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Of more than 140 complete translations of the Qur’an, only very few may be recommended for English-speaking readers who are new to the Qur’an/Islam. What makes these stand out above the others are: (i) their faithfulness to the Qur’anic text; (ii) their presentation skills; and (iii) their elucidation of things Qur’anic. Another contributing factor behind the success and excellence of these few translations is their earnest, pious commitment to imbue the readers with the life-giving soul stirring the message of the Qur’an.

Waleed al-Amri’s The Luminous Quran belongs to this same enviable category. This competent Saudi scholar, the head of Translation and English Studies at Taibah University, has sound credentials to embark upon translating the Qur’an. What is more edifying is that he has been successful in conveying the meaning of the Qur’an in chaste English, which should enable readers to comprehend the contents of the Qur’an and derive guidance from it. The volume under review, covering the first three Surahs: al-Fatihah, al-Baqarah and Āl-Imran, is the first in a multi-volume series encompassing the whole Qur’anic text. There is, however, inadvertent omission of Surah al-Fatihah on the title page.

As an accomplished academic, al-Amri appears to have carried out a thorough analysis of the needs of the readers before taking up this assignment. This is borne out by the seven introductory sections (pp. 17–42) prefacing the translation and commentary. Alive to the mind-set of his readers, al-Amri first defines what the Qur’an is all about. Ingeniously enough, he has cited as many as 30 passages from the Qur’an itself, indicating what it is (pp. 18–20). This is supplemented and complemented by the next

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section (pp. 22-24) comprising eight hadiths which bring out the excellent nature of the Qur’an. The next section “Keys to understanding the Quran” (pp. 25-31) contains user-friendly and helpful tips which prepare the readers better for grasping the meaning of the Qur’an. The sections on the translatability of the Qur’an and interventions in translation (pp. 32-38) bear out his wide and discerning familiarity with his assignment. Such discussion helps in placing the translation in the proper context. Modestly, he points to the unique distinguishing features of his venture (pp. 39-42). His following observations on the main contours of the history of English translation of the Qur’an is a testament to his expertise in the field: ‘First came ferocious Orientalism, and then sectarianism, after that came the turn of rationalism and apologia, and finally interventionist translation on socio-political grounds held sway’ (p. 39).

The bibliography (pp. 43-44) lists a host of standard works of tafsir, Hadith collections and references which have been copiously cited in the work, assuring readers of an authentic interpretation. Among numerous noteworthy features of al-Amri’s work, at least, the following four deserve special attention:

1. With an eye on the needs of the readers who cannot grasp first-hand the Qur’anic text in Arabic, al-Amri offers easy-to-understand information on a range of key Qur’anic terms and concepts such as yawm al-din (Day of Judgement, p. 50), al-huruf al-muqatta’ah (the abbreviated letters with which both Surahs al-Baqarah and Āl ‘Imran open, p. 55), at-taqwa (Mindfulness, p. 55), al-Ghayb (The Unseen, p. 56) Kufr (Denial, p. 56) Khalifah (Successor, p. 62), al-Mushrikin (The Associators, p. 77), Muslim/Islam (submitter, p. 87 and 110), Qiblah (Direction of Prayer, p. 91), ummat (nation, p. 91), and hudud Allah (God’s boundaries, p. 117).

2. Notwithstanding the timeless, eternal message of the Qur’an which is valid for all time and place, it is undeniable that the Qur’an was received by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) at certain points of time
and in the particular milieu of the early 7th century Arabia. The thrust of some Qur’anic verses comes out more sharply against the backdrop of their circumstantial setting. In such instances, al-Amri has done well to let readers learn about the occasion of revelation of some verses. This guided reading is of immense benefit to the uninitiated readers who cannot otherwise fathom the intended meaning and message. On the authority of scores of authentic hadiths, al-Amri has been remarkably successful in bringing out the context and content of the following verses or parts thereof: verses 70–74, 97–100, 113–115, 140, 158, 197, 204, and 272 of Surah al-Baqarah and verses 15, 169, and 188 of Al ‘Imran. Al-Amri steers himself clear of dubious reports of Judaeo-Christian origin which are not endorsed by the Qur’an and Hadith.

3. *Tafsir al-Qur’an bi’l-Qur’an* is the safest and most effective pedagogic approach to Qur’anic interpretation. For it orients readers more and more to immerse themselves in the Qur’anic text and form a clearer idea of the Qur’anic scheme of things. Also, it introduces the reader to the diverse Qur’anic narratives and rhetorical strategies which persuade them all the more of the literary hallmarks of the Qur’an. As a conscientious Qur’anic scholar, al-Amri has provided many cross-references to other Qur’anic passages while explicating a verse or theme. Instances in point are verses 27, 29, 34, 122–123, 117, 126, 130, 166, 168–170, 257 of al-Baqarah and verses 95 and 106 of Al ‘Imran. In a similar vein is his identification of around 10 other Qur’anic verses which elaborate the salient points pressed home in Surah al-Fatihah.

4. The above mentioned features should not leave the impression that al-Amri’s approach strictly typifies *tafsir bi’l-ma’thur* abounding in the material drawn only from the classical works of *tafsir* and avoiding and evading any attempt to relate the Qur’anic guidance to the pressing issues and concerns of the 21st century.
Al-Amri has addressed some problematic issues such as the exploitation of wives by unscrupulous husbands (pp. 116 and 118), marital affairs (p. 121), coercion in matters of faith (p. 128), dealing with trauma (p. 184) and gender parity (p. 196). Let us hope that in the forthcoming volumes he tackles more topics energetically and effectively, with the goal of projecting the relevance of the Qur’anic guidance in today’s globalised world which is rocked by numerous tricky issues, ranging from governance to LGBTQ, terrorism, coexistence, Islam/Muslims as a minority in non-Muslim majority nation-states, sectarianism, the global interest-based economy, medico-ethical dilemmas, da’wah strategies in the post-9/11 world, the threat of e right-wing political groups and parties, minorities, social justice in Muslim polity, etc.

This well produced work is marred by a few typos (pp. 88, 94, 165, 183, 185, and 195). More irksome, however, is al-Amri’s excessive predilection for capitalization. It is true that semantically rich Arabic words with their characteristic Islamic/theological overtones do not have their equivalent in English but his capitalization of even verbs related to Allah amounts to taking things too far. For example, his rendering of such words in capitals as “Believe, Mindful, Associate, Deny, Losers, Glorify, Praying, Damned, Knows, Ally, Pleasure, Punish, and Displeasure”, etc., does not and cannot infuse in any degree of awe or sanctity in the mind of the readers. All things Qur’anic should not be made to appear as alien, outside the ambit of our everyday life and experience. It is worth reiterating that the Bible employs capital letters only for God or Lord, not for any attribute, pronoun, adjective, expression related to Him. Two Qur’anic passages (verses 255 and 285–86 of Surah al-Baqarah) appear in bold type-face. It is not clear whether it is the printer’s devil or a strategy for highlighting their contents. Either way, it is not a happy choice. Al-Amri, nonetheless, deserves credit for having introduced an innovation: placing the extra-Qur’anic material within single quotation marks, rather than inserting the same in parentheses.
In view of its many merits, al-Amri’s work has opened up new vistas of understanding the Qur’an for English speaking readers, and he deserves huge applause for this feat which is destined to bolster *tafsir* literature in English.