachers, may understand the meaning of the Qur'an.

References

The following sources are used to prepare the above article. Some hyperlinks may not be still active.

1. Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'I, Quran in Islam, Zahra Publications,P.O. Box 730, Blanco, Tx. 78606, U.S.A