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All correspondences to the Secretary Editorial Board:

Dr Umar Ahmad
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Notes on Contributors (Vol. 19/1):

1. **Isa Muhammad Maishanu,** PhD is a Professor in the Department of Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Email: maishanu@udusok.edu.ng
2. **Madar Abdallah Ishaq Muhammad Aljazuli,** PhD is an associate professor in the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, International University of Africa. Khartoum, Sudan. Email: mataraim87@gmail.com
3. **Fidelis Achoba,** PhD is a lecturer in the Department of History and International Studies, Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State. Email: fidelisachoba@gmail.com
4. **Adinoyi Anakobe** is an independent researcher based in lokoja, Kogi State. Email: peteradinoyi@yahoo.com
5. **Mohammed Lawal Shuaibu** is an independent researcher based in lokoja, Kogi State. Email: placcas@gmail.com
6. **Ojo OluwoleSimeon** is a postgraduate student in the Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, University of Abuja, FCT. Email: ojooluwolesimeon@gmail.com
7. **Ifeoluwa O. James-Iduma** is a lecturer in the Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, University of Abuja, FCT. Email: Ifeoluwa.james@uniabuja.edu.ng
8. **Umar Ahmed**, PhD is a senior lecturer in the Department of Modern European Languages and Linguistics, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Email: ahmed.umar@udusok.edu.ng
9. **Musa Ibrahim**, PhD is a postdoctoral fellow at Florida State University, Gainsville, USA. Email: abba_danauta@yahoo.com
10. **Sameera M. Wasagu** is a postgraduate student in the Department of Modern European Languages and Linguistics, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.
11. **Attahir Shehu Mainiyo,** PhD is a senior lecturer in the Department of Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Email:
12. **Muhammad Dahiru Shuni**, PhD is a senior lecturer in the Department of Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Email:attahirushuni@gmail.com
13. **Yahya, Shaykh Ahmad** is a lecturer in the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State. Email: yahyashaykhahmad@gmail.com

14. **Ali, Miqdad Ali** is a lecturer in the Department of Religions, History and Heritage Studies, Kwara State University, Malete, Kwara State. Email: alimosankore@gmail.com
15. **Bala Babangida** is a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State. Email: balababangida40@gmail.com
16. **Uba Babayo Muhammad** is a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State. Email: babayomuhammaduba0744@gmail.com
17. **Muhammad Mujtaba Abdulkadir,** PhD is a lecturer in the Department of Islamic Studies, A.D Rufa'i College of Education, Legal and Social Sciences Misau, Bauchi State. Email: mujtabaabdulkadirjahun@gmail.com
18. **Ibrahim Dahiru Idriss** is a lecturer in the Department of Primary Education, Federal College of Education (Technical), Potiskum, Yobe State.Email: ibrahimdahiruidriss@gmail.com
19. **Lawal Gusau Hassan,** PhD is a Professor in the Department of Pure and Applied Chemistry, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.
20. **MustaphaSalihu** is a lecturer in the Department of Chemistry, Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto. Email: mustaphasalihu6773@gmail.com
21. **A. A. Warra** is a lecturer at the Centre for Entrepreneurial Development, Federal University, Gusau, Zamfara State.
22. **I. Atiku** is a lecturer in the Department of Pharmaceutical and Medicinal Chemistry, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Kaduna State.
23. **M.K. Sabo,** PhD is a lecturer in the Department of Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University,Sokoto.
24. **A. M. Isah** is a lecturer in the Department of Pure and Applied Chemistry, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto.
25. **Sidiq, Uthman Okanlawon** PhD is a lecturer in the Department of Religions and Peace Studies, Lagos State University Ojo, Lagos State. Email:sidiqkadara@gmail.com
26. **Danoye Oguntola-Laguda,** PhD is a professor in the Department of Religions and Peace Studies, Lagos State University Ojo, Lagos State. Email: danoyeoguntola@yahoo.com
27. **Ashafa, Saheed Afolabi,** PhD is a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies, Osun State University, Osogbo, Osun State. Email:saheed.ashafa@uniosun.edu.ng

