

### Conferences/Seminars

## Indexing of the Qur'an Cairo, Egypt

*Dhu al Hijjah 15-16, 1409/July 18-19, 1989*

A seminar was organized by the International Institute of Islamic Thought, on *Dhu al Hijjah 15-16, 1409/July 18-19, 1989*, at Zamalek, Cairo, to discuss the indexing of the Holy Qur'an.

In the first session, research papers and reports by members of the seminar were presented. In the second and third sessions, the papers were discussed from different angles. During the closing session, the recommendations prepared by the drafting committee were discussed.

### *First: Project Objectives*

The International Institute of Islamic Thought took the responsibility for the task of the Islamization of knowledge. The natural approach would be to make the two main sources of Islamic knowledge—the Qur'an and the Sunnah—accessible to research scholars in the humanities and social sciences. This project aims - during this stage—at analyzing the contents of the Qur'anic verses to classify them according to the different branches of knowledge, and to arrange them under suitable headings, in order to make it easy for research scholars to find the verses they want in the fields of the humanities and social sciences.

### *Second: Indices and Concordances*

Participants in the seminar exchanged consultations regarding whether it is suitable to compile a list of topics (index) first, then proceed with the classification process accordingly, or should the classification be completed first on the basis of topics to be found, followed by the compilation of an index.

After completing the discussion, it was decided to follow both approaches simultaneously as indicated below:

1—The classification team will work according to the headings used in the humanities and social sciences, and proceed to add new headings for topics not covered by the ones being used.

2—Qur'anic idioms are to be put on cards according to their occurrence in the verses, and according to the branch of knowledge being classified, so that the concordance would include all the Qur'anic idioms relating to the specific branch of knowledge being classified.

3—The team responsible for preparing the list of subject-headings is to be promptly provided with what the classification team produces so that the former would benefit from it in its work, in addition to benefitting from the modern indices available to it. The work accomplished during the different stages of preparing the index will be promptly distributed to the classification team to help the coders with their work.

### *Third: Indexing and Research*

Indexing is a tool of scientific research. Therefore, the following is necessary:

1—The person doing the coding should be honest and accurate in transmitting the information and different opinions. He/she should, therefore, transmit the chosen subject-heading whether he/she agrees with it or not.

2—If the meaning in the tafsir has nothing to do with the verse, but was included as an elaboration by the interpreter, only the portion related to the verse should be included.

—If the coder comes up with a new meaning for the verse based on his/her own knowledge, he/she should assign it a heading, write it on a card, and indicate that this is his/her own interpretation by writing the word 'coder' between parentheses.

4—For the previous considerations, it is necessary, upon choosing the coder, to be concerned that he/she be knowledgeable in the science to be classified, and be familiar with Islamic knowledge which would enable correct handling of the sources.

### *Fourth: Indexing Sources*

The coder should seek help, in the classification process, from a collection of chosen *tafsir* sources, covering both schools of the "Transmitted" and the "Reasonable." The coder can also check specialized old and modern sources in the branch of knowledge he/she is classifying.

The seminar discussed, in the light of experience, seeking help from nine *tafsir* sources:

al Tabari, al Tubsuri, al Razi, al Qurtubi, al Shawkani, al Alusi, al Manar, Ibn 'Ashur, al Zilal.

In concern for the methodology of the final product in all branches of knowledge, the seminar decided to unify the *tafsir* sources to be checked, considering the following:

1—That some of these *tafsir* sources could be of more benefit to some coders than it is for others.

2—The need to add more *tafsir* sources to the said nine, to ensure a representation of all the tendencies of the different exegesis and thought processes. The following three *tafsir* sources have been added:

1—*Lata'if al Isharat* by al Qurayshi.

2—*Taysir al Tafsir* by Ibn Atfash.

3—*Al Kashshaf* by al Zamakhshari.

#### *Fifth: Indexing Method*

1—The indexing process begins by carefully reading the Holy Qur'an verse by verse, examining each verse and recalling the broad categories of the sciences being classified, perhaps relating to one or more verse. Once the coder determines that the verse is not related to the science being classified, he/she should then move on to the following verse.

