

OCCASIONAL PAPERS SERIES II

# MARITAL DISCORD

*Recapturing the Full Islamic Spirit  
of Human Dignity*

ABDULHAMID A. ABUSULAYMAN

*foreword by*

KATHERINE BULLOCK

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT  
LONDON • WASHINGTON

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## FOREWORD

THE FAMILY in Islam is meant to be an abode of peace and tranquility. The Qur'an speaks of living with each other on a footing of kindness, of mutual consultation between husband and wife, and of the love and mercy God has put in our hearts. Being a Revelation intended for all kinds of situations, as well as all eras, the Qur'an addresses not only good relations between husbands and wives, but also those times when the atmosphere is strained. With a view to keeping the family intact whenever possible, and always stressing that people act kindly toward one another, even during times of marital discord, the Qur'an suggests different strategies for the husband and wife to follow when either spouse is recalcitrant. One of the verses that addresses husbands, 4:34 (in which a procedure is given for a husband to follow when dealing with an unruly wife) has achieved a certain notoriety in the West, as well as in some Muslim circles, for its supposed licensing of husbands to beat their wives.

Many non-Muslims in the West, as well as many Muslims around the world, sadly, understand this verse to condone the kind of wife abuse that is meant by the term "domestic violence," where one spouse will physically or verbally abuse the other. In *Marital Discord: Recapturing the Full Islamic Spirit of Human Dignity*, the distinguished scholar Dr. AbuSulayman intends to put at rest this misunderstanding of the Qur'an. This work is a re-reading of this important verse, based on the perspective of the Islamic value of human dignity.

From his research on childhood, Dr. AbuSulayman has learned that it is in the crucible of the family that we develop our moral character. It is his conviction that the revitalization of the Ummah, from its current state of depression and discord, to one of optimism

and unity, will occur only when Muslim families are indeed places of “repose, affection, and compassion.” Clearly the issue of husband-wife relations is decisive in this endeavor.

Dr. AbuSulayman’s methodology is to examine the nature of the problem, investigate the context and reach an objective understanding based on the purposes of the Divine Revelation and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him). He looks at the issue of marital discord with a deep sensitivity to women’s perspective, an attitude that is quite refreshing and, indeed, frequently missing in works on women written by men.

I am honored to write the Foreword to Dr. AbuSulayman’s work which addresses a crucial issue. There are many different ways of reading the Qur’an, from misogynistic to emancipatory. This work moves the debate forward by introducing an alternative interpretation of the Qur’anic text. His explanation is fresh and firmly on the side of women’s human rights.

Not all Muslims will agree with Dr. AbuSulayman’s conclusions. Nevertheless, as Dr. AbuSulayman points out, even according to the traditional account, the Qur’an does not condone domestic violence. Therefore, no one can dispute Dr. AbuSulayman’s call for husbands and wives to deal with marital discord in a compassionate manner. No one can deny his laudable goal for an Islamic family based on the Qur’anic values of human dignity, compassion, tolerance, and on the sanctity and dignity of human life.

I was completely engrossed in Dr. AbuSulayman’s text, as I am sure other readers will also be. I recommend this work to any one who wishes to study the Qur’an’s teachings on husband-wife relations in Islam.

DR. KATHERINE BULLOCK

The Qur'an speaks of living with each other on a footing of love, kindness, mercy and mutual consultation between husband and wife. It also addresses those times when the atmosphere is strained. This paper examines the issue of marital discord with a deep sensitivity to the perspective of women. Criticising an approach to the Qur'an that is misogynistic rather than emancipatory the paper moves the debate forward by introducing an alternative interpretation of the Qur'anic text dealing with the issue of marital discord. The explanation is fresh, firmly on the side of women's human rights and recaptures the full Islamic spirit of human dignity.

DR. ABDULHAMID A. ABUSULAYMAN

*The author is President of The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) USA; President of the Child Development Foundation, USA; and former Rector of the International Islamic University, Malaysia. He is also the author of numerous works including: Towards an Islamic Theory of International Relations; Crisis in the Muslim Mind; and Violence and Conflict Resolution (forthcoming).*



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