28. **Musa, Dalhatu Liman** is a postgraduate student, Department of Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Email: dalhatliman@gmail.com
29. **Àránsí Ayọ̀ọ́lá Ọládùnńkẹ́** is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, Kwara State University, Malete, Kwara State. Email: ayooransi@gmail.com
30. **AbdulRazak Mohammed Katibi**, PhD is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics, African and European Languages (Arabic Unit), Kwara State University, Malete-Ilorin. Email: abdulrazaq.katibi@kwasu.edu.ng
31. **Kabiru Labaran**, PhD is a lecturer at Aminu Kano College Of Education, Kano, Kano State. Email: kabirulabaran081@gmail.com
32. **Mannir Abba**, Ph.D is a lecturer in the Department of Adult Education and Extension Services, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Email: mannirabba@yahoo.com
33. **Bagudu, Alhaji Adamu**, PhD is a lecturer in the Department of Educational Foundations, Federal University, Dutsinma, Katsina State. Email: abagudu@fudutsinma.edu.ng
34. **Abubakar Umar Dange** is a lecturer at the Centre for Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Email: auadange@gmail.com
35. **Mohammed Sada Bature** is a lecturer in the Department of English and French, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina State. Email: baturesada@gmail.com
36. **Ibrahim Sani**, PhD, is a lecturer in the Department of English and French,Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina State. Email: ibrahim.sani@umyu.edu.ng
37. **Isah Muhammad** is a lecturer in the Department of Modern European Languages and Linguistics, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Email:isahgaladima@gmail.com
38. **Abdullahi Lawal Dikko** is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, Nigeria Police Academy, Wudil, Kano State. Email: abduldikko9@gmail.com
39. **Abubakar Umar Abubakar** is a lecturer at the Centre for Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. Email: auadange@gmail.com

40. **Usman Ibrahim Abubakar,** PhD is a Reader in the Department of Mass Communication, Bayero University Kano, Kano State. Email: usmanabubichi@gmail.com

Table of Contents

Religious Conflict and Peace Building in Nigeria: A Case Study of Christian-Muslim Dialogue Forum in Bussa, Borgu Local Government Area of Niger State, 1967-2017 1
Fidelis Achoba, Adinoyi Anakobe, and Mohammed L. Shuaibu

Corruption, Nation Building and Nigeria's Aspiration towards National Integration, 1960-2015 25
Ojo Oluwole Simeon and Ifeoluwa O. James-Iduma

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of National Consciousness Among Quranic Educators in Northern Nigeria 42
Umar Ahmed, Musa Ibrahim, and Sameera M. Wasagu

The Institution of *Hisbah* and the Realization of the Ideals of *Shari'ah* in Nigeria 62
Isa Muhammad Maishanu and Muhammad Dahiru Shuni

Empowering Youths through Skills Acquisition Programmes: The Surest Way for Community Economic Development in Nigeria 72
Mannir Abba and Bagudu, Alhaji Adamu

Effects of Internal Communication Channels on the Performance of Local Government Employees in North-Western Nigeria 84
Abubakar Musa Mijinyawa and Usman Ibrahim Abubakar

An Assessment of the Relationship between the Qur'ān and Sunnah 111
Yahya, Shaykh Ahmad and Ali, Miqdad Ali

The Role of the Qur'an and Sunnah in Promoting Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence between Muslims and Non-Muslims 123
Bala Babangida and Uba Babayo Muhammad

Shari'ah - A Complete Way of Life and the Challenges of Secularism in Nigeria 136
Isa Muhammad Maishanu and Attahir Shehu Mainiyo

Islam and Information Perspective on Some Modern Communication Technologies between Legality and Prohibition 152
Muhammad Mujtaba Abdulkadir and Ibrahim Dahiru Idriss

Phytochemistry in Islam: A Pathway For Sustainable Development 163
Lawal Gusau Hassan, Salihu Mustapha, Aliyu Ahmad Warra, I. Atiku, Muhammad Kabiru Sabo, and A. M. Isah

An Analytical Discourse on the Genesis and Impacts of Covid-19 on Islamic Organisations: A Case Study of Ansar-ud-Deen Society of Nigeria 183
Sidiq, Uthman Okanlawon and Danoye Oguntola-Laguda

Profiling a Model for Waqf in South-Western Nigeria through the Institution of the Mosque 201
Ashafa, Saheed Afolabi

Activities of House Dealers/Agents in Gusau Metropolis: Analysis from Islamic Perspective 216
Musa, Dalhatu Liman