2—If the coder felt there was any relevance, he/she then starts reading the *tafsir* of this verse in the different *tafsir* sources. It is advisable that the sources are read in chronological order, so that the coder would have a feel for the historical development of understanding the Qur'an by different *tafsir* scholars. This is because the science of *tafsir* is dynamic, and reflects the vibrancy of understanding the Qur'an and its applicability to all times.

3—If the coder finds in the exegesis a meaning which relates to the branch of knowledge being classified, he/she must first consider whether this is a part of what the verse indicates, or was it merely an elaboration by the *tafsir* scholar without any real connection to the verse being interpreted. In the latter case, the coder should ignore including this meaning in the index, since the indexing is of the Qur'an and not its exegesis.

4—If the meaning or meanings are indicated by the Qur'anic verse, the coder should then record them—from the different sources of exegesis—analyze them, and edit them in preparation for expressing them on index cards.

### *Sixth: Analysis*

1—The analysis level should be in-depth to cover all the topics that the verse could possibly indicate, ensuring the clarity of the relationship between the subject-heading and the verse.

2—The meaning is the index unit. This requires that every meaning should be put on a separate card, whether it is derived from the whole verse, a portion of it, or a series of sequential verses as arranged in the Qur'an.

3—The meaning can be expressed by more than one word. In such cases the different sub-headings are put on the same card.

4—The meaning derived from the verse is put under the sub-heading with a marking on the card indicating the more general heading to which the subheading belongs.

5—It is not necessary that the meaning is related to a verse indicating a religious legal opinion for it to be recorded. It would be enough that it sufficiently relates to the verse in some way or another for it to be recorded on an index card. The meaning could refer to a religious legal opinion, a clarification of a social order, or one of God's universal norms, or maybe a story intended to encourage pondering or meant as a guidance, or some other meaning.

It makes no difference how the meaning relates to the verse.

### *Seventh: Independent Indices*

In light of the fact that this project will be completed in stages, independent indices for every field of specialization will be produced each including the headings pertaining to the Islamic principles that are directly connected to that branch of knowledge.

### *Eighth: The Card Contents*

1—The card will include the sub-heading and the original heading of the topic.

2—The Qur'anic verse or its portion, which is directly related to the topic, is mentioned along with the name of the chapter of the Qur'an and the verse number. The basic word which illustrates the relationship between the heading and the verse in underlined.

3—A statement clarifying the connection between the heading and the verse is to be included. A brief phrase is preferable, provided that it is indicative, along with a mention of the *tafsir* source, volume number and page.

4—The card should also include the coder's name and the references.

### *Ninth: Individual and Group Coding*

The seminar reviewed the method of working within coding teams. It was evident that there were three methods:

First—Each coder would individually classify the whole Qur'an according to his field of specialization. In this case, the work needs to be reviewed by an outside reviewer, whether as it is being compiled, or after the whole indexing process has been completed.

Second—Dividing the work among several coders each of whom would work on a part of the Holy Qur'an, and members of the team would alternate coding and reviewing among themselves.

Third—A group of coders would classify the whole Qur'an, each alone, then they meet and compare their cards, and decide on a unified list among themselves.

After reviewing the three methods, the advantages and disadvantages of each, it was decided that the third alternative was the best, and that it would be advantageous to hold periodic meetings for the coders in each branch of knowledge separately, as well as for all the coding teams. Each team arranges for its own meetings, just as the teams would arrange for their collective meetings.

### *Tenth: General Recommendations*

1—In view of the importance of the indexing process, the seminar charged a committee composed of Dr. Gamal Attia, Dr. Muhammad al Misri, and Mrs. Zaynab 'Atiyah, to prepare a research paper on indices and concordances, including a statement on their practicality, their objectives, and the need for them, in addition to identifying the most important methods and techniques used in their preparation, as well as their benefits. This paper will be distributed to the different coding teams.

2—The seminar is of the opinion that field supervision is important to help the coding teams in the implementation of the seminar recommendations and that the Institute should establish a deadline for the completion of the classification lists that are now being produced.

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