

SOME LESSONS FROM THE HOLY QUR'AN ON HOUSING

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Introduction

In this paper, I shall discuss some major aspects of housing which the Holy Qur'an, the primary source of Islam, deals with, directly or indirectly. These references are deemed very crucial as they constitute part of Allah's revelation to man, as well as because they were aimed at contributing to the cleansing of the nascent Islamic society from all the erroneous beliefs and practices that had resulted from people's earlier rejection of truth and its ways, replacing them with new ones instead, which were inspired and guided by Allah's direct intervention, i.e., revelation.

The Qur'an's references to the issues pertinent to housing are presented in a number of contexts. Normally, the contexts revolve around providing education, guidance, inspiration, orientation and clear signs to the followers of Islam whose primary task will always be to live up to the requirements of their vicegerency (*khilafah*) mission on earth, creating in the process a virtuous society, culture and civilization, as well as making the earth a beautiful, safe and consequential place to live in and work at. Thus, the references of the Qur'an to housing are sometimes direct and sometimes indirect. They at times are in the contexts which are solely dedicated to housing, and at other times in the contexts which are dedicated to some other themes of which the theme of housing is seen as a supportive, complementary or an elucidatory one. The difference in the Qur'anic contexts, styles and tones on housing notwithstanding, the Qur'an expounds to the last of Allah's messengers, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and through him to the first and every subsequent generation of Muslims, a selection of normative and enduring values, truths and life principles which are central to the religion of Islam and will always have to feature dominantly in the lives and earthly accomplishments of those who follow it, i.e., Muslims.

The values and principles which the Holy Qur'an prescribes

through the various aspects of the theme of housing to Muslims in their undertaking of creating a just society and a righteous culture and civilization, are extremely important. This is so due to the extraordinary significance, position and role the house or dwelling phenomenon plays in Islam. The house in Islam is a microcosm of Islamic culture and civilization in that individuals and families bred and nurtured therein constitute the fundamental units of the Islamic *Ummah* (community). The places where people live are the first and arguably most influential and critical educational centers. If functioning properly, such centers have a potential to produce, in concert with other societal establishments and centers, the individuals who will be capable of transforming and making better their immediate surroundings and the whole communities they belong to. Conversely, if misconstrued and their roles distorted, the places where people live have a potential to become a breeding ground for nearly all social ills, which if left unchecked are able to paralyze entire communities and eventually stifle civilizational undertakings.

This is due to the simple fact that a society is no more than a mixture of individuals, which are grouped into families. The family institution is the most basic social unit which signifies a person's foundation in life with which he permanently stays affiliated to and to which he always leans and feels strongly inclined: physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. A society is an organization whose most basic, and at the same time most significant, configuration substance is its people or individuals, who, in turn, make up the family units which are a society's destined and thus uncompromising and unalterable building blocks. It goes without saying that a relationship between the society and its substance and basic units or blocks is a causal one, the latter, that is, the family institution and its members, being the cause and the society with its total conditions being the effect. This means that the health or the development, for example, of a society depends mainly on the health and development of its substance and basic units or blocks, that is, its family institution and its members. An improvement in the family inevitably and proportionately leads to an improvement in the society. Likewise, any degeneration in the family inescapably and proportionately leads to a degeneration of the society. It follows that