A Look at the Effects of Sorcerers and Soothsayers in Kano 231
Kabiru Labaran

Images of Witches in Yoruba Oral Poetry 245
Àránsí Ayọ̀ọ́lá Ọládùnńkẹ́

Politics in the Arabic Literary Writings in Nigeria 258
AbdulRazaq Mohammed Katibi

Out of Context Translations of English to Hausa in Some Radio and Television Houses 274
Mohammed Sada Bature and Ibrahim Sani

Gbagyi NPs within the Classical Government and Binding Theory: Theta, Case and Binding Sub Modular Appraisal 288
Isah Muhammad

Fa'idar Harshe Ga Rayuwar Al'umma 302
Abdullahi Lawal Dikko

آراء المعربين في (الكاف) من: ﴿ لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ البَصِيرُ ﴾ 311
عبد الله إسحق محمد الجزولي

التحديات التي تواجه استعمال الحديث في العصر الحاضر 349
أبوبكر عمر أبوبكر

An Assessment of the Relationship between the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*

Yahya, Shaykh Ahmad and Ali, Miqdad Ali

Abstract

The significance of the Qur'ān to the life of Muslims cannot be overemphasized. This is because it serves as a manual that provides accurate direction to the Muslims in their spiritual, social, economic and political endeavours. However, the guidance obtained from the teachings of the Qur'ān cannot be adequately understood without resort to the explanation offered by Prophet Muhammad (SAW), otherwise known as-Sunnah, whether through verbal expression, action or tacit approval. This work, therefore, intends to study the relationship between the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* to unravel the scope of the latter, dissect its roles for better understanding of the Muslims and unfold the authenticity of the position of *Qur'āniyyūn* and their likes who express satisfaction on the comprehensiveness of the messages of the Qur'ān and censure the Muslim '*Ummah* over their reference to the *Sunnah* as a secondary source of guidance. Exegetical and analytical research methods were adopted in the study. The work observed the confinement of the roles of *Sunnah* and the usurpation of some of its powers by some Muslims and orientalists and provided a framework to understand the arguments of those that accord it the right to legislate a new law and abrogate certain verses of the Qur'ān as well. The work concludes that the *Sunnah* plays a complementary role to the injunctions of the Qur'ān and affirms its statutory duty to enact a new law.

Introduction

Lexicographically, the root of the word Qur'ān has generated intense debate among scholars. For instance, Imām Shāfi'ī held that the Qur'ān is a proper noun that is not derived from any word, just like *Tawrah* (Old Testament) and *'Injīl* (New Testament) are not derivatives of any word. He revealed that the word Qur'ān is peculiar to the last revealed scripture with the absence of *hamzah* (glottal stop) in its root. He argued, further, that if it has *hamzah* in its root, the word Qur'ān could be used to describe any readable book (Az-Zarkashī, 1988, p.278).

On the other hand, Al-Qurṭabī posited that the word Qur'ān is ta... from *qarā'in* meaning resemblance. Therefore, the Qur'ān is called ... because the verses contained there resemble one another (Az-Zarkashī, 19... p.278). Another opinion suggests that *qarana*, meaning to join, is ... etymological derivation of the term. Illustrating this opinion, the protagonis... opined that the combination of *Ḥajj* and *'Umrah* is called *Qirān* because ... pilgrim performs it simultaneously. Consequently, Al-'Ash'arī submitted th... the combination of the verses and chapters makes it to be called Al-Qur'a... (Az-Zarkashī, 1988, 278).

However, it is also viewed that the Qur'ān is a synonym of *qirā'ah*, derived from *qara'a* meaning to read. In this opinion, the Qur'ān is a verbal noun (*maṣdar*) of *qara'a* which implies reading or recitation (Ṣāliḥ, n.d., p.28). The argument is premised on the following verses: "Indeed, its collection and recitation are on us, and when We have recited it, then follow its recitation." (Q75:17-18).The opinion seems to be superior because of the conformity of its stance on the derivation with the above verses of the *muṣḥaf*.

The Qur'ān is technically defined as the miraculous speech of Allah revealed to the seal of the Prophets and the Messengers in wordings and meanings through Angel Jibrīl, preserved in *muṣḥaf* and transmitted via *mutawātir* chain. Its recitation is an act of worship and it starts with *Sūrat'l-Fātiḥah* and ends with *Sūratu'n-Nās*.

