

Translator's Preface

The great scholar and philosopher Sayed Muhammad Hossein Tabataba'i was born in 1902 at Tabriz in a family whose members had been men of learning for many generations. He spent his youthful years at Najaf in Iraq where he studied various branches of philosophy and jurisprudence under well-known scholars of the time and returned to his native town at the age of 33. After 11 years he decided to make the holy city of Qum his residence where he died in 1981 after a long period of illness at the age of eighty.

He won fame as a philosopher, particularly in Islamic branches of knowledge, not only in Iran but also in many countries of the world including America and France where some of his works have been translated into English and French. He is considered by many American and European scholars as one of the most distinguished philosophers of the modern world.

His most famous contribution is the volumes of "Tafsir al-Mizan" which is considered as the finest interpretation of the Qur'an ever written during the last fourteen centuries. He has written many books and theses on jurisprudence and philosophy as well as discourses, articles and interviews on religious topics.

He did not only serve mankind but also his other valuable contribution was starting a school of thought KTI, which combined knowledge and ethics, where he trained many pupils who became great asset to the society in their particular fields.

He was a staunch upholder of education in both theory and practice, based on a deep conviction and belief in religion.

In this book the writer emphasizes the social aspect of Islam and shows to what extent it permeates the life of each individual. He compares Islam with western civilization and with various schools of thought, and finds them inadequate, since Islam bases its teachings on the search for truth, while all the others follow the verdict of the majority. He considers the goal of Islam to be human happiness, while other schools have exploitation as their objective. He is surprised at the indifference of westerners towards Islamic principles and their influence on human society, and thinks this attitude to be due to prejudice or

some ulterior motive.

According to him the superiority of Islam is in its goal, its belief in monotheism as the basis of society and law and all social acts, and in the faith in resurrection, which is the guarantee for the execution of all laws entrusted to Islamic government as well as to society. In Islam both material and spiritual things have their due importance. He does not believe in geographical or racial frontiers which separate human beings into small communities or nations. He thinks this frontier to consist of belief, a fact which makes a universal community possible.

In this book the letter (S) stands after Muhammad's name as an abbreviation for the customary phrase 'Greetings on him and his household' as a sign of reverence towards the Prophet.

In conclusion I wish to express my thanks to Mr Khurshid Ali, editor of the Bethat Foundation for his co-operation in reading the original script and for his valuable suggestions.

A.P.

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