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The Place of Divine Law in the Quran's Moral Theology

The Quran puts forward a moral theology predicated on the notion that God's creation of the world serves the basic purpose of "testing" moral agents (e.g., Q 11:7, 67:2), leading up to the proportionate allocation of rewards and punishments in the hereafter (in which the ultimate prospect of communion with God and with fellow agents plays a pivotal role). The Meccan surahs give little indication that legislative commandments and prohibitions occupy an important role in this vision of God's ultimate purpose. Revelation serves the purpose of "reminding" humans of God's moral expectations and of counteracting an inherent human tendency to forgetfulness; but this does not seem to require God's revelations to comprise detailed and minute definitions of what sorts of behaviour are agreeable to God. Rather, it is apparently taken for granted that humans have a basic grasp of valid norms of behaviour, however much they might be prone to ingratitude towards their creator and to hubristic illusions of self-sufficiency. In fact, some Meccan passages (e.g., Q 10:59) critique an alleged human penchant to fabricate unwarranted rules that gratuitously restrict God's generous provision (*rizq*), suggesting that according to the Qur'an, humans are *excessively*, rather than *insufficiently*, keen on quasi-legal rules of behaviour. As has often been observed before, this changes quite markedly in the Medinan surahs. This paper will examine some notable features of Medinan law and explore how they fit into the Quran's moral theology in general. I will argue that despite the tangible shift to a greater interest in legislative pronouncements in the Medinan surahs, Medinan law remains tightly and coherently embedded in the Quran's basic theological premises.



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