In addition to the documentation of the Qur'ān, whatever the Prophet (S.A.W.) uttered or did, which implied *Sunnah*, was also preserved by the Companions because of its explanatory and complementary roles to the Qur'ān. This unveils the belief of the Muslims that the Prophet (S.A.W.) symbolises the messages of the Qur'ān. Thus, the Qur'ān is a theoretical Book while the *Sunnah* represents the practical aspect of the theory.

However, the issue of the relationship between the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* has led to several debates to the extent that a group is known as *Qur'āniyyūn* vehemently oppose the reference of *Sunnah* as a source of guidance (Khan, 2000, p.180). This work, therefore, aims at examining the status of *Sunnah* in the Qur'ān as well as its functions concerning the Qur'ān to shed light on the relationship between the two.

The Status of *Sunnah* in the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān is a major source of Islamic law in Islam and Muslims believe that it is the last Divine Book, which was revealed from Allah as guidance to mankind. The guidance may be for spiritual, social, political, economic, mystical, marital, and everything relating to the life of man as reiterated in unequivocal terms by Allah: "... We have omitted nothing from the Book ..." (Q6:38). The verse signifies that the Qur'ān is an explanation of all things and means for men to be rightly guided. The Qur'ān is the absolute authority in all matters because the directives contained in it are immutable. Almighty Allah declares in the Qur'ān:

> But when our clear signs are rehearsed unto them, those who rest not their hope on their meeting with Us, say: Bring us a reading other than this, or change this, say: It is not for me, of my own accord, to change it: I follow nought but what is revealed unto me: if I were to disobey my Lord, I should myself fear the Penalty of a Great Day (to come).Q10:15

The Qur'ān makes it clear that the role of the Prophet (S.A.W.) is not merely that of a man who conveys only the revelation received from Allah to mankind. Rather, he was entrusted with the task of elucidating the Qur'ān to them. The Almighty Allah says:

> (We sent them) with clear signs and written ordinances; and We have sent down unto thee (also) the Message; that thou mayest explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought. Q16:44

In the same chapter, Allah emphasizes the mission of the Prophet (S.A.W.) in elaborating the Qur'ān thus: "And we have sent down the book to thee save you express clearly unto them those things in which they differ, and that it should be a guide and a mercy to those who believe." Q16:44

The *Sunnah*, which is derived from the root s*anna,* meaning smooth and direct flow path, is referred to as the mode of life of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) in Islam (Al Majlisu'l 'A'lā li-Shu'ūni'l- 'Islāmiyyah, n.d, p.351.). It includes his specific words, habits, practice and silent approval (Al Majlisu'l 'A'lā li-Shu'ūni'l- 'Islāmiyyah, n.d., p.351). It is important because it expresses ways of the life of the Prophet (S.A.W.) dealing with allies, family, polity, etc. The *hadīth*, which linguistically means news, carries the same significance as the *Sunnah*. In addition to the Qur'ān, the Prophetic *Sunnah* is taken as a secondary source of guidance because it is an explanation of the Qur'ān.

There are numerous verses in the Qur'ān that provide explicit information on the roles of the Prophet (S.A.W.), commanding Muslims to obey him, prohibiting them from disobeying him and enjoining them to be submissive to his dictates and follow his example. The Almighty Allah says: "O ye who believe! Obey Allah and His Messenger, and turn not away from him when ye hear (he speak)." (Q8:20). In another chapter, Allah discloses: "O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Apostle, and make not vain your deeds!" (Q 47:33).

The *Sunnah* is described as good conduct which deserves emulation (Q60:6). More so, Muslims are exhorted to adhere to the injunctions enunciated by the Prophet (S.A.W.) (Q59:7). Compliance with the Prophet's directives is equal to obedience to Allah (Q4:80). In addition, breaching the legislation made by the Prophet (S.A.W.) attracts painful punishment in the sight of Allah (Q47:33). The lofty paradise is also prepared as a reward for those who obey the directives of the Prophet (Q3:13).

The infeasibility of implementing the Qur'ānic injunctions also evinces the importance of *Sunnah*. This shows that all claims to ignore the *Sunnah* and rely solely on the Qur'ān is a means of discarding the regulations of the Qur'ān that enjoin Muslims to follow it. It is gratifying to note that the Qur'ān is not sufficient to worship as Allah desires Muslims to do without the Prophet's guide. For instance, Muslims are ordained to observe prayer in the Qur'ān without details on how it should be performed. Thus, the Qur'ān makes requirements of the Muslims while the *Sunnah* shows them the practical demonstration of it. In other words, it plays a complementary role to the Qur'ān. This is evident in the following *hadīth*:

> I have indeed been given the Qur'ān and something similar to it. Yet the time will come when a man leaning on his couch will say, follow the Qur'ān only: what you find in it as lawful, take it as lawful. And what you find in it as unlawful, take it as unlawful. But truly, what the Messenger of Allah has forbidden is like what Allah has forbidden ('Abū Dāwūd, *ḥadīth* 3988)

The above-quoted *hadīth* signifies that the *Sunnah* in its complementary nature to the Qur'ān cannot and should not contradict the ruling in the Qur'ān and legislate in certain cases where Qur'ān is silent. However, if there is contradiction, As-Salafī (1989) is of the view that the stand of the Qur'ān prevails because the position of the *Sunnah* is to illuminate the Qur'ān (P. 1

The *Sunnah,* therefore, explains, clarifies and removes perceived ambiguities of the Qur'ān.

The Qur'ān also asserts that the Prophet (S.A.W.) has taught not only the Book but also wisdom. Wisdom is, therefore, interpreted by Imam Shāfi'ī (n.d.) to mean *Sunnah* (p.32). The Prophet (S.A.W.) is made a judge (*hākim*) for the Muslims by Allah. Thus, no one remains a Muslim if he does not accept the Prophet's decision in any case. Allah says:

> But no, by the Lord, they can have no (real) faith, until they make thee judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance against thy decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction.Q4:65

Therefore, the *hadīth* goes along with the Qur'ān, since they are linked to each other. Also, it is impossible to understand the Qur'ān without a better understanding of the *hadīth*. It would be illogical to differentiate between the obedience to Allah and the obedience to Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) because whosoever believes in the latter has indeed believed in the former. Allah says in the Qur'ān: "He who obeys the Messenger obeys Allah..." Q4:80.

Functions of the *Sunnah* in Relationship to the Qur'ān

According to As-Salafī (1987), the role of the *Sunnah* in relationship to the Qur'ān for indicating what is in the Qur'ān does not exceed three (p.97) and they include:

1. **Emphatic *Sunnah* (*As-Sunnah al-Mu'akkidah*)**: This is a kind of *Sunnah* whose function is to repeat and stress what is stated in the Qur'ān (As-Salafī, 1989, p.97). For instance, Allah states that prayer, charity (*zakāh*), fasting and the pilgrimage are obligations. Stressing on those acts, the Prophet (S.A.W.) remarks:

Islam is established on five pillars: witnessing that there is no one worthy of being worshipped save Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger, establishing the prayer, paying *Zakāt*, fasting of Ramadan and making *Hajj* for those who can do it.

More so, Allah says in the Qur'ān: "The believers are but a single brotherhood..." Q49:10. The Prophet (S.A.W.) also emphasizes the verse when he says "Muslim is a brother of Muslim" (Al-Bukhārī,*ḥadīth* 4153).

2. Concise *Sunnah* (*As-Sunnah al-Mufaṣṣilah*): This has to do expounding on the message of the Qur'ān and providing an exam expatiate it (As-Salafī, 1989, p.97). This task is in line with Q16:44 Allah states that the Prophet (S.A.W.) is saddled with the responsibi explaining the Qur'ān. In reaction to this, it is reported by 'Ā'ishah, the be wife of the Prophet (S.A.W.), that the Prophet's character embodie Qur'ān (Muslim, Ḥadīth 1233). In other words, the Prophet explain Qur'ān by his words as well as character and example. In this re the *Sunnah* provides detailed information for every aspect of the Qur' many ways which include:

3. Explanation of non-detailed information (*Bayān al- Mujmal*): refers to non-detailed information, commands or concepts that require f explanation to comprehend them. For instance, the Qur'ān enjoin Muslims to observe *Ṣalāh* while details on how to observe it are not pro The *Sunnah*, therefore, gives all the needed details on timings, number o (*rak'ah*), conditions of *Ṣalāh*, etc. Similarly, Muslims are enjoine observe *Zakāh* while the minimum amount of it that is due on money i stipulated, the *Sunnah*, therefore, comes in to expatiate on the co Discussing the issue, Al-'Imām Ash-Shāfi'ī (n.d.) writes:

لم من أهل العلم مخالفا فى أن سنن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم من ثلاثة

ل الله فيه :أحدهما :وجوه فاجتمعوا منها على وجهين والوجهان يجتمعان

ر ما أنزل الله فيه جملة .نص كتاب فبين رسول الله مثل ما نص الكتاب

كتاب فبين عن الله معنى ما أراد

I do not know any contrary opinion from the people of knowledge th functions of *Sunnah* of the Prophet exceed three. They agreed on two include: That the Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.) explained the same whose text was revealed in the Qur'ān. The other one is that the Messen Allah (S.A.W.) explained the intended meaning of what was revealed by Allah (p.91).

4. Restriction of the Absolute (*Taqyīd al-Mutlaq*): This refers restriction of the general rule promulgated by the Qur'ān. A concise ex of this kind is the prescription of amputation of the hand of the thief Qur'ān where Allah declares: "As to the thief, male or female cut off

her hand: a punishment by way of example from Allah, for their crime: and Allah is exalted in power''. Q5:38. The verse does not limit the amputation of the hand to the wrist because of its absoluteness; the *Sunnah* then comes in to limit it to the wrist.

5. Specification of General Rule (*Takhṣīṣ al-'Ām*): This implies that the general rule enunciated by the Qur'ān is specified by the *Sunnah*. The vast number of the scholars unanimously agreed that the *Sunnah* which comes in form of *mutawātir* (any *hadīth* collected by the group of people who could not tell lie) can specify the general rule in the Qur'ān (Ash-Shāfi'ī, n.d., p.119). Al-'Imām Ash-Shāfi'ī, as one of the protagonists of the view, goes to the extent of giving it sub-heading in his epistle, *Ar Risālah*. A typical example of this is a verse where Allah says: "It is those who believe and confuse not their belief with wrong - that are (truly) in security, for they are on (right) guidance''. Q 6:82. It is reported that the companions were very disturbed and scared as a result of the revelation of the quoted verse because of their understanding of oppression (*Ẓulm*), which signifies to place something in a wrong place. The Prophet (S.A.W.) therefore calmed them down and explained that polytheism is great oppression regarding a verse in the Qur'ān where Allah says: "…O my son! Join not in worship (others) with Allah. For false worship is indeed the highest wrongdoing''. Q31:30. It can be deduced from the verse that the general rule is specified by the *Sunnah*.

6. **Independence in the Legislation (*al-Istiqlāl fī't-tashrī'*)**: This refers to the role of the *Sunnah* to legislate a matter which the Qur'ān touches not. In other words, it implies the capacity of the *Sunnah* to legislate a new law. In this wise, Al-'Imām Ash-Shāfi'ī and other scholars view that the *Sunnah* cannot legislate a new law except its genesis is found in the Qur'ān (Ash-Shāfi'ī, n.d., p.91). Contrary to this view, Ibn Qayyim (1968) and many other scholars submit that the *Sunnah* can legislate a new law that has no origin in the Qur'ānand it is compulsory to comply with it (p.48). The examples of the new law enacted by the Prophet (S.A.W) include the prohibition of wearing silk (*harīr*), wearing a gold ring by men and marrying the lady and her aunt. The instances given in the Qur'ān entail Q4:59, 65 and 80 among others to substantiate their stance that the Prophet can bring new law into effect. However, the former scholars debunked the view of the latter scholars with the following reason as expressed by As-Sibā'ī (2012):

ى أن السنة مبينة للكتاب وما ذكرتموه من الآيات التى توجب طاعة
رسول مع طاعة الله

مبها طاعة الرسول فى بيان شرحه فمن عمل وفق بيان الرسول صلى الله
وسلم فقد أطاع الله فيما أراد بكلامه وأطاع الرسول فى مقتضى بيانه ولو
... عمل على مخالفة البيان عصى الله تعالى فى عمله على مخالفة البيان
من تسلم بوجود ...فليس فى الآيات دليل على أن ما فى السنة ليس فى الكتاب
كام الزائدة ولكنها ليست زائدة زيادة شيء ليست فى القران بل هي زيادة
الشرح على المشروح(p.249-2

Indeed, we claim that the *Sunnah* is an explanation of the Book (Qur'ān) a all the verses you mentioned which make compliance with the Messen (S.A.W.) obligatory along with obedience to Allah mean that the Messen (S.A.W.) should be followed in his explanation. Thus, whosoever ac according to the exposition of the Prophet (S.A.W.) has complied with Alla as signified by His speech and followed the Messenger in his explanation well. However, whosoever acts in violation of the explanation has offend Allah by contravening the explanation. Therefore, there is no evidence in t verses that shows that *sunnah* encompasses what is not in the Qur'ān. W submit that there is the existence of additional laws but the addition is not add a thing that is not in the Qur'ān to it but it is only an additional explanati to what is being explained

It is interesting to note that a myriad number of scholars like Al-'Imām Mā viewed that one of the functions of *Sunnah* in relationship to the Qur'an is ability to abrogate some Qur'ānic verses ('Abdul Ghafūr, n.d.). Therefore, function in this respect forms the thrust of the next subheading.

Explanation with *Naskh (Al-Bayān bin-Naskh)*

According to Jalālud-dīn As-Suyūṭī (n.d.), the word *naskh* may be used in following contexts:

1. To obliterate as contained in the verse ". . . But God obliterates that wh the devil casts and then establishes His verses. . ." (Q 22:52)

2. To replace, as in the verse: "When We replace one verse with another..." (Q16:101)

3. To change hands, as occurs in matters of succession, where the inheritance changes hands from one person to another.

4. To transcribe from place to place. However, Al-Makkī (n.d.) maintains that it is incorrect to include this category in the Qur'ān, and he has strongly criticized an-Nuhhās for permitting it. He argued that the abrogator, in this case, appears not in the words of the abrogated but in words that are different (p.49).

The intellectual discourse, which generates intense debate, however, arises on the existence of abrogation in the Qur'ān especially in the abrogation of the Qur'ān by *Sunnah* in respect of its explanatory role to the Qur'ān. According to As-Sibā'ī, there is no controversy among scholars on the permissibility of abrogation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān except the detestation of al-Aṣfahānī on its occurrence as well as the abrogation of *Sunnah* by *Sunnah* (As-Suyūṭī, n.d., p.357). The controversy, therefore, stems out from the permissibility of abrogation of the Qur'ān by *Sunnah* and vice versa. Al-Aṣfahānī was therefore castigated by Ash-Shawkāni for his dispoṣition on the issue as follows:

النسخ جائز عقلا واقع سمعا بلا خلاف في ذلك بين المسلمين إلا ما يروى عن أبي مسلم الأصفهاني فإنه قال أنه جائز غير واقع وإذا صح هذا عنه فهو دليل على أنه جاهل بهذه الشريعة المحمدية جهلا فظيعا

Abrogation is rationally acceptable, and has occurred in reality without any dispute in that between the Muslims, except what was narrated from Abī Muslim Al-Aṣfahāni, who said that it is rationally acceptable, but never actually occurred. If that is narrated truly from him, it is an indication that he is extremely ignorant of this Islamic law (Ash-Shawkāni, 1999, p.352).

The above assertions of Ash-Shawkāni manifest that the occurrence of abrogation is not contentious. Imām Ash-Shāfi'ī and many others contend that the Qur'ān cannot be abrogated by the *Sunnah* in any respect. They, therefore, substantiate their view with the citation of the Qur'ānic verses which prove nullity of abrogation of the Qur'ān by *Sunnah* in their interpretation (As-Sibā'ī, 2012, p.114). The verses include:

None of our revelations do we abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but substitute something better or similar… Q2:106. "…Say: It is not for me, my own accord, to change it: I follow nought but what is revealed unto Q10:15.

Commenting on the above verses, Imām Ash-Shāfiʿī writes:

"السنة ليست مثل القرآن ولاخيرا منه وبقوله ... ما يكون لى أن أبدله من
تلقائ نفسى إن أتبع إلا ما يوحى إلي..." ولم يوحى إليه لكل ما متبع أنه ذلك ل
والنسخ تبديل منه لشيئ مبدلا كن

Sunnah is not like the Qur'ān and it is not better than it. Allah says: "…S It is not for me, of my own accord, to change it: I follow nought but wha revealed unto me". This points out that (the Prophet (S.A.W.) is to stick what was revealed to him without substituting anything in it while *Naskh* implies substitution (As-Sibāʿī, 2012, p.115).

The above excerpt attracts criticism from many renowned scholars. instance, Imām al-Marūzī argues that Allah does not state that He will brin verse that is better than it. Also, Ibn Hazm held that Imām Ash-Shāfiʿī and disciples have no proof to justify their assertion because no portion of Qur'ān is better than others(Al-Āmidī, n.d, p.478).

However, the majority of theologians which include Asharites, Mu'tazili and some jurists including Imām Mālik express the view that it is possi for *Sunnah* to abrogate the Qur'ān and such *Sunnah* must be *mutawātir* but occurrence generated debate among them (Al-Āmidī, n.d, p.153). T declare that whenever Allah pronounces judgement, He would inspire Prophet (S.A.W.) if He wants to substitute it. They maintain that the Prop (S.A.W.) could not speak from His volition. They, therefore, support th view with the following verses:

> …I but follow what is revealed to me… Q10:15
>
> Nor does he say (aught) of (his own) desire. It is no less than inspiration sent down to him. Q53:3-4

Relying on the above verses, the group vehemently opposed the view of former and declared that the revelation consists of the Qur'ān and *Hadīth*.

cases of abrogation cited by them include the verse that deals with a bequest in Q 2:180 where Allah says: "It is prescribed; when death approaches any of you, if he leaves any goods that he makes a bequest to parents and next of kin, according to reasonable usage…" (Q4:11).

The above verse is however abrogated by the Prophet's tradition, as stated by the protagonists of abrogation of the Qur'an by *Sunnah*, which says: "لا وصية لوارث". "There is no bequest for heir"(Abū Dāwūd, *hadīth* 2870).

However, Ibn Hazm and many others argue that *Sunnah* be it *mutawātir* or *āḥād* can abrogate the Qur'ān (As-Salafī, 1989, p.114). In sharp contrast to the opinion, Burton (1990) argues that the existence of abrogation might have been expected to cause dishonour to the Muslims (p.4). He reiterates that if the *Sunnah* had abrogated the Qur'ān, the people might have argued that Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) was saying or doing the opposite of what was revealed to him. Also, if the Qur'ān had abrogated the *Sunnah*, they could have mocked the Prophet (S.A.W.) by pointing out that God was belying the man who claimed to be Prophet (Burton, 1990, p.4). He declares that legal scholars often resolve to the principle of abrogation to harmonise the various contradictions between putative sources (Burton, 1990, p.4). This view of Burton may be convincing but the fact that Qur'ān was revealed in a piecemeal may necessitate its rejection. This is because the wisdom behind the gradual revelation was to respond to the circumstances that prevailed in the Arabian community. Thus, a rule may be changed if it was not suitable for the community.

More so, a great number of Orientalists submit that Allah changes His mind if abrogation refers to the cancellation of the older verse and its replacement by a contradictory one (Khalifa, 1983, p.96). We, however, argue that the fact that Allah is omniscient shows that He was aware that the new rules would replace the abrogated ones before the decree of its promulgation. He, therefore, cancels the older verse to ease worldly things for human beings.

Conclusion

Having discussed the status of the *Sunnah* as well as its role concerning the Qur'ān, it is obvious that it is not possible to have a better understanding of the Qur'ān without adequate study as well as a better understanding of the *Sunnah*. It should equally be stated that the duty of the Prophet (S.A.W.) was not only to convey a divine message but also to elaborate on it. In addition, the fact that the Qur'ān contains injunctions that direct Muslims to

conform with the Prophet (S.A.W.) makes it obligatory for Muslims to embrace his directives. Hence, the *Sunnah* is a secondary source of [illegible] in Islam because of its complementary role to the Qur'ān.

Concerning the Prophet's position on the establishment of the new law, this paper subscribes to the view that the Prophet (S.A.W.) could enact a new law but the law enacted by him could not contradict the Qur'ānic injunctions.

However, some scholars submit that the relationship between the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* in terms of explaining the Qur'ān does not extend to abrogating certain rulings in the Qur'ān. We, therefore, oppose the view because the Qur'ān abounds with the verses that abrogate one another.

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